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**The (de)construction of Lewis Carroll's Nonsense: A  
Close Reading into the Cosmos of *Through the  
Looking-Glass***

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## **Abstract**

*Through the Looking-Glass* has been categorized as children's literature, but behind this apparently simple façade, a complex cosmos arouses. Carroll's masterpiece opens a window towards a world of inverted logic, where child's imagination distorts reality by using linguistic and 'pretend games', where Alice's dream becomes the place where she can govern the ungovernable. So, through a seemingly child-like narrative, the reader is set to question his conception of reality; as his world, constituted by norms and logic behaviors, collapses under the reflection of the Carrollian mirror.

This paper focuses on the parameters and elements that constitutes Carroll's nonsensical cosmos. Therefore, I will be seeking a close reading of the text which will provide a deep view into the following aspects of the novel: nonsense as a new narrative genre, the creation of a new language based on the hollowness of normative language, the sardonic inversion of Victorian England's common life, nature's appraisal over norm and convention, the effects of the satirical mirror and of the vanishing dream and finally the distortion of space and time. These parameters will be accounted towards the following thesis: Lewis Carroll's nonsense is not purely the absence or negation of sense, but rather the base for creating a new cosmos by deconstructing meaning and logic.

**Keywords:** *Through the Looking-Glass*, Lewis Carroll, Nonsense, Logic, Child, Victorian Era, Nonsensical Cosmos, Children's Literature, Dream, Pretend Games.



## **0. Introduction**

### **0.1. Carroll and Dodgson, the child within the adult**

Given the complexity and obscure meaning behind Lewis Carroll's oeuvre, numerous critics have opted for a biographical lecture. However, once we approach this biography we are met with another problem: the insoluble fracture of his identity.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was born in Daresbury (Cheshire) in 1832. His family environment could be considered as the union between a modest ruralism and the paradigm of the Victorian ideal. His father, the Reverend Charles Dodgson, was "a High Church-man" (Haughton xv) and a "graduate of Christ Church, Oxford, where he took a First in classics and mathematics" (Haughton xv). His mother, Frances Jane Lutwidge, was the "ideal Victorian mother" (Haughton xv). Following his father's steps, Charles pursued a higher education in mathematics, becoming a professor in 1856, and was ordained deacon in 1861. As Virginia Woolf said: "but the Rev. C.L. Dodgson had no life. He passed through the world so lightly that he left no print. He melted so passively into Oxford that he is invisible" (70). The combination of logic and Christianity led to a life where little could be highlighted, excluding perhaps his productions on mathematical enigmas. Nonetheless, a bewitching light is hidden under Dodgson's invisibility, a light that has shone through the literary canon: Lewis Carroll. So Dodgson is the mere frame for the development of the character, he is the mask that encloses the lyricism of an invisible being. In this distancing, in the silenced impersonality of the man, we discover the poetic cry of the character.

Lewis Carroll, pseudonym that Dodgson started using in 1856, is the artist, the lover of inversion, the one that distorts reality with demolishing power. In his figure we discover the photographer who captured children's faces to eternally preserve their



essence. We also realize that behind Dodgson's adult mask the children's poet remains hidden, a child who dreams of describing his perception of the world, not only to other children but also to those who have already departed from these tender years. As Woolf says, even if Dodgson looked longingly at the memory of childhood, Carroll's "childhood was sharply severed. It lodged in him whole and entire." (70). Due to his ability to preserve this essence intact, he has been able to describe this cosmos in great detail. Carroll has opened a door into an idealized world where the reader is transported back to a state of incoherence, of ludicrous joy, where logical rules are bent under the gaze of the powerful child. It is evident then, the longing of the adult to return to this state of dominance over logic, where the child exerts the power of imagination and subjugates rationality. As Natov states: "this victory is for child power over the irrational claims of adults, and even as an adult, the child part of me rejoices in this affirmation" (56).

Alice's stories have been classified as children's literature, and even if they were created with the intention of being read by children "since the day of its first publication it has always appealed to adults too" (Haughton xii). This duality is triggered by the hybrid nature of the text itself, as it combines the flexibility and subversion of the fairy tale, fascination of the child, and the logical world's wish for organizing, sorrow of the adult. Nevertheless, the logic that organizes and constructs the Carrollian cosmos is a force of disorganization, of deconstruction, as it inverts common logic in order to suggest an absurd logic. This contradiction, which is inexorably repeated in all the aspects of the books, holds the true dichotomy: the child and the adult. The child, the poet, Carroll, lures us into a world where games and puns rule, where language is distorted. The adult, the irrational logic, the mathematic, Dodgson reminds us that this children's world is the adult's wish for escaping reality. Then, the child rebels creating otherness: creating a "nonsense world (...) built upon the humor of incongruity and reversals" (Natov 52).

Therefore, we can conclude that Carroll's oeuvre is the child's vision of adult's life; it is a satirical construction that mocks adult's norms, and once they are inverted in the mirror we discover that they are nothing more than a pile of absurdities. Contrarily, the absurd, the nonsensical, the child, takes the position of sovereign: Alice is crowned Queen of the chess game: "and what *is* this on my head?" she exclaimed in a tone of dismay, as she put her hands up to something very heavy, that fitted tight all round her head (...) It was a golden crown" (Carroll 218-19). So Alice, who is described as a goddess-like figure at the entrance of the mirror —"so Alice picked him up very gently, and lifted him across more slowly than she had lifted the Queen" (Carroll 129)—, is, in fact, the ruler of this reality: she is the one controlling the white King's memorandum —"it writes all manner of things that I don't intend" (...) '*The White Knight is sliding down the poker. He balances very badly*'" (Carroll 131)—, and usually her wishes become reality, such as becoming a Queen —"I should *like* to be a Queen, best" (Carroll 141)—, and even the White Knight turns into this rather comical character that cannot keep balance: "whenever the horse stopped (which it did very often), he fell off in front; and , whenever it went on again (which it generally did rather suddenly), he fell off behind" (Carroll 209-210). To sum up, Alice 'pretend games' are a representation of the child's wish to rule over others according to their own commands —"Alice's 'Let's pretend' games are (...) the fantasy of adult power, of being 'kings and queens'" (Haughton 327)— and, as we will see, the Looking-Glass cosmos is the result of combining a pretend game and a dream, of combining reality and imagination, logic and absurdity.

## 0.2. Literature Review

Lewis Carroll's fictional works, particularly those of Alice's adventures, have fascinated many through history. Its attraction power has inspired many artists from all disciplines, such as Steadman's haunting illustrations, Hepworth's silent movie, *Alice in Wonderland* (1903) or Burton's dark adaptations, *The Beatles* lyrics or *Jefferson Airplane*'s psychedelic experience of *White Rabbit* and of course literary oeuvres such as those of the surrealists or Dadaists. Lecercle, in his introduction to the book *Philosophy of Nonsense*, highlights the ever-present quality of Alice: her transmutation into a mythical figure that not only has the ability to have "proliferated across the various media" (1) but also has "been admitted into the canon of English Literature" (1). It is no surprise then that many studies have been devoted to this matter, since, as Lecercle puts it: "the books have proved to be an inexhaustible fund for quotation and allusion for linguists and philosopher alike" (1).

