



universität
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DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

„The Origin and Principles of Victorian Nonsense:
Darwin's and Lyell's Influence on Lear's Limericks
and Carroll's *Alice Stories*“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

Magistra der Philologie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2018 / Vienna, 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 190 347 344

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Lehramtsstudium UniStG, UF Französisch UniStG
UF Englisch UniStG

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. i.R. Dr. Ewald Mengel

Mitbetreut von / Co-Supervisor:

nicht zutreffend / not applicable

Acknowledgements / Danksagung

Vielen Dank an Herrn Professor Mengel für die Unterstützung bei der Themenfindung, die verlässlichen und raschen Rückmeldungen und den hilfreichen Input - ich habe mich durchwegs bestens betreut gefühlt.

I also want to thank Fionnuala Dillane, whose seminar on literature and science at UCD Dublin inspired me to choose a topic I could not have been happier with.

Ganz viel Danke auch an all die lieben Menschen in meiner Welt, die mich offener, zuredender und tanzender Weise durch diese Zeit begleitet haben.

Besonders danke ich meiner Familie: Mama und Papa, ich kann gar nicht ausdrücken, wie dankbar ich bin, dass ihr mich über all die Jahre in allem, was mir wichtig war, unterstützt, mir immer Halt gegeben und mich mit eurem Vertrauen angesteckt habt, dass schon alles gut so ist, wie es kommt und wie ich meinen Weg gehe. Und Fan, vielen herzlichen Buuh fürs gemeinsame Freuen über jeden Lustfortschritt und für die wohldosierte Ablenkung zwischendurch mit diversen Lustinarien. Und einfach fürs Da-Sein. ♥

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Introduction

The nineteenth century, the time of natural sciences' emancipation as individual disciplines, witnessed not only an unprecedented accumulation of paradigm shifts, but also a wave of literary explorations of the resulting epistemic crisis in Victorian society. One genre where this search for answers is particularly striking is that of nonsense literature, created and made popular by Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll (Schramek 1).

The present thesis therefore seeks to examine the manners in which these authors' nonsense echoes the implications of the scientific contributions made by two of the most important Victorian scientists, i.e. Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin. To that end, I will first discuss the impacts of Lyell's geological discoveries as well as those of Darwin's theory of evolution on nineteenth-century British society on four levels: the Victorians' scientific discourse community, their spiritual beliefs and moral convictions, their social structures and rules, and the methods and themes of their literature. Drawing on such monumental analyses as those by Beer, Dean, Levine, and Otis, I will illustrate that Darwin's and Lyell's work sparked a hitherto unparalleled enthusiasm and the further development of natural sciences, and that by promoting the secularization of science, these scholars provoked a skepticism among their contemporaries toward accepted authorities such as the Church or the wealthy. Subsequently, a link will be established between the resulting questioning of a godly-ordained order, the loss of spiritual purpose and moral direction, and the consequent reassessment of established social and natural hierarchies. At the end of the first main chapter, a brief overview will be given of the general manifestations of the Victorian epistemic crisis in the literature of the time, which will discuss the trend away from teleological linearity toward random multiplicity, as well as the growing presence of such themes as the (futile) search for 'objective truths' and man's connection to nature.

The second and principal part of this thesis will focus on the ways in which Lear's limericks and Carroll's *Alice* books reflect the changes of perspective caused by the scientific progress during the Victorian age. Two main themes pervading these works will be identified and examined in detail: on the one hand, man's position, first among other animals, and subsequently within (Victorian) society;

on the other hand, the workings and value of rules and human logic, taking natural laws and reality as a first focal point before passing on to linguistic systems.

It will be argued that both Lear's and Carroll's works in question include numerous satirical allusions to the food chain – e.g. with regard to the characters' body size, eating habits and (otherwise) predatory behavior –, frequently mock conventional hierarchies between man and other animals, and blur the physical and behavioral boundaries between them. Based upon this, the limericks and the *Alice* books will be interpreted as reactions to the scientific developments discussed, and it will be claimed that, while Lear appears to support Darwin's notion of a non-deterministic universe, Carroll's nonsense suggests a wish to hold on to the established order and ideas of benevolent design. This point will be further supported in my analysis of the poems' and novels' treatment of social conventions and the need to conform, which will illustrate that Lear promotes individuality first and foremost, while Carroll's books will be presented as indicating man as dependent on society and a certain order.

Additionally, both authors will be shown to enjoy playing with their characters' and/or readers' notions of and expectations towards reality, suspending natural laws, calling attention to the subjectivity of interpretation and reasoning processes, and blurring the lines between fact and fiction. In this manner, so it will be argued, Lear and Carroll expose man's over-dependence on rules, and human logic as fallible. This becomes similarly evident in the last chapter of the thesis, which will examine the nonsense writers' treatment of language, i.e. their experiments with literalizations, strange collocations and the detachment of signifier from signified. However, it will be argued that, rather than constituting examples of complete anarchy (linguistic or otherwise), Lear's and Carroll's play with rules is ultimately embedded in the safe frame of an overall reliable grammatical and literary form, suggesting an attempt to accommodate the human need for stability.

1. The impact of scientific development: Lyell and Darwin

The paradigm shifts and other drastic changes in nineteenth-century Victorian society arose primarily from game-changing scientific discoveries as well as the creation and re-evaluation of scientific fields and ideas (Paradis x). Some of the most important contributions in this context were made by Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) through their works *Principles of Geology: Being an Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth's Surface, by Reference to Causes Now in Operation* (3 vols., 1830-1833) and *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859), respectively: their theories regarding geology and evolutionary biology triggered an avalanche of debates among scientists, theologians, politicians, and the public concerning an array of questions ranging from man's position in the universe and the possibility of God's existence to the justifiability of established social structures (Dean 118; Paradis x; Smith 149; P. White 47).

Although Lyell and Darwin were not the first scientists to discuss the signification of geological formations or theories of evolution, their roles in the propagation and development of these ideas were decisive (Beer 2000, 3). Their scientific contributions to such discussions had an extraordinary impact not only on the concept of science per se, but also on religious and moral beliefs among their contemporaries, the meaning and legitimacy of rules such as those of society or language, and, consequently, on the contents and form of the literary traditions of the time, all of which shall be discussed in this first part of the present thesis.

1.1. Discoveries and new perspectives

Geology is considered among historians to have become a branch of modern sciences during the last decades of the eighteenth century, when James Hutton argued for the possibility of the creation, destruction and reformation of entire continents through geological processes that had been the same ever since their beginning (Dean 112). At this early stage, geology was welcomed by Victorian society as a seeming confirmation, as Dean (111) puts it, "of God's creative

intentions in fashioning the earth as a fit abode for man." In other words, geology was used to support established beliefs that the planet had been created for man as the center of divine creation – until Charles Lyell, with his publication of the first volume of his *Principles of Geology* in 1830, disturbed this "comfortable" (Dean 111) anthropocentric worldview: by presenting his interpretations of geological findings in the form of rock samples and fossils, Lyell made his readers aware of the illogicality of the prevailing assumptions about the age of the earth and suggested that geologists

have misinterpreted the signs of a succession of events, so as to conclude that centuries were implied where the characters imported thousands of years, and thousands of years where the language of nature signified millions (2010, 36).

Thus, Lyell's argumentation required his readers to expand their mental time frame from about six thousand years that had been sanctioned by Scripture (Levine 25; Roberts 91) to inconceivable millions of years. Moreover, he revealed humans to be relative latecomers on the planet by affirming that

the quantity of igneous and aqueous action, – of volcanic eruption and denudation, – of subterranean movement and sedimentary deposition, – not only of past ages, but of one geological epoch, or even the fraction of an epoch, has exceeded immeasurably all the fluctuations of the inorganic world which have been witnessed by man (Lyell 2010, 89).

As Paradis (99) phrased it, Lyell's discoveries "[dwarfed] the human moment." They shifted the focus away from man and onto nature as a whole, from whose perspective man, rather than being the center, constituted hardly more than a curious novelty (Schramek 2; Straley 113). What is more, Lyell argued that humans were not even in the position to adequately observe the natural world during the short era of their presence, since they were, as Adele Buckland summarizes, "bound by their bodies to a small fraction of [the earth's] surface [and] a tinier fraction of its depths" (264). Because of the inadequacy of their senses – not being able to "see into the past or into the depths of the earth or the sea" (A. Buckland 264) – they could not rely on their, or others', perceptions alone.

Lyell therefore aimed to suggest a new methodology for the study of the past: "Since human beings had not witnessed most of earth history, and the evidence they had with which to understand it was so incomplete, they would need to analyse 'causes now in operation'" (A. Buckland 264) in order to conduct good scientific work. He thus supported Hutton's concept of uniformitarianism, i.e. the gradual change over a long period of time due to constantly operating natural laws, and argued against the theory of "Catastrophism" (ibid.) that was commonly diffused by the Church and theologians and according to which the world had been shaped by sudden and violent events or catastrophes (Dean 112; Levine 7; Straley 112).

However, in his *Principles*, Lyell referred to "'a 'very few exceptions' to the general rule" (Lyell 1830, 147, qtd. in A. Buckland 262) that the earliest rock beds of the earth contain fossils of simpler species while more complex examples can be found in the younger strata, thus refuting the commonly accepted theory of the "transmutation of species" (Beach 331) by the zoologist and early evolutionist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck: according to this theory, more highly-developed beings evolved gradually from lower creatures by a set of natural laws of ascent as well as by their intentional adaptations (Beer 2000, 19f.; 33), which allowed for the complacent view that humans represented the peak of development. Lyell's findings took away the breeding ground for such anthropocentrism since, as he explained, these few exceptions were "as fatal to the doctrine of successive development as if they were a thousand" (Lyell 1830, 147, qtd. in A. Buckland 262).

As a consequence, Lyell rejected any kind of progression and believed in the immutability or fixity of species (Beer 2000, 5), therefore failing to account for those changes that are indeed directional (Dean 114). Nevertheless, his contributions to Victorian science were of vital importance to its progress. Apart from his findings regarding the age of the planet, his introduction of the observation of "causes now in operation" as a method for studying the past, and his crucial role in the secularization of science (see chapter 1.2.), his work in the *Principles* provided the basis for another groundbreaking piece of scientific work: Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.

Darwin, who had "a never-failing interest" (F. Darwin 227, qtd. in Dean 116) for geology and stated that the *Principles* were "of the highest service to [him] in many ways" (Darwin 1958, 77), found in Lyell's theory of the earth as a "self-regulating geological machine" (Schweber and Postlewait 14) a useful model for his studies of biology and evolution (Smith 146): in his *Origin*, he presented nature as a uniform system where all organisms are interconnected and interdependent (as he visualized in his famous passage of the "tangled bank" [Darwin 2003, 397, qtd. in Holmes 345]), perpetually interacting in their struggles for survival in an environment that is subject to constant change (Holmes 344).

Yet, in contrast to Lyell's observations, his theory insisted on the continuous and directional evolution of species – without, however, presenting this evolution as progressive improvement, let alone ascribing it to any kind of teleological principle or divine purpose (Otis 443). Whether or not he approved of other people's attempts to embed his theories in natural theology is a matter of great divergence of opinion among scholars: whereas Paul White argues that Darwin "encouraged [...] religious readings of his work" (44) such as that of the American Presbyterian Asa Gray (P. White bases his argumentation on Darwin's inclusion of a passage by the clergyman and naturalist Charles Kingsley in the second edition of the *Origin* as well as on his financing of the republication of articles by Gray), others, like Levine, claim that Darwin used Hutton's and Lyell's uniformitarianism "to disrupt the very ideas of design and intentionality that it was originally used to affirm" (Levine 8). Otis (443, xxi) presents the conclusive argument that, in general, Darwin "discouraged teleological thinking", but included religious references to "appease readers": as many Victorian scientists addressed issues whose discussions had, until then, been reserved to theologians and philosophers, they could more credibly "defend their right" (ibid.) to do so by integrating "the voices of accepted authorities" (ibid.).

What is certain is that Darwin attributed evolution to what he called *natural selection*, i.e. the continuous processes of preservation and extinction of species depending on their ability to adapt to their ever-changing environment. These adaptations, he argued, happened gradually through the appearance of minor and random (!) variations which, according as they proved beneficial or detrimental for the individual, either led to its death or to the production of more

offspring (Chapple 81; Otis 238). Thus, according to Darwin, the only purpose behind the successive development of species was that of survival (Paradis 105).

This view differed from previous theories of evolution in that it did not require a Creator: just like Lyell's geological nature, Darwin's organic nature was constantly fluctuating, yet overall self-sustaining owing to stable, but creative natural laws (Paradis 104; Schweber and Postlewait 14); however, while many Victorians accepted theories of evolution and even of common descent according to such laws as long as they were designed by God and purposeful (Bowler 2012, 38) (which implied man being the ultimate end of a path towards perfection), Darwin's insistence on the necessity of extinction – after all, new species could form only through the premature death of those individuals that had failed to adapt to their environment – made any argumentation for "a benevolent Providence seem to many a fool's endeavour" (Holmes 340).

Furthermore, Darwin moved away from the typically natural-theological conception that the earth's organisms were perfectly adapted to and live in absolute harmony with their respective environment (Levine 45; 104):

We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see, or we forget, that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects, and are thus constantly destroying life; [...] we do not always bear in mind, that though food may be now superabundant, it is not so at all seasons of each recurring year (Darwin 2007, 19).

Darwin emphasized the ubiquitous disharmony of nature, and man's biased perception of it (Darwin 2007, 20; Levine 104; Paradis 94). Throughout the *Origin*, he therefore supported his arguments, whenever possible, with lists of observable "facts" (Darwin 2007, e.g. 5; 75; 131-131) and, with regard to the idea of perfect adaptation, presented several pieces of evidence of "aberrations [...], maladaptation, imperfection" (Levine 103), e.g. "rudimentary or atrophied organs" (Darwin 2007, 117) such as the eyes of moles or the teeth of whales. These examples fascinated Darwin, and he argued that, in fact, deviations were the creative principle behind evolution (Beer 2000, 59). He even went so far as to suggest that man's attempts to classify animals and plants into distinctly separate species were futile, as the margins "between species and sub-species, [...]"

between sub-species and well-marked varieties, or between lesser varieties and individual differences" (ibid. 17) were blurred.

In other words, Darwin's theory presented nature as an ever-changing world of disharmony subject to a set of laws that were characterized by unidirectional change, imperfection, and – somewhat paradoxically – chance, and whose only purposes were those of survival and procreation (Levine 89; 111). This concept stood the world "on its head" (ibid. 106) and led to irreversible changes in the beliefs and practices of Victorians, as we shall see in the next chapter.

1.2. Impacts

1.2.1. The scientific world

The consequences of Lyell's and Darwin's theories for the Victorian scientific society were momentous. First of all, Lyell played a major role in the secularization of science, as he considered the authority of the Church – which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, dominated "government, education and most prestigious professions" (P. White 41) – to be obstructive to scientific progress (Dean 114). Lyell therefore avoided any appeal to natural theology and limited his argumentations to purely geological findings (Sleigh 72). For this reason, and because "there was no better popular encyclopedia of geological information than his" (ibid.), making his contemporaries "[buy] and read his book as if it were a novel" (ibid.), Lyell managed to trigger the gradual abandonment of literal interpretations of the Genesis in Victorian society (Bowler 2009, qtd. in Bowler 2012, 38) and thus the separation of science and the Church (Qureshi 24; P. White 41).

Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, too, encouraged this separation. Levine (25) states that Darwin "deliberately sought to displace" natural theology's teleological creationism since (like Lyell) he regarded it as a threat to "the very practice of science and [foreclosing] close empirical investigation of natural phenomena." Frank Turner (16, qtd. in ibid.) even asserts that, as a member of the small group of Victorian scientists often referred to as the 'scientific naturalists' (Smith 145) (to which Lyell belongs as well), Darwin "sought to expand the

influence of scientific ideas for the purpose of secularizing society rather than for the goal of advancing science internally. Secularization was their goal. Science, their weapon."

Both Lyell and Darwin tried to achieve this by drawing, whenever possible, on material evidence and other observable facts – an approach which greatly influenced Victorian (scientific) society: while, previously, it had always been common to form one's worldview by listening to theologians and philosophers, people in the Victorian age developed an attitude of expecting objective truths (Otis xx; Benson 299). As Dingle (309, qtd. in Benson 299) explains, the world was now understood as one of "external nature, sharply distinguished from subjective illusions," and the function of scientists was "solely to discover, first by observation and experiment and then by rational deduction, what the material world contained and how its course was ordered" (Dingle 305, qtd. in Benson 299). At the same time, however, both Lyell and Darwin stressed the inadequacy of the human senses and their limited position to observe this external nature (A. Buckland 264). Recognizing that what they perceived were only "sensations" (Levine 235) of something rather than the thing itself, Darwin and his fellow empiricist scientists had to accept that their "faith in observation [...] would be precisely that, 'faith.'" (ibid.) Thus, they anticipated the later shift from such faith to the modernist "distrust" (ibid.) against its authority.

Furthermore, Darwin's theories of the earth as a self-regulating system where geological and organic nature are intricately interdependent, of the irreversibility of change, and of the disharmony caused by the struggle for survival, raised among Victorians an interest in the study of these interdependencies, and thus led to the creation of ecology as a scientific branch. An advocate of Darwin's, the German biologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel, was the first to use the term and defined ecology as "the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature – the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment" (McIntosh 7f., qtd. in Holmes 345), and this growing body of knowledge led to further distinctions such as between environmentalism and conservation, ecological ethology and ecological politics (Holmes 346).

Overall, biology, together with geology and demography, became the most important science of the century (Chapple 80). However, Lyell's and Darwin's massive influence was possible only because both scientists immensely contributed to the popularization of science (Levine 3). Lyell's *Principles*, whose primary audience was, originally, intended to be the public (Roos 161), gave rise to "a widespread, sophisticated enthusiasm for earth science among those who read it" (Dean 116). Geology became *en vogue*, and, as phrased by his contemporary, famous US-American author and lecturer Ralph W. Emerson (71), "at this moment, every ambitious young man studies geology". Likewise, Darwin's *Origin* was a best-seller, and even though, as pointed out by O'Connor (161), it can hardly be referred to as "popular science", it spread the theory of evolution throughout the public. Moreover, it contributed – as did Lyell's *Principles* – to the integration of scientific activities into cultural life, as described by Levine (3) in the following way:

Popularizations of science were filling lecture halls, journals, and workingmen's institutes; [...] amateur fossil hunting, insect collecting, seashell study were holiday diversions and potential contributions to rapidly expanding scientific knowledge. 'Evenings at a Microscope' were pleasant hours of quasi-educational amusement.

Thus, the discoveries made by Lyell and Darwin triggered a wave of enthusiasm for studies of the earth and, consequently, contributed to the development of a range of new branches of science (Chapple 3; Paradis and Postlewait x; P. White 41). Additionally, the secularization of science, as promoted by Lyell and Darwin, caused Victorians to abandon their submission to the claims of accepted authorities and to expect factual evidence and objective truths. This was particularly appreciable in the realms of religion and other beliefs, as shall be argued in the following.

1.2.2. Religion and beliefs

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, natural theology had created strong ties between science and religion (P. White 43), as science's primary purpose was considered to be the support of religious assumptions, such as the unity and

coherence of the universe as well as the intelligence, rationality and purpose behind its design (Levine 24). The scientific discoveries of Lyell and Darwin, however, posed to theologians a challenge to integrate the new evidence into their doctrines (Dean 123; 125). At first, this reconciliation did not seem to pose a problem, as early theories of geology and evolution did not (explicitly) contradict the existence of a Creator (ibid. 111). William Buckland (19, qtd. in Levine 25), for instance, integrated Lyell's theories into the idea of creationism, claiming that "[n]o reasonable man can doubt that all the phenomena of the physical world derive their origin from God," and even Darwin left discussions of the origin of life per se to others and, particularly in early editions, made concessions to religious ideas, such as in his often-quoted reference to "powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms" (Otis xx).

However, the evidence of the earth's age made it necessary to abandon literal interpretations of Scripture and its stories of Adam and Eve, or Noah and the Flood (Dean 123). Moreover, the planet's geological record and Darwin's theory of natural selection implied that God intended for some species to go extinct so that others could survive, which, rather than showing benevolence, suggested a certain ruthlessness (Holmes 340). Similarly dispiriting was the idea that seemingly purposeful adaptations were merely the results of chance, which inevitably led Victorians to question the very concept of laws and systematicity (Levine 89). This disillusionment was further exacerbated by the fact that natural selection appeared to favor those species that brutally outrivaled their competitors, which, as Stocking phrased it, "threatened to take all ethical meaning out of temporal process not simply by postulating evolutionary change independent of God's direction, but also by premising it implicitly on vice rather than virtue" (222). In other words, the scientists' observations of nature forced Victorians to question their ethical and moral principles, which had always been assumed to be divinely ordained and were now revealed to be barely more than human conventions (Levine 118).

The greatest shock, however, was the realization that this shift of authority from Scripture to nature suggested that humanity was subject to the same natural laws as the 'lower' creatures (ibid. 1). This extension of Darwin's theory to humans, although avoided by himself in the *Origin* (Smith 143), was soon undertaken by

others (the first of whom was Huxley with his *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* in 1863 [ibid.]), before Darwin addressed the issue himself in *The Descent of Man* in 1871. This represented the last straw in Victorians' crisis of faith, since it opened the door to a range of further existential doubts: if humans did not enjoy any special treatment by God, this meant that they were exposed to the same risks of decline (after all, geology had shown that change was not always an improvement) and even extinction as all other creatures (Dean 130). Given that prehistorical animals of much bigger size and a much stronger physical constitution had already been wiped out of existence, humanity's only hope of a happier fate lay in their mental capacities or moral qualities (Lyell 1863, chap. XXIV, qtd. in Dean 129). However, in the light of a growing body of scientific answers to questions regarding human behavior, the notion of a 'soul' became increasingly problematic (Otis xxvi). Additionally, the idea of tracing back the human 'species' via apes all the way to unicellular organisms, in combination with the impossibility to draw clear lines between species, caused Victorians to question their uniqueness and thus, their superior position (Levine 91). If humans had not been created in the likeness of God, but descended from the lowest of beings, and if, as Darwin's theory suggested, human morality was not God-given, but had evolved from animal instincts, this further questioned the universality of human moral principles and thus "opened the door to a thoroughly amoral universe" (ibid. 85). Besides, even assuming that humans were indeed superior, Dean (130) notes that, "[b]y century's end, [...] Victorians were by no means sanguine that excellence of any kind would ensure human survival".

It is important to stress at this point that Darwin himself had a fairly optimistic view on life, as he illustrated in the following paragraph from the *Origin*:

It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving and adding up all that are good; silently and insensibly working [...] at the improvement of each organic being (Darwin 2007, 27).

In other words, although Darwin did not consider nature to improve in a teleological sense, he nevertheless identified in it a certain progression towards what is 'good' on the grounds that less well-developed individuals, and thus varieties, were gradually screened out by natural selection. This optimism was

shared by many of his contemporary scientists¹, who believed that scientific progress constituted a means to "create a better world" (Olson 294, qtd. in Schaffner 410). Furthermore, Darwin (2003, 431) insisted on happiness playing an important role in the survival of a species, arguing that

[i]f all the individuals of any species were to suffer to an extreme degree they would neglect to propagate their kind [...]. Now an animal may be led to pursue that course of action which is most beneficial to the species by suffering [...] or by pleasure [...]. But pain or suffering of any kind, if long continued, causes depression and lessens the power of action. [...] Hence [...] most or all sentient beings have been developed in such a manner, through natural selection, that pleasurable sensations serve as their habitual guides.

In spite of this optimism among scientists, and although religion maintained a powerful position within Victorian ideology and society (Otis xxvi), a wave of agnosticism – a term coined in 1869 by the influential biologist Thomas H. Huxley, a strong defender of evolutionary theory (Mitchell 9) – as well as a "general pessimism" (Dean 128) pervaded Britain during the last third of the nineteenth century. Scientific paradigm shifts had taken from Victorians the basis for their deep-seated beliefs regarding the meaningfulness of the world around them, which inevitably caused them to reevaluate the social structures and laws they had, until then, always considered to be unquestionable (Holmes 350).

