Isles of Boshen

Edward Lear's Literary Nonsense in Context

Michael Benjamin Heyman
Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD
University of Glasgow
Department of English Literature
June 1999

Abstract
Isles of Boshen: Edward Lear's Literary Nonsense in Context
Michael Benjamin Heyman

This thesis investigates three major areas in the background of Edward Lear's literary nonsense: the parodic relationship with text and genre of early children's literature, the trends behind Lear's innovative illustration style, and the "nonsense" child construct manifest within the genre, which I claim is, in many ways, an expression of the Romantic conception of the child.

The first chapter explores the parodic basis of nonsense. Most literary nonsense is referential; it often begins by inhabiting a genre or individual work, but what it does to the original is debatable. Some critics see nonsense as parody, while others claim that nonsense precludes parody in its intentional purposelessness. In this chapter I explore the critical debate surrounding parody in nonsense, and parody in general. I then examine the works of Lear, and some Carroll, looking first at their genuine, clear parodies. Next, I look at the many borderline cases of parody which use nonsense as a device but are not overshadowed by it. Finally, I discuss the more "pure" literary nonsense which, I argue, goes beyond parody to establish a new genre.

The next chapter looks at the background of Lear's nonsense illustration. His style of illustration was a wildly original combination of devices which are best seen in the context of the children's book illustrations of his day. With Bewick's innovations in woodcuts, the quality of children's illustrations had drastically improved. Diverging from this trend, Lear's illustrations hearken back to the rough chapbooks which he probably read as a child. His child-like style, coupled with an expert draughtsman's eye, began a rival tradition of children's book illustration. His illustrations are in way caricatures of chapbooks. His text and illustrations, like those of Blake and Hood, are integral, and their self-reflexiveness with the verses places them in an altogether different class of illustration.

The last several chapters are based on a reading of literary nonsense as a "Romantic" reaction to pre-Victorian child constructs originating with Locke and Rousseau and later developed by others, including Edgeworth, Godwin, and the Lambs. Lear's nonsense can be seen as an expression of the Romantic conception of the child developed primarily by Wordsworth, but also significantly by Blake and Coleridge. Chapter 3 is on the glorification, yet inherent anxiety, of individuality prevalent in both Romantic writing and Lear's nonsense. Lear's promotion of extreme individuality in the face of social and environmental opposition goes against the assumptions of pre-Romantic treatments of the child. Chapter 4 focuses on the "wild child," a child unfettered by the restrictions of society, yet who is still considered innocent and free from sin. The term "wild" is especially appropriate, as Lear's particular attention to the union of the animal kingdom and humanity relates to the Romantic fusing of the concepts of the animal and the child with little distinction. Chapter 5 deals with the elevated view of the child popularized by the Romantics. Nonsense, like the poetry of Wordsworth, calls attention to the 'fall' from childhood to adulthood, which is indicated by a split reading of Lear, one from the child's perspective and one from the adult's. One of the most important repercussions of this elevated view, discussed in Chapter 6, is the imparting of a divine imagination to the child. Such divine power, creating and receiving, is the basis for much of Wordsworth's elevated view of the child. In Lear's nonsense, this type of imagination is necessary to appreciate and fuse the various inherent nonsense devices. Chapter 7 utilizes the theories of Wolfgang Iser and Gilles Deleuze to grapple with the issue of "sense" and "non-sense," and argues for a reading of Lear as the latter. Set against the background of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century attempts to reveal the child as an understandable text, Chapter 8 argues that both the nonsense and the Romantic child constructs reflect the "non-sense" child, a new conception of the child defying analysis, categorization, or dissection.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction, Part One

you won't be an adult till you join the merry-go-round!

-Rabindranath Tagore, "Play" [1]

Nineteenth-century literary nonsense as a children's genre holds a curiously isolated historical and literary position. While nonsense of one sort or another has almost always been present in literature, the unique children's genre we now call "literary nonsense," which was to a great extent created and popularized by Edward Lear (1812-1888), has had a sporadic and somewhat mysterious past. The genre comes from two main cultural and literary streams: the "adult," "literary" tradition and the folk tradition of songs, ballads, and nursery rhymes. Its written, "literary" side, which is its most dominant quality and that which distinguishes it from the folk tradition, began strictly as an adult mode. As Noel Malcolm states in *The Origins of English Nonsense*, "full-scale nonsense poetry as an English literary phenomenon is.... a literary genre with a particular history or histories, developed by individual poets and possessing a peculiarly close relationship--largely a parodic one--to the 'high' literary conventions of its day."[2] Nonsense or near-nonsense texts first appeared in England in the mid-fifteenth century, though in forms considerably different from what we now call nonsense. Probably influenced by continental nonsense which had been around since at least the thirteenth century, the English version primarily included "impossibilia," or impossible actions and phenomena, such as the blind seeing or the sun shining at night.[3] After this brief surge, it disappeared until 1611, when John Hoskyns almost single-handedly started a resurgence of nonsense verse which lasted

---

[1] Rabindranath Tagore, *I Won't Let You Go: Selected Poems*, trans. Ketaki Kushari Dyson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991).

[2] Noel Malcolm, *The Origins of English Nonsense* (London: Fontana/HarperCollins, 1997), p. 4. Malcolm's book gives an excellent history of nonsense through the seventeenth century. Malcolm's main thesis is that literary nonsense does not come from the folk tradition, but he writes on seventeenth-century nonsense rather than that of the nineteenth-century, which I would argue combines the "literary" and the folk in a new "literary" form for children.

[3] Malcolm, pp. 52-62.

around forty years and produced one of the geniuses of nonsense, John Taylor.[4] But the nonsense verse of this period, again, was quite different from nineteenth-century nonsense, usually being highly topical, "intellectual," and meant for adults. This flowering of nonsense died away by mid-century, only to be remembered in a few miscellanies thereafter. It would be over a hundred and fifty years before the genre would start anew, but in a different guise and aimed at children, from the pen of Edward Lear, an expert landscape and wildlife artist, a travel book writer, a humorous letter writer, and the father of children's literary nonsense.

Even through the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century, the few texts which could be considered close to literary nonsense were usually meant for adult readers, such as Foote's famous "The Great Panjandrum" (1755) or Henry Cogswell Knight's "Lunar Stanzas" (1815), to name two of the most famous examples.[5] Satire dominated this period which left little room for more pure nonsense, though it was used sparingly as a device rather than a genre. As a device, it appeared in glimpses, such as in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760-7). The eighteenth century also saw a slow increase in nursery rhyme publication, starting around the first decade with the unknown "T.W."'s *A Little Book for Little Children* and gaining momentum towards the middle of the century with more comprehensive works like *Mother Goose's Melody, or Sonnets for the Cradle* (around 1760).[6] But while nursery rhyme and the folk tradition have been a considerable influence on nineteenth-century nonsense, the writing of Lear and Carroll is distinct from this tradition, as Malcolm and other critics have shown.[7]

---

[4]Malcolm, p. 52. According to a hand-written library catalogue of 1830, a copy of *All the Works of John Taylor the Water Poet, collected into one volume by the Author* (1630) was at the Knowsley Estate during Lear's residence there, though there is no direct evidence to show that Lear read it.

[5]An exception to this is Ann and Jane Taylor's adaptation of an older chapbook in their *Signor Topsy-Turvey's Wonderful Magic Lantern* (1810), which has the kind of role-reversing found in seventeenth-century nonsense, but written for children.

[6]*The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, 1951, eds. Iona and Peter Opie (Oxford: OUP, 1992), pp. 30-37.

[7]See Malcolm, p. 4; Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p. 101; Nina Demurova, "Toward a Definition of *Alice's* Genre: The Folktale and Fairy-Tale Connections" in *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*, ed. Edward Guiliano (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1982), pp. 75-88, (p. 79); Elizabeth Sewell,*The Field of Nonsense* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952), p. 85; Emile Cammaerts, *The Poetry of Nonsense* (London: Routledge, 1925), pp. 46-49. All references to these authors shall refer to these works, unless otherwise noted.

If we skip Lear, Carroll, and the rest of the nineteenth century momentarily, we find a curious twist to the course of nonsense. Although literary nonsense drastically changed the face of children's literature, as a more "pure" form for children it seems to have died away toward the turn of the century. Instead of remaining a children's genre, nonsense returned to its old adult audience in various forms. Even during Lear's success as a limerick writer, the limerick was being popularized by and for adult audiences in a much more successful manner than Lear's imitators who were writing for children.[8] In the twentieth century, the great, direct inheritors of the nonsense method and style have been distinctly "adult" writers such as Edward Gorey and Mervyn Peake, who steered nonsense down an altogether darker path.[9] In the novel there was Joyce, and in poetry, Wallace Stevens and Gertrude Stein, among others, all exploring the possibilities of nonsense.[10] It turns up as an influence on the surrealist movement and Dada, and on the Eastern philosophy of Alan Watts.[11] Yet from children's literature, its original springboard, it has to a great extent disappeared as a separate, formal genre.[12] Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl, more recent inheritors of some nonsense methods, use the occasional nonsense device effectively, but their writing for children cannot be considered literary nonsense. There are exceptions, of course, the most obvious being that Lear has never gone out of print and still may be found on the shelves, in his original form and in many selections with new

---

[8]Imitators like Gordon Brown (writing as "A. Nobody," *Nonsense; For Somebody Anybody or Everybody Particularly the Baby-Body* (c.1895) and *Some More Nonsense For the Same Bodies as Before* (1896))received little attention or success in the children's book market. In the 1860s, when Lear's limericks reached their height of popularity, *Punch* began printing limericks, and the limerick contest craze began. See W.S. Baring-Gould, Rupert Hart-Davis,*The Lure of the Limerick* (London: Hart-Davis, 1969), p. 32; and, G. Legman, *The Limerick: 1700 Limericks covering every bawdy topic from the 14th century to modern times* (London: Granada, 1964, 1979), pp. 8-11.

[9]Peake's children's book, *Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor* (1939) is an exception to this, but, not surprisingly, several contemporary critics questioned the suitability of *Captain Slaughteboard* for children. Much of his nonsense is decidedly adult in nature, particularly his volume of nonsense verse, *A Book of Nonsense* (1972). Peake's superlative nonsense poems in *Titus Groan* (1946) are particularly interesting, as some appear within the novel, in a child's book, yet it is hard to imagine any real child to be the intended audience.

[10]See Alison Reike, *The Senses of Nonsense* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992) for more on modern, adult nonsense.

[11]See Alan Watts, *Nonsense* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977).

[12]Nonsense was occasionally seen in children's literature, such as in a small amount of Kipling, Laura E. Richards, and some Carl Sandburg, but it rarely approached the quality and intensity of Lear's and Carroll's nonsense. See Kipling's "How the Whale Got His Throat" in *Just So Stories* (1897) and Laura E. Richards, *Tirra Lirra: Rhymes Old and New* (1933) and *I Have a Song to Sing You: Still More Rhymes* (1938). See also Sandburg's *Rootabaga Stories* (1924).

illustrations.[13] Other writers of nonsense for children have emerged, most recently Michael Rosen,[14] but the genre has never returned to the kind of success and popularity it had with Lear and Carroll.

To return now to the nineteenth century, we may now ask where children's literary nonsense came from and why, for the span of around fifty years, it became almost solely the domain of the child, an unprecedented turn in the genre's application. The answers are, of course, quite complicated and much more than can be tackled in this thesis, but we can begin by observing that the origin of children's literary nonsense is similar to that of the adult literary nonsense of the seventeenth century. Both versions combine a literary side and utter nonsense (or nursery rhyme, for the nineteenth century) to form a referential, yet divergent form, but in nineteenth-century literary nonsense for children, the literary side relates to children's literature and theories of the child. Consequently, I will look at nonsense from three different perspectives: the written, "literary" side of nonsense, its place in the history of children's book illustration, and its relationship with the Romantic concept of the child. First, in Chapter 1, I will look at Lear's literary nonsense through its prime distinguishing feature, its "literary-ness." In this chapter, more than the others, I also deal extensively with some of Carroll's works, as his verse "parodies" are some of his most important nonsense pieces, and also those which most resemble Lear's. Most literary nonsense by Lear and Carroll is referential, either directly or indirectly. It often begins by inhabiting an "alien" genre or individual work, but what it does to the original is debatable. Some critics, and especially those who deal almost exclusively with Carroll, see nonsense as parody, while others claim that nonsense precludes parody in its intentional purposelessness (a paradoxical phrase for a paradoxical genre). In this chapter I explore the critical debate surrounding parody in nonsense, and parody in general, as the contentious definition of parody lies at the heart of the whole dispute. I then examine the works of Lear and Carroll, looking first at their genuine, clear parodies, which often are

[13]The following editions of Lear (or Lear and Carroll)were all found in one bookshop: *The Book of Nonsense and Nonsense Songs* (London: Penguin, 1996); *The Owl and the Pussy-cat*, illus. Ian Beck (London: Doubleday/Picture Corgi Books, 1995); *Owls and Pussy-cats: Nonsense Verse* [Lear and Carroll] (Oxford: OUP, 1993); *The Owl and the Pusy Cat* (London: Walker Books, 1991); and *The Jumblies*, illus. Emily Bloom (London: Orchard Books, 1998). The Jackon *Complete* Lear is still in print.
[14]Michael Rosen, *Michael Rosen's Book of Nonsense* (Hove: Macdonald Young Books, 1997).

quite sensical. Next, I look at the many borderline cases of nonsensical parody, or parody which uses nonsense as a device but is not overpowered by it. Finally, I discuss the more "pure" literary nonsense which, I argue, goes beyond parody to establish a new genre.

The next chapter looks at the background of Lear's nonsense illustration. In the 1830s, when Lear was creating his first "nonsenses," his style of illustration was wildly original, but it was not, as some critics have claimed, mere "doodles," nor did many of its characteristics lack precedents. Lear's illustrations must be placed in the context of the children's book illustrations of his day. With the innovations of the Bewick brothers in wood engraving, the quality and realism of children's illustrations had drastically improved. Diverging from this tradition, Lear's illustrations hearken back to the rough chapbooks which he probably read as a child. His illustrations are in a way caricatures of these chapbooks, exaggerating both their strengths and weaknesses. His child-like style began a rival tradition of children's book illustration, sometimes called "naïve." But Lear's expert draughtsman's eye distinguished him from other "naïve" illustrators like Heinrich Hoffmann. Furthermore, his text and illustrations, like those of Blake and Hood, are integral, and their self-reflexiveness with the verses places them in an altogether different class of illustration. Like literary nonsense itself, Lear's illustrations have rarely been copied with success.

The remaining chapters are based on a reading of Edward Lear's literary nonsense as a "Romantic" reaction to pre-Victorian child constructs originating with Locke and Rousseau and later developed by others, including Edgeworth, Godwin, and the Lambs. Lear's nonsense can be seen as an expression of the Romantic conception of the child developed primarily by Wordsworth, but also significantly by Blake and Coleridge. While Wordsworth and others were developing a revised image of the child, early nineteenth-century children's literature had not yet begun to reflect such changes. Literary nonsense, as begun by Lear, acted as a stepping-stone between newer, Romantic theories of the child and actual writing *for* children. The following chapters each refer to specific characteristics of these child constructs: Chapter 3 is on the glorification, yet inherent anxiety, of individuality prevalent in both Romantic writing and Lear's nonsense. Lear's promotion

of extreme individuality in the face of social and environmental opposition goes against the assumptions of pre-Romantic treatments of the child. Chapter 4 focuses on the "wild child," a child unfettered by the restrictions of society, yet who is still considered innocent and free from sin, and therefore is not condemned for its actions. The term "wild" is especially appropriate, as Lear's particular attention to the union of the animal kingdom and humanity relates to the Romantic fusing of the concepts of the animal and the child with little distinction. Chapter 5 deals with the elevated view of the child popularized by the Romantics and supported by Lear. Nonsense, like the poetry of Wordsworth, calls attention to the 'fall' from childhood to adulthood, which is indicated by a split reading of Lear, one from the child's perspective and one from the adult's, highlighted by devices such as misappropriation, picture/poem discrepancy, and the portrayal of child- and adult perceptions of death. One of the most important repercussions of this elevated view, discussed in Chapter 6, is the imparting of a divine imagination to the child. Such divine power, creating and receiving, is the basis for much of Wordsworth's elevated view of the child. In Lear's nonsense, a reader needs this type of imagination to appreciate and fuse the various inherent nonsense devices. Chapter 7 utilizes the theories of Wolfgang Iser and Gilles Deleuze to grapple with the issue of "sense" and "non-sense," and argues for a reading of Lear's writing as the latter. Set against the background of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century attempt to reveal the child as an understandable text, Chapter 8 argues that both the nonsense and Romantic child constructs reflect the "non-sense" child, a new conception of the child defying analysis, categorization, or dissection.

Before proceeding I will attempt to clarify, as much as possible, what is meant by the classification of nineteenth-century "literary nonsense." However, there are so many different kinds of nonsense and different methods that easy definition is almost impossible. Generally, when I use the term "literary nonsense" in this thesis I mean the nonsense works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, and any writing which follows their various models. From nonsense alphabets, to nonsense botany illustrations, from travel prose to sonnets, from limericks to specific and general parodies, the scope of literary nonsense is as wide and varied as the many forms it inhabits. Any acceptable definition must therefore

be somewhat broad and abstract. Most critics agree that, generally, in literary nonsense there is a type of balance between "sense" and "non-sense." Sewell calls this the defining feature of nonsense as game: "The game is a play of the side of order against disorder" (p. 46). This game is interminable, for "it cannot suppress the force towards disorder in the mind, nor defeat it conclusively, for this force is essential to the mind no less than the opposing force of order" (p. 47). Lecercle also sees this struggle in more technical terms, as the dialectics between over-structuring and destructuring, subversion and support, excess and lack.[15] Wim Tigges presents a solid, if broad, definition of nonsense as a genre in which "the seeming presence of one or more 'sensible' meanings is kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such a meaning."[16] I would add to this the Deleuzean concept of nonsense as the necessary creation of an impossible alternative "sense," a non-entity which nevertheless asserts its impossible existence, trying to disguise itself as a type of sense. Chapter 7 addresses in more detail the difficult issue of sense and nonsense and their relation to the genre. I will turn now to the central figure of this thesis: Edward Lear.

An enemy of certainty, dogmatism, organized religion, dogs, and ginger beer, Edward Lear was a disaffected citizen of Victorian culture. He grew up in the later Romantic period, surrounded by a large family, his boyhood hero being Byron.[17] Raised mostly by his sister Ann, twenty-one years older than himself, he led a fairly normal childhood, if neglected by his parents. He had his share of childhood troubles though, including depression, or "the Morbids," and epilepsy, his "Demon," both of which would dog him his whole life. When he was 58 he reflected on the illness's impact on his life:

> 21 Nov. No sleep all night; counted every hour, & rose at 6 Worried & miserable.--I review my whole life in such hours, & full of evil as it undoubtedly is, I am obliged to conclude as I always do, that the great physical misery & "particular skeleton" of all these long years, which was not of my making--commenced when I was 5 or 6 years old, & has

[15]Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 3.

[16]Tigges, pp. 255.

[17]Some of his childhood poems are Byronic imitations, such as "The Ruins of the Temple of Jupiter, Aegina, Greece." See W.M. Parker, ed. "Edward Lear, Three New Poems," *The Poetry Review* (June, 1950), 81-83. I am indebted to Vivien Noakes', *Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer*, 1968 (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, revised edition 1979) for most of Lear's biographical information. All references to Noakes will be from this volume unless otherwise noted.

> influenced all the course of my existence. ...--but the foundation of wretchedness was too solidly there, ever to have allowed of a greatly different chain of events & condition of living than has been my lot to bear.[18]

His education, including his artistic training, was provided by his sisters until he entered school at the age of eleven. Though his love was for painting, his financial situation did not allow him to attend the Royal Academy, the only respected method of entering the profession (though he did enter the Academy briefly, many years later). Instead, when he and Ann moved to their own rooms in London in 1828, Edward earned money by making anatomical drawings for doctors and commercial sketches--anything he could get his hands on. Soon he began to draw birds, and when he produced *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots* (1830), a work which earned him immediate respect in the field, his career had begun. It was because of the reputation earned by this book and other drawings that he was asked by Lord Stanley, heir to the 12th Earl of Derby, to the Knowsley estate, in 1831 or 1832, to draw the menagerie.[19]

At Knowsley Lear came into his own. During his sporadic residence he not only became an honorary, fringe member of the upper classes, but he also began creating his "nonsenses," not yet called "limericks," for the many Stanley grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He worked at Knowsley, and also for John Gould, through 1837, but was forced in June of that year to leave the country due to pulmonary problems. His trip to Italy was the beginning of a long life devoted to travel and landscape painting. As his eyes constantly gave him trouble, detailed ornithological work was out of the question. Instead, he pursued landscape painting with almost fanatical diligence, a profession which allowed him to live fairly comfortably, if not without financial worries, for his entire life. From that time onward he rarely spent more than a few consecutive months in England. His painting commissions took him to many exotic locations, including Egypt, Palestine, Greece, and India, but his residence was most often in Italy, with frequent trips back to England.

---

[18]From Lear's unpublished diaries, 21 November, 1870. Houghton Library, Harvard University, 30 volumes, MS Eng 797.3. All references to Lear's diaries are from these volumes.

[19]The date of Lear's arrival at Knowsley is questionable. All works I have seen give the year of Lear's arrival at Knowsley as 1832, yet several of Lear's illustrations of birds from the Knowsley menagerie are dated 1831. This question of dating remains unresolved, but it seems that Lear at least visited Knowsley earlier than has been stated.

He lived abroad for most of his life and on the fringes of society, never quite fitting in with the elite amongst whom he circulated. An affectionate, likable man, he made friends easily, including many from the upper classes and fashionable artistic circles. For a short period in 1846 he gave drawing lessons to the twenty-seven-year-old Queen Victoria. He became quite close with the Tennyson family, Emily in particular, and also with some of the Pre-Raphaelites, including John Millais, William Rossetti, and especially William Holman Hunt, whom he called "Daddy Hunt" throughout their long friendship.

His life was spent in travelling and painting landscapes, writing and illustrating many travel journals, learning Italian, Greek (ancient and modern), and Spanish, reading constantly, writing amusing letters to his continually growing group of friends, and of course creating nonsense. His wandering life was lonely, and he treasured the many friends whom he never saw enough. He was never, in his lifetime, considered an important artist, nor did he earn the respect in artistic circles he so desired. As he neared the end of his life, he grew even more distant from his friends, many of whom held high positions in the British government. This lonely, isolated life contributed greatly to his nonsense writings, and there have been many biographical studies of his nonsense which treat the matter exhaustively.[20] While biographical approaches do indeed help to explain the origin of Lear's nonsense, they have often overshadowed cultural, historical, or theoretical readings. Occasionally studies of Lear are based solely on biographical criteria, including the great myth of Lear's life: a repressed, unrealised, latent, or otherwise hidden homosexuality, still yet to be proven conclusively.[21] In this thesis, however, I would like to depart from biographical readings and look at the contexts of the genre which have been all but ignored.

Lear read widely, and though he rarely wrote about his reading to his friends, we have a fairly good idea as to his literary tastes. He enjoyed the classics, particularly

---

[20]See S.A. Nock, "Lacrimae Nugarum: Edward Lear of the Nonsense Verses," *Sewanee Review*, 49 (1941), 68-81; Jorgen Andersen, "Edward Lear and the Origin of Nonsense," *English Studies*, 31 (1950), 161-166; Noakes, pp. 226-34; and Jackie Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland, The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, and A.A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 1995), *passim*.

[21]See Wullschläger, pp. 6, 63-71, and Susan Chitty, *That Singular Person Called Lear* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988), *passim*.

Sophocles, Plato, and Lucian, some of which he translated. In addition to the standards of

Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Walpole, he read most of the major romantic

figures, even composing music to some of Shelley's verse.[22] Tennyson was a great

favourite, and his main ambition in his later years was to complete a set of illustrations of

Tennyson's work. He also kept up with children's books throughout his life, such as

Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen (1822), the volume which inspired his

limerick-writing career, and Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* (1863), a book which had a

profound effect on Lear. It is telling that Lear and Kingsley had a relationship of mutual

respect and admiration, as Kingsley was a devoted and overt follower of the

Wordsworthian image of the child.[23] In 1871, after having read Lear's new volume

Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets (1870) Kingsley wrote to Tom Taylor

that it had "more wisdom & genius in it than all that Bain & Herbert Spencer ever wrote."[24]

Later that year, Lear wrote to Kingsley, "I have often thought I should like to thank you for

so much gratification given me by your many works--(perhaps above all--'Water Babies',

which I firmly believe to be all true.)"[25] Lear also showed some interest in

Maria Edgeworth, as he read her letters and memoirs in 1872.[26] In addition, it is a near-

certainty that Lear read Carroll, though never once, as far as we know, did he mention

Carroll's name.[27]

---

[22]Lear was friends with Shelley's son, Sir Percy Shelley (1819-89), who, to Lear's delight, wrote down Lear's musical version of "O world, O life, O time!" See Lear's letter to Lady Waldegrave, 15 March, 1863 in *Letters of Edward Lear Author of "The Book of Nonsense" To Chichester Fortescue Lord Carlingford and Frances Countess Waldegrave*, ed. Lady Strachey (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1907), p. 278, hereafter referred to as *LEL*. Soon after its publication, Lear read *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, ed. Francis Turner Palgrave (London: Macmillan , 1861), which included many verses from Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Southey, Lamb, and Hood. His childhood poem "Bury Hill" leans towards the Wordsworthian, though slightly more melancholy.
[23]Kingsley's work is saturated with his version of the Wordsworthian child. He makes this affinity apparent throughout, even quoting the *Ode* ("There was a time..."). See Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (New York: Dilithium Press, 1986), p. 60.
[24]Letter dates 16 March, 1871. Quoted in Noakes, p. 257.
[25]8 November, 1871. Edward Lear, *Selected Letters*, ed. Vivien Noakes (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. 190 (note 190, p. 305). Hereafter referred to as *ELSL*. Lear also writes to Holman Hunt, 31 December, 1863, "perhaps Daddy I shall be a Water Baby" (*ELSL*, p. 190).
[26]On 8 January, 1872, Lear wrote in his diary "Finished the first vol. of Miss Edgeworths (unpublished) letters: --curiously interesting--in many ways--but too breathless & fussy." Lear had access to Edgeworth's *Practical Education*, as well as Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, at Knowsley, though we do not know whether he read them (*Catalogue of the Library of the Right Honourable The Earl of Derby at Knowsley*, MS, 1830).
[27]The *Alice* books were also recommended to Lear in a letter from his close friend Fortescue (25 August, 1869). Lear's edition of *Alice* is now in America (Noakes, note 27, p. 242).

Lear's first nonsense book, *A Book of Nonsense*, anonymously published in 1846, was a moderate success, and new, revised and expanded editions came out in 1856 and 1861. Lear took great pride in his achievements as a children's writer-- "that all the world is thereby delighted."[28] He published three other volumes of nonsense: *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871), *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc.* (1872), and *Laughable Lyrics, A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems, Songs, Botany, Music, Etc.* (1877). All of these books met with general praise and popularity, and, taken with Carroll's nonsense works, made up the greater part of Victorian nonsense. There is much of Lear's nonsense and parody, however, which was not published in his lifetime and has slowly become available since his death. His nonsense corpus is extensive, embracing many genres, and his influence on later writers, poets, and illustrators has been substantial. Some of the greatest literary figures have written on Lear, including Tennyson, Ruskin, G.K. Chesterton, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and T.S. Eliot.

Finally, a word must be said about the scope of this thesis and my choice of topic. As a background to writing which began around 1832, this thesis deals most thoroughly with the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, the period which, necessarily, had the most influence on Lear's early writing. During this period occurred the most radical shifts in the conception of the child, the writing of children's literature, and educational theory. Much of the popular children's literature of the nineteenth century had been written in this earlier period and enjoyed a long life of Victorian reprintings. This includes works like Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories* (1778-89), Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1787-89), and John Aikin and his sister Anna Letitia Barbauld's *Evenings at Home* (1792-96), all of which remained popular throughout much of the Victorian period. We need only look at Carroll's "parodies" in the *Alice* books to see the survival through the century of the verse of Isaac Watts (*Divine and Moral Songs for Children*, 1715) and the Taylor sisters (*Original Poems for Infant Minds*, 1804). Of course, Lear and Carroll were also influenced by contemporary writers (including Lear's already-published nonsense), and I have also tried to take this into account.

---

[28]Letter to David Richard Morier, 12 January, 1871. *ELSL*, p. 228.

I have chosen to focus on Edward Lear, rather than Lewis Carroll, for several reasons. As this is a study of the context of the genre, it is important to begin, as the King of Hearts recommends, at the beginning: Edward Lear published literary nonsense verse nineteen years before Carroll, verse which Lear began writing around 1832, the year Carroll was born. Secondly, Carroll's work, which is much better known today, has received by far the greater amount of attention and criticism, and while Carroll's nonsense is more than deserving of this attention, a study of the origins of this genre must begin with Lear rather than Carroll. Because, in most studies of nonsense, Lear is cursorily passed over, the analyses and theories that have emerged have been centred on Carroll's nonsense, which, though being, in the grand scale of things, quite similar to Lear's, is nevertheless distinct in many ways. Consequently, much theory of the genre is based almost entirely (if not completely) on Carroll's nonsense, even in works which claim to examine both. Also, the background to the genre has been limited to Carroll's more specified range of reference, i.e. a few specific children's and adult verses, as opposed to the more intertextually broad-reaching nonsense of Lear. This bias towards Carroll has led to what I consider a grave omission in the "liberation" of the image of the child and children's literature in general. For instance, Harvey Darton, whose *Children's Books in England* has been the basis of most work on children's literature, dismisses Lear as merely "kicking his heels in an ecstasy" while claiming that Carroll's *Alice* books were, "the first unapologetic, undocumented appearance in print, for readers who sorely needed it, of liberty of thought in children's books. Henceforth fear had gone, and with it shy disquiet. There was to be in hours of pleasure no more dread about the moral value, the ponderable, measured quality and extent, of the pleasure itself."[29] Unfortunately, Darton's legacy has been for most critics to downplay the innovation of children's literary nonsense published nineteen years before Carroll's *Alice*, which came primarily from Lear.

---

[29]F.J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 2nd Edition, 1958 (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), p. 268.

Chapter One

The Parodic Basis of Nonsense

> *"Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn't fancy,"* cried the gentleman, quite elated
> by coming so happily to his point. *"That's it! You are never to fancy."*
> *"You are not, Cecilia Jupe,"* Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, *"to
> do anything of that kind."*
> *"Fact, fact, fact!"* said the gentleman. And *"Fact, fact, fact!"* repeated
> Thomas Gradgrind.
>
> -Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854)[30]

In his history of English children's literature, Harvey Darton claims that Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* is "a thing unrelated to its surroundings: as, perhaps, nonsense usually is" (p. 249). Like Darton, most literary critics and historians have largely ignored Lear's indebtedness to outside forms, cursorily observing his use of nursery rhyme, limerick, and Romantic verse, but his originality, and the originality of the genre, owes a great deal to what often approaches, and usually surpasses, a parodic relationship.[31] While most studies of literary nonsense focus on its creation of "nonsense" out of general linguistic and logical modes of sense, this chapter will show how literary nonsense is derived from *literary* sense, which is half, if not more, of the genre, and that which distinguishes it from nursery rhyme, fairy tale, light verse, and other possible nonsense-related genres. Many critics of literary nonsense have recognized the parodic tendency therein, yet some assert that nonsense, by its very nature cannot be parody--it must exist beyond any such direct purpose. The debate over whether nonsense can or cannot include parody continues today.

---

[30]Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, 1854 (London: Educational Book Company, 1910), p. 6.

[31]For brief summaries of the background for Lear's nonsense, including nursery rhyme, limerick, and Romantic verse, see Cammaerts pp. 1-4; Angus Davidson, *Edward Lear: Landscape Painter and Nonsense Poet* (London: John Murray, 1938), p. 200; Thomas Byrom, *Nonsense and Wonder: The Poems and Cartoons of Edward Lear* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977) pp. 50, 155-57; A.J.M. Smith, "Nonsense Poetry and Romanticism," in *Essays in Honor of Russell B. Nye*, ed. Joseph Waldmeir (East Lansing: The Michigan State UP, 1978), pp. 180-194 (pp. 188-90); and Tigges pp. 85-95, 149. A detailed study of Lear's indebtedness to past forms has yet to be done. The attention that Carroll has received, while considerably greater, has seldom approached the issue of the inherent conflicts between nonsense and parody.

In Noel Malcolm's study of seventeenth-century nonsense, he argues for this previously underrecognized aspect of it. He claims that literary nonsense is "something which existed only in a literary culture; and indeed something which, because of its essentially parodic nature, had a peculiarly intimate connection with the literary world...."[32] Rather than the early seventeenth-century background of Marlowe and Marston, Lear's "literary culture" is that of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century children's (and sometimes adult) texts. However, Malcolm sees the parody of Lear and Carroll in a very limited sense, "taking an approved and improving rhyme (which itself makes perfect sense), such as 'Star of the evening' or 'How doth the little busy bee', and rendering it absurd" (p. 115). If this were indeed the extent of Lear's and Carroll's work, then it would not be fair to call it nonsense, as, I would argue, parody alone cannot be nonsense. This description is more appropriate for Carroll's work, but in Carroll, and especially Lear, parody engages its literary source in a more vigorous and complex manner.

By looking at literary nonsense's referential texts, I will show how Lear's, and some of Carroll's, nonsense, both as device and genre, is saturated with parody, while at the same time standing aloof from it. When nonsense is used only as a *device*, the work usually becomes parody or satire. As a separate *genre*, it frequently, though not necessarily, depends on other genres for its forms and material, yet in such cases goes beyond parody, beyond criticism of specific author or genre. Indeed, the genre of literary nonsense cannot have this kind of direct purpose or target, as such. Though it may appear to do so, intertextual nonsense does not engage in any significant and meaningful critical dialogue with its parent text(s). The repercussions of the use of the parodic are two-fold: firstly, part of the implied reader's construction emerges from a recognition of and certain reaction to the literary references (see Chapters 6 and 7). Secondly, the relationship between nonsense and parody is integral to the issue of "sense" and "non-sense" discussed in Chapter 7. In the intertextual nonsense-as-genre of both Lear and Carroll, some characteristics of parody often do exist, and there is necessarily a tension between the parodied text and the parody itself, but it is only secondary, and, indeed, contributes to the

---

[32]Malcolm, pp. 52-53.

tension between meaning and lack of meaning inherent in nonsense. My object, then, is to show the uniqueness of the genre while at the same time revealing its intertextual nature without which this "literary" genre would slip into nursery babble.

Before we move to Lear's parodic work, we must first examine the critical debate on parody and nonsense which brings up some of the crucial features of both. Some critics would grant that parody is possible in nonsense. This tradition goes back to the reviews and articles concerning nonsense which flourished in the 1870s, in which there was a debate between critics who argued for "sense" (i.e. symbolism, satire, and parody) and those who argued for "non-sense," or "nonsense pure and absolute."[33] In one of the most thorough of these articles, called "Nonsense as a Fine Art" (1888), the author, assumed to be Edward Strachey, defines two kinds of parody. The first is "vulgar parody or travesty" which "takes some noble poem, and for its idea, thoughts, and images, substitutes the writer's own low and vulgar fancies, which he couples as far as possible with the words of the original which he thus outrages."[34] Strachey is too indignant to quote any examples. The other kind of parody, that which he claims Lear exemplifies, "is that in which the comic writer gives you real fun of his own, while clothing it in the style of some great author, but without any mere employment of his words, unless it be in so far as they are taken to express that style" (p. 354). There was no response to Strachey's arguments on parody, though other issues were taken up in later journals; he was ahead of his time in his analysis of nonsense, and the debate would continue into the twentieth century.

Émile Cammaerts, in an early study of nonsense focusing more on Carroll, claims that parody, but not satire, is possible in nonsense (p. 9). Elizabeth Sewell in *The Field of Nonsense* (1952) also maintains that parody is possible in nonsense, although she distinguishes between Lear and Carroll, claiming only the latter participates in it (pp. 171-2). Nevertheless, while she acknowledges Carroll's parody, she finds that the game of nonsense "goes forward without our being troubled necessarily even with the memory of the pious and moral originals lying behind so many of the verses" (p. 174). Smith notes,

---

[33]For a fuller discussion of this debate, see Chapter 7.

[34][Edward Strachey], "Nonsense as a Fine Art," *Quarterly Review*, 167 (October, 1888), 335-65 (p. 353).

somewhat equivocally, that in Lear's work there is "oblique and allusive" parody, in the form of appreciative criticism of romanticism, "And yet even this implies some sort of denigration" (pp. 189, 188). Smith does not question on a fundamental level the ability of nonsense to criticize. Therefore, his approach to the conjunction of nonsense and parody draws no satisfactory conclusions.

In more recent criticism, the issue of the definition of parody has become crucial. Noel Malcolm asserts that nonsense is parody, but he uses the term in a broad sense of a "literary phenomenon," which implies only intertextuality and contemporary literary relevance (pp. 88-89). Though he is discussing seventeenth-century nonsense, this definition is equally applicable to nineteenth-century nonsense, especially regarding intertextual relationships. Linda Shires, somewhat like Edward Strachey, tries to resolve the problem by defining two kinds of parody in Carroll: oppositional (as with Watts) and nostalgic (as with Tennyson and Wordsworth). Oppositional parody plays the more traditional role, while nostalgic parody, through positive and negative criticism, eventually demonstrates similarity rather than difference between parody and model text (p. 279). However, Shires does not seem to take into account the nonsense within the "parodies" of both kinds or discuss passages which are not so easily classifiable. Peter Levi sees Lear's work as parody of another kind altogether--a parody of emotion. He writes, "[Lear's] songs, his comic lyrics, were parodies of the deepest emotions they expressed, but they were at least as sad as they were funny, and when they were in perfect balance, the emotion overcame the parody."[35] Levi hedges around the issue of parody and offers a somewhat confusing balancing of "emotion" and humour which may or may not constitute parody, but he does recognize that Lear sometimes goes *beyond* parody. Kent and Ewen, in their work on Romantic parody, claim that "By 1865 Lewis Carroll was parodying Southey and Wordsworth in nonsense verse for humorous effects, not seriously questioning the

---

[35] "Edward Lear" in *The Art of Poetry: The Oxford Lectures 1984-1989* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1991), pp. 169-186 (p. 183).

convictions expressed by the originals."[36] Here there is a recognition that, although Carroll is writing parody, it is of a newer, less satirical type.

The awareness of this more modern approach to parody informs several recent studies of nonsense. While a parodic tendency is recognized in nonsense, many critics would hesitate to label it parody, at least in the more conventional definition of the term. Nina Demurova, in her study of Carroll's nonsense, admits that "parody" is not exactly the right term for what Carroll does in his "parodic" verses. She recognizes much satire and notes the ever-changing relationship with source texts. Carroll both respects his models and simultaneously holds some "deep, unconscious ambivalence" towards them (p. 85) . Once again, the relationship between nonsense and parody is treated equivocally. In Wim Tigges's detailed *Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (1988), he asserts that, because nonsense can have no purpose, it precludes parody, which is necessarily an attack (p. 95). Tigges, however, claims that nonsense often arises through parody and passes beyond it. This, too, is the contention of Donald Gray, who perhaps comes closest to appraising the relevance of nonsense within an ostensibly parodic framework. Gray recognizes the parodic in nonsense but claims that a "nonsense parody" tries to diminish its dependence on the original, which itself is a paradoxical act. However, Gray admits that this paradox is useful for what he claims is the "purpose" of nonsense, i.e. confronting without consequence the more weighty problems of life (pp. 171-72). Here, the issue of purpose arises, and Gray gives to literary nonsense what many claim it lacks.

Lecercle also offers an interesting take on the parodic slant of nonsense, claiming that "Nonsense texts are not explicitly parodic, they turn parody into a theory of serious literature" (p. 2). Taking Bakhtin's term "refraction" for an imitative text, Lecercle maintains that nonsense texts do not reflect, but "refract" their source text(s). He writes, "This is not merely distortion, but also inscription. A nonsense text literally inscribes other texts through ironic quotation--this is the distance of parody" (pp. 169-70). He proceeds to show, in what is a familiar method now, two different kinds of parody, using

---

[36]Kent, David A. and D.R. Ewen, eds., *Romantic Parodies: 1797-1831* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 15.

Barthes as a model: parody proper and pastiche. The dialogic relationship in parody proper is easily recognizable, and "Once we have grasped the language game we are in, meaning becomes easy to compute, through a maxim of parody or irony, which gives rise to implicatures." (p. 172). Irony, the inversion of meaning, is the most important transformative function of the parody. Pastiche, on the other hand, occurs when the theme of the original text is discarded for one or more different themes, "with the consequence that we no longer have a single voice, but a polyphonic babble.... the text escapes the control of the speaker and the words take over." (p. 172). This account of nonsense parody seems the most fair, yet Lecercle's claim that nonsense promotes a conservative pedagogy is at odds with such refractive, "polyphonic" texts. And while Lecercle's analysis works well with the more obvious "parodies" in the *Alice* books, it does not attempt to tackle the more subtle parodic forms, especially those found in Lear's adoption of the limerick, travel book, alphabet, natural history, and others.

Perhaps the reason for such critical confusion and division is that, aside from the issue of nonsense, the definition of parody itself has been heatedly debated for many years. Though I do not have the space here to enter into the complexities of this debate, a brief outline of the issues will be helpful. The most divisive aspect of parody theory concerns its critical function. Most agree that parody from its earliest manifestations up to about the nineteenth century was primarily censorious. Somewhere in the late eighteen-hundreds, though, one branch of parody, or what we might call critical imitation, seemed to drift away from its focus on ridicule. The result manifested, for example, in works such as Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, or in more recent times, Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. These texts certainly imitate in a critical manner, but can they be called parody? Is parody by nature a source of ridicule, or can it be a more neutral, or even positive, criticism-cum-homage? Coming from the background of Bakhtin's dialogic approach to parody, new and more radical theorists such as Hutcheon, Waugh, and Hannoosh broaden the scope of parody to include positive criticism, which places the parody in the genre it imitates, hence contributing to, expanding, and renovating the tradition in question. In contrast, the opposing school of thought supported by the majority

of theorists, including Rose, Bex, and Riewald, as well as the *OED*, claims simply that parody must include some degree of ridicule, or as Riewald states, a "willful distortion of the entire form *and* spirit of a writer, captured at his most typical moment" (p. 19). The question here is not what writers are doing so much as it is a question of labels--of whether the definition of parody should or should not be expanded to include newer forms of critical imitation.

Other issues which arise in the debate of parody are whether parody targets a single text/author/style or the entire genre represented by the anterior text. Irony is one issue of contention, though most theorists claim irony to be a powerful, if not intrinsic, quality of parody.[37] Further issues in parody theory centre around the extent of reflexivity and the degree to which parody contributes to the development of literary forms. For the purposes of this thesis I shall use a patchwork of theories to define my use of the word "parody," though I do not claim it to be definitive: Parody is a critical imitation marked by ironic difference, resulting in ridicule and usually humour. It can also exist in the form of dialogic "play," which implies critique and ultimately has a ridiculous effect. This criticism, which can be both positive and negative, may be directed at a particular author or style, or it may target a genre. If the critical stance towards the anterior texts is not deprecatory then the new text is not parody; there is no term for it, but I would label it simply "critical imitation," of which parody is a specific subset. The parodic text is reflexive, in that it places itself in or near the genre it parodies, necessarily inviting alternative or further parody of the anterior text, as well perhaps as of itself. Parody can attempt to dispense with its target, especially if the target is specific, such as a particular author, or, because of its critical stance, it can encourage the growth and development of the genre(s) it engages. For the sake of brevity, I will occasionally refer to the questionably parodic nonsense pieces as "parodies," though, in most cases I am arguing that this label is inaccurate.

---

[37]See, for instance, Wolfgang Iser's irony-based definition of parody in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 93.

The parodic element of Lear's nonsense can be seen as a slightly later echo of the Romantic reaction to popular children's (and adult) literature. Though nonsense does not lend itself to explicitness, Lear's outrageous transgressions of all conventional moral and pedagogic models is surely one of his "goals," though how he went about this, and what its effects are on his verse, have rarely been critically examined. Blake, Wordsworth, the Lambs, and Coleridge were united in their contempt for, what Charles Lamb's famous letter to Coleridge on 23 October, 1802 describes as, "this sore evil... Think what you would have been now, if instead of being fed with Tales and old wives fables in childhood, you had been crammed with Geography & Natural History.? Damn them. I mean the cursed Barbauld Crew, those Blights & Blasts of all that is Human in man & child.--"[38] The results of such discontent can be seen particularly in the writing of Blake and Wordsworth.

Blake's attack on children's literature derives from his opposition to Enlightenment philosophy, a dominating force in children's books at the time. He was quite familiar with the children's book market, having been commissioned three times from 1780-1791 to engrave illustrations for children's books,[39] but he is best known for having engraved Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788). His response to these "progressive" educational methods was the subtly, yet distinctly subversive *Songs of Innocence*.[40] Part of its subversive effect is a result of what this little volume leaves out: it questions empirical modes of reasoning, omnipresent in the new regiments of children's literature, which Blake so despised, and it refuses to conform to the "fact, fact, fact" aspect of "progressive" children's literature. To do this, it used the very forms common in other children's books, undermining them insidiously.

"The Lamb," for instance, appears to be a simple poem in catechistic form, yet it also seems to be a parody of Charles Wesley's "Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild" (1742) and the

---

[38]*The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr., 3 volumes (Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1976), II, 82.

[39]Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), p. 9. Also see Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 154, for a description of Blake's close acquaintance with children's writers.

[40]See also Blake's *An Island in the Moon* (in Erdman's *Complete* edition) for satire of rationalist education schemes.

catechistic method in general. Wesley's poem describes a child's prayer to the lamb of God, Jesus, in a plea for humility and likeness to Jesus:

. . . . . .

> Lamb of God, I look to thee,
> Thou shalt my example be;
> Thou art gentle, meek, and mild,
> Thou wast once a little child.
>
> Fain I would be as thou art,
> Give me thy obedient heart;
> Thou art pitiful and kind,
> Let me have thy loving mind.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thou didst live to God alone,
> Thou didst never seek thine own,
> Thou thyself didst never please:
> God was all thy happiness.[41]

Blake's version alters the entire situation and undermines the orthodox message of Wesley's poem: Most importantly, Blake creates "God the Child rather than God the Father"[42] and identifies the three figures of child, lamb, and God with little distinction, tearing down the traditional cosmic order. As Heather Glen states, all the conventional "hierarchies are subtly but surely dissolved" (p. 25).

But the use of the catechistic form, which Blake superimposes on Wesley's text, also has political implications. The catechistic form had been revived in the 1780s by educationalists such as Trimmer as a means to contain what was seen as the dangerous new literacy and "pretension" of the lower classes.[43] Catechistic method was used as an attempt to replace the traditional methods of learning with "a monologic, hegemonizing master discourse as the price of literacy."[44] The poor were meant to be content behind the plow regardless of rapidly increasing literacy rates. Typical of the Romantics, Blake probably saw the catechistic method as the mockery of a dialogic education and an intellectually barren imposition on the

---

[41]First published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742)by John and Charles Wesley. Quoted in Glen, p. 23. These are middle stanzas.

[42]Richardson, p. 74.

[43]See Trimmer's *Sunday-School Catechist* (1788) or *The Teacher's Assistant: Consisting of Lectures in the Catechetical Form* (4th edition, 1806).

[44]Richardson, p. 67. See Richardson, pp. 64-77, for a detailed account of the new application of catechistic method and Blake's and Wordsworth's reaction to it.

imagination. "The Lamb," like many of the other verses, is written with the child as narrator, which is one of the reasons why the subversiveness is so hard to detect. In the child's voice, sweet and innocent, the system of catechism is displaced and, Sarah Trimmer would have argued, perverted: here, the child, usually the passive recipient of catechism, is placed in the position of authority over a helpless, mute lamb, which itself, most tellingly, takes the child's normal position. And the religious message, if it had been fully understood (or even *read* at the time) would have been considered offensive by many.

Wordsworth also uses the catechism in order to undermine it. In such poems as "We Are Seven" and "Anecdote for Fathers," which are described in Chapters 3 and 7, the children prove the meddlesome adults wrong. Catechistic method, which enforces blind indoctrination, fails miserably in the face of the child's inscrutable superiority. Wordsworth himself was more outspoken than Blake when it came to education, the child, and children's literature. Wordsworth expresses similar sentiments to Lamb's letter, in a letter to an unknown correspondent (unknown date) recommending that the way to educate a child is "Assuredly not by mortifying her, which is the course commonly pursued with such tempers, nor by preaching to her about her own defects; nor by overrunning her infancy with books about Good Boys and Girls, and bad Boys and Girls, and all that trumpery..."[45] Wordsworth here refers to current theory about children and books for children, both of which he saw as disastrous to a child. He devotes large sections of *The Prelude* to venting his disapproval of such utilitarian education theorists as Edgeworth, describing the resulting child as

> ...no child,
> But a dwarf man; in knowledge, virtue, skill,
> In what he is not, and in what he is,
> The noontide shadow of a man complete;
> A worshipper of worldly seemliness--[46]

---

[45]*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, Part 1, 1806-1811*, 2nd edition, ed. Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 286-7.

[46]William Wordsworth, *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), V, ll. 294-98. All references to *The Prelude*, unless otherwise noted, are from the 1805 version in this edition. Wordsworth's dislike for such education theories is prevalent through much of his work, and is expressed explicitly throughout Book V of *The Prelude*. See also Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, or *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, 1817, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 volumes (Princeton: Princeton UP; London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 12-13, for a similar invective against the utilitarian education systems.

This child's soul is "vanity" and selfishness, the opposite of the free, unencumbered child Wordsworth envisions.

Wordsworth's strong sentiments surface in "The Waterfall and the Eglantine," a parodic fable in the style of Æsop, but which Wordsworth twists at the end to foil the reader's expectations for a standard, didactic moral. In the poem, the boastful waterfall orders the eglantine away from its stream, but the meek plant, our protagonist, tries to compromise. It proposes that the two live in harmony, generously offering to "deck" the river with its last possessions, its "scarlet hips." The narrator relates that at this point the river rose, the briar "quaked," and "much I fear, / Those accents were his last."[47] The pride of the river is rewarded; the meekness, sensitivity, and generosity of the eglantine are punished with death.[48] In this poem, Wordsworth expresses an irreverence for the form and content of Æsop's fables in parody, reflecting his more general feelings about the contemporary education theories and children's literature. The motivation which led Wordsworth to parodic criticism of contemporary education led Edward Lear down a similar path.

Lear's reading included children's books, which he sometimes illustrated for various children of his friends and patrons.[49] Though he rarely comments on any of his reading, he must have found the contemporary children's literature quite depressing. His rare, but enthusiastic reaction to what we would now call more progressive children's literature (i.e., that which was written to amuse and with a somewhat lighter didactic touch) perhaps indicates his tastes. He read Kingsley's *Water Babies* soon after it was published in 1863 and was so enthusiastic about it that he later wrote to Kingsley, himself a fan of Lear's nonsense.[50] He also wrote to William Holman Hunt, on 31 December, 1863,

---

[47]*The Oxford Authors William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: OUP, with corrections 1986), ll. 55-56. Unless otherwise noted, this edition will be used for all citations of Wordsworth's poems except for *The Prelude*.

[48]The companion poem to "The Waterfall and the Eglantine" is "The Oak and the Broom," which does reach its expected end.

[49]See Edward Lear, *Lear in the Original: Drawings and Limericks by Edward Lear for his Book of Nonsense*, ed. Herman W. Liebert (New York: H.P. Krauss; London: OUP, 1975), pp. 142-205, for Lear's illustrations of various children's (and adult) stories and poems, including the somewhat nonsensical *Daniel O'Rourke*.

[50]Noakes, p. 257. See p. 10 for a quote from this letter.

"Goodbye, Daddy; perhaps Daddy I shall be a Water Baby."[51] Kingsley's stance on the utilitarian literature still popular in much of the nineteenth century is obvious throughout his work, for example, in the caricature, of "Cousin Cramchild," an embodiment of the "dwarf man" Wordsworth decried in *The Prelude* (V, 1. 295). Of course, Kingsley did not hesitate to include his own eccentric brand of didacticism, however anti-establishment, in *Water Babies*. Nevertheless, Kingsley's book owes a considerable debt to Lear's nonsense.

Before the appearance of *A Book of Nonsense*, English children had to content themselves with a bland repast of the increasing piles of literature written for them. Reprints of eighteenth-century children's literature spread unabated, including primarily what was considered at the time "progressive" children's literature, often inspired by Locke and Rousseau, which exchanged fairy tales for more "useful" and practical information. The unlucky recipients dined on verse and prose, perhaps written by Sarah Trimmer or Hannah More, alternatively viciously or blandly didactic, representing unrealistic children, in a world reduced to the size of what was perceived as the child's mind.[52] This mind, a simple and predictable organ, could be filled in a rational, effective method with the information it needed to raise itself to the level of the adult world. Also on their plate could be found works from the Evangelical writers, such as James Janeway, and later, Watts and Sherwood, to save these little sinful creatures from damnation.[53] The high moral tone of such works has been felt long after their initial insurgence in the late-seventeenth century, even up to the present day. By 1800, moralistic children's literature wholly dominated the market which had all but forgotten imaginative, less didactic work. Nearly the only outlet for more frivolous works was the huge chapbook market, which was directed at the poor,

---

[51]*ELSL*, p. 190.

[52]See, for instance Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories: Designed for the instruction of children, respecting their treatment of animals* (1786, title later changed to *The History of the Robins*) and More's *Sacred Dramas: Chiefly intended for young persons: The subjects taken from the bible* (1782), in which she "rather aspired after moral instruction, than the purity of Dramatic Composition" (p. vi).

[53]See James Janeway's *A Token for Children, being an exact account of the conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children* (1671-1672), Issac Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715), and Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family; or, The Child's Manual: Being a collection of stories calculated to shew the importance and effects of a religious eduction* (1818).

and often did not distinguish between the adult and child in its readership.[54] After 1800, a few exceptions in the book market began to appear, notably a series of works beginning with William Roscoe's *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast* (1807), which, though escaping didacticism, did little to exercise the imagination. Even writers such as Charles and Mary Lamb and Thomas Love Peacock,[55] though declaiming against writers such as Trimmer and Barbauld, did not entirely move beyond such a condescending and programmatic treatment of children. The minimal story in Peacock's *Sir Hornbook*, for instance, is almost entirely engulfed by footnotes which give grammatical rules and explain the "allegorical" format.[56] And from 1830 to 1840 very little original or humorous material emerged.[57]

The world of children's literature would change, though, with Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* in 1846. Referring to his latest nonsense book, Lear wrote to his friends Chichester Fortescue and Lady Waldegrave on Christmas Day, 1871, "I wonder if you have been edified by my More Nonsense...,"[58] implying that he knew very well his nonsense defied all standards of children's writing, and that it was refreshingly free from any type of edification. Lear diverged from all types of "edification," indulging in a constant upsetting of adult reasoning and outrageously transgressing all conventional moral and pedagogic models. Lear appropriated many of the varying forms of children's literature available at the time, including the ABC verse, the cautionary tale, and the limerick, and parodied them,[59] but in so doing frequently moved beyond parody to the creation of a new children's genre: literary nonsense.

It should be noted, first of all, that a small amount of Lear's work for children is neither nonsensical nor parodic. Though Lear is generally not known for his alphabets, he

---

[54]See, for instance, the popular and continually reprinted late-eighteenth century "Cock Robin" chapbooks with various titles like *The Death and Burial of Cock Robin; as Taken from the original Manuscript, in the Possession of Master Meanwell* (Lichfield: M. Morgan and A. Morgan, [1793-1802]).
[55] See the Lambs's *Mrs. Leicester's School* (1809) or *Poetry for Infant Minds* (1808-1809) and Peacock's *Sir Hornbook; or, Childe Launcelot's Expedition: A Grammatico-Allegorical Ballad* (1814).
[56]Thomas Love Peacock, *Sir Hornbook; or, Childe Launcelot's Expedition. A Grammatico-Allegorical Ballad* (London: Sharpe and Hailes, 1814), *passim*.
[57] Darton, p. 217.
[58] *ELSL*, p. 235.
[59]See Sewell, pp. 172-173; Cammaerts, pp. 11-12; Lecercle, p. 2, for more on the relationship between nonsense and parody.

completed many throughout his life, some more nonsensical than others. While it has been the habit to label all of his alphabets "nonsense alphabets," most are nothing like his true nonsense and contain very few, if any, nonsense devices. As a child, Lear probably grew up with some of the same alphabets which taught his parents and grandparents. The first books of printed alphabets go back as far as 1538, though these were in forms only vaguely recognizable as children's. However, from the sixteenth century onward, many standard alphabets demonstrated a surprising resilience. In 1671 the famous "A was an Apple Pie" is referred to as if it were well-established. Between 1702 and 1712, the famous "A was an Archer and shot a frog" alphabet was first published.[60]

> A was an archer, who shot at a frog;
> B was a Blind-man, and led by a Dog:
> C was a cutpurse, and liv'd in disgrace;
> D was a Drunkard, and had a red Face:...   (Opie, p. 49)

These alphabets, printed in cheap forms for a wide market, are notable because they were still being used, with some variations, throughout the nineteenth century.[61] From about 1800, however, with the rapidly growing market for children's literature, the verse ABC flourished, with many new versions amidst the old, such as *The Invited Alphabet* (1808) and *The Assembled Alphabet* (1813).[62] Lear, who kept abreast of the children's literature market, contributed to this growing body, often seriously.

Several of Lear's alphabets are not nonsensical at all and only mildly humorous. In his *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany, and Alphabet* (1871) we see an example of the standard alphabet:

> **A** was an ant
> Who seldom stood still
> And who made a nice house
> In the side of a hill.
> **a!**
> Nice little Ant![63]

---

[60]Darton, p. 60.

[61]Opie, pp. 48-50.

[62]Percy Muir, *English Children's Books, 1600-1900* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1954), p. 220.

[63]*The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: Dover, 1947), p. 131. All Lear's poems, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from this edition.

This alphabet continues in this light way, rarely approaching anything like true nonsense. One of the possible exceptions is the verse for "P," a small pig, "But his tail was too curly, / And that made him surly" (p. 134). Here we see a glimmer of the nonsense logic so common in the limericks. Again, in the rhyme for "S," light nonsense appears:

> S was the sugar-tongs
> Nippity-nee,
> To take up the sugar
> To put in our tea.
> s !
> Nippity nee!   (p. 135)

The nursery-type nonsense, "nippity nee," has no other function than to create satisfying rhythm and rhyme. Taken out of the context of the highly formulaic limerick, with its inherent structural order and expected narrative coherence, such babble does not rise to true nonsense. The picture and rhyme for 'X', the ever-present King Xerxes, are also amusing, with the stretched rhyme of "Xerxes" with "Turks is." Though the letters "P" and "S" approach nonsense, they fall far short. The reader sees this alphabet as one among many such mildly humorous alphabets. Even the "Xerxes" rhyme, one of the more amusing ones, can be seen as a slight parody of traditional alphabet form, such as in *A Little Book for Little Children*, around 1703, in which "X," next to a sober woodcut, is: "Xerxes the Prince was great, / and nobly born."[64] Two other of Lear's alphabets follow a similar path of normalcy, one starting with "A was an ape" (1871) and the other more prosaic-sounding "A was an Area Arch" (1877). These alphabets are conventional imitations, with only the slightest hints of parody and nonsense.

Much of Lear's nonsense is imitative not just of genre, but also of specific works. From vague references to significant borrowing, literary nonsense is created in the image of a variety of other texts. Lear's *The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò*, for instance, has a rich background in ancient Mummer's plays, and probably in Tennyson and Wordsworth. A Mummer's play from Great Wolford, Warwickshire has "Fidler Wit," a foolish character, recite the following lines:

---

[64]Muir, *English Children's Books*, p. 38.

> In comes I Fidler Wit
> My head's so large, me wits so small
> I've brought me fidler to please you all.
> Toll-de-roll the tinder box
> Father died the other night
> And left me all his riches,
> A wooden leg, a feather bed,
> And a pair of leather breeches,
> A coffee pot without a spout,
> A jug without a handle,
> A guinea pig without a wig,
> A half a farthing candle.
> Sing brothers sing.[65]

This greatly resembles Lear's big-headed character whose riches amount to "Two old chairs, and half a candle,-- / One old jug without a handle" (ll. 5-6). The sound and rhythm of Lear's poem also bears some resemblance to Tennyson's "'Frater Ave atque Vale'," while the image of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò going to sea on a turtle's shell is surprisingly similar to the protagonist's flight in Wordsworth's "The Blind Highland Boy." Another instance of intertextuality is in Lear's *The Dong with a Luminous Nose*, which borrows much of its plot, rhythm, images, and sound quality from Thomas Moore's *A Ballad: The Lake of the Dismal Swamp*, the first two stanzas of which are as follows:

> "They made her a grave, too cold and damp,
> For a soul so warm and true;
> And she's gone to the Lake of the Dismal Swamp,
> Where, all night long, by a fire-fly lamp,
> She paddles her white canoe.
>
> And her fire-fly lamp I soon shall see,
> And her paddle I soon shall hear;
> Long and loving our life shall be,
> And I'll hide the maid in a cypress tree,
> When the footstep of death is near."[66]

A young man goes insane after the death of his lover, and he searches for her in the Dismal Swamp, where he expects to see her lamp. Through difficulty he finally finds her "meteor bright," much like the Dong's "Meteor strange and bright," and, so the legend goes, the couple are reunited. At midnight both the doomed couple and the Dong can been seen by their moving light. Of course, in Moore's tale the couple join in a ghostly reunion, but the

---

[65]R.J.E. Tiddy, *The Mummer's Play* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), pp. 230-1.

[66]Spoken by the "young man." I have modernized the quotation marks. In *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore, collected by himself*, 10 volumes (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1840), II, 223-24.

likeness of these poems is more than coincidental. The Dong also resembles forsaken

figures like Tennyson's Mariana, whom Lear often echoes in his diaries,[67] and especially

Wordsworth's Margaret in *The Ruined Cottage*, who wanders the wilds after having lost

her eldest child:

> I have been travelling far, and many days
> About the fields I wander, knowing this
> Only, that what I seek I cannot find.
> And so I waste my time: for I am changed (ll. 349-52)

In this aimless wandering she resembles the Dong who, after the Jumbly girl leaves him,

"arose and said;-- / 'What little sense I once possessed / Has quite gone out of my head!'--"

The Dong also searches in deluded hope, as he "seeks in vain / To meet with his Jumbly

Girl again." Echoes like those found in *The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò* and *The

Dong with a Luminous Nose* are common, and often noted by critics. Elizabeth Sewell

finds Spenser's *Epithalamion* and Milton's *Comus* in *The Dong* and *The Owl and the

Pussy-cat*, and nursery rhymes in *The Jumblies* (1871), while Thomas Byrom finds echoes

from Shakespeare, Gray, Burns, Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, and Arnold in Lear's

"Cold are the Crabs."[68] I do not have the space here to list all of Lear's referential

nonsense, and the specific implications of it do not concern this thesis; they could easily

constitute a separate study. In all of these textual references, whether direct, distant, or

coincidental, Lear betrays, among many things, his love for Romantic melancholy and for

the solitary. His intertextual references add to the richness of his texts but are usually

understated or vague enough not to be easily noticed, and far from indicating parody, they

usually show a deep respect for the spirit of the original, often startling us into seeing the

close thematic similarities of the echoed poems and nonsense.

When Lear chose to create an unequivocal parody, it differed significantly from his

attempts at non-parodic children's literature and nonsense. In fact, some of his

straightforward parodies came in the form of humorous illustrations to the popular ballads

which he himself sang throughout the drawing-rooms of well-to-do Victorian society. Lear

---

[67]Lear, in ill-health, writes in his diary for February, 1866, "He only said--my life is ugly-- / My life's a bore he said."

[68]Sewell, pp. 64-69; Byrom, p. 230.

illustrates many of these songs, often providing parody by making ridiculous the serious sentiments therein. In his parody of William Mee's "Alice Gray" (1815; also parodied by Carroll in 1855), Lear's joke, which is no longer very funny, is to portray Alice as a scrawny black woman, wearing the fashionable gear of the day. Her suitor mourns her profusely, and in Lear's close-up drawing of her face, we see the contrast between the lyrical text and the ugly illustration.
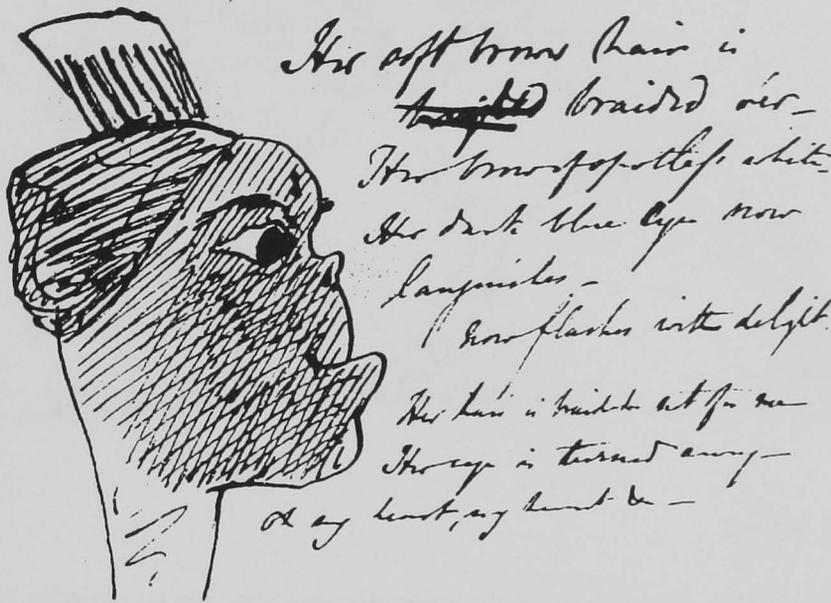
Her soft brown hair is
   braided o'er --
Her brow of spotless white,
Her dark blue eye now languishes,
Now flashes with delight.
Her hair is braided not for me
Her eye is turned away
Oh heart, my heart & --[69]

Lear's exaggerated inversion of the beautiful Alice Gray makes the poem, and its melodramatic genre, quite absurd. The parody consciously engages with the conventions of the genre and explodes them by showing the inappropriateness of the poem's subject.

A similar device is used in Lear's illustrations for Thomas Moore's "Rich and Rare were the Gems She Wore" (1807). The subject of the poem, a beautiful young woman who fearlessly displays her beauty and her wealth on "this bleak way," is drawn by Lear as an old hag, whose "rich and rare" gems consist of a huge ring through her bulbous nose,

---

[69]*Lear in the Original*, p. 145.

an outrageously large earring, and other absurd adornments. The last drawing, of the line "On she went & her maiden smile" shows the old woman striding away, cane in hand, flashing a particularly devious and altogether un-maidenly smile.

These series of illustrations directly engage and negatively criticize the poem's subject, as well as the style and genre.

