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Alice after Lacan: The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real

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ABSTRACT

Since the first publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), numerous scholars have used the psychoanalitical method to interpret Carroll's tales in numberless ways, and yet, the work continues to trigger an enormous interpretative appeal. Most of that research has been performed applying Freudian psychoanalysis to the text, to prove, for example, Carroll's impulses towards little girls. Taking Lacan's lecture "Homage to Lewis Carroll" (1966) as a starting point, I try to reverse that practice and explore how those two literary works may contribute to a theorization on the subjective structure. To that purpose, I analyze the presence of four elements of the Lacanian theory in those two works, namely, the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real, and the sublimating nature of the work of art. The results seem to confirm Lacan's stand that "Theory must always in the end hand over to practice."

Keywords: *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass*, Jacques Lacan, Symbolic, Imaginary, Real

RESUMEN

Desde la primera publicación de *Las Aventuras de Alicia en el País de las Maravillas* (1865) y *A Través del Espejo* (1871), un sinfín de expertos emplearon el método psicoanalítico para interpretar los cuentos de Carroll de innumerables maneras y, aun así, la obra sigue suscitando un inmenso interés interpretativo. La mayoría de las investigaciones sobre el tema se han realizado aplicando el psicoanálisis Freudiano al texto, para demostrar, por ejemplo, los impulsos que Carroll sentía por las niñas. Tomando como punto de partida la conferencia de Lacan "Homenaje a Lewis Carroll" (1966), intento invertir esa práctica y explorar cómo esas dos obras literarias pueden contribuir a una teorización sobre la estructura subjetiva. Para ello, analizo la presencia de cuatro aspectos de la teoría Lacaniana en esas dos obras, concretamente, lo Simbólico, lo Imaginario y lo Real, y el carácter sublimador de la obra de arte. Los resultados parecen confirmar la postura de Lacan de que "la teoría tiene que ceder la vez a la práctica."

Palabras clave: *Alicia en el País de las Maravillas*, *A Través del Espejo*, Jacques Lacan, Simbólico, Imaginario, Real

Table of contents

Introduction 1

Chapter 1. *Alice* psychoanalyzed 5

Chapter 2. Jacques Lacan's "Homage to Lewis Carroll" 9

Chapter 3. The Symbolic in *Alice* 13

Chapter 4. The Imaginary in *Alice* 25

Chapter 5. The Real in *Alice* 31

Conclusion 37

References 39

Introduction

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), were published over 150 years ago. These two works have become one of the best children's stories in history and one of the most psychoanalyzed works of literature. This Dissertation is framed within the field of Literary Theory and its main objective is to analyze how the three Lacanian registers of the subjectivity, namely, the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real, are represented in those two works by Lewis Carroll.

Psychoanalysis has dominated western culture since Freud developed it in the late nineteenth century and since the 1930s, both psychoanalysts and critics have constantly applied Freudian means of interpretation to the works of Lewis Carroll. The first wave of analysists focused on the work's sexual symbolism, as Anthony M. E. Goldschmidt did in "*Alice in Wonderland* Psychoanalyzed" (1933). The relationship between Carroll toward Alice Liddell remained as an object of speculation ever since and most often, the literary work has been read in subordination to it. Paul Schilder followed Freud and Goldschmidt when he published "Psychoanalytic Remarks on *Alice in Wonderland* and Lewis Carroll" in 1938, which led him to discourage children from reading the book since it was nonsensical and incited aggressiveness. In contrast, in "Lewis Carroll's Adventures in Wonderland" (1947), John Skinner claimed that the work does not revolve around violence, but around a childish attitude, since Carroll desired to reject his adult masculinity and to become a little girl himself.

The second wave focused on the concept of identity and development of the child which pervaded until the 70s/80s. In "Reconstruction and Interpretation of Development of Charles L. Dodgson and Lewis Carroll" (1955), Phyllis Greenacre concluded that Carroll's negative emotions created the adventures, whereas his impulses towards little girls were sublimated in the literary work. Moreover, this allegory of development was supported by Phyllis Stowell in "We're All Mad Here" (1983). The author confirmed that Carroll's work was

indeed beneficial for children's development by teaching them to know aggressiveness and adversity and not to succumb to self-pity.

Literary critics have applied psychoanalytical theory to Carroll's works ever since William Empson first merged psychoanalytic theory with the English literary tradition in 1935. However, no single study has considered *Alice* from the perspective suggested by Jacques Lacan in 1966.

In that year, Radio France broadcast a lecture by Lacan on Lewis Carroll. Later, this talk was published in *Pas-tout Lacan and Ornicar?* (2003) under the title "Hommage à Lewis Carroll." According to Lacan, *Alice* appeals to all of us, is universal, because it touches on the basic structure of our subjectivity. In his psychoanalytical theory, that structure has three main registers: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The Lacanian Imaginary refers to the part of our subjectivity that connects with the primary formation of the self, before and after being first shaped by the image and words that we receive from the others. The Symbolic register points to the subjection of the self to the language of the unconscious and to how equivocation and error are not failures of language but part of its innermost structure. The Real register disrupts the two other orders and can break the rules of space, time, and identity. In "Homage to Lewis Carroll," Lacan states that most psychoanalysts have analyzed the author's life through his works. Nevertheless, it is not in his attraction to little girls where his genius lies; it is in his ability of sublimating his impulses in a work of art.

The following pages will focus on the reading and analysis of Carroll's work and on the identification of the presence of the three Lacanian registers of subjectivity. To do so, I have started by reading "Hommage à Lewis Carroll" (1966) in Anthony Chadwick's English translation "Homage to Lewis Carroll."[1] I have next made readings to comprehend Lacan and his theory of the three registers, like *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (2003), and consulted Seminars I (1953-54) and II (1955-56). Finally, I have re-read Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Alice's Adventures through the Looking Glass* in the

[1] Henceforth, abbreviated as "Homage."

Barnes & Noble edition of 2015.[2] My purpose is to identify in their pages possible traces that may contribute to the understanding of the Lacanian theory of the three registers and of the workings of human subjectivity, to be able to prove Lacan's viewpoint that "Theory must always in the end hand over to practice" ("Homage" 9).

[2] Hereafter, each part will be abbreviated as AW or TLG in citation. When referring to both AW and TLG, the two works will be referred to as *Alice*.

Chapter 1. *Alice* psychoanalyzed

Ever since the first publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* in November 1865, the work has generated a torrent of critical attention. The book's immediate success continued over the following decades through multiple adaptations and revisions ("Celebrating 150 Years of Alice" 1). *Alice in Wonderland* was a revolutionary product: it was unlike anything written for children before and yet, within decades, the work was already considered a "children's classics, or at least children's classics in the making" (Iché 4). As early as 1933, the Freudian analytical method made of it an object of study.