1.2.3. Society and order

Nineteenth-century Victorian society witnessed the mushrooming of one new science or sub-science after the other, and as a consequence, the constant founding of new educational and research institutes, academic faculties, and specialized professional societies. Science became particularly popular through the lecture series of well-known scientists like John Tyndall, Thomas Huxley and Michael Faraday. These lectures aimed at educating the public of all social classes, educational and professional backgrounds, and thus largely contributed

¹ Schaffner (410) mentions the examples of "Saint-Simonian socialism, Comte's positivism, Marxism, Lamarckian evolutionary theory and most forms of social Darwinism."

to the propagation of science throughout Victorian society (Chapple 3; Paradis and Postlewait x).

Similarly important contributions were made through the founding and flourishing of scientific journals and several hundred periodicals, which provided a forum for public debates regarding science and its ramifications (Paradis and Postlewait x). The first and most immediate of these ramifications was, arguably, the separation of science from the Church, and consequently, the professionalization of scientific fields (Levine 37). Professionalization, "the institutionalizing and canonizing of independent expertise" (Moore 67), gradually replaced the Church as the path to authority and power in Victorian upper society. Therefore, it resulted in the need to mediate between received and new beliefs and doctrines in order to maintain social stability while integrating new and more liberal modes of thought (ibid.). This constituted a considerable challenge, as Darwin's random, dysteleological and mindless world conflicted strongly with the Western system built on order and intelligent design (Levine 94). The dissociation of the natural world from intention, and therefore nature's loss of an inherent significance, cleared the way for "willed constructions of meaning" (ibid.). As a consequence, the crisis of faith entailed a "crisis of legitimation" (Moore 66), where Victorian intellectuals struggled for new sources of power so as to protect their status and keep the risk of social upheavals in check.

This danger was further aggravated by the new trend towards individualism resulting from Darwin's focus on the aberrant, the unique (Levine 42): as the theory of natural selection presented deviation as the creative force behind evolution, this entailed each individual having its own value, since it held the potential of mutation and change for the better of the entire species (Beer 2000, 118). The consequence was an increased "conflict between the freedom of the individual and the stability of the social organism that contains him" (Hark 112; see also Schramek 4). However, Darwinism emphasized not only individualism: the notion of interdependence and the thought of animals behaving in such a manner as is "most beneficial to their species" (Darwin 2003, 431) gave similar importance to ideas of cooperation and group spirit (Bowler 2012, 43). This apparent contradiction was reflected in the rise of discussions regarding what

Huxley² termed *Social Darwinism* in 1860: this term is generally used to criticize the application of Darwinian natural laws, and in particular that of the struggle for life, to society. Social Darwinism implied for many the idea that this struggle was responsible for social progress and, therefore, that the suffering of the individual was a necessary evil to enhance the greater good of society as a whole (Chapple 86). In extension, if social structures had their foundation in natural laws, this allowed the convenient conclusion that poverty was unavoidable, possibly even an essential part of a functional society (Otis 444).

Thus, transferring from nature to society this Darwinian focus on the unique quite ambiguously entailed a new valorization of the individual, while at the same time subjecting it to the needs of the community (Beer 2000, 118; Otis 240). This paradox was further complicated by Herbert Spencer's conclusion that, as organisms go through their lives moving "from a state in which it is an indistinguishable part of the parent organism, to a state in which it is a separate organism of like structure with the parent" (Spencer 207), the concept of a unique individual and selfhood became meaningless and had to be understood as a cultural invention rather than as being rooted in nature (Otis 237).

As the boundaries between one's own identity and that of the community became blurred, the inevitable consequence was to question the legitimacy of social hierarchies (Moore 66). Reactions to this dilemma differed considerably: whereas the wealthy sought to 'mask' (see Otis 445f.) those facts that challenged established social order, others, particularly social scientists like the founder of utilitarianism John S. Mill or the sanity reformer Edwin Chadwick, promoted a society that catered for the well-being and intellectual prosperity of the largest possible sum of people. This was to be achieved through "reason and knowledge" (ibid. 444) based on facts and statistics. As these sociologists were convinced that an individual's quality of life was conditioned by his or her environment, it was no longer tenable to blame the poor for their own misery. Thus, the fight against social inequality became the responsibility of society as a whole, making the question of how to put an end to, or at least reduce, urban poverty a central issue for Victorian society (ibid. 446).

² Huxley, Thomas H., "ART. VIII.- Darwin on the Origin of Species." *Westminster Review*. (April 1860), 541–70.

A crucial factor in these efforts was for many to give a voice to the poor (ibid.), for which literature proved to be a very effective tool. In fact, literature constituted not only a central medium for discussions regarding social inequality, but also for the processing of the epistemic crisis caused by the scientific developments in general.

1.2.4. Literature

Before the nineteenth century, science as we know it today did not exist as a separate discipline. Rather than being limited to the systematic study of the natural and material world, it described any field of knowledge or skill and was, therefore, strongly interwoven with religion, philosophy, and the arts (Otis xvii; Chapple 1). Science and literature were particularly closely linked and influenced each other both formally and thematically, which became especially evident in the context of the controversies around Lyell's and Darwin's discoveries (Holmes and Ruston 9).

There is an extensive and growing body of scholarly work examining the impact of geological and evolutionary theories on nineteenth-century Victorian fiction and poetry³, demonstrating that these scientific ideas were quickly absorbed into the canonical literature of the time (Levine 2). While, in general, literature and criticism were "rarely [...] crudely unsympathetic" (Paradis and Postlewait xii) towards science and literary references to scientists became more and more common for writers who sought to enhance their credibility (Otis xxiv), reactions to Darwinian concepts were fundamentally divided: on the one hand, there were those literary works that adopted the dominant epistemology and ideology by integrating Darwinian themes and modes of thought; on the other hand, there were those writers who, eager to expose the incongruities within Darwinian theory, bridled at the trend towards realist narrative caused by science's increasing prestige (Levine 13; Otis xxiv).

Nonetheless, the overall tendency in Victorian fiction was to aim for representations of the "real" (Levine 12), following the scientific scheme of

³ For an overview of major contributions to this focus of research, see for example, Holmes and Ruston 2; Dean 116; Holmes 339f.

(would-be) objective observation and a marked concern with facts (ibid.). Therefore, some authors, like Mark Twain and Edgar A. Poe, decided to copy the style of scientists in their writing, focusing on the provision of evidence and presenting their fiction as "truths" (Otis xxiv). Furthermore, numerous writers, such as George Eliot, conducted detailed research in order to improve the credibility and accuracy of their works, thus moving away from the romantic tradition of obtaining one's inspiration primarily from imagination (Otis xxiii f.).

However, as most of them were "sophisticated about the impossibilities of a naïve realism" (Levine 12) and as the loss of theological or metaphysical explanations for physical events led to a certain solipsism (ibid. 218), observation became not only a narrative tool, but was increasingly incorporated into, and critically examined in, literature as a theme of its own. Following Lyell's and Darwin's ideas of the inadequacy of the human senses, the pretended directness of an omniscient narrator's representation was questioned: "unreliable spectators" (Levine 15) as well as an "idiosyncratic, often grotesquely individual, yet accessible human voice" (Beer 2000, 41) became the readers' primary source of information. Narrators oscillated between "purely [instrumentally] [...] expressing the activity of the characters" (ibid.) and "[asserting] an individuality which goes beyond and runs askance from the events of the novel" (ibid.), as they were increasingly concerned with the authentication of their role and struggling against their own biases. Thus attracting attention to him- or herself, the narrator, i.e. the observer, "becomes the observed" (Levine 15), making the reader aware that "all observation is ultimately observation of the self" (ibid. 218). In addition, observation was often used as a plotting device in Victorian writing, with characters who were primarily engaged in the observation of others or whose fate is decided through acts of (distorted) observation (ibid. 212; 221; 234).

Another thought pattern that saw a similar development in Victorian literature as in the sciences of the nineteenth century was the focus on relations of cause and effect (Beer 2000, 6) rather than predesigned progress, and consequently, a trend towards multiplicity rather than linear development. Just like evolutionism is multivalent and full of contradictions, literature increasingly invited diverse interpretations of the same experience (ibid. 6; 59), and the predominant linearity and neatness of eighteenth-century novels with their insistence on a "teleological

unfolding" (Levine 25) of events gave way to complex narratives that resisted any single reading, ascription of purpose, or closure (ibid. 54).

In a similar vein, the role chance played in Victorian writing underwent a shift away from supporting ideas of divine intention to invalidating them: whereas in the literary tradition based on natural theology, seemingly coincidental developments were regarded as proof of a godly plan that became evident in hindsight, post-Darwinian literature presented coincidence as precisely that – the random occurrence of events, revealing, at most, the intentions of the author, but not foreordained design (ibid. 95). As a consequence, the reading experience was increasingly concentrated on the here and now of the story rather than on where developments led to or originated from (ibid. 106). This trend was further supported by the Darwinian conceptions of, on the one hand, an obscure, "unfathomable past whose individualities are wholly lost" (Beer 2000, 36) and, on the other hand, an unstable future that is subject to unpredictable and irreversible changes (ibid. 18).

This loss of connectedness in time led to a need for a substitute source of belonging, for which Darwin's notion of entanglement provided valuable input. As Victorians were overwhelmed by the "spiritual isolation" (Beach 8) resulting from the loss of faith, they desperately grasped at nature to fill this void. Thus, man's embedding in nature, his „kinship with all other forms of life" (Beer 2000, 57), became an important theme in Victorian literature.

Nevertheless, nature could not restore the sense of purpose and direction, and one of the literary reactions to this loss of meaning was a flight into a world of fantasy, where writers could process the human existential crisis and safely express their doubts regarding older orderings of society and the world (Beer 2000, 114). One of the literary trends in this context is that of nonsense literature, which shall be the focus of this thesis.

2. Literary reactions: Carroll's *Alice* and Lear's Limericks

One of the major outlets for man's inner and interpersonal struggles has always been artistic creation, which is why the literature of a culture tends to reflect its

principal preoccupations during any given historical era. Victorian nonsense literature, which an overwhelming majority of literary scholars have found to consist primarily of the works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, represents a textbook example of such correlations. Originating in a period and society that were characterized by a particularly dense set of paradigm shifts, this literary current has been examined by numerous scholars⁴ with regard to its thematic and formal idiosyncrasies as well as their connections with the concerns and structural developments that dominated the Victorian age. Thus, nonsense literature has been analyzed with respect to such diverging topics as the industrial revolution and capitalism, British imperialism, the reevaluation of childhood, Victorian gender roles and man's moral responsibility towards animals (Rackin 24).

However, I argue that, although nonsense literature deals with all of the above issues, it primarily constitutes a tool in the attempt to cope with much more profound dilemmas and answer such questions as have been re-raised by the works of Sir Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin: what is man's place in the universe? What are his position and responsibilities in relation to (other) animals and society? What is the meaning of man-made rules and structures, and how do they relate to the natural, the 'real' world?

In the following, I will therefore perform a close reading of Lear's and Carroll's chief works, i.e. the nonsense limericks and the *Alice* stories (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*), respectively, in order to identify the ways in which they express the predominant insecurities among Victorians. I will begin by analyzing the theme of man's place in the animal world, before shifting my focus to the relationship between the individual and his or her community in general. In the second main subchapter, I will turn to those questions that concern the meaningfulness of rule systems and logic as established by humans, examining, in particular, Lear's and Carroll's treatment of natural laws and concepts of reality as well as their play with the rules of language. I will argue that both authors use nonsense to express their reactions to anxieties triggered by Lyell's and Darwin's discoveries and theories; that, with both authors, these reactions consist in the exposure, mocking, but also a certain

⁴ see Van Vuuren for an overview

acknowledgement of man's over-dependence on arbitrary, unstable, and/or faulty systems of rules; and that, even though their methods strongly resemble each other on the surface, they nevertheless suggest different perspectives between both writers on the scientific developments of their time.

2.1. Man's place

2.1.1. Man and other animals

The symbolic inclusion of animals is deeply embedded in literary tradition both for adults and children such as in animal tales, fables, or nursery rhymes (Lecerle 182), and literary writers have long recognized animals as a useful tool to exemplify and promote their moral, political and otherwise ideological convictions (Colley 112). Well into the nineteenth century, animals were widely and primarily portrayed as existing for the benefit of man (ibid. 115), be it as source of food and commodities, as working aid, or as companion. Certainly, the Romantic and Victorian eras brought with them an enhanced sensibility for the subjectivity (Mayer 249) and suffering (P. White 113) of animals, and Victorian literature in particular saw an increase in literature seeking to teach children kindness to animals (Lovell-Smith 2003, 386). Nevertheless, animals were portrayed as having the primary purpose of serving humans, and even in those narratives where they were provided with a subjective personality, they either assisted humans as helpers, donors, or "prophetic truth-tellers" (ibid.), or stories presented them as monsters, thus always illustrating a dividing line between man and animal.

The fact that Lyell's geological discoveries ousted man from the center of Creation and the universe, and, later, Darwin's dethroning of man from the animal kingdom, however, had deep repercussions on the place animals occupied in literature (Mayer 348). The nonsense literature of Lear and Carroll includes particularly striking examples of this shift, which can roughly be grouped into three major themes: predation, domination or exploitation, and the blurring of (both physical and behavioral) boundaries between humans and other animals (see e.g. S. Thomas 51; Rackin 41; L. White 110).

Although Lear's first set of limericks, *A Book of Nonsense* (1846), was published before Darwin's *Origin of Species*, its mockery of anthropocentrism and play with human-vs-animals distinctions can hardly be ignored. Furthermore, as pointed out by Jackson (xxviii), copies of the early, un-extended edition are almost impossible to obtain, as they were "very properly used up, or eaten up, by the children", and those editions that are accessible today date from 1861, i.e. shortly after the publication of the *Origin*. Thus, in the total sum of 212 limericks included in the extended edition of *A Book of Nonsense and More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc.* (1872) taken together, we find numerous instances where the poems present exaggerations or the reversal of food-chain hierarchies, questioning man's superiority over animals (Schramek 1f.).

First of all, several limericks revolve around animals devouring people, or vice versa. We have, for instance, the Old Man of Leghorn, who was "snapt up" and "devoured" (Lear 40) by a puppy; an Old Person who ate eighteen rabbits, which made him turn green (ibid. 19); the Old Man of the South, who choked on a dish "quite full of fish" (ibid. 20); and the Old Person of Florence, who choked on a Bustard fried in Mustard (ibid. 204; Schramek 2f.; J. Thomas 120). In all of these examples, the motif of eating is associated with danger for the humans: even in the two poems where they are not the prey but the 'devourer', the food they consume either costs them their lives (making them choke) or their physical integrity (making them turn green). More importantly, however, the sources of danger are ridiculous, thus mocking natural predator-prey hierarchies: a puppy, a dish and eighteen rabbits can hardly be regarded as ordinary reasons to fear for one's life.

Other figures in Lear's limericks portray eating habits which are, if not dangerous, at least strange and alienating: there is the Old Person of Ewell, who "chiefly subsisted on gruel" (Lear 56) enhanced by adding some mice; there is an Old Man whose clothes and hats are eaten up by "some very large rats" (ibid. 16); the Old Person of Putney "whose food was roast spiders and chutney" (ibid. 161); and the "unpleasing" (ibid. 201) Old Person of Bromley, "who sate in the dust eating spiders and crust" (ibid.). Thus, by describing the disturbing and/or unappetizing eating habits of his characters, Lear causes the readers to associate food with a certain unease and questions what is generally considered 'normal'

eating behavior – in other words, what is 'normal' in terms of who eats what, or whom.

This challenging of the established order among the creatures of the earth becomes similarly evident when looking at the role that size plays in Lear's limericks (Colley 1992, 115; Hassett 694; Schramek 3). Both the poems and their corresponding illustrations present the reader with numerous animals that exceed humans in size to an unnatural extent: firstly, there are those examples where the abnormal size is explicitly stated in the poem, as with the Old Person of Dover, who was stung in his nose and knees by "some very large bees" (Lear 19) roughly the size of his entire arm (judging from the illustration, see Fig. 1⁵); we also have the Old Man who said 'Hush!', who finds a bird "four times as big as the bush" (ibid. 42) it is sitting in; and there is Young Lady of Troy, who is annoyed by "several large flies" (ibid. 46) depicted as twice as big as her head (see Fig. 2).

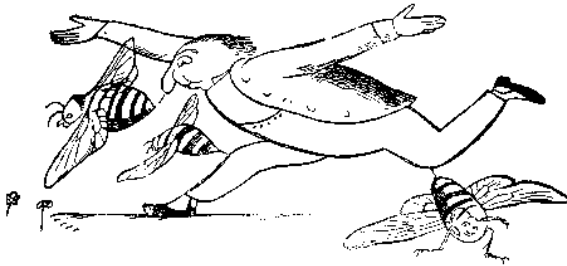


Fig. 1

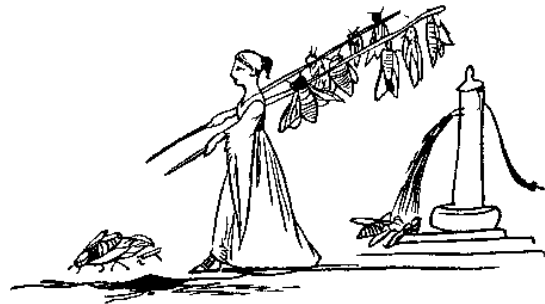


Fig. 2

However, there are also many limericks which, even though the poems themselves do not refer to size, present the reader with drawings of disproportionately large animals, such as the beetle sitting on the back of the old Man of Quebec (ibid. 21, see Fig. 3), the flea annoying the Old Man of the Dee (ibid. 35, see Fig. 4), the grasshopper jumping on the back of the old person in black (ibid. 166, see Fig. 5), or the Bluebottle fly dancing with the old person of Skye (ibid. 189, see Fig. 6).

⁵ All of Lear's illustrations on this page taken from:
Nonsenselit. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear//index.html>



Fig. 3⁶

Fig. 4

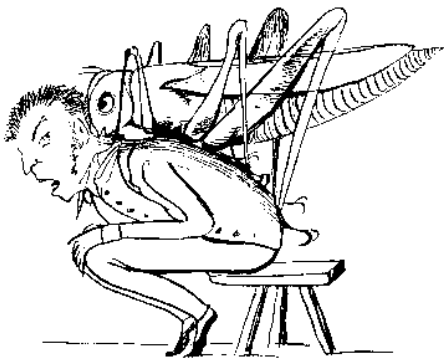


Fig. 5

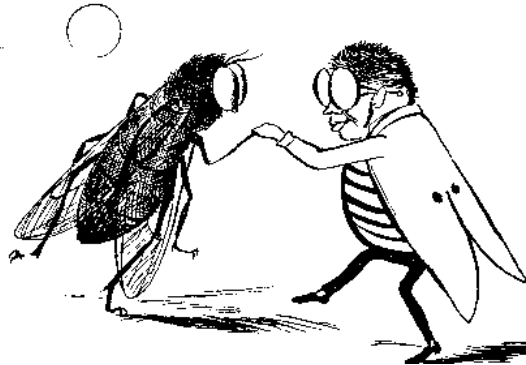


Fig. 6

Additionally, Lear occasionally exploits the genre's "duality of form" (Dilworth 535) by including contradictory information in the poem and the corresponding illustration (ibid. 47f.), as is the case with the enormously drawn "small dog" (Lear 197, see Fig. 7) found by the old man of Ancona, and with the Old Man of Aôsta's "large cow" (ibid. 57, see Fig. 8), which is drawn as even smaller than the human protagonist. Interestingly, this is the only limerick where the human is unnaturally bigger than the animal, which suggests that Lear's primary motivation for playing with his characters' sizes was to mock man's supposedly God-willed superiority over other animals by presenting size as an arbitrary factor.

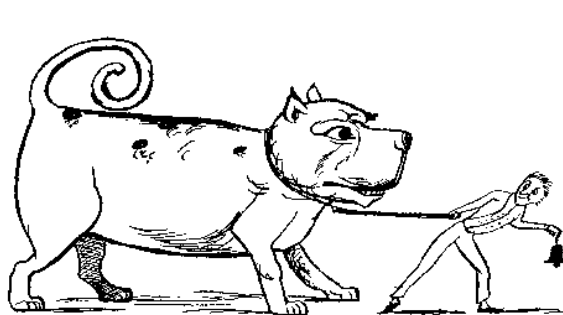


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

⁶ All of Lear's illustrations on this page taken from: Nonsenselit. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/index.html>

However, the food chain and size are not the only tools for Lear to question natural hierarchies. We frequently read about humans killing other animals for other reasons than alimentation, which can, however, hardly ever be considered 'natural': for instance, in the limericks about the Old Person of Rhodes (ibid. 28), the Old Man of the Dee (ibid. 35), and the Young Lady of Troy (ibid. 46), animals are (threatened to be) killed simply because they are considered annoying or because a human "strongly object[s]" (ibid. 28) to them. Likewise, the humans' ways of killing them are rather odd: while the Young Lady of Troy rids herself of the flies "with a thump" (ibid. 46) or by drowning them, the Old Person of the Dee is given a hatchet to "scratch" (ibid.) the flea. We also find humans dying similarly strange deaths that are caused by other animals, such as the Old Man of Madras (ibid. 11), who is literally scared to death by the length of a donkey's ears, and the Young Lady of Clare, who simply "expire[s]" (ibid. 59) while being pursued by a bear. Furthermore, people's reactions to imminent danger are often downright ridiculous, as with the Old Man trying to "soften the heart" (ibid. 38) of a "horrible Cow" (ibid.) by sitting "on [a] stile, and [continuing] to smile" (ibid.), or the Young Lady of Hull, who manages to distract a "virulent Bull" (ibid. 39) with a spade and by calling out "'Who's afraid!'" (ibid.). Thus, life-threatening confrontations and death are a pervasive theme throughout the limericks, but the reader is generally spared any real distress as they occur under fairly ridiculous circumstances and/or cause laughable reactions, which, again, suggests Lear's wish to mock 'natural' predator-prey hierarchies.

Certainly, there are those limericks where scared protagonists are simply abandoned to the dangerous situation and denied any (comical) resolution, like the "helpless" (ibid. 167) Old Person in black, who is "smitten with fear" (ibid.) because of a grasshopper on his back, the Old Man of Boulak sitting on a crocodile's back that "may probably bite" (ibid. 169), the Young Lady of Greenwich, who is alarmed by a calf biting her shawl "quite in half" (ibid. 194), or the Old Person of Hyde and his bride, whose poem ends with a crab "[filling] their bosoms with fear" (ibid. 190) and making them regret having left Hyde. However, in all of these examples, either the humans' fears are clearly out of proportion (as with the grasshopper or the crab), or the danger is otherwise trivialized by the context provided: the Young Lady of Greenwich's shawl is "bordered with

spinach" (ibid. 194), and the crocodile (ibid. 169), so it appears, is perfectly accepting of his role as mount as long as the sun is shining.

Thus, as with their treatment of the themes of eating and size, the limericks' manner of presenting predation mocks supposedly natural predator-prey behavior and hierarchies involving humans, either by reversing them, by presenting characters as scaredy-goats, or by making them act in ridiculous manners when reacting upon violent or threatening behavior.