In the attempt to grasp what constitutes the classical quality of Carroll, *littérateurs* have differed greatly, since the works of the Victorian writer seem to be multifaceted. Besides, the deceptive character that surrounds these works hinders the lineal or traditional interpretations, causing theories as subversive as the analyzed texts. Therefore, we discover that in the commentaries of Carroll this 'delusion' does not appear to be coincidental but, rather, a consequence of the nonsensical nature of his productions. Perhaps we could argue that both the analyzed text and the analyzers share a symbiotic relationship as they feed upon each other's existence. Nonsense productions, such as those of Carroll, have a certain analytical quality because the creatures that inhabit this cosmos usually present themselves as demented linguists or philosophers, as is the case of Humpty Dumpty. Seemingly, as I have already established, these texts have birthed 'fou littéraires' (Lecercle 6): critics who sin of demented argumentation. Nevertheless,

we should not understand these lectures as simply malign because, even if an excess of interpretative liberty might cause a mad analysis, they can also create new perspectives “more perceptive, or imaginative or intuitive” (Lecerle 6). Therefore, the different analyses are drafted between these two ends, which could be divided in three categories: linguistic, philosophical and socio biographical.

To begin with, linguistic studies are based on the attempt to decode the enigmas proposed by Carroll from a mere formal perspective. It is obvious that language plays a decisive role in Alice books, seemingly, it is also one of the most complex elements, as it is based on nonsense. One point of attraction for these critics might be that of the linguistic creatures, given that they show themselves as linguist imitators. Therefore, this might entail a wish of arranging a hectic reflection, a language that becomes inverted in the mirror. Another reason might simply be the need of overcoming the holes left by the text. In this sense, passages where the hollowness of language is manifested more aggressively, the sense is satisfied with an impulsive decoding. We can clearly see this in the analysis of the poem *Jabberwocky*, where the interpretations are the longest. For instance, as Lecerle states: “Martin Gardner’s *Annotated Alice*: the notes to *Jabberwocky* fill several pages and interrupt Carroll’s text” (Lecerle 7). This is also to be found in the edition of Hugh Haughton, where he elaborates on a list of the coined words with its decoding. This list takes the form of a dictionary entry with information concerning the possible origins of the word and its etymology:

Mome raths. OED has ‘mome’ as a noun meaning a ‘blockhead’ or ‘carping critic’ (from Latin *momus*), and as a dialect adjective meaning ‘soft’. ‘Rath’ is an Irish word for an archaic fortified enclosure, as in R. C. Hoare’s *Tour of Ireland* (1807), ‘one of those raised earthworks the Irish writers call raths’. (Haughton 330).

Therefore, this impulsive obsession of searching meaning through language can rapidly become a manipulation of the text. This is the case exposed and criticized by

Lecerle of the literary critic Abraham Ettelson. Ettelson in his reading of *Through the Looking-Glass* demonstrates that “it is a cryptogram for the Talmud” (Lecerle 7). This lecture not only evidences the mysticism surrounding Carroll but also that Ettelson’s method is quite demented. Moreover, there is a potential risk in this method, as bending the rules to accommodate one’s thesis might lead to confirmation bias. In this sense, Ettelson can justify his arguments by using excessive copulas that connects two distant signifiers: Carroll’s text and the sacred Jewish texts. Lecerle’s approach is also worth mentioning as his analysis of the Carroll’s texts is an attempt to bring coherence into nonsensical texts by dividing his investigation into the four disciplines of language. In other words, to demolish the distance between nonsense and the common reader, he decodes the texts according to its phonetics, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics.

The second way of analyzing Carroll’s books is that of philosophers, based on the interpretation of the meaning behind the enigmas, primarily regarding the genre and its implications. In this realm we find critics such as Roni Natov, whose article on Carroll’s *Alice, The Persistence of Alice*, revolves around the mystical figure of this heroine. Moreover, he suggests that Alice, just as philosophers, is trying to find logic in madness, seeking comfort in the unknown: “how well Carroll depicts Alice’s need to define, limit, control the chaos of so many of the Wonderland situations (...) Alice tries to find rules to relieve her discomfort” (Natov 55). Therefore, we can conclude that as linguists act as the creatures of the Carrollian world, philosophers act as Alice, a girl from the logical reality. Natov is also attempting to decipher the meaning hidden by dreams and childhood and concludes that the Alice books act as an epiphany, revealing the true nonsensicality of life: “it calls into question the very nature of our existence, and [Carroll] offers no solution or even possibilities for solutions. It is not possible, he seems to suggest, to be certain of anything, not even *that* you exist” (Natov 60).

The last way of reading Carroll is based on a socio-biographical view, which focuses on the biography of the author or the context of the creation of the texts. This means that the questions aroused by the books are answered by looking at external evidences, rather than analyzing the internal, or at least, the external clues are strong enough to influence what is found in the text. In the case of Lewis Carroll this is quite common, as his life might seem as enticing as his works. The mysticism that surrounds his life has intrigued many critics who have created studies analyzing the texts regarding his rather uncommon life. This is the case of Virginia Woolf, whose essay *Lewis Carroll* tries to decipher the mystery of the author's figure. In a rather epiphanic manner she announces that the ability of portraying childhood so purely is linked to the life and experiences of the author: "only Lewis Carroll has shown us the world upside down as a child sees it, and has made us laugh as children laugh, irresponsibly" (Woolf 71). So, we could argue that this close relationship between author and childhood is triggered by a personal obsession, which is evidently portrayed in his diaries. This way of connecting author and creation is also found in Haughton's introduction to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, where he interprets passages of the book as evidences of Carroll's life: "one familiar (...) way of re-framing the riddle of the Alice books is biographical" (Haughton xiv). For instance, he assumes that the mystery left by the dream of the Red King, in which the existence of Alice is questioned, might be that he is no other than Carroll himself: "one answer to Alice's last question (...), as to 'who it was that dreamed it all?' is 'Lewis Carroll'" (Haughton xv).

The aim of this paper is not such of the mentioned above but rather a thorough analysis of the parameters that constitute Carroll's nonsense in *Through the Looking-Glass*. So, my thesis statement will be the following: Lewis Carroll's nonsense is not purely the absence or negation of sense, but rather the base for creating a new cosmos by

deconstructing meaning and logic. That is to say, the rupture with logical laws is fundamentally linked to the construction of a particular and autonomous system, a nonsensical system which, in its most contradictory and paradoxical state, will be regulated by a set of new rules birthed from child's imagination, mirror's duality and inversion, and the logic behind dreams and games. To examine the validity of this statement my methodology consists in a close reading of the text, which will provide a deep view into the details that configure Carroll's novel. So, as I have already suggested, my aim in this work will not focus on external factors, as I seek not to evidence any passages of the book by its context or author. Nevertheless, in the definition of the nonsensical genre I will take into consideration its historical, cultural and social background, as it will help in the creation of an accurate context of development for the books. Therefore, my study will use primarily the linguistic and philosophical approach, which will help me in the argumentation of my thesis. Using them synchronically, I will assure a perfect state of oscillation that will prevent me of falling into a demented analysis or 'overplotting'.