In that year, Anthony M. E. Goldschmidt, an undergraduate of Balliol College, Oxford, turned his attention to Lewis Carroll. In the opening passages of *Alice in Wonderland*, Goldschmidt saw the product of Carroll's subconscious (279). He published his views in the *New Oxford Outlook* in an article entitled "*Alice in Wonderland* Psychoanalyzed." He used Freudian interpretation and focused on the work's sexual symbolism, indicating, for example, that Alice's running down the rabbit-hole was a symbol of coitus (280), just like the lock and the key, or that the little door that could not be trespassed symbolized a female child (281). The central idea of his article was that all these impulses demonstrated Carroll's "abnormal emotion" toward female children (281). The relationship between Carroll and Alice Liddell has remained subject of speculation ever since, also in the work of a wide variety of critics for whom Carroll's impulses define everything about the literary work.

In the 1930s the application of psychoanalysis to literature was legitimate, as Freud himself had published a number of essays on the psychoanalytic interpretation of art, in which he studied aspects of the life and work of Leonardo da Vinci, Goethe, Dostoyevsky, Michelangelo, and W. Jensen. The psychoanalyst Paul Schilder followed Freud and Goldschmidt when he published "Psychoanalytic Remarks on *Alice in Wonderland* and Lewis Carroll" in 1938. Schilder sustained that Wonderland was a cruel nonsensical world filled with destructive tendencies. In his view, Alice's adventures are mere "nightmares full of anxiety" (285), in which the integrity of Alice's body image is continuously threatened by

time and space distortions and the characters' sadistic behavior (286-87). This was explained as a result of Carroll's sexual frustration, mirrored in the violence of Wonderland's inhabitants. Schilder denounced what he thought was the book's rejection of reality and its incitement to aggressiveness. Wondering "whether such a literature might not increase destructive attitudes in children beyond the measure which is desirable" (292), he discouraged children's reading it.

John Skinner also pointed out Carroll's sadism and hatred in "Lewis Carroll's Adventures in Wonderland" (1947), but whereas Schilder (1938) argued that *Alice* is the result of the repression of aggressiveness, Skinner claimed that it arises from Carroll's "denial of adult sexual life" (302). Disclosing Carroll's letters, Skinner gave evidence of Carroll's anger, pedantry, and harshness. He interpreted that "he did not like his adult, masculine character and that he wished to change himself into a small, adventurous girl" (297), using the evidence in Carroll's letters. Carrol implies that just as the Turtle was not an authentic turtle, he never felt identified with the male gender as it was something he despised. In sum, for Skinner, Carroll "did not dare to become adult" (306) and the book's nonsense derives from that: "such logic is the peculiar delight of children who trap and overcome the restrictive adult" (298).

The first literary critic who actually used Freudian analysis in writing about Alice was William Empson. In "*Alice in Wonderland*: The Child as Swain" (1935), Empson believed there are so many obvious psychoanalytical references in Carroll's work that "there is no great discovery in translating them into Freudian terms" (253). He thought that clearly Carroll's "books [were] about growing up" and decided to use psychoanalysis only as a starting point to develop his theory that "the essential idea behind the books which is a shift onto the child . . . of the obscure tradition of the pastoral" (253-54), that is, Victorian and Romantic pastoral poetry, and their devotion for the child, untamed by civilization.

This idea of Alice's adventure as a quest for her self-development pervaded from the 1950s until the 70s and 80s. Phyllis Greenacre retook the allegory of childhood and the primitive state of reason. In "Reconstruction and Interpretation of Development of Charles L. Dodgson and Lewis Carroll" (1955), Greenacre stated that *Alice in Wonderland* is a portrayal of

"childhood development when the child is emerging from its primitive state of unreason, to the dawning conception of consequences, order and reason" (418-19). Furthermore, this primitive state resulting from Carroll's neglected infancy "awakens in the reader a feeling of fantastic familiarity with an extravaganza of outlandish nonsense" (419). Greenacre concluded that childhood rivalries and resentment created Alice's adventures whereas the repression of Carroll's impulses towards little girls was sublimated in the literary work.

Similarly, other authors saw Alice's experiences as an allegory of development. In "We're All Mad Here" (1983), Phyllis Stowell examined how Alice struggles to understand Wonderland and herself. As Stowell explained: "Alice must separate herself from identification with others, develop an ego, become aware of aggression, and learn to tolerate adversity without succumbing to self-pity … In other words, Alice has to grow up" (5). In this transformative journey, nonsense instigates growth, and his ultimate effect is positive (5). Contrary to Schilder's objection to exposing children to such a regressive tale, Stowell affirmed that the journey is beneficial for children since it "enhances their sense of wholeness and well-being" (8).

Here, Phyllis Stowell is clearly following Lacanian theory. Already in the 1960s, as Jean Michel Rabaté sums up, the trivialization of Freudian psychoanalysis by popular culture and its incompatibility with scientific claims had provoked the "obsolescence" of psychoanalysis (11). It was only thanks to the work of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan that psychoanalysis was adapted to the needs of modern society: a post-Freudian psychoanalysis, "first as a therapy based on a particular use of language … then, as a rigorous discourse" (11). Surprisingly, no attention has been paid by the readers of *Alice* to the work of the French psychoanalyst, especially since Lacan had shown much respect and interest for Carroll's *Alice* and made his own commentary on the most important contributions of his work.

As early as 1959, Lacan had recommended that child psychoanalysts read the work of Lewis Carroll as an introduction to their training. For him, *Alice* showed "the value, the incidence, the dimension of the operation of nonsense as such" (*Desire and its Interpretation* 116). Later, on 31 December 1966 Radio France broadcast his comments on Lewis Carroll (Evans). The talk was later published in *Pas-tout Lacan* and *Ornicar?* (2003) under the title

“Hommage à Lewis Carroll,” later translated by Anthony Chadwick. The important thing is that Lacan’s approach to *Alice* differed radically from that of the earlier analysts: “Lewis Carroll’s inclination for the pre-pubescent young girl–this is not where his genius lies” (“Homage” 7). According to Lacan, the genius of Carroll’s work is that it “touches the purest network of our condition of being” (4), which at the time he saw as a combination of three registers: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real.

Let us analyze Lacan’s “Homage to Lewis Carroll” to be able to see the ways in which Lacan’s three registers of subjectivity may be present in Carroll’s work.

Chapter 2. Jacques Lacan's "Homage to Lewis Carroll"

Jacques Lacan's "Homage to Lewis Carroll" was invited by France Culture and broadcasted by France Radio, under the title "Commentaire d'un psychanalyste" ("A psychoanalyst's comments") (Evans). It was part of the radio program "Lewis Carroll: maître d'école buissonière" or "Lewis Carroll: The truant schoolmaster" (Evans). His lecture was a little over 12 minutes. However, in it, Lacan identified two key aspects of Carroll's work: why it appeals to everyone universally and what it reveals about the relationship between psychoanalysis and literature.