A similar approach can be identified in Carroll's *Alice* books, where predation, particularly in the context of eating and size, is a pervasive theme throughout the stories. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (henceforth AAIW), the question of who-eats-whom lurks behind every corner. The tone is set during Alice's fall down the rabbit hole: first, when she overturns the natural hierarchy of predator and prey, musing about whether "cats eat bats" and "bats eat cats" (Carroll 25; see Auerbach 37); and second, when Alice remembers "several nice little histories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts" (Carroll 27). This latter phrase foreshadows the contrast the reader is going to find omnipresent in the book: on the one hand, it is a children's story about a marvelous dream world; on the other, the child protagonist and her companions repeatedly find themselves in dangerous situations revolving around predator-prey hierarchies, and even fire, which, as we have discussed before, is an important Darwinian motif symbolizing the man-vs-animal distinction. For instance, we have her famous unintentional parody of the poem *Against Idleness and Mischief* by Isaac Watt, where a crocodile replaces Watt's virtuous and hard-working bee and is romantically described as "[welcoming] little fishes in / With gently smiling jaws!" (ibid. 32), thus cynically presenting predation as a virtue: as Straley (99) argues, "[t]his reptilian mutation of Watts's noble insect suggests that the beneficent design of natural theology has been replaced by the self-interested predation of Darwinism." The next example is Alice's first encounter with the Mouse in chapter three, whom she inadvertently frightens to death by starting a conversation about cats and, particularly, her pet Dinah's mouse hunting skills (Carroll 34f.). The next, although less explicit, allusion to the Mouse's unfortunate place in the food chain is made in its recital of the Mouse's tale, where a dog, playing both judge and jury at the same time, essentially decides to condemn a Mouse to death (presumably

by being eaten) out of boredom (ibid. 39; Lovell-Smith 2003, 387). At the end of the chapter, Alice repeats her faux-pas of praising Dinah's predatory skills in her conversation with the Lory and causes her companions to flee, which leaves her wondering why "[n]obody seems to like" (Carroll 41) her pet.

The power dynamics change briefly when Alice, having been shrunk to the size of three inches, comes across a – from her perspective – "enormous puppy" (ibid. 47). Although, in hindsight, she describes it as "a dear little puppy" (ibid. 48), she is "terribly frightened all the time at the thought that it might be hungry" (ibid. 47), thus experiencing first-hand the feeling of being exposed to a predator. She quickly manages to escape this unpleasant position, however, by throwing it a stick, thus reestablishing man's supposedly natural superiority over animals (L. White 129). Not long after, this order is underscored when Alice, having been challenged by the Caterpillar to recite "You Are Old, Father William,"⁷ again ends up changing the original poem completely and talking, among other things, about Father William "[finishing] the goose, with the bones and the beak" (Carroll 53). The chapter continues in a similar tone, with Alice's unintentional intrusion into the Pigeon's home, where she reveals herself as a potential predator by referring to little girls' culinary fondness for eggs (ibid. 56). In other words, she is a potential egg-thief, which, as Lovell-Smith (2007, 31) convincingly argues, was a well-known motif in Victorian natural history representing predation. However, similarly to what we have seen in the limericks above, the seeming reestablishment of a natural predator-prey hierarchy is ridiculed in all of these examples: in the puppy scene, Alice manages to escape because the giant puppy is too tired to chase her after the stick game, a scenario which can hardly be taken seriously, as Alice's size should (under normal circumstances) make it unlikely for her to throw the stick this far and to run quickly enough for such a big puppy; in the poem, Father William, ridiculously, eats an entire goose including its beak; and during the encounter with the Pigeon, the latter argues Alice into silence with its twisted logic, claiming that her liking for eggs reveals her as a "kind of serpent" (Carroll 47). Additionally, the brief reestablishment of the food chain is soon undone once more when Alice meets the Cheshire Cat, whose "very

⁷ A parody of the didactic poem "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them" written by Robert Southey in 1799

long claws and a great many teeth" (ibid. 64) require a greater amount of respect from Alice than would be the case with a pet cat in real life (like Dinah).

The next blatant allusion to the food chain is the Mock Turtle, whose very name implies his having no other purpose of existence than as soup ingredient (ibid. 88; see Lovell-Smith 2003, 387), and twice during his conversation with Alice, the girl barely stops herself from making another blunder like her appraisal of Dinah's hunting skills: when the Mock Turtle suggests she might never have been "introduced to a lobster" (Carroll 92), Alice sets out saying "I once tasted – " (ibid.), and when asked whether she has ever seen whittings, she has to refrain herself from finishing the sentence "I've often seen them at dinn – " (ibid. 94; see Auerbach 37). Finally, the last instance where the story deals with the motif of "eat or be eaten" (Lovell-Smith 2003, 387) is the poem about the Owl and the Panther sharing a dish of pie, where the Panther, after eating the entire pie by himself, "concluded the banquet by – " (Carroll 97; see L. White 90) doing what, for the sake of the rhyme, is most likely something like 'eating the owl'. Although the order of who-eats-whom corresponds to natural predator-prey hierarchies in all of these examples, they again treat the topic as something laughable: the personified pun on mock turtle soup, the seafood endowed with personalities, and the Owl that contents itself with the dish as its meal – they all illustrate how the food chain is a laughing matter to Carroll. Throughout *AAIW*, Alice meets animals who, depending on the context, can be either her companions or, at least potentially, her food – or vice versa (the Rabbit; the birds and Mouse; the Pigeon and her eggs; the puppy; the Cheshire Cat; the Mock Turtle; the fish-footman [Carroll 58]; the baby turning into a pig [ibid. 61]; the lobster), and Carroll exploits this ambiguity in order to make fun of a topic that, since the publication of Darwin's *Origin*, had become a matter of serious discussion (Schramek 3).

The theme of eating and being eaten also runs through *Alice's Adventures Through the Looking-Glass* (henceforth referred to as *TTLG*), although less prominently. It starts with Alice using "her favourite phrase 'Let's pretend'" (ibid. 130) to suggest that she play a hyena, and her nurse, a bone (L. White 123). The next, highly evident, example is the pair of the snap-dragon-fly and the bread-and-butter-fly: not only is the latter named after a dish for humans (similarly to the Mock Turtle), they both consist of nothing but typically human food, thus satirically

epitomizing the idea of animals serving to nourish humans: the snap-dragon-fly's body "is made of plum-pudding, its wings of holly-leaves, and its head is a raisin burning in brandy" (Carroll 154), and the bread-and-butter-fly is said to consist of wings that "are thin slices of bread-and-butter" (ibid. 154), a body that "is a crust" (ibid.) and a head that "is a lump of sugar" (ibid.). A subtler allusion to the food chain can be identified in Alice's encounter with the Fawn, who, after merrily walking through the wood in Alice's arm for a while, suddenly takes flight when it realizes that she is "a human child" (ibid. 157; see L. White 129). The Fawn seems to suggest that Carroll amuses himself making his characters – unwittingly – embrace their (potential) cause of death, an impression which is further reinforced when Tweedledee recites the poem of *The Walrus and the Carpenter*: In this poem, a group of Oysters naively follow the two protagonists in anticipation of a shared dinner but, rather than being served, end up serving as dinner themselves (Carroll 161f.).

Furthermore, as the above examples show, TTLG treads in AAIW's footsteps in its play with the creatures' companion-or-prey ambiguity, including, for example, a Goat (ibid. 151), a giant crow (ibid. 171), the White Queen turning into a Sheep (ibid. 175), Alice's wish to catch "a dear little crab" (ibid. 179), and Humpty Dumpty as a live egg (ibid. 182). This play is taken to extremes when Alice is served a leg of mutton, which is not only formally introduced to her, but also stands up from its dish to bow before Alice (ibid. 225), causing the Red Queen to deem the mutton – and, shortly after, a large plum-pudding – no longer suitable as food for Alice since "it isn't etiquette to cut any one you've been introduced to" (ibid.). Finally, while the leg of mutton ends up occupying the White Queen's seat, the latter happily finishes as one of the soup ingredients and "several of the guests [lie] down in the dishes" (ibid. 229). Thus, putting the guests and even Queens (Alice having been crowned earlier) on the same level as their food, or even reversing the order, these scenes describe their disempowerment over the natural world (L. White 209) and can, therefore, be regarded as further examples of nonsense literature playing with the image of food-chain hierarchies.

As in the limericks, however, the food chain is not the only aspect of predation, or exposedness to the forces of nature, dealt with in the *Alice* books. The characters are also, on numerous occasions, presented as vulnerable or

threatening to each other for other reasons, such as their size (Schramek 3; S. Thomas 50). Thus, while during her fall down the rabbit hole in AAIW, Alice dreams of being able to "shut up like a telescope" (Carroll 26), it is not long before she is confronted with the perils of being small: after drinking the bottle inscribed with the words 'drink me', Alice shrinks rapidly, which causes her to fear she might "[go] out altogether, like a candle" (ibid. 27), and when she starts fanning herself shortly after, the girl again barely avoids "shrinking away altogether" (ibid. 32). Now about the size of a mouse, she finds herself struggling to keep afloat in a pool of her own (enormous past self's) tears (ibid. 33) and, judging from a loud splashing sound, briefly mistakes the Mouse for "a walrus or hippopotamus" (ibid.). However, the next time Alice manipulates her size, Carroll makes it clear that tallness does not necessarily constitute an advantage: when the girl decides to drink from a little bottle in the Rabbit's home, she ends up growing until her body fills the entire house, requiring her to "stoop over to save her neck from being broken" (ibid. 43). Furthermore, while one would assume her size to give Alice a sense of power over other creatures, it utterly fails to prevent her from trembling with fear at the thought of the Rabbit coming for her, "quite forgetting that she was now about a thousand times as large as the Rabbit, and had no reason to be afraid of it" (ibid. 44). Lastly, her size is even the reason why the Rabbit wants to rid himself of the intruder by burning down the house (ibid. 47). Nevertheless, and despite the fact that she only manages to save herself by returning to her previous size of three inches, Alice soon develops the desire to grow tall again when she meets the giant puppy, "expecting every moment to be trampled under its feet" (ibid. 48). Her attempt at it goes fairly wrong, however, as the Caterpillar's mushroom causes her head to rocket above the treetops, provoking her conflict with the Pigeon.

Then again, Alice's encounter with the Cheshire Cat appears to emphasize the power that is generally associated with size in the natural world: as suggested by Lovell-Smith (2003, 408), the roles that cats play in AAIW illustrate how an animal can be "a delightful little furry companion" (see also Schramek 3) for someone of superior size (as is the case with Dinah and Alice), and life-threatening when it is larger than oneself (like the Cheshire Cat compared to Alice who, at that point, measures only nine inches). Finally, and quite in contrast to the scene in the Rabbit's house, Alice recognizes her (newly reacquired) size as a source of

authority in the courtroom, giving her the courage to interrupt the King (Carroll 109; see Auerbach 35).

Similarly, throughout TTLG, the characters' size and – sometimes, but not always, correlating – power over one another constitute a frequent motif. For instance, when Alice meets the flowers, she asks them, "Aren't you sometimes frightened at being planted out here, with nobody to take care of you?" (Carroll 141), upon which the Rose replies "There's the tree in the middle" (ibid.). Thus, it deflects the argument that their being 'planted' (which the tree is, too) is a source of danger, insinuating instead that size is what matters. However, as the tree's capacity to help the flowers in a real emergency is rather questionable – particularly by barking, as suggested by the Rose –, the reader recognizes in this scene not an endorsement of evolutionary theory, but rather a mockery of it.

The second chapter, too, includes several instances where Carroll plays with the motif of size, from the honey-making elephants "bustling among the flowers, poking [their] proboscis into them" (ibid. 149) and Alice's conclusion of "what enormous flowers they must be!" (ibid.), to the Guard's looking at Alice "first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera-glass" (ibid. 151), to the "extremely small voice" (ibid.) by Alice's ear – so small that Alice is unable to identify and, consequently, help its owner –, to the chicken-sized Gnat (ibid. 152) which, however, does not make Alice nervous because "they had been talking for so long" (ibid. 153). However, rather than allegorizing Darwinian predator-prey hierarchies, these examples suggest that size is presented as an arbitrary factor, sometimes potentially decisive, but just as often irrelevant for the lives of Looking-glass world's creatures: while the elephant-bees are in a perpetual state of mutual dependence with flowers their own size, and the creature with the small voice misses out on Alice's help because of its tininess, the Guard appears to deny that size plays a role by acting as if one could be of several sizes at the same time, and the Gnat's (relatively) enormous size does not give it any additional power over Alice. When size does have an intimidating effect upon Alice, it is for nonsensical reasons, as with the enormous crow acting as a cloud cover and triggering a hurricane with its wings (ibid. 171), or with the plum-pudding which is so large that the girl cannot help "feeling a *little* shy with it" (ibid. 226, original emphasis).

As in the limericks, however, size is not the only motif treated – and ridiculed – as a means of determining a creature's place in Wonderland and Looking-glass world. On several occasions, we find power hierarchies established through violence, explicit death threats, or implied peril to life by another character's, or nature's, hand (see Wullschläger 50): in AAIW, apart from the most obvious example of the Queen of Hearts' constant exclamations of "[o]ff with her [or his/their] head[s]!" (e.g. Carroll 78; 80), we read, for example, about Alice kicking Bill out of the chimney (ibid. 46); the Pigeon attacking Alice (ibid. 55); the child/pig which Alice fears will be killed if she leaves it behind (ibid. 63); the three little girls stuck in the well (ibid. 71f.); the gardener bringing the cook (poisonous) tulip roots instead of onions (ibid. 76); the flamingo which "might bite" (ibid. 85); and the guinea-pigs being "suppressed" (ibid. 103). Similarly, in TTLG, examples are the Jabberwocky poem, where "*somebody killed something*" (ibid. 138, original emphasis); Alice's threat to "pick" (ibid. 141) the flowers if they do not shut their mouths; her (sensation of) nearly choking on the Red Queen's biscuit (ibid. 147); Alice's fear of the invisible insect's potential sting (ibid. 152) and the Red King's snore, the latter of which she mistakes for the sound of a "wild beast" (ibid. 166); Tweedledum apparently mistaking a rattle for a rattlesnake (ibid. 168); Tweedledee and Tweedledum's wish to battle (ibid. 169), the Lion and Unicorn's fight for the crown (ibid. 196f.), and the fight between the White and Red Knight (202f.). Additionally, we find the Dodo in AAIW (ibid. 35) and the bread-and-butter-fly in TTLG, who, each in their own way, epitomize extinction, while at the same time satirizing Darwin's concept of the survival of the fittest (L. White 98; 192): the Dodo, an already extinct species, leads the Caucus-race, which for Laura White symbolizes "the evolutionary race for survival" (ibid. 74); and the bread-and-butter-fly essentially procures its own eradication through its disadvantageous food habits, feeding solely on "[w]eak tea with cream" (Carroll 155) – which is, first of all, a difficult food resource to obtain, making survival improbable (as pointed out by both Alice and the Gnat), but more importantly, the tea would actually prove fatal for it, causing it to dissolve immediately upon contact with the liquid.

However, unlike in Lear's limericks, death never actually occurs in the *Alice* books: Alice and her companions never act upon their threats, and the reader is never confronted with the actual demise of a character. The only moment where

a character's death is at least implied is the "heavy crash" (ibid. 192) suggesting Humpty Dumpty's fall (in which nobody else is involved). This difference between Lear's and Carroll's works supports Laura White's (110) claim that Carroll was, in fact, opposed to Darwin's theories: while both authors appear to use nonsense to express (among other things) their reactions to the concept of natural selection, Lear's approach of having his characters kill or attack each other exhibits a certain conformity with Darwin's dangerous universe of the survival of the fittest (even if he satirizes it for the purpose of taking away the terror), while Carroll's figures seem to be, finally, protected from any real harm, suggesting an underlying principle of divine intervention and benevolence.

Thus, from all these examples in Lear's limericks and Carroll's *Alice* books it is evident that Darwin's theme of the struggle for existence, and thus of predation, the (overpowering) forces of nature, and death, are pervasive throughout nonsense literature. Furthermore, they suggest that both authors enjoy presenting the theme as something laughable rather than dead serious – albeit with different hidden agendas – by playing, in particular, with their respective characters' size and eating behavior.

Another important motif from the context of man's place among animals and shared by the works of both Lear and Carroll can roughly be subsumed under the terms of domination and exploitation, as numerous limericks and scenes from AAIW and TTLG involve people and/or other animals serving, or being forced to serve, one another (Colley 117; Schramek 3). In the limericks, one notices a stark contrast between, on the one hand, a set of poems where animals are exploited by humans more or less as in 'real life', and, on the other hand, those which describe humans serving other animals or failing at exploiting them (Colley 115f.). The first set includes several people riding on animals, like the Old Person of Basing on a horse (Lear 21), the old man of Messina's daughter on a pig (ibid. 175), or the old man of Dunluce on a goose (ibid. 178). Another group of characters wear clothing made from animals, namely the Old Person of Mold with his furs (ibid. 26), the young person in red with her feathered leather bonnet (ibid. 165), or the old man of Blackheath and his wreath "of lobsters and spice, pickled onions and mice" (ibid. 168).

However, even though these poems represent typical instances of humans dominating other animals, they indirectly question the power associated with the respective act. First of all, the characters exploiting animals for clothing are ridiculed by the verses or illustrations: the Old Person of Mold is drawn like an enormous fuzzball (see Fig. 9⁸), the young person in red's bonnet hides her entire head and seems to block her view (see Fig. 10), and the old man of Blackheath's wreath is one jumbled mess of animals and (other) food sticking out from his head (see Fig. 11).

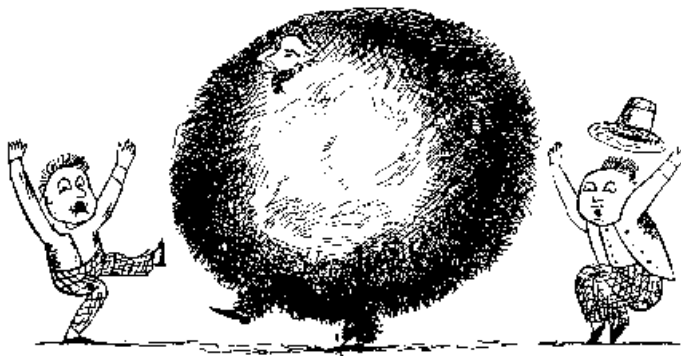


Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

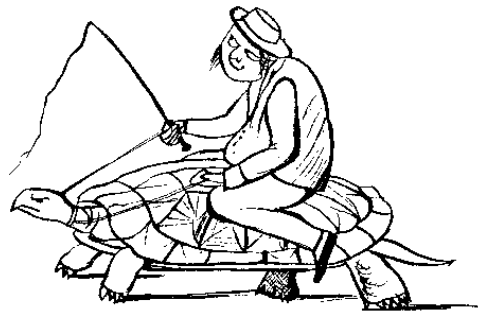


Fig. 12

In a similar vein, the humans riding on animals are, according to Colley, generally not presented as those in charge: the tortoise mounted by the old person of Ickley (*ibid.* 197) looks "stubborn" (Colley 115, see Fig. 12), suggesting it will march to its own beat, and its carapace defeats the purpose of the protagonist's carrying a whip; the old man of Boulak riding the crocodile can only hope that the latter will not work up an appetite; the Old Man of Madras is killed by the donkey; the Old Man of Nepaul is "split in two" (Lear 27) falling off his horse; and the Old Man with

⁸ All of Lear's illustrations on this page taken from: *Nonsenselit*. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear//index.html>

a beard riding a horse is prophesied to "fall off behind" (ibid. 45). Furthermore, we find a far greater number of limericks where humans appear to serve other animals than vice versa. For instance, there are several humans whose primary function is to ease the life/lives of a (flock of) bird(s): the very first poem in the *Book of Nonsense* tells of an Old Man whose beard ends up being used as a nest by "Two Owls and a Hen, Four Larks and a Wren" (ibid. 3); but we also find the Young Lady who welcomes all birds to sit on her bonnet (ibid. 5); the Old Man on whose nose "[m]ost birds of the air could repose" (ibid. 58); and the old man in a tree whose whiskers are plucked by birds as nesting material (ibid. 191). Another group of humans seem to have as their main purpose the entertainment or instruction of other animals: the Young Lady of Bute (ibid. 22), the old man in a Marsh (ibid. 165), and the young person of Bray (ibid. 192) all spend their days making music for their animals; others make it their business to teach virtues to animals, like the old lady of France with her dancing ducks (ibid. 170) and the old man of Dumbree with his tea-drinking owls (ibid. 184), or to tend to their basic needs, such as the old person of Cannes fanning her fowls (ibid. 176), the young lady of Corsica spoiling her "saucy-cur" (ibid. 191) with ham and "hot raspberry jam" (ibid.), and the old person on gray feeding her parrots with carrots (ibid. 195).

These examples show that the limericks exhibit a strong tendency of either humans serving other animals, or of human attempts to dominate an animal going wrong or being ridiculed. Similarly to Lear's themes of eating behavior, size, and death, this play with inversed domination and (voluntary) servitude suggests an influence by the Victorian zeitgeist of questioning human superiority over other animals, a trend which can also be identified in the *Alice* books.

For instance, throughout AAIW, Alice's relationship with the Rabbit is characterized by a power hierarchy that is quite contrary to what it would be in the 'real' world: Alice addresses him politely, "in a low, timid voice [asking] 'if you please, sir – '" (Carroll 31), while the Rabbit mostly debases her, either by ignoring her attempts of conversation (ibid.), by mistaking her for his servant and sending her for errands (ibid. 42), or even by trying to smoke her out of his home as if dealing with an infestation (ibid. 45). Likewise, the Rabbit is the one wearing kid gloves (ibid. 30), thus exploiting another animal for clothing. (An even 'curiouser' example of this is the March Hare living in a house whose "chimneys were shaped

like ears and [whose] roof was thatched with fur" (ibid. 66), since this description, with its emphasis on ears, suggests that the house was made to look like a hare itself – in all likelihood with the use of fur from a hare, i.e. through a 'cannibalistic' kind of exploitation.)

Other animals, too, appear to have a certain command over Alice: the Cheshire Cat and the Gryphon order her to recite poems (ibid. 51, 96), and the Gryphon additionally tells her to "come on" (ibid. 88), "[s]it down [...] and [not to] speak a word till [he has] finished" (ibid.), and "[h]old [her] tongue" (ibid. 89), causing Alice to complain more than once that she "was never so ordered about in all [her] life, never!" (ibid.) and "[h]ow the creatures order one about, and make one repeat lessons!" Furthermore, during the court trial, the Dormouse denies Alice the "right to grow *here!*" (ibid. 102, original emphasis).

Similarly, in TTLG, we read about a Beetle claiming that Alice will "have to go back from here as luggage" (ibid. 151), thus degrading her to the status of a commodity. Alice is also debased by Humpty Dumpty, who constantly presumes to know everything better, rudely contradicting or interrupting her, and telling her not to "stand chattering to [herself] like that" (ibid. 182), and by the Lion and the Unicorn, who ask her whether she is "animal – or vegetable – or mineral?" (ibid. 200) and classify her as "a fabulous monster!" (ibid.). Just as these scenes are examples of a human standing on a lower echelon than other animals, there is a textbook example in TTLG of a supposedly lower animal literally bringing back down to earth its human would-be master: as the narrator tells us about the Knight, he falls off his horse "[w]henver the horse stopped [...] and whenever it went on again" (ibid. 206), and that he also "had a habit of now and then falling off sideways" (ibid.). Alice's comment that he "ought to have a wooden horse on wheels" (ibid. 207) further underscores this failed attempt at dominating a live animal.

In contrast, we also find scenes in both *Alice* books implying a hierarchy of human dominance over other animals: in AAIW, for instance, Alice carries around the Duchess's baby, but decides that it would be "quite absurd for her to carry it further" (ibid. 63) as soon as the child turns into a pig, which can be interpreted to suggest that only humans are worthy of being carried. Furthermore, during the Queen of Hearts' croquet game, hedgehogs are (mis-)used for balls, and

flamingoes, for mallets (ibid. 79). Similarly, in the very first scene of TTLG, we read about Alice reflecting on an adequate punishment for the misdeeds of Dinah's kitten (ibid. 129), thus appearing to establish a clear hierarchy from the start. This impression is reinforced by Alice's observation of "[h]ow quiet the horses are! They let them get on and off them just as if they were tables" (ibid. 204), thus likening horses to mere objects made for man's convenience. Finally, the Knight's beehive constitutes another example of animal exploitation by humans and, therefore, of the latter's dominance (ibid. 205).