Outright parody also occurs in some of Lear's alphabets, such as the alphabet starting "A tumbled down, and hurt his Arm...." This alphabet is modelled after one which was well-known in 1671, starting "A was an apple-pie; / B bit it, / C cut it, D dealt it,...." The old version continues in this way, each letter having something to do with the apple-pie. Again, such an old alphabet is relevant here, as it was very popular in the nineteenth century, and is still being reprinted.[70] Lear wrote an alphabet in a similar vein:

> **A** tumbled down, and hurt his Arm, against a bit of wood.
> **B** said, 'My Boy, O! do not cry; it cannot do you good!'
> **C** said, 'A Cup of Coffee hot can't do you any harm.'
> **D** said, 'A Doctor should be fetched, and he would cure the arm.'
> (p. 270)

This alphabet continues, with each letter offering advice on the injured arm. A few of the suggestions are particularly Learesque, such as "**O** said, 'An Owl might make him laugh,

---

[70]Opie, pp. 47-48.

if only it would wink.'" and "**W** said, 'Some Whisky-Whizzgigs fetch, some marbles and a ball!'" These small instances of nonsense-like levity are amusing, but do not mark the alphabet as anything other than what it claims to be; however, they hint at the culminating joke of this alphabet. After all the letters offer their advice, we hear from "Z":

> **Z** said, 'Here is a box of Zinc! Get in, my little master!
> 'We'll shut you up! We'll nail you down! We will, my little
> master!
> 'We think we've all heard quite enough of this your sad
> disaster!' (p. 271)

Here, in the true colours of parody, Lear turns the rhyme upon itself, with the last letter finally fed up with this never-ending good advice and kindness. "Z" lashes out, creating, true to the definitions of parody, "a ridiculous effect" by way of commenting directly on the form and content of this traditional alphabet.

Carroll also participated in definite moments of parody, particularly in some of his early poetry. Like Lear, Carroll was raised on the popular children's literature of the nineteenth century. Throughout his life, the Reverend Dodgson himself wrote many morally and religiously didactic verses in the same vein as the ones he seems to mock in his parodies and nonsense as "Lewis Carroll." This apparent contradiction in ideology and method cannot be reconciled, nor need it be, but it can provide a clue as to the functional ambiguities of some of his imitations. While the literary nonsense of Lear and Carroll breaks out of the rigidly edifying conventions of children's literature, their parodies speak more directly in criticism and mockery, and they do this with little or no use of nonsense, even as a device. Carroll's "Brother and Sister," written when he was fifteen years old, is a typical example of didactic verse parody:

> "Sister, sister, go to bed!
> Go and rest your weary head."
> Thus the prudent brother said.
>
> "Do you want a battered hide,
> Or scratches to your face applied?"
> Thus his sister calm replied.
>
> "Sister, do not raise my wrath.
> I'd make you into mutton broth

As easily as kill a moth!"[71]

The poem continues, with the brother asking the cook for a pan to cook his sister in an

Irish stew. After the cook refuses, we are given the ridiculous moral: "Never stew your

sister." Compare these sibling relations with the conventional ones portrayed in *The*

Parent's Cabinet of Amusement and Instruction, of 1834: in a piece called "Toast and Tea"

two brothers amicably share their treat: "Their father used to give to each of the boys a

share. But each boy did not eat his own. The fun was for each to share with the other" (p.

191). In showing vicious, unrepentant, and unpunished children, Carroll parodies the

whole genre of moralistic, didactic children's literature, portraying absurdly good children.

Carroll wrote many other parodies, including ones imitating Old and Middle English, such

as the famous "Jabberwocky" (originally "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry") and "Ye

Carpette Knyghte" in *Phantasmagoria* (1869).

In the Wonderland version of Watts's "Against Idleness and Mischief" Carroll

gives us a verse closely related in structure and meaning to Watts's original. Watts's

poem, from his *Divine Songs for Children* (1715) begins,

> How doth the little busy bee
>   Improve each shining hour,
> And gather honey all the day
>   from every opening flower!
>
> How skillfully she builds her cell!
>   How neat she spreads the wax!
> And labours hard to store it well
>   With the sweet food she makes.[72]

The poem, like all of Watts's verse for children, is a moral lesson. It teaches us that

idleness leads to evil, which is a sentiment Dodgson approved of in other works.[73]

Nevertheless, Wonderland causes Alice to recite this poem quite differently:

> How doth the little crocodile
>   Improve his shining tail,

---

[71]From *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1940) p. 782.

[72]Issac Watts, *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1866), Moral Songs, Song XX.

[73]See his introduction to *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889), in which he proposes to write a "Child's Bible" and a book of Bible selections which would, during times of idleness, "help keep at bay many anxious thoughts, worrying thoughts, uncharitable thoughts, unholy thoughts" (Carroll, *Complete*, p. 282).

And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in,
With gently smiling jaws!   (p. 16)

Carroll's version is quite close structurally to the original. In the first line only the animal

in question is replaced, while the succeeding lines follow fairly closely the syntax of Watts.

However, he replaces the signifiers of the old version and creates a new, though related

description. Linda Shires notes, "By...supplying new signifiers for his poetic formula,

Carroll calls Watts's words into question....he mocks the moral and parodies the process

of moralizing" (p. 275). I would argue, however, that the aim of this parody is not

Watts's moral, "do not be idle" so much as it is the genre in which he wrote. The result is

anything but nonsense: the crocodile beautifies himself in order to attract his meal of fish.

In this light, it falls particularly under the label of parody according to Bex, who asserts

that parody is almost always directed towards genre rather than individual texts or authors

(p. 226). Here, in a moralistic frame, cleanliness is promoted, but only as a deceitful and

cunning ploy to kill fish. This goes against one of the most popular themes of children's

literature, kindness to animals, not to mention the evils of lying and vanity, also among the

most popular themes of the day. In nearly every nineteenth-century work for children, as

well as the many earlier works still popular, these three themes would have been found,

and the audience of both children and adults would probably have been shocked or amused

at such a contrary treatment of moral transgressions. The structural similarity, along with

the direct thematic relevance to the genre, place this in the category of parody.

Moving from the straightforward parodies, to the parodies that utilize nonsense as

device is not such a large step. Many of the "nonsense verses" of Lear and Carroll are

plain parodies, using nonsense as a device to show the folly in the originals. In studies of

Lear, the parodic element has been all but ignored. Critics often note that Lear writes in the

tradition of limerick, or nursery rhyme, or romantic lyric, but they almost never consider

the strong parodic tendency, nor the other genres which he utilizes. There are many pieces,

both unpublished and published, which must be considered parody. One of these

unpublished parodies is his answer to the poem Tennyson wrote to him, after he sent

Tennyson his new travel book, *Journal of a Landscape Painter in Greece and Albania*

(1851). First, the opening stanzas of Tennyson's "To E. L. on His Travels in Greece"

(1853):

> Illyrian woodlands, echoing falls
>   Of water, sheets of summer glass,
>   The long divine Peneïan pass,
> The vast Akrokeraunain walls,
> Tomohrit, Athos, all things fair,
>   With such a pencil, such a pen,
>   You shadow forth to distant men,
> I read and felt that I was there.[74]

And now for Lear's parody:

> Delirious Bulldogs; -- echoing, calls
> My daughter, -- green as summer grass: --
> The long supine Plebeian ass,
> The nasty crockery boring falls; --
>
> *Tom-Moory* Pathos; -- all things bare, --
> With such a turkey! such a hen!
> And scrambling forms of distant men,
> O! --ain't you glad you were not there![75]

No one knows if Tennyson ever saw this parody, but it is not surprising that most of

Lear's correspondence was with Emily rather than Alfred. While Lear's version may seem

to be literary nonsense, when compared with its model, the "nonsense" is explained.

Lear's version is an exercise in phonetic analysis: he changes the meaning drastically while

keeping the basic sound patterns of Tennyson's poem. He admits that the reason he was

"obliged" to make these parodies (his term) was "to recall the Tennyson lines of my

illustrations." Peter Levi also notices that "these curious, rather secret and innocent

parodies of Lear's show an acutely good ear for the texture of Tennyson's verse...." (p.

---

[74]Alfred Tennyson, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longman,1989), 301, p. 487.

[75] To Fortescue, 12 September, 1873, in *Later Letters of Edward Lear Author of "The Book of Nonsense" to Chichester Fortescue (Lord Carlingford) Frances Countess Waldegrave and others*, ed. Lady Strachey (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), p. 161. Hereafter referred to as *LLEL*. In the letter, the second stanza is given first, as Lear is listing the verses to his Tennyson illustrations.

175).[76] Indeed, parody may be implied by Lear's possible questioning and testing of Tennyson's famed euphony. Differing significantly from true literary nonsense, Lear's parody, plainly dictated by Tennyson's original, is mostly a jumble of ridiculous images which does not engage in the characteristic play between meaning and non-meaning so crucial to literary nonsense. Even without the essential frame of reference of Tennyson's poem, Lear's version remains more or less absolute nonsense, not the genre of literary nonsense. In relation to its model, such a confusion of images, more like a semantically and morphologically correct version of gibberish, is certainly one device of the genre, but appearing alone, it never rises above a ridiculous parody. The last line pulls this parody even further away from true nonsense, by making a personal joke to Tennyson, whose original poem describes his imaginative presence in the scenes evoked by Lear's travel book. As Tigges observes, a joke has a point, while nonsense does not (p. 93). The nonsensical flavour of this verse is undeniable, but nonsense is used only as a device to highlight the verse's relationship with its model. Never does the nonsense, as Gray states, "try to efface the connections between its language and forms and those of ordinary discourse [in this case, Tennyson], and thereby to pretend to an integrity and coherence all its own" (p. 170). On the contrary, Lear's parody clings tenaciously to Tennyson's poem.

In Lear's published "nonsense" there is much that is parodic without being parody, and some that actually is parody, such as his alphabet "A was once an apple-pie," which echoes the traditional "A was an apple-pie." The following is Lear's rhyme for the letter "B":

> B was once a little bear,
> Beary!
> Wary!
> Hairy!
> Beary!
> Taky cary!
> Little Bear!   (p. 138)

---

[76]Lear's published nonsense poems sometimes have their roots in the sounds and rhythms of Tennyson's poetry, such as in Lear's "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò," which sounds much like Tennyson's "'Frater Ave atque Vale'," though Lear's poem has no other relation to Tennyson's.

This alphabet, somewhat like the limericks, follows a tight structure: It names an object starting with the featured letter, four nonsense words ending with "y" (the first and last usually beginning with the featured letter), a small description ending in "y", and finally the object again, with "little" before it. The four words ending in "y" placed vertically appear to be nonsensical, but upon closer inspection, they usually make some kind of sense. The first and last of the four are the same, being merely the object with the added "y." The middle two, in the case of "B" do make sense, in that one should be "wary" of bears, which are usually "hairy." Hence, what appears to be nonsense becomes sense. This occurs frequently, with the middle two terms often having some relation to the object in question. For "Kite" we are given, "Whity / Flighty" and for "Owl," "Prowly, / Howly." In these and many others, the words that seem the most nonsensical turn out to be completely relevant.

Of course, Lear rarely engineers things so straightforwardly. While the words are discernible, even with the "y" ending, the issue of the series arises: are these a series of meaningful words with a "y" added to them, or are they just random words in a series, with some happening to make sense? To confuse the issue, Lear breaks the pattern with letters such as "G":

> **G** was once a little goose,
> Goosy
> Moosy
> Boosy
> Goosy
> Waddly-woosy
> Little Goose! (p. 139)

In this and many other letters, the central "y"-ending words, not to mention at least parts of the sixth line, are quite unrelated to the object, or are just sheer nonsense. Sometimes, one of the central words has some relation to the object while the other does not, as in the middle words for "whale": "Scaly / Shaly." "Scaly" comes from the idea of a fish, which is close enough to a whale, but "Shaly" has no place here other than for its phonetic value in the series. It is helpful to see such nonsense in terms of Elizabeth Sewell's classification of nonsense as game, "a construction subject to its own laws" (pp. 5, 26). However, this

game not only sets its own rules, but also may change them at any time; thus, the relationship between the central words in the series and the object is never quite certain, and the game dissolves with its rules. At these moments when the rules are uncertain, and the verse wavers between meaning and non-meaning, we witness the effects of literary nonsense; the generic form is forgotten and we are absorbed in delightful exasperation. While this is one aspect of literary nonsense, when taken as a whole this alphabet perhaps sits on the edge of the genre. It contains moments of nonsense and a closed structure within which our expectations of sense are sometimes dashed, but more often the sense is overt, bringing us back to parody and the original form, the alphabet, avoiding the release and escape needed to exist fully within the nonsense genre.

In a similar way, many of the verses which seem quite nonsensical in Carroll, upon a closer look, are simply (or not so simply) parodies. Carroll's treatment of anterior text varies significantly, but verses such as "How doth the little crocodile," "Speak roughly," and "You are old Father William" fall squarely into the parodic mode. One of the most nonsensical parodies of all is the White Knight's song, a parody of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" (published 1807). The version in *Alice* is a revision of a much older poem, entitled "Upon the Lonely Moor," which was published anonymously in *The Train* in October 1856.[77] Wordsworth's poem describes a "Traveller" with morbid thoughts who comes upon an ancient man, a leech gatherer. The Traveller questions the old man as to what he does, but while the man answers with "courteous speech," the Traveller does not hear. He is held in a reverie in which the old man appears as a dream vision come to enlighten him. The Traveller asks again, and the leech gatherer patiently answers in speech "above the reach / Of ordinary men" (ll. 102-3)[78] Without hearing an answer, the old man repeats himself once again, courteously. The Traveller laughs at himself and wonders "to find / In that decrepit Man so firm a mind" (ll. 144-45), pledging in the future to think of this wise man in times of trouble. The overall effect of the curious

---

[77] Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), *Alice in Wonderland*, 1865, ed. Donald J. Gray, 2nd edition (London: W.W. Norton, 1992), p. 255. All references to the *Alice* books will be from this edition, unless otherwise noted. References to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* will be shortened to *Alice*.
[78] *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: OUP, 1984).

interview is a deep respect for an old man who in the mind of the Traveller has proven a source of mental stability, but who in reality has done nothing more than patiently repeat himself two times to a listener who has for the most part ignored him.

Several critics have been troubled by Carroll's parodying a poet he admired so greatly (Demurova, pp. 83-85; Shires, p. 279), but there is no need for Carroll to be absolutely consistent in his taste or reverence for one whom he respected. Just as Lear could send Tennyson his Tennysonian parodies, so Carroll could occasionally question one of his models. Linda Shires attempts to solve this problem by labeling this a "nostalgic parody" rather than an "oppositional" one, implying that this is a parody of critical support rather than ridicule. I would argue against this position, however, and side with Polhemus (p. 370) in recognizing the oppositional character of Carroll's parody. Yet there are several points which draw the parody towards reverence. The first is the fact that the rhyme and metre of the parody are based not on Wordsworth, but on Thomas Moore's "My Heart and Lute," as Alice recognizes. Shires claims that this song, reflecting on Carroll's version, "speaks to the depth of serious emotion" (p. 281). The most obvious point, as Shires notes, is the Wordsworthian spot of time which Carroll gives to Alice as she listens to the song: "Of all the strange things that Alice saw in her journey Through the Looking-Glass, this was the one that she always remembered most clearly....all this she took in like a picture, as, with one hand shading her eyes, she leant against a tree, watching the strange pair, and listening, in a half-dream, to the melancholy music of the song" (p. 187). Wordsworthian echoes abound, from the look to the future in which the memory will return, to the "half-dream" and "melancholy music," marking this as what Jonathan Wordsworth would call a Romantic "border" experience (p. 6). The narrative frame brings the poems even closer together as Alice herself is, in a way, given the role of the Traveller, or the narrator in Carroll's version, listening to an old man's story. Here, Alice only half-listens to the White Knight just as the Traveller is oblivious to the Leech Gatherer in his visionary trance, and as the White Knight's narrator is deaf in dreaming of absurd inventions. The implication of this double-reference complicates the parody, which is probably just what Carroll had in mind.

Shires's argument for the "nostalgic" rather than "oppositional" parody is based on the parody retaining "the referent, a code of sympathy for the vexed relations between young and old, while he replaces signifiers and signifieds" (p. 281). I would argue that this "code of sympathy" is not retained; rather, it is exploded by Carroll's use of ridicule and nonsense aimed squarely at Wordsworth's poem. The impact of Wordsworth's poem relies on the respect the Traveller has for the old man, and this is just where Carroll begins his attack. Carroll portrays the old man as more or less insane (though his wink might lead us to believe otherwise). The old man is made an absurd figure by the nonsense occupations given him: he claims to make butterflies into mutton-pies, to set a "mountain-rill" on fire, and hunt for "haddocks' eyes / Among the heather bright" (p. 188).[79] In addition, the narrator's violence increases as he questions the old man. He first "thumped him on the head," then "shook him well form side to side, / Until his face was blue" (pp. 187-88). In the original version of 1856, the old man is "pinched," "kicked," and "tweaked." Any "code of sympathy" between these characters is dissolved in the violence and disrespect shown by the younger. Nor does the younger man fare much better. As the old man relates his impossible occupations, the narrator is day-dreaming, like the White Knight (and Carroll, perhaps), about nonsense inventions, such as his design "To keep the Menai bridge from rust / By boiling it in wine" (p. 189). Further derision might be implied by the wink which the old man gives near the end. This could signify that, because he knows the younger man is not listening, he is intentionally spouting fantastic accounts of his livelihood.

The last stanza, which departs from Moore's stanza form, is Carroll's finishing touch on the parody. It was added to the 1856 version, and it gathers the references and criticism of Wordsworth's poem in one concentrated stanza. In describing the old man, it makes several references to Wordsworth's Leech Gatherer: the "mild" look, the slow speech, the white hair, and "eyes, like cinders, all aglow" (p. 190) are echoes from the Leech Gatherer's "gentle answer" in "courteous speech which forth he slowly drew," his

---

[79]This is reminiscent of the conjectural distractions for Wordsworth's nonsensical protagonist in "The Idiot Boy" (ll. 222-241). See pp. 248-9 of this thesis.

"grey hairs," and the "fire about his eyes" (ll. 92-3, 56, 98). However, in this cumulative stanza, the description soon goes from the reverent to the ridiculous. The old man rocks his body and mutters, "As if his mouth were full of dough." This stanza comes to a grand anti-climax, showing the old man "Who snorted like a buffalo." This description, so antithetical to Wordsworth's poem, draws the two poems even closer, exposing the disparity between a noble, visionary figure and the ignored and simple old leech gatherer. Also, by exaggerating the absurdity and coarseness of the narrator, Carroll may be attempting to criticize Wordsworth's (or the Traveller's) self-absorption and inaction when faced with abject poverty. The champion of "the real language of man," it seems, has an unusual idea of philanthropy. The Traveller is made into a sadistic fool who, instead of morbidly brooding, conceives absurd plans. The parody may also comment on the Leech Gatherer, whose speech is exaggerated, either to make him more apparently a fool, as the poor old man may well have been, or to make the narrator seem the fool in playing a trick on him. Regardless of the particular reading, Carroll's parody critically engages its Wordsworthian model, and the result is not favorable.

As we have seen, nonsense is one of the tools Carroll uses to ridicule the anterior text, but never does it hide the parody. Carroll uses nonsense to show the foolishness (or devious wit, depending on the reading) of the old man, to ridicule the narrator (and Wordsworth, possibly) as a self-absorbed, quixotic dreamer, and to ridicule the serious lesson proffered by the model text. The nonsense never rises above its parodic setting because it is never asserted as truth. The speech and thoughts of the characters are just that; they do not necessitate any kind of radical reworking of reality. This is not a world in which "buttered rolls" can be found growing underground, but only a world in which such a thing could be *thought of*. The old man could be toying with the daydreaming listener, or he could simply be insane, as could the narrator himself. Regardless of the reading, the nonsense does not assert itself as anything which must be believed or taken seriously, though it does function to discredit the characters. Nonsense works within the parody as a device of inversion and subversion, never deviating from these specific functions. In a way, the nonsense is "caged" within specific goals and structures. It is possible to see the

parody on a deeper level, with Carroll's narrator representing not only Wordsworth's Traveller, but Wordsworth himself as autobiographical poet, Alice, for her role as listener, and even Carroll, who was known as something of an inventor. This line of interpretation, though interesting, is probably not very fruitful. Carroll seems to delight in offering tantalizing referential echoes, only to defy classification and straightforward comparison. Nevertheless, Carroll's critical engagement with Wordsworth's model is undeniable.

The closest Lear comes to straight parody within an ostensibly nonsense text is in his emphatic responses to the type of "awful warning"[80] book which still proliferated in the nineteenth century and which would easily have been recognized by his audience. Started by the evangelical movement in children's literature in the seventeenth century, this type of book lived on into the nineteenth, in works like Ann and Jane Taylor's *Original Poems for Infant Minds, By Several Young Persons* (1804). The moralism in this book is often graphically illustrated and taught through violence inflicted on those who must learn a lesson. In "The Little Fisherman," by Jane, a little boy who has come home from fishing gets caught by the chin on a meat hook :

> Poor Harry kick'd and call'd aloud,
> And scream'd, and cried, and roar'd,
> While from his wound the crimson blood
> In dreadful torrents pour'd.[81]

The boy thus learns what it is like to be a fish. Lear's response to this type of "awful warning" is felt throughout most of the limericks in which the "punishment" or consequence the old person receives for his or her action is often ineffectual, humorously exaggerated, or simply ignored by the recipient, such as with the Young Lady of Norway:

---

[80]Darton's phrase, p. 189.

[81]Ann and Jane Taylor, *Original Poems for Infant Minds, By Several Young Persons*, 1804-05, 3rd edition, 2 volumes (London: Darton and Harvey, 1807), I, 29.

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

The young lady receives punishment for her careless behaviour, but her flattened state does not really harm her; her misbehaviour and punishment are her triumph and that which earn her the description of being "courageous."

Lear's most involved and parodic treatment of such moralistic literature is *The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-popple* (written in 1865, published 1871). This prose work encompasses many different types of children's literature, including the fairy tale, the natural history, the "awful warning books," and the "animal party" books initiated by Roscoe in the early 1800s. The story begins, "In former days-- that is to say once upon a time, there lived in the Land of Gramblamble, Seven Families" (p. 107) indicating a conventional fairy tale beginning, yet the following story only roughly resembles a fairy tale. The text moves on quickly to imitate other genres. In Chapters 2 and 3, its mock-pedagogic tone and content parody the popular natural histories for

children, such as the *Zoological Gallery* (1830?), a typical nineteenth century bestiary,

describing the stork:

The stork is seldom seen in this country; but in Holland, where there is
much water, and a great many frogs, it is considered highly valuable. It
walks about the streets, builds its nests in the chimneys, is very tame and
domesticated, and seems to delight in the society of man....The Stork
feeds on frogs, fishes, birds, and serpents.[82]

In Chapter III of *Lake Pipple-popple*, which like all the chapters is no more than a few

paragraphs, Lear describes the creatures who live around the lake. Contrary to traditional

natural history, Lear gives his own "nonsense" version:

The Storks walked in and out of the Lake Pipple-popple, and ate frogs for
breakfast and buttered toast for tea, but on account of the extreme length
of their legs, they could not sit down, and so they walked about
continually.
The Geese, having webs to their feet, caught quantities of flies, which
they ate for dinner.... (p. 110)

---

[82]*Zoological Gallery*, Nos. 1-6 (London: Edward Lacey, [n.d.]), No. 5, p. 5.

The absurd misinformation, coupled with linguistic play, seem to parody the standard works of children's natural history. This kind of parody also appears in some of Lear's nonsense botany, particularly in the few botany drawings which have some text attached to them. The example above from the *Zoological Gallery* is typical in its dealing with animals by their relationship to humankind--by how we use them. Lear parodies this tendency in his "nonsense" for "The Kite-Tree":
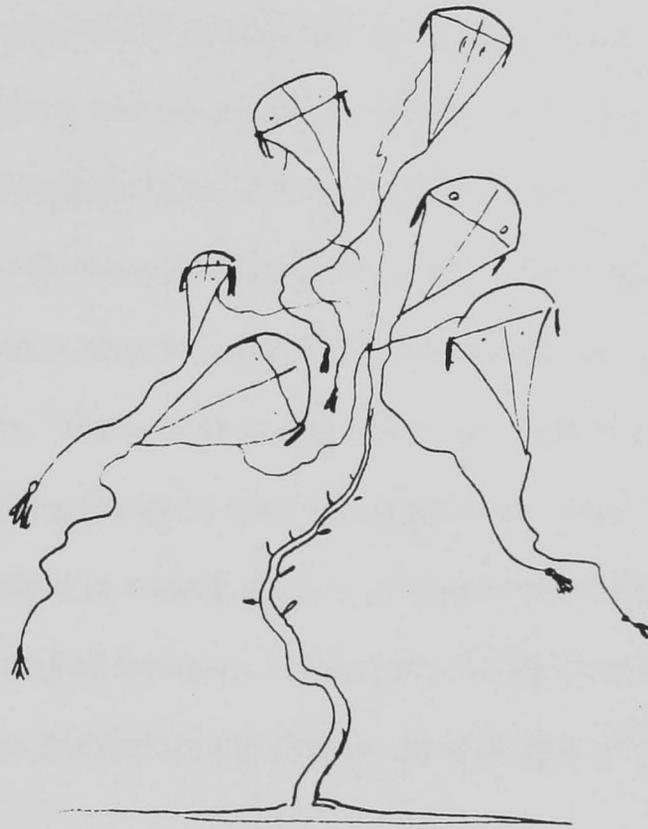
The Kite Tree is a fearful and astonishing vegetable when all the Kites are agitated by a tremendous wind, and endeavour to escape from their strings. The tree does not appear to be of any particular use to society, but would be frequented by small boys if they knew where it grew.   (*Teapots*, p. 56)

All four of these botanical drawings are even more ironic in that their "fruits" are all very utilitarian objects: clothes-brushes, kites, biscuits, and forks. But as we shall see, Lear takes *Lake Pipple-Popple* beyond such a limited target.

The parents of the seven families give specific warnings to their groups of seven children and then send them off into the world. All the groups of children subsequently die

horribly for their direct disobedience, echoing the "awful warning" books typified by Janeway and the Taylors. The seven young geese, for example, leave home and find a tree, "So four of them went up to the top of it, and looked about them, while the other three waddled up and down, and repeated poetry, and their last six lessons in Arithmetic, Geography, and Cookery" (p. 113). A "Plum-pudding flea" comes along, and, as they were told never to do, they touch it. Here, Lear derides the practical, standard education given to children, showing how little good it does outside the classroom. After the flea is touched, it barks until "by degrees every one of them suddenly tumbled down quite dead." (p. 114). A similar grisly fate awaits all the young creatures: in each case they do exactly as they were told not to do, and they pay for it in absurd instances of death. The parrots, while fighting over a cherry, tear each other "into little bits, and at the last there was nothing left to record this painful incident, except the Cherry and seven small green feathers" (p. 112). The cats chase a "Clangle-Wangle" until "they all gradually *died* of fatigue and of exhaustion, and never afterwards recovered" (p. 117). And so on. Unlike the Taylors' "Poor Harry," these creatures learn neither from their instructions nor from the gruesome or violent consequences of their transgressions. They merely die. Most of the "useful" things they learned in school, such as grammar and arithmetic, prove useless, and even damaging. At the end of the story, Lear makes further, even more parodic references to "moralizing" literature, but before the climax, another type of children's literature is lightly satirized.

After the deaths of all the children, the remaining victorious creatures who caused the downfall of the young ones hold a grotesque mirror image of the popular "animal party" books that had emerged between 1807 and 1820, beginning with Roscoe's *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast* [83]. In this innocuous work and the many imitations to emerge after its success, a miscellaneous band of creatures gathers to hold a party: "And there came the Beetle, / So blind and so black; / And carried the Emmet, / His friend, on his back." [84] It was original only in its lack of didacticism, which in itself was enough to

---

[83] Darton notes (p. 206) that by 1817, Mrs. Dorset's *The Peacock at Home* (1807), the follow-up to Roscoe's *The Butterfly's Ball*, was in its 28th edition.

[84] William Roscoe, *The Butterfly's Ball, and the Grasshopper's Feast* (London: J. Harris, 1807), p.6.

ensure its popularity. The verse is light and there is some humor, though illustrations of

the first edition are somewhat sedate. In a dark reflection of Roscoe's party, the creatures

around Lake Pipple-popple create a gruesome testimonial to the dead ones which includes

remaining body parts, "after which they gave a tea-party, and a garden-party, and a ball,

and a concert, and then returned to their respective homes full of joy and respect,

sympathy, satisfaction, and disgust" (p. 119).
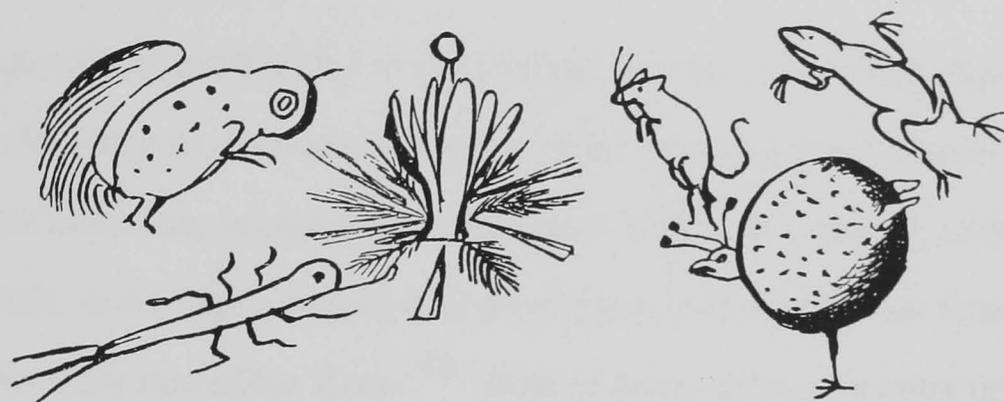
Lear offers a party subversively different from the simple and innocent "party" books, yet

this, like all other references to contemporary children's literature, is only a brief scene in

the work.[85]

When the parents of the dead children learn of the mishaps, they promptly buy

pickling materials in order to pickle themselves to be put in a museum,

> to be placed on a marble table with silver-gilt legs, for the daily inspection
> and contemplation, and for the perpetual benefit of the pusillanimous
> public.
>   And if ever you happen to go to Gramble-Blamble, and visit that
> museum in the city of Tosh, look for them on the Ninety-eighth table in
> the Four hundred and twenty-seventh room of the right-hand corridor of
> the left wing of the Central Quadrangle of that magnificent building; for if
> you do not, you certainly will not see them.   (p. 121)

---

[85]See also Lear's "The Quangle Wangle's Hat" and "Calico Pie" for less parodic versions of the "animal party."

Such is the fate of the "respectable" adults who try to prove a point to others.[86] They attempt to convey their moral, didactic message, but because they are placed among so many others, they are unnoticed and insignificant. Their care, instruction, and sacrifice have all been wasted. Moral, didactic literature is thus humorously and efficiently crushed by Lear, who wrote to James Fields on 18 November, 1869, "I have a story also of the Lake Pipplepopple & its 7 families--highly instructive, & wh. I wish I could see you...laughing over."[87] Lear was well aware that his "instructive" story transgressed all models of children's literature.

The parodic element in this work is strong, yet there is a considerable amount of nonsense to challenge its dominance. As was stated before, the tale is prose, which is rarely used for nonsense, but appearing just before *Lake Pipple-popple*, in the same volume of 1871, is the highly nonsensical prose piece, *The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World.*[88] Both of these stories, the latter being a loose parody of the popular travel writing of which Lear himself was an exponent, challenge the notion that nonsense cannot be in prose.[89] In these stories, the narrative structure makes sense, yet it is within such sensical structure that we find the real nonsense. In *Lake Pipple-popple*, the parody is frequently undermined by the devices of literary nonsense. The parody of the natural history books in Chapter III, however, only contains a trace of nonsense. In this chapter, the various creatures are described in amusing, absurd ways, but the descriptions never rise to pure nonsense. For example, the owls "looked after mice, which they caught and made into sago puddings" (p. 110), which is silly, but unambiguous. The only hint of nonsense comes in a wholly sensical line: "And all these Seven Families lived together in the utmost fun and felicity" (p. 110). Taken alone, this line is clear, but in light of the implied alliterative nonsense structure, some doubt may arise. The two adjectives ending the chapter, "fun and felicity," though themselves sensible, echo a frequently used nonsense device--that of an often alliterative series of

---

[86]Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), a figure not unrelated to the parents of this story, also had himself pickled after death.

[87]*ELSL*, pp. 214-15.

[88]Hereafter, *Four Little Children.*

[89]Cammaerts writes that "Prose walks too slowly for [nonsense]" (p. 39).

words, especially adjectives, which frequently includes misappropriations. We see this repeatedly throughout the prose nonsense, such as in *Four Little Children*, during their encounter with the Blue-Bottle-Flies:

> The Moon was shining slobaciously from the star-bespringled sky, while her light irrigated the smooth and shiny sides and wings and backs of the Blue-Bottle-Flies with a peculiar and trivial splendour, while all nature cheerfully responded to the cerulaean and conspicuous circumstances.
>
> (p. 100)

Here we find several variations of the nonsense device of serial description. The alliterative pair "smooth and shiny" make sense, but the next pair, though not alliterative, nonsensically links "peculiar" and "trivial" as modifiers of "splendour." At the end, Lear climaxes anticlimactically with a nonsensical pairing, in a similar fashion to his limericks, with the nonsensical "cerulaean and conspicuous." To adults who know these words and children who probably do not, it is still nonsense (though of a different variety).[90] After having experienced several instances of such nonsensical alliterative pairs in serial description, we might doubt the sincerity, if not the meaning, of the description of the families around Lake Pipple-popple living in "utmost fun and felicity."

Parody of the "awful warning" books is perhaps the strongest and least nonsensical. In the beginning of the story, the parents give their children conventional, practical advice and also a few gifts, most of which make sense. All is standard parody until the children leave home for their journey. At this point, each group of children encounters trouble, which is played out usually in violence and death, as is standard in the "awful warning" books. Lear, however, mitigates the unpleasant circumstances through certain nonsense devices. The most common and noticeable nonsense device is the longer nonsense series. When the seven young parrots fight over the single cherry,

---

[90]See Chapter 5 for more on the difference between the adult- and child-reading of misappropriation.

they scuffled,
and huffled,
and ruffled,
and shuffled,
and puffled,
and muffled,
and buffled,
and duffled,
and fluffled,
and guffled,
and bruffled, and
screamed, and shrieked, and squealed, and squeaked, and clawed, and
snapped, and bit, and bumped, and thumped, and dumped, and flumped
each other, till they were all torn into little bits...   (pp. 111-112)

The typical nonsense series, strongly signalled by the typography, describes a fight in

which all of the participants die violently, yet because the series turns nonsensical, the

seriousness and emotional impact are dispelled. Some of the words make sense, some

come close, and some are complete nonsense. Though the overall idea here is parodic,

lampooning the absurd consequences of heavily moralistic literature, Lear goes beyond

parody: the exaggerated consequences of not listening to their parents' advice are almost

forgotten in the sheer abundance and absurdity of the nonsense. Only at the end of this

enormous sentence, taking up most of the chapter, do we learn of the actual devastation,

but at that point the nonsense has at least partially numbed us. And as a crowning touch,

Lear adds one of the nonsensical alliterative adjective pairs, discussed earlier, to

summarize the incident: "And that was the vicious and voluble end of the Seven young

Parrots" (p. 112). Nonsense is present here, but whether it overshadows the parody is not

so certain.

Other sets of children meet equally horrible fates, yet in almost every case the final

image is mitigated with nonsense. Aside from the nonsense series, Lear also uses faulty

logic and misappropriation to soften the parody. When the Plumb-pudding Flea emits a

fatally loud bark in the presence of the seven geese "by degrees every one of them suddenly

tumbled down quite dead" (p. 114). Here we have the contradictory logic of their falling as

"by degrees" and "suddenly." At the climactic point in this chapter, Lear makes the final

action ambiguous, thereby taking the edge off of the tragedy. Similarly, when the seven

guinea pigs all hit their heads together simultaneously, "the concussion brought on directly

an incipient transitional inflammation of their noses, which grew... till it incidentally killed them all Seven" (p. 116). Again, at the moment of death the action becomes blurred with nonsense. Such long words, a favourite device with Lear, would be unknown to children, and to adults who are familiar with them, the overall meaning is no clearer. Nor do we understand when the seven owls "all fell superficially" (p. 115) down a well and to their deaths. The alliterative set of adjectives also appears in the context of death. In each fatal case, some nonsense device appears to ease the blow. Nor does this happen in this story only. Rather, nearly every time some kind of violence occurs, whether it is in the limericks or longer verses, it is outweighed by the nonsense. The short section of *Lake Pipple-popple* which parodies the "animal party" books also uses similar devices to mitigate what is truly a gruesome scene.

The end result of this tug-of-war between parody and nonsense cannot perhaps be determined until the story's ending, which seems to accentuate the parodic elements. After the adults are pickled, they wish to have their bottles labelled "with Parchment or any other anticongenial succedaneum... for the perpetual benefit of the pusillanimous public" (p. 121). This initial burst of nonsense is then tempered by the final anti-moral:

> And if ever you happen to go to Gramble-Blamble, and visit that
> museum in the city of Tosh, look for them on the Ninety-eighth table in the
> Four hundred and twenty-seventh room of the right-hand corridor of the left
> wing of the Central Quadrangle of that magnificient building; for if you do
> not, you certainly will not see them. (p. 121)

This final statement shows the utter futility of the parents' enormous sacrifice in the name of moralizing. Their pickled bodies will float unnoticed, among countless other useless artifacts. Compared to the nonsensical ending of *Four Little Children*, in which the journey is abruptly ended, and the rhinoceros which had borne the travellers is stuffed and used as a "Diaphanous Doorscraper" (p. 106), *Lake Pipple-popple* seems relatively sensible. Though the nonsense often gains the upper hand within the story, the last statement seems to win the final contest for parody.

Literary nonsense rarely forgets its parodic background; when it does, it is often less effective, as can be seen in Lear's *Teapots and Quails*, for instance. The series of 26

verses and drawings have no apparent order (though the number reminds us of an alphabet) and are a curious mixture of objects and arbitrary causal relationships which have no known literary precedent. A typical example is as follows:
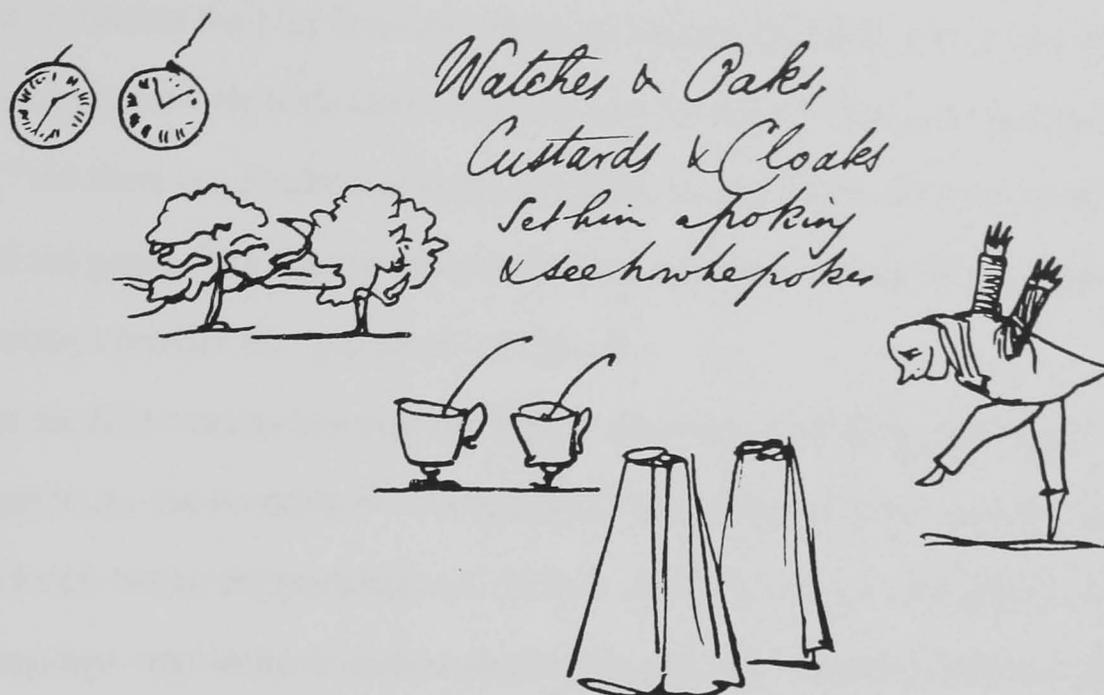
Watches and Oaks,
Custards and Cloaks,
Set him a poking
and see how he pokes!   (*Teapots*, p. 29)

While some of the illustrations are amusing, and the outrageous mixtures of objects and events baffle the sense-seeking eye, these verses seem weaker than more referential nonsense, whether in form or content. One of the critics' main objection to Lear's nonsense is that it sometimes diverges too far from sense. This opinion can be seen as far back as the first detailed appraisal of the genre, in "The Science of Nonsense" from *The Spectator* of 17 December, 1870. Here the writer objects to Lear's nonsense recipes, claiming they are "a trifle nearer to the grave talk of an idiot asylum, than to the nonsense of sane people" (pp. 1505-6). A similar opinion is voiced by the reviewer of "Mr. Lear's New Nonsense" in *The Spectator* of 23 December, 1871, in which he labels some of Lear's more fantastic work as "verbal" nonsense, that is, nonsense in which language has no referential function at all.[91] This tradition of criticism has continued into the twentieth century with Orwell, and its result is that most recent criticism ignores non-referential nonsense texts, a study of which might prove interesting.

[91]"Mr. Lear's New Nonsense," *The Spectator*, no. 2269 (23 December, 1871), 1570-71 (p. 1571).

Literary nonsense often goes far beyond a parody of the source genre or text. As Lecercle claims, nonsense texts can be seen as a "refraction," rather than a reflection, of their source(s). In its purest form nonsense declines to comment on its source(s), often using them to further the play between meaning and anti-meaning. Of course, it is impossible to pigeon-hole texts into categories like "parody," "nonsense parody," or "pure nonsense," but there is a gradient of sense-implication which I have tried to follow as a measure of the genre. We can see this paradoxical operation in Lear's limericks, alphabets, and what many consider the "parodies" of Carroll.

For the first twenty-five years of Lear's nonsense publishing career, he was famous for only one form: the limerick.[92] Though it has been claimed to the contrary, Lear did not invent the form, but he did popularize it. In fact, the form seems to be almost as old as the English language, appearing in ageless nursery rhymes like "Hickory Dickory Dock" (which comes very close) and songs as far back as the fourteenth century. It has been used for a wide variety of topics, from the utter nonsense of the "Bedlam" songs of the sixteenth century, to the love poetry of Robert Herrick's "Night-piece: To Julia" (1648).[93] In the early nineteenth century the form saw a slight revival, in a few chapbooks, starting with *The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women, illustrated by as many engravings: exhibiting their Principal Eccentricities and Amusements* (1820-1 by Harris and Son). This work was followed by a few others, including the one Lear cited as the impetus for his first "nonsenses" (he never called them "limericks"), the *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (1822).[94] The popularity of these works was minimal, and the limerick form might have slipped back into limbo had not Lear taken it and made it his own.

However, exactly what Lear did to the limerick is under debate. Because, roughly speaking, they are, ostensibly, absurd imitations of an older form, they could be considered parodies. According to Legman, Lear's limericks are a "clean" bastardization of

---

[92]At the time it had not acquired that name. There still is no answer as to the origin of the limerick's form or name. For discussion of the limerick's history, see G. Legman, *The Limerick: 1700 Limericks covering every bawdy topic from the 14th century to modern times* (London: Granada Publishing, 1964, 1979) and Cyril Bibby, *The Art of the Limerick*(London: The Research Publishing Co., 1978)

[93]Legman, pp. 7-20.

[94]*Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (London: Marshall, 1822).

what has always been, and always should be, a scatological form: "The limerick is, and

was, originally, an indecent verse-form. The 'clean' sort of limerick is an obvious

palliation, its content insipid, its rhyming artificially ingenious, its whole pervaded with a

frustrated nonsense that vents itself typically in explosive and aggressive violence."[95]

Marco Graziosi argues against Legman's assertion that the limerick was always an indecent

form and claims that "Lear invented almost nothing, he simply refined and brought to

perfection a form that had already had a brief fad in the 1820s...."[96] What is clear is that

Lear had a major impact on the limerick form, but I would argue that his contribution to the

limerick went beyond making it "clean." Lear appropriated the old form and, within this

tight structure, created the basis for a new genre.

Comparing a traditional limerick of the 1820s with Lear's limericks will be helpful

in illustrating the technical revisions so important in nonsense. Take, for example, one of

the limericks from *Fifteen Gentlemen*:

> As a little fat man of Bombay
> Was smoking one very hot day,
>   A bird called a Snipe
>   Flew away with his pipe,
> Which vex'd the fat man of Bombay.[97]

This typical limerick leaves no room for wonder or uncertainty. The illustration perfectly

illustrates the text, creating an easy, pleasurable, and mildly humorous experience. The

text is a coherent narrative, with all causal relationships explicit, except perhaps the snipe's

motivation, which is unimportant. Lear copies this model, which most likely was still in

the minds of his readers, and plays with it, as in the following verse:

[95]Legman, p. 7.

[96]Marco Graziosi, "The Limerick" on *Edward Lear Home Page*
(http://www2.pair.com/mgraz Lear/index.html). For more on the history of the limerick, see also H.
Langford Reed, *The Complete Limerick Book* (New York, London: Jarrolds, 1925); W.S. Baring-Gould,
The Lure of the Limerick. An Uninhibited History (London: Hart-Davis, 1968), Part One: "The Lore of the
Limerick", and Jean Harrowven, *The Limerick Makers* (London: The Research Publishing Co., 1976).
[97]Quoted in Bibby, p. 36. See *Lear in the Original* for Lear's version of this, p. 37.

There was an old man of Three Bridges,
Whose mind was distracted by midges,
He sate on a wheel, eating underdone veal,
Which relieved that old man of Three Bridges. (p. 162)

This limerick, like its "sensible" model, purports to tell a complete story within the confines

of the form. The first line establishes the character and place. The second and third lines

detail the conditions and "action" of the narrative. By nature of the regular form and the

rhyming structure, an expectation is created--an expectation of a sensible outcome or

explanation in the last line. Lear, however, posits in the middle lines seemingly unrelated

conditions and actions, in this case the attack of midges and the action of reposing and

eating veal, which the reader still will expect to be explained in the last line, the "punch-

line." When the last line does arrive, it seldom supplies the cohesion needed to make

"sense" of the seemingly at-odds components.[98] In addition, the last lines of Lear's

limericks frequently follow a strict pattern: they repeat the first line, with the addition of an

adjective or verb describing the state of the character involved. However, this added

adjective or verb often is a nonsense word, a misappropriation, or simply an incongruous

or puzzling word in connection with the previous elements. With the man of Three

Bridges, we learn he is "relieved," but the cause-- his sitting on a wheel and eating

"underdone veal"-- remains inscrutable. The last lines of Lear's limericks, which, by the

standard of the 1820s limericks should show the logical effect of the narrative, are often

[98]Lear's simultaneous recognition and disregard for logical, causal relationships will be dealt with in more
detail in Chapter 7.

inconclusive, circular, contradictory, or simply baffling. As Ann Colley comments, the last line *pretends* "to move forward from cause to effect. The originality of Lear's verse is that the last line, by repeating the first, undermines the progressive movement of the 1823 models."[99] Nor does the illustration help matters; this limerick, like many others, exhibits a picture/poem discrepancy. The man's arms are spread as in joy, but his face seems to betray that the cloud of midges is still not forgotten. Lear's revisions to his model limericks are extensive. The reader is given both the structure and expectation, based on the standard limerick model, of sense, but Lear refuses to comply. Whether or not such liberties within a "conservative" form constitutes parody, we shall see.

On one hand, there is no question as to whether Lear "mimics" the limericks of the 1820s. His limerick form is closely related in rhyme, in metre, in its insistence on naming an "old" or a "young" person, in giving a location, and even in adopting, what displeases so many limerick fans including Legman, the same-rhyming last line which is found in the first set of limericks, the *Sixteen Wonderful Old Women*. In fact, Lear makes the form even more restrictive by following these rules, with very little variation, in almost every limerick. Graziosi shows this tight adherence to form by illustrating Lear's limerick "formula" with mathematical variables, precise rhythmic models, and prescriptive functions for each line.[100] Anatomized like this, the limericks appear far more tightly structured, and perhaps limited, than almost any existing verse form.[101] It could be said that such absolute strictness in a way exaggerates, and thus parodies, an already tight form. In addition, the effect of Lear's limericks are often ridiculous in their exaggeration of the relatively tame idiosyncrasies of the subjects from the 1820s limericks. Compare, for example, the Old Woman at Lynn, from the *Sixteen Wonderful Old Women*, with one of Lear's limericks:

---

[99] Ann Colley, "Edward Lear's Limericks and the Reversals of Nonsense," *Victorian Poetry*, 29 (1988), 285-299 (p. 293).

[100] Graziosi, on *Edward Lear Home Page* .

[101] Wim Tigges has presuasively argued that the limerick can be regarded the "sonnet of nonsense," in its strict structure, implication of expected theme, and content's transcendence of the form, in "The Limerick: The Sonnet of Nonsense?" *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 16 (1986), 220-236.

OLD WOMAN OF LYNN.

There liv'd an Old Woman at Lynn,
Whose Nose very near thouch'd her chin,
You may easy suppose,
She had plenty of Beaux;
This charming Old Woman of Lynn.[102]

[102]From a partial facsimile of *The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women, illustrated by as many engravings; exhibiting their principal eccentricities and amusements* (London: Harris and son, 1820) in Leonard De Vries, *Flowers of Delight* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1965), p. 118.
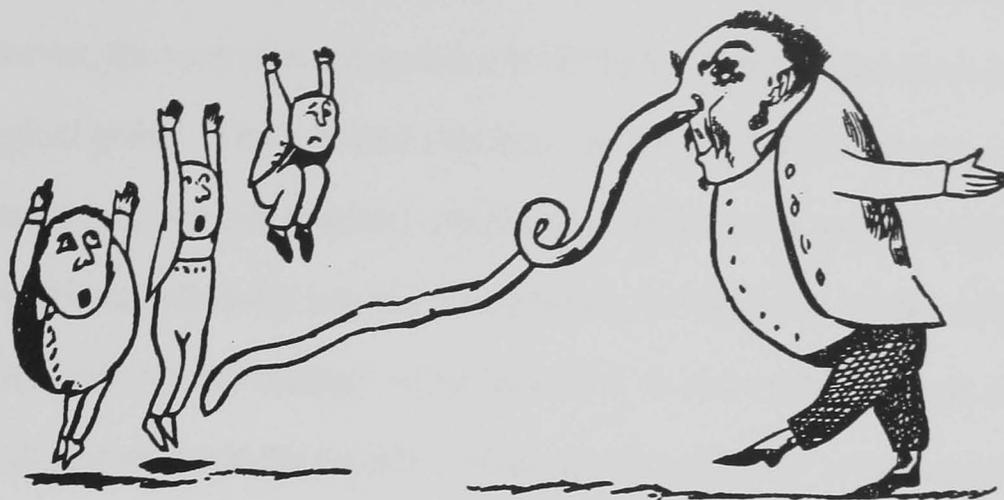
There was an Old Man with a nose,
Who said, 'If you chose to suppose,
That my nose is too long, you are certainly wrong!'
That remarkable Man with a nose   (p. 4)

Of course, Lear's text is not particularly nonsensical, but when taken with the picture,

illustrating an exaggerated nose which loops around near a group of excited children, it

becomes absurd. From the slightly comic, to the ridiculous, the limerick form and content

from the 1820s limericks *seem* to be parodied, according to some of the definitions of

parody as an exaggeration of the form and content of the model text. Yet no critics

seriously consider Lear's limericks to be parodies, even when they are familiar with the

1820s models. So what, then, has occurred?

Perhaps Legman's main complaint is relevant at this point, to illustrate, albeit

negatively, the real changes Lear imposed on the limerick.

> Lear's imitation of this form, as is well known, invariably drops back,
> from the simple but dramatic resolution of the action in the final line, to
> the namby-pamby repetition of the first line--very weak, even for
> nonsense verse--made to do double duty as the last line as well,
> possibly with some tremendously unimportant change in the adjective
> rung in by way of climax..... The whole thing, and most particularly
> the invariable echoic last line, represents a clear failure of nerve, an
> inability to take the obvious and final jump and to resolve even the stated
> nursery situation in some satisfactory way. This is the neurotic problem
> at the root of all 'nonsense', and is -- as much with Lewis Carroll as
> with Lear -- the secret or Sense of Nonsense.   (Legman, p. 12)

If, indeed, Lear were merely writing an imitation of the limerick form, this criticism might

be more persuasive. The characteristics Legman mentions, if looked at in the light of

imitation or even parody, in which imitation is understood, would corroborate Legman's claims. However, the very characteristics which distress Legman are those which help to create an original genre. The repeated first line, far from a "failure of nerve," does not attempt to resolve any simple "nursery situations." As we have seen, it achieves far more (or less) than this, intentionally leaving the situation *un*resolved. Furthermore, the "tremendously unimportant change" of the adjective or verb in the last line, *is* a climax of sorts, in that at that moment the possibly, if not problematically, sensible structure built so far comes to a grand anti-conclusion. As Orwell notices, "The very slight change increases the impression of ineffectuality, which might be spoiled if there were some striking surprise" (p. 181). This is no mistake or "namby-pambyness"; it is simply one form of a different genre. To take this major step, we need only look again at the definitions of parody. While Lear's nonsense does mimic, it does not imitate the "characteristic turns of thought and phrase" of the old limerick form. Far from exaggerating or attacking the simple, nursery-sense of the 1820s limericks, its aims are mainly elsewhere (if anywhere). Rather than "correcting the well-meaning eccentric," Lear's verse encourages eccentricity; rather than "cooling the fanatical," his verse seems positively inflammatory. If there is a referential exaggeration, as we saw with the Old Man with a Nose, the exaggeration is usually so far beyond the original text (here, the Old Woman at Lynn) as to leave it almost forgotten. We feel little or no attack, however mild, on the form or content of the traditional limerick. Likewise, all of the devices of nonsense we have examined, including the picture/poem discrepancy, the nonsense words, and the general lack of logic, push the form in a different direction from the original 1820s limericks.

The following nonsense alphabet by Lear is perhaps the only one that is consistently and conscientiously in the genre of literary nonsense. It follows in the tradition of the alliterative alphabet, which was a fairly new product of the increasing levity of nineteenth-century children's books. A famous example of such a work is *Peter Piper's Practical Principles of Plain and Perfect Pronunciation* (1813), which is a combination alphabet, pronunciation guide, and tongue-twister book:

Jumping Jackey jeer'd a Jesting Juggler:

The Dolomphious Duck,
who caught Spotted Frogs for her dinner
with a Runcible Spoon.   (p. 211)

The nonsense devices here are much the same as were found in the limericks. A major

difference, however, is that, far from swift sketches, the drawings for this alphabet are

comparatively ornate and detailed. One exception occurs in the "Dolomphious Duck"

illustration, which shows one of the frogs, leaping in attack, frog-fangs bared, towards the

duck, while the frog that is in the spoon seems to be waving at the duck in friendly

recognition. Other possible discrepancies between picture and text occur when the drawing

does not reflect one of the adjectives describing the animal. For instance, the "Enthusiastic

Elephant" does not appear so, nor does the drawing of the quail illustrate how it is "Queer"

or "Querulous." It is no more queer than any of the other creatures here, and it looks quite

contented, sitting on the tea kettle, peacefully smoking.

The "pure" nonsense words and neologisms are present in abundance in this

alphabet as well, including the "Rural Runcible Raven" and the "Scroobious Snake,"

among others. Lexical misappropriations abound here, including the "Obsequious

Ornamental Ostrich, / who wore Boots to keep his / feet quite dry" (p. 216). The word

"Obsequious" does not make sense, other than its beginning with the required "O," which

in the nonsense world of words is sufficient reason. The alphabet series calls for an "O"

word, and that is what is given, regardless, or even in spite of, the sense. Nor do we see

why it is "ornamental", as its boots, its only appurtenances, are more utilitarian than

decorative. In a similar fashion, we meet "The Visibly Vicious Vulture, / who wrote some Verses to a Veal-cutlet in a / Volume bound in Vellum" (p. 219). All sense and logic are relinquished for the structural requirements of words beginning with "V". Nevertheless, Lear does not limit himself to words beginning with the featured letter. Rather, the seriality of one letter may be broken for a completely different letter, as with, in the "I" verse, the "Inventive Indian, / who caught a Remarkable Rabbit in a / Stupendous Silver Spoon" (p. 213). Here we find, apparently for the sake of alliteration on an inappropriate letter, two subsequent words starting with "R" and three with "S", seemingly undermining the whole alphabet form. Form has usurped meaning, and meaning has become absurd, overshadowing form, resulting in nonsense.

Of course, the alphabet's short descriptions gain their humor not just from the idea of nonsense seriality, but also from the ensuing illogic and sheer absurdity: the idea of a vulture writing poetry to a veal cutlet. Similarly, we learn that the gull carries "the Old Owl, and his Crimson Carpet-bag / across the river, because he could not swim" (p. 212). The situation itself makes no sense because, while it is obvious that the owl cannot swim, it certainly should be able to fly. As this alphabet is less narrative than the limericks, their fallacious causality is replaced by absurdity of situation. Observe "The Perpendicular Purple Polly, / who read the Newspaper and ate Parsnip Pie / with his Spectacles." Here, the situation is absurd enough without the ambiguity in the adverbial phrase which could imply Polly's ability to eat pie with "spectacles." In the illustration we see the spectacles on the Polly, but the text implies that the spectacles could be used as an eating utensil, or even that he will eat the spectacles as well.

Through these nonsense devices, this alphabet becomes far more than a normal alphabet, a humorous alphabet, or even a parodic alphabet. In addition, unlike Lear's conventional or parodic alphabets, this one is entitled "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures," rather than "Nonsense Alphabet," which de-emphasizes its underlying structure. Nor does it graphically highlight the featured letter in any way. In every other alphabet, Lear begins each letter's verse with the letter itself, alone, and proceeds from there. The "Abstemious Ass" alphabet, on the other hand, has no such indicators of its supposed

function. Such ambiguity misled reviewers like Sidney Colvin, who complained of the "alliterative pieces" in his review in *The Examiner*, without realizing, or at least commenting on the fact, that these "pieces" were actually an alphabet.[104] It is telling that, in Jackson's *Complete Nonsense* edition of Lear, this alphabet is laid out with several of its letters out of alphabetical order, as if it were simply a nonsense series rather than an alphabet.[105] The devices of nonsense in Lear's alphabet, while potentially parodic in isolation, collectively go far beyond mere comment on the form or the content of the traditional alphabet. With its illustrations, non-sense words, and neologisms; with its insistence on form over meaning and ensuing outrageous situations, the resulting product passes through the doors of parody and securely into the realm of nonsense.

Having said this, however, it is important to recognize that in all referential nonsense the anterior text is still present, and it may be argued that any absurd imitation implies ridicule. Indeed, Carroll is careful to keep some reference to Watts's verse, even while his nonsense seems to break free from such restraints. Or in Lear's "Abstemious Ass" alphabet, the basic alphabet structure remains, however distorted. In much of Carroll's and Lear's nonsense there is some reference to the anterior text or genre involved, but this presence adds to, rather than detracts from the play of nonsense. As Gray states, nonsense achieves its "own plangency within an idiom which never really is but never openly acknowledges that it is not the idiom it plays against" (p. 171). Watts's poem is simultaneously present *and* absent in Carroll's verse. That is, the absence is felt even more intensely because of the text's marginal, yet essential presence. This very relationship of presence and absence, meaning and anti-meaning, is the heart of literary nonsense, and, as might be expected, is present not only regarding the ordinary meaning of sense, but also to the "sense," the necessary critical stance, implied in parody. Only in the meeting of nonsense and parody can this secondary form of sense be the material of play.

---

[104]Sidney Colvin, *The Academy*, 3 (15 January, 1872), 23-4 (p. 24).
[105]In the original editions of Lear the alphabet is laid out in proper order. Jackson's edition was probably printed in this way partially because of layout problems with the more horizontally drawn illustrations, yet such an alteration is somewhat shocking for the alphabet form.

Indeed, to read literary nonsense as a parody of its anterior text can lead to wild interpretations, yet, in the play of nonsense, the nonsense text often does ask to be seen at least partially in the light of its model. Take, for example, the song sung by the guests at Alice's dinner-party, "To the Looking-Glass world it was Alice that said." Scott's "Bonny Dundee" is the model text behind this verse which been called "direct parody" by more than one reader,[106] yet to read the former as parody of the latter raises many questions and answers none. The few references to Scott's song are countered by nonsense as well as entirely new material, in much the same manner as in "'Tis the voice of the lobster." Scott's song is about the doomed Highland uprising, headed in 1689 by John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, against William and Mary, in support of the exiled James. There would be interesting implications if indeed these two texts held a real dialogue. Because Alice has just become a queen, is she being compared to William and Mary? Is her right to her crown being questioned in a similar manner? Or does she represent James, or Dundee himself, upsetting the existing world order--just as she does by pulling the tablecloth from under her guests? Does Carroll's version comment in any way on either the content or the structure of Scott's verse? Again, these are questions which lead nowhere, but which Carroll would have us ponder over playfully .

It is important to recognize, as does Smith (p. 188), that any absurd imitation must reflect negatively upon its model to some degree. Nevertheless, even when a text closely follows the form of an anterior model, such as Carroll's "Twinkle, twinkle," it still may be considered nonsense rather than parody. The result is "ridiculous" in relation to the anterior text, but it goes beyond any real critical response to it. Ann Colley notes that in nonsense parody "the taking over of one text by another is a form of negation, of cancelling out and/or transforming the meaning of the confiscated text. Thus the history of parody is a replica of the reversibility of other structures of communication, of the ability to take back what has been framed as a fiction." (p. 76). Though nonsense is "a critical activity," it is far less critical of any particular text than of sense in general. As a critical device, then,

---

[106]Sidney Herbert Williams and others, ed., *The Lewis Carroll Handbook* (London: OUP, 1962), p. 284 and *Alice*, p. 200. Scott's song was first published in *The Doom of Devorgoil*, 1830.

nonsense is indiscriminate. It paints over its varied material, all of its generic guises, with only one colour, showing absurdity, but never critically engaging the text. The relationship of parody to referential nonsense can be seen as that of sense to nonsense itself: on one hand there is necessarily a small element of the parodic, but if there is no overt criticism (positive or negative) then we are stuck between the two modes. It is parody, but it is not parody--simultaneously, just as in Tigges's definition of nonsense as the simultaneous presence and absence of one meaning. Here it is the presence and absence of the anterior text, structurally and thematically, which would give it some sort of "meaning."

From straight parody, to parody utilizing nonsense devices, and finally to the genre of literary nonsense, Lear and Carroll demonstrate the often problematic confluence of parody and nonsense. While ultimately nonsense as genre does not parody its models, it does come quite close, not so much to the standard *OED* definition, but more to the expanded use of parody found in critics such as Hutcheon, Bex, and Phiddian. If nonsense is a parody of anything, it is parody in a much broader sense, reaching far beyond its anterior texts. Cammaerts (p. 15) and Eliot (Tigges, p. 12) have described nonsense as a parody of sense in general, while Ann Colley has seen it as parody of the "metaphoric impulse" (pp. 294-95), deconstructing the very basis of this most vital tool of sense-making. Literary nonsense marks one of the many divergent progressions away from the simple ridicule of parodic imitation. By abstaining from the critical and ironic, even in the face of its "parodic impulse," it presents an alternative relationship between source and referential text. In the end, nonsense cannot, and does not wish, to separate itself completely from its source; instead, it uses that source as an additional point of tension, contributing to the endless play of nonsense.

Chapter 2

Lear's "Pictorial embellishments"

> *...the Pictures,*
> *Tho' the handling of line is a little defective,*
> *Make up amply in verve what they lack in perspective.*
>
> -Hilaire Belloc, <u>A Moral Alphabet</u>[107]

An illustration in *Mamma's Pictures, or The History of Fanny and Mary* (ca. 1818),

shows a girl and a boy at the dinner-table with their mother. The girl seems to have put her

fork down, and her complaint is described in the caption:

F f

Fanciful Fanny

Mamma (said Fanny) I can't eat
This piece you've cut me from that meat.

Below the caption an indignant reader, in adult handwriting, has written, "What a set of

noodles!" expressing an impatience with this typically fatuous illustration from an early

---

[107]Hilaire Belloc, *A Moral Alphabet*, in *Cautionary Verses: The Collected Humorous Poems of H. Belloc* (London: Duckworth, 1939)

children's book.[108] In this rare occurrence of reader feedback, we glimpse the impatience which many parents and children alike must have felt at yet another children's volume displaying the old motifs in dreary engravings. The booming children's book market of the early-nineteenth century, dominated by publishers like Harris and Darton, was under pressure to produce more inexpensive books, which often meant choosing speed and cheapness over quality, in both text and illustration. The result, as the reader of *Mamma's Pictures* implies, was often less than inspiring--even humorous in a way unintended by the publisher. This type of illustration, and those far more crude from the previous fifty years or so, were reprinted frequently into the 1840s.[109] A young artist with an eye and hand to match any of his day, Edward Lear also probably had little patience for such illustrations. When we compare illustrations like this to Lear's nonsense drawings, which he began in the early 1830s, we begin to see how Lear's were drastically different from his dour predecessors, yet at the same time not entirely unrelated. His characters seem to leap off the page, whether in joy or rage, drawn with great economy of line and, as Belloc was later to write about his own illustrations, more *"verve"* than attention to the conventions of realism. Lear kept his interest in realism to his serious painting, which was his livelihood. Breaking all rules of perspective, ignoring all but the essential details, he began a popular trend in children's book illustration, sometimes called "naïve," which has survived since then and can still be seen in the illustrations of James Thurber (though not for children) and Shel Silverstein. Kirby Olson, who explores Lear's relationship with formal art, comments on his contribution to comic art: "Lear combined his love of Dürer's straight line with some aspects of the picturesque to create a hybrid form which immediately swept England and its colonies....[His] was a founding act of genius...."[110] While Olson and others have discussed Lear's nonsense drawings in relation to formal art trends of the early-nineteenth century, few have looked at their relationship with what they resemble far

[108]Broome, Charlotte Ann, *Mamma's Pictures, or The History of Fanny and Mary* (London: Darton, Harvey, and Darton, [ca 1818], in *Early Children's Books and Their Illustration* (New York, London: The Pierpont Morgan Library, OUP, 1975), p. 76.

[109]Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration* (London: John Murray with the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1988), p. 54.

[110]Kirby Olson, "Edward Lear: Deleuzian Landscape Painter," *Victorian Poetry*, 31.4 (1993), 347-62 (p. 357). Lear was familiar with many artists, both famous and obscure, as his many references to them in his travel journals demonstrates.

more: the more "lowly" art of children's book illustration.[111] Critics have also usually

separated Lear's illustrations from the mainstream in his day, claiming that his drawings

had "sprung from whims"[112] which developed outside the industry, but I would argue that

Lear's illustrations are better understood by looking at their relationship *with* the industry.

While his originality cannot be denied, his technique and the effects he achieved emerged

partly from both the old, rough woodcuts as well as a reaction to the newer, more "artistic"

children's book illustrations.