My paper will be divided into three main parts. Firstly, a historical contextualization will help to explain the importance of the Victorian Era and its schooling in the creation of the nonsensical genre, as well as serving as an attempt to resolve the difficulties with the genre: the importance of children's literature in the consolidation of the child as the longing of the adult. Secondly, a close view into the characteristics of nonsense will settle the foundations for the creation of the cosmos. An analysis of its paradoxical nature and constant contradiction will be complemented with a study of its implications in linguistics, as the deformation of common language and creation of a new one. Thirdly, my study will cover the basic parameters that will govern this new world, the imposition of dreams in the liberation of the child's imagination and

the alteration of space and time in order to create an existence that is profoundly non-existent.

## **1. Nonsense**

### **1.1. The creation of a new genre: the structure of non-structure**

Nonsense is a literary term that is frequently used to discern between logical and illogical discourses. From that perspective, we might think that nonsense is no more than the manifestation of an absurd speech, empty of meaning and sense, therefore, mere gibberish. But this consideration would lead us to a critical error, for although the term is used as a pejorative adjective, we should account for its wider definition.

If we are to understand sense as the result of reason and of right-thinking, then nonsense is irrevocably its antithesis. As Strachey says, “sense is the recognition, adjustment, and maintenance of the proper and fitting relations of the affairs of ordinary life” (515). Therefore, sense reflects quotidian logic, everything that is perceived through the physical senses and is not questioned for its evident veracity: “it almost seems the mental outcome and expression of our five senses” (Strachey 515). Furthermore, according to Strachey, we could suppose that sense does not trigger an intellectual response, as it penetrates us rather unconsciously. Contrarily, nonsense is the mechanism that denounces logic’s falsity and dismantles the belief that reality is arranged according to a natural and sensitive logic. So, “in contradiction to the relations in harmonies of life, nonsense sets itself to discover and bring forward the incongruities of all things within and without us” (Strachey 515). In nonsensical education the maxims to demonstrate the incongruities of everything that is pre-established seem to be: lack of logical causalities and thematic cacophonies. Moreover, nonsense, in opposition to sense, will not fairly



reflect the object of analysis, it will rather deform it, as the Carrollian mirror sardonically distorts reality.

Nonsense will choose the literary vehicle, because through entertainment's pleasure the reader will be led towards a lesson. Finally, nonsense should be understood as a new genre as it has its own characteristics: "A genre of narrative literature which balances a multiplicity of meaning with simultaneous absences of meaning. This balance is effected by playing with the rules of language, logic, prosody and representation, or a combination of these" (Tigges 47).

Having established that nonsense is a literary genre, we should then determine its historical and cultural context. This movement is framed in the context of Victorian England, being Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear its biggest advocates and contributors. The former shone for its deformations of reality and the latter triumphed in the reign of humoristic limericks. But, in the appraisal of both authors we encounter a new paradox in terms of their historical influences: the lack of history and yet its great archetypal traceability. As Lecercle suggests: "Victorian nonsense has both no history – it is a Victorian creation, an event in the field of literature – and a long history" (5). This confusion arises from the fact that nonsense had no "direct ancestors (Carroll is nobody's 'ephebe')" (Lecercle 5) and yet we cannot omit the fact that it took elements from diverse cultural backgrounds. The fixation for fantastic or bizarre elements, as well as the apparently simple form of children's literature, seems to point towards the influence of medieval tales: "the genre is a repetition, in a vastly conjecture, of medieval French fantasies, those absurd short poems which might, four centuries in advance, have been written by Edward Lear" (Lecercle 5). Besides, the use of archetypal elements and figures is more than evident, for instance in the characters "from the traditional repertoire of nursery rhymes like Humpty Dumpty and the Unicorn" (Haughton xiv). This echo

from the past signals, once again, the wish to lure the child reader, since they will recognize, in this chaotic Carrollian cosmos, familiar characters that belong to their imaginary. This recognition will be announced either by “old songs” (Carroll 157), such as the one sung by Alice when she meets Tweedledum and Tweedledee: “Tweedledum and Tweedledee / Agreed to have a battle” (Carroll 157) or by popular rhymes, like the one that Alice “repeated to herself:– ‘Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall: / Humpty Dumpty had a great fall” (Carroll 181-182). All in all, even if nonsense seems an island that stands alone in the vast literary ocean, we should consider it as another element of the eternal convergence of genres.

The characteristics of Victorian England were crucial in the configuration of nonsense, therefore, a quick overview of this period should seek to explain the “emergence of nonsense in the Victorian context, its function in a determinate conjuncture” (Lecerle 4). Victorian society preached the values of hard work, progress, and self-improvement. “Society’s values were increasingly in the hands of an expanding middle class that was growing wealthy through industry” (*History of Britain & Ireland* 278), and for this reason it based its betterment on rectitude and discipline. On top of that, this society, which was motivated by scientific and geographical discoveries, insatiably searched for an answer, a logical sense for everything that surrounded it. As Natov suggests, “in their grasping after some kind of certainty, particularly after Darwin’s explosion of their sense of order, the Victorian seem very modern” (58). This modernity resides in the reiterated search for life’s meaning, which was endangered after the questioning of Christian values. Carroll lies in this social frame of order and work, and he will use nonsense as an opposition to this wish of decoding: “the deep-seated need for meaning, which nonsense texts deliberately frustrate in order to whet it” (Lecerle 3). Therefore, nonsense will be Carroll’s way of denouncing and ridiculing a logical society’s

need for interpretation: “in mid-Victorian England, Lewis Carroll stood alone revealing the essential meaninglessness of life” (Natov 58). This meaninglessness is based both on “the incapacity of natural languages reasonably to fulfil their allotted task of expression and communication” (Lecerclé 3) and the absurdity of an utilitarian society that educates in line with some rigid and ridiculous codes of conduct. The garden flowers will embody Victorian’s values of utilitarianism and rigidity, satirically relativizing the importance of a tree to its pragmatic function: “there’s the tree in the middle (...) what else is it good for?” (Carroll 137). Moreover, they attribute their ability to talk to the fact that their beds are tougher in comparison to “most gardens” (Carroll 137) where “they make the beds too soft – so that the flowers are always asleep” (Carroll 137). Therefore, their process of learning a language is cemented on maxims of mental toughness and resilience.

The necessity of order and logic found its highest splendor in the appearance of public schools, where the principles of discipline and sacrifice were imposed to all children: “schools emerged as places that organized, monitored and regularized childhood” (Reynolds 252). The child, locked in the school, was obliged to prematurely grow old, to turn into a self-made man in the image of Victorian values. Yet, this created a new fissure between the will of arranging childhood and its disagreement, a “contradiction between the urge to capture an ever wider proportion of the population for the purpose of Elementary schooling, and the resistance (...) that such a cultural upheaval inevitably arouses” (Lecerclé 4). This conflict is easily identifiable in contemporary novels such as the paradigmatic case of Dickens: “Dickens, who campaigned for better education (...) portrayed several cruel schools in his novels” (*History of Britain & Ireland* 278).