It can be argued that in all of these cases, human dominance over animals is not simply presented as a fact, but rather as questionable: the pig that is supposedly unworthy of Alice's service is also the Duchess's baby (see Rackin 51); the use of hedgehogs and flamingoes as croquet equipment is an absurdity in itself; Alice's reprimands and punishments of the kitten are futile, as it cannot understand them; the horses are, in fact, described as those making the decisions, *letting* the knights mount and dismount them; and the Knight's beehive turns out to be ineffective, as it is utterly ignored by the bees. However, Carroll's representations of man's place among animals is more complex than most scholars make it appear: while the majority interpret the *Alice* books as supportive of Darwinian theories in their satirical challenge of man's superiority⁹, Laura White (4) states that Carroll "mocks Darwinian accounts of survival of the fittest, devolution, hybrids, and extinction". Thus, we mainly find one-sided interpretations of the Darwinian theme in the *Alice* books. That Carroll's treatment of evolutionary theory is often paradoxical, however, becomes particularly clear when looking at the last motif from his and Lear's nonsense literature that shall be discussed in this chapter: anthropomorphism and zoomorphism. (For the sake of a coherent order of analysis, however, I will again examine the limericks first, before turning to the *Alice* books.)

In Lear's *Book of Nonsense* and *More Nonsense*, it is almost the exception to find a limerick involving both humans and other animals where they *do not* resemble one another (see Colley 1992, 115; Schramek 3). The most obvious similarities are found between a number of human protagonists and birds (J. Thomas 121): there are those who, with their beak-like noses, round eyes, and/or wing-like

⁹ See for example Empson; Auerbach; Schwartz; Rackin; Lovell-Smith 2007

arms, look like birds, such as the Old Man who said 'Hush!' (Lear 42, see Fig. 13¹⁰), the Old Man with an Owl (ibid. 51, see Fig. 14), and the old person of Brigg (ibid. 195, see Fig. 15); those (additionally) adopting their posture, like the Old Man with a beard (ibid. 3, see Fig. 16), the Old Man with a nose (ibid. 4, see Fig. 17), and the old person of Nice (ibid. 198, see Fig. 18); and others who exhibit some other typically avian behavior, like the Old Person of Cromer, standing on one leg (ibid. 34), the Old Man of the Coast, who "placidly sat on a post" (ibid. 44), and the old man of El Hums, who "lived upon nothing but crumbs" (ibid. 180).

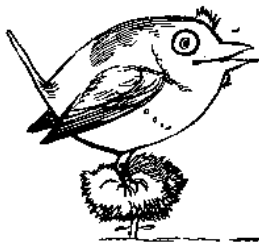


Fig. 13

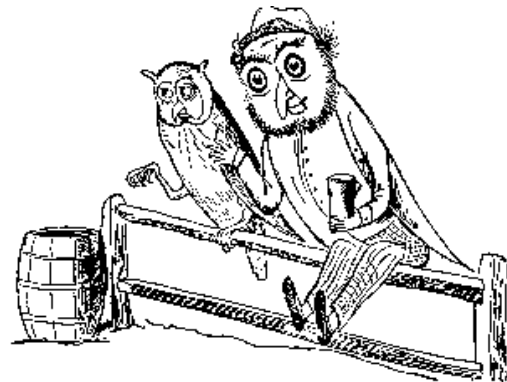


Fig. 14

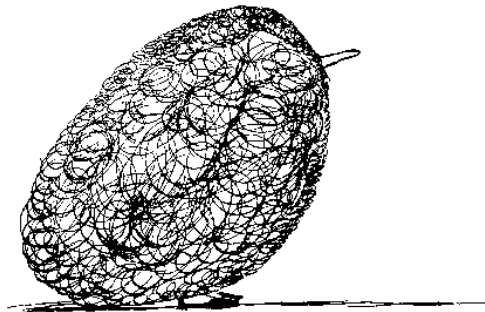


Fig. 15

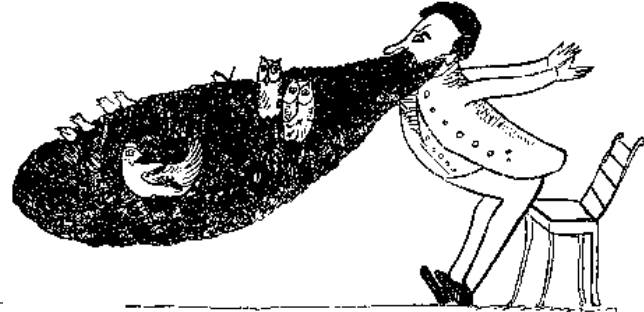


Fig. 16

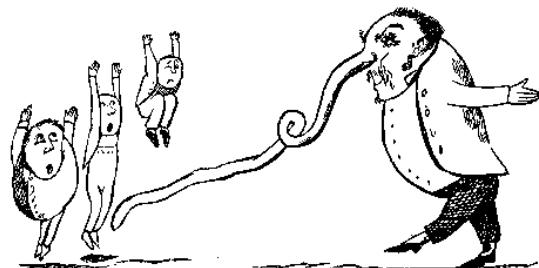


Fig. 17



Fig. 18

¹⁰ All of Lear's illustrations on this page taken from:
Nonsenselit. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear/index.html>

A particularly striking number of limericks revolve around humans climbing or living in trees or bushes: there are, among many others, the Old Person of Philoe, who "rushed up a Palm" (ibid. 22); the Old Lady "whose folly induced her to sit in a holly" (ibid. 31); and the old person of Jodd, who "sate on a thistle and squeaked" (ibid. 183). As Colley (115) argues, "always [...], the birds possess the controlling eye", subjecting the humans to their "haunting [...]' tolerant' or amused glances" (ibid.) and thus inverting the power hierarchy. Furthermore, it is almost exclusively the humans who metamorphize into or adopt the behavior of birds (and not vice versa), a tendency which can be found in the limericks also with regard to other animals. Whether we look at the ape-like Old Person of Buda (Lear 14, see. Fig. 19¹¹), the old person of Dover resembling the bees (ibid. 19, see Fig. 20), the old man in a Marsh sitting on a log just like his frog-companion (ibid. 165, see Fig. 21), or the old person of Filey dancing "perfectly well to the sound of a bell" (ibid. 180) like a dog – it is almost always the human who assimilates to other animals, suggesting that Lear wanted to dethrone man from his pretended superiority over other creatures (Schramek 3).

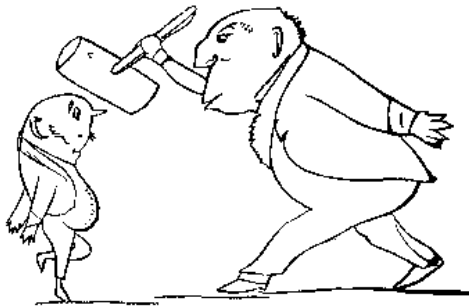


Fig. 19

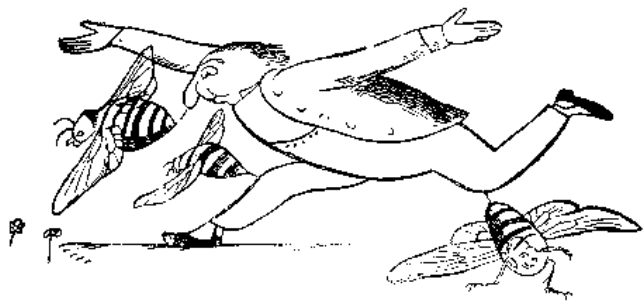


Fig. 20

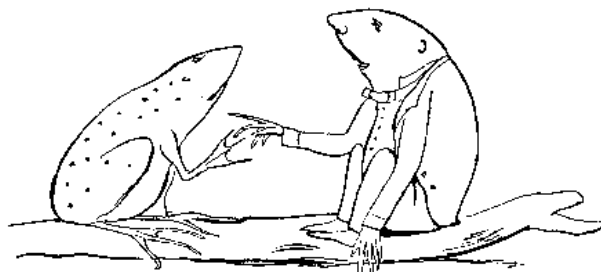


Fig. 21

¹¹ All of Lear's illustrations on this page taken from:
Nonsenselit. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear//index.html>

In contrast, both in AAIW and TTLG, it is primarily animals whose appearance and/or behavior resemble that of humans, rather than vice versa (see L. White 4; 78). Alice's adventure in Wonderland begins with her seeing the Rabbit, who not only wears clothes (a waistcoat and kid gloves) and uses objects made for humans (a watch and a fan), but who is also, like all animals from Wonderland (except the puppy and the live croquet equipment), able to talk – and he talks about very human concepts: running late (Carroll 23), being executed by the Queen (ibid. 41), cross-examining a witness (ibid. 104). Alice's other companions, too, act like humans: the Mouse tells her a story; the animals from the Caucus-race solemnly award each other prizes; the Caterpillar smokes a hookah; the March Hare and the Dormouse have a tea party; the (weeping) Mock Turtle tells Alice about its school subjects and dances a quadrille with the Gryphon; and the Cheshire Cat provides her with directions (and smug advice). Many also *look* like humans: the Dodo is drawn with hands and a walking stick (ibid. 37, see Fig. 22¹²); the Caterpillar with hands, a nose and sleeves (ibid. 49, see Fig. 23); the (walking) Frog-Footman and the Fish-Footman in livery (ibid. 59, see Fig. 24); and the parrot-jurors with wigs and robes (ibid. 106; 108, see Fig. 25).



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

¹² All illustrations from the *Alice* books on this page taken from: Djelibeibi. 2011. Ignacio Fernández Galván. 18 June 2018 <http://djelibeibi.unex.es/libros/Tenniel/>



Fig. 24¹³



Fig. 25

Similarly, throughout TTLG, there are numerous animals – and even plants – treated like humans, or described as resembling them in their appearance or conduct: even before her entry into Looking-glass world, Alice claims that her kitten watched a game of chess "just as if [it] understood it" (ibid. 130) and pretends that it is talking to her. We also read about flowers discussing manners (ibid. 141), a Goat's opinion on human concepts such as a ticket-office and the alphabet (ibid. 151), and a Gnat philosophizing about the use of names (ibid. 153). The narrator and Tenniel's illustrations present us with a Jabberwocky dressed in a vest (ibid. 137, see Fig. 26), a Walrus walking upright and wearing clothes (ibid. 161, see Fig. 27), a group of oysters in brushed coats and clean shoes (ibid. 163, see Fig. 28), a knitting sheep wearing clothes and glasses (ibid. 176, see Fig. 29), the King's messenger – a rabbit – in medieval attire (ibid. 195, see Fig. 30), as well as the Lion and the Unicorn walking upright and wearing glasses and a seemingly baroque costume, respectively (ibid. 199, see Fig. 31).

¹³ All illustrations from the *Alice* books on this page taken from: Djelibeibi. 2011. Ignacio Fernández Galván. 18 June 2018 <http://djelibeibi.unex.es/libros/Tenniel/>

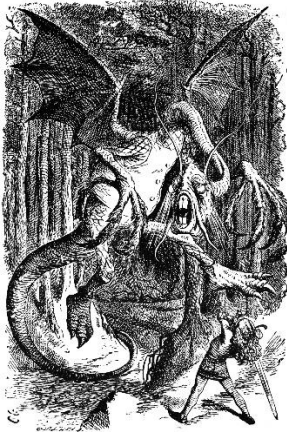


Fig. 26¹⁴

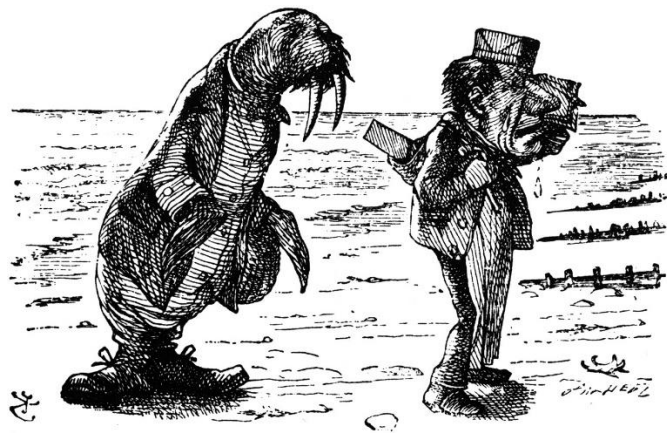


Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29



Fig. 30



Fig. 31

We also find passages where it is Alice who – voluntarily or involuntarily – assimilates to, or is denoted as, other animals and even plants, thus presenting cases of zoomorphism or phytomorphism: during her encounter with the Pigeon

¹⁴ All illustrations from the *Alice* books on this page taken from: Djelibeibi. 2011. Ignacio Fernández Galván. 18 June 2018 <http://djelibeibi.unex.es/libros/Tenniel/>

in Wonderland, her neck is so long that she resembles a serpent (ibid. 55); in Looking-glass world, she is referred to by flowers as one of their kind, and said to be "beginning to fade" (ibid. 142); and she is called "a little goose" (ibid. 179) by a sheep, which Alice finds offensive. Other characters from the *Alice* books also behave like or are compared to other creatures, such as the White King happily eating hay to regain his strength (ibid. 195), the messenger-rabbit "wriggling like an eel" (ibid. 194), or the Lion calling the Unicorn a "chicken" (ibid. 200).

However, while Carroll presents both kinds of assimilation – i.e. from animal to human and from human to animal – as ridiculous, he goes one step further in his satire of the latter kind, taking it to the extreme of chremamorphism, that is between human and object. Thus, when Tweedledee informs Alice that she is "only a sort of thing in his [i.e. the Red King's] dream" (ibid. 167), he compares her not even to a 'lower' living being, but to an inanimate object. Likewise, both stories include instances of anthropomorphized (but also zoomorphic) objects or even concepts: in *AAIW*, examples are the Mad Hatter's explanation that Time is a *he* (ibid. 69), and the fact that the majority of the Wonderland's royal household consists of live playing cards (ibid. 76). In *TTLG*, we read about the live egg Humpty Dumpty wearing a cravat and starting a philosophical discussion about semantic freedom (ibid. 185 f.); the already-mentioned talking plum-pudding and bowing leg of mutton (ibid. 225f.); and, of course, the bottles which, each taking "a pair of plates, which they hastily fitted on as wings" (ibid. 228f.), and "forks for legs" (ibid. 229), "went fluttering about in all directions" (ibid.) during Alice's dinner party.

In short, Carroll explores such assimilation in almost all possible constellations – between humans, other animals, plants, and objects –, which basically allows two broad directions of interpretation: as done by numerous scholars (see above), this blurring of boundaries can, on the one hand, be regarded as an expression of insecurity concerning man's place within nature. On the other hand, however, the blatantly ridiculous inclusion of inanimate objects in this assimilation game supports Laura White's point that this aspect of Carroll's nonsense is his "satirical response" (L. White 110) to "those – like Darwin – whose reasoning, he suggests, has been deformed enough to forget the clear dividing line between animals and

people" (ibid. 109). I would argue in favor of a combination of both, in line with Straley (116f.), who notes that "Alice confronts the central anxieties associated with Darwinian evolution without entering into a Darwinian allegory" and that "Carroll, facing the flux of evolutionary biology, saw in parody a way to show his readers how to take control of that flux and to impose direction onto the seeming inevitability of change." In other words, while Carroll, arguably, did not support the Darwinian abolition of the boundaries between humans and other living beings, he was nevertheless affected by the Victorian insecurities caused by evolutionary theory, and sought to reestablish an order by means of satirical exaggeration.

Thus, we have identified many similarities in Carroll's and Lear's manners of dealing with the Darwinian theme of man's place in nature, but also some important differences. In the works of both authors analyzed here, we find frequent (satirical) allusions to the food chain, including plays with the creatures' body size, eating and otherwise predatory behavior; inversions or mockery of 'habitual' hierarchies of domination and exploitation between man and other animals; and the blurring of physical and/or behavioral boundaries. And although both the limericks and the *Alice* books treat these motifs satirically, it appears that they, occasionally, let shine through certain differences in their respective hidden agenda: on the one hand, while death through another creature's, or nature's, hand is a very real scenario in the limericks, Alice and her companions are, eventually, always safe, which suggests that Carroll's worldview included benevolent design, while Lear appears to support the idea of Darwin's non-deterministic struggle for existence; on the other hand, whereas Lear's play with natural hierarchies happens primarily to the detriment of humans, thus suggesting a wish to knock man off his high horse, Carroll's multi-directional, nonselective derision of all things (not just those living) seems to satirically represent the chaotic lack of structure caused by Lyell's and Darwin's discoveries. It can therefore be said to mock the Victorians' reaction to them, i.e. the questioning of the previously established order, rather than the order itself. This difference becomes similarly evident in the authors' respective treatment of (Victorian) social order and the individual's place within it, as shall be demonstrated in the next subchapter.

2.1.2. The individual and society

As discussed above (see chapter 1.2.3.), the paradigm shifts promoted by Lyell's and Darwin's theories entailed a rethinking of man's position not only within the animal world, but also among his own kind: triggering a trend towards individualism and a heightened community spirit at the same time, the scientific revolution strongly affected the Victorians' view on their social structure, which is also reflected in the literature of the era. Humor proved to be a particularly useful tool to question the established order, and both Lear's and Carroll's nonsense exemplifies this practice. Brimming with individuals who range between clashing with and trying to accommodate society, and vice versa, their works raise the question of what actually constitutes an individual.

The characters in Lear's limericks have been referred to as 'eccentrics' by numerous scholars (e.g. Dilworth; Hark; Lecercle; Minslow; Rieder), and indeed with the majority of these poems, the humor seems to stem from a – usually comical, but mostly (also) tragical or even brutal – conflict between an eccentric and 'them', i.e. the representatives of society (Hark 118). Frequently, this eccentricity consists in the protagonist's peculiar behavior, as with the Old Man of Whitehaven who "danced a quadrille with a raven" (Lear 39), the Old Man of Melrose who "walked on the tips of his toes" (ibid. 29), or the old man on the Border who "danced with the cat, and made tea in his hat" (ibid. 202). The reactions of 'them' vary considerably, from simply being "perplexed" (ibid. 193) by the old person of Bude's deportment, to threatening to "thump [the old man of Ibreem] quite blue" (ibid. 170), should he decide to scream. In the poems about the Old Man of Whitehaven, the Old Man with a gong, and the Old Person of Buda, the ominous 'they' even go so far as to punish the eccentrics by "smashing" (ibid. 39; 6; 14) them. And while in some few cases 'their' vexation is, to a certain degree, understandable, as with the Old Man who "bumped" (ibid. 6) at a gong all day long, or with the old man at a Station, who "gave a promiscuous oration" (ibid. 207), the great majority of eccentrics are met with excessively, or altogether gratuitously, punitive responses (see Rieder 52). Thus, we read about the Young Lady of Parma being asked "Are you dumb?" because her conduct "grew calmer and calmer" (Lear 57); the old person of Loo being told to "go away" for saying "What on earth shall I do?" (ibid. 204); or the people of Earling, who are distressed

by an old person who "drove a small gig with three Owls and a Pig" (ibid. 196). Furthermore, several poems are noticeably vague regarding the actual nature of an eccentric's (mis-)behavior, leaving the reader to rely on 'their' judgment of what is acceptable, and what is not: the Old Person of Buda's conduct is only described as "ruder and ruder" (ibid. 14); the old person of Sark is only said to have made "an unpleasant remark" (ibid. 179); and the old man of Thermopylae allegedly "never did anything properly" (ibid. 199). Yet, they are verbally abused, threatened, or even smashed for their comportment.

In numerous cases, it is not even the eccentrics' behavior that provokes such acts of rejection, but the mere fact of looking different is sufficient cause for 'their' intolerance. For instance, Lear tells us of a Young Lady "whose eyes were unique as to colour and size", which causes all people to "[start] away in surprise" (ibid. 17); of an old person of Down who, because of the frown in his face, "alarmed all the people of Down" (ibid. 178); and of an old man of Dumblane who is requested to leave because of his long legs (ibid. 189).

Even when we do not learn what 'they' think of the eccentrics' conduct or appearance, the protagonists are usually judged by an external voice (Rieder 48): a great majority of Lear's limericks end with the structure 'that X old/young person/man of ____', with X generally being an adjective that is either judgmental, as in "That unpleasing old person of Bromley" (Lear 201), outright nonsensical, as in "That ombliferous person of Crete" (ibid. 13), or, in rare cases, even approving, as in "That wonderful Person of Sparta" (ibid. 54). This latter example illustrates another noteworthy trend in the limericks, namely that of some reactions being surprisingly mild or even positive rather than, as discussed above, (excessively) harsh. Thus, we read about the old person of Stroud, who brutally rids herself of surrounding people by "[slaying]" some "with a kick" and "[scrunching]" others "with a stick," for which she is soberly qualified as "impulsive" (ibid. 169); about Opsibeenaa "[delighting]" the people of Messina by wearing a "small wig and [riding] out on a pig" (ibid. 175); and about the old person of Bray who is deemed "valuable" because he "sang through the whole of the day to his ducks and his pigs, whom he fed upon figs" (ibid. 192).

In other words, 'their' reactions to the protagonists' behavior are mostly condemnatory or punitive, but essentially unpredictable (Rieder 52). As a

consequence, it is impossible to determine the 'right' conduct to please 'them', i.e. to fit in. What this suggests is an underlying critique of the expectation to conform to society, which was deeply anchored in the heads of Victorians (Schramek 5). This impression is reinforced by the fact that several protagonists actually suffer bad consequences from conforming to society (Dilworth 42): for instance, the Old Lady of Churtsey does such a "remarkable curtsey" that she ends up "[twirling] underground, which distressed all the people of Churtsey" (Lear 7); an Old Man loses so much time waiting for the bell to be answered that his hair grows white (ibid. 48); and the Old Man of the Nile's attempt to meet society's expectation of a well-groomed image by sharpening his nails costs him his thumbs (ibid. 33). In fact, the need to conform to Victorian standards of appearance seems to be a particularly popular object of satire for Lear (Rieder 51). On the one hand, some of the characters in his limericks are condemned for their unconventional style, like the old person of Brill, who is compared to a fish because of his shirt with a frill (Lear 162), or the old person of Bude, whose "large ruff of pale straw-coloured stuff [...] perplexed all the people of Bude" (ibid. 193); on the other hand, several conformers suffer in their fashion-forward outfits, like the old man of Toulouse who finds his newly-purchased shoes unpleasant (ibid. 167), or the Young Lady of Dorkin, the size and color of whose bonnet "so bedazzled her eyes" (ibid. 15) that she is forced to return home.

Thus, seeing that conformity, more often than not, proves disadvantageous for them, several of Lear's characters choose to live away from society, either among animals, like the "tranquil" old person of Hove, who frequents a grove to "[study] his books, with the wrens and the rooks" (ibid. 177), or completely alone, like the "romantic" old person of Putney who spends his time at the sea drinking tea and eating "roast spiders and chutney" (ibid. 161; see Schramek 4). Interestingly, it appears that these loners are, overall, better off than their conforming fellow eccentrics – although it would not be Lear's nonsense if this was a reliable rule, as illustrated by the old Person of Cromer, who ends up jumping off the cliff he seeks out to read Homer (Lear 34).

Thus, Lear's limericks express a pronounced skepticism towards conformity with society in that most individuals are rejected by 'them', regardless of whether they try to accommodate 'them' or fully live out their eccentricities. The predominance

of blatantly eccentric characters can be regarded as a defiant celebration of individualism – albeit with the seeming concession that, occasionally, a certain communion with society is necessary or at least beneficial, as several limericks revolve around 'them' coming to the aid of more or less helpless individuals: the Old Person of Prague suffering from the Plague, who is cured by 'them' with some butter (ibid. 25); the restless Old Man of the West whom 'they' relieve by setting him to "spin on his nose and his chin" (ibid. 45); and the Old Person of Rheims, whom 'they' help with his nightmares by keeping him awake and feeding him cake (ibid. 33) – they all illustrate how 'they' can be helpers in need (Dilworth 42; Schramek 4). However, the fact that their remedies usually range from being unusual to downright ridiculous further emphasizes Lear's critical attitude towards society.

