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## Satire and Synthesis: Parody and Satire of Victorian Education in the Works of Lewis Carroll

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SATIRE AND SYNTHESIS: PARODY AND SATIRE OF VICTORIAN EDUCATION  
IN THE WORKS OF LEWIS CARROLL

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

English Literature

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by

Cameron David Sedlacek

May 2016

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

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## ABSTRACT

# SATIRE AND SYNTHESIS: PARODY AND SATIRE OF VICTORIAN EDUCATION IN THE WORKS OF LEWIS CARROLL

by

Cameron David Sedlacek

March 2016

Education is an integral part of any society. Victorian England saw drastic reform in the method of childhood education, shifting from religious to secular forms of rote memorization. An analysis of the works of Lewis Carroll reveals significant instances of parody, pastiche, and satire on these styles of education and their corresponding reform. Unlike traditional satire, however, Lewis Carroll's satire does not simply criticize these targets, but utilizes a strategy of synthesis to illustrate strengths and weaknesses of various conflicting educational ideologies and to suggest ways of adopting methods from all available options.

**Keywords:** Victorian; Lewis Carroll; education; religion; nonsense; parody; satire

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	1
	The Life of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.....	1
	The Claim of This Thesis.....	2
	Scholarship on Lewis Carroll.....	4
II	INTRODUCTION TO AND DEFINITION OF NONSENSE.....	16
	The Paradox of Nonsense.....	31
	Nonsense in Relation to Education .....	34
	Parody and Satire in Nonsense.....	41
III	EDUCATION IN THE WORKS OF LEWIS CARROLL.....	47
	Wisdom in Wonderland .....	63
IV	LEWIS CARROLL AND SATIRE OF VICTORIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION .....	72
V	LEWIS CARROLL AND SATIRE OF CLASSROOM EDUCATION ....	89
VI	THE INTERACTIVE NATURE OF NONSENSE AND EDUCATION .....	111
	WORKS CITED .....	115

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### The Life of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson

On July 4, 1862, Charles Dodgson made a fateful journey with Alice, Lorina, and Edith Liddell, the three daughters of Henry Liddell, the Dean of Christ Church College, Oxford. In an entry in his diary on this day, Dodgson writes, “I made an expedition *up* the river to Godstow with the three Liddells . . . [o]n which occasion I told them the fairy-tale of ‘Alice’s Adventures Underground,’ which I undertook to write out for Alice” (qtd. Collingwood 93-94). *Alice’s Adventures Underground* would, of course, become *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Despite its origin in a very specific event, this story has become one of the most far-reaching and iconic children’s tales in the English language.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, perhaps better known by the penname Lewis Carroll,<sup>1</sup> was born on January 27, 1832, in the town of Daresbury. He was the third of what would be eleven children, and the oldest son. Dodgson’s father, also named Charles Dodgson, was incumbent of the parish of Daresbury, and this connection to religion remained with the younger Charles throughout his lifetime. In 1843, the elder Charles was appointed Archdeacon of Richmond, and the Dodgson family relocated to the Rectory at Croft. The Rectory provided young Charles with the opportunity to explore his role as educator and writer, where he took it upon himself, as the oldest male child, to entertain his ten siblings. Dodgson wrote extensively while living at the Rectory,

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis Carroll is derived from Dodgson’s Christian names, Charles Lutwidge, Latinized, reversed, and re-rendered into English (Gasson xix).

producing plays that he performed in a marionette theatre he constructed himself and at least eight periodicals, of which Charles was the editor and to which the rest of the Dodgson family contributed. Some of Dodgson's earliest literary works emerged from this setting, in the form of periodicals written by and for members of the Dodgson family. He used his large family as an audience for his literary works; this young, religious audience informs the writing style that made Dodgson, under his penname Lewis Carroll, famous. Of these collections, *The Rectory Umbrella* and *Mischmasch* are the most significant; indeed, *Mischmasch* contains an early version of the Jabberwocky poem from *Through the Looking-Glass*, complete with definitions for Carroll's coined words.

In 1850, Dodgson matriculated at Christ Church College, Oxford. He would remain at Christ Church until his death, forty-seven years later. In 1852, he was made a Student, the Oxford equivalent of a Lecturer or Fellow, and in 1855, he was made a "Master of the House," which granted him all the privileges of a Master of Arts at Christ Church College.<sup>2</sup>

### The Claim of This Thesis

Dodgson's decision to obey some of the religious regulations required of him and ignore others, reflects a central aspect of the philosophy of Lewis Carroll: synthesis. My goal in this thesis is to show how Carroll frequently utilizes parody and satire, not typically, i.e. primarily as forms of criticism and attack, but rather as tools to suggest synthesis, and through synthesis improvement, in and for education. Much of this synthesis is made apparent through the use of nonsense,<sup>3</sup> which is not a lack of sense but

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed explanation of Dodgson's Studentship, see Chapter IV of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> For an extensive explanation of the genre of nonsense, see Chapter II of this thesis.

rather a call for response, demanding participation on the part of the reader in order to create sense. Carroll uses these tools to reconcile figures, institutions, and modes of thought traditionally believed, in Victorian England, to be in opposition. For example, much of his parody and satire focus on educational institutions. This mockery, nevertheless, provides readers with an alternative form of education, one based on justification and understanding, rather than on the standard Victorian forms of instruction, based on rote learning and memorization. Carroll extensively parodies religious songs, poems, and nursery rhymes in both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* (which I hereafter collectively refer to as the *Wonderland* texts). Carroll does not intend to criticize religion itself through his parodies (Carroll considered himself a Christian), but rather to suggest a way of adapting the rigid, adult world of religion to the mind of a child in ways that benefit children. Similarly, he parodies memorization and rote learning not to condemn the dominant styles of Victorian education directly, but rather to expose weaknesses in these forms of education and to provide alternatives that are more suitable and beneficial to children and to the educational system of Victorian England.

In essence, the *Wonderland* texts function as conduct books, while at the same time parodying and satirizing the Victorian conduct book. This comic, “nonsensical” style also engages readers in a way that reconciles the young mind of the original audience with the adult mind of the author. Carroll wrote of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* that “[t]he why of this book cannot, and need not, be put into words. Those for whom a child's mind is a sealed book, and who see no divinity in a child's smile

would read such words in vain; while for anyone who has ever loved one true child, no words are needed” (qtd. in Woollcott 8). Thus, the content of the *Wonderland* texts is not without sense, as may first appear to an adult readership, but a combination of education, imagination, parody, satire, and reference that works to suggest multiple new methods of education for Victorian children. These methods provide explanation of answers, relate new concepts to familiar concepts, and de-emphasize the rote learning and memorization that dominated Victorian religious and secular institutions.

#### Scholarship on Lewis Carroll

Since its original publication in 1865, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* has been a source of near-constant scholarship. In 1971, Robert Phillips compiled an anthology of Carrollian scholarship, *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll’s Dreamchild as Seen through the Critics’ Looking-Glasses*. The variety of essays anthologized in this text exemplifies Carrollian scholarship in the hundred years after the publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Ranging from biographical and historical evaluations of both Carroll and the texts to essays on philosophy, psychoanalysis, parody and satire, and even psychedelic interpretations, most of these essays deal, in some way, with the author’s connection to his work. However, Donald Rackin’s “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night” challenges this biographical focus.

First published in 1966, and winning the *PMLA* essay prize for that year, Rackin’s article begins by addressing a central aspect of Carrollian studies Rackin finds problematic: the debate regarding the connection between *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and its author and Victorian English culture:

In the century now passed since the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, scores of critical studies have attempted to account for the fascination the book holds for adult readers. Although some of these investigations offer provocative insights, most of them treat Carroll in specialized modes inaccessible to the majority of readers, and they fail to view *Alice* as a complete and organic work of art. Hardly a single important critique has been written of *Alice* as a self-contained fiction, distinct from *Through the Looking-Glass* and all other imaginative pieces by Carroll. (391)

Rackin believes that the majority of Carrollian scholarship assumes the text to be deeply interwoven with the life of the author and with Victorian culture. As a result, the focus of such scholarship tends to be on the author and his relationship with his culture, rather than on the text itself. Rackin believes that the lack of focus on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a single text detracts from its value as a work of art, and that this lack of focus creates other problems:

Critics also tend to confuse Charles Dodgson the man with Lewis Carroll the author; this tends to lead to distorted readings of *Alice* that depend too heavily on the fact, say, that Dodgson was an Oxford don, or a mathematician, or a highly eccentric Victorian gentleman with curious pathological tendencies. The results are often analyses which fail to explain the total work's undeniable impact on the modern lay reader unschooled in Victorian political and social history, theoretical

mathematics, symbolic logic, or Freudian psychology. It seems time, then, that *Alice* be treated for what it most certainly is—a book of major and permanent importance in the tradition of English fiction, a work that still pertains directly to the experience of the unspecialized reader, and one that exemplifies the profound questioning of reality which characterizes the mainstream of nineteenth-century English literature. (391-92)

Rackin abandons the Carrollian tendency to attempt to explain the power of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by explaining the author and instead uses the text itself to explain its legacy. His focus on *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a single text, isolated from historical and biographical contexts, marked a renewal in the debate over the role of the authorial presence in text. His work has been used by Carrollian scholars and educators as a method for a variety of purposes and has had a lasting impact on Carrollian scholarship.

Rackin again contributed to *Wonderland* studies in 1976 with “Laughing and Grief: What’s So Funny About *Alice in Wonderland*?” As with his previous essay, Rackin reiterates his intent to treat *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as its own individual text, separate from the author and from *Through the Looking-Glass*. However, he devotes a significant portion of this essay to his belief that, while adults find this book funny, many children find it frightening. A significant portion of this horror, according to Rackin, stems from the illustrations; these often deal with polarities: “sense vs. nonsense, consciousness vs. unconsciousness, waking vs. dreaming, reality vs. fantasy, adult vs. child, narrator vs. protagonist, teller vs. doer, delight vs. fear, order vs. chaos, humor vs.

wit, and laughter vs. tears” (15). *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* often reverses these polarities or demolishes them altogether, either by adding additional options to the binary pairs, which is often why such material is described as nonsense, or by blurring the boundaries between them, thus illustrating Carroll’s strategy of synthesis. This abandonment of binary oppositions is precisely what Carroll does in his own work in order to provide an improved educational foundation for his child readers.

Following Rackin’s work in the 1960s and 70s, many Carrollian scholars focused less on Charles Dodgson the author and more on the *Wonderland* texts’ connection to their audience. In 1982, Nina Auerbach published “Falling Alice, Fallen Women, and Victorian Dream Children,” in which she adopts a similar stance to Rackin’s. She begins her essay by stating:

The prosaic but strangely haunting Alice we think we know was many Alices from her inception. . . . [t]he child of the text, imperturbably civilized yet uncannily adaptable, is still another being from the inspirations and exegeses that surround her. Her aplomb makes her unrecognizable as a child, but her cool response to flamboyant violence makes her the ideal hostess for dreams and nightmares: effortlessly and instinctively, she turns madness to etiquette. (46)

Auerbach chooses to compare Alice to both the general Victorian child and to the Victorian woman, using Alice to evaluate widely held ideas and attitudes of Victorian England. Her claim that Alice turns madness to etiquette parallels Carroll’s use of nonsense to create education and, through education, knowledge.

In the same year, Mark Gabriele published “*Alice in Wonderland: Problem of Identity—Aggressive Content and Form Control*” in which he relies both on “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night” and on an earlier piece by Nina Auerbach, “Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child.” Gabriele describes how Alice’s actions in Wonderland reflect her desire to avoid being caught in a position of ignorance, especially in terms of social relationships: “Alice defines herself more from without than from within . . . [s]he avoids contact with her own feelings, and looks toward rules to preserve her from threat” (370). These rules that Alice so diligently attempts to follow were often taught to Victorian schoolchildren through rhymes, poems, or stories, and this didactic children’s literature is precisely what Lewis Carroll created with the original Wonderland story, though the *Wonderland* texts are critical of the type of rote learning that these rhymes embody. Responses to Rackin’s work were not always positive, however; in his 1986 essay “Alice as Self and Other: Experiences of Reading *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*,” Michael Steig criticizes Rackin’s dismissal of individual readers. He writes that “Rackin is too generalizing about reading in a way that does not take into account the variously disturbing and liberating aspects of the text for individual readers,” which, by extension, would include Alice Liddell, whose relationship with Lewis Carroll as storyteller mirrors that of student and teacher (180).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, Carrollian scholars developed a renewed interest in anthologized responses to the *Wonderland* texts. Due to the extensive response to “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night” in these anthologies, Donald Rackin revisited his old essays in 1991 when he published *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

*and Through the Looking Glass: Nonsense, Sense, and Meaning*. This book contains “*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland: An Underground Journey to the End of Night*,” based on “Alice’s Journey to the End of Night,” and “Laughing and Grief: What’s So Funny about the *Alices*?” based on “Laughing and Grief: What’s So Funny About *Alice in Wonderland*?” Though he maintains most of his previous arguments, Rackin includes both *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* in these analyses, while his earlier work focused solely on the former. He also discusses the original written tale, authored by Charles Dodgson for Alice Liddell and titled *Alice’s Adventures under Ground*, admitting that the personal relationship between the two is evident in this edition but that the general public is not familiar with *Under Ground*. Rackin, it appears, has embraced the concept of synthesis that Lewis Carroll favored. Though Rackin’s new collection contains the most recent versions of his essays, many Carrollian scholars still cite the originals in their own work. Rackin’s anthology also coincided with a renewed interest among Carrollian scholars in the relationship between the *Wonderland* texts and their Victorian readers, especially regarding the fluidity of this relationship.

Despite Rackin’s claim that most analyses of the works of Lewis Carroll are too complex for lay readers, and thus of limited interest outside of academia, the texts themselves remain significant. Jean-Jaques Lecercle claims that the *Wonderland* stories, “in spite of the fact that they have been admitted into the canon of English Literature . . . have managed to keep remarkably alive, far beyond the range of the professional interest of academics” (1). The popularity of the original stories, as well as their pop-culture adaptations, can be traced to their unusual style: the *Wonderland* books are frequently

described as “nonsense” texts. In his 1994 book *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense*, Lecercle defines the specific genre of Victorian “nonsense” texts, of which the *Wonderland* books are his primary example, emphasizing the inseparable relationship between this genre and education.<sup>4</sup>

Referencing the work of both Auerbach and Rackin in his 1998 book *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity*, U. C. Knoepfelmacher explores how the life of Charles Dodgson, leading up to and briefly following the creation of the *Wonderland* texts, relate to these two texts and how the two texts relate to each other. He addresses the conflict among critics, including Rackin, about the relationship of Alice Liddell to the character of Alice. Knoepfelmacher notes that, although Alice Liddell was twelve-and-a-half years old when she received the original manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, Dodgson included with the book a photograph of the young girl at seven years old, the same age as her namesake character (168). Knoepfelmacher uses this photo to claim that *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was written specifically for Carroll’s ideal memory of the seven-year-old Alice Liddell, but, as Rackin had earlier claimed, *Through the Looking-Glass* was written for an adult. This change in audience explains one reason why *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* received far more criticism than *Through the Looking-Glass*. However, Knoepfelmacher neither claims that these texts were written exclusively for children nor for adults. Similar to Rackin, he believes that the texts themselves are important works of art, but unlike Rackin, he places a heavier emphasis on their connection to author and culture, especially through parody and satire. Rather than excluding possible interpretations, Knoepfelmacher’s work embraces the idea

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<sup>4</sup> For an extensive analysis of Lecercle’s work, see Chapter II of this thesis.

of a multitude of simultaneous, opposing interpretations—a truly Carrollian style of synthesis.

Modern Carrollian scholars continue to respond to these works, especially those of Rackin and Auerbach. Brian Gibson addresses the difference between authorship and authority, an issue Rackin explores in much of his own work, in his 2003 essay “‘Let’s Consider Who It Was that Dreamed It All’: Looking Through the Refracted Glass of Narrative at Authorship and Authority in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* Books.” Gibson’s analysis includes such questions as whether there is an ultimate authority, what determines authority in Wonderland, and how Charles Dodgson, Lewis Carroll, Alice Liddell and the titular character from the *Wonderland* texts all relate (these relationships often take the form of parody). Unlike Rackin, Gibson believes that one cannot separate the author from the text, much like Knoepflmacher, and that this relationship is invaluable to understanding the text as a whole.

The issue of how much Dodgson/Carroll’s personal experiences influenced his work is not the only significant aspect of Carrollian scholarship. Florence Milner’s 1903 essay, “The Poems in *Alice in Wonderland*” (reprinted in *Aspects of Alice*) is essential to understanding the parody and satire present in the *Wonderland* texts. She writes of Carroll’s masterpieces:

[T]hose who read the book when it was first published found in it a delight which the child of today misses. Fifty years ago certain poems appeared in every reader and were read over and over again until the child was stupid indeed who did not unconsciously learn them by heart. Today there is a

new fashion in literature. Children are whirled from one supplementary reader to another, conning graceful rhymes and pretty stories all illustrated with pretty pictures, but the old things have passed away. All the poems in *Alice in Wonderland* are parodies upon these once familiar rhymes. Scattered lines of the poems cling to the minds of older people; they remember being once familiar with them; they recognize the meter and can sometimes repeat two or three opening lines, but the complete poem eludes them, and the author they probably never did know. The children of today do not know the verses at all, and . . . parody ceases to be parody without the original poem as a background. (245-46)

Milner proceeds to cite eight instances where Carroll parodies a well-known (for 1865) poem and then cites the original. A reader of the *Wonderland* texts must be familiar with these originals in order to first understand that they are being parodied and then to understand the purpose and meaning of the parody. In 1960, John Mackay Shaw expanded upon Milner's work, compiling a list of all of Carroll's parodic poems and their originals in both *Wonderland* texts. He classifies them as "fifteen recognized parodies of then currently well-known poems, five other poems not so recognized, at least so far, and four popular nursery rhymes" (1). This compilation is of vital importance to any study that involves parody of poetry in the work of Lewis Carroll.

Will Brooker's 2004 *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture* attempts to explain the continuing popularity of the works of Lewis Carroll by analyzing Charles Dodgson the author, the works themselves, the illustrations, and various

adaptations of the *Wonderland* texts. He addresses one major complication with *Wonderland* in popular culture: the general population is more familiar with the Disney animated film than with the original book, though many critics disagree about whether this has made a positive or negative impact on the value of the originals and on Carrollian scholarship as a whole.