First of all, *Alice* gives evidence that the analytical method that is based on Freudian myth must be replaced by one based on structure. The work offers all sorts of truths that are certain, although not obvious, and "psychoanalysis is in the best position to explain the effect that his work has" ("Homage" 1). One main truth is that the little girl can be "an absolute object" (1), that certainly Lewis Carroll made himself servant of and that appeals to all of us. Lacan's main concern is it is that the work appeals to us all, "how this oeuvre reaches us all" (2). He observes that, until his time, "[s]torytelling is dominating the psychoanalytical treatment of truth" (2), in reference to the use that psychoanalysts made of the Freudian Oedipus and Freudian interpretation of sexuality with their patients. In the same way, psychoanalysts reading *Alice* have used the work to analyze Lewis Carroll the man. But he believes that although the patient's life history is dominant in psychoanalysis, in fact, "structure dominates it" (2). Hence, to produce the best literary criticism, according to Lacan, we must transcend the "histories" to get to the structure: "the best literary criticism is made when one knows this" (2). *Alice*'s brilliance lies in how allows us to discern both Carroll's psychic structure and, with respect to all of us, the structure of the self, or as Lacan says, of the 'subject' of the unconscious. Not surprisingly, Lacan laughs at Schilder: "nothing could be further from the truth concerning the psychological effects of works of art" (3) than Schilder's theory of aggressivity. Looking at *Alice*, Lacan wonders: "how does this oeuvre have such a hold?" given that it does not belong to the great epic works: "Neither genesis, nor tragedy, nor

destiny are evoked there" (4). The answer for him is that it is because it touches on "on the purest network of our condition of being," (4) the basic structure of our subjectivity.

That basic structure of human subjectivity has three main registers: "the symbolic, the imaginary and the real" ("Homage" 4). This is the second great contribution of the work. He starts by saying that images and their combinations shape the Lacanian Imaginary register. According to Lacan, "[o]f images, one makes pure play of combinations" (4). They can create all sorts of virtual dimensions, he says, but, more importantly, they open up access to that reality which finally is "the most assured" (4). That reality is "that of the impossible" (5), in reference to the Lacanian Real. Both can be seen in Wonderland, a dream land where there is a constant challenge to the rules of space (both virtual and real), of time, and of identity. This could be said as well of "the power of wordplay" (5), the Symbolic register. Lacan clarifies about it that Carroll's wordplays are not something immature or ill-constructed: "first of all don't go thinking that it is a question of a so-called childish, even primitive articulation" (5). Rather on the contrary, Lacan remarks that "the play on words in Carroll is always without equivocation" (5), following logic rules that are not mathematical, as Carroll says, "sillygisms":

> I will only give proof about that by finding the finest style in the mouth of the complainer who baffles a pedantic goose, speaking to him about sillygism, which she swallows without realising that she will carry everywhere with that word her identity as a poor fool: silly. (5)

Reason-driven dimensions such as sizes or arithmetic do not operate in Wonderland. This does not mean that there is not a "demand for rigour" ("Homage" 6) in how psychoanalysis is applied. Lacan knows that most psychoanalysts reading Carroll have concluded the logical mathematician is fond of little girls. Instead, Lacan prefers to say: "Lewis Carroll's penchant for prepubescent girls, that is not his genius" (7). Analyzing the common life of Carroll would be nothing new compared to analyzing the life of a common man: "we psychoanalysts don't need our clients to know where that fails in the end in a public park" (7). But if we look at his work, which is the work of a religious man, we see that it transcends. Carroll's work is a

“marvelous object, still not deciphered and forever dazzling” (7), revealing another non-scientific form of ‘dialectical material’ truth.

Here is Lacan’s third great contribution on the subject: Lacan states that “for a psychoanalyst [Carroll’s] work is a privileged site for demonstrating the true nature of sublimation in a work of art” (“Homage” 9). By having written *Alice*, Carroll’s drives are diverted from their primary purpose of being recognized by the object, Alice.

This is why Lacan is not interested in Psychoanalysis being applied to Literature, the way it had been done with Alice before. It should be the other way round: Literature should illuminate Psychoanalysis: “Theory must always in the end hand over to practice” (“Homage” 9). Let us see what Carroll’s work of art teaches us about subjective structure, as Lacan suggests.

Chapter 3. The Symbolic in *Alice*

If there is something analysts of Lewis Carroll and his work have agreed on, before or after Freudian criticism, is that "the endurance of Carroll's tale may be explained by its particular work on language and the kaleidoscope of effects, meanings, and games that it produces, thereby creating a remarkable literary work," as Márcia Lemos reminds us (23). Nonsense and wordplay in *Alice* have been the object of numerous studies, like for example, Jacqueline Flescher's "The Language of Nonsense in Alice" (1969) and Márcia Lemos' "Language-Games in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*" (2009).

In his lecture "Homage to Lewis Carroll," Lacan mentions nonsense and wordplay in relation to Carroll's work and how it is present everywhere: "One could lay out as much as you like about the power of wordplay, there too how many precisions would need to be made" (5). However, Lacan clarifies that nonsense is neither the reflection of a primitive phase in the process of subjective maturation process, as Schilder or Greenacre argue, nor a mere child's wordplay: "don't go thinking that it is a question of a so-called childish, even primitive" (5). For Lacan the relevance of nonsense is what it teaches about the structure of human experience. In that respect, *Alice* is the best place to learn about it.

Following the Freudian theory of the unconscious, Lacan found that the structure of language does not obey the common logic of syllogism. Instead, it follows the logic of "syllygysm," that is, the logic of equivocation. As a psychoanalyst, Lacan had proof that the equivocation of language is placed at the center of each person's identity, which is nothing but the identity of "a poor fool: silly," as he says in his "Homage" (5). Although wordplay is essentially based on equivocation, Lacan defends that it leads paradoxically right into to the truth of the human experience and that this can be seen in Carroll better than anywhere else: "wordplay in Carroll is always without equivocation" (5).

At the time he gave his talk, Lacan was building his theory on human subjectivity as a structure of three registers: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. Around that year 1966,

his principle that “the unconscious is structured like a language” (Fages 46) situates the Symbolic order over the other two. Lacan understands language as a structure that precedes, constitutes, and determines the human being since the moment he or she is spoken for the first time. As Fages explains, “on arriving in language, the subject will be entirely dominated by the symbolic order. And not only dominated but also constituted by that order” (my translation; 23). Language, however, does not consist on the language of common words, but of symbols organized. According to Lacan, these symbols “function on the basis of the link between the signifier and the signified, which is equivalent to the very structure of language” (“The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real,” qtd in Frink 16). The use that Lacan makes here of the terms “signifier” and “signified” demonstrates that he is inspired by Saussure’s structural linguistics. However, whereas Saussure argues that both “signifier” (acoustic image) and “signified” (concept) correspond and depend on each other, Lacan affirms, not only that the signifier and the signified do not correlate, but also that the signifier prevails over the signified and produces “meaning” only when it comes in connection with other signifiers.

Apart from Saussure, Lacan’s conception of language and of the Symbolic order is also based on the Freudian theory of the unconscious and of repression. For Lacan, language is not what is understood commonly as a means of communication; language properly is an unconscious “signifying chain,” a chain of consecutive signifiers that try without success to reinstate the “primary signifier” of our hidden impulses, repressed the first time we encountered language, tamed our instincts and in that way became human (Fages 29). Every human being is, therefore, the “subject” of the unconscious or, as he puts it, “the subject is submitted to the signifier” (“The Subversion of the Subject” 682). The “chain of signifiers” that governs our experience is itself governed by what is most meaningful and important to us, our hidden impulses.