This theme of conformity with society is similarly pervasive in Carroll's *Alice* books. In *AAIW*, we find numerous passages where Alice's or her companions' efforts to please society are ignored, go wrong or turn out to be out of place in Wonderland. A major subject of mockery is that of manners and politeness (Auerbach 37): it starts as early as during Alice's fall down the rabbit-hole, during which she tries to curtsy as she imagines a conversation with the people on the other side of the planet. The absurdity of this act is such that the narrator even interrupts his account to call our attention to it, inviting us to "fancy *curtseying* as you're falling through the air!" (Carroll 25, original emphasis). This is but the first of a series of scenes where the readers are made aware of the arbitrariness of certain Victorian rules of conduct. Alice attaches great importance to good form, as we are repeatedly told by the narrator (e.g. "she did not like to be rude" [ibid. 84]; "that's not at all a proper way of expressing yourself" [ibid. 63]; "You should learn not to make personal remarks" [ibid. 68]). Therefore, whomever she stumbles upon during her adventure, she generally tries to treat politely (Auerbach 39). However, her politeness is never met with appreciation or reciprocated. For instance, when she first addresses the Rabbit with the words "if you please, sir –, " (Carroll 31) the latter simply runs off, and when she opens her heart to the Caterpillar, lamenting that "being so many different sizes is very confusing", her interlocutor bluntly denies her the right to her own feelings by retorting "It isn't" (ibid. 50). Similarly, when Alice tactfully sugarcoats her doubt about cats having the habit to grin with the words "I don't know of any that do,"

the Duchess rudely replies, "You don't know much [...] and that's a fact" (ibid. 61). The acme of Wonderland's impoliteness is the mad tea-party, where Alice is not only refused a seat at the table for no tenable reason ("The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it. 'No room! No room!' they cried out when they saw Alice coming" [ibid. 67]) and offered wine that is not there, but also rudely interrupted by the Hatter, who counters her incomplete sentence "I don't think – " by concluding, "Then you shouldn't talk" (ibid. 73). But the insults continue throughout the adventure, with the Duchess claiming that Alice has "[j]ust about as much right [to think] [...] as pigs have to fly" (ibid. 86), insinuating that she is incapable of using her brain, or the Mock Turtle calling her recited poem "uncommon nonsense" (ibid. 96).

Manners and politeness appear to be an even more prominent topic in TTLG. First of all, Alice is explicitly told how to behave on several occasions: for instance, the Red Queen orders her to "[l]ook up, speak nicely, and [not to] twiddle [her] fingers all the time", to "[c]urtsey while [...] thinking what to say", and to "open [her] mouth a little wider when [she] speak[s], and always say 'your Majesty'" (ibid. 144). She further claims, "in a tone of grave reproof," that Alice "*should* have said, [...] 'It's extremely kind of you to tell me all this'" (ibid. 148, original emphasis), and, later on, tells her to "[s]peak when [...] spoken to" (ibid. 217). Similarly, Tweedledum explains to Alice that "[t]he first thing in a visit is to say 'How d'ye do?' and shake hands!" (ibid. 160).

As in AAIW, Alice's efforts for a spirit of politeness are also constantly thwarted in TTLG. Even though she is "very anxious to be of use" (ibid. 134), to say things "as politely as she [can]" (ibid. 161) and to do what she "*ought* to" (ibid. 189, original emphasis) and what is "civil" (ibid. 191), the inhabitants of Looking-glass world do not hold themselves to the same standard, insulting her on a regular basis instead (Birns 467): for instance, the Rose sharply replies to Alice's utterance "I've never thought of that before!" by saying "It's *my* opinion you never think *at all*," and the Violet joins in on the offensive remark, claiming never having seen "anyone that looked stupider" (Carroll 142). Likewise, the White Queen asserts that "[i]t's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards" (ibid. 173) like Alice's, and calls her a "little goose" (ibid. 178), while Humpty Dumpty

qualifies the girl's name as "stupid" (ibid. 183), and the Red Queen claims being "five times as clever" (ibid. 220) as her.

On several other occasions, Alice's politeness is not ignored or countered with rudeness, but simply revealed as unfit for, or meaningless in, Wonderland and Looking-glass world (see Jenkins 80). For example, when she knocks at the Duchess's door in AAIW, she is informed by the fish-footman that "[t]here's no sort of use in knocking, [...] [f]irst, because I'm on the same side of the door as you are; secondly, because they're making such a noise inside, no one could possibly hear you." (Carroll 58) In TTLG, her "I beg your pardon?" is dryly countered by the White King's words "It isn't respectable to beg" (ibid. 194), and she is reprimanded for offering a slice of mutton leg to the Queens because "it isn't etiquette to cut any one you've been introduced to" (ibid. 225f.). Occasionally, Alice's understanding of what is good conduct is not just nullified, but actually turned upside down, as in TTLG, when she complains about being "so hot and thirsty" (ibid. 147) and the Red Queen offers her a biscuit so dry that Alice feels like she is choking, or when she is told that in Looking-glass world, a cake is to be handed round first and *then* cut (ibid. 201). Thus, by taking typical acts of politeness and mannerliness out of their habitual contexts or turning them topsy-turvy, all of these scenes emphasize the arbitrariness of what is, in fact, considered polite and mannerly behavior, and can therefore be interpreted to question society's expectation for its members to conform (Schramek 5).

A similarly critical perspective on social norms can be identified in the books' treatment of conventions beyond politeness. One of Carroll's favorite subjects of satire in this respect appears to be society's approach to time (see Rackin 4; 54), which is first introduced at the very beginning of AAIW with the Rabbit looking at its pocket watch and crying "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!" (Carroll 23). This fear of belatedness is a recurrent motif in the *Alice* books: as Beer (2011, xxviii) puts it, "[b]elatedness, anxiety, physical props like the watch, all bespeak the individual under the cosh of time-regulated society", the watch being not only "the token of human respectability and worth" in Victorian times but also "the [instrument] that controlled industrialized labour" (ibid. xxix). Thus, we read about the Rabbit's anxious remark "Won't she [the Duchess] be savage if I've kept her waiting!" (Carroll 31), Alice's fear that "[i]f I don't make haste, I shall have to go

back through the Looking-glass" (ibid. 138), and the train passengers' chorus "Don't keep him waiting, child! Why, his [the Guard's] time is worth a thousand pounds a minute!" (ibid. 150). In all these examples, time is presented as something not to be wasted and to be used wisely. However, from other passages it becomes evident that Carroll's approach to socially regulated time is not nearly as serious as it appears: at the mad tea-party in *AAIW*, the Hatter uses a watch that "tells the day of the month, and doesn't tell what o'clock it is" (and is two days wrong), and when Alice expresses her astonishment about it, he dryly replies, "Why should it? [...] Does *your* watch tell you what year it is?" (ibid. 69, original emphasis) He goes on to inform Alice that capital-T Time is a *he* with whom one needs but to "[keep] on good terms" to make him "do almost anything you liked with the clock" (ibid. 70), such as jumping from a lesson straight to dinner time. As an unfortunate incidence spoiled his chances with Time, however, he explains that "[i]t's always six o'clock now" and, consequently, "always teatime" (ibid. 71). This passage clearly calls attention to the arbitrariness of social time conventions, as do Tweedledum's suggestion to "fight till six, then have dinner" (ibid. 170), and the White Queen's explanation that in Looking-glass world, "we mostly have days and nights two or three at a time, and sometimes in the winter we take as many as five nights together" (ibid. 220).

Apart from time, and similarly to the limericks, the *Alice* books also like to mock the need to conform to all sorts of conventions regarding people's appearance and, particularly, clothing. Not only do we find several animals wearing clothes, as discussed in chapter 2.1.1., but clothes and beauty accessories often turn out to be cumbersome for their wearers: the curls of the fish-footman's wig in Wonderland get entangled as he solemnly bows low (thus ridiculing social conventions on two levels at the same time) (ibid. 58); Tweedledum and Tweedledee put on such a "quantity of things" like "bolsters, blankets, hearthrugs, tablecloths, dish-covers and coal-scuttles" (ibid. 169) that the reader can only wonder how they are supposed to move enough to fight their battle; the White Queen struggles with a shawl that is "out of temper" (ibid. 172) and a hairbrush that gets entangled in her hair; and the White King needs Alice to help him take off his helmet which impedes his breathing (ibid. 204). But Carroll also makes fun of clothing conventions in other ways, such as by having Alice muse about sending a new pair of boots to her own feet "by the carrier" (ibid. 29) after growing

so tall she cannot see them; by dressing the Oysters in shoes despite their not having any feet (ibid. 163); or by having Alice mistake Humpty Dumpty's cravat for a belt due to the eggman's particular body shape (ibid. 184). Especially this last example, again, emphasizes the arbitrariness of human (clothing) conventions and thus exposes the dubiousness of society's expectation to conform.

The fact that animals wear livery additionally satirizes social conventions on another level, i.e. that of social hierarchies and power structures. There are numerous other allusions to this subject in the *Alice* books, starting with the narrator's side note in AAIW that Alice "generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it)" (ibid. 28), thus calling into question the habit of lecturing others, having Alice both assume the roles of advisor and 'advisee' simultaneously and ignore the counsel. This derision of hierarchies continues during the Caucus-race, where the Lory claims "I am older than you, and must know better", which Alice "would not allow without knowing how old it was, and, as the Lory positively refused to tell its age, there was no more to be said" (ibid. 35). In the same passage, the Mouse is said to "be a person of authority" (ibid.) among the other animals, whereas after the race, it is the Dodo who decides that "*Everybody* has won, and *all* must have prizes" (ibid. 38, original emphasis). Then again, it is Alice's honor to award these prizes, including to herself.

Shortly after, the Mouse introduces with its "long and [...] sad tale" (ibid.) the most salient and pervasive object of Carroll's mocking of society, namely that of the judicial system (see Lecercle 87; Wullschläger 5). In this poem, it tells us about the dog Fury, who, because he has "nothing to do" (Carroll 38), decides to bring a mouse to trial and, assuming both the roles of judge and jury, condemns it to death (see S. Thomas 51). This satire of jurisdiction recurs throughout both *Alice* books: first, in the poem 'You Are Old, Father William' recited by Alice in AAIW, the old man claims that his habit of "[arguing] each case" from his job in the legal industry has given his jaws the strength to chew a goose "with the bones and the beak" (Carroll 53). Most prominently, however, the subject is treated in the last two chapters of AAIW, where the Knave is tried for allegedly having stolen the Queen's tarts: the King orders the jurors' verdict before even hearing the witnesses, and the Queen insists that there be "sentence first – verdict

afterwards" (ibid. 110; see Rackin 62). Also, we read about the jurors taking random and often contradictory notes on their slates (Carroll 100f.; 107); about Alice being denied the right to grow within the court room (ibid. 102); about the King spontaneously inventing a rule to make Alice leave (ibid. 107); about officers "[suppressing]" (ibid. 103) guinea-pigs, which is explained as being done by stuffing them into a canvas bag and sitting on it; and about the King threatening the Hatter three times with execution, first for being nervous, and then in order to blackmail him into giving his evidence and remembering the Dormouse's words (ibid. 102f.). Thus, through this satire, Carroll's trial scene exposes the legal system's susceptibility to error and to abuse of power by high-ranking individuals who order about and suppress the powerless at will.

This theme continues to be strongly present in TTLG, where the King's Messenger is punished for a crime he has yet to commit and Alice's objection "Suppose he never commits the crime?" is dismissed by the White Queen saying, "That would be all the better, wouldn't it?" (ibid. 173) Strikingly, in TTLG, it is often Alice who places a lot of stock in hierarchies, as when she feels that "it would be far grander to have a talk with a real Queen" (ibid. 143) than the flowers, or in her statement that she "wouldn't mind being a Pawn" but should, "of course, [...] like to be a Queen, best" (ibid. 145); and occasionally, she even takes advantage of her position, such as when she scolds the – verbally unarmed – kitten with the words "What have you got to say for yourself? Now don't interrupt me!" (ibid. 129), when she secretly manipulates the White Knight's pencil into writing what she wants (ibid. 136), or when she threatens the flowers, saying "if you don't hold your tongues, I'll pick you!" (ibid. 141). But the book also appears to advertise the subversion of or escape from power, as when Alice reasons that, in the topsy-turvy world on the other side of the mirror, "there'll be no one here to scold me away from the fire" (ibid. 133), and later when the Gnat argues that if Alice had no name, the governess could not call her to her lessons "because there wouldn't be any name for her to call, and of course you wouldn't have to go" (ibid. 155).

In other words, both AAIW and TTLG present power as something that is, generally, abused and, consequently, should be subverted. This message ties in with the books' treatment of another recurrent motif from the theme of social structures and conventions, namely that of education and the (Victorian) school

system (see Lecerle 219). From the very first sentence in AAIW, we find numerous passages implying a criticism of established teaching methods and content: it begins with the narrator telling us of Alice's boredom with her sister's book because "it had no pictures or conversations in it" (Carroll 23). Subsequently, during her fall down the rabbit-hole, Carroll has Alice use the time to practice "[showing] off her knowledge" using terms like 'Latitude', 'Longitude', and 'Antipathies' without knowing their meaning, as if suggesting that education attaches too much importance to "nice grand words" (ibid. 24f.). This impression is reinforced by Alice's recurrent failure to recite poems that she learned in school, and her replacing them with entirely new, and usually satirical, poetic creations: be it 'How Doth the Little Crocodile', her parody of Watts' moralistic poem 'Against Idleness and Mischief', where the busy bee's virtuous hard labor is replaced with the crocodile's cunning manipulation of his prey (Lovell-Smith 2003, 285); 'You Are Old, Father William', where the pious hero of Southey's 'The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them' turns into "an impolite, indeed violent old rake and a conniving, commercialistic one at that" (Rackin 47); or 'Speak Roughly To Your Little Boy', Alice's version of David Bates's 'Speak Gently', where the advice of how to treat one's children is turned entirely upside down (as foreshadowed by the title): Alice's poems constitute a critique of the practice of using moralistic or didactic poetry to indoctrinate people – and particularly children – how to behave. The Mouse's account of "the driest thing [it knows]" (Carroll 36), namely a text about William the Conqueror, allows a similar interpretation, as does Alice's conversation with the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, where Alice is wrongfully reprimanded for "asking such a simple question" (ibid. 89) and the Mock Turtle tells her that he "took only the regular course" at school, namely the subjects of "Reeling and Writhing [...] and then the different branches of Arithmetic – Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision" (ibid. 90).

Likewise, in TTLG, the goat on the train tells us that Alice "ought to know her way to the ticket-office, even if she doesn't know her alphabet!" (ibid. 151), implying that the priorities in Victorian education are questionable. Furthermore, the act of asking a question takes on an air of (cross-)examination, such as when Humpty Dumpty replies to Alice's friendly question "Why do you sit out here all alone?" by saying "Did you think I didn't know the answer to *that*? Ask another" (ibid. 183,

original emphasis), or when the White and Red Queens bombard the girl with mostly nonsensical questions like "Divide a loaf by a knife – what's the answer to that?" or "What's the French for fiddle-de-dee?" (ibid. 218f.) and either provide nonsensical answers themselves or ridiculously misinterpret Alice's replies. Finally, another telling representation of popular educational methods can be identified in the Red Queen's reaction to Alice's incorrect answer and self-correction, namely her contention that "'It's too late to correct it, [...] when you've once said a thing, that fixes it, and you must take the consequences'" (ibid. 220).

In short, Carroll appears to criticize in both *Alice* books the Victorian school system for the way it promotes the indoctrination of useless factual knowledge or moralistic sermons, as well as for its practices of equating teaching with examination and correction, and he seems to promote in their place the development of a child's individuality through their natural curiosity and creativity, as suggested by Alice's repeated reinventions of popular didactic or moralistic poems.

Thus, Carroll's treatment of the motifs of politeness, appearance, other conventions and education appear to imply a critical stance regarding social norms and the constraint to conform to them. Nevertheless, the *Alice* books include a subtle concession to social structures and individual efforts to accommodate society: Alice's constant misunderstandings and conflicts with other creatures mainly derive from her application of those "cultural scripts" (Jenkins 80) she learned above the ground, which often clash with those reigning in Wonderland and Looking-glass world. In other words, her problems are caused by her failure to conform with social norms (of, for example, conversation, reciprocity, or fairness), even though it is exactly her insistence on conventions that leads to this nonconformity. Thus, similarly to Lear's limericks, AAIW and TTLG call attention to the individual's dependence on society and their resulting predicament of having to rely on unreliable social structures and norms.

As in the limericks, however, this dilemma is not the only source of conflict between Alice and her social environment. Similarly to Lear's eccentrics, Alice and her companions repeatedly represent the struggle to assert oneself as an individual, and to balance this commitment to individuality with the wish to fit in with society – in this case, the (other) inhabitants of Wonderland and Looking-

glass world. Thus, on several occasions, Alice becomes insecure as to her own identity (Jenkins 79): in AAIW, it starts soon after her fall down the rabbit-hole, when she shrinks for the first time and fears that "there's hardly enough of me left to make *one* respectable person!" (Carroll 28, original emphasis). In a similar vein, the fact that everything is so "queer [...] today!" while "yesterday things went on just as usual" causes her to wonder "if I've been changed in the night?", "Who in the world am I?", and whether she might have transformed into one of her age mates – an idea which she dismisses right away, on the grounds that she does not have Ada's ringlets and that Mabel "knows such a very little" (ibid. 31). Her concern is newly sparked when she grows so big that she fills the rabbit's entire home, leading her to wonder "What *will* become of me?" (original emphasis) and, realizing that she is already "grown up now," whether she shall "never get any older than [she is] now" (ibid. 43f.). Likewise, when she walks into the wood "where things have no names" in TTLG, she ends up asking herself "And now, who am I?", her only hunch being that "it begins with L!" (ibid. 156).

And Alice is not the only figure questioning her identity. In AAIW, the first words the Caterpillar directs at her are "Who are *you*?" (ibid. 50, original emphasis), and while this is certainly not the friendliest of conversation starters, it only gets worse from this moment on: the 'who' becomes a 'what' during Alice's encounter with the Pigeon ("*What* are you?" [ibid. 56, original emphasis]), and in TTLG, she is finally even denied the status of a real entity when Tweedledee claims that she is "only a sort of thing in his [the King's] dream!" and Tweedledum chimes in saying, "You know very well you're not real" (ibid. 167; see Lecercle 83).

Interestingly, while these constant interrogations by others and involuntary changes usually cause Alice to question who she is (with the only exception being the moment she merrily says goodbye to her own feet and muses about sending them presents), she appears to actually enjoy a certain fluidity of her mental identity – so long as it happens under her control (see Auerbach 35; Beer 2011, xxxvi): in AAIW, the narrator informs us that

[s]he generally gave herself very good advice [...] and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people (Carroll 28).

Likewise, at a later point, we read, "And so she went on, taking first one side and then the other, and making quite a conversation of it altogether" (ibid. 44). In TTLG, too, we are told that Alice's "favourite phrase [is] 'Let's pretend,'" (ibid. 130) which she apparently likes to use in combination with a game of assuming another identity. She also talks about "How I wish I was one of them [the chessmen]" when she sees the giant chessboard, and says "I wouldn't mind being a Pawn [...] though of course I should *like* to be a Queen, best" (ibid. 145, original emphasis), and we are told that she wanders through the wood "talking to herself" (ibid. 158).

Thus, there appears to be a strong ambiguity in Alice between her interest in a variable identity, on the one hand, and her concerns whenever the integrity of her identity is threatened due to external causes, on the other hand. This contradiction brings to mind the Victorian conflict between the new promotion of individuality at the time and the simultaneous development of a heightened sense of community, as discussed in chapter 1.2.3., as Alice oscillates between her struggle to live out her personality and the fear of losing her place in society and ending up "all alone down here" (ibid. 32).

Unlike Alice, the inhabitants of Wonderland and Looking-glass world seem to be perfectly accepting of any transformation they undergo: for instance, the Cheshire Cat continues to grin or talk through the disappearance and reappearance of parts of its body (ibid. 66; 80ff.); the Caterpillar counters Alice's claim that "one doesn't like changing so often, you know" by replying "I *don't* know" (ibid. 54, original emphasis); the baby from Wonderland "quietly trots away into the wood" (ibid. 61) after turning into a pig; Looking-glass world's White Queen does not let the fact that she turns into a sheep (ibid. 175) distract her the least bit from her knitting, and later keeps grinning through the process of becoming a soup ingredient (ibid. 229); and the Red Queen "merrily [runs] round and round after her own shawl" after having "suddenly dwindled down to the size of a little doll" (ibid.). This general flexibility among the creatures of Wonderland and Looking-glass world regarding their bodily state is best summarized by the White Knight when Alice asks him "How *can* you go on talking so quietly, head downwards?" (original emphasis) and he replies "What does it matter where [or, one might add, what] my body happens to be? [...] My mind goes on working all the same" (ibid.

209). Thus, Alice's companions do not appear to perceive their identities as all too connected to their physical state.

What we do find is the occasional effort to establish or protect their identities through their place in society, particularly by trying to accommodate authorities: the ever-tardy Rabbit, the gardeners painting the roses (ibid. 75), and the croquet players (ibid. 79) are all eager to please the Queen of Hearts, and the Dormouse (ibid. 71) instantly obeys the March Hare's order to tell a story. However, their compliance turns out to have no effect on their respective position: the Queen's threats of execution when she is disobeyed are never carried through, and the Dormouse is maltreated despite doing what it is told. Furthermore, the far stronger tendency among the characters from AAIW and TTLG is to do as they please, and we soon realize that who is in for a penny need not be in for a pound in Wonderland and Looking-glass world: in AAIW, the Duchess's cook throws "everything within reach at the Duchess and the baby – the fire-irons [...], saucepans, plates, and dishes" (ibid. 61), but does not appear to have any effect on his targets whatsoever; the Hatter's offer to "[h]ave some wine" is immediately followed by the information that "[t]here isn't any" (ibid. 67), and he asks a riddle ("Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" [ibid. 69]) without having an answer for it; the guests of the tea-party perpetually move around the table when they want a new set of tea-things, without ever thinking about washing up ("But what happens when you come to the beginning again?" Alice ventured to ask. 'Suppose we change the subject,' the March Hare interrupted, yawning" [ibid. 71]); and the Mock Turtle announces a story but leaves his audience hanging in the air for several minutes before finally beginning his account (ibid. 88).

Likewise, in TTLG, we read about Humpty Dumpty reciting a poem "written entirely for [Alice's] amusement" which, however, simply ends after the suspenseful verse "I tried to turn the handle, but – " and Humpty Dumpty's statement that "[t]hat's all" (ibid. 189ff.); about the tiny voice by Alice's ear explaining to her twice how she "might make a joke on" (ibid. 151f.) something she said, instead of straightforwardly making the joke itself; and we are told that the Unicorn runs the Lion through with his horn without hurting him (ibid. 198ff.). In other words, Alice's companions usually do what they want without having to face the consequences, to assume any (social) responsibility for their actions, or

even to see them through to the end. Alice, in contrast, does not share this carefree attitude, and in both her adventures, she eventually reaches a point where the chaos becomes too much for her to handle, leading her to leave the fantastical world behind and return to the reality she knows: in *AAIW*, the last straw is "the idea of having the sentence first" (ibid. 110) and only then the verdict, and in *TTLG*, it is the "dreadful confusion" (ibid. 229) during the Queens' banquet, with people pushing Alice about and objects turning into people and vice versa. This suggests that Alice, in contrast to her fantastical companions, requires a certain structure of reliable codes and scripts in order to know who she is and is, therefore, dependent on (Victorian) society, with all its questionable and arbitrary rules (see S. Thomas 50).

