

1991

Deconstructing Alice's 'Wonderlands': The non-sense of nonsense?

Beverley Farr
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Farr, B. (1991). *Deconstructing Alice's 'Wonderlands': The non-sense of nonsense?*. Edith Cowan University. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/403

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/403

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

DECONSTRUCTING ALICE'S 'WONDERLANDS': THE
NON-SENSE OF NONSENSE?

BY

Beverley Farr

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Award of

Bachelor of Arts (English Studies) - Honours

at the School of Community and Language Studies, Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission: 7.11.1991

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

The profusion of literary criticism surrounding the *Alice* books affirms the heterogeneous nature of the texts which resist the imposition of an exclusive, closed interpretation. A deconstructive reading of the texts demonstrates the tendency of the books toward multiple meanings, revealing how they are transgressive of notions of coherence and structure.

Utilising some of the concepts of Jacques Lacan to examine the texts beyond the traditional analytic readings, language is shown to be a signifying chain of desire, structured like the unconscious. Alice becomes Lacan's split subject, banished to the world of language where she finds herself enmeshed in an endless process of difference and absence. The psychoanalytic deconstructive reading then incorporates the concepts of critics such as Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous to offer a feminist interpretation which deconstructs some of Lacan's notions.

Several binary oppositions in the texts are then examined using Jacques Derrida's strategies of deconstruction. The reading focuses primarily on the opposition sense/non-sense and reveals how blurred the distinction is between the two. If one cannot distinguish between sense and non-sense, then 'meaning' is obviously problematic. Additionally, Derrida's strategies show how the structures of the *Alice* books are themselves deconstructive and thus resist closure. All frames and borders are dissolved becoming subsumed to a trace of differences. Intertextuality also ensures the recession of boundaries, and the annotations, which punctuate the edition of the *Alice* books used in the thesis, further fragment the text.

Finally, it is shown how the *Alice* books, which cross generic boundaries and draw upon elements from realism through to postmodernism, simply defy definition through categorisation.

Declaration

"I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where reference is made in the text."

Signature..

Date.....7:11:1991.....

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	2
Declaration.....	3
Introduction.....	5
I. Alice as Lacan's Split Subject.....	9
II. Desire and Discourse of the Other.....	19
III. Deconstructing Lac(k)an: A Feminist Perspective.....	26
IV. Unbinding Binary Oppositions.....	34
V. The Frame - Framed.....	47
VI. The Undefined Alice.....	55
Notes.....	63
Bibliography.....	71

Introduction

Lewis Carroll, when once asked to explain the meaning of one of his nonsense works, *The Hunting of the Shark*, was known to have replied,

"I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense!"¹

If the same question had been asked of the *Alice* books, no doubt it would have produced a similar response, for Carroll was insistent upon the ambiguity of his works and indeed, language in general. Even if Carroll could be regarded as an authority on 'intended' meaning, his reluctance to delimit the meaning of his works of nonsense has encouraged a proliferation of critical interpretations of the books, each one an attempt to procure an overriding meaning or message. The wealth and variety of criticisms connected with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) attest to the heterogeneity of the works.

In a collection of critical essays that span a whole century after the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Robert Phillips' *Aspects of Alice*² reveals a wide diversity of readings from various fields of inquiry, each with their own explication of the *Alice* books. For instance, *Alice in Wonderland* has been interpreted by Donald Rackin as a "comedy of man's absurd condition in a meaningless world", (454) by Elsie Leach as a child's rejection of adult authority, (125) and together with *Through the Looking Glass*, the books are shown to illustrate philosophical principles according to Harry Levin (217) and Roger W. Holmes. (199) The more radical readings, from critics like Geza Roehelm and Thomas Fensch, see affinities between the books and the traumas of a schizophrenic patient (387) and the experience of an LSD trip, (486) respectively. Shane Leslie's approach from within an ecclesiastical framework, sees both books as allegories of the intellectual struggles of mid-Victorian Oxford and a satire on the Church. (258)

Other critics have noted the books' psychoanalytical content and a wealth of symbolism has been unearthed to expose a preoccupation with oral, anal and sexual metaphors. One distinctive interpretation from

Kenneth Burke propounds that the books are a metaphor for purgation through excretion. (396) Other critics reveal how the books allegorize child and adult traumas and some psychoanalytic critics have referred these traumas back to Carroll's own child/adult life. As a consequence, Carroll has been analysed as sexually neurotic (Goldschmidt 332) as anally retentive, (Skinner 352), or else lacking love and burdened with a repressed guilt anxiety. (Schilder 341-342) To further compound the problems signalled by this inventory of psychoses, other critics suggest that Carroll's unresolved Oedipal attachment (Bloomingdale 443) conflicts with his desire for complete virility. (Goldschmidt 332) More unfortunately for Carroll, John Skinner suggests that Carroll's innocent friendships with the young, disguise a "sublimation of his sexual interest in children", (353) a claim that is often refuted.

Likewise, the protagonist Alice, has not escaped the probing of psychoanalysis and her tendency towards oral aggressiveness has been pointed out by Schilder. (336) She has also been perceived as a phallic symbol (Grotjahn 361) and it has been noted that some of Tenniel's illustrations add support to this claim. Apart from this, Alice, it is claimed, represents various figures, such as a freshman in the Oxford movement, (Leslie 258), a lost orphan searching for self identity (Gordon 132-133), a swain and snob, (Empson 400 & 421), a tribute to Victorian childhood (de la Mare 91) and a nominalist. (Holmes 202) One critic sees Alice as the essence of Christianity and on a more scientific note, a mathematical symbol. (Taylor 284-285) Yet others perceive her in roles ranging from the responsible position of Carroll's anima, (Bloomingdale 438), a lady, and the other extreme, rebel. (Auden 34 & Rackin 472).

Other characters have not managed to elude the analytic gaze through (what Phillips terms) the 'critics looking glasses'. Humpty Dumpty is a conspicuous character and has been interpreted as a satiric portrait of a literary critic, (Priestly 313), the essential platonic man, (Bloomingdale 441), a realist (Holmes 203) and in more metaphysical terms, 'Verbal Inspiration'. (Leslie 265) Another character, the

Cheshire Cat, is seen to represent the eternal feminine, (Bloomingdale 446) the epitome of intellectual detachment, (Empson 416) a Cardinal (Leslie 260) and even God. (Sewell 162) The Tweedle brothers are representative of a certain university type according to Lennon (110) or else symbols for the High and Low church. (Leslie 250) The White Knight has attracted attention as a satiric portrait of pastoralism and a Victorian scientist, (Empson 408-409), a positive animus, Christ as clown, Sir Lancelot, and Don Quixote. (Bloomingdale 449) There has even been a suggestion that the character is based on Lewis Carroll himself.³

Certain critics have remarked upon the variety and volume of criticisms of the *Alice* books. Lillian Smith, a critic of children's literature, remarks on the "infinite speculation" concerning the books.⁴ Robert Phillips comments that the *Alice* books remain "delightfully enigmatic to the end", with no one critic having the claim to the final word. (25) Perhaps this profusion of literary analyses would have been what Lewis Carroll anticipated for it was he who noted that "no word has a meaning *inseparably* attached to it".⁵ How much less likely, then, is a whole book of words to have a meaning inseparably attached to it.

The enigmatic nature of the *Alice* books is further compounded by the elements of nonsense. The subversive nature of nonsense is at once transgressive of sense, yet vital to its production. This paradoxical relationship reveals that nonsense is often shown to be sense, just as sense itself can be exposed as nonsense. The destabilisation of sense-making procedures makes the appropriation of meaning an even more difficult task, when the language of nonsense can signify either nothing, or anything at all.

As the traditional critical readings of *Alice* have demonstrated, by their abundance and diversity alone, there always seems to be another layer of interpretation to the texts, affirming Florence Lennon Becker's metaphor of the *Alice* books as an "infinite onion". (105) The multiplicity of interpretations attests to the apparent impossibility

of a final meaning and confirms Rosemary Jackson's claim that there can be no claim made to "re-present absolute meaning or 'reality'".⁶

Lewis Carroll's resistance to the assignation of a coherent unified interpretation of the *Alice* books, together with the critics' inability to pin any one meaning on such equivocal texts, emphasises the poststructuralist quality of the texts, inadvertently demonstrating a 'theory' of literary criticism which was to arrive a century after their publication. Deconstructive criticism has, as its major 'premise', a rejection of any attempt to seal off meaning in a closed referential circuit and de-centres fundamental notions of Western philosophy, traditional psychology and literary criticism. By questioning the assumptions implicit in concepts of centre, origin and presence, meaning is disseminated in an ongoing process of endless deferral towards infinity. The *Alice* books illustrate how language and the nature of textuality and discourse assume an autonomy which is characterised by indefiniteness, refusing to be constrained by the restrictions of conventional signification and categorisation. Instead, the endless possibilities for meaning and the recession of boundaries sees the texts unravelled rather than bound. The *Alice* books resist critical definition through the denial of an enclosed final meaning; in this, they mirror deconstruction itself, in which, as Jonathon Culler suggests, "there can be no final meanings that arrest the movement of signification".⁷

An examination of the *Alice* books in the light of deconstructive theory, will, like the traditional readings, reveal yet another layer of skin of the 'infinite onion'. However, unlike many of the traditional criticisms which attempt to confine the text to a neat interpretation, exposing a supposed meaningful coherence underneath the apparent abstruse surface, the deconstructive reading will demonstrate the very impossibility of fixing meaning to a text where, meaning, like the elusive egg in *Through the Looking Glass*, seems to get "further away the closer you come towards it."⁸

Additionally, unlike many of the traditional readings which cite

biographical, historico-social, religious or political reference there will be an obvious omission of such external reference, as all allusion to the texts' complexity will be found within the texts/textuality itself. Similarly, although the author, Lewis Carroll, has been resurrected (as have some of his views) by some recent critics, he will be forced to oblige Roland Barthes' poststructuralist formulation of the 'death of the author,' by remaining conspicuously absent from the deconstructive readings.

Because the psychoanalytic readings have often been the most productive in a reading of the *Alice* books, this deconstructive reading will begin by extending psychoanalysis beyond Freud to incorporate the deconstructive theories of Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and others. Derridean procedures will be shown to be "allegorically thematized"² within the diegetic narratives, and the extradiegetic levels will be examined to reveal how notions of framing and intertextuality aid in the dissemination of meaning and coherence. Finally the *Alice* books will be shown to defy strict genre definition, crossing a variety of genres and modes of fiction whilst displaying both modernist and postmodernist elements that further affirm their poststructuralist tendencies toward indeterminacy and undecidability.

I. Alice as Lacan's Split Subject

Jacques Lacan, in his re-reading of Freud's Oedipus Complex as a linguistic process, posits the child-subject as having entered the world of language after a successful negotiation of the mirror-stage. Applying Lacan's concepts to a deconstructive reading of the *Alice* books, it is possible to see the child Alice, as Lacan's split subject, severed from the Imaginary Order and cast into the world of language, the Symbolic.

The opening paragraphs of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* depict Alice as existing in the Imaginary Order where Alice, the subject, and her sister, the reflected mirror image', exist in a state that is

at once one of likeness and difference. Alice is able to identify with her sister as an object/image with whom she sees a similarity, yet is able to perceive the way in which she is alienated from this image, unable to identify with her in other ways. This is evidenced by the fact that despite the apparent idyll implicit in the setting (two sisters engaged in leisurely pursuits on a river bank on a hot spring day) there is an underlying tension established by Alice's boredom and by her being unable to relate to her sister's reading of a "book without pictures"². The process of Alice's separation from her sister is furthered by the presence of a patriarchal figure, Lacan's Imaginary Father, the White Rabbit (invisible to Alice's sister). The Rabbit, apart from being of the male sex, clearly belongs to the patriarchal order as evidenced by his concern with time and order, and, later on in the book, his integral role in the masculine domain of the court of Law. With the entry of the White Rabbit, Alice experiences a startling recognition of his difference:

Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it,... (26)

Alice, who is described as "burning with curiosity" (the terms being metaphoric substitutions for passion/yearning/desire) is filled with the desire to pursue it and runs "across the field after it". (26) The revelation and consequent acknowledgement of her desire causes Alice to feel guilt and concern for her previous relationship with those of the same sex. This is represented by Alice expressing concern over Dinah, her cat (symbol of the feminine) who Alice feels depends upon her, "Dinah'll miss me vey much tonight...I hope they'll remember her saucer of milk at tea-time." (28) Alice feels guilt at having to leave her secure, domestic realm in which she is an integral member. Her frequent musings and teary outbursts during her ensuing adventures reveal her attachment to her former matriarchal world, which comprises the female cat and Alice's sister. In her new-found state of desire and difference, Alice will be forced to repress her desire, culminating in the birth of the unconscious

and the split with the conscious. This is metaphorically represented by Alice's pursuit of the Rabbit deeper underground.

