THE DECONSTRUCTION OF LANGUAGE IN LEWIS CARROLL'S *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND*

Adelina RĂU
PhD Student, "Ovidius" University of Constanța

Abstract: *Starting from the premise that postmodernism is a state of mind rather than a precise cultural period, this paper provides a lingustic deconstructive analysis of Lewis Carroll's* Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The language used in the most important scenes are analyzed employing not only Wittgenstein's and Sausurre's deconstructive theories but also other postmodern concepts appeared long after Carroll's novel, which makes the inquiry realatively audacious. Language becomes intrumental in costruing aspects of the protagonist's identity, including the way in which the narrator equipped Alice with a certain kind of thinking. The double-coded narrative reflected both at the textual and identitary level are merged into one, thus augmenting the fluid character of the fictional text; Lewis Carroll manipulates both her appearance and musings in a playful and paradoxical manner. The free-floating signifiers and the language puns contribute to the blurring of the various boundaries within the text and to the arbitrariness with which the story unfolds.*

Keywords: *postmodernism; fluidity; language; code; deconstructive; arbitrariness; floating signifiers*

Ever since the beginning of the first chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll introduces us to the thoughts of his protagonist, Alice: "'What is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations'?" (Carroll 37). Alice is still a child and her world revolves around images and interactions. Her intense contemplation shifts from the intellectual area to the practical one such as whether "the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies" (Carroll 37). However, the stability of her existential questions will be soon invaded by the first fantastic character of Wonderland that she is going to meet: the White Rabbit. As soon as he steps into the narrative, the White Rabbit acts like a trigger for all that is about to unfold. The character is reminiscent of the magical world, of the old "hat-trick,"[1] and thus the White Rabbit could serve to hint that the whole narrative, or perhaps fiction at large, is a magic number or an illusion.

In an essay published by Lewis Carroll to help some theatre directors who intended to stage *Alice in Wonderland*, he wrote:

> And the White Rabbit, what of him? Was he framed on the "Alice" lines, or meant as a contrast? As a contrast, distinctly. For her "youth," "audacity," "vigour," and "swift directness of purpose," read "elderly," "timid," "feeble," and "nervously shilly-shallying," and you will get something of what I meant him to be. I think the White Rabbit should wear spectacles. I am sure his voice should quaver, and his knees quiver, and his whole air suggest a total inability to say "Bo" to a goose! (Dodgson 340)

The White Rabbit is a fragment of Wonderland. He lures Alice into the fantastic world and contaminates her with uncertainty. Undoubtedly, the White Rabbit as the product of a nonsensiacal world should be audacious, vigorous and have a "swift directness of purpose," because he is the older one, not Alice. However, she starts to adopt the White Rabbit's lack of direction, concentration and sense of self, all being mirrored in the girl's absurd ponderings, language and the entire narrative. The play upon the characters, their contrastive, absurd way of being is used as a starting point for the play upon words and (fictive and fictitious) worlds.

[1] The earliest magician to pull a rabbit out of a hat is said to have been Louis Comte, in 1814, though this is also attributed to the much later John Henry Anderson.

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Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is at its core a double-coded narrative, which is reflected both at a textual and at an identitary level. On the one hand, the story is an adventure narrative comparable to the fairy-tale where various encounters between incompatible characters take place (humans with animals, royalty with middle-class people). On the other hand, the game of cards generates the fictional world and allows for the arbitrariness with which the story unfolds. Both codes, the narrative and the game, are merged into one, which augments the fluid character of the fictional text. The transition from one code to another is made with the aid of free-floating signifiers and language puns which contribute to the undermining or blurring of the boundaries, including the social ones such as: the commoners (as Alice is) and the aristocrats (the queen and duchess). Apart from the identity issue which permits *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to be viewed from a postmodern angle, language is another facet of the story worth treating from a postmodern perspective. All twelve chapters represent a long series of language games that illustrate the postmodern concept of floating signifiers and can breed nonsense by literalizing various idioms or manipulating words as such.