As our analysis thus shows, while both Lear and Carroll evidently mock Victorian society for their insistence on often arbitrary conventions and exaggerated expectations to conform, they nevertheless appear to make the concession that a certain degree of integration into society is probably inevitable and potentially advantageous. However, whereas Lear seems to strongly prioritize individuality and present conformity as an occasionally necessary evil, Carroll's Alice suggests that only the structures of society provide the stability an individual needs if it does not want to sink into complete chaos and meaninglessness. In other words, Carroll certainly criticizes the specific nature of Victorian conventions and hierarchies, but he also appears to promote the concept of an order per se, which can be read as an attempt to counter the threat of utter lawlessness as caused by Darwin's and Lyell's ideas.

In fact, these notions of meaning(lessness) and law(lessness) are, themselves, a pervasive theme throughout both *Alice* books, but also Lear's limericks. This shall be the subject of the second main chapter of our literary analysis.

2.2. Rules and logic

2.2.1. The laws of nature and reality

As the popularity of Lyell's and Darwin's works pushed research to focus on material evidence and observable facts, British literature saw a similar trend

towards realist representations in the Victorian age. On the other hand, there were also those writers who sought to undermine this development, particularly those skeptical about the new scientific ideas and the resulting crisis of faith (see chapter 1.2.3.). In either case, the themes of natural laws, and (objective vs subjective) reality, became popular literary tools to explore the concepts of 'truth' and meaning.

Arguably the most effective method for checking the validity or value of a system of 'truths' is to stand it on its head and see what happens. Such reversals of (Victorian) realities and the dissolution of natural laws are among the major elements in Lear's and Carroll's nonsense literature, as a close reading of the limericks and the *Alice* books reveals. All of these works play with humorous confrontations of their characters' inner representations with external (or other people's) realities, and they blithely suspend the laws of nature as they please, causing their figures and/or readers to question the 'facts' and 'meanings' they have always taken for granted (see Kennedy 109; Schramek 2).

One of both authors' favorite toys appears to be the principle of cause-and-effect (Hark 117), as their works include numerous instances where their characters' actions result either in surprising events or in the failure of expected consequences to arise. Thus, Lear tells us, for instance, of several Old or Young Persons whose various physical and psychological afflictions are miraculously alleviated or even cured with nonsensical methods: in addition to those mentioned in chapter 2.1.2., we read about the old person of Fife, whose "[disgust] with life" (Lear 159) disappears thanks to 'their' singing for him and feeding him on salad; about the old man of Three Bridges, who manages to relieve his distracted mind by "eating underdone veal" (ibid. 162) on a wheel; and about the old person of Pett, who lessens his being "partly consumed by regret" by "[eating] cold apple tart" (ibid. 182) while sitting in a cart.

However, the unexpected effects of the characters' actions are not always (entirely) positive in the limericks. For instance, the Old Man of the East's children end up causing their father to die simply through their immoderate eating and (bad?) conduct (ibid. 43). Similarly, the young person of Janina's uncle fans her with so much force that he eventually fans off her head – even if the poem goes on to describe her, rather surprising, reaction as "[smiling] sweetly" and calling

him "propitious" (ibid. 186). It also occurs that we read about utterly arbitrary consequences, as in the limerick about the old man of Port Grigor, who "stood on his head till his waistcoat turned red" (ibid. 181).

In several other limericks, the suspension of the law of cause-and-effect shows itself not so much in concrete events or actions as in the characters' understanding of such relations, namely in their surprising deductive or explanatory reasoning. Thus, the old man of Dumbree, convinced that "to eat mice is not proper or nice" (ibid. 184), makes it his business to teach little owls to drink tea instead. The Old Person of Spain, because he "[hates] all trouble and pain", decides to "[sit] on a chair with his feet in the air" (ibid. 47) – in a position which, judging from the drawing, would have to be among the most pain-provoking of all (see Fig. 32¹⁵). Another, most topsy-turvy example is the old person of Slough who dances "on the end of a bough" and is warned that he might "damage the trees" (ibid. 160) if he sneezes. In other words, 'they' want the hero to believe that, although the tip of one tree can apparently support his full body weight, he might wreak havoc among an entire group of trees by blowing air through his nose. Finally, the most nonsensical reasoning we read of is the old person of Ware's explanation that the bear he is riding does "[c]ertainly not" trot because, after all, "he's a Moppsikon Floppsikon bear" (ibid. 187).



Fig. 32

The *Alice* books, too, like to play with the relation between cause and effect – in fact, they do so with such frequency that Alice begins to think at a very early point

¹⁵ Illustration by Lear taken from:
Nonsenselit. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear//index.html>

of her first adventure that "very few things indeed [are] really impossible" (Carroll 26). In *AAIW*, she even ends up being surprised when the act of eating does (at first) *not* cause her to grow or shrink (ibid. 28), as the consumption of any food or drink usually affects her size one way or another: it starts with the little bottle labeled 'Drink me' and the cake which make her grow small and tall, respectively (ibid. 27; 29), and continues throughout the story – from the bottle and cake which she finds at the Rabbit's house, and which have the inverted effects (ibid. 42; 47) from the first set, to the pieces of mushroom that she uses to adjust her size to her needs in a controlled way (ibid. 55; 57). But her growing (smaller) can also have other (equally nonsensical) reasons – as when she shrinks as a result of using a fan (ibid. 32) – or no apparent reason at all, i.e. during the trial scene (ibid. 102). In *TTLG*, Alice's body dimension is never explicitly stated to change, but she still somehow ends up at eye level with the garden flowers and the Red Queen despite having been able to pick up the White King only moments before (ibid. 134; 140ff.). Additionally, cause and effect evidently develop a life of their own on several other occasions. First, Alice's attempt to approach the Red Queen results in her "walking in at the front door again" (ibid. 143), and she arrives at her destination only by walking the opposite direction. Similarly, the White Queen finds her finger bleeding and cries *prior* to pricking herself on her brooch (ibid. 174). The epitome of this topsy-turvy relation of cause and effect, then, is the White Knight's claim that "the more head downwards I am, the more I keep inventing new things" (ibid. 209) (rather than losing his concentration and even consciousness, as one would naturally expect).

However, in both *Alice* books, the far more dominant manner in which we find cause and effect dissociated from one another is that of the characters' (il)logical reasoning (see Rackin 39). Similarly to Lear's hero(in)es, the creatures from Wonderland and Looking-glass world frequently draw conclusions which, from Alice's and the reader's perspective, can only be described as ranging from amusingly unexpected to wildly absurd. Through incongruencies in his characters' ways of thinking, Carroll cleverly calls into question the very act of (what is generally considered) logical reasoning, as numerous passages from both novels show (see Lecercle 201). For instance, in *AAIW*, Alice's statement that "little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do" causes the Pigeon to infer

that, consequently, "they're a kind of serpent" (Carroll 56). Another example is the following conversation between Alice and the Cheshire Cat:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where – " said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"– so long as I get *somewhere*," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

Alice felt that this could not be denied, so she tried another question.

"What sort of people live about here?"

"In *that* direction," the Cat said, waving its right paw round, "lives a Hatter: and in *that* direction," waving the other paw, "lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad."

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here" (ibid. 64f., original emphasis).

In this passage, the Cat first of all manages to convince Alice even though its line of argument is, actually, highly flawed: in reality, walking long enough is no guarantee at all that Alice will arrive at a place of interest, and even if one interprets Alice's "*somewhere*" as 'any place' rather than a 'place of interest', the Cat's addition of "if you only walk long enough" is illogical, as any single step Alice takes would bring her to 'any place'.

Furthermore, the Cat's conclusion that Alice "must be" mad since, otherwise, she "wouldn't have come here" exemplifies the pitfall of making over-generalized inferences – which Alice, this time, appears to be aware of, as she does not "think that proved it at all" (ibid. 65). The Cat's argumentation becomes even more ridiculous as their conversation continues:

[S]he went on: "And how do you know that you're mad?"

"To begin with," said the Cat, "a dog's not mad. You grant that?"

"I suppose so," said Alice.

"Well, then," the Cat went on, "you see, a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now I growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore I'm mad" (ibid.).

Here, too, Carroll exposes the danger of over-simplified reasoning, as the Cat wrongly assumes that just because A, having a certain attribute, is not-x, B without the same attribute must be x. Other companions of Alice's follow a similarly distorted logic: for instance, when the Knave argues during his trial in Wonderland, "I didn't write it, and they can't prove I did: there's no name signed at the end", the King merely retorts, "If you didn't sign it, [...] that only makes the matter worse. You must have meant some mischief, or else you'd have signed your name like an honest man" (ibid. 108). Similarly, the Rose from Looking-glass world explains Alice's (false) observation that the Red Queen has "grown a good deal" claiming that "[i]t's the fresh air that does it" (ibid. 143), and when the Red Queen pricks her finger *after* having screamed, as mentioned above, she dryly counters Alice's question of why she does not scream now by saying, "Why, I've done the screaming already, [...] [w]hat would be the good of having it all over again?" (ibid. 174) Finally, when the White Knight describes his idea regarding how to keep hair from falling off, he argues that "the reason hair falls off is because it hangs *down* - things never fall *upwards*, you know" (original emphasis), which leads him to assume that the solution would be to "take up an upright stick" and "make [one's] hair creep up it, like a fruit tree" (ibid. 206).

While all of these inferences still bear some twisted logic, those made by other characters appear to be utterly random. During the tea-party, for instance, the Hatter first attributes the fact that his watch is not working properly to the butter applied by the March Hare, only to revise his explanation upon the latter's objection that "[i]t was the *best* butter" (original emphasis), now finding that "some crumbs must have got in as well" (ibid. 69). Another particularly glaring example of such nonsensical reasoning is the Duchess and her obsession with finding a – generally nonsensical – moral in everything: from Alice's remark "the game's going on rather better now," she concludes that "the moral of that is – 'Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round!'", and when the former objects that "[s]omebody said [...] that it's done by everybody minding their own business",

the latter's reaction is that "it means much the same thing [...] and the moral of *that* is – 'Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves' (original emphasis). She further sees the moral of the fact that "flamingoes and mustard both bite" in the proverb "Birds of a feather flock together", and the moral of there being "a large mustard-mine near here" in the fact that "[t]he more there is of mine, the less there is of yours." Thus, not only does each of her morals bear less relation to the initial statement than the previous one, but they also appear to emphasize the arbitrariness of (human, or at least the English) language – first by alluding to the unfixed relation of signifier and signified, and then through a pun. This tendency to take language to pieces reaches its climax in the Duchess' 'simplified' formulation of her moral "Be what you would seem to be" (ibid. 84f.) and will be discussed in greater detail in the last chapter of the present thesis. But the inhabitants of Looking-glass world, too, exhibit a certain liking for arbitrary inferences, such as the passengers on the train, who, seeing that Alice is "travelling the wrong way," claim that "[s]he'll have to go back as luggage!", "must go by post" or "be sent as a message by the telegraph", and "draw the train herself the rest of the way" (ibid. 151), or the White Knight with his ever-empty beehive and mousetrap, who reasons that either "the mice keep the bees out – or the bees keep the mice out, I don't know which" (ibid. 205).

However, particularly in AAIW, it is often Alice, rather than her companions, whose reasoning is revealed as flawed or, at least, becomes a source of amusement for the reader as it clashes with the logic of Wonderland or Looking-glass world. An example of the first kind is the following conversation between Alice, the March Hare and the Hatter:

"I believe I can guess that [riddle]," she added aloud.

"Do you mean that you can find the answer to it?" said the March Hare. [...] Then you should say what you mean[.]" [...]

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

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

While here Alice's train of thought is clearly illogical also according to 'real-world' standards, its falsity is nevertheless relativized when the ever-dozing Dormouse,

"who seemed to be talking in his sleep", adds "You might just as well say [...] that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe,'" and the Hatter replies "It *is* the same thing with you" (ibid. 68, original emphasis).

Alice's logic also frequently becomes an object of laughter simply because it is exposed as a misapplication of laws or systems from her 'old' to the 'new' world (Jenkins 79). One example of this is her already-mentioned assumption in AAIW that her being what she considers "grown up now" (i.e. so big that she fills the Rabbit's entire house) might entail that she "shall [...] *never* get any older" (original emphasis) than she is at that moment. This scenario is "a comfort, one way – never to be an old woman", but it also causes her to infer that she then would "always [...] have lessons to learn" (Carroll 44). Also, when she accidentally tips over the jury box during the Knight's trial, she immediately feels the urge to put its members back in their places as quickly as possible, as the incident gives her "a vague sort of idea that they must be collected at once and put back into the jury box, or they would die" (ibid. 105), like the goldfish from the bowl she upset recently. And when she sees Humpty Dumpty grin "almost from ear to ear," she muses that "[i]f he smiled much more, the ends of his mouth might meet behind [...] and then I don't know what would happen to his head! I'm afraid it would come off!" (ibid. 183f.). In passages like these, Carroll presents logic as a fluid concept which changes not only depending on the thinker's perspective, but also on their current situation.

In a similar spirit, he appears to find pleasure in illustrating how one and the same situation can allow two seemingly opposed inferences: for instance, at the mad tea-party, Alice correctly claims that she "can't take *more*" (emphasis added) tea, seeing that she has not had any yet; however, the Hatter makes the equally valid point that she "can't take *less*" and that "[i]t's very easy to take more than nothing" (ibid. 72, original emphasis). In a similar vein, during the Queen of Hearts' discussion with the executioner and the King about the feasibility of beheading the Cheshire Cat with nothing but its head being present, the latter convincingly argues that "anything that has a head [can] be beheaded," while the executioner makes just as strong a case claiming that you cannot "cut off a head unless there [is] a body to cut it off from" (ibid. 83) – a dilemma which the Queen threatens to solve by simply executing everyone if they do not act quickly. This seeming

solution is all the more amusing as its realization would actually require the very act whose feasibility is considered the problem. Thus, by having his characters' lines of argument chase their own tails in this manner, Carroll mocks the popular Victorian idea of a single, objective truth that only needs to be found.

Yet, Carroll seems to be just as critical of the human (or scientist's?) tendency to overthink, as on several occasions, his characters so blatantly state the obvious (see Lecercle 63) that one cannot help but interpret them as attempts to indicate the danger of being too questioning or overcomplicating the evident. For instance, during the trial, when the White Rabbit suggests that the letter was "written by the prisoner to – to somebody," the King's response is that "[i]t must have been that, [...] unless it was written to nobody, which isn't usual, you know", and when the Rabbit asks where he should begin to read out the set of verses, the King "gravely" replies, "Begin at the beginning [...] and go on till you come to the end: then stop" (Carroll 107f). Likewise, when Alice suddenly finds herself in the White Queen's shop in Looking-glass world, the latter utters a similar platitude, explaining "You may look in front of you, and on both sides, if you like, [...] but you can't look all round you - unless you've got eyes at the back of your head" (ibid. 177). When Alice asks Humpty Dumpty "Why do you sit out here all alone?", he seems almost offended as he cries "Why, because there's nobody with me! [...] Did you think I didn't know the answer to *that*?" (ibid. 183, original emphasis) And finally, during her encounter with Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the topic of logical thinking is even addressed explicitly during the following conversation between the two brothers: "'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.'" (ibid. 159) This latter example is particularly interesting, as it appears to be a statement of the obvious at first glance, but a closer reading reveals it to be much more complex: for Tweedledee, not even the premise of A being x appears to guarantee that it is indeed x, only that it "might be"; yet, in the same breath, he claims that "if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic" – in other words, he undermines his own explanation of logic by failing to consistently apply it to the explanation itself. What is more, this inconsistency, again, suggests logic to be a fluid concept, thereby rendering it void, as consistency arguably constitutes the very essence of logic.

Throughout the *Alice* books, Carroll thus appears to question the idea of absolute truths – including that of a fixed logic – as well as the habit of overthinking. However, considering that he was himself a mathematician and logician, his message (if nonsense can be claimed to *have* a message, which is still a matter of debate among scholars) seems more likely to be that human reasoning and logic are *insufficient* tools to grasp absolute truth, rather than useless per se. Thus, under the light of Carroll's religious faith, his critique can be interpreted as directed at the Victorians' unhesitating confidence in logic and science, rather than logic itself.

Returning to the bigger picture of nonsense literature's treatment of the laws of reality, we find that cause-and-effect is not the only natural law that the limericks and the *Alice* books play with. One motif that has already been mentioned in chapter 2.1.2. also plays an important role in this context: time. Rather than mimicking its 'real-world' counterpart, time in the limericks and Alice's dreamlands appears to play by its own rules, its pace being a particularly frequent object of manipulation for both authors. For instance, Lear has the already-mentioned Old Man with a beard suddenly realize that no less than eight birds have built a nest in his beard, as if this could be done from one moment to the next (Lear 3). Another Old Man, as we have also discussed earlier, manages to spend so much time pulling at a bell that his hair grows white – as if he was immune to all other effects of the passing of time (ibid. 48). Similarly, the young lady of Firle's hair has the time to "[curl] up a tree, and all over the sea" (ibid. 174), while the old man who "[f]ell casually into a kettle" as a little boy apparently "[grew] stout" (ibid. 173) so quickly that it became impossible to help him out before he was stuck forever. Finally, the old person of Down's frown becomes scary only when he opens the door "for one minute or more" (ibid. 178), suggesting that the people of Down have unnaturally slow emotional response times.

In the *Alice* books, too, time seems to pass at an unnatural pace. Alice's very entry into Wonderland happens with her falling down so slowly, or for so long, that "she ha[s] plenty of time as she [goes] down to look about her and to wonder what [is] going to happen next", such as if "the fall [will] *never* come to an end" (original emphasis), or "how many miles [she has] fallen by this time" – she assumes about four thousand miles –, and at a certain point, Alice even begins

to feel "rather sleepy" (Carroll 24f.). Furthermore, similarly to the fact that "it's always six o'clock" (ibid. 70) in Wonderland because Time is a vengeful *he* (as mentioned in the previous chapter), in TTLG we read about Alice and the Red Queen "never [seeming] to pass anything" "no matter how fast they [go]" (ibid. 146), which suggests that time has come to a similar standstill in Looking-glass world. Yet, we also learn that the inhabitants of Looking-glass world "[live] backwards" and therefore have memories that "work both ways" (ibid. 172); that rushes "[begin] to fade, and to lose their scent and beauty, from the very moment that [Alice] [picks] them" (ibid. 179f.); and that "a minute goes by so fearfully quick" that one "might as well try to stop a Bandersnatch" (ibid. 196). Thus, just like logic, time is presented as a fluid concept rather than following any fixed principles. However, this fluidity of time has its limits since, as the White Queen informs us, even in Wonderland "nobody can do two things at once" (ibid. 175).

Another element that both Lear and Carroll appear to enjoy manipulating is their characters' expectations concerning the properties and integrity of (the objects in) their surroundings. In Lear, this becomes particularly evident when looking at the number of limericks which involve objects with characteristics ranging from rather improbable to outright ridiculous. Strikingly, the great majority of these are related to the objects' proportions (see also chapter 2.1.1. for an analysis of the characters' sizes): for instance, the illustrations accompanying almost all limericks about people climbing trees, bushes, palms, etc. depict these plants as far too small to be able to carry the weight of a person (e.g. Lear 7, see Fig. 33; 22, see Fig. 34; also 31; 42; 160; 183). Similarly, we often read about noses of such size or length that they reach their owner's toes (ibid. 23), serve as a perch for birds (ibid. 58), are able to support a light (ibid. 166), grow "out of sight" (ibid. 175), or have such a resonating body that the sounds they produce are "heard through the whole of West Dumpet" (ibid. 181). The characters' bodies, in general, often have impossible characteristics or show unnatural reactions: for instance, the Young Lady of Norway's door squeezes her body flat, which does not prevent her from continuing to talk (ibid. 18); the old Person eating rabbits turns green (ibid. 19); the Old Man of Nepaul's body can simply be mended with glue after having been "split quite in two" (ibid. 27); and the old person of Pinner is so thin and "elastic" that "they" are able to "[roll] him up tight" (ibid. 201).

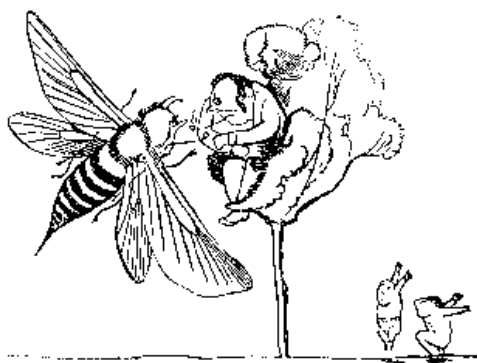


Fig. 33¹⁶

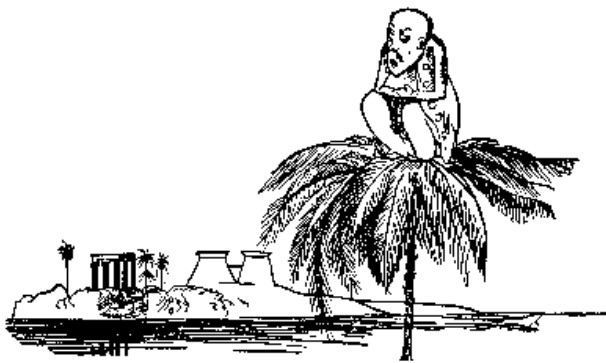


Fig. 34

Carroll's Wonderland and Looking-glass world are similarly brimming with creatures and objects endowed with supernatural properties. Unlike in the limericks, however, apart from the edibles, drinks and other objects that have the power to change Alice's size, the objects' peculiarity lies not so much in (fixed) specific characteristics but rather in their capacity to spontaneously *change* their properties and even location from one moment to the next, such as by randomly appearing/and or disappearing (Jenkins 82). In AAIW, for instance, this is the case with the golden key and the 'Drink Me' bottle on the little glass table (Carroll 26), and, of course, the Cheshire Cat. In TTLG, we read about a carriage suddenly "[rising] straight up into the air" (ibid. 152); about the Goat's beard that "[melts] away" upon contact with Alice's hand (ibid.); a "large bright thing that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes like a working-box and was always in the shelf next above the one she was looking at" (ibid. 177); and about a golden crown suddenly adorning Alice's head (ibid. 215). Alternatively, some creatures or objects from Wonderland and Looking-glass world randomly alter their form, like the door from the great hall that appears to open and close at whim (ibid. 28; 32), the baby/pig, or the pebbles at the Rabbit's house turning into cakes in Wonderland (ibid. 47), and the knitting needles transforming into oars (ibid. 177), or "everything [turning] into a tree the moment [Alice] [comes] up to it" (ibid. 181) in Looking-glass world.

Occasionally, it is not only individual entities that change from one moment to the next, but Alice's entire surroundings. Thus, in AAIW, we are told that "the great hall, with the glass table and the little door, had vanished completely" (ibid. 42)

¹⁶ All of Lear's illustrations on this page taken from:
Nonsenselit. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear//index.html>

during Alice's swim in the Pool of Tears. In Looking-glass world, we read about a path "[giving] a sudden twist and [shaking] itself" (ibid. 139) so that Alice ends up walking back in at the door she left just before, which happens again when she sets out to meet the Red Queen for the first time (ibid. 143). Furthermore, after a short episode on the train – which Alice appears to have boarded just as suddenly and involuntarily – the scenery again changes abruptly, leaving the girl "sitting quietly under a tree" (ibid. 152). Likewise, while one moment Alice is walking through a wood with the White Queen, the next moment she finds herself in a shop, facing a sheep, only to suddenly end up in a boat with said sheep, "gliding along between banks" (ibid. 176ff.). Yet, as we have seen in the passage where Alice and the Red Queen run "very fast for a long time" but still eventually find themselves under the same tree with everything around them being "just as it was" (ibid. 147), the unpredictability of her surroundings does not always lie in its spur-of-the-moment changes, but can also show itself in their *failure* to change in the way Alice and her readers would naturally expect.