In Lacan's linguistic terms, Alice, as signifier in the Imaginary Order, who perceives her sister as a reflected image, the signified, becomes a split sign on sighting of the Rabbit who is a signifier of difference. Alice, like the sign, is defined by difference, rather than likeness, to other signs/subjects. This difference between signs means that presence/meaning is always deferred, as Alice will discover. As Vincent B. Leitch expounds Jacques Derrida's views,

There is neither substance or presence in the sign, but only the play of differences. *Différance* invades the sign, allowing its operation as *trace* - not self-present sign.³

Différance, which means to differ, defer and, taken from the Latin word 'differre', to scatter and disperse, replaces the concept of presence. *Différance*, Derrida explains, is the "movement by which language" becomes "'historically' constituted as a fabric of differences"⁴ Hence Alice has entered into the world of language, which in Terry Eagleton's terms is

...an endless process of difference and absence: instead of being able to possess anything in its fullness, the child will now simply move from one signifier to another, along a linguistic chain which is potentially infinite. One signifier implies another, and that another, and so on *ad infinitum*: the 'metaphorical' world of the mirror has yielded ground to the 'metonymic' world of language.⁵

This metonymic world of language, the world of Wonderland, where signs and objects, displace other signs or objects through a process of metamorphosis is the world in which Alice flounders. In this world, Alice's tears become the ocean (40), pebbles become cakes (63) subjects assume other roles and identities or else appear and disappear at random. As she moves from one signifier to another, in an act of metonymic displacement the signified remains ever elusive as nothing is ever fully explained or completed. This world of

différance and absence is permeated by lack, which engenders in Alice a desire to fill this lack, find meaning and attain the signified. Alice has entered the discourse of the Other, the unconscious, and, as Lacan points out, "the unconscious is structured like language" ⁵. Just as desire is an "effect"⁷ of language/discourse, as Elizabeth Grosz has noted, so is it also, an effect of the unconscious:

each self-conscious subject desires the desire
of the other as its object. Its desire is to be
desired by the other, its counterpart.⁸

Alice becomes entangled in the web of desire (of the Other) and in her relentless quest for the object of her desire she becomes more and more frustrated as the desired slips away from her. Moving along a chain of substitute objects, Alice's journey is a continual movement without a destination. As Anthony Wilden states, in his discussion of Lacan and desire,

it is in the sense that desire ultimately seeks
the annihilation of the other as an independent
subject (or of oneself) that Lacan seeks to
show...the impossibility of any fundamental
satisfaction of desire...⁹

Alice's adventures in Wonderland and The Looking Glass world illustrate Lacan's concepts and show how the worlds of language and the unconscious exemplify Lacan's notion of a process of movement which sees a continual "sliding of the signified beneath the signifier"¹⁰

The lack Alice experiences in the empty world of language, is evidenced by her loss of stable self-identity upon initial entry into the Symbolic. Alienated from her previous existence in the Imaginary Order, which was characterised by similarity and familiarity, Alice finds herself in alien territory which propels her into a state of epistemological uncertainty as she attempts to apply the concepts of her previous world to this one. As Robert D. Sutherland has pointed out, Alice's act of wondering which latitude or longitude she has reached, is of absolutely no consequence in the context of the world

she finds herself in. This is exacerbated by the fact that Alice has no idea of the meaning of the words anyway. The words are what Sutherland calls "empty labels",¹¹ signifiers without a signified. The coherent sign has become destabilised, (in ways which will be shown further on) due to the unstable nature of language which reveals the impossibility of a stable signified being attached to a signifier.

Alice's epistemological ponderings, which begin most often with the phrase "I wonder..."¹², ("I wonder how many miles I've fallen?" [27], "I do wonder what can have happened to me!" [58]), elude answers and instead dissolve into more questions. Stabilised meaning and concrete answers have no place in Wonderland. The endless musings, such as "Do cats eat bats ? Do bats eat cats ?" (28), lead nowhere and escape resolution. With this particular question unresolved, the notion of a world of signifiers without signifieds is established. There will not, and cannot be, any one overriding meaning in a world where the signified dissolves into another signifier. The sign for Cat, which eats a Bat, can be reversed so that a Bat can now eat a Cat, thus each dissolves into the other, becomes the other. The relationship between the word/sign and thing/object is dismantled. The image Alice saw reflected back to her in the mirror stage can now never be a totally coherent image of the self (signified) instead it becomes another signifier, where each reflects the other and defines the other, by difference. Likewise, cat and bat, both appear similar yet are defined only by their difference - cat and bat (the lack of a 'c' or 'b'). Alice will now resume her quest for identity by trying to define herself by what she is not.

The White Rabbit, object of her desire and true to the nature of desire, will never be satisfactory, merely a substitute and accordingly will flit in and out of Alice's presence leaving the desire unfulfilled. As desire is, as Grosz defines, a "chain of substitution"¹³ it can be expected that Alice, while the White Rabbit is absent, finds another substitute and almost immediately she sees (looks/gazes at) the "loveliest garden" and "longs" for it. (30) This desire will 'appear' to be fulfilled when Alice actually finds herself

in the garden, but the fulfillment of her desire will prove to be a delusion. The garden, like all substitutes of desire, will fall short of expectations.

Before Alice embarks on her fragmented journey with her series of encounters with others of difference, the realisation of her self as split and incoherent is again emphasised. Alice's dissociation from the self is illustrated by her oscillation between shrinking and growing. She begins to perceive her body as an objectified image in a series of metaphoric associations, "I'm shutting up like a telescope/candle"¹⁴. As if to further enforce her split identity Alice begins talking to herself "as if she were two people"(33) and even addresses her own feet. As Lacan suggests, such

unconscious discourse is that of the Other in the subject who has been alienated from himself through his relationship to the mirror image of the other.¹⁵

With this recognition of a split self, epistemological uncertainty has given away to ontological uncertainty and Alice now asks "Who in the world am I ?"(37) - the question the split subject must ask him/herself before s/he assumes an identity in the Symbolic world as speaking subject¹⁶. As if trying to assert her rights as a speaking subject in the world of language, Alice challenges her position as a subject mastered by language, by attempting to master it. Her recitation of Isaac Watts' poem which comes out all wrong illustrates Lacan's notion of language as the master of the subject ¹⁷, a notion that will be further developed in the next book with the character Humpty Dumpty. Meanwhile Alice's difficulty with language prefigures the rest of her adventures in Wonderland where language will constantly slip away from her. Alice finds in this 'other' world, that communication is always miscommunication. In her conversation with the Hatter at the mad tea party, misunderstanding occurs when the Hatter literally interprets a statement made by Alice that is metaphoric, "I have to beat time." (98) There are many other instances of this in the book and Alice discovers that characters in Wonderland

have a tendency to literalise metaphor. This undercuts established notions of what words mean by discounting the context in which utterances are made. By literalising metaphors in this way, it is shown that the condensation of meaning can be dispersed and split through the simple device of offering a fresh interpretation of a well established phrase/image.

Susan Stewart comments that "metaphor in nonsense is left without a context"¹⁹ and utilises the example of the riddle "Why is a Raven like a writing desk?" (95) to illustrate the "fantastic combination of domains that is implied."¹⁹ The riddle is left unanswered as there is an unlimited number of possible answers which will ensure the inadequacy of one final answer. Examples such as these, where the signified remains repressed (as in metaphor, literalised metaphors being yet another form of signifier), illustrate a Lacanian notion, as expressed by Eagleton, that, with language "we can never mean precisely what we say and say precisely what we mean."²⁰

If meaning can never be present, neither then, can any sign nor subject be ever fully present in a world which is also characterised by metonymic displacement. Just as language slips away from Alice, so too, do the other subjects of Wonderland. Indeed it seems that just as Alice believes she has established a rapport with some of the creatures, they vanish. Alice begins to feel with the creatures of the Caucus Race that she had "known them all her life" (45) and very soon after, she is abandoned by them. The Cheshire Cat and his characteristic appearances and disappearances, as well as illustrating the notion of never being fully self-present, is often marked by a synecdochic process whereby his grin displaces his whole self. The Duchess' baby actually metamorphoses into a pig. This is an example of metonymic displacement, which reveals the unstable nature of the sign/subject, where it is possible for a baby to become a pig, or even a fig. The sign/subject is often not what it appears to be and just when a signifier seems to have a signified it rapidly slides into just another signifier. Alice is consistently reminded, in this way, of her own absence, from others and herself, and difference, from others

and herself. Language is in a constant state of flux and therefore can never be stable, reliable or coherent.

Understandably, the the anxiety that such a precarious ontological existence evokes, manifests itself in a contradiction of feeling in Alice who is caught between a desire to return to the state of undifferentiation and stability (the Imaginary) and a desire to forge an identity in the estranged world of the Symbolic. Additionally, Alice feels her own sense of identity slipping away. When asked by the pigeon to identify what she is, Alice replies *doubtfully* "I'm a girl." (67) Alice, like the sign, can identify herself more confidently by what she is not, "I'm *not* a serpent." (76) Perhaps the most accurate confession comes from Alice when she explains to the Caterpillar that she "can't explain herself, because she is not herself" (67) Her entry into the Symbolic has resulted in not only a division between others and herself, as she enters the world of pronouns, (I am not you, you are not me), but also created divisions within herself (I am not me). When Alice attempts to explain who she is to the Caterpillar,

I hardly know, Sir, just at present- at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then. (67)

she can be seen to be in the destabilising position of the split subject who can only "designate him/herself by a convenient pronoun"²¹. The pronoun can never fully represent the whole person and Alice shows an intuitive grasp of such a concept when she reveals the division between the 'I' of this morning (the enunciated) and the 'I' of now (the enunciator). Additionally, the grammatical structure that employs the present tense 'I Know who I was' instead of the past form 'I knew who I was' also emphasises the division between self/I. The 'I' of present, *knows* who the 'I' of the past *was*, implying that they cannot possibly be the same 'I'. Therefore the subject, apart from being never fully present to another subject, is also never fully present to itself, like the linguistic sign which can never signify the signified because the signifier only signifies

another signifier and so on.

Alice's initial entry into the garden shows that her desired object still remains unobtainable. The garden, far from being the imagined paradise is, like the Symbolic state, a world of empty signs. Upon finding the gardeners, Alice discovers that a sign for a red rose is deceptive because the rose it signifies is actually white. Signs are not to be relied upon and therefore language is unreliable. A sign cannot be taken at face value in this world in which a red painted white rose may signify a red rose but is actually a white rose. Furthermore, in this garden, not only do subjects transform into other subjects, but subjects are objects and objects are subjects. A Pack of Cards becomes a chaotic animate community whereby Flamingos and Hedgehogs serve as croquet mallets and balls.

If Alice is resigned to the fact that in this world she can not be herself then it stands to reason that she should try to insert herself into the role of an-other. In order to become a speaking subject in language Alice must take up her role within the patriarchal system and submit to the law of the Father which means forming an identity with a matriarchal subject. Alice has already found fleeting companionship with the Duchess but it is the Queen of Hearts with whom she will find a role model (prefiguring her relationship with the Queens in the second book). At this stage of her journey Alice has lost her awe of the White Rabbit who has proven to be a rather ineffectual patriarch and is free to strike up a friendship with the Queen. However, before this relationship is allowed to develop much further, Alice must be subjected to a hearing of the Mock Turtle's history. His/story comprises a surplus of puns in which one word is a homophonic replacement of another; the Mock Turtle's lessons are called so because they "lessen" (130) each day. The device of punning, Susan Stewart remarks, illustrates the "surplus of signification" within language.²² Significantly the Mock Turtle never finishes his oral tale and, as if in preparation for the final stage, Alice is whisked off to attend a patriarchal ceremony - the Court of Law.

Alice's initial role in the trial is that of a passive witness of the proceedings. However it is not long before she is invited to give evidence as a speaking subject. Alice is not ready to assume a position in the patriarchal system. She has not managed to develop a sufficient relationship with a matriarchal figure and she is rebellious toward the Queen in these final moments indicating disrespect rather than awe. This indicates her unwillingness to identify with a female gender role. Likewise, she has found the patriarchal figures, including the King of Hearts, weak and inadequate and thus has not been provided with an adequate male gender role against which she can define herself. Hence Alice refuses to assume her gender position in patriarchy and rebels against such a requirement. Alice's response to the invitation to speak is to subvert notions of law and order (patriarchal constructs) by upturning the gentlemen of the jury whom she realises "would be quite as much use in the trial one way up as the other" (154-155). She then voices her contempt for the system in the outcry "Who cares for You?...You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (161) and consequently there is a (temporary) dissolution of Wonderland and therefore, patriarchy.

An ontological shift in the narrative, which sees Alice returned to the diegetic narrative scene on the riverbank, places her back in the Imaginary Order. The reinstatement of Alice into the relatively stable Imaginary realm suggests that Alice failed to successfully negotiate the Oedipus Complex, whereby she might have submitted herself to patriarchy, and therefore failed to take a place in the Symbolic world, the world of language. Just as the patriarchal system proved itself inadequate and unreliable, language itself has proven to be equally ineffective, indicating the failure of the Symbolic order. It appears that Alice has gained nothing from her experiences and returns to her initial state. The Symbolic world has been deferred and all Alice can do is to initiate the dream cycle, (She tells her sister the dream and her sister proceeds to dream the same dream, a process which resembles Jung's collective unconscious). However she still remains Lacan's split subject and she is a subject

with a division between conscious and unconscious, therefore lack and desire still remain. The fissure ensures that there can be no return to complete unity. Eventually unconscious desire will irrupt into the conscious. The return of the repressed will manifest itself in the sequel, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*.