Similarly, nonsense also took a stand, but in a rather satirical manner. Being “the school (...) the institution where not only rules of grammar, but also maxims of good

behavior, linguistic and otherwise, are learnt (Lecerle 4), we can clearly understand Carroll's wish of rupture. Carroll departs from the point of view of the child, as their resistance to Victorian schooling shows adult's absurdity. It is worth highlighting that "nonsense texts aim at (and choose characters from) the type of child who has not yet been captured by the institution – children of nursery age in the case of Lear, little girls in the case of Carroll (Lecerle 4). In this opposition between domestic and institutionalized schooling, we encounter the dispute of "who had the right to define and shape the experience of childhood" (Reynolds 251). Therefore, nonsense supplies the educational gap left by Victorian school and targets those who had been marginalized by it: little children and girls. These readers, attracted by the rhymes and fantastic worlds, can remain pure against the control of adult's institution.

Thereby, we discover the importance of our heroine Alice, because not only does she reveal the absurdity of Victorian manners—for instance, in her persistent conflict with civility in the most absurd contexts: "what she really wanted to know was, whether it could sting or not, but she thought this wouldn't be quite a civil question to ask" (Carroll 148)—but she also remains away from the institution: "Alice does not go to school; but she has a governess at home" (Lecerle 4). Alice governess is a crucial matter in the book as she is embodied by the Red Queen. Not only does she keep Alice in a constant reprimand—"look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time" (Carroll 140)—but she also is described by Carroll as: "a Fury, but of another type; *her* passion must be cold and calm; she must be formal and strict, yet not unkindly; pedantic to the tenth degree, the concentrated essence of all governesses" (Carroll, "*Alice*" on the Stage: 296).

So, Carroll's nonsense acts in two directions: inverting the reglementary education by mocking it, and drawing a new one based on sense's perversion, on child's

logic: “the pedagogic positions that can be derived from nonsense texts can hardly be said to reflect mainstream Victorian practices” (Lecerle 218). In this way we enclose the circle of sardonic critic and nonsense subversion, confronting Victorian society’s values and the school institution with nonsense’s values and reversed schooling. Eventually, the child prevails over the adult, the poet over the straight society, chaos over harmony and nonsense over sense.

## **1.2. Nonsensical language**

In the Carrollian world we are met with two concentric stories: one that acts as a realist frame and another one where its logic pillars are deconstructed. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice’s reality is set in her consciousness, whilst Alice’s dream is the portal to this second reality which is ruled by her unconscious. This ambiguity, which is pictured in the beginning of the book: “Alice was sitting curled up in a corner of the great armchair, half talking to herself and half asleep” (Carroll 121) is cemented by the mirror, the materialized passage of both realities: “I’ll put you through into Looking-glass House” (Carroll 125). This mirror reflects Alice’s reality, the reality of a child who prioritizes imagination over logic: “I’ll tell you all my ideas about Looking-glass House” (Carroll 125). Moreover, in her explanation of inverted logic, she voices: the poet’s conception of reality deformed by nonsense: “the things go the other way” (Carroll 126); its attraction power: “what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but (...) all the rest was as different as possible” (Carroll 127); and its deconstructivism: “they don’t keep this room so tidy as the other” (Carroll 127). Nevertheless, in this inversion, language is also split into two: language from mundane reality, sense, will be perverted in the mirror, becoming nonsense: “well then, the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way” (Carroll 126). Therefore,

as Tigges suggests: “the language creates a nonsensical reality” (55), and it will do so through constant play on words, linguistic mutations, humorous puns and an obsessive predilection for words’ sonority.

Language is a crucial part to nonsense as it is the outlet for its games and meaning deformations. Therefore, language will partake a significant play in Carroll’s world configuration. There is a clear obsession with language, with its properties, its function and pragmatism which is embodied on all creatures of the mirror: “the creature [Humpty Dumpty] is a logophilist and therefore not to be trusted” (Lecerle 22). Emotion will be so subdued by language that it will vanish completely from the text: “that’s not a memorandum of your feelings” (Carroll 131). This wish for emotion eradication is clearly portrayed in the conversation between Alice and the White Queen, who suggests that she should “consider anything, only don’t cry” (Carroll 174). Apart from this rationalist observation, there is also an effort towards regularizing emotions: “I wish *I* could manage to be glad (...) only I never can remember the rule” (Carroll 173). Therefore, all sentiments’ nature and spontaneity are governed by norms and logic and deformed by nonsensical language, creating rather ironic dialogues: “can *you* keep from crying by considering things?” (Carroll 174). Another linguistic parody is that of the attribution of mercantile value to abstract parameters. In chapter three a vast amount of mercantile lexicon is used to shape this absurd theory of commercialization. Time —“his time is worth a thousand pounds a minute!” (Carroll 146)—, land —“the land there is worth a thousand pounds an inch!” (Carroll 146)—, smoke —“the smoke alone is worth a thousand pounds a puff!” (Carroll 146)— and even language —“language is worth a thousand pounds a word!” (Carroll 146)— are abstract, immaterial elements that become materialized under the power of money. This persecutory obsession, which is so strong that it becomes engraved into Alice’s unconscious: “I shall dream about a thousand

pounds to-night” (Carroll 146), is able to relativize and pragmatize language, a theory that will constantly haunt these pages. For instance, in chapter six, Humpty Dumpty implies that words serve a need of ‘meaning’ something, which should be compensated by a monetary bonus: “‘when I make a word do a lot of work like that,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘I always pay it extra’” (Carroll 187).

As I have already alluded in the previous section, one of the fundamental characteristics of this genre is the oscillatory state between presence and absence of meaning. This paradox is explained by the fact that nonsense should not be read on one line of interpretation:

A nonsense text (...) plays with the bounds of common sense in order to remain within the 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 (Lecerle 20).

Therefore, “nonsense text requires to be read on two levels at one – two incompatible levels: not ‘X means A’, but ‘X is both A and, incoherently B’” (Lecerle 20). For this reason, if we try to read nonsense in one unique interpretative line, we will encounter a brick wall, a significative hollowness or absence of meaning. Meanwhile, if we read it not “in symbolism but in paradox” (Lecerle 20) we will discover its most prolific and rich nature. This opposition to the analogous thought of ‘A = B’ breaks with the canonical poetic basis, in which there is an effort to arrange real and metaphorical elements through operative relations. Moreover, symbol and referent not only distance from tradition, but they also abstract from each other in a satirical manner. Essentially, where the parallel formulation allows codification and consequently a decoding, nonsensical structure opposes to this need of formulation and methodology. Besides, if the metaphorical poem wishes to fulfill an expressive difficulty, the nonsensical text seeks out this complexity through an illogical causality: “metaphors (...) are self-destroying

because they exaggerate one of the characteristics of all metaphors, their blatant falsity (...) this exaggeration tends towards paradox, or the random filling of syntactic positions, as embodied in true coinages” (Lecerle 29). As Lecerle suggests, this tendency is to be found in the linguistic game of creating new words —coined language— which is clearly portrayed in chapter three where the Gnat creates new species by playing with their names. Given that Carroll’s coined language “is neither (...) compulsive repetition of obsessional sounds (...) nor imitation of the sounds of another language” (Lecerle 21), we can see that he tends to imitate mother tongue but with a subtle semantic perversion. In his game, the Gnat alters the nature of the animal by playing with its semantic meaning, he perverts his form with a humoristic pun on his abstract name: “the puns are a good image (...) of portmanteau creations that the conjunction of two heterogeneous fields produces” (Lecerle 217).