Thus, both authors like to have characters' and readers' expectations clash with the states and workings of their surroundings, thus presenting the former's experiences and inner representations of their worlds as separate from reality (see Neill 388). This contrast between inner and outer reality, between subjectivity and objectivity, and, similarly, between fact and fiction, is another recurrent theme in the nonsense of both Lear and Carroll.

For instance, in several of Lear's limericks, we read about 'them' having quite different views on what is happening to the hero(in)es of the poem than the latter themselves. In some examples, 'they' simply contradict the protagonists, as is the case with the Old Man in a boat, whose hysteric cry "I'm afloat! I'm afloat!" is simply shrugged off by 'them' with the words "No! You ain't!" (Lear 10), which almost causes him to faint. Similarly, the Old Person of Gretna's judgment that the crater of Etna is not hot is flatly denied by the narrator, who accuses him of being "mendacious" (ibid. 52). In other cases, the others' disagreement takes the form of rather nonsensical reactions or assessments of the situation: when the old man on the Humber, "who dined on a cake of burnt Uumber" says, "It's enough!", he only receives the puzzling reply "Stuff!" (ibid. 168), and the old

person of Cassel, whose nose "[finishes] in a tassel" (ibid. 186), is left perplexed by 'their' claim that it rather resembles a bell.

In other cases, the subjectivity of experience is illustrated not through opposing views between two parties, but through an individual's sudden realization of their own faulty thinking or thoughtlessness. Thus, the Old Man of Jamaica's wife is stricken by the, apparently shocking, insight of having "married a Black" (ibid. 41); the old lady of France is "grieved" when the little ducklings she has taught to dance reply to her "Tick-a-tack" with a less-than-spectacular "Quack" (ibid. 170); and the old person of Dundalk, "who [tries] to teach fishes to walk", is brought back down to earth when his students "[tumble] down dead" (ibid. 188). For some of Lear's eccentrics, reality seems to be such a burden that they choose to withdraw from it (to varying extent). For instance, while the Old Man of the Hague's "[delusion]" is limited to his "[building] a balloon to examine the moon" (ibid. 40), and the old person of Dean's worldview is also merely distorted in that he "[dines] on one pea, and one bean" because "more would make [him] too fat" (ibid. 187), the decisions by other characters are utterly mysterious: we read about the old man of the Dargle who rolls "six barrels of Gargle" (ibid. 164) into the river as a treat for the fish; about the old person of Bar, who spends her life in a jar, "which she [paints] sea-green, to appear more serene" (ibid. 182); and about the old person of Shoreham, who decides to "[buy] an Umbrella, and [sit] in a cellar" (ibid. 184). Lear tops off this list of delusive figures with the old person of Woking, telling us that this person "[sits] on a rail, with his head in a pail," as if to shield off his "perverse and provoking" (ibid. 171) mind from the outer, the real world – or vice versa. Often, however, it is not entirely clear what exactly *is* the real world in Lear's limericks, or, more accurately, which of the realities presented therein we should trust: does the Old Man with a gong really bump against a gong, or is it actually a drum, as the illustration suggests? (Dilworth 47, see Fig. 35) Is the Old Person of Tartary's wife telling the truth when she says that his death "will be felt by all Tartary" (Lear 50, see Fig. 36), even though she is clearly smiling in the drawing – as is the old person of Ealing, who is allegedly "devoid of all good feeling?" (ibid. 196, see Fig. 37) Finally, it is also striking that Lear occasionally intersperses his mostly real geographical locations (such as Spain, Cannes, or the Dargle) with invented place names (such as Ibream, Philœ, and El Hums) as settings for his limericks, as if to suggest that the real and fictional

worlds are interchangeable. Thus, by bringing his hero(in)es' experiences and worldviews into conflict with those of others or with the 'real' world in some limericks, while presenting reality as a matter of interpretation or blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction in others, Lear's nonsense seems to question the idea of absolute truths in a similar manner as Carroll's.



Fig. 35¹⁷



Fig. 36

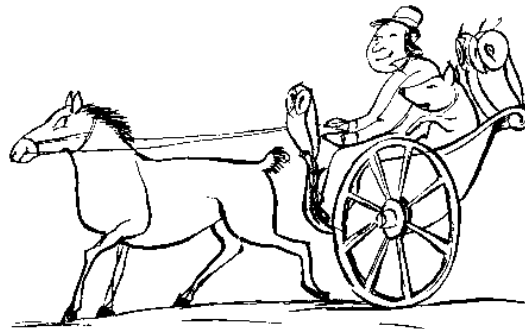


Fig. 37

When looking at the *Alice* books again, we find that the tools applied to this end by Carroll are fairly similar to Lear's. On several occasions, Alice's companions contradict her in such a manner as to basically deny her the right to her own perception of the world, as we have already shown in the discussion about (im)politeness (see chapter 2.1.2.). At certain moments, Alice's view is indeed presented as a distortion of reality, such as when she assumes that the people on the other side of the planet "walk with their heads downward" (Carroll 25); during the already-mentioned discussion at the tea-party, where she claims that to say what she means is the same thing as to mean what she says (ibid. 68); or when she perceives a sound "like the puffing of a large steam-engine" in Looking-

¹⁷ All of Lear's illustrations on this page taken from: Nonsenselit. 2012. Marco Graziosi. 18 June 2018 <http://www.nonsenselit.org/Lear//index.html>

glass world, which she interprets as "most likely" coming from a "wild beast" but which turns out to be "only the Red King snoring" (ibid. 166).

At other times, Alice's worldview seems to be accepted by the other characters, but only as one possibility among others. In other words, these different truths are usually presented as interchangeable, the commitment to one of them as a negligible possibility at the most. One example of this is Alice's conversation with the Pigeon from Wonderland, who calls her a serpent and counters her claim that she is "a little girl," saying, "you're looking for eggs, I know that well enough; and what does it matter to me whether you're a little girl or a serpent?" (ibid. 56) Thus, the final definition is presented as lying in the eye of the beholder, as is the case in several other passages from AAIW: for instance, Alice becomes aware that beauty is relative when she realizes that the baby/pig "would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes rather a handsome pig," which leads her to "[think] over other children she knew, who might do very well as pigs" (ibid. 64); similarly, when the Cheshire Cat explains that it "growl[s] when [it is] pleased" and Alice replies "I call it purring, not growling" (original emphasis), the Cat's rather apathetic conclusion is, "Call it what you like" (ibid. 65); and during the trial, the discussion between the Rabbit and the King as to whether Alice's knowledge of the incident is important or "[u]nimportant" (ibid. 107, original emphasis) leads to the different jury members' randomly writing 'important' or 'unimportant' on their respective slate.

Similarly, in TTLG, what Alice considers to be facts either clashes with her companions' worldviews or is reduced to merely one possible interpretation of reality several times. In most cases, the conflict comes down to a simple matter of definition, such as when the King calls his headgear "a helmet, though it certainly [looks] much more like a saucepan" (ibid. 170) to Alice, or when Humpty Dumpty replies to Alice's exclamation of "how exactly like an egg he is!" saying, "It's very provoking [...] to be called an egg" (ibid. 181, original emphasis). In contrast, the following conversation between Alice and the Red Queen presents the topic as much more complex:

"When you say 'hill'," the Queen interrupted, "I could show you hills, in comparison with which you'd call that a valley."

"No, I shouldn't," said Alice, surprised into contradicting her at last: "a hill can't be a valley, you know. That would be nonsense – [...]"

"You may call it 'nonsense' if you like," [the Queen] said, "but I've heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary!" (ibid. 144, original emphasis).

Here, the Queen not only asserts that, under certain circumstances, a word can be used to refer to an object that is usually understood as its opposite; she also claims to have examples that support this argument, but does not present them to Alice. Thus, she deprives the girl of her stable reality without offering her an alternative to hold onto, causing her to fall into silence and shift her attention to the nature surrounding her. This reaction, calling to mind what Beach (8) describes as man's "[grasping] at nature" due to the fact that "[t]he human mind cannot suddenly pass with ease and comfort from any form of faith to agnosticism or unbelief" (ibid. 5), is but one of several moments in TTLG where Alice's loss of reality can be interpreted to symbolize the Victorians' crisis of faith and their resulting "spiritual isolation" and "intolerable burden of loneliness" (ibid. 8f.). Other examples are the moments after Alice's passage through the mirror, when she first *feels* "as if [she is] invisible" (Carroll 133), and, shortly after, when the King can indeed "neither hear nor see her" (ibid. 134). In other examples, the topic of reality is even addressed more or less directly, particularly in the following discussion of Alice's with Tweedledum and Tweedledee concerning the girl's realness:

"You know very well you're not real."

"I am real!" said Alice, and began to cry.

"You won't make yourself a bit realer by crying," Tweedledee remarked: "there's nothing to cry about."

"If I wasn't real," Alice said – half-laughing through her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous – "I shouldn't be able to cry."

"I hope you don't suppose those are real tears?" (ibid. 167)

In other examples, facts are actually presented as secondary to belief – first, in the following discussion between Alice and the White Queen:

"I'll give you something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day."

"I can't believe *that!*" said Alice.

"Can't you?" the Queen said in a pitying tone. "Try again [...]."

"One can't believe impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice, said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast" (ibid. 175, original emphasis).

The same happens during the girl's conversation with Haigha and the Unicorn as to whether children and unicorns exist:

"I always thought [children] were fabulous monsters!" said the Unicorn. "Is it alive?"[...]

"I always thought Unicorns were fabulous monsters, too! I never saw one alive before!"

"Well, now that we have seen each other," said the Unicorn, "if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?" (ibid. 199)

Thus, reality as it is understood in Looking-glass world, is less associated with physical experience (such as crying) than it is a question of belief, which further supports the argument that, unlike Lear's, Carroll's nonsense is influenced by the author's religious faith and skepticism towards the Victorians' unbridled glorification of science. Particularly in the context of questions of morality, Carroll quickly brings the scientific approach to its wits' end: when Alice hears the poem about the Walrus and the Carpenter who tricked a group of oysters in order to eat them, she concludes that she "like[s] the Walrus best [...] because you see he was a *little* sorry for the poor oysters" (original emphasis). Tweedledee's comment that "[h]e ate more than the Carpenter, though" causes Alice to simply change her mind, saying with just as much conviction, "Then I like the Walrus best", as if to suggest that the characters' morality can be measured quantitatively. The faultiness of such reasoning, however, is pitilessly exposed by Tweedledum's objection that the Carpenter "ate as many as he could get" (ibid. 165f.).

This idea of belief or, in a broader sense, imagination trumping 'objective' reality is reinforced by the frequent literary allusions included in both *Alice* books. First of all, Alice's repeated recreations of famous poems suggest that inventiveness is to be placed above factual knowledge. Furthermore, AAIW and particularly

TTLG are full of fictitious and fictional characters from mythology, folklore, and other stories, such as the Gryphon, Humpty Dumpty, and Tweedledum and Tweedledee – and although this makes them more 'real' from Alice's perspective, their intertextual transfer from one story to the next (and, what is more, to a story describing a dream rather than a realistic account) reminds the reader all the more of the *Alice* stories' fictionality (see Fordyce and Mareello 151; Lecercle 137). Thus, even though Carroll blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction (as does Lear using different methods), the effect on the reader here is actually a reaffirmed sense of reality. On the other hand, even though Alice eventually leaves both Wonderland and Looking-glass world when everything becomes too complicated (see Rackin 129), her return does not leave the "dull reality" (Carroll 112) unaffected, and has a certain nostalgic undertone: in AAIW, her account causes her sister to "half [believe] herself in Wonderland" and makes her wallow in thoughts about the "simple sorrows" and "joys, [...] and the happy summer-days" (ibid. 113) of childhood; in TTLG, Alice reprimands Kitty – whom she addresses as "Your Red Majesty" at first – "with some severity" for having woken her "out of – oh! Such a nice dream!" (ibid. 230), and she wonders "who it was that dreamed it all" (ibid. 232) – herself, or the Red King. Both novels thus end with blurred boundaries between reality and fiction, which is made complete when the narrator uses his very last sentence in TTLG to ask the readers, "Which do *you* think it was?" (ibid., original emphasis; see Jenkins 83).

In summary, both Lear's and Carroll's nonsense frequently plays with their characters' and/or readers' expectations and worldviews, be it by suspending natural laws, by exposing reality as a matter of interpretation and reasoning processes as highly subjective, or by blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. The result of this "[transgressing] the frame of 'the real'" and "[opening] up a space of uncertainty", as Shires (267; see Schramek 5) describes it, is that their nonsense pushes the world and its meanings (as constructed by humans) "toward the realm of non-signification where nothing is stable". One important method by which this is achieved both in the limericks and the *Alice* books is their creation of a "gap between signifier and signified" (Shires 267; Schramek 5) through the manipulation of language, which shall be our focus for the remainder of this analysis.

2.2.2. Language

The topic of language is strongly connected with all the previous focuses of our analysis: not only is it the most frequently mentioned distinguishing feature between humans and other animals and, arguably, the most complex of all social conventions (Schramek 5), but it also shapes our perception of the world. Language is both partly responsible for and frequently the object of our expectations towards reality, a seeming paradox which makes it doubly interesting for nonsense literature: as this literary strand likes to run counter whatever we take as a matter of course, the rules of language provide endless material for humorous twists and games.

Both Lear and Carroll vividly exploit the realms of puns, literalizations, and other plays on language, thereby exposing the arbitrariness of human conventions and order on yet another level (see Rieder 49; Williams 661). In Lear's limericks, a particularly frequent method of playing with language and our expectations towards it is related to the author's word choice in a number of the last lines of his poems. As already mentioned in chapter 2.1.2., a major proportion of these finish with the structure 'that X old/young person/man of ____', with X generally being an adjective that may or may not fit the situation as we understand it (Rieder 48): not only does this adjective often express a judgment that is either too harsh or surprisingly lenient, but in many cases its meaning is outright incongruous with the situation or, at least, bears no comprehensible link to it. We have already discussed the young person of Janina's strange assessment of her killer as "propitious" (Lear 45), and we also read about, for instance: the old person of Chili whose habit of sitting "on the stairs, eating apples and pears" earns him the description as "imprudent" (ibid. 6); an Old Man of Vienna who is deemed "nasty" for "liv[ing] on Tincture of Senna" and then on "Camomile Tea" (ibid. 18); an Old Man in a pew who tears his waistcoat "in pieces, to give to his nieces," which, in the narrator's eyes, makes him "cheerful" (ibid. 38); an old person of Rye riding a fly to travel to town, who is called "abstemious" (ibid. 174) by his fellow townsmen; and the old man of Port Grigor who, because "[h]e stood on his head, till his waistcoat turned red," is described as "eclectic" (ibid. 181).

In by far the greatest number of cases, the incongruence lies in Lear's unusual choices of collocation. Thus, we find numerous instances where a human

character is described with an adjective that is, typically, used only to qualify objects or concepts: some figures of the limericks are referred to as "intrinsic" (ibid. 12), "umbrageous" (ibid. 47), "incipient" (ibid. 55), "turbid" (ibid. 167), "exhaustive" (ibid. 173), "expansive" (ibid. 174), "expensive" (ibid. 191), and "aquatic" (ibid. 198). In a similar vein, Lear tells us of people being "smashed" (ibid. 39; 6; 14) or getting "[slain] with a kick" and "scrunched with a stick" (ibid. 169); of "nautical" ideas (ibid. 10) and a head that is "infested with beads" (ibid. 12); of a man who "objected to" toads (ibid. 28) and another who is "concluded" (ibid. 34) by falling from a cliff; of hair that is "addicted to curl" (ibid. 174), a person who is "*partly* consumed by regret" (ibid. 182, emphasis added), and of someone's manners being "tinctured with fury" (ibid. 183). Thus, Lear uses lexemes in ways that seem unrelated with or even go counter their established meanings (see Ponterotto 155), having them either denote something which lacks any characteristics that would justify the qualification, or combining them with other lexemes that do not allow such collocation in general language use.

In several other cases, Lear simply creates a new word to refer to objects, his characters or their actions: in addition to the already-mentioned "ombliferous Person of Crete" (Lear 13) and the "Moppsikon Floppsikon bear" (ibid. 187), we read about the "borascible person of Bangor" (ibid. 44) as well as a "cake of burnt Uumber" (ibid. 168), and the adjective "scroobious" appears in as many as three of his limericks (ibid. 22; 177; 198). Likewise, several of his hero(in)es produce utterances that can only be considered sheer nonsense, like the "laconic" old person of Wick "[w]ho said, 'Tick-a-Tick, Tick-a-Tick; / Chickabee, Chickabaw'" (ibid. 163) and the old man of Spithead shouting out the window "Fil-jumble, fil-jumble, Fil-rumble-come-tumble!" (ibid. 203). Thus, language and its meanings are presented as subject to the speaker's whims and, therefore, as unreliable. This impression is further reinforced by several figures whose utterances are rather uninformative or unsatisfying, as with the "oracular" Old Person of Sparta, "whose language was horribly vague" (ibid. 52); the "distressing" old Person of Burton, "whose answers were rather uncertain" (ibid. 55); the "provoking" Young Lady of Parma, who, upon being asked if she is dumb, "merely [says], 'Hum!'" (ibid. 57); the young lady in blue who, as she is asked to introduce herself, "replie[s] only 'Whizz!'" (ibid. 163); and the "repulsive" old person of Sestri who, when accused of being wrong, "merely [says] 'Bong!'" (ibid. 192); In other cases,

people's assertions even appear to be deceiving, as when the "mendacious" (ibid. 52) Old Person of Gretna claims that the crater of Etna is not hot, or when the already-mentioned Old Person of Tartary's wife says, with a smile, that his death "will be felt by all Tartary" (ibid. 50).

Finally, even grammar, which is generally less susceptible to change than semantics, is presented as unstable in the limericks. On several occasions, Lear uses the conjunction 'but' without introducing the contrast that conventionally follows this linking device as by definition: for instance, we are told the Old Man of Wrekin's shoes "made a horrible creaking / *But* they said 'Tell us whether, your shoes are of leather'" (ibid. 17, emphasis added), as if their question was either incongruous with the shoes' creaking or constituted a surprising solution to the "horrible" situation; similarly, when the Old Person of Tartary "divide[d] his jugular artery", the narrator adds, "But he screeched to his wife" (ibid. 50), as if this reaction was inappropriate or unexpected; in the same way, Lear presents 'their' question "Don't you wish, you may'nt look like a fish" as standing in contrast with the hero's purchase of a "shirt with a frill" (ibid. 162) rather than as a consequence (e.g. using 'so' or 'thus'), and 'their' reproach "Don't you see, what a brute you must be!" as conflicting with the old person of Sark's making "an unpleasant remark" (ibid. 179) – and not, as one might expect, as its result. Additionally, Lear occasionally chooses rather unconventional word order in his verses, presenting syntax as similarly subject to the author's (or utterer's) fancy: thus, the old Man of th' Abruzzi is described as "[s]o blind that he couldn't his foot see" (ibid. 25), and the old Lady of Winchelsea is told to sweep the floor "if [she] needle or pin shall see" (ibid. 173).

In Carroll's works, an even greater array of language games and linguistic nonsense can be – and have been – identified. One of the most prominent aspects of his humor is to be found in the numerous literalizations in the *Alice* books: first of all, some of Alice's most important acquaintances during her adventures are personifications of idioms, namely the Hatter and the March Hare, who are "both mad" (Carroll 65) and thus literalize the sayings 'mad as a march hare' and 'mad as a hatter,' as well as the Cheshire Cat, whom Alice finds indeed grinning 'like a Cheshire Cat' most of the time (see MacArthur 61). Other characters do not personify idioms, but otherwise figurative elements of the

English language: for instance, the ever-drowsy Dormouse perfectly lives up to its name (see *ibid.* 59), which in standard English usage refers to somnolent people or those blessed with profound sleep. A particularly interesting example is the already-mentioned Mock Turtle, who, as Lecercle (41) phrases it, "embodies a [deliberate] mistake in immediate constituent analysis," creating the concept of "mock-turtle soup" instead of "mock turtle-soup". Likewise, the baby's turning into a pig after being called one by the Duchess (supposedly for sneezing) can equally be considered an embodiment of an idiosyncrasy of the English language, as the term 'pig' is often used to refer to an unclean or ill-mannered person.

Additionally, on several occasions, the characters literalize English expressions and idiosyncratic structures, not through their sheer existence, but their actions or interpretations of a given situation. Thus, in *AAIW* we read about the Hatter speaking of "murdering the time" (Carroll 70), the Dormouse asking Alice whether she has ever seen a drawing of "a muchness" (*ibid.* 73), and about Alice reprehending the King, after he tells the Cheshire Cat to stop looking at him, pointing out that "A cat may look at a king" (*ibid.* 81). Likewise, the Gryphon's argumentation that, like blackings, 'whitings' owe their name to their habit of "[*doing*] the boots and shoes" (*ibid.* 95, original emphasis) goes in a comparable direction of excessive literalness, and a similar pun can be identified in the King's order that the Hatter "stand down" and the latter's reply that he "can't go no lower" since he is "on the floor, as it is" (*ibid.* 103f.).

In *TTLG*, the White Queen objects to the King's comment "I turned cold to the very end of my whiskers!", pointing out that he does not have "got any whiskers" (*ibid.* 135); when Alice explains that she has "lost her way", the Red Queen pleads, "all the ways about here belong to *me*" (*ibid.* 144, original emphasis), and later, she claims that if one took "a bone from a dog", what would remain is "the dog's temper" because "it would lose its temper" (*ibid.* 218); the White King's approach to language appears to be too literal as well, for instance when Alice claims seeing "nobody on the road," which provokes his "fretful" remark "I only wish / had such eyes [...] to be able to see Nobody!" (*ibid.* 193f., original emphasis); when Alice's "I beg your pardon?" results in his comment that "it isn't respectable to beg" (*ibid.*); and when he denies her plea that he "be good enough

[...] to stop a minute", saying "I'm *good* enough [...] only I'm not strong enough" (ibid. 196, original emphasis). Finally, Humpty Dumpty appears to be similarly inclined to take matters too literally: his reply to Alice's "I beg your pardon?" is "I'm not offended" (ibid. 185), and when Alice claims that "one can't help growing older", he answers that "[o]ne can't, perhaps, [...] but *two* can" (ibid. 184, original emphasis). However, while the other characters appear to be simply insensitive towards figurative meanings of language, Humpty Dumpty's literal approach seems to be a conscious choice, as can be gathered from the following conversation:

"So here's a question for you. How old did you say you were?"

Alice made a short calculation, and said, "Seven years and six months."

"Wrong!" Humpty Dumpty exclaimed triumphantly. "You never said a word like it."

"I though you meant, 'How old are you?'" Alice explained.

"If I'd meant that, I'd have said it," said Humpty Dumpty (ibid. 184).

Thus, Alice is continuously confronted with challenges to the linguistic prism through which she conceives the world, which usually leave her "puzzled" or "confused" (ibid. 73; 95; 186; 222). This occurs not only through literalizations like the above, but also whenever Carroll's uses his characters to live out his predilection for plays on (polysemous) homonymy and homophony (see Fordyce and Marella 22; 185). Examples of the first kind can be found in several conversations both in AAIW and TTLG: in Wonderland, for instance, the Mouse tells the other Caucus-racers "the driest thing" (Carroll 36) it knows in order to make them dry after their swim in the pool of tears; the Gryphon's Classics teacher can be assumed to be "an old crab" (ibid. 91) not only in the figurative sense (i.e. an unpleasant person), but also literally an aged crustacean, considering the Gryphon was also taught by a so-called (albeit not actual) Tortoise and in "Seaography" (ibid. 88). Similarly, during the tea-party, the Dormouse tells the story of three sisters living in a "treacle well" and "learning to draw [...] [t]reacle," which evokes in Alice the question "Where did they draw the treacle from?", seemingly misinterpreting the verb 'to draw' to signify 'to pull' rather than the more context-appropriate 'to depict.' However, as the Hatter goes

along with this alternative interpretation, saying "You can draw water out of a water-well [...] so I should think you could draw treacle out of a treacle-well", he causes even greater confusion: as rightly observed by Alice, "they were *in* the well" (original emphasis), an objection which is disregarded as such by the Dormouse, who replies, "Of course they were [...] – well in" (ibid. 73). Thus, the confusion derives from the double pun on the polyseme 'to draw' and the homonym 'well'. Other plays on polysemy can be identified in the Duchess's observation that "flamingoes and mustard both bite" and her conclusion that "the moral of that is 'Birds of a feather flock together'" (ibid. 85); in the King's remark that the Hatter is not (only) a "poor man" (as self-proclaimed), but furthermore "a *very poor speaker*" (ibid. 103, original emphasis), thus playing on the double sense of 'poor' as 'poverty-stricken' and 'unsatisfactory'; and finally, the King even advertises one of his puns as such when the Queen denies ever having "had *fits*" (as suggested by the evidence letter), observing "then the words don't *fit* you" and, upon the audience's failure to laugh, "It's a pun!" (ibid. 110, original emphasis).