To be able to decipher the combination of signifiers that define them and our existence, the mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy must be known. According to Lacan, “metaphor is located at the precise moment where this sense is produced in the non-sense” (my translation; Fages 52). In other words, the metaphor is a comparison between two unlike signifiers, which

produces an immediate emergence of signification. Regarding metonymy, Lacan seems to abide by the traditional Jakobsonian definitions: “a substitution of signifiers that have relations of continuity among themselves” (my translation; Fages 56). Metonymy is always an apparent nonsense, since there is no direct correspondence between signifier and signified, and the signified continuously slips under the signifier. This is why, in fact, meaning can only be found retrospectively, in what Lacan called the *points de capiton* (literally, ‘quilting points’), certain fundamental points of attachment between the signified and the signifier where the slippage of the signified stops for a time. Otherwise, “the unconscious is the Other’s discourse” (“Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” 10). That ocean of signifiers that Lacan calls the “big Other” is so strong that it prevents all communication. Individuals often find that the words they receive from the other are their own message but in an inverted way (Fages 41). This is the result of what Lacan calls “the unconscious master”: no communication at all is possible, but pure nonsense.

All throughout *Alice*, Carroll uses language-games to create Alice’s dream worlds. There, as Jean-Jacque Lecercle points out: “rules and maxims appear to be joyously subverted” (3). This literature is nonsensical literature. It draws attention to language, as Jacqueline Flescher claims: “Conversation, or more precisely, argument, is the essential vehicle of nonsense in *Alice*, but it is conversation of an unusual kind” (137-38). For instance, nonsense is created through different uses of sonic and visual qualities of language or with the use of puns.

Fortunately, the mechanisms of puns and their effects, have been very well explained by Dirk Delabastita (1996). They fall into eight categories which Turkay Bulut summarizes as:

> the homophonic puns (non-synonymic word pairs that sound alike but have different meanings), the homographic puns (two words that are written the same but have different sounds and meanings), the homonymic puns (words which are spelled and pronounced alike), the compound puns (phrases with more than one pun), the recursive puns (the second aspect of the pun relies on the interpretation of an element in the first aspect), the visual puns (the pun aspects are substituted by a

> picture as used in cartoons), the onomastic puns (made by names), and finally the idiomatic puns (made of idioms). (173)

By analyzing Lewis Carroll's use of nonsense, wordplay, puns, and neologisms next, we will discover what they reveal about our subjective structure.

In the Mouse Tale, we find the famous pun on "tail"/"tale." When Alice begs the Mouse to explain his aversion towards cats and dogs, the Mouse tells the story: "'Mine is a long and sad *tale*!' said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing. 'It is a long *tail*, certainly,' said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; 'but why do you call it sad?'" (my emphasis; AW 25). This example exemplifies the prevalence of the signifier over the signified in Wonderland. It is clear that the acoustic image of the signifier commands Alice's answer, since "tail" and "tale" are both homophones. Alice assigns the word she hears a different meaning from what is intended, referring to the body of the mouse and not to the story. This is reinforced by the way Alice associates the signifier "tale" to the signifier "mouse" creating in her unconscious a sign which in this case is the story in the image of a mouse tail. Hence, Alice's mistake reveals that Alice depends on language both to interpret the world and to express herself, but that because the signifier and the signified are as Lacan defends unrelated, miscommunication is frequent.

The same applies to Alice's conversation with the Gryphon. When Alice asks about the length of their lessons the Mock Turtle explains that their lessons' duration is reduced from day to day: "'That's the reason they're called *lessons*,' the Gryphon remarked: 'because they *lessen* from day to day'" (my emphasis; AW 82). This sentence is pure *point de capiton* since Alice understands the connexion between the signified and the signifier. The slippage of the signified stops for a time when, thanks to the signifier "lessen," Alice uses logic to determine the duration of their lessons: if the first day they do ten hours, the eleventh day must be a holiday. Following Alice's logic, the twelfth day enters in the quality of negative or irrational numbers. To break this *point de capiton*, the Gryphon changes completely the subject of the conversation. Once more, the signified is detached from the conversation whereas the signifier prevails. But here a new meaning is revealed.

Again, it is the sound of the signifier that leads the conversation between Alice and the Duchess. However, this time it disrupts it through the unexpected association that emerges. When the Duchess remarks that if people minded their own business the world will roam faster, Alice tries to prove her knowledge since the Duchess has underestimated her intelligence: "'Just think of what work it would make with the day and night! You see the earth takes twenty-four hours to turn round on its *axis* –' 'Talking of *axes*,' said the Duchess, 'chop off her head!' (my emphasis; AW 50). Commanded by the signifier, the duchess leaves the interlocutor speechless and turns the conversation abruptly to a different and disconnected topic. We understand that in Wonderland not everything about wordplay is play or humor.

The Dormouse's story is built in the fashion of a recursive pun, as Alice starts asking questions, the Dormouse completes the story by adding Alice's hesitations. The Dormouse joins Alice's frustration telling the story of three sisters, Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie:

> 'Why did they live at the bottom of the well?'
> The Dormouse again took a minute or two to think about it, and then said, 'It was a treacle-well.'
> 'There's no such thing!' Alice was beginning very angrily . . .
> 'And so these three little sisters – they were learning to draw, you know –'
> 'What did they draw?' said Alice, quite forgetting her promise.
> 'Treacle,' said the Dormouse, without considering at all this time. . . .
> 'But I don't understand. Where did they draw the treacle from?'
> 'You can draw water out of a water-well,' said the Hatter, 'so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well – eh, stupid?' (AW 61-63)

This conversation does not lead anywhere and the characters involved intend to have the last word. There is an attempt of attaching the signified and the signifier, but the Dormouse manages to escape from such *points de capiton* and signification and meaning escape Alice. This story also exposes how language may constitute the subject entirely. The names of the sisters Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie correspond to the real-world Liddell girls. "Lacie is an anagram of Alice, Elsie is made of the two capital letters "L.C." the initials of Lorina Charlotte, and

Tillie was the family nickname for Edith" (Greenacre 422). Just like the individuals are supported by their proper names in the social environment, the unconscious that rules Wonderland identifies them with a whimsical rearrangement of letters, sounds, or substituting names.

This is because the rule of the signifier masters Wonderland, like in this onomastic and homophonic pun: "'The master was an old Turtle – we used to call him Tortoise –' 'Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?' Alice asked. 'We called him *Tortoise* because he *taught us*'" (AW 80). Neither the Mock Turtle nor the Gryphon question the non-terrestrial nature of the turtle. A new signifier, "taught us," is the only thing that commands their absurd reasoning that a turtle can be called a "Tortoise," which otherwise is logic, because tortoises indeed are all turtles. It happens elsewhere. The following idiomatic play on words involves two homophones: "'Have you seen the *Mock Turtle* yet?' 'No,' said Alice. 'I don't even know what a Mock Turtle is.' 'It's the thing *Mock Turtle* Soup is made from,' said the Queen" (my emphasis; AW 77). In this case, the Mock Turtle is a character in Carroll's tale and at the same time a soup made of veal. Alice does not have a referent in reality of what a Mock Turtle is and she is unable to figure out the meaning, because there really is no such a thing and the Queen is speaking with pure signifiers.