As I hope to demonstrate, Lewis Carroll uses the game as more than an explicit leitmotif: the game provides the structuring principle, i.e. the underpinning model for the Alice texts. Taking into consideration the fact that postmodernism focuses mainly on arbitrariness, game, randomness, amalgam and play, the Alice texts can rightly be construed as precursors of certain postmodern practices which operate in a ludic vein. Since the early Alice text bristles with this kind of "games," I find it necessary to quote Wittgenstein's notion of language game:

> We can also think of the whole process of using words in as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game. And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. Think of certain uses that are made of words in games like ring-a-ring-a-roses. I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a "language-game." (Wittgenstein 8e 43)

Lewis Carroll, under his real name Charles Dodgson, was a mathematician and logician who created games of logic. He not only created but published in this direction. To him, the simple act of writing becomes a game. This may be due to the fact that his fiction was created for and dedicated to children. However, Carroll uses the game as a structuring leitmotif for both of Alice texts: he uses the game at the level of letters, words, and sentences. Moreover, he combines the elements specific to the game of cards and the game of chess. Thus, the concept of game is applicable at once at the level of language, at the level of the text and at the level of the game itself. Carroll creates a sort of bricolage: the pages become the physical medium where, little by little, the letters, the words, the symbols and numbers are meticulously pasted. The author, making use of these linguistic instruments, blurs several boundaries, such as the one between language and game, concrete and abstract, human and animal, dream and reality, high class (royalty) and middle class, presence and absence. These contradictions are accentuated through visual sequences throughout the text, which anticipate Derrida's concept of sign.

In Gayatri Spivak's words summarising one of the major concepts of Derrida's *De Grammatologie*, "such is the strange 'being' of the sign: half of it always 'not there' and the other half always 'not that.' The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent" (Spivak 18). Derrida's statement about the sign, half of which is always not there, can describe not only the way Carroll creates his language but also reflects the way he creates Alice, especially in *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice becomes a "sign," in Derrida's sense: either she is there, or she is not; actually, she herself does not know if she is

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there anymore or even who she is. The signifier "Alice" does not point to "her" (the girl) anymore. This explains why her identity and her language changes as she moves further within Wonderland. What is happening in Wonderland is a continual metamorphosis, both of Alice and of the universe surrounding her, which recalls yet another concept of Derrida's, the *freeplay of signs*:

> Sign will always lead to sign, one substituting the other (playfully, since "sign" is "under erasure") as signifier and signified in turn. Indeed, the notion of play is important here. Knowledge is not a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found. It is rather the field "of *freeplay*," that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble. (ED 423, SC 260) (Spivak 20; original emphasis)

Through language, Carroll stages a ludic universe, a world of play and game where every sign leads to another sign and so on and so forth; the language is recycled into new patterns of utilization, following Antoine Lavoisier's principle in chemistry where nothing is lost, everything is transformed. The author not only anticipates postmodernism, but he may be considered a postmodernist avant la lettre.

Carroll also demonstrates what Derrida calls the deconstruction of language, or at least some aspects of his theory. To clarify this, I shall proceed from the definition of the sign as cited by Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, from the *Histoire de la langue universelle*. The sign is:

> "Anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, this intepretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum" ... If the series of successive interpretants comes to an end, the sign is thereby rendered imperfect, at least. (Derrida 141)

Derrida expands on this notion of free play later in the text while he describes "the absence of the transcendental signified as limitless of play" which results in "the destruction of ontotheology and the metaphysics of presence" (Derrida 50). Further he adds: "one must think of writing as a game within language […] this play, thought as absence of the transcendental signified, is not a play in the world, as it has always been defined" (50); rather,

> to think play radically the ontological and transcendental problematics must first be seriously exhausted; the question of the meaning of being, the being of the entity and of the transcendental origin of the world – of the worldness of the world – must be patiently and rigorously worked through […] It is therefore the game of the world that must be first thought; before attempting to understand all the forms of play in the world. (Derrida 50)

Thus, in a way, Derrida suggests that first one has to understand the world, its universe, and only after that should the forms of the "play" that there are in the universe be analyzed. But, taking into consideration that the universe is infinite, how much time should the analysis of the "play" take? It would be too difficult, since everything is in a perpetual movement. Derrida's view of the free play of sign and therefore of meaning is also reflected in the text and not only at the level of words, signs, signifiers and symbols, but also at the overall textual level, in the way in which the imagery and characters are constructed and in the way the story unfolds, in how the scenes are linked to one another.