In Looking-Glass world, the Tiger-lily attributes the taciturnity of most flowers to their beds being so soft "that the flowers are always asleep" (ibid. 141), the Rose explains to Alice that the tree could protect them by *barking*, and the Daisy adds that its branches are called 'boughs' because "it says 'Bough-wough!'" (ibid. 141); the gnat jokes about Alice's inevitably missing her lessons if her governess shouted "Miss!" (ibid. 155) to summon her to class; Tweedledum answers Alice's question "It may rain outside?" saying that "[i]t may – if it chooses" (ibid. 167); the White Queen explains to Alice that "the rule is, [...] jam every *other* day", meaning "jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam today" (ibid. 172, original emphasis); the White Knight states that "the wind is [...] as strong as soup" (ibid. 205), and tells Alice about an incident where he could not take off his helmet for hours because he stuck fast, "as fast as – as lightning" (ibid. 208); and finally, when Alice inquires the whereabouts of "the servant whose business it is to answer the door", the Frog replies, "To answer the door? [...] What's it been asking of?" (ibid. 223).

As for homophony, both *Alice* books abound with a comparable number of humorous examples. The first of these in *AAIW* can be found in the Mouse's

introduction into its "sad and long tale", upon which Alice observes "it *is* a long tail, certainly" (ibid. 38, original emphasis) and which is presented in the book in the form of shape poetry, depicting a tail (see Fig. 38).

Fury said to
a mouse that
he met in the
house, "Let
us both go
to law: *I*
will prose-
cute *you*.
Come, I'll
take no de-
nial; we
must have
a trial:
for really
this morn-
ing I've
nothing
to do."

Said the
mouse to
the cur,
"Such a
trial, dear
sir, with
no jury
or judge,
would
be waste-
ning our
breath."
"I'll be
judge,"
said the
sieg
of
Fury;
"I'll
try
the
case."
"I'll
be
judge,"
said the
sieg
of
Fury;
"I'll
try
the
case."

Fig. 38 (Carroll 38)

The wordplay continues when Alice apologizes for not attending:

"I beg your pardon," said Alice very humbly: "you had got to the fifth bend, I think?"

"I had *not*!" cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.

"A knot!" said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her. "Oh, do let me help to undo it!" (ibid. 40, original emphasis).

The next pun of this kind is made when Alice explains to the Duchess that "the earth takes twenty-four hours to turn round on its axis" and is interrupted by the latter, who says "Talking of axes, [...] chop off her head!" (ibid. 61). But also the Turtle, who used to be called Tortoise "because he *taught us*" (ibid. 89, emphasis added), the Gryphon's claim that 'lessons' owe their name to their "lessen[ing] from day to day" (ibid. 91), as well as the following conversation between the Hatter and the King are obvious examples:

"I hadn't begun my tea [...] and what with the bread-and-butter getting so thin – and the twinkling of the tea –"

"The twinkling of the *what*?" said the King.

"It *began* with the tea," the Hatter replied.

"Of course twinkling *begins* with a T!" (ibid. 103, original emphasis).

TTLG is similarly rich in instances where Carroll plays on homophony: one particularly avid fan of such puns appears to be the owner of the tiny voice in Alice's ear, who suggests that she make a joke, first on the "hoarse voice" sounding "like a horse," and then, based on Alice's exclamation "I was in a *wood* just now - and I wish I could get back there!", "about 'you would if you could'" (ibid. 151f., emphasis added). At other times during Alice's adventure behind the mirror, such humorous verbal exchanges are created less intentionally but rather through misunderstandings: when Alice asks, "Am I addressing the White Queen?", the latter replies, "Well, yes, if you call that a-dressing [...]. It isn't my notion of the thing at all" and goes on to complain about having been "a-dressing [herself] for the last two hours" with her shawl being "out of temper" (ibid. 171f.). The play on homophony finally reaches its peak during Alice's conversation with the two Queens during the banquet:

Here the Red Queen began again. "Can you answer useful questions?" she said. "How is bread made?"

"I know *that*!" Alice cried eagerly. "You take some four – "

"Where do you pick the flower?" the White Queen asked. "In a harden, or in the hedges?"

"Well, it isn't *picked* at all," Alice explained: "it's *ground* – "

"How many acres or ground?" said the White Queen (ibid. 219, original emphasis).

Occasionally, similar wordplays arise based on near-homophones, such as the various subjects from the Mock Turtle and/or Gryphon's school curriculum, i.e. "Reeling and Writhing," "Mystery," "Seaography", "Drawling", and "Fainting" (ibid. 90), the sounds of which differ from conventional school subjects only by a single feature, respectively; the Gryphon's comments that under the sea, boots and shoes are made of "soles and eels" (with the former actually being a true homophone; ibid. 95); or the Mock Turtle's statement that "no wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise" because "if a fish came to [*him*], and told [*him*] he

was going on a journey, [he] should say, 'With what porpoise?'" (ibid., original emphasis).

Thus, Carroll repeatedly bestows surprising meanings on familiar words, or has his characters use them in ways that almost sound right but eventually still fail to fit the situation. In this manner, he raises the reader's awareness for our tendency to freight language with expectations, and by disappointing them, he exposes the vulnerability of our worldview. Carroll also applies other methods to play with this human dependence on fixed meanings, for instance through the motif of taxonomy and our preoccupation with names and labels (see Jenkins 80; Tazudeen 535). As early as during her fall down the rabbit-hole, Alice faces the "disappointment" of a misleading label when she finds an empty jar of "Orange Marmalade" (Carroll 24) on a shelf. Shortly after, her trust in labels manifests itself again when she follows the instruction on the bottle inscribed with the words "Drink Me" unhesitatingly after having verified that it is "*not* marked 'poison'" (ibid. 27, original emphasis), and when she, equally unhesitatingly, follows the order "eat me" (ibid. 28), which she finds written on a little cake. This dependence on labels reappears in TTLG, when Alice finds herself outside a door with two bell-handles, marked "Visitors' Bell" and "Servants' Bell", respectively, which leaves her confused and wishing there was a bell marked "Queen" (ibid. 222).

Throughout both of her adventures, and in line with this inclination to rely on labels, Alice exhibits a strong desire for the objects in her surroundings to have their respective designations and categories, and for everybody and everything to function accordingly. For instance, when she meets the Pigeon in AAIW, Alice stresses that "it matters a good deal" (ibid. 57) to her if she is a girl or a serpent, and when the Duchess rightly observes that "mustard isn't a bird," the girl is eager to find its correct taxonomic category, suggesting at first, "it's a mineral, I *think*," and then "it's a vegetable. It doesn't look like one, but it is" (ibid. 85, original emphasis). Alice's insistence that "a hill *can't* be a valley" (ibid. 144, original emphasis) paints a similar picture, and occasionally it becomes clear that Alice does not only care about everything having its correct designations, but that her own self-esteem is strongly associated with her knowledge of these: for instance, during her fall down the rabbit-hole, Alice enjoys using "nice grand words" like "Latitude" and "Longitude" (ibid. 25), and during the Knave's trial, she is not only

"quite pleased that she [knows] the names of nearly everything" she sees in the courtroom, but also proud of knowing the word 'juror' "for she thought, and rightly too, that very few little girls of her age knew the meaning of it at all" (ibid. 100).

As Alice travels across the giant chessboard, she decides that "[o]f course the first thing to do [is] to make a grand survey of the country she [is] going to travel through" and, regarding this enterprise as "very like learning geography," begins looking for "[p]rincipal rivers [...], [p]rincipal mountains," and "[p]rincipal towns" until she is distracted by the flying Elephants and wonders "why what *are* those creatures, making honey down there?" (ibid. 149, original emphasis). Another, particularly pointed example of Carroll mocking this typically Victorian obsession with taxonomy can be identified in the Gnat's presentation of the different types of flies inhabiting Looking-Glass world:

"[...] half-way up that bush, you'll see a Rocking-horse-fly, if you look. It's made entirely of wood, and gets about by swinging itself from branch to branch."

"What does it live on?" Alice asked, with great curiosity.

"Sap and sawdust," said the Gnat. [...] "Look on the branch above your head, [...] and there you'll find a Snap-dragon-fly. Its body is made of plum-pudding, its wings of holly-leaves, and its head is a raisin burning in brandy."

"And what does it live on?" Alice asked, as before.

"Frumenty and mince-pie," the Gnat replied; "and it makes its nest in a Christmas-box. [...] Crawling at your feet, [...] you may observe a Bread-and-butter-fly. Its wings are thin slices of bread-and-butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar."

"And what does *it* live on?"

"Weak tea with cream in it" (ibid. 154f., original emphasis).

But both *Alice* books also include other allusions of this kind, particularly with regard to names (see Fordyce and Marello 152). For instance, during her identity crisis in the great hall, Alice talks about asking "[them] [...] 'Who am I then? Tell me that first, and then, if I like being that person, I'll come up: if not, I'll stay down here till I'm somebody else'" (Carroll 32), suggesting an – albeit defiant – submissiveness to the power of names. In fact, the importance of names is discussed explicitly on more than one occasion: during their conversation about insects, the Gnat asks Alice whether those living in her world answer to their

names and adds, upon her negative answer, "What's the use of their having names, [...] if they won't answer to them?" Alice rightly observes that names are only there for (and because of) humans: "No use to *them*, [...] but it's useful to the people that name them" (original emphasis), but is nevertheless influenced by the Gnat's doubts concerning their usefulness, as she asks, "If not, why do things have names at all?" (ibid. 153) At a later point, the Gnat takes these doubts a step further when it argues "only think how convenient it would be if you could manage to go home without [a name]" (ibid. 155), arguing that, for instance, there would not be any name for her governess to call at lesson time, which would leave her off the hook. Alice continues to reflect on the importance of names as she enters "the wood [...] where things have no names", wondering "what'll become of *my* name when I go in? I shouldn't like to lose it at all" (ibid. 156, original emphasis), and this importance of names is again ridiculed when the Fawn suddenly flees from Alice when it remembers being a "Fawn" and realizes in dismay that it has been walking with "a human child!" (ibid. 157).

Names also appear to be a central topic for Humpty Dumpty, who does not only consider it "very provoking [...] to be called an egg" (ibid. 181, original emphasis) and insist on his ambiguous accessory to be referred to as a cravat rather than a belt (ibid. 184f.), but also has his own discussion with Alice about the meaning of names:

"[...] tell me your name and your business."

"My *name* is Alice, but – "

"It's a stupid name enough!" Humpty Dumpty interrupted impatiently. What does it mean?"

"*Must* a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.

"Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: "my name means the shape I am [...]. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost" (ibid. 183, original emphasis).

For at least one character, names are of such importance that they can even have their *own* names: as the White Knight explains to Alice, "the name of the song [*A-sitting on a Gate*] is called "*Haddocks' Eyes*" (ibid. 210; see Fordyce and Marello 152). Thus reducing the concept of names ad absurdum, this circular reference sends a particularly clear message of mockery about the value humans

attach to them. Similarly, this exaggerated faith in names is doubly ridiculed during the Knave's trial, when the missing signature of his name in the evidence letter is presented as both preventing the jury from identifying the culprit ("Please your Majesty," said the Knave, "I didn't write it, and they can't prove I did: there's no name signed at the end") and to prove the defendant's guilt ("If you didn't sign it," said the King, "that only makes the matter worse. You *must* have meant some mischief, or else you'd have signed your name like an honest man" [Carroll 108, original emphasis]).

Overall, however, Alice's companions appear to be more flexible as to the role of names or designations, which can be seen, for instance, by the Pigeon's question "you're looking for eggs, I know *that* well enough; and what does it matter to me whether you're a little girl or a serpent?" (ibid. 51, original emphasis); the Cheshire Cat's unconcerned answer "Call it what you like" upon Alice's insistence on calling its cheerful sound "purring, not growling" (ibid. 65); by the Red Queen's claim of having seen "hills, in comparison with which you'd call that a valley" and "heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary!" (ibid. 144); and by the White Queen's reply to Alice's question "Am I addressing the White Queen?", saying "Well, yes, if you call that a-dressing [...]. It isn't my notion of the thing at all" (ibid. 171). The general attitude in Wonderland and Looking-Glass world seems to be that meanings are of much greater importance than the words and sounds used to convey them, which two characters make clear in particularly nonsensical manners: in AAIW, the Duchess wants to convince us that "love" and "everyone minding their own business" mean "much the same thing," which leads her to conclude that "the moral of *that* is – 'Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves.'" (ibid. 85, original emphasis) This is not only a masterful pun on the saying 'take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves', but also a telling description of Wonderland's laissez-faire approach to language. One of the major figures from TTLG seems to advocate a similarly loose relationship between signifiers and their signifieds: in one of the most iconic conversations from the *Alice* books, Humpty Dumpty and Alice discuss the possibilities and limits of attributing specific meanings to words:

"There's glory for you!"

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory'," Alice said.

"(sic) Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knockdown argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knockdown argument'," Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all" (ibid. 186, original emphasis).

Thus, Humpty Dumpty insists that the utterer has the final say in what their utterance is to mean – so long as they know how to handle words with determination:

"They've a temper, some of them – particularly verbs, they're the proudest – adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs – however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability!"

"Would you tell me, please," said Alice, "what that means?"

"[...] I meant by 'impenetrability' that we've had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't intend to stop here all the rest of your life."

"That's a great deal to make one word mean," Alice said in a thoughtful tone.

"When I make a word do a lot of work like that," said Humpty Dumpty, "I always pay it extra" (ibid. 186f., original emphasis).

In other words, while Humpty Dumpty claims that language can be "manage[d]", like a pack of wild animals that only need to be tamed, the underlying message is that words have their own will: this idea brings to mind the widespread Victorian view of language as "organic" (Williams 651) and autonomous from its speakers, which resulted from the "discomfort[ing] [...] realization that English had its origins in 'such unbiblical tongues as Sanskrit and Proto-Indo-European'" (Dowling, qtd. in ibid.). By exaggerating this image of autonomous words to the point of having someone "pay [them] extra", Carroll ridicules the notion of language as being organic and somehow detached from the human mind.

Nevertheless, throughout the *Alice* books, language is presented as similarly unreliable as in Lear's limericks. In addition to the numerous misunderstandings due to inappropriate literalizations mentioned above, Alice's struggles with language can be divided into two main groups: on the one hand, those where her "words [do] not come the same as they used to do" (Carroll 31), i.e. do not submit to Alice's will; examples of this are the moment Alice cries "Curiouser and curiouser!", being "so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English" (ibid. 29), her repeated unintentional malapropisms of well-known poems, or the passage in the wood of nameless things, where Alice fails to recall the word 'tree' as well as her own name. Likewise, Alice and her companions observe on several occasions "what nonsense" (ibid. 30), "uncommon nonsense" (ibid. 96), or "dreadful nonsense [they] are talking!" (ibid. 218, original emphasis). On the other hand, there are those where the problem lies not in speech production but in its reception or interpretation. In some of these cases, the reason for the communication problem evidently lies in the listener's failure to make sense of a perfectly sensible statement, e.g. when the Eaglet does not understand the Dodo's order "that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies" (ibid. 36); or when the Rabbit, after telling Alice that the Duchess "is under sentence of execution" and being asked "What for?", gives the arbitrary reply "Did you say, 'What a pity!'" (ibid. 79). Most frequently, however, communication appears to be doomed to fail from the start, as the initial statement is outright nonsensical. For instance, Alice may well wish for a written version of the Duchess's moral:

"'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'" (ibid. 85)

– the reader knows that it does not become any more logical in written form. Similarly, the King's claim that the letter containing little more than empty pronouns is "the most important piece of evidence [...] yet" (ibid. 109) seems foolish to us, and we also smile at Alice's attempt to make sense of the Jabberwocky poem (ibid. 136f.), knowing that it largely consists of fantasy words. Humpty Dumpty's definitions of some of these do not help: since we know that

he likes to impose random meanings on words, we can hardly deem his explanations trustworthy.

Other humorous side blows against our obsession with fixed linguistic meanings can be identified in the characters' and narrator's skeptical attitude towards language: a telling example is the Dodo's reaction to Alice's question of what a Caucus-race is, when it says, "the best way to explain it is to do it" (ibid. 37), thus clearly placing action over speech; likewise, the narrator's side note "if you don't know what a Gryphon is, look at the picture" (ibid. 87) suggests that verbal descriptions are inferior to visual depictions. With all this "trouble" of "[trying] to find" (ibid. 110) a meaning in language – or rather, choosing the right meaning among the overwhelming number of possibilities – it is hardly surprising that the passengers on the train in Looking-Glass world "[think] *in chorus* [...] 'Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!'" (ibid. 150f., original emphasis).

Thus, both Lear's limericks and Carroll's *Alice* books expose the human dependence on rules and the fallibility of human logic not only by playing with natural laws and reasoning processes, but also/particularly by humorously presenting language as unreliable: especially through (inappropriate) literalizations, but also using strange collocations or by having their characters either give nonsensical meanings to language, choose the 'wrong' of several possible significations (both on the producing and the receiving end of speech), or simply create new words, they emphasize the highly subjective and variable nature of linguistic meaning.

Yet, their nonsense is not what J. Thomas (120) refers to as "pure nonsense", for which only "a madman's babbled jibberish" would qualify since, as observed by Beatrice Turner (248f.), "Something truly without sense [or rules, author's note] could not be read: it would be an arbitrary collection of words or letters; it would not be language." Rather, while both Lear and Carroll suspend and experiment with linguistic systems and meaning, they always maintain a safe frame within which to explore the limits of intelligibility and meaningfulness: in the limericks, the "anarchic" content is "balanced by the rigid requirements of the verse form" (Hark 121) and the overall adherence to rules of grammar (despite the occasional subtle attempt to play with it, as mentioned above); in the *Alice* books, grammar

is even more respected, and the narratives of both adventures are presented as dreams, each framed by an introductory and a concluding passage within the comforts of Victorian reality. In other words, while both authors explore the possibilities to manipulate language and meaning and thus raise awareness for our unreasonable willingness to doubtlessly trust in arbitrary systems of rules, they nevertheless grant the reader a certain need for structure. Against the background of the scientific advancements of the nineteenth century, this concession can be regarded as a natural reaction to the threatening Victorian idea of an utterly random universe.

Conclusion

The present thesis has examined the influence of the geological and biological discoveries and theories by Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin, respectively, on the literary nonsense in Edward Lear's limericks and Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books. In an introductory overview of the scientists' impact on the structures, zeitgeist, and literature of Victorian society, it has discussed several direct and indirect consequences of the publication of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*: the secularization of science; an increased interest among Victorians in the interdependencies of geological and organic nature, and the resulting development of new scientific branches such as ecology; a shift away from unquestioning trust in the claims of established authorities toward expectations of observable facts; a wave of agnosticism and pessimism with regard to man's place in the universe and purpose in life; the paradox of a new appreciation of individuality and the simultaneously increased longing for group spirit, which led to a skepticism of and changes in social hierarchies and systems; and a literary trend away from romantic, teleological, single truths towards realist accounts, randomness, ambiguous meanings, as well as a new emphasis on man's belonging in nature.

The second and principal part of this thesis has taken as its subject the manners in which Lear's limericks and Carroll's *Alice* books reflect the Victorian epistemic crisis provoked by Lyell's and Darwin's work. First, numerous allusions to the food chain have been identified in several poems' and passages' mocking or inversion

of typical hierarchies between man and other animals, and of their characters' body size, eating habits, and predatory behavior. It has been argued that, while Lear appears to mock the human concept of natural hierarchies, Carroll's nonsense suggests a critical stance toward exaggerated skepticism of such an order. A similar difference between Lear's and Carroll's works, albeit within the shared approach of derision, has been found during the subsequent analysis of the authors' respective treatment of social conventions and conformity, particularly with regard to politeness, judiciary processes, and educational practices: unlike Lear, for whom individuality seems to outrank the need to fit in, Carroll has been argued to promote the maintenance of a certain social order.

Subsequently, the focus was shifted to the importance of rules and logic as a pervading theme both in the limericks and the *Alice* books. Based on the frequent suspension of natural laws, the continuous presentation of reality and reasoning processes as subjective, and on the blurring of the dividing line between fact and fiction, it has been argued that Lear and Carroll humorously criticize the human dependence on rules and over-reliance on logic. This argument has been further supported by a close reading of their works from a linguistic perspective, i.e. their play with nonsensical literalizations, use of odd collocations, and detachment of signifier from signified, which emphasize the unreliability of language. However, as discussed in this context, the unease created by the authors' linguistic experiments is ultimately cushioned by the safe frame of grammatical and formal consistency. This, finally, has been interpreted as a natural attempt to accommodate the human need for stability, particularly in as deeply unsettling a time as the aftermath of Lyell's and Darwin's discoveries.

The limited scope of this thesis inevitably prevents an exhaustive analysis of Lear's and Carroll's complete works as well as an additional discussion of other related topics, such as man's relationship with technology, the revaluation of the child in society, and questions of gender. These are similarly present in the works analyzed here and evidently merit equal scholarly attention. Nonetheless, claiming to have contributed to a deeper understanding of the impact of the scientific advancements on Victorian (nonsense) literature and, consequently, on the concerns and interests of nineteenth-century British society, it hopes to

provide a fruitful basis for future explorations of related questions which have hitherto been underrepresented in academic research.

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Appendix: Summary in German / Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht den Einfluss der wissenschaftlichen Entdeckungen und Theorien des Geologen Charles Lyell und des Biologen Charles Darwin auf die Nonsensliteratur der Autoren Edward Lear und Lewis Carroll. Nach einer einführenden Präsentation der Auswirkungen des diesbezüglichen naturwissenschaftlichen Fortschritts des 19. Jahrhunderts auf die viktorianische Gesellschaft – genauer gesagt auf ihre wissenschaftliche Diskursgemeinschaft, ihre spirituellen und moralischen Überzeugungen, ihre sozialen Strukturen sowie ihre Literatur im Allgemeinen – widmet sie sich ihrem Schwerpunkt der Limerick-Gedichte von Lear sowie der Romane *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* und *Through the Looking-Glass* von Carroll. Hierbei beschreibt sie am Beispiel diverser Gedichte und Passagen den satirischen Umgang der beiden Nonsensautoren mit der Rolle des Menschen in der Tierwelt und des Individuums innerhalb seiner Gemeinschaft, sowie ihre Darstellung menschlicher Regelsysteme und Logik als fehlbar. Sie zeigt auf, dass beide Autoren – wenngleich mit unterschiedlichen Untertönen – nicht nur die Selbstverständlichkeit verlachen, mit der sich Viktorianer hierarchisch über andere Wesen stellten, sondern auch ihre Abhängigkeit von und ihr blindes Vertrauen in arbiträre Strukturen. Abschließend hebt sie die formell jeweils einheitliche grammatikalische und literarische Struktur der untersuchten Werke hervor und plädiert, diese als Zugeständnis an den menschlichen Wunsch nach Stabilität einer von erschütternden Paradigmenwechseln zutiefst verunsicherten Gesellschaft zu verstehen.