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Nonsense and Madness in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma „Nonsense and Madness in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass" vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Content

1. Introduction

The story of a little girl named Alice resonated with many readers of all generations. Nowadays, it is extremely rare to meet someone who doesn't know about that curious girl who fell down the rabbit hole and found herself wandering around the mad dream-like world called Wonderland. This story, even though published over 150 years ago, still brings people pleasure and enjoyment of encountering a great story. Not to mention the popularity of film adaptations, whether cartoon films or live-action. No matter the age or current trends, the story of Alice still offers inspiration across generations. However, many people know Alice mainly from the films that are only inspired by the book, and not many have actually read the book. The reason why I chose this topic for my thesis is that I wanted to know more about the hidden meanings behind madness and the true nature of the nonsensical tale that I love so much.

This bachelor thesis focuses on the books Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, generally known as the Alice books written by Lewis Carroll and published in the 19th century. The topic of this thesis is *Nonsense and Madness in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass.* In other words, the aim of this thesis is to analyse the Alice books by Lewis Carroll based on the selected requirements and, therefore, the elements of nonsense and madness.

The thesis is composed of three main parts, starting with the theoretical part, which covers the topics of introduction to the life and work of Lewis Carroll and a detailed description of selected elements, literary nonsense and madness as a literary trope. The second part of the thesis is focused on a practical analysis covering topics of nonsense in Alice in Wonderland, where subtopics such as linguistic nonsense, structural nonsense and characters as nonsense devices are discussed, then furthermore analysing madness in Alice in Wonderland, where subtopics such as mad characters and Alice as a "sane" anchor are debated. The last part of the thesis focuses on the sequel, Through the Looking Glass, following a similar structure as the previous part. In the chapter about nonsense, the subtopics are mirror logic, inversion and poetic nonsense. Additionally, in the chapter about madness, the discussed subtopics are identity, reality, the Queen´s logic and the theme of a dream within a dream. The last chapter of this thesis is the conclusion, which summarises the analysis and key findings.

The character of this thesis is theoretical-empirical since the thesis focuses on theoretical research as well as practical work. The aim is to discover how to explore the depiction of nonsense and madness in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. Furthermore, the key is to examine the use of these depicted literary devices and their impact on the overall meaning of the story. The thesis also attempts to explain nonsense and madness. Additionally, it attempts to analyse the characters' identities, actions, and motivations through these elements and further analyses the linguistic and structural components of the books.

2. Life of Lewis Carroll

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, generally known by his pen name, Lewis Carroll, was born on January 27, 1832, in a village called Daresbury, Cheshire, England. He was raised in a large and pious Anglican family. At the time, Daresbury was a quiet and rural village, relatively isolated from larger towns, which provided an ideal setting for the reflective and imaginative child Dodgson would become.[1]

Dodgson was the third child and the eldest son in a family of eleven siblings. Growing up primarily among sisters, he naturally took on the role of storyteller and entertainer within the household. From his early years, he exhibited a quiet and introspective nature, often favouring solitary pursuits over group activities.[2] According to his nephew and biographer, Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, young Charles frequently invented imaginary worlds to amuse himself, finding companionship in toads, worms, and other small creatures. These early expressions of imagination would later form the foundation for the fantastical landscapes featured in his literary work.[3]

Although Carroll left behind a considerable number of diaries, relatively little is known about his earliest years. When he was eleven, the family relocated to the more active village of Croft in Yorkshire. Up to that point, Dodgson had been educated at home, but shortly after his family moved, he was enrolled in a boarding school in Richmond. Even at a young age, he showed remarkable academic talent, particularly in Latin poetry. During school holidays, he often entertained his siblings with illustrated stories and poems of his creation.[4]

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[1] Roger Lancelyn Green and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Lewis Carroll,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified March 27, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lewis-Carroll.
[2] Jenny Woolf, *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll: Discovering the Whimsical, Thoughtful, and Sometimes Lonely Man Who Created "Alice in Wonderland"* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), 15.
[3] Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll (Rev. C. L. Dodgson)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898) 9-12.
[4] Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), 15-59.

On January 14, 1898, in Guildford, Charles Dodgson died after developing bronchitis from a cold. He passed away just weeks before his sixty-sixth birthday.[5]

2.1 Insight to the Work of Lewis Carroll

In the year 1851, Dodgson enrolled at Christ Church, Oxford. He went there to study mathematics, and since then, Oxford has remained a place to which he has been very closely connected for the rest of his life. His academic journey was interrupted by the sudden and unfortunate death of his mother when he was just nineteen. As Edward Wakeling observes, the loss had a considerable impact on him: "The death of his mother probably affected his outlook, thereafter, revealing to him that mortality was ever present."[6] Despite this personal tragedy, Dodgson completed his degree and later took up a position as a mathematics lecturer at Oxford.[7]

One of the requirements or conditions at Chris Church University was celibacy and ordination for long-term fellowship. Even though Dodgson never became a full priest, he abided by these conditions.[8] Dodgson faced many teaching challenges regarding his career due to his introverted nature and severe stammering. Despite the fact that he was a great mathematician, according to Morton N. Cohen, his speech impediment and overall shyness made it quite difficult for him to maintain discipline and respect and generally deliver effective engagement to students.[9] Moreover, Dodgson endured chronic health issues throughout his life. For example, during his childhood, he lost hearing in one ear due to a fever and later also suffered from whooping cough. As it was mentioned, the most noticeable struggle was his stammering. Although he sought treatment from speech specialists such as James Hunt and Henry Rivers,

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[5] Roger Lancelyn Green and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Lewis Carroll," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified March 27, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lewis-Carroll.
[6] Edward Wakeling, *Lewis Carroll: The Man and His Circle* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 13.
[7] Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll (Rev. C. L. Dodgson)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898) 15–59.
[8] Jenny Woolf, *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll: Discovering the Whimsical, Thoughtful, and Sometimes Lonely Man Who Created "Alice in Wonderland"* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 43.
[9] Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 4.

his condition never fully improved.[10] These challenges resulted in his inclination towards private tutoring and scholarly writing, especially in mathematics and logic, published under his real name, Charles Dodgson, since he preferred separating his literary work from his academic one.[11]

Coming back to his literary career, as it was said, Dodgson decided to publish his creative works under his pen name, Lewis Carroll. This pseudonym first appeared in 1856 when he published poems in The Train magazine. Initially, there were many previous considerations concerning his pen name, such as the name “Dares”, which was meant to be a reference to his birthplace. However, eventually, he chose the name Lewis Carroll, which is basically a Latinized and reversed version of his own name.[12] Among biographers, we can encounter several debates behind the rationality of this decision, and some early biographers like Langford Reed speculated that his choice of separating his work is a reflection of Carroll's split personality. Nevertheless, this theory was kind of ridiculed by Karoline Leach, who emphasised the fact that pseudonyms among authors who wished to separate their professional and creative identities were common.[13]

Previously, it was mentioned that from a young age, Carroll displayed significant creativity and understanding towards children, which often resulted in inventing games and stories frequently illustrated with his own humour drawings. Early family performances like these would later derive into more representable works for a broader audience.[14] His interest in photography, which was likewise concentrated on children, is worth mentioning. Helmut

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[10] Jenny Woolf, *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll: Discovering the Whimsical, Thoughtful, and Sometimes Lonely Man Who Created "Alice in Wonderland"* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010), 78.
[11] Derek Hudson, *Lewis Carroll: An Illustrated Biography* (New York: C. N. Potter, distributed by Crown Publishers, 1977), 13-14.
[12] Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll (Rev. C. L. Dodgson)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898) 67.
[13] Karoline Leach, *In the Shadow of the Dreamchild: The Myth and Reality of Lewis Carroll* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2015), 31-33.
[14] Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll (Rev. C. L. Dodgson)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898) 11-42.