The 2000s also saw an increase in using *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as an educational tool. In 2005, Michael Mendelson published "Can We Learn Practical Judgement? *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the Quest for Common Sense." In this essay, he adopts several aspects from Rackin's work. First, Mendelson writes that, when he as a professor introduces *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to his students, he finds that they often know the basic story but not the text. Many students know the text only through more recent adaptations of the story, such as the Disney animated film, or have vague memories of reading or being read the original novel, but no solid knowledge of the text itself. Mendelson finds that this lack of familiarity with details presents his class with both positive and negative effects on reading the story: with no previous experience, students can read the novel as an individual text, as Rackin suggests, but they often discuss their experiences and opinions when students encounter passages that differ from what they expect or remember. Because of this fresh view of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Mendelson and his students may treat Alice as a person rather than as a character. This allows for Alice's experiences with judgment, logic, and identity to be evaluated on psychological and educational levels, in addition to the literary level. Mendelson expands on his earlier work in his 2007 essay, "The Phenomenology of Deep

Surprise in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*," but this time he strays from Rackin's work, choosing to focus on emotion rather than logic. Mendelson also utilizes bibliographic aspects of both Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell, something Rackin's early work criticized, to explain how the character Alice's emotional responses are both natural and appropriate for a Victorian child. Because of the continuing debate over the importance of authorial and cultural relationship to the texts, contemporary Carrollian scholarship continues to maintain an interest in the relationship between the *Wonderland* texts, education, and Victorian England.

Because the history of scholarship on the works of Lewis Carroll is so long and varied, it is necessary for this thesis to limit its focus to major scholarship pertaining to education and parody. These analyses all focus on the *Wonderland* texts' relationship (or lack thereof) with Victorian culture, mostly through Carroll's parody and satire. They also include exploration of the character Alice's education throughout *Wonderland*. However, with the exception of Lecercle, these scholars fail to connect Alice's education to the educational systems of Victorian England. My work explores how Carroll's parody, satire, and pastiche focus on *Wonderland* education, not for the purposes of direct attack or condemnation, but to reveal flaws and to synthesize various methods of education for the benefit of mid-nineteenth century children..

The analysis of the works of Lewis Carroll are divided into five sections. Chapter II defines the genre of nonsense and the methods through which Victorian nonsense parodies and satirizes its source culture. This chapter also illustrates the extent to which nonsense and education are related. Chapter III explores Lewis Carroll's educational

beliefs, by examining his texts, the prefaces to these texts, and his personal correspondences. Chapter IV examines how the works of Lewis Carroll satirize Victorian religious education without criticizing religion, with emphasis on his satire of rote learning and of uncompromising dogma. Chapter V reinforces Carroll's parody and satire of rote learning, this time through an evaluation of Victorian schoolroom education. This chapter also explains Carroll's satire of Victorian educators by revealing common trends in Victorian educators' hiring and educational requirements. Chapter VI connects Carroll's strategy of synthesis to the interactive nature of education, explaining the importance of such synthesis in modern education. Each of these chapters evaluates instances of parody, pastiche, and satire within the texts and links these instances with their Victorian counterparts. In doing so, Lewis Carroll's satire of Victorian education, not for the purposes of attack or critique but for education, improvement, and synthesis, is revealed.

## CHAPTER II

### INTRODUCTION TO AND DEFINITION OF NONSENSE

Nonsense is a central concept to the *Wonderland* texts. Alice herself exclaims “Stuff and nonsense” when the Queen, during the courtroom scene in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, tells the court to decide on a sentence before the verdict (129). The work of linguist and philosopher of language Jean-Jacques Lecercle on nonsense as a genre, specifically Victorian nonsense, is integral to this thesis and its analysis of the *Wonderland* texts. His work helps to explain the significant connection between nonsense and education, how this connection works to satirize Victorian education, and how this connection illustrates Carroll’s strategy of synthesis.

Nonsense texts are often described as such not because of a total lack of sense, but because there is a multiplicity of answers, interpretations, and/or explanations of the content, all existing simultaneously and often in opposition to each other. Lecercle writes of the genre of nonsense that “the persistence of its mythical power is due to the quality of the intuitions, linguistic, pragmatic, and philosophical, embedded in the text” (2). Lewis Carroll provides an example of the multiplicity of interpretations of nonsense texts, when he writes of “The Hunting of the Snark”:

As to the meaning of the Snark, I’m very much afraid I didn’t mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them; so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer means. So, whatever good meanings are in the book,

I'm glad to accept as the meaning of the book. The best that I've seen is by a lady, that the whole book is an allegory on the search after happiness.

I think this fits in beautifully in many ways. (qtd. in Collingwood 173)

Carroll embraces interpretations that differ from his intent; he meant “nonsense” but accepts sense as a meaning for his book. His use of the term “nonsense,” then, conveys far more than a simple lack of intended meaning; rather, he uses “nonsense” to mean a multiplicity of possible meanings, which are up to the reader, not the author, to determine. There are, however, limitations to interpretations of nonsense texts. While Carroll champions the idea that a single situation may possess multiple correct responses, he does not believe that *every* response is correct. Responses must be logically justified, because, as Lecerle observes, “even a nonsense text can be interpreted wrongly, against the grain of its sense” (18). This is where Charles Dodgson the logician appears in the work of Lewis Carroll. His nonsense texts do not create meaning; rather, they create the opportunity for meaning. This opportunity has been described, by Lecerle, as the polyphony of nonsense: “[b]ecause the text says nothing, the empty shells of discourse multiply, and the text says everything, becoming the bearer of a potential infinity of meaning . . . there is a specific receptiveness of nonsense texts, which is the mirror image of their semantic emptiness” (191). The true meaning, or rather value, of nonsense texts lies in their readers’ response, in the dialogue created between the author, the text, and various readers. This value reflects Charles Dodgson’s role as a logic instructor and explains the position of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in the English canon: it is the archetype of Victorian nonsense, but an archetype that includes not only the original

publication but the entire body of work, reproduction, commentary, and evaluation, that has risen out of the original text.

In his 1994 book *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense*, Lecerclé defines the concept of nonsense as a genre and as a “chronotope.” He borrows the term chronotope from Mikhail Bakhtin, and Lecerclé, despite claiming “its meaning is so wide as to defy precise definition,” explains the term as

denot[ing] the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are expressed in literature, something like literary forms of intuition. This, for Bakhtin, is the locus for the relationship between the work of art and reality, which goes beyond simple mimesis. . . . [T]here is no simple reflection of reality in the work of art, but there is no linguistic closure either. . . . Bakhtin has a distinction between propositions, which exist in *langue* as potentialities of meaning, and utterances, which actualize those potentialities in a given situation or conjuncture. The failure of structural linguistics, and of formalism, is due to their choice of propositions as objects of study. This makes them miss the polyphony of texts. Only the utterance has full meaning, and its structure, its relationship with the context of utterance, with reality, is given by the chronotope. Envisaged in this way, the chronotope is not a reflection (of a historical period, of the *Zeitgeist*), but rather the locus for the plurality of voices and points of view to develop. Language, Bakhtin says, is not only a system of abstract

grammatical categories, but also an “ideologically saturated” worldview.

(168)

The chronotope of Victorian nonsense, then, is not limited to a single ideological point of view, but the locus of all potential ideologies and of their implementation in Victorian culture. In Victorian England, this locus often materialized in educational institutions.

The enduring popularity of the works of Lewis Carroll is, per Lecerle, due in part to this chronotope of Victorian nonsense. The term “nonsense” and its continuing interest, both academic and popular, are closely related but problematic; the negative prefix “non-” in “nonsense” is part of this reason:

non-sense is to be taken not so much as the trace of a cognitive judgment, (“I assert that there is no sense in this text”) but rather as an elliptic exclamative, calling for dialogic response. Not so much the recognition of an absence as the defiant and provisional formulation of a value judgement, calling for contradictory response, as when Alice, irritated beyond what she can possibly bear by the Wonderland characters’ quirks and absurdities, exclaims: “Stuff and nonsense!” This is no absence of sense but a calling for the sense that the answer will provide—in this, literary nonsense is only the manifest staging of the language game of sense, at least as defined by Bakhtin: “sense can be assimilated in response. It is always the answer to a question.” (Lecerle 180)

The nonsense in nonsense texts, then, requires a response, either on the part of Alice, the Wonderland residents, or the narrator. The nonsense of nonsense texts also calls for a

response on the part of the reader. Readers want to take part in Alice's conversations with the Wonderland residents, but because this is an impossible task, they create real-world counterparts to the Wonderland conversation, discussing these situations with other readers. Additionally, younger audiences would be likely to ask questions of their own, prompting responses and justifications that would mimic the young Liddell children asking for explanations from Charles Dodgson on that fateful river journey.

Nonsense, in the works of Lewis Carroll, is not a lack of sense. It is more than that. Because Carroll emphasizes a multiplicity of possible meanings, and then a synthesis of these meanings and their justifications, nonsense as a genre is not the same as nonsense as a single word. Lecercle emphasizes that the negative prefix in the word nonsense "is the mark of a process not merely of denial but also of reflexivity, that nonsense is also metasense. Nonsense texts are reflexive texts . . . Nonsense texts are not explicitly parodic, they turn parody into a theory of serious literature" (2). Such parody is central to nonsense texts, and is closely linked to nonsense as a chronotope. Expanding on this claim, Lecercle defines a diachrony of nonsense, which he divides into three aspects. First,

Nonsense has an *intertext*—it is a characteristic of nonsense texts that they are always secondary, always after-the-event rewritings of other texts, hence the importance of parody in the genre. The chronotope emerges in this distance between the nonsense text and the text it parodies (169)

Such a focus on parody means that nonsense texts are invariably tied to the history and culture of the texts. Rather than being a simple relationship between parody and its target,

nonsense incorporates everything in between, including the institutions, responses, and recreations of both the parody and its target. Second, “[n]onsense also has a *tradition*—a mythical, fictitious tradition, created *a posteriori* (like all traditions) to justify the texts, to organize their polyphony into a mythical chronology” (169). Such traditions are common in nonsense texts, and integral to the genre. Readers frequently the Victorian inspirations for various Wonderland characters, if there even were any (Carroll has explicitly stated, for example, that he was the Dodo), or the answer to the Hatter’s riddle. These examples are used to define nonsense, but like the chicken and the egg, nonsense defines these examples, exemplifying nonsense texts’ propensity for paradox. Third,

nonsense texts are the locus for a *polyphony of discourses*: this multiplicity of voices refracts (to use Bakhtin’s term, which he carefully distinguishes from ‘reflects’) the historical conjuncture, by anchoring nonsense in ideology and its apparatuses. The result of this diachronic study is that nonsense will appear in the light of a *narrative*, in the sense of Lyotard. (169)

Nonsense texts are always connected, in some way, to information that readers would already be familiar with. They are never completely devoid of sense; there is always some connection, something familiar in them, and readers strive to discover and explain this connection. Nonsense texts do not seek to supplant or devalue parodied texts, but rather to complement them. The act of refraction in nonsense literature both imitates but at the same time alters the targets of parody, whether they be other texts (pastiche) or constituted discourses (ideology), creating a similar but distinct version of the source

(Lecerle 210). The nonsense nature of these new texts, in the works of authors like Lewis Carroll, are not meant purely as comedy or entertainment; they serve both pragmatic and pedagogic purposes. The act of refraction also “is not merely distortion, but also inscription. A nonsense text literally inscribes other texts through ironic quotation—this is the distance of parody . . . it is because nonsense inscribes texts that it inscribes reality—in the guise of discourses” (Lecerle 169-70). In fact, nonsense texts are often so successful at creating meaning that they become more popular, more familiar to their readers than the source texts. Thus, the works of Lewis Carroll represent not simply nonsense as a genre, but the chronotope of Victorian English nonsense. The chronotope of Carroll’s nonsense is unique in its construction, even among other nonsense texts; most nonsense texts place fictional characters in factual locations, but Wonderland places fictional characters in a fictional location. As such, parody becomes integral to the *Wonderland* texts even more than in other nonsense texts, and parodies “are the privileged locus for the dialogue between the author and his child readers,” who would be familiar with the Victorian counterpart (Lecerle 170). The abstract nature of Wonderland (which many have described as nonsense) thus becomes centrally concerned with parody. Rather than a geographic parody, Wonderland is a linguistic parody; the primary focus, then, of the *Wonderland* parodies becomes not the source of parody but its function. Readers of the *Wonderland* texts must understand the purpose and function of parodies, such as Carroll’s strategy of synthesis, and not simply identify the source text. They must then take it a step further and engage themselves in synthesizing, creating new, often anachronistic interpretations of the *Wonderland* texts and the targets of their

satire that, according to the genre of Victorian nonsense, are both not the intended meaning (not the expected sense) and at the same time possible valid interpretations.

Another significant detail of nonsense literature as a genre is its denial of metaphor. Rather than obscuring meaning, nonsense literature focuses on literal interpretations: “rejection of metaphor is another characteristic of the [nonsense] genre. Or, rather, it is the logical consequence of the avoidance of semantic anomaly. . . . nonsense texts seem to deploy complex and ingenious strategies in order to avoid metaphors” (Lecerle 63). A major goal of nonsense literature is to have its readers create their own meaning, based on justification. The ambiguous nature of metaphor denies readers the ability to create their own meaning, instead relying on the author’s intended meaning of the metaphor.

Nonsense literature, especially that of Lewis Carroll, utilizes four strategies, identified by Lecerle, that nonsense texts employ to avoid the ambiguity of metaphor: literalism, coinage, incongruity of sentences, and the use of puns instead of metaphors. The first strategy, literalism, is accomplished through tautology. This repetition of words often appears in the form of excessively detailed, repetitive lists. The second strategy, coinage, is the creation of new words, such as in the “Jabberwocky” poem. These coined words must be explained arbitrarily, as is the case with both Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking-Glass* and with Carroll himself, in the preface to later editions of the text, and these arbitrary explanations negate metaphorical interpretation. In fact, Humpty Dumpty’s explanation of these coined words created a now-standard linguistic formation: the portmanteau-word. Portmanteau-words

embody the contradiction which is central to nonsense. On the one hand, they conform to structural or formal regularity, belonging as they do to identifiable parts of speech and filling the correct syntactic slots. On the other hand they are also the bearers of semantic excess, of two meanings packed up into one word, and of formal irregularity, which ends up producing a semantic void, since, not conforming to the structural necessity of a homophonous string, their structure is impossible to determine without the help of an authorized commentary. (Lecerle 47-48)

Coined words can also be problematic; one can never be certain whether a word is an original creation of the author or is simply an outdated or specialized term that the reader is simply unfamiliar with (Lecerle 29). As such, coined words embody a major paradox of nonsense literature: they may mean both what the characters and readers believe they mean (the correct meaning in the text) while possibly having a different meaning (correct in the real world) existing simultaneously. The third strategy, incongruity of sentences, removes the logical link between said sentences. With no link between their content, these sentences must be interpreted literally, in isolation from the rest of the text. As such, they cannot be part of a larger metaphor, for there is no link between these sentences (and thus between their meaning). The final strategy, the avoidance of metaphor completely by replacing metaphor with puns, is perhaps the most obvious strategy in the *Wonderland* texts. Though puns are similar to metaphors, nonsense authors like Carroll are aware of this similarity, and choose to use notoriously simple puns, often in pairs or in a series (such as with the mouse, and Carroll's use of tail/tale

and not/knot), to remove as much possibility of metaphorical interpretation as they can (Lecerle 63-68). Carroll's frequent punning, then, like the frequency of explanation/justification, represents nonsense texts' propensity for the multiplicity of language. Through such multiplicity, various meanings can be synthesized, and punned words like the previously mentioned tail/tale and not/knot become simultaneously accurate (in their pronunciation) and inaccurate (in their spelling); neither is fully correct nor incorrect, and neither option completely negates the other from also being correct or incorrect.

Another reason for the enduring popularity of the *Wonderland* texts is that nonsense texts "mimic the activities of literary critics and philosophers . . . In so doing they express intuitions that often escape more serious practitioners of the art. They also, of course, fail to produce the same result—a coherent interpretation of the text being read" (Lecerle 5-6). This paradox illustrates how the parody and satire of Lewis Carroll often exposes extremely specific intuitions about the objects of his parody and satire, but at the cost of a seemingly fragmented, or nonsensical, narrative. This fragmented nature has led many Carrollian scholars to refer to the *Wonderland* texts as a form of Menippean satire,<sup>5</sup> though Lecerle believes that this label is only paradoxically accurate:

there must be, and there cannot be, a filiation between Menippean satire and nonsense. There must be, because the universe described, the universe of carnival, is the same, and nonsense is the forgetful heir of a certain type of medieval literature (the texts that are closest to Victorian nonsense, true

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<sup>5</sup> M. Keith Booker defines Menippean satire as a genre "associated by Mikhail Bakhtin with carnivalesque qualities in literature. Menippean satires tend to explore both fundamental philosophical ideas and controversial current events. They combine naturalistic detail with fantastic images" (482).

nonsense *avant la lettre*, are the French *fatrasies*). And there cannot be, not only because no concrete historical filiation can be traced, but because the contextual meaning of the same elements has radically changed—there is, for instance, nothing revolutionary about the topsy-turvy world of Victorian nonsense, and no attempt at sacrilege. (195)

Paradoxes such as this are a major part of nonsense literature, and, in keeping with the nature of nonsense literature, both contradicting aspects exist simultaneously. Nonsense literature is not even a subtype of Menippean satire; Lecercle describes nonsense more as a parody of the basis for Menippean satire:

Nonsense is not even a de-semanticised, non-political version of Menippean satire—it is rather the mythical repetition of the literature of carnival. Bakhtin reaches the same conclusion for the dialogic novel: the field of contemporary literature is strewn with the rubble of what he calls medieval or Renaissance “grotesque realism.” Like the dialogic novel, but more insistently, nonsense has used this for its building materials. (195)

Similar to much of his parody, Lewis Carroll utilizes not a single literary source but multiple sources to create his nonsense. He relies on certain aspects of Menippean satire, such as an episodic structure and an abundance of food and drink, but at the same time ignores others, like the negative criticism associated with traditional parody. In this sense, Victorian nonsense literature can be seen as a kind of parody, or rather pastiche, of Menippean satire.