Children's book illustration of the early-nineteenth century was often not far

removed from the first woodcuts used commonly for children's books from the mid-

eighteenth century.[113] Of course, children have always enjoyed book illustrations, and for

much of the eighteenth century they often had access to illustrations in "adult" books which

they appropriated. From as early as Caxton's *Aesop* (1484) and various fifteenth-century

bestiaries, to the fairy tales of Perrault, which reached England around 1729, children have

had to get illustrations where they could find them. Children were particularly drawn to

The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726),

all of which came out in illustrated (and altered) versions in the eighteenth century. The

majority of the common population, however, was rarely able to see complete,

unadulterated versions of most books; instead, they took advantage of what amounted to

the popular people's press, or the chapbook industry. The chapbooks, having 12, 16, or

24 pages and some rough illustration, were only able to contain drastically cut versions of

these and other works, but were popular because of their cheapness and accessibility.

Aside from reduced texts, chapbooks contained a great variety of popular entertainment,

from news, to cookery, to nursery rhymes. Originally aimed at adults, chapbooks were

soon equally the domain of children, who could occasionally afford to buy half-penny

---

[111]For more on Lear's formal art in relation to nonsense, see also Cammaerts, pp. 60-70, who discusses nonsense technique and Colley, "Edward Lear's Limericks," pp. 285-299, who shows Lear's nonsense art to be the opposite of his formal art.

[112]William Feaver, *When we were young: Two centuries of children's book illustration* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 10.

[113]Often these woodcuts were leftovers from even earlier publications, relegated to the lowest level in publishing: chapbooks and children's books (often indistinguishable until the mid-nineteenth century).

chapbooks themselves, though chapbooks for children were not as common until the beginning of the nineteenth century.[114]

Illustrations accompanied books specifically for children's entertainment from their beginning in the first half of the eighteenth century, but the illustrations were used quite differently from those in adult publications. Because early children's books and chapbooks were expected to be cheap in all ways, they were produced with little regard for the illustrations. Copperplate engraving, the more costly method of production popular in adult books, was rarely used in the children's market, though it became popular briefly in the beginning of the nineteenth century, most notably in Roscoe's *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast* which had engravings after Mulready. Copperplate engraving produced a far higher quality illustration than woodcuts, but it was too expensive and also not well-suited for children's books, as it could not simultaneously be printed with text. To cut on expenses, therefore, antiquated woodcuts, often twenty years old or more, were frequently used.[115] Furthermore, these illustrations often had little or no connection with the text. In *The Christian Alphabet, or, Good Child's First Book* (no date, but probably early-nineteenth century), for example, we find the carelessness so common in the treatment of illustrations. The text, which also appears in other chapbooks, is illustrated by woodcuts for the earlier alphabet, *A was an archer.*[116] In this case, the result is complete disparity between text and picture. For the letter "H" we find the following:

> Hold true the faith, I do beseec, [sic]
> Which Orthodox Divines do preach,
> Cleave fast to Christ our Saviour dear,
> Then Satan's trap you need not fear[117]

The rough woodcut, inappropriate and unrelated to the text, is of a huntsman on horse, a hound at their feet running in a chase. Such disparity between verse and illustration was not so uncommon. This type of woodcut, surviving from the eighteenth century, would be

---

[114]Whalley and Chester, p. 94.

[115]Percy Muir, *Victorian Illustrated Books* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1971, revised 1985), p. 20.

[116]*A was an archer* (Derby: Henry Mozley and Sons, [n.d., not before 1815]). This alphabet, sometimes called "Tom Thumb's Alphabet," can be traced back to the reign of Queen Anne (Opie, p. 49). Chapbooks were rarely dated. I therefore use the cataloguer's best guess when available.

[117]*The Christian Alphabet, or, Good Child's First Book* (London: Ryle and Co., [n.d.]).

used throughout most of the first half of the nineteenth century in various children's publications.

Around twenty years after Newbery began the successful mass production of children's books, the art of illustration began to develop from the crude, general-purpose woodcuts. Newbery's *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes Otherwise called, Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes* (3rd edition, 1766, commonly attributed to Goldsmith) represented a progressive step in illustration. Its illustrations were made exclusively for it and worked with the text, an almost unheard-of practice at the time.[118] Shortly after this volume appeared, the young Thomas Bewick entered the trade. Beginning in the 1770s with works like *A New Invented Hornbook* (1770) and *The New Lottery Book of Birds and Beasts, for children to learn their letters by as soon as they can speak* (1771), Bewick quietly revolutionized children's book illustration. During his career he perfected the technique of "white-line" wood engraving which allowed for greater depth and detail, even in the small spaces allotted in children's publications.[119] In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, copper was often replaced by steel in engraving, but Bewick's methods ensured that wood engraving eclipsed both kinds of metal. Bewick not only showed great care and artistry in his work, but also gave a greater dignity to the profession.[120] Indeed, by the end of his career his methods were widespread, as can be seen, for instance, in *Children's Tales or Infant Prattle* (1818), a small volume which contains anonymous illustrations full of detail and artistic attention. He also trained many apprentices who would carry his tradition through much of the nineteenth century. Eaton remarks that Bewick's illustrations demonstrate "truth to nature, and humor; a sense of beauty, a love of detail and skill in using it."[121] As we shall see, many of these "innovations" would be willfully undermined in Lear's illustrations.

[118]Anne Thaxter Eaton, "Illustrated Books for Children Before 1800" in *Illustrators of Children's Books: 1744-1945*, compiled by Bertha E. Mahony and others (Boston: The Horn Book, 1947, repr. 1961), pp. 5-24 (p. 15).
[119]For brief descriptions of Bewick's career, see Eaton, p. 16-18 and Whalley and Chester, pp. 27-29.
[120]Whalley and Chester, p. 28. Because of Bewick, nineteenth-century children's book illustrators would achieve unprecedented distinction. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century did illustrators' commonly sign their names to their work. Around 1850 illustration began to dominate the children's market, and illustrators often became more famous than writers.
[121]Eaton, p. 18.

While the children's book industry was providing progressively higher quality and more realistic illustrations, Lear, among a few others, chose a different artistic direction. By the 1830s children's illustrations were considerably better than those of thirty years before, but at this point the children's book market became somewhat stagnant. Production was higher than ever, but little new material appeared. The rich detail and improving overall quality of the earlier two decades, along with more expensive metal engraving, gave way again to the cheaper wood engraving and woodcuts. Many of the older works were reprinted, often with the original woodcuts which had worn their way down to the bottom of the market, in children's books.[122] Such aging illustrations had other ramifications, as Whalley points out: "Many of the reprints were issued with the original illustrations, which must have seemed very archaic to the child, since fashions, especially in clothes, had changed considerably" (p. 54). The antiquated illustrations, used because of the publishers' conservatism, cheapness, or sheer laziness, were thus noticeable whether for their outdated fashions or for the outmoded fashion of the illustration's style. Children's libraries of the 1830s stocked both the Bewickian examples of improved wood engraving alongside some of the older examples of ornate metal engraving, but most illustrations were dictated by thrift rather than quality. It was during this period of creative stagnation that Edward Lear drew his "nonsenses" for the children at Knowsley Estate.

Lear's *Book of Nonsense* was a throwback to an earlier time, to the older woodcuts before Bewick and the arrival and awareness of artistic conventions in children's literature. As we shall see, Lear's limerick illustrations show a deliberate simplification in line, embellishment, and detail. Shading is often absent, or kept to a crude minimum. What detail is given, what lines are drawn, are careful and deliberate, expressing with the least amount of ink the complicated relationship between picture and poem. In their exaggerated simplicity, they betray a resemblance to the overly simple pre-Bewick woodcuts and an opposition to the fashion for increasing ornamentation. Lear's illustrations, which usually have a certain, if problematic, relationship with the text, could also be said to mock the carelessness or indifference of many children's book publishers who would mismatch

---

[122]Whalley and Chester, p. 54.

picture and text, such as in *The Christian Alphabet, or, Good Child's First Book,* described above.

Lear's book was also a throwback in its format. Around the 1840s illustration was just beginning to become popular for its own sake in children's books. Toy books, or what we would now call "picture books," began to appear--volumes which were mainly ornate illustration, with perhaps a little text. Later in the century illustrators like Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, and Randolph Caldecott would become highly successful through their toy books, but in the 1840s they were just beginning.[123] The first edition of *A Book of Nonsense* included monochrome lithographed illustrations (an unusual practice in children's books, though chromolithography was just starting to become popular) in two volumes costing 3*s*. 6*d*. each, a hefty sum at the time.[124] If we compare these volumes to the "Felix Summerly" (pseudonym for Sir Henry Cole) books, we see the market for which Lear's books were meant. Summerly's traditional tales, issued from about 1841 onwards, sold for 6*d*. plain, and 1*s*. coloured. These volumes were well-made, printed on good paper with large type, and illustrated by well-known artists--all qualities distinguishing these works from lower publications and chapbooks. They were also distributed in larger, collected volumes, for around 3*s*. 6*d*., the same price as one of Lear's volumes.[125] These more expensive Summerly books were coloured and bound in cloth gilt and were clearly meant for a wealthy audience. In contrast, Lear's books, rather than being opulent, were rather plain. They sold for a high enough price that their audience would have expected the quality and detail of Summerly's books, or at least colour, but they were stark black and white, with none of the ornamentation that was becoming so popular. Though in a format different from chapbooks, the overall presentation of Lear's limericks reflected the older chapbooks, exaggerating both the good and bad of those early efforts at amusement.

Before moving on to Lear's nonsense illustrations, we must first recognize that he came to them neither entirely spontaneously nor without some experimentation. During the

[123]Whalley and Chester, pp. 101-2.
[124]Noakes, p. 66.
[125]Darton, pp. 242-3.

1830s, while he resided frequently at Knowsley Estate in order to draw its menagerie, he also began his first known drawings for children. Lear treated the many Knowsley children to sketches of popular nursery rhymes, songs, and "nonsenses," or what we now call limericks. However, he did not illustrate all of these in the same manner. Two series of drawings, probably from the mid-1830s, demonstrate a style of illustration quite different from the limerick drawings. In "The Adventures of Daniel O'Rourke" and "The Adventures of Mick," Lear's style is more sketchy, and also more realistic. Take, for example, the illustrations of "Daniel O'Rourke's merriment" and "Mick accepts the bottle" [see next page]. The illustrations for these series exhibit a less confident line coupled with an attempt to depict the text accurately, both qualities that Lear would often drop or distort in illustrating the limericks. These illustrations attempt a sense of proportion and depth, and the actions depicted are given full execution within the illustration. In the drawing for "Mrs. Judy O'Rourke interprets [interrupts?] her husband's dream," we see Mrs. O'Rourke throwing a bucket of water onto her husband. Unlike in the limerick drawings, the action is clearly occurring: the lines representing water slash into Daniel's face, and he frowns in displeasure at being so rudely awoken, or perhaps because of his dream, or both.
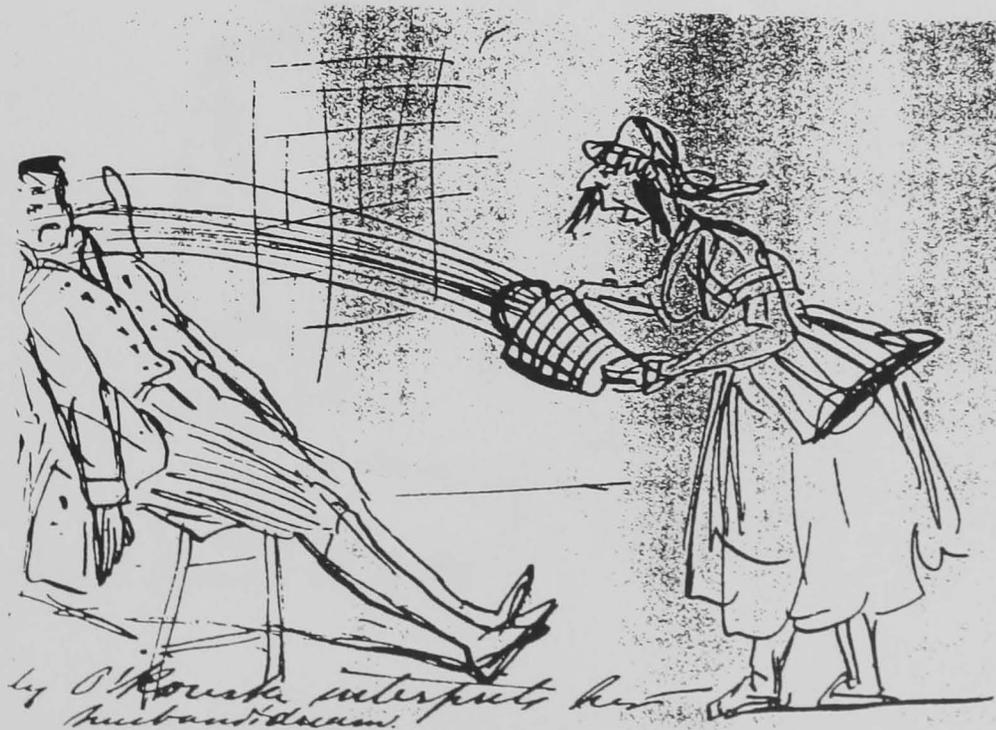
(*Lear in the Original*, p. 198)

Daniel O'Rourke messiment.

Mick accepts the bottle

(*Lear in the Original*, pp. 186, 201)

This example shows clear action and realistic reaction. Lear's limerick drawings, however, rarely allow such physical contact in the case of violence and usually confuse the situation by having the "victim" appear to react in a way contrary to the difficult circumstances. Lear's "Old Man of the Nile" is typical of this picture/poem disparity in his limericks:
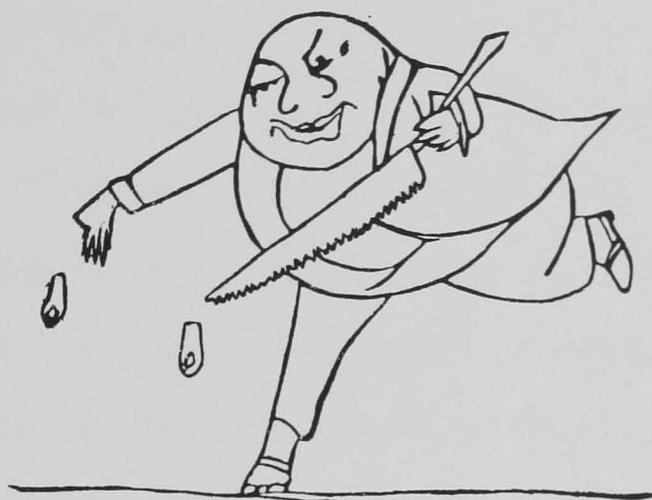
There was an Old Man of the Nile,
Who sharpened his nails with a file;
Till he cut off his thumbs, and said calmly, 'This comes--
Of sharpening one's nails with a file!'   (p. 33)

The Old Man's actions seem to be disconnected from the apparent results. The enormous saw-like file hovers away from his right thumb, which is disconnected from his body and inexplicably far from the action's probable site. His other thumb falls as well, it seems, from the tip of the file, but how he manages this while holding the file is quite perplexing. His enigmatic smile and pleased, closed-eye countenance complete the nonsense picture/poem unit, softening and confusing the action described in the text by virtue of several visual/verbal incongruities and a sense of physical disconnectedness with action. Lear's true nonsense drawings, like in the Old Man of the Nile, shy away from such direct, unequivocal portrayals as seen in "The Adventures of Daniel O'Rourke" and "The Adventures of Mick."[126] Though there is certainly a sense of humour throughout these two series, particularly in Lear's depiction of an oversized eagle and the Man in the Moon,

---

[126]See Colley, "Edward Lear's Limericks," p. 295.

they seem to be somewhat stilted. We see, however, some of the traits that would emerge more strongly in the limerick illustrations, such as, in the above illustration of Daniel's merriment, the odd, comical crowd sketched simply, yet expressively. A few of the figures in "The Adventures of Mick" (p. 205) also resemble the limericks' more child-like figures, but the differences are far greater. Nearly all that was original in Lear's nonsense drawings would come only with his original limericks.

Lear also illustrated some of the limericks found in the volume that inspired him, the *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen* (c. 1821), but like the two stories, in a slightly different manner.[127] In the drawings for two of these, the "old soldier of Bicester" and the "sick man of Tobago" he demonstrates a different style, although in this case progressively closer to that which he would use for his own limericks. The first drawing for the "sick man of Tobago" is a fairly well-executed and detailed caricature.[128]

There was a sick man of Tobago,
Lived long on Rice gruel and sago.
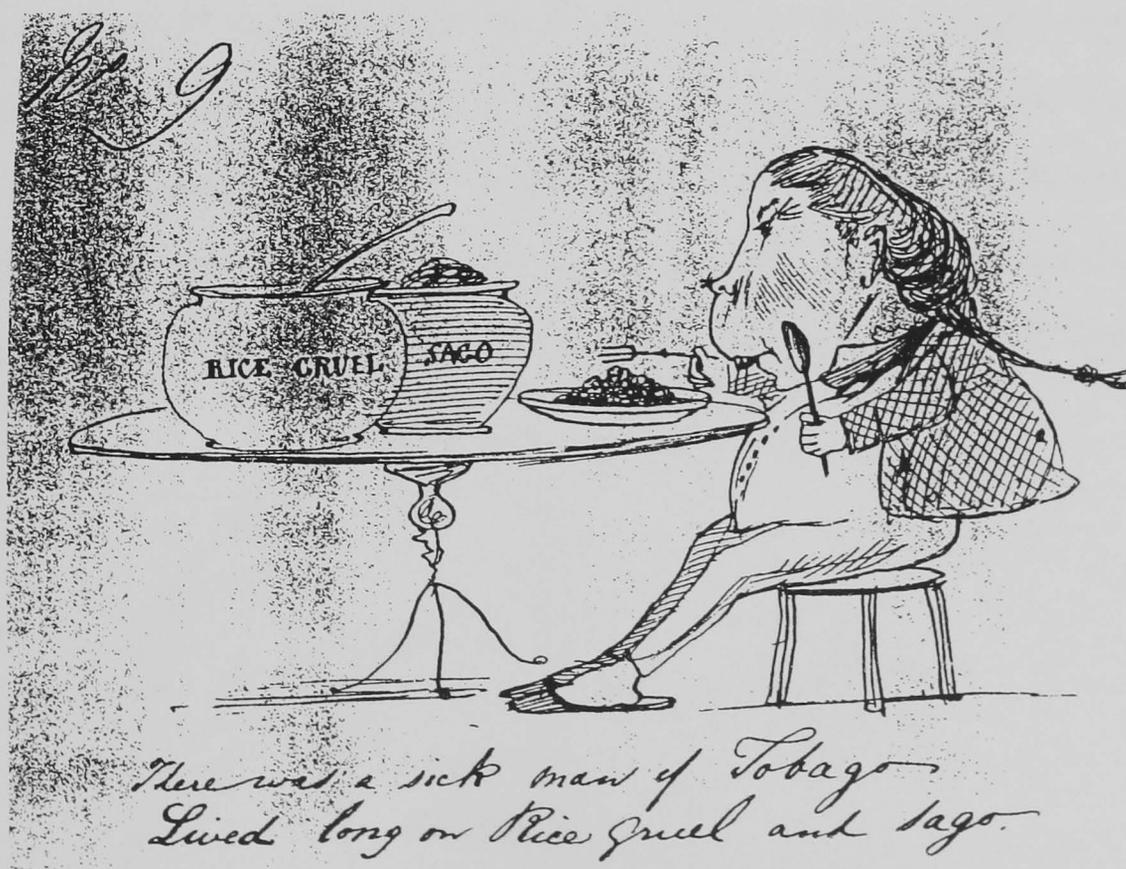
Compare this to Lear's own limerick appearing in *A Book of Nonsense*:

---

[127]This chapbook was illustrated by Robert Cruikshank and possibly written by R. S. Sharpe (Peter Levi, "Edward Lear" in *The Art of Poetry: The Oxford Lecutres 1984-1989* (New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1991), pp.169-186 (p. 173).
[128]*Lear in the Original*, p. 53.
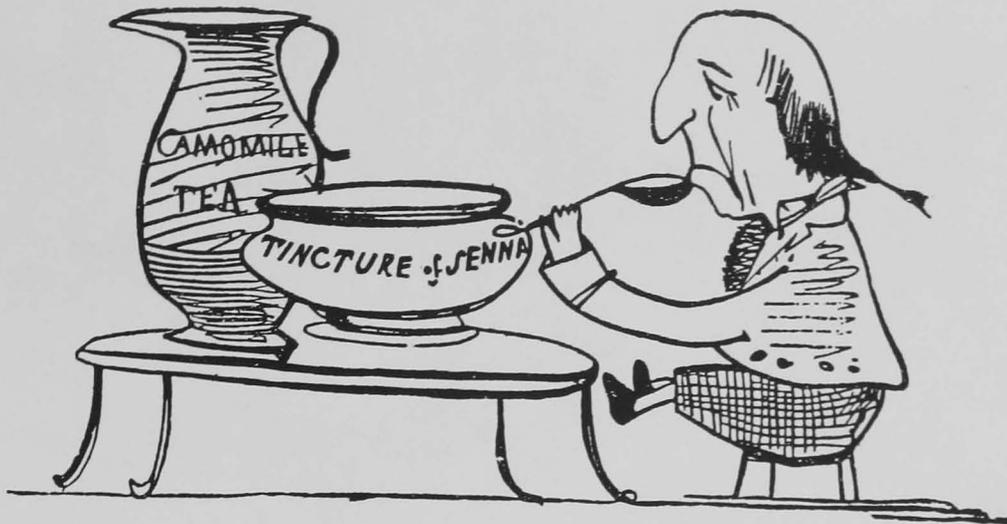
There was an Old Man of Vienna,
Who lived upon Tincture of Senna;
When that did not agree, he took Camomile Tea,
That nasty Old Man of Vienna. (p. 18)

The illustrations are strikingly similar (though the verses different), yet the latter is much more characteristic of Lear's true style: the heavily distorted body, the legs flying, and the simple lines which manage to express the old man's feelings, all contribute to this somehow fitting and expressive "naïve" style. The next two drawings for the sick man of Tobago become far more typically Learian, almost as if Lear, by progressing from the representational to the absurd, were inventing the form for his nonsense limericks by *illustration* first.
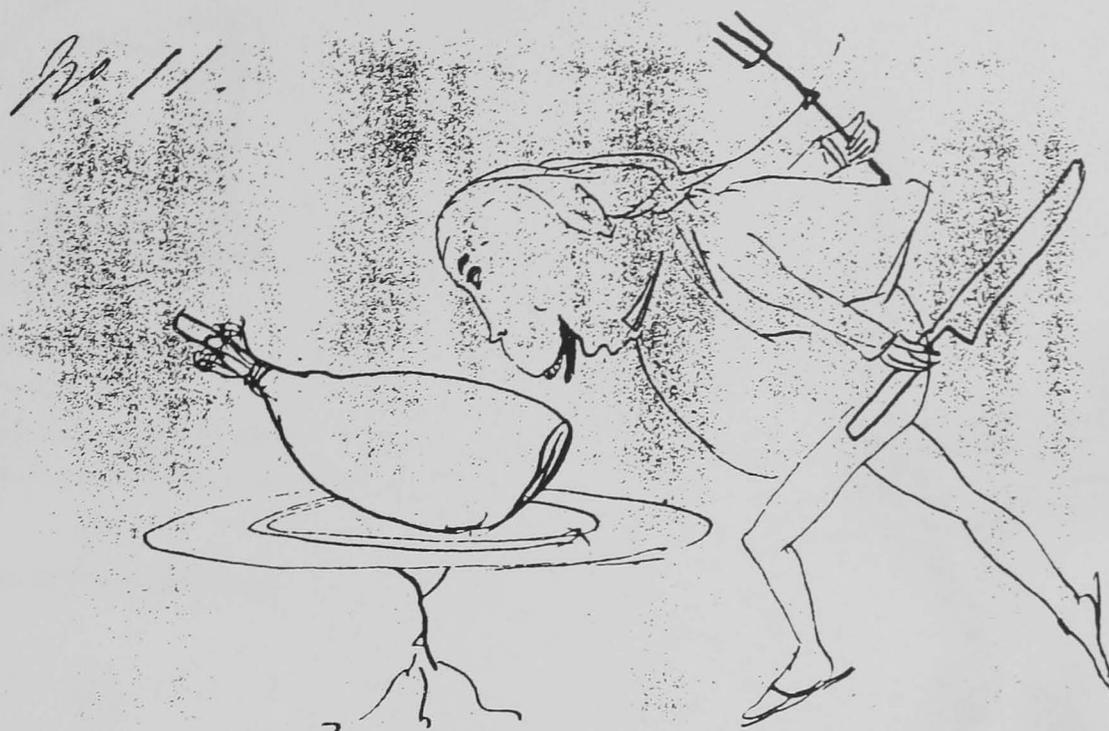
"To a roast leg of mutton you may go." —

We should also not ignore the different styles within the nonsense corpus: in particular, Lear's "Nonsense Botany" is drawn with the same expert eye that rivaled Audubon in wildlife drawing. Lear gave to these illustrations, which were very popular with his nineteenth-century audience, the same attention that he did his serious botanical drawings.[129] The result was what appeared to be an accurate representation of fantastic plants. The alphabets as well are more realistically illustrated, though as we have seen in the last chapter, they are rarely nonsensical. The drawings for his nonsense songs, like "The Owl and the Pussy-cat" and "The Pobble Who Has No Toes" are child-like, but more plainly representational of their texts, rather than being inextricably interrelated, as in the limerick illustrations. The main style he would adopt and keep throughout fifty years of creating nonsense was thus reached after considerable experimentation, but it was not created in isolation from the book market.

---

[129]Lear published many drawings of birds and other wildlife. Besides publishing his own volumes, he worked for several years under John Gould and contributed to many natural history publications. See, for example, his independent works: *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots* (London: R. Ackermann and E. Lear, 1832) and *Gleanings from the Menagerie and Aviary at Knowsley Hall*, ed. J.E. Gray (Privately printed, 1846).

E
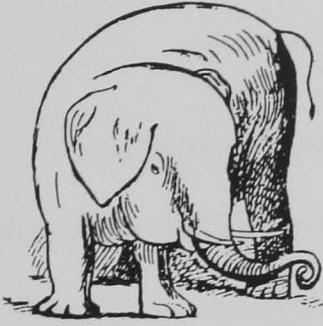
E was an elephant,
Stately and wise;
He had tusks and a trunk,
And two queer little eyes.

e !
O what funny small eyes!

G
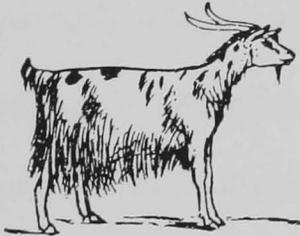
G was a goat
Who was spotted with brown
When he did not lie still,
He walked up and down.

g !
Good little Goat!

(p. 132)

The Obsequious Ornamental Ostrich,
who wore Boots to keep his
feet quite dry.

(p. 216)
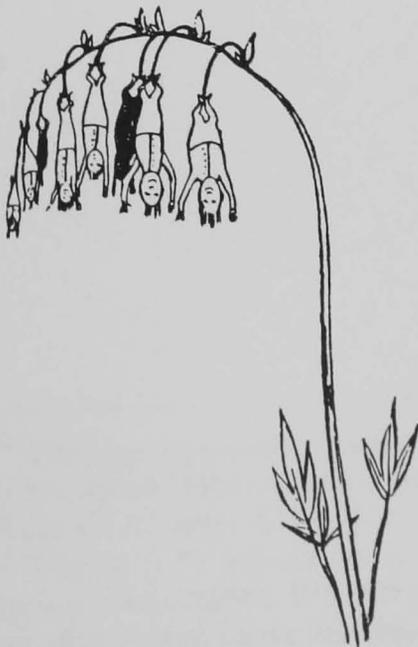
Manypeeplia Upsidownia

(p. 128)

Cockatooca Superba

(p. 129)

Lear's unique style was derived partly from predecessors in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century children's literature. It is probable that he, like so many other writers of the time, grew up exposed to chapbooks.[130] Within these crude works we can find some of the beginnings of his own nonsense-illustration style. As Feaver observes, Lear's illustrated nonsense works "were inspired and shaped to a great extent by the imagery their creator[s] had been brought up on. They are caricatured chapbooks."[131] For example, one of Harris's few chapbooks which was solely for children's amusement was *The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog* (1805). In this rhyming tale of Mother Hubbard's procuring for her dog proper attire, there are many humorous, if rough illustrations. At the end, the dog dons all he has been bought and becomes almost human himself. Unlike the more Bewickian engravings, these show relatively little detail and betray an amateurish hand.[132]

---

[130]Dickens, for instance, makes repeated references to chapbooks. One such instance is in *Great Expectations* (1861), which refers to Mother Hubbard's dog, who appeared in an early-nineteenth century chapbook (Chapter XIX). The rhyme's history is described in Opie, p. 316. See also below.

[131]Feaver, p. 9. See also R. L. Mégroz, "The Master of Nonsense," *The Cornhill Magazine*, 157 (January-June, 1938), 175-190 (p. 185). While both of these critics note this relationship, neither they nor any other source I have seen has explored it. Ann Colley, one of the few critics to have written considerably on the nonsense drawings themselves, sees them as opposed to the realism in Lear's formal art. See Colley, "Edward Lear's Limericks," pp. 285-299. See also Olson, who writes of Lear's creation of a new "comic picturesque," pp. 347-362.

[132][Sarah Catherine Martin], *The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog* (London: John Harris, 1805), facsimile copy (San Marino: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1962).

She went to the Barber's
To buy him a Wig.
When she came back
He was dancing a Jig.

The simple profile and distorted perspective give these illustrations the typical chapbook naiveté, yet there is a certain humour and vivacity here which often did not appear in costlier volumes. An exception to this is the work of the young George Cruikshank, whose illustrations for *German Popular Stories* (1823) also demonstrated the beginnings of a wilder spirit in the nursery.

(Illustrators of Children's Books: 1744-1945, p. 25)

So many of Lear's illustrations are full of this kind of vivacity and humour. Lear's figures, like Cruikshank's elves, dance in wild abandonment, but the relationship of Lear to his predecessors is closer than this simple, yet significant, attribute.

Lear tries to out-chapbook the chapbooks. Literary nonsense, as we have seen in the last chapter, usually has a close relationship with some source text and often borders on the parodic. This is also the case with Lear's illustrations, which take the conventions of the chapbook and other literature, and turn them on their head. Lear's "Old Man of Whitehaven," for example, shows a scene similar to that in *Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog*, of a human being dancing with an animal:

There was an Old Man of Whitehaven,
Who danced a quadrille with a Raven;
But they said--'It's absurd, to encourage this bird!'
So they smashed that Old Man of Whitehaven.   (p. 39)

The joke here, as in the many limericks that show close contact with human beings and animals, is that, rather than the animal becoming more human--the common trope found in fairy tales, folk legends, and nursery rhymes--the human beings become physically more animal-like.[133] The Old Man here spreads his coat to look like wings of a bird. More obvious is the old person of Skye:

---

[133]See Chapter 4 for more on the relationship between animals and human beings.
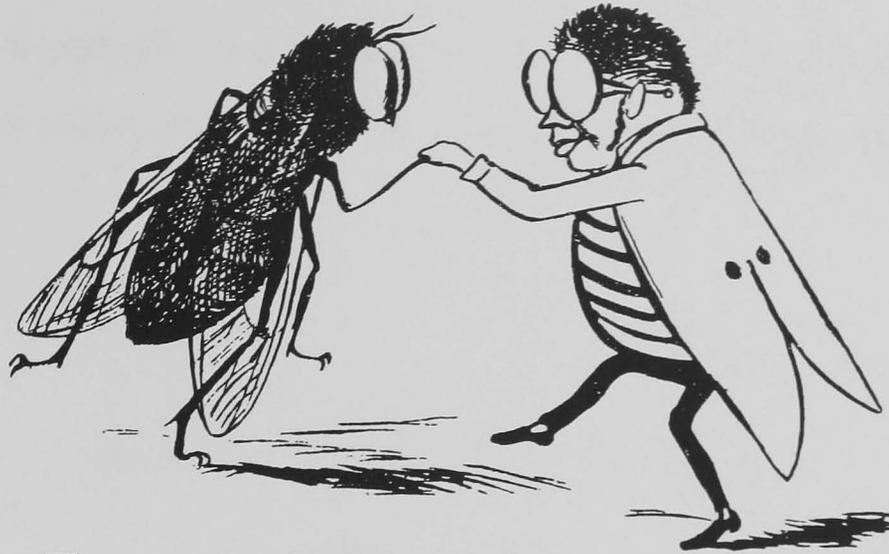
There was an old person of Skye,
Who waltzed with a Bluebottle fly:
They buzz'd a sweet tune, to the light of the moon,
And entranced all the people of Skye.   (p. 189)

Again, Lear reverses the common joke of the animal turning human, adopting a common

chapbook theme only to turn it upside-down. However, this was not simply a chapbook

theme. Thomas Hood's adult light verse, *Whims and Oddities* (1826-7), portrays a similar

kind of animal transformation. In the piece "Love Me, Love my Dog" the old woman

pictured looks remarkably like her little bulldog, and therein lies part of the joke.[134] This

kind of human transformation was quite rare in children's books, though, and much of

Lear's accomplishment was to bring the sophistication of some aspects of "adult" humour

to the nursery.

The works that perhaps most influenced Lear were the volumes of limericks coming

out starting around 1820. In comparison to these works, Lear's illustrations approach

caricature. His preface to *More Nonsense* tells of his inspiration for writing his limericks:

the somewhat obscure chapbook called *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen*,

of which we have already seen some of Lear's illustrations. Another volume, appearing

about a year earlier, also seems to have influenced Lear, though he does not mention it.

The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women contains limericks with same-rhyme last

lines, and, unlike the *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen*, illustrations which

---

[134]Thomas Hood, *Whims and Oddities*, 2nd edition(London: Lupton Relfe, 1827), p. 98.

seem to anticipate Lear's own. These limericks, which give brief tales of idiosyncratic characters, such as the "Old Woman named Towl, / who went out to sea with her Owl" or the "Old Woman of Croydon" who plays with a hoop like a child, seem controlled, "sensible" versions of what Lear would write. The similarities are striking with the "Old Woman at Lynn":[135]

OLD WOMAN OF LYNN.

There liv'd an Old Woman at Lynn,
Whose Nose very near touch'd her chin.
You may easy suppose.
She had plenty of Beaux;
This charming Old Woman of Lynn.

The "Old Woman" here resembles Punch with her comically long nose and chin, and the illustration is executed with humor. Lear creates many limericks with large or unusual

---

[135]*The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women, illustrated by as many engravings; exhibiting their principal eccentricities and amusements* (London: Harris, 1820) in De Vries, pp. 117-18 (p. 118).

noses as the main theme, and in the following limerick he takes the 1820 limerick one step further:
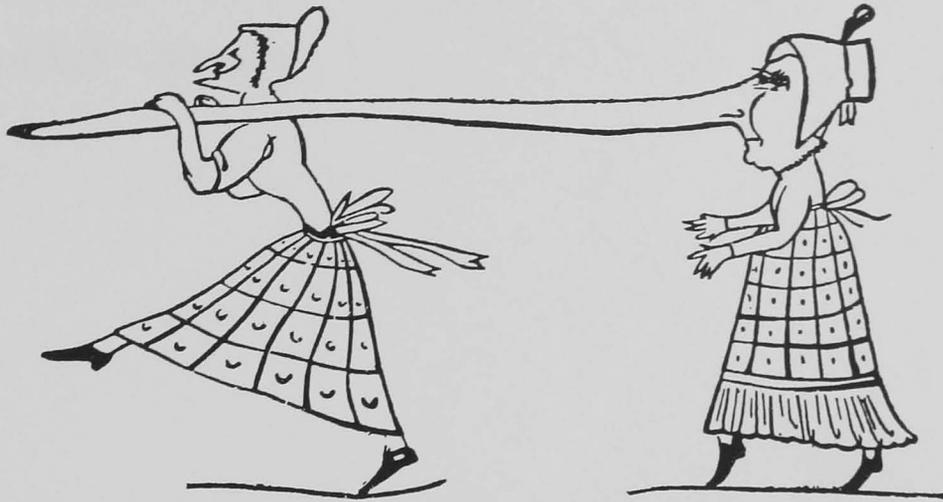
There was a Young Lady whose nose,
Was so long that it reached to her toes;
So she hired an Old Lady, whose conduct was steady,
To carry that wonderful nose.   (p. 23)

The unusual nose of the Old Woman at Lynn is nothing compared to Lear's Young Lady.

The Old Lady who bears the nose on her shoulder, interestingly, has a nose and chin quite

like the Old Woman at Lynn, but in Lear's world, this mild sort of freakishness is rather

commonplace. Lear takes the 1820 limericks further in his "old person of Harrow," which

resembles the 1820 "Old Woman of Harrow":

OLD WOMAN OF HARROW.

> There was an Old Woman of Harrow,
> Who visited in a Wheel barrow,
> And her servant before,
> Knock'd loud at each door;
> To announce the Old Woman of Harrow.　　　　(De Vries, p. 118)

The following is Lear's limerick:
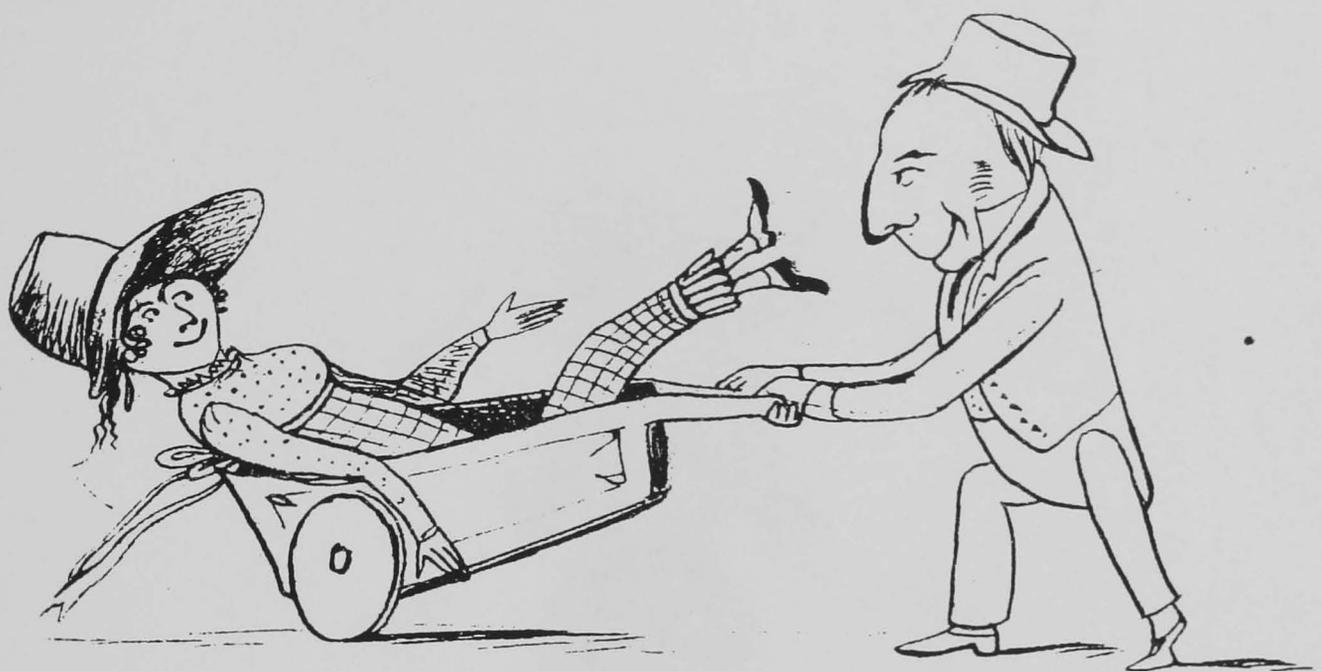
> There was an old person of Harrow
> Who bought a mahogany barrow,
> For he said to his wife, "You're the joy of my life!
> "And I'll wheel you all day in this barrow!"　　　　(*Teapots*, p. 44)

What was a mild idiosyncrasy in the 1820 limerick becomes a nonsensical, humorous

freakishness in Lear's limerick. Lear's old person acts on motivation beyond

understanding, and the illustration shows the blissful consequences for both parties. It

would be inaccurate to call this a parody or a caricature of the original, but there is some

relationship, some refraction of the original in its passage to nonsense.

Lear was the first, but not the only, popular practitioner of the "naïve" style. In

1848, two years after Lear's *A Book of Nonsense*, Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*

appeared in England and became popular instantly. Its lively, simplistic drawings, though

different from Lear's in crucial ways, helped to insure the popularity of the naïve style.

Hoffmann, however, was no artist, but a physician, and his illustrations were conceptually and artistically less complex than Lear's. His was a more "true" naïve style which did not attempt anything beyond being strikingly childish. This effect was intentional, as evidenced by his directions to his English printer not to refine his drawings.[136] Hoffmann's illustrations, though child-like and humorous, seem one-dimensional in comparison to Lear's. The well-known image of Shock-headed Peter, for instance, illustrates the verse adequately, yet it, like most of the other illustrations, is stiff and simplistic.[137]

1. SHOCK-HEADED PETER.

Just look at him! There he stands,
With his nasty hair and hands.
See! his nails are never cut;
They are grim'd as black as soot;
And the sloven, I declare,
Never once has comb'd his hair;
Any thing to me is sweeter
Than to see Shock-headed Peter.

There is little if any interaction between picture and poem, though there is certainly an energy and a willingness to illustrate the exaggerated cautionary tales which creates amusing, violent images. Another naïve illustrator contemporary with Lear was Rodolphe Töpffer (see next page for examples from *Dr. Festus* (1840)). The small sketches found within *Dr. Festus* are sketchy and humorous, and they also appear to be related to Lear's

[136]Whalley and Chester, p. 64.
[137]From Whalley and Chester, p. 64.

Rodolphe Töpffer, *Voyages et aventures du Docteur Festus* (Geneva, Paris: 1840) from
facsimile (Cologne, Geneva, 1996), pp. 73, 44, 45
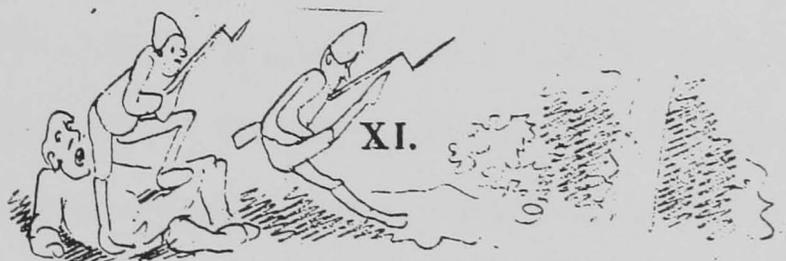
C'EST dans cet état qu'elle vint à rencontrer le
Maire, qui, sous l'habit de Milady, regagnait sa
commune. A la vue de tant d'indiscipline, ce res-
pectable magistrat sentit le texte de la loi lui apos-

Festus, moitié veillant, moitié rêvant, se déro-
bait pour toujours au moulinet, en se cachant dans
le creux d'un arbre miné par les ans.
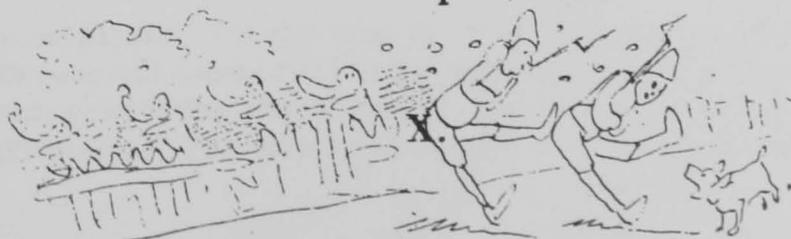
style, though it is unlikely that Lear read Töpffer. The smaller pictures, though child-like, are often clumsy and rarely display the kind of artistry characteristic of Lear's drawings. Töpffer's full-page illustrations are more carefully drawn, but with these more "artistic" drawings the child-like quality vanishes. Neither Hoffmann nor Töpffer exhibit quite the combination of the naïve and sophisticated demonstrated in Lear's nonsense. Just as literary nonsense text is often a marriage of high and "low" literary (and oral) forms, so the illustrations combine masterful artistic skill with rule-breaking pictorial expressions of childhood.

Lear's contemporary reviewers were perhaps more aware than today's critics of his innovations in the naïve style and frequently commented on his originality and skill. An article just after Lear's death, in the 1888 *Spectator*, asks, "after all, was not his popularity due in great measure to the pictorial embellishments of his text, which, being idealised versions of the scrawlings of a clever child, were exactly in harmony with the requirements of his juvenile readers?"[138] Contemporary reviewers most commonly commented upon this quality of Lear's "scrawlings," and it was this characteristic which proved the most influential. Imitators like A. Nobody (Gordon Brown) and C. L. Fraser would try to capture the same spirit, but none found Lear's success. A review from *The Saturday Review*, in 1888, states that "The drawings very cunningly combine the clumsy conventions dear to children with types and expressions that display real artistic knowledge and observation."[139] After giving a limerick as an example, the reviewer continues: "in all the really successful pictures in this book there is on one hand the concession to childishness which childhood appreciates, combined on the other hand with genuine humour, and sometimes with a mild species of genuine satire" (p. 361). Taking the Young Lady of Hull and the Young Lady of Troy as examples, we see the combination of naïve drawing with real skill:

---

[138]"Nonsense Pure and Simple," *The Spectator*, no. 3149 (3 November, 1888), 1503-5 (p. 1503). That reviews in the 1880s were still commenting on the originality of Lear's illustrations (which had first appeared around fourty years earlier) shows how even those who imitated Lear did not entirely succeed.
[139]"Lear's Book of Nonsense" *The Saturday Review*, 65.1691 (24 March, 1888), 361-2 (p. 361).
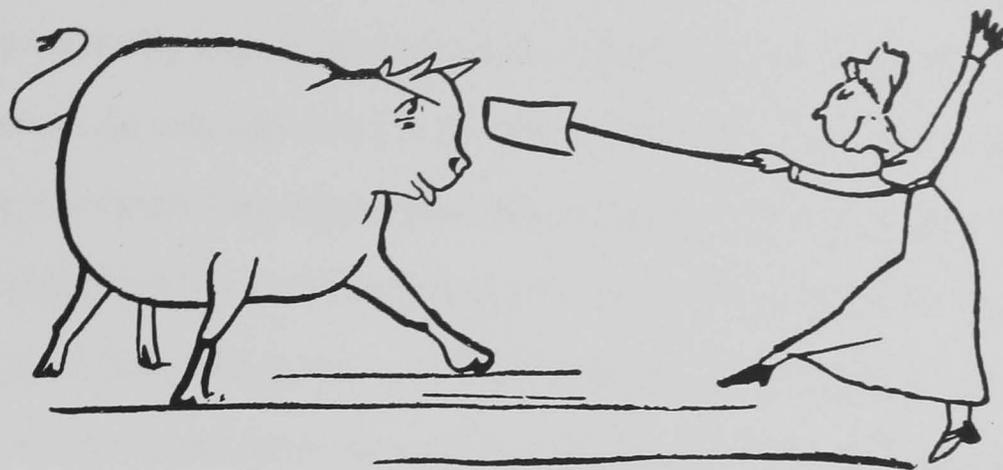
There was a Young Lady of Hull,
Who was chased by a virulent Bull;
But she seized on a spade, and called out--'Who's afraid!'
Which distracted that virulent Bull.   (p. 39)

There was a Young Lady of Troy,
Whom several large flies did annoy;
Some she killed with a thump, some she drowned at the pump,
And some she took with her to Troy.   (p. 46)

The drawing of the Young Lady of Hull, with the bare minimum of line, no shading and

the typically Learian flailing limbs, manages to convey her bold, almost carefree defiance.

The bull, also simply drawn, is full of character, and seems to be "distracted" into a starry-

eyed affection for the Young Lady. Here, we also glimpse a picture/poem discrepancy of

the violence and fright implied by the text opposed to the sheer joy apparent in the

illustration.[140] The Young Lady of Troy is sparsely drawn in a mock-classical style, while

she carries the comically huge flies, drawn with childish lack of perspective and detail.

These illustrations are only ostensibly in the naïve style; they, like most of the limerick

illustrations, go far beyond the inherent limitations and true simplicity of naïve illustrations.

Perhaps the root of Lear's innovations in illustrations is their interrelationship with

the text. It is particularly telling that rather than calling Lear's drawings "illustrations," the

1888 *Spectator* critic labels them "pictorial embellishments" of the text, implying that they

and the text, more like in Blake's works, are integral. Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789)

was perhaps the first children's book, if it can indeed be called that, to integrate word and

image so closely, as in "The Ecchoing Green."
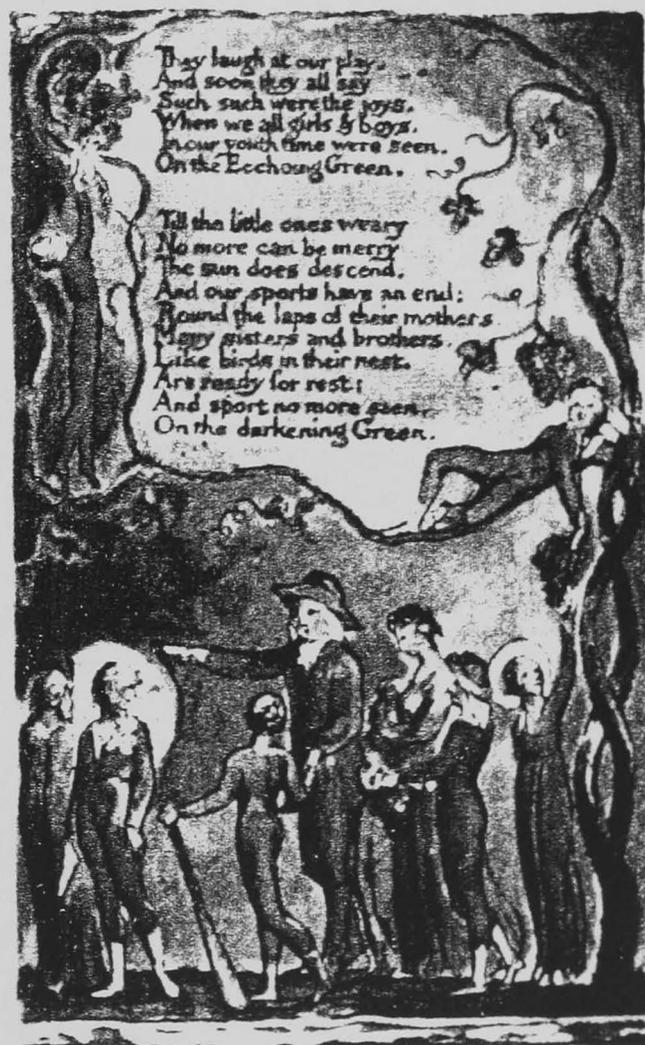
(plates 6, 7)[141]

[141]Compare this limerick to a later version of it in Lear's *Bosh and Nonsense* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 1982), p. 15, which seems more faithful to the text. The woman appears somewhat more shocked and the bull looks considerably more "virulent" as it charges her

[140]All passages from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 1789, 1794, ed. Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: OUP, 1967).

The first plate, original itself in the intermixed images and text, is, however, more or less illustrative of the song. The scene at the top of the first page shows "Old John" and the old folk under the tree with the infants, while the older children sport around them. Surrounding and within the text are smaller illustrations, showing boys at other sports. The next page, however, has a much more curious illustration which shows the party heading homeward. A twisted tree climbs the side of the plate and wraps around the text. Among the branches are male youths: one reaches for grapes while the other lounges, holding a bunch of grapes down to the outstretched arm of a young, haloed girl. Such suggestive imagery, which, among many possible interpretations can signify the coming of sexual maturity, opens the song to extratextual suggestions, ideas only hinted at in the closing "darkening green" of the song. Most of Blake's illuminations in this volume (and others) contain the enigmatic figures around and within the text, whose significance is, at best, only suggested. As in nonsense, the relationship between image and text rarely finds closure. Heather Glen comments on this relationship in Blake's illustrations:

> the sense of art to which that interplay [visual and verbal] points can be traced in some of their most puzzling verbal features: their refusal to 'instruct', to confirm expectations of closure, finality, and unambiguous generalization; the apparently unrelated perspectives from which they address their audience. The reader is not offered an authoritative and static text, but called upon to participate in a dynamic act of creation. It is an act of creation which involves a curiously skeptical attitude towards the language of which the poems are made... (p. 72)

Glen notes many of the same qualities found in Lear's picture/poem "nonsenses": a lack of closure, a text requiring the reader's active participation in meaning creation, and a "skeptical attitude" towards language.[142] Blake's *Songs*, however, reached only a very small audience, and it would mainly be through Lear's nonsense that such qualities would find a wider exposure.[143]

---

[142]See Introduction, Part 2 and Chapters 6 and 7 for more on reader response in relation to nonsense.
[143]There is no direct evidence that Lear knew of Blake, but it seems likely that he did at some stage, considering his keen knowledge of the art world and his involvement with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a group influenced by Blake.

Lear's illustrations, like Blake's, do not simply correspond to the text, but actually *embellish* it, initiating a relationship which adds further meaning (or anti-meaning). This interactive quality was, with the exception of Blake, almost unheard of in children's books. As Meyer states, "Lear's pen drawings embellished each limerick. Here he invented a form never before attempted and virtually impossible to imitate."[144] These illustrations were so striking that reviewers commented on them with some of the same criteria as they did on the limerick text. A reviewer in *The Spectator* from 1870 notes in the *illustrations* the same combination of sense and nonsense found in the *text*, an unprecedented critical practice in children's literature: "The nonsense botany is genuine nonsense,--extravagant enough to make the most prosaic man laugh; but yet nonsensical precisely because it recognizes the laws of sense, and directly traverses them."[145] Lear's illustrations were thus elevated to "texts" in themselves, creating nonsense in the same way as the written text.

Lear's illustrations establish three distinct kinds of relationship with the text. First, there are some limerick illustrations which do attempt mimesis. For example, the following illustration is an exact depiction of the limerick:

There was an old man in a tree,
Whose whiskers were lovely to see;
But the birds of the air, pluck'd them perfectly bare,
To make themselves nests in that tree.   (p. 191)

---

[144]Susan E. Meyer, *A Treasury of the Great Children's Book Illustrators* (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, 1987), p. 56.
[145] "The Science of Nonsense,"*The Spectator* (17 December, 1870), 1505-6 (p. 1505). For a modern analysis of nonsense illustrations, see Hendrik van Leeuwen, "The Liason of Visual and Written Nonsense," in *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 61-95

The drawing is amusing in its child-like simplicity, showing the fantastic beard and the man's (and birds') expression of contentment, but it does little except faithfully represent the words, albeit with a time discrepancy. This is a true illustration, rather than a "pictorial embellishment." There are surprisingly few of these throughout the limericks.

The next two types of illustration are those which add essential information to the text/picture unit.[146] One type *furthers* the joke implied by the text. This occurs in the following limerick:
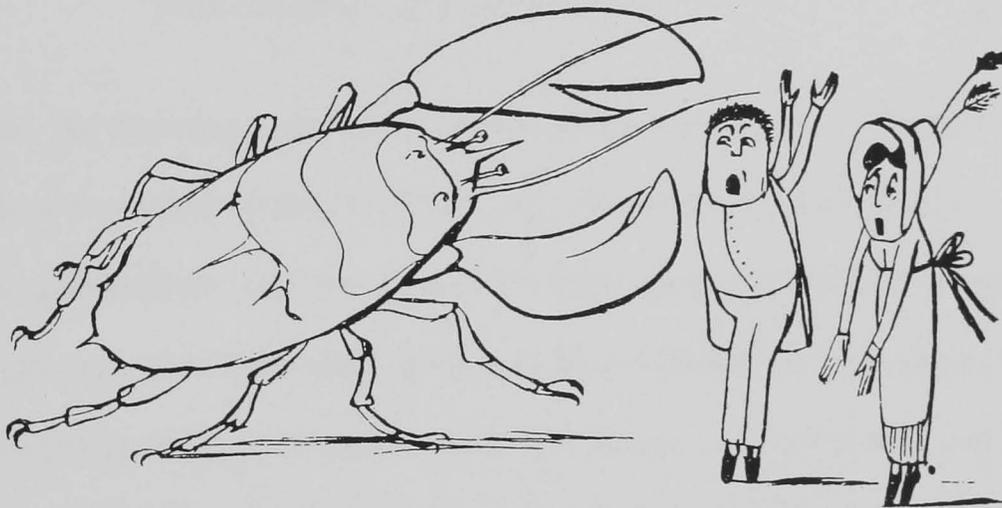
There was an old person of Hyde,
Who walked by the shore with his bride,
Till a Crab who came near, fill'd their bosoms with fear,
And they said, 'Would we'd never left Hyde!'   (p. 190)

Obviously, the joke here is in the crab's size which is only indicated by the drawing, even though the text implies, perhaps in its strong wording, that this crab is unusually terrifying. Another example is the Old Man in a pew:

---

[146]See Lisa S. Ede's "Edward Lear's Limericks and Their Illustrations" in *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 101-116, for a similar discussion of the interaction between picture and poem.
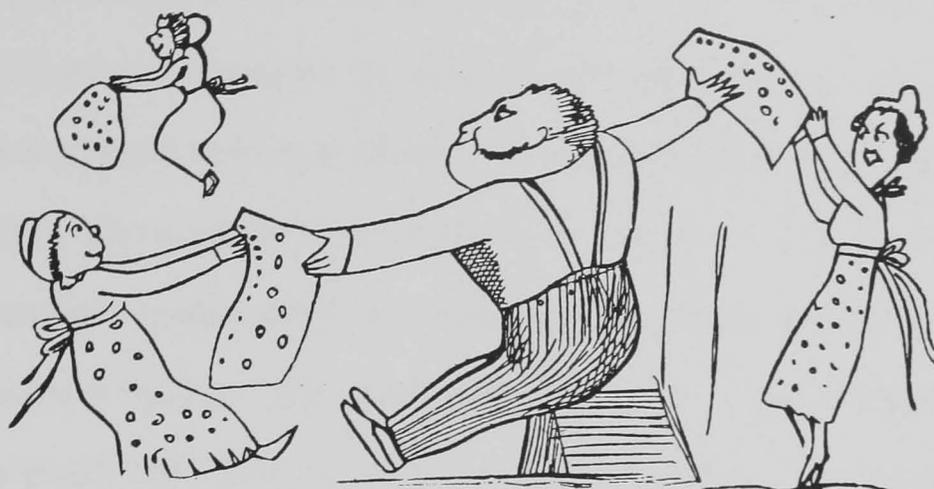
There was an Old Man in a pew,
Whose waistcoat was spotted with blue;
But he tore it in pieces, to give to his nieces,--
That cheerful Old Man in a pew.   (p. 38)

In this limerick, the drawing contributes substantially to the joke, not simply in showing

the joyous nieces bouncing around the Old Man, but in adding an extra detail which makes

the whole unit much richer: the two girls in the foreground are each wearing dresses which

seem to be made out of the Old Man's previous blue-spotted, and shredded, waistcoats.

This perhaps explains their joy at such a dubious present. However, the one girl in the

back (though it is difficult in such a depthless drawing to place her with certainty) wears a

plain dress; *her* joy is inexplicable. In both of these limericks, the illustrations hold a

dialogue with the text--they embellish it, creating new jokes and further elaboration.

This sort of relationship can be seen in Hood's *Whims and Oddities*, in the poem,

"Please to Ring the Belle." Though this poem is distasteful to us now for its open racism,

the relationship between picture and poem is very much what Lear was to copy. The poem

is about "Young Love" coming to call on Lucy:

The meeting was bliss, but the parting was woe
For the moment will come when such comers must go:
So she kiss'd him, and whisper'd--poor innocent thing--
"The next time you come, love, pray come with a ring."   (p. 13)

In this poem, a ridiculously exaggerated and ugly black person is pictured, with a bone in her hair, large stiff earrings, and an enormous ring (almost the size of her head) through her nose.[147] Obviously, she wants another ring for her nose. Also, this is anything but a conventional love story, judging by the hideous looks of the woman. Such a person would not live in a normal house (which is knocked on in the poem), nor would a "spruce single man" come to call. She is hardly a "hand-maid" nor does she seem a "poor innocent thing." The humour is caused solely by the incongruities between the picture and the expectations raised in the text. This kind of humour can be found in issues of *Punch* as well, in the one-panel "cartoons," which usually have a caption at the bottom completing the joke. The popular and "adult" drawings of Thomas Hood and *Punch* were thus mirrored in the deceptive childishness of Lear's drawings.

The last type of illustration resembles the first, in that it causes a dialogue between image and text which creates humour and nonsense. However, these illustrations directly or indirectly *contradict* the limerick they supposedly represent. This is the case with the old man of Ancona:
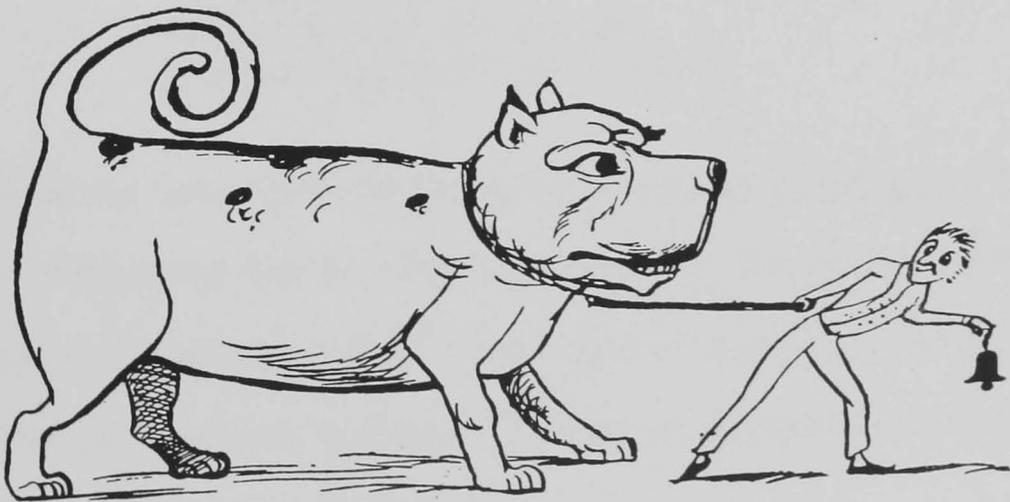
There was an old man of Ancona,
Who found a small dog with no owner,
Which he took up and down, all the streets of the town;
That anxious old man of Ancona.   (p. 197)

---

[147]This woman resembles Lear's "Old Person of Tring" (p. 36), but even more so the subject of his early parody of Thomas Moore's "Rich and Rare Were the Gems She Wore." See Chapter 1 for more on this parody.

The "small" dog is anything but small, and it does not seem to want to move a paw, let alone walk "up and down" the street. The man pulls on the leash, and the dog, teeth bared, looks as if he might just bite. The text labels the man "anxious," but not for the text's probable reason, finding the dog's owner; rather, the man should be anxious because a dog the size of a hippopotamus seems about to eat him. Nevertheless, the interplay continues in that the man has a thoroughly pleasant expression on his face, despite the well-justified, if different, causes for anxiety given in the picture *and* the text. The humour and skill of this picture and poem is in the sheer richness brought about by the interaction between two.

This kind of discrepancy was not unique to Lear, though he exploited it as no other children's illustrator would for many years. The chapbook *Dame Wiggins of Lee and her Seven Wonderful Cats* (1823) also has this kind of picture/poem relationship. In this chapbook, like *The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog*, the cats also participate in human activities, to the delight of the Dame. But here we find, in one of the last illustrations, the picture/poem discrepancy. The cats get out of control,

> When each nimbly leap'd
> On the back of a Goose,
> Which frighten'd them so
> That they ran to the sea,
> And half-drown'd the poor cats
> Of Dame Wiggins of Lee. (p. 18)[148]

The illustration of this verse shows the cats riding on the backs of the geese, but, contrary to the text, two of the cats are on the backs of *flying* geese. The joke here is that only one of the cats seems to be "half-drowning." Three others are riding the geese like boats, while two are flying the geese, smiling in pleasure. The picture and the text are at odds, like Lear's limericks, creating further humour.

After the appearance of Lear's limericks and Hoffmann's cautionary tales, the naïve style was copied by many, but rarely successfully. One of the reasons, perhaps, was that

---

[148]*Dame Wiggins of Lee and her Seven Wonderful Cats. A Humourous Tale. Written Principally by a Lady of Ninety*, (London: A.K. Newman, 1823), p. 18. According to M.F. Thwaite, *From Primer to Pleasure, An Introduction to the History of Children's Books in England, from the Invention of Printing to 1900* (London: The Library Association, 1963), p. 126, this was first published by Dean and Munday, 1823. The verses are ascribed to R.S. Sharpe and Mrs. Pearson and illusrations to R. Stennett.

Lear's success resulted from much more than a simple child-like style. Yet, in most imitations, this was the primary, sometimes the only, attribute retained. In Gordon Brown's *Nonsense; For Somebody Anybody or Everybody Particularly the Baby-Body* (1895), a clear Lear imitation, the illustrations have some humour, but the text is far less engaging than Lear's, and the crucial picture/poem discrepancy is absent. More successful was W.S. Gilbert's *Bab Ballads* (1869), which does keep the tradition of the inextricable picture/poem unit, but, of course, Gilbert was not writing for children.[149] Claude Lovat Fraser found some success in his Learian illustrations for traditional nursery rhymes,[150] but again, there is little humour found in any kind of interchange between picture and rhyme.

Taking into account Lear's borrowing from earlier styles of illustrations, it becomes harder to justify the claim that Lear's nonsense was quite so "revolutionary." Indeed, nearly every aspect has some kind of predecessor. His illustrations draw upon a hundred years of illustration, primarily from the chapbook but also from other illustrations in adult and children's literature. Yet, even a cursory comparison of Lear's nonsense to book illustrations in the 1830s and 40s, let alone reprints from much earlier times, shows Lear's startling differences and innovations. The uniqueness of Lear's nonsense was in the masterful combination in children's literature of already-established adult characteristics, like caricature and parody, with what was more original, the child-like quality and the interrelationship between picture and text. In this way, the illustrations are like the text of literary nonsense: combining an "adult," intertextual side with the "folk" style. His use of a child-like style can belie not only his subtle, yet precise artistic skill, but also the crucial dynamic interchange between picture and poem, the combination of the two making Lear the initiator of a style which would be copied, usually unsuccessfully, by many others.

---

[149]These poems first appeared in the periodical *Fun* from 1866 to 1871. A second volume, *More Bab Ballads*, was published in 1873.

[150]*Nursery Rhymes, With pictures by Claud Lovat Fraser* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1919).

Introduction, Part Two: Lear, Romantics, and the Implied Child Construct

I am almost thanking God that I was never educated, for it seems to me that 999 of those who are so, expensively and laboriously, have lost all before they arrive at my age--and remain like Swift's Stulbruggs [sic]--cut and dry for life, making no use of their earlier-gained treasures: whereas, I seem to be on the threshold of knowledge...