Gernsheim, in his book „Lewis Carroll: Photographer “, presents arguments that Carroll should be considered a key figure in Victorian photography.[15]

2.2 The Alice Books

Although Carroll’s Alice Adventures in Wonderland is nowadays one of the most referenced literary creations, it began as a story told to entertain the daughters of his friend Henry George Liddell, who was a dean of Christ Church. In the summer of 1862, during a boating trip, Carroll created an enchanting tale, which fascinated the middle daughter, Alice Liddell, so much that she urged Carroll to write it down. This moment led to the creation of „Alice’s Adventures Under Ground”, illustrated by Carroll himself, and later, he gifted his final product to Alice as a Christmas present.

Initially, Carroll had no intention of publishing the story: “There was no idea of publication in my mind when I wrote this little book: that was wholly an afterthought, pressed on me by the ‘perhaps too partial friends’ who always have to bear the blame when a writer rushes into print.”[16] However, novelist Henry Kingsley had a chance to read Carroll's work during his visit to the deanery and, to Carroll's surprise, ended up urging Mrs Liddell to persuade the author to publish the story.[17]

Eventually, Carroll was persuaded by his friends to do so, which resulted in the publication of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, illustrated by John Tenniel and released by Macmillan & Co. in 1865.[18] Despite the book’s slow but steadily increasing success, Dodgson was already considering a sequel which would be based on further stories told to the Liddells. After several years, in January 1869, the sequel, “Through the Looking-Glass”, was sent to the publisher and

[15] Helmut Gernsheim, *Lewis Carroll: Photographer of Children* (London: Max Parrish, 1949), 6-8.
[16] Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 126.
[17] Roger Lancelyn Green and The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Lewis Carroll,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, last modified March 27, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lewis-Carroll.
[18] Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography,* 126.

published in time for Christmas 1871, again featuring Tenniel's illustrations.[19] Alice's books were increasing in fame and brought Carroll international fame. However, he remained modest about their importance. As Virginia Woolf pointed out in her essay "Lewis Carroll", he even told his friend Gertrude Thomson that he simply did not understand the popularity of the Alice books and believed that his work "Sylvie and Bruno" would earn more popularity and be a more substantial effort.[20]

As mentioned, the Alice books are vastly referenced books that are not only popular but also inspired by a broad spectrum of critical responses and interpretations. Edward Guiliano explains that reviewers of "The Hunting of the Snark", for example, were less concerned with its nonsensical style than with its puzzling meaning.[21] On the other hand, Lauren Millikan examines her work on the evolving literary criticism of Alice's books, from biographical approaches that focus on authorial intent to reader-response theories emphasising individual interpretation.[22]

While Carroll's background, meaning his academic and religious career, shows the presence of discipline and tradition, the Alice books allowed him to explore his imagination, absurdity and childlike logic, which he was keen on since a young age. His work continues to inspire not only scholars but readers alike, showcasing enduring playfulness and philosophical depth.

[19] Morton N. Cohen, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 132.
[20] Jenny Woolf, *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll: Discovering the Whimsical, Thoughtful, and Sometimes Lonely Man Who Created "Alice in Wonderland"* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 75.
[21] Jenny Woolf, *The Mystery of Lewis Carroll* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 75.
[22] Lauren Millikan, "Curiouser and Curiouser: The Evolution of Wonderland," *Carleton College Department of English*, last modified February 9, 2011, https://www.carleton.edu/departments/engl/alice/index.html.

3. Nonsense and Madness

This chapter explains the definitions of madness and nonsense as literary devices in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*. Furthermore, it shows the relationship between these two terms and examines how Carroll uses these elements in his work.

The first part is focused on discussing the concept of literary nonsense. This part covers topics such as logic, language, and narrative, drawing from theorists such as Wim Tigges, Susan Stewart, and Martha Taussig. The second part of the chapter deals with madness as a literary trope, referencing Lars Bernaerts, Pauly, and others to depict how madness operates both thematically and structurally. This part covers topics such as madness in narration, identity, and narrative form, situating Carroll's work within the Victorian context.

3.1 Literary Nonsense

When talking about nonsense literature, we can say that it is a complex, self-sufficient genre that has limitations in terms of language, logic, and meaning. According to Wim Tiggers, this genre is best understood in a way that it "balances a multiplicity of meaning with a simultaneous absence of meaning." This could be achieved through manipulations of linguistic, logical, and poetic rules.[23]

Nonsense creates an ordered framework; therefore, it is not chaos or pure absurdity; instead, it is depicted by rules which do not follow our everyday expectations, thus resulting in frustration in an attempt for interpretation on a deeper symbolic or allegorical level. Furthermore, Tiggers emphasises that nonsense "must at the same time invite the reader to interpretation and avoid the suggestion that there is a deeper meaning" [24] and continues by listing elements such as mirroring, arbitrariness, and infinite repetition, which shape a world

[23] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 27–28; Edward Wakeling, *Lewis Carroll: The Man and His Circle* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 27-28.
[24] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 27–28.

that exists within its own logic. Carroll's work clearly shows these elements in his narratives; however, we will discuss this further later in the thesis.

Literary nonsense in Alice's books is present in a particular style. Carroll builds his own logic. His narratives present internal consistency while simultaneously undermining external logic, placing his nonsense as "archetypal" in the literary tradition.[25] Unlike any random absurdity, his stories obey alternative rules, which, as Tigges states, are "different from our normal ones."[26] Tigges further explains that readers may feel as though they have grasped the system; however, then "the rules are changed again," or entirely new propositions are introduced.[27] Narratives play with language, symbol and logic, which results in revealing gaps in traditional sense-making structures.

Even though some scholars argue that Carroll should not be seen as a nonsense writer but rather as a logician using fiction, Tigges recognises Carroll as a master of structured nonsense.[28] We can support this argument by mentioning Susan Stewart, who outlines five main operations that help define literary nonsense. These are reversals and inversions, the setting of boundaries, play with infinity, simultaneity (puns, portmanteaus, paradoxes), and closed systems (codes, anagrams, games).[29] All of these operations are present throughout the Alice books.