Unlike traditional satire, such as the aforementioned Menippean satire, Carroll's parody, satire, and pastiche are more positive in their function, offering supplementary insights or solutions rather than simple criticism or direct attack. In this sense, nonsense differs from traditional definitions of parody and satire; Northrop Frye, for example, uses the term "attack" in *Anatomy of Criticism* to describe targets of satire. Nonsense literature, however, maintains a reverence for the source material; its goal is to strengthen and support the original text by providing new possibilities. It is "deeply respectful of authority in all its forms: rules of grammar, maxims of conversation and of politeness, the authority of the canonical author of the parodied text," and therefore is not meant as an opposition but rather as a complement (Lecerle 3). Carroll's strategy of synthesis allows for readers to combine the original source and the parody to create new alternatives, new meanings. Thus, though there are many instances of nonsense in the *Wonderland* texts that readers and/or characters find difficult to understand due to certain aspects of nonsense, these instances are grammatically correct and often deal with proper Victorian rules of conduct—the overly-moralizing Duchess is a perfect example. The parody of nonsense is not identical to traditional parody, however. Lecerle provides an explanation of these two types of parody:

The first is parody proper: if I may say so, a *textual* intertext, ascribed by an erudite footnote to a specific author. The second is pastiche, where the ascription of authorship is blurred or impossible, where the parodic distance is even greater—pastiche is the parody of a parody, where the

style, the clichés, the slips of the pen are recognized as somehow “other,”  
but no name can be given to this other. (170)

Lecerle provides several reasons for this otherness—in many instances, Carroll simultaneously parodies multiple authors, or even genres, so that there is no single source of his parody. This lack of a single source conforms to his fondness for multiplicity and his preference for (logical) justification and exemplifies his love of synthesis. As Florence Milner noted: “[t]he children of today [i.e., 1903] do not know the verses at all, and as a parody ceases to be a parody without the original poem as a background, the trouble of gathering these originals seems worth while” (246). Thus, a reader must be familiar with both the parody and the parodied source, or risk mistaking parody for pastiche or original work. Lecerle further explains the difference between parody and pastiche. Traditional parody operates according to specific rules:

The advantage of parody is that we know where we are. In this it is like irony, at least according to the trivial definition (irony is the inversion of meaning). Once we have grasped the language game we are in, meaning becomes easy to compute, through a maxim of parody or irony, which gives rise to implicatures. The text works according to recognizable dichotomies: parodying/parodied, comic/serious; in it a voice can be heard, which controls the meaning, the voice of the author.

However, such dichotomies conflict with Carroll’s strategy of synthesis and with the multiplicity of meaning inherent in nonsense literature. Therefore, according to Lecerle, the works of Lewis Carroll are more than simple parodies:

Carroll's text goes further than [parody], into what I call pastiche. . . .  
[T]he sheer excess of Carroll's verve . . . is what subverts the unifying control of the authorial voice, what liberates the multiplicity of discourses. This is the *pasta* of pastiche: an ungodly and excessive mixture, the source of a textual *fuite en avant* whereby the text escapes the control of the speaker and words take over. (172)

This distinction means that nonsense parodies separate the theme of parody from the variations of pastiche. However, these parodies “are always the locus of a multiplication of words, discourses, or points of view. In fact, all nonsense texts—this is a defining characteristic of the genre—are parodies in this sense” (Lecerle 173). There is never one single source, one single meaning, one single purpose for nonsense texts. These sources are not random either; the voices that comprise the pastiche are “[n]ot a babble of inane voices, but a polyphony of historically relevant, because historically constituted, discourses,” representing the chronotope of Victorian nonsense (Lecerle 177). In essence, Carroll synthesizes parody, pastiche, and satire in his work, so that all are present, yet the borders between these literary strategies are so blurred that readers can rarely identify precisely where one ends and another begins. As a result, these readers feel a sense of familiarity with the *Wonderland* texts, and are constantly striving to discover and explain precisely where this familiarity lies.

The justification or explanation of nonsense is not the only process by which nonsense texts create meaning. A nonsense text also “plays within the bounds of common sense in order to remain within view of them, even if it has crossed to the other side of

the frontier; but it does not seek to limit the text's meaning to one single interpretation—on the contrary, its dissolution of sense multiplies meaning" (Leceracle 20). When Leceracle uses the word "sense" here, he does not mean it as any or all meaning, but rather the expected, established meaning of such situations. Leceracle gives the example of the Hatter's riddle "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" Because it has no given answer, the riddle appears to contain no sense, because a riddle traditionally has an answer, but in actuality this riddle has no *single* answer—any appropriately, i.e. logically, justified response to this riddle is correct, according the rules of nonsense. Leceracle explains,

This is an interesting case of saying without meaning. Of course, both Carroll and the Hatter know what the words mean, but in an important sense they do not know what the utterance means. Worse even, both speakers do not want to know what it means—they want it not to mean, what they mean is not to mean.

This is another example of how nonsense literature mimics the actions of literary critics. Critics, like Carroll's readers, understand the meaning of the individual words, but do not understand the meaning of the entire text. However, unlike most traditional authors, the Hatter (and by extension Carroll) does not intend a specific meaning. Rather, he intends to create dialogue regarding the riddle itself, placing focus not on the expected answer but on the justification, the conversation, involved in arriving at an answer. Such literary nonsense "is a scandalous object, which must be reduced by an ascription of meaning: a riddle *must* have a solution" (Leceracle 119). The expected, pre-existing answer to the riddle is not the point; the concept that it does not require an answer (or rather knowledge

of the pre-existing answer) is the main idea of this infamous passage. It does not lack sense because of the speaker's failure in the use of language, but rather the intent of the speaker(s) causes the non-sense nature of the conversation. Without a definitive answer, the riddle has no closure, and thus the dialogue, the synthesis of possible responses, remains forever open.

On the surface, the *Wonderland* texts appear to show Alice free of the constraints of Victorian society and education, and thus the rules of language, but Lecercle believes this viewpoint to be "a partial and therefore a naïve conception of nonsense. . . . [nonsense] is a kind of textual doublebind, or paradox. It is both free and constrained. It tells the reader to abide, and not to abide, by the rules of language" (25). While many passages from the *Wonderland* texts appear to contain no sense, these passages still follow the carefully constructed rules of language, while modifying their application. Language is a living entity; words continuously enter and leave the standard lexicon, even when such words are grammatically incorrect. It is up to speakers of the language to accept these new words as possible, to synthesize them with what they already know about the language, and turn such "non-sense" into sense.

#### The Paradox of Nonsense

Paradox is a central aspect of nonsense literature. Because of the multiplicity of meanings, contradictory responses can exist simultaneously. The words "tale" and "tail" are both written differently and spoken identically, both the same and different. Such paradoxes are not limited to the use of language, but to the rules themselves. Lecercle notes that nonsense contains situations where the rules of language are subverted; the

apparent paradox in nonsense can be accounted for in terms of the “dialectic of excess and lack” (3). Nonsense texts provide readers with a certain freedom from some of the restricting aspects of language while at the same time remaining largely within the safe boundaries of understandability. In Lecercle’s words, the “lack of structure at one level . . . is amply compensated by an excess of structure at other levels . . . Lack of sense here is always compensated by excess or proliferation of sense there. This . . . is the central paradox, or contradiction, of the genre” (31). As such, while a multiplicity of meanings exist, they are not all equally valid: some are more accurate, more justifiable, more probable than others. In the *Wonderland* texts, nonsense often appears through an excess of justification to compensate for a lack of truth or knowledge (i.e. the Duchess’ moralizing, where her justification, her logical argumentation, is true, but based on flawed premises). Nonsense literature is, nearly always, accurate linguistically; it is only flawed semantically (Lecercle 33). The “Jabberwocky” poem is an excellent example of this dialectic. A significant aspect of the linguistic accuracy of nonsense literature is its focus on syntax: “[n]onsense texts strictly conform to the rules of syntax—we may even go further, and note that they relish their syntax. I have called this hypersyntaxism. Even paradoxes are expressed through canonic sentence structures” (Lecercle 58). While there are many instances where Alice fails to fully understand Wonderland dialogue, such as with the “Jabberwocky” poem, she is sure that such dialogue is still spoken according to proper linguistic rules. As such, Alice and the Wonderland residents, like Humpty Dumpty, are able to extrapolate possible meanings for the words based on both logic and linguistics.

While the multiplicity of explanations in nonsense literature may appear to create chaos, it in fact relishes order. Nonsense literature is a syntactic genre, where “syntax plays with semantics. It compensates and exposes semantic incoherence. . . . The formal excess of syntax compensates for a semantic (material) lack, or incoherence” (Lecerle 59-60). Thus, the *Wonderland* texts appear to focus on logic, justification, and rules and regulations because they must, in order to compensate for aspects of the situation that appear to be nonsense because they have no Victorian counterpart, or where the Victorian counterpart is completely different. The tea-party is a perfect example of this; in *Wonderland*, the tea-party lasts forever, but in Victorian England, tea-time lasts for only a short part of each day (though one could argue that it indeed *does* last forever, because it takes place every day, and will continue to do so). Readers must learn to understand unfamiliar material, and an excess of justification, or adherence to standard rules, compensates for a lack in familiar concepts or situations. This dialectic between excess and lack is not the only contradiction present in nonsense literature, for

nonsense as a genre is the weaving together, into a tradition, of two different, even opposed, threads, one literary, the other folkloric, one poetic, the other childish, one “high,” the other “low.” The opposed threads produce naturally dialogic, or contradictory, texts—texts that capture this contradiction in some sort of unstable and provisional unity.

In nonsense this dialectic of monologism and dialogism is inscribed in the very name of the genre. (Lecerle 179-80)

These descriptions, however, are still rooted in binary oppositions. Lewis Carroll does not simply relish in the contradiction, he synthesizes them, utilizing pastiche so that the *Wonderland* texts, while appearing to be “low,” have entered the “high” canon of English literature. These texts are simultaneously “high” and “low” while at the same time being (completely) neither. The relation of the literary to the folkloric is precisely why nonsense utilizes parody and satire to such a wide extent—material previously considered “high,” such as canonical literature or educational and religious texts are combined with the “low,” or common realm. In fact, after the Romantic revival of popular culture, such low literature became the “monuments of the English national past,” being texts that, due to their low nature, escaped the cultural domination of invading cultures such as the French (Lecerle 180-81). Lecerle is also careful to note that “nonsense is not merely a linguistic genre, one which is highly preoccupied with language, but also a pragmatic genre” (71). Alice, and by extension readers of her adventures, is not meant only to be entertained, she is meant to learn from *Wonderland* experiences, to apply these combinations of education and folklore to her own life, i.e. life in Victorian England.

#### Nonsense in Relation to Education

Because of the pragmatic and pedagogic nature of nonsense literature, such texts are especially concerned with education. Nonsense as a genre emerged in the Victorian era because nonsense texts “attempt to solve by imaginary means a real contradiction in the historical conjuncture” (Lecerle 2). Many critics downplay the connection between the *Wonderland* texts and Victorian England, but certain aspects of Victorian education are essential to nonsense literature as a genre. The rapid industrialization and

urbanization of Victorian England led to an influx of school-age children who needed an education. While, in the early nineteenth century, schools were controlled primarily by religious organizations, laws such as the 1870 Education Act (passed between the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*) gave control of many English educational institutions to secular, government organizations. Thus, Victorian education lies at the heart of Lecercle's "historical conjuncture" of nonsense:

nonsense as a genre is a by-product of the development of the institution of the school, that [nonsense] texts provide an imaginary solution to the real contradiction between the urge to capture an ever wider proportion of the population for the purpose of elementary schooling, and the resistance, religious, political, and psychological, that such a cultural upheaval inevitably arouses. (4)

Yet again, nonsense literature embodies a contradiction, a paradox, being an imaginary solution to a real problem, while providing a solution that large portions of the population refuse to embrace. Nonsense literature, however, is not intended at these populations, the status quo, usually involved in the bureaucracy of Victorian England, but rather at the child, who has not yet been indoctrinated into the traditional ideologies:

The school is the institution that develops the need for meaning and a reflexive attitude towards language, and channels them in socially acceptable ways. The school is the institution where not only rules of grammar, but also maxims of good behavior, linguistic and otherwise, are

learnt. . . [N]onsense texts aim at (and choose their characters from) the type of child who has not yet been captured by the institution . . .[,] little girls in the case of Carroll[,] . . . and the school as theme is present in nonsense texts . . . [N]onsense reflects the changing state of schooling; it also phrases the resistance to this change. (Lecerclé 4)

Major religious organizations of the latter half of the nineteenth century, then, were no longer solely in control of teaching children rules of morality, behavior, and propriety. Such institutions maintained a dogmatic approach to these rules, refusing to compromise, to adapt, even in the face of the overwhelming changes of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Several major organizations were pitted against each other to gain control over education:

The School in Victorian Britain is a complex arrangement of institutions, the result of a compromise between (a) the state, whose responsibilities in the field of education have begun to increase; (b) the various churches who compete between themselves, with the help of the state (but also, to a certain extent, against its intervention) for the traditional right to educate the masses; and (c) the lay reformers, the founders of modern educational institutions, often Utilitarians or Benthamites, who criticise the inadequacy of the system, which fails to prepare the students for the tasks the economy demands. (Lecerclé 218)

As both a man educated in this system and an educator forced to deal with the conflicts of interest between these groups, Charles Dodgson was intimately aware of the various groups and methods for education. As such, in the *Wonderland* texts, he compromises

and synthesizes between these in his work, pointing out strengths, weaknesses, and areas of overlap between such organizations and methods, allowing for a synthesis of such conflicting viewpoints. Rather than choosing one group to support or criticize, Carroll utilizes nonsense literature, and by extension his strategy of synthesis described in this thesis, to make his readers aware of the possibility of religious and political freedom or resistance, the need to not simply obey but to understand when and why one must obey, and when to reject or embrace change. People of Victorian England were beginning to experience these new situations, and in this capacity, nonsense

fulfills, in classic Marxist terms, an ideological function. It has no ideology itself (there is no specific ideological position defended in nonsense texts) but it is one of the vectors of Victorian ideology, one of the forms through which, with certain ideological apparatuses, the Victorians experienced an imaginary relationship with the real conditions of their lives. (Lecerle 195)

Thus, the relationship between Victorian readers and nonsense texts is vital to the evolution of Victorian culture. Nonsense literature allowed Victorian readers to confront aspects of their lives while at the same time distance themselves from conflict. The nonsense of Lewis Carroll, because it is targeted towards Victorian youth, helps prepare the future Victorian England to better deal with these relationships.

Because of the increasing number of children attending public school, education in Victorian England became increasingly more important. Lecerle uses the term

“institution of nonsense” to describe the relationship between nonsense texts and Victorian educational institutions:

nonsense texts are an integral part of a complex Victorian arrangement, or social apparatus, which we will call “the School” for short—an arrangement of spaces (the buildings and grounds), bodies (the scholars and the teachers), books (the textbooks), discourses (at the school and about the school), and texts (*Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, but also *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, as well as innumerable “primers”). Because nonsense texts are contiguous with, coexisting with and conjunct to all those elements, they somehow “contain” them. (214).

Nonsense literature and education, then, are inseparable, and this relationship is fluid. Nonsense texts must contain aspects of education, just as education contains aspects of nonsense, and the school is present in nonsense texts, both in theme and in discourse. Lecercle further elaborates on the co-presence of literary text(s), social discourses, and ideological apparatuses, or institutions, when he writes that “the first form of this co-presence is the importance of the school as theme and discourse in nonsense texts . . . in Victorian Britain the school is steeped in nonsense, and nonsense inscribes the school within its text” (214). This relationship provides the basis for an understanding of the *Wonderland* texts as a form of satire on the state of Victorian education. A reader who understands how to use *Wonderland* nonsense to create sense will be better fitted to use Victorian educational nonsense to create knowledge and understanding.

Another vital aspect of nonsense literature, closely related to the ideas of explanation and justification, involves the premise of conversation, or dialogue. In nonsense literature, “dialogue is mostly agonistic, . . . not a cooperative undertaking for mutually rewarding ends, but a verbal battle, where the speaker’s linguistic survival is always at stake” (Lecerclé 72). Such battle requires one speaker to emerge victorious and the other to be defeated. If a speaker cannot win through use of language, speakers turn to other methods in order to achieve victory: “speech is always threatening to give way to brute force, for, being reduced to the function of a weapon, it may always be discarded if or when a more powerful weapon is available” (Lecerclé 72). Lecerclé notes that the Queen’s frequent declaration of “Off with her head!” stands as the perfect example of such tendencies. This agonistic nature, therefore, exemplifies nonsense literature’s focus on language. Unlike many other children’s adventure tales, the *Wonderland* texts place Alice in verbal, rather than physical, conflict with fantastic creatures (though the possibility of physical conflict persists). Conversation is reduced to a power struggle, and Alice must learn to wield language in order to survive her journey through Wonderland. She must first understand language in order to choose when to use it to create strong arguments of her own and when to critique the arguments of her Wonderland counterparts. Alice, once she has learned the rules of Wonderland conversation, most often utilizes this second form when the Wonderland residents adapt nonsense as their form of conversation. This form is central to the one primary purpose of nonsense texts, pragmatism, for “[t]here is no nonsense that is not capable of being turned into sense. There is no piece of language that cannot be made the pretext for a pragmatic

manipulation which is part of an agonistic strategy” (Lecerclé 98). All nonsense possesses some link to sense; it is up to the reader to synthesize such nonsense with familiar knowledge. Likewise, nonsense texts are neither arbitrary nor incoherent, and “*Agon* is not chosen for the fun of disruption, but in order to comfort cooperation by staging the disasters that its absence entails—which means that the strategy has a pedagogic aim” (Lecerclé 111). Thus, readers of nonsense texts are exposed to the disastrous nature of non-cooperative conversation, in an effort to teach them the importance of cooperation in language—the point of a conversation, such as that between teacher and student, is not to win the conversation, not to be the dominant entity, but to understand all aspects of such conversation. Nonsense texts intentionally incorporate nonsense in order to force readers to consider possible sense, or responses, to this nonsense. Alice, as a dual representative (the character as a Victorian child in Wonderland and her Oxford counterpart as a Victorian child in nineteenth century England), must learn from Wonderland, because

the game of nonsense, and the Wonderland it calls into being are the negative moment in the pedagogic dialectics of the acquisition by the child of good manners, in society as in conversation. Once Alice has perceived this negative inverted order [,] she learns to conform to the new rules and to use them for her own purposes. (Lecerclé 113)

Thus, the relationship between Alice and what she learns through the nonsense of Wonderland closely mimics the effect of nonsense on Victorian educational institutions:

nonsense both upholds and ruins the values of Victorian education, it both mimics and mocks the educational institutions, it both captures and frees the children still excluded by the system, it echoes, stages, and intervenes upon the contradictions of language as both object and vehicle of Victorian pedagogy. (Lecerle 220)

Education is a central theme in nonsense texts. Lewis Carroll, through his *Wonderland* texts, aims to educate his readers. He does not teach his readers simply to obey, but to explore a multitude of possible meanings, to synthesize these meanings with those put forward by others. Therefore, his pedagogic purpose in these texts is to teach his readers, i.e. young Victorian girls, to understand when obedience and disobedience are appropriate, based on the evaluation of their counterparts' (in many cases educators) sense.