-Edward Lear to Chichester Fortescue, 2 September, 1859[151]

One of the most interesting approaches to the origins of literary nonsense is its relation to the conception of the child and its similarity to the new, Romantic constructs of the child which had yet to be fully represented in children's literature. I use the term "Romantic" with some hesitation, as during the Romantic period there were many different conceptions of the child. However, Wordsworth's image of childhood, which is related to Blake's and other Romantics' ideas to some degree, is the one usually considered to be the most original, comprehensive, and influential. Alan Richardson remarks, "It is significant that the most frequently cited authority in nineteenth-century writings on education and in Victorian children's literature alike...is not Locke's *Some Thoughts* or Rousseau's *Émile*, but Wordsworth's 'Intimations' ode" (p. xv). Wordsworthian images of childhood are the ones which survived and flourished after the Romantic period, and thus I use the word "Romantic" in relation to childhood theory, as Richardson does, with reference primarily to Wordsworth and ideas similar to his in other Romantics.[152] The work of Charles and Mary Lamb, which I often refer to in the following chapters, represents an intermediary

---

[151]*LEL*, p. 148.
[152]Wordsworth and Coleridge would change their conceptions of the child repeatedly throughout their lives, as can be seen in their acceptance and later rejection of Andrew Bell's Madras system of education, their views becoming more conservative as they aged. However, their poetry written as younger men was that which remained popular and shaped the Victorian conception of the child.

stage in the conception of the child, though their more commercial works belie their inclination towards the Wordsworthian view of the child.

Childhood theory and writing for children have traditionally been related to some extent. Throughout the eighteenth-century writers such as Isaac Watts, Sarah Trimmer, Maria Edgeworth and Anna Barbauld were both active educationalists and children's authors. Their more theoretical works emerged hand in hand with their writing for children. Trimmer, for instance, the author of the popular *Fabulous Histories; Designed for the Instruction of Children, respecting their Treatment of Animals* (1786, later called *History of the Robins*, and reprinted throughout most of the nineteenth century) started two magazines intended to quell the pernicious and later, Jacobean tendencies which she thought could take root in the nursery: *The Family Magazine* (1778-89) and *The Guardian of Education* (1802-06). Another preacher to and analyst of the child was William Godwin, whose *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature* (1797) set the stage for his later ventures in children's book writing and publishing. But this tradition somehow changed concerning the concept of the child emerging primarily from Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Though this concept of childhood was one of the central aspects of Romantic thought, the children's literature which emerged at the same time was, for the most part, unmarked by the new theories. Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* was among the very first children's books to approach the Romantic conception of the child.[153] Reflecting this innovation, Lear wrote to Chichester Fortescue in 1859 that, through the educational mill of current childhood theory, the person loses "all" of something which was present in childhood. Adulthood is, unfortunately, a time of forgetting, a losing of the "earlier-gained treasures" which, if present, would place the adult, as the child always is, "on the threshold of knowledge." A sentiment similar to Lear's letter is expressed by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, referring to his "escape" from the utilitarian education theories during his childhood. He

...must speak out

---

[153]The text which came closest to such an ideal was Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789), but the classification of such a deceptively simple work is problematical in many ways, not the least of which is its questionable status as children's literature.

> Thanksgivings from my heart that I was reared
> Safe from an evil which these days have laid
> Upon the children of the land--a pest
> That might have dried me up body and soul.　　　　(V, ll. 225-229)

Both Wordsworth and Lear use the metaphor of being "dried up" or "cut and dry for life,"[154] implying that these education theories take away a vital "substance" which is present in the child. It is only in opposition to pre-Romantic theories of childhood, and through the developing Romantic theories, that this "substance" which is lost can be understood.

Writing children's literature is similar to writing childhood theory in that the literature also must assume a construct of a child and embody the characteristics of that child.[155] When Lear wrote nonsense, he had in mind a construct of the child, even though he was writing directly for the Earl of Derby's grandchildren. Lear's children's writing assumes a "nonsense child," the implied reader, who intrinsically shares characteristics of literary nonsense, and who would thus respond sympathetically and naturally to it. But this "nonsense child" is, like the genre it reflects, an elusive creature. Chapters 3 through 6 attempt to illustrate this child and are structuerd as follows: each chapter introduces a specific quality of the nonsense child (individual, wild, elevated, divine), then contrasts this with the constructed children of pre-Romantic writers, beginning with Locke and Rousseau, the two most fundamental influences on the image of the child. Each chapter then moves on to writers like Maria Edgeworth and William Godwin, who create something closer to a "utilitarian" child. Next in this progression are Charles and Mary Lamb, representing Romantic-period writers who did not quite achieve the Wordsworthian image of the child in their children's literature. Finally, at the end of each of these chapters I discuss the similarities between the nonsense child and the Romantic construct of the child with reference to the chapter's topic characteristic. Chapters 7 and 8 go deeper into the

---

[154] According to the *OED*, "cut and dry," used since the early eighteenth century, originally referred to "herbs in the herbalists' shops, as contrasted with growing herbs; hence, fig. ready-made and void of freshness and spontaneity."

[155] Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, in *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), discusses a similar construct of the child, but one which is created by the critics of children's literature. Her thoughts may also apply to children's literature itself, as not only the critic, but also the writer, necessarily implies a child construct within his or her writing.

significance of the nonsensicality of the genre and show how the construct from Lear's nonsense and the Romantic construct are both, in some ways, "nonsense" children.

It may be helpful to see the child construct in terms of some of the current reader-response theories, which are based on the idea that, in a text, the author fabricates a construct of the reader. As Wayne Booth states, "The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement."[156] This reading is based on an "aesthetic response"[157] which stresses the importance of the dialectic between text and reader. There have been many theories built around this premise, but the two most relevant to literary nonsense are Erwin Wolff's "intended reader," and, to a greater extent, the "implied reader" of Wolfgang Iser. Wolff stresses a historical perspective in the reader-construct, while Iser's concept, rather than being based on a theory of historical reception, emerges solely from the text. What is important in these theories is not the "meaning" of a text, but its construction of the reader.[158] The child construct in Lear's nonsense emerges from a combination of these theories, arising partly out of the cultural references and the generic guises of Lear's work and, more strongly, out of the unique and baffling combination of semantic and syntactic fields inherent in nonsense. For this thesis, I primarily use Iser's theory for the textual construct, with Wolff's construct implied in the historical context.

The consequences of such theories are two-fold: the text can be seen as eliciting particular responses from an imagined, more or less ideal, reader by way of textual signals. The specific processes and signals of this phenomenon, important in themselves, will be dealt with in the following chapters, but one of the significant outcomes is the formation of the reader-construct, the potential and competent recipient of such textual promptings. Erwin Wolff's "intended reader" represents one side of the construct found in Lear's literary nonsense, the side pertaining to the audience's historical position. Wolff claims

---

[156]Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* , 2nd edition (London: Penguin Books, 1983, 1991), p. 138. See also John Preston, *The Created Self, The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1970), esp. pp. 196-211.

[157]Iser, *Act*, p. x.

[158]Ibid, p.18.

that the text reconstructs, by various references and devices, the author's conception of the ideal contemporary reader.[159] Iser remarks that "This image of the intended reader can take on different forms, according to the text being dealt with: it may be the idealized reader; or it may reveal itself through anticipation of the norms and values of contemporary readers."[160] In Lear's case, the "norms and values" are manifest in several ways, as his ideal audience of Victorian children and adults share certain cultural experiences, including a knowledge of the parodied texts (seen in Chapter 1) and the precedents behind nonsense illustration (in Chapter 2). However, because his audience is split between children and adults, their readings, though sometimes merging, may differ significantly. My concern here is not the adult reader per se, unless, as frequently happens, the adult is defined in relation to characteristics of the child, as I will show in detail in Chapter 5. It is important to remember that this audience is only a virtual one--one that is implied in the text and in no way is meant to be "real," though probably exhibiting some characteristics of a typical contemporary reader. We must not mistake a real reader interpreting a text for the process of the text implying a reader. Lear's ideal audience would respond, sometimes quite differently according to whether child or adult, to the extreme individuality asserted in his work (Chapter 3), the glorification of the "wild" nature of children (Chapter 4), and the elevated nature of the child, approaching divinity (Chapters 5 and 6, respectively). The intended reader of Wolff is thus constructed from these and other assumptions of the historical audience manifest in the text.

Iser recognizes the truth of Wolff's construct, admitting, "Clearly, the historical qualities which influenced the author at the time of writing mould the image of the intended reader...,"[161] but Iser approaches the reader construct from another angle:

> If, then, we are to try and understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation. We may call him, for want of a better term, the implied reader. He embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect--predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his

---

[159] Erwin Wolff, "Der intendierte Leser" *Poetica*, 4 (1971), 141-66.
[160] Iser, *Act*, p. 33.
[161] Ibid, p. 33.

> roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no
> way to be identified with any real reader.   (p. 34)

The "historical situation" implies a limited set of reader perspectives, but these constructs

are, so to speak, trapped in the text. Iser's implied reader, on the other hand, emerges

solely from the text and hence, he claims, is more universal and historically independent.

Because Iser's reader is text-based, he or she can be identified only by close

attention to devices which are meant to guide the reader in meaning-formation. I will only

briefly mention some of these devices here, saving a more detailed approach for the

following chapters. The text incorporates "a network of response-inviting structures,

which impel the reader to grasp the text."[162] These structures include what he labels

blanks, negation, and negativity, among others, all of which leave room for the reader's

reaction. Aiden Chambers offers a similar reader construct, and explains some of these

"response-inviting structures" as, "the way [the author] signals his intentions, his evocation

of suspense, the introduction of the unexpected, and the way he can play about with the

reader's expected responses....All these create a relationship between an author and his

reader....in which an author reveals in his narrative what he wants from his reader, what

kind of relationship he looks for."[163] Chambers' stress on the author's relationship is an

important concept here, in that literary nonsense is in the peculiar position of not, in the

end, being able to evoke a "meaning" at all. Rather than establishing a meaning, even a

subjective one, nonsense operates by both drawing forth *and* frustrating meaning. The

effect of the text is of importance here, and takes the place of what Iser and Chambers

sometimes call the "meaning" of the text. The process of deriving the "meaning," or effect,

of the text is governed by the "fulfillment of conditions that have already been structured in

the text."[164] It is these "conditions" which identify the implied reader. For Iser, this effect

is evoked by the dual nature of a text, in his terms, the "artistic" side and the "aesthetic

---

[162]Ibid, p. 34.
[163]Aiden Chambers, "The Reader in the Book" in *The Signal Approach to Children's Books*, ed. Nancy
Chambers (Harmondsworth: Kestrel Books, 1980), pp. 250-275 (p. 266).
[164]Iser, *Act*, pp. 49-50.

side": the "artistic" or verbal aspect "guides the reaction [of the reader] and prevents it from being arbitrary" while the "aesthetic," or "the affective aspect is the fulfillment of that which has been prestructured by the language of the text" (p. 21). When these factors combine, the reader creates a "virtual" end product, one which is a personal "ideation" while still being guided by the text.[165] The mechanism by which this process works will be explained in the following chapters.

---

[165]The word "ideation" is Iser's translation of the German *vorstellen*, which is "to evoke the presence of something which is not given" (Iser, *Act*, p. 137).

Chapter Three
The Individual Child

*Every infant is probably born with a character as peculiar to himself as
the features in his countenance, if his faults and good qualities were
permitted to expand according to their original tendency... [but] the very
mind of youth seems in danger of becoming a machine.*

-Catherine Sinclair, Preface to <u>Holiday House</u> (1839)[166]

One of nonsense's most characteristic themes is its insistence on complete individuality

and disdain for convention. Klaus Reichert sees this subject as the most important link

between the Romantics and nonsense, the "tension of being an individual in a collective,

the 'Ich-Zerrissenheit'."[167] This anxiety of the self being "torn apart," a tension emerging

from the fiercely individualistic tendencies of the Romantic period, is heightened in the

Victorian period, in which occurred more than ever before a "conflict between the freedom

of the individual and the stability of the social organism that contains him."[168] On the one

hand, Victoria's reign, according to Thwaite, was "Most marked... [by] the widespread

belief in individualism and voluntary effort, a natural accompaniment of the *laissez-faire*

doctrine advocated for industry and government."[169] Many initiatives for the poor and for

human rights reform were voluntary, while at the same time the individual was given

increasing political responsibility. Likewise, the government kept as far away from

business regulation as possible, though this would change as the century progressed.[170]

In the public sector, individuality and personal strength were increasingly respected as can

[166]Catherine Sinclair, *Holiday House* (Edinburgh: William Whyte, 1839).

[167]*Lewis Carroll: Studien zum literarischen Unsinn* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1974). Quoted in Tigges, p. 252.

[168]Ina Rae Hark, "Edward Lear: Eccentricity and Victorian Angst," *Victorian Poetry*, 16 (1978), 112-122 (p. 112).

[169]Thwaite, p. 94.

[170]Take, for example, the inordinate amount of time it took for the government to rectify the child-labour situation. See Raymond Chapman, *The Victorian Debate, English Literature and Society 1832-1901* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 14-17.

be seen, for instance, in such differing works as Carlyle's popular lectures collectively entitled "On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History" (1841) and Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859), which sold well throughout the century.[171] On the other hand, Victorian society, at least ostensibly, often demanded a strict conformity to social standards regarding religion, sexuality, class structure, and the family unit.[172]

Since the late-eighteenth century, the child had been increasingly portrayed as an individual as well. The mass-marketed children's books of Newbery, for instance, starting around 1744, were typically aimed at a generalized child, ignoring such factors as age and sex. Because these works moralized heavily, their portraits of children were more ideal and therefore indistinct and lacking in careful observation.[173] However, with Rousseau's influence and the Romantic movement, the child was increasingly perceived as an individual possessing unique and valuable qualities. In literature, this trend began around the 1760s with writers like Lloyd, Miss Whately, and Cowper. Burns was perhaps the most daring, in poems like *A Poet's Welcome to his Love-Begotten Daughter* (1784) which not only glorifies the individual child, but an *illegitimate* child. As we shall see, the individualization of the child flowered in the writing of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, as well as that of Blake and Coleridge. This trend could also be seen, albeit slightly later, in the art world starting with the work of John Millais, whose controversial and popular paintings of children, like *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50), *The Woodman's Daughter* (1851) and *Cherry Ripe* (1879) both brought a deeper awareness of the idealized and individual (and sexualized) child and satisfied the public's growing fascination with and desire for paintings of children.[174] Of course, this shift was not simply a

---

[171]See Paul Turner, *English Literature 1832-1890 Excluding the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 5-6, for more on the increased emphasis on individuality in the Victorian period as seen in the works of Tennyson, Mill, Browning, Hopkins, and Pater.

[172]Chapman, pp. 5-6; See also Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1973), esp. pp.238-246; Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), esp. pp. 91-2.

[173]A. Charles Babenroth, *English Childhood, Wordsworth's Treatment of Childhood in the Light of English Poetry from Prior to Crabbe* (New York: Columbia UP, 1922), p. 25.

[174]In a letter to Fortecue of January 23, 1853 (*LEL*), Lear claims that he was present when Millais began "The Blind Girl" (1856). Millais painted children frequently, partly as a response to public demand. See Robert M. Polhemus, "John Millais's Children: Faith and Erotics: *The Woodman's Daughter* (1851)" in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkleley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 289-312 (pp. 289-90).

philosophical one. The cult of childhood had significant financial implications. The demand for children's books was increasing rapidly, and publishers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, like Harris, Marshall, and Godwin, were discovering and expanding the many niches of the market. By mid-nineteenth century, children's books had branched off into many categories and covered most subjects. There were calls, as in Catherine Sinclair's passage heading this chapter, to recognize the individuality of the child, but no one was quite prepared for the radical individuality promoted by Lear's nonsense. Later in the century, when the image of the child became hyper-idealized, as can be seen in the later works of Millais like *Bubbles* (1886), the children's book illustrations of Kate Greenaway, and the angelic, sentimentalized characters like MacDonald's "Diamond" in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) children lost much of their hard-won individuality. As Polhemus comments, "Turning the child into a fetish of the good, however, denies children their own separate identities" (p. 301). Lear, however, in the wake of Romantic writing, was one of the least compromising children's writers concerning the individualization of the child.

If anyone was able to stand "outside the conventions of the Victorian compromise, with its heavy insistence on the domestic bliss of hearth and home,"[175] it was Edward Lear, and, likewise, his nonsense expresses a reliance on individuality and a disregard for convention. This quality was recognized in reviews of Lear, such as the 1888 review of the twenty-fifth edition of *A Book of Nonsense*: "Another lasting charm which breathes through the book is the gallant spirit of so many of the characters, and their noble disregard of any of those inconveniences which ensue upon the indulgence of personal eccentricity....[The limericks] are instances of a great spirit of independence...."[176] The forces of external society are represented as the ubiquitous "them" of the limericks or as other nameless collectives of censorious conformers. Orwell aptly called "them" "the realists, the practical men, the sober citizens in bowler hats who are always anxious to stop

Illustrators for children were becoming increasingly important as well. See Chapter 2 for more on children's book illustration.
[175]Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979), p. 115. Throughout his life, Lear was constantly on the fringe of society, frequenting aristocratic and artistic circles, but never quite fitting in.
[176]"Lear's Book of Nonsense," *The Saturday Review*, 65.1691 (24 March, 1888), 361-62 (p. 361).

you doing anything worth doing."[177] The relationship between "them" and the individual is most frequently aggressive or at least uneasy, but "they" sometimes are helpful and accepting, as with the old person of Fife, "Who was greatly disgusted with life; / They sang him a ballad, And fed him on salad, / Which cured that old person of Fife." (p. 159). Nevertheless, "they" usually are "the force of public opinion, the dreary voice of human mediocrity: 'they' are perpetually interfering with the liberty of the individual...."[178]

The tension between unique personal identity and conformity to "them" is indicated in the limericks and other nonsense writing by a marked anxiety concerning individuality. Such an anxiety also features as an important aspect of Romantic theories of self, as Roderick McGillis notes in "the tension between the individual imagination and the force of environment, which is evident in Wordsworth...."[179] In Lear's nonsense, this tension is often presented as threats to individuality through the transformation of the self into animals or objects. The old person of Crowle experiences one of these transformations:

There was an old person of Crowle,
Who lived in the nest of an owl;
When they screamed in the nest, he screamed out with the rest,
That depressing old person of Crowle.   (p. 195)

---

[177]George Orwell, "Nonsense Poetry" in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950), pp. 179-84 (p. 182).

[178]Davidson, p. 196.

[179]Roderick McGillis, "Childhood and Growth. George MacDonald and William Wordsworth" in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran (London, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 150-67 (p.153). The issue of the anxiety of individuality is pervasive in nonsense as well as Romanticism. Wordsworth's struggle of the imagination against the outside world shows a concern with an *excess* of personal identity while Keats's poet without identity and Shelley's ideas of the fundamental unity of creation are representative of the Romantic concern with the *lack* of identity and individuality. In this dissertation, though, I will only deal with the implications of identity anxiety concerning childhood.

As the illustration shows, the old person greatly resembles the owls. He "screamed out with the rest," following their convention, and thus begins to look like them as well. Of course, as is the nature of nonsense, the laws of causation are always shifting, and such a deduction can never be certain, but such a treatment of conformity is fairly consistent in Lear. In the fragment *The Adventures of Mr. Lear, the Polly, and the Pusseybite on their Way to the Ritertitle Mountains*, another instance of identity anxiety occurs. The small party falls "over an unexpected cataract, and are all dashed to atoms."[180] A page is then missing in the manuscript, but the next one is a frightening scene of utter identity confusion: "The 2 venerable Jebusites fasten the remains of Mr. Lear, the Polly and the Pusseybite together, but fail to reconstruct them perfectly as 3 individuals" (p. 54).
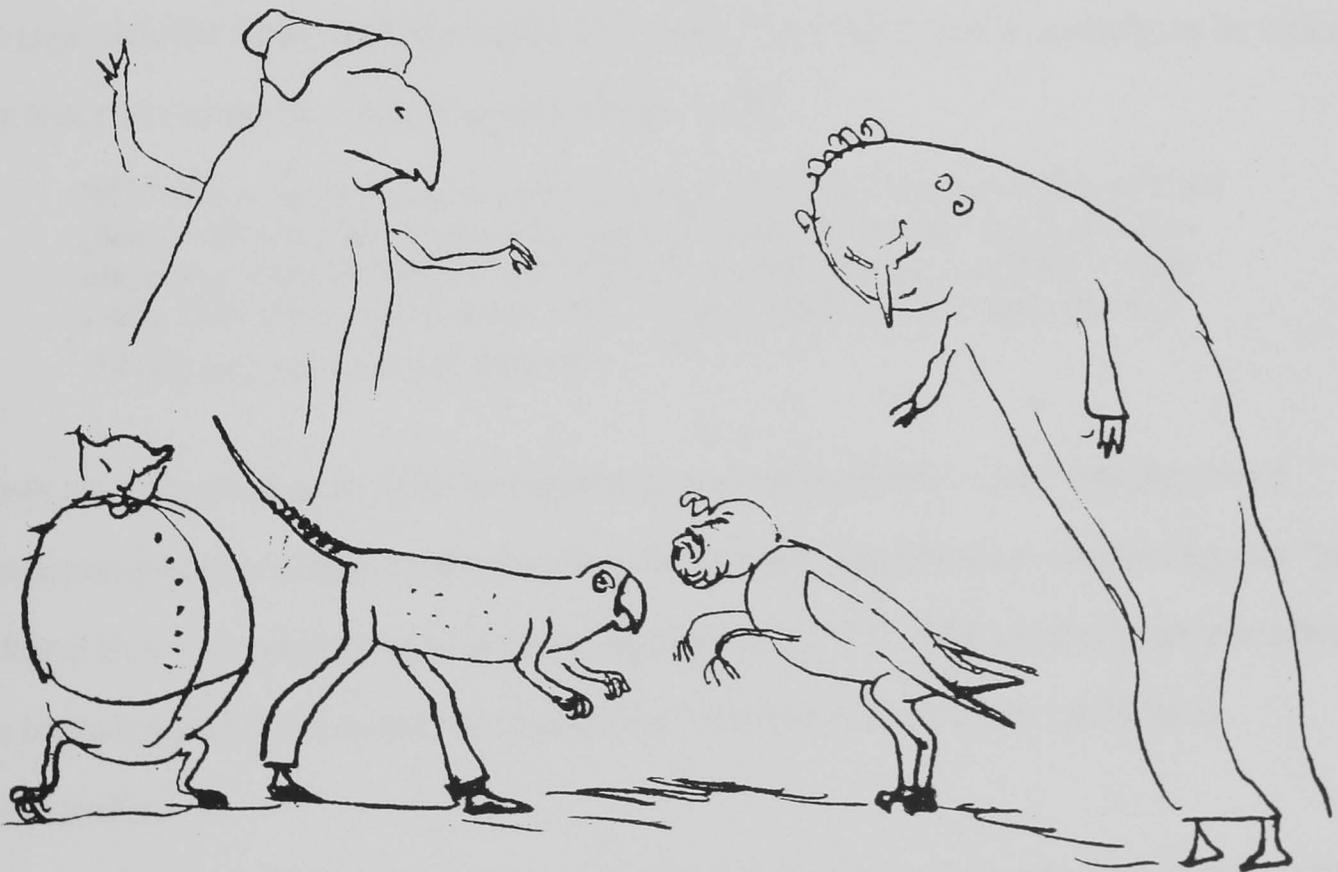
Lear offers a nightmarish image of the three adventurers with interchanged bodies and limbs. In such nonsense worlds it is no wonder that Carroll's Alice answers the

[180]Edward Lear, *Teapots and Quails*, eds. Angus Davidson and Philip Hofer (London: John Murray, 1953), p.53. This is a compilation of previously unpublished verse.

Caterpillar's question, "Who are *you*?" by replying "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."[181] At nearly every stage of her journey her identity is

questioned and tested, and the confusion is not helped by her habit of talking to herself as

two people.[182] At the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*, the "serious" question is who

"dreamed it all." Neither Alice, nor Lear's adventurers change themselves; instead, outside

forces are responsible--hence the passive construction in the above quotation, "have been

changed," from Carroll. In Lear's diary he seems to lose his self-coherence in a similar

manner: Below an entry for 29 January, 1866--"A cold in the head, & swoln nose"--is a

caricature of himself with huge, bulbous nose. At the bottom of page there is a set of

disembodied Lear-body-parts (two arms, two legs, a head, and a round middle). To the

right is what looks like a strange mis-combination of the parts, with the arms on top, then

the legs, then the head, then the body. In London Lear felt a similar anxiety, as he remarks

in a letter to Chichester Fortescue on 28 May, 1877:

> My brain is in so bewildered a condition from the contrast of this infernal
> place with the quiet of my dear Sanremo that I have nearly lost all ideas
> about my own identity, and if anybody should ask me suddenly if I am
> Lady Jane Grey, the Apostle Paul, Julius Caesar or Theodore Hook, I
> should say yes to every question....[183]

Upon returning to the city after living in self-imposed isolation, Lear feels the crowd

constricting him, and his identity becomes threatened. Sometimes he wished he was "an

octapod or a Jerusalem Artichoke, or a Hippopotamus."[184] This anxiety is an indication of

the fear about which nonsense is so sensitive--the fear of conformity and loss of

individuality.

Assertion of the independent, individual, non-conforming self is the surest method

to avoid this anxiety. Most of Lear's work is about just such individuals. The protagonists

are mostly outcasts and misfits, but they always brave the censure and violence of "them"

---

[181]*Alice*, p. 35.

[182]P. Gila Reinstein, *Alice in Context* (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1988), p. 186.

[183]*LLEL*, p. 204. cf. Keats's letter to Richard Woodhouse of 27 October, 1818, for a similar loss of identity, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 volumes (Cambridge: CUP, 1958), I, 386-87.

[184]To Fortescue, 27 June, 1880. Quoted in Noakes, p. 295.

to assert their individuality. However, eccentricity is not always punished. In the world of nonsense, rules are never stable, and often unconventional activity has no negative effects. But the individual in nonsense never *cares*, one way or the other. It is a strict, unashamed individuality, upholding itself in the face of all adversity, social pressure, and even violence or death.

The first type of individual shown in nonsense is the intrinsic individual, best exemplified in *The Scroobious Pip* (written 1871). The Pip, according to the unfinished drawing and the verse, is a creature exhibiting features of all different types of natural living beings. Yet, when the inquisitive animals gather to ask the Pip what conventional category of creature it is, it can only give a nonsensical explanation, singing "these words with a chirpy sound-- / Flippetty chip-- / Chippetty flip-- / My only name is the Scroobious Pip."[185] The Pip is intrinsically an individual, a class of being all to itself, through its physical appearance, for which it has no explanation. No word exists to describe a class which consists of only one individual, and so the only fitting answer is indeed nonsense words, which better than any other words relate an answer beyond expression or reason. At the end of the poem all the different types of creatures congregate and celebrate the individuality of the Pip, who is at once all of them and none of them--a rare victory for the individual.

The other creatures in *The Scroobious Pip*, the "they," all belong to the natural world, which is rare in Lear's verse. Such an unreservedly happy ending is not usually available when the individual is of the second type, the extrinsic individual, who must assert his or her individuality through actions (or non-actions), braving the censure of fellow beings and possibly the uncertain consequences of natural nonsense "law." The limericks are saturated with eccentrics; opening to almost any page reveals a figure such as the Young Lady of Lucca:

---

[185]*Teapots and Quails*, p. 61.

There was a Young Lady of Lucca
Whose lovers completely forsook her;
She ran up a tree, and said, 'Fiddle-de-dee!'
Which embarrassed the people of Lucca. (p. 29)

The Young Lady has lost her attachment to society, her lovers, and now is brazenly

defiant, which is shocking to "them." But according to the illustration, she appears not to

care at all about their reaction; her blissful smile and wild posture, so characteristic of

Lear's eccentrics, reveal her whole joyous outlook. Her defiance of societal norms, and

eccentric actions of climbing the tree and speaking nonsense, are private joys, regardless of

what "they" think. This attitude is shared by almost every eccentric, as if each reacted as

the Jumblies do: "'Our Sieve ain't big, / But we don't care a button! we don't care a fig! /

In a Sieve we'll go to the sea!'" (p. 71).

Nearly the only time "they" are really pleased is when an individual is conforming

to societal regulations. However, such conformity is not an ideal state, as the Old Person

of Crowle demonstrates, being "depressing" because of his conformity. The same is true

of the Old Person of Shoreham, "Whose habits were marked by decorum; / He bought an

Umbrella, and sate in the cellar, / Which pleased all the people of Shoreham" (p. 184).

While usually conformity only leads to boring, innocuous, inactive existence, it can also

lead to punishment, as with the Old Person of Cadiz, who is "always polite to the ladies"

(p. 20). He pays for his politeness by falling into the water and drowning. Nonsense is

about defying convention, and Lear's nonsense world allows the bending of rules which enables those who are willing to break all restrictions, both intrinsic and social, in wild rebellion.

The force opposed to this rebellion is not only "them," but also the more insidious topos of domesticity; however, returning to the home is ultimately a defeat. As Fred Miller Robinson states, "the greatest threat to the characters of Lear's nonsense is 'la Vie Quotidienne.'"[186] A few of Lear's poems, however, seem to end in a happy conformity, but even in such apparently happy endings there is usually an undercurrent of gloom. Most of Lear's longer poems involve some kind of escape from the home, with varying results. More conventional conclusions are reached in *Mr. and Mrs. Spikky Sparrow, The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker, and the Tongs,* and *The Table and the Chair* (all 1871), among others. In all of these poems, the protagonists escape the confines of their homes, whether in open rebellion, as in *The Table and the Chair*, or in more sanctioned escape, as with the other two, only to return in the end. In *Mr. and Mrs. Spikky Sparrow*, the parent birds fly away from their children on a shopping trip to London. After buying clothes to keep them warm, they return to their children, who cry,

> ... 'We trust that cold or pain
> 'We shall never feel again!
> 'While, perched on tree, or house, or steeple,
> 'We now shall look like other people...'   (pp. 83-4)

The illustration shows a scene of avian domestic bliss, with the parent birds dressed in their new London clothes. The problems of warmth are solved, but the children raise a disturbing point. Wearing clothes, the birds will "look like other people," which was not the purpose of the shopping spree. Looking like "people" rather than birds is a strange quality to laud, but this is the final line of the poem, save the repeated nonsensical twittering of the birds, and carries curious implications about conformity. By doing as "other people" do, the birds, in a way, lose their identities. The ending is about as happy as a return to domestic life allows, yet there is, however minor, this disturbing note.

---

[186]Fred Miller Robinson, "Nonsense and Sadness in Donald Bartheleme and Edward Lear," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 80 (1981), 164-76 (p. 173).

In *The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker, and the Tongs*, all of the characters go for "a drive in the Park," at which time the male utensils (the Poker and the Tongs) try to woo the female utensils (the Shovel and the Broom). They are met with violent threats of rejection, and the Coachman, "Perceiving their anger," drives them back home. Once home,

> they put on the kettle, and little by little,
> They all became happy again.
> Ding-a-dong! Ding-a-dong!
> There's an end of my song!   (p. 86)

There is no verbal *rapprochement* and the illustration shows the characters back at home, stiffly "sitting" (more like *leaning* against chairs), across from each other. Tea is set out, but the scene looks nothing like a cosy reconciliation. Even the verse, which spends so much time on the cause of the trouble, seems to bail out at the end, trying to salvage the illusion of happiness with a weak and inexplicable solution. It is interesting to note that in both *Mr. and Mrs. Spikky Sparrow* and *The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker, and the Tongs*, Lear uses a refrain of what could be called "pure" nonsense words, in the former case the changeable "Twikky wikky wikky wee" of birdsong or in the latter, simply "Ding-a-dong! Ding-a-dong!" These more traditional, nursery-type nonsense words are rarely used by Lear, which is one of the main distinctions between his nonsense and nursery rhyme or "mad" poetry. Rather than the challenging, endlessly circular nonsense Lear perfected, here we find nursery babble. Thomas Byrom claims that the use of such nonsense "encourages as it mocks the kind of compromise which, so the other poems [of domestic escape] tell us, is exactly what Lear most dreads. It is the coward's way out, a false peace; it spells the loss of the sublime."[187]

The nonsense sublime is indeed the goal of the eponymous Table and Chair. After disregarding conventional standards of furniture mobility, the protagonists hop about on two legs "With a cheerful bumpy sound" around the town. Once they stroll about a bit, they head for their intended destination:

> But in going down an alley,
> To a castle in a valley,
> They completely lost their way,
> And wandered all the day   (p. 88)

---

[187]Byrom, p. 171.

The "castle in a valley" is another manifestation of Lear's mythical land of romantic escape and adventure, called variously the "Gromboolian Plain," the Hills or the streams of the "Chankly Bore" (in *The Dong with a Luminous Nose* and *The Pelican Chorus*, among others), or "the sunset isles of Boshen" (*The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò*). The heroes of *The Table and the Chair* are unable to find their castle, and rather than continuing their search, they pay a few friendly creatures to take them back home. Once they arrive, they whisper, "What a lovely walk we've taken! / Let us dine on Beans and Bacon!" and, after dancing on their heads, toddle off to bed. Their party seems to celebrate their walk, which, though an exceptional accomplishment for furniture, was still, in the end, a failed mission. As Byrom remarks, the moral at the end seems to be to stay at home if you do not have the courage to break free of restrictions.[188] Still, though, there is relative happiness in the end, and the activity of the party, that of dancing upon their heads, shows that their new-found abilities, far from being wasted, have expanded further.

All three of the poems which show a return to domesticity resemble one of Wordsworth's more curious poems about a child. In Wordsworth's "The Blind Highland Boy, A Tale Told by the Fire-side, after Returning to the Vale of Grasmere" (1804-06), a visionary youth escapes home using a turtle shell (not unlike the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò) as a sea vessel.[189] When the villagers try to retrieve him, he speaks nonsense:

> '*Lei-gha - Lei-gha*' - he then cried out,
> '*Lei-gha - Lei-gha*' - with eager shout;
> Thus did he cry, and thus did pray,
> And what he meant was 'Keep away,
> And leave me to myself!'   (ll. 201-5)[190]

This boy, much like the Idiot Boy, utters nonsense, but in this case, it is translated by the narrative voice.[191] His nonsense is uttered just as he perceives the crisis in his plan of visionary escape. But he is taken back and realizes that his dreams,

---

[188]Byrom, p. 173.
[189]In the original version, the vessel was a washing-tub.
[190]In *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947).
[191]"The Idiot Boy" was written long before this poem and represents Wordsworth's earlier view of childhood. See Chapter 8 for a discussion of "The Idiot Boy."

> ...that inward light
> With which his soul had shone so bright -
> All vanished; - 'twas a heartfelt cross
> To him, a heavy bitter loss,
> As he had ever known."   (ll. 211-15)

He returns to his comfortable home, having given up his visions: "And, though his fancies had been wild, / Yet he was pleased and reconciled / To live in peace on shore" (ll. 243-45). Compared with Wordsworth's earlier accounts of childish mischief, this episode seems a decisive defeat.[192] The child loses his dreams and is happy to live without them, but, contrary to what occurs in *The Prelude* (in all versions), there have been none of nature's "severer interventions," no sublime haunting of the perceptive child—his dreams are simply taken away without recompense. Though Wordsworth would probably have seen such submission, at this stage in his poetic career, in more religious terms—as the quelling of fanciful and futile dreams and the denial of misguided passion—such an ending may make the modern reader distrustful of the implied final happiness. It seems unlikely that the Wordsworth of the 1799 *Prelude* would have depicted the events in such a manner. As in *The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker, and the Tongs* in which the kettle steaming on the fire in the end is not necessarily a sign of ultimate happiness, it is hard to imagine the Highland Boy's visions of escape and freedom disappearing so easily.

Lear's boldest statement about domestic "happiness" occurs in *Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos, Second Part*. Part one shows the young Discobboloses escaping convention, climbing to the top of a wall "to watch the sunset sky / And to hear the Nupiter Piffkin cry," where they are happily isolated from other beings and from possessions: "'We want no knives nor forks nor chairs, / 'No tables nor carpets nor household cares, / 'From worry of life we've fled" (p. 248). But after "twenty years, a month and a day," the Discobboloses are old and have a large family, creating the domestic scene they had originally escaped. When Mrs. Discobbolos expresses discontent about their situation, Mr.

---

[192]See Chapter 4 for more on Wordsworth's glorification of childish violence.

Discobbolos detonates a trench filled with "dynamite, gunpowder gench," destroying his whole family.

> He lighted a match, and fired the train,
> And the mortified mountain echoed again
>   To the sound of an awful fall!
> And all the Discobbolos family flew
> In thousands of bits to the sky so blue (p. 251)

Conformity and domesticity can thus return even after an initial rebellion, and death is offered as the only alternative to this couple who failed to remain individuals.

Both intrinsic and social limitations are dashed more openly and finally in *The Nutcrackers and the Sugar-Tongs* (1871). The two heroes of this story begin in their traditional roles, "The Nutcrackers sate by a plate on the table, / The Sugar-tongs sate by a plate at his side" (p. 75). The Nutcrackers expresses the desire to escape "this stupid existence for ever, / 'So idle and weary, so full of remorse" (p. 75). The Nutcrackers has its doubts, seeking support and confirmation, "'Shall we try? Shall we go? Do you think we are able?' / The Sugar-tongs answered distinctly, 'Of course!'" (p. 75). Their leap of faith and effort propel the pair beyond their physical conditions and beyond their conventional roles sitting by a plate and a table. They jump on horses, and, to the surprise and disapproval of the household implements, they ride away "with screamings and laughter" from the house.

> They rode through the street, and they rode by the station,
>   They galloped away to the beautiful shore;
> In silence they rode, and 'made no observation',
>   Save this: 'We will never go back any more!'
> And still you might hear, till they rode out of hearing,
>   The Sugar-tongs snap, and the Crackers say 'crack!'
> Till far in the distance their forms disappearing,
>   They faded away.--And they never came back!   (pp. 76-77)

Unlike the protagonists in *The Table and the Chair*, who return after their rebellion to questionable domesticity, this pair succeeds in "snapping" the confines of their supposed physical limitations and "cracking" their societal roles, to leave them free forever.

Though the Nutcrackers and the Sugartongs enjoy a happy ending, there is some doubt in general about the success of the individual's escape from convention. After all,

the fate of the Discobbolos family is quite disturbing. And heroes such as the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò and the iconoclasts of the limericks have questionable fates; they often escape convention, but at what price? The dangers could include social isolation possibly leading to solipsism, not to mention insanity (the Dong) and criminal behavior (Mr. Discobbolos). Part of the problem is that, as always, the genre does its best to foil our irrepressible search for meaning. Tigges argues that nonsense reflects personal and cultural tensions, yet refuses to resolve them, and that therefore it is "an aesthetic form of resignation rather than self-reliance and confidence" (p. 254). While it is true, as we have seen, that the "victory" of the individual is sometimes questionable, and occasionally a failure, I would argue that in most cases, the individual, and almost militant individuality, is successful.

In one respect, I agree with Tigges: the limericks and longer narrative pieces do not resolve any of the tensions of life with a concrete "answer." Because most individuals are successful, or at least happy, in their paradoxical or ridiculous pursuits, I would argue that nonsense's refusal to give an answer is itself the answer. Rather than "resignation," nonsense represents an aesthetic form of *acceptance*, which is slightly, but crucially different. The acceptance of contraries, as Keats wrote, "without any irritable reaching after fact & reason"[193] is a triumph and indeed a sign of "self-reliance and confidence." Lear happily accepted the unsolvable in his own life. Though he was disgusted by organized religion, he did believe in Christian values. He admits, in a letter to Chichester Fortescue on 9 September, 1879, that "in the Gospels one finds nothing which is perfectly clear,"[194] and that this state of uncertainty, far from a resignation, is an important step in finding happiness. As many critics of nonsense have seen, the joy in nonsense lies within its uncertainty. Chesterton, who saw nonsense as a proof of religious faith, claims that "a thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible."[195] The human condition, with its questions of alienation, individuality, and mortality, is laid before us,

---

[193]To George and Tom Keats, 21, 27(?) December, 1817. Keats's *Letters*, I, 193.
[194]*LLEL*, p. 224. Written in Greek and translated by the editor.
[195]G.K. Chesterton, "A Defence of Nonsense," in *The Defendant* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1914), pp. 42-50 (p. 48). See also Aldous Huxley, "Edward Lear" in *On the Margin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923), pp. 167-172.

but, as Byrom states "we too stand on tiptoe, next to the Old Man...and look over the lip of the intelligible world into the wonderful night beyond" (p. 150).

As we have seen in this chapter, the individuals in the limericks usually revel in their circumstances. In many cases they are alone, as with the Old Person of Wick but there is little indication of solipsism. Though we cannot understand his speech, we have no reason to believe that his world is limited to our lack of understanding. The limerick protagonists usually interact with their neighbours, even if it is in defiance of them. The Old Man with a nose (p. 4), for instance, informs "them" that his extended nose is *not* too long, and he expresses great pride and joy in displaying his nose, which "they" have to jump over to avoid. Though his proboscideferous nose may alarm his neighbours, he gives no indication that he lives in any kind of solipsistic world derived from his unique ideals: he simply does not agree with all of the norms of his community. Similarly, the Old Man of Kilkenny (p. 9) may be "wayward," in his preoccupation with onions and honey, but he seems a perfectly happy, well-adjusted fellow. When the individuals of the limericks are not shown in their communities, they are often in the company of animals, more often in a sympathetic, rather than antagonistic, relationship . In the longer poems, with the exception of the Dong, the individuals usually escape to the Gromboolian Plain, or some other mythical and happy nonsense land, with a friend. The Duck and the Kangaroo, the Daddy Long-legs and the Fly, and the Nutcrackers and Sugartongs, all either intrinsic or extrinsic individuals, escape convention and domesticity together.

§ § §

The next section of this chapter contrasts the pre-Victorian child construct as "individual" with what I call the nonsense child. I begin with Locke, and move to Rousseau, Edgeworth, Godwin, and the Lambs, at which point I turn to the similarities between the Romantic and the nonsense child. Locke's theories of childhood represent the antithesis of the child construct which would evolve from the assumptions behind Romanticism and Lear's nonsense. Locke does allow for the toleration of childish behaviour, but the period of childhood is mainly worthless and sinful, one full of "natural

wrong Inclinations and Ignorance."[196] Locke discourages the social individuality *and* the internal individuality, advocating the repression of "unreasoned" desires. He writes, "It seems plain to me, that the Principle of all Vertue and Excellency lies in a power of denying our selves the satisfaction of our own Desires, where Reason does not authorize them" (p. 107). The child is also subject to strict control by adults, even to the point of controlling his bodily functions (p. 99-101). Thus, Locke's child construct is typically one of Lear's "them", adhering to the standard norms of adult life. Since childhood is only a separate stage of error, the child is not independent--he relies heavily on instruction from adults. The "individuality" of the child is mostly ignored or condemned.

The next major development in childhood theory is Rousseau's *Émile*, but Émile would not respond favourably to Lear's nonsense. Émile would be shocked by nonsense's lack of intrinsic conformity. Rousseau states, "When man is content to be himself he is strong indeed; when he strives to be more than man he is weak indeed."[197] The nonsense characters do not recognize their inherent limitations and are *rewarded*, while those who do "confine their wishes within the limits of their powers" (p. 35) are punished, or at least marginalized. This tendency of nonsense is perhaps similar to Blake's emblem, in *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793), of a child climbing a ladder to the moon. The inscription below is "I want! I want!" Only in the state of innocence particularly associated with childhood can such desires seem fulfillable, and though the adult knows the child will never reach the moon, the emblem, and indeed much of Blake's work, implies that the state of innocence is a desirable one, even though we inevitably gain experience as life goes on. Rousseau, in contrast, teaches that only by confining unreasonable desires to the realm of the rationally "possible" will the children "scarcely feel the want of whatever is not in their power" (p. 35). Rousseau's world is a place of freedom--but a freedom which is circumscribed by the limitations of individual ability, environmental restrictions, and the machinations of the tutor. Émile also would hate the fact that the outward circumstances of

---

[196]John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 1693, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 90.
[197]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile or Education*, 1762, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1911, 1974), p. 45.

the nonsense world are not usually limiting, for Émile has been taught to bear the harsh, unforgiving forces of nature and to recognize his limits within it. But he would be pleased by the defiance of "them," as he can appreciate the individuality and independence of the nonsense figure opposed to "social conventions," which are only designed to make him part of the collective and lose his individuality (pp. 6,7). However, Émile would not approve of Lear's blatant sanctioning of this *juvenile* state of individuality. While this state exists, it should not be promoted to this degree, since it is irrational. If only the Old Man of Melrose were a bit more like Robinson Crusoe...

Approaching the child constructs of writers closer to the Romantic period and Lear reveals the consequences of the past theorists: the child construct of utilitarianism, which nonsense more directly confronts.[198] To a utilitarian child[199] who has been taught taste according to conventional standards, the activities of these nonsense characters would be quite disturbing. Edgeworth writes of teaching the child about taste:

> the first objects that he contemplates with delight will remain long associated with pleasure in his imagination; you must, therefore, be careful, that these early associations accord with the decisions of those who have determined the national standard of taste....[but] no exclusive prejudices should confine your pupil's understanding.[200]

While Edgeworth wishes to make her pupil open-minded, promoting only a "toleration" of other ideas implies a definite division between correct and incorrect ideas. Some utilitarians, particularly the earlier Godwin, would sympathize with much of nonsense's individuality, although without approval. According to Godwin, the present order of society "is the great slaughter-house of genius and of mind."[201] Utilitarianism as a moral and social theory is based on the principle of individuality and non-conformity to this

---

[198] I use the term "utilitarianism" to refer to the philosophy generally recognized as starting with Bentham, and continuing with variations through Godwin and Maria Edgeworth. It is important to recognise that Godwin tried to distance himself from Benthamite utilitarianism, which he saw as based on selfish motives.

[199] See Dickens' "Bitzer" in *Hard Times* (1854) for a stereotypical utilitarian child.

[200] Maria and R. L. Edgeworth, *Essays of Practical Education*, 1798, 3rd edition, 2 volumes (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1815), II, 280. All references to Edgeworth are from these volumes, unless otherwise noted. Richardson calls this work "exemplary" of the "progressive educational thought of its day; it assimilates many of the suggestions not only of Locke and Rousseau, but of the liberal-radical group of educational writers..." (p. 52).

[201] William Godwin, *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature* (Dublin: J. Moore, 1797), p. 17.

corruptive society, in "Happiness to the individual in the first place" (p. 1). However, the individual must be directed in a useful manner, which nonsense characters are not. Nevertheless, since the underlying principles are similar (self-discipline, independence of thought), the utilitarian viewpoint is sympathetic to such individuality, although its sympathies end when faced with works without a real moral and some use for this non-conformity.

Charles and Mary Lamb's works for children, while written in the Romantic period, do not, however, project an entirely progressive construct of the child. The Lambs' conception of childhood is difficult to gauge, as their works for children do not match their letters' more Wordsworthian opinions.[202] While such works as *Poetry for Children* (1808-1809) may be discounted as mainly being motivated by the children's book market, *Mrs. Leicester's School* (1809) seems to capture something of Wordsworth's view of the child. It is an interesting compromise between the old and new theories, but it does not explore childhood as deeply as Blake, Wordsworth, or Coleridge. In *Mrs. Leicester's School*, social acceptance and immersion are the indicators of happiness. Maria Howe, the young, solitary girl in Charles Lamb's "The Witch Aunt," reads forbidden books until she becomes frightened and finally cannot distinguish fantasy from reality. She imagines her aunt to be a witch and is not "cured" of this fancy until she is removed from her solitary existence to another place, where she has companions of her own age. When she returns, she is happier and has kinder feelings towards her aunt. She remarks "I became sociable and companionable: my parents soon discovered a change in me....They have been plainly more fond of me since that change, as from that time I learned to conform myself more to their way of living."[203] Social conformity is not only the cure for imaginative ills, but also what makes the child shed her fears and become happy.[204] This kind of outcome occurs in

[202] See C. Lamb's letter to Coleridge, 23 October, 1802, quoted on p. 20.

[203] Charles and Mary Lamb, "The Witch Aunt" (Charles) in *Mrs. Leicester's School: or, The History of Several Young Ladies, Related by Themselves*, 1809, in *Books for Children, The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 1903-5, ed. E.V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1912), III, 374.

[204] Although the frightening manifestations of imagination have a "cure," they originate from "archetypes" which cannot be evaded, especially in childhood. See Lamb's "Witches and other Night-Fears" in *Elia and the Last Essays of Elia, The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 1903-5, ed. E.V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1912), II, 78.

many children's books of the time, including the very book which, as the heading of this chapter shows, claims to champion the child's individuality. In Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839), Laura describes her motivation for self-punishment: "I never take my own way without being sorry for it afterwards, so I deserve now to be disappointed and remain at home."[205] The "individuality" of the child is dangerous, and as Locke writes, comes from the child's "natural wrong Inclinations." Hence, Lear's non-conformists are in this state of untethered, dangerous imagination before it has been controlled by outside society. The Lambs might sympathize with the eccentrics, but happiness and balance only come with an acceptance of the real world and the social flock.

The Romantic construct of the child, as exhibited in the Romantics' works not intended for children, is the only one which approaches the individuality and non-conformity of Lear's characters. It relates to Blake's idea that the child (and the adult) should be spared the "denigration of the human soul through the denial of Man's individuality and his 'Imaginative Vision'."[206] Wordsworth's position is similar in a letter to an unknown correspondent around 1804 or 1806, describing the child as naturally "independent and sufficient for itself."[207] By "independence," Wordsworth is not referring to Rousseau's pejorative picture of the separate state of childhood, one which is "empty" and waiting to be informed; this independence is a child's blissful state of fullness, which is the universal ideal. In Wordsworth's "Ruth" the child is orphaned at seven years old and becomes "Herself her own delight." Hartley Coleridge, in "To H.C., Six Years Old," is similarly an individual "And fittest to unutterable thought / The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol" (ll. 3-4). The carol, the glorious song of childhood, is the child's individual creation; it is "self-born," and does not rely on the teaching of adults. As Coleridge remarks in a letter to Thomas Poole, of 14 October, 1803, describing Hartley: "like the Moon among thin Clouds, he moves in a circle of Light of his own making--he

[205]Catherine Sinclair, *Holiday House* (Edinburgh: William Whyte, 1839), p. 70.
[206]Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood*, revised edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 53.
[207]This letter is a long discussion of education theory. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, Part 1, 1806-1811*, 2nd edition, ed. Mary Moorman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 285.

alone, in a Light of his own," and also his daughter Sara: "she smiles, as if she were basking in a sunshine, as mild as moonlight, of her own quiet Happiness."[208]

It is appropriate at this point to clarify one of the major changes between Rousseauistic and Wordsworthian views of the child. This conceptual difference drastically affects all aspects of the perception of the state of childhood, yet may initially appear a similarity. Rousseau liberated the concept of childhood, giving it an individual identity, but this recognition of a separate, and "special" state encouraged analysis of exactly what that state was. The Romantics inherited Rousseau's observations of the child's accordance with nature, innocence, and purity, but to varying degrees they attributed these and other qualities to a different source from Rousseau. As Wordsworth writes in *Ode* ("There was a time..."), the child enters the world "not in utter nakedness, / But trailing clouds of glory do we come" (ll. 62-63). Rousseau's child comes into the world with nothing, which is reflected in all his actions. For Wordsworth, a child's feelings, inclinations, and perceptions are the result of the child's elevated position and the child's "fullness," or *positive* attributes, as opposed to Rousseau's conception, which sees the child's attributes more as a result of the child's vacuity, and lack of mental capacity and ability. Childhood contains the "substance," which Lear and Wordsworth saw "dried up" in later life.[209] Thus, in Wordsworth's *Ode*, he admires in children "The *fullness* of your bliss" (l. 41, my italics). Rousseau saw the same results from the cause of *absence*, which Wordsworth saw from the cause of *abundance*. For Rousseau it is a time to be treasured, but only for what it does not (or should not) have, being a time of vacuous ignorance.

Rousseau would never have deemed the activities of children worthy of poetry, but Wordsworth used the children he met and their activities as the basis for serious poetic works. Part of Wordsworth's innovation in focusing on the individual child comes from this faithful observation of real children and their activities. Many Wordsworth poems,

---

[208]*The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), II, pp. 1014, 1015.

[209]See Introduction, part 2. This "substance" may be related to what Richardson calls the "power" which he sees Wordsworth attributing to children. He writes, "Rousseau, who shares Wordsworth's suspicions regarding conventional methods of socialization, views the child as originally innocent but emphatically not as strong or powerful" (p. 34).

aside from the autobiographical ones, are based on children he knew and real events. For instance, "Anecdote for Fathers" shows Basil Montague's child (the Wordsworths' ward) in what Wordsworth claims was a real incident. Hartley Coleridge's uniqueness, vivacity, and other-worldliness inspired both Wordsworth and Coleridge to write some of their most well-known poems about the child. Other poems, such as "We Are Seven," "Ruth," and "Alice Fell" purportedly record real events.[210] Several of his poems, somewhat like Burns's, are for or about his own children, such as "Characteristics of a Child three years old" and "Address to My Infant Daughter, Dora on Being Reminded That She Was a Month Old That Day, September 16" (1804). In most of these poems, especially the earlier ones, the children are shown to be individuals worthy of poetic consideration--often far more worthy than the adults accompanying them. While Wordsworth is nearly always concerned with the effect of childhood on the adult, he attempts to give considerable, if not equal, weight simply to showing the qualities of the child *now* as opposed to their effect on the adult later. Of course, a child portrayed in a poem is not real, and Wordsworth's poems related to childhood ultimately only show his vision of the child. However, his attempts, as outlined above, come closer than most writers of his day to showing a more accurate image of the child.

Contrary to Jonathan Wordsworth's claim that the child is mainly a "symbol-child who has nothing to do with personal experience, and little enough with observation,"[211] Wordsworth seems dedicated to creating what he would claim to be a more mimetic child construct. Though there is not room in this thesis to show the great care Wordsworth took in portraying children, one need only to look at the psychological reality behind the little girl in "We Are Seven," the boys' antics in "Idle Shepherd-Boys," and the physical description of the child "tricked out" in "beggar's weeds" in "Nutting." One of Wordsworth's more striking, and telling, practices was to include the actual names,

---

[210]See the Fenwick notes in the De Selincourt edition of Wordsworth for details on the events these poems are based on (I, 360-3; II, 509-10; I, 359-60).

[211]Johathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 90, and *passim*. Wordsworth is discussing the *Intimations Ode* in particular here, but his reading tends to see all of the poet's child figures exclusively as symbols.

sometimes full names, of his child characters. Hence, "Rural Architecture" (1800) begins in this unique fashion:

> There's George Fisher, Charles Fleming, and Reginald Shore,
> Three rosy-cheeked School-boys, the highest not more
> Than the height of a Counsellor's bag;
> To the top of Great How did it please them to climb   (ll. 1-3)

This poem, like most, based loosely on fact, boldly gives the full names of the characters in the first line--something unheard-of in poems about children.[212] The result is that the children, no taller than a "Counsellor's bag," are given distinct individual identities and an importance far greater than their height. The narrative voice implies that we should already know this famous trio. Their actions are appropriate to such a grand beginning: they not only build, christen, and maintain the stone figure "Ralph Jones," but are compared to the builders "In Paris and London, 'mong Christians and Turks" and, it seems, found to be more noble. Compare Wordsworth's use of names with Isaac Watts's, for instance, in the poem "Innocent Play" found in his *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*(1715): "But Thomas and William, and such pretty names, / Should be cleanly and harmless as doves or as lambs / Those lovely sweet innocent creatures" (*Moral Songs*, Song II). It is almost as if Watts's children are merely names rather than sentient beings. Nor do the names define individuals, for Watts was trying to appeal to all boys, rather than to describe any particular ones. Names are given here in order to generalize, not to specify. Other Wordsworth poems which include the names of children are "The Pet-Lamb: A Pastoral" (1800) in which we find young Barbara Lewthwaite (l. 13)[213] and Dorothy Wordsworth's "The Mother's Return" (1807). The inclusion of complete names of children is one telling example of how Wordsworth (and his sister) promoted the image of the powerful, important, and individual child.[214]

---

[212]A not-unexpected exception is in Blake's "The Chimney Sweeper," which names "little Tom Dacre."
[213]The Fenwick note states that this was not the real name of the girl who inspired the poem (I, 364).
[214]As Wordsworth aged, his portrayal of the child became victim to what would be the Victoran stereotype of the frail, angelic child. See, for example, "To ---, Upon the birth of her first-born child, March, 1833." His ideas had turned around so much in this stage of his career that he included the doctrine of original sin, so inimical to his earlier ideas, in poems like "Sonnet 20" in *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (both poems in De Selincourt).

Wordsworth's concept of the child, reflected in Lear's depiction of the anxieties of individuality, is also not without ontological angst: there is a tension between infinitude and nothingness in the individual soul.[215] In *The Prelude* Wordsworth implies that humanity shares a soul which is diffused throughout the world by the "Sovereign Intellect" (V, ll. 14-17). On the other hand, by reading imaginative works, the child "doth reap / One precious gain--that he forgets himself" (V, ll. 368-69). This tension between having an all-pervasive soul and at the same time experiencing an absence of individual self-consciousness is certainly cause for such anxiety as Lear implies. Characteristically, with Wordsworth and Lear, the tension is left unresolved. However, the child and the adult must still assert their individuality, which means relinquishing ties to what Keats called the "habitual self," or "custom." In *The Prelude* childhood is described as:

> The time of trial ere we learn to live
> In reconcilement with our stinted powers,
> To endure this state of meagre vassalage,
> Unwilling to forego, confess, submit,
> Uneasy and unsettled, yoke-fellows
> To custom, mettlesome and not yet tamed
> And humbled down...   (V, ll. 540-546)

Custom is the enemy, the force that has not yet fully descended on the child, but "Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight, / And custom lie upon thee with a weight, / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!" (*Ode*, "There was a time..." ll. 129-131). The child should not live as if life were "endless imitation," (l. 107) but instead should be free of society's stereotypes and role constructs. The Romantic child can well understand, at least on a non-rational level, what it means to be an individual unencumbered with the habitual and could therefore readily accept and revel in the eccentrics of Lear's nonsense.

---

[215] Elizabeth Sewell suggests that "Nonsense has a fear of nothingness quite as great as its fear of everything-ness" (p. 124).

Chapter Four
The Wild Child

My imps, ... hardy, bold, and wild,
As best befits the mountain child...

-Scott, <u>Marmion</u> *(1808)*

The characters represented by Lear's nonsense are frequently depicted as "wild" in two related senses of the word: first, "wild" as in rollicking, happy, misbehaving children; second, "wild" as in favourably compared to nature, and especially animals. The world of nonsense is joyous and irreverent, demanding of its audience a sympathetic response.[216] To be able to enjoy and relate to nonsense, Lear's assumed "nonsense child" is unlike all other child constructs emerging from previous children's literature. As Cammaerts recognizes, the child must be "healthy," meaning the "child is by nature, sufficiently imaginative, exuberant and irresponsible to enjoy the visions of Wonderland."[217] Such a child is like Coleridge's description of his son in a letter to Southey on May 6, 1801: "A little child, a limber Elf / Singing, dancing to itself."[218] This child is full of joy but also is "a faery Thing," meaning it can be mischievous while still remaining innocent. Lear wrote to David Richard Morier on 12 January, 1871 that he was constantly proud that he could "make half a million children laugh innocently."[219] In Lear's nonsense, children will harmlessly enjoy the reflection of their own innocent passions and violence. Catherine

---

[216]Though some of Lear's works, especially the later lyrics, are tinged with melancholy, the majority of the poems demonstrate joy, even in the face of opposition. See, for example, "The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò" (pp. 237-241).
[217]Cammaerts, p. 19.
[218]Coleridge *Letters*, II, 728. This was attached to the end of *Christabel*.
[219]*ELSL*, p. 228.

Sinclair, in her preface to *Holiday House*, denounces contemporary mechanistic education and discusses the need to rediscover this "wild" child. She finds children's minds are stuffed with the type of practical, factual information the utilitarians would feed to children, observing: "no room is left for the vigour of natural feeling, the glow of natural genius, and the ardour of natural enthusiasm....In these pages the author has endeavoured to paint that species of noisy, frolicsome, mischievous children which is now almost extinct" (pp. vii-viii).[220] Sinclair, writing imaginative, though didactic prose, joined Lear in the crusade to promote what they saw as a more realistic image of the joyous and "bad" child.

The characters of Lear's limericks display joy, as well as insubordination and violence, in uninhibited emotional outpourings of happiness, dance, and song. Opening to almost any page reveals the eccentrics, poised on tip-toe, with blissful smiles, dancing in celebration. Such an individual is the Old Person of Ischia:

There was an Old Person of Ischia,
Whose conduct grew friskier and friskier;
He danced hornpipes and jigs, and ate thousands of figs,
That lively old Person of Ischia.   (p. 9)

The illustration is of a man, his face darkened in passion, dancing so fervently that he no longer plays his guitar and barely keeps his feet on the ground. There is also the old person of Wick:

---

[220]By 1839 the utilitarian and evangelical movements had done much to crush the Romantic attitudes of the first decades.
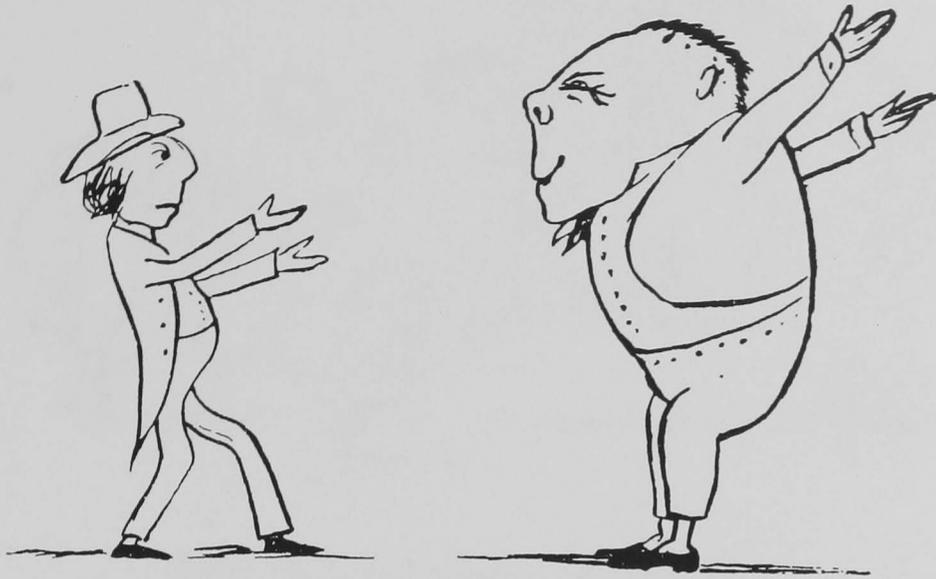
There was an old person of Wick,
Who said, 'Tick-a-Tick, Tick-a-Tick;
Chickabee, Chickabaw,' And he said nothing more,
That laconic old person of Wick.   (p. 163)

While the man to whom he speaks might find him "laconic," this old person is merely

expressing verbally the joy apparent on his face and in his wild posture. This joy is

indescribable; the nonsense words are appropriate as an expression of the inexpressible.[221]

But the joy of the characters is not just pure and unqualified; often the individuals are "bad

girls and boys," exhibiting unruly passions, undisciplined actions, and open

insubordination, as with the Old Lady of Prague, "Whose language was horribly vague. /

When they said, 'Are these caps?' she answered, 'Perhaps!' / That oracular Lady of

Prague" (p. 54). The illustration plainly shows the objects in question to be caps, but the

Old Lady refuses to give a definite answer and displays a wry, superior smile. The

limericks are likewise full of violence unreprimanded:

---

[221]Similarly, Lear uses this device in a letter to Lady Waldegrave of 13 April, 1866, describing one of his many excursions: "Its Coast scenery may truly be called pomskizillious and gromphibberous, being as no words can describe its magnificence." *LLEL*, p. 77. Wordsworth uses nonsense in a similar way in "The Idiot Boy." Johnny's utterance at the end, "The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo, / And the sun did shine so cold," (ll. 460-41) is a fitting nonsense utterance for one representing the childish state of inarticulacy. See Chapter 8 for more on "The Idiot Boy."

There was an old Person of Chester,
Whom several small children did pester;
They threw some large stones, which broke most of his bones,
And displeased that old person of Chester.   (p. 51)

The children in the illustration seem to delight in their bad behaviour, and they are not punished. Their actions are mitigated in that the illustration captures the incident seemingly just before the stones hit their target and also in that the old person is only "displeased," even though most of his bones are broken. The limericks pass no explicit judgment, but they seem to imply that the children's actions are all in good fun. The limericks also condone the raw anger of the Old Person of Bangor, which, if anything, is supported by "them."

There was an Old Person of Bangor,
Whose face was distorted with anger,
He tore off his boots, and subsisted on roots,
That borascible person of Bangor.   (p.44)

The illustration shows "them" smiling and humbly offering a plate of assorted roots to the Old Person. Although such a whole-hearted acceptance by "them" is rare, if "they" are not supportive of the unruly passion, then the individual neither cares, nor is punished in a way which disturbs him or her. Throughout the poems, the assumption is that, rather than being shocked and horrified, as "they" usually are, the child reading these lines will delight in the authoritative recognition of such unqualified joy or plain "bad" behaviour.[222]

The Old Person of Bangor is not simply wild in the sense that his behaviour is bad, but also in the sense of "animal-like," which brings us to the second meaning of the "wild" child: relating children to the natural world, and especially animals. The Old Person bares his feet and subsists on roots thereafter, in what would appear almost an animal existence. Such use of animality is an important part of nonsense, as we have seen, in the previous chapter in the Old Man of Crowle's animal transformation. And while to the modern reader, Lear's quizzical drawings of mutating half-human creatures is perhaps not very novel, in the context of nineteenth-century children's writing it was daring. The closest instances of such intermingling in children's literature come in works like the chapbook,

[222]The animal children in The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-popple all behave against their parents' wishes, usually in a brutal, animalistic way, and they are punished by gruesome deaths. However, their deaths are so ridiculous, and their parents' absurd moralistic reaction so futile, that any didacticism is quickly lost. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed description of this poem as a parody of popular didactic writing for children.

tentatively dated around 1820, entitled *The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog*. Here, after Mother Hubbard buys her remarkable dog several items of clothing, the dog dons them and imitates human behaviour. Of course the dog is not human, but wearing such clothes and standing on his hind legs, he approaches the sapient.[223] While animals have always been an integral part of children's literature, their world and the world of humanity had usually been carefully stratified in the emerging children's literature of the eighteenth century. They were usually used for moral purposes. Israel Zangwill, discussing Kipling's unique neutral treatment of animals in *The Jungle Books* (1894 and 1895) noted, "Beast stories are as old as the Vedas, but the beasts in them have almost always existed for moral ends, and for the edification of the ethical mind."[224] Zangwill was writing in 1894, and though his pronouncement may be too absolute, it shows how, even at the end of the century, animals in literature were still usually relegated to teaching lessons. Animals as a subject were typically used to deter childrens' cruelty towards them and to make conventional, superficial comparisons with children, often stressing difference rather than similarity.[225] Such a comparison can be found in Watts's classic *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715), in the poem "Innocent Play:"

> Abroad in the meadows, to see the young lambs
> Run sporting about by the side of their dams,
>   With fleeces so clean and so white;
> Or a nest of young doves in a large open cage,
> When they play all in love, without anger or rage,
>   How much may we learn form the sight
>
> If we had been ducks, we might dabble in mud;
> Or dogs, we might play till it ended in blood:
>   So foul and so fierce are their natures;
> But Thomas and William, and such pretty names,
> Should be cleanly and harmless as doves or as lambs,
>   Those lovely sweet innocent creatures. (*Moral Songs*, Song II)

By insisting on the differences between animals and children, children's writers taught their moral lessons. Lamb ridicules such comparisons in his letter to Coleridge, 23 October,

---

[223][Martin, Sarah Catherine],*The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog* (York: James Kendrew, [n.d., 1820?]).
[224]"Without Prejudice," *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 4 (September-December, 1894), 521-28 (p. 525).
[225]See below, p. 146, for a description of the omnipresent kindness-to-animals theme in children's literature.