Moreover, language is also used in the process of blurring the traditional boundaries both at a linguistic and textual level. Last but not least, self-conscious language manipulation influences and helps Alice to find her way in, through, and out of Wonderland. The first chapter

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of the book shows Alice follow the White Rabbit and jump after him "down the Rabbit hole." "The White Rabbit" himself is a metaphor standing for time and for the notion of "novelty" kindling Alice's imagination and curiosity. The White Rabbit can be considered the character who "hooks" the reader into the story. As Alice follows him and jumps after him into the hole, throughout her falling, she instantly experiences trouble both with her knowledge of the world (since she feels it necessary to check everything she has learned, whether mathematics or geography) and with language. She calculates that she will land in the Land of "Antipathies"; what she actually means by the malapropism is the "Antipodes" and not the "Antipathies." As she is plunging deeper into the rabbit hole (which seems bottomless), her language issues are becoming more and more nonsensical:

> And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to herself, in a dreamy sort of way, "Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?" and sometimes, "Do bats eat cats?" for, you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't much matter which way she put it. She felt that she was dozing off, and had just begun to dream that she was walking hand in hand with Dinah, and was saying to her very earnestly, "Now, Dinah, tell me the truth: did you ever eat a bat?" (Carroll 39–40)

The letters start "to float," changing their place within the words, and "it didn't much matter which way she put it" anyway because, as the reader will find out at the beginning of the second chapter, Alice is "so much surprised" by everything happening to her "that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English" (44) and so she utters "Curiouser and curiouser!" – a word whose morphology flouts grammar rules. It is not the only time this kind of wordplay has appeared in Carroll's text. In the fifth chapter, when the Cheshire Cat asks Alice what has become of the Duchess' baby, she says it "turned into a fig"; not understanding the answer, the Cheshire Cat asks again "Did you say pig, or fig?" (Carroll 88). Apart from the playfulness of the letters and words, there is the play with meanings using the homophones as a device. For instance, when the Mouse warns Alice that his history is a sad and long tale, Alice misunderstands it to be a "tail," and Carroll represents the two concepts by graphically figuring the Mouse's tale as a tail:

> "but why do you call it sad?" And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:



(Carroll 56)

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Lewis Carroll literalizes various phrases. For example, when Alice grows up exceedingly much, Alice starts weeping bitterly until she realises her tears have grown into a "pool." Ironically, when she grows small again she almost drowns in her own tears:

> "You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Alice, "a great girl like you," (she might well say this,) "to go on crying in this way! Stop this moment, I tell you!" But she went on all the same, shedding gallons of tears, until there was a large pool all round her, about four inches deep and reaching half down the hall. (Carroll 44)
> "for I never was so small as this before, never! And I declare it's too bad, that it is!" As she said these words her foot slipped, and in another moment, splash! she was up to her chin in salt water. Her first idea was that she had somehow fallen into the sea […] However, she soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high. (Carroll 49)

The first social interactions Alice has in Wonderland offer a "pool" of opportunities for linguistic play and meta-communicative endeavors. As Alice was floating in her own "pool of tears" she notices that she was not alone anymore as "the pool was getting quite crowded with the birds and animals that had fallen into it: there was a Duck and a Dodo, a Lory and an Eaglet, and several other curious creatures. Alice led the way, and the whole party swam to the shore" (Carroll 51). First, she approaches the Mouse, in English. Not getting any answer, she thinks that he does not speak English, but is actually "a French mouse come over with William the conqueror" (50), so she addresses him the second time in French: "'Où est ma chatte?' which was the first sentence in her French-lesson book" (50), an ironical (and vexing) question. Realizing the blunder she has committed, she immediately apologizes.