Therefore, he polarizes language’s abstraction until hybridizing its former animalistic form and its new semantic appearance: “you’ll see a Rocking-horse-fly (...) it’s made entirely of wood, and gets about by swinging itself from branch to branch” (Carroll 149), combining in this fashion two signifiers in one significant, or as Humpty Dumpty describes it: “it’s like a portmanteau —there are two meanings packed into one word” (Carroll 187).

So, the mirror unveils the falsity and fallacy of this systematical metaphor by reflecting an absurd and discordant reality whose interrelations are erratic and arbitrary. Alice’s dream becomes an awakening, her poetic madness becomes lucidity. Nonsense speculates whether reality is sensible or not, therefore, the representation of this debate cannot be simplified by a causative and unidirectional correlation. For this reason, it should be farcical and erratic, illogic and unaccountable. The adult wishes to codify reality, the child lives it decoded because they have not learned the code yet, therefrom



their conception of reality, their poetic, and their imagination is thus of irregularity. If we do not understand Carroll, if we become lost in nonsense, it is not because it is profoundly coded, but, precisely, because there is no code: “the reading is no longer systematic and rational, but desultory and playful. There is no fixed and unique meaning or interpretation, but a proliferation of variously ambiguous partial structures” (Lecerclé 24).

Given that nonsensical language is profoundly complex and opaque, it is natural that any reader might feel rather disoriented, which is precisely Alice’s experience after reading the poem *Jabberwocky*: “‘somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don’t exactly know what they are’” (Carroll 134). This paradoxical feeling is based on the confrontation, once again, of a vague linguistic recognition and its complete ignorance, that is to say: “Alice is firmly aware (...) that narrative coherence somehow compensates for semantic incoherence” (Lecerclé 22). Therefore, even if we find semantical gaps in nonsensical texts, they are greatly compensated by other linguistic levels. For instance, *Jabberwocky* conforms to phonetic —“all the words can be pronounced, even the coined ones” (Lecerclé 21)—, morphological —“[words] can be analyzed, every single one of them” (Lecerclé 21)— and syntactical regularity —“we have sentences, easily analyzed into syntagmata, and we can ascribe a part of speech to every word” (Lecerclé 21)—. Even if “the lack of analysis on the semantic level” (Lecerclé 23) will threaten a coherent reading, a new reading will arouse, taking into consideration semantic blanks and treating them not “as a residue, but as the essential aspect of the text” (Lecerclé 23). Therefore, the creation of own words, semantic conjunctions and phonetical and semantical games are the result of these inversion of normative reading and normative writing, which will disorient, yet fascinate the reader, just like “Humpty Dumpty’s explanations (...) try to make us visualize those toves, a thing which is either impossible (...) or trivial” (Lecerclé 24).

Finally, if we revisit chapter three, we will encounter a synthesis to nonsensical's linguistic and communicative theory. Alice who is a connoisseur of names, "I can tell you the names of some of them" (Carroll 149) enters in confrontation with the Gnat who questions the true empirical need of language and the relative importance of cataloguing and naming: "what's the use of their having names (...) if they wo'n't answer to them?" (Carroll 149). In opposition to the passage where they both create new creatures through language, thanks to Alice wandering through the woods, we stumble across the forest where names are abolished, which is "cool and shady" (Carroll 152). This wood "where things have no names" (Carroll 152) represents the opacity and confusion of everything that has no name and, therefore, it is dangerous if you become lost in this vagueness: "I suppose you don't want to lose your name" (Carroll 151). A lack of name results in the blurring of identity, which Alice experiences harshly: "and now, who am I? I *will* remember, if I can!" (Carroll 153).

Moreover, Alice's encounter with the Fawn reaffirms the fact that language is essentially a human code based on norm. Being both on the depths of the forest, they have forgotten their names and consequently their identity, which leads to the reconciliation of humanhood and nature: "a Fawn came wandering by: it looked at Alice with its large gentle eyes, but didn't seem at all frightened" (Carroll 153). In the absence of human language that hierarchizes and classifies everything, semantic gaps are filled with natural interactions and exchanges. Nevertheless, this ideal scenario quickly dissolves once they both reach the end of the forest and they are struck with the light of language: "till they came out into another open field (...) 'I'm a Fawn!' (...) 'And, dear me! You're a human child!' A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes" (Carroll 154). Perhaps, we could argue that, in this critique of human language, Carroll is trying to outline a more

natural language which escapes norms and regularity, which is deformed and ambiguous, which is nonsensical, yet so meaningful and communicative.

## **2. The creation of a nonsensical cosmogony**

### **2.1. The inversion of the Looking-Glass and dreams' ethereality**

Mirror and dreams are the two entrances to Carroll's world, the former being the materialization of the latter. This entrance, penetration or fall into the inverted world is where Carroll's oeuvre distances from fantasy literature, in which the subversive element is introduced into everyday life. As Ziolkowski states: "the mirror in which the double appears and from which he sometimes emerges, singly or multiply, is the principal category of fantastic narrative involving mirrors in nineteenth (...) century" (216). Yet, Carroll's magic mirror is not used as an exit, but as an entrance, and its story is not based on the element of collision with reality, but on the description of the "mirror realm" (Ziolkowski 216), of the Looking-Glass House. Therefore, "the human being enters the mirror, which becomes the symbol of a different reality of an altogether different order" (Ziolkowski 216).

In the mirror world, in the Carrollian cosmos, common logic loses its authority and is no longer the norm. Through its deconstruction a new logic, a new set of laws, is created. This science of absurdity is based on exception and alterity, rather than in regularity; on mirror's duplication and inversion, rather than unification and straightforwardness, on paradox and on dream's ethereality. Therefore, Alice and the reader will be the intruders —intrusion which will cause the comedic surprise of the mirror's mythical creatures such as the Unicorn: "“what—is—this? (...) This is a child. (...) I always thought they were fabulous monsters!”" (Carroll 201)— which will lead to their disoriented wandering. In this disorientation we will encounter the conflict that

compromises the acceptance of this new set of rules. Therefore, both the reader and Alice find themselves in the position of wanting to believe in these subversions, an impulse which is natural and unquestioned in fairy tales —“wonder (...) gave to even the strangest phenomenon an aspect of the familiar and desirable” (Melani 15)—, and their logical denial: “everybody seemed satisfied with this, though Alice felt a little nervous at the idea of trains jumping at all” (Carroll 148). So, separating from the fantasy genre, where reality is questioned by the intrusion of the oddity, and from fairy tales, where “they presented a world which was whole in a simple, direct, factual way as a natural, expected, unquestioned part of life” (Melani 16), we must reaffirm that the worlds depicted by Carroll are realities of a profound and complex creation and understanding.

One of the first rules that overcomes us when entering the mirror is our world’s duplication and inversion. Whether in the mockery of the typical chivalry figure of the White Knight, whose qualities are quite the opposite to what one should expect: “I’m afraid you’ve not had much practice in riding” (Carroll 210); or even in the depiction of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, we will encounter this phenomenon. In fact, the twins are a paradigmatic example of this duplication and inversion because behind a mask of identical appearance, a contradictory behavior lurks: “twins are a special case of looking-glass doubling (...) their penchant ‘Contrariwise’ conversation represents a different kind of mirror effect, inversion” (Haughton 339). Therefore, in their use of language we will discover once more how communication erodes under the effect of the nonsensical mirror: “‘contrariwise, (...) if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be but as it isn’t, it ain’t. That’s logic’” (Carroll 157).