1802, when he complains of the prevalent children's books which teach "that a Horse is an Animal, & Billy is better than a Horse."[226] This tradition can be seen as far back as 1781 in the daunting *Vice in its proper shape; or, the Wonderful and Melancholy Transformation of Several Naughty Masters and Misses into Those Contemptible Animals which They Most Resemble in Disposition*, in which Master Jack Idle is turned into a donkey and Miss Dorothy Chatter-fast becomes a magpie.[227] This type of comparison and cautionary attitude changed little until around the nineteenth-century, before which the comparisons were usually trivial and shallow, as in *Nursery Morals* (3rd ed. 1825), which describes "Silly Jane" as "fair as the lily, and bright as the lark....She called herself bright as the butterfly, and gay as the tulip."[228] Such superficial comparisons are common, along with the usual unfavourable contrast between animal and human being, such as "The Pig" from the same volume:

> How we all turn with scorn from that Pig.
> His skin is thick in dirt.
> He lies on damp, musty straw, and rolls in mud and mire.
> He lives to eat and drink, and will perhaps die, because he is too fat.
> How sad to look on so dirty a brute.
> But, oh! how much more sad to be like him.   (De Vries, p. 138)

The animal is thus typically used as a negative contrast or comparison with the child, though even when comparison is positive, there is still a clear line between animal and child; the two worlds are kept separate in order to enforce the moral message.

Natural histories also enforced this kind of separation in their depiction of animals. Most nineteenth-century natural histories consider an animal primarily as a tool or machine useful to human society. The *Zoological Gallery* (mid-nineteenth century), for instance, describes certain animals' use to human beings, whether as food, clothing, or for vermin control. Because the Black Stork is more timid that the White, it is judged to be "less useful."[229] The description of the ox in an early nineteenth-century lesson-book is similarly focussed:

[226]Lamb, *Letters*, II, 81.
[227]Reprinted in *Early Children's Books and Their Illustration* , p. 139.
[228]Reprinted in De Vries, p. 140.
[229]*Zoological Gallery: Nos. 1-6* (London: Edward Lacey, [n.d.]), p. 5.

> Ox is the general name for horned cattle, and of all these the cow is the most useful to us. The flesh of an ox is beef. An ox is often used to draw a plough or cart; his flesh supplies us with food: the blood is used as manure, as well as the dung; the fat is made into candles; the hide into shoes and boots; the hair is mixed with lime to make mortar; the horn is made into curious things, as combs, boxes, handles for knives, drinking cups, and is used instead of glass for lanterns...[230]

The hog, described with syllables emphasized, fares little better: "A hog is a dis-gust-ing animal; he is filthy, greedy, stubborn, dis-a-gree-a-ble, whilst alive, but very useful after his death" (p. 79). Occasionally animals are even blamed for being of no use to people at all, as in *The Parent's Cabinet of Amusement and Instruction* (1834), in which the peacock is killed to save the farmer money because "*one* alone, of all our feathery train, / Does us no good, but only eats our grain."[231] The division between the user and the used is never forgotten in such illustrations, partly because of the religious background of much of nineteenth-century children's literature. Thus, in an alphabet published by "The Book Society (for promoting religious knowledge among the poor)", we find the description of the cow: "C--is the Cow, / That for our use brings / Milk, cheese, and butter, / And other good things. / 'Tis God who has made her, / To supply us with food; / We should *always* thank *Him*, / Who to *us* is so good."[232] Religiously sanctioned, the line between species could not be more clear than in these children's books.

There are some notable exceptions, however, in the early nineteenth century. The text of the highly influential *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast* describes a group of children going to see the gathering of animals and insects. Yet the illustrations show a radically different story, in which the insects are occasionally represented simply as insects but more often appear to be a curious human and insect hybrid. In a bizarre juxtaposition, a human being usually accompanies each creature, which sometimes rides on the character's head, or sometimes is ridden like a horse. While nothing like Lear's

---

[230]William Mavor, *The English Spelling Book, Accompanied by a progressive series of Easy and Familiar Lessons, Intended as an Introduction to a Correct Knowledge of the English Language* (London, Derby: John and Charles Mozley, [n.d., ca. 1830?]), p. 78

[231]*The Parent's Cabinet of Amusement and Instruction*, Volume 4 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1834), p. 188.

[232]*Alphabet of Animals. Designed to Impress Children with Affection for the Brute Creation* (London: The Book Society (for promoting religious knowledge among the poor), 1863), p. 9.

characters' bodily contortions appear, many anthropomorphized creatures reflect in some way the creature they represent. The moth-woman, for instance, spreads her dress out like wings, while the snail-woman slouches and seems to creep in a snail-like posture.[233]

The bewhiskered "Dormouse" figure rides a dormouse, leading the blind figure of the mole (p. 213).

[233]William Roscoe, *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast*, 1806 (London: J. Harris, 1807) in De Vries, pp. 212-14 (pp. 213).

The text never implies the human counterpart, yet they usually exist in the illustration without any explanation, which in itself is notable; the animal and human worlds meet here for a party and nothing else.[234] Later in the century the mixture of animal and human became more commonplace, as in *The Fables of Aesop and Others, translated into human nature* (1857), written and illustrated by Charles Bennett and engraved by Joseph Swain. This edition places animal heads on human bodies, though its biting commentary suggests that it was probably not meant for children.[235] From the mid-century to the present day, this kind of species intermingling becomes commonplace, almost standard fare in text as well as illustration.

It is this kind of intermixing of the animal and the human which we find in Lear's limericks, yet, going against contemporary trends, with an added implicit *approval* of such species barrier breakdowns. Transformations from animal to human and vice versa are common in the limericks, blurring the distinction between the animal and the human worlds. Occasionally an animal resembles a human being, such as with the Old Man in a tree (p. 7), but far more frequently the human character takes on the animal's features, as with the old person of Skye:

---

[234]In 1808 these illustrations were replaced by ones more faithful to the text, representing more naturalistic creatures. Whalley and Chester, p. 49.

[235]Reprinted in *Early Children's Books and Their Illustration* , p. 21.

There was an old person of Skye,
Who waltz'd with a Bluebottle fly;
They buzz'd a sweet tune, to the light of the moon,
And entranced all the people of Skye.   (p. 189)

Such transformations occur repeatedly, especially in the second series of limericks from *More Nonsense Pictures, Rhymes, Botany &c.* (1872). The persons who experience these changes are almost always in contact with the creature they resemble, with the exceptions of the old people of Bromley (p. 201) and Dumblane (p. 189), whether they are dancing together, talking, or simply staring at each other. Also, the human being is usually pleased with his transformation or at least his situation, even though the limerick text may use an uncomplimentary adjective to describe him.[236] The old person of Crowle is described as "depressing," yet he appears quite content amongst the owl family. Such is also true of the "unpleasing" old person of Bromley, but he presents a special case in another way. Neither in the limerick nor in the illustration is there any clue as to an animal transformation, yet the old person distinctly resembles a frog:

---

[236]No female characters experience animal transformation. The only characters who do not enjoy their transformation are the old men of Dumblane (p. 189) and Brill (p. 162), the latter perhaps simply having a particularly expressionless fish-like face.

There was an old person of Bromley,
Whose ways were not cheerful or comely;
He sate in the dust, eating spiders and crust,
That unpleasing old person of Bromley.   (p. 201)

With legs akimbo, long fingers, and a frog-like mouth and chin, the squatting figure

certainly resembles a frog, not just in his appearance but also in his diet of spiders. The old

person looks and behaves like a frog, is insulted by the text, yet appears perfectly content

amongst his crust and spiders. A similar transformation occurs with the Young Lady of

Portugal (p. 10) whose beak-like nose and flowing gown greatly resemble a bird. Nor are

these the only characters to behave animalistically. In many limericks we find the

protagonists up a tree or in a bush, perched like the birds around them, such as with the

people of Lucca (p. 29) and Dundee (p. 35). Even when the characters and animals are

distinct, a great proportion of the limericks include the usually favourable relationships

between them. The Old People are fond of riding creatures (Old persons of Ware,

Dunluce, Rye) teaching them (Dumbree, Dundalk, France) feeding them (Corsica, person

in gray), entertaining them (Bute, Bray), or simply existing with them harmoniously

(Ealing, Hove, man with an owl). Occasionally the animal world threatens, as with the

young lady in white, whose heart is filled with "despair" by the "birds of the air" (owls),

but such cases are less common. While the roles played by animals in the limericks vary,

the transformations, the moments of species mixture, are usually advantageous for the

character being transformed. Such blending of animal and human not only promotes wild

behaviour, but also implicitly compares the two spheres. As we shall see in the Romantics'

similar treatment of children, such a close and favourable association with the animal

kingdom breaks down the barrier between animal and human to the advantage of both.

<div align="center">§ § §</div>

Child constructs before Lear were built upon an entirely different basis regarding

the "wild" nature of the child. Because children generally *do* misbehave, they have often

been portrayed as doing so, which naturally leads to an animalistic comparison, but it is the

treatment of such behaviour which is important. The roots of the portrayal of children as

wild animals goes back to classical figures such as Aristotle, Horace, and Plato, but in

most cases the comparison is explicitly deprecatory. For example, Plato claims in *Laws*:

> And just as sheep, or any other creatures, cannot be allowed to live
> unshepherded, so neither must boys be left without the care of
> attendants...Now of all wild young things, a boy is the most difficult to
> handle; just because he more than any other has a fount of intelligence in him
> which has not yet 'run clear', he is the craftiest, most mischievous, and
> unruliest of brutes. So the creature must be held in check....[237]

Children are "creatures," "things," and "brutes," and, like animals, they must be penned

up. Plato also likens children to animals by claiming that both are creatures of crude

sensation, that they are impelled only by pain and pleasure, a sentiment to which Aristotle

agrees, adding that the child has no natural love for its parents.[238] This view of the child

proves to be the most common, as can be seen much later in both Locke and Rousseau.

Locke recognizes that children exhibit "Inadvertency, Carelesness, and Gayety," but these

are "foolish and childish Actions" (p. 141), "childish" here meaning "unworthy of notice."

Locke would train a child to pass this wasted stage of life; it is acceptable and good in

infants, but such bold promotion of it in children's literature would not be tolerated.

According to Locke, reading for the child should "draw him on, and reward his Pains in

Reading; and yet not such as should fill his Head with perfectly useless trumpery, or lay

---

[237]Plato, *Laws*, trans. A.E. Taylor (London: J.M. Dent; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1960), 808, p. 193.
[238]George Boas, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1966), p. 12. Plato bases his whole education system on "pleasure and pain...the domain wherein the soul first acquires virtue or vice." (*Laws*, 653, p. 29). For more on the classical portrait of the child, see Boas, pp. 11-15 and also Robert Pattison, *The Child Figure in English Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), pp. 1-19.

the principles of Vice and Folly" (p. 212). Rousseau's Émile is, like Plato's image of the child, more negatively animal-like, experiencing only pleasure and pain, experiencing the world like a cat, instinctively (p. 57). He would understand this portrayal of the nonsense child's attributes and celebrate the joy of the limericks as the unthinking joy of childhood. The violence and "bad" actions would be proof to Émile that "Before the age of reason we do good or ill without knowing it, and there is no morality in our actions..." (p. 34). It would make sense to Émile that children would accept this violence, if not with laughter, then at least with ignorant toleration, but with the coming of reason, the child should see the error of such ignorance. Such "bad" actions simply are not sensible or useful, and by promoting them, Lear is not "preserving the heart from vice and from the spirit of error."[239]

The children portrayed in the Lambs' *Poetry for Children* (1808-1809) are just such good little girls and boys against which Lear rebelled. A typical poem in this volume is "The First of April," in which a boy plays an April-fool's joke on a little girl. His mother sees signs of guilt, and she asks the boy what is wrong. He answers:

> "O mamma, I have long'd to confess all the day
> What an ill-natured thing I have done;
> I persuaded myself it was only in play,
> But such play I in future will shun."[240]

This is the absurdly good, repentant child, which Sinclair and Lear were struggling against, the same child who is now in *Mrs. Leicester's School*, telling "the story of my foolish and naughty fancy" (p. 375). This child, so Lear's nonsense would imply, has forgotten the joyous, boisterous side of herself--a side which is to be cherished, and even promoted--not to be observed with a smile of condescension and derision.

The Lambs' *Poetry for Children*, however, is an exception when seen against Romantic period writing about (rather than for) children. The positive image of the "wild" child, both in the misbehaved and naturalistic senses, was prevalent in Romantic writing. In Wordsworth's poetry alone, the word "wild" is used in conjunction with children in

---

[239]Rousseau, p. 57.

[240]Charles and Mary Lamb, *Poetry for Children*, 1809, in *Books for Children. The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 1903-5, ed. E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1912), III, 416.

dozens of instances.[241] From "youth's wild eye" of *An Evening Walk* (l. 23, composed 1788, published 1793) to the "wild, unworldly-minded youth" of *The Prelude* (IV, l. 281), the child is almost always "wild" in one sense or another. This child also appears in Dorothy Wordsworth's "The Mother's Return":

> Her joy is like an instinct, joy
> Of kitten, bird, or summer fly;
> She dances, runs without an aim,
> She chatters in her ecstasy.   (De Selincourt, *Works*, ll. 21-24)

What distinguishes this use of the wild child is that nearly all of these comparisons are favourable, rather than the conventional derogatory references to cleanliness or misbehavior. Coleridge shared this image of the child, especially in reference to his son Hartley, whose odd behaviour he described, using Wordsworth's phrase, as " '*exquisitely wild'!* An utter Visionary!"[242] Though Coleridge's and Wordsworth's view of the "wild" child would change considerably during their lives, and not usually in the child's favour, these earlier, more favourable models were the most influential in the Victorian period.

In contrast to most eighteenth-century portraits of the child, and indeed, much Victorian writing as well, only the Romantic child exhibits such positive joy and capriciousness. Blake glorifies this type of child, a creature displayed with no sentimentality, "no fragile innocence, not regretful, nostalgic, static, or deadening."[243] In *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes his vision of what real children are:

> A race of real children, not too wise,
> Too learned, or too good, but wanton, fresh,
> And bandied up and down by love and hate;
> Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy,
> Mad at their sports like withered leaves in winds;
> Though doing wrong and suffering, and full oft
> Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight
> Of pain and fear, yet still in happiness
> Not yielding to the happiest upon earth.   (V, ll. 436-44)

---

[241]This can be explained partly by the easy rhyme of "wild" and "child," but there are far more occasions than this coincidence would warrant.

[242]Griggs, II, 525, p. 1014.

[243]Coveney, p. 56.

In this complete picture of the child, Wordsworth stresses the joy, in the face of "wrong" actions and "life's mysterious weight," that a child experiences.[244] As with many of Wordsworth's portrayals of children, there is also a hint of melancholy and death in the comparison of the children to "withered leaves," implying decay and death, yet such awareness reflects more on the adult's conception than the imagined child's consciousness.[245] While the child may be innocent, it is anything but angelic, at least in outward appearance and action.

The essence of Wordsworth's child construct, its creative soul, is inextricable from rebellion, as we find in Book II of *The Prelude*:

> ...I still retained
> My first creative sensibility,
> That by the regular action of the world
> My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
> Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
> Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
> A local spirit of its own, at war
> With general tendency, but for the most
> Subservient strictly to the external things
> With which it communed.   (II, ll. 378-87)

The child's soul is "unsubdued" by social custom because he retains a childlike imagination, a "plastic power" which acts rebelliously against soul-deadening custom. His imagination is also "wild" in another sense, as Wordsworth likens it to a "local spirit," implying the child is intimately related to nature. In this case, the imagination is like a spirit of the woods, whether bear, river, or tree. This spirit is "at war / With general tendency" but, somewhat like Émile, is "subservient strictly" to "external things." Of course, Wordsworth is not talking about raising a child here, but about the tendency of the child's imagination, which, he claims, though rebellious, needs the "external things" or images of nature to make them its own. The passage continues by describing how, through the

---

[244]For Wordsworth the child was closer to divinity, and this instinctive relationship dignifies the child's actions. This essential trait of the Wordsworthian child relates more to the imagination, and is discussed in Chapter 5.

[245]See also "The Kitten and the Falling Leaves" (published 1807). It is in these wistful moments that Wordsworth's resemblance to eighteenth-century writers about children becomes more apparent. C.f. Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College." For the important differences between Gray and Wordsworth, see Paul H. Fry, "Thomas Gray's Feather'd Cincture: The Odes" in *Poets of Sensibility and the Sublime*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 89-118.

"auxiliar light" of imagination, the child is able to enhance and intensify the images he receives from nature. This dialectic relationship of imagination and external stimuli will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 6, but for now I simply note the "wildness" of the child's imagination, whether regarding its allowed rebelliousness or its animalistic tendencies.

Wordsworth frequently shows examples of a child behaving badly, or, to be more precise, children behaving in a manner which was considered unacceptable by conventional portrayals of the child. More often than not, the child in Wordsworth's poems is breaking rules, whether natural or societal. In *The Prelude* alone there are numerous instances of this in the "spots of time," from the boat-stealing, to raven's nest plundering, to fishing, yet the child is rarely, if ever, condemned. Directly after the boat-stealing episode, we find the child Wordsworth climbing the "lonesome peaks" in search of ravens' nests to plunder. He describes, in the heroic language he often uses with such childhood adventures, "when the vales / And woods were warm, was I a plunderer then / In the high places, on the lonesome peaks" (I, ll. 335-37). However, he does add one disclaimer: "Though mean / My object and inglorious, yet the end / Was not ignoble" (I, ll. 339-41). Even in this brief recognition that stealing eggs or baby birds is "inglorious," there is a stress on the "end," which is just the opposite. During such moments of thievery,

> ...at that time
> While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ears; the sky seemed not a sky
> Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!   (I, ll. 346-50)

For this cruel act, the child and the reflecting adult are rewarded with a spiritual vision. Forgotten is the "meanness" of thievery; this activity, like the others in the poem, is glorified because of its results. In an observation which, though describing "The Danish Boy," could easily be applied to the above passage, Babenroth observes, "The passage is rather, in all its beauty, an interpretation of the nuances which nature vouchsafes, not to the mighty hunter, who is bent upon capturing his prey, but to the sensitive boy who responds

to spiritual suggestions of external nature."[246] It seems that most "spiritual suggestions" occur after base actions.

In popular nineteenth-century children's writing, such activities as "nesting" or fishing were bitterly condemned in countless moral tracts, and Wordsworth's lax attitude could have been viewed as scandalous.[247] Cruelty to animals was one of the most common themes of children's literature and can be found in texts from Rousseau's time, to Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories: Designed for the Instruction of Children, respecting their Treatment of Animals* (1778-89), to Christina Rossetti's *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872) and beyond. To take one example from Ann and Jane Taylor's *Original Poems for Infant Minds* (1804-1805), we see the result of "nesting" in a poem entitled "The Bird's Nest," in which the child is intended to feel like a stolen bird.

> Suppose some great creature, a dozen yards high,
> Should stalk up at night to your bed;
> And out of the window along with you fly,
> Nor stop whilst you bid your dear parents good bye,
> Nor care for a word that you said:
>
> And take you, not one of your friends could tell where,
> And fasten you down with a chain;
> And feed you with victuals you never could bear,
> And hardly allow you to breath the fresh air,
> Nor ever to come back again.[248]

Nor did this trend of verses condemning cruelty to animals fade. In light of such didactic work, Wordsworth's mitigating and elevating portrayal of "bad" childish behaviour stands out all the more.

Wordsworth illustrates such "wrong" actions in "To a Butterfly" (written 1802), in which he relates happy memories of a child being cruel to other creatures: "A very hunter did I rush / Upon the prey;--with leaps and springs" (De Selincourt, ll. 14-15). Rather than viewing childhood cruelty as, in Spiegelman's view, the "beginning of potential

---

[246]Babenroth, pp. 72-73.

[247]Of course, *The Prelude* was not children's literature, but it still might have caused alarm had it been published in the early half of the nineteenth century. It was not published until 1850 (after Wordsworth's death), at which time the new "boy's" books were already transgressing many of the taboos of earlier children's literature.

[248]Ann and Jane Taylor, *Original Poems*, I, 5-6.

criminality,"[249] Wordsworth glorifies the violence. Contrary to Spiegelman's reading, this butterfly is not wreaking nostalgic revenge on its former tyrant, but allowing the adult to look back nostalgically upon a situation grounded in aggression. He recognizes the kinder impulses in the sister Emmeline but nevertheless revels in "our childish plays" (l. 11) of reckless abandon. It is the same "wild" child which Wordsworth shows in "Nutting," though in this case the child himself learns a lesson from his violence. This child is rough and destructive, forcing his way through the woods, and finally in the climactic act of violence, "dragged to earth both branch and bough, with a crash / And merciless ravage..." (ll. 41-43). The child "exults" in his victory, even though he feels a "sense of pain." The adult poetic voice does not entirely condemn the actions of the child. The moral at the end only expresses a more mature sentiment, which does not reflect or have significance on the actions of the child who helped the adult to arrive at it. The child's actions, their "Past violence, transmuted, becomes a source of unending creativity"[250] and in this transformation, the actions of the child are exonerated. There is a certain glory in the child who could instigate the action and even have a "sense" of the enormity of his trespasses. This admiration for the result of violence is similar to Keats's reaction to a common brawl in a letter to his brother and sister-in-law on 17 March, 1819: "Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine....By a superior being our reasoning[s] may take the same tone--though erroneous they may be fine."[251] As Keats explains, ugly actions may pass from the condemnable to the commendable when viewed from a different perspective. Wordsworth's poetic voice does not excuse the "bad" actions of the child; on the contrary, as he shows in "Characteristics of a Child three Years Old," the child's actions are happily justified by innocence:

> And Innocence hath privilege in her
> To dignify arch looks and laughing eyes;
> And feats of cunning; and the pretty round
> Of trespasses..."   (ll. 2-5)

---

[249]Willard Spiegelman, *Wordsworth's Heroes* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press: 1985), p. 59.

[250]Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth, The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 73. This is in reference to Wordsworth's "The Danish Boy."

[251]From a serial letter to the George Keatses, in Keats's *Letters*, II, 80.

Her innocence does not excuse, does not mitigate, but "dignifies" these actions.

Wordsworth gives what are normally called childish transgressions a "dignity" previously unimagined. Rousseau comes the closest to appreciating such qualities, but for him they exist because of an intrinsic lack of formed character, instead of a bounty of positive character attributes. The Romantic child thus would respond favourably to Lear's nonsense, which celebrates joy, and shows an equal glorification of such childlike tendencies of what adults might call "erroneous" behaviour.

The basis of the Romantic tendency to compare children and animals in a positive light, aside from the obvious behavioral similarities, perhaps comes from the idea of the "One Life" which was popular with the younger Wordsworth and Coleridge, and in a different way, Blake. No longer are the worlds of the brute creation and humanity spiritually separated. There is

> ...something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.   (*Tintern Abbey*, ll. 97-103)

Or as Coleridge writes, "'Tis God / Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole."[252] Such sentiments as these, though Wordsworth and Coleridge did not maintain them throughout their careers, are one possible reason for supporting a new kinship not just between animals and children, but also for other traditionally marginalized groups such as the working classes, "savages," or women. Though Blake did not have the same pantheistic or Unitarian leanings, he did envision a unifying force behind creation, which he illustrates quite simply in many of the *Songs of Innocence*, such as in the *Laughing Song*, which describes all creation laughing together:

> When the meadows laugh with lively green
> And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene,
> When Mary and Susan and Emily,
> With their sweet round mouths sing Ha, Ha, He.   (plate 15)

---

[252]*Religious Musings*, ll. 130-31, from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: OUP, 1969). All references to Coleridge's poetry will be taken from this volume unless otherwise noted.

except in the ways of nature, and who, still a youth, triumphantly escapes to the savages on the American continent. More frequently in Wordsworth's poetry, the child is directly and favourably compared to animals for far more than their outward behaviour. Reflecting his Rousseauistic inheritance, the young Wordsworth in *Tintern Abbey* is compared to a roe which "bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides / Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams, / Wherever nature led..." (ll. 69-71). Like an animal, the child is led by nature for his physical and spiritual benefit. The child of "Three years she grew in sun and shower" is also raised by Nature's caring hand, though not in isolation, as with Ruth. All creatures and elements unite in educating the young Lucy, who "shall be sportive as the fawn / That wild with glee across the lawn / Or up the mountain springs" (ll. 13-15). The fawn here is not simply exuberant and "wild," but motivated by "glee," an anthropomorphic description further blurring the human and animal. Such comparisons as these recur frequently in Wordsworth's description of children, erasing the distinctions between them and the animal world.[255]

Though Blake's ideological motivation may be somewhat different from Wordsworth's, his portrayal of children is often outwardly similar. In "The Little Girl Lost," Lyca, a seven-year-old child, is lost in the "desert wild," (l. 21) lured on, it seems, by the "wild birds' song" (l. 16). Even though Lyca is lost in a dangerous desert, she is unafraid, expressing concern only for her parents' sake. She lays down to sleep in the desert and the "beasts of prey," including lions, leopards, and tigers, gather and "gambol" in reverence around her. The animals first undress the child and then take her away to a cave. In "The Little Girl Found," her parents search for her and finally find the lion, who attacks them but then, after smelling them, realizes that they are Lyca's parents. The lion then appears as a crowned golden spirit and reunites the family in his palace. They live from then onward without fear of "the wolfish howl, / Nor the lions' growl" (ll. 51-52). In this striking poem which deals with complicated issues of sexual maturity, the child instinctively feels secure in what she sees as a natural world no different from herself--

---

[255]In Wordsworth's later poetry, the animal is differentiated from the child in a more conventional manner. See "The Westmoreland Girl" and "Sheep-Washing" (XXIII of the River Duddon Sonnets). See also Spiegelman, pp. 73-77, on Wordsworth's "taming" of the "wild" child in his later poetry.

innocent and loving, and her confidence proves to be justified. It is interesting to note that the lioness undresses the girl before taking her away, as if to emphasize, in addition to the sexual undertones, the girl's natural state and association with her protectors. When her parents come in search of her, the lion attacks, though we cannot be sure of his motivation. While the lion deeply respects a sleeping child, he attacks adults without provocation or hesitation. The second poem ends almost with a moral, at least for the family involved: they have seen the benevolence of even the most fearsome beasts and never need fear them. Throughout these poems, we witness the spiritual kinship of all creation; just as the child is made more animal-like, so the lion reveals his spiritual, and more "human" side, by his regal accoutrements. As Babenroth states, Blake goes beyond the conventional "be kind to animals" children's poem "into a vital dramatization of animal life in terms of the humanitarian spirit that had begun to pervade all classes of English people..." (p. 286). This kinship with the animal creation marks many of Blake's other works, including "The Fly," "On Another's Sorrow," and "Spring." In all cases, the child and animal are favourably combined, showing their spiritual likeness.

In nineteenth-century children's literature such bad behaviour, whether related to the treatment of animals or not, usually has immediate castigatory consequences. This tradition was kept alive in works like Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs*, which give the dire consequences for lying in "Against Lying":

> The Lord delights in them that speak
> The Words of Truth; but every Liar
> Must have his Portion in the Lake
> That burns with Brimstone and with Fire. (*Moral Songs*, Song XV)

In some ways, mid-Victorian children's literature had not gone very far from Watts, who remained popular throughout the period.[256] As Reinstein comments, "most children's novels of the 1830's to 1860's [sic] hold that mischief, far from being amusing, is sinful and the product of a damnable soul."[257] Even minor behavioural offences may be

---

[256]Percy Muir, *English Children's Books*, p. 58.

[257]Reinstein, p. 79. Reinstein shows the exceptions to this rule, in Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839) and Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841), but such leniency would not become more widely acceptable, let alone popular, until the latter half of the century.

considered to have dire practical and spiritual consequences, as Mary Sherwood

demonstrates in *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818-1847): Augusta Noble, much

like Hoffmann's Harriet in *Struwwelpeter*, burns herself to death, ending her life in sin.

Because "Miss Augusta was brought up without the fear of God,"[258] she disobeys her

parents by playing with fire. She is found by the maid, "all in a blaze, from head to

foot!...poor Miss Augusta was so dreadfully burnt, that she never spoke afterwards, but

died in agonies last night--a warning to all children how they presume to disobey their

parents!" (p. 156). Augusta dies with "not one moment for thought or repentance; and it is

well known that Lady Noble never taught her any thing concerning God and her

Redeemer" (p. 159). For disobedience to parents, the hymn after this episode threatens

plague and damnation. It concludes with another graphic punishment: "The ravens shall

pick out his eyes, / And eagles eat the same!" (p. 162).

The second half of the nineteenth century did see some change in attitude towards

the "wild" child. After the popularity of pioneers like Lear and Sinclair, the later Victorians

found acceptable in certain circumstances the approving but usually heavily qualified

portrayal of a more "wild" child, particularly in the new boys' adventure stories such as

Thomas Mayne Reid's *The Rifle Rangers* (1850), H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's

Mines* (1885), and those found in magazines like *Boys of England* (1866-1874). Other

works, like *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) did much to display the rough-and-ready

quintessential English schoolboy. The male child was allowed to misbehave in the cause of

right, adventure, and simply being male. But these stories were for older boys (age

difference now being accounted for in the industry of children's books); those for younger

children, and girl's books adopted sentimentalized portrayals of children. Girl's stories did

find a place for the "wild" child, but for a watered-down, harmless version of that which

Lear or the boys' writers portrayed. In girls' books, however, the trend came quite late, in

the 1880s, with books like L.T. Meade's *The Autocrat of the Nursery* or Stella Austin's

Stumps (1873). Even in these works bad behaviour would only be tolerated if the children

---

[258]Mary Sherwood, *The History of the Fairchild Family; or, The Child's Manual: Being a collection of stories calculated to shew the importance and effects of a religious eduction*, 1818, 2nd edition (London: J. Hatchard, 1818), p. 155.

were pure at heart; children were becoming sentimentalized, exaggeratedly angelic creatures, weak in body and mind, if closer to God. Children also became "pure" in appearance. In contrast to the utilitarian child, who usually succeeded over the vain, beautiful child, the later Victorian children became attractive, and were rewarded rather than punished.[259] In the early example of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), we overhear the two nurse maids comparing the plain Jane to the beautiful Georgiana: "'Yes,' responded Abbot; 'if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that.'"[260] Georgiana is loved for her "long curls and her blue eyes, and such a sweet colour as she has; just as if she were painted" (p. 58). Jane is constantly punished while Georgiana "who had a spoiled temper, a very acrid spite, a captious and insolent carriage, was universally indulged. Her beauty, her pink cheeks, and golden curls, seemed to give delight to all who looked at her, and to purchase indemnity for every fault" (pp. 46-7). No longer is the spoiled, attractive, well-dressed child, like Tommy Merton of Day's *Sandford and Merton*, punished and taught to be frugal and modest; instead, the beautiful, vain child rules the nursery. We can also look to graphic representations of the beautiful child, such as Mary Cassalt's painting "The Sisters" (c.1885), which features two indistinct, angelic children, with wide, innocent eyes, arms around each other. The *spiritually* angelic child of Wordsworth had been distorted to become an angel in all ways, to the detriment of the child's inherent "power" and individuality. Even in Cassalt's painting the two children are barely distinguishable from each other both in physical features and clothing, their white frocks forming a collective, glowing cloud around them. There were some exceptions, including of course Lear's later nonsense, Carroll, and novels like Flora Shaw's *Castle Blair* (1878) which shows thoroughly wild children who, contrary to most other works, do not become the props for eventual moral lessons. Carroll's Alice and Lear's Violet, curious and bold, stand out all

---

[259]Gillian Avery, *Nineteenth Century Children: Heroes and Heroines in English Children's Stories 1780-1900* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), p.176.
[260]Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 58.

the more when compared to the typical heroines of contemporary girl's stories.[261] But

these exceptions, especially in works meant at least partly for girls, were rare. It is difficult

to sum up accurately the "wild" child of the Victorian period, as, at this stage in children's

literature, there was a continually expanding assortment of genres and an ever-growing

number of writers for children. This brief sketch has shown some of the major trends that

took the cue from Romanticism, nonsense, and novels like *Holiday House* to incorporate

the "wild" child into works for children, even if in a diluted, sentimentalized form.

---

[261]Carroll did comply to standards of the time, however, in using the more angelic, beautiful Mary Hilton Badcock rather than Alice Liddell for the illustrations to both books. Even in *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* he changes Alice's appearance to be less tom-boyish.

Chapter Five
The Elevated Child

Dear Child I also by pleasant streams
Have wandered all Night in the Land of Dreams
But tho calm & warm the Waters wide
I could not get to the other side

-Blake, "The Land of Dreams," (ll. 13-16)

Although Rousseau had recognized the separate state of childhood, theorists and writers after Rousseau still would often treat children as if they were adults, or as if they should be elevated to the state of adulthood, whether through reason or refining of sentiment. They saw, as Rousseau did, the attributes of the child as negative, coming from vacuity. It was not until Blake and Wordsworth in particular, and Lear's nonsense, that in differentiating the worlds of the child and the adult, the image of the child, its attributes now seen as "positive," was elevated *above* the adult. As Cammaerts suggests, to an adult, nonsense is "the only way, by which those unfortunate beings who have fallen down from the blessed state of childhood are able to evoke the spirit of the nursery..."[262] It is the adults who have "fallen" from childhood instead of vice versa. But in differentiating the two states, both the Romantics and Lear attempt to show that this is not a fortunate Fall. Rather than suffering a total separation, the adult keeps a vestige of childhood's perceptions and insights throughout his or her life, though usually this becomes buried under the weight of custom. Lear's nonsense attempts to highlight this non-ideal separation through the use of various devices which show adults that there is something "wrong" with their thinking, that things in the nonsense world will not work the way they do in the "real" world. Nonsense shows its adult readers that their childhood has not been properly preserved in them, that the worlds of the adult and the child have split to too great a degree. Though nonsense is written primarily for children, many of its conventions and inventions are thus clearly meant for the notice of the adult. The adult should recognize that, being tainted with what

---

[262]Cammaerts, p. 35. Cammaerts stresses the relations of nonsense to the nursery rhyme, but the "nursery" here represents the world of the child.

Blake would call "experience," he or she may read nonsense differently from a child. An adult's "incorrect" reading can indicate the superiority of the child's perspective. For the adult to read like the child, it takes effort; what a child can do naturally, an adult may have to enact an "act of faith" to enjoy.[263] Lear's contemporary critics have repeatedly claimed that his nonsense "will be best appreciated amongst adult readers by those who retain a childlike freshness of imagination."[264] The points where the adult's and children's readings differ are the adult "traps" of nonsense.

One of the main devices used in nonsense to "trap" the adult is the illustration. Locke recognized that children were especially receptive to illustration, but until the early nineteenth century, children's books were filled with generic, half-whimsical, half-dreary wood cuts illustrating the various "good and bad boys and girls."[265] Lear's illustrations, on the other hand, were quite original in their simplicity and also their interrelatedness with the text.[266] Blake was perhaps the first to have so intimately related his poetry with his art, and as he wrote to Dr. Trusler on 23 August, 1799, "I am happy to find a Great Majority of Fellow Mortals who can Elucidate My Visions, & Particularly they have been Elucidated by Children, who have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I even hoped."[267] Nonsense limericks rely greatly on this faith in children's receptivity to illustrations. While Lear's longer poems do not depend heavily on illustration for effect, the illustrations are crucial for the limericks, such as that in the young person of Janina:

---

[263]Davidson, p. 202.

[264]"Nonsense Pure and Simple," *The Spectator* (3 November, 1888), 1503-05 (p. 1505).

[265]Locke, p. 147. A particularly good example of entirely dull, predictable illustrations is Mary Ann Kilner's very popular *The Adventures of a Pincushion designed chiefly for the use of Young Ladies*, (c. 1780) which includes characteristic and entirely drab woods cuts of moping children.

[266]See Chapter 2 for more on illustration.

[267]*The Letters of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1956), p. 36.

There was a young person of Janina,
Whose uncle was always a fanning her;
When he fanned off her head, she smiled sweetly, and said,
'You propitious old person of Janina!'   (p. 167)

The illustration shows that the fan is quite far from the young person and probably could not have committed the beheading, yet its serrated edge might indeed prove lethal. Her uncle still seems to be fanning and smiling, as if nothing had happened. Also, her head floats above her body, as if it were a balloon, another detail which could not happen if the crime were committed as stated. I would argue that the child reader is perhaps more likely to notice the incongruity--an incongruity which, in this and many other cases, cannot be resolved. In an analysis of her own experiments with children, Morag Styles also suggests that the child is more likely to notice picture-text incongruities: "Picture books that often confused or intrigued me were pored over by little people, laughing aloud eagerly devouring every visual joke. Inevitably, they noticed things I didn't, even when it was a book I thought I had examined closely" (pp. 26-7). As Lear's illustration shows, the crime scene is anything but conclusive, demonstrating the common device of picture/poem discrepancy. A similar incongruity occurs with the Old Man of Peru, "Who watched his wife making a stew; / But once by mistake, in a stove she did bake, / That unfortunate Man of Peru" (p. 28). In the drawing it is obvious that this "mistake" is not at all accidental. The woman is laughing, pointing directly at her husband, who is angry and, it seems,

trying to escape.[268] The majority of Lear's limericks depend, for their comic effect, on this type of discrepancy, and the child reader is perhaps more attuned to this level of Lear's nonsense.

The final lines usually revolve around one central adjective describing the old person. Lear commonly fills this descriptive "blank" with the misappropriation of difficult or long words which do not necessarily fit into the context, creating a gap in meaning. The young person of Janina describes her uncle as "propitious," which is probably not in a young child's vocabulary. When (or if) the adult does understand the joke of the picture/poem discrepancy, he or she discovers the misappropriation, the word "propitious," for there is nothing about the man or his actions which is propitious. To the child this is a nonsense word, and no "sense" can be made of its relation to the picture.[269] The child's humour must come from something other than definitions. Thus, there is the unresolved tension resulting from the misappropriation--one which only the adult, who tries to make "sense" of the whole, can fully see. As Ann Colley observes, "this vague and ambiguous adjective creates a gap in which the reader must supply the means of combining or tying together the incongruous details."[270] Colley here is assuming an adult reader, who knows the meanings of all the words. But in this world of words, the definition of a word may not be as important as its verbal qualities, or it may even be misleading. A child might enjoy the words for their sheer musicality, which could be their primary function. The child who does not know Lear's difficult words cannot see an incongruity, only an unknown. Only an adult, who understands the components and sees that they truly are incongruous, can try to combine the un-combinable into conventional "sense," which will ultimately fail. The child must either fabricate a meaning for what is, in effect, a neologism, or ignore it, while the adult possibly falls into the trap of trying to make false "sense" of the misappropriation. Whether from the adult's or the child's perspective, much

---

[268]The original illustration of this limerick is even more harsh than the final version, showing a more sinister expression on the cook, with her teeth bared. See *Lear in the Original*, p. 109.

[269]Compare this with Carroll's use of longer words. When the narrator uses the word "suppressed," (*Alice*, p. 90) he is quick to explain the term in a humorous manner. Lear declined such authorial intrusion.

[270]Colley, "Edward Lear's Limericks," p. 294.

of the humor of Lear's nonsense is found encoded in the gaps of meaning within the picture/poem relationship which cannot be filled with certainty.

Another adult "trap" is Lear's innocent use of words which have a sexual, or otherwise "unfit" meaning in their application to children or children's writing. Lear's favourite word of this type is "promiscuous," which, at the time of Lear's writing nonsense had gained a sexual meaning in addition to its meaning of "indiscriminate."[271] But when Lear uses this word, it is always in the older, innocent sense, such as in *The Adventures of Mr. Lear, the Polly, and the Pusseybite on their way to the Ritertitle Mountains*: "Mr. Lear, the Polly and the Pusseybite all tumble promiscuous into the raging river and become quite wet."[272] The adult will immediately think of sexual connotations, which are certainly improper here. In nonsense, there can be no overt sexuality, and the adult's knowledge only interferes with the tone and method of nonsense. Thus, as Prickett observes, Lear is "trying to get the adult reader to be half-shocked in order to show, by this false reaction, what a dirty mind the *reader* has..." (p.126). This reaction is "false," in that it differs from the child's, the primary audience's, reaction, and the adult who discovers this will realize that adulthood is tainted and neither innocent nor spontaneously creative enough to accept nonsense for what it really is.[273]

Like Lear, Wordsworth also shows the division between the adult and child world with the "trap" of what adults might read as a misappropriation "unfit for children". Rather than "promiscuous," Wordsworth uses "wanton" or "voluptuous."[274] In *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes the "real" child as "not too wise, / Too learned, or too good, but wanton, fresh..." (V, ll. 436-7). The word "wanton" is used innocently here, but its placement between "not too... good" and "fresh" highlights its ambiguity. Just like

---

[271] According to the *OED*, "promiscuous" has had a pejorative meaning since the seventeenth century and sexual connotations since at least the mid-nineteenth century.

[272] *Teapots and Quails*, p. 52.

[273] See also Lear's use of the word "sousy" in his "A was an apple-pie" alphabet, in the verse for the letter "m" (p. 141). Only an adult would think of the entirely inappropriate meaning of "drunken" in this context.

[274] In *Paradise Lost*, Milton uses "wanton" in a similar way to describe Eve before the Fall, such as in her hair's "wanton ringlets" (*The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London, New York: Longman, 1968), IV, 1.306). Milton uses the tension of this word's possible derogatory meaning to highlight the difference between prelapsarian and fallen humanity.

the word "promiscuous," "wanton" also had sexual connotations, as well as a more innocent meaning. As Michael Mason comments in a note in the Longman's edition of "Lucy Gray," another poem using "wanton," "there was no sense of the adjective available in Wordsworth's day that was not potentially pejorative, but Wordsworth liked to challenge the moralism of the word in conjunction with children...."[275] Wordsworth and Lear both use such tainted words to prove a point about children and adults: that adults have "fallen" from a state of pure imagination and innocence, a state closer to the divine creativity, from which most adults have severed their ties.

The most common theme both Lear and Wordsworth use to further this point of non-ideal separation is death. In reading Lear's nonsense, adults are often horrified by the prevalence of death, which is treated so lightly. But what Lear and Wordsworth are showing is that their child constructs have a much more enlightened view of what death is-- a view which adults, to their disadvantage, no longer hold. Death is obviously one of an adult's main causes of anxiety, but nonsense attempts to "reduce the experiences central to the human condition of the adult world to absurdity."[276] Both Carroll's and Lear's nonsense is obsessed with death, but almost never does it become threatening. Death is the supposed punishment in the kingdom of Wonderland, but despite her enthusiasm, the Queen of Hearts never sees one head roll. Death threatens in almost every scene of both *Alice* books, but it is rarely realized. Alice falls down the hole, almost drowns in her own tears, is threatened by a playful but deadly puppy, and has her whole existence challenged by the problem of the White King's dream. Death also threatens many of the characters, from the Queen's subjects, down to the oysters in *The Walrus and the Carpenter*, the latter being a rare case of actual death. But even when the oysters are eaten, the death scene is dealt with so evasively and gently that we hardly know they are gone. Of course, Humpty Dumpty falls, we assume, but again, it happens off-stage. Being a part of the nursery rhyme, his death is inevitable, and, because it comes from a nursery rhyme, it has a cyclical

---

[275]William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798-, ed. Michael Mason (London, New York: Longman, 1992), p.257.

[276]Byrom, p. 149. But, this reduction highlights Lear's assumptions about a child's ability to take death in such a manner as a result of its enlightened perception of death.

nature, as if, if Alice returned the next day, Humpty would be back on the wall. When death occurs, it is treated as a joke (played on the oysters) or a matter of indifference (we knew it would happen). Linda Shires notes the pervasiveness of death in both books and claims that Carroll deals with death in *Alice* "by ignoring it or by taming it with logic and rules."[277] Indeed, death is always a joke, however serious the undertones.

Lear's poems often show death, but always mitigate the circumstances, either by showing miraculous recoveries, or by not taking the whole topic seriously. More than a quarter of the limericks in the *Book of Nonsense* (1846) deal with death, suicide, and violence, yet in each case the burden of such a heavy topic is lightened in various ways. Illustration mitigates circumstances in the Old Person of Tartary :
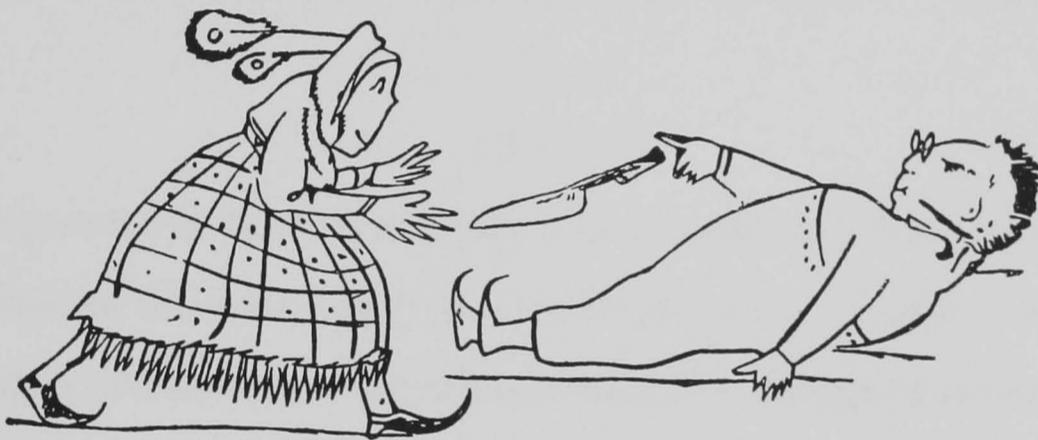
There was an Old Person of Tartary,
Who divided his jugular artery;
But he screeched to his wife, and she said, 'Oh, my life!
Your death will be felt by all Tartary!'   (p. 50)

The man who commits suicide looks content, and his wife appears quite excited about his death. In almost every limerick dealing with death, the illustration mitigates the impact in a similar manner.[278] Death is miraculously defied by the Young Person of Janina (p. 186), whose decapitation seems to please her. Death can be sanctioned in the hero, as in the Old Person of Stroud (p. 169) who, trapped in a crowd, murders her way out, or it can occur

[277]Linda M. Shires, "Fantasy, Nonsense, Parody, and the Status of the Real: The Example of Carroll," *Victorian Poetry*, 26 (1988), 267-283 (p. 278).

[278]Often when Lear finalized his drawings for publication he mitigated the harsh circumstances even further. cf. "The Old Man of Peru" (p. 28): The original illustration shows a more sinister expression on the cook, with her teeth bared. See *Lear in the Original*, p. 109.

without any sensible reason, such as with the Old Man of Madras (p. 11), who dies merely because of his strange fear of the length of the ass's ears on which he rides. In *The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-Popple* (1871) all the groups of children die horrible deaths. One group, the seven young cats, "all gradually *died* of fatigue and of exhaustion, and never afterwards recovered" (p. 117). Lear writes of these deaths as if they might not be permanent. In all cases, the deaths are treated in the same way that the "sexual" misappropriated words were, in innocence, joy, and irreverence. It is in this light that death is celebrated, defeated, applauded, and irrationally brought on. While the adult may disapprove of such lightness in dealing with the subject, it is only because he or she has an adult, "incorrect" view of death. The child sees this treatment of death and laughs, because its comprehension of death is much more "advanced" than the adult; it sees the "common sight" of death in nonsense "Apparelled in celestial light...["]279 of its innocent childhood.

§ § §

Lear's portrayal of death differs greatly from its representation in children's literature through the nineteenth century and from the child theorists' views. Death has saturated children's literature from its beginning, though its presentation and the purpose for using it have changed considerably. In Puritanical children's literature, we see the first flowering of death as a subject, stemming from the very real concern that the child could die and go to hell at any moment. Such sentiments are not as surprising when we realize that, even through the mid-eighteenth century, seventy-five percent of children born in London were dead before the age of five.[280] The combination of poor conditions for children and zealous Puritanism was conducive to the publication of children's books like Bunyan's *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686) and James Janeway's *A Token for Children: Being an exact account of the conversion, holy and exemplary lives and joyful deaths of several young children* (1672?). The tradition of hellfire and brimstone continued well into the eighteenth century. When Isaac Watts used images of death and hell in his *Divine*

[279] *Ode* ("There was a time..."), ll. 2,4.
[280] Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 2 volumes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), I, 300-1.

Songs (1715), he quenched some of the Puritanical fire by writing more on a child's level. Nevertheless, the threat of perdition was still quite visible. This tradition continued in a more secular form in the Georgian period, in the hands of writers like the Taylors, in their *Original Poems for Infant Minds, By Several Young Persons* (1804), and even more shockingly in Mrs. Sherwood's works. Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818-47) demonstrates a fascination with the physical aspects of death, but her treatment of death, as with all those before her, was dead serious. Rather than being threatened with damnation, the children in Sherwood's works were taught to shun, for instance, sibling arguments under the possible eventual penalty of death. The children are taken to view corpses and are thereby taught to avoid an untimely demise. Such a secular use of death to shock the child into submission was common in this period, running alongside the more traditional "fire and brimstone" evangelical tracts.[281] The Victorians are well-known for their sentimental child-death scenes, such as in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) or Dean Farrar's *Eric, or Little By Little* (1858) and *St Winifred's* (1862). Such scenes were used for sentimental value and also for religious reinforcement. The Victorian period saw the re-emergence of religion's paramount role in children's literature, and it was often because of a touching death-bed scene that the survivors would be converted and diverted from their evil ways.[282] Of course, the death-bed scene was irresistible, and even secular children's authors such as Mrs. Ewing were using it for effect. However, as the nineteenth century moved past the mid-point, death became less overt, and by the 90s, perhaps because of a surfeit, fewer fictional children were dying.[283] Regardless of the purpose behind the use of death, it is always taken seriously and used, so to speak, as the ultimate governess.

Theorists concerned with the child were less enthusiastic about the use of death in education. Utilitarian thought, stemming from Locke's empiricism, promotes raising children with a knowledge but not an understanding of death. These children will have

[281] Avery, p. 212. See Avery, pp. 212-224 for more on the prevalence of death in children's literature. See Paul Sangster, *Pity My Simplicity* (London: Epworth Press, 1963) for more on Evangelical methods of teaching children.
[282] Avery, p. 66.
[283] Avery, p. 223.

been taught an adult's conception of death, having been taught like an adult in most other ways. Locke states "The sooner you *treat him as a Man*, the sooner he will begin to be one..." (p. 159). Godwin echoes this sentiment, writing "One of the greatest errors of education, is that children are not treated enough like men..." (p. 127). Edgeworth is more sympathetic to the state of childhood, protecting the child in a more Rousseauistic way, yet in all cases the state of childhood is one below that of the adult. To Locke, the child starts in a sinful state of "the most shameful Nakedness, *viz.* their natural wrong Inclinations and Ignorance,"[284] in which the mind is "narrow, and weak" (pp. 148, 221). The child's intrinsic characteristics are "faults" to be reformed, like a criminal's. The utilitarian child's intrinsic qualities are also "defects" which must be mended with reason. He has no taste, cannot appreciate nature, and has no real friendships--his pleasures being superficial and "worthless."[285] Even the child's thoughts are "idle and of small account."[286] As Godwin states, "we are lifting them up to our level, not sinking ourselves to theirs" (p. 117). Although, again, Edgeworth, who was more influenced by Rousseau, argues that "children are not fools, and they are not to be governed like fools,"[287] her writing for children also strives to cure the "defects" of childhood. The utilitarians thus try to raise children up from their fallen state by treating them as far as possible as rational adults.

Rousseau would not treat the child as a man. Émile knows nothing of death and would be puzzled by its insistent presence in Lear's nonsense. Although Rousseau recognizes the separate state of childhood as not something inherently sinful, his child is still far below the adult. For Locke, the faults of children are "of their Age, rather than of the Children themselves" (p. 119). But for Rousseau, it is "the children themselves" who are at fault, in that the faults which accompany the newly separated state of childhood are attached personally to the child, not simply accepted as the "mistakes" of his age. Émile knows neither death nor love, being entirely self-absorbed (p. 183). His world is reduced to the size of his small understanding and his two feelings: joy and sorrow (pp. 219, 191).

---

[284] For Locke's ambivalence on nurture and nature, compare Locke, p. 83 and p. 122.
[285] Godwin, p. 68.
[286] Godwin, p. 121.
[287] Edgeworth, II, 415.

The child has no moral sense, and "His ideas, if indeed he has any ideas at all, have neither order nor connection; there is nothing sure, nothing certain, in his thoughts" (p. 70). While Rousseau has separated the states of childhood and adulthood, he has done it mainly to the disadvantage of the child.

The image of childhood promoted by the Lambs in *Mrs. Leicester's School* is a medial state between the older conceptions and the Romantic conception of the child. This child has at one time what Wordsworth would call a more "enlightened" view of death, but those ideas pass with time, and adulthood brings a more realistic (and thus, "better") viewpoint. Elizabeth Villiers, the girl who narrates "The Sailor Uncle," articulates her childhood conception of death. As a younger child, Elizabeth spent much time at her mother's grave, learning to read from it and playing by it, much like the little girl in Wordsworth's "We are Seven." When her uncle, who does not know of her mother's death, asks her "'Who has taught you to spell so prettily, my little maid?'" she answers, "'Mama,' I replied; for I had an idea that the words on the tombstone were somehow a part of mamma, and that she had taught me."[288] To Elizabeth, her mother's spirit is still alive, taking an active part in her education. She cannot conceive of death conventionally, wishing "I was sleeping in the grave with my papa and mamma; and in my childish dreams I used to fancy myself there, and it was a place within the ground, all smooth, and soft, and green" (p. 321). This is strikingly like Wordsworth's description of a child's conception of death in his *Ode* ("There was a time...") but in this case, Elizabeth retracts this fancy, admitting to the listeners "My thoughts on these subjects were confused and childish..." (p. 322).[289] Elizabeth as a child cannot conceive of death in a conventional way. But then the conventional adult, or the more "unreal" child-, sentiment takes over, and what could have been a supportive recognition of a more Romantic outlook turns into a condemnation of childhood's error. Mary Lamb is sympathetic to the Romantic outlook, recognizing its manifestation in children, but then condemns it, promoting the view of

---

[288]*Mrs. Leicester's School*, p. 320. Written by Mary Lamb.
[289]See ll. 120-23 in *Ode* ("There was a time...").

childhood found in the earlier concepts of children. The states of childhood and adulthood are separate, but childhood still remains a negative state of error.

The Wordsworthian child has an enlightened view of death, resembling Mary Lamb's portrayal of it, which is separated from and raised above the more conventional adult view of death. Wordsworth demonstrates the separation between childhood and adulthood in the series of poems he grouped together (starting 1815) under the heading "Poems Relating to the Period of Childhood" in the many editions of his collected works. These are: "We are Seven," "The Idle Shepherd-Boys," and "Anecdote for Fathers." In each poem, the values of childhood are placed above the meddling adult's values. McGillis attributes this elevation to the implication that children "are poets in their immediacy of response to nature and in their unmeditated speech. They speak a pure language untainted by self-consciousness, the will to power, or the need to rationalize...."[290] These attributes enable the children in each of these poems to demonstrate a higher understanding than the adults. What to Rousseau might appear to be empty ignorance is to Wordsworth a positive, superior mode of thought. The first of this series, "We are Seven," is the most revealing and relevant to Lear's nonsense, as it deals with a child's perception of death. In the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* Wordsworth comments on this poem, citing "the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion."[291] But this inability is not, as it is for Rousseau, a result of the child's vacuity. Rather, Wordsworth sees this as a more enlightened view, as evidence of the "indomitableness of the spirit"[292] of children. The little girl in the poem, so much like Lamb's Elizabeth Villiers, understands the questions she is asked and replies directly: "'Seven boys and girls are we; / Two of us in the church-yard lie, / Beneath the church-yard tree'" (ll. 30-32). When the adult tries to reason with the child, she only responds "'Their graves are green, they may be seen'" (l. 37), implying that she sees in the physical representation of death beyond the physicality of death--that the buried bodies have little to

---

[290]McGillis, p. 163.

[291]In Gill's *Wordsworth,* p. 598. Thus the child in *Ode* ("There was a time...") sees death as "a lonely bed without the sense or sight / Of day or the warm light, / A place of thought where we in waiting lie" (ll. 121-23).

[292]Fenwick Note in Wordsworth's *Works,* IV, 463.

do with the spirits. The child simply cannot express in words her perception that the graves are a proof of both death and life. The narrative voice asks "What should it know of death," (l. 4) and the answer given in the poem only makes a fool of this presumptuous adult. Similar endings occur in "The Idle Shepherd-Boys" and "Anecdote for Fathers," which show the child, though unable to articulate himself perspicuously, as teaching the adults, demonstrating the child's superiority over their older "pupils."

The examples of the child teaching the man illustrate the Romantic concern with the harmful division between these states. While Lear's separation of childhood from adulthood is always only implied the Romantics are usually more overt about their division. For Blake, this division is the "Contrary States of the Human Soul:"[293] "innocence" and "experience." Coveney comments that "The Songs of Innocence are...the affirmation of human life in children; the Songs of Experience the comparative denunciation of the forces in society which deny to both child and adult the expression of their imaginative joy, their essential humanity."[294] Wordsworth expresses this division in the Ode ("There was a time..."), in which he definitively creates the two separate states of childhood and adulthood, yet with the latter retaining something of the former. Though the adult narrator begins the poem in doubt and confusion, he discovers that both childhood and adulthood have advantages. The child's is a time of "splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower" (l. 181), but while the adult finds solace in "the soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering" (ll. 186-7), his joy, though elevated, is still not on the level of the child. Wordsworth writes "I love the Brooks which down their channels fret, / Even more than when I tripped lightly as they" (ll. 195-96), but this only indicates that what appears to be the "fortunate fall" of the adult still leaves him on a lower level ultimately than the child. The adult may love nature more, but since the child is under the "habitual sway" of nature, he is a part of it, and thus, he can only love it as he loves himself, instinctually; he cannot love it as an entity separate from himself. The adult, even though he has learned enough from childhood to have a "faith that looks through death" (l. 188) is still in a state in which

---

[293]Blake, Songs, plate 1.

[294]Coveney, p. 56. I would argue that adults can also partake in the state of innocence, though they cannot achieve it in as undiluted a manner as children.

"The Clouds that gather round the setting sun / Do take a sober colouring from an eye / That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality" (ll. 199-201). There is a certain melancholy, weighted with experience, which adds the dark colour in the mind's perception of the sunset. This melancholy comes from the adults' clearer perspective of the human condition:

> Though inland far we be,
> Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither,
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the Children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore. (ll. 165-70)

Though the adults' perspective is much broader than the child's, they only achieve this in so far as they have distanced themselves from the ocean of divinity. Its sounds still reach them, but not with the immediacy and intrinsic sympathetic perception of the child. The adult can no longer fathom the

> ...first affections,
> Those shadowy recollections,
> Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain light of all our day (ll. 151-154)

The child's is indeed the highest point of existence, whose relative position to the adult is described in the *Ode* as "thy Beings height" (l. 125).

Thus, we have arrived at the crux of the difference between the child and the adult: the child's proximity to divinity which affects its character and actions. This is the child who floats on a cloud in the introduction to Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. It is Wordsworth's childhood state in which "Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne / That hath more power than all the elements."[295] This is also the child, as we shall see in the next chapter, whose divine, combinative imagination will allow access to the paradoxical world of nonsense. It is the child of "To H.C., Six Years Old," who "no forewarning gives; / But, at the touch of wrong, without a strife, / Slips in a moment out of life" (ll. 31-33). Death comes as if the child were only barely on this side of life. There is no

---

[295] *The Prelude*, V, 531-33.

resistance and no great distance between the states--only one "slip" and the child has

crossed back to the realm of divinity. This same child is floating in a boat which seems

"To brood on air than on an earthy stream; / Suspended in a stream as clear as sky, / Where

earth and heaven do make one imagery" (ll. 8-10). Like Blake's angelic child, this child

exhibits his "intimations of immortality." He is like the earthly stream but which here

seems to be in some mid-point between the earth and heaven, mixing the two, in the

reflection of heaven.[296] But he is also the child in the stream, with its reflections and

strange middle state, who illustrates that "Heaven lies about us in our infancy."[297]

Wordsworth asserts in *The Prelude*, "awful is the might of souls" of children--"awful" in

the same way that divinity, so close to childhood, is awe-inspiring. In "It is a beauteous

Evening, calm and free" (written 1802), Wordsworth ascribes this inscrutable divinity in

his daughter Anne-Caroline (by Annette Vallon):

> If thou appear'st untouched by solemn thought,
> Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
> Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
> And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
> God being with thee when we know it not.   (ll. 10-14)

Even when the child appears not to appreciate the grand scene, the "gentleness of

heaven...on the Sea" (l. 5), she holds closer communion with the divine than the observant

and reverent adult. It is this proximity to divinity which endows the Romantic child with a

creative imagination--one which is essential to a child's enjoyment and interest in Lear's

nonsense.

---

[296]See also *The Prelude*, III, 135-6, for another image of the child being likened to the reflections of heaven on the waters.

[297]*Ode* ("There was a time..."), l. 66.

Chapter Six
The Divine Imagination

...and make
Strange combinations out of common things
Like human babes in their brief innocence

-Shelley, <u>Prometheus Unbound</u>(*1818-19*)[298]

The assumption that a child has a close relation to divinity has far-reaching implications.

Such a child has a "divine" creative imagination, which is necessary for the child's

response to literary nonsense. Nonsense accommodates this faculty by supplying the

materials necessary for the imagination to create another world. If the child is able to make

this creative leap, then nonsense provides ample recompense. Lear wrote to Emily

Tennyson on 5 October, 1852, concerning his attempts to illustrate Tennyson's poetry, that

> Alfred Tennyson's poetry (with regard to scenes--) is as real & exquisite
> as it is relatively to higher & deeper matters:--that his descriptions of
> certain spots are as positively true as if drawn from the places themselves,
> & that his words have the power of calling up images as distinct & correct
> as if they were written from those images, instead of giving rise to
> them.[299]

Lear admires Tennyson's ability to evoke the reality of a poetic "other" world, which he

recognizes as being approachable from two perspectives. Tennyson, Lear claims, is able to

use words to create the impression of a *source* reality for the poetry, creating in the reader's

mind a world which seems to exist outside the reader's mind, and which appears to dictate

the *words*. The words seem to be describing a real place instead of evoking an imaginary

landscape. The other, less valuable kind of poetic world which Lear claims for poetry is

the poet's ability to use words to "give rise" to a subject, which is consciously a poetic

[298]Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York, London: Norton, 1977).
[299]*ELSL*, p. 117.

construct. This world is imaginatively limited to the words which create it; the words *are* the world created. In both cases, a poetic scene creates an alternative reality, whether represented by or constituted by words.

This two-fold system of creating other worlds is also employed in the fantastic side of nonsense. But here we must distinguish between the world of the limericks and the world of the other nonsense poems. Because the limericks occur in recognizable places (Melrose, Tibet, Hong Kong) and lack unnatural creatures (the Jumblies, the Quangle Wangle, the Dong), they are nominally in the "real" world, even with their distortions of humanity. The following discussion, therefore, concerns mainly the longer poems and the prose. The most prevalent critical opinion of the nonsense world is that it is a world created by, and made entirely of words: it *is* the words. Iser accounts for this type of world by the clash of narrative forms and perspectives. In nonsense, the clash is not with narrative form, which is coherent and part of the "sense" side of nonsense, but between meaning and anti-meaning. Iser writes, "Instead of evoking a manifold picture of reality, this clash of forms will create a semantic reality of its own, which can be tackled by the reader only through interpretation."[300] Likewise, in nonsense there is a "semantic" reality, created by the clash of words against each other. This is the type of poetic creation which Lear valued less. Sewell sees this world as "Not a world of 'things' but of words and ways of using them..." (p. 17). Dolitsky agrees, defining the nonsense reality as limited to the confines of a self-referential hermetic text; nonsense is an "evocation of a world far different from the one readers normally operate in, where words do not take their meaning from conventional relations among them and with the things and experiences encountered in the objective world, but where meaning is emergent from the words' own interanimation within a specific text."[301] Because in this type of reality the words are the world, the syntactic and semantic relations dictate the rules of this world. And because such relations are, in nonsense as well as in other writing, quite strict, the reality which emerges is one

---

[300]Wolfgang Iser, "The Generic Control of the Esthetic Response: An Examination of Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*" in*The Implied Reader: Patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), pp. 57-80 (p. 80).

[301]Marlene Dolitsky, *Under the Tumtum Tree: From Nonsense to Sense* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984), p. 8.

which is "logical and orderly, with separate units held together by a strict economy of relations, not subject to dream and disorder with its multiplication of relationships and associations."[302] This is a nonsense reality which makes "sense" on the level of word construction, usage, and syntactic relations. In *Four Little Children*, a scene of nonsensical sublime includes these strict syntactic and word relations:

> ...and on a signal being given all the Blue-Bottle-Flies began to buzz at once in a sumptuous and sonorous manner, the melodious and mucilaginous sounds echoing all over the waters, and resounding across the tumultuous tops of the transitory Titmice upon the intervening and verdant mountains, with a serene and sickly suavity only known to the truly virtuous. The Moon was shining slobaciously from the star-bespringled sky, while her light irrigated the smooth and shiny sides and wings and backs of the Blue-Bottle-Flies with a peculiar and trivial splendour, while all nature cheerfully responded to the cerulæan and conspicuous circumstances. (p. 100)

In this example the regularity of the words, beyond any meaning, contributes heavily to the creation of the nonsense reality. The world is partially created by alliterative pairs such as "sumptuous and sonorous" and "melodious and mucilaginous," words whose sheer musicality, alliteration, and emotive value accord them a place in this world. In fact, they "become" the world, having no clear meaning. Likewise, words such as "slobaciously" are pure nonsense words, but nevertheless are strictly structured according to phonetic and grammatical rules. Furthermore, the words in the sentence are related to each other in what appears to be a recognizable, logical order.[303] All of these attributes of the hermetic "word" side of nonsense are characteristic of Gilles Deleuze's definition of nonsense as "a word that denotes exactly what it expresses and expresses what it denotes."[304] Nonsense words are locked into an endless cycle of meaning because they stand alone, without a prior context of sense. They must bear the responsibility for their own meaning, which is an impossible task for any word, but the result of this limitation is that those parts of the

---

[302]Sewell, p. 114.