In the third chapter, after getting out of the "salted sea" Alice made by crying, the "queer looking party" that has gathered and got wet as well are concerned with how to dry themselves. At first, the Mouse thinks that telling "the driest thing he knows" will make everyone dry: "'Sit down, all of you, and listen to me! I'll soon make you dry enough!' […] 'Ahem!' said the Mouse with an important air, 'are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know'" (Carroll 53). Consulting Alice, the mouse finds out that his tentative has failed so the Dodo bird comes up with a new idea, "a caucus race":

> "How are you getting on now, my dear?" it continued, turning to Alice as it spoke. "As wet as ever," said Alice in a melancholy tone: "it doesn't seem to dry me at all." "In that case," said the Dodo solemnly, rising to its feet, "I move that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies –" […]
> "What I was going to say," said the Dodo in an offended tone, "was, that the best thing to get us dry would be a Caucus-race."
> "What is a Caucus-race?" said Alice; "Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it." (And as you might like to try the thing yourself, some winter day, I will tell you how the Dodo managed it.)
> First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, ("he exact shape doesn't matter," it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no "One, two, three, and away," but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. (Carroll 53–4)

As far as the "caucus race" is concerned, the signifier does not "match" the signified. The Oxford Dictionary online defines a "caucus" as:

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> 1. a meeting at which local members of a political party register their preference among candidates running for office or select delegates to attend a convention. 2. 2.1 A conference of members of a legislative body who belong to a particular party or faction. The members of a legislative body who belong to a particular party or faction, considered as a group. 2.2. An informal group composed of legislators who have shared concerns or interests. A group within an organization or political party which meets independently to discuss strategy or tactics. (Oxford Dictionaries.com, s.v. "caucus")

Lewis Carroll's scene therefore consists of a "race" of wordplays, ironies and parody pointing to the political activity of the time. As can be noticed from these episodes, Alice uses language to gradually start interacting with the creatures in Wonderland. The scene where all the creatures gather with Alice in the same "pool of tears" is symbolical since it can be read as a metaphor of fluidity. On the one hand it points to the fluidity of Alice's own identity/character and on the other hand it points to the fluidity of all the other layers of the text, especially to the social one since, in this case, Alice finds herself floating together with almost all animal kingdoms, from the furred creatures, to the feathered ones or even to crustaceans. As she goes further in Wonderland, Alice will "climb up" the social and evolutionist "ladder," finding herself in the situation of interacting with a cook, a duchess, a cat, a Caterpillar and the Queen of Hearts herself.

At the end of the sixth chapter the Cheshire Cat shows up again. Her "logic" is completely nonsensical. From this moment on she becomes a kind of adviser for Alice and she seems to show up only when Alice finds herself in difficult situations. According to the Cat's mixed up logic, Wonderland is a place where only mad people live.

> "Oh, you can't help that," "we're all mad here. I'm mad. said the Cat: You're mad."
> "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."
> "I call it purring, not growling," said Alice.
> "Call it what you like," said the Cat.
> "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
> "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." (Carroll 78)

In the Cheshire Cat's conception, she is mad because dogs "growl" when they are mad and wave their tail when they are angry while cats are doing the opposite. The argument strikes Alice as hardly convincing:

> Alice didn't think that proved it at all; however, she 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." (Carroll 88)

Arguably, the dialogue refers to a logical argument – a topic dear to Dodgson and focused on other texts signed Lewis Carroll – which, in itself, is capable to prove its own veracity, yet the author imputes logical acumen precisely to a character, Alice, whose "social" features and prior actions are not meant to give her much credence. She is a young middle-class girl – hence a member of an age group and gender regarded as unreliable – whose educational

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accomplishments and memory become disputable to herself in the first place, at least during her unbelievable adventures in Wonderland.

The text's (and its characters') self-consciousness about the unstable logical lineaments of Wonderland anticipates the postmodern philosophical and artistic concern with the limits of logical arguments, understanding and, generally, intelligibility as being illusorily stable. In fact, the very criteria for intelligibility, argumentative coherence and meaningfulness are questioned when the Cheshire Cat makes the non-Cartesian move to offer another "self/ego" as the yardstick of "normality," which here is, ironically, the reputed enemy of the philosopher-cat.