Indeed, in Wonderland the signifier prevails over meaning. This can be seen when Alice is falling down the rabbit hole. She picks up a jar which is labeled "'ORANGE MARMALADE'" (AW 8), but the jar is empty. This misrepresentation of the signifier with its void signified, not only shows how Carroll provided the readers with an expectation that was not met, but that in this world of Wonderland, as in the unconscious, the carrier of the signifier contains no specific signified. There are divided entities. This is what the Duchess tells Alice: "Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves" (AW 75).

The signifier masters the situation in this dream world in such a degree that sometimes it imposes an extreme literalism. This can be seen when Alice tries to control language and instead gets mislead by it, as when the March Hare invites her to drink "more" tea:

> ‘Take some more tea,’ the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly.
> ‘I’ve had nothing yet,’ Alice replied in an offended tone, ‘so I can’t take more.’
> ‘You mean you can’t take *less*,’ said the Hatter: ‘it’s very easy to take *more than* nothing.’ (AW 61-62)

Alice cannot drink any more tea, as she has not been served a cup yet. The literalism with which the Hare uses the word “nothing” prevents him from metonymizing it as “nothing-of-tea.” The concept of “nothing” as an absolute thing leaves out the existence of something that could be “more or less of” it. Of tea, there can be more or less; of nothing, only more. Lacan is right to say that this new creation of words and specifically, neologisms, are indestructible: “the more the signifier signifies nothing, the more indestructible it is” (*Seminar* III 185).

But wordplay does not start and end with puns. Through portmanteau-words, Carroll combines two concepts into a single lexical unit, where part of the word designating the first concept is merged with another part of the word designating the second. These portmanteau-words ignite the imagination of the readers who must guess the meaning of those words and have their greatest exponent in the famous poem “Jabberwocky.” In the poem, the signified remains suspended and the meaning network lacks coherence, as Alice points out various times: “‘It seems very pretty,’ . . . ‘but it’s *rather* hard to understand!’ . . . ‘Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don’t exactly know what they are!’” (TLG 128). The only thing that she gets is a glimpse of the idea of the poem: “*somebody* killed *something*: that’s clear at any rate” (TLG 128). At least, beneath all the ballad’s signifying nonsense, she can metonymically recognize the poem’s questing narrative.

The absence of the signified is such that, not only the words of others, but even the words she uses seem to act independently of Alice’s will and intended meaning. This is illustrated when Alice is wondering if she has been changed for Mabel who does not know many things: “‘no, *that’s* all wrong, I’m certain! I must have been changed for Mabel!’” (AW 16). Even worse, her voice sounded like another person’s: “her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come the same as they used to do” (AW 16). These events underline Alice’s idea that she might be someone else, which makes her feel alienated.

Then again, communication with the other turns impossible and Alice keeps receiving her message back to restart again. When Alice is talking to the Caterpillar, with a shift from the figurative to the literal, there is no progress in their conversation. It turns cyclical:

> 'What do you mean by that?' said the Caterpillar sternly. 'Explain yourself!'
> 'I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, sir' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.'
> 'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar.
> 'I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly,' Alice replied very politely, 'for I can't understand it myself to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing.'
> 'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar. (AW 37-38)

Alice is torn apart in her unconscious, in this dream world. All throughout the novel, the characters demand Alice questions that conceal an implicit need, the revealing of the self, which she cannot perform.

The only place where Alice may seek to find support is in the symbolic world of the fairy tales she has read, in an attempt to restore her identity: "When I used to read fairy-tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!" (AW 16). Outside Wonderland she was aware of the fictional dimension of those stories, but now she is submerged in this dream world which is nonsensical, illogical, and ultimately driven by the signifying chain, the big Other of language, that masters and commands.

It is clear that Alice is under everybody's orders and commands. This can be seen during the Caucus-race when the animals demand Alice to give the prizes: "'But who is to give the prizes?' . . . 'Why, *she*, of course,' said the Dodo pointing Alice . . . in despair she put her hand in her pocket . . . and handed [the] prizes" (AW 23). Alice also succumbs to the White Rabbit orders out of fear: "'Run home this moment, and fetch me a pair of gloves and a fan! Quick, now!' And Alice was so much frightened that she ran off" (AW 28). Frequently, Alice is diminished and suppressed by the characters' linguistic power. They restrict Alice's intervention by cutting abruptly the conversations or using language in their favor. This is

explained by Humpty Dumpty, who shows how the signifier is dissociated from the signified: "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less . . . The question is which is to be master – that's all." (TLG 180). The possibility of imposing the relation of the signified to the signifier is a dream of almightiness for Humpty that is impossible. It is complicated to understand a world in which the signified continuously slips under the signifier. However, it would be even more complicated if someone could bind signifier and signified in a perpetually univocal way.

The Duchess also speaks from that commanding position. She misrepresents what is expected of a mother because there is no tenderness in her words. She turns the poem "Speak gently," into the opposite: the language of tyranny: "Speak roughly to your little boy, / And beat him when he sneezes: / He only does it to annoy, / Because he knows it teases" (AW 50). Another character that shows incandescent cruelty is the Queen of Hearts. In chapter VIII, "The Queen's Croquet-Ground," the Queen demonstrates her authoritative character towards her cards: "'Who is this?' She said it to the Knave of Hearts, who only bowed and smiled in reply. 'Idiot!' said the Queen, tossing her head impatiently" (AW 67). Moreover, when the Queen asks Alice who the gardeners are, Alice does not have an answer, since she does not know them. It is Alice's inability of responding that ignites the Queen's behavior: "The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring for a moment like a wild beast, began screaming 'Off with her head!'" (AW 68).

All three, Humpty Dumpty, the Duchess, and the Queen of Hearts, act as masters and yet, they are unsuccessful masters, like the King and the judges, who paradoxically also lack command. This lack of command can be seen in the letter that is addressed to no one: "It isn't directed at all . . . in fact, there is nothing written on the outside" (AW 100). The letter represents pure nonsense since without an address and addressee it has accomplished its purpose. These nonsensical tasks do not stop here, as the Queen demands "Sentence first – verdict afterwards" (AW 103), which exacerbates the nonsense of celebrating a trial. Even more, the King demands Alice to stop growing, since she has "no right to grow here" (AW 94), but the order is a natural failure.