#### Parody and Satire in Nonsense

The work of Jean-Jacques Lecerle on nonsense literature, on the chronotope of Victorian nonsense, is vital to developing a greater understanding of the *Wonderland* texts. However, he focuses on the texts themselves, on the works of Lewis Carroll, and does not delve deeply into the life and work of Charles Dodgson, a man deeply connected to Victorian English literature, culture, and Victorian education. Similarly, while Lecerle focuses heavily on the relationship between nonsense literature, Victorian England, and the general Victorian schoolroom, he does not delve into specific instances of Victorian education. He focuses on the generic concept of Victorian England and education rather than on the specific laws, figures, and institutions that this thesis evaluates. Likewise, he

does not deal much with the significant present of religious education in Victorian England, choosing instead to consider the standard, secular (in the later nineteenth century) Victorian classroom as his source. This thesis analyzes how Lewis Carroll/Charles Dodgson parodies and satirizes the shifting power structures and ideologies in Victorian England (both religious and secular), with regards to Victorian education.

Lewis Carroll utilizes all of the aforementioned aspects of nonsense in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. These texts are frequently described as parodic; there are “in the two ‘Alice’ books, fifteen recognized parodies of then currently well-known poems, five other poems not so recognized, at least so far, and four popular nursery-rhymes” (Shaw 1). They are also often described as satirical, especially when combined with the original illustrations of Sir John Tenniel, a cartoonist who worked for the famously satirical magazine *Punch* for over fifty years. However, we have already seen that the parody and satire (pastiche) of nonsense literature are different from traditional forms of parody and satire, like that of *Punch*. Rather, Carroll utilizes the cooperative nature of conversation, by satirizing the competitive nature of Wonderland conversation, to propose a synthesis of parody/satire and their targets. Alice’s incorrect recitation of religious rhymes is not, in Wonderland, religiously blasphemous; they only offend the rules of language and logic. Carroll does not, for example, parody nursery rhymes in order to criticize them, but to offer to young children new ways of understanding these rhymes without condemning the original purpose as wrong. There must be balance in nonsense; a single point of view, answer, or explanation should never

claim to be the *only* one. Justification, based in logic, determines the extent of each argument's validity. Again, Charles Dodgson the logician appears in the works of Lewis Carroll. Logic, rather than common sense and knowledge, is the most important aspect of meaning to Dodgson/Carroll. In *Symbolic Logic*, under the Appendix heading "Addressed to Teachers," Carroll writes:

If I find an author saying, at the beginning of his book, "Let it be understood that by the word '*black*' I shall always mean '*white*', and that by the word '*white*' I shall always mean '*black*,'" I meekly accept his ruling, however injudicious I may think it. . . . I maintain that every writer may adopt his own rule, provided of course that it is consistent with itself and with the accepted facts of Logic. (164)

The reversal of the meaning of the words "white" and "black" is, here, an example of nonsense. It does not abide by the rules of common sense or by traditional definition, occurring outside of the author's text, but within the text, it is logically sound—containing only sense, provided it is both consistent (not random) and can be logically justified. This, of course, applies specifically to Victorian England—twenty-first century speakers of English would be familiar with instances of people using the term *literally* as an intensifier for figurative statements, or using the plural pronoun *they* to refer to a singular, gender-neutral antecedent, without the speakers or writers having prefaced these usages.

The large number of parodies in the *Wonderland* texts reflects a significant criticism of Victorian education: rote learning. Alice repeatedly resorts to recitation of

her school lessons when confronted with the unexpected experiences of Wonderland, but she has not learned the appropriate application of these lessons. She instead acts as a child who has been possessed by this knowledge but who is not in control of it. Carroll criticizes Victorian educators who assume memorization of a topic denotes understanding. Alice, on the other hand, gains understanding through her experiences and through questioning her educators, often in response to the flawed educational processes of the Wonderland creatures. Nonsense, therefore,

is a constant effort towards mastery, towards blocking the emergence of the radically unmeant, the true or radical nonsense of possession or delirium. Alice's possession is a mild, even if disquieting, case—it is limited to recitation. The repetition of the failure to recite the right words is nothing other than the compulsive re-staging of the primitive scene of language, where mastery over language is mythically acquired—the compulsiveness of the re-staging being due to repeated, inevitable failure.

(Lecerle 134)

Lecerle's use of the word "possession" here is itself a loaded term. He associates school lessons with demonic possession, creating a link between secular classroom education and religious education. This link also connects religious education, which relies heavily on rote recitation, with demonic possession, causing readers to question the value of such learning. Because of this questionable value of her previous lessons, Alice must never assume that anything she has previously been taught in Victorian England, experienced in Wonderland, or told by the Wonderland residents is correct; rather, she must apply her

Victorian lessons to her experiences, and come to a synthesis of ideas, where all aspects of her knowledge can be logically accounted for. This stands true even when her new knowledge appears contradictory; Lecercle notes that Lewis Carroll once claimed that “if he had a choice between a watch that was always a minute fast and another that did not work at all, he would plump for the latter, since it gave the right time twice a day, whereas the former never did” (qtd. in Lecercle 166-67). True, the watch that never worked tells the exact time more often than one that is not properly calibrated; however, the owner of the working watch should understand it to be fast and adapt. Both of these situations, while in opposition, are correct; one simply has to understand when to use each situation, based on their explanation. In a logic classroom, the watch that is perfectly precise twice a day is the superior option, but in everyday practice the one that performs the intended action of a watch, albeit slightly misadjusted, is by far the more useful. This watch is a perfect example of Carroll’s use of nonsense to illustrate his strategy of synthesis. Carroll frequently presents, in his writing, situations where a seemingly nonsensical statement or response carries certain aspects of sense; however, these situations are not accurate in *every* situation. It is up to his readers to determine when and how to utilize these aspects of (non)sense.

Because his original audience was the three young Liddell sisters, Lewis Carroll tailored his parody around the type of education that these young Victorian girls would have experienced. Lecercle claims that “the filiation which goes from nursery rhymes to school rhymes to literary nonsense is fairly straightforward. First there were nursery rhymes, then there was *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*” (185). Victorian nonsense

owes its origins to nursery rhymes, limericks, fairy tales, and school rhymes, the latter being the most closely related. As such, there is a close relationship between nonsense, Victorian religious education (in the form of nursery rhymes), and classroom/schoolyard education (both rote learning rhymes and schoolyard rhymes). This thesis analyzes how Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* texts, as one of the greatest examples of Victorian nonsense, parodies and satirizes (mostly in the form of pastiche, of synthesis) Victorian religious and secular classroom forms of education.

## CHAPTER III

### EDUCATION IN THE WORKS OF LEWIS CARROLL

As we have seen from the work of Jean-Jacques Lecercle, education and nonsense literature are interconnected. Carrollian scholarship supports this concept: a significant portion of Carrollian criticism deals with various aspects of education. The work of Donald Rackin explores how, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the characters and experiences of Wonderland educate Alice and force her to recreate her identity. Michael Mendelson expands on this idea, using Aristotle's concept of practical wisdom to separate Alice's Wonderland education into various types of knowledge. He utilizes Aristotle's explanations in order to teach *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to his own students. Mendelson's use of the *Wonderland* texts as educational tools strongly resembles the original pedagogic purposes of these texts. After all, Charles Dodgson was a lecturer in mathematics at Christ Church College, Oxford and author of mathematics textbooks. As a logician at Oxford, Carroll was familiar with, either by reading or by knowing personally, the main linguists of his time: John Horne Tooke, Richard Chevenix Trench, and Max Müller (Lecercle 196). However, his background was in mathematical logic and not linguistics, but he brilliantly blends the two fields in *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*, a mathematical defense or argument in support of his geometric pedagogy written in dramatic form. Although Lecercle does not specifically refer to *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*, and only three times to *Sylvie and Bruno*, as he focuses more on the linguistic

aspect of the relationship rather than the logical side, he does explain how Carroll links the rules of Victorian linguistics to those of logical support in much of his work:

There is a sense in which nonsense is a metanarrative genre, an intuitive, proto-reflexive view of fiction. In turn, this capacity for intuition is due to the genre's intimate relation to logic. The relation is not only subjective (in the case of Lewis Carroll), but also objective. The negative prefix indicates a relation of Freudian negation to the rules of sensible discourse, that which provides the bounds of linguistic sense, logic. And the wild imagination of nonsense is bound to exploit, and thereby make manifest, the constraints imposed on propositions by categories and logical form.  
(199)

Nonsense literature, like the *Wonderland* texts, provides an avenue for education that relies on the logical forms of justification and support. Carroll utilizes these forms to present a strategy of compromise, by which multiple logically supported responses can be correct at the same time, without proving other responses incorrect, though he does sometimes express a preference for a particular response. In the Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*,<sup>6</sup> Carroll reveals that

critics have objected to certain innovations in spelling, such as “ca’n’t,” “wo’n’t,” “traveler.” In reply, I can only plead my firm conviction that the popular usage is *wrong*. As to “ca’n’t,” it will not be disputed that, in all

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<sup>6</sup> *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* was a sequel to *Sylvie and Bruno* and the final novel published by Lewis Carroll. Like Carroll's earlier work, much of the combined text takes place in a fantasy setting, but unlike the *Wonderland* texts, a significant portion of this work is set in Victorian England, allowing for a more direct satire of Victorian England and English culture.

*other* words ending in “n’t,” these letters are an abbreviation of “not”; and it is surely absurd to suppose that, in this solitary instance, “not” is represented by “’t”! In fact, “can’t” is the *proper* abbreviation for “can it,” just as “is’t” is for “is it.” Again, in “wo’n’t,” the first apostrophe is needed, because the word “would” is here *abridged* into “wo’”: but I hold it proper to spell “don’t” with only *one* apostrophe, because the word “do” is here *complete*. (509-10)

While Carroll claims that the existing rule is wrong, he means that it does not adhere to proper rules that would be taught to a student in a grammar lesson, not that he believes it to be incorrect in the mathematical sense (a complete negation of the rule; mathematical equations are either entirely correct or entirely incorrect). The English language is full of exceptions to the rules of proper grammar, mechanics, and orthography, and Carroll believes that these exceptions often cause confusion. While he insists on creating his own rules for contractions, he provides an explanation for them in the preface to his text so that readers are not confused when they encounter these situations. This shows Carroll’s adherence to logic rather than tradition, to simplicity rather than dogma. It also shows his emphasis on justification rather than memorization: if he is able justify his alternate usage, why shouldn’t he make these modifications? Isn’t a simpler, standard form of grammar a better choice than a complicated, irregular way, left over from the evolution of English from several other languages? Carroll here has provided an additional option, allowing a choice on the part of users of the English language, who may, perhaps, choose

a compromise between the two (later editions of Carroll's work have removed the extra apostrophes).

In this chapter, I provide evidence of Lewis Carroll's strategy of synthesis; in education this synthesis manifests as a preference for justification and explanation over memorization and rote learning. This often leads to his work being described as nonsense, though the term does not denote a simple lack of sense (as per Lecercle's definitions). This nonsense allows for multiple conflicting but correct answers, provided they are justified, which allows for his students/readers (for Carroll frequently educates as he entertains) to attain practical wisdom, what Aristotle referred to as *phronesis*. All of these methods of synthesis and compromise act to satirize traditional Victorian modes of education, which maintain their form(s) as the superior, and therefore only, method for education.

Lewis Carroll long favored justification and explanation to simple rote learning and memorization as the primary method of child education. He includes explanations of much of his work within the prefaces of later editions of his texts. In the preface to the 1896 edition of *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll reveals his strategies of justification and of compromise:

As the chess-problem, given on the previous page, has puzzled some of my readers, it may be well to explain that it is correctly worked out, so far as the *moves* are concerned. The *alternation* of Red and White is perhaps not so strictly observed as it might be, and the "castling" of the three Queens is merely a way of saying that they entered the palace; but the

“check” of the White Knight at move 6, the capture of the Red Knight at move 7, and the final “checkmate” of the Red King, will be found, by any one who will take the trouble to set the pieces and play the moves as directed, to be strictly in accordance with the laws of the game. (138)

Carroll here presents two key compromises, each logically sound. First, while a young child may be familiar with the rules of chess, he or she may also be expected to occasionally make mistakes, or at least be unaware of the mistakes of others during a chess match. Second, though he claims “[t]he *alternation* of Red and White is perhaps not so strictly observed,” he later claims the moves themselves “to be strictly in accordance with the laws of the game” (138). While his approach to chess does not follow the rigid rules of the game, Carroll arrives at the same conclusion that a chess match, played according to the rules of the game, would have. His justification of these steps to reach his conclusion proves his claim to be viable. Carroll neither criticizes the rules of chess nor advocates ignoring the rules of the game, but instead shows how he (and by extension his readers) can adapt previously held rules to fit new situations. This parody of chess reflects Carroll’s criticism of the rigidity of Victorian education laws and of forms of rote learning that Victorian schoolchildren were exposed to.

A prime example of Carroll’s preference for justification manifests itself in his work in the form of one of the most iconic characters of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*: the Hatter. The Hatter asks Alice “[w]hy is a raven like a writing-desk?” (75). Alice responds with “I believe I can guess that,” believing that she will finally have some fun (75). This response indicates Alice does not understand that education and

entertainment are not mutually exclusive. She believes that, like many religious and formal educational institutions, a teacher-student relationship cannot involve entertainment, so this riddle provides her with an escape from the previous didacticism of the Tea-Party guests into the realm of childish fun. The Hatter's response, "[d]o you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it," turns the riddle from a simple question and answer situation into a site of education for Alice (75). If Alice simply guesses why a raven is like a writing desk, she does not truly understand how to answer the question. If she happens to guess correctly, but does not understand why her response is correct, she is lucky, not knowledgeable. Similarly, if Alice simply recites facts without knowing how to properly use those facts (as she frequently resorts to during the first part of her Wonderland journey), she has not learned anything useful. After a brief back-and-forth between Alice and the tea-party guests, the Hatter asks if Alice has "guessed the riddle yet?" (78). Here, the Hatter has chosen to repeat Alice's use of the word "guessed" rather than asking if Alice has arrived at an answer to the riddle. In response, Alice gives up without even attempting an answer, as she does not know how to answer correctly. Both the Hatter and March Hare respond that they are also unable to answer the riddle, implying that the riddle itself has no answer. Had she attempted to find the solution to this verbal problem, Alice most likely would have received more "nonsense" from the Wonderland residents, which, through dialogue, would emphasize justification of her response (asking Alice to explain her statements) rather than the response itself (her response as either correct or incorrect). Alice claims that attempting

to solve a riddle with no answer is a waste of time, not realizing that even if she does not arrive at a solution, her attempt to discover meaning would result in knowledge.

The term “nonsense” is extremely important in situations such as the Hatter’s riddle: like many forms of religious education, Alice believes that something must have either a single, correct answer or no answer at all. She does not understand the importance of justification or the fact that a single question may result in multiple solutions. Jean-Jacques Lecercle believes that the term nonsense provides for this, that nonsense “is to be taken not so much as the trace of a cognitive judgment, (‘I assert that there is no sense in this text’) but rather as an elliptic exclamative, calling for dialogic response” (180). The fact that there is no single, correct answer to the Hatter’s riddle that negates all other answers from being correct does not discount the possibility of a response. The answer itself is not as important as the justification, provided the person who gives the answer is able to support said answer with evidence, logic, and reasoning rather than simply by guessing or through recitation. This use of evidence to support an answer is central to Lewis Carroll’s logic, and by extension, his satire of rote memorization.

Although his riddle does not have an answer within the text, and he makes no effort to educate Alice on possible responses, the Hatter does provide other forms of education to Alice. When Alice claims that meaning what she says is the same as saying what she means, the Hatter responds that these are “[n]ot the same thing a bit! Why, you might just as well say that ‘I see what I eat’ is the same thing as ‘I eat what I see!’” (76). Here, the Hatter has correctly identified a logical flaw in Alice’s speech. Because the

Hatter provides Alice with knowledge through nonsense, he demonstrates Lewis Carroll's main purpose in satirizing Victorian education. Carroll does not claim that the dominant form of education, learning by rote, is completely wrong; rather, he believes that students need to evaluate every situation in order to understand what they experience and learn, and then be able to justify their actions or responses. After all, rote memorization is useless if students are unable to apply this knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Carroll himself felt a need to understand reasoning, even if he didn't comprehend the final answer. Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, Lewis Carroll's nephew and biographer, tells a story from Carroll's youth that emphasizes this focus on justification:

One day, when Charles was a very small boy, he came up to his father and showed him a book of logarithms, with the request "Please explain." Mr. Dodgson told him that he was much too young to understand anything about such a difficult subject. The child listened to what his father said, and appeared to think it irrelevant, for he still insisted, "*But*, please, explain!" (Collingwood 12-13).

Carroll's fascination with mathematics remained throughout his life; he taught mathematics at Christ Church College, Oxford for twenty-six years. Even while teaching mathematics and logic, he still favored explanation over memorization.