Along with mirror’s laws, whose effects we will explore further on the following section, we should account for children’s games and dreams. In the absorbed contemplation of the mirror’s reflection, Alice distorts reality with her imaginative

games: “let’s pretend there’s a way of getting through into it, somehow Kitty. Let’s pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze” (Carroll 127). Therefore, it is obvious that “let’s pretend’ games are the origins of her dream adventures, and like them a clue to her fantasies” (Haughton 327). Thereupon, games will be a constant which will be projected onto the creatures, as they are the result of Alice’s own pretending game: “when I was your age, I always did [believe impossible things] for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast” (Carroll 174). In this sentence we can see how there is an encouragement and support for children’s imagination, for believing in alternative realities and for the possibility of ruling over logic and reason. However, in this dream we can find elements from reality, from consciousness, traces of what Alice sees just before falling asleep. These are transformed, magnified or diluted once entering the realm of dreams, such as the Red Queen who is a paradox of a governess, or popular songs which end up as revelations of what will happen in the chapters—for instance in the battle between the twins or the one between the Lion and the Unicorn—. Nevertheless, the most evident example is the one proposed by Alice herself, as she explains that the creatures in the mirror were based on the kittens with whom she was playing before falling asleep: “and what did *Dinah* turn to, I wonder? (...) did you turn to Humpty Dumpty? I think you did” (Carroll 239).

However, the line that separates conscious and unconsciousness is quite thin: “Carroll depicts the thinnest of the line between dreams and the waking world which young children experience, and their curious lack of discomfort as they wander between the two” (Natov 52). This not only causes the already stated intrusion of real elements, but also creates an existential paradox. In Alice’s dream we are met with the Red King’s dream: “it’s only the Red King snoring (...) he’s dreaming now (...) and what do you think he’s dreaming about?” (Carroll 164), which creates this double frame of unreality.

Intertwining complexity with paradox, Alice's own integrity and existence is questioned under the suspicion of her being a mere object of another's unconsciousness: "you're only a sort of thing in his dream! (...) if that there King was to wake (...) you'd go out—bang!—just like a candle!" (Carroll 165). Therefore, we are left with the unanswered enigma of who is dreaming about whom in the nonsensical dream: "he was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too!" (Carroll 240).

Dreams and illusional imagination forge a rather oneiric and devious reality, and its effects create a strong sense of disorientation, which we have already explored in the linguistic level. For instance, Alice constantly finds herself in places or situations without understanding how she has gotten there: "Alice never could quite make out, in thinking it over afterwards, how it was that they began: all she remembered is, that they were running hand in hand" (Carroll 141). This is to say that there is no real focus on the logical evolution of actions but, rather, an emphasis on their constant metamorphosis. In the dissolution of spatial structure, in the fuzziness of logical frames, we discover a narrative strategy similar to an unfocused lens. This is clearly seen in chapter three, where we change sceneries by fading and melting away: "but the beard seemed to melt away as she touched it, and she found herself sitting quietly under a tree" (Carroll 149).

Similarly, in chapter five we recognize the peak of *liquid* spaces, and in this constant transformation we are faced with an observation about desire and possession. The lack of focus is used to exemplify the impossibility of obtaining the desired object: "whenever she looked hard at any shelf, to make out exactly what it had on it, that particular shelf was always quite empty, though the others round it were crowded as full as they could hold" (Carroll 176). This childish frustration becomes a real defiance for the eye, as it can never obtain what it is focused on, just merely appreciate what lies on its unfocused surroundings: "'things flow about so here!' she said at last in a plaintive

tone, after she had spent a minute or so in vainly pursuing a large bright thing” (Carroll 176). Moreover, as Alice pursues to pick some scented rushes she discovers that “the prettiest are always further” (Carroll 178) and “the rushes had begun to fade, and to lose all their scent and beauty, from the very moment that she picked them” (Carroll 178). That is to say that beauty’s unattainability and ephemerality is magnified and exaggerated in this world under the force of dreams. Therefore, being already an ideal, once part of the dream, it becomes doubly unattainable and ephemeral.

Finally, this metamorphosis is also applied to characters, who suffer from constant physical mutations. One of the clearest examples is the ability of growing and becoming smaller or simply the incongruity in sizes, which was greatly explored in the first book of Alice’s adventures. Even if in *Through the Looking-Glass* it is not so apparent, it is still frequently suggested: “and what enormous flowers they must be! (...) something like cottages with the roofs taken off” (Carroll 145), “everybody was holding a ticket: they were about the same size as the people” (Carroll 146); “she’s grown a good deal!” (...) she had indeed: when Alice first found her in the ashes, she had been only three inches high” (Carroll 138). However, the most interesting consequence of this physical volatility is creatures’ metamorphosis, their slow deformation into other beings. As Woolf declares in her essay, this is a consequence of dreams, which tend to merge concepts or images together: “without any conscious effort dreams come; the white rabbit, the walrus, and the carpenter, one after another, turning and changing one into the other, they come skipping and leaping across the mind” (71). For instance, Tweedledum gains some animalistic characteristics: “his eyes grew large and yellow all in a moment” (Carroll 166) “looking more like a fish than anything else” (Carroll 167), similarly, the White Queen becomes a sheep: “much be-etter! Be-e-e-tter! Be-e-ehh!” The last word ended in a long

bleat, so like a sheep that Alice quite started” (Carroll 174). Thus, the barriers between humans and animals dissolve once again, as they become hybridized by children’s dream.

## **2.2. Coordinates of non-existence: the dissolution of space and time**

Every frame of existence is ruled by space and time coordinates, as it would be impossible to live without a place or a present. Therefore, when speaking about Carroll’s subverted worlds, where existence is diluted under the demolishing force of dreams and paradox, space and time coordinates are also to be found deformed. Then, rather than being coordinates of existence, we should consider that the frame where our story unravels is such of a non-existence, of a profoundly unpredictable unreality. As Woolf states: “down, down, down we fall into that terrifying, wildly inconsequent, yet perfectly logical world where time races, then stands still; where space stretches, then contracts. It is the world of sleep; it is also the world of dreams” (71).

First of all, we should account for the construction of space. When entering the mirror and falling into the depths of the unconscious, the world deforms and, as we have already stated, spatial settings dilute creating a constant topographical metamorphosis. In the division of those thematic spaces that conform Carroll’s stories, we are met with the classical dichotomy between culture and nature, between the house and its natural surroundings. The house that belongs to the real world, to the conscious mind, is a representation culture, of hegemonistic norm, of adult’s punishment on children — “there’ll be no one here to scold me away from the fire” (Carroll 127)— and of logic. Likewise, it represents the protection of law and faith in the belief that the child will grow obeying social conventions. This security is shattered once Alice dares to look through the mirror and face otherness. So, she does not wish to see the reflection of a comforting reality, but an opening to the possibilities offered by the unknown. In oral tradition,



danger is commonly seen as an intrusion to the security of the home lead by an open window to wild nature, to a turbulent sea or to any luring entity. However, in Carroll's story there is no exit of the house into the wilderness, but an evasion towards oneself. Then, the mirrored house is a symbol of nature, of the child, of deformed logic; it is danger, but also, adventure. Moreover, the security of rationality is substituted by a constant estrangement and uncertainty for what is coming, as dreams dissolve everything and parameters only correspond to their own exceptionality and subjectivity. This will create a barrier of distancing that will warn us of the dangers of a world where, in the defying of norm, the idyllic dream can turn into a nightmare. In this configuration, the house not only constitutes the point of contact with the adult world, but also is the beginning and the end of the world.