II. Desire and the Discourse of the Other

The Other re-emerges in the sequel as that which lies beyond the Looking Glass. Alice sees reflected in the mirror the desired other and longs to be desired by the other, to enter into discourse with the Other. Because the unconscious, in psychoanalytic terms, invades the conscious, it is the unconscious that enters Alice rather than Alice who enters it. Alice merges into the world beyond the mirror in such a way that the one world blurs into the other and ontological boundaries become indistinct:

She was up on the chimney-piece while she said
this, though she hardly knew how she had got
there. And certainly the glass was beginning to
melt way, just like a bright silvery mist. (184)

Alice, as unconscious subject, finds a world permeated by *différance* and inversion where, once again, she is subjected to the elusive nature of language. Her initial exposure to the written word (Jabberwocky) reveals that even though language can be inverted, and, is seemingly incomprehensible, the poem reveals a propensity toward multi-meaning, rather than non-meaning. The poem comprises grammatically and syntactically correct neologisms like "outgrabe" and "wabe" (191) which work at the level of connotation rather than denotation. Other words more clearly resemble existing portmanteau words which according to Susan Stewart, involve the "simultaneity of two or more words within one meaning". The metaphoric condensation of "lithe" and "slimy" to produce "slithy" (271) combines the connotations of both words into a single image. However although the portmanteau word can lay claim to one unified meaning in this way, the "simultaneity" of the combination of two or more words,

once attended to, dissolves 'the meaning' into its constituent elements, and those constituent elements again split into all the possible combinations of meaning available to their convergence.²

The division of a word like "mimsy" into "flimsy and miserable" (272) indicates the possibility of further meanings and division of meaning as each individual word will signify other words which differ slightly in their connotation. The lexical definition of flimsy - "frail, weak, thin"³ and miserable - "wretched, worthless, squalid"⁴ lead to other words/signifiers quite divergent in meaning from the initial combination. This implies the possibility of infinite meaning and undercuts the validity of Humpty Dumpty's claim to sole interpretive rights further on in the book. As Robert D. Sutherland remarks, Humpty Dumpty has his own "stipulative definitions" for words, which are not necessarily shared by others.⁵

Through the Looking Glass emphasises some of the concepts explored in the first book and utilises lucid examples to illustrate the processes of the Symbolic order. The unobtainable signified, the desired other, will, in this land of "living backwards", (247) remain even more elusive. Alice discovers that the closer she comes to an object, the further away it is. As Susan Stewart claims,

each inversion and reversal, undercuts the status of the original order, inverting the animal and the human, or the human and the mechanical, or the linguistic sign and what it signifies...linguistic inversions emphasize the reversible and flexible nature of communication.⁶

It is the Red Queen who greets Alice (as other) and provides a model of identification for Alice in her desire to become Queen. Alice's shy request "I should *like* to be a Queen, best" (208) is granted by the Queen who proceeds to give her the necessary instructions for attaining this status. As one would expect in this inverted world, Alice's moving forward towards Queenhood involves an initial backward movement, where she finds herself back in the Imaginary, the pre-linguistic realm of the nameless Wood. This symbolic representation

of a world before language offers Alice a brief respite from the frustrating and elusive world of the Symbolic. In this realm, objects and subjects have not been assigned names, have not yet entered into language. Here she finds undifferentiation and unity with a creature ironically very unlike herself, a deer. However, as the return to the Symbolic world is inevitable, this harmonious union is destined to end. With the reinstatement of language into the world, as they exit from the wood, difference is installed, and with it, absence. The deer remembers their names and flees in terror from the girl, as he recalls the divisions between humans and animals. This episode clearly exemplifies the divisions and rifts between subjects, caused by language. Alice, once again alone and acutely aware of her loss, consoles herself with the remembrance of her personal name and resumes her journey along the path of signification. She has, once again, been reminded of her difference and remains a subject cast out into the world of language at the mercy of an empty signification process.

Just how empty the process of signification is, in the Symbolic world, is illustrated in the following metaphorical example. Alice has no sooner re-entered language when she encounters a symbolic representation of the split sign. The two signifiers, the sign posts "To Tweedledum's House, To the House of Tweedledee" (228) point towards a dubious signified (are they two houses or the same house?), a question which is denied an answer. Alice, led by her desire to reach the signified (the house/s) follows the signifiers which of course never lead to their destination. Instead Alice is led to another signifier, the Tweedle brothers themselves. The brothers, identical, yet different, represent the notion of the split self, the self and the other, which is at once, of the self, and not of the self. In the presence of the brothers, who are mirror images of each other, Alice is reminded of her own disunity. This is compounded when the brothers tell her she is part of the Red King's unconscious and "not real...rather, a sort of a thing in the Red King's dream". (238) Alice, realising the precarious nature of her subjectivity, comes to doubt her own ontological status and despite

her efforts to explain it away as nonsense, (which is, after all, language), she becomes disturbed by the implications of such a notion. She is only an effect of language, hence, controlled by language. Alice is possibly only a part of the other's unconscious, the o/Other's desire; additionally, the Red King is part of her unconscious/desire. The subject hardly matters, for, in the Symbolic world, language is master. The question of whose unconscious is it or "which dreamed it ?" (341) is a central issue in the book and remains inconclusive. Alice and the Red King share in each other's language, are part of a shared discourse. As Terry Eagleton propounds Lacan's notion,

the unconscious is an effect of our relations
with one another... it exists between us rather
than within us. ⁷

Alice's dilemma is deferred/repressed for the moment, as she soon becomes involved in the role of mediator in a squabble between the brothers. This is illustrative of many of her involvements with patriarchs in the book where Alice is either directly involved in quarrels or else acts as witness. Alice may well have been "never so contradicted in all her life" (72) in Wonderland, but in the Looking Glass world, the contradictions are inherent within the individuals. Many of the characters have their counterparts or doubles, representing the split self, hence the conflicts between them are merely contradictions within themselves. It is not a wonder, in this chaotic world of patriarchal feudings (Lion vs Unicorn, Red Knight vs White Knight), Alice never finds her Symbolic father figure. The White King is nervous and impotent, the Red King sleeps through the book, the Red Knight is defeated and the White Knight is an ineffectual, sentimental figure. Alice's relations with patriarchy offer little consolation. The Red Queen is absent for the majority of the book and the muddled figure of the White Queen dissolves, most aptly, into a sheep. This act of displacement, where one subject metamorphoses into another, illustrates the metonymic relationship between signifiers in language. Such relationships are a notable feature of the chapter "Wool and Water".⁸ Here objects and subjects

continually displace each other and any attempts by Alice to pin down a signified are frustrated. The shelves of the shop seem to be full of objects yet when Alice tries to focus on the contents of any one shelf it appears empty and the others comparatively overloaded. Alice cannot obtain satisfaction of her desire as the object of the gaze eludes the subject:

"Things flow about so here!" she said at last in a plaintive tone, after she had spent a minute or so in vainly pursuing a large bright thing, that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes like a workbox, and was always in the shelf next above the one she was looking at. (253)

This process is continued until the desired object disappears altogether. Alice has similar difficulty with the beautiful rushes when she suddenly finds herself in a rowing boat. As she gathers the rushes, the most lovely one is always out of reach. Desire is never fulfilled and subjects in language live in endless pursuit of its material and symbolic manifestations.

A series of transformations that sees the Queen become a sheep, a shop become a boat and then a shop again, leaves Alice bewildered in another thwarted attempt to grasp the concrete signified. Eventually, an egg she tries to purchase, becomes Humpty Dumpty, who, defies classification, according to Jean Jacques Lecercle, being neither "egg nor man."² One signifier slides into another and Alice may well be deluded into believing she has at last found a transcendental signifier, after all, Humpty Dumpty himself claims to have mastered language,

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less". (269)

Humpty Dumpty has his own idiosyncratic import for word meanings and maintains mastery over the flow of communication, severing conversation with abrupt closures and even changing the last line of

the nursery rhyme that will seal his fate, "They'd pick me up again in a minute, they would." (265) However Humpty Dumpty's mastery is rapidly subverted when he falls to his death as Alice leaves. Alice will discover in the next episode that "all the King's horses and Men" can barely even pick themselves up off the floor,

she had never seen soldiers so uncertain on feet:
they were always tripping over something or other,
and whenever one went down, several more always
fell over him...Then came the horses...even they
stumbled now and then;.... (277)

Humpty Dumpty's self-deluded claim to the mastery of language is therefore rendered all the more ironic. Like the signified of the split sign, Humpty Dumpty is to be subsumed into the processes of signification where he is proven to be just another signifier.

After her brief and chaotic sojourn in the patriarchal realm Alice is unexpectedly transformed into Queen. After an initial moment of glory Alice's Queendom proves to be an anticlimax when she finds that she must undergo further interrogation by the other two Queens, who, consequently, fall asleep in her presence. The scene dissolves and the deflated Alice finds herself literally and metaphorically shut out of a feast of which she is a guest of honour. Alice's Queendom is further deflated by a rude Frog servant, and a greeting of complete silence from her guests. The Symbolic remains just as elusive and frustratingly unpredictable even though she is now a Queen. The feast itself, representative of the feminine realm of food and comfort,¹⁰ proves to be as chaotic and petty as the patriarchal realms she has encountered. Alice's desire has been thwarted once again. In a rage of frustration and disgust, Alice articulates her rejection of the Symbolic and in doing so, returns to the Imaginary realm, language having failed again, perpetuating the cycle of non/sense and non resolution.

As a conscious subject in the Imaginary realm, Alice is soon haunted by the return of the repressed. The question of the Red King's dream reasserts itself. Alice is still haunted by the desire for an answer.

Her desire *for* the other has led to her becoming the desire *of* the other. This act of displacement, where the displaced unconscious of the Red King, influences Alice's conscious state, affirms Elizabeth Grosz' claim that

the repressed term always remains in associative relations to the rest of the subject's language, explaining how the unconscious is able to intervene into or speak through consciousness at symptomatic moments.¹¹

The signifier refuses to become a signified in the final analysis as one form of unconscious (Alice's) displaces and substitutes for another (the Red King's). The unconscious is, in Lacan's term "transsubjective."¹² To confound the notion of dreaming further, Lacan claims that "the dream is not the unconscious but rather the distortion of the unconscious dream thoughts as they regress to the level of perception"¹³ The intradiegetic narratives of the two *Alice* books are dreams, therefore distortions of the unconscious; and, furthermore, the narrative, as it is presented in the diegetic form, will have undergone distortion in the communication of the dream itself. Therefore, the question remains, how much of the dream/text has been distorted through various interpretations or else omitted altogether? The link between the unconscious and language is noted by Jean Jacques Lecercle who suggests that "language is founded on the impossibility of saying everything..."¹⁴ That which is omitted, in language, is as important, as that which is included. This will become a central concept in a Derridean deconstructive reading of the *Alice* books where, like Lacan's unconscious that refuses to be suppressed, the 'unsaid' of the texts will preserve as much a privileged status, as the 'said'. Alice learns that language is an endless journey of desire, a place where difference and absence replace sim/fam/iliarity and presence. Language is unreliable and words can either have surplus meaning or no meaning at all. The Symbolic is a world where even the simple conjunction 'if' is no longer attributed a harmless, closed meaning:

"I only said 'if'!" poor Alice pleaded in a piteous tone.
The two Queens looked at each other, and the Red Queen remarked with a little shudder, "She says she only said 'if'!"
"But she said a great deal more than that!" the White Queen moaned, wringing her hands.
"Oh, ever so much more than that!" (318)

III. Deconstructing Lac(k)an: A Feminist Perspective.

That which is left 'unsaid', in a Lacanian reading of the *Alice* books, is articulated in a feminist reading. A feminist reading refuses to let the obvious *phallocentrism* of Lacan's privileging of the 'Law of the Father' go unnoticed. The female subject, portrayed as having "the lack of even the lack" in Ruthven's terms¹, provides a conspicuous gap into which a deconstructive feminist can enter.

So far, this paper has considered Wonderland and the Looking Glass world as signifying a patriarchal world of the Symbolic. However these unstable, multivalent worlds can also be construed as matriarchal. The ability to perceive the worlds as either distinctly patriarchal or matriarchal is precisely what one would expect in books which contain the seeds of their own deconstruction.

Luce Irigaray assumes a feminist position and proposes an alternative 'concentric'² discourse to displace the *phallogentric*, whereby the vulva is privileged and the feminine aspects of plurality and heterogeneity are celebrated. The *phallogentric* discourse which relegates women to the silenced margins is then perceived as a defensive, rigid system, threatened by the mystery of a separate woman's language. This forbidden space, which Irigaray claims is "occupied by women only"³, is a place where woman can assert herself as speaking subject and define herself "not as a negative term beside man but as a term in her own right."⁴ Edwin Ardener has named this space the "wild zone"⁵ - a plural non unified world of liberated desire that is inaccessible to men. Ardener elaborates that this zone

crosses beyond the borders of the paternal Symbolic, thus women are in the enviable position of having access to both zones, while men remain confined to the one.