[303]Jean-Jacques Lecercle, in his *Philosophy of Nonsense* , contributes the most detailed investigation of the strict phonetic, syntactic, and morphological conventionality of nonsense. I would argue that this level is an under-structure, present, but not dominant, in the practical application and interpretation of the genre, though it may be more significant with Carroll's nonsense.

[304]Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (originally *Logique du Sens*, 1969), trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p. 67. The issue of sense and nonsense will be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter.

nonsense "world" which are more pure nonsense are constituted only by words. Words create this side of nonsense reality, the side which Lear saw Tennyson surpass.[305]

Not only words create this structural world, but also form. Most recent nonsense criticism claims that the genre privileges form over content. Because nonsense almost always makes use of a pre-established form, whether alphabet, natural history, or limerick, while at the same time denying, in most cases, the genuine efficacy of that form, it can be seen as an empty structure which comments on the very form it inhabits. Rather than having any relevance to the "real" world or even to a fantasy world, this side of nonsense comments on its own discourse. Susan Stewart observes that "nonsense has no everyday-life context...and...is primarily a discourse about discoursing rather than about any 'real life' content" (p. 88). While this may be true in the case of the children's counting rhymes and other child-culture forms Stewart discusses, it is less so in literary nonsense. In a "choosing" rhyme, for instance, there is no tension between meaning and non-meaning; there is no pretense of meaning aside from the choosing series repetition. This is why many choosing rhymes, regardless of the language, include simple gibberish, such as the English "Eena, meena, mina, mo" or even the Bengali "Agdoom, bagdoom, ghnoradoom, shaje." Such an approach to nonsense, one which is more prevalent in those critics like Stewart and Lecercle whose interest in the genre is more structural, is certainly a part of the nonsense dynamic, yet the imaginative, imagistic mode of thought, paradoxical though it may be, is even more significant, especially for children.

Consciousness of lexical matters and form is partly laid aside when it comes to the other version of poetic reality in nonsense, the one Lear greatly admired in Tennyson's poetry, being written as if "from the images." Taking a step back from the minute dissection of the language and form of nonsense enables the reader to envision "a mythical landscape of the poet's own invention," which is "an environment of occasional miracles and rather more frequent catastrophes."[306] As Isabelle Jan states, "Here, instead of

---

[305]Compare Lear's use of language with Blake's, in poems like "A Cradle Song." According to Glen, "through ambiguities of syntax, verbal echoes and assonances--[Blake] portrays the mother's seemingly nonsensical, repetitious language shaping itself into a pattern which constitutes a quite different reality" (p. 135).
[306]Hark, "Eccentricity," pp. 113, 116.

sublimating reality or translating it into symbols, it is completely distorted, an altogether different world emerges from which all the familiar landmarks have been removed, a world of pure fantasy."[307] What was described as a world of words is now a "landscape" and an "environment." This type of reality is not merely verbal, but approaches the creation of what appears to be an alternate reality to which the words refer. In Iser's theory, the blanks in meaning lead the reader "to shade in the many outlines suggested by the given situations, so that these take on a reality of their own."[308] Lehmann recognizes this substantive world, commenting that Lear's "invented places, 'the Hills of the Chankly Bore' and 'the great Gromboolian plain', have resonance as profound as that of Shelley's 'wild Carmanian waste' and 'lone Chorasmian shore'. The result is that, if you succumb to the incantation, if you don't pull yourself up and examine the sense, you are almost ready to accept the poems in which they appear as examples of the great Romantic tradition."[309] Lehmann implies that these places have the imaginative depth required to "invent" places, something akin to what Lear saw Tennyson doing. This is the world that transcends words, going beyond syntactic and hermetic relation.

Likewise, nonsense is more than simply a metalinguistic process. If this were the dominant quality of literary nonsense, it would not be so engaging, especially for children who may be less aware of metalinguistic manipulation. Nonsense has the ability to create another reality which does not and cannot exist, but because the genre subtly implies a precedent of sense, a fictitious signified, it forces us to attempt to create this world. Of course, the pictures offered are often self-contradictory or impossible, but the memory and feeling remain. In nonsense serializing, for instance, the series which appears infinite is only a completely incongruous and potentially interminable list for the adult, who is more apt to place whatever seems impossible or inconsequential into the convenient category of

[307]Isabelle Jan, *On Children's Literature*, ed. Catherine Storr (London: Allen Lane, 1969, 1973), p. 56.
[308]Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), pp. 274-294 (p. 275).
[309]John Lehmann, *Edward Lear and his World* (Norwich: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 62. This is the opposite of Sewell's view, which sees nonsense as avoiding the "dream and disorder" which characterizes poetry, although at the end of her study she admits that nonsense can lead back, eventually, to this state.

nonsense where it need not cause any further trouble.[310] For the child who can take nothing for granted, the series is more: the events, or objects themselves in the series cannot be ignored. The Jumblies' booty, for instance, of an owl, a cart, some rice, a tart, some "silvery Bees," a pig, some "green Jack-daws," etc., is not a list about the infinitude of listing, but a list of objects, increasingly nonsensical, yet still objects--ones of which we have to make something, or at least ones which, by their collective presence, necessitate an attempt to find a logical connection.

Of words, yet beyond them, Lear's world is a mythical reality attainable through imaginative creation. Its components, contributing to both the "word" side and "world" side of nonsense reality, are its scenarios, structure, language, and devices. The places are strange and mythical, as Lehmann notices, and the world of nonsense goes beyond semantics into a fantasy universe, which demonstrates its own inner consistency of place and inhabitants. It includes the famous "Gromboolian plain" and the "hills of the Chankly Bore," for example--regions that are mentioned throughout Lear's writing. Places like these are often described poetically, such as in the famous opening stanza of *The Dong with a Luminous Nose* (1877):

> When awful darkness and silence reign
> Over the great Gromboolian plain,
>   Through the long, long wintry nights;--
> When the angry breakers roar
> As they beat on the rocky shore;--
>   When Storm-clouds brood on the towering heights
> Of the Hills of the Chankly Bore:--   (p. 225)

Here is a real description of a fantasy world, going far beyond syntax, word relations, and nonsense devices. In moments like these, when nonsense words are used within poetry seemingly to describe real scenes, Lear approaches what he admired so much in Tennyson's writing.[311] Contrary to Lecercle's claim that nonsense "does not construct characters, but rather presents eccentricities, more often than not quirks of language" (p.

---

[310]See Richard A. Hilbert, "Approaching Reason's Edge: 'Nonsense' as the Final Solution to the Problem of Meaning," *Sociological Inquiry* , 47.1 (1977), 25-31, for an experiment in which adults classified as "nonsense" certain logical connections which seemed impossible.

[311]Tigges, p. 149, claims that Lear's parody of contemporary travel journals, *Four Little Children*, rises above parody and creates its own reality.

71), these places are inhabited by an equally consistent set of beings which recurs throughout the poems, including the Jumblies, the Dong, the Quangle-Wangle-Quee, and the Pobble who has no toes. These are not merely "eccentricities," or even less "quirks of language": they seem flesh-and-blood characters. A review of one of Lear's books in *The Athenaeum*, 18 November, 1876, recognizes the perception of "reality" behind such characters:

> There are men and women who have heard of the Quangle Wangle Quee; but few of us have a notion of the hat of that remarkable creature, of which, as yet, no living specimen has been brought to Europe. Mr. Lear's information respecting this hat, and his further studies of the habits of the beast, will therefore be welcome to drawing-room naturalists.[312]

This reviewer humorously demonstrates the "reality" which the words seem to describe. Or as Nock puts it, "these dream-like, uncertain, undefined creatures...have still such definite personalities that their fates are of considerable importance to the sympathetic reader."[313] The events of different poems also relate to each other, as anyone who is curious where the Jumblies went on their journey need only refer to *The Dong* to learn of adventures not mentioned in *The Jumblies*. Even some of the nonsense words like "scroobious" and "runcible" are repeated in a way that implies some kind of meaning, even though the words are never defined. The "rules" of nonsense, the mirroring, imprecision, infinity, simultaneity, puns, portmanteau words, and arbitrariness, all contribute to the general logical integrity of the nonsense world, even though these devices themselves usually only reinforce the lack of conventional sense.[314] The nonsense world is made consistent by its geography, characters and events, language, and devices of nonsense; it comprises, yet is more than, the words describing it.

But if the world of nonsense were completely uniform, with its images established, and conventional syntactic, morphological, and phonetic relations, it would cease to be nonsense. These attributes provide the frame which upholds the nonsense reality. But

---

[312]Anonymous review of *Laughable Lyrics, A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems, Songs, Botany, Music, Etc.*, in *The Athenaeum*, no. 2560 (18 November, 1876), 664.

[313]Nock, p. 78.

[314]These are Tigges' classifications of the devices of nonsense. For a full description, see Tigges, pp. 56-73.

what creates the nonsense is the semantic chaos, coupled with attributes of "sense," which appears nonsensical. It is helpful to see nonsense, as Sewell does, as a game, which offers certain pieces to be played with. These "pieces" are the consistent, definite parts, but what we do with them, and what we make of the semantic inconsistencies, is an individual, creative act of the imagination. Hans-Georg Gadamer describes play as movement for the sake of itself, an excess of words "striving to express itself."[315] He asserts that a text "issues a challenge which expects to be met. It requires an answer--an answer that can only be given by someone who accepted the challenge. And that answer must be his own, and given actively. The participant belongs to the play."[316] Nonsense texts, which borrow the Romantic proclivity towards the indefinite, encourage this kind of imaginative play. As Nock has observed in Lear's *The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò*, "There is a vagueness in Lear's poems which entrances and leads on the reader, which induces the reader to call up in his own mind the details of the landscape only suggested" (p. 80). But nonsense is more than a "vagueness"--it is a deliberate assertion of paradoxical meaning.

To achieve the combination of contrary images characteristic of a "divine" imagination, the play of nonsense must be careful always to keep its components in balance. Wolfgang Iser also sees the interaction between text and reader as a delicately balanced play: "A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative. In this process of creativity, the text may either not go far enough, or may go too far, so we may say that boredom and overstrain form the boundaries beyond which the reader will leave the field of play."[317] Lear is careful not to make his work too simple and sensical, yet never lets the nonsense become too chaotic or overwhelmingly meaningless, which could cause "overstrain" in the reader's understanding. In *The Jumblies*, for instance, Lear lists the items bought by the crew:

---

[315]Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 1977, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), pp. 1-53 (p. 23). Though nonsense perhaps has no ultimate "purpose," it does intentionally create this alternate reality. However, because of its indefinite nature, it can be considered as "play" in Gadamer's and Sewell's sense.
[316]Gadamer, p. 26.
[317]Iser, "The Reading Process," p. 275.

> And they bought an Owl, and a useful Cart,
> And a pound of Rice, and a Cranberry Tart,
>   And a hive of silvery Bees.
> And they bought a Pig, and some green Jack-daws,
> And a lovely Monkey with lollipop paws,
> And forty bottles of Ring-Bo-Ree,
>   And no end of Stilton Cheese.   (p. 73)

This series starts concretely and realistically, naming everyday objects, even down to "a useful Cart."[318] The series spirals away from reality into the fantastical with the monkey's "lollipop paws," and finally to the nonsensical, with an arbitrary, yet uselessly specific number of bottles of "Ring-Bo-Ree," an unknown substance. Yet rather than continuing the progression further into nonsense, Lear returns to the stolidly British "Stilton Cheese," a substance which could not be more familiar to the audience. Moving from nonsense to the solidly real, the play of nonsense returns the players to the known, keeping them engaged without boring or overstraining them. This is not to say that the meaning of the "Ring-Bo-Ree" has been found, or that the nonsense is solved or diluted in any way. The imagination still must work to create a meaning for this mysterious potion, but its activity is balanced with the comforting normalcy of the real. Such requirements of true nonsense have been recognized practically since it was written, as can be seen in the article/review of Lear's *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871), "The Science of Nonsense," from the 1870 *Spectator*: "Nonsense is exactly this,--a gay rebellion against sense. But there is no relief to the mind unless there be enough sense in the nonsense to make the nonsense visible...."[319] The next chapter discusses in more detail the intimate relationship between sense and nonsense.

In "The Science of Nonsense," the writer tries to explain the workings of nonsense by its reception by children. He claims that a child will laugh at the gap in meaning of a nonsense word, but that he or she *should not*, as this kind of nonsense is "a trifle nearer to the grave talk of an idiot asylum, than to the nonsense of sane people" (pp. 1505-6). But the child laughs because "there is something in a child's mind which exactly corresponds to

---

[318]The "useful cart" is reminiscent of Edgeworth's "substantial cart" (p. 2) the only toy, she claims, suitable for a child, though there is probably no direct connection (from *Essays on Practical Education*).
[319]"The Science of Nonsense," *The Spectator* (17 December, 1870), 1505-06 (p. 1505).

the sensitiveness of the soles of its feet or the armpits to gentle tickling" (p. 1506). This writer gives no credit to the child's cognitive power or imagination. It seems the animalistic reflexivity of Locke's child construct still exists.

More recent opinion, however, observes that the nonsense child construct has an active imagination which rises to the challenge of nonsense. Sewell claims that in the play of nonsense "The mind is seemingly partly the player and partly its own plaything, not alternately but simultaneously, in a mutual interchange" (p. 187). The nonsense child is able to combine contrary ideas together imaginatively, as Keats wrote, "without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."[320] The assumption in nonsense is that the child has a type of imagination that, instead of trying to make "sense" like an adult, will accept and create a new world from combining the contradictory materials it is given. Lear notes this poetic faculty in a letter to John Gould, 28 August, 1841: "I forgot the celebrated Chestnut trees...but these were rather disappointing--being I believe a groupe [sic] of trees which the poetical mind of the guide chooses to think a single stem."[321] The poetic faculty of imaginative combination is what allows a child to combine a meaningless word (to the child), and the same word, put through the "play" process of the imagination, with an individual, original meaning. As Lecercle states, nonsense "does not seek to limit the text's meaning to one single interpretation--on the contrary, its dissolution of sense multiplies meaning. This is because nonsense text requires to be read on two levels at once--two incompatible levels."[322] Nonsense assumes that this is within the child's ability.

The child reading nonsense is given some known materials (structure and meaningful words and images) and some unknown materials (undefined words, and unclear semantic relationships) out of which, through the "play" thereby ensuing, he or she receives and creates, inventing a new world in the process. From the clues and more

---

[320]To George and Tom Keats, 21, 27(?) December, 1817. Keats's *Letters*, I, 193. Negative capability is quite interesting in relation to nonsense but is not especially tied to childhood by Keats. Keats himself was instinctively endowed with a "nonsense-like" combinative ability, as he wrote in a letter to Fanny Brawne in February, 1820, describing spilled jelly on a book: "I have lick'd it but it remains very purple [Keats wrote "purplue," but Rollins edits this out, adding it in the note only]--I did not know whether to say purple or blue, so in the mixture for a colour made up of those two..." (p. 262). See also Keats's "nonsense" letters to his sister, letters which have occasionally been put in nonsense anthologies.

[321]*ELSL*, p. 59.

[322]Lecercle, p. 20.

definite components of nonsense, the child evokes a private, imaginative image of, for example, what the "tumultuous tops of the transitory Titmice" are, in the above passage from *Four Little Children*. Lear has placed them in the landscape, upon mountains, with sound echoing off the water through them, but by leaving them undefined, he necessitates the play of the imagination to take over and form the final images by combination of the familiar and the unknown. By combining unlike words or ideas, the child construct is expected to continue the process of creating the "world" side of the text. In the passage from *Four Little Children*, "while all nature cheerfully responded to the cerulæan and conspicuous circumstances," the child would understand "nature cheerfully responded," but is then confronted by alliterative, emotive words apparently deprived of referential meaning. The child must combine the known and the unknown, difficult words, to create what *happens* to nature here. An adult, who knows the meanings of the unusual words, would try to make "sense" of them, which cannot be done. The adult finds humour in the discovered incongruities, but will not, unless having more of a childlike mind (in a positive sense), combine all incompatibles into another world, the individual fantasy reality beyond the linguistics. As Sewell writes, "to play, no matter at what, is to play at being God" (p. 187). Similarly, the "nonsense child," whose mind is far more than the sole of a foot or an underarm, possesses an imagination akin to divine creative power.

We must keep in mind that the child construct is in no way a real child, or even a grouping of the expected reactions of any particular real child; rather, it is a wholly artificial idea born of the text and the historical context. This nonsense child emerges partly from what Iser, albeit in the context of narrative, calls "blanks" in the text. In literary nonsense, these blanks are the semantic and logical gaps whose meanings are left empty or incomplete, such as in the "tumultuous tops of the transitory Titmice" above. Chapter 7 goes into more detail as to the workings of Iser's theory in the context of nonsense, but here we should only notice that the implied reader is assumed to be able to fill the blanks in nonsense, however impossible that may appear. The combination of contrary elements is the divine imagination at work, which theoretically creates a new world. In reference to a narrative form which clashes internally, not unlike nonsense, Iser states

> One can...imagine a case in which the forms are deliberately made to clash with one another. In this case there will be a radical change in the intention underlying the conception of the novel, for the clash of forms must destroy one of the prime intentions of the realistic novel: the illusion of reality. Instead of evoking a manifold picture of reality, this clash of forms will create a semantic reality of its own, which can be tackled by the reader only through interpretation.[323]

Likewise, in literary nonsense, a genre rife with clashes of form and meaning, the "illusion of reality" is destroyed in favour of a new, nonsense reality, a paradoxical reality which is implied but cannot exist. The nonsense child's imagination, the impossibly combinative faculty arising from the paradoxical gaps which create this reality, is the source of this reality--where it ostensibly begins.

§ § §

The imagination is one of the most important and divisive issues in child theory. All theorists recognize in their child constructs the tendency to exercise imagination, but before the Romantics, this faculty was often humoured at best and absolutely condemned in the most extreme cases. If we return to Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, we notice the roots of such a deprecatory image of the child's imagination. Locke is tolerant of childish fancy, but this fancy is nothing like the exalted Romantic imagination; it is the predecessor to the activities of a child's mind likened to the "sensitiveness of the soles of its feet or the armpits to gentle tickling." Childhood and its creations are simple folly, without any value. The child's fancies emerge from a mind which is "narrow, and weak, and usually susceptible but of one Thought at once."[324] Thus, Locke could not conceive of a child's combining or holding two contrary ideas simultaneously, a concept so vital to nonsense. Imagination is dangerous and can fill children's heads with frightening stories of *"Raw-Head and Bloody Bones"* which will make them "afraid of their Shadows and Darkness all their Lives after."[325] The underdeveloped imagination of Locke's child construct could not manage the difficulties of nonsense.

---

[323]Wolfgang Iser, "Generic Control," p. 80.
[324]Locke, p. 221.
[325]Ibid, p. 196.

Rousseau continued Locke's tradition of discouraging the child's imagination, further distancing Émile from the Romantic and nonsense child. Émile is perhaps the most resistant to creating imaginative worlds, with the utilitarian child coming close behind. Émile's imaginative faculty has been strictly discouraged since birth. Rousseau suggests,

> if instead of taking your scholar far afield... in remote centuries, in the ends of the earth, and in the very heavens themselves, you try to keep him to himself, to his own concerns, you will then find him able to perceive, to remember, and even to reason. (p. 82)

Because Émile's imagination is undeveloped, Lear's words and ideas would only seem like pure "non-sense"--unrelated, undefined, and therefore unimportant. Without imagination to manipulate the components of nonsense, the genre disintegrates. Maria and Richard Edgeworth do promote the "innocent" cultivation of the imagination but claim the faculty should be discouraged.[326] It is better to read the "history of realities"[327] than imaginative material, which induces "reverie," or "castle-building." This tendency is extremely dangerous, as "Inventive castle-builders are rather nearer the state of insanity than of reverie; they reason well upon false principles; their airy fabrics are often both in good taste and in good proportion; nothing is wanting to them but a foundation."[328] Such is not a bad description of what nonsense does: the "false principles" are the different, closed rules of the nonsense world, which are self-referentially in "proportion," and they indeed lack a conventional foundation. The Edgeworths do not consider that the imagination may itself constitute a foundation. Nor is the utilitarian child receptive to the unusual language of nonsense. The proper language for a child is closest to a "philosophical" language with exact definitions, because "Children, who have not the habit of listening to words without understanding them, yawn and writhe with manifest symptoms of disgust whenever they are compelled to hear sounds which convey no ideas to their minds."[329] Nonsense, which is full of nonsense words and misappropriations, is entirely opposed to this idea of

---

[326]Edgeworth approved highly of Mrs. Barbauld's writing for children. See preface of Maria Edgeworth, *Moral Tales*, volume 1, *The Longford Edition: Tales and Novels* (London: Routledge, 1893), I, iv. and *Essays on Practical Education*, pp. 406, 410.

[328]Edgeworth, I, 434.

[328]Edgeworth, II, 324.

[329]Edgeworth, I, 97.

perspicuous language. While Émile has no use for his imagination, the utilitarian child's meagre allowance of it, coupled with an intrinsic dislike of so much of the essence of nonsense, leaves both child constructs without the ability to enter wholeheartedly into the nonsense world.[330]

The Lambs, who could not entirely escape the past deprecatory views of childhood imagination, mainly condemn the active imagination, but at least it is recognized and produces some slight benefit. It resembles the type of imagination which nonsense requires--powerful, active, and combinative. *Mrs. Leicester's School* demonstrates this imagination in most every story, as the imaginative child grows up and out of this harmful tendency. In Charles's "The Witch Aunt," he portrays Maria Howe, the narrator, as demonstrating in her youth a potent imagination. When she reads Glanvile's book on witches, she admits

> Some words I could make out, some I could not; but I made out enough
> to fill my little head with vanity, and I used to think I was so courageous I
> could be burnt too, and I would put my hands upon the flames which
> were pictured in the pretty pictures which the book had, and feel them;
> but, you know, ladies, there is a great difference between the flames in a
> picture, and real fire, and I am now ashamed of the conceit which I had of
> my own courage... (p. 370)

Maria cannot understand all the words, but she nevertheless gleans from the book enough to stimulate her imagination to "feel" the fire in the pictures. She resembles the previous childhood theories in not being receptive to new words and novelty, but her powerful imaginative response is Romantic. After reading this book she fancies her slightly unusual aunt a witch and becomes confused upon seeing her in daylight: "a confusion was in my head, *who* it was I had seen that night:--it was my aunt, and it was not my aunt:--it was that good creature who loved me above all the world....Again, it was a witch,--a creature hateful to God and man..." (p. 374). Here, the child has the combinatorial powers also needed to appreciate nonsense--the ability to combine simultaneously two contrary images or ideas. She sees her aunt as the relative who loves her and also an evil witch who could

---

[330]Godwin's view of imagination and its role ameliorated drastically as he grew older and became better acquainted with Coleridge. See William St Clair, "William Godwin as Children's Bookseller" in *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, eds. Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 169-70.

destroy her. Of course, the subsequent denunciation of these imaginative responses only shows that, though this faculty is recognized and elevated to a degree much higher than previous writers, it is still not held in as high esteem as it is in Blake or Wordsworth. The nature of the imagination is different here, though it outwardly resembles the more progressive Romantic view. Lamb recognizes the characteristics of imagination, but attributes it to the lower level of childhood, that which is below the adult level--the image more common with the previous writers. In "First Going to Church," also by Charles, the girl who imagines church bells were angels singing, at the time of telling the story says, "But I never can hear the sweet noise of bells, that I don't think of the angels singing, and what poor but pretty thoughts I had of angels in my uninstructed solitude." (p. 383-4). Such is an illustration of Lamb's sentimental, nostalgic view of children: the child's imagination is a powerful deceiver and should be discouraged, but out of the evil comes some good, at which the adult can look back in an amused state of condescension.[331]

Charles Lamb's works about children rather than for children often reflected this same sentimental, angelic view of children which became increasingly popular as the nineteenth century progressed. The essay "The Child Angel; A Dream" in *The Last Essays of Elia* (1833) shows just such a child, a half-human, half-angel babe deposited for heaven's safe-keeping. Because the child is only half-angelic, it "was to know weakness, and reliance, and the shadow of human imbecility; and it went with a lame gait" (p. 278). Heaven is also shown to be a place which nurtures the child-like and excludes the adult. The child, Ge-Urania, must forever remain a child, because "by reason that Mature Humanity is too gross to breathe the air of that super-subtile region, its portion was, and is, to be a child for ever" (p. 278). Child-like nature, in direct opposition to the more "gross" adult "fallen" state, is allowed access to heaven and is akin to divinity. But going further than the typical early-Wordsworthian linkage of the child and the man, Lamb's dream-child is a predecessor to some of the sentimentalized Victorian child constructs. Like Ruskin's Gluck at the end of *The King of the Golden River* (1841), the child is

---

[331] See Richardson (p. 23) for more about the Lambs' "sentimentalized" view of children.

trapped in perpetual childhood. Like the lisping, sometimes lame, angelic children in Mrs. Molesworth's *This and That* (1899), the child is enfeebled sentimentally.

A Romantic child's reaction is derived from a different source from that exhibited in the Lambs' writing. Blake and Wordsworth portrayed a child that could participate in what Edgeworth would label a "reverie," but what they would dub a visionary trance. This trance is not the immature, almost useless fancy attributed to children by the pre-Romantic theories, but a creative moment, resembling divine creativity. As we have seen, the Romantic child is closer to divinity, the repercussions of which are felt most strongly in the concept of the imagination. This divinity, and the visions which accompany it, is, Blake saw, particularly strong in children. From his Platonic leanings, Blake believed in *anamnesis*, the idea that we are born into the world already stocked with knowledge from the realm of the ideal, or God. He writes, "Man Brings All that he has or can have Into the World with him. Man is Born like a Garden ready Planted and Sown."[332] Richardson remarks that for Blake, "children are natural visionaries" (p. 21). Their inward vision is the god within humanity, but for Blake this is a complex issue. Because Blake's idea of divinity is inextricably linked to innocence, imagination, and most importantly, a refutation of conventional, i.e. Enlightenment, modes of "sense," the consideration of Blake's role in nonsense will be addressed in Chapter 7.

A Platonic interpretation of childhood and *anamnesis* are also the basis of some of Coleridge's writings, though his opinion of the child would fluctuate dramatically. In his "Sonnet: Composed on a Journey Homeward; The Author Having Received Intelligence of the Birth of a Son, Sept. 20, 1796" Coleridge gives an account of a "strange fancy," in which "some have said / We liv'd, ere yet this robe of flesh we wore" (ll. 5-6). In a notebook entry of 1804, he writes, "To deduce instincts from obscure recollections of a pre-existing State--I have often thought of it..."[333] It is difficult to know whether such ideas came originally from Wordsworth or Coleridge, but Coleridge was certainly not as

[332]In Blake's annotations to Reynolds' *Works*, (471A). Qtd. in David Newsome, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought* (London: John Murray, 1974), p. 34.
[333]*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 2 volumes(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), II, 2332.

strong a believer in them, and his poetry makes slightly more modest claims for the child. Indeed, in *BiographiaLiteraria* (1817) he expresses his dismay at the elevated image of the child presented by Wordsworth. Coleridge quotes a few lines from the *Ode* ("There was a time...") and wonders,

> ...what does all this mean? In what sense is a child of that age a *philosopher*? In what sense does he *read* "the eternal deep?" In what sense is he declared to be *"for ever haunted* by the Supreme Being? or so inspired as to deserve the splendid titles of a *mighty prophet*, a *blessed seer*? By reflection? by knowledge? by conscious intuition? or by *any* form or modification of consciousness?" These would be tidings indeed; but such as would pre-suppose an immediate revelation to the inspired communicator, and require miracles to authenticate his inspiration. Children at this age give us no such information of themselves; and at what time were we dipt in the Lethe, which has produced such utter oblivion of a state so godlike? There are many of us that still possess some remembrances, more or less distinct, respecting themselves at six years old; pity that the worthless straws only should float, while treasures, compared with which all the mines of Golconda and Mexico were but straws, should be absorbed by some unknown gulf into some unknown abyss." (II, 138-9)

In this sketch, which denies so much of the "Romantic" view of the child, the child's unknowing and unexpressed proximity to God makes it on the same level as "a *bee*, or a *dog*, or a *field of corn*; or even to a ship, or to the wind and waves that propel it? The omnipresent Spirit works equally in *them*, as in the child; and the child is equally unconscious of it as they." (II, 140). While these statements might suggest a "nonsense" child construct, it is a negative image of the child's unknowability, not the elevated God-like inscrutability ascribed to the child by Wordsworth and Coleridge himself, in other writings. In taking these passages into account, we must remember that the *Biographia Literaria* was published twelve or more years after most of Coleridge's poetry on the child, and that, like Wordsworth, he changed his views considerably over the years. Most evidence in his poetry, letters, and other writings is contrary to this image of the child. The child he portrays, coloured by his son, the extraordinary Hartley, is given a visionary hue and appears to contradict his denouncement of Wordsworth in the *BiographiaLiteraria*. In the letter previously quoted to Thomas Poole of 14 October, 1803, he uses Wordsworth's own words to describe Hartley as "*exquisitely wild*'! An utter Visionary!"[334] Whether as

---

[334]Coleridge *Letters*, II, p. 1014.

the visionary "limber Elf" or the "Untaught, yet wise!"[335] infant, childhood for Coleridge was, though perhaps something less than Wordsworth's image, an ideal state from which much of the value and ability of adulthood is derived. Newsome explains that for Coleridge, "the particular genius of the child...was the combination of simplicity, innocence and sensibility which enabled it to penetrate to the essence of what it observed, without being able to explain the process in intellectual or rational terms" (p. 33).

Coleridge, in a similar manner to Blake, constructed a spiritual philosophy based on the imagination and its relation to the divine and humankind. The famous bipartite definition of the imagination in *BiographiaLiteraria* illustrates the inseparability of the imagination, God, and humanity: "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." (I, 304). The "secondary imagination," being an "echo of the former," is identical "in the *kind* of its agency." (I, 304). The distinction between the two, though an area of continuing critical debate, is not important here;[336] what is crucial is the acknowledgment that the "finite mind," or the human imagination, performs the same function as God, whose most important act was in the self-creating statement "I AM." Add this broad statement to Coleridge's observation that the child, whether in Plato's vision of *anamnesis* or not, was naturally endowed with a powerful imagination, and we must conclude that the child is much closer to God, not in the same way as a "bee," "dog," or "a field of corn," but as a divinely creative, vital being. The imagination is not something we gain through age, but something pre-established. Coveney remarks, "Only by the preservation of the child's wonder, joy, and spontaneous imagination could Man's moral nature develop into Reason and Imagination, the two sovereigns of his mature existence" (p. 88). Furthermore, Coleridge's description of the imagination, in a slightly earlier work, shows its similarity to the process of nonsense by which paradoxical meanings are endlessly juggled. In the Shakespeare Lecture on *Romeo and Juliet* (1811-12), Coleridge claims that the "nonsense" of Romeo's "O heavy lightness!

---

[335]"To an Infant" (1796).
[336]The Engell and Bate edition of *Biographia* includes an extensive list of sources related to this distinction. See note 4 on pp. 304-5.

serious vanity!" induces "a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other, when it is, as it were, hovering between two images. As soon as it is fixed on one image it becomes understanding; but while it is unfixed and wavering between them, attaching itself permanently to none, it is imagination."[337] From these two descriptions of the imagination, as a reflection of divine power and a holding of contrary images in the mind, we begin to see how closely in Coleridge's writing, the child, the imagination, the divine, and a mental activity almost identical to the function of nonsense, are related.

Wordsworth also saw the creative imagination as a divine faculty stemming from the child's proximity to divinity. This idea of the imagination is central to Wordsworth's childhood theory (in his earlier works), in which "Our childhood sits, / Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne / That hath more power than all the elements" (*The Prelude*, V, ll. 531-33). Childhood, then, is the "king" which sits above the adult world on the throne of imagination, the faculty which has "more power than the elements" in that it can create its own reality, strongly affected by, but ultimately transcending the limitations of exterior nature. In Gadamer and Sewell's "play" of nonsense, and in Iser's reader response theory, the child construct must receive and create simultaneously, forming the impossible sense-context in the gaps between sense and nonsense. Similarly, the Romantic child's divine imagination is both a receiver and creator. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes the child's simultaneous passive and active imagination:

> ...his mind,
> Even as an agent of the one great mind,
> Creates, creator and receiver both,
> Working but in alliance with the works
> Which it beholds.   (II, ll. 271-75)

Such a child as this would be wholly accepting of nonsense and would participate in the "game" which creates other realities. Indeed, the Romantic conception of imagination is an earthly reflection of the creative mind of God, and the child is closest to this state,

---

[337] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Romeo and Juliet," *Lectures on Shakespeare* in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Oxford: OUP, 1985), pp. 640-54 (p. 648).

exercising "the holy forms / Of young imagination."[338] Such elevated imagination is also

able, as is necessary in reading nonsense, to combine imaginatively the known and the

unknown, the unlike components, which cannot be, yet are combined. Just as Lamb's

Maria Howe was able to see her aunt as both a good person and an evil witch

simultaneously, so the Romantic child, even as an infant, is

> ...eager to combine
> In one appearance all the elements
> And parts of the same object, else detached
> And loth to coalesce.   (*The Prelude*, II, ll. 247-50)

The Norton editors of *The Prelude* note that this child performs the basic imaginative

function of forming parts into a whole, but Wordsworth is implying more, emphasizing

that the parts are not only "detached," but "loth to coalesce," which implies that the

imagination does not simply combine parts, but actually allows the combination of *unlike*

elements.[339] There is an implicit irrationality in such a faculty, an acceptance of

combinations which have no logical connection. It is this faculty which nonsense takes

advantage of. The mind receives wildly disjunct images which it attempts to combine in the

imagination's play.[340]

Wordsworth demonstrates this type of imagination in *The Prelude*, in the boat-

stealing "spot of time." After returning the stolen boat, the young Wordsworth is haunted

by his experience. Wordsworth attempts to remain within the child's mind which "worked

with a dim and undetermined sense" (I, ll. 121) to describe his reaction. The image which

---

[338]Wordsworth, "Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree," ll. 47-48.

[339]The components of the whole "same object" here may seem to an adult to be related, but to the child without experience, they are without the least relation.

[340] It is particularly telling that Wordsworth deleted this passage, along with ll. 244-254 and 267-8, from Book II of the 1805 *Prelude*. He added instead, in the 1850 version, passages stressing the purity and weakness of the infant, which show the infant, a "Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail" (1850, II, l. 253), pointing to a flower "Too weak to gather it" (1850, II, l. 246). Gone is the reference to the child's extraordinary combinative powers and much weakened is his conscious *active* role in nature. In the 1850 version, in what seems an attempt to illustrate the child's role, the child makes the flower more beautiful by his wanting it, yet far from the consciousness of not being "satisfied" and "largely" giving back to nature (in the 1805 version), the 1850 child gives back unwittingly. Rather than the rough and imaginative child who experiences "grief, / ...exultation, fear and joy" (1805, II, ll. 270-1, cut from 1850 version), the 1850 child is a weak blob of love, pity, and "inward tenderness" (added to 1850, II, l. 249). In a subtle, yet crucial change, the child's mind alters from an actual "agent of the one great mind" (1805, l. 272) to be "*like*" an agent of the one great Mind" (1850, l. 257, my italics). Relegating the child's proximity to divinity to the metaphorical rather than the real, Wordsworth withdraws much of the earlier child's power. By 1850, as his revisions to *The Prelude* indicate, Wordsworth's idea of the child had changed considerably into a sentimentalised, weak, but pure child.

disturbs the boy's thoughts for days afterwards is that of "huge and mighty forms that do not live / Like living men" (I, ll. 127-8). The rising mountain has combined with a vengeful and fully animate being, whether God, or nature, or the owner of the "elfin pinnace," and the result is a paradoxical combination created by his imagination in conjunction with the promptings of his experience in nature.[341] The unlike elements of animal and mineral are combined in an impossible image, yet the child is deeply moved by his creation.

Such mental agility also occurs in *Ode* ("There was a time...") in which the child creates images of his world through "work of his own hand":

> Some fragment from his dream of human life,
> Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
> A wedding or a festival,
> A mourning or a funeral;   (ll. 91-94)

The child, being new to the world and coming from divinity, can still see reality only as a dream. He has no prejudices, no preconceived, tainted notions of convention, and thus is in a state of wonder towards all, somewhat like the infant in Coleridge's "To an Infant," of whom, "Alike the Good, and the Ill offend thy sight, / And rouse the stormy sense of shrill Affright!" (ll. 9-10). Rather than being frightened, yet still motivated by the same lack of distinction, Wordsworth's child is all-accepting of the conventions of humanity, not attaching conventional taboos to the "wedding," and the "funeral;" he sees them from a higher viewpoint. This child, poised on a "new" world, is exceptionally accepting of perceptions which create this reality for him. His divine creativity seeks the materials out of which he can form his world, as in the infant in "Characteristics of a Child three Years Old," who chases "wantonly / The many-coloured images impressed / Upon the bosom of a placid lake" (ll. 19-21). The child chases a false image of reality, the one reflected in the still water, instead of running to the source of the image, which is reality. The child is delighted with this reflection and is more attracted to this other reality in play than the one around him. Such a "play" reality is nonsense, towards which the child will be drawn, as the child is drawn to the colourful images on the water. Though Wordsworth might have

---

[341]Jonathan Wordsworth, pp. 47-48.

condemned nonsense as "outrageous stimulation,"[342] he could not deny its appeal and acceptance by the type of child he envisions.

---

[342] 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 599.

Chapter Seven
Sense or Nonsense?

...uproar's your only musick...

-*Keats to George and Tom Keats; 13, 19 January, 1818*[343]

The qualities of the nonsense and the Romantic child constructs described in the preceding chapters define these constructs up to a point, but the source of these characteristics remains a mystery. What drives the child's individuality? Whence comes such wildness? What exactly elevates the child above the adult? These features signal the child's elevated status, even its divinity, but, whether from divinity or some other source, the inner workings of the child's mind, the underlying mechanics behind the surface characteristics, remain inscrutable. While the Romantic child's unknowable characteristics perhaps ultimately make sense, they only do so because the divine influence is simply beyond the comprehension of adults. The nonsense child does not have this questionable comfort. Part of my argument in this thesis is that, in the end, literary nonsense rests on the side of non-sense rather than sense. The issue is important, as, if the genre can be proven to be "non-sense," then the child-reader construct will naturally follow. Likewise, if the implied child-reader emerges as a nonsense construct, the text follows. The text and implied reader are thus linked in this self-defining circle. The basis for such a nonsense child and hence the genre, I argue, can be found in the Romantic conception of the child, albeit with some crucial differences. This chapter and the next argue that literary nonsense is indeed closer to non-sense and that the implied, nonsense reader construct is a close descendant of the Romantic child.

---

[343]*Letters*, I, 200.

It may seem an absurd question to ask whether literary nonsense makes "sense" or not, but critical debate often addresses this question in its struggle to find order and design. When Edward Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* first hit the market in 1846, it became popular instantly, coming to the attention of both children and adults, including that hardy species of adult, the literary critic. What followed in the next half-century was an unprecedented debate, sparked by Lear's work (and later, Carroll's), on the very nature of nonsense. As we have seen in the last few chapters, the nature of nonsense has repercussions for child theory, the genre being a direct sympathetic reflection of the child construct. The question thus expands into whether the "nonsense child" makes "sense," that is, whether the child and its world are rational and explainable, or not. Before we look further at nonsense- and sense-child constructs, we must examine the "sense" debate, which has continued into the twentieth century, increasing in sophistication, often splitting the critics into roughly two theoretical camps. On one side are the critics who claim that nonsense is non-sense--on the other, those critics who claim that nonsense, in the end, is really a kind of disguised sense.

Unfortunately, there are as many definitions of sense, nonsense, and literary nonsense as there are critics. As theoretical debate progresses on the meanings of sense and nonsense, they are increasingly seen as two sides of the same coin. Definitions of these terms build progressively upwards from the *OED* to the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Susan Stewart. The basis of the classification of literary nonsense is its relation to what we call "sense." The *OED* defines "sense" in fairly simple terms: "The meaning or signification of a word or phrase; also, any one of the different meanings of a word, or that which it bears in a particular collocation or context." A few other, related definitions are applicable: "The meaning of a passage or context," "The meaning of a speaker or writer; the substance, purport, or intention of what he says," "Discourse that has a satisfactory and intelligible meaning," and "What is wise or reasonable." Derived from the meaning of that which can be sensed, or verified physically by the senses, thereby presenting a self-evident truth, the meaning of sense becomes a somewhat less definite assumption of general "purport," or even common-sense. Yet, the definition assumes that words are definable.

In a broad study of sense and nonsense, Baker and Hacker assert the conditions of sense to be related to three fields of discourse: syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

> An adequate syntax for a language should, when supplemented by a lexicon specifying the meanings of its words... assign a definite meaning to every well-formed sentence. This semantic theory, when supplemented by a specification of the relevant context of utterance of a sentence-token, should determine exactly what a speaker has done in uttering this token sentence (*whether* he has made an assertion, issued an order, etc., and also *what* he has asserted, ordered, etc.).”[344]

Put simply, these three levels work together to create a coherent meaning for the communicative act, but meaning is also contextual. Hence, we find the stress of a critic such as Susan Stewart on the subjective and social side of making sense. For Stewart, “meaning,” the key concept in “sense,” “is manufactured and accomplished in light of the constraints of tradition, the stock of knowledge at hand. ‘Meaning’ itself is not prior to social interaction, but is achieved in the course of social interaction.”[345] This relativistic viewpoint, which makes “sense” a condition of culture and social interaction, is important for her discussion of nonsense. Sense, in whatever form, is another term for what she calls “common-sense,” which “is used to determine the parameters of everyday situations, including their functions and outcomes.... Common-sense activities are characterized by direction and hierarchy” (p. 47).

But saying that sense is that which makes sense, in an absolute or relativist sense, is simply tautological. What do we make, for instance, of the paradox of Epimenides the Cretan, who walked out of his cave and pronounced “All Cretans are liars”?[346] It is this problematic side of sense which Gilles Deleuze and Susan Stewart explain. Deleuze, in his dense *Logique du Sens* (1969), highlights the inextricable nature of sense and nonsense. Deleuze enumerates the paradoxes inherent in the concept of sense, paradoxes without which sense would not exist at all. He writes:

---

[344]G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Language, Sense and Nonsense: A Critical Investigation into Modern Theories of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 6.

[345]Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978,1979), p. 14. See also Fred Inglis, *The Promise of Happiness: Value and meaning in children's fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), pp. 27-8.

[346]Stewart, p. 30.

> The systematic characteristics of good sense are thus the following: it affirms a single direction; it determines this direction to go from the most to the least differentiated, from the singular to the regular, and from the remarkable to the ordinary; it orients the arrow of time from past to future, according to this determination; it assigns to the present a directing role in this orientation; it renders possible thereby the function of prevision; and it selects the sedentary type of distribution in which all of the preceding characteristics are brought together.[347]

The proposition of sense, which is that which joins actions and their objects, comprises denotation, or the relation of word to idea; manifestation, or the relation of the speaker and context; signification, or the relation to universal concepts; and a fourth, his entirely original category: sense, or *"the expressed of the proposition*, is an incorporeal, complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in the proposition" (p. 19). That is to say, sense does not exist as such, but only as the assumed foundation of a "sensical" proposition. Deleuze continues:

> Sense is like the sphere in which I am already established in order to enact possible denotations, and even to think their conditions. Sense is always presupposed as soon as *I* begin to speak; I would not be able to begin without this presupposition. In other words, I never state the sense of what I am saying. But on the other hand, I can always take the sense of what I say as the object of another proposition whose sense, in turn, I cannot state. I thus enter into the infinite regress of that which is presupposed. (p. 28)

Because the sense of any sensible proposition (or word) must exist before the event, and the proposition cannot create its *own* sense, the sense contributing to it and that which it potentially creates is infinite; it is always that which is before or after. To illustrate this, Deleuze uses the example of the White Knight's song in *Alice in Wonderland*, a song whose "name" always has another name designating that name, and so on.[348] Stewart also claims that nonsense exposes the paradoxical side of normal sensical operations, in metaphor for instance. She writes: "By abstraction, the metaphor presents another domain of meaning that is more than the sum of its components. Like fictions, metaphor involves the making of both "factual" and metacommunicative statements, yet it is neither" (p. 3-4).

---

[347]Deleuze, p. 76.
[348]Deleuze explores the other paradoxes of sense, such as "sterile division," neutrality, and the absurd, but there is no room in this thesis for these.

This paradox, and others inherent in discourse, will lead us on an increasingly more perilous path of sense. What began as a somewhat straightforward idea of sense as progressing from disorder to order has become fraught with paradox, and indeed, shades of nonsense.

The *OED* defines "nonsense" as "that which is not sense; spoken or written words which make no sense or convey absurd ideas; also, absurd or senseless action." Other definitions are, "Absurdity," "Unsubstantial or worthless stuff or things," and "A meaning that makes no sense." These definitions add to Johnson's definition (1755) of "unmeaning or ungrammatical language" or "Trifles; things of no importance."[349] The word, it seems, is susceptible only to negative definition. Stewart discusses one of the most significant reasons why a definition of nonsense is so difficult: "[The] nature of nonsense will always be contingent upon the nature of its corresponding common sense, and since such common sense is always emergent in social processes... the category "nonsense" will never have a stable content; and second, the forms of nonsense will always be determined by the generic system available to the given set of members" (p. 51). Nevertheless, within our own system of sense (whatever that is) we must make an attempt at definition.

By negation Stewart mentions the most definitive point of nonsense--that it stands in a direct, if inverse, relationship to sense. Like the two sides of a coin, one cannot exist without the other. Stewart writes, "Nonsense stands in contrast to the reasonable, positive, contextualized, and "natural" world of sense as the arbitrary, the random, the inconsequential, the merely cultural. While sense is sensory, tangible, real, nonsense is 'a game of vapours,' unrealizable, a temporary illusion" (p. 4). Deleuze also describes the intimate relationship between sense and nonsense: "nonsense is what is opposed to sense in a simple relation with it....[It] is that which has no sense, and that which, as such and as it enacts the donation of sense, is opposed to the absence of sense" (p. 71). Rather than being the absence of sense, nonsense *opposes* sense: opposition presupposes an opponent

---

[349]E.L. McAdam and George Milne, *Johnson's Dictionary: A Modern Selection* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963)

that must be present for the conflict to take place. Deleuze describes nonsense on its most basic level as the internal conflict in a nonsense word:

> It is a word that denotes exactly what it expresses and expresses what it denotes. It expresses its *denotatum* and designates its own sense. It says something, but at the same time says the sense of what it says: it says its own sense. It is therefore completely abnormal. We know that the normal law governing all names endowed with sense is precisely that their sense may be denoted only by another name... (p. 67)

To go back to "sense" for a moment, we remember that any "sensible" word is one which does not contain its own sense--the sense is always anterior. Nonsense, Deleuze argues, is exactly that which, against the rules of sense, defines its own sense. Or as Stewart puts it, it is "a rule that erases its own context" (p. 30). In fact, the nonsense word tries to become its own world, its own sense, but if nonsense designates its own sense, then it is designating a blank; without a history or context of sense behind it, there is no way to know what it is--it is only itself. We can guess its signification--in fact the reading process requires that we make some attempt at making sense--but it is an endeavour which can only result in arbitrariness. From a similar argument, Stewart claims that this nonsense-relationship to sense "bares the ideological nature of common sense, showing common sense's precarious situation--rooted in culture and not in nature" (p. 49). The word without sense exposes normal sense-relationships to be themselves arbitrary, subjective, and infinitely regressive. The "unsaid" in our discourse, the "given" in our cultural context, i.e., the sense, is thus challenged.[350] Of course, these definitions are more specific to nonsense *words*, as opposed to the many other methods of making nonsense, dealt with throughout this thesis, such as "nonsense" relationships with other texts, genres, social contexts, and logical and emotional incongruities. But the idea of an impossible, paradoxical, alternate "sense," one which can never exist yet is implied, is essential to creating all kinds of literary nonsense.

We can now turn back to the critical debate between the "sense" critics and "nonsense" critics. I take as an example a critical reading of a nonsense text within a nonsense

---

[350]Stewart, pp. 88-9.

text, that is, the King of Hearts's analysis of "Alice's Evidence," or the verses beginning "They told me you had been to her" found in the last chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* The White Rabbit reads aloud the verses assumed to have been written by the Knave of Hearts, who is accused, of course, of having stolen the tarts.

> They told me you had been to her,
> And mentioned me to him:
> She gave me a good character,
> But said I could not swim.
>
> He sent them word I had not gone
> (We know it to be true):
> If she should push the matter on,
> What would become of you?
>
> (pp. 94-5)

The verse continues in this manner, piling up subjectless pronouns to create a truly meaningless text. Or is it? Alice believes so (and by this time in the story her judgment is keen), but the King steps in to give it, as he thinks, a shrewder interpretation. He claims "If there's no meaning in it...that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn't try to find any" (p. 95). This seems to be the commonsensical conclusion, as attested by Alice's assent, and yet, if this were indeed so of nonsense texts there would be no need for explication or analysis, theoretical or otherwise. Nonsense would be locked in its own hermetic and hermeneutic portmanteau, if you will, but one for which the key has been lost or never made at all. Of course, the King is not a literary critic--he is looking for practical information regarding the case at hand, but his first reaction is troubling, at least from the perspective of the hungry critics who argue for the "sense" of nonsense.

The King reconsiders his opinion and continues his analysis: "'And yet I don't know,' he went on, spreading out the verses on his knee, and looking at them with one eye; 'I seem to see some meaning in them, after all'" (p. 95). The King then proceeds to read the characters and events of the present trial into the obscure verse: "'"--*said I could not swim--*" you ca'n't swim, can you?' he added, turning to the Knave." And, of course, the Knave cannot deny this, being made of cardboard. "'All right, so far,' said the King; and he went on muttering over the verses to himself: '*We know it to be true*'--that's the jury, of course'...." The King continues, fitting the verse to the present situation in an entirely spurious manner, but in a way that is hard to refute for him or Alice. This type of

criticism is more common with literary nonsense texts; critics use existing theories or milieus, whether linguistic, Freudian, or cultural/symbolic, to "interpret" and impose (ostensibly bring forward) meaning on (or from) the text. I do not criticize these methods in general, but regarding nonsense texts, I hope to show that they are sometimes as arbitrary as the methods of the King of Hearts and often go against a practical reading of the genre.[351] As Wim Tigges states, "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 or associations, because these lead to nothing" (p. 47).[352] The King's disparate readings—one being a denial of any meaning, and the other, an inappropriate overlay of meaning, represent the pitfalls of critical accounts of nonsense texts.

I suggest an alternative to these two schools of criticism: a model for a *theoretical* reading of nonsense as "non-sense." On the one hand, just because a text is non-sense rather than sense does not mean that it is unworthy of attention. As nearly all critics agree, there is a strong presence of sense inherent in the non-sense. On the other hand, a reading that discovers nonsense to be sensical necessarily distorts the text. Our pleasure comes, instead, from the "discomfiture of Sense by Nonsense," as Edward Strachey put it in 1888, "this bringing confusion into order by setting things upside down, bringing them into all sorts of unnatural, impossible, and absurd, but not painful or dangerous, combinations" (p. 335). This process, Strachey claims, is "a source of universal delight" (p. 335). As William Touponce argues, in his defense of pleasure as a theoretical basis for critical analysis, allegory, or symbolic interpretation

> implies that "true" meaning does not exist at the level of the text; we must search for it elsewhere by means of some specialized moral code of meaning belonging to adults....we must become wary of both ideological criticism, with its reductive interpretation ("unmasking") of literary works, and its opposite, the formalistic...criticism that pretends that literature is a "structure of words" rather than a complex expression of human desire and pleasure.
> (p. 176)

---

[351]See also Lisa S. Ede's "An Introduction to the Nonsense Literature of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll" in *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 47-60, which criticises psychological interpretation.
[352]This was originally published in "An Anatomy of Nonsense," *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 16.3 (1986), 162-185 (p. 166).

Interestingly, in 1846, the same year as Lear's first nonsense book, Edgar Allan Poe repudiated allegorical reading in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in *Godey's Lady's Book:*, "The deepest emotion aroused within us by the happiest allegory, *as* allegory, is a very, very imperfectly satisfied sense of the writer's ingenuity in overcoming a difficulty we should have preferred his not having attempted to overcome."[353] Poe claims that by focussing on the allegory, we lose the pleasure of the narrative. Nonsense, on the other hand, frees us from such tasks. Colley suggests that nonsense is pleasurable because it "removes the reader...from the anxiety of difference and lets him safely explore the gaps between events." (p. 298)[354] Appropriate theories, used with discretion, can avoid "allegorical" readings, "ideological criticism," or limited formalism, allowing nonsense its free rein. In this thesis, I use reader response theory similar to Wolfgang Iser's and the concepts of "sense" and "nonsense" already discussed to analyze the genre. But before I give my reading, I would like to step back and take into account some of the theoretical application on both sides of the sense-fence.

Some of Lear's first critics claimed that, rather than non-sense, a portion of Lear's work was in fact satirical, symbolic, or politically motivated. We can see this trend, albeit quite feeble, throughout the century. A review of 1872 claims that Lear's nonsense botany is "a good-humoured satire" and that some of the limericks are "quaint satire" on "things in general" which contain contemporary references.[355] In *The Saturday Review* of 24 March, 1888, the critic relates that some of the limericks had been seen as "code" marking Edward, thirteenth Earl of Derby as author and that some verses were "a mild species of genuine satire" (p. 361). The critic of *The Spectator* who, while claiming that Lear's nonsense is "incapable of being made to harbour any symbolical meaning"[356] still cannot resist a "sensical" interpretation of Lear's old man at a Station, which had been noted by others, as well. Some thought this limerick a critique of Gladstone's slapdash railway speeches.

---

[353]"Allegory" in *Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism 1840-1910*, eds. Eric Warner and Graham Hough, 2 volumes (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), I, 153-4.
[354]This pleasure in filling gaps is related to Iser's "gaps" in his reader response theory (described below).
[355]Anonymous review of *More Nonsense Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, &c.* in *The Athenaeum*, no. 2307 (13 January, 1872), 43.
[356]"Lear's Nonsense Books," *The Spectator*, no. 3090 (17 September, 1887), 1251-52 (p. 1251).

This writer asks demurely, "What bearing may we assume the foregoing couplet to have upon Mr. Lear's political views?" (p. 1252).

But the majority of critics, and Lear himself, came to the defense of the genre. In 1861, an anonymous reviewer for a new edition of Lear's first book writes "*A Book of Nonsense* ...is certainly what it claims to be....The book, we believe, is a reprint of a nursery favourite."[357] The anonymous critic believes that Lear only executed the illustrations, despite Lear's name being on the cover. The verses, taken to be pure "nonsense," are mostly disregarded, being mistaken for traditional nursery rhymes, which understandably upset Lear.[358] Sidney Colvin, in a review of Lear's *More Nonsense* (1872), writes "A stout, jovial book of *More Nonsense*, by Mr. Edward Lear, transcends criticism as usual."[359] Again, the perception of pure "non-sense" precludes serious attention to the work. It is appreciated for its diverting properties but not given any real consideration. We cannot blame the critics entirely, as they were simply supporting Lear's own words in his preface to *More Nonsense*. He denies the charges that "that the rhymes and pictures are by different persons; or that the whole have a symbolical meaning, &c., &c....in no portion of these Nonsense drawings have I ever allowed any caricature of private or public persons to appear, and throughout, more care than might be supposed has been given to make the subjects incapable of misinterpretation: 'Nonsense,' pure and absolute, having been my aim throughout."[360] Lear wrote to David Richard Morier, on 12 January, 1871, concerning his *Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets* (1871): "The critics are very silly to see politics in such bosh: not but that bosh requires a good deal of care, for it is a sine qua non in writing for children to keep what they have to read perfectly clear & bright, & incapable of any meaning but one of sheer nonsense."[361] But whether nonsense makes "sense" or not is not so much a question of authorial intent as it is

---

[357]"Christmas Books,"*The Saturday Review* (21 December, 1861), 646.

[358]He complained in a letter of 21 January 1862 "but I was disgusted at the Saturday Review Dec. 21. talking of the Nonsense verses being 'anonymous, & a reprint of old nursery rhymes,' tho' they gave 'Mr. Lear credit for a persistent absurdity.' I wish I could have all the credit due to me, small as that may be." (*LEL*, p. 219).

[359]Sidney Colvin, *The Academy*, 3 (15 January, 1872), 23-4 (p. 24).

[360]*More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc.* (London: R.J. Bush, 1872), p. iv.

[361]*ELSL*, p. 228. Lord Alfred Douglas was later to echo similar sentiments concerning the difficulty of writing good nonsense. See Douglas's *The Duke of Berwick* (London: Martin Secker, 1926), pp. 11-13.

a question of interpretation. Most reviewers, unable to separate authorial intent, questionable in itself, from interpretation, agreed with Lear's statement in his Preface, and as a result the genre was, for the most part, not taken seriously (although for children's literature, it received quite a lot of attention). Even through the first half of the twentieth century, critical opinion tended to be more like the King of Hearts's first reaction, to disregard that which is meaningless or to consider it unworthy of serious study. Edmund Wilson, writing a review for Gertrude Stein's *Useful Knowledge* in the 1929 *New Republic*, reveals both the disregard of "nonsense" literature of the time and a somewhat half-hearted attempt at appreciation. He writes: "To characterize something as nonsense is usually to throw it out of court as literature...Yet our ordinary use of the word "nonsense" in English, in connection with matters of literature, is based upon a complete misconception of the nature of literature, and of human expression itself."[362] Wilson argues that in literature, sense and nonsense are not easily distinguished because figurative language is itself a type of nonsense. Though he compares Carroll and Lear favourably with Coleridge and Poe, in the end his verdict on Stein's book reveals his opinion of nonsense: "I confess that I find most of it [Stein's book] very tiresome. But if I had merely said that it was a book of nonsense, and left it at that, I should have created a misleading impression" (p. 22). Even in an article which attempts to redefine "nonsense" literature (and his definition is almost all-encompassing), he betrays his, and society's, negative estimation of nonsense in general.

As the century progressed, however, critics began to take a closer look at Lear's work. While, for the most part, they maintained the idea of non-sense, they began to contemplate exactly what such an activity entailed. The first review which closely examined Lear's nonsense was in *The Spectator*, on 17 December, 1870, in an article entitled "The Science of Nonsense," the title alone indicating an interesting change in critical perception. The anonymous writer claims that Lear has a "scientific feeling for nonsense." He continues by establishing a definition of nonsense that has prevailed to this day:

---

[362] Edmund Wilson, "Nonsense," *The New Republic* (20 February, 1929), 21-22 (p. 21).

> In the "Book of Nonsense" Mr. Lear never went beyond the limits of true nonsense. His delightful rhymes and delightful pictures defied sense,--which is just what nonsense ought to do,--but the defiance was in itself at once acknowledgment and rebellion. What we want from Nonsense is exactly this,--a gay rebellion against sense. But there is no relief to the mind unless there be enough sense in the nonsense to make the nonsense visible...
>
> (p. 1505)

Of course, there is not a detailed investigation into the meanings of "sense" or "nonsense," but the critic recognizes the essential paradox of the genre, and hence how it differs from nursery rhyme. This critic also asserts that some of Lear's nonsense goes too far, bypassing sense completely and resembling "asylum talk" rather than nonsense proper. Six days later, another article in *The Spectator* would name this latter "inappropriate" and totally nonsensical nonsense as "verbal" nonsense, with the former, the mixture of sense and nonsense, called "public" nonsense.

It was not until Edward Strachey's lengthy article "Nonsense as a Fine Art," in the *Quarterly Review* (October, 1888) that nonsense was given significance beyond the nursery. Strachey begins his piece with "What is Sense? What is Nonsense?" and continues to try to redefine nonsense in a broad manner, including such "nonsense" writers as Aristotle, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, among other somewhat farfetched icons. Strachey claims that nonsense is the pinnacle of wit and humour and offers some detailed analysis of how it works, claiming that "Nonsense sets itself to discover and bring forward the incongruities of all things within and without us."[363] Strachey was before his time, and his analysis was attacked the next month in *The Spectator*. His introduction to a new edition of Lear's *Nonsense Songs and Stories* (1894), which contained much the same content as the earlier *Quarterly Review* article, was also attacked in *The Spectator*. The time was not yet ripe for his more serious consideration of nonsense, and it would be more than fifty years later that Elizabeth Sewell would continue from where he left off. The anonymous critic of the 1894 *Spectator* refutes almost every claim Strachey makes for nonsense, declaring that the genre must come from "innocent lightness of heart which

---

[363]Edward Strachey, "Nonsense as a Fine Art," *Quarterly Review*, 167 (October, 1888), 335-65 (p. 335). Such overly-broad definitions continue today, as in the entry for "nonsense" in J.A. Cuddon, ed., *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th edition, revised by C.E. Preston (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976, 1998), pp. 551-58.

pours out the purest Nonsense in a full stream, and without stirring the springs of shame and fear."[364] He claims for nonsense only an escapist value. We are back to the idea of nonsense as "non-sense" and unworthy of serious evaluation. This opinion of nonsense continued into the first half of the twentieth century most notably in the works of Davidson and Cammaerts, and in a slightly different direction, Chesterton and Huxley, who argue that nonsense resembles faith.[365] These interpretations revolve around the idea of the "non-sense" of nonsense, and consequently critical output of this period, though of increasingly better quality, was sparse.

The King of Hearts's latter reaction is closer to the modern take on nonsense. He proceeds to make sense out of what at first appeared non-sense by imposing a theoretical construct on the text. It was not until Elizabeth Sewell's *The Field of Nonsense* that critical opinion swayed in favour of the "sense" side. Bypassing biographical and religious accounts, she attempts a detailed linguistic analysis which puts the "game" of nonsense firmly on the side of order and "sense." If nonsense leaned too much towards non-sense, Sewell claims, it would slip into dream and poetry. She writes that "Poetry, so Coleridge said, is at its best when only imperfectly understood. There is nothing of this in Nonsense verse. Far from being ambiguous, shifting and dreamlike, it is concrete, clear and wholly comprehensible:--" (p. 23). This somewhat surprising statement in reference to nonsense comes from the idea, as Jacqueline Flescher writes, that in nonsense "Meaning is often purely physical or factual. It leaves no room for speculation or suggestion and therefore refers to nothing beyond itself."[366] Not only is the text "clear," but the illustrations contribute to the "sense." Sewell claims that the "pictures sterilize the mind's powers of invention and combination of images while seeming to nourish it, and by precision and

[364]"Sir Edward Strachey on Nonsense," *The Spectator*, no. 3463 (10 November, 1894), 638-39 (p. 639).
[365]See Ann Colley's *Edward Lear and the Critics* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), pp. 1-45, for a brief, but informative summary of Lear's critical reception. One of the more interesting schools of nonsense criticism sees nonsense as an act of faith having a direct correlation to religious faith. In addition to Davidson and Cammaerts, see also Deleuze and Nietzsche (who saw nonsense as a passionate skepticism): "Wenn Skepsis und Sehnsucht sich begatten, entsteht...Nonsense" (*Böse Weisheit*, Aph. 71. Quoted in Tigges, 260). This sort of "giving up" on the real world also has been interpreted as either a giving up in "despair," (Tigges), or as a cheerful renunciation of sense, looking towards the unknowable with good faith (Chesterton, Byrom, and Huxley).
[366]Jacqueline Flescher, "The language of nonsense in *Alice*," *Yale French Studies*, 43 (1969-70), 128-44 (p. 137).

detail they contribute towards detachment and definition of the elements of the Nonsense universe" (p.112). In this respect, Sewell argues on the same lines, for illustration at least, as Edward Strachey in his 1888 essay on nonsense: "In each creation some touch of art which escapes analysis makes the grotesquely impossible, a living, flesh-and-blood reality."[367] Sewell, in effect, started the modern critical trend in nonsense criticism.

Whether trusting Lear's own description of his writing or not, a reader of Lear's nonsense would be quite puzzled at Sewell's and Flescher's description of nonsense. Consider the old man of the Hague:
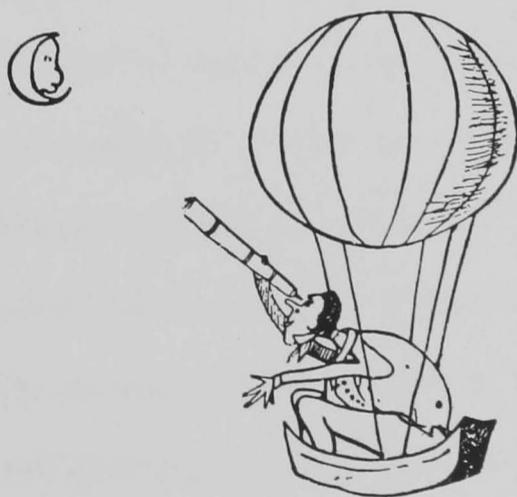
There was an old Man of the Hague,
Whose ideas were excessively vague;
He built a balloon, to examine the moon,
That deluded old Man of the Hague.　　　　　(p. 40)

---

[367][Edward Strachey], "Nonsense as a Fine Art," *Quarterly Review*, 167 (October, 1888), 335-65 (p. 360).

The strict limerick form enforces "order." Yet, even in this fairly mundane limerick, the "meaning" is far from what Sewell calls "concrete, clear and wholly comprehensible" (p. 23). If we understand the limerick to exist, as Flescher (and Sewell) would argue, on the "purely physical or factual" level, then the words and ideas here simply represent themselves: "[Meaning] leaves no room for speculation or suggestion and therefore refers to nothing beyond itself. It is in a sense self-contained. In spite of the necessity to *mean*, the power of meaning is reduced to a minimum" (p. 137). This is a barren nonsense. The Old Man of the Hague is deluded because he is deluded, and this, in a way, is why it could be called "wholly comprehensible." But this description of our processing of nonsense does not go deep enough into the heart of any word's or situation's sense. As Deleuze demonstrates, *all* words refer to a sense that is not in themselves, but nonsense words refer to an implied sense which does not exist. They can derive meaning only from themselves, and because, according to Deleuze, meanings can never be self-generated, they are non-sense. The implied "sense" in nonsense can never be deduced, can never be made sensical. Yet, instead of emptying nonsense of meaning, i.e. understanding any nonsense word or action to refer only to itself, the Deleuzean concept calls for multiple meanings, suggesting that, through the reading process, nonsense creates a multiplicity of paradoxical sense-contexts or meanings. Even the creation of a single paradoxical sense-context, or an idea of sense and its contrary, implies an endless, unsolvable dialogic puzzle, or non-sense.

On a more practical level, there is no way to explain why the "old Man's" ideas are vague, why he is "deluded," or even why the moon has a strange face in it. Neither does the illustration help. The picture of the old man of the Hague, though it illustrates fairly accurately the words, still does not elucidate the underlying tensions of semantics. The pictures in the limericks either highlight a picture/poem discrepancy, or, in the limericks where there is no such discrepancy, the underlying questions still go unanswered. The illustration has only succeeded in heightening the tension. Kirby Olson, in his study of Lear's art and drawings, notes this ability of the limerick illustration to exaggerate the nonsense. He writes, "The poems themselves are fraught with curious lacunae, which

sometimes point toward an odd incomprehensibility, which are pushed further into aporia by the drawings" (p. 358). Byrom also recognizes this quality of the illustrations and, referring to the old man of Deal's unexplained walking on his heels, states: "Everything has been rendered so purely a matter of indifference that only the mystery remains, and this is Lear's basic point. When the paradox is dissolved, we are left not with a grand answer, but with the continuing mystery of an unexplained triumph" (p. 132). Contrary to Sewell's assertion that the illustrations detract from the nonsense, concretizing what might have been out of control, it seems that the illustrations add an indispensable level of uncertainty and contradiction which *increase* the nonsense effect.