In the case of Alice, the lack of command is over her own words. She is unable to recite the poems correctly: "'I'm sure those are not the right words,' said the poor Alice, and her eyes filled with tears" (AW 16). She is tortured by it, as well as ridiculed by other characters. This can be seen when Alice tries to recite "You are old, Father William": "'That is not said right,' said the Caterpillar. 'Not *quite* right, I'm afraid,' said Alice, timidly; 'some of the words have got altered.' 'It is wrong from beginning to end,' said the Caterpillar decidedly, and there was silence for some minutes" (AW 41-42). On another occasion, the Red Queen complains about Alice's lack of control over meaning: "'That's just what I complain of! You should have meant! What do you suppose is the use of child without any meaning?'" (TLG 214). We can observe how the unconscious master is in charge. The tyranny of the unconscious is such that, apart from submerging the subject in the signifying chain, produces mockery of us because we lack meaning.

All this was indicated in Carroll's famous "Mad Tea-Party":

> The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he said was 'Why is a raven like a writing-desk?'
> 'Have you guessed the riddle yet?' the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.
> 'No, I give it up,' Alice replied. 'What's the answer?'
> 'I haven't the slightest idea,' said the Hatter.
> 'Nor I,' said the March Hare.
> Alice sighed wearily. 'I think you might do something better with the time,' she said, 'than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers.' (AW 57-59)

The main purpose of any riddle is to have a solution that can be found, but not in Wonderland, where the greatest riddle is the one that cannot be solved. The intrigue of the riddle itself is enough for the Mad Hatter. Knowing the answer would have undermined the Mad Hatter's nonsensical nature, since the answer would have required forethought, which nonsense does not allow. And here, no answer is necessary, since the Mad Hatter has already intrigued Alice, with which the main purpose of the riddle has been accomplished.

Lacan can be right to say that Carroll instructs us about the structure of the unconscious and of our subjectivity. The two are, after all, a Symbolic riddle without a solution.

Chapter 4. The Imaginary in *Alice*

Just like he did with the Symbolic order, Jacques Lacan's "Homage to Lewis Carroll" referred to the Imaginary register, as part of "the network of our condition of being" ("Homage" 4). He did so in these terms: "they are the ones which open up access to reality" (4), having said earlier that in *Alice* they are playing with the other two registers of subjectivity "in the pure state in their simplest relation." As we will see, the Imaginary register of our subjectivity refers to that part of the self that is constituted by images and identities, but also by deception.

Lacan's psychoanalytical theory began with his construction of the Imaginary register of subjectivity. It is rooted in comparative psychology and in particular, Henry Wallon's 1931 "mirror test." He agrees with Wallon that unlike animals, the child progresses from a partial to a whole perception of his or her body. In the early months of its life, in a process named by Lacan the "mirror stage," the child perceives himself or herself in parts, until it is mature enough to perceive his or her body as complete in the image seen in the mirror. In Lacan's terminology, this reassembling of the "fragmented body" into an "ideal-I" is an effect of the Symbolic, of the words that the child has been spoken to (Fages 14-15). As Jean-Baptiste Fages says, with language, the individual becomes the subject of the sentence putting itself alongside the other signifiers of the Symbolic register (28). However, according to Lacan, what matters is that the unified image the child perceives is given to him or her by another (a mirror or another subject, most commonly, the mother) and that therefore, this imaginary reconstruction of the parts of the body and of the self into an imaginary-I entails some misidentification (20-21). As a consequence of this, that imaginary-I is nothing but an illusion of unity and each one of us misidentify ourselves with a specular image that is not really ourselves (14). Hence, in the Lacanian interpretation, imitation, attraction, love, but also hatred, and aggressiveness are manifested towards cognates (15).

As he said in his “Homage,” Lacan found that *Alice* was full of image combinations. It is interesting to see what *Alice* tells us about the Imaginary order, image and identities in Wonderland.

On several occasions, the characters in *Alice* make comments on her external appearance and frequently they define her identity according to it. The first characters Alice encounters in *Through the Looking Glass* are the flowers of the garden. Based on her appearance, the flowers assume that she is a flower too: “If only her petals curled up a little more” (TLG 131). Clearly, they are determining Alice’s identity by projecting on her their own imaginary features. Alice does not correct them. She seems to accept that imaginary association. After all, she has traversed a mirror to enter into another imaginary world.

Nonetheless, Alice had gone through much discomfort because of the image she received of the others and how they gave her a new identity. This can be seen in the conversation with the Lion. He mistakes Alice’s appearance due to her body transformations: “‘Are you animal – or vegetable – or mineral?’” (195 TLG). She used to immediately reject that kind of misidentification: “‘Serpent!’ screamed the Pigeon. ‘I’m *not* a serpent!’ said Alice indignantly” (AW 43). She felt self-alienated. It is no wonder that those recurrent statements caused frustration, anxiety, and originally resulted in the stereotypical behavior of a sentimental little girl who cries easily:

> ‘Oh dear!’ cried Alice, with a sudden burst of tears, ‘I do wish they would put their heads down! I am so very tired of being all alone here!’ . . . she soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high. ‘I wish I hadn’t cried so much!’ (AW 16-18)

Even worse, she herself could not recognize her own body. Its image was constantly deformed and fragmented, as in very primitive stage of the maturation process. The reader can see how it grows (“‘now I’m opening out like the largest telescope that ever was!’,” AW 13), shrinks disproportionately (“‘I must be shutting up like a telescope.’ And so it was indeed: she was now only ten inches high,” AW 11), over and over (“‘I must be growing small again.’ . . . she was now about two feet high, and was going on shrinking rapidly,” AW

16) or grows again (“Alas! it was too late to wish that! She went on growing, and growing” (AW 29). At one point, Alice seems to see her body dislocated in parts that neither join nor meet. First, the feet severe from the rest of the body: “‘Good-bye, feet!’ . . . they seemed to be almost out of sight . . . I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears?’” (AW 13). Her body is disjointed to such an extent that even Alice realizes it saying goodbye to her feet and therefore perceiving and recognizing herself in parts, as a split self. As if to further reinforce her split identity Alice starts talking to herself: “this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people ... ‘But it’s no use now, there’s hardly enough of me left to make *one* respectable person’” (AW 12). Therefore, Alice shows the quintessential fragmentation of her body; next, the head: “all she could see, when she looked down, was an immense length of neck . . . ‘And where have my shoulders got to? And oh, my poor hands, how is it I can’t see you?’” (AW 43). Parts of her body seem to have disappeared to her eyes. Alice’s body perception is completely fragmented, nothing like her pre-Wonderland experience: “‘Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual’” (AW 14). It is as if she had had a regression into a primary stage of herself.

The problem she finds now is that others do not recognize her. Her encounter with Humpty Dumpty presents her with her own face, as if she was in front of a mirror. However, he does not seem to give back an image that may be recognizable, only part by part: “‘I shouldn’t know you again if we *did* meet’: . . . ‘Your face is the same as everybody has – the two eyes, . . . nose in the middle, mouth under. It’s always the same’” (TLG 186). Those fragments of her image are not giving back any completed form of personal identity and this is perhaps why she cannot recognize herself in *Alice in Wonderland*. All her body parts, all the sensations that she cannot place are just a bunch of things that made no sense: “‘[W]as I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little bit different. But if I’m not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I?’” (AW 14). This search for identity divides Alice, disrupts her, and leads her to wonder she is not like “all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself” (AW 14-15). In her, disfiguration and fragmentation prevail and prevent any coherent form of self-perception.