Alice enters into the 'wild zone' when she enters Wonderland and the Looking Glass world. As Irigaray explains, when Alice passes "through the looking glass", she enters the "maternal world".⁶ The Looking Glass world in this case is perceived as matriarchal despite the apparently systematic structure which is imposed on it - the chess game, the rules of which are significantly not strictly adhered to. In this matriarchal world, as in Wonderland, the Queen reigns supreme. Martin Gardner's annotations confirm this position of power when he comments "the Queen is the most important piece in a chess game".⁷ Consequently, this is the role Alice wishes to assume in her journey through the Looking Glass world. The respective Kings and other patriarchs, as previously elucidated, are depicted as ineffectual and clearly occupy a subordinate position to that of the Queens. Even the White Queen of Looking Glass world, portrayed as bumbling and confused, makes her grand entry into the book by inadvertently knocking the White King into the ashes. Her status is further reinforced in her matron/patron/ising attitude toward the King and his memorandum notetaking. In fact even her general appearance, described later on in the book as "dreadfully untidy with every thing crooked", (246) can be seen metonymically to signify the Queen's efforts to affront the orderliness of patriarchy. Additionally the White King's subordinate position is further exacerbated when Alice takes control of his pen/is/phallus.⁸ The King's attempts to write are thwarted by Alice's own inscriptions/language. When Alice begins writing for him the White King fears his loss of control:

The poor King looked puzzled and unhappy, and struggled with the pencil for some time without saying anything; but Alice was too strong for him, and at last he panted out "My dear! I really *must* get a thinner pencil. I can't manage this one a bit: it writes all manner of things that I don't intend." (190)

The phallus in the maternal world can not exercise its authoritative meaning and at inopportune moments, is subverted by the irruptions of what Julia Kristeva, another feminist critic, calls the Semiotic. Modelling her Semiotic on Lacan's Imaginary order and her Symbolic on Lacan's notions of the Symbolic, Kristeva proposes that rather than the subject progressing from the Imaginary order into the Symbolic with the latter superseding the former, the two realms co-exist, with the Semiotic continually modifying the Symbolic. As a consequence, the subject is "in process"⁹ rather than in a state that sees the subject progressing from one order to the other in hierarchical fashion. John Lechte notes Kristeva's contribution and explains, that,

while Lacan was concerned to trace the limits of the signifiable and bring it under the auspices of the symbolic order, Kristeva, by contrast, has been concerned to extend the limits of the signifiable, perhaps to the extent of relativizing the role of the symbolic order...¹⁰

Feminist deconstruction then, responds to the *phallogentric* bias toward the Symbolic order as the transcendental realm, by acknowledging and valorising the feminine Semiotic and showing how the Semiotic not only irrupts into the Symbolic but modifies it. Kristeva actually suggests that the two orders are ironically complementary, the one liberates, the other regulates, and, in Ruthven's succinct phrase, "the Symbolic isn't displaced by the Semiotic, rather it is a process of interaction".¹¹

This interaction is evident in the books where Alice travels back and forth between the Imaginary and Symbolic, which intermingle, and her status is modified by each visit. Rather than the the two orders being distinct, they merge. Alice finds that the Symbolic will always try to impose structure on the Semiotic and, as the Semiotic is too fluid to be contained, it will always overflow the borders. The Semiotic, rather than being outside of the Symbolic, works from within to subvert it, as Alice herself does. Alice's brief escape from the Symbolic into the Semiotic nameless wood reveals to her the necessity

of returning to language (from which there is no escape) and working from within language to subvert it. This is the reason Alice is able to return to the other side in her trip through the Looking Glass and suggests the potential for further trips to Wonderland where the two orders will always exist in a state of flux, the subject a fluid, rather than fixed entity.

The world of Wonderland is also disrupted by the Semiotic as the patriarchs of Wonderland find themselves ruled by the passionate rages of the Queen of Hearts. In fact both Wonderland and the Looking Glass worlds, with their free play of signifiers which disrupt rationality and order, allow ambiguity and nonsense to run rampant and thus could be seen as feminine realms. As illustrated in the Lacanian reading, the worlds of both Wonderland and the Looking Glass are representative of the unconscious. It is claimed, by such critics as Kristeva, that the unconscious is commonly associated with the feminine whereas conscious discourse is associated with the masculine. This results from what Ruthven explains is a

feminist appropriation of Freud's distinction between the language of the unconscious, which uses images and puns as freely as poetry in creating those 'irrational' and ambiguous scenarios we call dreams, and that conscious 'rational' and (we try to ensure) disambiguated language in which our daily affairs are conducted.¹²

Thus the feminine, as discursive realm, favours open-endedness and freedom of form as opposed to closure and rigidity.

The structure of *Through the Looking Glass* displays a tendency towards subversion of conventional closures. Such an instance occurs when the closing sentence of chapter ten is left unfinished and is carried over to chapter eleven. (337-338) The division of a sentence by chapters indicates a structural form that is akin to poetry with its open disregard of syntactical arrangement. In fact denial of closure occurs frequently throughout the text, evident in the interaction between Alice and other characters. Often Alice's conversations remain unfinished as characters either disappear (the Red Queen),

cut off conversation (Humpty Dumpty) or else transform into other characters (the White Queen).

Attempts at communication are also thwarted by the elements of punning, double meaning, mis-meaning or else the interruptions of song or poetic verse. The poem Jabberwocky, for instance, with its potential for multiple meaning and non-meaning (it "fills Alice's head with ideas" only she doesn't "exactly know what they are!" [197]) is rife with the free-ing mechanisms of the feminine which seeks to liberate rather than confine. Equally important in establishing a 'dialogic' status is the fact that most of the poems in the books are parodies of traditional Victorian verse or aphorisms which undermine the 'respectability' of the original form. The prolific punning in the books continually halts the logical flow of communication to ensure that there is always an alternative meaning to words, giving rise to further possibilities for meaning and so on. Even one of the inhabitants of Wonderland, the Cheshire Cat,¹³ explains the other-ness of the world when he tells Alice "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." (89)

Madness, the secondary term in the traditional hierarchy of binary oppositions, occupies the same position as the feminine in masculine/feminine, with implications of the secondary term as the wayward 'other'. This is refuted by feminist critics who reinstate the other as the silenced, misunderstood elements of a patriarchal system which are oppressed out of fear of the unknown. Alice is oppressed by patriarchy when she is forced to become a passive listener to the relating of the Mock Turtle's history. However the positions of oppressor and oppressed are not firmly maintained. Not only does Alice interrupt the Mock Turtle with questions at regular intervals, his/story is self-subverting through the feminine disruptive elements of punning and poetry and it remains without a satisfactory closure. When it is time for Alice to give her/story, the patriarchs (the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon) interrupt in an attempt to try to anchor some sort of meaning to her tale, "explain all that", (138) the Mock Turtle demands before she has barely begun.

Her unorthodox recitations of well known poems cause the Mock Turtle some concern and frustration as he pesters Alice for explanations which she cannot provide:

"What is the use of repeating all that stuff," the Mock Turtle interrupted, "if you don't explain it as you go on?" (140)

Eventually the patriarchs respond by asking Alice to dispense with her/story altogether being the "most confusing thing they had ever heard". (140) The feminine (her/story) then, can be equated with the unconscious, which continually disrupts and confounds the masculine conscious (his/story). The maternal world of liberated desire incessantly resists the paternal world of order. As the Mock Turtle episode shows, even the patriarchs cannot escape the influence of feminine libidinal impulse and many of them, in both books, cannot resist the temptation to burst into spontaneous recitation or song, an observation Alice notes when she tells the Red Queen "You know I've had such a quantity of poetry said to me today". (332)

As noted, poetry is just one of the many ways in which the Symbolic order is displaced from its position of authority. If the Symbolic order no longer occupies a position of authority, then the notion of the subject as subjugated to the Law of the Father is also questionable. The interdependency of the two orders suggests the impossibility of such a submission. The Semiotic Chora, Kristeva's 'Body of the Mother', the realm of instinctual, rhythmic drives, resists the authority of Lacan's 'Name of the Father', which means that according to Lacan, Alice does not successfully negotiate the Oedipus complex. If one accepts, uncritically, Irigaray's position then, there is no room for Alice to negotiate the Oedipus Complex because there is no Symbolic order. Interestingly, for feminist deconstructionists, Alice's failure to acquire a position in Language means that in Lacan's terms she is 'psychotic'.¹⁴ A feminist reading refutes the hierarchical positioning of such a claim and sees Alice's apparent 'failure' to be bound by patriarchal systematics as an active refusal to repress the free flowing libidinal drives of feminine

desire.

Furthermore, according to Lacan, a subject's gender position is acquired upon succession to the Symbolic world, with the male subject taking up the position of the father and the female subject accepting her subordination. Alice's inability to identify with/against a fe/male gender role as discussed in a Lacanian reading, might then be reinterpreted by feminists as an acknowledgement of her bisexuality, which is in keeping with Kristeva's notions of a "fundamental bisexuality in all desiring subjects."¹⁵ That is to say, the subject in process, does not assume a masculine or feminine role, but rather comes to acknowledge the gender division within him/herself. As Kristeva believes, "the chora is never eliminated."¹⁶ This coincides with Lacan's belief that the subject lives in desire of returning to the Imaginary state (Semiotic Chora) of presence and undifferentiation.

Hélène Cixous, another deconstructive feminist, boldly counteracts Lacan's notions of the Oedipus complex, which favours the male subject and depicts the female as subordinate and lacking, and proposes that it is actually the male subject who suffers a greater loss/lack. The female subject remains ever connected to what Cixous terms the 'Good Mother' due to her likeness and fusion with the mother.¹⁷ The male subject, on the other hand, exists in a negative relation to the mother and must sacrifice the maternal in order to assume the paternal. The female subject infuses with the mother so that the differentiation of 'I' and 'you' becomes a more positive 'we',¹⁸ hence there is no sense of loss or guilt. The male, by abandoning the maternal, thereby suppressing it, has what Grosz describes as "an unspeakable debt to the mother as creator."¹⁹ Therefore, although the Lacanian reading suggested that Alice did not gain a stable position in the Symbolic, she is not deprived, in Cixous' notions, because she still retains the link with the Semiotic Chora. Alice, far from being psychotic, is in the more balanced position of being able to traverse both the matriarchal and patriarchal worlds. She exists primarily in the feminine pre-Symbolic (matriarchal) world, but enters the

patriarchal Symbolic (Wonderland and the Looking Glass world) at will. Consequently, the feminine, which exists both within and outside of the Symbolic order (patriarchal), can be seen to be on the border. Eagleton provides a concise summary of these issues:

Women are represented within male-governed society, fixed by sign, image, meaning, yet because they are also the 'negative' of that social order there is always in them something which is left over, superfluous, unrepresentable, which refuses to be figured there. On this view, the feminine... signifies a force in society which opposes [society].²⁰

Hence the anarchical status of the feminine in patriarchy challenges all *phallogentric* notions of the phallus as transcendental signified. Phallus, as symbol of truth, is abrogated, a notion that Jacques Derrida, in unison with feminist critics, expounds in his deconstructive strategies. Derrida extends his critique of Lacan's privileging of the phallus when he accuses Lacan of *phallogocentrism*. As Vincent B. Leitch explains,

The singular function of the phallus as sovereign signifier was to center and regulate systematically the process of interpretation, the unveilings of truth, the imports of the voice, and the flights of the signifier.²¹

This function becomes negligible under the scrutiny of deconstruction.

A Lacanian reading divided the concept of unified self and sign and showed how Alice resisted the supremacy of a transecendental signifier, thus deregulating the process of interpretation and so on. A feminist reading removed the phallus from the centre. A final examination of the *Alice* books, through the deconstructive strategies of Derrida, will take this one step further and remove the centre itself.

IV. Unbinding Binary Oppositions

The Poststructuralist psychoanalytical readings suggested that the intradiegetic narratives of the *Alice* books are structured like the unconscious. According to Derrida, the text of the unconscious is, like all texts, permeated by *différance*. The 'unconscious text' is

already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united - a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are always already transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with reproduction. Always already: that is to say, repositories of a meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, '...

As previously illustrated, Wonderland and the Looking Glass world are inhabited by this *différance*. The split between signifier and signified means that the divided sign has given way to the trace, which David Buchbinder explains is "a trace of absent meanings".² The trace, with its constant deferral of presence and meaning, decentres the Western metaphysical notion of 'being as presence'. Derrida criticises the alleged *logocentrism* of Western metaphysics for privileging the transcendental signified where there is always a centre in which meaning and truth are present. To counteract this Derrida points out the blindness of *logocentrism* for disregarding the fact that,

before the alternative of presence or absence and prior to the possibility of center or structure, *play* operates. It then disrupts presence, producing chains of substitutions at the center, undermining the solidifications of structure and subverting the stability of the origin.³

Therefore, whereas the Lacanian reading deconstructed the idea of a unified subject and a coherent language system, Derrida undermines the concepts of Western philosophy upon which such notions are founded. Presence has been displaced by difference which is characterised by repetition and substitution. Furthermore, *logocentrism* asserts itself through the formulation of hierarchical oppositions such as

presence/absence, male/female, which a deconstructive reading finds necessary to dismantle. The feminist reading showed how it is possible to deconstruct the binary opposition between male and female and, Lacan's re-reading of Freud, as it applies to the *Alice* books, demonstrated how absence cannot be regarded as simply non-presence, because presence itself is inhabited by difference/absence - *différance*.

The notion of language as a stable system of communication and meaning then, is radically destabilised and a close reading of the intradiegetic narratives of the two *Alice* books confirms the deconstructive premise put forward by Christopher Norris that "deconstruction suspends the view that language exists to communicate meaning".⁴

Derrida's critique of the binary oppositions in Western philosophy takes as its starting point the division between speech and writing. The tendency to privilege the former over the latter has led Derrida to characterise Western philosophy as *phonocentric*, resulting in its subsequent valorisation of the spoken word. The spoken word, because of its quality of being immediately present in acts of communication, has always been held up by Western philosophy as the purest form of *parole*. Writing, on the otherhand, has always been regarded, in the words of Raman Selden as "a contaminated form of speech".⁵ Selden explains, that the function of writing is to represent speech and since pure representation is made impossible by distance and difference it is necessarily a deformation of speech. However, what is discounted in this notion is the fact that speech actually shares similar characteristics to writing. As Selden remarks, they are both "signifying processes which lack presence":⁶

When we interpret oral signs, we have to recognise certain stable and identical forms (signifiers), whatever accent, tone or distortion may be involved in the utterance. It appears that we have to exclude the accidental phonic (sound) and recover a pure form. This form is the repeatable signifier...⁷

In a process of inversion then, the purest form is actually writing and speech is the subsidiary. This is exemplified through the prolific use of punning in the Alice books. The written pun actually works against the notion of presence and speech as the dominant form of *parole*.

The pun, by foregrounding its character as the privileged resource of writing, thus works against any notion of poetic enactment that presupposes the presence and immediacy of spoken language...⁶

This explains why many of the characters are excluded from sharing the ironic humour of many of the communicative acts. The verbal pun often misses its target such as the mock Turtle's naming of the Old Turtle a "Tortoise, because he taught us" (127) or the dead silence that accompanies the King of Hearts' pun on the word "fit" (161) or the misunderstanding revolving around the knot/not in the Mouse's tail/tale. (52) The spoken word is thus shown to be deficient by comparison with its written counterpart in this instance. Howard Felperin elaborates:

The relative transience, the short time available for the construction and concretization of meaning, in spoken as distinct from written wordplay, would thus seem to be a control upon its counter-enactive effect. But the written pun, by making available a longer, potentially endless, time for the construction of possible meanings, and hence the deconstruction of fixed or monumental meaning, reveals this control to be arbitrary and illusory, merely a momentary stay against multivocality.⁷

Furthermore, writing, which openly flaunts its figurativeness and ambiguity, more truly represents the problematic nature of language that speech attempts to disguise. This gives rise to the concept of writing as a *generalised writing* which Derrida terms *écriture*. As Jonathon Culler comments, "vocal writing and graphic writing" are therefore "subspecies" of this generalized writing.¹⁰

The process of deconstructing hierarchical oppositions, in which the

secondary term initially displaces the privileged term and is then shown to exist on equal terms with it destroying the notion of hierarchy altogether; is performed by Derrida's application of the *logic of the supplement*. The second term, the *supplement* is said to both add to the first term and thereby complete it. This implies that the first term is superior to the second which is merely an addition to the hierarchical structure. However, as David Buchbinder succinctly explains, "if the structure can be added to, it cannot be complete, and if the supplement can be added, it cannot merely be secondary."¹¹ Jonathon Culler explains this further when he states,

we are dealing with a logic of the supplement when something characterized as marginal with respect to a plénitude - as writing is marginal to the activity of speech or perversion to normal sexuality - is identified as a substitute for that plenitude or as something which can supplement or complete it.¹²

As Culler goes on to explain the "distinguishing characteristics" of the marginal term/concept are then shown to be the "defining qualities" of the term/concept of plenitude.¹³ The *logic of the supplement* can be applied to some of the binary oppositions that appear to dominate Wonderland and the Looking Glass world and illustrate how the hierarchical oppositions exist in a state of tension rather than one subordinating the other. The apparent *phonocentrism* of the two worlds (they are both predominantly oral worlds) is shown to be riven with contradiction under the scrutiny of this deconstructive procedure. Critics who examine the aspects of language and communication in the books, note, as Robert D. Sutherland has, that most of the "communication difficulties occur in the speech register".¹⁴ This is evident right from the beginning of Alice's sojourn in Wonderland when she is assembled with various creatures of the Caucus-Race. The Mouse and his companions are the first creatures Alice has encountered in Wonderland and she soon discovers that they share her language. However, this promising start to communication rapidly gives way to a series of misunderstandings and misinterpretations that eventually lead to a dispersal of the party members. The Mouse begins his oral story by inverting the literal

meaning of 'dry' to a metaphor, the Duck demands an elaboration of the word 'it' and the Dodo confounds most of the party with his convoluted vocabulary. (47) Additionally, Alice confuses the semantic meaning of an ambiguous phone on several occasions which eventually culminates in the Mouse's stormy departure when Alice mistakes his 'not' for a 'knot'. (52) The precarious foundations of *phonocentrism* are already revealing fault lines which will broaden into gaping fissures by the end of Alice's adventures.

Despite this shaky start the spoken word insists on asserting its dominance. Most of the communication is oral, histories are related by word of mouth (the presence of being/origin) and Alice is always being asked to 'speak up', 'speak out' or 'speak the truth'. As if to exaggerate the power of the spoken word, many of the subjects prefer to shout or scream, and acts of noise, which perturb Alice, are received with a blasé acceptance by the inhabitants of these two worlds. Similarly, Humpty Dumpty has a verbal pomposity that attempts to undercut Alice's literary knowledge. The fact that Alice has read about a King in a book is in no way comparable with the fact that Humpty Dumpty has "spoken to a King". (264) Yet, as shown in the previous reading of Humpty Dumpty's tragic fate, much of the oral declamations are shown to be subsumed under the overriding power of the already written word i.e. the nursery rhyme that portrays his fall. Also, the apparent noise of Wonderland and the Looking Glass world accentuates the frequent pauses and dead silences that punctuate the worlds. Alice is often stunned into silence by some remark and is also often received in silence by others. These stony receptions are often strategic moments in Alice's adventures, such as her initial meeting with the raging Queen of Hearts who is abruptly silenced by Alice's retort "Nonsense!". (109) Again, in the Looking Glass world when Alice prepares to be received by guests at a feast in her honour, she is greeted by 'dead silence'. (330) On occasion the spoken word is evaded altogether in favour of a private or communal clairvoyancy. The caterpillar reveals his telepathic powers when he replies to Alice's unvoiced question, answering "just as if she had asked it aloud". (73) In another instance Alice's fellow passengers all

"*thought* in chorus". (217) This subverts the notion of the spoken word as the most immediately present transmitter of thought because communication can, and often does, exist without it. Similarly when Alice recites Watts' poem, her 'voice', far from being a direct transmission of her thoughts and intentions is totally alienated from her self-presence, being "hoarse and strange" and the words not her own. (38) This exemplifies Barbara Johnson's claim that speech "springs out of an alienation or *différance* that has the very structure of writing"¹⁵ In other words, the very difference and absence that characterises writing, being removed as it is from the immediate presence of the writer, is also a characteristic of speech where the speaker has equal difficulty articulating his/her intended thoughts through the 'purer' medium of speech.

The Red Queen, an advocate of the spoken word, little realises the complexity and problematic nature of her statement when she tells Alice

"Always speak the truth - think before you
speak - and write it down afterwards." (319)

The authority of the spoken word is subverted on two accounts. Firstly, it is often misinterpreted by others; and secondly, it is often an inadequate expression of the speaker's intended meaning. Intention, thought and speech are not simultaneous and if the spoken word must be written down in order to be understood, there must be an inherent lack in speech to begin with.

In this way speech is shown to be just as infected by *différance* as writing. In fact on several occasions, communicative acts are exempt from deformation by the clarificatory nature of the written word. The written invitation from the Queen to the Duchess, unlike some of the oral acts, actually reaches its destination and fulfills its purpose. The verbal witnessing of the court scene sees the trial no further forward and it takes a piece of literature to procure some solid evidence (no matter how discredited it is). The written form can

often complete the lack within the spoken form as illustrated when Alice expresses her wish to write down the Duchess' convoluted sentence:

never imagine yourself not 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: (122)

in order to understand it better.

Finally, Alice, who throughout her sojourn in the two worlds chooses often to surpress her own oral communication in favour of others' utterances, gives voice to her opinion in the final moments of her adventures in an act that seems to affirm *phonocentrism*. It would appear there is a power attributed to the voice as her loud declamations result in the disintegration of the worlds. However, as noted previously, rather than the worlds being destroyed they are merely surpressed, they recur again in another form. Furthermore, both Wonderland and the Looking Glass world are immortalised by the written word. Alice's musings that "there ought to be a book written about me, there ought" (39) are realised. Alice's dream, (a form of *écriture*) is orally communicated and then tran/scribe/d for narration, returning to its original written form. Hence, within the binary opposition speech/writing, writing has had the last word it would appear. Yet, in the final analysis, there can be no such domination of either form. The written has brought the oral into existence but the oral has given the written an existence. The *logic of the supplement* destroys the hierarchy.

The *logic of the supplement* can be applied to many of the binary oppositions in the *Alice* books and one of the recurring motifs of the book - seeing - as opposed to 'not seeing' can be unbound in a similar way. Seeing is inextricably connected to the notion of presence and is therefore on precarious hierarchical ground to begin with. Confirmation that an object/subject is actually present is procured through the sighting of it. Both books abound with references to

seeing and Alice's actions are frequently described with phrases associated with vision such as "her eye fell upon"; or elsewhere, the terms she looked/saw/stared occur with some frequency. Additionally there are numerous references to objects which aid in the ability to see such as telescopes, candles, looking glasses, binoculars. Such a proliferation of ocular terminology which emphasises the concept of seeing, is ironically subverted by the fact that in the worlds of Wonderland and the Looking Glass, seeing is an illusion. Appearances are deceptive and that which is sighted as present more often than not is absent through difference or else dis/appears. In fact, the more Alice literally sees in Wonderland, the less she sees both literally and metaphorically. When Alice tells the White King in *Through the Looking Glass* "I see nobody on the road" his literal interpretation

"I only wish *I* had such eyes," the King remarked
in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody!
And at that distance too! Why, it's as much as *I*
can do to see real people, by this light!" (279)¹⁶

might be interpreted as narratorial irony in the context of Alice's experiences. For all Alice's claims to see, it is really as much as *she* can do to see real people, in the light of her world/s. Similarly, when Humpty Dumpty explains to Alice that he does not sing his poem she replies "I see you don't" to which he is quick to retort,

"If you can see whether I'm singing or not,
you've sharper eyes than most". (273)

Once again this highlights the notion of seeing and not seeing. Thus the narratives, which appear to privilege the concept of seeing, are shown to be 'infected and affected' (to borrow Culler's terms) with the notion of blindness - a term conspicuously absent from the two books. Marked by its absence, it becomes clear that blindness is a central thematic thread in the books. Alice wanders blindly through the worlds where the creatures are often blind to her as they are to their own discrepancies and weaknesses. Alice, throughout her journey through the worlds, remains blind to meaning/presence/truth. For all

the worlds' emphasis on sight, it becomes apparent that sight itself has an inherently blind spot. The *logic of the supplement* when applied to seeing/not seeing affirms that blindness is characteristic of sight as well.

Another hierarchical opposition that is deconstructed in the text is the structure of cause and effect. When the White Queen from *Through the Looking Glass*, screams out *before* the brooch pricks her finger, this not only demonstrates the inversion of the Looking Glass world but illustrates an aspect of deconstructive strategy. As Culler explains,

the distinction between cause and effect makes the cause an origin, logically and temporally prior. The effect is derived, secondary, dependent upon the cause.¹⁷

The White Queen's actions emphasise the priority of the effect (the scream and bleeding finger) over the cause (the brooch) and therefore invert the hierarchical structure. This action illustrates the deconstructive premise that the effect can be treated as the point of origin rather than the cause because it is the effect that makes the cause initially apparent, thus establishing its nature as a cause. The hierarchy of the binary structure is dismantled because, as Culler puts it "if either cause or effect can occupy a position of origin, then origin is no longer originary;"¹⁸ Hence even the notion of causality is vulnerable to the disruptive influence of deconstruction, where, in this case, neither cause nor effect can be said to occupy an originary position.

Of all the binary oppositions in the *Alice* books, the most important and pervasive is that of sense and nonsense; nonsense being the marginalised other of (common) sense. Like all the other oppositions, there is an implicit hierarchy where the secondary term is the repressed element of the privileged term. Susan Stewart, in her discussion of nonsense, affirms this when she claims that "nonsense speaks the unsaid of common sense".¹⁹ Nonsense, with its punning,

inversion, reversal, parodying and other playful procedures threatens borders and contexts and ensures a surplus (or deficiency) of meaning. Hence the inherent leaks and gaps apparent in the concept of sense are exposed. One of the ways in which nonsense subverts sense is through the literalisation of metaphor (or vice versa). There are numerous examples of this reversal of metaphor/literalisation in the books. When in the Looking Glass world Alice asks an old Frog "whose business is it to answer the door?" his reply is a comically literal response which subverts the common sense notion of the metaphor,

"To answer the door?" he said. What's it been asking of?" (328)

Stewart further claims that nonsense is a "transgression of hierarchies".²⁰ All that is held to be sound sense is shown to be flawed by the subversive activities of nonsense. So inherent is the concept of sense that anything outside of the boundaries of sense is denounced as non/sense. The word nonsense reverberates in the vocabulary of Alice and she uses the word to discredit major events and conversations (Wonderland itself is destroyed by the word). Alice arrives in Wonderland and the Looking Glass world with preconceived notions of sense which disintegrate under the perversive influence of non/sense. This is allegorically represented by Alice's attempts to establish order in the chaotic worlds through the imposition of her own notions of sense. Alice's attempts to flaunt her existing knowledge, through the quotation of poetry and facts, are thwarted by the nonsense that is articulated in replacement of it. Her 'first' world knowledge and sense is reduced to non/sense. Alice's concepts of social order, some of which are shared by other characters, are exposed as non-sense in several instances in the 'secondary' worlds. When the Red Queen tells Alice not to speak until she is spoken to, Alice replies

"But if everybody obeyed that rule...and if you only spoke when you were spoken to, and the other person always waited for you to begin, you see nobody would ever say anything,... (318)

Sense, in this way, is proven to be quite non-sensical.

Two other concepts of sense and order (which are instilled in Alice from her previous world) are time and space, which also succumb to the disruptive forces of non/sense. Time in Wonderland has been halted so it is "always six o'clock" (99) and time in the Looking Glass world moves so fast it is impossible to keep up with. Alice discovers this when she is engaged in an arduous run with the Red Queen only to discover that for all their exhaustive efforts they are in the same place at which they commenced. When Alice tries to explain that in her notion of time they should have reached another destination, the Queen replies,

"Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that." (210)

Philosophically, this concept has an element of sense in it, so that what at first appears to be non-sense, on reflection, is less clearly so. Hence non-sense itself cannot be taken at face value, containing as it often does, valid common-sense principles.

Similarly, spatial concepts cannot be constrained by the orderly conventions of sense as Alice knows it. In Wonderland, Alice's alarming size changes prepare her for adaptation to a world where space is distorted and objects disappear and transform before her eyes. In the Looking Glass world Alice must prepare herself for the radical spatial transformations that occur when she crosses the brooks. The episode 'Wool and Water' takes such a concept to the extreme when transformations take on a dizzying effect.

True to Stewart's claim, nonsense subverts and transgresses hierarchies and communication becomes miscommunication, meaning, non-meaning, and sense upon scrutiny is shown to be non/sense. The examples of literalised metaphors are a forceful illustration of the ways in which sense becomes non/sense. Such examples reveal the

illogicality often found in conventional usage and also the possibility that such expressions can, when they are taken at face value and not as loose metaphors, result in absurdities which might NOT be recognized as such by common sense.²¹

Ordinary common sense usage of language also comes under scrutiny when literalised, as evidenced in an incidence in Wonderland when the March Hare tells Alice to take "some more tea":

"I've had nothing yet," Alice replied in an offended tone: "so I can't take more."

"You mean you can't take *less*," said the Hatter: "it's very easy to take *more* than nothing." (101)

As this example shows, nonsense exposes the non sense of sense and is an integral part of sense itself. Nonsense, is literally the lack of sense (sense's lack). Additionally, nonsense often makes more sense than sense and sense is shown to be non-sense. Stewart recognises this interdependency when she remarks that just as nonsense is an integral part of the "ongoing accomplishment of common sense" so too, is all common sense "potential nonsense". To discard non-sensical situations as sheer nonsense, is not only to "preserve the integrity of common sense" but to *give an integrity to common sense*.²² Hence, once again, the *logic of the supplement* re-emerges.

Closely related to the binary opposition of sense/nonsense is another pairing, that of order/chaos. The acts of nonsense in Wonderland and the Looking Glass world are indeed chaotic, overflowing the rigid confines of the order of sense. It is possible then, to see the intradiegetic narrative as an affirmation of chaos and nonsense, celebrating as it does the subversion of order and sense. Both narratives contain a succession of chaotic events (all the more chaotic for their apparent randomness) which culminate in the frenzied final scenes of the trial in Wonderland and the feast in the Looking Glass world. However, Alice's rejection of the worlds and the resulting narrative shift to the extradiegetic world of sense and order may be perceived as a final affirmation of sense/order. Donald

Rackin sees Alice's denial of the chaotic worlds as such and claims that the "frame story of each Alice book stands in direct, defiant opposition" to the intradiegetic narrative.²³ He elaborates that Alice, in her act of naming the "dreaded and uncontrollable chaos" as "curious dream, mere nonsense" seizes power, through words. Rackin then utilises Humpty Dumpty's eggshell as a metaphor for "man's" (and Alice's) "fragile and precarious mastery" over chaos, explaining that

If our eggshell, invented, but coherent waking world
falls and is shattered, we too, like that imperious but
fragile Humpty Dumpty, may be shattered forever. ²⁴

Rackin suggests that the reader, perceiving Alice's adventures as an allegory for modern "man's" confusing existence will bless Alice in the dénouement for asserting control and taking "dominion everywhere".²⁵ Rackin's emphatic declamation of Alice's ability to establish order is weakened by the less definite adjectives - "shaky", "fragile", "artificial" and "precarious", that have elsewhere in the article accompanied the description of this "imposed" order. Alice, Rackin concludes, through her act of shaping disorder, actually creates a new metaphysical order. The argument then ends with a quote from Florence Becker Lennon, which closes with the words,

modern readers, more than ever, cherish their Lewis Carroll, thankful that he accompanies them on their necessary, though pointless, quest for our order and meaning. ²⁶

It would seem that the inherent contradictions in Rackin's argument are more openly acknowledged in his earlier article 'Alice's journey to the End of the Night' where, in a moment of deconstructionist *aporía*, he declares, "Thus, the book is paradoxically both a denial and affirmation of order."²⁷

It is significant that the endings have posed problems for critics of the *Alice* books. Lennon claims the books "end weakly"²⁸ and Martin Grotjahn, in a discussion of the symbolisation of *Alice in Wonderland*, claims that the "awakening is the book's weakest part".²⁹ Rackin also concedes that the narrator and Alice "nicefy" the endings by referring

to the "ominous underground" as a "sunny Wonderland".³⁰ The lack of credibility afforded by the cautious and imposed extradiegetic narrative emphasises the tension between chaos/nonsense and order/sense and the refusal of the former to be subsumed by the hierarchical domination of the latter. The uncertainty of the ending of the books is further complicated by another ontological level which has thus far been neglected - the poems which frame the extradiegetic narrative itself. An examination of the device of framing will assist in the continued deconstructive unfolding of the texts.

V. The Frame - Framed

Ironically, the frame of the *Alice* books, rather than enclose the texts, renders them more accessible to the process of unfurling. The prefatory poem of *Alice in Wonderland* opens the text on an ontological level which is not returned to, on completion of the book. Hence the framing distinction between the ontological level of the poem and the extradiegetic narrative is blurred. This is further reinforced by the similarity of the tone of the prefatory poem and the concluding paragraph of the book, both imbued with sentimentality. The sentimental tone of the narrative voice at the level of the extradiegetic poems, infects the more detached, rational narrative voice of the diegesis. There are several instances when the intradiegetic narrator, recounting Alice's adventures in objective retrospect, diverges into sentimental embellishment of events such as the relating of the impression of the White Knight on Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*, (307) or the description of Alice picking rushes,

And then the little sleeves were carefully rolled up,
and the little arms plunged in...while with bright
eager eyes she caught at one bunch after another of
the darling scented rushes. (256)

Additionally, the intradiegetic narrative voice which has been concerned throughout the retelling of Alice's adventures *Through the Looking Glass* with the questionable nature of dream and reality, re-

emerges at the level of the extradiegetic poems to pose the dilemma of dream and reality once again. This merging of narrative levels results in an inconsistent narrative voice and detracts from the authority of a reliable overriding narrator. Such examples of inconsistent narratorial/ontological levels produces an instability which, in the words of Brian McHale, "violates the implicit contract with the reader".¹ This blurring of levels interferes with the distinction of boundaries and is disturbing for the reader who is also caught up in the transgression of framing.

The lack of a terminal poem to complete the framing structure of *Alice in Wonderland* appears not only to emphasises the book's incompleteness but in a way reveals its organic link with the second book. The prefatory poem of *Through the Looking Glass* contains, as Martin Gardner points out, the closing three words of the previous book. (174) This has the effect of dissolving the boundaries between the two books and blending the various ontological levels. This continuity is further enhanced in the terminal poem of *Through the Looking Glass*, where, Gardner suggests certain themes of the prefatory poem are echoed. (345) The very term 'echo' suggests reiteration and interestingly the terminal poem concludes on a note of uncertainty with the question "Life, what is it but a dream?" (345) This question also 'echoes' one of the central concerns of the book concerning dreaming. The question 'who dreamed it?', is left unanswered in the extradiegetic narrative. These questions serve to emphasise the problematical nature of the distinction between reality and dream which is, as Roger W Holmes claims, a "central problem of philosophy" which has been "left suspended"² both by the narrator and philosophers. Thus, reality, which already has a dubious status according to the narrator of the poem and the extradiegetic narrator, is deferred. The dream-within-a-dream motif of the books folds into itself in further acts of regression. It is no longer a simple matter of Alice relaying a dream to her sister and then to the narrator, who relays it to the reader, it is far more complicated. The question remains - whose dream is it? Another problem posed is the possibility

of life/reality being but a dream.

The hazy distinction between ontological boundaries is also illustrated in the narrative shifts between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative. The framing of the latter by the former rather than being Rackin's "defiant", rigid "oppositional"³ structure, is a fluid construct that flows into the intradiegetic narrative. The point at which Alice's reality ceases and her dream begins is blurred in both books. Although the narrator informs the reader in the final chapters that the adventures had been dreams, the precise moment at which reality becomes dream is not made clear by the narrative voice. The events which lead Alice into Wonderland are related with extraordinary complacency. Furthermore, Alice's 'matter of fact' attitude toward the situation is noted by the narrator when he remarks,

(when she thought over it afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural). (260)

In *Through the Looking Glass* Alice finds herself walking through the mirror which "melts away like mist" though "she hardly knew how she had got there." (184) The separation of reality and dream is effected in such a subtle way that the concluding explanations of the adventures appear more as an afterthought. The uncertainty which surrounds this notion of 'dream' and 'reality' re-emerges, as has been shown, in the other levels of the narrative.

The use of the framing device in the *Alice* books provides an illustration of the apparent contradiction in Derrida's statement "there is framing, but the frame does not exist".⁴ The framing devices of the two books are so fluid and illusory, that they dismantle concepts of frameworks as rigid, unifying structures. Utilising Kant's concept of the *parergon* as the definition of a frame which is "a composite of inside and outside",⁵ Derrida formulates the *logic of the parergon* which is similar to the *logic of the supplement*. Following the *logic of the parergon* Derrida explains that the frame

only exists because of a lack of that which is framed. Applying this to the *Alice* books, the *parergon* exists to complete the lack of the intradiegetic narrative. Derrida elaborates that this lack is actually produced by the frame, the frame actually emphasises it:

above all, the frame is what gives us an object that can have intrinsic content or structure...[furthermore] It is what leads to the definition of the frame as *parergon*, thus defining its own subsidiary externality.⁶

Thus the extrinsic frame is intrinsic to that which it frames. The *parergon* blurs the boundaries between what is intrinsic (framed) and extrinsic (the frame and beyond). Another term Derrida uses to describe this inverted process of framing is *invagination*. Jonathon Culler explains this process:

What we think of as the innermost spaces and places of the body - vagina, stomach, intestine - are in fact pockets of externality folded in. What makes them quintessentially inner is partly their difference from flesh and bone but especially the space they mark off and contain, the outside they make inner. An external frame may function as the most intrinsic element of a work, folding itself in; conversely, what seems the most inner or central aspect of a work will acquire this role through qualities that fold it back outside of and against the work.⁷

The process of *invagination* is evident in the inversion of reality and dream as discussed, where the framing 'reality' may itself be a dream. The intrinsic notion of dreaming blends into the extrinsic notion of reality. As Holmes has already suggested the nature of reality is threatened by the subjectivity of knowledge. What exactly is reality or dream? Similarly the nonsensical dream narratives may be more real than 'reality'. Logician critics of the *Alice* books emphasise the illogicality of the 'real world's' usage of language. Donald Rackin concedes that Alice's experiences, though dismissed as nonsense, "most certainly seem to be sense".⁸

The external structural framework of *Through the Looking Glass* is modelled on a chess game, the characters movements mimicking certain

chess manoeuvres. However, this external framework becomes subsumed by the internal diegetic narrative in the same way that the extradiegetic narrative voice fades into the background. The intradiegetic events assume priority and the characters (chess pieces) assume a life of their own as the implied players remain completely unobtrusive. Even the conclusion of the game (Alice's Queening) occurs as an unanticipated anticlimax. In fact the game itself is never played out, which is significant, for it is an unfinished structure, an incomplete frame. Thus the chess game structure folds in on itself as the internal game narrative overruns the borders.

The process of *invagination* is also evident in the incidences when the intradiegetic crosses the boundaries of textuality to address the reader directly. When the narrator states "she was obliged to say 'creatures', you see, because some of them were animals, and some were birds" (144) and in another instance, "but this is taking us away from Alice's speech to the kitten" (180), the world external to the text is enveloped by the internal narrative and vice versa. This is yet another instance when the objective narrative voice digresses into subjectivity as it is subsumed in the chaos of the intradiegesis. The metafictional nature of the text is exposed by the intrusion of the narratorial voice and the reader is at once real and fictional, being included in the body of the text itself. Gerard Genette emphasises the uneasiness involved in such a shift between two worlds, which are "the world in which one tells and the world of which one tells".⁹ He elaborates that this transgression is destabilising and puts into question the whole concept of the boundaries between diegetic levels. The implications of this result in a disturbing hypothesis,

...that the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic,
and that the narrator and his narratees - you and I -
perhaps belong to some narrative.¹⁰

Thus frames dissolve as the repressed elements of textuality come to the fore. That which is external to the text may be internal after all and vice versa.

This process is also revealed by the role of the illustrations in the books. The illustrations not only add to the text, they also show the written narrative to be lacking. The narrator explains to the reader, "if you don't know what a gryphon is, look at the picture" (124) revealing the organic link between the two. Richard Kelly states,

the illustrations...are inextricably wedded to the total performance of the work...Instead of [the author] describing his character in detail, he depended upon his sketches to do that work for him.¹¹

As a consequence, the illustrations which appear as marginal to the text are in fact central. They are not merely decorative effects; their function is integral to the narrative as a whole.

Boundaries are also dissolved by a further ontological level of the *Alice* books in the particular edition used in this paper - Martin Gardner's annotations. Needless to say, the annotations, which punctuate both books, rather than work towards binding meaning into a coherent whole, further fracture the texts. The text is fragmented by isolating certain passages and phrases and diverting attention from the work as a whole. Hence, Gardner's annotations, rather than attiring *Alice* with a "new party dress",¹² reveal that the original dress is comprised of numerous interwoven threads of texts. The effect of the detailed annotations which highlight certain passages or phrases, are disruptive because the reading process entails a radical shift from one ontological level to another. Susan Stewart explains the use of the footnote/annotation in a fictive text is an "implicit denial of the status of the text" which has the effect of

dispersal and scattering of the text and therefore
dispersal and scattering of the real...¹³

The voice that intrudes is "contradictory and therefore ironic".¹⁴ Hence annotations have the effect of disseminating the narrative voice as a result of one discourse talking about another discourse. This self-reflexivity draws attention to the boundary/frame and consequently reveals the illusory status of the frame. The

recuperation of other contexts with other frames and so on, is an infinite process, because context is boundlessly intertextual. The notion of framing undermines the notion of context, blurring as it does, the distinction between that which is inside the frame and that which is external to it. In traditional terms the context frames the text and thus confines it. However, as shown, framing is a fluid concept which aids in dissemination rather than limitation. Leitch notes that,

the matter of context depends on the operation of difference and the installation of borders. Once borders are overrun and difference is set loose, context multiplies itself to infinity.¹⁵

Consequently the text itself is no longer a unified concept where the distinction between internal and external is blurred. The borders which separate one text from another are equally vulnerable to the same process of dissemination. As Leitch explains, the literary text is "irreducibly infiltrated by previous texts" and because each text has a prior and potential text within it - "that is, in their signifiers - no text is ever fully self-present".¹⁶ Like the sign which can never be fully present because of the division within itself - the deferring of the signified and the freeplay of the signifier - the text is divided by its infiltration by other texts. Each text and part of the text is capable of being re-iterated. This *iterability*, as Derrida terms it, has the effect of making another independent text severed from its original context. Language itself is

characterised by its intertextual dimension, its detachability from a context of origin or immediate situation and relocation into other situations...¹⁷

In short textuality becomes intertextuality ensuring that meaning is disseminated across an infinite range of intertexts. *Différance* re-emerges to deconstruct textuality. The text, like the sign has entered Derrida's "differential network of traces" caught up in an endless de/re/ferral to "other differential traces".¹⁸

The *Alice* books are permeated with intertextual references. As

discussed previously, much of the poetry and verse which abounds in the books is a parodied or borrowed form of an original source. Gardner includes the original form of these in his annotations, though some such as 'The Star' (98) and 'Hush-a-by baby' (326) are well enough known to be immediately recognised. At times the formal structure of a poem is not parodied, but rather borrowed, such as in the case of 'The Walrus and the Carpenter', which Gardner notes, is based on the style of Thomas Hood's 'dream of Eugene Aram'. (233) The narrator not only experiments with the content of poetry but also the form, hence the first verse of 'Jabberwocky' is written in reversed form (the words appear on the page as they would if viewed through a mirror) and the 'Mouse's Tale' in emblematic verse. (50)

Many of the characters and their notable features are based on well known aphorisms, such as 'to grin like a Cheshire Cat' and 'as mad as a March Hare'. (90) Gardner's annotations also indicate the numerous references to other texts which occur throughout the books; for example 'The Garden of Live Flowers' is a parody of Tennyson's talking flowers. (200) Other critics have offered a profusion of possibilities as to the origins and bases for many of the characters, some of these are literary - for example, Humpty Dumpty, Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum and the Knave of Hearts are nursery rhyme characters.

Intertextuality is also evident between various levels within the diegetic narrative itself. In *Through the Looking Glass* Humpty Dumpty quotes a rather lengthy poem to Alice in which he himself is a character in the poem. The sections of the poem where he takes a "corkscrew from the shelf" and "knocks at a door" (275) are actually verified as 'real' events by the two Queens further on in the book when they tell Alice that Humpty Dumpty "came to the door with a corkscrew in his hand". (324)

The narrator also borrows characters from Wonderland and inserts them into different roles in the Looking Glass world. The Hatter and Hare re-emerge as Hatta and Halgha. The Hatta is now released from the term of imprisonment that he was sentenced to at the end of

Wonderland. The homophonic nature of their names also suggests a link. The linking of the two books at the level of the extradiegetic narrative has already been elucidated in the discussion of framing. The various ways in which writing itself is foregrounded in these examples supports Derrida's claim (in the words of Barbara Johnson), that

there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace...¹⁹

For, as Derrida insists "there is nothing outside of the text".²⁰ The 'real world' is also a text. Gardner's annotations then, refer not to the real world but only to other texts and hence enhance the texts' intertextuality. Consequently, all texts are only traces of other texts. The texts of the *Alice* books then succumb to this deconstructive premise that will finally undo them as coherent works. The text itself is deconstructed by the very nature of its textuality, it becomes a part of the general text that is intertextuality. In the final analysis, the *Alice* books as texts, defy meaning, unity and self enclosure. As a consequence, within textuality,

the iterability of forms, their connections with other forms and contexts, and the expendability of context itself preclude the rigorous circumscription of meaning.²¹

VI. The Undefined Alice

The critical industry surrounding the *Alice* books - and the creative offshoots from the works - underscores their illimitable nature. Moreover, the recent criticism emphasises the ambiguity of these elusive books which elude circumscribed meaning. The criticisms reverberate with the equivocality that is characteristic of the books themselves.

Within a broader spectrum of genres (not only literary), Jeffrey Stern points to the surrealist qualities of *Alice* whilst other critics note the modernist elements. Ann McGarrity Buki is one such critic and in her article she comments on the similarities between James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and the *Alice* books. She also cites the abundance of cross references to the *Alices* contained in Joyce's work.² Other critics have noted the indefinable nature of the books which defy strict genre definition.

The diversity of criticism across varying academic fields such as mathematics, logic, art, philosophy, psychology, literature, history and others, has culminated in the dissemination of the *Alice* books which are too diverse to be fitted into any one category. In keeping with their elusive nature, the *Alice* books simply defy the imposition of one particular genre, much as they defied the imposition of one particular meaning or interpretation.

Roger B. Henkle maintains that the *Alice* books, though often classed as children's literature, are far too complex for children. This is a notion that has been proposed by earlier critics such as Lillian Smith, who, in her examination of the works, cites Lewis Mumford's well known phrase, "the words are for children and the meanings are for men"³. Although Henkle concedes that they can be fitted into the mode of adult fiction, he explains that the books are a mixture of genres. Whilst they are basically Victorian literature and deal with Victorian issues such as moral choice, rationality and behaviour, they clearly have modernist (subtextual) elements. The *Alice* books foreground issues of predestination (the fate of the nursery rhyme characters and Alice's Queenhood) and explore causality. Henkle believes that the *Alice* books are "organised through psychic tensions".⁴ Notwithstanding the internal conflicts within Alice, as she attempts to find meaning in the world of non-sense, or the contradictions within other characters whose mood-swings often range from adult-authoritarian to childishly petulant, the books fluctuate between other extremes. The conflict between Victorian and modernist concerns has already been noted but there is another undercurrent

which reflects both the "concerns of a growing child and the anxieties of adulthood".⁵ Alice, as a child is preoccupied with growth changes and clings to her secure, familiar world. She also concerns herself with winning adult approval and is given to crying tantrums. Alice desires to be integrated into the role of adult (Queen) yet frequently finds herself behaving with more decorum and responsibility than the adults themselves. She often takes control of situations (she assumes an adult role in re-dressing the White Queen and her brief adoption of the maltreated baby) whereas the adults are given to sulking (Humpty Dumpty, the Mouse) and petty arguments. The adults have been shown to be inadequate role models for the child and have insecurities of their own, epitomised by the White Knight who needs Alice's encouragement to go on his (life's) journey. (314) The confusion of adult and child roles only serves to illustrate the ambiguous status of the books as fiction for adults or children.

Another critic, Nina Demurova, attempts to place the *Alice* books in a genre position, but her uncertainty is marked from the start by her hesitant but honest title, '*Towards a definition of Alice's Genre.*' (my emphasis). Demurova suggests that the *Alice* books come close to Romantic writing but admits that the books are a "somewhat reduced variation of the usual Romantic pattern".⁶ She draws upon a number of genres and connects the *Alice* books with fairy and folk tales, though she claims that only certain elements are borrowed from this tradition and the structure is altered. For instance the cause and effect structure of Alice's adventures is subverted and events do not flow on from one to another but flow haphazardly *into* one another in a dream-like fashion. The presence of an animal helper/donor is also replaced by a variety of crazed creatures Demurova calls "madmen and eccentrics".⁷ In fact it is the presence of these characters within a non-sense world of topsy-turveydom that leads Demurova to comment upon the carnivalesque and theatrical quality of the books, admitting other generic forms. Their subversive laughter, scant description, dualist dialogic form and eccentric spontaneity, emphasise the books' roots in the traditional wild spirit of folklore. Demurova aligns Lewis Carroll with such canonical writers as Shakespeare and concludes her

article with an apt phrase from Louis Untermeyer, that *Alice*, is the 'most inexhaustible tale in the world.'⁸

Additionally, it is difficult to place the *Alice* books within a specific position in literary history. They are not strictly nineteenth century novels of growth and development, for it is doubtful whether Alice has gained much or matured from her experiences. Nor do the books have enough depth to be psychological novels, although certain characters do represent psychological states. All in all, Henkle remarks, the *Alice* books defy genre boundaries, remaining "sports" and "oddities" to this day.⁹

Donald Rackin, in a recent discussion of the *Alices* notes that the ending of the books do not conform to the usual Victorian compromise. In fact the books reject the happy endings and modest dénouements that characterize realism. Rackin argues that the works of Lewis Carroll have a "strong claim to a place in the rise of modernism".¹⁰ Certainly modernist elements, such as irony, are discernible. The endings of the books, particularly the sequel, remain ambiguous and open. The beginning of *Through the Looking Glass* is typically modernist as it opens part way through a stream of experience, rather than with an introductory description. The narrative begins immediately with a dispute the reader knows nothing about:

One thing was certain, that the *white* kitten
had had nothing to do with it - it was the
black kitten's fault entirely. (175)

Another modernist concern is the foregrounding of the problematic, ambiguous nature of language which is characteristic of the non-sensical worlds Alice finds herself in. John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury comment that a hallmark of modernism is the way "language ceases to be what we see through and becomes what we see."¹¹ The numerous examples of the obscurity of words and resulting communication difficulties, attest to this. Finally, another condition of modernism, the representation of "bleakness, darkness,

alienation and disintegration"¹² can be said to comprise much of Alice's experience in Wonderland and the Looking Glass world, which have been likened to nightmares rather than dreams.

Rosemary Jackson is more confident in her attempts to place the *Alice* books, and locates them with the genre of fantasy. However, fantasy as a literary genre is problematic in itself. Drawing on Todorov's views, McHale believes that "the fantastic is less a genre than a transient state of texts..."¹³ Todorov elaborates that fantasy proper, hesitates between the uncanny and the marvellous unable to decide whether supernatural events (such as Alice's adventures in the worlds of Wonderland and the Looking Glass) belong to a supernatural order, or have a natural explanation (eg dream). Indeed, Jackson acknowledges the undefinable nature of fantasy and concedes further on that there is "no adequate definition of fantasy as genre".¹⁴

It is significant then, that the *Alice* books, if they are to be closely aligned with any genre at all, should find affinities with fantasy, belonging as they do, to what McHale terms as the the "zone of hesitation".¹⁵ Moreover, Jackson also sees the fantastic as a text which foregrounds the question of reality by exposing a confrontation between the real world and the non-real world. Jackson formulates two modes, the marvellous (fairy, supernatural) and mimetic (realist) and posits fantasy as existing between the two, "confounding elements of both."¹⁶ Rather than describe fantasy in terms of genre, Jackson prefers to use 'mode', which implies the possibility of a combination of different genres. Significantly, she comments on Lewis Carroll's own theories of the fantastic which comply with the situating of fantasy between the marvellous and mimetic. According to Jackson, Carroll's definition of three mental states (ordinary, eerie, trance-like) correlate with the mimetic, fantastic and marvellous modes. It is almost as if the books deliberately set out to reject notions of definition from the start.

This indefiniteness and uncertainty that is characteristic of fantasy reveals itself in the texts in the foregrounding of epistemological

uncertainty (Alice's split self and loss of knowledge) resulting in ontological uncertainty (who am I in this world? What is this world?). This shift into ontological uncertainty conforms to McHale's claim that the foregrounding of ontological concerns is the "dominant" of "postmodernist fiction"¹⁷ which he sees as having "close affinities with the genre of the fantastic".¹⁸ Other characteristics of the nonsense worlds of the *Alice* books, such as semiotic excess, deferral of meaning, the articulation of the unsaid and unseen, the reversals and inversions, ambiguity and the unfulfillment of desire, are all characteristic of fantasy and additionally, poststructuralist and postmodernist concerns.

Another feature of the *Alice* books which connects them with postmodernism is the use of Romantic irony. Demurova, among other critics points out the device of Romantic irony which also aids in the illumination of the ontological dominant. When the narrator interrupts the diegetic level of narration with comments like,

(Alice didn't venture to ask what he paid them
with; and so you see I can't tell you.)

the ontological boundaries are exposed destabilising the relationship between narrator, text and reader. This results in the disturbance of the reader's experience as previously discussed and illustrates another postmodernist concept:

The author flickers in and out of existence
at different levels of the ontological structure
and at different points in the unfolding text...
This ontologically amphibious figure, alternately
present and absent, embodies the same action of
ontological vacillation or 'flicker' that we have
observed in other elements of postmodernist poetics.¹⁹

The *Alice* books have features that are characteristic of different historical periods and literary genres, and hence resist placement in any *one* period or genre. Like a floating signifier the *Alice* books slip through the categories of fiction, never anchoring the signified. It seems the closer one gets to pinning meaning on *Alice* the further

the books recede away from it. *Alice* remains infinitely open to a plurality of meaning. The books, in true deconstructive fashion, defy any notion of unity or coherence. *Alice* criticism in the end must be resigned to an *aporia* of meaning.

Furthermore, the critics' attempts to make sense out of Carroll's nonsense are doomed by the paradoxical relationship of sense and nonsense. For, co-existing in a continual dialectic, sense will always be shown to reveal that which is its integral part, non-sense, just as non-sense often makes more sense than sense itself. When Carroll declared his works as nothing but nonsense, he, like Alice, actually "said a great deal more than that!" (318) The intrinsic ambiguity of language means that sense and meaning can no longer be the prevailing elements that are sought for in any act of communication. The works of Lewis Carroll foreground the inherent deconstructive nature of language/ textuality. Deconstruction exposes the infinite plurality of meaning in language and Lewis Carroll intuitively recognised this aspect of language:

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 what the writer meant.²⁰

This "great deal more" has continued - and will continue - to both intrigue and defy critics of the *Alice* books. There will be no final word on *Alice* for a reason that is profound in its simplicity; there is no final word...

NOTES

Introduction

1. Robert D. Sutherland, *Language and Lewis Carroll*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p 97. Sutherland also cites the few statements Carroll made in his lifetime on the nature of language and summarises his inferences. Among the few, he concludes, Carroll believed that most words are ambiguous and word meanings are totally arbitrary. (p.98)
2. Robert Phillips (ed), *Aspects of Alice. Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as seen through the Critics Looking-Glasses 1865-1971*, (Middlesex: Penguin Ltd, 1971). All further references to the essays contained in this text, for the purposes of the introduction only, will appear in the body of the paper in parentheses.
3. Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll* (1970; London: Penguin, 1960), p.296.
4. Lillian Smith, *The Unreluctant Years*, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1970), p.157
5. Sutherland, p.97.
6. Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion*, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1981), p.141.
7. Jonathon Culler, *On Deconstruction, Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, (1982: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1983), p.188.
8. Gardner, p.259.
9. Culler, p.208. Culler suggests that although deconstructive readings " allegorically thematize" certain "deconstructive concerns" they must be distinguished from the "thematic criticism" they aim to transcend. For instance they do not "promote one theme and deny others" but "attempt at another level to describe the logic of texts".

I. Alice as Lacan's Split Subject

1. "There does not have to be an actual mirror." Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (Middlesex: Harvester, 1985). Alice's 'eager eyes' are gazing into her sister's as affirmed by her sister's remembrance of the scene at the end of the book. Hence Alice would see reflected in her sister's eyes, a likeness of her own image. (Martin Gardner,

The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll [1970; London: Penguin, 1960]), p.162.

2. Gardner, p.25. All further textual reference to the *Alice* books will be taken from Martin Gardner's edition and will appear in parentheses in the body of the paper.
3. Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism. An Advanced Introduction*, (New York: Columbia University Press 1983), p.44.
4. Leitch, p.44.
5. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.167.
6. Anthony Wilden, *The Language of The Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan* (New York: Dell, 1968), p.262.
7. Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p.98.
8. Grosz, p.64.
9. Wilden, p.190.
10. Eagleton, p.168.
11. Sutherland, p.123.
12. Gardner, p.27. Additionally, the punning on the word *wonder* exemplifies the propensity of words toward multi-meaning. Alice wanders through *Wonderland* always *wondering* and often in a state of *wonder*.
13. Grosz, p.100.
14. Gardner, pp.31-32. The use of candle and telescope for metaphors of Alice's elongation has been pointed out by psychoanalytic critics who emphasise the obvious phallic quality of the objects.
15. Wilden, p.262.
16. Wilden, p.177.
17. Eagleton, p.174.
18. Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 1978), p.160.
19. Stewart, p.160.
20. Eagleton, p.169.

21. Eagleton, p.170.
22. Stewart, p.93.

II. Desire and the Discourse of the Other

1. Stewart, p.163.
2. Stewart, pp.163-4.
3. G.A. Wilkes & W.A. Krebs, *The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language*, (1982: London and Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1988), p.427.
4. Wilkes & Krebs, p.726.
5. Sutherland, p.156.
6. Stewart, p.69.
7. Eagleton, p.173.
8. A number of metonymical displacements occur, the woollen shawl dissolves into a woollen sheep, knitting needles into oars, an egg into Humpty Dumpty etc.
9. Jean Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass: Language, Nonsense, Desire* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1985), p.73.
10. In Traditional Literature the Feast is the archetypal feminine realm which offers respite and nourishment from the hardships of patriarchal quests. It is also an opportunity to participate in the storytelling and the transmission of history which in the *Looking Glass* is completely subverted by the inclusion of a talking pudding/roast and nonsensical conversations.
11. Grosz, p.100.
12. Wilden, p.265.
13. Wilden, p.262.
14. Lecercle, p.65.

III. Deconstructing Lac(k)an: A Feminist Perspective.

1. K.K. Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.53.

2. Ruthven, p.100.
3. Grosz, p.173.
4. Grosz, p.172.
5. Elaine Shoalwater, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed Elizabeth Abel, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p.30.
6. Grosz, p.173.
7. Gardner, p.315.
8. Shoalwater, p.17. (Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar - pen as metaphorical penis).
9. Ruthven, pp. 98-99.
10. John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, (London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall Inc, 1990), p.56.
11. Ruthven, pp. 98-99.
12. Ruthven, p.96-97.
13. It is interesting to note that the Cheshire Cat is of the male sex, rather than the female, with which cats are usually equated. Traditional criticism has often pointed out the quality of intellectual detachment and Godliness that is often associated with the male gender, despite the fact that the Cheshire Cat's most notable feature is it's air of mystery, an essentially feminine quality.
14. Wilden, pp.270 & 281. *Forclusion* (rejection) of the Name-of-the-Father in Lacan's terms also means rejection of the Symbolic order (p.270) which is a mechanism of psychosis. (p.281).
15. Grosz, p.161.
16. Ruthven, p.99.
17. Raman Selden, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, (1985: Hertfordshire: Harvester Press, 1989), p.151.
18. Grosz, p.183.
19. Grosz, p.181
20. Eagleton, p.190.

21. Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p.292.

IV. Unbinding Binary Oppositions

1. Culler, p.164.
2. David Buchbinder, *Contemporary Literary Theory and the Reading of Poetry*, (Melbourne: The MacMillan Co of Aust Pty Ltd, 1990), p.61.
3. Leitch, p.37.
4. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*, (1982: New York: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1988), p.128.
5. Selden, p.85.
6. Selden, p.86.
7. Selden, p.88
8. Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.192.
9. Felperin, p.192.
10. Culler, p.101.
11. Buchbinder, p.58.
12. Jonathon Culler, "Jacques Derrida" in *Structuralism and Since. From Levi Strauss to Derrida*, ed John Sturrock, (1979: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.168.
13. Culler, p.168.
14. Sutherland, p.212.
15. Barbara Johnson ed., *Jacques Derrida. Dissemination*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p.xi.
16. The pun on the words 'I/eye' is emphasised by the repeated use and italicisation of the words.
17. Culler, p.88.
18. Culler, P.88.
19. Stewart, p.89.
20. Stewart, p.37.

21. Sutherland, p.198.
22. Stewart, p.202.
23. Edward Guilliano ed., *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration. Essays on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson*, (New York: Clarkson N. Potter Inc Publ, 1982), p. 20.
24. Guilliano, p.21.
25. Guilliano, p.21.
26. Guilliano, p.23.
27. Phillips, p.479.
28. Phillips, p.113.
29. Phillips, p.367.
30. Guilliano, p.21.

V. The Frame - Framed

1. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (New York: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1987), p.117.
2. Phillips, p.211.
3. Guilliano, p.20.
4. Culler, p.197.
5. Culler, p.195.
6. Culler, p.195.
7. Culler, p.198.
8. Guilliano, p.21.
9. Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1980), p.236.
10. Genette, p.236.
11. Guilliano, p.62.
12. This is a statement made by Gardner in his adoption of the narrator's style of emblematic verse 'The Mouse's Tale'. Gardner's tale/tail is found on the book's back cover piece.

13. Stewart, p.108.
14. Stewart, p.108.
15. Leitch, p.160
16. Leitch, p.98.
17. Stewart, p.27.
18. Leitch, p.118.
19. Johnson, p.xiv.
20. Johnson, p.xiv.
21. Culler, p.148.

VI. The Undefined Alice

1. Guilliano, p.150.
2. Guilliano, p.154.
3. Smith, p.156.
4. Guilliano, p.90.
5. Guilliano, p.97.
6. Guilliano, p.75.
7. Guilliano, p.81.
8. Guilliano, p.86.
9. Guilliano, p.89.
10. Guilliano, p.20.
11. Malcolm Bradbury, John Fletcher, "The Introverted Novel" in *Modernism*, eds Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane, (Middlesex: The Harvester Press, Penguin Books, 1976), p.401.
12. Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism" in *Modernism*, eds Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane, (Middlesex: The Harvester Press, Penguin Books, 1976), p.26.
13. McHale, p.74.
14. Jackson, p.13.

15. McHale, p.75.
16. Jackson, p.34.
17. McHale, p.10.
18. McHale, p.74.
19. McHale, p.202.
20. Sutherland, p.97.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY REFERENCE

Gardner, Martin. *The Annotated Alice. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll.* 1960: London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1970.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Belsey, Catherine. *Critical Practice*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1980.

Bradbury, Malcolm & Fletcher, John. "The Introverted Novel" in *Modernism*, eds Bradbury, Malcolm & McFarlane, James. Middlesex: Harvester Press, Penguin Books, (1976).

Bradbury, Malcolm & McFarlane, James. "The Name and Nature of Modernism" in *Modernism*, eds Bradbury, Malcolm & McFarlane, James. Middlesex: Harvester Press, Penguin Books, (1976).

Buchbinder, David. *Contemporary Literary Theory and the Reading of Poetry.* Melbourne: The MacMillan & Co of Aust Pty Ltd, 1991.

Culler, Jonathon. *On Deconstruction, Theory and Criticism after Structuralism.* 1982: London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1983.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory. An Introduction*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986.

Felperin, Howard. *Beyond Deconstruction; The uses and Abuses of Literary Theory.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1980.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Jacques Lacan. A Feminist Introduction.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd, 1990.

Guilliano, Edward. ed. *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration. Essays on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.* New York: Clarkson N. Potter Inc Publ, 1982.

Hudson, Derek. *Lewis Carroll. An Illustrated Biography.* London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1976.

Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion.* London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1981.

Johnson, Barbara. ed. *Jacques Derrida. Dissemination.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Johnson, Barbara. *A World of Difference.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Lecercle, Jean Jacques. *Philosophy through the Looking Glass: Language, Nonsense, Desire*. Illinois: Open Court, La Salle, 1985.

Lechte, John. *Julia Kristeva*. London and New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc, 1990.

Leitch, Vincent B. *American Literary Criticism from the 30's to the 80's*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Leitch, Vincent B. *Deconstructive Criticism. An Advanced Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. New York: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1987.

Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction. Theory and Practice*. 1982: New York: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1988.

Phillips, Robert. ed. *Aspects of Alice. Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as seen through the Critics Looking Glasses*. Middlesex: Penguin Ltd, 1971.

Ruthven, K.K. *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Hertfordshire: Harvester Press, 1985.

Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 1985: Hertfordshire: Harvester Press, 1989.

Shoalwater, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in *Writing and Sexual Difference*. ed. Abel, Elizabeth. Hertfordshire: Harvester Press, (1982).

Smith, Lillian. *The Unreluctant Years*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1970.

Stewart, Susan. *Nonsense. Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*. Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Sturrock, John. ed. *Structuralism and Since: From Levi Strauss to Derrida*. 1979: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Sutherland, Robert D. *Language and Lewis Carroll*. The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1970.

Young, Robert. ed. *Untying The Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*. Boston, London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan & Paul, 1981.

Wilden, Anthony. ed. *The Language of The Self. The Function of Language In Psychoanalysis By Jacques Lacan*. New York: Dell publishing Co Inc, 1968.

Wilkes, G.A. & Krebs, W.A. *The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language*. London & Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1988.