In the next scene, Alice meets another group of hilarious characters, the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse, having a never-ending tea-party. The March Hare's remark hints to the fact that Alice is not invited to their party, and maybe not even to Wonderland, but she fights to fit in, untangling and deconstructing the meanings of everything that she hears. "'No room! No room!' they cried when they saw Alice coming. 'There's plenty of room!' said Alice indignantly. […] 'It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited,' said the March Hare" (Carroll 91). The exchange, especially the March Hare's retort is anything but civil and befitting the social context, five o'clock tea, i.e., a time for guest entertaining, here emphatically identified as a tea-party from the very chapter title. Nor is their anxious deterrent to the unwelcome guest, Alice, typical of social English intercourse either. With the character's mad rejection of Alice, Lewis Carroll questions the underside of social conventions of decorum and politeness as a socially sanctioned form of hypocrisy or, in Derridean terms, of social slipperiness between the signifier (here: five o'clock tea hospitality) and the signified ("actual" feelings about guest entertaining).

As the episode unfolds, Alice engages in a challenging discussion with the March Hare about meaning and logic, starting from the Mad Hatter's riddle, "Why does a raven look like a writing desk?," whose answer Alice believes she could guess. As the Wonderland's characters try to "get her" with their trick questions, the March Hare and the Dormouse start a series of wordplays:

> "Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.
> "Exactly so," said Alice.
> "Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
> "I do", Alice hastily replied; "at least – at least I mean what I say – that's the same thing you know."
> "Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. (Carroll 91)

The exchange of meaning anticipates, if in reverse, Humpty-Dumpty's take on the semantic arbitrariness of words, in *Through the Looking Glass*, and introduces a highly debated topic as much in philosophy (ever since Plato's *Cratylus*) as in linguistics, especially ever since Saussure:

> "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"
> "You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"
> "You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, who seemed to be talking in his sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!" (Carroll 91–2)

In this exchange the slipperiness of the social "sign" (i.e. polite interaction) is shifted to refer to the linguistic sign, these syntactic rules of meaning-making in English due to its sparse

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inflexion. Unlike in languages like Latin, whose inflexion makes syntax and hence meaning clear, in English the position of a word is paramount to its meaning in the utterance, and so are syntactic roles at sentence level. Ironically, precisely this apparent "relaxation" of word order imposes strict rules of logical argumentation too so that English syntax and logic work in tandem. Again, such linguistic, logical self-awareness renders the text a precursor of postmodern thought on the inherent instability of meaning as encoded linguistically.

The discussion at the Mad Tea Party goes as far as to consider that Time is "a he" when Alice suggests that they should stop wasting time asking riddles with no answers. "'If you knew Time as well as I do,' said the Hatter, 'you wouldn't talk about wasting it. It's him'" (Carroll 93). Time is a recurrent concept in the book starting with the White Rabbit who is permanently hurrying, which suggests the ephemeral character and the rapidity with which time is passing. Later, Time is personified and given a gender. Trying to fit in the conversation, Alice admits not having talked to Time but finds a correspondent from her experiences and said that she knows she has to "beat time" when she learns music. The Hatter takes literally what Alice says and comes to the conclusion that Time does not speak to her because she is beating it, and he "won't stand beating." In this context, the reader witnesses a blurring of discursive genres: music, history and, perhaps, mythology. "Time" is perceived as a literalization of the music trope, to beat time, yet it is also personified. Carroll went as far back as to take the gender of "time," in his story, from Greek mythology: Chronos.[2]

> Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with the clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o'clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons: you'd only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling! Half-past one, time for dinner! (Carroll 93)

Supposedly, the Mad Hatter "killed Time" when he went to sing "Twinkle, twinkle, little bat," an obvious parody of the famous "Twinkle, twinkle little star." Since then "he [Time] won't do a thing I ask! It's always six o'clock now" (Carroll 94):

> A bright idea came into Alice's head. "Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?" she asked.
> "Yes, that's it," said the Hatter with a sigh: "It's always tea-time, and we've no time to wash the things between whiles."
> "Then you keep moving around, I suppose?" said Alice.
> "Exactly so," said the Hatter: "as the things get used up." (Carroll 95)

This image elicits a two-sided approach. On the one hand, it presents the tea-party as a metaphor of time and the clock with the characters moving from seat to seat just as the clockhands are moving on the clock face (dial). There are three characters at the table, and they all may stand for the three clock-hands: the hour, the minute and the second. On the other hand, Carroll creates a decaying reflection of time in a nonsensical world. The postmodern playful reflection on time and conventional strictures of thought and of social interactions is just about the corner. The image of time in this chapter aligns an erosion of naturally "ticking" time with the fundamental nonsense of Wonderland.