To further focus on what nonsense is and how we define it, Martha Taussig, in her work, notes that nonsense is not a lack of sense but a subversion of "conventional linguistic, temporal, spatial, emotional, or ethical forms."[30] In other words, nonsense constructs an autonomous reality which is different from the logic of the real world; however, it maintains internal rules. It is, as she writes, "directed and purposive."[31] In the Alice books, this framing becomes

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[25] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 48.
[26] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 150.
[27] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 151.
[28] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 152.
[29] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 79.
[30] Martha Taussig, *Edgar in Wonderland: Elements of Nonsense in Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allan Poe* (MA thesis, Eastern Illinois University, 1996), 1.
[31] Martha Taussig, *Edgar in Wonderland: Elements of Nonsense in Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allan Poe* (MA thesis, Eastern Illinois University, 1996), 24.

particularly vivid. In Wonderland, nonsense is episodic and driven by dream logic, and in Looking-Glass, the world follows the structure of a chessboard; therefore, nonsense becomes more philosophical and logical.[32] On top of this, Alice remains the rational core in between the chaotic logic and acts as a guide and observer.

G. K. Chesterton remarked that "Wonderland is a country populated by insane mathematicians," but also called it "the sunny country of common sense."[33] Thus, we can see that there is a duality that reflects the way nonsense can use absurdity to expose the artificiality of rationalism. In the books, Alice is disorientated but attempts to make sense of the shifting illogical world, and as readers, we share this experience with her.[34] Carroll's nonsense relies heavily on linguistic manipulation. Humpty Dumpty's reinterpretation of words, the Queen's declaration that sentences precede verdicts, or paradoxical races in which one must run simply to remain in place are examples of how logic is simultaneously upheld and undermined.

On the other hand, to better understand what nonsense is, we must define what nonsense is not. According to Tigges, nonsense should not be confused with allegory, satire, or symbolism. Even though this mode may appear nonsensical on the surface, typically, they rely on deeper interpretations. Satire points to real-world criticism; symbolism relies on representative meaning. The nonsense that we are discussing resists such a simplified interpretation.[35] Furthermore, Stewards argue that parodying nonsense renders it satire, not nonsense. Therefore, we can say that this distinction stresses the fragile balance between structure and meaninglessness. When there is too much structure or too little, it disrupts the balance, and the genre loses its unique character.[36]

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[32] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 81-90.
[33] William Irwing, "Alice and the Logic of Wonderland," in *Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy: Curiouser and Curiouser*, ed. William Irwing (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), 79.
[34] William Irwing, "Alice and the Logic of Wonderland," 80.
[35] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 35–38, 134–135.
[36] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 186.

3.2 Madness as a Literary Trope

There are several ways to define madness in literature. Lars Bernaerts, in his work Narrative Threads of Madness, notes that "madness is not so much a mental malfunction as a state of horrible hyperfunction of certain mental characteristics" and that it is often "a performance or a rhetorical figure rather than an essential property."[37] Moreover, we can say that madness in literature can be both a theme and a technique. It is a vehicle of expression and also destruction. Concerning nonsense literature, madness becomes a principle of structure and disruption of narrative, logic, and language. This hyperfunctionality of madness leads to exaggerated behaviours, illogical speech acts, and narrative instability.

Carroll's work entails many examples of the use of madness. In his case, madness serves as a semiotic and philosophical device. For example, we can mention the famous quote: "We're all mad here," which shifts madness from an anomaly to a universal norm. This aspect is blurring the boundaries between sanity and insanity. Furthermore, we can see the reflection of the rejection of fixed truths where "linear plot, unified personality, and simple meaning are discarded in favour of dream logic, fragmented and multiple personalities, and multiple levels of interpretation."[38]

When speaking of literary madness, it functions through specific devices. Firstly, we can talk about madness in narration, when the author uses unreliable or delusional narration, which results in drawing the readers to alternate views. According to Pauly, the "reader is drawn into the narrator's subjective vision," which challenges understandings of "reality, fiction, sanity and illusion."[39] Furthermore, another device to focus on is a repetition and circular structure. This means that, for example, the narrative loops that are present in Wonderland mimic obsessive thought patterns and cognitive disorientation.

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[37] Lars Bernaerts, "Narrative Threads of Madness in Literature," *Journal of Literary Theory* 3, no. 1 (2009): 285.
[38] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction* (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2000), 13–14.
[39] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction*, 16–17.

However, in order to understand madness better, especially in Carroll's work, it is important to analyse the Victorian understanding of madness. During this period, madness was a cultural metaphor. According to Bynum and Porter's explanation, Victorian psychiatry increasingly associated madness with individuality, interiority, and emotional excess. In addition, even the insanity came to be seen as "the distorted mirror image of rationality."[40] Similarly, we can support this claim by referencing Rick Rylance, who emphasises that, at the time, there was a fascination with the limits of the mind. Additionally, he describes how madness was commonly linked to cognitive overflow or disruption of epistemic control.[41]

Frequently, madness is connected to identity loss or fragmentation. Referring to Pauly, mad characters show that there is no timeless, consistent identity behind appearances; thus, there are only appearances behind appearances.[42] In the Alice books, identity is undermined through the transformation of the body, reversed logic, and mirrored reality. According to Arszulowicz's argument, madness tends to reveal the construction of identity rather than the inheritance, meaning that characters are not defined by their own image of themselves but rather by what others project onto them.[43] In addition, Bernaerts notes that madness shows the process of how the character becomes unstable when separated from consistent narrative frames.[44]

In the same way, we defined the specific devices of madness, we can identify several recurring tropes based on Pauly and Bernaerts' work. Firstly, neurotic madness can be seen in characters like the Hatter. To elaborate, we can notice that the character compulsively performs rituals such as endless tea time, which in this case can represent breakdown.[45] The next trope would be institutional madness, for which the best example would be the courtroom in *Wonderland*

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[40] *W. F. Bynum, Roy Porter, and Michael Shepherd, eds., The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry. Volume I: People and Ideas (London: Routledge, 2004),* 27–29.
[41] Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152–154.
[42] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction* (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2000), 14.
[43] Rose Arszulowicz, *We're All Mad Here: The Madness of Linguistic Expression in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (undergraduate thesis, Montclair State University, 2017), 22.
[44] Lars Bernaerts, "Narrative Threads of Madness in Literature," *Journal of Literary Theory* 3, no. 1 (2009): 287–288.
[45] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction* (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2000), 19.

with its arbitrary laws and verdicts preceding the evidence.[46] Lastly, we can focus on narrative madness, which manifests in nonlinear structure, fragmentation, and recursive loops, creating a mad narrative logic.[47]

As it was mentioned, madness is not a defect but rather a literary principle. Its function is structuring the text, destabilising logic and reconfiguring meaning. When it comes to Carroll's work, it is important to note that it shows how madness can be humorous, critical, and even revelatory, ranging from linguistic disruption to institutional parody, from identity confusion to narrative instability, madness becomes a comprehensive strategy. All of this invites the reader to overthink what is real, what is meaningful and what is rational.