Coming from the same structural background as Sewell, Jean-Jacques Lecercle imposes a linguistic and a pragmatic (speech-act theory) reading upon the genre with mixed results. He sees nonsense as a paradoxical genre, one which combines strict adherence to rules with the apparent flouting of those same rules. His overall thesis "is that the genre is structured by the contradiction...between over-structuring and destructuring, subversion and support" (p. 3). In relation to sense, "A nonsense text...plays with the bounds of common sense in order to remain within view of them, even if it has crossed to the other side of the frontier; but it does not seek to limit the text's meaning to one single interpretation--on the contrary, its dissolution of sense multiplies meaning. This is because nonsense text requires to be read on two levels at once--two incompatible levels" (p. 20). Though Lecercle refers to "common sense" here, the idea rarely appears in his analysis, and his usual use of the word "sense" has more to do with the following of linguistic or pragmatic rules than "meaning." In his linguistic theory, these contradictions exist primarily amongst a hierarchy of linguistic levels which are continually in play against each other, language itself being the central concern of the genre (p. 68). These levels are phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics. In a strict linguistic/structural reading, "all the levels recognized by theory have the same importance" (p. 51). Lecercle proceeds to show that all the linguistic levels in nonsense, except semantics, are perfectly correct, in fact, hypercorrect. Of course, the semantic field is unknown, but this is only one-fourth of the linguistic equation.

Such a reading, Lecercle admits, is "banal," because "one of the structural levels is void: this may preserve the coherence of the reading, but it makes its completeness impossible. The lack of analysis on the semantic level will soon threaten to destabilise the coherent reading..." (pp. 22-3). Notwithstanding this flaw in the linguistic reading, Lecercle continues to appraise nonsense in this admittedly limited way. He observes a law of conservation in which "excess always counterbalances lack, and semantic incoherence is canceled by either semantic series, or syntactic hypercorrectness, or both" (p. 68). We are back to a linguistic equation which gives equal, or similar, values to all the levels of linguistics. Somehow, semantic "incoherence" is "canceled" by the existence of an abundance of other linguistic levels, which seems to go against his previous contention of the dominance of the semantic field. But following linguistic rules does not constitute "meaning" or "cancel" the conspicuously blank field of semantics. Nonsense texts are readable, just as other texts are readable, because they follow most linguistic conventions, but this does not mean they make "sense" in a practical appraisal.

Lecercle seems undecided as to the application of linguistic analysis, giving contradictory results. On one hand, he claims that literary nonsense has "crossed the frontier" into non-sense, yet on the other hand, he claims that "one aspect, the orderly or cosmic aspect, is always in the end revealed to be dominant, so that the risk of disorder is strictly limited" (p. 68). It seems that his linguistic reading sides ultimately with the latter evaluation, judging from his conclusion, that "Nonsense...has the same goals (but not the same methods) as school education: to teach children the rules of language... and more generally the rules of conduct" (p. 216). Furthermore, nonsense promotes the type of "rule-governed playing that acclimatizes the child to the rules of adult society through imitation and constraints" (p. 216).

Lecercle's assertion that nonsense is a conservative pedagogic genre disguised in an unconventional method comes from the hermeneutic paradox which recognizes that language cannot be used accurately to describe or criticize language--that such an effort leads us to a loop of meaning from which there is no escape, as there is nothing outside of language to describe language. Therefore, Lecercle would claim, because nonsense tries to

subvert language through strict adherence to three linguistic levels while deliberately overturning the fourth--and because it means not to mean--it ends up *supporting* the very system it ostensibly subverts, which, in the end, is its meaning. Nonsense becomes an ultra-conservative form only pretending rebellion; the upside-down genre is stood back on its feet. I would argue, however, that adherence to linguistic fields, no matter how strict, does not necessarily teach the rules of language. Why should we find it unusual that nonsense follows these three linguistic fields precisely? In this it is like most sensible texts. The subversion of the fourth, the semantic field, represents a gap to be filled but in no way supports or highlights the other three levels: they are indeed correct, but no more so than a Chemistry textbook, which, though it happens to follow correct syntax, phonetics, and morphology, does not in any way teach language. While perhaps any text written in correct English could be used to teach the language, this is usually not the text's purpose or effect. The dialectic between "subversion and support" is important in making nonsense readable but, I would argue, does not create the kind of "sense" implied by Lecercle's claim that nonsense is a covert pedagogical scheme of language and social behavior instruction.

Lecercle's second claim, that nonsense teaches "essential educational material--a belief in the necessity of rules: rules of grammar, of linguistic behavior, of politeness and manners" (220), I would again answer with a practical reading of the text. Several historical and cultural studies of the *Alice* books have shown that Alice is the antithesis of the girl heroine typically found in Victorian girl's books like Harriet Mozley's *The Fairy Bower* (1841).[368] Gillian Avery describes this image of the ideal Victorian girl: "She should be thoughtful and devoutly religious before anything else, devoted to her mother and to her brothers and sisters, obedient to her father, well educated, serious of purpose, submissive to whatever heaven might choose to send. Very little room seemed to be left for satisfying personal tastes and interests, and any independence of mind was stamped out."[369] Alice on the other hand, though thoughtful, well-educated, and serious of purpose, has no thought for her family, aside from her cats, and is strikingly independent-

---

[368]See Gerald P. Mulderig, "Alice and Wonderland: Subversive Elements in the World of Victorian Children's Fiction," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (1977), 320-9, (p. 322) and Rackin, p. 244.
[369]Avery, p. 75.

minded, which would have been considered selfish in a Victorian context. Furthermore, the traits she learns in Wonderland are assertiveness, confidence, and independence--qualities far from the "rules of adult society" for women of the period. However, because Alice *is* learning things, the claim that nonsense is pedagogic bears some truth, but what is being taught, which is itself unclear, seems quite opposite the norms of the period.[370]

Lear's nonsense, often a parodic version of pedagogical forms, seems entirely opposed to the "politeness and manners" of middle- and upper-class Victorian society. Lear himself constantly felt these oppressive restrictions, especially when he began living and working at Knowsley Hall. He found it stifling to mingle with the gentry, with their "uniform apathetic tone." He writes in a letter, "nothing I long for half so much as to giggle heartily and to hop on one leg down the great gallery--but I dare not."[371] Likewise, his nonsense promotes the defiance of societal rules. Most studies of Lear have noted that in the majority of limericks the eccentric individual is nearly always blissfully happy, even in the face of societal opposition.[372] Social conformity is usually the enemy: Lear's heroes, like the Nutcrackers and the Sugar-tongs, the Daddy Long-legs and the Fly, or the Jumblies, escape their restrictive cultural surroundings and usually seem the better off for it. When domesticity becomes unbearably oppressive and inescapable, as it does for Mr. Discobbolos, he simply fills a trench with "dynamite, gunpowder gench" and blows up his whole family, himself included. With this kind of activity condoned in nonsense, it is odd that Lecercle would claim that "it complements the usual institutions by providing material for home schooling--after all, that is what nursery rhymes and cautionary tales are meant to do" (p. 219). It seems that Lecercle has forgotten that nonsense, by its irreverence towards these texts, opposes them.

Other problems also arise with Lecercle's linguistic analysis (not to mention his pragmatic analysis), as it ignores vital components of nonsense which add to its "non-sensicality." Linguistic play is perhaps the largest part of literary nonsense, made most

[370]Stewart also disagrees with Lecercle, noting nonsense's questioning of reality and convention: "If nonsense has to do with learning, it has this status most likely as a pattern of incongruity, teaching the nature and uses of incongruity, and a set of procedures for making things incongruous... [It teaches a] set of procedures for manipulating, for erasing and reforming, contextual markers" (pp. 207-8).
[371]Noakes, p. 43.
[372]See Davidson, p. 196; Orwell, p. 182; Byrom, pp. 92-101, among many others.

famous by Lear's and Carroll's neologisms and portmanteaus like "scroobious" and "brillig," but there is more to nonsense than word-play. Lecercle neglects the all-important characteristic of Lear's nonsense, especially the limericks: the interaction with illustration. Lear's work marries poem and picture in an interactive relationship that is usually amusingly contradictory. The linguistic approach also ignores the logical incongruity, though Lecercle's speech-act analysis takes this more into account. Looking at nonsense as a purely linguistic phenomenon also has disadvantages in basic comprehension of the genre. He asserts that, in nonsense, "the semantic blanks are not meant to be visualized. They are meant to be playfully explored, or exploited, by our linguistic imagination, which is boundless." (p. 24). Anyone who has seen the pictures of Lear's "Runcible Bird" and "Scroobious Bird" might care to argue that our imaginations cannot be limited to linguistics, that in the "tumultuous tops of the transitory titmice" our minds explore beyond the words.

Here we find one of the weaknesses of both Lecercle's and Stewart's analyses of nonsense: for both critics, literary nonsense is a genre not about a fantasy world, characters, or stories; rather it is a genre about linguistics or discourse.[373] As the King of Hearts does, these and other critics have allowed theory to take over its subject, making the subject about the theory instead of the theory being used to describe the subject. Because the text conforms to Lecercle's theory, he declares, "It is by now clear that there is nothing arbitrary or incoherent in those texts--that they conform to a strategy" (p.111). The "strategy," if it can be called that, is his theory of nonsense creation, yet to claim that nonsense texts are neither arbitrary nor incoherent in any way is bizarre. Part of the problem is that these analyses focus on Carroll. Lear's nonsense is less technical, less aware of itself, and therefore more childlike. As "sophisticated" adults, we all too easily find the undercurrents, the flashes of linguistic insight which comprise nonsense, to be dominant, but we must never forget the intended audience and the child's reaction.

---

[373] See Stewart, p. 88; Lecercle, p. 71. This somewhat backward approach to the genre is also the cause of Lecercle's claim that the genre represents a conservative pedagogy.

The King of Hearts's major fault is that he construes the nonsense "letter" from faulty premises, i.e. the verse is a letter written by the Knave of Hearts. He attempts an interpretation: he looks for hidden meanings, and, as might be expected, he finds them. The result is ridiculous, though, in a devious way, hard to refute. A similar process has been practiced upon Lear's nonsense, in the form of symbolic-structuralist readings, notably in Paul Bouissac's two articles, "The Meaning of Nonsense (Structural Analysis of Clown Performances and Limericks)" (1982) and "Decoding Limericks: A Structuralist Approach" (1977). In the latter article, Bouissac begins his analyses of limericks with a few hypotheses: "nonsensical discourses" he claims, refer "to the codes which condition cultural meaning," are "a constellation of mythical reflections," and "seem to manipulate the rules concerning the culinary system of our society...through a translation of those rules into the sexual code...."[374] From these premises, he analyses several limericks, deriving meaning from "the semiotic operations" of the verse. He interprets the following limerick of Lear:

> There was a Young Person of Smyrna
> Whose grandmother threatened to burn her;
> But she seized on the cat
> And said, "Granny, burn that!
> You incongruous old woman of Smyrna." (p. 5)

This limerick's meaning is clear until the adjective in the final line, which may or may not make sense depending on how "incongruous" is defined. If taken to mean simply "unbecoming, unsuitable, inappropriate" (*OED*), the word is fairly clear. However, the first definition of the word, as "disagreeing in character or qualities; not corresponding" (*OED*), colors all the word's meanings, implying that there must be some other basis by which to judge any incongruent behavior. Taken in this sense, the word is nonsensical and is the basis of Bouissac's reading of the limerick as culturally symbolic "code" which will make sense of the final adjective by giving it a frame of reference. He claims that "to burn" can be understood as "the act of roasting or barbecueing [sic]" and that "therefore the operation denoted in the first two lines can represent the first step of an act of

---

[374]Paul Bouissac, "Decoding Limericks: A Structuralist Approach," *Semiotica*, 19 (1977), 1-12 (pp. 2-3).

anthropophagia" (p. 6). Because cannibalism is a cultural taboo, the act can been seen as "incongruous" or alien to the cultural system. He continues, observing that "'to burn' can also denotate a sexual content" and that therefore "the action can be interpreted as an overrating of kinship and be seen as 'female homosexual incest'" (p. 7). He also notes that the substitution of the cat is significant because the cat "traditionally stands for the female sexual organs" (p. 7). Once again, because this type of sexual behavior is taboo, the word "incongruous" makes sense. To summarize, the limerick is important because "it refers precisely to the link existing between feeding and breeding through the institution of culture" and that "a mate must above all be considered as non-edible protein" (p. 8).

It seems we have come a long way from the Young Person of Smyrna. The premises, the logic, and the theoretical basis are all suspect. Not only are the definitions for "burn" highly doubtful, but Bouissac's whole method stands the actual nonsense in the limerick on its head. In his analysis Bouissac questions a word whose meaning is clear, like "burn," while claiming that the usual "non-sense" part of the limerick is the essential piece of sense-making, but in a way contrary to the actual definition which might make it sensical. In the *OED*, "burn" has over a dozen meanings, none of which refer to the meanings Bouissac claims. "Burn" certainly has no immediate connection with "barbecuing," or with any food which we plan to eat, as burnt food is considered inedible. In an obsolete usage ending in the sixteenth century, the verb could have meant "to infect with sores; esp. with venereal disease," but this is not quite the second definition Bouissac claims.[375] The nonsense here is not derived from any equivocal meanings of this verb; we can probably assume from the situation that the grandmother has fire and punishment or torture in mind, not her appetite, sexual or otherwise. The non-sense of the limerick, if there is indeed any at all, comes from the word "incongruous." Even though the grandmother's actions are somewhat shocking, we have no basis on which to judge her congruity. It seems farfetched that the granddaughter would be referring to the congruity of the grandmother's actions to sexual or culinary norms. Like all good nonsense, the

---

[375] After checking two nineteenth- and three twentieth-century slang dictionaries, I could not find a sexual meaning for "burn."

word elicits the desire for meaning while refusing to satisfy it. Yet this vague, but suggestive word is Bouissac's primary piece of evidence, the anchor of meaning, in solving the sense equation in a direction far from the more obvious sense implications. Bouissac's interpretation, like the King of Hearts's, is difficult to refute once the premises are accepted. Literary nonsense certainly allows for various readings, but the key to its success is that it provokes a simultaneous multiplicity of contradictory interpretations.

Reader-response theory has also been applied to nonsense in ways which wrestle the genre into interpretive submission, in the analyses of Marlene Dolitsky and Thomas Dilworth. Dolitsky, in her book *Under the Tumtum Tree: From Nonsense to Sense*,[376] claims that nonsense gains meaning in context or experimental situation. Normal relations between word and world cannot be taken for granted, and so the world becomes strictly textual, its meaning found within. She assumes that meaning is a product of authorial intention, however obscured, and that we as readers must try to find it. Dolitsky writes, "While, like ordinary texts, nonsense texts presuppose the readers' ability to find its purpose, goals, and motives, readers must do so without the usual givens they are accustomed to."[377] Stating that nonsense has "purpose, goals, and motives" is a position which is difficult to defend. Dolitsky admits that the text alone will never admit a definite meaning; it ignores the rules which normally govern meaning, splitting signifier and signified. Thus, "each person, when presented with nonsense, must bring into play some strategy that will lead to a satisfactory interpretation" (p. 102). Here, Dolitsky approaches reader response theory, but the assumption that a "satisfactory interpretation" is necessarily one of sense, however it is achieved, is false. In fact, I would argue, using similar theory, that the essence of nonsense is that it can never achieve a "satisfactory interpretation," especially with an adult--that its meaning must remain in flux, and that our pleasure derives from such an impasse.

Thomas Dilworth, in his article "Society and the Self in the Limericks of Lear," takes reader-response theory to heart and comes up with yet another symbolic

---

[376]This study focuses on Carroll, but its approach to indeterminacy can easily be applied to Lear.
[377]Dolitsky, p. 9. Dolitsky's definition of nonsense, as the signifier without the signified, is quite a narrow one, and may be the cause of her extraordinary claim for "sense" in nonsense.

"interpretation" of Lear's nonsense. His interpretative premise is that, because the limericks are "social in subject" they rely on reader response. The reader identifies with both the individual represented in the limericks and "them," or societal forces. This dual allegiance of the reader as individual *and* society is what causes much of the reader's tension, and hence the tension within the nonsense. So far, there is no implication of sense, but Dilworth continues: "Like riddles, the limericks insist on interpretation by resisting it. They also require interpretation because, however dramatic they may seem, they are primarily revelatory."[378] The limericks become simply "riddles" to be solved, and it is only a small step to the dangerous ground of outright symbolic interpretation. Bouissac claims that because "the nonsensical elements are symbolically significant, the limerick provides no serious impediment to straightforward analysis" (p. 46). We shall see the consequences of this assumption.

Among the limericks Dilworth "solves," his account of Lear's "old man, who when little" shows the bizarre direction symbolic interpretation, in the name of reader response theory, can take.

There was an old man, who when little
Fell casually into a kettle;
But, growing too stout, He could never get out,
So he passed all his life in that kettle.   (p. 173)

---

[378]Thomas Dilworth, "Society and the Self in the Limericks of Lear," *Review of English Studies*, 45 (1994), 42-62 (p. 44).

Just as Bouissac does, Dilworth disregards the obvious: ignoring the limerick's assertion that the man has stayed in the kettle because he grew too fat, Dilworth looks for some other reason why he has remained there his whole life. The "clues" Dilworth finds satisfactorily answer his fabricated question: "See the man's gesture. Why does he regard and display the marvellously erect spout? In relation to his body the spout is phallic, but the spout is not a phallus. Where then is his phallus?" (p. 54). I would argue that this is not a constructive question to ask. His phallus, we can assume, is where most men's phalluses are--attached to them--and it is probably doing nothing very interesting. Dilworth, however, proposes that either the old man is "having intercourse with the kettle" or that he is using the spout as "a boastful disguise for an easily surmised physical inadequacy. Look again at his nose. If his phallus is proportionately unextended, he is hardly likely to be copulating with the kettle" (pp. 54-5). These are the only two options we are given; the limerick's "message" which arises out of a combination of the two is "the phallic and infantile...social valuation that bigger is better" (p. 55). Mixing the Freudian, the symbolic, and reader response, Dilworth has constructed two "solutions" to the fabricated riddle, and though he does not choose one over the other, they combine to produce a distinct "moral."[379] Dilworth seems guilty of faulty psychoanalysis, which, as Gilles Deleuze states, "has two ways of deceiving itself: by believing to have discovered identical materials, that one can inevitably find everywhere, or by believing to have discovered analogous forms which create false differences."[380] From the premise that there is a meaning to be found, Dilworth, like the King of Hearts, sets about finding it. Beginning with the reader response premise of identification with both the limerick's subject and "them," the interpretation becomes transformed into a fantasy at least as amusing as the limerick itself.

---

[379]See also Dilworth's article "Edward Lear's Suicide Limerick," *The Review of English Studies*, 46.184 (1995), 535-38, which offers an ingenius "solution" to Lear's "old man whose despair" limerick. While Dilworth's reading is quite interesting in its exploration of visual/verbal puns, it is also based on dubious psychoanalytic assumptions, such as the hare being "an exaggerated phallus" (p. 537). While all interpretations make nonsense texts richer, any conclusion drawn, any "answer" to the fabricated riddle, is reductive and does not faithfully represent the open-endedness necessary in literary nonsense. In this case, Dilworth, who does note seemingly-contradictory "messages" within the limerick, nevertheless reconciles them in his unique deduction of the "moral": "Killing yourself achieves nothing more decisive or permanent than masturbation" (p. 538).
[380]Deleuze, p. 92.

Because Dilworth sees the sensical as non-sense, he fails to recognize the non-sense. The limerick gives the reason the man could not leave the kettle, but the circumstances leading up to this condition are where we find paradoxical meanings. The nonsense is two-fold: first, we are informed that the young man fell "casually into a kettle," itself a nonsensical action. That a kettle could be big enough to fall into, yet small enough not to be able to get out later, and that anyone could fall in "casually," seems impossible. If we accept these circumstances, however, we are still left with a paradoxical situation. It appears from the syntax of the statement that the man wanted to leave the kettle, as he would never know if he could not leave without trying to do so. Growing stout, which takes considerable time, should not provide any real impediment to egress, but the limerick asserts that it prevents his leaving. We may ask why, then, he stayed in the kettle (which is what Dilworth does), but the limerick clearly states the answer--unfortunately, the answer is anything but clear. The reason and the situation are nonsense, to be taken for what they are, yet they remain entirely impossible. We thus find an example of Deleuzean nonsense, attempting to create its own sense, implying a paradoxical, impossible context. The limerick is nonsense.

§ § §

It is not the theory that is necessarily at fault. Literary theory is a tool which should help the text resonate; it should not be overlaid onto the text, in which case its results are somewhat predetermined, but should develop from a close examination of the text and its practical reception. To begin what I would hope is a more fair theory of nonsense, we must first clear away the old premises. If we wipe out the last fifty years of nonsense criticism, we wipe away (along with some fine analyses) the assumption that nonsense has a symbolic meaning which the author may or may not have intended. As Lecercle states, nonsense is "a text which is said, and certainly not meant, or only paradoxically so, as it means not to mean" (p. 124). We must also step back from structuralist and linguistic

evaluations which, though they have demonstrated the technical brilliance of nonsense in terms of playing with the linguistic field, are less relevant to the idea of sense.

Like most critics, I assume that the genre of nonsense operates primarily by transmitting contrary meanings. I use Wim Tigges's definition of nonsense as a genre in which "the seeming presence of one or more 'sensible' meanings is kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such a meaning" (p. 255). Furthermore, as Deleuze has shown, such contradiction erases the sensical "context" required for all statements or words. A key element in literary nonsense is its ability to imply an impossible context, a sense which never was nor could ever be, yet which is taken as a given. And with Sewell, I would furthermore claim that in the play of nonsense "The mind is seemingly partly the player and partly its own plaything, not alternately but simultaneously, in a mutual interchange" (p. 187). The reader of nonsense is given some known materials (structure and meaningful words and images) and some unknown materials (undefined words, unclear semantic relationships, and unclear logic) out of which, through the "play" thereby ensuing, he or she mentally attempts to fill the gaps between these fields. If these gaps could indeed be filled satisfactorily, then they would cease to be nonsense; the gaps are the embodiment of the missing context implied in Deleuze's theory of nonsense. To show how these two fields are brought together, I refer to Iser's theory of the implied reader.

While Sewell's concept of play explains why the reader participates in the game of nonsense, Iser's theory shows in detail the result of this play, which, in the case of nonsense, is non-sense. The particular effect of nonsense mentioned above, that of supplying imaginative links where the more pure nonsense words occur, is similar to the effect of what Iser calls the "blank" occurring in prose fiction. The blank is one of the three major methods by which the reader is brought into the dialectic of reading, the others being negation and negativity, which are not relevant here. "The blank," Iser writes, "designates a vacancy in the overall system of the text, the filling of which brings about an interaction of textual patterns."[381] In a work of fiction, the blank as Iser defines it is the "empty space between segments" (p. 197), which could include the physical or temporal space left

---

[381] Iser, *Act*, p. 182.

between segments of plot, character, and narrative perspective. It could also be "a deliberate omission of generic features that have been firmly established by the tradition of the genre" (p. 208). The function of these blanks is described by Aiden Chambers who finds two kinds of blank, or what he calls "gaps": the first is simply when information is left out, while the second, the one closer to Iser's, is one "that challenge[s] the reader to participate in making meaning of the book" (p. 264). Iser claims that these blanks "indicate that the different segments of the text *are* to be connected, even though the text does not say so. They are the unseen joints of the text...[which] trigger acts of ideation on the reader's part" (pp. 182-83).

A good example of this device in a fictional setting, although one not mentioned by Iser, occurs in *Alice in Wonderland*, at the moments when Alice has consumed something which changes her size. When Alice experiments with the caterpillar's mushroom, she accidentally makes herself far too small. She is barely able "to open her mouth; but she did it at last, and managed to swallow a morsel of the left-hand bit" (p. 42). The paragraph ends here, and between this and the next paragraph appears a series of asterisks, occupying three horizontal lines of text, in a simple alternating pattern. When the text resumes, Alice exclaims, "'Come, my head's free at last!'" which implies that the actual growing has been left out of the description. As this is meant to be a child's story, Carroll includes the asterisks as a guide to the child that something is happening; it is up to the child to imagine exactly the manner in which the growth occurs.[382] This is a somewhat exaggerated example of what Iser calls a blank, a moment in the text when the reader is halted, is given a task, and must use his or her imagination to compensate for the lack of information. The implied reader is one who is able to fill the gaps; if the reader is unable to perform the expected tasks, then the text fails in its designs.

Using the example we have already seen from *Four Little Children*, we find that Iser's theory of blanks helps explain exactly how the "play" of nonsense functions to create

---

[382]At some of these moments there is also an illustration (p. 13), another helpful device for the child to imagine the unusual contortions of Alice's body.

non-sense and why, consequently, literary nonsense is such an effective genre for children and adults.

> ...and on a signal being given all the Blue-Bottle-Flies began to buzz at once in a sumptuous and sonorous manner, the melodious and mucilaginous sounds echoing all over the waters, and resounding across the tumultuous tops of the transitory Titmice upon the intervening and verdant mountains... (p. 100)

As we have seen, the sensical (syntactic, phonetic, morphological, and at least some semantic coherence) and nonsensical (semantic confusion) elements become the pieces with which the play is performed, the distances between which are the "blanks." Each time the reader encounters nonsense words among the sensical ones, he or she is briefly halted and must bridge the gap to continue. As Iser states, "whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections--for filling in the gaps left by the text itself."[383] While Iser is concerned with narrative structure, the same idea holds true on a smaller scale, for individual words which, because of their equivocal meaning, represent blanks in the meaningful construction of a sentence. Susan Stewart observes this tendency in nonsense, claiming that "it is only by means of such blank spaces that what is interpreted is able to appear."[384] The result in either case is the imagination's attempt to create a meaning out of the given materials. It is the job of nonsense both to encourage such an attempt and to ensure the attempt is ultimately a failure.

Nonsense achieves its effects through the various devices we have seen described throughout this thesis, including misappropriation, neologism, portmanteau, and logical incongruity.[385] For example, the misappropriated word "mucilaginous" in the above example represents a semantic blank, as its dictionary definition does not make sense here. It seems to follow phonetic rules, and also seems to fulfil the role of adjective. Additionally, the word is placed in a fairly sensible context which implies some meaning,

---

[383]Iser, "Reading Process," p. 280.
[384]Stewart, p. 86.
[385]My intention here, rather than to give yet another exhaustive list of technical nonsense devices, is to show the inherent non-sense of the genre. There are many comprehensive, technical analyses of the mechanics of nonsense, including Sewell's *The Field of Nonsense*, Stewart's *Nonsense*, Byrom's *Nonsense andWonder*, Tigges's *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, and Lecercle's *Philosophy of Nonsense*.

and the word's evocative sound comes into play, adding another clue as to meaning. However, Lear's use of misappropriation is unique in that, usually, it is neither malapropism nor pun. Contrary to Carroll's malapropisms such as "Reeling and Writhing" for "reading and writing," Lear's misappropriation usually has little or no relation to any sensible word in context.[386] The definition of "mucilaginous" does not fit this context, nor does it resemble an appropriate word; the word represents a semantic blank, yet the mind tries to bridge this gap by forming some image, an image which is negated soon after its inception. By a stretch of the imagination, we can try to imagine a beautiful, echoing sound to be "mucilaginous," but whatever we imagine remains arbitrary, however resonant and evocative the word may be. We try to create the impossible sense-context behind a word which neither has nor *can* have one. We must also remember that the adult and the child will react differently to this device of nonsense--that the child does not know the real meaning of the word and therefore has a different problem from the adult, who knows the meaning and must deal with the obvious incongruity.[387] Because in the end this word will remain ambiguous, no imagined image can reach any objective certainty, yet the mind must try nonetheless.[388] Hence, the genre's most essential effect is realized: in the end it is non-sense.[389]

A similar effect occurs with neologisms and the rare Learian portmanteau. The neologism goes through the same process as the misappropriation, minus the blank (for adults) between the dictionary definition and the apparently different textual usage. In this case, the evocative sound of the word may be the most important factor in the attempt to make meaning, such as in

---

[386]When Carroll does use a misappropriation, either the narrator or the characters in the story discuss the word, such as in "The Wasp in a Wig" chapter taken from *Looking-Glass*. The Wasp uses the word "conceit" for a "stiff-neck," and he and Alice discuss the meaning (p. 212).

[387]See Chapter 5 for more on misappropriation.

[388]The same could perhaps be said, coming from a deconstructive view, of nearly any word or image in a text, but nonsense is unique in that these effects are the desired ones, rather than simply the necessary ones.

[389]Lear's "serious" sonnet, "Cold are the Crabs" (*Teapots and Quails*, p. 63) also has a pronounced "blank" in that the last line of the otherwise structurally sound sonnet stops short three feet and fails to rhyme. This is not as successful as a nonsense device as the other "blanks" because the text is too open.
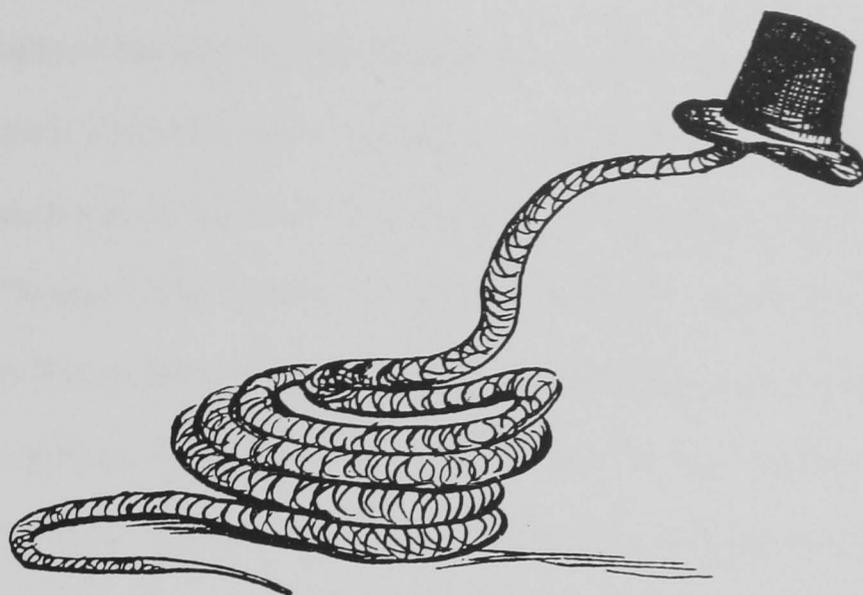
The Scroobious Snake,
who always wore a Hat on his Head, for
fear he should bite anybody   (p. 218)

In cases such as this, we witness Lear's ability to coin words which somehow phonetically

fit their context; it is hard to deny that the pictured snake somehow is indeed "scroobious,"

whatever that is. Again, no definite meaning can emerge, but the imagination must make

something of the information it receives. The context implies that the reader knows the

word and/or that the following situation somehow is a result of it. An anonymous reviewer

from *The Times* (1876) notes this quality in the word "Gromboolian": "Who shall venture

to say what meaning is attached to 'Gromboolian'; but what an expressive word it is; how

significant of darkness and size, and generally of the mysterious and awful!"[390] The

problem is that this imagined "meaning" proves arbitrary. To make matters even more

difficult, Lear uses the word "scroobious" in several texts, always with what appears a

different meaning.

The portmanteau also lacks the blank between usage and dictionary definition(s),

but it adds another blank: the questionable space between the meanings of the two (or

more) combined words. In Lear's term "Torrible Zone" (p. 74), in *The Jumblies*, it seems

that the word combines "torrid," "terrible," and "horrible," yet the conglomerate "Torrible"

can only be a semantic blank--not any *one* of these, nor an easily definable combination.

The formation of a portmanteau word is anything but clear, partly because we do not know

---

[390]"Christmas Books,"*The Times*, (21 December, 1876), 646.

upon what basis the words, if it is indeed two words, are combined; Carroll gives several conflicting accounts of his famous portmanteaus in "Jabberwocky." Humpty Dumpty argues for a semantic convergence of meaning, in the word "slithy," but he also puts forward other guesses as to the formation of "mome," for instance, a word he claims is a deterioration of "home." The first stanza of "Jabberwocky" which first appeared as "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry" in *Misch-Masch*, a juvenile, family publication in the Dodgson family, gives a similar method to "translate" the nonsense words, but with some differences from what would later be Humpty Dumpty's explanations. Carroll, in the preface to *Looking-Glass* gives a phonetic analysis of portmanteau words, in his guide to pronunciation, and in the Preface to *The Hunting of the Snark* he offers a third method, a psychological one, as to the formation of the portmanteau. He never offers the more likely method, that of morphology.[391] The blank created by the constitutive words cannot be filled definitively because we cannot be certain as to the nature of that blank--whether it is semantic, phonetic, psychological, morphologic, or a combination of any or all of these.

Even if we could know the words which create the portmanteau and their relation to each other, the words themselves often have many meanings. In the case of "Torrible Zone," "torrid" alone has two definitions, with several sub-definitions (*OED*). We cannot assume the words we imagine to be the constitutive ones actually are. Sewell notes that Carroll's word "frumious," "is not a word, and does not have two meanings packed up in it; it is a group of letters without any meaning at all" (p. 120). The reader may choose to imagine many different words to be the constitutive ones: "furious, fuming; or frumpish, gloomy" (p. 120). Deleuze agrees and offers a radically different reading of "mome raths outgrabe": "but it is also possible to interpret as follows: taxes, preferential rates (*rath= rate+rather*), far from their point of departure, were prohibitive (*outgrabe*)" (p. 46). Portmanteau words are thus rife with blanks--but blanks which can never be filled satisfactorily; there simply are too many possibilities. We need not go beyond Carroll's own contradictory "definitions" of his portmanteau words to show the dangers of making

---

[391] Lecercle, pp. 44-7.

any kind of sense of them. Perhaps we should consider the wisdom of taking Humpty Dumpty, let alone Carroll's writing persona, too seriously.

The portmanteau word also goes beyond the definitions of the words which ostensibly constitute it--assuming we decide on two words at all. A short nonsense poem by Michael Rosen, "Really?" illustrates this difficulty inherent in the portmanteau:

> He had a little sticker
> and he had a little ticket
> and he took the little sticker
> and he stuck it to the ticket.
>
> Now he hasn't got a sticker
> and he hasn't got a ticket.
> He's got a bit of both
> which he calls a little sticket.   (p. 9)

As this poem demonstrates, the combinative portmanteau (here, a physical combination, as opposed to the other possible categories we have seen) is neither one nor the other of the terms we assume are its parts. Indeed, the boy no longer has a sticker or a ticket, but a "bit of both" which is in effect something new, a "sticket." Because the two separate words are so close in spelling, the resulting combination is even more confusing regarding the dominance of any one word: is the word "sticket" the word "sticker" with the "r" replaced by a "t," or is it the word "ticket" with an "s" added on the front? Such a distinction should have some effect on the meaning of the portmanteau. A mouse at the bottom of the page warns the boy holding the sticket, "They won't let you on the bus with a sticket," implying that this artificial entity no longer has the function of either of its parts. Even though the driver will see the ticket only partially hidden by the sticker, the mouse signals that the new creation is something else entirely. In this case the portmanteau "word" is two physical, observable objects placed together, but a true portmanteau is more ambiguous, constituting two or more questionable words. These words can never be combined satisfactorily, and as Jacqueline Flescher states, "The portmanteau words are significant, not so much because of the specific meanings which they suggest, but because they embrace two disparate elements" (p. 133). The end result approaches neologism, and therefore evokes the inherent blanks already discussed in that device.

One of the most common features in Lear's literary nonsense is the introduction of faulty cause and effect situations. This occurs in nearly every piece of nonsense, but I will take an example from *Four Little Children*, when the adventurers are pelted with falling oranges and must flee: "Nevertheless they got safely to the boat, although considerably vexed and hurt; and the Quangle-Wangle's right foot was so knocked about, that he had to sit with his head in his slipper for at least a week" (p. 96). Obviously, there is a blank, or gap, in reasoning between the Quangle-Wangle's injuring his right foot and the seemingly unrelated remedy of putting his head in his slipper. However, there is some semblance of a connection, however nonsensical. The slipper, after all, is related to the injured foot in its function, which possibly leads to the head-in-slipper remedy, but, as far as I know, there is no medicinal value to slippers nor any medical relevance to the head in the case of foot injuries. This is a typical nonsense predicament: just enough sense to activate the mind's powers only to negate any imagined solutions. There is no logical way of reconciling the cause and effect here, but the gap in reasoning created calls for some effort on the reader's part to bridge it. In fact, the humour can only be experienced when the reader has tried to connect the two and found it impossible, thus giving up to the absurdity of the situation. Yet, the narrator, our omniscient authority in this tale, relates that this remedy works, implying some connection. This connection is implied in the very syntax of the sentence, which reflects what seems to be a circumstance well-known and casually linked: he was so X that he had to Y. The structure presupposes a relationship between the given variables. We are almost fooled in these cases into believing the rhetoric, so to speak, of nonsense. Nonsense implies Deleuzean sense, that is, a sense prior to the focal point which would provide a "sensible" context for it. Of course, the context implied does not and cannot exist. A similar description occurs when Violet's brothers churn salt water "in the hope that it would turn into butter, which it seldom, if ever did" (pp. 92-93). By stating that it "seldom" did, the action is granted possibility, and once again the reader's mind must try to imagine how this could work. These examples cannot make sense, but we must accept their consequences and move on in the story. A blank occurs in the logical sequence which

must be filled, even if that which fills it cannot make sense and must be laid aside or discarded.

This brings us to the fundamental difference between the result of Iser's implied reader's processing of the blank and the result in Lear's nonsense. The process, as we have seen, is quite similar, though in nonsense it occurs on a smaller scale within the bounds of syntax and semantics. The end result, however, is where the different genres diverge. For Iser's implied reader, the blanks only remain "blank" until they are filled by the imagination, guided by textual strategies, of the reader. Looking back at the example from *Alice*, once the reader has imagined the manner in which she changes size and the results of this, the blank no longer exists. The reader is able to fill this blank in a manner suitable to both the text's promptings and the reader's imaginative inclinations. While our various ideas of exactly what Alice looks like as she changes size may differ slightly, we will agree on the basics of the situation. Thus, in Iser's model of the implied reader, the blanks allow the reader to participate in to the dialogic relationship out of which a meaning emerges.

This act of creating an unequivocal meaning in a consistent manner with the promptings of the text cannot occur in the crucial junctures of literary nonsense. As we have seen, every time the reader tries to fill a nonsense gap, the result cannot, in the end, lead to a meaning. Or, it can lead to two or more irreconcilable meanings. The blanks in nonsense evoke imaginative possibilities, only to contradict them soon after they are imagined. Iser calls such possibilities "illusions," the creation of which can be dangerous: "if reading were to consist of nothing but an uninterrupted building up of illusions, it would be a suspect, if not downright dangerous, process: instead of bringing us into contact with reality, it would wean us away from realities."[392] Indeed, this is what partly occurs in literary nonsense. Iser argues, however, that illusion-building should not be dispensed with altogether. We need this faculty to make sense of most texts, but when too much illusion-building occurs, caused by the paradoxical nature of nonsense, the text

---

[392]Iser, "Reading Process," p. 284.

cannot hold meaning in a coherent way. Nonsense, in this respect, is similar to the modern

texts Iser discusses such as the works of Joyce,

> in which it is the very precision of the written details which increases the
> proportion of indeterminacy; one detail appears to contradict another, and so
> simultaneously stimulates and frustrates our desire to "picture," thus
> continually causing our imposed "gestalt" of the text to disintegrate.
> Without the formation of illusions, the unfamiliar world of the text would
> remain unfamiliar; through the illusions, the experience offered by the text
> becomes accessible to us, for it is only the illusion, on its different levels of
> consistency, that makes the experience "readable."[393]

Similarly, nonsense is quite precise in the details of its world, which rarely cohere in a

logical manner.[394] To follow the narrative of nonsense texts, we also must create such

"illusions" to keep the text coherent, yet here we find the major difference between the texts

Iser discusses and Lear's work. The defining factor of nonsense is that there is an

intentional breaking of these "levels of consistency" of illusion. Nonsense forces us to

create illusions which we cannot uphold. Thus nonsense is "readable" and enjoyable

precisely because we strive to make the "illusion" hold together in a consistent, logical,

manner while at the same time the illusion proves paradoxical. Images are created only to

the accompaniment of their anti-image, and hence we experience the full effect of nonsense:

endlessly juggling meaning and its lack.

---

[393]Ibid, pp. 284-85.
[394]See the example from *The Jumblies*, above.

Chapter Eight
The Nonsense Child
vs.
The Sense Child

That's just what I complain of! You should *have meant! What do you suppose is the use of a child without any meaning?*

-Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (p. 193)

Writing nonsense is writing the nonsense child. Though Lear wrote his verse for various real children, his texts imply a special kind of child. Because, as I have tried to show in the last chapter, literary nonsense on a practical level is non-sense, the reader construct in the genre must be a similar creation. John Preston, reflecting the reader response theories of Booth and Iser, claims that "The writer, who can hardly tell his story if he does not feel sure that some one will read it, is impelled to imagine a reader. Or, in other words, the way in which he tells his story may be taken as envisaging its reader."[395] Even though a nonsense text means not to mean, so to speak, it still implies a reader construct who, theoretically, can make "sense" of, or in Iser's terms "ideate" (create an imaginative image), from the blanks created by the text's characteristic paradoxes and omissions. At this juncture of sense and nonsense, the Deleuzean concepts also clarify the reader construct. As we have seen in the previous chapter, nonsense is that which implies a prior sense that does not exist. It attempts to create its own sense-context, which is impossible. The child construct can be seen as an embodiment of this impossible sense-context, the audience which is dictated by the text yet cannot exist according to our rules of common sense. The construct of the child-reader in literary nonsense, like Iser's implied reader, "is therefore a *textual* structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him...."[396] A textual creation, this construct is a fictional entity projected upon the

---

[395]Preston, p. 198.
[396]Iser, *Act*, p. 34. My italics.

intended audience of children. The "meaning," or, rather, the well-defined non-meaning, of nonsense, paradoxical though it may be, is therefore inherently a joint product of text and implied reader. The result of this combined effort is that the reader

> cannot detach himself from such an interaction; on the contrary, the activity stimulated in him will link him to the text and induce him to create the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of that text. As text and reader thus merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer applies, and it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to be experienced.[397]

The text and the reader merge into one hypothetical entity through the ideational filling of blanks, i.e., the act of writing nonsense for children creates the nonsense child construct. It just so happens that in nonsense, the real reader can never *be* that implied construct, that illusory field of sense which can never be filled. The conception of the child which most closely approximates this "nonsense child" and its ability to ideate the impossible is the individual, wild, elevated, divinely creative, and inscrutable Romantic child. The "meaning" of nonsense becomes not a "meaning" at all, but the non-sense "effect" produced by the inherent devices.

That nonsense is closer to "non-sense" than "sense" shows the child construct, likewise, to be a creature not abiding by any rules--a child who is not predictable, a child for whom a system of education would fit like his father's trousers. In fact, no narrow theoretical "system" can explain him; to an adult, the child is "non-sensical," a mystery of thought and action. Likewise, the child accepts this quality in what he experiences and reads. In a similar way in which the child is able to combine unlike ideas, he is able to accept mystery and indefiniteness just as he does more concrete things. Lear often comments in his letters about his disdain for certainty, and yet his hope in the face of doubt. He writes to Chichester Fortescue on 9 September, 1879, "In this our mortal state doubt is better than certainty."[398] For this reason he disliked Crabb Robinson's "account of Kants, Wielands, and other German fools. For it is they--metaphysicians--who are the

---

[397]Ibid, pp. 9-10.

[398]*LLEL*, p. 224. This is translated from Lear's Greek by the editor.

fools..."[399] Lear despised those who professed dogmatic belief; he accepted life's incomprehensibility with grace. His writing for children was, likewise, a reflection of his feeling for life's mystery and incomprehensibility, and in turn a recognition that a child comprised these qualities, enjoying them in Lear's nonsense with a sympathetic response.

He displays such mystery in many of his limericks, which, as Ann Colley states, "mock the reader's impulses to find a resting place in congruity,"[400] as the eccentric behaviour is usually unexplained. The old person of Deal is one of these individuals, "Who in walking, used only his heel; / When they said, 'Tell us why?'--He made no reply; / That mysterious old person of Deal" (p. 199). This old person, like so many others, gives no reason for his eccentricity. They all exhibit the unreasonableness of humanity, which Lear saw children appreciating most. "They" ask the old man in a garden why he "always begged every-one's pardon"; he simply replies, "'You're a bore! / And I trust you'll go out of my garden'" (p. 205). When asked to explain his actions, he contemptuously refuses, implying that human motivation is a mystery of which critical dissecting only destroys the beauty. The ultimate statement about certainty is perhaps with the old person of Diss, "Who said, 'It is this! It is this!' / When they said 'What? or which?'--He jumped into a ditch, / Which absorbed that old person of Diss."[401] This old person professes a dogmatic certainty, then commits suicide when asked for his knowledge. Such is the result of being certain... Lear's universe is one of randomness, in which certainty is useless because cause and effect are not necessarily logically related.[402] In its ability to keep perfect tension between meaning and non-meaning, the nonsense world, reflecting the child for whom it is written, is a place of mystery, uncertainty, and above all, the lack of conventional "sense."

This audience that does not make "sense," the implied Deleuzean context of impossible "sense" within nonsense embodied in the child construct, has caused some problems for Lear's critics who are disturbed by the conspiratorial and exclusionary nature

---

[399]To Fortescue, 23 December, 1882. *LLEL*, pp. 281-2.
[400]Colley, "Edward Lear's Limericks," p. 297.
[401]*Teapots and Quails*, p. 44.
[402]Hark, p. 117.

of the genre and indeed, the impossibility for real readers, whether adult or child, to be able to "get" every literary nonsense device. An anonymous critic in *The Spectator* of 1871 complains that "Mr. Lear is a little too much disposed to *verbal* nonsense, which is, we admit, not unfrequently [sic] a success with children, but depends for its success entirely on the *private intelligence* between the inventor and the children to whom it is confided."[403] The reviewer is upset by the idea that there is a secret interchange of information between Lear's verse and the child reading it, information which is unavailable to the adult. He concludes that this sort of nonsense, which is a "great show of mysterious intelligence" should be kept from the public. Of course, there can be no real conspiracy between Lear and any actual children, but, as I have shown with Iser's theory of the implied reader, the text implies at least the possibility (but in the case of nonsense, never a verifiable actuality) of an audience perfectly in harmony with the paradoxes of nonsense. It is this "mysterious intelligence," the secret, shared basis of imaginative creation behind Lear's nonsense and its implied reader which does indeed exclude the outsider, the reasoning adult who can never, unless possessing a particularly un-analytical and child-like mind, enter fully into the impossible alternative reality implied by nonsense.

That Lear's nonsense could be mistaken for a secret interchange of meaning between author and child indicates the success with which he created the nonsense child construct. Emerging from a genre which treats certainty and conformity with disdain, this construct is the culmination of the varying aspects of nonsense dealt with throughout this thesis, although it derives in part from the child as portrayed by Wordsworth and other major Romantic figures. It defines itself particularly in contrast with the more anatomized child constructs derived from Locke and Rousseau, who were the bases of much of eighteenth- and nineteenth century writing on or for the child. A fierce individual, a "wild," naughty child, a child elevated above the adult world by virtue of its innocence, purity, and divine imaginative power, the nonsense child emerges as a textual creation, one whose value lies precisely in *not* making sense in relation to the adult world. It is the impossible sense-field absent in nonsense words, and that which hypothetically fills the

---

[403]"Mr. Lear's New Nonsense," *The Spectator* (23 December, 1871), 1570-71 (p. 1571).

impossible blanks which make the genre a constant conflict between a meaning and unmeaning. It is truly a 'non-sense" child in its positive defiance of sense and in its ability to escape classification, dissection and appropriation by adults.

§ § §

Throughout most of this millennium the figure of the child in the written word has been marginal at best. When children have been the topic of discourse, whether in political or religious tracts, their general psychological and developmental aspects have often been taken for granted. Classical writers such as Aristotle and Plato barely mention children, and when they do the child appears little better than an animal.[404] Nor did Biblical writers expend much effort on portraying the child.[405] The spiritual side of childhood did receive some attention, but Augustine's widely accepted pronouncement of the child's inherent, original sin did little to encourage analysis of such a creature. Medieval writings depict some child-figures, often martyrs, but again, there was little effort to understand the nature of the child--not the unusual, saintly martyr, nor the son of God, but the ordinary, unexceptional child. To find examples of more ordinary children, we must look towards the folk tradition, with its many portrayals of children in cautionary tales. But the first highly influential endeavour at close, methodical scrutiny of the child did not come until the English Enlightenment and Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which used the nature of the child as one of the foundations of philosophical inquiry.[406] From this point onward, writers in most areas, and especially those for or about children, were obsessed with making "sense" of the child in order to accommodate their various political, religious, or humanitarian agendas. It is this rational, explainable child which some of the Romantics and Victorian nonsense counteracted.

---

[404]Boas, pp. 12-13. See also Pattison, pp. 1-19.

[405]Of course, Christianity did much to promote the image of the child, from the baby Jesus as icon, to Jesus' words: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14) and "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

[406]By 1800 Locke's *Some Thoughts* had gone through twenty-five editions. (Richardson, p. 48)

Reason and systematization dominate Locke's writings on the child, going against the assumptions inherent in nonsense of the "positive," irrational, illogical, and spontaneous child. Locke, and those who would followed his precedent, attempted to illustrate a child that made "sense" in thought and action, and his tool was a child's propensity to reason. According to Locke, a child is inherently a rational creature whose natural inclination only needs encouragement. Locke claims that children "distinguish early between Passion and Reason: And as they cannot but have a Reverence for what comes from the latter, so they quickly grow into a contempt of the former...."[407] To Locke, passions, the dangerous, uncontrollable element in humanity, are naturally repugnant to children, who understand reason "as early as they do Language; and...they love to be treated as Rational Creatures, sooner than is imagined" (p. 142). Such discipline was adopted by reformers throughout the eighteenth century, such as John Brown, in his *Thoughts on Civil Liberty, On Licentiousness, and Faction* (1765), who argued that in order to ensure a stable, free society, all citizens must be trained early in a "System of *Manners* and *Principles* effectually impressed on the human Mind, as may be an *inward Curb* to every inordinate Desire; or rather, such as may so frame and model the human Heart, that its ruling Desires may correspond, coincide, or coalesce, with all the great and essential Appointments of public Law."[408] Brown claims that humanity, from childhood upward, should be (and *can* be)moulded so as to conform to the national agenda and character. Brown is a typical example of how Locke's ideas, and especially those related to the training of the child, were applied towards various other goals. The educationalists and children's writers who adopted Locke's ideas, sharing a general utilitarian tendency, did not see education so much as a way of opening the mind to inquiry and individual contemplation, but rather as machinery by which the adult would be formed, according to the political or otherwise motivated agenda of the writer. As we shall see below, much of the children's literature, and child-related theory, of the nineteenth century was similarly in

---

[407]Locke, p. 138. Locke further explains that a child's reason is a lower form of the adult's reason, but they are both manifestations of the same faculty (p. 142).
[408]Quoted in Richardson, p. 87, from John Brown, *Thoughts on Civil Liberty, On Licentiousness, and Faction*, 2nd edn. (London: Davies and Reymers, 1765), pp. 26-7.

Locke's rationalist tradition. Before we examine some of these works, though, we must also take into account the other major influence on children's literature, Rousseau.

Contrary to Locke, Rousseau recognized a child's initial inability to exhibit a more conventional form of reason, claiming that "childhood is the sleep of reason" (p. 71). Instead of teaching through reason, education teaches how *to attain* reason. In fact, reason exposed to too young a child can be harmful (pp. 53-54). Indeed, Rousseau wanted to make a clear separation between the adult and the child, and he pleaded that the child be recognized *as* a child instead of an adult, much more so than Locke. He writes, "Love childhood, indulge its sports, its pleasures, its delightful instincts" (p. 43). However, Rousseau limits this kind of indulgence on all sides, allowing only those few "instincts" which he deems edifying, actively discouraging all others. Rousseau also recognizes that the passions should not be suppressed to the extent recommended by Locke (and later, the utilitarians), and that, indeed, they are "the chief means of self-preservation..." (p. 173). However, Rousseau makes "sense" of the child partly by claiming that Émile's inclinations will always be dictated by natural forces which define what "sensible" or correct actions are. Nature's hand will curb any errors in the child if he is raised properly, conforming to her dictates which are reality. The world of nonsense, which refuses natural order in creating its own, if accepted by Émile would only result in what Rousseau calls "insanity," for "he who concocts imaginary relations, which have no real existence, is a madman..." (pp. 165-66). If this were the extent of Rousseau's conception of education, then he would indeed be very close to Wordsworth and Coleridge in their earlier years, but Rousseau's system was far more involved and complicated. Rousseau, for all of his rhetoric about letting nature, within and without, teach Émile, nevertheless distrusts a strictly "natural" education and prescribes a most careful, detailed, and monitored education. First, the tutor must observe the child closely in order to know and every shade of the child's character. He writes, "Every mind has its own form, in accordance with which it must be controlled" (p. 58). Rousseau assumes that a child's personality composes an observable, fixed set of variables which can be exploited. Having made "sense" of the child, the tutor controls all of Émile's activities, moulding his student and

curbing some of his natural inclinations, such as his faculty of imagination. Rousseau writes, "put off their dawning imagination with objects which, far from inflaming their senses, put a check to their activity" (p. 192). The child is to be watched constantly, and, thinking he has complete freedom, is actually under the relentless control of his tutor, who surreptitiously arranges "chance" meetings with neighbours. Émile's tutor must create, through his teaching methods, the character of a child who will then run like clockwork, exhibiting compassion, independence, and above all, reason, who in turn will become an ideal citizen. Rousseau writes in "Considerations on the Government of Poland" (1773), "It is education that must give the souls of the people a national form, and so shape their opinions and their tastes that they become patriots."[409] The French Revolution and the turmoil of the 1790s ensured that Rousseau's methods and goals did not spread too widely or openly, but his influence again flourished in the nineteenth century, with, for example, the continuous reprinting of Day's highly Rousseauistic Sandford and Merton (1783-9), and also with the Romantics, although in both cases differing from Rousseau in some crucial aspects. Still, Rousseau's Émile is much closer to the independent, wild, and free Romantic child, and the Nonsense-child, than Locke's construct.

Children's literature in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be seen in one respect as a struggle between the ideas of Locke and Rousseau and those who followed them. Regardless of which theory one followed, however, the child became the subject of intense scrutiny. The figure of the child gained importance in the wide arenas of politics, finance, and psychology, and it therefore became crucial that children be understood and made to fit in their new roles. Whether as unfortunate inheritors of Original Sin, or as creatures dominated by reason who would justify utilitarian premises; whether as potential recipients of Republican ideals, or as the basis of a newly industrialized nation, children and their world became central issues. With respect to children's literature, education, and more basic theory of the child, the child's constitution was of obvious importance, and those who participated in these fields were quick to adopt some method of decoding the

---

[409]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Considerations on the Government of Poland," 1773, in The Minor Educational Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, ed. and trans. William Boyd (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1910,1962), p. 97

child, of making "sense" of the child. As Richardson comments, the "'moral' works of children's fiction produced in the Romantic-era are animated by the desire to reconstruct the child through fictions which simultaneously mirror the child's mind and refashion it" (p. 129). Of course the child was rarely observed for its own sake; rather, the educational theory concerned "itself with the swift creation, through controlled environment, of the rational adult man. It seldom considered the nature of the child as a child. Treated as a small adult, the child was to be trained out of his childish ways into the moral and rational perfection of regulated manhood."[410] To achieve this kind of education, though, the system had to be built around an adjustable and predictable child, a constructed child who would fit into the prescribed mould. New strategies of education were devised to reform the world through the child. At a time long before the national education act in 1870, which ensured universal, primary education, various educational theories circulated, and many different organizations and educational systems competed in the ever-expanding education of the country's youth. From the Sunday School movements in the 1780s to the more "progressive" monitorial systems in the early 1800s of Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster, to the utilitarian views spread predominantly from the 1830s onwards by Bentham's influence and Mill, the questions of education, class, and politics mixed to create widely varied means of forming the child's mind.[411] The Evangelists, such as Mrs. Sherwood and her hugely popular *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818-47), complete the picture of the many different camps trying to create the child in their own image. As Hilary Jenkins notes, the child's world increasingly became, in an image from Émile's only allowed book, an insular Crusoean island, "a fitting image of how adults saw children's lives in the nineteenth century: small, isolated, limited, easily explored, controlled and understood."[412]

Children's writers swayed more by Lockean and utilitarian ideologies, such as Edgeworth and Godwin, agree in this tendency of children towards reason. Edgeworth's

---

[410]Coveney, pp. 40-1.

[411]See p. 48 and note 86 for Lear's possible opinion of Bentham.

[412]Hilary Jenkins, "*The Child in his World: Changing Images in Children's Literature, 1796-1839*" (unpublished M.Litt. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1986), note on p. 123.

claims for a child's "sense" are also based in Hartleian associationism; the child should be taught and will be receptive to "correct" associative thought patterns which will dictate all the child's actions.[413] The basis of associationism is that all actions can be deduced to logical, traceable patterns in the brain. Edgeworth claims that if children "arrive at certain conclusions in reasoning, we may be satisfied that they have taken all the necessary previous steps" (I, 125). The child's mind shows no mystery in its patterns; if children arrive at a conclusion, we can assume their minds work in the same way as those of adults--in predictable, sensible, associative reason. Godwin would therefore have any point of contention between an adult and child settled with a rational discussion, proposing points of logical argument. Whoever convinces the other must win, and if the child is not convinced, then it must still have its way, for Godwin would allow no "despotism" through the adult (pp. 95-6). Godwin assumes the child will usually act according to the dictates of reason, yielding when error is shown. Both Edgeworth's and Godwin's (earlier) theories allow for no mystery; as Edgeworth states, "we may show them that, in reality, there is no *mystery* in any thing, but that from certain causes certain effects will follow...."[414] Like the adult world, and reality, there is no mystery in the child. Gillian Avery writes, "The late Georgians did not believe in the irrational, and what was more, they were certain that reasoning could always conquer--even when a young child's unreasonable fears were involved."[415] It is this attitude which the Romantics, and later, literary nonsense, would openly dispute.

Images of such children who make "sense" dominate the children's literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mary Wollstonecraft, in the tradition of Locke, wrote unapologetically didactic works for children, always incorporating her theories of the child and education throughout. Her Introduction to C.G. Salzmann's, *Elements of Morality for the use of children; with an introductory address to parents* (1790), which she "translated,"

---

[413]Edgeworth, II, 317. Associationism is based on sense impressions. If these sensations are learned properly, they create both physical and moral "sense" out of experience. Coleridge, of course, named his child after David Hartley, but his adherence to associationism, which waned as he aged, manifested itself in a different manner regarding children. Wordsworth also, especially as a younger man, believed in some associationist theories, but again, they surfaced in his writing quite differently from Edgeworth or Godwin.
[414]Edgeworth, I, 22. Godwin's revises his view on the dominance of reason. See note 330.
[415]Avery, p. 26.

though a more accurate word might be "adapted," is heavily influenced by the empiricism of Locke and Benthamite utilitarianism. Its goal is to produce children with a "good disposition," which means a "superior degree of knowledge" and the concomitant effects of such knowledge.[416] In the Introduction, Wollstonecraft begins with the basic utilitarian assumption that "we love what gives us pleasure, and hate what gives us uneasiness" (p. vii), and proceeds to demonstrate a method of educating a child on this simple principle and the child's inherent conformity to reason's dictates. She continues, "By this method it appears, that we may direct the inclination of a child which way we wish, if we only know how to make him rightly comprehend the pleasure or pain which certain things will procure him." (p. viii). Reason, which distinguishes between what brings pain and pleasure, is enough to convince the child of right and wrong, of virtue and vice. As an example of this method in action, Wollstonecraft demonstrates how to teach a child not to drink alcohol: "Place in a room a bottle of wine and another of water, and tell the boy that water is very wholesome, and wine very hurtful to children....he will not have any inclination to taste the wine" (p. xxii).

Two years earlier, Wollstonecraft wrote a volume which would remain popular for some time, her *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations, calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (1788). In these tales Mrs. Mason, the tutor, discusses various typical topics such as cruelty to animals and obedience, effectively convincing the children through reason. It is this faith in a child's reason, which "with difficulty, conquers settled habits."[417] Mrs. Mason teaches the children that the work of childhood is to create a more "sensible" child, to develop the natural inclination towards reason, which can occur if "the heart has been capable of receiving early impressions, and the head of reasoning and retaining the conclusions which were drawn from them...."[418] The Romantic child and the child construct from Lear's nonsense would

[416]C.G. Salzmann, *Elements of Morality for the use of children; with an introductory address to parents*, trans. Mary Wollstonecraft, 2 volumes (London: ptd for J. Johnson, 1790), p. v.

[417]Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*, 1788, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (London: Pickering, 1989), IV, 359. The children in this work are 12 and 14 years old, but the child's adherence to reason should begin as young as possible.

[418]Wollstonecraft, p. 415.

defy such correct associative thought patterns, thus showing children who do not make "sense." Such incorrect associations would be naturally repugnant to the utilitarian child.

If we skip for a moment the Romantic writers who were generally against utilitarian constructs of the child, we see that the proliferation and expansion of the constructed, utilitarian child promoted in the eighteenth century gained momentum throughout the nineteenth century. Unimpeded by Romantic protest, such varied figures as John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, and Sigmund Freud carried on the tradition of making a child make sense in relation to their various theories. With Mill's development of Bentham's utilitarian thought, the child became the instrument by which the scientific inquiry of the human character could proceed. In one way, it can be seen as the experimental, utilitarian side of Wordsworth's claim that the child is father of the man. Mill writes in *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive, Being a connected view of the principles of evidence and the methods of scientific investigation* (1843):

> The instances requisite for the prosecution of a directly experimental inquiry into the formation of character would be a number of human beings to bring up and educate from infancy to mature age; and to perform any one of these experiments with scientific propriety, it would be necessary to know and record every sensation or impressed [sic] received by the young pupil from a period long before it could speak, including its own notions respecting the sources of all those sensations and impressions.[419]

Mill demonstrates that this kind of analysis is impossible, not because a child could not, theoretically speaking, be dissected in this manner, but because we simply do not have the ability to take into account the many factors which contribute to behaviour. However, there is still a way to what Mill calls "Ethology," or the "Science of Character," through deducing the general laws of the mind by another kind experimental approach involving the effects of certain circumstances on the character (p. 567). As Pattison suggests, "Childhood held a certain fascination for the rationalists precisely because it could be observed; surely cause and effect were at work here, if one only had the key" (p. 102). Darwin also used the child as an experiment in the developmental formation of the adult. In

---

[419]John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive, Being a connected view of the principles of evidence and the methods of scientific investigation* ,1843 (New York, Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906), p. 565.

his article "A Biographical Sketch of an Infant" (1840), he describes a detailed study he carried out on his own children, exploring in great detail sensual perception, emotional development, motor coordination, reason, and the formation of character. Darwin, like Mill, assumes that the child is a bundle of developing, observable qualities and abilities which, when explained, will bring a new understanding of humanity. In his analysis of the dawning of reason, Darwin argues that the infant develops associative reasoning faculties long before it had generally been believed.[420] The investigation into the human character gained momentum throughout the century, and articles like George Henry Lewes's "Consciousness and Unconsciousness" led onward to Freud's psychoanalytical method, particularly his 'Infantile Sexuality' (1905). In all of these cases the child, once the secrets of the child's nature were uncovered--and this was an eventuality, not a possibility--was considered the key to understanding the adult. The child is father to the man in the same way that a set of cog-wheels is father to a clock.

The desire to make "sense" of the child found in the more philosophical works of the century, of course, also materialized in literature, both children's and adult. Even works which attempt to introduce the "nonsense" child often fail, like Sinclair's *Holiday House*, which begins with a preface promoting the wild, non-sense child but ends with the almost inescapable didactic morality and eschewal of non-sensical child-like ideals. The pages of *Punch* were quite aware of the popularity of the figure of the child and all that related to it, and a humourous sketch of two grandmothers fighting over a baby illustrates the ridiculous extent to which adults try to "understand" an infant.[421] The baby smacks its lips, and immediately both grandmothers know what the baby wants. Mrs. Daffy says he wants pork while the elder Mrs. Bib counters with: "Bless its darling rosebud of a mouth! Wants! the precious pipkin! I know what it wants! It's salmon!"[422] An argument ensues, until the boy's father, Mr. Bib, interrupts:

> "If there's anything in these whimsies at all," said the ignorant,
> unphilosophic father--"if a child really wants what its mother wished for--"

[420]Charles Darwin, "A Biographical Sketch of an Infant," *Mind*, 2.7 (July, 1877), 285-94 (pp. 289-90).
[421]From the 1840s onwards *Punch* included various children's genres in their satires, including nursery rhyme, didactic tales, primers, and fairy tales.
[422]"Mrs. Bib's Baby,"*Punch*, 10 (1846), 53, 64 (p. 64).

"If!" exclaimed the two grandmothers--for once in concert...
"I should say that the thing at this moment nearest Baby's heart was
a real Cashmere shawl, and a box at the opera."
"How *can* you Edward?" said young Mrs. Bib.   (p. 64)

Though this is in jest, it illustrates how adults appropriate the child and the child's

supposed nature for their own purposes.

One of the most popular children's periodicals around mid-century was *Aunt*

Judy's Magazine (1866-73), edited by Mrs. Gatty (mother of Juliana Horatia Ewing),

which, though on the side of fairy tales, reflected the craze for explaining all things

childish. In *Aunt Judy's Christmas Volume* of 1869, we find a popular twist to nursery

rhyme. A series of pieces entitled "The Lost Legends of the Nursery Songs" chose to take

more or less nonsensical nursery rhymes and, in effect, give them sense by placing them in

a suitable context. In strained narratives which have little cohesiveness, aside from an

explanation of the rhyme, such rhymes as "Bye, Baby Bunting" are "explained." This tale

begins: "Baby Bunting was the youngest child of Captain Bunting, a brave old sailor, who

was the owner of a ship in which he went fighting or trading according as he was

wanted."[423] From such a solid, practical beginning, the tales limp forward, extracting

every bit of nonsense from the original rhyme. The tale for "Hickory, Dickory, Dock"

begins, ""Once upon a time there were three brother-mice named Hickory, Dickory, and

Dock, who lived together behind a carved oak cabinet in the hall of a large, rambling

house. Not far from them stood an old-fashioned cuckoo clock, and under it there lived a

beautiful lady-mouse named Glossyfur" (p. 218). We learn that the brothers run up and

down the cuckoo clock in order to win the beautiful Glossyfur. They all fail in their

mission to free the cuckoo, but in the end Hickory succeeds, and "Hickory and Glossyfur

made themselves a comfortable nest in the old clock-case, and there they lived in peace and

happiness, and brought up a large family of little mice..." (p. 225). What was once

nursery nonsense has turned into the opposite of Lear's verse narratives: a triumph in

domesticity and solid Victorian values. We can begin to understand the significance of

Lear's tale of Mr. and Mrs. Discobbolos when compared to such conventional.

---

[423]*Aunt Judy's Christmas Volume for young people*, ed. Mrs. Alfred Gatty (London: Bell and Daldy, 1869), p. 143.

melodramatic contrivance. The mid- to late-nineteenth century was not, however, without its rearguard defence of the Wordsworthian child. Writers like Kingsley and MacDonald believed strongly in Wordsworth's vision of childhood, and though their works were far in the minority of children's literature, they are perhaps those which still hold some popularity.

Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Lamb, though usually not writing for children (with some notable exceptions, especially with the Lambs), were involved in reforming the image of the child--"reforming" not only in the sense of shaping anew or re-forming, but also in the sense of removing the faults and errors of previous child-related writing. Peter Coveney suggests that the "Romantic reaction against moralizing, utilitarian literature for children was part of its whole reaction against the child of the associationist eighteenth century; which in turn was part of its whole reaction against the central intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment" (p. 50). One of the ways in which some Romantic writers defied Enlightenment thinking was to incorporate some of Rousseau's concepts of the nature of the child. Aside from the child's natural "sensical" inclinations, Rousseau's concept of the irrational child is what, in many ways, informs the Romantic view on the child. The children in the Lambs' *Mrs. Leicester's School* are all irrational as younger children, but their deviance from rationality is explained by their over-active imagination. Elinor Forester, the teller of "The Father's Wedding Day," has her seemingly irrational action of spying into the bedroom of her dead mother explained by her account of her past habits and state of imagination. While the actions are not rational, they are explainable and thus, excusable. She still inhabits that smaller world of the child which can make sense to the adult, yet Émile's irrationality has been allowed a place in the nature of the child. While the Lambs did not commit completely to the more traditional "Romantic" child, Blake and the Wordsworths (both William and Dorothy) did.

Another way in which the Romantic writers countered the utilitarian child was to illustrate utilitarian educational concepts as failures in practical situations. The child imagined by Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth, and Godwin, one for whom reason is the guiding principle, is usurped by a more nonsensical child. Placed in the kind of typical educational

situation repeatedly found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century children's literature, the Romantic child reacts quite differently from its predecessor. Dorothy Wordsworth's "The Mother's Return" presents a situation in which two children are told that, after a month's absence, their mother is returning home the next day. Upon hearing the news, the oldest child, a boy, is silent for a moment in thought, but then laughs and, speaking to his mother, demands her presence that instant, shouting "'Mother, come to me!'" (De Selincourt, l. 8). Of course, she is still far away, and the patient adult explains, just as in a typical utilitarian story, the logical reasons why the mother not only cannot hear her son, but also why she cannot be there immediately. If Mary Wollstonecraft had written this poem, the boy, being presented with such faultless reasoning, would almost certainly understand and admit his error. Dorothy Wordsworth's poem, however, illustrates quite a different kind of child. The adult narrator describes the argument:

> I told of hills, and far-off towns,
> And long, long vales to travel through;
> He listens, puzzled, sore perplexed,
> But he submits; what can he do?   (De Selincourt, *Works*, ll. 13-16)

The boy listens to the careful explanation of his mother's delay and failure to materialize at his command, and though he thinks carefully about it, he remains "puzzled" and "sore perplexed." The logical arguments do not make sense to him; his child-logic tells him they are false, but because his mother does not appear, and also possibly because the argument is given by the authoritative adult figure, the boy must "submit," for indeed, there is nothing he can do. He neither can make his mother appear nor explain his objections to the reasoning he has just heard. He is in a similar dilemma to the "little cottage girl" in William Wordsworth's "We Are Seven," who also persists in her illogic, though in this case her child-like reasoning is made clearer and described as having an altogether different standard from the adult. The foolproof method of utilitarian education has failed in both these cases

because this child construct appears to be a different kind of child, one whose logical reasoning an adult might call "nonsense."[424]

Blake, in his small but important corpus of children's books, attempts nothing less than a reformation of Enlightenment sense-making through the voice of a redefined child. Heather Glen writes, "Blake is using the form of the late eighteenth-century child's song not as a vehicle for 'ideas' counter to those which it usually expressed, but in order to expose and subvert that whole mode of making sense of the world which it characteristically embodied" (p. 18). As we have seen in Chapter 1, Blake used forms like catechism, one of the most popular for children's literature, not to counter any specific ideas communicated by that method but the religious and philosophical basis of it. Unlike in Lear's writing, Blake's manipulation of narrative voice and the image of the child was more directed towards ideological, anti-enlightenment goals, but the resulting child construct has many similarities: both are built around structural and thematic ambiguities.

One of Blake's innovations, and his most insidious device, is to write in the voice of the child, using the child's own language to highlight the unique, intrinsic qualities of a child and to frustrate conventional, rational ways of making sense.[425] This occurs in poems like "The Little Black Boy," "The Lamb," and "The Blossom" from *Songs of Innocence*. In these poems there is a sense of ambiguity promoted by the open structure, play with syntax, and the inconclusiveness of the verses, so different from conventional children's verse. Glen observes that "These poems demand a new kind of activity of their readers: not the passive acceptance of a finished literary product, but a creative engagement with that which is suggestively unresolved" (p. 54). "Spring," from *Songs of Innocence*, is a typical example of the child's poetic voice. The short, two- or three-word lines tumble down the page with little regard for syntax or meaning:

> Sound the Flute!
> Now it's mute.
> Birds delight

---

[424]A slightly different approach to show the foolishness of the adult's attempt to reconstruct the child is in William's "The Pet-Lamb," a poem in which the narrator imagines the song he feels the child would sing and almost fools himself into thinking she *does* sing it.

[425]See La Belle, p. 59, for Blake's use of the child's voice, especially in relation to Rothke.

> Day and Night.
> Nightingale
> In the dale
> Lark in Sky
> Merrily
> Merrily Merrily to welcome in the Year   (plate 22)

The child's language is used here to evoke the feeling of spring, but it is difficult to piece together any coherent "meaning" from the syntactic and morphological (related to punctuation) irregularities. Also, the causal relations and general narrative unity are questionable: Is this an order to play the flute? Why does it become mute? The verb "delight" is used incorrectly here, as an intransitive verb, almost implying a possessive form of "birds" before it, though this also leads only to ambiguity. Verbs are missing, as with the nightingale, and adverbs have unclear modifieds. Furthermore, the rich illustration surrounding the verses only serves to complicated matters. In the following stanza, next to the mention of the "Little Boy" is what appears to be a full-grown, male angel, and next to "Little Girl" appears a mature, female angel (wearing a long dress). Similarly problematic images can be found in the several versions of "The Tyger," which display a tiger whose appearance varies from ferocious to tame, depending on the copy. Blake's illustrations, like Lear's, often reinforce the mystery rather than dispel it. I will not attempt to analyze such figures, but the implications and resonances are plenteous, while any kind of clarification is conspicuously lacking. Nor does this kind of ambiguity seem accidental: in some of the revisions of *Songs of Experience* Blake went to some trouble to take out the more demonstrative, telling elements of his verses. In "The Lilly," for instance, Blake changed the "envious" or "lustful" Rose to "modest," and the "coward" sheep to "humble," thus replacing the stronger, more judgmental language with less judgmental words.[426] In *Songs of Innocence*, through the voice of a child, Blake plays with language "in a way which displaces it from its familiar referential meanings....so that new formal patterns different from those of discursive reasoning are created, imaging a

---

[426]He also crossed out the explanatory line: "The prist [sic] loves war & the soldier peace." See the draft version found in the Notebook (also known as "the Rossetti MS"), c. 1791-2, in *The Notebook of William Blake: A photographic and typographic facscimile*, ed. David V. Erdman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. N109.

world which stands at an 'obtuse angle' to that of common sense."[427] The child construct portrayed here is a nonsense creation, or at least a being beyond the adult, conventional rules of grammar and logic. Somehow Blake manages to communicate the general meanings behind these verses while at the same time making many of them opaque with a child-like, rule-breaking voice.

Wordsworth exhibits a nonsense child construct by extending the child's curious actions and thoughts beyond the realm of reason or explanation. Unlike Rousseau's conception of a child's vacuous irrationality, Wordsworth sees this irrationality as a favourable characteristic, approaching the inscrutability of nature or God. Repeatedly, the child is compared to the incomprehensibility of nature.[428] In "Characteristics of a Child three Years Old" the child, filled with "gladness and involuntary songs" (l. 14) is compared to a fawn "Forth-startled from the fern where she lay couched; / Unthought-of, unexpected as the stir of the soft breeze ruffling the meadow flowers" (ll. 16-18). The child's songs are "involuntary," her actions "unthought-of" and most importantly, "unexpected." Her motivations are as well known to an adult as the fawn's or even the wind's are. But there is no attempt to discover the source of the child's actions. Just as Wordsworth does not question the mystery of the wind, so he accepts the child's actions unreservedly.[429]

Coleridge and Wordsworth, at least when they were not promoting Andrew Bell's Madras system of education (see below), believed in nature's instruction for the young child. Far from the ostensibly "natural" system of Rousseau and Bell's monitorial system, Coleridge advocated what he saw as a "true" natural education which was based in the incomprehensible constitution of nature itself:

> There is indeed "method in't", but it is the method of Nature, which thus
> stores the mind with all the materials for after use, promiscuously indeed,
> and as it might seem without purpose, while she supplies a gay and motley

---

[427]Glen, pp.133-4.

[428]See also Chapter 4 on the "wild" child.

[429]The wind is a potent Romantic symbol implying among other things a connection with God. Thus, we are brought back to the idea of the "divine" child. See M.H. Abrams' "The Correspondent Breeze A Romantic Metaphor," 1957, in *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays in English Romanticism* (New York: Norton, 1984), pp. 25-43. See also the babe in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," who "shalt wander like a breeze / By lakes and snady shores, beneath the crags / Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds" (ll. 54-56).

chaos of facts, and forms, and thousandfold experiences, the origin of which lies beyond memory...430

Nature does indeed have a purpose, but one which is far beyond human contrivance or imitation, and one which seems to our minds a "chaos." The child's receptiveness to nature Coleridge describes as: "the happy delirium, the healthful fever, of the physical, moral, and intellectual being, Nature's kind and providential gift to childhood" (p. 8). These observations on nature and the child's receptiveness to it show the extent to which Coleridge saw the first stages of a proper education as a time of seeming nonsense (to the adult), a time which we can no longer remember accurately. This is a crucial point: the Romantic child is not, in the absolute sense, non-sensical--it only appears so to the adult's tainted and limited perspective. While the child would not see itself as a "nonsense" being, this is the *only* way an adult can see it, as both teacher (nature), and student (the child), are beyond adult knowledge. Coleridge, and Wordsworth, especially in *The Prelude*, rather than limiting our view of childhood by defining and dissecting it, instead expose the dim recollections and loaded ambiguities which connect the glorious, yet mysterious state of childhood to the adult. Their "investigation" into the nature of childhood is negative, that is, it exposes the problems of investigation in the face of an inscrutable being.

The young Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, Book V, is also mysterious, even to himself.[431] Before Wordsworth viewed the body dragged out of "Esthwaite's Lake," he "was roving up and down alone / Seeking I knew not what..." (ll. 455-6). Here is a realistic picture of a child, acting with unknown motives. Not only are the actions of the child mysterious, but also his thoughts are beyond comprehension. In Book I, Wordsworth attempts to describe his thoughts as a child after the boat-stealing episode:

> ...for many days my brain
> Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
> Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts

---

[430]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Logic* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton UP, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 8. The composition date of *Logic* is uncertain, but it was probably begun around 1817 and worked on constantly for many years.

[431]As always, Wordsworth is acutely aware that he is removed from the state of childhood, and possibly may not be expressing that state accurately. See *The Prelude*, II, ll. 28-33; "Nutting," ll. 46-47, and "The Pet-Lamb," which illustrates almost entirely an adult's stale view of the child who only utters four words

> There was a darkness--call it solitude
> Or blank desertion--no familiar shapes
> ....
> But huge and mighty forms that do not live
> Like living men moved slowly through my mind
> By day, and were the trouble of my dreams.   (I, ll. 418-22; 424-26)

The young Wordsworth creates a paradoxical, imaginative image, but Wordsworth's attempt to describe the process leading to it also shows us the mystery of the child's mind. As Jonathan Wordsworth suggests, the passage "is so vague, so heavy with border negatives. And yet it is highly impressive because in it we respond to the urgency and appropriate *un*success of a struggle to define the child's experience as it was felt at the time. No adult wisdom is offered, and none would be acceptable" (p. 47). Adults cannot make sense of that unpredictable organ, the child's mind. Similarly, in "To H.C., Six Years Old," the child "fittest to unutterable thought / The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol" (ll. 3-4). The child's thoughts are "unutterable," which implies that even if the child had the use of an adult's vocabulary, he could not express his thoughts. His thoughts are beyond adult comprehension because they are beyond the limited adult language. Likening him to a "breeze-like motion" shows that this thought is wild and mysterious, with unknown origins and purposes.

When a child is forced to *speak* his "unutterable" thoughts, it is quite fitting that the child speaks nonsense. Johnny in "The Idiot Boy," though in age probably a teen-ager, is mentally a child.[432] After his horseback adventures, Johnny is found and taken back home. When Betty asks him where he has been, what he has heard, and what he has seen, he can only reply,

> 'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
> And the sun did shine so cold.'--
> Thus answered Johnny in his glory,
> And that was all his travel's story.   (ll. 460-464)

This is one of the only moments in Wordsworth when the child's utterance is given directly, without any interpretation by an adult. The result is nonsense. The implications

---

[432]See introductory note to "The Idiot Boy" in the Longman edition. "'The Idiot Boy' is another encounter with human joy as exemplified in the experience of a child (or childlike teenager)" (p. 157).

in the poem are described by Ross Woodman: "The poem's success... lies finally in the license which releases it from the controlled liberty of an imposed meaning. Wordsworth's muses will not and need not explain."[433] But the truth is that his "muses" need not explain any *further*, as Johnny's answer *is* a type of explanation, implying that his experience is inexpressible, unknowable, and truly beyond meaning or "sense." According to Woodman, Johnny is Wordsworth's portrait of the poet as infant, as the wielder of unconscious vision, and as the creator of his own reality.[434] Wordsworth, in a letter to John Wilson on 7 June, 1802, remarks upon Johnny: "I have often applied to Idiots, in my own mind, that sublime expression of scripture that, *'their life is hidden with God.'*"[435] Thus, Wordsworth aligns Johnny with children, whose lives are also mysterious and "hidden with God," or at least much closer to God than adults.

Johnny is an earlier version of some other mystic-children who, while demonstrating the continuance of Wordsworth's "nonsense-child," also show the substantial change of Wordsworth's view of the child. In "The Blind Highland Boy, A Tale Told by the Fire-side, after Returning to the Vale of Grasmere" (1804-06) the child, much like Johnny, is probably mentally, and certainly physically, handicapped, a condition which further removes him from the confines of adult classification. Though the boy leads a different kind of life, he retains a mystical happiness:

> And yet he neither drooped nor pined,
> Nor had a melancholy mind;
> For God took pity on the Boy,
> And was his friend; and gave him joy
> Of which we nothing know.   (ll. 21-25)

Unlike Johnny, the Blind Highland Boy's joy is specifically given to him by God, and because of this, his mental state is far beyond what adults can comprehend. Yet instead of the vague, unanswerable, seemingly self-created joy of Johnny, the Blind Highland Boy's joy, though no less mysterious, can be attributed to God and thus becomes somewhat more

[433]Ross Woodman, "The Idiot Boy as Healer," in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran (London, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), p. 91.
[434]Woodman, p. 82.
[435]*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edition, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 357.

sensical, or at least more explainable. He has visionary dreams of eagles screaming, and roaring water which lead him to his misadventures on the water, and when the adults are about to end his fantasy, he speaks nonsense, but again, the slightly older Wordsworth was not as willing to keep such speech as open as Johnny's:

> '*Lei-gha - Lei-gha*' - he then cried out,
> '*Lei-gha - Lei-gha*' - with eager shout;
> Thus did he cry, and thus did pray,
> And what he meant was 'Keep away,
> And leave me to myself!'[436]

Although this child's motives and goals remain unknown and unknowable, his nonsensical speech is now translated by the narrator, something which the younger Wordsworth (of the 1798 "Idiot Boy") did not do. The boy is taken home and becomes reconciled to his loss of vision, a result far different from the triumph of Johnny. In his old age, Wordsworth would again change his conception of the child as seen in "The Norman Boy," in which the boy's mystical experience becomes subsumed in religion. The poor shepherd boy who makes a rude shelter from a storm and affixes a cross inside trusts in religion "as the surest power and best / For supplying all deficiencies, all wants of the rude nest..." (De Selincourt, ll. 21-2). The child's mystery is now the mystery of faith, but this child is far different from Wordsworth's earlier children who would know little of faith and less of religion and religious symbols. While divinity has always been present in the child, it is no longer an instinct, but a more intentional adult abstraction; the child's mystical nature remains, yet is transformed. And the children in Wordsworth's later poems need religion because their nature had also drastically changed. The innocent child of his youth had acquired Original Sin, as can be seen as early as the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1827), in Sonnet 20:

> Dear be the Church that, watching o'er the needs
> Of Infancy, provides a timely shower
> Whose virtue changes to a Christian Flower
> A Growth from sinful Nature's bed of weeds!--[437]

[436]De Selincourt, ll. 201-5.
[437]Ibid, ll. 1-4.

This child, the antithesis of the "naked savage" or the child-philosopher, is inherently sinful, as is the child's "mother," or nature. In Wordsworth's earlier poems, however, children's experiences, like Johnny's and the Blind Highland Boy's, must ever be unknown, and "nonsensical" to adults, remaining "far hidden from the reach of words."[138] The most fitting words for Wordsworth's child-construct are therefore nonsense, and the implied reader recognizes in them a kindred spirit of sorts—a reflection of his or her own nature.

Though this thesis is concerned with the earlier, and far more influential work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, it is important to note the great changes concerning their ideas of childhood and education throughout their lives. Young men full of the revolutionary spirit of the late 80s and early 90s, they became somewhat disillusioned after the excesses of the French Revolution, and their view of the child was shaped by this experience. Their organic, wild, divinely creative image of the child, in a way, was a conservative gesture aimed against the more "progressive" utilitarian reformers, but also truly progressive in what we now consider a more modern approach to the child.[439] And though, in the early stages of their poetry the child fluctuated between naked savage, angelic bard, and mischievous imp, there was a common base of assumptions which would inform the great child-poems around the turn of the century. In the first few years of the nineteenth century, though, their views would change. Their interest in education led them both to educational experiments, like the Wordsworths' tuition of young Basil Montagu (slightly earlier), and to disasters like Thomas Wedgwood's "nursery of genius," a system by which a child was brought up in sensual deprivation, without ever seeing the outdoors. Coleridge took Wedgwood's plan far more seriously than Wordsworth, but they both declined Wedgwood's proposals and became quite involved in the Madras system of Andrew Bell. Coleridge lectured on this system and Wordsworth practiced it, with Bell, in Grasmere

---

[138]*The Prelude*, III, l. 185. See also Wordsworth's "The Danish Boy," in which another mysterious child who, in the words of Spiegelman, "Living or dead, visible or invisible, militant or lyric...defies our knowing him" (pp. 64-5).
[439]For opposition to the "new schools," see Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Book V; and Coleridge's *BiographiaLiteraria*, Chapter 1.

school classrooms in 1811 and 1812.[440] Both men would enthusiastically support Bell's system for over ten years, which is surprising considering some of the differences between their earlier ideas of less-structured education and Bell's prescriptive system of peer monitors and the master's ever-vigilant eye. But Wordsworth and Coleridge began to have increasing doubts about the system. Coleridge, in his unpublished *Logic*, departs from the Madras system, claiming that the first part of education, that which should be instilled by nature, is a process far beyond human comprehension or knowledge. The beginnings of education are to be acquired "promiscuously" in nature, and, contrary to Bell's system, "the plan is not formed by the selection of the objects presented to the notice of the pupils, but by the impulses and dispositions suited to their age..."[441] Coleridge continues: "nor would it have been possible, had the matter been left to our own invention, to have discovered or invented a medium possessed of advantages so many, so peculiar, and so appropriate, to all its [Nature's] various and numerous purposes" (p. 15). In this educationally conservative view, humanity could never devise a system of education as appropriate and complex as nature's.

Wordsworth's disenchantment with Bell's system can be seen by 1828, in a letter to Hugh James Rose. He complains in this letter of the Madras system's lack of imaginative stimulation and overall effectiveness, and "against all Dr Bell's sour-looking teachers in petticoats that I have ever seen."[442] He calls for a return to a more traditional, less structured plan that, contrary to Bell's system, would "encourage the imaginative feelings, without which the practical understanding is of little avail...."[443] Of course, such sentiments had appeared much earlier, in the 1805 *Prelude* : referring to the contemporary utilitarian educationalists (not to mention Rousseau), he writes that the "tutors of our youth"

---

[440]R.A. Foakes, "Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Education," *Studies in Romanticism*, 28.2 (Summer 1989), 187-206 (p. 195). Book IX of Wordsworth's *The Excursion* discusses national education and refers to the Madras system.

[441]*Logic* , p. 8. From the Latin root of "education," as "educing," or "drawing forth," Colerdige likens this stage to an organic growth, something quite different from the mechanistic educational schemes. While Coleridge was eventually against Bell's system, his description of the "proper" formal schooling is vague and abstract, with no practical guidelines (*Logic*, pp. 12-13).

[442]*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, Part 1, 1821-1828*, revised and ed. Alan G. Hill, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 685.

[443]Ibid, p. 686.

> ...who in their prescience would controul
> All accidents, and to the very road
> Which they have fashioned would confine us down
> Like engines--when will they be taught
> That in the unreasoning progress of the world
> A wiser spirit is at work for us   (V, ll. 380-5)

The references to contemporary educationalists are obvious here, as is Wordsworth's disapproval of systems which too closely monitor and control the child. Children must be more in tune with the "unreasoning progress of the world," by definition a world which appears nonsensical to mortals who cannot comprehend the ministerings of nature. By the end of his life, Wordsworth came full circle in his educational theory, and though his view of the child had changed drastically, he returned to the less structured, more imaginative educational ideal he advocated fifty years earlier, one based on freedom, the imagination, and the teachings of nature. Of course, the reasons for this turn-around, both religious and political, were quite different from those of the younger Wordsworth.[444] I have mainly ignored the *reasons* of these philosophical shifts, for they do not concern this thesis, but it is important to recognize that the image of the child and its proper education, some of the most popular topics and themes of Romantic writing, were constantly changing throughout Wordsworth's and Coleridge's lives. Nevertheless, as far as the Victorians were concerned, the child of *Ode ("There was a time...")* and *Tintern Abbey* would forever be the Wordsworthian, and hence "Romantic," child.

Though the Romantic child of the younger Wordsworth and Coleridge *appears* to resemble the nonsense child, there is ultimately an unbridgable gap between them. The inscrutability the Romantics saw in the child was the inscrutability of God, which, in the end, would hopefully be the opposite of nonsense. If adults had access to God's will, then the child's actions would indeed make sense, but as this is impossible, children remain mysterious testaments to the incomprehensibility of God. Nonsense utilizes the active imagination, but it creates in a god-like fashion *impossible* worlds. Such an act opposes a

---

[444]See Alan Richardson's detailed account on Wordsworth's and Coleridge's agreement with and subsequent detachment from Bell's system, pp. 91-108. Richardson explores the complicated religious, political, and social reasons for Wordsworth's and Coleridge's changes in opinion concerning educational systems

fundamental principle of the Romantic imagination--that it creates truth: "it is not a diverting faculty or a means of creating private dreams...The poet remains a responsible human spokesman, and his art is a moral art."[445] This is akin to Coleridge's faith, which Wordsworth had to some degree, that the imagination led to truth and, ideally, to the divine. Wordsworth expresses this more ambiguously in *The Prelude*, writing about the "mystery of words":

> Even forms and substances are circumfused
> By that transparent veil with light divine,
> And through the turnings intricate of verse
> Present themselves as objects recognised
> In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own.   (V, ll. 625-629)

The "veil" here refers to "words," which, though they can be opaque, through verse become representatives of "objects recognised." This "recognition," means they corroborate the previous experience of the reader, thus reinforcing reality through de-familiarization and then the "flash" of recognition. The "glory" may derive from the imagination of the reader, but it only occurs by recognizing the truths of reality. Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge had faith to some degree in poetic symbols as a type of revelation perceived by the imagination. Victorians like Lear, on the other hand, found it increasingly difficult to hold such a faith, and they often viewed poetic symbols as subjective devices lacking any connection to higher truths.[446] Lear's nonsense is a hyperbolic expression of such subjectivism, as in the end it leads to nothing, or at least certainly not conventional "reality." However, though it may not find such solid ground, it does not seem to mind. The Gromboolian Plain may remain a mystery, but at least we may forever play "battlecock and shuttledore" there.

---

[445]McGillis, p. 150.
[446]Prickett (p. 8) describes this disillusionment with poetic symbol with reference to Carlyle

Conclusion
A Quiet Afternoon

The year is 1875, and a group of children, three boys and three girls around eight years old, gather round an elderly, rather round, bearded gentleman, with glasses perched near the end of his large nose. Edward Lear is 63 years old, at the height of his nonsense career, and he entertains yet another group of children. However, this group is *not* like any other. Each child is the representative construct of the previously discussed theorists, writers, and poets. The children eagerly wait, as Mr. Lear produces a drawing pad, dips his pen, and begins to create his "nonsenses":

> MRS. JAYPHER found a wafer
> Which she stuck upon a note;
> This she took and gave the cook.
> Then she went and bought a boat
> Which she paddled down the stream
> Shouting, "Ice produces cream,
> Beer when churned produces butter!
> Henceforth all the words I utter
> Distant ages thus shall note--
> 'From the Jaypher Wisdom-Boat.' "[447]

Lear continues in this fashion, drawing pictures and telling tales about eccentrics, and strange, mythical creatures inhabiting other worlds, until he notices varied and dissonant reactions from the children. Alfred, dressed in ill-fit adult clothes, smiles an instant, but then frowns in disapproval. He looks with disdain at the puzzled Lear, who has never

---

[447] *Queery Leary Nonsense*, p. 67.

imagined such a reaction to his nonsense from a child. Émile looks up at Lear in doubtful confusion, and then asks "What is the use of that?" Lear emits a small *harrumph* and ignores this question, as Edwin commands his attention by abruptly standing up and walking away, slightly puzzled and disgusted, carrying his toy "substantial cart." In amazement, Lear stares after him, as his glasses slip a little further down his nose. Catherine is smiling in amusement, but then after a moment seems to rethink, and shakes her head with an embarrassed and amused expression. Mary, who all this time had not reacted very much at all, staring away blankly, suddenly rolls on the floor in spasms of laughter. The last child, Ann, joins her. Lear, whose glasses had almost reached the end of that ample nose, finally relaxes, seeing the reaction in Mary and Ann which he had envisioned from the start. He stands up, takes them by the hand, and walks away, wondering where on earth those other children had come from.

§ § §

The children of this scene react hypothetically according to all we have observed from the theories and literature which created them. It now comes as no surprise that of the constructed children who gathered around Lear, Alfred, the child of Locke's theories, is the first to react, and the one whose disapproval is strongest; he experiences a flash of amusement, a reflexive return to memories of a childhood which he now sees as mostly useless and worthless. Émile, whose imagination has been discouraged from birth, cannot understand the appeal of this writing. It serves no purpose, illustrating situations contrary to his experiences of nature. He does not recognize the references to other children's literature because he has only been allowed to read *Robinson Crusoe*. Edwin, the utilitarian child, reacts in a similar way. He appreciates the external non-conformity of the characters in the face of "them," just as Émile did, but the unreality and uselessness, coupled with his stunted imagination, inhibit him from appreciating nonsense. The illustrations confuse him because they do not faithfully represent the text; they seem childish scrawlings which inhibit his desperate, but failing attempt to find the moral. Catherine, the child of the Lambs' more progressive *Mrs. Leicester's School*, appreciates the poems much more than the others because she has a more active imagination, which is

able to create out of the materials of nonsense. However, she detests, along with Alfred, the promotion of social non-conformity. She recognizes the imaginative nature, and possibly sees some benefits in its indulgence, but overall such flights of imagination to her are harmful and unsociable. The last three children may have had imaginative reactions to greater or lesser degrees, but their responses which in any way are deemed "child-like" derive partly from the child created by Rousseau's theories. Rousseau's construct presents the child's attributes more as a result of the child's vacuity, and lack of mental capacity and ability. Thus, a child's responses have no validity--they are empty actions of a thoughtless creature. When these children imagine, laugh, aspire beyond their limitations, or have any other response associated only with childhood, it is only a negative good, one without any real basis. Locke, Rousseau, Edgeworth, Godwin, and even the Lambs were trying to make "sense" of childhood, to contain it within a state from which it could then be moulded according to the "elevated" standards of adults.

Mary, the Romantic child, responds similarly to Ann, the nonsense child, to all the devices and themes of nonsense. Her temporary inactivity is what Edgeworth calls "reverie," but now in Mary is exalted, being the divine imagination, forming paradoxical visions of other worlds. Her imaginings are individual, restrained by no conventions either external or internal. She is "wild" and unpredictable, and laughs to see her reflection in nonsense. But most importantly, her reactions have a positive basis. Her imagination is not idle daydreaming, but the divine creative force, to which her proximity to God entitles her. Her characteristics are evidence of a "fullness" present in childhood, a positive ability justifying and exalting all her actions. She represents a childhood state of innocence and imagination that is higher than adulthood's conformity and domesticity, a state from which adults inevitably and unfortunately *fall*, though they retain some of the "earlier-gained treasures" which are the real energy and force behind existence. As a child, Mary would never understand these reactions to nonsense, nor would she feel any discrepancy between her constitution and the constitution of the writing. But as we have seen in the previous chapter, the adult Romantic would not approve of "wasting" the imagination in the creation of impossible, fantastic worlds. Oddly enough, Ann, the nonsense child, though finding

Lear's work funny, nevertheless laughs for different reasons. Though she resembles the Romantic child in most ways, she is the only child for whom the nonsense world is not paradox, but a consistent fantasy world. She is the impossible key to its meaning, the missing context.

From the genre of literary nonsense, seen as non-sense, emerges the nonsense child construct, a reader (or listener) of bold individuality, "wild" tendencies, and an inscrutable, elevated, divine nature, who in these respects resembles the most influential Romantic child constructs. This Romantic child and the nonsense child are sisters in that, though they have their differences, they are both reactions to the portrayal of the child in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Whether in political, economic, social, or religious contexts, the child was dissected and re(-)formed in order to serve the purpose of the moment. In children's literature and educational theory, Lockean and Rousseauistic theories clashed, but the resulting combinations of the child-image formed the basis of the rational, sensible, predictable, and profitable human being. Wollstonecraft and Godwin, Day and Edgeworth--all assumed that if only the nature of the child could be known and displayed, surely education could be reformed and possibly the future of humanity could come closer to the ideal. The child has been paid no less attention by Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, yet its worth lay in its breaking of rules, rather than in its adherence to them: its mystery is its value, a mystery which an adult must forever perceive from the other side of Blake's visionary river, or from Wordsworth's distant inland spot away from the shore of the infinite ocean. The nonsense child resembles this child, yet lacks the sense of direction given by the Romantics. Because nonsense, unlike nature's teaching no matter how "promiscuous" it seems, does not come back around to sense, the nonsense child remains, at best, in a blissful state beyond our comprehension.

The creation of the nonsensical child brings us back to the opening question of this thesis concerning the cause of literary nonsense's isolated historical position as a children's genre. Lear's immense popularity in mid- to late-Victorian England shows that his historically constructed intended reader was indeed close to the real audience of the time. His awareness of this audience is seen in his humorous manipulation of popular children's

(and adult) genres, as well as illustration. When Lear's first work appeared, the children's literature market was in a fairly dire state, being dominated on one hand by utilitarian efforts at edification and on the other hand by moralistic and didactic religious works. To the children and adults forced to read such works, Lear's nonsense must have displayed a remarkable freshness and originality. Dancing in and around parody, Lear's poems and illustrations defied such genre classifications as alphabet, natural history, and animal-party books while simultaneously being tied to them. Some contemporary critics would simply give up when they tried to describe his work, such as Sidney Colvin in his review of *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, &c.* (1872) in *The Academy*. In this review, which gives considerable space to other authors such as Rossetti and MacDonald, Lear is only given a paragraph, which begins, and nearly ends, with "A stout, jovial book of *More Nonsense*, by Mr. Edward Lear, transcends criticism as usual."[448] Add to this Lear's implied recognition of the new child construct from the Romantics, and the reason for the genre's rise in the child's domain becomes clearer.

We are now left with the question of the genre's partial departure from children's literature and re-emergence in the adult world. While Lear's books were immensely popular--his *A Book of Nonsense* went into fifteen reprints in his lifetime--they have undoubtedly lost some of their appeal today.[449] In addition, many adults nowadays admit that Lear has never quite appealed to them; his nonsense can seem far more puzzling, or even boring, than humorous to a modern audience. That children (and adults) today do not find him as appealing perhaps exposes his construct of the child, and literary nonsense itself, as time-bound, restricted to the literary and historical conventions of its day. For this same reason we cannot now read Taylor's seventeenth-century nonsense without much background knowledge. One of the causes for his decline in popularity is indeed that children (and adults) today are significantly different from their Victorian ancestors in

---

[448]Sidney Colvin, Review of *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, &c.* , *The Academy*, 3 (15 January, 1872), 23-4 (p. 24).
[449]Lear's works are still available, with new editions coming out occasionally, but our exposure to his work is now often limited to some of the major narrative verses like "The Owl and the Pussycat" and "The Jumblies," and a handful of limericks, usually with newer, more ornate illustrations. See note 13 for a partial list of Lear's works currently in print.

certain aspects. Today's children's literature and other media forms such as television have embraced nonsense antecedents fully, from the nonsense words of Dr. Seuss to the outrageous abandonment of the conventional and the intellectual in the "Ren and Stimpy" cartoon. There is no longer a serious tradition to fight against, and children's entertainment must continually go further in its pursuit of an audience inundated with novelty, humor, and creativity. Children today are thus far less likely to notice what now seem to be the somewhat tame rhymes and plain illustrations of Lear. What once appeared to be open rebellion in the dull world of children's literature now, to some, appears dull itself. The decline of Lear's popularity, it seems, has partially been caused by the culturally and historically specific reader.

As we have seen, literary nonsense usually clings to and rebels against some kind of contemporary, literary frame of reference. It seems that once the climate of children's literature had improved--after the popularity of Carroll and the new freedom it entailed-- there was no longer sufficient fuel for nonsense as children's literature. The world had begun to shift, becoming more serious, and more bloody, and nonsense was taken back to the adult world. Its potential for subversion was rediscovered and redirected. Nonsense filtered into surrealism, existentialism, and the absurd, in the questioning of reality and modern existence. Its tendency towards meaninglessness was exploited by Edward Gorey, whose nonsense drains away all optimism from its Victorian predecessor, leaving only a tainted ennui. It became a tool for such writers as Stein, Joyce, and Stevens by which they could question the efficacy of language. Of course, it has never disappeared entirely from children's literature, and its ability to remain, in however diminished a state, reveals that we can we still enjoy Lear's nonsense even if we can never *be* the historically or textually constructed implied reader.

Lear's writing is still available, in one form or another, which cannot be said of almost any of the children's versifiers of his time: it is hard to imagine today's children (or adults) reading the Taylor sisters, the Lambs, or Margaret Gatty, yet Lear's works somehow manage to hold their place in the canon of children's literature, occasionally being reprinted alone, with Carroll's verse, or in anthologies, and usually with new

illustrations. Gyles Brandreth, in a recent volume of nonsense, writes a telling tribute to Lear in his acknowledgments, "My principal debt, of course, is to the genius of Edward Lear, the first of the great nonsense writers and, in my view, the greatest."[450] Wolff's historical intended reader of Lear's nonsense no longer exists, but enough of an audience still does to maintain Lear's influence. This phenomenon may be explainable on the historical side, simply because literary nonsense is only partially a historical construct. Nonsense devices themselves are not bound to anything temporal--they can be applied to any genre with relatively equal effectiveness. We may no longer see all the humour of Lear's botanical drawings, as botanical illustration has gone out of vogue, but such techniques could be applied to superhero comics, Teletubbies, or contemporary political cartoons, for example. It is only once the nonsense devices have been applied that the result usually is to some extent time-bound. Additionally, in Iser's textual terms, it appears that the genre has been and still is effective exactly because we can *never be* the true nonsense reader construct. This construct is the non-existent co-conspirator in the play of nonsense, the listener in the above scenario who can provide the missing sense-context. As long as she is never found, she and the genre will remain nonsense creations.

---

[450]Gyles Brandreth, *Total Nonsense Z to A*, illus. Lucy Robinson (New York: Sterling, 1981). p 4

Bibliography

Primary Sources

A was an archer (Derby: Henry Mozley and Sons, [n.d., not before 1815])

Alphabet of Animals: Designed to impress children with affection for the brute creation (London: The Book Society, 1863)

Aunt Judy's Christmas Volume For Young People, ed. Mrs. Alfred Gatty (London: Bell and Daldy, 1869)

Belloc, Hilaire, *Cautionary Verses: The Collected Humorous Poems of H. Belloc* (London: Duckworth, 1939)

Blake, William, *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988)

_____. *The Letters of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1956)

_____. *The Notebook of William Blake: A photographic and typographic facsimile*, ed. David V. Erdman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973)

_____. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 1789, 1794, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: OUP, 1967)

Brandreth, Gyles, *Total Nonsense Z to A*, illus. Lucy Robinson (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., 1981)

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, 1847 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)

Broome, Charlotte Ann, *Mamma's Pictures, or The History of Fanny and Mary* (London: Darton, Harvey, and Darton, [ca. 1813])

Brown, Gordon [A. Nobody], *Nonsense; For Somebody Anybody or Everybody Particularly the Baby-Body* (London: Gardner, Darton & Co., [c. 1895]

_____. *Some More Nonsense For the Same Bodies as Before* (London: Gardner, Darton & Co., 1896)

Carroll, Lewis (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), *Alice in Wonderland*, 1865, ed. Donald J. Gray, 2nd edition (London: Norton, 1992)

_____. *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1940)

Catalogue of the Library of the Right Honourable The Earl of Derby at Knowsley, MS, 1830

Children's Tales or Infant Prattle (London: J. Bush, 1818)

The Christian Alphabet, or, Good Child's First Book (London: Ryle and Co., [n.d.])

Cock Robin: A pretty painted toy for either girl or boy; suited to children of all ages (London: Harris, 1819)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, 1817, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 volumes (Princeton: Princeton UP; London: Routledge, 1983)

_____. *Coleridge, Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: OUP, 1912, 1969)

_____. *The Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956)

_____. *Logic* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton UP, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)

_____. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 2 volumes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962)

_____. "Romeo and Juliet," *Lectures on Shakespeare* in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Oxford: OUP, 1985), pp. 640-54

Croker, Thomas Crofton, *Daniel O'Rourke or Rhymes of a Pantomime*, 2nd edition (London: [n.p.], 1828)

Dame Wiggins of Lee and her Seven Wonderful Cats. A Humourous Tale. Written Principally by a Lady of Ninety, [ascribed to R.S. Sharpe and Mrs. Pearson] (London: A.K. Newman, 1823)

Darwin, Charles, "A Biographical Sketch of an Infant," *Mind*, 2.7 (July, 1877), 285-94

Day, Thomas, *The History of Sandford and Merton*, 1783 (London, 1853)

The Death and Burial of Cock Robin; as taken from the original manuscript, in the possession of Master Meanwell (Lichfield: M. Morgan and A. Morgan, [1793-1802])

Dickens, Charles, *Great Expectations*, 1861 (London: Hazell, Watson, & Viney, n.d.)

_____. *Hard Times*, 1854 (London: Educational Book Company, 1910)

Dorset, Catherine Ann, *The Lion's Masquerade* (London, 1807)

_____. *The Peacock at Home* (London, 1807)

Douglas, Lord Alfred, *The Duke of Berwick and Other Rhymes* (London: Martin Secker, 1926)

Edgeworth, Maria and R. L., *Essays of Practical Education*, 1798, 3rd edition, 2 volumes (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1815)

Edgeworth, Maria, *Moral Tales*, volume 1, *The Longford Edition: Tales and Novels*, 10 volumes (London: Routledge, 1893)

Fraser, Claude Lovat, *Nursery Rhymes, With pictures by Claud Lovat Fraser* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1919)

Godwin, William, *Ali Baba or The Fourty Thieves* (London, 1805)

_____. *The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature* (Dublin: J. Moore, 1797)

_____. *Fables Ancient and Modern Adapted for the Use of Children*, 1805, 7th edition (London: M.J. Godwin, 1817)

The Happy Courtship, Merry Marriage, and Pic Nic Dinner, of Cock Robin, and Jenny Wren, To Which is Added, Alas! The Doleful Death of the Bridegroom (London: Harris, 1814)

The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women: Illustrated by as many engravings: exhibiting their principal eccentricities and amusements (London: Harris, 1820) in De Vries, *Flowers of Delight* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1965), pp. 117-18

Hoffmann, Heinrich, *The English Struwwelpeter, or Pretty Stories and Funny Pictures*, 1848 ([London: Routledge, 1909)

Hood, Thomas, *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood*, ed. Walter Jerrold (London: H. Frowde, 1906)

_____. *Whims and Oddities*, 2nd edition (London: Lupton Relfe, 1827)

Keats, John, *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (London: Heinemann, 1978)

_____. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 volumes (Cambridge: CUP, 1958)

Kilner, Mary Ann, *The Adventures of a Pincushion: Designed chiefly for the use of Young Ladies* (London: Marshall, c. 1780)

Kingsley, Charles, *The Water Babies*, 1863 (New York: Dilithium Press, 1986)

Kipling, Rudyard, *Just So Stories* (New York: Signet, 1912)

[Lamb, Charles], *Felissa, or; The Life and Opinions of a Kitten of Sentiment*, 1811, attributed to Charles Lamb (London: J. Harris, 1811)

Lamb, Charles and Mary, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, Jr., 3 volumes (Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1976)

_____. *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 1903-5, 6 volumes (London: Methuen, 1912)

Lear, Edward, *The Book of Nonsense and Nonsense Songs* (London: Penguin, 1996)

_____. *Bosh and Nonsense* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 1982)

_____. *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, ed. Holbrook Jackson (New York: Dover, 1947)

_____. Diaries, Houghton Library, Harvard University, 30 volumes, MS Eng 797.3

_____. *Edward Lear: Selected Letters*, ed. Vivien Noakes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)

_____. *Gleanings from the Menagerie and Aviary at Knowsley Hall*, ed. J.E. Gray (Privately printed, 1846)

_____. *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots* (London: R. Ackermann and E. Lear, 1832)

_____. *The Jumblies*, illus. Emily Bloom (London: Orchard Books, 1998)

_____. *Later Letters of Edward Lear Author of "The Book of Nonsense" to Chichester Fortescue (Lord Carlingford) Frances Countess Waldegrave and others*, ed. Lady Strachey (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911)

_____. *Lear in the Original*, ed. Herman W. Liebert (New York: H.P. Kraus; London: OUP, 1975)

_____. *The Lear Omnibus*, ed. R.L. Mégroz (London: T. Nelson and sons, 1938)

_____. *Letters of Edward Lear Author of "The Book of Nonsense" To Chichester Fortescue Lord Carlingford and Frances Countess Waldegrave*, ed. Lady Strachey (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907)

_____. *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc.* (London: Robert Bush, 1872)

_____. *The Owl and the Pussy-cat*, illus. Ian Beck (London: Doubleday Picture Corgi Books, 1995)

_____. *The Owl and the Pussy Cat* (London: Walker Books, 1991)

_____. *Owls and Pussy-cats: Nonsense Verse* [Lear and Carroll] (Oxford: OUP, 1993)

_____. *Queery Leary Nonsense*, ed. Lady Strachey (London: Mills & Boon, 1911)

_____. *Teapots and Quails*, eds. Angus Davidson and Philip Hofer (London: John Murray, 1953)

_____. Unpublished Edward Lear MSS (courtesy of Vivien Noakes)

Locke, John, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 1693, eds. John W. and Jean S. Yolton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

MacDonald, George, *At the Back of the North Wind*, 1871 (London, Glasgow: Blackie & Sons, [n.d.])

[Martin, Sarah Catherine], *The Comic Adventures of Old Mother Hubbard and Her Dog* (London: John Harris, 1805), facsimile copy (San Marino: Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1962)

Mavor, William, *The English Spelling Book, Accompanied by a progressive series of easy and familiar lessons, intended as an introduction to a correct knowledge of the English language* (London and Derby: John and Charles Mozley, [n.d., ca. 1830?])

Meyer, Susan E., *A Treasury of the Great Children's Book Illustrators* (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, 1987)

Mill, John Stuart, *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive, Being a connected view of the principles of evidence and the methods of scientific investigation* 1843 (New York, Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1906)

Milton, John, *The Poems of John Milton*, eds. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London, New York: Longman, 1968)

Moore, Thomas, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore, collected by himself*, 10 volumes (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1840)

More, Hannah, *Sacred Dramas: Chiefly intended for young persons: The subjects taken from the bible* (London: T. Cadell, 1782)

"Mrs. Bib's Baby," *Punch*, 10 (1846), 53, 64

Nobody, A. [Gordon Brown], *Nonsense; For Somebody Anybody or Everybody Particularly the Baby-Body* (London: Gardner, Darton & Co., [1895])

_____. *Some More Nonsense For the Same Bodies as Before* (London: Gardner-Darton & Co., 1896)

Nursery Rhymes: With pictures by Claud Lovat Fraser (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1919)

Palgrave, Francis Turner, ed., *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (London: Macmillan, 1861)

The Parent's Cabinet of Amusement and Instruction, volume 4 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1834)

Peacock, Thomas Love, *Sir Hornbook; or, Childe Launcelot's Expedition. A Grammatico-Allegorical Ballad* (London: Sharpe and Hailes, 1814)

Peake, Mervyn, *A Book of Nonsense* (London: Picador, 1972)

_____. *Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor* (London: Country Life Book, 1939)

_____. *Titus Groan* (London: Methuen, 1946)

Peter Piper's Practical Principles of Plain and Perfect Pronunciation (London: J. Harris and Son, 1820)

Plato, *Laws*, trans. A.E. Taylor (London: J.M. Dent; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1960)

Richards, Laura E., *I Have a Song to Sing You: Still More Rhymes*, illus. Reginald Birch (New York, London: D. Appleton–Century Company, 1938)

_____. *Tirra Lirra: Rhymes Old and New*, illus. Marguerite Davis (London: George G. Harrap, 1933)

Roscoe, William, *The Butterfly's Ball, and the Grasshopper's Feast*, 1806 (London: J. Harris, 1807)

Rosen, Michael, *Michael Rosen's Book of Nonsense*, illus. Claire Mackie (Hove: Macdonald Young Books, 1997)

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Émile or Education*, 1762, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1911, 1974)

_____. "Considerations on the Government of Poland," 1773, in *The Minor Educational Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, ed. and trans. William Boyd (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1910, 1962)

Ruskin, John, *The King of the Golden River, or the Black Brothers, A Legend of Stiria*, 1841, 6th edition (London: Smith, Elder & Co., [n.d.])

Salzmann, C.G., *Elements of Morality for the use of children; with an introductory address to parents*, trans. Mary Wollstonecraft, 2 volumes (London: ptd for J. Johnson, 1790)

Sandburg, Carl, *Rootabaga Stories* (London: George G. Harrap, 1924)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York, London: Norton, 1977)

Sherwood, Mary, *The History of the Fairchild Family; or, The Child's Manual: Being a collection of stories calculated to shew the importance and effects of a religious education*, 1818, 2nd edition (London: J. Hatchard, 1818)

Sinclair, Catherine, *Holiday House* (Edinburgh: William Whyte, 1839)

Tagore, Rabindranath, *I Won't Let You Go: Selected Poems*, trans. Ketaki Kushari Dyson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1991)

Taylor, Ann and Jane, *Original Poems for Infant Minds, By Several Young Persons*, 1804-05, 3rd edition, 2 volumes (London: Darton and Harvey, 1807)

_____. *Rhymes for the Nursery*, 1806, 8th edition (London, 1814)

Tennyson, Alfred, *Tennyson: A Selected Edition*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Harlow: Longman, 1989)

Töpffer, Rodolphe, *Voyages et aventures du Docteur Festus* (Geneva, Paris: 1840) from facsimile (Cologne, Geneva: [n.p.], 1996)

Trimmer, Sarah, *Fabulous Histories: Designed for the instruction of children, respecting their treatment of animals* (London: 1786)

_____. *The Sunday-School Catechist: consisting of familiar lectures, with questions, for the use of visiters and teachers* [sic] (London: T. Bensley, 1788)

_____. *The Teacher's Assistant*, 4th edition (London: [n.p.], 1806)

Walpole, Horace, *Hieroglyphic Tales*, 1785, facsimile in *The Augustan Reprint Society* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1982)

Watts, Alan, *Nonsense* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975; originally Stolen Paper Review Editions, 1967)

Watts, Isaac, *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, 1866)

Wollstonecraft, Mary, *Original Stories from Real Life; with Conversations. Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*, 1788, volume IV, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, eds. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, 7 volumes (London: Pickering, 1989)

Wordsworth, William, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd edition, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967)

_____. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, Part 1, 1821-1828*, revised and ed. Alan G. Hill, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978)

_____. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, Part 1, 1806-1811*, ed. Mary Moorman, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)

_____. *The Oxford Authors William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: OUP, with corrections 1986)

_____. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, eds. Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, 5 volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940-52)

_____. *The Prelude, 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (London: Norton, 1979)

Wordsworth, William and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798-, ed. Michael Mason (London, New York: Longman, 1992)

Zoological Gallery: Nos. 1-6 (London: Edward Lacey, [n.d.])

Secondary Sources

Abrams, M.H., "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor," 1957, in *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays in English Romanticism* (New York: Norton, 1984), pp. 25-43

Altick, Richard D., *Victorian People and Ideas* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1973)

Andersen, Jorgen, "Edward Lear and the Origin of Nonsense," *English Studies*, 31 (1950), 161-166

Anonymous review of *Laughable Lyrics* in *The Saturday Review*, 42 (9 December, 1876), 734

Anonymous review of *Laughable Lyrics* in *The Spectator*, no. 2527 (2 December, 1876), 1516

Anonymous review of *Laughable Lyrics, A Fourth Book of Nonsense Poems, Songs, Botany, Music, Etc.* in *The Athenaeum*, no. 2560 (18 November, 1876), 664

Anonymous review of *More Nonsense Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, &c.* in *The Athenaeum*, no. 2307 (13 January, 1872), 43

Avery, Gillian, *Nineteenth Century Children: Heroes and Heroines in English Children's Stories 1780-1900* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965)

Babenroth, A. Charles, *English Childhood: Wordsworth's Treatment of Childhood in the Light of English Poetry from Prior to Crabbe* (New York: Columbia UP, 1922)

Baker, G.P. and P.M.S. Hacker, *Language, Sense and Nonsense: A Critical Investigation into Modern Theories of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984)

Baker, William, "T.S. Eliot on Edward Lear: An Unnoted Attribution," *English Studies,* 64 (1983), 564-566

Baring-Gould, W.S. and Rupert Hart-Davis, *The Lure of the Limerick* (London: Hart-Davis, 1969)

Belknap, George, "History of the Limerick," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America,* 75 (1981), 1-32

Bex, Tony, "Parody, Genre, and Literary Meaning," *Journal of Literary Semantics,* 25.3 (1996), 225-44

Bibby, Cyril, *The Art of the Limerick* (London: The Research Publishing Co., 1978)

Boas, George, *The Cult of Childhood* (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1966)

Booth, Wayne C., *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* 2nd edition (London: Penguin Books, 1991)

Bouissac, Paul, "Decoding Limericks: A Structuralist Approach," *Semiotica,* 19 (1977), 1-12

Brockway, J., "Edward Lear, Poet," *Fortnightly Review,* 167 (1950), 334-339

Buckley, Jerome Hamilton, *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 1966)

Byrom, Thomas, *Nonsense and Wonder: The Poems and Cartoons of Edward Lear* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977)

Cammaerts, Emile, *The Poetry of Nonsense* (London: Routledge, 1925)

Carpenter, Humphrey, *Secret Gardens: The Golden Age of Children's Literature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985)

Carpenter, Humphrey, and Mari Prichard, *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1984)

Chambers, Aiden, "The Reader in the Book" in *The Signal Approach to Children's Books,* ed. Nancy Chambers (Harmondsworth: Kestrel Books, 1980), pp. 250-275

Chapman, Raymond, *The Victorian Debate: English Literature and Society 1832-1901* (New York: Basic Books, 1968)

Chesterton, G.K., "A Defence of Nonsense," in *The Defendant* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1914), pp. 42-50

Chitty, Susan, *That Singular Person Called Lear* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988)

"Christmas Books," *The Saturday Review* (21 December, 1861), 646

Cohen, Morton N. and Anita Gandolfo, ed., *Lewis Carroll and the House of Macmillan* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987)

Colley, Ann C., *Edward Lear and the Critics* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993)

_____. "Edward Lear's Limericks and the Reversals of Nonsense," *Victorian Poetry*, 29 (1988), 285-299

_____. "The Limerick and the Space of Metaphor," *Genre*, 21 (Spring 1988), 65-91.

Colvin, Sidney, Review of *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, &c.*, *The Academy*, 3 (15 January, 1872), 23-4

Coveney, Peter, *The Image of Childhood*, revised edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967)

Cuddon, J.A., ed., revised by C.E. Preston, "Nonsense," in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976, 1998), pp. 551-58

Darton, F.J. Harvey, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 1932, 2nd edition (Cambridge: CUP, 1958)

Davidson, Angus, *Edward Lear: Landscape Painter and Nonsense Poet* (London: John Murray, 1938)

Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (London: The Athlone Press, (French version 1969), 1990)

Demurova, Nina, "Toward a Definition of *Alice's* Genre: The Folktale and Fairy-Tale Connections" in *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*, ed. Edward Guiliano (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1982), pp. 75-88

Dent, N. J. H., *Rousseau: An Introduction to his Psychological, Social, and Political Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988)

DeVries, Leonard, *Flowers of Delight* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1965)

Dilworth, Thomas, "Edward Lear's Suicide Limerick," *The Review of English Studies*, 184 (1995), 535-38

_____. "Society and the Self in the Limericks of Lear," *The Review of English Studies*, 177 (1994), 42-62

Dolitsky, Marlene, *Under the Tumtum Tree: From Nonsense to Sense* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984)

Dunn, John, *Locke* (Oxford: OUP, 1984)

Early Children's Books and Their Illustration (New York: The Pierpont Morgan Library; London: OUP, 1975)

Ede, Lisa S., "The Nonsense Literature of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 1975)

_____. "Edward Lear's Limericks and Their Illustrations" in *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 101-116

_____. "An Introduction to the Nonsense Literature of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll" in *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 47-60

"Edward Lear," *The Saturday Review*, 65.1684 (4 February, 1888), 130

Feaver, William, *When we were young: Two centuries of children's book illustration* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977)

Filmer, Keith, ed., *The Victorian Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in the Mythopoeic Fiction of the Victorian Age* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991)

Flescher, Jacqueline, "The language of nonsense in *Alice*," *Yale French Studies*, 43 (1969-70) 128-44

Foakes, R.A., "Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Education," *Studies in Romanticism*, 28.2 (Summer 1989), 187-206

Fry, Paul H., "Thomas Gray's Feather'd Cincture: The Odes" in *Poets of Sensibility and the Sublime*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 89-118

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 1977, in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), pp. 1-53

Glen, Heather, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's* Songs *and Wordsworth's* Lyrical Ballads (Cambridge: CUP, 1983)

Gilead, Sarah, "Magic Abjured: Closure in Children's Fantasy Fiction," *PMLA*, 106 (1991), 277-93

Gray, Donald J., "The Uses of Victorian Laughter," *Victorian Studies*, 10 (1966), 45-76

Graziosi, Marco, "The Limerick" on *Edward Lear Home Page* (http://www2.pair.com/mgraz/Lear/index.html)

Grimsley, Ronald, *The Philosophy of Rousseau* (Oxford: OUP, 1973)

Guiliano, Edward, "A Time for Humor: Lewis Carroll, Laughter and Despair, and *The Hunting of the Snark*" in *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration*, ed. Edward Guiliano (New York, 1982), pp. 123-131

Haight, M.R., "Nonsense," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 11 (1971), 247-56

Hancher, Michael, "Alice's Audiences" in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran (London, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 190-207

Hannoosh, Michele, "The Reflexive Function of Parody," *Comparative Literature*, 41.2 (1989), 113-127

Hark, Ina Rae, *Edward Lear* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982)

_____. "Edward Lear: Eccentricity and Victorian Angst," *Victorian Poetry*, 16 (1978),112-122

Harrowven, Jean, *The Limerick Makers* (London: The Research Publishing Co., 1976)

Hilbert, Richard A., "Approaching Reason's Edge: 'Nonsense' as the Final Solution to the Problem of Meaning," *Sociological Inquiry*, 47.1 (1977), 25-31

Houghton, Walter Edwards, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957)

Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985)

Huxley, Aldous, "Edward Lear," in *On the Margin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923), pp. 167-172

Huxley, Francis, *The Raven and the Writing Desk* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976)

Inglis, Fred, *The Promise of Happiness: Value and meaning in children's fiction* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981)

Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: The John's Hopkins UP, 1978)

_____. "The Generic Control of the Esthetic Response: An Examination of Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*" in *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1974), pp. 57-80

_____. *The Implied Reader: Patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1974)

Jan, Isabelle, *On Children's Literature*, ed. Catherine Storr (London: Allen Lane, 1969, 1973)

Jenkins, Hilary, "The Child in his World: Changing Images in Children's Literature, 1796-1839" (unpublished M.Litt. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1986)

Jordan, Barbara, "Tricks and treats; picture books and forms of comedy," in *Talking Pictures: Pictorial texts and young readers*, ed. Victor Watson and Morag Styles (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), pp. 48-60

Kent, David A. and D.R. Ewen, eds., *Romantic Parodies: 1797-1831* (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1992)

Krips, Valerie, "Imaginary childhoods: memory and children's literature," *Critical Quarterly*, 39.3 (1997), 42-50

La Belle, Jenijoy, *The Echoing Wood of Theodore Roethke* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976)

Lasdun, Susan, *Making Victorians: The Drummond Children's World 1827-1832* (London: V. Gollancz, 1983)

"Lear's Book of Nonsense," *The Saturday Review*, 65.1684 (24 March, 1888), 361-62

"Lear's Nonsense Books," *The Spectator*, no. 3090 (17 September, 1887), 1251-2

Lecercle, Jean-Jacques, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994)

Legman, G., *The Limerick: 1700 Limericks covering every bawdy topic from the 14th century to modern times* (London: Granada, 1964, 1979)

Lehmann, John, *Edward Lear and his World* (Norwich: Thames and Hudson, 1977)

Lesnik-Oberstein, Karín, *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (Oxford: OUP, 1994)

Levi, Peter, "Edward Lear" in *The Art of Poetry: The Oxford Lectures 1984-1989* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1991), pp. 169-186

Mahony, Bertha E., compiler and others, *Illustrators of Children's Books: 1744-1945* (Boston: The Horn Book, 1947)

Malcolm, Noel, *The Origins of English Nonsense* (London: Fontana/HarperCollins, 1997)

Manlove, C.N., *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975)

McAdam, E.L. and George Milne, *Johnson's Dictionary: A Modern Selection* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963)

McGillis, Roderick, "Childhood and Growth: George MacDonald and William Wordsworth" in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth Century*

England, ed. James Holt McGavran (London, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 150-167

Mégroz, R. L., "The Master of Nonsense," *The Cornhill Magazine*, 157 (January-June, 1938), 175-190

Meigs, Cornelia, *et al*, eds., *A Critical History of Children's Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1969)

Meyer, Susan E., *A Treasury of the Great Children's Book Illustrators* (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, 1987)

Miller, Edmund, "Two Approaches to Edward Lear's Nonsense Songs," *The Victorian Newsletter*, 44 (Fall 1973), 5-8

"Mr. Edward Lear," *The Athenaeum*, no. 3145 (4 February, 1888), 154-5

"Mr. Lear's New Nonsense," *The Spectator*, no. 2269 (23 December, 1871), 1570-71

Muir, Percy, *English Children's Books, 1600-1900* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1954)

_____. *Victorian Illustrated Books* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1971, rev. 1985)

Mulderig, Gerald P., "Alice and Wonderland: Subversive Elements in the World of Victorian Children's Fiction," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 11 (1977), 320-9

Newsome, David, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought* (London: John Murray, 1974)

Noakes, Vivien, *Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer*, 1968 (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, revised edition 1979)

_____. *Edward Lear, 1812-1888* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985)

Nock, S. A., "Lacrimae Nugarum: Edward Lear of the Nonsense Verses," *Sewanee Review*, 49 (1941), 68-81

"Nonsense Pure and Simple," *The Spectator*, no. 3149 (3 November, 1888), 1503-05

Olson, Kirby, "Edward Lear: Deleuzian Landscape Painter," *Victorian Poetry*, 31 (1993), 347-362

Opie, Iona and Peter, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, 1951 (Oxford: OUP, 1992)

Orwell, George, "Nonsense Poetry" in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950), pp. 179-184

Osgood Field, William B., *Edward Lear on my Shelves* (New York: Privately Printed, 1933)

Parker, W.M., ed., "Edward Lear, Three New Poems," *The Poetry Review* (June, 1950), 81-83

Partridge, E., "The Nonsense Words of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll," in *Here, There and Everywhere: Essays Upon Language*, 2nd revised edition (London: Hamilton, 1978)

Pattison, Robert, *The Child Figure in English Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978)

Phiddian, Robert, "Are Parody and Deconstruction Secretly the Same Thing?" *New Literary History*, 28 (Autumn 1997), 673-696

Pinchbeck, Ivy and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society*, 2 volumes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969)

Poe, Edgar Allan, "Allegory," [review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, March, 1846], in *Strangeness and Beauty, An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism 1840-1910*, eds. Eric Warner and Graham Hough, 2 volumes (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), I, 153-4

Polhemus, Robert M., "John Millais's Children: Faith and Erotics: *The Woodman's Daughter* (1851)" in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 289-312

_____. "Play, Nonsense, and Games: Comic Diversion," in *Alice in Wonderland*, ed. Donald J. Gray (New York, London: Norton, 1971, 1992), pp. 368-372

Preston, John, *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Heinemann, 1970)

Prickett, Stephen, *Victorian Fantasy* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979)

Reichert, Klaus, *Lewis Carroll: Studien zum literarischen Unsinn* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1974)

Reike, Alison, *The Senses of Nonsense* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992)

Reinstein, P. Gila, *Alice in Context* (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1988)

Richardson, Alan, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994)

_____. "Wordsworth, Fairy Tales, and the Politics of Children's Reading" in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran (London, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 34-53

Riewald, J.G., "Parody as Criticism," *Neophilologus*, 50 (1966), 125-48

Robinson, Fred Miller, "Nonsense and Sadness in Donald Bartheleme and Edward Lear," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 80 (1981), 164-76

Rogers, G.A.J., ed., *Locke's Philosophy: Content and Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

Rogers, Robert, "Three Times True: Redundancy in Ambiguous Texts," *Poetics Today*, 6 (1985), 591-605

Rose, Margaret A., "Parody/Post-Modernism," *Poetics*, 17 (1988), 49-56

Sangster, Paul, *Pity My Simplicity* (London: Epworth Press, 1963)

"The Science of Nonsense," *The Spectator* (17 December, 1870), 1505-6

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

Shires, Linda M., "Fantasy, Nonsense, Parody, and the Status of the Real: The Example of Carroll," *Victorian Poetry*, 26 (1988), 267-283

"Sir Edward Strachey on Nonsense," *The Spectator*, no. 3463 (10 November, 1894), 638-39

Smith, A.J.M., "Nonsense Poetry and Romanticism," in *Essays in Honor of Russell B. Nye*, ed. Joseph Waldmeir (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1978), pp. 180-194

Smith, Karen Patricia, *The Fabulous Realm: A Literary-Historical Approach to British Fantasy, 1780-1990* (London: Scarecrow, 1993)

Spiegelman, Willard, *Wordsworth's Heroes* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1985)

St Clair, William, "William Godwin as Children's Bookseller" in *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, eds. Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 165-179

Stephens, John, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London, New York: Longman, 1992)

Stewart, Susan, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: The John's Hopkins UP, 1979)

Strachey, Sir Edward, "Sir Edward Strachey on Nonsense," *The Spectator* (10 November, 1894), 638-9

[Strachey, Sir Edward], "Nonsense as a Fine Art," *Quarterly Review*, 167 (October, 1888) 335-65

Styles, Morag, "Inside the tunnel: a radical kind of reading - picture books, pupils and post-modernism" in *Talking Pictures: Pictorial texts and young readers*, ed. Victor Watson and Morag Styles (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), pp. 23-47

Tiddy, R.J.E., *The Mummer's Play* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923)

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

_____. "The Limerick: The Sonnet of Nonsense?" *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 16 (1986), 220-236

_____. ed., *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987)

Thwaite, M.F., *From Primer to Pleasure: An Introduction to the History of Children's Books in England, from the Invention of Printing to 1900* (London: The Library Association, 1963)

Touponce, William F., "Children's Literature and the Pleasures of the Text," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 20.4 (1996), 175-82

Tracy, Honor, "The Runcible Man," *The Listener*, 50 (31 December, 1953), 1130-1131

Turner, Paul, *English Literature 1832-1890 Excluding the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

van Leeuwen, Hendrik, "The Liaison of Visual and Written Nonsense," in *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), pp. 61-95

Wells, Carolyn, "The Sense of Nonsense," *Scribner's Magazine*, 29 (1901), 239-48

Whalley, Joyce Irene, *Cobwebs to Catch Flies: Illustrated Books for the Nursery and Schoolroom 1700-1900* (London: Elek, 1974)

Whalley, Joyce Irene and Tessa Rose Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration* (London: John Murray with the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1988)

Williams, Sidney Herbert, and others, eds., *The Lewis Carroll Handbook* (London: OUP, 1962)

Willis, Gary, "Two Different Kettles of Talking Fish: The Nonsense of Lear and Carroll," *Jabberwocky*, 9 (1980), 87-94

Wilson, Edmund, "Nonsense," *The New Republic* (20 February, 1929), 21-22

Wolff, Erwin, "Der intendierte Leser," *Poetica*, 4 (1971), 141-66

Woodman, Ross, "The Idiot Boy as Healer," in *Romanticism and Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. James Holt McGavran (London, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 72-95

"Word-Twisting *versus* Nonsense," *The Spectator*, no. 3067 (9 April, 1887), 491-2

Wordsworth, Jonathan, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982)

Wullschläger, Jackie, *Inventing Wonderland, The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, and A.A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 1995)

Zangwill, Israel, "Without Prejudice," *The Pall Mall Magazine*, 4 (September-December, 1894), 521-28