Moving on, the dormouse starts to tell a story about three little girls living at the bottom of a well, who fed on treacle and learnt how to draw:

[2] The classical image of Father Times is nevertheless complemented by that of Mother Nature.

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> "They were learning to draw," the Dormouse went on, yawning and rubbing its eyes, for it was getting very sleepy; "and they drew all manner of things – everything that begins with an M –"
> "Why with an M?" said Alice. "Why not?" said the March Hare. Alice was silent […]
> "– that begins with an M, such as mousetraps, and the moon, and memory, and muchness – you know you say things are 'much of a muchness' – did you ever see such a thing as a drawing of a muchness?" (Carroll 97)

Again, Lewis Carroll plays with letters and words to create nonsense and humor pointing to a possible graphic representation of an abstract term such as "muchness."

Unsurprisingly, the absurd take on words points to the arbitrariness of language already signalled by Ferdinand de Saussure and commented on philosophically by Jacques Derrida. Like in Borges's encyclopedia, in the Dormouse's list, M-words juxtapose ordinary occurrences (for example: "mousetraps") with fanciful ones ("muchness") with a philosophical ring to them for respectability. In having the Dormouse enjoin Alice to contemplate the prospect of seeing (witnessing, as well as visualizing) the "drawing of a muchness," Lewis Carroll plays – in would-be postmodern vein – with the capacity of thought and language to represent the abstract (much > muchness) as quantifiable, including grammatically mass/countable noun: "a muchness."

Getting extremely confused Alice walks away from the party. Towards the end of the chapter, Alice is given a second chance to do the things right and to find her way into the garden:

> Once more she found herself in the long hall, and close to the little glass table. "Now, I'll manage better this time," she said to herself, and began by taking the little golden key, and unlocking the door that led into the garden. Then she went to work nibbling at the mushroom (she had kept a piece of it in her pocket) till she was about a foot high: then she walked down the little passage: and then – she found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flowerbeds and the cool fountains. (Carrol 98)

Up to this point, Alice has acquired experience and interacted with some of the most important creatures from Wonderland. She has led a war of words and fought her way through her many adventures and challenges. At this moment in the narrative, the author seems to give Alice the chance to go back in time and "manage" her adventure "better this time." Time can be warped at will, it appears, even in science-fiction and much postmodern art (though not exclusively). Alice arrives at last in the beautiful garden. Just like her body which has undergone countless augmentations and reductions, a phenomenon specific to twenty-first computerized manipulation, the narrative, as well, is redone, repeated, but this time with a more experienced version of Alice who passes lightly through the places she has already been to and takes only the necessary things that will help her later.

Chapter eight finds Alice in the beautiful garden rife in floating signifiers, where the gardeners are painting the white roses red, and the "balls" and "mallets" are not at all "balls" and "mallets" but living hedgehogs and flamingoes. Thus, the words do not account for the objects they represent, in a scene which, in abstract terms, anticipates Derrida's view on language. Even the frightening Queen of Hearts loses her authority in front of Alice, at least, when the Queen yells "Off with her head!" Alice retorts calmly: "Nonsense!," thus indicating that her character has changed since the beginning of the story. The frightened schoolgirl has metamorphosed into a confident young lady who has the courage to talk back to the Queen.

The Queen of Hearts herself is a caricature whose obsessive repetition of the order "Off with her head!" becomes her logo and leitmotif of the final moments of the story. She has repeated the sentence so often that it has lost its edge and become a catch-phrase. Later, the

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readers are informed that actually the Queen has never beheaded anyone, as the Gryphon says: "It's all her fancy that they never execute nobody you know" (Carroll 114). What Austin classifies as a performative ("Off with her head!"), in Wonderland works rather as a linguistic cliché capable only to identify a sanguinary, power-obsessed Queen.

Chapter nine starts with a pleasant reencounter between Alice and the Duchess, who is in an agreeable temper. Alice thought that "the pepper made her savage when they met in the kitchen":

> "When I'm a Duchess," she said to herself, (not in a very hopeful tone though), "I won't have any pepper in my kitchen at all. Soup does very well without – Maybe it's always pepper that makes people hot-tempered," she went on, very much pleased at having found out a new kind of rule, "and vinegar that makes them sour and chamomile that makes them bitter – and – and barley-sugar and such things that make children sweet-tempered. I only wish people knew that: then they wouldn't be so stingy about it, you know–" (Carroll 109)

Again, Carroll plays with the meaning of words and literalizes expressions such as "sweet" about persons in a ludic reconfiguration of the ancient humoral theory of body and character which refers to personality and health alike in terms of the balance of body humors as affected by one's eating habits.

In her discussion with Alice, the Duchess provides one of the most significant and symbolic sayings in the story, "Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves" (Carroll 110), which summarizes in a sentence the whole idea of Carroll's playing with words along his text:

> "and the moral of that is – '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.'" (Carrol 111)

The Duchess's apophthegmatic remark as stated above explains again the nonsense that Carroll created in *Alice in Wonderland*: playfulness, parody, humor, misunderstanding, appearance versus essence, what things appear to be versus what they really are, imagination and contradiction, convention vs arbitrariness. The peak of chapter nine's nonsense is reached by the Mock Turtle's account of the subject he studied when he went to school in the sea:

> "What was that?" enquired Alice.
> "Reeling and Writhing, of course, to begin with," the Mock Turtle replied: "and then the different branches of Arithmetic – Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision." […]
> "Well, there was Mystery," the Mock Turtle replied, counting off the subjects on his flappers, – "Mystery, ancient and modern, with Seaography: then Drawling – the Drawling-master was an old conger-eel, that used to come once a week: he taught us Drawling, Stretching, and Fainting in Coils." […]
> "I never went to him," the Mock Turtle said with a sigh: "he taught Laughing and Grief, they used to say." (Carroll 116–17)

"Reeling and Writhing" are graphic puns which stand for "reading and writing"; "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification and Derision" stand for "addition, deduction, multiplication and division"; "Drawling, Stretching and Fainting" may stand for "drawing, sketching and painting

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in oil," and "Laughing and Grief" stand for Latin and Greek. The Mock Turtle's ostensible malapropisms indicate Lewis Carroll's persistent and systematic concern with the arbitrariness of language, which the Oxford mathematician and logician shared with philosophers and linguists. However, such concern may equally well owe to students' in-jokes which "uglify" school subjects and notions which they dislike. "And how many hours a day did you do lessons?" said Alice, in a hurry to change the subject.

> "Ten hours the first day," said the Mock Turtle: "nine the next, and so on." "What a curious plan!" exclaimed Alice.
> "That's the reason they're called lessons," the Gryphon remarked: "because they lessen from day to day."
> This was quite a new idea to Alice, and she thought it over a little before she made her next remark. "Then the eleventh day must have been a holiday?"
> "Of course it was," said the Mock Turtle. (Carroll 117)

Carroll's logic explains that a "lesson" is called thus because it lessens with every day, or at least so it happens in Wonderland. Again, linguistic and social conventions are turned upside-down to reveal their fundamental arbitrariness.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland encompasses all the characteristic of a postmodern artwork. Lewis Carroll has created the perfect medium where the codes juxtapose and blur, where nonsense prevails and the games have no discernable rules. The novel's double-coded narrative is reflected both at a textual and at an identitary level. The stories are adventure narratives comparable to the fairy-tale, where various encounters between "incompatible" characters take place (humans with animals, royalty with middle-class people). The game of cards generates the fictional world and allows for the arbitrariness with which both stories unfold. The narrative and the game codes merge, which augments the fluid character of the fictional text and of its characters. The transition between one code to another is made with the aid of free-floating signifiers and language-puns, which contribute to the undermining and blurring of the boundaries, including the social and narrative ones. Arguably, Lewis Carroll has created postmodern sequences and imagery by playing with words: the topsy-turvy world of Alice's nonsensical ponderings, the blurring of the fictive reality and the dream, and the fantastic worlds of Alice's imagination where again the boundaries between social classes are porous, so that she is able to talk both with a rabbit and the Queen herself.

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