[46] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 108–110.
[47] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction* (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2000), 20.

4. Nonsense in Alice in Wonderland

This chapter explores the various forms of nonsense in the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Primarily, it will focus on the employment of linguistic and structural nonsense and also on characters as nonsensical devices in the book.

Firstly, the chapter examines linguistic nonsense, including the disruption of dialogues and the use of wordplay, puns and riddles that challenge the semantic expectations of the reader. Secondly, it analyses structural nonsense, discussing Carroll's narrative in the sense of dreamlike and episodic framing. Furthermore, this part also examines the author's critique of the social and legal order. Lastly, the chapter covers the topic of characters as nonsense devices. This part focuses on certain figures in the story that embody a paradox, defy rationality and function as tools for philosophical and linguistic play.

4.1 Linguistic Nonsense

The core of linguistic nonsense in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* stems from the manipulation of conversational norms, grammatical structure, and semantic expectations. Throughout the book, Carroll establishes the response vs. answer dualism, which enables the reader to experience disrupted interaction through illogical yet syntactically correct exchanges. For example, Alice's conversation with the Mad Hatter:

"Really, now you ask me," said Alice, very much confused, "I don't think –"

"Then you shouldn't talk," said the Hatter.[48]

This example can demonstrate competitive and antagonistic use of language, emphasising conflict over clarity. According to Lecercle, it could also be viewed as a part of nonsense's

[48] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 103.

agonistic pragmatics.[49] Furthermore, we can support this idea with Susan Steward's work in which she frames nonsense as a disruption of communicative exchange. Caroll composes his conversations to purposefully fail and, therefore, enhances their absurdity. Moreover, her work emphasises how nonsense literature often depends on the formality of dialogue while denying its pragmatic intent.[50] When this type of breakdown is taken into consideration, it supports the idea that meaning can be both conveyed and withheld at the same time.

When talking about the centrality of Carroll's style, the immediate literary devices that come into one's mind are wordplay and puns. Carroll uses polysemy and homonymy to challenge fixed meanings. For example, the pun on Tortoise, which reflects playful literalism:

> "We called him Tortoise because he taught us."[51]

To further focus on the arbitrariness of language, we can examine a situation at Mad Hatter's tea party:

> "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"[52]

In this case, Alice's confusion over the idiom used is one of the components that emphasises arbitrariness. These kinds of instances are at the forefront of the way children interpret language literally. In addition, they highlight the author's ability to mimic and intensify childhood logic through the use of the mentioned devices. Barton and Williams also mention that Victorian literature embraced linguistic experimentation as a reaction to industrial and cultural change.

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[49] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 134–143.
[50] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 47-55.
[51] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 91.
[52] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*, 63.

Nonsense in Carroll's books mirrors this tension and takes it even further by exaggerating a world where meaning becomes unstable and fluid.[53]

Not only wordplay and puns but also logic games and riddles present a further complicated communication in Wonderland. During a Mad Tea party, one of the most famous unanswerable symbolic riddles is presented:

"Why is a raven like a writing-desk?"[54]

According to Gardner's explanation, Carroll gave this riddle no answer, and therefore, this omission is part of the riddle's meaninglessness.[55] This aligns with the tradition of literary nonsense presented by Tigges: grammatical and syntactical consistency coupled with a breakdown of semantic expectation.[56]

4.2 Structural Nonsense

When it comes to the narrative structure of Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, it is apparent that he avoids the traditional and rather focuses on surreal and episodic movement. These episodes are linked through associations, transformations, and abrupt transitions reminiscent of dreams. The book starts with Alice's descent down the rabbit hole, which has a symbolic function. It marks a transition into the unconscious, governed by emotional and imaginative rather than logical processes. The world in Wonderland functions based on dream logic and, therefore, shifts in time and space without explanation. Carroll's nonsense is not tied to linguistic devices but comes to the surface through the disruption of narrative conventions.

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[53] Anna Barton and James Williams, eds., *The Edinburgh Companion to Nonsense* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 81–97.
[54] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 63.
[55] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 93-94.
[56] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 56-73.

One of the most distinct examples is the previously mentioned Mad Tea Party in chapter 7. This scene is widely acknowledged as the peak of narrative disjunction. We can observe several interesting situations, such as characters switching seats for no apparent reason, time being "murdered," and riddles being posed without answers. The entire episode shows a closed linguistic system that functions independently of the real world's logic. Rose Arszulowicz describes the scene as a "reification of madness through structure".[57] Furthermore, we could examine the trial scene at the end of the book. In this case, we can talk about the breakdown of legal and logical order. The clearest example of this would be the Queen's declaration of "Sentence first—verdict afterwards", which completely undermines the fundamental principles of justice. Even though Alice persists in applying a logical procedure, her attempts are met only with failure. She clashes with Wonderland's absurd legalism and rejects the rules. According to Arszulowicz, this scene symbolises Alice's awakening and return to rational consciousness.[58]

As mentioned, Wonderland's legal and social system follows its own logic. Therefore, the system is internally coherent but externally absurd. Concerning this scene, it is helpful to mention Wim Tigges's discussion of "closed systems." Tigges notes that nonsense texts often create internal systems of meaning that are consistent within themselves but disconnected from external reality.[59] Carroll also uses framing devices to highlight the unnaturalness of the narrative. Framing the narrative into a dream allows him to build a boundary between the nonsensical world and the rational one. However, this boundary is not impenetrable and often, the logic of Wonderland leaks into the waking world. This suggests that nonsense is not limited to the dreams but reflects more profound epistemological uncertainty. Furthermore, we could ask the question, "What is Wonderland?" which takes on philosophical significance. Carroll shows that Wonderland is not only a fantasy realm but a space where the failures of language, logic, and social order are exposed. This could have served as a mirror that reflects and deforms the assumptions of Victorian society.

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[57] Rose Arszulowicz, *We're All Mad Here: The Madness of Linguistic Expression in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (undergraduate thesis, Montclair State University, 2017), 30-32.
[58] Rose Arszulowicz, *We're All Mad Here*, 45-48.
[59] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 60-65.