*Euclid and His Modern Rivals*,<sup>8</sup> a mathematical argument for Euclid published under Carroll's true name, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, exemplifies this preference for

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<sup>7</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the failure of rote memorization in Victorian schools, see Chapter V of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Published in 1879, as a satire on educational reform for the sake of reform, while Dodgson was a lecturer in mathematics at Christ Church College, Oxford.

explanation. Dodgson presents his book in a four-act dramatic form; Carroll here blends the scientific, either/or nature of mathematics with the creative, fluid nature of drama. He prefaces his book by stating:

In one respect this book is an experiment, and may chance to prove a failure: I mean that I have not thought it necessary to maintain throughout the gravity of style which scientific writers usually affect, and which has somehow come to be regarded as an “inseparable accident” of scientific teaching. I never could quite see the reasonableness of this immemorial law: subjects there are, no doubt, which are in their essence too serious to admit to any lightness of treatment—but I cannot recognize Geometry as one of them. Nevertheless it will, I trust, be found that I have permitted myself a glimpse of the comic side of things only at fitting seasons, when the tired reader might well crave a moment’s breathing-space, and not on any occasion where it could endanger the continuity of a line of argument.<sup>9</sup> (x)

By abandoning the scientific language of mathematics in this textbook, Dodgson nearly explicitly states the disapproval of rote learning that he so frequently satirizes in his writings under the penname Lewis Carroll. Rather than maintain a rigid system of question and answer, Dodgson’s textbook provides dialogue that justifies the step-by-step process through which his characters arrive at answers to logic problems. He accomplishes this process by placing his characters in dialogue with each other, a

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<sup>9</sup> This quotation has had a lasting impact on the English world: in 2000, the web-based encyclopedia Wikipedia utilized this quotation in its homepage image.

situation calling to memory Alice's thought, on the first page of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, of "what is the use of a book . . . without pictures or conversations?" (17). Such conversations also emphasize Carroll's preference for dialogue in education, rather than a simple system of rote memorization based solely on question and answer. Carroll also provided examples of situations where the material taught via rote learning can be incorrect. In Act III, Scene, I of *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*, the character Minos criticizes Herr Niemand regarding a problem from a standardized mathematics textbook, E. M. Reynolds' *Modern Methods in Elementary Geometry*:

In Th. I (p. 3), I read "the angles  $CDA$ ,  $CDB$  are together equal to two right angles. *For they fill exactly the same space.*" Do you mean finite or infinite space? If "finite," we increase the angle by lengthening its sides: if "infinite," the idea is unsuited for elementary teaching. You had better abandon the idea of an angle "filling space," which is no improvement on Euclid's method. (175)

While the information from the aforementioned mathematics problem is correct in many cases, Dodgson does not feel that the language is sufficiently precise. Though his emphasis is on precision of terms (an important issue in mathematics), rote memorization of imprecise terms leads to a flawed understanding of the subject. The problem does not explain to elementary students of mathematics the appropriate use of said problem—that the term "space" applies, in this usage, to only geometry. Dodgson's critique of mathematics textbooks, then, explains both the answers to problems and when the use of mathematics for said problems is appropriate—or when to use mathematical terms and

when to avoid using them. This section of *Euclid and his Modern Rivals* is also thick with satire. Herr Niemand literally translates from German to English as Mr. Nobody, and Dodgson consistently shows Niemand's arguments to be unsupported and, as a result, flawed. Dodgson here uses Herr Niemand to satirize Victorian educational figures who demand educational change for the sake of change and not for the benefit of students (Victorian nonsense literature arose from the vast changes to education during the middle part of the nineteenth century). He also uses this textbook to satirize Victorian figures who implemented sudden changes without preparing students for the transitions. Dodgson shows, in this textbook, that there is nothing wrong with continuing to teach Euclid to students of mathematics, while at the same time granting that some of the newer styles of mathematics can be beneficial to students. Act 3 also begins with the phrase "[t]hough this be madness, yet there's method in't" (175). This line, from *Hamlet*, is Polonius' comment on Hamlet's feigned madness. However, in the preceding line from this Shakespeare play, Hamlet refers to the author of a book he is reading as a "satirical rogue"; Dodgson's choice to include this reference at the beginning of his third act implies, to a well-read audience, that he considers himself a satirical rogue of an author and educator (2.2.197).

Carroll provides a similar example of his preference for justification and support in one of his "Puzzles from Wonderland." Carroll asks:

A stick I found that weighed two pound:

I sawed it up one day

In pieces eight of equal weight!

How much did each piece weigh?

(Everybody says “a quarter of a pound,” which is wrong.). (819)

Many readers, would consider this puzzle to be nonsense in the traditional sense, as the final line negates the expected response. Lecercle, had he included it in his analysis, would likely have described this rhyme as literary nonsense, as the final line calls for a dialogic response, for both an explanation of why the common answer is incorrect and for Carroll’s (expected) answer. Had this been a story problem in a mathematics lesson, a quarter of a pound would have been the proper answer; the instructor would assume that this poem presents the equation two divided by eight. However, Carroll critiques this simple, binary form of questioning in his answer poem:

In Shylock’s bargain for flesh was found

No mention of the blood that flowed around:

So when the stick was sawed in eight,

The sawdust lost diminished from the weight. (821)

The common response, upon hearing the first poem, would be to find the claim that two divided by eight is not one quarter to be nonsense. Carroll’s answer provides an example of his strategy of compromise and of his use of metasense, or of multiple answers to a single question. He again references Shakespeare, this time *The Merchant of Venice*, combining the literary aspects of drama with the scientific aspects of mathematics. Carroll’s riddle can be correctly answered in many ways, depending on how one explains the calculation of sawdust (if one can even calculate this number without more information; say, the specific type of wood, the measurements of the sawblade, or the

force the sawyer applies to the saw). This use of metasense does not mean that Carroll believes logic and wordplay to be superior to mathematics; rather, he believes that a child who can justify his or her responses is a far more knowledgeable child than one who can simply recite mathematics tables. Put another way, the mathematical equation of two divided by eight equals one quarter would be correct for a student of mathematics, but Carroll's riddle would be correct for a student of carpentry, where the length of the final pieces, and thus the final product, are the only important result. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the Caterpillar provides a similar situation:

“One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.”

“One side of *what?* The other side of *what?*” thought Alice to herself.

“Of the mushroom,” said the Caterpillar, just as if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight. Alice remained looking thoughtfully at the mushroom for a minute, trying to make out which were the two sides of it; and, as it was perfectly round, she found this a very difficult question. (59)

A circle is a paradoxical figure, having opposite sides but at the same time no corners to mark their boundaries. A student, asked to identify two sides of a circle, would have no difficulty in identifying opposite positions on said circle, but how would they know to relate this to some invisible separation created by their instructor? In this situation, any two opposing positions on a circle can be identified as opposite sides; all that is required is the justification for the (in most cases) ambiguous decision to select those points.

Carroll's strategy for justification and compromise is not limited to scientific or mathematical education. Although he held tremendous respect for the works of Shakespeare, Carroll believed that they could be improved in order to better educate Victorian children. In his introduction to *Sylvie and Bruno*,<sup>10</sup> Carroll writes that he would like to compile "a collection of passages, both prose and verse, from books other than the Bible" (281). These passages would be read and reflected on by children, to improve their minds. Some Victorian educators, particularly those with religious connections, would disagree with a collection of such popular, secular, "un-inspired literature" as Shakespeare being used to educate young children (especially with some Victorian churches condemning the popular theatre), but Carroll counters this disagreement with his belief that "if Shakespeare was not inspired, one may well doubt if any man ever was" (281). Because of his strong belief in compromise, Carroll champions for variety of literature (mathematics, drama, poetry, sciences, etc.) in education, rather than for the singular genre of education (that which was approved by the governing religious body) that was prevalent in Victorian religious educational institutions. This, in turn, leads to another book that Carroll would like to see written: a version of Shakespeare designed for young girls. In such a book, material unsuitable for young Victorian girls, from around 10 to 17, should be removed. By unsuitable material, Carroll means not just material he deems inappropriate to these girls, but "also all that seems too difficult, or not likely to interest young readers. The resulting book might be slightly fragmentary: but it would be a real treasure to all British maidens who have any taste for poetry" (283). This statement

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<sup>10</sup> Although Lecercle briefly addresses *Sylvie and Bruno* in his work, his focus remains on linguistic aspects of the text rather than on its content.

explains why so much of his work appears fragmentary; he has removed anything he does not feel is essential. Here Carroll's sense of compromise affects not religious material, but artistic material. A lover of Shakespeare may be just as offended by Carroll's significant censorship of the Bard as a clergyman would be by his censorship of the Bible.<sup>11</sup> However, Carroll is not concerned with the artist or the clergyman; instead, he is concerned with the student. In a letter to the actress Ellen Terry, concerning the subject of *The Merchant of Venice*, Carroll writes:

I want to see the clause omitted (in the sentence on Shylock)—“That, for this favour, / He presently become a Christian;” It is a sentiment that is entirely horrible and revolting to the feelings of all who believe in the Gospel of Love. Why should our ears be shocked by such words merely because they are Shakespeare's? . . . To all Christians now (except perhaps extreme Calvinists) the idea of forcing a man to abjure his religion, whatever that religion may be, is (as I have said) simply horrible. I have spoken of it as a needless outrage on religious feeling: but surely, being so, it is a great artistic mistake. (Collingwood 182-83)

As a man, Carroll firmly believes that anything should be an open target for censorship or change, that everything can be improved upon, provided said change is in the best interest of those involved (in Carroll's case, usually young girls). He is careful to explain and justify his claims, showing how these changes would benefit young students. These explanations also illustrate Carroll's emphasis on education in all aspects of his thought.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information on Carroll's censorship of the Bible, see chapter V of this thesis.

Carroll's criticism of traditional rote learning in favor of a form of practical wisdom exemplifies his satire of the Victorian education system: the vast majority of Victorian education utilized extensive rote learning strategies with no explanation of how a student should properly apply what they have learned to their lives outside of the classroom. Carroll's conclusions are not new; the Greek philosopher Cicero once commented "how little difference there is between the learned and the ignorant in judging" (qtd. in Thiele 104). Wonderland is full of characters who attempt to judge both Alice and other Wonderland residents. The King who, as a literal judge, presides over the trial must be constantly reminded of the rules of law by the White Rabbit, such as when he asks the jury to "[c]onsider your verdict" before the trial has even begun (116). The Duchess acts as judge in a different capacity, telling Alice that "[e]verything's got a moral, if only you can find it" (96). The Duchess then carries on a conversation with Alice, misunderstanding most of what is said but making moral judgments on the statements nonetheless.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a deeper analysis of classroom education and the Duchess' moralizing, see Chapters IV and V of this thesis.

## Wisdom in Wonderland

The lyrical parodies within the *Wonderland* texts also help to provide justification for Alice's Wonderland knowledge. Alice is consistently put in situations where she must alter both her actions and her understanding. Her responses to these situations echo the reactions of child readers of these *Wonderland* texts:

Alice's assumptions about the world include fictive conventions inherited from children's stories as well as the experiences accumulated through first-hand encounters of daily life. As a result, a talking rabbit is routine because recognizable, while the novelty of a rabbit with a waistcoat and a watch calls up an entirely different response. (Mendelson 290)

This connection between children's stories and logic is vitally important to Victorian education, due to the emphasis placed on education through conduct books, nursery rhymes, and other widely-known children's literature used by Victorian educators. By parodying commonly known stories, poems, and songs, and including explanation and justification for the Wonderland equivalents, Carroll provides his readers with the opportunity to question the value of the originals.<sup>13</sup>

Michael Mendelson has completed a considerable amount of scholarship regarding Alice's education in the *Wonderland* texts. He applies Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* to Carroll's emphasis on justification rather than on memorization. By connecting Alice's Wonderland education with Aristotle's *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, and separating this form of knowing from scientific, artistic, theoretical, and

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<sup>13</sup> For detailed explanations of Carroll's lyrical parodies in the *Wonderland* texts, Chapters IV and V of this thesis.

intuitive knowledge, Mendelson argues that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* requires Alice to abandon her early understanding of knowledge, based on her school lessons, in favor of common sense (40). This common sense appears to contradict Lecercle's use of nonsense, but the two are closely related: they focus on methods of learning rather than on the material of lessons. Mendelson relies on Aristotle's book 6 of *Nichomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle describes *phronesis* as a mixture of interpretation and creativity in order to adapt one's actions to meet various situations. In *Aristotle's Ethics*, David Bostock expands on Aristotle's definition, contrasting *phronesis* with Aristotle's other form of wisdom, *sophia*. While *sophia* is traditionally translated as "wisdom," Bostock prefers the term "theoretical wisdom," and while *phronesis* is traditionally translated as "practical wisdom," Bostock prefers the terms "being thoughtful" or "being sensible" (77). Alice's actions when she first arrives in Wonderland provide the perfect example of the failure of Victorian rote education. Alice struggles with her own identity, asking herself "[w]ho in the world am I?" (28). She attempts to answer this question first by reciting her multiplication tables, then by reciting her Geography lessons, and finally by reciting the poem "How doth the little—," but these recitations fail to improve her situation. Alice possesses the theoretical wisdom taught to her through Victorian educational systems and institutions, but she has never been taught the sensibility to properly utilize her theoretical wisdom and apply it to her life outside the classroom. She makes these mistakes because, as Donald Rackin claims, "Alice's assumptions are typically no more than her elders' operating premises, which she maintains with a doctrinaire passion that is almost a caricature of immature credulity" (394). Alice has

been taught that everything told to her by Victorian instructors is fact, and she has never questioned this “truth.” However, when she realizes that her Wonderland educators frequently make mistakes in their justification, or are simply unable or unwilling to justify their responses, Alice begins to abandon traditional Victorian educational processes, develop practical wisdom, and synthesize the two, altering her behavior to suit various situations.

Though he contrasts practical wisdom with other forms of knowing, Mendelson does not claim that practical wisdom is superior. Rather, he advocates the belief that an individual, here represented by Alice, should recognize when each form of knowledge or knowing is appropriate. This recognition is the same concept as Carroll’s strategy of synthesis. As Leslie Paul Thiele writes, “[p]ractical judgment finds in literature a workshop where its skills and sensibilities may be finely honed” (238). Readers of the *Wonderland* texts, then, learn practical wisdom alongside Alice, and Lewis Carroll is successful in presenting an alternative to the standard, rote form of learning that dominated Victorian education. Alice does not completely abandon her school lessons; she learns when she should apply school lessons to life and when she should adopt a different approach to understanding the world around her. In this sense, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* acts as a form of conduct book, educating its readers on appropriate forms of knowing.

Thiele defines practical wisdom as “an aptitude for assessing, evaluating, and choosing in the absence of certainties or principles that dictate or generate right answers. Judges cannot rely on algorithms. Their efforts always exceed adherence to rules and are

not tightly tethered to law” (5). However, the Wonderland residents are notoriously lacking in their ability to assess and evaluate any belief other than their own. Many Wonderland characters adopt the role of judge when they meet Alice, but, because they cannot understand her Victorian system of knowledge, they end up as examples of flawed judges. The most famous of these is, of course, the Queen of Hearts, who constantly judges and sentences various other characters to death by decapitation (although the King explains that these sentences are never carried out). Additionally, although there is a jury in the courtroom scene in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, it is the Queen who maintains authority over these jurors, at least until Alice effectively ends the trial by escaping Wonderland. Alice is finally able to utilize the practical wisdom that she has learned through her Wonderland encounters to take control of the situation, correct her Wonderland companions, and return to Victorian England. Alice learns that, as Thiele writes, “[g]ood judgment is not so much gained in the classroom as in the school of hard knocks” (8). Her experiences in Wonderland, based on faulty education, not her Victorian school lessons, which are factually correct, have taught her how to respond appropriately to new and unexpected situations that many readers have described as nonsense. For example, in Chapter VIII of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, when she is forced to play a game of croquet with a live flamingo for her mallet and a live hedgehog for her ball, Alice is at first mystified. She quickly learns, however, that the goal of this croquet match is not to win, as would be the case in Victorian England. Victorian croquet followed very strict rules of play, but Wonderland croquet doesn’t “seem to have any rules in particular: at least, if there are, nobody attends to them” (92). She concludes that

the true purpose of the croquet game is to flatter the Queen; the setting of a croquet match is irrelevant. While the character of Alice has learned these lessons from her experiences, readers must also remember that the original audience, the three Liddell sisters, learned these lessons directly from Charles Dodgson.

The fact that both *Wonderland* texts are written from Alice's perspective is extremely important to the concept of practical wisdom. Thiele writes that "[t]he articulation of a judgment typically signals its conscious birth" (71). Readers, therefore, get to experience Alice's acquisition of practical wisdom as the character does, and this experience serves to educate young readers of the *Wonderland* texts. After all, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was originally an oral tale told to the three Liddell sisters. At the same time, however, the reader is occasionally made aware of the authorial presence of Lewis Carroll. For example, in the first chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll breaks from his description of Alice and her kitten to address the reader directly: "I wish I could tell you half the things Alice used to say, beginning with her favourite phrase 'Let's pretend'" (145). These breaks remind readers that Alice is a fictional character, and that the book is meant not to be read by a lone individual, but by a speaker (adult) to a listener (child). These multiple viewpoints contrast the *Wonderland* characters, who cannot see things from Alice's point of view, with the reader, who sees Alice's, Carroll's, and a third-person viewpoint of the story. As such, readers are privy to Alice's evolution, from the one-sided Victorian (and its opposite, *Wonderland*) style of thought to her understanding of the multiplicity of knowledge that lies between the two poles.

Readers are not only privy to the thoughts of the author and narrator but to Alice's thoughts as well. Throughout the texts, Alice thinks out loud, voicing many of her thought processes both to the Wonderland residents and to readers of the text. This adds an additional element to a reader's understanding of the Victorian texts: Thiele writes that "[n]ot all that is thought, felt, or intuited finds a voice; and what gets selected for articulation or relegated to silence can significantly alter the judgments we develop" (73). Thus, a reader experiences what Alice says and thinks as well as what she may not be aware of, presented either through other Wonderland characters or through the narration or description by Carroll himself. Unlike the standard relationship between narrative and dialogue, where there is a binary relationship between the author and character(s), the *Wonderland* texts include narrative breaks which create a three-part relationship: author, character(s), and reader(s). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* strays from most author/reader relationships in that the general relationship between Lewis Carroll and his reader is different than the original relationship between Charles Dodgson and the Liddell sisters. As such, readers may infer that Carroll has chosen to eliminate some explanation he gave in response to the Liddell sisters, while including others that a reader may not be familiar with, such as explanations and intuitions that explain Alice's personality. While the relationship between author and character is usually one-way (the author can affect a character but a character cannot affect the author), the relationship between author (Carroll), characters (Alice), and readers (both the Liddell sisters, who were present to ask questions and affect the story, both in content and in presentation, and Victorian readers, who frequently corresponded with Carroll regarding his work) is much more

fluid. Because of this extended relationship, there are details within Carroll's stories that, to understand, require a very particular point of reference; these references usually appear in the form of parody, pastiche, or satire. In the introduction to one of his later stories, *Sylvie and Bruno*, Carroll describes this fragmentary style of writing: "thus it came to pass that I found myself at last in possession of a huge unwieldy mass of literature—if the reader will kindly excuse the spelling—which only needed stringing together, upon the thread of a consecutive story" (278). Carroll's works are collections of ideas, events, characters, and other bits of Victorian culture, fit together in a larger text. These references necessitate an intimate understanding of Carroll, his specific audiences, and of Victorian and Oxfordian culture. There is, then, an abundance of parody, pastiche, satire, and reference, of both Christ Church and Oxford and of Victorian England as a whole in the works of Lewis Carroll. Likewise, matters traditionally found serious, such as religion and law, are mixed with the comic, forming a compromise between seriousness and comedy without declaring one superior to the other.

Because of Carroll's style of fiction writing, texts such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* provide readers with the opportunity to mix entertainment with education. In fact, this mixture led to the creation of the portmanteau-word (itself a term created by Lewis Carroll) edutainment. Although the overt purpose for texts such as these is to entertain, they act covertly to educate young readers. The opposite is often not the case: many school textbooks are noticeably lacking in entertainment. Lewis Carroll was certainly not the first to do this, as children's literature has been used to both entertain and instruct for as long as it has existed, but during the

Victorian era, fiction writers were beginning to embrace children's texts as a vehicle through which the rote learning of religious and secular educational institutions could be countered. In the preface to her 1839 children's novel *Holiday House*, Scottish author Catherine Sinclair writes:

In this age of wonderful mechanical inventions, the very mind of youth seems in danger of becoming a machine; and while every effort is used to stuff the memory, like a cricket-ball, with well-known facts and ready-made opinions, no room is left for the vigour of natural feeling, the glow of natural genius, and the ardour of natural enthusiasm. It was a remark of Sir Walter Scott's many years ago, to the author herself, that in the rising generation there would be no poets, wits, or orators, because all play of imagination is carefully discouraged, and books written for young people are generally a mere dry record of facts, unenlivened by any appeal to the heart, or any excitement of the fancy. The catalogue of a child's library would contain Conversations on Natural Philosophy,—on Chemistry,—on Botany,—on Arts and Sciences,—Chronological Records of History,—and travels as dry as a road-book; but nothing in the habits of ways of thinking, natural and suitable to the taste of children. (vi-vii)<sup>14</sup>

This quotation reveals a problem that authors like Carroll attempt to address: not to condemn scientific, religious, and rote learning, but to offer an alternative or supplement, a middle ground where children can be entertained as they are educated. Because students

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<sup>14</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the conflict between fiction and fact in Victorian writing, see Ronald Reichertz' *The Making of the Alice Books: Lewis Carroll's Uses of Earlier Children's Literature*.

often feel more engaged with familiar material, this middle ground often appears through the combination of various situations already familiar to these students, such as nursery rhymes or famous characters (Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking-Glass* stands as a perfect example).

Lewis Carroll's strategy of synthesis thus reconciles the rigid, scientific, rote memorization of standard Victorian educational institutions with the creative, entertaining, evidence-based argumentation present in works such as the *Wonderland* texts and *Euclid and His Modern Rivals*. By allowing for, and in many cases insisting upon, a multiplicity of possible answers to a single question, Carroll forces readers of his texts to understand the meaning of their lessons, rather than to simply repeat what they are told. Carroll also synthesizes the dull, rigid language of science with the imaginative content of literature. This compromise helps readers and students understand the practical application of their lessons, resulting in practical wisdom that truly helps them learn.

## CHAPTER IV

### LEWIS CARROLL AND SATIRE OF VICTORIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In “Theory of Myths” from *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye writes that “[i]n the warfare of science against superstition, the satirists have done famously. . . . Similarly with religion” (231). Lewis Carroll brilliantly blends the superstitions of Victorian propriety and Victorian religion in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Frye further writes:

satire shows literature assuming a special function of analysis, of breaking up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious errors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions, and all other things that impede the free movement (not necessarily, of course, the progress) of society. (233)

Frye’s “fossilized beliefs” and “pedantic dogmatisms” are apt descriptions of Victorian religious education, which had undergone very little change during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His use of the term “movement” rather than “progress” is also appropriate to the satire of Lewis Carroll; Carroll offers a supplementary alternative to solely religious education rather than a direct condemnation of the dominant educational styles of Victorian England.

Lewis Carroll does not, in his writings, directly criticize religion itself. After all, Lewis Carroll was the penname of the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, who was also the son of an archdeacon. His status as a Student of Christ Church College came

with only two requirements: that he should “remain unmarried, and should proceed to Holy Orders” (Collingwood 52). The thought of taking Holy Orders greatly distressed Dodgson, for two main reasons. First, he believed that his stutter would prove problematic in performing clerical duties, but was advised by his superiors at Christ Church that “a deacon might lawfully, if he found himself unfit for the work, abstain from direct ministerial duty” (qtd. in Collingwood 74). Second, and more significantly, the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, told Dodgson that the “resolution to attend theatres or operas was an absolute disqualification for Holy Orders (qtd. in Collingwood 74). Dodgson was not prepared to cease his theatre attendance, and this dilemma threatened his position at Christ Church, until he discovered this decree applied only to the parochial clergy (74). Despite the clear stance of the Church of England on popular theatre, Dodgson was unwilling to end his attendance, deciding to let his own reasoning supersede that of his governing institution. Although taking Holy Orders was a requirement for Dodgson’s Studentship, he waited nine years to be ordained deacon (76). His nephew and biographer Stuart Dodgson Collingwood believed that Dodgson “never proceeded to priest’s orders, partly, I think, because he felt that if he were to do so it would be his duty to undertake regular parochial work,” which would have required him to completely cease his attendance of the popular theatre (76). Dodgson’s judgment of morality acts on a scale that relies on justification rather than on a binary that relies on the rule of authority.

In fact, Dodgson consistently advocates alternatives to established practices and condemns unwavering policies and institutions that rely solely on binary judgments such

as true/false or right/wrong. Collingwood writes that while his uncle refused to donate to any charity that supported vivisection, Dodgson “did not, however, advocate the total abolition of vivisection—what reasonable man could?” (166). In a letter to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Dodgson asks, “[h]ow far may vivisection be regarded as a sign of the times, and a fair specimen of that higher civilization which a purely secular State education is to give us?” (qtd. in Collingwood 167). Carroll’s choice to use the adjective “purely” to describe secular education, and his choice to sign the letter Lewis Carroll as opposed to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, informs readers of his middle-ground stance, of his synthesis of religion and science. Later in the letter, Carroll answers his own question, stating that “[s]elfishness is the keynote of all purely secular education; and I take vivisection to be a glaring, a wholly unmistakable case in point” (qtd. in Collingwood 170). While Carroll personally finds vivisection to be abhorrent, he does recognize that, under appropriate circumstances, it can serve a beneficial purpose. Or, put another way, he opposes vivisection as a Reverend, a religious (i.e. moral) figure, but supports the possibility of vivisection as a scientist (an instructor of logic).

Carroll’s preface to *Sylvie and Bruno* contains a much more explicit example of compromise between religion and education. In this preface, Carroll outlines four additional books that he desires to be written, by himself should he have the time (he didn’t). The first of these books is a Child’s Bible. Carroll believes such a Child’s Bible should be passages chosen for their suitability for a child, not for suitability to religious policy and education. As such, he believes that “Religion should be put before a child as a revelation of *love*—no need to pain and puzzle the young mind with the history of

crime and punishment. (On such a principle I should, for example, omit the history of the Flood)” (280). Once again, Carroll reveals his strategy of synthesis, choosing to omit one of the most well-known events of the Bible because it may harm and puzzle young readers. The message, according to Carroll, is more important than the method; likewise, the effect on the child is more important than obedience to established Christian dogma.

Second, Carroll desires “a book of pieces selected from the Bible—not single texts, but passages . . . to be committed to memory. Such passages would be found useful, to repeat to one’s-self and to ponder over” (281). While this may seem similar to the rote style of learning prevalent in religious and school institutions, the small number of passages, along with the goal of repetition and reflection, allow readers’ knowledge to develop, to evolve. Such repetition to one’s-self also eliminates the teacher/student binary, synthesizing the two opposite positions into one (the child is both the speaker and the listener, both the teacher and the student). In his explanation for the small number of passages, Carroll states that “we have no means of *recalling* single texts: memory needs *links* and here are none” (281). This emphasis on links explains why Carroll uses so many instances of parody, pastiche, and satire in his text: while the specific reference or target of parody, pastiche, or satire may be lost, memory can still assist in understanding the function of these references. Carroll’s parody and satire are meant to educate, not to merely entertain. In a letter to a Miss Dora Abdy, Carroll states that one thing he “want[s] to convey to other minds is that while the laughter of *joy* is in full harmony with our deeper life, the laughter of amusement should be kept apart from it. The danger is too great of thus learning to look at solemn things in a spirit of *mockery*, and to seek in them

opportunities for exercising *wit*” (Collingwood 331). While his readers are surely entertained by texts such as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll believes that amusement should not be the only purpose for reading. He also reiterates that his satire is not meant as mockery, or as an attack, but rather as a tool to enhance education, knowledge, and understanding, for the benefit of his readers, who are effectively his students.

Carroll’s work is heavily influenced by his extensive history with both education and religion. Because his life at both the Rectory at Croft and at Christ Church mixed religion with education, Carroll treats them as pieces of the same whole. Such combination of religion and education was not limited to the works of Lewis Carroll; the 1870 Elementary Education Act separated elementary schools from religious institutions. Though it was passed five years after *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was published, this Act was a response to a longstanding concern among Victorian educators. Section 7.1 of the Act states:

It shall not be required as a condition of any child being admitted into or continuing in the school, that he shall attend or abstain from attending any Sunday school or any place of religious worship, or that he shall attend any religious observance or any instruction in religious subjects in the school or elsewhere, from which observance or instruction he may be withdrawn by his parent, or that he shall, if withdrawn by his parent, attend the school on any day exclusively set apart for religious observance by the religious body to which his parent belongs. (Owen 47-48)

The Act essentially took control away from religious institutions and gave it to newly appointed school boards, which would be referred to as “board schools.” If a school board was found to be in violation of any part of the Act, the Education Department could legally “declare a school board in default and appoint new additional members” (Smith 135). Response to this Act was often severe; Conservative leader Benjamin Disraeli, who would be elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1874, claimed that

[y]ou will not intrust the priest or the presbyter with the privilege of expounding the Holy Scriptures to the scholars; but for that purpose you are inventing and establishing a new sacerdotal class. The schoolmaster who will exercise these functions, and who will occupy this position, will be a member of a class which will in the future exercise an extraordinary influence upon the history of England and upon the conduct of Englishmen. (Ewald 169)

Disraeli’s claim here is based on the belief that there can be only one institution and form of education; in this case, the choices are either completely religious or completely secular. Lewis Carroll’s belief in synthesis addresses and refutes these criticisms.

Attitudes like Disraeli’s persisted into the twentieth century, with many twentieth-century scholars believing that education should either be purely secular or purely religious and never a combination of the two. In “Reassessing the ‘Crisis of Faith’ in the Victorian Age: Eclecticism and the Spirit of Moral Inquiry,” David Nash addresses the binary pair of what he identifies as the crisis of faith/crisis of doubt. He claims that many

early- and mid-twentieth century Victorian historians maintain the belief that Victorian England either underwent a crisis of faith, where religion was all but destroyed, or a crisis of doubt, where religion eventually became dominant in Victorian culture. Nash claims, however, that late-twentieth and twenty-first century historians have begun to accept a different interpretation of Victorian religion:

New definitions of religious belief and observance have similarly altered both the dynamic and the nomenclature that characterize what it means to be sacred or secular. A crucial shift of emphasis in this area of inquiry has been the recognition that religious belief is capable of a sustained existence beyond the institutions that dispense it in its purest forms. (66)

This abandonment of, or at least alternative to, the dominant institutions of Victorian culture is precisely what Lewis Carroll attempts in the *Wonderland* texts. Carroll does not parody or satirize religion itself; he parodies and satirizes educational figures, institutions, and practices. Carroll considered himself to be a Christian, but he took issue with the unwavering rigidity of religious dogma, such as the Church of England's stance on popular theatre. Carroll, therefore, is an example of what Nash calls "Victorian radicals . . . motivated seekers after credible belief and morality that might be realized within a culture of exploration and questioning" (71). Nash argues that belief, morality, knowledge, and understanding should be sought and developed by each individual, not mass produced and forced upon each and every Victorian citizen, though many of these "seekers" were not quite ready to abandon their governing institutions altogether. The very nature of nonsense literature requires questioning, so the works of Lewis Carroll act

as an example of this improved form of education. However, such reform is precisely what many Victorian religious institutions feared. They dreaded their loss of control over education. Bishop Ullathorne wrote of the new board schools that “their constitution, object and aim was to ‘propagate a system of education in antagonism with Catholic education, and with all definite religious education’” (Smith 137). Likewise, Bishop Vaughan of Salford urged that “we cannot do evil that good may come of it. . . . That no Catholic can vote for any candidate who proposes to saddle the country with a secular and godless system of education” (qtd. in Smith 138). Not all religious figures took an overt approach to combat the secularization of English schools; in 1873, Canons John Cromwell and Robert Gregory of the Church of England and Dr. James Harrison Rigg, a Wesleyan Methodist minister, “created an interdenominational alliance to protect existing denominational schools, attacking the Board’s building programme as profligate and deeming the existing provision as adequate” in an attempt to circumvent the Act instead of condemning it (Smith 137). Religious figures such as these, being unable to alter their dogmatic practices in order to compromise, believed that there was only one right (in both factual and moral senses) way to educate children: their way. Their inability to compromise resulted in a significant reduction in the number of and funding for religious elementary schools.

Nash further addresses the conflict between religion and secularization in “Laughing at the Almighty: Freethinking Lampoon, Satire, and Parody in Victorian England.” One of his main goals in this essay is to convince his readers that many Victorian writers, both religious and secular, found religion to be “a monolithic and all-

pervasive influence on the culture of the society in which they lived” (44). Though Victorian laws regarding blasphemy protected Christianity from most forms of attack, Victorian writers were able to utilize areas of popular culture to both overtly and covertly parody, satirize, and lampoon sacred institutions. Lewis Carroll was careful to avoid any direct attack on religion and religious institutions in his *Wonderland* texts; there are no characters that represent religion in either text; even the chess-piece bishops are missing (at least nominally) from *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Nash begins his essay with a brief examination of the job of cultural historians in analyzing humor. He writes:

[T]here are numerous episodes in more recent cultural history where the “joke” is not so much not understood but that the full depth of its humor and the relevance of its attacks upon powerful institutions and individuals are lost upon a contemporary audience. Thus there are occasions where the cultural gulf is not nearly so great, enabling the joke to be “got,” but its significance may be misunderstood or more often, and importantly, may be dismissed as juvenile or simply offensive. (43)

In order to apply this statement to the *Wonderland* texts, the term “nonsense” or, more accurately, “metasense” should be added to Nash’s description of the significance of historical jokes. For example, many modern readers of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* would understand that “Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat” is a parody of, or at least a reference to, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” and most who recognize the song remember the tune to

which it is sung. However, few would understand the cultural and religious purposes of such nursery rhymes from over two hundred years ago.

This song was first published in 1806 by sisters Ann and Jane Taylor in *Rhymes for the Nursery*, under the name “The Star.” In their preface, the Taylor sisters address the issue of “[w]hether ideas adapted to the comprehension of infancy, admit the restrictions of rhyme and meter?” (iii). The Hatter’s singing of “[t]winkle, twinkle, little bat! / How I wonder what you’re at!” in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* would have been immediately recognizable to a Victorian reader of this text (79). However, there exists an immediate and significant contradiction between the original and the parody. Any person who has seen a star can understand that these celestial objects twinkle. If a child looked up on a clear night in Victorian England, he or she would have seen thousands of twinkling stars, though the child may “know not what [they] are” (Taylor 11). The poem and the image of the star would have been everyday objects to a Victorian child. The parody, however, subverts the purpose of the original poem. Rather than portraying an object that nearly every sighted individual has experienced, Carroll changes the object into a bat. Though still relatively commonplace in Victorian England, these creatures still act as a vehicle for nonsense in the poem. Victorian children would know that a bat does not twinkle, which would cause a rift between what they read and what they know. Whether they are conscious of this rift or not, Victorian readers would be aware that the Hatter is misrepresenting his knowledge, both of the original poem and of the nature of bats. Therefore, while “Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat” is a parody of “The

Star,” the Hatter functions to satirize the Taylor sisters and nursery rhymes as educational tools.

The discrepancy between stars and bats is not the only form of satire in this parody. The parodied poem does not include a version of the third, and central, stanza (of five) of the original:

Then the trav’ller in the dark  
Thanks you for your tiny spark:  
He could not see which way to go,  
If you did not twinkle so. (10)

The original poem instructs children that even though they may not fully comprehend something, in this case a star, they can still understand its purpose (in the religious, not the scientific, sense). The bat, like the Hatter’s version of the poem, has no purpose. Or rather, the poem serves a different purpose in Wonderland than the original did in Victorian England. “The Star” was meant to be read or sung to young children until they remembered it by heart and understood its message as truth. “Twinkle Twinkle Little Bat,” however, informs readers that information should be evaluated on an individual basis, not determined by the authority of the speaker. By parodying this well-known poem, Carroll criticizes the Victorian emphasis on memorization and rote learning and emphasizes the idea that information should be valued based on personal experience, what Aristotle describes as *phronesis* or practical wisdom. Leslie Paul Thiele explains practical wisdom as “an aptitude for assessing, evaluating, and choosing in the absence of certainties principles that dictate or generate right answers” (5). A Victorian child,

especially a Christian child, would be able to understand the concept of a bright star being used to guide a wayward traveler. Such guidance has value; after all, the star is compared to a diamond. That child would likely not, however, believe that a bat would provide the same guidance. A bat is simply a mundane, commonplace thing, similar to the tea-tray to which the bat is compared in the Hatter's version of "The Star." The Hatter here replaces objects in the rhyme, which creates a nonsensical parody of the original; however, by doing so, he establishes a situation in which a reader may question the original objects and their purpose, and by extension the purpose of the rhyme itself.