The solutions that she is able to provide do not work well. Tying the different parts of the body of the Duchess's baby, trying to figure out "the proper way of nursing it (which was to twist it up into a sort of knot, and then keep tight hold of its right ear and left foot, so as to prevent its undoing itself)" (AW 51). But the baby's fragments (metaphorically), if reconstructed at all, only take the shape of something alien to itself: a baby metamorphosed into a pig.

However, it seems that she will try to rival the self of Wonderland and the self of the real world. In fact, the specular image of rivalry is all the time present in, even more, in the second adventure of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. There, one finds that, there, rivalry is one of the most notable feelings of the characters, as is the case with Tweedledum and Tweedledee. These siblings are an exact replica of each other, as is confirmed by themselves: "'what are you, I should like to know?' 'Ditto' said Tweedledum. 'Ditto, ditto' cried Tweedledee" (TLG 158). They are a reflection of each other and, therefore, the rivalry between equals predominates in their attitude: "'I know what you're thinking about,' said Tweedledum: 'but it isn't so, nohow.' 'Contrariwise,' continued Tweedledee, 'if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic'" (TLG 150). One completes the sentences that the other begins, and both want to have the last word and thus be superior to his counterpart: "'Of course you agree to have a battle?' Tweedledum said in a calmer tone. 'I suppose so,' the other sulkily replied" (TLG 160). That same rivalry with the other is repeated throughout the second book as may be seen in the case of the lion and the unicorn or the fight between knights in which we can appreciate the mirror effect: "'One Rule seems to be, that if one Knight hits the other, he knocks him off his horse; and if he misses, he tumbles off himself'" (TLG 200).

Alice goes across an upside-down world where she can barely recognize herself nor be recognized by the other, who are only able to confuse narcissistically the imaginary-I for themselves and so turn on each other. Alice resorts to an ideal-I that seeks to identify herself with her version outside Wonderland, that would be recognized in her environment. She likes to boast her politeness and education: "'Perhaps it doesn't understand English,' thought Alice; 'I daresay it's a French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror'" (AW 19),

and her refinement: "'I've been to a day-school, too, . . . we learned French and music'" (AW 80). Nevertheless, the conversation between Alice and the Duchess, which demonstrates the pure meaning of the mirror stage, suggest the only wise way to deal with the deception and rivalries of the reconstructed imaginary-I that we receive from the other:

> 'Be what you would seem to be' – or if you'd like it put more simply – Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise. (AW 76)

The Duchess' advice to Alice could be that she should not expect to imagine she is but that which she appears to be others, but at the same time that in that play of deception, that appearing image of herself is at least a possibility of being.

Chapter 5. The Real in *Alice*

In "Homage to Lewis Carroll," when discussing subjective experience, Lacan speaks not only of the Symbolic and the Imaginary, but also of the Real: "The symbolic, the imaginary and the real; the three registers . . ., there they are, playing in the pure state in their simplest relation" (4). The relation among these three orders of the subjective structure is very particular. None of the registers prevails over the others. Lacan represents that relation using the figure of the Borromean knot, in which each register is a ring and the three are interlocked in such a way that "each ring prevents the other two from drifting apart" (Colette Soler, "The Paradoxes of the symptom in Psychoanalysis," *Companion*, 93). That relation is nevertheless unstable. Just like in the Borromean knot, the three registers are interlocking in such a way that if one of the rings is released, the others are also released and any kind of psychic disruption may emerge. To repair that potential flaw of the knot of our subjective structure and achieve stability between the registers, Lacan produced the new category of the *sinthome*, a new purified form of our own symptoms that holds together the three registers and prevents them from breaking apart. The *sinthome* "allows the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real to be held together" (Soler, "The Paradoxes of the Symptom in Psychoanalysis" 95), providing a certain stability to the subjective structure.

The Real is the most elusive of the three registers. To understand the Lacanian Real, it is very important first to clarify that the Real in Lacan is not reality. Reality is codified; it is constituted by images and language. Therefore, reality has a meaning of its own, whereas the Real is an abyss of meaning; it is beyond signification. According to Colette Soler's "The Paradoxes of the symptom in Psychoanalysis," the Real "remains alien to any form of symbolization, [and] in no way reaches the unconscious but may haunt the imaginary form of the body" (93). In other words, the Real is not detached from language and imagination, the difficulty is that it cannot be symbolized or imagined. The Real is the closest thing to the trace of trauma, a trace that is difficult to recover in words or even in images. This element of subjective experience accompanies us. Therefore, although reality acts as a barrier

protecting the subject from the abyss of the Real, when neither the Symbolic nor the Imaginary register are strong enough, the Real erupts violently with feelings of devastation or insanity that overcome the subject. In a milder way, this experience of the Real has been faced by all of us in dreams as the uncanny.

The Real in Lacan derives from Freud's concept of "the uncanny," or "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud, The Uncanny 1-2). In "The Interpretation of Dreams," Freud explains: "there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown" (528). The uncanny is that "navel" of the dream, a passage or part of a dream that cannot be interpreted or unraveled and which is not possible to be known to us. Because it is impossible to be translated into words or represented by images, the uncanny produces anguish. Lacan also finds this same impossibility to be represented through words and images in the Real that he conceived as part of us. Just like the uncanny, the Real produces anguish. An equivalent of what happens in this register is a quote by Nietzsche: "if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee" (107).

In *Alice*, by following a rabbit down a hole, Alice enters the dream world of Wonderland. In this place underground qualities such as time and space become completely relative as Alice points out: "Either the well was very deep, or [I] fell very slowly" (AW 8). The effects of time and space cause Alice a general sense of uncertainty. Out of curiosity, Alice "tried to look down and make out what she was coming to, but it was too dark to see anything" (AW 8). Perhaps the darkness of the bottom represents that Alice is venturing into the dream's navel, what Lacan named the Real.

The stability and organization of time and space in Wonderland are constantly threatened. In Wonderland, time is frozen due to the accusation of the Queen of Hearts towards the Mad Hatter: "'He's murdering the time!'" (AW 60). This quarrel had caused that it was endlessly teatime for the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Dormouse: "the Hatter went on in a mournful tone, . . . 'It's always six o'clock now'" (AW 60). This punishment is symbolized

in the Mad Hatter's clock that runs in a strange time scale: "'What a funny watch!' she remarked. 'It tells the day of the month, and doesn't tell what o'clock it is!'" (AW 58). Whereas from the Mad Hatter's point of view, his timescale is perfectly logical, from Alice's perspective, that time dimension there has something of the impossibility of the Real and naturally creates discomfort in Alice. Alice "felt dreadfully puzzled" (AW 58) trying to figure out whether the tea party exists in a time distortion, a time loop.

That kind of dimensional distortion is even more noticeable in *Through the Looking-Glass*. There space is completely distorted, as if in a mirrored world. Alice's attempts to leave behind the house are useless. When Alice wants to meet the Red Queen, the Rose tells her: "'You can't possibly do that … I should advise you to walk the other way'. This sounded nonsense to Alice … To her surprise, she found herself walking in at the front-door again" (TLG 133). Every single time, Alice ends up returning to a starting point: "wandering up and down, and trying turn after turn, but always coming back to the house" (TLG 129). The impossibility of moving forward and always returning to the same place naturally creates anxiety in Alice. The same thing happens when the Queen and Alice start running: "the trees and the other things round them never changed their places at all: however fast they went, they never seemed to pass anything" (TLG 136). The Real may be sensed in this emphasis on repetition of immovability and returning to the origin, the impossibility of breaking with this endless loop. Here it is understood what Freud wrote once: "The better orientated in his [or her] environment a person is, the less readily will he [or she] get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it" (The Uncanny 2).

Nevertheless, the topological dimension is not the only one that creates uncanny feelings. Dreams often contain objects transforming into new identities, such as body transformations. As explained earlier, throughout *Alice*, Alice's body has both shrank: "the poor little thing sat down and cried" (AW 12) and enlarged: "her head struck against the roof of the hall … [she] was more hopeless than ever: she sat down and began to cry again" (AW 14). The recurrence of these bodily changes caused her unease and anxiety, as she expresses her emotions crying. Within the physical changes, we also find the threat of a loss of identity. Alice believes that she has been changed for another girl, seeing that since she is unable to

utter the correct words: "'I'm sure those are not the right words,' said poor Alice, and her eyes filled with tears again as she went on, 'I must be Mabel after all'" (AW 16). This uncanny feeling of not knowing herself, this complete disconnection from her body may be also considered part of the experience of the Real.

Some Wonderland inhabitants experience literal dismembering of their body parts, such as the Cheshire cat: "'I've often seen a cat without a grin but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life!'" (AW 55). Cheshire is reduced to a grin, to an uncanny smile no longer attached to his body. The grin reveals the Lacanian Real, this abyss of meaning between Cheshire's smile and body produces an eerie feeling. Other characters that present uncanny bodies are those of the flat two-dimensional cards. In Alice's words: "you're are nothing but a pack of cards!" (AW 104). It needs to be reminded here that it is that complete lack of logic and the idea that Alice's existence could be only fictitious that triggers her anxiety in the end of *Alice in Wonderland* and will wake her up.

This idea of whether she is being or not part of a dream is to her difficult to take and occasionally turns traumatic: "'in my going out altogether, like a candle. I wonder what I should be like then?'" (AW 12). This image of the blown-out candle is significantly traumatic, since talks about a life that cannot go on and approaches the immovability of life, the impossible of the Real, death itself.

This reappears in *Through the Looking Glass* when she meets Tweedledee and Tweedledum and with a still more threatening tone. The twins reveal Alice that she is only part of the Red King's dream: "'When you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real.' . . . 'I *am* real!' said Alice, and began to cry" (TLG 158). Being in a dream is uncanny, but becoming aware that you may not exist outside that dream maybe is too Real. The search for sense of completeness dominates this situation and the horror and trauma of being dreamed, the uncertainty of non-existence, the possibility of not being real. This uncanny feeling is what leads her to say: "'Hush! You'll be waking him, I'm afraid, if you make so much noise'" (TLG 158). It is the fear of just not being, of the Real feeling of death.

In “Homage” Lacan states: “[o]f the little girl, Lewis Carroll made himself the servant; she is the object which he draws, she is the ear he wants to reach, she is the one he is truly addressing amongst us all” (2). Alice Liddell occupied the place of an absolute object for Carroll. She represents Carroll’s deepest desires and having suppressed them; he did something beautiful in his work. Instead of trying to satisfy them by going to “a public park,” as Lacan says (“Homage” 7), he satisfied them through sublimation. This force of sublimation “involves a shifting of our instinctual aims from their original intent” (Sugarman 131) and produce perhaps an artistic creation: “[Carroll] redeployed [his impulses] to some higher use” (Sugarman 14). Sublimation accounts for the creation of Carroll’s *Alice*. Lacan expresses that the work of art was not only the result of his affection towards Alice Liddell, but also of the combination of his various skills: “[t]here is indeed – as we are told – Lewis Carroll the dreamer, the poet, the lover if you will, and Lewis Carroll the logician, the professor of mathematics” (“Homage” 6). All the traces that can be found of the triple structure of our subjectivity, of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real, is the product of what I would call “Carrollian sublimation”: disruption of the established order, changes in logic, and dislocation of images and meanings.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* and their relation with the Symbolic, Imaginary, and the Real, the three Lacanian registers of subjectivity. The aim is to break with the critical tradition of applying psychoanalytical theory to the literary texts and instead try to find some teaching about us as subjects of the unconscious in the works of literature.

Jacques Lacan's "Homage to Lewis Carroll" proposed that psychoanalytical theory can learn from Lewis Carroll's works, as our subjective structure is better represented in *Alice* than anywhere else. After having read Lacan's "Homage" and consulted his Seminars I and II and some of his *Écrits*, I have re-read *Alice* and come to these conclusions.

Firstly, those aspects of the subjective structure present in *Alice* have been discussed in terms of the Symbolic. We have seen how the people of Wonderland always make use of puns (homophonic, homonymic, compound, recursive) and portmanteau-words. When Alice hears them, meaning is always changing and elusive. Also, the presence of Alice's inability to express herself and of her lack of communication with the others is constant. Every logical explanation given by Alice is dismissed and this causes her lack of identity. In Lacanian terms, Wonderland's world of nonsense is ruled by the signifier and miscommunication is an effect of the lack of correspondence between signifier and signified. As in the big Other of the unconscious, every attempt to find meaning in Wonderland is frustrated.

Secondly, the Imaginary register of subjectivity can be also found in *Alice*. Alice is defined by the others in terms of her appearance and image but they constantly mistake her for something different. Also, her body is constantly changing (growing or shrinking) or fragmented, in such a way that she cannot identify her own body or herself. It is what she tries to repair by tying up the parts of the body of the Duchess' baby or by building an ideal image of herself as a good, educated girl. There is strong evidence to suggest that in Wonderland one returns to an early imaginary order of subjectivity that Lacan described, a

mirror world that is best represented by the narcissistic rivalries of twin pairs in *Through the Looking Glass*.

Lastly, in Wonderland, we have found in Alice the experience of anguish produced by all those body transformations, misidentifications, and nonsensical words that have created and abyss of meaning and identity around her. This corresponds to the Freudian uncanny, the Lacanian Real. It all begins by falling down a rabbit hole into the world of the unconscious, where time and space lose their referents and liberation from anxiety only comes by waking up.

In conclusion, it may be said with Lacan that Wonderland represents the world of the unconscious in which the main registers of the human subjective experience can be found: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. Alice's experience is not different from ours. Usually, our attempts to find meaning through what we know or have learnt are useless, we do not feel that the others recognize us and have to defend from anguish. By sublimating his own impulses in writing *Alice*, Carroll integrated all aspects of the subjective structure in his work. Thanks to it, we can learn about its complexity.

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