4.3 Characters as Nonsense Devices

Another important component that should be taken into account is characters. Carroll's characters are not only playful inventions but also function as devices for linguistic and philosophical experimentation. The first typical character of the paradoxical logic of nonsense that will be discussed is the Cheshire Cat. Not only does he appear and disappear whenever he wants, which defies physical law, but he also speaks in aphorisms that bend the line between sense and absurdity. One of his most famous claims, "We're all mad here", frames the whole spirit of Wonderland, suggesting that madness is not a pathological but rather an ontological condition. According to Arszulowicz, the Cat's role is to undermine Alice's assumptions and force her to navigate a world where guidance is deceptive.[60] For example:

"Would you tell

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

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

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

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.**7**

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

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

enough."[61]

In this situation, Alice asks for directions; however, the cat does not seem to give her a clear answer but rather pushes her to decide the goal of her journey. If she does not know what she

[60] Rose Arszulowicz, *We're All Mad Here: The Madness of Linguistic Expression in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (undergraduate thesis, Montclair State University, 2017), 22-25.
[61] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 57.

is aiming for or where she is going, it doesn't matter what road she will take.[62] Furthermore, the cat's vanishing act, leaving only a grin, brings us to visual nonsense when a metaphor is made literal. According to the description from Steward's work, this is a semiotic reduction, meaning that the referent is removed while leaving the signifier.[63] The result would be a symbol without substance. This is typical for nonsense's broader play with language and meaning.

Another character that should be taken into consideration is Caterpillar, who also operates on multiple levels. The dialogues which he shares with Alice revolve around questions of identity and logic, for example:

> "Who are *you?*" said the Caterpillar.
>
> This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied rather shyly, "I—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."[64]

In this scene, the Caterpillar is not seeking a proper answer but rather exposes Alice's uncertainty. The obvious answer to the question "Who are you?" should be "Alice." However, Alice understands the question differently and, instead of simply replying with her name, exposes her anxiety about her identity. Additionally, this situation showcases semantic play. Throughout the dialogue, the Caterpillar insists on literal interpretation and rejects idiomatic speech, which can be shown in this example:

> "I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "because I'm not myself, you see."
>
> "I don't see," said the Caterpillar.

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[62] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 234.
[63] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 47-55.
[64] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 37-38.

"I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly," Alice replied very politely, "for I can't understand it myself, to begin with, and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing."

"It isn't," said the Caterpillar.[65]

Even though Alice admits she is confused because she is not herself, the Caterpillar demands a logical explanation and, as was mentioned, simply ignores the metaphorical content. What is more, further in the dialogue, Caterpillar corrects Alice's grammar, mocks her logic, and leaves her more confused than before. Lecercle interprets this as a Socratic challenge, highlighting the instability of self.[66]

The enforcement of literalism in a nonsensical world creates paradox and disorientation. According to Tiggers, this behaviour is a part of the "nonsense repertoire." In nonsense literature, characters often follow strict but irrational rules and act as agents of disruption.[67] These characters highlight the instability of meaning and emphasise the flaws of logic in navigating a world governed by uncertainty. However, Carroll doesn't use these characters only for humour. He also explores the philosophical limits of communication and cognition through them.

Again, to refer to Tiggers, he sees these characters as "semantic traps," meaning figures who follow the surface rules of discourse while undermining their communicative intent.[68] They can also serve as pedagogical tools for teaching not only Alice but also the readers how language can both reveal and obscure truth.

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[65] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 39.
[66] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 134-143.
[67] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 56-60.
[68] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense*, 60-65.

5. Madness in Alice in Wonderland

This chapter examines the madness of characters in *Alice in Wonderland.* It focuses on the behavioural patterns of characters and divides the mad characters into three displays of madness. Additionally, it covers the topic of Alive and her change during the book.

The first part of the chapter is dedicated to exploring characters such as the Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Queen of Hearts as embodiments of chaotic reasoning, performative irrationality, and authoritarian excess. It explains how their madness operates as a psychological caricature and also as a narrative critique of logic and social norms.

The second part of the chapter focuses solely on Alice as a sane anchor in the book. It analyses how her rationality is tested and transformed through encounters with Wonderland's logic-defying inhabitants and systems.

5.1 Mad Characters

In the previous chapter, we focused on characters as nonsense devices. However, Carroll's character also displays madness, which both satirises Victorian society and also inquires more profound philosophical questions. Characters such as the Mad Hatter, the March Hare, and the Queen of Hearts embody distinct types of irrationality. Mad Hatter, with his constant absurd wordplays; March Hare, with his temporal confusion; and Queen of Heart, who displays tyrannical authoritarianism. These characters supersede the reader's expectations. Additionally, they represent madness not only as a psychological instability but as a broader narrative and linguistic strategy.

The first character to focus on is the Mad Hatter. He represents the typical character of the chaotic reasoning that defines Wonderland. The Mad Hatter is emblematic of the chaotic reasoning that defines Wonderland. His obsession with time, combined with nonsensical riddles, is what defies the boundaries of traditional logic and epistemology. Most notably, during the tea party scene, Carroll parodies social rituals and structured conversation by making the characters, Mad Hatter and March Hare, endlessly rotate around the table. This reduced the ritual of tea to absurdity. Furthermore, the conversation presented in the scene is loop without

meaning, idioms are taken literally, and rules are applied inconsistently. Therefore, the whole episode highlights how this disorientation in dialogue reflects a deeper critique of Victorian social conventions.[69]

When talking about March Hare, even though he is less vocal than Hatter, Carroll manages to showcase his madness through his irrational behaviour, such as dipping a watch in tea or offering wine that does not exist. The visible chaos in the actions emphasises the narrative's logic-defying atmosphere. Furthermore, it supports the sense of a world led by non-linear reasoning. In addition to the actions of these characters, during the time when Carroll wrote Alice in Wonderland, there were common phrases like "mad as a hatter" and "mad as a March hare", which gives these characters even deeper semantic meaning because it is implied from the start that these characters will not follow the traditional course of logic.[70]

Moreover, characters such as the Queen of Hearts, the March Hare, and the Duchess act as caricatures of societal roles taken to extremes. The clearest example is the Queen's violent authoritarianism, which shows irrationality, underscoring the theatricality of power.[71] These characters enforce rules but subvert reason. The Queen of Hearts' madness, in this case, is not used as a comical relief but rather, as it was mentioned, an authoritarian abuse of power. One of her most repeated and also referenced lines is "Off with their heads!" which illustrates the irrational execution of power. We could also focus on the trial at the end of the book, where it is clearly visible that her judicial system is a travesty of real-world justice, meaning that verdicts follow sentences and trials lack due process.[72]

Furthermore, to focus on Alice's declaration that the Queen and her court are "nothing but a pack of cards" depicts that the Queen is viewed as an emotionally unstable and violent

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[69] Rose Arszulowicz, *We're All Mad Here: The Madness of Linguistic Expression in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (undergraduate thesis, Montclair State University, 2017), 27–31.
[70] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 234.
[71] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction* (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2000), 13–14.
[72] Elena Soler Huici, *Analysis of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (undergraduate thesis, Universidad de Zaragoza, 2016), 10–12.

monarch, which satirises the British monarchy itself. In this case, Carroll critiques the emptiness of hereditary authority and makes fun of its capacity for reasoned governance.[73] In the end, the Queen becomes a symbol of chaos and unreason; therefore, her reign is marked by fear rather than legitimate rule.