The Hatter's name itself is another example of how, like Alice, Victorian readers found the Hatter to be a purveyor of nonsense. Although he is only ever called "Hatter" in the original story, he quickly became known as the "Mad Hatter." This may be in part due to the expression "mad as a hatter" being popular since well before the novel was published. It may also be in part because the chapter that the Hatter first appears in is titled "A Mad Tea-Party." It may be because, shortly after mentioning the Hatter and the March Hare for the first time, the Cheshire Cat tells Alice "we're all mad here" (72). None of these possibilities can be conclusively considered as the sole, correct answer to this question. As Carroll so frequently teaches his readers, there is no single answer; all are equally justifiable, and the issue of his name is strengthened by a synthesis of all possible reasons, rather than selecting which reason is the "right" one.

Similar to how Nash characterizes cultural historians, the purpose of this thesis is to "rejuvenat[e] [contexts] that have become a faint and dusty memory in contemporaries" (44). One prime example of this rejuvenation can be found in the first

lyrical parody of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Alice recites the poem “How doth the little—” while attempting to answer her question to herself, “[w]ho in the world am I?” (28-29). Alice’s version reads:

“How doth the little crocodile  
Improve his shining tail,  
And pour the waters of the Nile  
On every golden scale!  
How cheerfully he seems to grin  
How neatly spreads his claws  
And welcomes little fishes in,  
With gently smiling jaws! (29)

This parody describes a crocodile devouring its prey, a subject very different than the original. Alice’s version parodies Isaac Watts’ 1715 poem “Against Idleness and Mischief” from *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children*. These titles alone illustrate the purpose of the source poem; as written in the introduction to *An Explanation of Dr. Watts’s Hymns for Children, in Question and Answer*, the poems are “for the instruction of children brought up in the principles of [the Established] Church . . . [for] the spiritual instruction of . . . little ones” (iv). “Against Idleness and Mischief” is an especially potent poem for parody; the very first line of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* reads “Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank and of having nothing to do” (17). Alice begins the story by being idle, and shortly

thereafter pursues a rabbit in a waistcoat down a rabbit hole, leading her into mischief.

The first stanza of Watts' poem reads:

How doth the little busy bee  
Improve each shining hour,  
And gather honey all the day  
From ev'ry op'ning flow'r. (75)

A busy bee gathering honey is a natural process, just like a crocodile eating fish; the substitution of crocodile/fish for bee/honey is a feasible one, unlike the Hatter's substitution of a bat for a star. However, Watts' explanation of his poem is very different from Alice's interpretation. After the main text, the author asks "what is the honey which we are to gather?" (76). The response, "[i]nstruction from the Word of God," reveals the biblical (and metaphorical rather than literal) meaning behind the poem. Although a young child may not understand what a bee or honey has to do with religious instruction, he or she would still be expected to listen to the poem and the explanation, and to take them as truth. Alice knows that her recitation is incorrect, but her response, "I'm sure those are not the right words," focuses on the words that she had to memorize, not on the purpose of the lesson (29). Alice, at this point in the story, considers the rote memorization of her school lessons to be the most important, indeed the only, form of knowledge and identity. She uses this recitation to test that she is not Alice; she creates her identity based solely on what others have taught her. Shortly after deciding she does not know who she is, Alice literally changes size, adding a physical loss of identity to her previous psychological loss. Lewis Carroll then spends the rest of the story rebuilding

Alice's identity based on her own experiences, rather than on (and in many cases in direct contradiction to) what the Wonderland residents tell her to do.

Although rote forms of religious instruction, such as nursery rhymes, are a common point of parody in the *Wonderland* texts, Lewis Carroll also satirizes the content of much religious education. Brian Gibson claims that “[m]orals, it seems, are pointless in Wonderland” (7). The Duchess from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is the best example of Wonderland morality; she lectures Alice at length about the topic. In Chapter IX, the Duchess tells Alice “[e]verything's got a moral, if only you can find it” (96). This short statement contains two very important pieces of satire. First, the Duchess' claim reflects a focal point of common religious education of the Victorian era: morality. For example, Isaac Watts' collection of poetry, parodied earlier in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, contains several pages of questions and answers dealing with the moral aspects of each poem. Second, and more important, is the Duchess' use of the word “you.” Normally, a religious figure determines morality and a student is taught simply to memorize established morals. In Wonderland, however, Alice is tasked with determining this morality for herself. There are no suitable authority figures to tell Alice how to think and feel. The Duchess attempts to do so, but Alice must consistently correct her. At one point, the Duchess says “flamingoes and mustard both bite. And the moral of that is— ‘Birds of a feather flock together’” (97). Alice is quick to point out that “mustard isn't a bird,” to which the Duchess responds that Alice is correct (97). Alice then mistakenly describes mustard as a mineral, to which the Duchess makes a moral statement on mines;

when Alice corrects herself and calls mustard a vegetable, the Duchess responds with yet another moral. The Duchess at first says,

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. (98)

This now infamous “simple” explanation is far too complicated for Alice, who says, “I think I should understand that better . . . if I had it written down: but I ca’n’t quite follow it as you say it” (98). The Duchess’ line is not something a Victorian person would likely utter in standard conversation. Carroll here parodies one typical strategy of moralizing authority figures: If put in a situation where said figures cannot justify their stance, statement, or moral, they respond with something so complicated that the listener cannot understand. While Alice is a victim of this strategy, believing the failure is in her comprehension and not in the Duchess’ speech, readers are not; Lecercle, commenting on the Duchess’ speech, notes that “the joke is on us. As we read “I think I should understand that better . . . if I had it written down,” we are bitterly reminded that *we* have it written down, and that we cannot follow it at all” (57). This sentence even crosses the boundaries of the genre. In nonsense, multiplicity of meaning pervades the text. However, because the complexity of the sentence lies in syntax and not semantics, “no interpretation whatsoever crosses the reader’s mind,” there is only confusion (Lecercle 57-58). The Duchess’ complicated utterance is, therefore, true non-sense; it does not contain any understandable meaning (in traditional sense), but it also does not call for a

response on the part of the listener (as in literary nonsense). Because it lacks even partial meaning, it is ignored, both by Alice and by most readers of the text.

Carroll's strategy of synthesis for the good of education manifests itself throughout the *Wonderland* texts. By parodying and satirizing Victorian religious and educational institutions, Lewis Carroll presents alternative forms of education based entirely on potential benefits to students.

## CHAPTER V

### LEWIS CARROLL AND SATIRE OF CLASSROOM EDUCATION

Nonsense literature, as described in Chapter II of this thesis, is closely related to the Victorian classroom. Therefore, the works of Lewis Carroll, as part of this genre, satirize both educational figures and the classroom itself. The *Wonderland* texts portray several significant educational figures: the stuffy, know-it-all Caterpillar, who merely tells Alice she is wrong; the Mock Turtle and Gryphon, who describe *their* experiences in their under-sea school and compare this school to Alice's education; and Humpty Dumpty, who adopts the role of literary critic to explain the meaning of the "Jabberwocky" poem to Alice.

Alice demonstrates her inability to properly utilize her school lessons almost immediately upon entering Wonderland:

"I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think—" (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the school-room, and though this was not a *very* good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over). (19)

Though Alice could use such knowledge of geography to attempt to identify her position in the earth, she instead believes that the purpose of knowing the distance to the center of the earth is to either show off her knowledge (thus proving she is a "good" student) or to

repeat it (to ensure that she can show off her knowledge). The fact that the narrator intervenes to explain the reason for Alice's recitation provides readers with Lewis Carroll's beliefs, as a teacher, on the purpose of education. Carroll believes that students who simply memorize the facts, or *what* they have learned, are not well educated; these students must also understand *why* they are learning these lessons and *how* to apply this knowledge to their life. Successful students must be able to find an answer to a question they have not been taught, using thought processes that they have learned in similar situations, but Alice does not understand this. When falling down the rabbit-hole, "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" (20). Alice does not take the time to consider the different parts of the question, because she has not been taught the proper answer. Lecercle says of this situation that

Alice, "in a dreamy sort of way," is playing with the words without paying attention to their differential value, as children and nonsense texts are apt to do. In other words . . . the "bat"/"cat" episode subverts the code by describing a possible playful exploitation of the rules (36).

Alice, then, acts as a toddler would, playing with the words to see how she can say them, with no consideration for their individual meaning. I am reminded of my two-year-old cousin who, upon hearing my aunt yell "crap" when she made a mistake, repeated the word seven or eight times, in varying pronunciations, to experiment with the word itself. She had no knowledge of what the word meant, and was not provided with a definition or

explanation. She did not care; she learned to say the word anyway. Children who speak in this way are unaware of the rules of language, and thus do not learn much from lessons that rely solely on this form of repetition. Alice demonstrates such an instance when, as she first encounters the mouse, she attempts to address it in English. When the mouse does not respond, she addresses it in French, thinking it came over with William the Conqueror, for, “with all her knowledge of history, Alice had no very clear notion of how long ago anything had happened” (32). Despite clearly having learned these history lessons, and memorized the names, dates, locations, etc. of the events, Alice does not understand how these events relate to her, to other history lessons, or to Victorian England or Wonderland. She has memorized the information, but not been taught how to apply it. Just as one report to the School Board of London indicated that “it was not uncommon ‘to find a child able to indicate readily the exact position on a map of Flamborough Head or Airdnamurchan Point, and at the same time fail to give satisfactory proof that it understands the meaning of a map’” (qtd. in Horn 8). After reciting the distance to the center of the earth, Alice wonders “what Latitude or Longitude I’ve got to?” (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say.)” (19). Alice, like the aforementioned students of geography, has memorized her lessons through repetition but has not learned how to properly apply them outside of the classroom. While these geography students have succeeded in their lessons, that is memorized them, they have not understood the purpose of such lessons and are not prepared to apply them to the real world, much in the same way as Alice. This disconnect between the memorization of school lessons and their

application in Victorian England is satirized through Carroll's comparisons between Wonderland and Victorian England.

Alice further demonstrates an inability to properly apply her school lessons when, after growing too large for Bill's cottage, she exclaims to herself, "[t]here ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one—but I'm grown up now," she added in a sorrowful tone: "at least there's no room to grow up any more *here*" (45). Alice mistakes growing physically for maturing or gaining knowledge and experience, not realizing that she can learn from her experiences outside of the schoolroom. She further demonstrates her mistaken belief that she can only learn while in a school when she states to herself "[h]ow can you learn lessons in here? Why, there's hardly room for *you*, and no room at all for lesson-books!" (45). She does not understand that her school lessons can be applied to her life experiences, and vice versa.

Lewis Carroll satirizes two primary types of faulty educational figures: those who focus on recitation as opposed to understanding and those who believe in only one possible interpretation. The character of the Caterpillar exemplifies the instructor who is more concerned with recitation than with conveying knowledge. When the Caterpillar asks Alice to recite "You are old, Father William," she recites an altered version. The Caterpillar tells Alice "[t]hat is not said right . . . It is wrong from beginning to end," with no explanation of how Alice may improve her recitation. Lecercle believes that, in this situation, the Caterpillar alters the teacher/student relationship to one of teacher/vehicle for recitation:

The question “Who meant that, if Alice did not mean it?” looms large. And we note that the Caterpillar does not say “you said that wrong,” but “that is not said right,” a passive without an agent. Poor Alice is reduced to the state of a tape recorder, a possessed mystic or a raving lunatic. The words that come out of her mouth are not hers. (118)

Interestingly, Alice *does* actually act as a vehicle; she is a vehicle for Lewis Carroll’s nonsense, for his satire of Victorian education, and through this satire as a vehicle for presenting his educational beliefs. If students are not part of the primary relationship with their instructors, such as the situation between Alice and the Caterpillar, they cannot learn how to utilize and apply their lessons. Rather, such students represent

[t]he interpellation *cum* exclusion of pedagogic dialogue: the addressee stands up, which makes her stand out, to hear the sentence assessed on her performance. The jocularity of the intervention is characteristic of the fake chumminess of pedagogic address. The narrator of nonsense tales makes the pedagogic nature of all narrative relationships explicit. The school is always somehow present in the text, explicitly so in nonsense. (Lecerle 215)

Students’ recitations in such situations are not for their own benefit; rather, they are meant to be an example for other students to learn from. As such, the students who are forced to recite in front of their classmates are not meant to learn anything; in fact, they are not part of the teacher/student relationship at all. Rather, their role is to function

primarily as a tool, a subject, an example through which teachers educate their other students.

Even the driving purpose of Victorian education was flawed. Charles Dickens' 1854 novel *Hard Times* satirizes educational figures who focus solely on memorization. The novel begins with Thomas Gradgrind speaking in a classroom:

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir! (9)

Facts are so immensely important to Gradgrind that he insists on capitalizing the word, treating it as a proper noun, a type of deity. He condemns the other half of the binary, Fancy, and allows for no Carrollian synthesis between the two. Later in the story, Gradgrind repeats this binary, albeit with different terms:

“Some persons hold,” he pursed, still hesitating, “that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so; but, as I have said, I mistrust myself now. I have supposed the head to be all-sufficient. It may not be all sufficient.” (217)

Gradgrind has realized his mistaken belief in Fact, in wisdom of the Head, as the only form of knowledge. The narrator, in the final chapter of the novel, provides a third similar binary: that of present and future. Fact, the wisdom of the Head, the present, these are all things that can be proven either correct or incorrect. There is nothing left to be done with

them by students other than memorization. Fancy, the wisdom of the head, the future, these are all things that cannot be proven correct or incorrect, that possess the possibility for a multiplicity of meaning, of knowledge. Put plainly, Fact represents the realm of knowledge, while Fancy represents the realm of belief (albeit not in the religious sense) and wonder. A belief, like a hypothesis, can and should be justified, be explained, according to Carroll. Mr. Gradgrind is not alone in his steadfast beliefs; his wife, Mrs. Gradgrind, orders her daughter Lousia to “never wonder!” (52). These two words embody, according to the narrator, “the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections. Never wonder” (53). These words contrast sharply with the very title of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, with the entire realm of Wonderland. Like Mr. Gradgrind, Mrs. Gradgrind proves herself wrong when, on her deathbed, she asks for a pen with which to write her husband. She does not receive a pen, but “[s]he fancied, however, that her request had been complied with, and that the pen she could not have held was in her hand. It matters little what figures of wonderful no-meaning she began to trace upon her wrappers” (194). Despite her husband’s adamant belief in fact, Mrs. Gradgrind descends into fancy. Despite not actually writing anything, her action has meaning. Her no-meaning contains within it a purpose. Her no-meaning means, much in the same way that literary nonsense contains sense, if one can only look beyond the realm of Fact. Mr. Gradgrind’s educational ideology led to the term “gradgrind” being used to describe somebody concerned solely with fact, with science, with provable knowledge to be

memorized. Such educational figures anticipated the Revised Code of Education, which standardized such modes of learning in Victorian public schools.

Beginning with the Revised Code of Education in 1862, Victorian schools received their funding based on the results of their students in examination in the three R's: reading, writing, and arithmetic, plus attendance (Horn 2). As a result, many schools taught only those three subjects, so that their students would perform adequately in examination, while neglecting additional subjects that would require students to spend less time on the three R's. For nearly thirty years, students were taught that their educational goals were to score well on examination, not to learn:

For more than one generation of teachers and scholars . . . the daily routine became an unremitting grind in the three Rs, with constant repetition and rote learning the normal method of instruction. Individual initiative was crushed, as teachers endeavored to meet the conditions of the Code, and discipline was severe. (Horn 5)

This system would endure until 1890, when the government began phasing it out, although annual examinations remained in some subjects until the mid-1890s (Horn 8). Although Carroll satirizes this system, he is careful not to attack the instructors. After all, educational policy is not entirely their fault. In many cases, teacher salaries depended on the examination-based grants from the government, which constituted the entire funding for board-based schools. For example,

in 1888, the newly-appointed headmaster of Charlbury Board School, Oxfordshire, received a basic salary of £50 a year, plus 20 per cent of the

grant; his principal female assistant received £50 a year plus 10 per cent of the grant; and the second female assistant a meagre £15 per annum and 5 per cent of the grant. (Horn 11)

Instructors were hired by schools based on their ability to train students in the art of test taking, not on the ability to provide understanding of their lessons. Carroll satirizes this style of educator with the Caterpillar, who appears useless when removed from the economic reality of the Victorian schoolroom.

Humpty Dumpty stands as the perfect example of the second style of educator that Carroll finds issue with: an instructor who believes in only one possible interpretation. His famous claim that “[w]hen *I* use a word . . . it means just what *I* choose it to mean—neither more nor less” demonstrates his refusal to compromise, to synthesize, or to accept other interpretations (214). This dogmatism contrasts sharply with Carroll’s strategy of synthesis and of multiplicity of knowledge in and through explanation. Expanding on his stance on words, Humpty Dumpty exclaims: “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 of them! Impenetrability! That’s what *I* say” (214). When Alice asks Humpty Dumpty to explain himself, he responds by stating “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 meant to stop here all the rest of your life” (214). Alice responds that “[t]hat’s a great deal to make one word mean,” pointing out a flaw in Humpty Dumpty’s logic: an unnecessarily broad or complicated meaning does not convey knowledge, especially when some of that

meaning has nothing to do with the word itself (214). Humpty Dumpty then proceeds to define Carroll's coined words from "Jabberwocky," and many readers of *Through the Looking-Glass* have taken his explanations as satisfactory definitions of these new words. However, Lecerle identifies two main flaws with Humpty Dumpty's reasoning. First, he states that a reader "can never be certain that the 'coined' word one discovers in a text does not have existence, and conventional meaning, in a larger dictionary or specialised jargon" (29). Such instances are commonplace in classrooms; students are often introduced to words they have never heard before, but are asked to treat instructors' definitions as truth. Readers, like students, must consider several questions in response to Humpty Dumpty's explanation. If Carroll's coined words exist in Wonderland English, but not in Victorian English, how should readers like Alice and Humpty Dumpty respond? Can a word, paradoxically, exist simultaneously (in Wonderland) and not exist (in Victorian England)? Should readers treat these coined words as both existing (meaning precisely what Humpty Dumpty claims they mean), and not existing (they would not be present in a Victorian English dictionary) at the same time? Humpty Dumpty defines what he believes these words *may* mean, but acts as though he knows their *only* meaning. In his preface to "The Hunting of the Snark," Lewis Carroll explains the formation of one such portmanteau from "Jabberwocky":

take the two words "fuming" and "furious." Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards "fuming," you will say "fuming-furious;" if they turn, by even a hair's

breadth, towards “furious,” you will say “furious-fuming;” but if you have that rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say “frumious.”