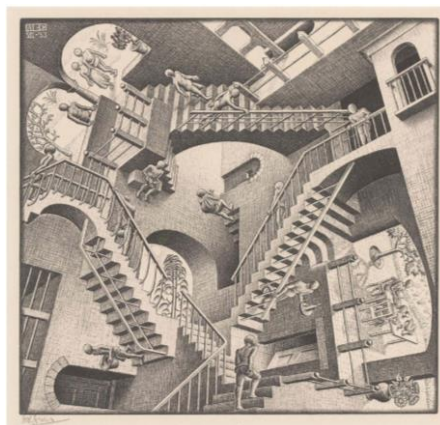
By contrast, the garden is the desired object, where nature becomes the wildest and nonsense games proliferate, as the Red Queen says, in the illusory deformation of this natural space, the garden ends up as a true disarray: “when you say ‘garden’—I’ve seen gardens, compared with which this would be a wilderness” (Carroll 140). Furthermore, this garden is shaped like a giant chess board, connecting in this fashion nature and games as two sides of the same coin: “there were a number of tiny little brooks running straight across it from side to side, and the ground between was divided up into squares by a number of little green hedges, that reached from brook to brook” (Carroll 141). So, as Alice guesses, the game will govern characters’ movements and the board will frame the land: “it’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played—all over the world (...) how I *wish* I was one of them!” (Carroll 141). This game is regulated by a set of fixed rules and movements, but in the Carrollian mirror it is a pretend game, it “is not a conventional game of chess. It is a game played on the other side of the mirror (...) and in a dream” (Haughton 325).

Secondly, we should look into the way characters move inside this altered space. Throughout the book characters are obsessed with a frenetic movement towards the end of the chess game. This constant running might be a satire of a society that, with its technological advances, was riding a high-speed train towards progress: “the Queen kept crying ‘Faster! Faster!’, but Alice felt she *could not* go faster, though she had no breath left to say so” (Carroll 141-2). However, this world that is ruled by games’ parameters seems to stay still: “the trees and the other things round them never changed their places at all: however fast they went, they never seem to pass anything” (Carroll 142). The Queen suggests a pseudo-rational explanation that seems to make sense: “‘now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running *you* can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!’” (Carroll 143). Therefore, in a world that moves too quickly for the eye to even notice, creatures must outrun it by moving twice as fast in a reality that, undoubtedly, ridicules an unnatural and unstoppable existence.

Yet, this delirious movement towards the desired element breaks under the pressure of both dreams’ and mirror’s inversion. In the first case, we see how dreams’ mistiness defies gravity creating a floating advance, a very common effect of the unconscious desire to subvert the ties with rational limits: “it wasn’t exactly running, but a new invention for getting down stairs quickly and easily, (...) she just (...) floated gently down without even touching the stairs with her feet” (Carroll 134). In the second case, the impossibility of obtaining the desired object through a straight advance illustrates that the inverted rule is that we must walk away from it in order to find it: “‘I should advise you to walk the other way.’ This sounded nonsense to Alice (...) she thought she would try the plan (...) of walking in the opposite direction. It succeeded beautifully” (Carroll 139-40). That is to say, when looking into the mirror what is mirrored in front of you cannot be obtained

by walking right into it, as it is a reflection of what is on your back, so, you must walk away from it in order to detect it. Yet, as we have seen, this can turn into an insatiable greed as the dreamt mirror cannot materialize desires' ethereality. Likewise, in the beginning of Alice's wanderings she is fixated with the idea of seeing the garden, and she believes that she will get there through "a path that leads straight to it" (Carroll 135) but she quickly realizes that this is not the case: "no it doesn't do *that* (...) but I suppose it will at last. But how curiously it twists! It's more like a corkscrew than a path!" (Carroll 135).

Then, the house acts as a magnetic attraction force of eternal return: "and so she did: wandering up and down, and trying turn after turn, but always coming back to the house, do what she would" (Carroll 135). This distortion of the path that twists upon itself connecting the beginning with the end —"I'm *not* going in again yet. I know I should have to get through the Looking-glass again—back into the old room—and there'd be an end of all my adventures!" (Carroll 135)— creates a paradoxical reality where gravity is linked not to the ground, but rather to the house, which could be echoed in the works of the graphic artist M.C. Escher, who defied logic with mathematical impossible works. Therefore, by subverting logic with logic itself, both Escher and Carroll present an exploration of infinity, reflection, perspective and gravity where normality is questioned by otherness.



**Figure 1.** *Relativity* by M.C. Escher

Thirdly and lastly, we should account for the second parameter of this dreamt existence: time. Similar to the obsession with running, there is also a clear emphasis on the importance of time, both of passing time and of time being tracked. For instance, in chapter four, music deforms into “the ticking of a clock” (Carroll 157), and there are numerous instances where Carroll’s characters recall the fugacity of time and the impossibility to stop its advancing: ““would you–be good enough (...) to stop a minute (...)?” (...) ‘I’m *good* enough (...) only I’m not *strong* enough. You see, a minute goes by so fearfully quick”” (Carroll 198). Moreover, time’s deformation inverts the logical order of causality which, as the White Queen claims, is “the effect of living backwards” (Carroll 171). Therefore, consequence precedes cause, and punishment or pain come before the crime or the injury: ““he’s in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn’t even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all”” (Carroll 172); ““what *is* the matter? (...) have you pricked your finger?’ ‘I haven’t pricked it *yet* (...) but son I shall”” (Carroll 173). These examples challenge rational understanding of justice and punishment —““where *you* ever punished?’ ‘only for faults’ (...) I *had* done the things I was punished for” (Carroll 172)—, and also of emotional responses as they become, once again, a mere accessory to mirror’s characters: ““I’ve done all the screaming already (...) what would be the good of having it all over again?”” (Carroll 173). This alteration of causality is justified by a memory that acts both regressively and progressively: “one’s memory works both ways” (Carroll 171). So, the White Queen claims that she can remember “things that happened the week after next” (Carroll 172), even if no other characters seem to share this ability. Similarly, Carroll overlaps time that allows for having “days and nights, two or three at a time” (Carroll 224), which is not only another mockery for time’s logic, but also a satire for utilitarianism: ““in the winter we take as many as five nights together—for warmth, you know”” (Carroll 224). Finally,

we should also consider the jam incident: “the rule is, jam to-morrow and jam yesterday— but never jam *to-day*” (Carroll 171). Whilst, the values of ‘tomorrow’ and ‘today’ are relative, not absolute nor specific, ‘today’s’ value is empirical. Therefore, being ‘tomorrow’ and ‘yesterday’ a response to what ‘today’ is not, having jam, then they are values of non-existence: they are days to never become, “it’s jam every *other* day: to-day isn’t any *other* day” (Carroll 171). ‘Yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow’ do not exist *per se*, they are just a ‘not-today’; they only exist if they become present. Yet, in this affirmation of relativity, in this insistence of avoiding the materialization of what is desired in ‘now’ and ‘here’, we must accept the coordinates of non-existence as they frame what could have been or what will be, but never ‘is’.