In conclusion, the Queen, the Hatter, and the Hare portray noticeable kinds of madness: tyrannical, absurdist, and performative. These characters offer comic relief, but their actions also comment on reason, authority, and the collapse of logic in both personal and institutional spheres.

5.2 Alice as a "Sane" Anchor

The story of Alice is swirling with the chaos of Wonderland since the start of the book; however, initially, Alice functions as the voice of reason. She attempts to rationalise her surroundings and also questions the behaviours of others, which seems to her nonsensical. The attempts establish her as a figure of sanity. Nevertheless, as the story continues, this role becomes increasingly ambiguous.

The rationality of this character lies in her constant questioning. She is challenging the illogical statements that are presented to her by Wonderland's inhabitants. What is more, she often applies her own logic in an attempt to bring coherence to an incoherent world. She consistently seeks answers and tries to understand the logic; however, in the end, she is defeated by this world that thrives on contradiction.[74] Throughout the book, we can identify particular moments in which her own identity is questioned, and therefore, Alice is put into a position where she doesn't know who she really is. Moreover, not only is her identity questioned, but her sanity is as well. As an example, we can use her dialogue with the Cheshire Cat:

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[73] Nina Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child," *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1973): 40-42.
[74] Rose Arszulowicz, *We're All Mad Here: The Madness of Linguistic Expression in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (undergraduate thesis, Montclair State University, 2017), 13.

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

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

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

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

Alice didn't think that proved it at all; however, she went on: "And how do you know that you're mad?"

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

"I suppose so," said Alice.[75]

This dialogue shows that Alice does not want to accept that she is mad, as the Cat says. However, it also shows Alice's powerlessness in her situation since no matter what she does, she will end up with mad people who will affect her and, therefore, put pressure on her sanity.

As time progresses, Alice begins to incorporate herself within Wonderland's illogical way of existence. She engages in wordplay, responds with nonsense of her own, and even partakes in circular reasoning. This situation could be interpreted as madness taking over her, but it also reflects a child's adaptation to a new set of rules. Pauly notes that Carroll's text "blurs the dichotomy between sanity and madness by showing how logic itself can be used to irrational ends."[76]

Eventually, she reaches the top of her empowerment, which occurs in the courtroom when she defiantly declares that the Queen and her subjects are just a pack of cards. This shows her rejection towards Wonderland's distorted authority. However, even when she escapes back to the real world, the lines between sense and nonsense remain blurred. As Stewart writes, "The

[75] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 57.
[76] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction* (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2000), 13–14.

child becomes a symbol of sanity only through her engagement with madness."[77] To elaborate, Alice is not only a sane observer in the mad world; on the other hand, her experiences transform her during the journey. Throughout the story, her rationality is tested, adapted, and ultimately reaffirmed. However, this happens only after she has navigated the full spectrum of Wonderland's lack of logic.

According to Bernaerts, who writes about narrative representations of madness, characters like Alice "become sites of negotiation" between cultural definitions of sanity and madness.[78]

[77] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 48-50.
[78] Lars Bernaerts, "Narrative Threads of Madness in Literature," *Journal of Literary Theory* 3, no. 1 (2009): 13–18.

6. Nonsense in Through the Looking Glass

The sixth chapter of this thesis focuses on the sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass*. It explores the use of nonsense, which is embedded in the mirrored structure and inversion, poetic invention, and a chess-based narrative framework.

This chapter partly analyses how this sequel constructs a world governed by inversion, where temporal, spatial, and linguistic norms are systematically demolished. It focuses on mirror logic and the meaning behind this thematic concept. Additionally, it analyses the use of the inversion principle.

Furthermore, the chapter explores how Carroll employs logical absurdity, portmanteau-laden verse, and structural parody. The point is to show that these components are not only present to bring parody and entertainment but also to criticise epistemological stability, narrative coherence, and Victorian ideologies of order.

Lastly, the chapter focuses more closely on the thematic concepts of the book and the chess structure. It depicts how the structure is used and the possible meaning behind using it.

6.1 Mirror Logic and Inversion

Opposed to Carroll's first book, in the sequel, he intensifies his exploration of nonsense and creates a world that is governed by inversion. These reversals are not only tied to direction but also appear in logic, temporality, language, and causality.

The book starts with Alice entering the familiar Wonderland through a mirror that is not only a physical passage but also a metaphor for a complete ontological reversal. This book also explores the logical inversions and reversals to a much greater extent than its predecessor. To start with one of the most striking examples of mirror logic, we can examine the behaviour of the White Queen. This character is presented as a person who lives backwards and remembers the future instead of the past. This component, named temporal inversion, ridicules the teleological structure of narrative and overall human perception. According to Douglas-

Fairhurst, the Queen's ability to cry before experiencing pain demonstrates Carroll's ability to construct a universe where cause and effect are unbounded from typical expectations.[79]

In Anatomy of Literary Nonsense, Wim Tigges categorises this kind of inversion as the repertoire of literary nonsense. According to his outline, "mirroring" and "inversion" are primary devices that are used to create an aesthetic where formal consistency is protected even while semantic coherence collapses.[80] Moreover, this inversion applies to linguistic behaviour. Focusing on the characters The Red and White Queens, their communication uses tautologies, which means using two words or phrases that express the same meaning, even when it is unnecessary,[81] with contradictory and circular definitions. Auerbach, in his work, points out that Carroll uses these characters to satirise Victorian pedagogy, where learning by heart and dogma often replace critical thought.[82]

The inversion principle is applied in the entire structure of Looking-Glass World. As mentioned, time, space, and morality are reorganised around mirrored logic. This claim can be supported by Stewart, who affirms that nonsense literature functions by "reversal of categories" and the "movement between levels of discourse," both of which are exemplified in this backwards-facing universe.[83]

6.2 Poetic Nonsense

Poems are a prominent part of the Alice book, and one particular poem called "Jabberwocky," introduced in Through the Looking-Glass, is often considered the pinnacle of literary nonsense poetry. Despite the fact that, at first sight, this poem seems to be filled with

[79] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 211–213.
[80] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 56–57.
[81] Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. "tautology," accessed May 14, 2025, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/tautology.
[82] Nina Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child," *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1973): 36.
[83] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 50-55.

nonsensical words, it also mimics the grammatical structure and intonation of conventional verse. This important component of the poem aims to give the reader the illusion of understanding. According to Tigges, this poem is the leading example of how portmanteau and neologism can exist within a stable grammatical framework to produce nonsense that is internally coherent but semantically opaque. He also writes, “The poem adheres to the rules of English syntax while defying the meaning assigned to its lexicon.”[84]

As Haight explains, nonsense words must evoke a sense of meaning within context to function literarily. Words like “slithy” and “mimsy” appear meaningful due to their phonetic construction and syntactic placement.[85] In the Annotated Alice, Gardner emphasises the poem’s capacity to stimulate imagination despite its lexical opacity. The poem “Jabberwocky” uses portmanteau, onomatopoeia, and evocative syllabics, which create a sonic landscape that suggests menace, heroism, and triumph—even when its exact content eludes translation.[86] Portmanteau's words, such as “slithy” (lithe + slimy), demonstrate Carroll’s morphological innovation, merging words to construct a new word. The lexemes that are constructed draw attention to how we can manipulate the language and the language itself. It is also important to emphasise that Carroll doesn't strip language of meaning but reveals its unreliable structure. Douglas-Fairhurst emphasises how Carroll’s background as a logician spreads through his prose and helps him with using precise structures to unfold sense.[87]

Furthermore, we can examine the reflection of the logic of nonsensical poetry through Tweedledum and Tweedledee. For example:

> "I know what you're thinking about," said Tweedledum, "but it isn't so, nohow."