(754)

Carroll’s explanation exemplifies his belief in synthesis and in explanation; the nonsense word “frumious” is here an example of synthesis between the two standard responses and an explanation of how he believes explanation to be superior to strict adherence to standard rules. He does not claim that “frumious” is correct while both “fuming-furious” and “furious-fuming” are incorrect; he considers all to be acceptable, depending on the individual who utters the word(s). His belief in synthesis goes so far as result in the creation of entirely new words. Ironically, Humpty Dumpty’s (possibly) false definitions of the nonsense words from “Jabberwocky” have entered the English lexicon, but Lecercle reveals Humpty Dumpty’s second flaw, a flaw with these definitions: “Humpty Dumpty’s explanations are semantic, whereas the rules for the formation of portmanteau-words are morphological” (44). Thus, Humpty Dumpty stands as an example of one of the most dangerous types of teachers: those who attempt to explain something, and do so incorrectly, but because they claim their way is the only way, convey a false education to their poor students.

One way that Carroll believes an educator can combat poor education, in the manner of Humpty Dumpty, is through justification and explanation. He uses the characters of the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon to parody *good* educators (thus illustrating his non-standard use of parody), and these two characters bear many similarities to Carroll himself. After spending some time with the Mock Turtle and

Gryphon, Alice thinks to herself, “[h]ow the creatures order one about, and make one repeat lessons. . . . I might just as well be at school at once” (111). Alice connects these creatures with her understanding of teachers. This understanding emphasizes the Mock Turtle’s statement to Alice after her recitation of “Tis the voice of the sluggard.” He asks her, “[w]hat *is* the use of repeating all that stuff . . . if you don’t explain it as you go on?” and the Gryphon adds, “[y]es, I think you’d better leave off” (112). Both of these figures understand that Alice has not truly learned anything from her school lessons if she is unable to explain what she has memorized. This is not a flaw in Alice, however; it is a flaw with the entire educational system of Victorian England

The Mock Turtle’s name is another example of Carroll’s satire of rote learning; he is a nonsense creature, something that does not exist outside of Wonderland. He “embodies a mistake in immediate constituent analysis which presupposes the possibility of a correct analysis” (Lecerclé 41). When the Queen asks Alice if she has met the Mock Turtle, Alice responds, “I don’t even know what a Mock Turtle is” (99). The Queen then explains the Mock Turtle in relation to mock turtle soup, as if it were hyphenated mock-turtle soup (a soup made from the fictional mock-turtle) rather than the Victorian mock turtle-soup (a soup made from brains and organ meats). Lecerclé identifies similar creatures, present in the *Wonderland* texts through the illustrations of Sir John Tenniel, such as the bread-and-butter fly (instead of bread and butterfly) and rocking-horse fly (rather than rocking horse-fly). He claims that these illustrations, and by extent the creatures themselves, are paradoxical rather than wrong; he uses the real-world example of an English speaker analyzing “hamburger” into “ham” and “burger” rather than

“Hamburg” and “er” to show how these mistakes are those that a child, operating under the basic rules of linguistics, would be inclined to make (41-42). Rather than simply being incorrect, because they are not the original meaning, Carroll accepts the Wonderland explanations of these creatures as truth, because such explanations are logically sound.

Another explanation for the poor quality of Victorian educators, in addition to their standardized modes of education, comes from the fact that “[i]n the early nineteenth century, elementary teaching was often taken up by those too old, too sick or too inefficient to earn their living in any other way,” and that the income of teachers was less than what able-bodied laborers would receive (Horn 163). Such teachers had no other methods through which to earn their income, and were often poorly trained, if at all:

the work of adult teachers in National and British and Foreign Society schools was normally supplemented by child monitors. They were drawn from the older pupils and taught their fellow scholars under the supervising eye of a single adult, who might have been briefly “trained” for that role at one of the central schools run by the two societies. But often no such instruction had been given and, in these circumstances, teaching degenerated into a monotonous routine of repetitive chanting and rote learning. Little attempt was made to arouse the pupils’ interest or reasoning powers. (Horn 164-65)

While possibilities for teacher education existed in Victorian England, they were not required, and many instructors preferred to begin teaching immediately, for economic

reasons, rather than to polish their educational abilities. The result was educators who either thought they were good instructors when, in fact, they were not (like the Duchess), or instructors who simply parroted information, relying on rote learning and memorization as their only form of education (like the Caterpillar).

One of the most significant instances of educational satire in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is the courtroom scene, which bears many similarities to Victorian classrooms. The chaotic nature of the Wonderland courtroom is intimately connected to Victorian education. Due to the significant increase in the number of students in the middle part of the nineteenth century, English schools were often held wherever space was available:

In 1870, the overall principle of design remained much what it had been a quarter of a century earlier, when voluntary providers were advised that a barn or a warehouse would offer a suitable model for a school. Children were taught within one large room, perhaps subdivided by partitions or curtains, but with little genuine separation between the classes. (Horn 36)

One Joseph Ashby recalls his youth, in which six different classes worked together in the same schoolroom: “[s]everal children would be reading aloud, teachers scolding, infants reciting, all waxing louder and louder until the master rang the bell on his desk and the noise slid down to a lower note and less volume” (qtd. in Horn 37). Such chaos is readily apparent in the courtroom scene, where too many Wonderland residents are trying to speak and listen at the same time. When the King of Hearts asks when the mad tea party began, the Dormouse, March Hare, and Hatter all respond with different dates, which

results in the jury writing all three down, adding them together, and then converting the numbers into currency (117). A question that originally involved chronology transforms into one of currency, and the entire system is thrown into confusion. The jury, with their slates and pencils, all listening to these (flawed) testimonies, reflects students of Victorian one-room schoolhouses, who are forced into a position where they do not understand what they are being told but are unable to ask for clarification or justification from their instructors.

The moderator of the Wonderland courtroom, The King, also represents a poorly qualified instructor who contributes to the chaos:

“That’s very important,” the King said, turning to the jury. They were just beginning to write this down on their slates, when the White Rabbit interrupted: “*Unimportant*, your Majesty means, of course,” he said, in a very respectful tone, but frowning and making faces at him as he spoke. “*Unimportant*, of course, I meant,” the King hastily said, and went on to himself in an undertone, “important—unimportant—unimportant—important—” as if he were trying which word sounded best. Some of the jury wrote down “important,” and some “unimportant.” (124)

The King is more concerned with which word *sounds* better, not which word conveys what he *means*. As a result, some of his “students” have written down one of these words, while the rest have written down the other, and consequently, the trial cannot be properly concluded. The King’s indecision regarding the words “important” and “unimportant” may stem from the ambiguity of apparently negative prefixes like “in-” as in the case of

flammable/inflammable and habitable/inhabitable, where the meaning is not altered as it is in important/unimportant, though un- and in- are not the same (Lecerle 90-91). This coincides with Carroll's belief in justification; for, in English grammar, there are often exceptions to the rules, so students must understand the reasons behind such rules rather than simply memorizing them.

Unfortunately, if instructors like the King do not completely understand their own lessons, they will not be able to respond to any student questions, and this may result in an attack against a student, such as the Queen's continued exclamation of "off with her head!" Another such attack comes from the Lory<sup>15</sup> to Alice, who states, "I'm older than you, and must know better," but refuses to state its age. Such problems arise when one of the major requirements for Victorian educators is simply to be eighteen years of age. Even if students are somehow able to understand the reasons for their lessons, they still likely lack the ability to properly explain or utilize them, much like Alice when she first enters Wonderland. After having been engulfed in the Pool of Tears, the Wonderland residents search for a way to dry themselves. The Mouse claims to know the solution, and promptly recites a history lesson:

"Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him; and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable—"

"Found *what*?"

"Found *it*," the mouse replied rather crossly: "of course you know what "it" means."

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<sup>15</sup> Many scholars have theorized that the Lory refers to Alice's elder sister, Lorina Liddell.

“I know what “it” means well enough, when *I* find a thing,” said the Duck.

(36)

Unfortunately, the Mouse has confused two definitions of the word “dry,” and attempted to remove moisture from the Wonderland residents with an uninteresting piece of a history lesson. Likewise, both the Mouse and the Duck understand what the word “it” represents when they use the word, but neither possesses adequate understanding of their grammar lessons to explain pronoun usage. These characters also embody a major issue with unqualified Victorian educators. Such educators may understand the basics of their lessons, and be able to simply teach what they are instructed to teach, but lack sufficient proficiency in the topics to respond to student questions regarding their lessons. The mouse ignores the Duck’s second appeal of “[t]he question is, what did the archbishop find?” and continues reciting the history lesson, failing to help its audience understand the history passage (36).

Victorian educators were not the only problem; with the standardization of education, textbooks and lessons themselves became problematic. Textbooks and lessons had to be designed to be easy for teachers to understand and to teach, as well as for students to understand and repeat. The result was that these textbooks often failed to appropriately educate students, rather they taught what would more accurately be described as nonsense or trivia: “textbooks naturally draw on all sorts of texts and discourses. In Victorian textbooks, the result was often absurd, an absurdity which nonsense barely exaggerates” (Lecerle 215). Such textbooks attempted to incorporate aspects of Victorian culture into lessons, without explaining how those aspects relate to

the lessons, and the result is true nonsense, with the method and content having no explanation or relation. Rote learning, especially in the forms of tables, lists, and preformed constructions (i.e. grammar), was thus easy to memorize even if no teacher was present. Unfortunately, such lessons could rarely be applied to Victorian life. Lecercle refers to an account (indirectly through Brian Simons) of the *Westminster Review*'s description of grammar schools in July 1825:

From six or eight, till sixteen or seventeen, nine or ten months in every precious year of youth are occupied, for six or eight hours of every day, in learning, or trying to learn, a little Latin and less Greek; in attempting, in fact, not to read and understand the matter of a classical author, to know the history, the poetry, the philosophy, the policy, the manners, and the opinions of Greece and Rome, but the grammar, the syntax, the parsing, the quantities, and the accents; not in learning to write and speak the languages, but in getting by rote a few scraps of poetry, to be again forgotten, and in fabricating nonsense, or sense verses, it is indifferent which.” (156)

Lecercle believes that these formed sentences truly lack sense, “because they are written with a view to grammatical correctness and metrical regularity, not as a means of expressing feelings and ideas” (216). Carroll’s strategy of synthesis can be applied to these courses, in order to combine both the form and content of the lessons. Students of these courses are not taught that the purpose of such repetition is to understand either the content or the form but (usually) not both, when such lessons should address a synthesis

of both content and form (in varying amounts, depending on the lesson). Carroll, as Lecercle notes, explicitly satirizes Latin grammar as an example of such lessons. When Alice first encounters the mouse in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, she addresses him based on her experiences with one such Latin grammar book:

“O mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here, O mouse!” (Alice thought this must be the right way of speaking to a mouse: she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen, in her brother’s Latin grammar, “A mouse—of a mouse—to a mouse—a mouse—O mouse!”). (31-32)

Alice, not having studied Latin, misinterprets the purpose of her brother’s Latin book. Rather than using this textbook to understand Latin grammar, she believes this to be a lesson on addressing a mouse. Such silly situations were often used to teach grammar. Unfortunately, if students such as Alice (who, in this situation, has had no interaction with a teacher) are not taught that such constructions are not lessons but merely examples of lessons, they have failed to learn how to use knowledge such as Latin grammar.

Lecercle strongly believes that “nonsense and the school interpenetrate. There is rich nonsense in school life” (216). He cites, as example, how Winston Churchill described having to learn by rote the declension of *mensa* (a table) during his first lesson at Harrow in 1888:

“What does O table mean?”

“Mensa, O table, is the vocative case,” he replied.

“But why O table?” I persisted in genuine curiosity.

“O table—you would use that in addressing a table, in invoking a table.”

And then seeing he was not carrying me with him, “You would use it in speaking to a table.”

“But I never do,” I blurted out in honest amazement.

“If you are impertinent, you will be punished . . . was his conclusive rejoinder.” (qtd. in Lecercle 216)

One can understand Churchill’s confusion regarding the appropriate method for addressing a table. In this situation, the instructor has chosen not to explain that the form is the important part, that the table is simply an example, and rather has chosen to threaten his student into submission, much like the Queen of Hearts accomplishes through her chant of “off with their heads!” If Churchill’s instructor had been like Carroll, and favored explanation and justification, Churchill may have better understood the purpose of his lesson, and by extension the lesson itself. Grammar lessons are a perfect example of the connection between nonsense and memorization:

There is in fact a strong link between parsing as the core of old-fashioned education in Victorian Britain, and nonsense as a literary genre. I have shown that nonsense was preoccupied with the rules of language.

Nonsense is a metalinguistic genre because it has the same goals (but not the same method) as school education: to teach children the rules of language (this is why the purity of language is so important, both in the narrator’s aside in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and in Carroll’s practice), and more generally the rules of conduct. In the terms of Roger

Caillois, nonsense appears to give in to *paidia*, the rule-free playing of the unruly child, in order to promote *ludus*, the rule-governed playing that acclimatizes the child to the rules of adult society through imitation and constraints. (Lecerle 216)

Therefore, nonsense texts act to educate their readers, by forcing them to question the form and content of such texts. Rote memorization in classrooms discourages questioning entirely, and thus can discourage true understanding of such lessons in favor of simple recitation.

The unfortunate result of standardized Victorian education was that students who were able to memorize their lessons and not ask for additional information were considered the superior students, because they were understood to have learned their subjects. Carroll believes that such education did not benefit students as much as an interactive style of education. Those students of Victorian classrooms that asked for clarification, justification, or explanation were seen as inferior students, because they (supposedly) did not understand their subjects and did not follow the rules of the school. This resulted in a failure to learn, as when Alice first enters Wonderland and encounters a bottle labelled “DRINK ME”:

It was all very well to say “Drink me,” but the wise little Alice was not going to do *that* in a hurry. “No, I’ll look first,” she said, “and see whether it’s marked ‘*poison*’ or not”; for she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them

. . . she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked  
“poison,” it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later. (22)

Alice does not trust the label that says “DRINK ME,” but she would trust a label that says “poison.” Alice here only relies on the labels, never considering that a bottle containing poison may not be labelled as such, or considering why somebody would label a bottle of poison with the words “DRINK ME” while at the same time include the word “poison” elsewhere on the label. She contradicts herself, failing to heed the words in front of her while obeying the lessons told her by her friends. At the outset of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll has portrayed Alice as one of those unfortunate students who is only a vehicle for the conveyance of knowledge and not one who is able to take such knowledge and apply it to the world, whether that world is Victorian England or Wonderland. As Alice continues her adventures in Wonderland, however, she quickly learns to question, adapt, and understand her Wonderland lessons.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE INTERACTIVE NATURE OF NONSENSE AND EDUCATION

As we have seen, Lewis Carroll uses parody, satire, and pastiche as tools to suggest synthesis in and for education. Much of this synthesis appears in the form of nonsense, and, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle states, nonsense and education were strongly related in the second half of the nineteenth century. Carroll's synthesis does not only take the form of paradox, or multiple contradictory statements existing as truth, but also in the synthesis of such opposites. This synthesis satirizes the policy that, according to the operating premises of Victorian education, multiple contradictory responses cannot exist at the same time. Carroll, then, demolishes binary modes of thought by shifting the focus of education from the final answer or response, which would either be correct or incorrect, to a focus on justification and logic, where responses might be both correct and incorrect but were more often evaluated as strong or weak. In practice, therefore, synthesis and paradoxes are a significant presence in more successful modes of Victorian education.

This presence of synthesis appears, through the works of Lewis Carroll, as a preference for an interactive style of education. When instructors only teach by rote memorization, there is no true interaction between instructor and student; the two simply become vehicles for the passage of others' language and knowledge. Carroll, however, encourages both instructors and students to question and justify statements, responses, and answers, in an effort to encourage deeper understanding of the material. The origin of

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* stands as a perfect example of this preference; the novel emerged from an interactive storytelling session between Carroll and the three Liddell sisters. Such interaction allowed the sisters to create a personal bond with the story, as well as with its teller, and this is a significant reason for the tale's enduring interest among both children and adults.

While Carroll's fondness for synthesis is not new, opposition to these modes of instruction persists through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Modern American educational policy strongly mirrors failed Victorian educational ideologies, with government policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, attempting to standardize education across the United States of America. This Act sought to improve education by focusing on standardized test scores, mirroring the way early Victorian schools earned their national funding. In Carrollian terms, these acts sought to ensure that all students received an education (the binary of yes/no in terms of education), rather than to qualify the education such students received (the synthesis of strong/weak, where one type of education can be strong in comparison to a first school, but weak when compared to a second). These policies do not consider that an extremely poor public education (which would satisfy the yes binary of such policies) could, in fact, be more harmful than a self- or home-taught schooling or no education at all. Such styles of argumentation mimic Victorian proponents of rote learning who are satirized in Carroll's works. Educators who adopt a Carrollian attitude understand these issues, and are able to adapt, to synthesize, their lessons to meet the needs of various students and educational situations.

Unfortunately, standardized lessons and testing severely inhibit instructors' abilities to make these syntheses. As such educational policies are inherently tied to government and governmental policy, Lewis Carroll's satire is thus tied to the satire of one of the greatest Victorian authors, Charles Dickens, who, earlier, extensively satirized the flawed system of Victorian bureaucracy.

The importance of synthesis, then, is vitally important in twenty-first century education, which seems to be returning to the standardized, bureaucratic forms of Victorian English education. In 1860s Victorian England, students had no access to alternative forms of education outside of the classroom and the church, with the exception of those students from families wealthy enough to hire private educators. In the twenty-first century, alternative forms of education are widely available through resources like the internet. Educators must concern themselves with engaging students in the classroom so as not to alienate them from the class and/or school. Rote learning does not engage students and can, in fact, force them to seek entertainment elsewhere; mobile phones have made this a significant issue among educators and students. Education should synthesize new technology with old bureaucracy. If students feel interested and compelled to respond to an instructor, they are more likely to pay attention and retain knowledge from their lessons. If not, they often retreat to the internet, either for entertainment, or for knowledge. Unfortunately, the internet, especially social media, contains more argumentation that seeks to disprove opponents' claims than that which is used to support one's own position. In order to encourage critical thinking, instructors should direct students to seek compromise and synthesis, in order to enhance students'

abilities to form strong, valid arguments. Educators should also encourage nonsense, even if in the smallest amount, to entertain their students. Such educational beliefs are a significant reason for the legacy of the work of Lewis Carroll. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in particular, is an iconic children's tale, due in large part to its use of the genre of nonsense. The world could always use more nonsense, whether it makes us laugh, cringe, ponder, or simply shrug off such material. We could all use a break, at some point, to wonder why a raven is like a writing desk.

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