### **3. Conclusions and Further Research**

A close analysis of the primary text and its critical studies has allowed me to validate my thesis statement and to argue that Carroll’s nonsense is based on two fundamental functions: first, the subversion of a dull reality, second, the creation of a new enticing reality based on imagination’s power of deformation and on a new set of rules regulated by a logic of exceptionality. So, Alice’s wanderings through these realities act as a revelation in which the reader can see the slow decay of our reality, the slow but steady demolition of sense. Carroll throws us into a world where the absurd becomes law by ridiculing norm, therefore, what one might see as logic and rational decays under the power of nonsense. Moreover, nonsense opposes sense, right-thinking, logic causalities and harmonic unions: nonsense is the mechanism that denounces logic’s falsity. In this condemn and deconstruction, Carroll wonders about the big dilemmas of human existence: the opposition between a normative and a natural language and its consequence

to communication and learning, the fallacy of social conventions, the impossibility of obtaining the desired object, Victorian Era's society fracture with nature and humans' alienation of their surroundings, the necessity of returning to nature by demolishing cultural impositions, the importance of reuniting logic and imagination, individual's identity dissolution within a utilitarian society, and finally the transformation of the ideal into a nightmarish scenario once crossing the limits of what is conventional.

However, these wonderings do not wish to meet any conclusions, Carroll does not bring solutions, he does not want to draw a straight path to the Ideal. Instead, this path of the Carrollian cosmos, just like the one leading to the garden, twists upon itself, creating paradox and impossible inversions, humoristic contradictions, metamorphosis and dissolutions. Therefore, Carroll shows us that this deconstruction of reality, this nonsensical world, is built upon impossible, inexistent, paradoxical, nonsensical parameters: it is a dream, a game, the world that extends into the mirror, the unattainable garden, the toy in a vanishing shelf, the shop that transforms into a river or the Queen that is actually a cat.

So, in the constant dichotomy between creation and abolishment, we see that Carroll's oeuvre is not an apology for chaos and hollowness, it is not a world where we scape from reality in order to live in harmony with the child, but a reality where the child defies the limit between logic and imagination. Carroll does not abolish reason nor logic; the language of reason is very present throughout the story. However, he does satirize canonical logic and his false appearance as the only way of obtaining knowledge. So, imagination will be governed under the laws of a new reality, not limiting it, but rather amplifying its power by creating a cohesive and complex reality. Hence, in this reconciliation between imagination and logic, the points of contact are the following:

linguistic and pretending games, mirror's duplication and inversion, and dreams' ethereality, all parameters for diluting and creating language, space, and time.

Firstly, in the fact that nonsensical language seems empty of semantic signification we encounter a clear intention of satirizing a prefigured and straightforward language. Yet, this new system of signs constitutes not only the outlet for its games and meaning deformations, but also the result of the mirror's ability to multiply and distort signifiers. So, language is constantly balancing between presence and absence of meaning, which is the result of two paradoxical lines of interpretation.

Secondly, the lack of logical causality between signifiers could also be accounted by space metamorphosis, which are caused by the dissolution of dreams, not by a logical evolution of actions. In this manner, paradox is also to be found on dreams' ethereality, which cause the impossible understanding of two concentric dreams coexisting in the dissolution of each one of them, or even the exaggeration or vanishment of reality's elements.

Thirdly, time is also deformed by both the mirror and dreams, creating a sense of non-existence, of unreality and unattainability. So, in this cosmos where language necessarily has two paradoxical meanings, time and space become the 'not here' and 'not now': they stay away from materialization and sensical bounding; they are, as I have already said, a dream, a game and an inversion of reality, the construction of 'what is not', of otherness.

In this hunt of otherness, nonsense seeks the marginal, always avoiding the hegemonic sphere. Therefore, through narrative and songs, through poems and limericks, the nonsensical author lures the child into a world where their vision of reality governs over adult's logic. So, Carroll will use the child as the point of departure for his creations,

as his imagination does not know the full potential of adult's codes and regulations. However, Alice, being a girl from reality and not a product of this deformed existence, finds herself in constant confrontation between her need to conform to dreams' rules and its estrangement effects. Moreover, Alice, like the nonsensical author, is not naïve, she is not the purely benign idealization of the romanticized child, she is not divine. The dream in its power of completely dissolving norms, represents a reality where the child governs with its dominant wishes, where there are no moral restrictions, hence, violence becomes rather prominent, and folklore intertwines with nature's demolishing force over technology.

To sum up, whilst reading *Through the Looking-Glass* we enter a new reality where childhood is the unitary force that cements together imagination and logic, where nonsensicality becomes the voice for denouncing rationality's absurdity. Therefore, the Carrollian cosmos is where a new logic finds meaning in the absence of common logic's meaning. So, in an evident wish to reunite humanhood with nature and exceptionality, being nature the antithesis of norm and normality, the child becomes one with the inverted cosmos and the poet merges with this new logic.

In this paper I have introduced some issues that I could not fully develop within the scope of my research. For instance, I have mentioned the issue of Alice's identity fragmentation, but further research is necessary to fully examine the complexity of this psychological problematic. As I have suggested, the metamorphosis of Alice's body that ends up making her question her own existence, as well as her constant reification by mirror's creatures, would be an interesting topic in order to confirm whether it is or not a consequence of her growing up and conforming to adulthood.



Similarly, another interesting topic would be thus of Carroll's effect on surrealism. As Tigges suggests in his work, the parallelisms between nonsense and surrealism are quite evident —“three methods which the surrealists applied in common with Carroll: the use of material offered by dreams and madness, automatic compositions, and the probing of language and logic, space and time”— (119), so that would be a different and interesting approach to keep in mind for a comparative paper. The evolution of mirror's symbolism in literature tradition, as well as the different kinds of mirrors is an interesting topic for future work because, as I have already stated on section 2.1, depending on its function it can vary the style of the narration. Moreover, a deeper analysis on the function of music in this narrative, would provide a better understanding of its double function as a familiarization for the child and estrangement for the adult. For example, tracing back the origins of these nursery rhymes and popular songs could help in the understanding of its impact on children's imaginary. Meanwhile, looking into the use of music in playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, could be used as an example of how it can produce an effect of artificiality and reality's disassociation. Further research is needed to confirm the role of humor and puns on the deconstruction of communication. As I have said, puns and satirical contradictions are quite essential in Carroll's nonsensical reality, but I have not accounted for its importance in ridiculing the status quo, a very essential element in modernist literature. Another topic that I could not fully develop is the relation between Carroll's nightmarish illustrations and their rather prettier version made by Tenniel. The persistence of illustrations in these stories account for the materialization of dreams into a physical frame, which can turn either into a magical setting or a nightmarish perverted reality. This dichotomy could be looked into further detail comparing those illustrations

that become distorted when reflected by the mirror, such as the double meeting between Alice and the Caterpillar.



Figure 2. *Who are you?* by Lewis Carroll



Figure 3. *Who are you?* by John Tenniel

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