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[84] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 65–67.
[85] M. R. Haight, “Nonsense,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 11, no. 3 (1971): 247.
[86] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 191–195.
[87] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 87–112.

> "Contrariwise," continued Tweedledee, "if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic."[88]

This dialogue shows the circular debate and contradictory logic. The repetition, which is often present in their dialogues, reflects the narrative's recursive structure. Stewart identifies these repetitions and mirrored structures as crucial to the poetic function of nonsense, at which point form and sound often override semantic clarity.[89]

Overall, the illusion of comprehension in "Jabberwocky" and the circular dialogues of Tweedledum and Tweedledee demonstrate Carroll's linguistic genius. For example, readers instinctively feel that the poem is meaningful, which shows how deeply structure informs perception. Carroll's strength lies in his ability to mimic understanding through form, even if the semantic foundation of language is taken apart.

6.3 Chess Structure and Thematic Consequences

Opposed to Alice in Wonderland, the sequel Through the Looking-Glass is governed by a particular structure based on the game of chess. The reader is presented with characters that act as chess pieces, and Alice is initially a pawn that, throughout the story, moves square by square across the board until she becomes queen. This spatial organisation imposes a framework of order onto an otherwise chaotic world.

This specific chess structure provides the novel with a sense of narrative and also progression as opposed to the episodic wandering in the first book. Besides this point, Douglas-Fairhurst also notes that it reflects Carroll's fascination with games, rules, and logic, from which each is a form of constrained freedom.[90] MacDonald furthermore interprets this structure

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[88] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (London: William Collins, 2022), 179.
[89] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 50-55.
[90] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 218–220.

through a utopian lens. He describes Carroll as a "crypto-utopian." Additionally, he argues that the chessboard is both a literal game and a metaphor for social mobility and transformation. Throughout the story, we can see that Alice's ascension to Queen symbolises personal development. It also presents a critique of rigid social structures.[91]

The term structural nonsense was already mentioned previously in this thesis, and similarly, in the sequel, this structure also demonstrates structural nonsense. Although seemingly the rules of chess guide the narrative, they are inconsistently applied. For example, pieces come alive, converse, and violate the mechanics of their own movement. This component is emphasised by Tigges as a trait of nonsense: an internally consistent system that violates external logic.[92]

As it was said, the story starts with Alice being a pawn and eventually transforms into Queen Alice. This scene is completed with a grotesque coronation ceremony that collapses into chaos. According to Gardener's remark, this moment connects satire and fantasy, emphasising how absurdity hides beneath even the most rule-bound systems.[93]

Overall, this structural nonsense questions the nature of agency and free will. The question arises whether Alice is truly progressing or whether she is only being manipulated through a pre-scripted sequence. This illusion of control becomes another Carrollian riddle.

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[91] Alex MacDonald, "Utopia Through the Looking-Glass: Lewis Carroll as Crypto-Utopian," *Utopian Studies*, no. 2 (1989): 125–127.
[92] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 58–67.
[93] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 262–265.

7. Madness in Through the Looking Glass

The last chapter of this thesis explores the theme of madness intertwined with the questions of identity, perception, and ontological uncertainty.

Opposed to the chapters concerning the first book, *Alice in Wonderland,* where madness is often portrayed as an eccentric behaviour, the sequel focuses more on a philosophical condition. The first part of the chapter examines the question of identity and reality and tries to give insight into the meaning of this motif.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the logic presented in the sequel and further analyses the dream-like framework of the book. Additionally, the chapter provides input concerning Carroll's challenges towards conventional notions of reality and agency, presenting madness not as chaos but as a recursive system that dismantles narrative and cognitive certainty.

7.1 Identity and Reality

As it was in the first book, Alice in Wonderland, even the sequel presents a theme of madness and focuses on the instability of identity. This time, however, not only is this one of the central themes of the book, but we can also see this theme developing more into exploring the blurring boundary between self and perception.

Again, Alice's own sense of existence is brought into question. This is shown during the scenes with Tweedledee and Tweedledum, bringing to light the idea that Alice is merely a character in the Red King's dream. This existential uncertainty is deeply unsettling for Alice, which symbolically destabilises the notion of an autonomous, grounded self. The idea can be illustrated through this situation:

"Well, it's no use *you're* talking about waking him," said Tweedledum, "when you're only one of the things in his dream. You know very well you're not real."

"I *am* real!" said Alice, and began to cry..”[94]

This part of the dialogue plays into Lecercle’s theory, in which he notes that characters are continually repositioned by language and narrative to the point where identity becomes a reflexive hallucination.[95] This fear of not being real parallels postmodern anxieties about authorship and agency. In addition, it also aligns with Auerbach’s reading of Alice as a narrative cypher. Alice's character is less defined by psychological depth but more defined by her relational function in a world that constantly reflects and bends her image.[96] What is more, her status as a “real” character is never fully resolved. She continues to move through the dream world, and others continue to project identities onto her, which challenges the notion of her confidence.

This idea of Alice being a figment of Red King’s passive dreaming escalated to be the central question of the book. There is no clear resolution as to whether she is a figment or whether her self-awareness overrides that external determination. Lecercle notes that this paradox that is present in the book is a kind of hallmark, meaning that the search for truth collapses into endless recursion.[97]

7.2 Queen´s Logic and the Theme of Dream Within a Dream

As was previously implied, the time in Through the Looking-Glass does not function linearly. We can use an example of the White Queen to support this claim since she is the one

[94] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 123.
[95] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122–124.
[96] Nina Auerbach, “Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child,” *Victorian Studies* 17, no. 1 (1973): 36.
[97] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 123–124.

stating that she "remembers things that happen the week after next" and also asserts the mental necessity of "believing six impossible things before breakfast."[98]

These statements do not reflect playful irrationality but rather deliberate destruction of cause and effect. According to Gardner's explanation, the invention of Carroll's characters who live backwards serves as a philosophical inversion, where memory and prophecy become indistinguishable, for example, the White Queen, which means her time functions retrospectively.[99] This phenomenon presents madness as an alternative form of rationality freed from physical constraints rather than irrationality. Bernaerts describes this component as a "chronotopic fracture" in narratives of madness, meaning that the fragmentation of temporal order is a manifestation of psychological decomposition.[100] Therefore, the Queen's conversations accomplish madness that is controlled and tied to the nonsensical universe.

In a symbolic sense, we could say that the Queen's reversal of logic and time can be interpreted as a critique of Victorian notions of progress and empiricism. To support this claim, Douglas-Fairhurst notes that Carroll uses these bizarre sequences to mock scientific rationalism. Furthermore, he parodies insistence on verifiable origin.[101] Therefore, Queen's statements become nonsensical and paradoxical questions or truths that resist linear interpretation.

In addition to the Queen's reversal of logic and time, in the sequel, Alice encounters perhaps the most thematically unsettling moment. Throughout the story, as it was mentioned, an implication arises that the entire story may be a dream.

Furthermore, this dream does not seem to be Alice's, but the Red King's. Gardner points out that this situation casts a shadow over the entire narrative: if Alice is merely a component

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[98] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 198.
[99] Martin Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, 199.
[100] Lars Bernaerts, "Narrative Threads of Madness in Literature," *Journal of Literary Theory* 3, no. 1 (2009): 16.
[101] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 211–213.

of someone else's unconscious, then all of her perceived agency evaporates.[102] This implication of a "dream within a dream" reaches the top in a recursive gesture, where the character and reader are involved in an existential loop. As Pauly suggests, this dream recursion is a "cognitive distortion of self-location," which is common in literary portrayals of madness, where spatial and subjective boundaries blur.[103] In other words, Alice's journey is a metaphor for negotiating identity in a world where the limits of self and reality are unstable.

However, the unanswered question of whose dream it is still stands. In a way, this signifies Carroll's refusal to offer interpretive closure. As Lecercle suggests, nonsense literature presents "a continuous undoing of certainty,"[104] therefore, the dream becomes a method of literary dislocation, as opposed to a metaphor for fantasy.

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[102] Martin Gardner, ed., *The Annotated Alice: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, definitive ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 211–213.
[103] Susanne Pauly, *Madness in English-Canadian Fiction* (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2000), 13–14.
[104] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), 124.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this bachelor thesis was to focus on the books Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass by Lewis Carroll and analyse them through set elements, which were nonsense and madness. The key was to examine depicted literary devices by outlining the focus points of these devices and describing their significance. Furthermore, based on the research, it implements the analysis of the selected books.

The thesis was divided into three parts, from which two are practical and one theoretical. The theoretical part provides the socio-historical context of the book, insight into the author's life and work, and lastly, examines the relationship between elements of nonsense and madness while also explaining the linguistic nonsense and madness as literary tropes.

The second part of the thesis was divided into focusing firstly on the book Alice in Wonderland and secondly on the sequel Through the Looking Glass. Chapter 4 discusses three key forms of nonsense: linguistic, which manipulates dialogues through wordplay to disrupt meaning; which uses an episodic and dream-like narrative to challenge logical order and nonsense through characters, which embody paradoxes and function as tools for exploring the instability of language, logic, and identity. Chapter 5 focuses on certain characters that represent different forms of madness, such as chaotic, performative and authoritarian. Furthermore, it focuses on the character of Alice as a rational outsider and analyses the gradual adaptation of herself to Wonderland's madness.

The last two chapters analyse the book Through the Looking Glass, resulting in depictions of mirror logic, linguistic play, and a chess-based structure, all of which invert conventional logic, language, and narrative form. Furthermore, the chapters also redefine madness as a philosophical condition marked by identity instability, temporal dislocation, and ontological uncertainty.

I believe this thesis will bring a better understanding of the discussed topic to a broader audience and help to spread the idea that the Alice books are not merely fairy tales for children but also can provide meaningful and enriching points of view on the nonsense literature and the Victorian era. For further research, I would recommend focusing only on one element of analysis and providing a deeper study of the particular use in the books. I would also

recommend focusing on one book. I also believe that this topic has the potential to be examined and analysed in terms of a master's thesis.

9. Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu knih *Alenka v říši divů* a *Za zrcadlem a co tam Alenka našla* od Lewise Carrolla prostřednictvím dvou hlavních prvků, které jsou nonsens a šílenství. Cílem teto bakalářská práce bylo prozkoumat, jak jsou tyto dva prvky literárně ztvárněny, jak ovlivňují strukturu a význam příběhu a jak se projevují v jednání, motivacích a identitě jednotlivých postav.

Práce je rozdělena do tří hlavních částí, ze kterých je jedna teoretická a dvě praktické. Teoretická část se zaměřuje na socio-historický kontext viktoriánské éry, přináší krátký přehled života a tvorby Lewise Carrolla a vysvětluje nonsens a šílenství jako literární prostředky. Důraz je kladen na jazykový nonsens a na způsob, jakým Carroll pracuje s narací a jazykem, aby narušil logiku a význam.

Praktická část se věnuje podrobné analýze obou knih. V první části je rozebírána kniha *Alenka v říši divů* s důrazem na jazykový nonsens (např. slovní hříčky), strukturální nonsens (epizodická, snová logika vyprávění) a postavy jako nositele paradoxů. Dále jsou zde analyzovány projevy šílenství v jednotlivých postavách – chaotické, performativní a autoritativní šílenství – a pozice Alenky jako racionální pozorovatelky, která se postupně přizpůsobuje absurditě okolního světa.

Třetí část se věnuje knize *Za zrcadlem a co tam Alenka našla*, kde jsou rozebrány motivy zrcadlové logiky, jazykových hříček a šachové struktury, které opět narušují konvenční logiku a realitu. Šílenství je zde interpretováno jako filozofický stav, projevující se nestabilitou identity, narušením času a nejasností bytí.

Práce má teoreticko-empirický charakter a jejím přínosem je hlubší porozumění nonsensové literatuře a viktoriánské kultuře. Pro další výzkum se doporučuje užší zaměření – buď na jeden konkrétní prvek, nebo pouze na jednu z knih. Taktéž třeba podotknou, že téma má potenciál i pro diplomovou práci.

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Annotation

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Rok obhajoby: 2025

Název práce: Témata nonsensu a šílenství v díle Alenka v říši divů a Za zrcadlem od Lewise Carrolla

Název práce v angličtině: Nonsense and Madness in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass

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Abstrakt:

This thesis explores the depiction of nonsense and madness in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. The key idea is to examine the nonsensical structure of the ideas in the novel and the frequent fascination with madness. Simultaneously, the thesis analyses the characters' motivations, actions, and their identities. Additionally, it focuses on Lewis Carroll's narration and style of writing and attempts to provide the socio-historical context of the novel.

Klíčová slova:

Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass, Nonsense, Madness, Victorian Age, Alice Liddell, British Literature, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson