The Politics of Nonsense:
Civil Unrest, Otherness and National Mythology in Nonsense Literature

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Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

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This study argues that the generative qualities of nonsense literature that foster in the reader a rebellious, anti-authoritarian spirit have been underestimated. At characteristic moments of social unrest the popularity of nonsense literature rises and texts that utilise the mores and tropes of nonsense are enlisted in support of radical causes. Nonsense participates in the genesis of a new political paradigm that is incommensurable with the old, serving as a popular coded representation, and as a vehicle for the propagation, of new concepts, beliefs and ideologies.

These "characteristic moments" of social unrest are akin to the historical situation that Mikhail Bakhtin requires for a flourishing of carnivalesque imagery. Nonsense, like Bakhtin's carnivalesque, is invigorated by "moments of crisis, of breaking points in… the life of society and man" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9). Because of its close association with carnivalesque imagery, nonsense is normally situated in a convivial, democratic atmosphere. As Bakhtin posits, this carnivalesque milieu fosters an atmosphere that revels in the expression of political criticism and utopian ideals (ibid 92-3).

Revisiting Elizabeth Sewell's contention that nonsense rejects magic and superstition (Sewell 171-72), I suggest instead a two-part process. Nonsense first rejects commonly accepted, but arbitrary, systems of authority and then, through subversive allusions to an alien alternative, nonsense subtly advertises the desirability of unofficial belief systems. In nonsense texts, symbols of unofficial belief systems are routinely combined with inexplicable narrative voids and temporal anomalies that tempt the reader

to envision a temporary release from constrictive conceptions of society and the self.

Nonsense thus plays a pivotal role in the language, culture and mythology of revolution. This process, which allies nonsense to radical causes in times of social upheaval, is one of the major sources of the popular success of icons of children's literature such as Mother Goose, Lewis Carroll and Dr. Seuss. Because nonsense is not restricted to texts intended for children, neither is this study. The political aspects of nonsense will be the more holistically examined by inclusion in this discussion of, for example, the political satire of eighteenth century colonial American humorist Francis Hopkinson, the Victorian era libretti of W. S. Gilbert, and the lyrics of 1960s era songwriters John Lennon and Bob Dylan.

For Elka

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Paratext

Abstract ii
Acknowledgments v
Table of Contents vi
Figures and Illustrations ix
List of Abbreviations xiv

Chapter One: Nonsense and Politics

SECTION I: THESIS AND INTRODUCTION
Scope 1
John Taylor and The English Civil War 2
The Dangers of Definition 8
Nonsense and the Carnivalesque 11
Historical Trend 23

SECTION II: BEYOND BAKHTIN:
OTHER POLITICAL ASPECTS OF NONSENSE
First Last, Last First 32
Political Cartoons and Nonsense Illustrations 34
Narrative Void and Political Allegory 39
Nonsense as a Legislative Language 41
The Incommensurable and Political Acts of Nonsense 46

SECTION III: SUPERSTITION, MYTH AND MAGIC
Saying “No” to Magic 48
Saying “Yes” to Magic 51
Mythic Space and Temporal Anomalies 60
Spiritual and Mythic Ascendance 65

Chapter Two: Nonsense and the American Revolution

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION
Three Wise Men of Gotham 70
Historical Situation 72
Locating Eighteenth-Century American Nonsense 74

SECTION II: POLITICS AND NONSENSE IN COLONIAL AMERICA
Nonsense and the Colonial American Rebel 82
Benjamin Franklin 82
Francis Hopkinson 85
Isaiah Thomas 88
George Washington 92
The Carnivalesque 94

Framing Nonsense with Political Statements 104
Usurpation and the Impossible Rebel 110
"Yankee Doodle" 111
"The World Turned Upside Down" 116
Nonsense in Power Relations and Protest 119
The Boston Tea Party 121
Nonsense and the American Flag 123
Narrative Void and Political Allegory 128

SECTION III: MYTHIC SPACE AND COLONIAL AMERICAN NONSENSE
Magic, Pagan Association and Otherness 132
The Mystical Americans: Yankee Doodle and Mother Goose 140

Chapter Three: Victorian Nonsense

SECTION I: POLITICS AND VICTORIAN NONSENSE
Introduction 149
Scope 151
Historical and Political Context 152
Personal Politics 159
Political Readings of Victorian Nonsense 163

SECTION II: AN ANATOMY OF VICTORIAN NONSENSE:
THE TROPES OF TRANSFORMATION
The Carnivalesque 180
Unofficial Belief Systems 196
Temporal Anomalies, Impossible Spaces and Narrative Voids 205

SECTION III: ECCENTRICITY AND EMPIRE
The Enemy Within 208
The English Eccentric 209
National Identity, Folklore and Victorian Nonsense 212
Nonsense and Empire 219
The Absurd Foreigner as an Englishman 229
Popular Fantasies of Colonisation 234
Jonathan Miller and the Sixties Alice 241

Chapter Four: Nonsense and the 1960s

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION
A Microcosm of 1960s Nonsense 249
1960s Nonsense: A General Introduction 254
Three Iconic Figures: Lennon, Dylan and Seuss 261
John Lennon and Nonsense 263
Bob Dylan and Nonsense 274
Dr. Seuss and Nonsense 287

SECTION II: POLITICS AND 1960S NONSENSE
Politics in Lennon, Dylan and Seuss 290
Political Acts of Nonsense in the 1960s 305

SECTION III: TROPES OF TRANSFORMATION
The Carnivalesque 310
Unofficial Belief Systems 328
Filling the Narrative Void 335
Temporal Anomalies 342
Existential Dilemmas 345

SECTION IV: MYTH, LEGACY AND APPROPRIATION
Alice's Restaurant 352
John Lennon 353
Bob Dylan 354
Dr. Seuss 355

Chapter Five: Conclusions

The Innocent Critic 361
Rebellion to What End? Utopian Dreams and Difference 365
Harlequin's Army 372

Works Cited 377

LIST OF FIGURES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 (p. 26) — *Successione* (1935). Wassily Kandinsky. The Phillips Collection, Washington DC.

Figure 2 (p. 35) — Illustration accompanying John Taylor, "The Complaint of M. Tenter-hook", 1641, as reproduced in Bernard Capp's *The World of John Taylor*, Oxford: Clarendon: 1994. Unpaginated insert between pages 87 and 88.

Figure 3 (p. 36) — "Mal Lui Veut Mal Lui Tourne", 1780. Reproduced from *The Comical Spirit of Seventy-Six: The Humor of Francis Hopkinson*. Paul Zall, ed. San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1976. 78.

Figure 4 (p. 54) — "Mother Goose turning Jack into Harlequin". From the chapbook, *Old Mother Goose*. London: W. S. Johnson, c.1850. 6.

Figure 5 (p. 54) — "Mother Goose takes flight on her magic goose". From the chapbook, *Old Mother Goose*. London: W. S. Johnson, c.1850. 12.

Figure 6 (p. 55) — "Old Mother Goose". Lawson Wood, Illus. *Old Mother Goose and Other Rhymes.* London: Nelson, 1940.

Figure 7 (p. 55) — "Old Mother Hubbard". Reproduced from Iona and Peter Opie's *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. OUP, 1997. 375.

Figure 8 (p. 56) — "The Feline Mystique". Reproduced from Frank Manolson's *The Language of Your Cat*. London: Marshall Cavendish, 1977. 8.

Figure 9 (p. 59) — "The World Turned Upside Down". From *The World Turned Upside Down, or No News, and Strange News*. Printed and sold by J. Kendrew, Colliergate, York, c. 1804. Reproduced in Hugh Haughton's *The Chatto Book of Nonsense.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1988. 176.

Figure 10 (p. 66) — "*Alice in Wonderland* Nativity Scene". Daresbury Church, Cheshire, England. Reproduced from *daresburycofe.org.uk* 27 Jan. 2007 <www.daresburycofe.org.uk/alice/index.htm>

Figure 11 (p. 70) — "The Three Wise Men of Gotham". Woodcut by A. M. Simon, for William and Ceil Baring-Gould's *The Annotated Mother Goose*, New York: Bramhall House, 1962. 100.

Figure 12 (p. 71) — "The Three Wise Men of Gotham". *Mother Goose's Melody: Or Sonnets for the Cradle,* c.1785, first Worcester edition, Isaiah Thomas, printer. 21. Page 21 is slightly torn in the first Worcester edition; therefore, the image I have used is from the second Worcester edition, 1794, which is thought to be a facsimile of the c. 1785 edition.

Figure 13 (p. 77) "Sense and Nonsense".
Alexander Hamilton, *The History of the Ancient and Honorable Tuesday Club*. v.3. Robert Micklus, ed. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1990. 245.

Figure 14 (p. 90) "The Devil stabbing the royal stamp".
Woodcut of the Devil by Isaiah Thomas. Published in the *Halifax Gazette*, 13 February 1766. Reproduced in *Isaiah Thomas*, by Richard Steele. Worcester MA: Worcester Telegram and Gazette, 1981. 11.

Figure 15 (p. 95) "Singing, dancing, anticks, tumbling".
Little Robin Redbreast. Worcester MA: Isaiah Thomas, printer, 1786. 27.

Figure 16 (p. 96) "See the jolly train are reaping".
Little Robin Redbreast. Worcester MA: Isaiah Thomas, printer, 1786. 81.

Figure 17 (p. 98) "A human head placed on a large brawny pair of buttocks".
Illustration by Alexander Hamilton, from *The History of the Ancient and Honorable Tuesday Club*. v.2. Robert Micklus, ed. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1990. 31.

Figure 18 (p. 107) "The Wise Men of Gotham and Their Goose".
Reproduced from Michael Wynn Jones' *The Cartoon History of The American Revolution*. London: London Editions, 1975. 75.

Figure 19 (p. 109) "Boys and Girls Come Out to Play".
Tommy Thumb's Song Book, For All Little Masters and Misses.
Worcester MA: Isaiah Thomas, printer, 1788. 50.

Figure 20 (p. 110) "Boys Marching".
Tommy Thumb's Song Book, For All Little Masters and Misses.
Worcester MA, Isaiah Thomas, 1788. 64.

Figure 21 (p. 115) "The Yankees Return from Camp".
From, *Collection of Broadsides and Ballads*, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester Massachusetts. Unpublished. N. pag. The text from this version dates from 1775, while the printing is post 1800, probably about 1810.

Figure 22 (p. 123) "Liberty Triumphant - The World Turned Upside Down".
Reproduced from *The Comical Spirit of Seventy-Six: The Humor of Francis Hopkinson*. Paul M. Zall, ed. San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1976. 172.

Figure 23 (p. 125) "Final Page of *A Pretty Story*".
Francis Hopkinson, *A Pretty Story, Written in the Year of our Lord 2774*, 1774. Published in facsimile. Ed. Neda Westlake. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1970. 29.

Figure 24 (p. 127) "The Art of Paper War", 1786.
Reproduced from *The Comical Spirit of Seventy-Six: The Humor of Francis Hopkinson*. Ed. Paul M. Zall. The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, 1976. 172.

Figure 25 (p. 165) "The Queen of Hearts and the Knave of Clubs".
Figaro in London (18 Nov. 1837). Reproduced from *Queen Victoria, First Media Monarch*. By John Plunkett. OUP 2003. 123

Figure 26 (p. 171) "Alice preparing for a charivari".
John Tenniel. *Punch* (1864) 46:1.

Figure 27 (p. 171) "Hoity-Toity!!!".
John Tenniel. *Punch* (1 Feb. 1868). 51.

Figure 28 (p. 171) "Alice in Blunderland".
John Tenniel. *Punch* (30 Oct. 1880). 199.

Figure 29 (p. 171) "Alice in Bumbleland".
John Tenniel. *Punch* (8 March 1899). 115.

Figure 30 (p. 183) "The Keepers Nightmare".
Punch's Almanac for 1871 60:vi-vii.

Figure 31 (p. 195) "Edward Lear, Archbishop of Canterbury".
Edward Lear. *Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense.* Ed. Vivian Noakes. London: Penguin, 2001. 453.

Figure 32 (p. 201) "The Beaver Brought Paper, Portfolio, Pens", 1876.
Henry Holiday, from *The Hunting of the Snark*.
Reproduced from *The Annotated Snark*, by Martin Gardner. London: Penguin, 1962. 79.

Figure 33 (p. 228) "He Comes to View this Wondrous World of Ind".
Punch's Almanac for 1875 (16 Dec. 1876). N. pag.

Figure 34 (p. 230) "Edward Lear, Fakeer".
Edward Lear. From "The Poona Observer", 1875.
Reproduced from *Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense.* Ed. Vivian Noakes London: Penguin, 2001. 408.

Figure 35 (p. 232) "X was King Xerxes".
Edward Lear. From "A was an Ant", 1846.
Reproduced from *Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense.* Ed. Vivian Noakes. London: Penguin, 2001. 133.

Figure 36 (p. 232) "The Excellent Double-extra XX".
Edward Lear, from "The Absolutely Abstemious Ass", 1870.
Reproduced from *Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense.* Ed. Vivian Noakes. London: Penguin, 2001. 268.

Figure 37 (p. 233) "Advice from a Caterpillar".
John Tenniel, from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*
Reproduced from *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll.* London: Penguin, 1988. 48.

Figure 38 (p. 233) "The English Caterpillar".
Punch (6 Dec. 1873). 229.

Figure 39 (p. 236) "Alice Liddell as a Beggar-child", 1850s.
Photograph by Charles Dodgson. From the archives of the Princeton University Library. Reproduced in Stephanie Lovett Stoffel's *Lewis Carroll and Alice*. New York: The Wonderland Press, 1997. 1.

Figure 40 (p. 239) "Xie Kitchin in Chinese Costume", 1873.
Photograph by Charles Dodgson. Reproduced from Stephanie Lovett Stoffel's *Lewis Carroll and Alice*. New York: The Wonderland Press, 1997. 9.

Figure 41 (p. 239) "Annie and Francis Henderson, Shipwrecked".
Photograph by Charles Dodgson. Coloured by an unknown artist.
Reproduced from Stephanie Lovett Stoffel's *Lewis Carroll and Alice*.
New York: The Wonderland Press, 1997. 114.

Figure 42 (p. 241) "*Alice's Adventures in Atomland*".
Uncredited cover art for Richard Field's *Alice's Adventures in Atomland in the Plastic Age: A Stark Fantasy*. South Duxbury Massachusetts: Faulkner & Field, 1949.

Figure 43 (p. 258) "Lewis Carroll".
Detail from the cover art for *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967. By The Beatles. CD. London: EMI Records, 1987.

Figure 44 (p. 264) "Walrus and the Carpenter", by John Lennon, age 12.
Unpublished illustration. *news.bbc.co.uk.*
20 Apr. 2006 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/4925354.stm>

Figure 45 (p. 288) "Beyond Z".
Dr. Seuss. *On Beyond Zebra.* New York: Random House, 1955. N. pag.

Figure 46 (p. 315) "Circus tent scenery".
Dr. Seuss. *Oh The Places You'll Go*. New York: Random House, 1990. N. pag.

Figure 47 (p. 317) "The Who Feast".
Dr. Seuss. *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*. New York: Random House, 1957. N. pag.

Figure 48 (p. 321) "This Way".
John Lennon. *A Spaniard in the Works*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1965. 80-81.

Figure 49 (p. 323) "A Policeman in a Pail".
Dr. Seuss. *Dr. Seuss' ABC*. New York: Random House, 1962. 38.

Figure 50 (p. 344) "The Finest of Clocks of J. Carmichael Krox".
Dr. Seuss. *Dr. Seuss' Sleep Book*. New York: Random House, 1962. N. pag.

Figure 51 (p. 346) "The Fat Growth on Eric Hearble".
John Lennon. *In His Own Right*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1964. 25.

Figure 52 (p. 348) "Poor Harry Hadow".
Dr. Seuss. *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?*. New York: Random House, 1973. N. pag.

Figure 53 (p. 349) "Near and Far".
Dr. Seuss. *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*. New York: Random House, 1960. 33.

Figure 54 (p. 349) "There and Here".
Dr. Seuss. *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*. New York: Random House, 1960. 9.

Figure 55 (p. 350) "The Fork in the Road at the Vale of Va-Vode".
Dr. Seuss. *Dr. Seuss' Sleep Book*. New York: Random House, 1962. N. pag.

Figure 56 (p. 357) "Cat in the Hat Tie-Dyed Rasta Cat".
(Advertisement on eBay). *The Tie Dye Factory*.
Downloaded 2 April 2007.

Figure 57 (p. 369) "The Scroobius Pip".
Edward Lear, c. 1871.
The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense, London: Penguin. 387.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASITW	*A Spaniard in the Works*, by John Lennon, London: Jonathan Cape, 1965.
IHOW	*In His Own Write*, by John Lennon, London: Jonathan Cape, 1964.
Looking Glass	*Through the Looking Glass*, by Lewis Carroll. *The Complete Works Of Lewis Carroll*, London: Penguin, 1988.
Melodies	*The True Mother Goose. Mother Goose's Melodies: The Only Pure Edition*, Boston: Munroe and Francis, 1833.
MGM	*Mother Goose's Melody: Or Sonnets for the Cradle,* c.1785. Worcester Massachusetts: Isaiah Thomas, printer. As the only surviving copy of the first Worcester edition, c 1785, is damaged, my page citations are from the second Worcester edition, 1794, which is intact and is believed to be a facsimile of the c. 1785 edition.
TTPB, 1764	*Tom Thumb's Play-Book, Boston: Barclay Publishers, 1764* (typeset by Isaiah Thomas).
TTPB, 1794	*Tom Thumb's Play-Book*, Worcester MA: Isaiah Thomas, printer, 1794.
TTSB	*Tommy Thumb's Song Book, For all Little Masters and Misses to be Sung to them by their Nurses, until they can sing themselves, by Nurse Lovechild. To Which is Added, A Letter from a Lady on Nursing.* Worcester MA: Isaiah Thomas, printer, 1788.
Wonderland	*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll. *The Complete Works Of Lewis Carroll*. London: Penguin, 1988.

Chapter One

Nonsense and Politics

And is not this rare Nonsence, prethee tell,
Much like thy writing, if men marke it well:
For Nonsence is Rebellion, and thy writing,
Is nothing but Rebellious Warres inciting.

John Taylor, *Aqua-Musae* 1644
(Malcolm 184)

SECTION I: THESIS AND INTRODUCTION

Scope

This study is primarily about nonsense, with the subject of children's literature a secondary, though major focus. Because the use of nonsense is not restricted to texts for children the study will move freely between texts intended for adults and those intended for children—and importantly, those in which the intended audience is unclear. This scope is purposeful and is intended so that the one set of texts may better inform the other. In Chapter Four, for example, the "texts" of songwriters John Lennon and Bob Dylan will be compared with those of Dr. Seuss. Such juxtaposition will be an advantage because Lennon and Dylan are widely recognised as political forces of the 1960s, and by juxtaposing their work to Seuss', I hope to gain a fuller comprehension of Seuss' political strategies. And so while the ultimate goal of this study is to say something about the

political nature of nonsense, I remind my reader early on that a separate goal implicit to this examination is to reveal something about iconic figures of children's literature. While I will consider Lennon and Dylan in detail, (and other writers who are not clearly working in the realm of children's literature) these other authors will help facilitate a better understanding of how nonsense functions in Mother Goose rhymes, and in the texts of Lewis Carroll and Dr. Seuss, and ultimately will say something to the subject of how three of the most iconic figures in the history of children's literature achieved their fame and iconic status.

John Taylor and The English Civil War

Looking up from the tumult and confusion of the English Civil War, John Taylor, one of the earliest English poets of literary nonsense, found his bedlamite verses at the height of their public appeal. That Taylor worked in nonsense, as we commonly understand the "genre", is made clear by his use of made-up words and phrases such as, "Mubble-Fubbles", "Mungerellimo whish whap", and "Quishquash" (qtd. in Malcolm 201; 139; 141), and by his frequent use of impossible topsy-turvy images as in "Aqua-Musae" in which he suggests the verses of George Wither are:

> Like the Frost and Snow that falls in June,
> Or like the sweet Musique, that was ne're in Tune. (Ibid 184)

Taylor had dabbled in nonsense earlier in his career, throughout the 1610s and 1620s. Yet as Noel Malcolm details in *The Origins of English Nonsense,* it was in the 1630s that Taylor's fame palpably ascended, a collection of his *Workes* finding a wide audience just as the country began to spiral into crisis. Malcolm notes, "It is quite inconceivable that any gathering of London wits and players in the 1630s could have been ignorant of John Taylor's well-known contributions to [nonsense literature]". He became at this time, "a

public institution" (ibid 22). By 1640 Taylor was well enough known to be offhandedly mentioned in a Henry Glapthorne's comedy, *Wit in a Constable*, in which a master directs his servant, "John Taylor, get me his nonsense" (ibid 20). As the political tide advanced and threatened established hierarchies of king and custom, Taylor's writings were at the centre of a new vogue. Among university students Taylorian-style, fustian nonsense speeches became "almost an obligatory party trick for undergraduates" (ibid 22).

During the war Taylor found himself inextricably drawn into the political mêlée and his fame increased. Bernard Capp notes that although the war cost Taylor his day job as a waterman, "he quickly found a successful new career as a popular political propagandist" (145). His political views and his verses attracted increased attention, and Taylor was seen in the company of powerful men of government. The war years were his most productive as an author. According to Bernard Capp's bibliography of Taylor's writings, nearly sixty percent of Taylor's total output was composed between the tumultuous years 1637 to 1652, with 1642 (the outbreak of hostilities) the most productive year of his life, with nineteen new works finding their way into print.[1] After several intrigues Taylor was arrested for espionage in 1649. Prior to and just following his arrest, Taylor's newer nonsense verses, such as "A Bill of Fare" (1637), "Mad Fashions, Od Fashions" (1642), "Aqua Musae" (1644), "Mercurius Nonsensicus" (1648) and "The Essence of Nonsense Upon Sense" (1651), influenced a young generation of nonsense poets. Malcolm traces Taylor's influence on up-and-coming versifiers of the 1640s, including Martin Parker, Richard Corbett, and James Smith. Andrew Marvell might also be included on this list.

In this same period anonymous nonsensical verses, such as "Cure for the Quartain Ague" (c. 1640), "If All the World Were Paper" (1641), "Pure Nonsence" (1641), "A Mess of Nonsense" (1653) and "Nonsense" (1655), also found appreciative revolution-era

audiences.[2] In the press *The Man in the Moon* was a leading satirical loyalist almanac, the title referencing one of the few recurring characters in nonsense poetry, while a popular ballad, "The Man o' the Moon", directly referred to King Charles as that character (Opie 346). Popular music at the time also included songs such as "The First Beginning", which features the earliest reference in English to a cow jumping over the moon,[3] and various incarnations of the topsy-turvy anthem, "The World Turned Upside Down". Journals and broadsides reflected an interest in nonsense as well. An anonymous broadside of 1659 features a nonsensical recipe: *An Excellent Recipe to make a Complete Parliament or (if you please) a New Senate Fitted to the English-Man's Palate*. This recipe requires, among other ingredients,

> A *drachme* of the scrapings of the Divell's cloven foot, five spoon-fulls of the marrow of old Oliver's nose; half a Committee man; [and] two Galleons of Aquafortis… (Malcolm 93)

The popularity of nonsense in this period was augmented by what Malcolm describes as a "sudden vogue for the low burlesque in the 1640s" (97). The popularity of nonsense, then, concurred with a rise in the popularity of grotesque and carnivalesque imagery.

Despite its vogue during the Civil War era, by the 1660s, a period of relative political calm, nonsense was becoming unfashionable. Malcolm notes,

> The genre died away in the second half of the seventeenth century… By the 1670s it had, like its stylistic sources, become strange-sounding stuff… the point is not that it became unreadable, but that the impetus to write it had gone. (49-50)

This was neither the first nor the last time that nonsense, in tandem with carnivalesque imagery, flourished during a period of civil unrest and then died out amidst a relative political calm that followed. The present study examines three such flourishings, each separated by roughly 100 years. Chapter Two examines colonial American nonsense

during the American Revolution. Chapter Three investigates nonsense during the breakdown in consensus that occurred in post-Darwinian, Victorian England. Chapter Four explores the renaissance of nonsense forms that accompanied the socially volatile 1960s. In each of these eras the pattern established above during the English Civil War will recur. Nonsensical literatures will flourish, accompanied by a rise in grotesque and carnivalesque imagery, and then subsequently die out in popularity as a more conservative period dawns.

Despite the evidence gathered from Malcolm's book, Malcolm himself would, perhaps, be unwilling to endorse this study. One of Malcolm's concerns is to free the origins of nonsense from any connection to the "folk" on the one hand, and politics on the other. Malcolm wishes to establish the birth of English nonsense as spurred exclusively by literary concerns, as literary parody performed uniquely by an erudite elite of often non-radical intelligentsia. Malcolm believes, for example, that Taylor's comment that "Nonsense is Rebellion" was insincere (25). To associate nonsense with carnivalesque political traditions is to recommend a more ancient folk origin for nonsense traditions and, thus, to reverse Malcolm's argument.

Malcolm would also likely point out that John Taylor was, in fact, a conservative and a royalist. As Capp notes, "For the most part... Taylor viewed social change with dismay" (108). Similar arguments have been made concerning Charles Dodgson. In such Carrollian arguments, critics, hoping to reveal nonsense as apolitical, stress the conservative personal views of the author of *Alice in Wonderland*. However—and this assertion cannot be understated—the interpretation of nonsense texts should never be confined to a discussion of authorial intent. The nature of nonsense verses, its arbitrary and random quality, *requires* that the reader, not the author, construct the meaning. The reading public have always determined the meanings of obscurely written texts, including

in the period leading up to the English Civil War. In her essay, "Intention", Annabelle Patterson looks at the case of the William Prynne, who in 1633 was charged with "seditious libel" for "an oblique attack" on the monarchy that was said to be laid between the lines in his book, *Histriomatix*. Though Prynne denied any such intention the courts concluded that the author was indeed responsible for the public misreading, the verdict stating that though "...hee maye bee ill interpreted. That must not be allowed him in excuse..." (135). Patterson concludes of this ruling:

> Once released into public territory, in other words, the text is inevitably subject to whatever interpretation seems most plausible to its readers, who will determine its meaning in light of local circumstances. (136)

Further, in the post-Freudian paradigm, Patterson argues, the idea that any author's intention is fully available even to himself must always be questioned (139-140). In the case of Charles Dodgson, whose notoriously buttoned-up mind suggests a case of obsessive-compulsive disorder, it cannot be asserted with any surety whether Dodgson's unconscious self was more desirous of sense or nonsense, radicalism or conservatism. Carroll's radical literary inventions may say more about his real self than any item Dodgson may have voted on. Regardless, as Patterson suggests and history confirms, the public—folk and intelligentsia alike—will do what they like with nonsense and, as this study will demonstrate, what the public does with nonsense is associate it with subversive radical causes.

It should be affirmed here that this study is not concerned with *absolute meaning* but rather with *potential meanings*. "High Diddle Diddle" is not cogent social commentary. It is nonsense. But, as this study will suggest, verses like "High Diddle Diddle" are highly suggestive by their juxtaposition of key phrases and open-ended, ambiguous quality. No particular meaning is obvious, but if one stops to consider the signifiers and the order in which they are placed, a "reading" of sorts, emerges, albeit a

personal reading. The author of a piece of nonsense need not have meant anything specific, but a reader may work with the suggestive juxtapositions and solve the "riddle".

Malcolm does admit that, to his admirers, Taylor may have represented certain republican ideals. Malcolm writes, "The most important practitioner of the [nonsense] genre, John Taylor, stood outside the privileged socio-literary circles of his day" (124). Capp refers to Taylor as an "unsophisticated layman" (121). Taylor, although something of a scholar, was working class, serving as a gondolier on the Thames, and spoke no second language. He wrote in praise of jail, hempseed and beggary, and as Malcolm notes, his poetry often contained an "inappropriate mingling of high and low" (98). Capp suggests that to artisans and tradesmen Taylor may have seemed not unlike the familiar motif of a particular traditional ballad hero—a "bluff countryman who encounters the king alone, fails to recognise him, and treats him as an equal" (193).

Malcolm's own description of nonsense is that it is "radically destabilizing" (41). While Malcolm sees this destabilisation in purely literary terms, I extend the argument and underscore its social significance and political import. He notes also that impossibilia is "a standard tool of satire, of criticism and denunciation" (81). This study will document a similar radical, subversive appeal at work in subsequent flourishings of nonsense, suggesting an unbroken folk-oriented carnivalesque aesthetic as key to the success and fame won by "Mother Goose", Lewis Carroll and Dr. Seuss and other authors enamoured of nonsense.

The Dangers of Definition

In his introduction to *The Chatto Book of Nonsense,* Hugh Haughton comments, "nonsense is a bit of a problem" (2). Haughton is alluding to the longstanding disagreement among critics concerning the definition of nonsense. In *An Anatomy of Nonsense* Wim Tigges acknowledges the same dispute when he complains that nonsense "has never been properly defined" and concludes fatalistically "to write about nonsense is like going to sea in a sieve" (2-4). While only a few genres can truly be described as fixed by their definition, nonsense appears especially difficult to define, even in general terms. Discussions that broach the topic suggest subcategories such as "literary" nonsense, "pure" nonsense and "folk" nonsense. Such distinctions can have their value. A colleague, Michael Heyman, neatly suggested to me, for example, that Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear's innovation was to mix adult literary nonsense with childish folk nonsense. Though I find this insight helpful I remind myself that definition must always come with caution flags and exceptions. The lines between adult and children's literature, for example, have always been too blurred to withstand such rigorous distinctions. Further, to suggest that adult literary nonsense and childish folk nonsense are separate is simultaneously to allow for the possibility that both originated at different times, with different strategies in tow—a contention that is disputed by the carnivalesque origins of both. In other accounts that intend to define nonsense, distinctions are drawn, and preferences expressed, between rhyming and prose nonsense, so that verse ultimately becomes the only real nonsense, while prose becomes merely a discussion of the superior, attendant verses (Sewell 20-22). Inevitably definitions of nonsense prove too exclusive. In Tigges' forty-eight-page chapter, "What Nonsense Is Not", nursery rhymes find themselves excluded from the nonsense canon; Elizabeth Sewell drops from the canon

certain poems by Lear and Carroll that finds too emotional (149); and according to many "purists" the works of Dr. Seuss would be too traditional in their narrative construction to count as nonsense.

The difficulties outlined above do not arise because nonsense is a problem, but because there is a problem with how we look at nonsense. Many who would offer definitions of nonsense, such as Sewell and Tigges, confine their discussion to its more unusual attributes, such as its topsy-turvyness and paradoxes and/or its linguistic anomalies. This sharp focus artificially reifies these attributes and defuses the potential meaning of nonsense. What is forgotten in these arguments is that a nonsense poem is rarely published as an independent piece. In its most familiar format, a piece of nonsense is one poem among many others, a part of a nursery rhyme collection, or a short passage in an extended narrative such as the Alice books. Even works of parodic literary nonsense delivered at twelfth night celebrations in the seventeenth century were presented in the context of a carnivalesque evening of raillery and irreverence. Nonsense poems, therefore, are not usually read alone. They are read in the context of a larger literary work (or heard within a larger festive setting). Academic discussions of nonsense have erroneously removed these topsy-turvy verses from this wider context in which they play a significant role in what we may confidently label more holistically as carnivalesque literature. For where there is topsy-turvyness and linguistic irreverence, one can be assured that festivity, the grotesque, gluttony, mock violence, and political invective are close at hand. If the carnivalesque allusions are not present in the topsy-turvy verse itself, they are undoubtedly lurking nearby, framing the nonsense poem and colouring its meaning.

Regardless, however, of how dangerous definition may be, as the present study occupies itself with nonsense, a brief definition must be hazarded. This can be done safely

provided nonsense is not defined as a single literary genre, but as words, phrases and texts that function in particular ways in multiple genre. Nonsense may be comprised of words, phrases or texts that revel in inversion fantasies, manifesting a topsy-turvyness that serves to reject authoritarian order. What is specifically rejected by these inversions may be natural laws or hierarchical laws of order and place. Shel Silverstein's "If the World Were Crazy" presents a typical set of such inversions:

> I'd fly through the ground and I'd skip through the air,
> I'd run down the bathtub and bathe on the stair.
> [. . . . . .]
> And the greatest of men would be silly and lazy
> So I would be king… if the world was crazy. (146)

Nonsense also often rejects commonly endorsed systems, such as linguistic and grammatical laws. Carroll's "'Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe" (Carroll 140), for example, represents the neologisms and portmanteau words that are typical to nonsense, while Lear's "We think so then, and we thought so still" (412) from "The Pelican Chorus" demonstrates a disregard for grammar conventions. Nonsense is also frequently typified by excessive randomness, the seeming disparate, chimerical construction of a piece of nonsense suggesting a wilful disregard for narrative convention and order. Samuel Foote's "The Great Panjandrum" is typical in this regard:

> So she went into the garden to cut a cabbage-leaf, to make an apple-pie; and at the same time a great she-bear, coming up the street, pops its head into the shop. "What! no soap?" So he died, and she very imprudently married the barber. (Haughton 159)

And nonsense often celebrates the impossible, positing temporal and spatial confusion. The folk rhyme "One Bright Day in the Middle of the Night" in which "two dead boys got up to fight" is typical in this regard. Often nonsense ennobles anomaly while simultaneously rejecting the expected, the orderly and the everyday. Lear's characters, for example, go to sea "in a sieve", Carroll's "aged aged man" hunts "for haddocks' eyes Among the heather bright", and in folk rhymes, cows jump over the Moon.

Nonsense and the Carnivalesque

In his book on Victorian fairy tales, Jack Zipes quips, "Magic and nonsense are not liberating forces." (Zipes 126) While Zipes' text was not intended as an exploration of nonsense, his quick dismissal of the political force implicit to nonsense is typical. Routinely nonsense is mistaken as innocent and frivolous. In some cases, as is apparently the case with Zipes, he is apparently unread on the topic. Zipes' comment, for example, suggests that he is unaware that, in important ways, nonsense and magic are diametrically opposed (more on this to come) and Zipes is apparently also not aware of, or is completely dismissing, the connection between nonsense and ostensibly subversive carnival traditions. To date, academic discussions of nonsense have afforded only cursory allusions to the carnivalesque and the fundamental kinship between the two "genres" has yet to be seriously explored. At best, allusions to the carnivalesque origins of nonsense are perfunctory, or even reluctant. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, in *The Philosophy of Nonsense*, asserts, for example,

> …a complex network of similarities of detail emerges from a comparison between the texts of carnival literature and nonsense texts—to see an ancestor of nonsense in Rabelais… is not so difficult…topsy-turvyness, eccentricity, mismatching and profanation… makes full sense in the universe of nonsense. (195)

Lecercle, however, is quick to add, "there is nothing revolutionary about the topsy-turvy world of Victorian nonsense" (195). Yet this proposed connection between nonsense and the carnivalesque cannot be dismissed so lightly. For, if we view nonsense as occurring in, and/or fostering, a carnivalesque context, and if, as the present study suggests, nonsense is also often associated with political statement, then we are very close to seeing nonsense as Mikhail Bakhtin viewed the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and his World*. Among Bakhtin's findings we discover that carnival humour "means the defeat of power,

[the defeat] of… kings, of… upper classes, [and] of all that oppresses and restricts" (92), and further, that "for thousands of years the people have used these festive comic images to express their criticism, their deep distrust of official truth, and their highest hopes and aspirations" (269).

Unfortunately Bakhtin's study fails to take into account nonsense literatures popular after the Renaissance. The connection, however, is too striking to be either minimised or ignored. Among the material Bakhtin explores, for example, are various forms of carnival speech and carnival literatures such as the medieval French *fatrasie*, the Renaissance-era *coq-à-l'âne* and the sixteenth-century *sotie*. Quoting Bakhtin's description of these topsy-turvy, bizarre works immediately draws forth comparisons to more recent nonsense literature:

> …a genre of intentionally absurd verbal compositions… that ignores all norms, even those of elementary logic… words linked by assonance or rhyme but with no meaning and no single theme… (422-3)
>
> [ideas] follow each other without any logical sequence… expressions are turned inside out… (424)
>
> …exceptional linguistic freedom. Even formal grammatical construction became extremely plastic. (471)

The above descriptions fit precisely the qualities of important nonsense poems such as "High Diddle Diddle", "The Great Pandrandrum", many of Lear's works, and Carroll's well-known, "Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe." (140) The connections between nonsense and carnival go even beyond these similarities. Bakhtin, for example, cites examples of carnivalesque speech that are populated by made up words (203-4; 206; 263), double entendres (225), and riddles (233; 238), and that exhibit a peculiar obsession with large, precise numbers (150; 190; 221)—all qualities typical of nonsense. According to Bakhtin, carnivalesque speech is recognizable by its strong element of play (7; 231-5), its seeming ambivalence (11-12; 16; 101; 260), its use

of exaggeration (19), and Bakhtin notes further that the carnivalesque was a genre that revelled in the idea of madness (260-61).

Bakhtin asks, "What is the artistic and ideological meaning of this genre?" and explains,

> First of all it is a game of words… It is as if words had been released from the shackles of sense, to enjoy a play period of complete freedom and establish unusual relationships among themselves… (423)
>
> In a period of the radical breaking up of the world's hierarchical picture and the building of a new concept, leading to a revision of all old words, objects, and ideas, the *coq-à-l'âne* acquired an essential meaning; it was the form which granted momentary liberation from all logical links—a form of free recreation. It was, so to speak, the carnivalization of speech, which freed it from the gloomy seriousness of official philosophy. (426)

Like Lecercle, other critics of nonsense literature briefly allude to the carnivalesque; such critics include Vivian Noakes in her introduction to *Edward Lear: The Complete Verse and Other Nonsense* (xxiv), Peter Levy in his biography, *Edward Lear* (53), Haughton in his introduction to *The Chatto Book of Nonsense* (9), John Reider in "Edward Lear's Limericks: The Function of Children's Nonsense Poetry" (47) and Malcolm in *The Origins of English Nonsense* (117-18). Like Lecercle, however, none of these critics believes that the carnivalesque is anything more than a possible distant, ideologically insignificant origin for nonsense. Levy admits that Lear was at times "blatantly derivative" of mummers' plays but does not go on to explore how this association affected the political content of Lear's work (53). And while Haughton remains mute on the political connection to carnival, the other critics flatly deny that the subversive qualities of carnival have remained active in post-Renaissance nonsense literature.[4] Noakes, for example, explores Lear's relation to carnival traditions in greater depth, but denies any political significance to this connection. Noakes details antique Carnivalesque traditions from which nonsense literature emerged, mentioning the Roman

feast of Saturnalia, the Feast of Fools, Boy Bishops and Court Jesters. She suggests that Lear "was drawing, almost certainly unconsciously, on this age-old heritage" (Introduction xxiv). But by the Victorian era, Noakes claims, the ancient and medieval political heritage of nonsense had been lost. Noakes sees in Lear, instead, a mixture of "merriment and sad-futility" (ibid) and believes that Lear merely "offered his readers an escape from the world of anxiety into one of safety and imagination" (Introduction xxvi). Reider notes that the engagement with social convention found in Lear's limericks "resembles the highly charged mode of festivity that, according to Mikhail Bakhtin's classic book on Rabelais, was ritualised in medieval carnival" (50), but then goes on to claim that "there is also a crucial difference between the spirit of carnival and Lear's nonsense"; that difference being that carnival traditions directly addressed church and state while Lear's verses were aimed in "less official" directions (51). In a similar vein, Lecercle asserts that "there is... nothing revolutionary about the topsy-turvy world of Victorian nonsense, and no attempt at sacrilege" (195). In fact, according to Bakhtin's study, the political importance of carnival literatures is not dependent on the material being directly addressed against church and state—as Bakhtin's coverage of the above mentioned *coq-à-l'âne*, *fatrasie*, and *sotie* verse forms (and other examples of randomly absurd texts) suggests. As quoted above, Bakhtin held that "it was the form [and not overt attacks on church and state] which granted momentary liberation." Therefore, according to the scope of Bakhtin's study, even if this claimed difference between Lear's limerick's and carnival traditions exists in a limited way, it is hardly "crucial".

Further, as the case study offered in Chapter Three will establish, the claim that Victorian nonsense was free of religious travesty is incorrect. Carroll himself did not escape this very charge. A letter published in the *St. James Gazette* in 1890 suggests that Carroll's "Tis the Voice of the Lobster" from *Alice in Wonderland* was a parody of "Tis

the Voice of the Sluggard" (Solomon 2:12 - Book of Psalms), a charge Carroll did not deny (Gardner, *Alice* 111). Lear, who drew a comical image of himself as the Archbishop of Canterbury (452), was vehemently critical of the Church of England in his correspondence (see Noakes, *Wanderer* 302), and his nonsensical text, "Ribands and Pigs" undermines religious authority by juxtaposing items associated with religion with mundane and everyday objects; "Mitres & beams" are paired with "Thimbles & creams" (139) and tea urns are juxtaposed with church pews (145). This study, in fact, will demonstrate that all the qualities Bakhtin ascribed to carnival traditions are alive and well in nonsense literature. Each case study offered in this thesis will systematically explore, for example, the festive atmosphere, the offices of the topsy-turvy, grotesque images of gluttony, raillery, and mad feasting, mock violence, sexual and death/rebirth imagery and political invective in the form of travesty: travesty of the aged, travesty of royalty and government officials and travesty of the church.

Comparing the qualities of carnival traditions to those of nonsense Lecercle goes so far as to claim "[since the middle ages] the contextual meaning of the same elements has radically changed" (195). Note first that Lecercle is claiming that Victorian nonsense has the "same elements" as medieval carnival, and thus he contradicts his claim (made in the same paragraph) that the Victorian material shows "no attempt at sacrilege" (195). Beyond this contradiction Lecercle does not explore his claim that "the contextual meaning of the same elements has radically changed," and leaves this assertion unexplained. Upon consideration it is highly unlikely that the meaning of texts and images that depict the "defeat of power, [the defeat] of… kings, of… upper classes, [and] of all that oppresses and restricts" could mean so much less in 1870 than they did in 1370. There does not exist a society that is not maintained, in some measure, by power,

oppression and restriction. As my case studies will demonstrate, the "same elements" are surely in place, and the "contextual meaning" remains unchanged.

The most common misconception about an author who makes conspicuous use of nonsense is that the artist's work supports, personifies or celebrates popular notions of childlike innocence. In Bobby Russell's hit song, "Little Green Apples" (1968), the narrator's wife is described as one who loves with just such an unconditional childlike innocence. She will drop whatever she is doing whenever he calls, and if he is late meeting her somewhere, she never minds. The narrator then asks, "if that's not lovin' me, then"

> God didn't make little green apples, and it don't rain in Indianapolis in the summer time. / And there's no such thing as Dr. Seuss or Disney Land and Mother Goose, no nursery rhymes... / And there's no such thing as make-believe, puppy dogs or autumn leaves...

While the logic of this song may be questioned in any number of ways, what is clear is that the songwriter equates Dr. Seuss with Disney Land, puppy dogs and make-believe... and the implication is that each of these things is like the narrator's wife, innocent, childlike, safe and predictable. Popular on the airwaves during the most turbulent year of the sixties, 1968, Russell's lyrics are burdened by his notion of childlike innocence, and thus he sees no connection between the Yippie Party's antics at the Democratic National Convention, the city policemen implicated in The Beatles' nonsense song, "I Am the Walrus" and the rising iconic status of nonsense author, Dr. Seuss—all topics that will be explored in Chapter Four of this study, and which implicate the use of nonsense in relation to civil discord. Russell was like many others who appreciated and supported Dr. Seuss books at this time, who revelled in the fun, while underestimating their political relevance.

The problem of "seeming innocence" may haunt numerous arguments concerning authors of nonsense. Above we noted Vivian Noakes' assessment that Lear "offered his readers an escape from the world of anxiety into one of safety and imagination"

(Introduction xxvi). Similarly there is Bernard Capp's assessment of John Taylor, which posits that,

> Though [his nonsense verses] contained little of substance...
> Taylor's main contribution to the war effort... lay in boosting morale... His cheerfulness and wit were doubly welcome amidst the gloom and anxieties of civil war (152).

Despite Taylor's claim that "Nonsense is Rebellion" Capp maintains that Taylor's "preposterous rhymes" were "designed primarily to entertain" (181) and suggest that "it would be wrong to spend too much time on Taylor's political or religious arguments" (177). Significantly, the topic of nonsense literature is omitted in Capp's 196-page literary analysis of Taylor.

The mistake here is a common one: that is, to assume that what is seemingly "innocent" or simple cannot simultaneously be provocative. And while a preoccupation of the present study has been to ennoble nonsense, I admit that, like many, I am not entirely liberated of the false notions that work against my understanding. Just as the indoctrinal aspects of fairy tales, such as "happily ever after", can shame us in divorce or marital strife, so the image of the innocent child prevents us from complicating the texts ostensibly intended for a "simple" reader. The notion of childhood innocence is so ingrained in us that it is difficult to imagine *anyone* who is in every way free of its shackles.

Interestingly, it might be claimed that the false vision of the "innocent" child was historically created in part by a misunderstanding of the meaning, purpose and import of nonsense literature. The false association with children, innocence and nonsense can be examined historically in two stages, by looking first at how the notion of childhood "innocence" was constructed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and second by looking at the types of texts this "innocent" child was assumed to enjoy. John Morgenstern, in "The Rise of Children's Literature Reconsidered" works with Walter

Ong, whose works "explore the consequences of literacy on the historical construction of modes of subjectivity" (71). Morgenstern's main task in his article is to throw doubt on the popular notion that the emerging vision of the "innocent" child gave birth to the children's book industry in the eighteenth century, as one who follows Aries might claim. Instead Morgenstern argues that it was the children's book industry that gave rise to the innocent child. He writes, "It is to the nature of literacy itself that we should look for an understanding of the historical development of children's literature" (71). Morgenstern makes the point that "children's literature and adult literature for a mass audience emerged at the same time..." (71). With the spread of literacy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Morgenstern posits, there grew a larger population of adults seeking more sophisticated texts—and the novel developed to meet this need in the market.[5] Morgenstern asserts "It is the 'gap' [in complexity between adult and children's texts] that defines children's literature, [and which] makes the very term intelligible" (71). Morgenstern cites a condescending remark made in 1709 by Richard Steele, editor of *The Tatler*, which posits child readers as unsophisticated. Here Morgenstern notes, "the child is defined, at least partially, in terms of the difference in his taste in literature" (69). Morgenstern goes on to conclude that the emerging differences between adult and child literary sophistication, brought on by increased literacy, resulted in the child being culturally constructed as other and simple.

> ... I think it can be shown that at least some of the characteristics associated with the "innocent" child are simply derived from the general cultural assumption that children are pre-readers who must receive extended training in literacy. Instead of trying to understand how the "discovery" of the child in the seventeenth century gave rise to children's literature in the eighteenth century, we should investigate how the spread of literacy changed social institutions and led to the construction of the child as innocent, which is to say, as a pre-reader. Or, to put it simply, it is not the "child" that gives rise to children's literature but children's literature that gives rise to the "child" (71).

In this development children were not simply cast as "other" but specifically they were looked at, in Morgenstern's words, as "pre-literate". This new "species", if you will, required "special" texts for pre-literate people. Morgenstern sees the success of John Newbery in the eighteenth century as responsive to, and simultaneously creative of, this vision of children as pre-literate, the simplistic Newbery texts orienting themselves toward didactic aims—with literacy as their goal (64-73). But what texts does Newbery work with to, in Morgenstern's estimation, create this new species? Among Newbery's greatest successes were works filled with references to oral folklore, fairy tales, nursery rhymes and nonsense. Consider next what it might mean to be cast as pre-literate in the dawning days of the British Empire. Morgenstern asserts,

> The close connection between the history of children's literature and the history of literacy... gives us a perspective from which to explore the intimate connection of that literature and some lost, "original" oral culture (71).

For, as Rousseau would claim later in the same century, to be "pre-literate" was to be like the noble savage, to be pure and Edenic—and thus, one may assume, children were associated with texts from pre-literate societies and the children's nursery became a place filled with texts from oral traditions: folklore, fairy tales, country rhymes—and nonsense.

While children have generally not minded being associated with this material it remains true that the "natural" association between children and these "innocent" texts is a notion that is at best, forced, and, at worst, woefully colonial. In this transaction, however, an almost comical misunderstanding has occurred. While adults have generally assumed children like these texts because the texts are "dreamy" and "innocent", children, on the other hand, have liked them because they are challenging, contradictory, political, utopian, sexual, violent and eminently complex. To thrust a book of nonsense at a child and expect that child to have simply a frivolous diverting experience is to misunderstand so many things—children and nonsense literature chief among them.

If the image of the innocent child was claimed during the enlightenment, and ennobled during the romantic period, it was certainly enshrined and made holy by the Victorians. And although some cracks in this false holy image are occurring, we are, as a society, yet beholden to the Victorian cult of the child, and our ability to understand nonsense is, correspondingly, stunted. Just as we systematically underestimate the resilience, independence, rebelliousness and sexuality of children, we correspondingly underestimate the provocative qualities of nonsense. The same mistake is made whether the nonsense in question is intended for adults or for children, because the word "nonsense" carries with it a false association with childhood innocence.

Bakhtin describes a similar set of misunderstandings with regard to authors who made use of carnivalesque images and tropes. Bakhtin writes "In the second half of the eighteenth century an essential change took place in literature" (*Rabelais* 35). Bakhtin notes the scholarship of Justus Moser and Carl Friedrich Flogel, who, between the 1760s and 1780s, published several examinations of carnival tropes and the grotesque. Bakhtin complains that their work manifests a "lack of a systematic historical point of view [and has thus] cause[d] a somewhat haphazard choice of material and superficial understanding of the grotesque" (*Rabelais* 36). "Both Moser and Flogel", Bakhtin continues, "are aware only of the grotesque comic form based on the humorous principle, and this principle is conceived by them as [merely] gay and joyful" (ibid). Bakhtin posits that this lack of a holistic perspective on the carnivalesque resulted in the Romantic era in a splintering in the understanding of the carnivalesque, one vision seeing the grotesque as merely joyful and gay, and the other, an ascendant gothic vision (*Rabelais* 37), only sees the grotesque that informs the morbidity of Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Keats' "Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil", in which a severed head is planted in a pot of herbs. Critical misunderstandings of nonsense break along similar lines, scholars typically seeing nonsense as either simple,

joyful fun, or as schoolyard rhymes that revel in darkness, innuendo and violence. Bakhtin relates that the gulf in understanding the functions and purpose of the carnivalesque is yet deeper when Carroll and Lear come of age; he writes, "In the second half of the nineteenth century the interest in the grotesque was considerably reduced in literature and literary thought and study" (*Rabelais* 45).

Bakhtin's contention that without a fuller historical and holistic vision of the carnivalesque, we risk misunderstanding these literatures as merely "gay and joyful" is a view that has obvious parallels to contemporary discussions of nonsense. As Bakhtin writes of Rabelais, "It is impossible to understand him if we adopt the nonfestive posture". (*Rabelais* 276) Further, the historical loss of understanding that Bakhtin traces in scholarship, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, is suggestive, in that it was precisely at that moment, as noted above, that the children's book industry was being established and nursery rhymes were first published. Turning his attention to the emergence of the novel and toward the dialogism therein, Bakhtin missed this vital avenue of exploration. In the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries the carnivalesque spirit did not merely lay buried in the *Dialogic Imagination* of the novel, as Bakhtin might assert, but lived and breathed more vitally, albeit clandestinely, in children's texts.

Another reason some critics make light of the connection between nonsense and carnivalesque traditions may be that Bakhtin's findings are occasionally subjected to criticism. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, for example, suggest in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* that carnival was utilised, at times, not by a people in revolt, but by an authority that wished to contain seditious thinking in an officially sanctioned "safe zone" (19). Yet while this argument about containment may be wholly correct in certain circumstances, it does not in any way deny the ideological meaning of carnivalesque imagery as Bakhtin viewed it. The question remains, then, what becomes of this imagery

when it is no longer contained in an officially sanctioned zone? In an unrecognised form carnivalesque imagery may produce a subliminal and subversive effect that is more potent than its medieval, officially sanctioned ancestor. While we might imagine the participant in medieval carnival as generally recognizing the seditious qualities of carnival festivities, the child reader of nonsense, and his or her parent, for example, would be relatively more unsuspecting and, so, possibly more vulnerable to any seditious characteristics. To defend oneself against the imbibing of an ideology one must be aware that an ideology is being presented. Further, unlike carnival, children's books are widely perceived as sources of instruction; they are popularly understood as teachers of moral truths. When a children's bookshelf is arrayed with moral fairy tales and bible stories, for example, nonsense rhymes lying on the same shelf may be unreflectively assumed to be similarly "good" or positive in some way. And unlike carnival, which was cordoned off to specific weeks in the year, children's literature enjoys a year-round, in many cases, daily interaction with its audience. Add to this the fact that Mother Goose rhymes and the works of Lewis Carroll and Dr. Seuss (three of the ultimate foci of this dissertation) are widely recognised as the some of the most popular and influential texts for children and the potential for their works to effect ideological views is raised all the higher. Rather than looking at dialogism in Dostoyevsky or Pushkin for his evidence,[6] Bakhtin might have found Mother Goose texts a more provocative avenue of exploration.

To ignore the connection between nonsense and the carnivalesque is to ignore a whole set of ancient, medieval and modern studies that seek to show that a combination of the ridiculous and the grotesque is the ideal recipe by which to effect a process of social formation. This proposition is first formally defended by Lucian in various of his essays, dialogues and satires;[7] it is later endorsed by Erasmus in 1511 in *Praise of Folly* [8], reaffirmed by Rabelais' texts in 1532 (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 284-5), then by Lord Shaftesbury

in 1709 in *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour,* and it is exhaustively theorised by Bakhtin throughout *Rabelais and His* World in 1936. We will examine a microcosm of this "process of social formation" in Chapter Two when we explore what David Shields terms the "ridiculous" clubs of colonial America. The allusions to carnival and the lower body, which run throughout the absurd proceedings of The Tuesday Club of Annapolis Maryland and other colonial "ridiculous" clubs, clearly demonstrate that convivial fraternity is nurtured in just such a blending of nonsense and the grotesque, and that liberty of speech is its natural result.

Historical Trend

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin suggests that a characteristic historical situation is required before a flourishing of carnivalesque imagery occurs. Bakhtin describes these historical situations as "moments of crisis, of breaking points in… the life of society and man" (9) and cites as examples the convergence of the Greek, Oscan and Latin cultures of late antiquity (31; 472), the cultural upheavals of both Ivan the Terrible's and Peter the Great's Russia (218; 270-71), the Renaissance generally and the French Revolution (119).

The history of nonsense literature conspicuously aligns itself with Bakhtin's theory, its flourishings occurring at key crisis moments in society. We noted earlier that it was leading up to and during the agitations surrounding the English Civil War that nonsense first flourished in England. Similarly The American Revolution witnessed an increased interest in nonsense, as evidenced by the popularity of songs such as "Yankee Doodle" and reinterpreted versions of "The World Turned Upside Down", and by the club and society activities alluded to above. American authors such as Benjamin Franklin and

Francis Hopkinson revelled in the production of humorous absurd literary "bagatelles". By the 1780s, rebel American publisher Isaiah Thomas enjoyed unprecedented success with the release of Newbery's nursery rhyme books in America, culminating in the cultural attachment, via patriotic association, with an alleged "Goose" family in Boston. Meanwhile in France, according to Bakhtin, "At the time of the French Revolution Rabelais enjoyed a tremendous prestige in the eyes of its leaders. He was made out to be a prophet of the revolution." (119)

The Revolutions of 1848 were marked not only by student protests across Europe, but also by the unprecedented success of Lear's *Book of Nonsense* (1846). With a cursory glance Lear's text would appear frivolous and without relevance to the European revolutions. Yet the *Book of Nonsense,* in which all that is "old" is soundly mocked, and all that is "young" is lauded, and the book's violence, randomness and European geographic scope, may have offered a subtle mirror to the disturbances occurring on the continent. Though the violence in Hoffmann's grotesque *Struwwelpeter* (1846) is typically more motivated than Lear's, Hoffmann's release of the text in 1846 (and in English in 1848) may have sparked a similar subtle resonance. The period is also marked by the popularity of James Halliwell's *Nursery Rhymes of England*, which went through numerous editions in the mid and late 1840s. In "How Children's Literature Changed: What Happened in the 1840s?" Dennis Butts suggests that "political reform... fuelled by public unrest" in the 1830s and 1840s led directly to both a more human approach to children's literature and also a relaxing of the impulse to dictate rigid rules, as evidenced by the success of Edward Lear's nonsense and Catherine Sinclair's mischievous *Holiday House*. (156-57)

The breakdown in consensus that occurred between 1861 and 1876, called the "bohemian" period of Victorian England by Carroll biographer Donald Thomas, bore

witness to the greatest social debates of the nineteenth century. Texts such as *Origin of the Species*, *Essays and Reviews* and *London Labour and the London Poor* sparked intense debate and scandalous heresy trials. The period was marked by civil unrest, riots, rapid legislative reforms, and ultimately a financial collapse in 1873, leading to a period of continued doubt and tension. It was during this period that *Punch* magazine dabbled conspicuously in nonsensical forms and Lear, Carroll and W. S. Gilbert produced their most enduring works of nonsense literature.

The 1930s, marked by The Great Depression and an increased public interest in communism, led, again, to civil unrest and rapid legislative reform, particularly in America. In this period we witness a flowering of American nonsense in the works of James Thurber and Ogden Nash and the early children's books of Dr. Seuss. Laura Richards and Gertrude Stein also release their nonsensical works for children at this time. Modernist authors display an increasing interest in nonsense, as evidenced by Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), itself an ode to nonsense, containing references to sixty-eight nursery rhymes, a preponderance of portmanteau words and borrowing its thematic structure from "Humpty Dumpty". T. S. Eliot's only children's book, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, which is distinctly Learesque, is released in the same year as *Finnegan's Wake* (1939). In music, scat singing emerges as the most distinctive quality of 1930s era jazz, while songwriter and social critic Woody Guthrie regularly mixes social comment with nonsense and reaches the zenith of his popularity in the late 1930s (Klein 58; 129; 155; 194). In art, Wassily Kandinsky's experimentation with sign and symbol resonate of nonsensical associations, as evidenced in his painting, *Successione*, (1935), a rendering of meaningless symbols across a stylised lined page.

Figure 1

In cinema, the most important comedian of the age, Groucho Marx, is, for his verbal inversions and linguistic gymnastics, frequently compared to Lewis Carroll in the press (Kanfer 136; 303).

The period ranging from the birth of the Civil Rights Movement (1954) to the end of the Vietnam War (1975), a period I (and other scholars) label for convenience, "The Long 1960s", was an era of social unrest that included the Civil Rights Movement, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the sexual revolution, the age of Vietnam War protests, the Spring of Prague and the Watergate scandal. This era is not only marked by acute political and social revolution on multiple fronts, but also bore witness to one of the greatest flowerings of nonsense in multiple media. It was in this period that Dr. Seuss achieved his greatest fame in the United States. Other children's book authors, such as Spike Milligan, Shel Silverstein, Maurice Sendak,[9] John Ciardi, Edward Gorey and Lewy Olfson demonstrated an abundant interest in nonsense in their works at this time as well. In popular music Alice resurfaced in anti-establishment anthems such as Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant"[10] and in the imagery of The Beatles. In the United States television programs that revelled in the absurd were among the most popular of the decade, including *The*

Monkees, *The Smothers Brothers*, *Laugh In*, *Sesame Street* and *The Banana Splits*. In late 1950s Britain the absurd BBC radio program *The Goon Show* reached the height of its fame, and the program's influence spread in the following decade, influencing the films of the Beatles and BBC television programs such as *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (1968-1969) and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1975).

Correspondingly, nonsense falls out of fashion during conservative or unified periods devoid of significant social confusion. As noted above by Malcolm, the cessation of hostilities in the English Civil War heralded the end of the first flourishing of English nonsense: "the point is not that it became unreadable, but that the impetus to write it had gone" (49-50). Similarly, or perhaps because of its close proximity to rebel causes English opposition to nonsense follows quickly on the heels of the American and French Revolutions. As Alan Richardson asserts, "The 'new [English] child' of the 1780s and 1790s was to be held at a pristine distance... from the more boisterous humour of the Newbery era..." (144). Oddly enough, this trend repeats at the end of both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. According to Donald Thomas, in his *Lewis Carroll, a Portrait with Background*, this is the normal course of events:

> The last decade of the eighteenth century saw the routine hunting of indecency and blasphemy through the courts by the Proclamation Society, overtaken in the last year of the century by sponsors of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. (12)

In the 1890s, lamenting the fact that he was increasingly being criticised as immoral, Lewis Carroll looks back one hundred years to find a character with whom he could equate his critics. He finds her in the character of Mrs. Grundy, a personality to whom Carroll makes frequent references in the last two decades of the 1800s. Thomas explains:

> The frowning figure of Mrs. Grundy… This totem of moral disapproval had first appeared in Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plow* in 1798… with its constant admonition of "What will Mrs. Grundy Say?". Dodgson seemed to sense her everywhere… in the 1880s and 1890s. (11)

In the conservative 1980s and the "politically correct" 1990s, nonsense once again falls from fashion. After a conspicuous flourishing in the 1960s, nonsense nearly evaporates from cultural products after 1975. In the new moral seriousness that describes the 1980s and 90s one struggles to find an audience for nonsense. Where Carroll had cried "Mrs. Grundy!" so the modern writer of nonsense in the 1990s might cry "Victorian!"

A seeming contradiction to this thesis is the fact that the 1970s marked the beginnings of a certain renaissance in children's poetry, and that renaissance was manifested throughout the 1980s and 1990s by a certain emphasis on playfulness and nonconformity, as in the works of Michael Rosen, Adrian Mitchell and Shel Silverstein. In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, for example, John Stephens argues that poetry for children in this era might be understood via Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. (121) Yet while Stephen's observation is correct enough it remains true that nonsense was no longer the driving force in these artists in the 1980s and 1990s—and more importantly, the relative public embrace of these authors may not be described as a cultural phenomenon, as was the case for Dr. Seuss in the 1960s. This study does not claim that nonsense may not be written at any time. Rather I argue that nonsense flourishes and is made dominant, in a particular historical setting. Further, one might view the "renaissance" of poetry in the 1970s and after as importantly a result of the rebellions of the 1960s. Rosen's and Silverstein's most influential and popular works, for example, which are most clearly beholden to nonsense traditions (Rosen's *Mind Your Own Business* and Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends*), were both published in 1974, which is within the period of social upheaval described as the "Long 1960s", a period demarked above as ending in 1975. In Silverstein's case, most of the poems in *Sidewalk* were actually first published in magazines and anthologies in the 1960s.

It is necessary to be more specific about what historical situation sparks a flourishing of nonsense literature. To note the moral seriousness in the 1980s and 1990s is to slightly misdirect the challenge posed to nonsense in this time. The cultural relevance of nonsense in this period was more specifically challenged by the simple fact that Anglo-American society in general was relatively unified in its projects and aims. For it is not simply "war" that gives rise to an appreciation of nonsense, it is specifically *civil* war. This applies not only to the English Civil War, but also to the American Revolution, in which the English somewhat artificially divided from themselves, and to the 1960s, in which a youth culture painfully disassociated themselves from their parents "establishment" aims. It is this dynamic that explains why nonsense was culturally acceptable in the 1930s and fell out of fashion in the 1940s. Subversion from within in the 1930s—that is, Americans intrigued by the utopian promises of communism in the setting of The Great Depression—occasioned a severe societal split in the United States. By contrast, the threat posed by Japanese and German aggression in the 1940s was ultimately unifying for America. World War II was not a revolution. It was a defensive war. Spiritually speaking, World War II was not about changing the world and building a new vision, it was about regaining something that had been lost. The Allied leaders did not operate as bold radicals, but as conservative protectors who operated from a point of fear. And so the nonsensical writings of Nash, Stein, Richards and Seuss, and the linguistic shenanigans of the Marx Brothers, so appreciated in the 1930s, lose their cultural relevance in the 1940s. The waning popularity of Walt Disney films in this period further exemplifies this point. Disney's wildly inventive and absurd Goofy and Donald Duck cartoons reached their artistic zenith and height of popularity in the mid and late 1930s. By the early and mid 1940s the Disney Company was on the brink of bankruptcy, its films losing audiences and cultural relevance at a steady rate since the outbreak of the war.[11]

The historical trend posited above essentially suggests times of acute social change as the setting in which nonsense becomes culturally pertinent. Morally stifling periods, as well as the aftermath of traumatic events which cause a society to operate from a point of fear, seeking safety and stability, are not ones in which bold ideas of "change" can easily grow. Civil wars, social unrest and revolution, however, seek forward movement, from an old way to a new one. That nonsense literature should flourish conspicuously at these moments of change has a "local" origin, in that the carnivalesque festive occasions from which nonsense emerged took place at "times of change"—at the solstices and equinoxes of the seasonal year: Saturnalia (winter solstice), May Day (spring equinox), Midsummer Eve (summer solstice), and the Celtic Samhain, (autumn equinox). It is from traditions held on those holidays, and their successors such as All Souls and Christmas, that Bakhtin draws his examples (*Rabelais* 5; 79). Significantly, the examples to which Malcolm appeals when detailing the birth of English nonsense are most commonly culled from Twelfth Night festivities and other festive occasions that marked the passing of the year.[12] These moments of change—of one season giving way to another—are readily transferable to a metaphorical "season" in which one political system gives way to another. Whether it be a New Year's feast or the storming of the Bastille, nonsense is equally appropriate, the perfect texts through which to celebrate "out with the old and in with the new".

It should be noted that the pages referred to above in which Malcolm notes the holidays and festive settings within which nonsense poems were presented are the very same section in which Malcolm presents his arguments against a Bakhtinian interpretation of the carnivalesque (117-21). My reason for citing the pages noted above is to confirm the association of a festive setting, which Malcolm's examples do confirm. I defend against Malcolm's containment argument on pages 21 and 22 of this study. And Malcolm's second assertion, that carnival traditions and nonsensical parody are not

invented by the folk, but by the intelligentsia, has no bearing on the main arch of the present study. Regardless of who invented carnival traditions, the public interpretation of carnival images and the nature of their ancestral ideological import remain separate questions.

A final observation on the role of language in these times of change will complete the cataloguing of the ways in which Bakhtin's theories may be helpful in understanding nonsense literature. Linguistically speaking, Bakhtin notes that a clash of languages is a key element in the facilitation of an ideological shift of perspective, philosophy and custom. In one case Bakhtin posits the clash among Greek, Latin and Oscan languages as integral to the manifestation of a carnivalesque quality in the literature of late antiquity (*Rabelais* 472). Moving to the Renaissance Bakhtin notes the emerging importance of vernacular languages such as French, English and Italian, and suggests that their unofficial status made them the ideal vehicles through which to challenge the symbolic hierarchical stance of church and government Latin. For Bakhtin any language is philosophically and ideologically charged:

> Languages are philosophies—not abstract but concrete, social philosophies, penetrated by a system of values inseparable from living practice and class struggle. (*Rabelais* 471)

In order to see beyond one's language, and thus beyond the confines of one's cultural identity, it is necessary to step outside the normal communicative pattern. An essential historic change of language, however, need not imply that this new language be made ultimately "official", as French and Italian were destined to be. The function of the new language lay most importantly in its unofficial nature. In times of social unrest, when languages from "other" cultures are unavailable, temporary slang and nonsense languages step in. "Locally" carnivalesque festivities traditionally invoked linguistic clash via the use of carnival speech. This Bakhtin describes as "a special… style of expression… [that]

demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms…" (*Rabelais* 10). This carnivalesque language not only required new words, portmanteau words and grammatical and narrative anomalies, but was also characterised by a

> sense of gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities…the peculiar logic of "inside out" (à l'envers), of the "turnabout", of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from rear to front. (*Rabelais* 11)

Carnivalesque speech also involved an inappropriate mixture of high and low language (*Rabelais* 72; 154). Similarly, in emerging at times of civil unrest, nonsense literature—with its equal parts of traditional English and invented linguistics—presents itself as a clash of languages. Carroll's "Twas brillig and the slithy toves", Lear's portmanteau words and the invented words of Dr. Seuss offer an escape from normal communicative patterns. In historical situations that require people to step outside of themselves and see their culture from a fresh perspective, nonsense steps in and provides the linguistic and ideological launching space from which such a perspective may be envisioned.

SECTION II: BEYOND BAKHTIN: OTHER POLITICAL ASPECTS OF NONSENSE

First Last, Last First

The various incarnations of the poem "The World Turned Upside-Down" offer a paradigmatic example of an individual piece of nonsense that has over a long period preserved both its comic appeal and political edge. While I do not submit the following verses as representative of all nonsense, it may be asserted that they embody the central concerns of much nonsense literature. These verses are remarkable for the uniformity they maintain over an eight-hundred-year span. According to Malcolm, the earliest-known

nonsense poetry is found in a verse by the German Minnesinger, Reiner der Alte, who died in 1210. Malcolm's translates:

> Breastplate and crown want to be volunteer soldiers,
> Boys playing with a top think they are acting wisely,
> The boar hunts with hares, setting a poor example,
> A feeble hen flies up and catches a falcon.
> Then the cart goes in front of the oxen,
> The sack drags the donkey to the mill,
> An old nag turns into a filly:
> This is what one sees in the world turned upside-down. (Malcolm 53)[13]

The following incarnation, by John Taylor, appeared during the English Civil War in 1642:

> [. . . . . .]
> His Breeches on his shoulders do appeare,
> His doublet on his lower parts doth weare;
> His Boots and Spurs upon his Arms and Hands,
> His Gloves upon his feet (whereon he stands)
> The Church or'eturnd (a lamentable show)
> The Candlstick above, the light below,
> The Cony hunts the dogge, the Rat the Cat,
> The Horse doth whip the Cart (I pray marke that)
> The Wheelbarrow doth drive the man (oh Base)
> And Eeles and Gudgeon flie a mighty pace. (Qtd. in Malcolm 24)[14]

The following adaptation, is from Thomas Holcroft's "Fool's Song" (1784):

> When swallows lay their eggs in snow
> And geese in wheat-ears build their nests;
> When roasted crabs a-hunting go,
> And cats can laugh at gossips' jests;
> When law and conscious are akin,
> When pigs are learnt by note to speak;
> Your worship then shall stroke your chin,
> And teach an owl to whistle Greek.
> [. . . . . .]
> The World shall be merry and wise.
>
> Till then let your wisdom be dumb. (Qtd. in Haughton 167)

Lastly, the following is culled from a Shel Silverstein poem published in 1974:

[. . . . . .]

If the world was crazy, you know what I'd do?
I'd walk on the ocean and swim in my shoe,
I'd fly through the ground and I'd skip through the air,
I'd run down the bathtub and bathe on the stair.
[. . . . . .]
And the greatest of men would be silly and lazy
So I would be king… if the world was crazy. (146)

These topsy-turvy sentiments, reduced to their elementary expression in The New Testament, "Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mathew 19:30), have been a familiar literary device since antiquity. Herodotus and Ovid composed similar passages in prose. And it is in this form that nonsense has left its most durable pattern, as an expression of a threat to "natural" order and established authority. Just as the first/last trope in Christian teaching was subversive to Roman authority, so too have the various incarnations of "The World Turned Upside Down" been deemed radical and subversive. Just as "If the World Was Crazy" is emblematic of Silverstein's radical views in 1974, so too is "Fool's Song", emblematic of the radical leanings of Thomas Holcroft in 1784.

The volume in which Holcroft's verse originally appears is titled *The Noble Peasant*. Holcroft later became an associate of Thomas Paine and was tried for treason in 1794.

Political Cartoons and Nonsense Illustrations

Another vital connection between nonsense and politics is the kinship between nonsense illustrations and political cartoons. Purists of nonsense will inform you that a nonsense illustration, if canonical, will appear hastily scribbled, a few black and white lines scrawled, apparently, without much thought or care. As Emile Cammaerts contends in his *Poetry of Nonsense*, "the clumsy sketch of a child may give us a more adequate

impression of its spirit than the creation of the greatest artist" (67). Edward Lear's artwork fits neatly into this definition, as do the illustrations of Gilbert, G. K. Chesterton, James Thurber, John Lennon, Shel Silverstein and numerous other artists with an inclination for nonsense.[15] If one considers political cartooning, the same description may apply: hastily scribbled, a few black and white lines scrawled, apparently, without much thought or care. As the public is, ostensibly, more frequently confronted with political scribbles, nonsense scribbles may at first sight appear political, and therefore invite political thought.

The confusion, or close association, between nonsense illustrations and political cartooning is evident in as early as the seventeenth century. Illustrated political lampoons in that era prompted the rise of what may be referred to as a "culture of the hidden message". Nonsense poet John Taylor's political cartoon, "The Complaint of M. Tenter-hooke" (1641), is a telling example. Set against the background of the Long Parliament, Taylor complains in this image of the emerging importance of patents and monopolies. His method of expression is as wild and bizarre as his nonsense poems, the figure on the left as much a chimerical and impossible creature as it is representative of his political topic (Capp 85):

Figure 2

Similarly, during the War of Independence, American cartoonists did much to educate a growing population of literate readers in the art of code and symbol, and its relation to propaganda. This "secret language" was taught through the frequent publication of bizarre illustrations intended to suggest political meaning. These cartoons were often very elaborate, and in most cases came with a set of instructions on how to read the symbols. A case in point is *Mal Lui Veut Mal Lui Tourne* (Zall 78), an illustration printed in the American press about 1780:

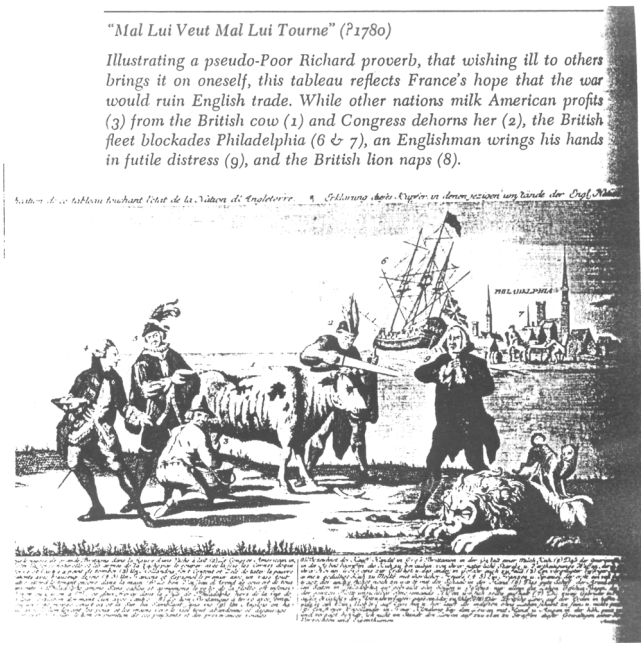

Figure 3

Pictured is a man of European descent who is wearing an Indian headdress. He holds a saw and is cutting off the horns of a cow that is being milked by three well-dressed gentlemen. There is an angry man to one side who is in the process of turning away from a sleeping lion. The lion has a monkey on his back. In the background a British ship is teetering atop a great ocean wave and the citizens of distant Philadelphia recline at ease at a table as large as a house. Without the accompanying set of "instructions" this image would be bewildering—the symbols open to any wild interpretation. Provided in small type below the illustration, however, is a key that assists in decoding the meaning.

Reviewing this key the reader learns that the illustration represents "France's hope that the war would ruin English Trade" (Zall 78). Observing the complex relationship between the mad symbols and their political meaning, one begins to understand why a nonsense poem such as "High Diddle Diddle" might naturally be examined for political interpretation by a reader of the time. To anyone familiar with propaganda cartoons from this era an illustrated version of "High Diddle Diddle" appears like a propaganda piece published without a key. To such a reader, the cat and the fiddle must represent something. And the cow jumping over the moon must symbolise some outlandish political figure. The observation is as relevant to today's political cartoons as it was to those published in colonial America. Political cartoons are a realm in which absurdity is expected, and the wild images scrawled across the editorial pages of the *London Times* may only be matched in absurdity by those featured in collections of children's nonsense.

It is also worth noting how often those artists associated with nonsense texts also earn a living as political cartoonists. Isaiah Thomas, "The American John Newbery" who published *Mother Goose's Melody* and other Newbery titles in the wake of the Revolution, was a printer and publisher of many political squibs and seditious broadsides prior to and during the rebellion. In 1772 Thomas collaborated with Paul Revere on the broadside "A Monumental Inscription on the Fifth of March", a largely inaccurate illustration of the Boston "Massacre" accompanied by a rhyming verse poem. This broadside, once distributed, did much to solidify resistance to the British in America. Two of the nineteenth century's most celebrated children's illustrators of nonsense texts, George Cruikshank and Sir John Tenniel, were both first and foremost political cartoonists. Cruikshank established his career on the popularity of political parodies based on nonsense rhymes, such as *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819) and *The Political A Apple Pie* (1820). Tenniel meanwhile was the foremost political cartoonist of his day and

was employed by *Punch* for many years. His only foray into children's illustration was for the nonsensical works of Lewis Carroll.

The association of the work of Thomas, Cruikshank and Tenniel with political cartoons, prior to the release of their work for children, may have coloured the expectations of their audiences. Just as Isaiah Thomas' popular broadside on the Boston Massacre preceded his children's books, so Cruikshank produced his popular political squibs based on "The House that Jack Built" and "A Apple Pie" prior to the release of his first sincerely rendered attempted at nursery rhymes, *Old Mother Hubbard* (1822).[16] Tenniel's public, likewise, received his work for children under the same conditions, preconditioned to assume his works were political. As Martin Gardner observes, the Victorian public were more than willing to see Tenniel's illustrations for *Alice* as part-and-parcel of his political work:

> It was widely believed in England that Tenniel's lion and unicorn, in the illustration of the scene [in *Through the Looking Glass*] were intended as caricatures of Gladstone and Disraeli… (*Alice,* 103)

Seuss, arguably the most influential author and illustrator for American children in the twentieth century and whose canon is devoted to nonsense, was employed by the United States government as a propagandist during and just after World War II (Minear), his political cartoons appearing regularly in the American Press for many years. As above, this may, in part, explain why Seuss' works were automatically interpreted politically. With Seuss, however, the issue is more transparent, as, by his own admission, many of his works for children were intended as political and social commentary.

Narrative Void and Political Allegory

Another way in which nonsense is associated with subversive politics is via interpretation of its narrative voids. Like the medieval French *fatrasie* or Renaissance era *coq-à-l'âne*, a nonsense verse can be an assembly of seemingly disconnected phrases.[17] The mind, which naturally fears the unknown, struggles to fill in the blanks suggested by such bedlamite verses. More often than not, as in Freudian dream analysis, the understanding garnered from such a "reading" expresses a repressed or subversive desire, one that conflicts in some way with authority. Bakhtin describes this phenomenon in relation to bedlamite carnivalesque texts:

> [these poems are] written in such a way that the reader is induced to look in it for allusions to some contemporary or recent political events… (*Rabelais* 424)

Interpretations of "High Diddle Diddle" are a fitting example, as "High Diddle Diddle" has the dubious honour of being one of the most interpreted poems in the canon. In their *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* Iona and Peter Opie devote half a page of small type to discounting eleven separate theories concerning the meaning of "High Diddle Diddle", the most popular of which is an elaborate allegory of high-jinks occurring in the court of Elizabeth I. The vast number of cases in which nonsense poems have been understood politically suggests that readers of nonsense assume that such verses are political, and have trouble accepting that they may not be. Nursery rhymes, in general, are the subject of countless rumours concerning the political allegories they support. Whether fact or fancy, these allegories have been an accepted feature in nursery rhymes for hundreds of years, since at least the Elizabethan age, and probably long before.[18] Nursery rhymes alleged to contain political allegories include "The Lion and the Unicorn", (as related to the amalgamation of Royal Arms between Scotland and England in the time of

James I), "Sing a Song of Sixpence" (as related to Henry VIII), "There Was an Old Woman Toss'd Up in a Blanket" (as related to James II and Henry V), "Arthur O'Bower" (in connection to Arthur's legendary Scottish campaign), "Hark! Hark! The Dogs do Bark" (in connection to William of Orange), "Bobby Shaftoe", (in connection to the Parliamentary elections of 1761), "Pibroch of Donnel Dhu" (relating to tensions resulting from the clearances of the Scottish Highlands), and "Hey Ding a Ding I Heard a Bird Sing" (in connection to Charles II).[19] The Opies contend, in fact, that the facility with which politics may be applied to a nonsense poem can directly affect its popularity. Concerning "Old Mother Hubbard", for example, they remark, "the public believed it to be a political squib, and this may, in part, account for it having so immediate a success" (*Dictionary* 377).

Politically the use of narrative voids is also attractive metaphorically for its capacity to engender active, rather than passive, reading. As suggested by much reader response theory, such as that proposed by Wolfgang Iser in *The Act of Reading*, narrative voids are aggressively inclusive; that is, the reader is incited to reach beyond the passive act of reading (or listening) and to produce creatively with the text. Ultimately, then, narrative voids inspire a certain personal responsibility for meaning. At times when nonsense literature is flourishing and popular, the narrative gaps so common to such works can serve as a subtle tutorial that emphasises the superiority of the active over the passive citizen. If obvious, direct and authoritative tales laden with clear meaning—that is, texts that ideally seek a passive reader—are out of fashion, and texts characterised by obscurity and ill-defined purpose—that is, texts that require active interpretation— are in fashion, then the popularity of the one over the other may subtly recommend an ideal. A citizen who wants to be involved in determining what his country "means" is a citizen who sees logical gaps in his government or society and actively seeks to fill them.

Further, it is the logical gaps in government and society that citizens most readily fill with political meaning and import.

Nonsense as a Legislative Language

The adult perception that nonsense is political might also be based on childhood experience. In the Opies' *Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* we can observe that nonsense fosters an early "political" awareness in that children use nonsensical humour to mock, in the Opies' words, "the absurdity of the adult world" (*Lore* 18). The Opies also comment that nonsense among school children operates as a convivial language that equalises and binds the members of a community. The arbitrary legislative apparatus governing schoolyard jump-rope protocols is a fitting example. As the Opies note, moving from one schoolyard to another—from one hierarchy to another—can be mind-boggling for the jump-roper:

> When the rope is turning away from the nobby-ender it is lupey-dyke. When the nobby-ender is out he takes the laggy-ender's place and the laggy-ender takes the foggy-ender's place so that the foggy-ender becomes the nobby-ender. (*Lore* 15)

Operating as a legislative language, nonsense phrases are also used among children to regulate power structures in their games and society. The Opies report, for example, a vast repertoire of nonsensical legislative terms. Oral contracts are guaranteed by phrases that begin with "Ring a ring a pinky" and "Pinky, Pinky, bow bell" (*Lore* 130-31). The permanence of the exchange of goods and swapping is assured by phrases starting with "Tick Tack", "Chiff-chaff" and "Chick, chock, chino" (*Lore* 133). Possession of an item is procured absolutely by a phrase commencing "Iddy iddy onker" (*Lore* 138). Civic duty, in the form of self-sacrifice, is made sacred by the count-out rhyme "Eennie Meenie Minie Moe" (*Dictionary* 156). Truce terms include "Olly-olly-ee", "blobs", "Bloosey",

"croggies", and "squoggies" (*Lore* 150; 153). And in an effort to determine the truthfulness of a fact, the most absurd rituals are invoked. In one case veracity is determined by the ability to say the word cheese ten times in a row without laughing (*Lore* 127-28).

Katharine Briggs, in *Folklore of the Cotswolds*, describes an adult language of protest that is derivative of this childhood lore. Briggs describes the form of protest known as "rough music", a popular method of demonstrating disapproval that employed nonsense phrases and nursery rhymes when enacted by a citizenry (130). Also known as Riding the Stang, or by its French equivalent, *charivari*, rough-music was used on both sides of the Atlantic for at least several hundred years. When a wife-beater was identified in a Cotswold village, for example, the inhabitants would rise up and produce a mad cacophony. There would be a demonstration in the form of a "procession, with rhymes, songs and lampoons accompanied by every noise that could be made with pots, kettles, pans and rattles" (115). Briggs sites the chorus of one of these protest rhymes from South Stoke:

> Holler boys, holler boys,
> Make the bells ring.
> Holler boys, holler boys,
> God Save the King. (116)

This chorus, though not strictly nonsensical, is frivolous and echoes a child's nursery rhyme. More overtly nonsensical verses were common in these protests as well. As E. P. Thompson notes, "nominy" verses of rough music were often "attenuated to a few scraps of doggerel" (469):

> Here we cum, wiv a ran a dan dan;
> It's neither fo' mah cause nor the cause
> That ah ride this stang (473)

Or

> Ran, tan tan!
> The sign of the old kettle, and the old tin pan (512)

Accompanied by mad "music", this particular form of demonstration appears grounded in the ritual belief that by enacting youthful absurdity justice may be achieved. According to Briggs, the parties against whom these raving demonstrations were directed soon admitted their guilt, or left the village.

There are also images of traditional carnivalesque clowns endowed with civic responsibility and embroiled in election intrigues. Briggs details the position of responsibility bequeathed upon the fool among Morris dancers in the Cotswolds. There the fool was armed with a stick that he flourished to "keep the crowd back" and "conduct matters generally" (*Cotswolds* 130). In this personage we meet a cousin to the Master of Ceremonies, the joking figure whose humour is traditionally matched by his ability to "control" his audience. A darker traditional clown image is embodied in the Man in the Moon. The phrase, Man in the Moon, as we have seen, was associated with political intrigue since the English Civil War, when the phrase was used in connection with an influential political pamphleteer. The phrase, ubiquitous in nonsense literature, is also associated with a traditional clown popular in nineteenth-century Britain. This Man in the Moon was the mysterious figure with whom election bribes were negotiated (Opie, *Dictionary* 346). One contemporary review of *Wonderland,* published in *John Bull* 20 January 1866, refers to this figure and suggests that an allusion to him lurks in Carroll's tale:

> We do not know but that there is a cunning covert allusion in [the March Hare] to the famous Oxford man in the moon, and the increased payment for his hats at the time of a city election. (Kelly 279)

Given its connection to children's lore, folk protest rhyme and traditional clowning—and connected via concepts of control and legislation—it shouldn't be

surprising to find nonsense invoked in both low and high government. From the frivolous choruses attendant to "rough music" it is a short distance for nursery rhymes to travel to find themselves embroiled in the local election process, as was for example the case for "Tommy Kept a Chandler's Shop", which was used in the Carlton elections in Nottingham in 1898 (Opie, *Dictionary* 495). The verse "Bobby Shaftoe" arose from the parliamentary election campaigns of 1761 (Opie, *Dictionary* 104). During the English slavery debates in 1833, "What Care I How Black I Be?" was used in Parliament to lampoon Zachary Macauley (Opie, *Dictionary* 100). "I Do Not like thee, Dr. Fell" was quoted in the House of Commons, as reported in Carlyle's *Parliaments* in 1850 (Opie, *Dictionary* 198). In the 1940s the Chancellor of the Exchequer was compared to "Little Jack Horner", and Churchill's fall from power was marked by a recitation of "Humpty Dumpty" (Opie, *Dictionary* 43). The Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, invoked "Old Mother Hubbard" in an election speech in 1950 (Opie, *Dictionary* 380).

It should also be noted that nonsense rhymes have inspired numerous overt political parodies appearing in books, newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides and popular songs from the fourteenth century forward. The Opies note that the verse "My Father He Died but I Can't Tell You How" was taken up and politicised during the reign of Richard II, where it was sung as "Jack Straw and his Blazey-Boys" (Opie, *Dictionary* 194). And then there is the connection between Henry V and "The Old Woman Tost Up in a Blanket", which was posited in the introduction to eighteenth-century prints of *Mother Goose's Melody* (*MGM* vii). The Opies describe parodic nursery rhymes associated with nearly every major political conflict since the Rebellion of 1745, including the American War of Independence, Napoleon's planned invasion of England in 1804, and the 1818 reform scandals that inspired *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819), Cruikshank's political squib, which saw no less than fifty-four editions (Opie, *Dictionary* 272). As

Chapter Three will explore in more detail, in the late nineteenth century, Carroll's work becomes the preferred set of texts upon which to base political parody. Between 1865 and 1914 politically motivated Alice parodies appeared regularly in the English press. John Tenniel himself created a number of these cartoons. Tenniel's final contribution to the genre was "Alice in Bumbleland", a cartoon published in *Punch* that mocked the complexity of the London Government Act of 1899. Here Alice represents the conservative politician Arthur James Balfour, author of the Act, the Gryphon represents London, which was to be divided by the Act into 28 boroughs, and the weeping Mock Turtle is the cry of Westminster, which was threatened with being divided into two boroughs, (Figure 29, p. 171, this study). In this cartoon Alice, by her association with a book of nonsense, represents the potential confusion and disorder the Act, it was feared, might cause. The Mock Turtle complains, "It's by far the most confusing stuff I've ever heard!" The Opies collected similar political parodies based on nonsense rhymes that carry the tradition forward through to the Cold War.

More recently the works of the American nonsense author, Dr. Seuss, have inspired further examples. Seuss' *Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now* (1972) is a bizarre, unmotivated list of methods by which an undesirable child may remove himself from the presence of an adult: "You can go on skates. You can go on Skis. You can go in a hat. But please go. Please!". Just prior to President Nixon's resignation, Seuss parodied himself, replacing the words "Marvin K. Mooney" with "Richard M. Nixon", and asked Art Buchwald to run the parody in his column in the *Washington Post*. Within nine days of the appearance of Seuss' parody, Nixon went (Morgan 221). As Carroll's imagery operated in England in the later part of the nineteenth century, so Seuss' nonsense has since become a standard tool of political criticism in the United States. In 1999, during the impeachment process of Bill Clinton, Signe Wilkinson published an illustration in *The*

New York Times that visually compared Clinton to Seuss' juggling Cat in the Hat (Nel 185). More recently, the November 2004 issue of *Mad Magazine* compared "The Strange Similarities Between George W. Bush and Dr. Seuss", offering parodies of Bush's politics based on eight separate Dr. Seuss stories (Devlin 39-42). For at least seven hundred years then, from the fourteenth century to the twenty-first, nonsense texts have been routinely employed as a political tool, a language of criticism directed at those leaders and politicians accused of abusing their power.

The Incommensurable and Political Acts of Nonsense

In certain cases nonsense may be used to assert a sense of otherness during a political protest. One reason nonsense is attractive to radicals is that the political "act of nonsense" may help the rebel cause appear incommensurable with the system of the old guard. An "act of nonsense" can destabilise any possible criticism that the rebel faction may encounter. The old guard has no established lines of defence against "nonsense", and with it, or *about* it, he cannot even converse. As Emile Cammaerts asserts, nonsense works are unique in world literature in that they are "The only literary productions which are entirely impervious to parody… You can not make fun of nonsense" (14-15). This observation explains some of the usefulness and power of nonsense when it is utilised during a conflict. As Chapter Two will detail, the participants of The Boston Tea Party spoke nonsense amongst themselves during the protest. As Wesley Griswold contends, the festival atmosphere which preceded The Tea Party involved multiple requests to "fetch more punch", which inspired the participants of The Tea Party [who were disguised as Native Americans] "to try to talk like Indians as well" (Griswold 97). Here an inexplicable behaviour—the unintelligible language—helps separate the rebels from the

establishment and asserts a sense of otherness. A similar strategy will be used to unpack two of the more unique protests staged in the 1960s, John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Bed Ins", held successively in Amsterdam and Montreal hotels in the spring of 1969. The events, which Lennon and Ono claimed were protests against the war in Vietnam, featured news coverage of the couple in their hotel beds, wearing their pyjamas, sipping tea, amid cut-outs and posters that read "Bed Peace", or the pun, "Hair Peace". The event was inexplicable to the political analysts who viewed the images. Lennon explains the power of ambiguity in political action:

> If you wanna really change the [world] do it subtly in a way the establishment can't attack, i.e.; Theatre in Court [a reference to Abbie Hoffman] and/or bed events... things the establishment don't understand, therefore they can't kill it. ("Interview")

The point, for Lennon and Ono, was to operate outside of normal experience, to thrust nonsense at the viewer in the hope of moving the viewer beyond his or her own normal expectations. It was a strategy of disorientation.

The rebel who engages in an "act of nonsense" is unknowable. Like a child who answers ,"Z" to the question, "Why?" nonsense transcends the established dialogical forms and, by stepping outside of the normal communicative patterns, calls for the establishment of a new set of norms. In this respect, the political role of nonsense is strongly reminiscent of the role that scientific anomalies play, according to Thomas Kuhn, in bringing about scientific revolutions (Kuhn 52). That is, nonsense shifts the reader's focus onto the limits of the established political paradigm, forcing one to stand outside these boundaries, occupying a new paradigm within which the anomaly can be absorbed into normalcy. In so doing, nonsense participates in the genesis of a new political paradigm that is incommensurable with the old, rendering communication across these paradigms difficult, if not impossible.

So far we have seen nonsense and politics entangled by both the real and the imaginary. Among the readily tangible connections there is the supposition that nonsense preserves a subversive power through its association with carnivalesque imagery, what Bakhtin described as a literature of protest and renewal. Another empirically valid connection between nonsense and politics is forged in the steps through which we trace nonsense functioning as a legislative "language" from childhood, to small town politics and on to parliamentary debate and political protests that appear as "acts of nonsense". And as various of our examples suggest, there are also times when nonsense deliberately meddles in politics, in political parody or in rhymes intended to be allegorical.

However, the connection between nonsense and politics is, in some instances, a result of public confusion of style or genre, as when the illustrations of Cruikshank and Tenniel "looked" political to the public. Finally, among the proposed connections between nonsense and politics, we note that because nonsense texts have a tendency to leave out logical connectors, nonsense is prone to engender subversive political interpretation as the mind fills in the "blank space" with an invented anti-authoritarian narrative.

SECTION III: SUPERSTITION, MYTH AND MAGIC

Saying "No" to Magic

What is yet required to establish the relation of nonsense to power and politics is a further investigation of the realm of the "imaginary". Elizabeth Sewell contends that nonsense (like the carnivalesque) says "no" to any type of magic or mysticism (171-72). Her observation is correct on one level. There are countless occurrences in nonsense

literature where mythological/magical beliefs are lampooned, discredited and brought down to earth. In Ann and Jane Taylor's original "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star", the star manifests a guardian angel-esque quality as it benignly and mysteriously watches over a child and travellers in the dark:

> In the dark blue sky you keep,
> And often thro' my curtains peep,
> For you never shut your eye… (Opie, *Children's Verse*, 122)

Consider next Lewis Carroll's parody of this poem:

> Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!
> How I wonder what you're at!
> Up above the world you fly,
> Like a tea-tray in the sky. (72)

Carroll's parody rejects the subtle mysticism of the original and switches the allusion from its guardian angel-esque quality to something entirely more concrete and everyday, a tea tray, an object that when launched in the sky will fly unpredictably and will come crashing down quickly. Carroll's parody thus rejects the permanence and reliability of the Taylors' benevolent and ever-watchful star. This is what Sewell describes as nonsense's preoccupation with the "concrete and fastidious" (quoting Lear) and this concern is often used to point out the difference between fantasy and nonsense. Sewell is neither incorrect nor overstating the fact. This trope is found everywhere in nonsense. Silverstein revels in verses that bring the mythological down to earth, perhaps most succinctly in the poem, "Magic":

> Sandra's seen a leprechaun,
> Eddie touched a troll,
> Laurie danced with witches once,
> Charlie found some goblins' gold.
> Donald heard a mermaid sing,
> Suzy spied an elf,
> But all the magic I have known
> I've had to make myself. (11)

This deflation of mysticism is perhaps a descendant of the medieval travesty, in which sacred prayers and religious rights were desecrated at carnival time by parodies of prayers and liturgies such as The Liturgy of the Ass, Cyprian's Supper or The Money Gospel (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 85). Such travesty has a direct descendant in children's lore, as the Opies observe in their chapter on "parody and impropriety" in *The Lore and Language of School Children*. They record, for example, the following parody of the Christmas hymn, "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night":

> While shepherds washed their socks by night
> All seated round the tub,
> A bar of Sunlight soap came down
> And they began to scrub. (88)

Authority-figures whose power is sanctified by quasi-mythological belief systems—systems involving, for example, the belief that a person with royal lineage is endowed with certain rights beyond those of the common man—may suffer a loss of prestige due to a proliferation of verses that serve to bring their mythological power down to an everyday, common sense level. Nonsense verse is eminently suited to serve this function. Consider the following two nonsense verses, and the everyday items that serve to undermine any divine right to power:

> When good King Arthur ruled this land,
> He was a goodly king;
> He stole three pecks of barley meal
> To make a bag pudding. (Opie, *Dictionary* 63)

And from oral folklore,

> Good King Wenceslas looked out
> In his pink pyjamas.
> What d'you think he hollered out ?
> "Lovely ripe bananas!" (Opie, *Lore* 89)

Note the total absence of crowns, sceptres and shooting stars. It is rather with barley meal, bag pudding, pyjamas and bananas that these nonsense poems "ordain" mythological English Kings.

Saying "Yes" to Magic

This quality of nonsense literature—its tendency to mock the mythological or supernatural—is, however, slightly misunderstood. Nonsense is only outwardly opposed to the mythological. Inwardly, it harbours a world of superstitious tradition. And to fully comprehend how authoritarian rule is subverted by nonsense it is important to understand how this other-worldliness is manifested.

The feasts from which much nonsense traces its origins—carnivalesque celebrations and ritual fairs—were occasions peopled by gypsies and mystics. Divination rituals and fortune telling were no less important than the misrule and clowning of these festivities. The concept of fortune itself, particularly as divined through a wheel of fortune, has a particular resonance to nonsense, because chance is so emphasised, order played with, and because of the open-ended possibilities a fortune may foretell. Perhaps as a result of this proximity "nonsense tales", as Katherine Briggs notes, "have a notion of magical efficacy behind them" (*British* 63). The Opies point out numerous nonsense verses that are assuredly allied with spells, charms and divination rituals, such as "Can You Make Me a Cambric Shirt", "Jack be Nimble", and "Tinker Tailor, Soldier Sailor". Other verses may contain relics of Celtic rituals, such as "Jack and Jill" and "Robin to Bobbin". One less familiar nonsense rhyme that runs "I have four sisters beyond the sea, Perrie, Merrie, Dixie, Dominie…" is speculated to be a corruption of a Latin exorcism.[20]

The connection of nonsense to the occult, though not as recognised today, would have been more obvious in the eighteenth century. Consider "The Sow Came In With the Saddle" from *Mother Goose's Melody*:

> The sow came in with the saddle,
> The little Pig rock'd the cradle,
> The dish jump'd up on the table
> To see the pot wash the ladle.
> The spit that stood behind the door
> Threw the pudding-stick on the floor.
> Odsplut! said the gridiron,
> Can't you agree ?
> I'm the Head Constable,
> Bring them to me. (*MGM* 63)

"The Sow Came In With the Saddle" is taken from the mummers' tradition. In the Snowshill mummers' play the part spoken by Beelzebub, the Prince of Darkness himself, runs very close to "The Sow Came In With the Saddle" (Briggs, *Cotswold*s 34). But what would the voice of the devil, even a comic devil, be doing in a Mother Goose collection? The answer, surprisingly enough, is that the Devil and his "servants" are intimately involved in nursery rhymes in a number of ways.

The association between nonsense, witchcraft and devil worship is explicit and readily documented. In the 1640s we discover that nonsense poet John Taylor published "several pamphlets written in the form of proclamations by the Devil" (Malcolm, *Origins* 23). In 1685, James Sinclair makes the connection between nonsense and witchcraft clear when he mentions a witch who was "much addicted to nonsense rhymes" (Opie, *Dictionary* 358). The Opies also note that Sinclair, in association with his brother George, assert that certain innocent sounding rhymes were, in fact, charms intended to summon the help of dark forces. *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* (by George Sinclair) warns that rhymes such as "Come Butter, Come," and "Mathew, Mark, Luke and John" were conjuring spells of pagan fairy worship (Opie, *Dictionary* 125; 359). Briggs records that

there was in the nineteenth century a witch from Burford, Oxfordshire, who would recite the nonsensical phrase, "Ting Ting Ting Ting-*Tang* Ting", in an effort to call forth evil spirits (*Cotswolds* 136). And while Lewis Carroll prints the first verse of Jabberwocky in reverse, we learn that backwards language was a key tool by which dark forces were said to be summoned. Witches, we are informed, would recite prayers backwards, sometimes in Latin, to call forth the Devil, and this is perhaps why some may associate Pig Latin and other slang or secret languages with the occult. Virginia Woolf referred to the secret language that she shared with her niece as "pixerina witcherina" (Warner xii).

Ingredients in a witch's potion can read very like a nonsense verse. Ben Jonson capitalised on this connection in the song of the eleventh hag in *The Masque of Queens* (1609).

> I went to the toad that lies under the wall,
> I charmed him out, and he came at my call;
> I scratched out the eyes of an owl before,
> I tore the bat's wing: what would you have more? (Opie, *Lore* 486)

Another nonsensical witches brew is recorded by the Opies in the following cafeteria rhyme:

> Hotch Scotch, bogie pie,
> Mix it up with a dead man's eye,
> Hard boiled snails, spread it thick,
> Wash it down with a cup of sick. (Opie, *Lore* 162)

Mother Goose, and a number of characters from nonsense rhymes who are closely associated with her, such as Old Mother Hubbard and Old Dame Trot, are often depicted visually in terms that are more than faintly reminiscent of the popular image of a witch. Below are two images from a chapbook (printed c. 1850) based on the English pantomime Old Mother Goose, first performed in 1806. Here Mother Goose is depicted as an old hag with a wand, capable of performing magical transformations—here turning her son Jack into Harlequin:

Figure 4

And in the following image Old Mother Goose flies away on her magic goose, much as a witch would on her broomstick. While there has been speculation regarding the origins of the Mother Goose character, thus far discussion on the topic has failed to explore (or even note) the pagan association. Considering the image below one may see a connection, however, that possibly dates back to Celtic belief in the goddess Epona who was sometimes depicted riding atop a great horned goose (MacKillop 190):

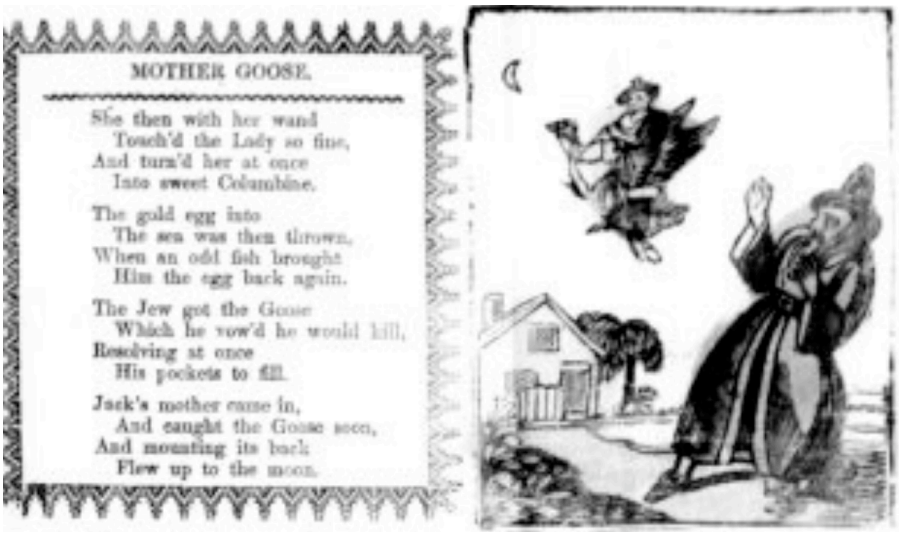

Figure 5

Lawson Wood's image of "Old Mother Goose" (1940) is derivative of the above examples:

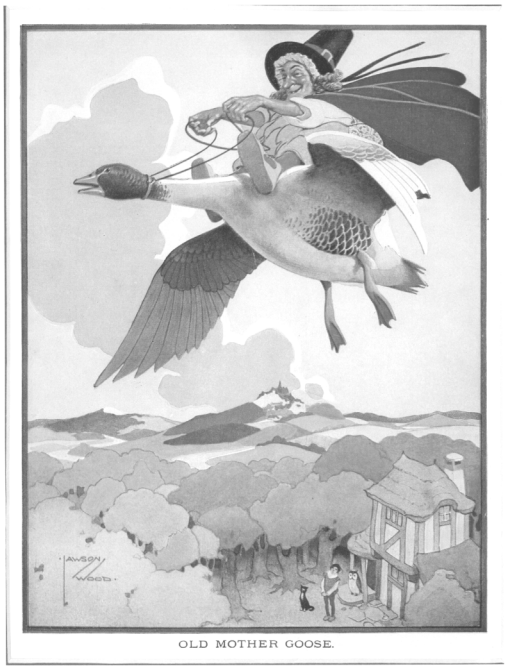

Figure 6

Here Mother Goose is depicted as quintessentially witch-like. You can almost hear her cackle, with her pointed chin and long nose, purple cape and Puritan hat. She is (apparently) taking off from an enchanted cottage in the middle of a dark wood, where she has left a (mostly) black cat and an owl by the door. Another image, of Old Mother Hubbard, dates from (1840) and is equally startling for her witch-like features and costume:

Figure 7

Stéphane Mallarmé assumed, perhaps not unfairly, that the "Old Woman", with her "broom", who was "Toss'd Up in a Blanket" in the nonsense poem, was probably a witch (Warner ix). And in popular culture, images that feature cats with fiddles are routinely

associated with witchcraft. In the introduction to *The Language of Your Cat*, for example, the image of a cat with a fiddle is juxtaposed with that of a witch:

Figure 8

Another connection between nonsense and the occult is observable in the animation of inanimate objects. We see this in "The Sow Came in With a Saddle" and in "High Diddle Diddle", as the dish runs away with the spoon, in Lear's "Table and the Chair", who "went out to take the air" (278), in the characters in Lewis Carroll's stories depicted as playing cards and chess pieces, and in separate stories by Seuss (*Sneeches* 45) and Silverstein (126) in which they both depict pants that walk about without anybody in them. These nonsense texts never offer to explain this anomalous behaviour. We are simply left wondering. Nonsense appears to function not unlike a poltergeist that mysteriously moves inanimate objects in uncanny ways. In folklore, inanimate objects are given life by the forces of dark magic. Standing stones shift on Midsummer Eve because they are bewitched kings, witches take the form of elder trees (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 14), evil transfers itself through objects like hazel sticks and bits of wheat (Opie, *Lore* 316-17), fairies or devils work to move churches (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 161), shift whole towns (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 151) or cause inns to disappear (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 82).

As we shall explore in more detail in Chapter Three, the Alice books are rife with such superstitious allusions. Charles Dodgson was deeply fascinated with occult belief and as Martin Gardner observe, "his library contained dozens of books on the occult" (*Alice* 56). The settings of both Alice books illustrate this connection. Wonderland is underground, a popular location for fairies in English folklore (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 14). And looking glasses were traditionally the domain of spectres that appear in the glass at midnight during divination rituals (Opie, *Lore* 274). It might also be noted that Alice is playing with a black cat, a symbol of a witch, when she decides that she will enter Looking Glass Land. Also, cats that vanish and reappear at will, as the Cheshire Cat does, imply supernatural association. One of the most striking allusions to the supernatural in *Wonderland* is the white rabbit that leads Alice to Wonderland. In England, and particularly in Oxfordshire where Carroll wrote the tales, the supernatural significance of a white rabbit is well known. As Briggs notes in *Folklore of the Cotswolds*, "A white hare is nearly always a witch" (135).

In Chapter Four we will discover similar "dark forces" at work in 1960s era nonsense. Seuss and Silverstein, for example, both offer characters who are able to disconnect themselves from their shadows. While Seuss' "Poor Harry Hadow… never had a shadow" (*Did I Ever*), we read in Silverstein's "Shadow Wash" about a women who washes, and shrinks, her shadow (113). Yet again, while Seuss and Silverstein let this existential mystery lie unexplained, we find an answer in superstitious folklore. Much like vampires, who suffer a frustrating relationship with mirrors, those who cavort with the Devil may lose their shadows. In the legend, *The Laird of Pittarro,* we meet Sir James Carnegie. Carnegie was believed to have studied black arts in Padua, where he lost his shadow in a game with the Devil (Briggs, *British* 351).

The observations detailed above are bound to disappoint those who wish to see nonsense as solely "concrete and fastidious". For, in its allusions to witchcraft and the occult, nonsense may at first appear to forsake its alleged practical demeanour. Yet the attitude of nonsense towards superstition comprises two distinct responses that operate on different levels. The point of much nonsense is to debunk superstition, as nonsense parodies and travesties often do, but in these cases the debunking is explicit, as in the verses cited earlier, for example, Carroll's "tea-tray" and in children's lore, where specific sacred songs are directly parodied. The associations with the occult that we are now exploring, by contrast, occur at a second, deeper level. Nonsense invokes the supernatural to help explain impossibilia. The unspoken reason why Old Mother Hubbard's dog can play a musical instrument and rise from the dead is because Old Mother Hubbard is a witch, as suggested by the illustration of her that opens the book (Figure 7, p. 55, this study). The dog is under her spell. We might infer the same for the cat and her fiddle in relation to Old Mother Goose. The obverse interpretation is also available, that the nonsense authorises the witch's magic power.

A children's picture book version of *The World Turned Upside-Down* will assist us in establishing this pattern more firmly. J. Kendrew published this undated chapbook sometime just prior to 1805. The cover features a man wearing a turban riding a goose. The first illustration with text features a man upside-down, his body in the shape of a globe. Nearby is an upside-down castle with an upside-down banner flying below it. The introductory verse reads,

> Here you may see what's very rare,
> The world turn'd upside down;
> A tree and castle in the air,
> A man walk on his crown

Page two depicts a hare chasing a dog:

This hare hunts the dog,
Tho' all of you know,
Most dogs hunt the hare –
But here it's not so.

On page three is an illustration of a witch hugging the Devil:

Is your name Nick, sir,
Or Old Harry,
I insist you tell before
We marry.

Figure 9

What follows next are fourteen nonsensical illustrations and verses depicting animals acting like humans and other reversals of natural order, such as a goose roasting a man, a lamb pursuing a bear and a dear pursuing a hunter. Yet this is all "natural" enough, given the first three pages. The man riding the goose on the cover is wearing a turban, an indication that he maintains exotic or "pagan" ritual beliefs and is likely a mystic of some kind. After the introduction, the first verse of the story involves the pursuit of a dog by a hare. Hares, as noted above, are nearly always endowed with supernatural significance in British folklore, and most usually represent witches. Another well-established custom is for the Devil to appear in the form of a (usually black) dog (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 145). We might ignore the coincidence of the coupling of these two common tropes were it not for

the following page, in which we see the Devil and the witch (the same two supernatural beings suggested by the animal iconography) embrace one another and "marry". Now that the unholy act has been consummated, anything is possible, and the world's natural order is dramatically reconfigured. The book also contains direct political comment. The cover, featuring the inverted castle and pennant, suggests that kings and kingdoms may be "over-turned".

The supernatural in nonsense, then, does more than mock; it shows a way. For the supernatural in nonsense subtly suggests to those who believe in another plane of existence (that is, a great many people) that the impossible can be achieved. Subconsciously (because the verbal and symbolic clues lurk below the surface) the reader of nonsense learns that what is "impossible" may, in fact, be achieved, but not without the performance of taboo practices. Exactly what practices are considered "taboo" might change over time, but the message remains the same. If you want to change the world—or if you want to change the "natural" order of things—you must engage in activities and beliefs that the establishment believes to be "pagan" or "bad".

Mythic Space and Temporal Anomalies

A subversive promotion of taboo practices and superstitions is not the only technique that nonsense utilises in its attempt to lure us into a mythic space. Temporally and spatially, nonsense invokes a spiritual setting, one in which miracles can occur. Perhaps the best known of all nonsense poems is from oral folklore. The specimen appears in variations throughout much of the world. The following was collected in the United States in 1976:

> One dark day in the middle of the night,
> Two dead boys got up to fight.

> Back to back, they faced each other,
> Drew out their swords and shot each other.
> A deaf policeman heard the noise,
> Stood up and shot those two dead boys,
> And if you doubt the story's true,
> Ask the blind man, he saw it, too. (Knapps 97-8)[21]

A dark day in the middle of the night is a temporal location of which nonsense is quite fond. Like a "world turned upside-down", a "bright day in the middle of the night" is an aged trope. An early version, from the first verse of "A Messe of Nonsense", by Francis Ben, was printed in 1653.

> Upon a dark, light, gloomy, sunshine day,
> As I in August walkt to gather May,
> It was at noon neer ten a clock at night,
> The Sun being set did shine exceeding bright,
> I with mine eyes began to hear a noise,
> And turn'd my ears about to see the voice,
> [. . . . . .] (Haughton 122) [22]

A later version is from Lewis Carroll's "Walrus and the Carpenter", (1872):

> The sun was shining on the sea,
> Shining with all his might:
> [. . . . .]
> And this was odd because it was
> The middle of the night. (168)

Carolyn Wells collected a further variation in 1902:

> 'Tis midnight, and the setting sun
> Is slowly rising in the west;
> The rapid rivers slowly run,
> The frog is on his downy nest. (26)

And lastly, in Shel Silverstein's "The Flying Festoon" (1974) we learn that the flight is "leaving this evening precisely at noon" (80).

In *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories*, Diane Purkiss observes that in fairy lore, fairies often occupy an "indeterminate phase of life" (48). Fairies are "liminal borderers" who "wander between the dead and the living". In fairy lore a portal between worlds opens, and a man may become a fairy if he dies "when the

sun was sinking, when it was neither dark nor light, neither night nor day" (60). It is precisely this same magic space that nonsense invokes in the temporal anomalies quoted above. While the "magic hour" in folklore removes the border between mortals and magical creatures, the "bright day in the middle of the night" is where we may cross the border from what is known in the everyday to the miraculous otherworldly space of nonsense—where a man may die and a new being, a magical fairy, may be born. By entering this magic realm we are guaranteed to witness miracles. The blind will see, the deaf will hear, cripples will walk, and the dead will rise.

Nonsense poems regularly perform such miracles. In the 1833 *Mother Goose's Melodies* we learn, "There were two blind men went to see / Two cripples run a race" (14). In Randolph Caldecott's version of "Sing a Song of Sixpence" a wren (a bird of mythic significance in Celtic lore) reattaches the Queen's severed nose. The wise man of Thessaly not only scratches out his eyes, but also scratches them in again (Opie, *Dictionary* 480). In "There Was an Old Woman and What Do You Think?" the woman's deceased husband rises from the dead (Opie, *Dictionary* 517). In the version of "I Had a Little Nut Tree" published in 1797 there is an added couplet that runs, "I skipped over water, I danced over sea." (Opie, *Dictionary* 391)

G. K. Chesterton was the first to argue for a connection between nonsense and spirituality. He suggests that "nonsense will, in a very unexpected way, come to the aid of the spiritual view of things", and adds,

> a thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible… This simple sense of wonder… is the basis of spirituality as it is the basis of nonsense... (*Defendant* 69-70)

Occasionally nonsense is more explicit about its courtship with spirituality. The final couplet in the well-known nonsense poem "If All the World Were Paper" includes the

phrases, “If all things were eternal, / And nothing their end bringing…” (Opie, *Dictionary* 525). And the names of biblical characters are often entwined within a nonsense verse:

> I saw Esau sawing wood,
> And Esau saw I saw him;
> Though Esau saw I saw him saw
> Still Esau went on sawing. (Opie, *Lore* 13)

or

> Iggory Oggery iggery amm
> Filsy folsy filsy famm
> Heeby coby Virgin Mary,
> Sprinkle sprinkle block. (Opie, *Dictionary* 396)

Earlier I suggested that the lose narrative construction typical of nonsense allows for political allegory to be easily read into a work of nonsense. Now we have seen a different use of these same empty connectors or blank spaces. Through traditional nonsense phrases such as “One bright day in the middle of the night”, the empty space—the impossible realm implied—becomes a spiritual and mythic location. Combining these two ideas, these two ways of filling blank space—the first with political allegory, the second with spirituality—we may conjoin the phenomena and look at the blank spaces of nonsense more generally as a subversive “open door”. In the first case, nonsense leaves the door open to political suggestion, and in the second the door is open to casual glances at unofficial belief systems.

The concept that nonsense is inherently connected to the idea of an “open door” has a curious correlation in children’s Halloween traditions in Britain. Many of the mischief traditions reported by the Opies in *The Lore and Language of School Children* can be divided into two categories. The first set of mischievous behaviours is like the nonsense poem, “The World Turned Upside-Down”. Adopting the guise of a fairy, devil or a witch, the task for the child becomes one of setting about reversals of order. In All Souls Night traditions clothes are worn back to front, or inside out. Boys wear girls

clothing and girls wear boys clothing. Misrule hi-jinks include switching property, where, for example, the black horse in one barn is exchanged for the white horse in another (271-71). On Guy Fawkes Night, a holiday now irremovably linked with Halloween, house numbers are switched and backyards are turned upside-down (276).

Along with these reversals, a second set of Halloween traditions involves luring people to gaze out of windows or to open their doors. The victim inside is lured to a window by "fairy tapping" and finds himself face to face with a turnip or a pumpkin carved in the likeness of some devil. Others answer a knock at the door to find no one there. One of the more inexplicable traditions involves the systematic removal of front gates. The morning after Halloween, homeowners rise to find their front gates removed and hidden, or perhaps thrown into a river (276). If we ignore the humorous effect of these traditions, how might we read them literally? In the first two cases, the window tapping and the door knocking, the person who answers the tap or the knock is faced with a void. Either there is nothing there, which is inexplicable, or there is a glowing, floating spectral face, which is equally inexplicable. In either case this person is expected to contemplate the mysterious world beyond normal experience. Meanwhile, the removal of gates may be understood as a bold social comment suggesting that "gates" must always be left "open"; open, that is, to anything. And, so, on Halloween night the entire universe of nonsense is animated in one mischievous evening, complete with superstition, reversals and an insistence on keeping doors "open".

Remaining "open" and embracing reversal is, politically, a deeply significant attitude. During times of civil unrest this cultic undertone of openness and reversal, so common in nonsense, at once allies itself with a radical cause while at the same time destabilizing any possible criticism that it may encounter from the old guard.

Spiritual and Mythic Ascendance

The Opies relate that the nonsensical term "alligoshee", used in a marching game, eventually evolved in the schoolyard to the phrase "Adam and Eve" (*Lore* 8). We will note a similar transformation in the next chapter as we follow the character Yankee Doodle from a nonsensical country bumpkin during the American Revolution, to a trickster hero during the War of 1812, to his ultimate destiny as the mythological persona of the stolid, reserved Yankee. And following what Katherine Briggs referred to as folk memory's "curious power of retention and distortion" (*Cotswolds* 14), we will sift through the mythology of the American Mother Goose legend, tracing her nonsensical history through patriotic and supernatural associations, culminating in a new Mother Goose mythology for Boston and America. In both these cases what were first perceived as seemingly innocuous nonsensical cultural products ascend eventually to mythic significance.

In subsequent chapters we will follow this trail forward through history and will locate other similar metamorphoses. In Daresbury Church, Cheshire, near where Charles Dodgson was born, one may pray beneath the stained glass "Lewis Carroll Memorial Window". Alongside an image of Carroll kneeling with Alice the shrine also features pious images of the Dodo, the White Rabbit, the Knave, the Queen of Hearts and the Cheshire Cat and an image of Bill the Lizard, who is apparently ascending into heaven.[23] A nativity motif is offered featuring The Mad Hatter and the March Hare who stand above the Dormouse, who is emerging from a teapot. The intent is quite serious, as the Mad Hatter and the March Hare hold aloft a pious verse authored by Carroll:

We have heard
the children say
Gentle children,
whom we love
Long ago, on
Christmas Day,
Came a message
from Above. [24]

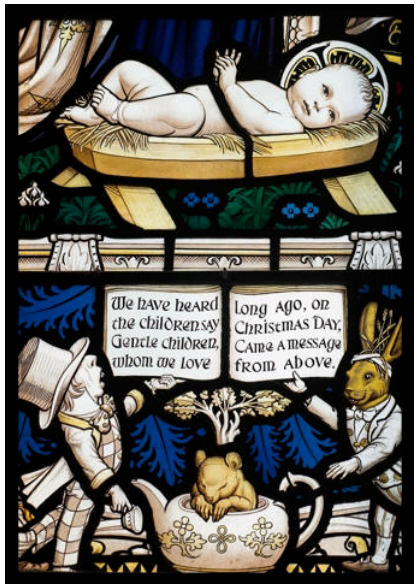

Figure 10

Along with a spiritual ascendance, Victorian nonsense ascends into patriotic and nationalistic status as well. The popular success in the 1870s of nonsense literature will, amid the early critical discussions of Carroll and Lear, imperceptibly move nonsense from a topsy-turvy Victorian fad to a literary manifestation of a new national icon, the English eccentric. Alice particularly will undergo an equally curious cultural transformation. Alice, by any account an unlikely national heroine, will become by the early twentieth century supposedly representative of England itself. Yet accompanying this patriotic association Alice's persona will continue to metamorphose, enriching, corrupting and complicating itself by association with psychedelic counter culture. By the late 1960s Alice will come to represent an emerging alternative spiritual experience, as well as a misgiving over colonial practice.

While it is early to discover the destiny of Dr. Seuss' posthumous public persona, we will note that in the 1960s his was an iconic figure that was vaguely understood then to represent innocence and mirth. By the 1970s, however, he was understood as a wily subversive by many. Today, however, there is a struggle to appropriate Seuss' image, as radical and conservative parties vie for its ownership. While Seuss' texts espouse the

views of a subversive, liberal radical, his unprecedented success is representative of all that is massive and unyielding about American corporate enterprise. And so we locate, for example, two competing images of recent years: in hip California boutiques we discover a popular Cat in the Hat t-shirt that depicts Seuss' Cat smoking a joint and giving the peace sign (Morgan 292), while in 1997 Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer wears the Cat's hat and necktie to honour the National Education Association (Nel 183). Similarly, just as Seuss' environmental tract, *The Lorax*, is a text that has created "real enemies" among logging concerns (Nel 175), so on 1 March 2001 Seuss' Cat in the Hat rang the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange and that night was emblazoned in electric colours up one entire side of the Empire State Building ("Read Across America" 8). Seuss' Cat, then, is at this moment emblematic of both counter-culture and the establishment, and of both radical and corporate/conservative culture. Like the split between Red and Blue states, the struggle to appropriate Seuss' image indicates that there is at stake in Seussian icons an emerging mythical image of America.

These manifestations and transformations should not surprise us. Spiritual and mythic inspiration has long been connected with madness and nonsense. As noted earlier, Alvin Kernan suggests that Christopher Marlow's blank verse was like John Taylor's nonsense in that it expressed "a constant striving for a condition beyond any known in this world" (qtd. in Morgan 42). This ethereal, utopian quality of nonsense nurtures conceptions of the ever-after and infinity. And it should be noted that perhaps the first "nonsense" was the word of God itself, as spoken by those overcome by the Holy Spirit who babbled in tongues that none could understand. Similarly, there is the image of the Sibyl, the Greek priestesses who uttered disconnected and erratic prophesies in an ecstatic frenzy. Even the Cat with her fiddle is similarly endowed with spiritual significance in one village at least. In North Leach, in the Cotswold Hills, there is a small church with the

image of a Cat with a fiddle carved into the top of one of the pedestals (Briggs, *Cotswolds*159).

Nonsense, in one form or another, has always wielded a special relation to power. The peculiar qualities of nonsense foster an ascendant, forward-moving attitude that extends far beyond the power wielded by its author. Nonsense befuddles the opposition, transcends itself, embodies an unlimited-ness and manifests a special relation to mythic force and ultimately, to national identity.

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[1] Precisely 57.37 % of Taylor's total output occurred between 1637 and 1652, 109 of his 190 known works appearing in print for the first time in these years. Taylor was active as an author for 42 years, publishing his earliest work in 1612 and his last in 1654. While the period 1637 to 1652 occupies only about ¼ his total years as an active writer, these same 15 years saw the release of 57 percent of his total output. See Capp (197-204).

[2] For "A Mess of Nonsense" and "If All the World Were Paper", see Haughton 122; 106. For "Cure for the Quartain Ague", "Pure Nonsence" and "Nonsense", see Malcolm 247; 217; 219.

[3] The Opies locate only cryptic evidence that "Hey Diddle Diddle" was perhaps known as early as 1569 (Opies, *Dictionary*, p. 240). However the earliest direct reference that specifically mentions a cow jumping over the moon is found in "The First Beginning", an anonymous nonsense poem published in *Sportive Wit, The Muses Merriment* (1656). See Haughton, *Chatto*, pp. 86 and 503. I am speculating that this is the earliest reference specifically addressing the cow who jumped over the moon, as I have never seen a more complete history of "Hey Diddle Diddle" than that which was offered by the Opies, and they were apparently unaware of "The First Beginning".

[4] See Lecercle 195; Lear xxiv; Malcolm 25; 118-19.

[5] In this argument Morgenstern is working partially from observations made by Peter Hunt in *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (28-9).

[6] As was partially the aim in Bakhtin's related studies collected as *The Dialogic Imagination*.

[7] For discussion of the relation between Lucianic banquets, overindulgence and death, and freedom of speech and fearlessness, see Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 69-70; 161; 207.

[8] As A. H. T. Levi makes clear in his introduction and notes to Erasmus' *Praise of Folly,* Erasmus makes numerous direct or implied references to Lucian, including to *The Dream or The Cock* (xliii; 54; 72; 134); *Icaromenippus* (xliii; 20n; 76n; 77n); *Encomium of the Fly* (5); *On the Parasite* (5); *Ode of Horace* (29n); *Philopseudes* (62)*; Eunuchus* (86); *Saturn* and *Timon* (40).

[9] Although Sendak is best known for his Max books, in the mid 1960s he produced two works of nonsense, *Hector Protector and As I Went Over the Water* (1965) and *Higglety Pigglety Pop*! (1967).

[10] While Alice does not appear in Guthrie's song, the first verse is inspired by Alice's conversation with the White Knight in *Through the Looking Glass*.

[11] It was not until the mid and late 1950s, with the construction of Disney Land, that the fortunes of the Disney Company would rebound.

[12] See Malcolm (7-11; 31; 50; 117-21; 122-3).

[13] The verse is translated from F. von der Hagen, Minnesänger*: deutche Liederdichter des zwölften, dreizehnten und vierzehnten Jahunderts*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1838), 1: 197, no. 53.

[14] Originally published in Taylor's, *Od Fashions,* London, 1642.

[15] While Seuss' images might be said to fit this aesthetic description as well, the illustrations of John Tenniel and Edward Gorey, with their meticulous attention to detail, present a challenge to this line of thought.

[16] See Opie: "The Political House that Jack Built" (1819), *Dictionary* 272; The Political A Apple Pie (1820), *Dictionary* 54; and Old Mother Hubbard (1825), *Dictionary* 379.

[17] For examples of thirteenth-century *fatrasies*, see Haughton (48-51), and *coq-à-l'ânes*, see Morgan (75).

[18] For an authoritative exploration of the political allegories that have been applied to nursery rhymes, see the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Allegories involving historical persons are described in verses 16, 22, 29, 44, 74, 93, 110, 122, 140, 153, 170, 181, 213, 233, 240, 262, 270, 274, 281, 282, 287, 304, 312,

325, 331, 342, 354, 365, 381, 392, 395, 422, 425, 428, 434, 454, 457, 486, 528, 529, 544 and 545. Allegories involving military campaigns are suggested in verses 7, 37, 173, 233, 322, 355, 507 and 548.

[19] "The Lion and the Unicorn" (*Melodies* 28); as related to the amalgamation of England and Scotland, see Opie, *Dictionary* 316. "Sing a Song of Sixpence" (*Melodies* 7); as related to Henry VIII, see Opie, *Dictionary* 395. "There Was an Old Woman Toss'd Up in a Blanket" (*Melodies* 22); as related to James II and Henry V, see Opie, *Dictionary* 434. "Arthur O'Bower" (*Melodies* 35); as related to Arthur's legendary Scottish campaign, see Opie, *Dictionary* 58. "Hark! Hark! The Dogs do Bark" (*Melodies* 26); as related to William of Orange, see Opie, *Dictionary* 152. "Bobby Shaftoe" (*Melodies* 55); as related to the Parliamentary elections of 1761, see Opies, *Dictionary* 90. "Pibroch of Donnel Dhu" (*Melodies* 71); here the political connection is assumed on the basis of the content of the poem, which apparently relates to tensions resulting from the clearances of the Scottish Highlands. "Hey Ding a Ding I Heard a Bird Sing" (*Melodies* 70); as related to Charles II, see Opies, *Dictionary* 341.

[20] See Opie, *Dictionary*:

> For a discussion of the superstitious customs associated with the following nursery rhymes, see "Can You Make Me a Cambric Shirt" (128); "Cushy Cow Bonny Let Down Your Milk" (160); "Two Little Dicky Birds" (172); "A Girl at the Army" (218); "Jack be Nimble" (255); "Ladybird Ladybird, Fly Away Home" (309); "Mary Mary, Quite Contrary" (355) "Mathew Mark Luke and John" (359), "One I love, Two I love" (391) "One-ery Two-ery, Ickery Ann" (396); "Rain, Rain Go Away" (429); "I Have Four Sisters Beyond the Sea" (461-2); "Snail Snail, Come Out of Your Hole" (466) "Tinker Tailor, Soldier Sailor" (483).
>
> For discussion of ancient pagan rituals, see "Jack and Jill" (267); "Robin to Bobbin" (439).
>
> For those rhymes erroneously associated with superstition, see "High Diddle, Diddle" (241); "Sing a Song of Sixpence" (470).

Briggs comments briefly on the possibility that Cock Robin was a witch's "familiar" in *Cotswolds* 160.

[21] For British versions, see Opie, *Lore* 25.

[22] Originally published in *Wit's Interpreter* in 1653; reprinted in 1671 by Francis Ben.

[23] See Figure 10, this study; see also M. Cohen 8; Batey 3.

[24] The text is taken from Lewis Carroll's "Christmas Greetings (From a Fairy to a Child)", a dedicatory verse that precedes the 1867 printing of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The image is from Daresbury Church, Cheshire, England.

Chapter Two

Nonsense and the American Revolution

"Vive la bagatelle"

Francis Hopkinson, 1785
(*Comical Spirit* 160)

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

Figure 11

Three Wise Men of Gotham

The above woodcut appears in William and Ceil Baring-Gould's *The Annotated Mother Goose* (100) and depicts, left to right, George Washington, John Adams and

Thomas Jefferson, the first three Presidents of the United States, as the lead characters in the nonsense rhyme, "The Wise Men of Gotham". At first glance the image appears to be an authentic eighteenth-century woodcut, similar in design to those featured in the John Newbery nursery rhyme books. The "chapter decorations" in Baring-Gould's texts, however, are the work of E. M. Simon, a contemporary of the Baring-Goulds, who produced the woodcuts in the early 1960s, basing their design on antique American printings, such as the *Mother Goose's Melody* printed by Isaiah Thomas in c. 1785:

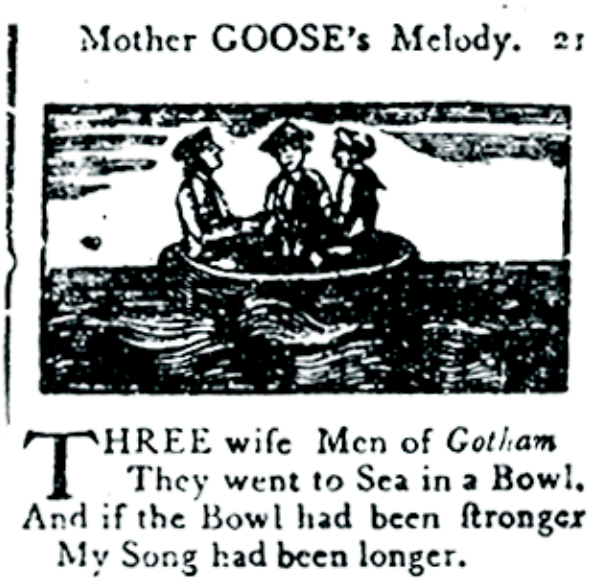


Figure 12

Simon's decision to remove the original Englishmen (Gotham is a small English village) and replace them with American politicians from the Revolution suggests an understanding, on Simon's part, of how nonsense, politics and revolution relate to one another. The image speaks volumes in this regard. If one were to "read" Simon's image one possible understanding is that it is cautionary; the American political figures, who are depicted smoking pipes, reading books and engaged in philosophical debate may reference the trope of fallen greatness, the reversal of fortune that inevitably befalls one who believes in his power of reason to such an absurd degree that he considers himself beyond the reach of natural law. There is, however, another possible reading as well. Simon, who

also illustrated *Origins of the American Revolution* (1943), may have intuitively created this image because he thought it indicative of the developing national identity in America, during and after the Revolution, when the fledgling republic identified itself in relation to wanton nonsense rhymes, irreverence, childhood and Mother Goose. As this chapter will demonstrate, the usurpation by Americans of traditional English nonsense verses was rather the rule than the exception in this era, nonsense being a choice tool of propaganda for the American rebel. Moving from a 1960s-era illustrator/historian's retrospective interpretation of the Founding Fathers in a sea of nonsense, we must shift back two hundred years to unearth the cultural products that may have informed Simon's vision.

Historical Situation

As noted in Chapter One the claim that nonsense literature functions as a catalyst for socio-political change can effectively be established in relation to various historical moments when civil unrest and a political need for "otherness" converge at a crisis point. The cultural products of the American Revolution are particularly useful in demonstrating this tendency, and are for several reasons the topic of this chapter. Between 1760 and 1776 the British colonies in America underwent a dramatic reversal of public allegiance. In 1760, in the wake of British victories over the French in Quebec fidelity to the crown was nearly universal in the American colonies. Within five years, however, and particularly after 22 March 1765, when the Stamp Act received Royal sanction, zealous and widespread support for rebellion spread from Georgia to Massachusetts. One of several riots occurred on 1 November 1765, when more than 2000 protestors gathered at Fort George in New York, where they proceeded to throw stones and bricks over the walls and burned an effigy of the Lieutenant Governor (see "No Taxation"). Within another ten

years colonial resistance snowballed into formidable proportions. Radical Whigs and loyal Tories drew battle lines. For the Whigs, otherness needed rather suddenly to be asserted. This need lent agency to literatures and other media of popular cultural expression that mingled inversion, randomness and mythological symbolism—all hallmarks of nonsense.

Another reason to focus on the American Rebellion may be introduced with the question, when could nonsense be more inflammatory than *during* the era Paine dubbed the "Age of Reason"? It was, after all, Paine's *Common Sense*, that "incalculably influential" text, which converted so many to the radical cause in the crucial winter and spring of 1776 (Kramnick 1). For, just as the radicals needed to appear "other", alien (or nonsensical) to the establishment, so too had they to assert that the establishment was itself arbitrary and nonsensical. For colonial leaders such as Francis Hopkinson, a member of the Continental Congress and signatory of The Declaration of Independence, the events that led to the war of Independence were frustrating, not merely because citizens' rights were threatened, but also because of the Crown's seeming inability to see *reason*. To the mind of the rebellious American, it was the arbitrariness and absurdity—the nonsensicality—of the establishment that was deemed suspect and, therefore, these attributes were the targets of the greatest scorn. Hopkinson rails against just such absurdity in *Letter by a Foreigner* (1777).

> The general character of the English is certainly the most absurd and fantastic that ever fell to the lot of human nature… in short, contradiction and absurdity make an Englishman. (*Comical Spirit* 86).

Hopkinson goes on to suggest by metaphor that the claims of the English monarch are based on an illogical, nonsensical proposition.

> He has quarreled with this people, because they are so stupid that they cannot understand, or so obstinate that they will not acknowledge that *two and two make five*. (*Comical Spirit* 87)

Nonsense and absurdity, then, were a sticking point, and during the conflict the rebel colonists would use nonsense as a weapon, both in accusing the British of being nonsensical, as above, and, simultaneously and more importantly, in courting an affection for nonsense as a way of painting themselves as "other" and incommensurable with all things British.

The remainder of this chapter will proceed as follows: To set the stage for the ensuing discussion, I will provide a catalogue of source materials, followed by a look at how nonsense figured in the lives and spirits of four influential rebels in the colonies, Francis Hopkinson, Isaiah Thomas, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington. These biographical sketches will be followed by an examination of how the carnivalesque functioned in colonial nonsensical cultural products. Next we will look at several ways in which nonsense in the colonies manifested a political stance, from popular songs to children's rhymes and protest forms. We will then examine how blank spaces and narrative voids functioned politically in nursery rhymes and political cartoons in this era. As in Chapter One, the question of magic will be considered from two perspectives to substantiate the claim that nonsense brings arbitrary authority and mythical status down to earth, while simultaneously courting a subliminal affection for pagan association. The chapter will close with a discussion of the mythic ascendance, throughout the nineteenth century, of two nonsensical cultural products of the Revolution, Yankee Doodle and Mother Goose.

Locating Eighteenth-Century American Nonsense

An equally attractive reason to focus on this era is that very little critical work has been done on eighteenth-century nonsense literature.[1] Because nonsense from this era is

generally not so well known, the existence of this material must first be established. It will be found in abundance in British American club and society life, newspapers, popular music, children's books, broadsides and in protest forms.

Immediately following the Revolution, during the pivotal years when the U.S. Constitution was being written, Isaiah Thomas of Massachusetts, who had been a fiery rebel during the war, shifted his attention away from his foundry of sedition, the radical newspaper *The Massachusetts Spy*, and became what scholars today refer to as "The American John Newbery". Among the repackaged Newbery[2] titles published by Thomas were *Mother Goose's Melody* (c. 1785), *Little Robin Redbreast* (1786), *The House that Jack Built* (c. 1786), *Cock Robin* (c. 1787), *Tommy Thumb's Song Book* (1788) and *Tom Thumb's Play-Book* (1794, originally typeset by Thomas for Barclay Printing in Boston 1764). These books were remarkably popular and Thomas built a considerable fortune upon their success. That nonsense was the key element to the success of these titles is indicated by an advertisement for his children's catalogue. Thomas—always the shrewd marketer—is careful to place the word "Nonsense" as the first word in his description of children's texts available. His advertisement reads, "Nonsense Rhymes and Nursery Tales, or Fables, for Children."[3] Among the nonsense rhymes that Thomas made available in print for the first time in America were, "High Diddle Diddle", "Sing a Song of Sixpence", "The Sow Came in With a Saddle", "There Was a Man of Thessaly", and "Three Wise Men of Gotham", among numerous others.[4] The nonsense verses in these texts range from the purposeless and inconsequential:

> The was an old woman Liv'd under a hill,
> And if she isn't gone she lives there still. (*MGM* 24)

To the more sustained madness of "The Old Women Toss'd Up in a Blanket":

> There was an old woman toss'd in a blanket,
> Seventeen times as high as the moon :
> But where she was going no mortal could tell,
> For under her arm she carried a broom
> Old Woman, old woman, old woman, said I ?
> Whither, ah whither, ah whither so high ?
> To sweep the cobwebs from the sky,
> And I'll be with you by-and-by. (*MGM* vii)

Thomas went on to become an eminent literary figure of the New Republic era, the most important publisher and collector of books in his day. That nonsense founded this empire should not be overlooked.

That the American of the New Republic era should demonstrate an affection for nonsense is not surprising as, for some years, the rebel colonist had been courting the offices of nonsense with vim and vigour. In *Civil Tongues: Polite Letters in British America*, David Shields details the rise, in the eighteenth century, of what he terms "ridiculous clubs" in the colonies. Clubs such as The Tuesday Club of Annapolis, Maryland, and the various "fishing companies" founded near Philadelphia between 1732 and 1793 revelled in absurd writings and nonsensical activities. One of these clubs, The Fort St. David's Fishing Company, featured a mock garrison sporting a stuffed hog dressed in armour (196). Among their mad proceedings they published absurd declamations, such as "divers unwieldy sugar trees have sometimes their evil disposition…." (194). An excerpt from what was, at one point, the official club song of The Tuesday Club demonstrates their affinity for nonsense:

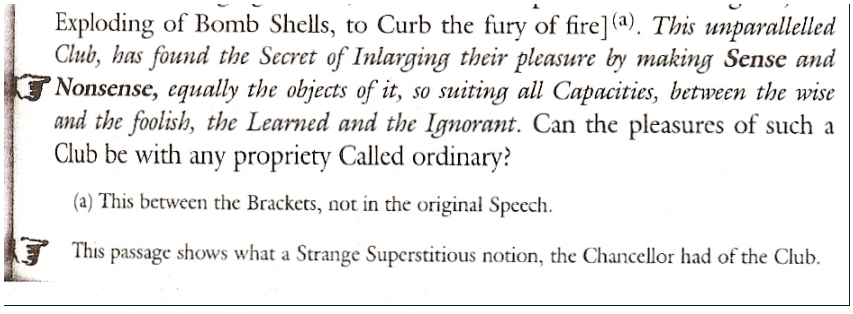
> She drank her stockings. She drank her Soon,
> And next, she drank her bran new Gown,
> And eke the Smoke that Civer'd her early,
> Oh! If my wife would drink hooly & fairly.
> [. . . . . .]
> she drank Crummie & then she drank Glarie,[5]
> Next she drank my bonny gray Marie (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1: 167)

Other Tuesday Club verses further establish their appreciation of nonsense, such as this short verse, quoted in its entirety:

> *** me ***** Lord
> ******* one single Turd
> **** for ***** flat
> ******** a nine taild cat. (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1: 164)

Members of The Tuesday Club adopted nonsensical aliases such as Loquacious Scribble, Huffman Snap, Crinkum Crankum, Tunbelly Bowzer, Surly Huffbluff, Joggle Hasty, Squeak Grumbleton, Slyboots Pleasant, Drawlum Quaint, Comico Butman and, my favourite, Jealous Spyplot (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1: lxxv-lxxvii). While similar humorous clubs existed in England, Shields notes that there was a greater emphasis on nonsense in the American fraternities. He writes, "What is striking was the number of Anglo-American clubs that recognised the aesthetic grounds of their being by emphasizing the irrationality of their commonality in club identity" (203).

Indeed, The Tuesday Club was explicit about its allegiance to nonsense. The club Chancellor notes, "This Unparalleled Club, has found the secret of Inlarging their pleasure by making **Sense** and **Nonsense**, equally the objects of it…" (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 3:245). Not only does the club secretary embolden the words "Sense" and "Nonsense", but also in the margin to the left he has drawn a hand pointing a finger at the word "Nonsense":


Exploding of Bomb Shells, to Curb the fury of fire][a]. *This unparallelled Club, has found the Secret of Inlarging their pleasure by making* **Sense** *and* **Nonsense,** *equally the objects of it, so suiting all Capacities, between the wise and the foolish, the Learned and the Ignorant*. Can the pleasures of such a Club be with any propriety Called ordinary?

(a) This between the Brackets, not in the original Speech.

This passage shows what a Strange Superstitious notion, the Chancellor had of the Club.

Figure 13

The illustration of the hand is reserved for this one occasion only in all of the nine hundred-plus pages of the proceedings of The Tuesday Club.

Other social settings in which nonsense flourished were colleges and salons. There, Shields notes, the poetry game Crambo was "greatly popular." He explains:

> Play commenced with a person's writing a single line of tetrameter verse. The paper was then passed to the right, where the next person had to compose spontaneously a complementary line, creating a rhymed couplet, then add an additional line for the next person to complete as a couplet…" (165).

While the game was played with the intention of making sense, the results were often nonsensical. An excerpt from a game of Crambo played at The Fifth Day Club at Harvard in about 1750 demonstrates the randomness that could invade this sort of literary endeavour. After line ten the verses begin to spiral out of control:

> Pray what's the Reason that some lines
> Were scant of sense and short of Rhymes
> Tis surely but for want of Brains
> Nor have we ever spar'd our Pains
> But constantly have well Endevour'd
> To have our Thought from Nonsense lever'd
> Tis sure because the muse is dull
> Tis sure because the Moon is full
> Or rather Phebus won't assist us
> Or else because no Lass has kist us
> Or else because Our Subjects Dry
> Or we can't tell the reason why
> But since Apollo and the Nine
> To smile upon us doth incline
> I believe we had better go to bed
> And clear the vapours from the head (Qtd. in Shields 166)

During the rebellious years between 1765 and 1781 colonial newspapers often printed humorous verses, many of them mocking, satirical or nonsensical. The politician Francis Hopkinson, mentioned above, produced much doggerel for *The Pennsylvania Packet*, including verses that anticipate the style of Dr. Seuss and that make a mockery of

the British. His rhyming work *The Battle of the Kegs*, for example, was a madcap satire that painted the British forces in terms predictive of the Keystone Cops:

> Now up and down throughout the town
> Most frantic scenes were acted;
> And some ran here and others there,
> Like men almost distracted. (*Comical Spirit* 98)

In the back pages of his fiery publication, *The Massachusetts Spy,* Isaiah Thomas provided ample space for pseudonymous and anonymous nonsense. There are acrostics on George Washington (3 Sept. 1778)[6] and Benedict Arnold (26 Oct. 1780), a political ABC in rhyming verse (22 Oct. 1778) and nonsense verses such as,

> Who puts a doublet on a horse,
> Or on a man a saddle,
> Or claps a stocking on his head,
> Sure that man's brain is addle. (9 Aug. 1775)

In faddish admonishment of fops and dandies Thomas' journal dabbles in the ridiculous:

> [from] "The MACARONI"
>
> A thing in an odd shape I met,
> It seem'd like a monkey tripping
> It reel'd and waddled through the street,
> Just like a magpye skipping:
> With little hat, and forhead flat,
> And swich to drive a ponney;
> What's that? said I; the folks did cry,
> 'tis call'd a *Macaroni*. (19 May 1774)

. .

Rhymes in *The Massachusetts Spy* were pushed to their limits, as in this example from 1775:

> Tom Gage's PROCLAMATION,
> Or blustering DENUNCIATION,
> (Replete with Defamation,)
> Threatning Devastation,
> And speedy Jugulation,
> Of the New-English Nation,--
> Who shall by pious ways shun ? (19 July 1775)

The above anticipates Edward Lear's "To Miss Lear on Her Birthday" by fifty-one years:

> Dear, and very dear relation,
> Time, who flies without cessation, -
> Who ne'er allows procrastination, -
> Who never yields to recubation
> Nor ever stops for respiration,
> Has brought again in round rotation
> The once a yearly celebration (Lear 5)

Turning to popular music it should be noted that two of the most popular songs in the colonies during the Revolution, "Yankee Doodle" and "The World Turned Upside Down", were nonsense songs. Later in this chapter the evolution of both of these songs will be examined as they metamorphose from sensible British marching songs to nonsensical American anthems. While individual verses of the American "Yankee Doodle" will manifest a semblance of internal sense on their own,

> Yankee Doodle went to town,
> Riding on a pony.
> Stuck a feather in his hat,
> And called it macaroni (Opie, *Dictionary* 528)

the full song will be understood as a series of purposefully disconnected verses, a song intended to be in a constant state of evolution, an odd patriotic anthem that invited infinite elaboration and non-narrative diversion. "The World Turned Upside Down" will not only be sung at important military engagements, but will also inform topsy-turvy political illustrations that celebrate the Boston Tea Party. And, like "Yankee Doodle", the song "The World Turned Upside Down" will shift from a loyalist air to a decidedly nonsensical American "anthem":

> If buttercups buzz'd after the bee
> If boats were on land, churches on sea
> If ponies rode men and if grass ate the cows
> And cats should be chased into holes by the mouse
> If the mamas sold their babies
> To the Gypsies for half a crown
> If summer were spring
> And the other way 'round
> Then all the world would be upside down! (Montgomery)

Broadsides are another medium through which nonsense was made available to the American public in the eighteenth century. Broadsides, however, are not a separate category from the material discussed above, as club and society announcements, newspaper special editions, popular music, and children's doggerel were all part of broadside culture. In the style of the proceedings of The Tuesday Club, for example, one broadside dated 1799 reads:

> By his High and Mighty Laziness
> Ephraim Eager
> Captain and General Commander in Chief, of the Idle Society
> Throughout the United States of America.
> To Clarke Chandler, Gentleman, Greeting.
>
> Your are being appointed Captain of an Idle Society in the Power vested in me... You are constantly to refrain from all necessary labor… never stand without leaning… never run in the most extreme and urgent cases, such as fire… you are to be constant in doing nothing… (Bumgardner)

Ballads such as "The World Turned Upside Down", "The Yankees Return from Camp",[7] and Hopkinson's "Battle of the Kegs" were also featured on revolutionary and new republic era broadsides. Some broadsides, however, provide access to nonsense verse not otherwise available. A broadside titled "A Cabinet of Wonders" is a rhyming list of impossible items such as "a yard long foot rule", paper boots to walk dry through the ditches, a "steele night cap", a pot of "mahogany capers" and "a cast iron toad in a hole". (*Collection*).[8] Other broadside ballads from the colonial and new republic eras that revel in nonsense and impossibilia are the songs "Tom Bolin", "A Description of a Wonderful Old Man", and "Rare Sights or Hue Boys Hue",[9] the final verse of which concludes:

> I saw a Loon chase the Moon,
> Hue boys hue!
> I saw a Loon chase the Moon,
> All around a silver spoon,
> Hue boys, hue
> Upon my word 'tis true,
> So sing away, sing away
> Hue boys hue. (*Collection*)

Thus concludes our tour of the conspicuous presence of nonsense in Colonial-American and New Republic culture, in children's books, club and society life, in newspapers, popular music, and broadsides.

SECTION II: POLITICS AND NONSENSE IN COLONIAL AMERICA

Nonsense and the Colonial American Rebel

This section serves to introduce four individuals, Benjamin Franklin, Francis Hopkinson, Isaiah Thomas and George Washington, in terms that outline how nonsense functioned in their writings and interests.

Benjamin Franklin

As one who would coin phrases such as "a penny saved is a penny earned" Benjamin Franklin is sometimes misunderstood popularly as manifesting a conservative, miserly attitude. But Franklin's persona is routinely confused with that of his fictitious alter ego, Richard Saunders, or Poor Richard, as the character was popularly known in the colonies. Poor Richard, a farmer turned philosophe, was the character Franklin created to be the editorial voice of his annual volume, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which Franklin published each year between 1732 and 1758. The author of the almanac, according to the cover pages, was Saunders. The name Benjamin Franklin was listed in small letters as printer only. While the character Saunders might confidently warn, "Babbling is ever a Folly" (*Wit* 98), it is less certain that Franklin would entirely agree. He was known, for example, to quote from nonsense rhymes. In a letter describing the Pennsylvania Governor's Assembly of 1755, Franklin remarks,

> Did you never hear this old catch?
>
> There was a mad Man, He had a mad Wife,
> And three mad Sons beside;
> And they all got upon a mad Horse
> And madly they did ride.
>
> 'tis a Compendium of our Proceedings… (Opie, *Dictionary* 343)

Occasionally the real Franklin surfaces in *Poor Richard's Almanac*. In the 1758 *Almanac* Franklin quotes, for example, from the nursery rhyme "For Want of Nail the Shoe was Lost" (Opie, *Dictionary* 383). And then there is the odd case of the 1857 *Almanac,* when, quite out of the blue, Franklin offers instructions on how to construct what he calls, a "Striking Sundial." In what appears to be a straightforward set of instructions the reader learns that this particular sundial is useful in that it is a dial "by which not only a man's own family, but all his Neighbors for ten Miles round may know what a Clock it is..." The reader is then instructed to first "Chuse an open place... which the Sun may shine on all Day without Impediment." This is fine and sensible advice for one who would construct a sundial. But as the instructions progress we read "On the Ground mark out your Hour Lines taking Room enough for the Guns..." The Guns? Moving ahead, the reader discovers that he is building a sundial in which the hours are ticked off by the blast of canons, ignited, ingeniously enough, by magnifying glasses positioned atop gunpowder-laden triggers. As for the size of the canons, Franklin advises that enormous weapons that can handle "Thirty Two pound [canon balls] will be best for this Use..." Near the end of the instructions Franklin casually adds, "Note. There must be 78 Guns in all." Reverting to the character of Poor Richard for a moment, Franklin remarks "there will be a great Savings of Powder in Cloudy Days" (*Wit* 58-59).

After war was declared in 1776 it should be noted that Franklin's nonsense became more absurd. Perhaps no single American performed a more decisive role in that war than Franklin did by securing the aid of France. Franklin, while struggling to forge this

alliance, would retire to his rooms in Paris after a long day of diplomatic work. Late in the evening he scribbled away at a series of essays he referred to as "bagatelles," a word which generally means "something unimportant", but which was also used in the late 1700s to describe short pieces of music and nursery rhymes. In one of these bagatelles, *The Ephemera* (1778), Franklin writes from the perspective of a minute bug living on the leaf of a bush—an insect he calls "an Ephemera". The insect has a life span of less than eight hours; seven and three quarters hours into its existence, it looks back from old age and reflects upon its life on the leaf, the other bugs he knew in his youth and the futility of "amassing honey-dew". "Alas", cries the bug, "I cannot expect to live above seven or eight minutes longer".

In 1780 Franklin composed *Dialogue Between the Gout and Mr. Franklin* a bagatelle that featured Franklin as himself, a physically lethargic figure plagued with a stubbornness that will not allow him to admit the error of his sedentary lifestyle. Meanwhile the character of the Gout takes the moral high ground in an unsuccessful bid to convince Franklin of the folly of his ways.

FRANKLIN:	Oh! Ehhh!-It is not fair to say I take no exercise, when I do very often, going out to dine and returning in my carriage...
GOUT:	That, of all imaginable exercises, is the most slight and insignificant, if you allude to the motion of a carriage suspended on springs...
FRANKLIN:	Your reasonings grow very tiresome.
GOUT:	I stand corrected. I will be silent and continue my office; take that, and that.
FRANKLIN:	Oh! Eh! Oh! Ohhh!

Franklin's sense of the absurd was also evident in several political stunts. His *Edict From the King of Prussia* was published in the London press in 1773. In that text Franklin poses as the King of Prussia who notes that England was colonised by Germanic tribes and thus feels the right to make the same trade and tax demands on former German colonists in

England as England was making on the American colonies in the 1760s and 1770s. The piece, of course, appeared without Franklin's name attached, and George III's government took the edict seriously—initially missing the irony and humour entirely. Later in this chapter Franklin's "RULES by which a GREAT EMPIRE may be reduced to a SMALL ONE", a nineteen-step self-help program for reducing empires, will be examined.

Franklin, it should also be noted, also attended a meeting of The Tuesday Club, where he adopted the comical alias "Mr. Electro Vitrifrice".[10] And, as Dave Barry notes, "Franklin helped draft the Declaration of Independence though reportedly the other Founding Fathers did not trust him to write the proclamation [alone] for fear he might put a joke in it" (Franklin, *Wit* vii).

Francis Hopkinson

Francis Hopkinson, who, as mentioned above, was a member of the Continental Congress and a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, was the foremost humorist in the colonies during the war years, and his writings will figure prominently in this chapter. Hopkinson, a protégé of Benjamin Franklin and a great fan of Franklin's humorous satiric works, made merry with journals and published numerous humorous and provoking satires on the British. Following the British surrender at Yorktown, for example, Hopkinson placed a counterfeit advertisement in the *New York Gazette*. The target of this attack was James Rivington, the King's Printer in New York and publisher of *The Royal Gazette*. Rivington ran a successful chain of bookstores in New York that catered to a Royalist clientele. The bogus ad, which from a twenty-first-century perspective sounds very like a sketch from Monty Python, announces that Rivington is going out of business and that the following books are on sale, among others:

> A New and Complete System of Cruelty…
>
> The Law of Nations Revised and Amended…
>
> Who'd Have Thought it?...
>
> An elegant map of the British Empire of North America, upon a very small scale… (*Comical Spirit* 119)

There is also an electrical apparatus available wherewith "the operator may unexpectedly receive the shock he intended to give" (*Comical Spirit* 119).

Paul Zall, Hopkinson's anthologist, comments, "at its best, Hopkinson's humour focuses on incongruous images and absurd ideas..." (Zall 29). Hopkinson describes his own writing style as follows:

> Some men accustom themselves to see everything in a ludicrous point of view . . . I walk round the square and attend to all the scraps and fragments of conversation which I can pick up en passant. As soon as I get home I write down these on separate pieces of paper; and then amuse myself with arranging them in such order, as to produce, if possible, some apparent connection of sense. . .
>
> > Is your cousin married?
> > She will be launch'd next week.
> >
> > He will carry you thro' thick and thin and never tire--
> > Ah! be sure, we must support the constitution.
> >
> > She's a d----d fine girl--faith!--
> > But she sprung a leak and was obliged to be hove down. . .
> > (*Comical Spirit* 156-58)

This cut-and-paste method, which echoes the mad construction of a Rabelaisian *coq-à-l'âne*, anticipates Lewis Carroll's advice in *Poeta Fit, Non Nascitur* (1869):

> First you write a sentence,
> And then you chop it small;
> Then mix the bits, and sort them out
> Just as they chance to fall:
> The order of the phrases makes
> No difference at all. (790)

Hopkinson's comic verses often appeared first in *The Pennsylvania Packet* and were then enthusiastically reproduced by other newspapers and journals throughout the colonies. His rhyming works of doggerel, such as the aforementioned *The Battle of the Kegs* was a

lampoon of the British military and was "frequently sung by the revolutionary troops" (Westlake ii). From soldiers to politicians, Hopkinson's texts were known in all socio-political quarters. His tale, *A Pretty Story*, for example, was presented to the First Continental Congress. *A Pretty Story*, which will be looked at in detail later in this chapter, was a satiric allegory of the deterioration of Anglo-American relations and was presented as a mock children's book, in the style of John Newbery.

Like that of many authors of nonsense literature, Hopkinson's canon is one of a writer who sought to reach beyond the traditional confines of a symbol and infuse greater representational value into the printed medium. He wrote, for example, essays such as *A New Plan for Education*, in which he imagines children play-acting the parts of speech *Comical Spirit* 59-63), and *The Art of Paper War*, in which he recommends that certain newspaper typefaces be devoted to denoting specific emotions (*Comical Spirit* 169-78). In *The Art of Paper War*, for example, Hopkinson recommends that if one wishes to advertise the sale of something you might otherwise throw away you should use the typeface called "English Roman". However, if you are engaged in "warm controversy" it might be best to increase the font size and use "**French Canon**" (*Comical Spirit* 173; see Figure 24, p. 127, this study). Hopkinson, then, who referenced Tweedledum and Tweedledee (*Comical Spirit* 160) in one of his essays, resembles Lewis Carroll in a number of ways, from his cut-and-paste construction method, his references to children's literature and folk material to his impatience with the ambiguity of language.

Isaiah Thomas

The journals that regularly reproduced Hopkinson's work included *The Massachusetts Spy*, which was arguably the most influential colonial newspaper during the revolution. Its publisher and editor, Isaiah Thomas, was a great admirer of both Franklin and Hopkinson's humorous works. A word on Thomas' formative years suggests that his prevailing idioms—those of a promoter of irreverent or rebellious satire and a maker of children's books—were lifelong interests and represented a consistent duality of purpose.

Thomas had a very early start in the printing business, being apprenticed to the Boston printer Zachariah Fowle at age six. Before turning seven Thomas was given his first job as a typesetter, a piece entitled *The Lawyer's Pedigree*. Despite the off-colour material contained in the verses, Thomas remained quite proud of the piece, and

> [w]hen Isaiah Thomas was an old man, honored throughout the country and in England as one of the most progressive publishers and patrons of literature, he would show to his grandchildren and chance visitors this first sample of his typesetting. (Marble 4)

The Lawyer's Pedigree is a tale of ascending and descending fortune—a story of fallen greatness—and is, ultimately, an elaborate lawyer joke. It begins by detailing the genealogy of a beggar, each of whose descendents reaches a higher station in life than his father's:

> A Beggar had a Beadle,
> A Beadle had a Yeoman;
> A Yeoman had a prentice,
> A Prentice had a Freeman...

The fortunes of his descendents continue improving until,

> The Duke he had a Prince,
> The Prince, a King of Hope
> The King he had an Emperor
> The Emperor a Pope...

At this point the story takes an unexpected turn.

> Thus, as the Story says,
> The pedigree did run;
> The Pope he had a Friar,
> The Friar had a Nun:
> The Nun she was with Child
> And so her Credit sunk
> The Father was a Friar,
> The Issue was a Monk... (Qtd. in Steele 9)

And so the fortunes of this family falls by degrees until they hit rock bottom, with a lawyer, who is referred to as "A beggar's Brat".

While in his early teens, in 1762, Thomas was assigned by Fowle the task of setting the type for the first children's book he would work on, *Tom Thumb's Play-Book*, which was likely a reprint of a book by the same title which Benjamin Franklin had advertised 1747 (itself a pirated copy of the London printing, no doubt). In this volume were found carefree rhymes and a playful ABC.

> A a apple py
> B b bit it
> C c cut it... (Qtd. in Marble 11)

With his childhood and teen years spent in a printing office, it was inevitable that the young Thomas would became politically savvy before his years. As a young boy, for example, he had witnessed, and likely assisted in, the printing of such titles as *Monster of Monsters* (1754), which was a "satire against the Excise Act, and certain members of the State Assembly" (Marble 14). The title page of this work attests that one, Thomas Thumb, Esq, had authored the pamphlet (Marble 14).

In 1765 Thomas set out to seek his fortune and gain a bit more experience. At the age of sixteen he landed a position in Nova Scotia, typesetting and often editing the *Halifax Gazette*. The owner of the journal, Anthony Henry, was said to be a slovenly fellow who didn't mind staying at home and letting young Thomas put the *Gazette* together as he saw fit (Marble 21). This proved to be a dangerous decision, as Thomas

was an outspoken critic of the Stamp Act and took, on several occasions, the liberty of lampooning the Royal decree in the *Gazette*. The Stamp Act required that all journals and printed material be stamped with a royal emblem that indicated that the tax had been paid on that publication. Thomas did everything he could to deface or invert the dreaded stamp. Sometimes he just neglected to print the stamp (Steele 11). On one occasion he printed a skull and crossbones where the stamp should have been placed (Steele 11). He was known to print the stamp upside-down in the wrong corner and, in the 13 February 1766 issue, he performed his coup de grace. Thomas printed the stamp inverted, and placed it carefully just below, but overlapping, the lower corner of an illustration he had designed. In the illustration the Devil is poking his fork into the upside-down stamp (Steele 11):

Figure 14

Perhaps Henry did not recognise that the playful relationship his apprentice had displayed to sign and symbol were indicative of the rebel mind in times of civil unrest—or perhaps he did realise it; after a brief interview with Henry concerning the matter, Thomas was fired.

Armed only with a "resistance to any ban upon his personal liberty" (Marble 6) Thomas drifted down the American coast and found editorial work in the southern colonies. In 1769 he was printing in Wilmington Virginia when he chanced upon the early Hopkinson satire, *Science, A poem*, and immediately had it printed. This was the

beginning of a long association between author and printer. Hopkinson's son Joseph once referred to Thomas as "An old and valuable friend of my father" (Marble 286).

By 1770 Thomas was back in Boston and hoping to set up his own journal. Returning to Fowle, he made an offer of partnership. At this time Fowle was known for printing "broadsides of coarse wit and buffoonery" (Marble 45) and one of Fowle's titles from this period ran,

> *Mother Midnight's Comical Pocket Book, or a Bone for the Critics: Being a sure and certain Cure for the Hip; Containing the nicest and largest Dish of Novelties that ever was Seen—Heard—Smelt or Tasted; carefully Cooked up by Mother Midnight's merry Grandson, containing nothing but Originals; all very humorous, prodigious, satirical and quite uncommon*. (Marble 61-2)

Together these two men founded *The Massachusetts Spy* and Thomas reacquainted himself with a rebel faction he had known in his teenage years, The Sons of Liberty (Marble 16), which was comprised of key rebel leaders such as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere. *The Massachusetts Spy* represents a fusion of nonsense, satire, propaganda and provoking political statements. Among Loyalists and Tories *The Massachusetts Spy* was known as a "foundry of sedition" (Marble 62).

Throughout the American Revolution, Thomas was involved in many of the most historic and traumatic events. He was present at the first battle: "On the morning of April 19, 1775 he was in Lexington, on the green, either as a minute-man or a spectator of the scene which he was soon to describe in vivid words" (Marble 94). His subsequent printing of *A Narrative of the Excursion and Ravages of the Troops Under the Command of General Gage, On the nineteenth of April, 1775* was commissioned by the Provincial Congress and was spread far and wide throughout the colonies, doing much to solidify resistance to the British. Thomas' reputation as a rebel grew and by the spring of 1775 there were rumours that the British were planning to assassinate him (Marble 93). And on 14 July 1776, it was Thomas who first read the Declaration of Independence to Bostonians

gathered at a meetinghouse on Boston Common. That night, the Sons of Liberty—Thomas, Revere, Adams and others—gathered at a tavern for a merry feast. Among the toasts offered that night were "Perpetual itching without the benefit of scratching, to the enemies of America" and "May the freedom and independency of America endure, till the sun grows dim with ages, and the earth returns to chaos" (Marble 128).

This was the man who would become "The American John Newbery". The cornerstone of his future economic prosperity, and a very natural extension of his radical philosophies, were the children's books he produced. And unsurprisingly these children's books were laced, as was *The Massachusetts Spy*, with nonsense, carnivalesque allusions and political intrigue.

George Washington

Regarding George Washington, I do not offer an extensive portrait, but rather one curious anecdote. According to the Opies, Washington was known to be fond of "As I was Going to Derby" (*Dict*ionary 171), a set of nonsense verses that, like "Yankee Doodle", had the potential for infinite elaboration and random variation. Folklorist Richard Chase reports,

> ["The Darby Ram" (song) or "As I Was Going to Derby" (nursery rhyme)] I have often heard [was] George Washington's favorite song. Some years ago I met an old man in Virginia who told me that his great-uncle used to tell how Mr. Washington had taken him on his knee many a time and sung him "The Darby Ram,"—including all the "naughty verses." (134)

"As I was Going to Derby" consists of a description of a common creature, a ram, that has taken on grotesquely huge proportions. The creature stands ten yards high and is endowed with a "fat behind" that stretched ten yards wide, a tail six yards long, and horns that reach to the sky. Each leg occupies an acre of land and the horns are so lofty that Eagles build

their nests in them (and, one may imagine the measurements of his other "appendages"). If one envisions Washington reciting this ditty to himself as he prepared for battle, the verses can be seen to function as positive reinforcement, a forerunner, if you will, to the overblown motivational speech. Like the ragtag commoners that comprised Washington's army, the common farmyard denizen of the poem has transcended his limitations and is performing beyond all expectations. The prominence of the eagles in the poem conveniently reflect American iconography, and the verses even espouse republican ideals:

> The space between the horns, sir,
> Was as far as man could reach,
> And there they built a pulpit,
> But no-one in it preached. (Opie, *Dict*ionary 170)

A pulpit in which no-one feels qualified to preach is a reversal of the ideals espoused by the English monarch at the time, who felt himself qualified to sit atop his throne, or "pulpit" and preach his reprimands and sermons to the American colonists. The song, it should be added, was also popular among American sailors during the war of 1812 (Opie, *Dict*ionary 171).

For Franklin, Hopkinson and Thomas nonsense was no tangential cultural experience—indeed, these three important leaders of the Revolution were not merely drawn to nonsense, but were defined, in part, by nonsense, both as who they were and as how they saw themselves. Regarding Washington the case is less clear, except that we know he had apparently an earnest affinity for at least one nonsense song and revelled in the reproduction of even its most grotesque "naughty verses". In their affinity for nonsense these rebels were reaffirming the ideal anti-authoritarian stance learned in childhood and, thus, in their offhand references to seemingly "frivolous" humour, these men were unconsciously acculturating themselves into the ideology of rebellion. E. M

Simon's woodcut of the founding fathers as The Wise Men of Gotham suddenly seems to have a historical bearing.

The Carnivalesque

If the potential meanings of the nonsense texts considered in this chapter are to be holistically examined, they must be viewed in relation to their "published" environment, the setting in which they were originally encountered, a setting that may confidently be described as carnivalesque. The topsy-turvy, in which up becomes down and low becomes high, is often the most obvious manifestation of the carnivalesque. Although the broadside from which I have culled the following example dates from the War of 1812, the song itself asserts that it dates from the Revolution, its full title being "A Song Composed in the Year SEVENTY FIVE. Transfer'd to 1812. Tune: The World Turned Upside Down". The text opens,

> This world is like a whirlagig, and swiftly spins about,
> And nations like great statesmen are sometimes in and out. (*Collection*)

A similar political/class reversal is referenced in Thomas' *MGM* in "Hark! Hark the Dogs do Bark", in which the beggars are dressed in velvet gowns (*TTSB* 43). In other nonsense poems, kings are fed joke pies filled with blackbirds and symbols of royal power, lions and unicorns, are drummed out of town while "wise" men are uniformly shown to be the opposite of wise, scratching out their eyes and going to sea in a bowl, for example.[11] And in the comic broadside, *Tom Bolin*, we read that one of Tom's distinguishing features is that he wears his breaches inside out (*Collection*), which, as was noted in Chapter One, is a children's All Souls/carnival tradition.

A festive setting is claimed in many of these texts as well. In Thomas' *Little Robin Redbreast* we discover the image of a clown cavorting outside a tent. Beside him stands a

seller of what looks to be cakes and pumpkins. The image, and the verse that runs below it, directly invoke carnival:

SONG X.

I.

SINGING, dancing, anticks, tumbling,
Trick on trick ſtill merry jumbling;
Full of laughing, joking, ſporting,
To the booths the crowd reſorting.
Such is a country fair, boys.

Figure 15

The image of Mother Goose is often associated with a festive setting. Although the image below dates from c. 1850, the text is based on a pantomime that dates back to at least 1806. In this text Mother Goose herself is seen as the progenitor of the very embodiment of carnival, Harlequin himself. Here Mother Goose, witchlike and brandishing a wand, magically transforms her son Jack into the master of carnival ceremonies:

MOTHER GOOSE.

She sent him to market,
A live goose he bought.
Here mother, says he,
It will not go for nought.

Jack's goose and her gander
Grew very fond,
They'd both eat together,
Or swim in one pond.

Jack found one morning,
As I've been told,
That his goose had laid him
An egg of pure gold.

Jack ran to his mother,
The news for to tell;
She call'd him a good boy,
And said it was well.

Figure 4

In Thomas' nursery rhyme collections, the setting is overwhelmingly one of harvest time and other fall festivals, as located by activities such as the shearing of the sheep in "Baa Baa Black Sheep" (*MGM* 59). Reprinted below is a reaping scene from *Little Robin Redbreast* (1786):

Figure 16

As noted in Chapter One, "The Sow Came in with the Saddle" (*MGM* 63) is culled from Christmas mumming traditions and, in *Tommy Thumb's Song Book*, the beggars in their velvet gowns in "Hark! Hark! the Dogs do Bark" (43) likely reference carnival traditions as well. Meanwhile in club and society life we discover that, along with the nonsense, the proceedings of The Tuesday Club emphatically enshrine the subjects of appetite, raillery, mockery and liberty. In one speech the club orator likens its "clubical" proceedings to "saturnalia" (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 3: 322).

As one would expect at fall festivals and Christmas celebrations, references to gluttony, mad feasting and merry-making run throughout these texts as well. At the Tuesday Club, drinking songs abound, including the song, quoted earlier, about the

woman who drinks her stockings, her gown and her husband's horse (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1:167). And there is this conundrum, the text of which is recovered from the floor after a long night of conundrum business and just when "every Longstanding Member expected to retire in peace..." (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 2:82). Unfolding the scrap of paper club member Huffman Snap gravely informs the club that he has found one more conundrum, which he dramatically hands over to the Club Chancellor:

> Club Chancellor: Why is Laconic Comas' mouth like a puppet show?
> Loquacious Scribble offers a solution: Because there is always *punch* in it. (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 2:83-84)

In Thomas' *Mother Goose's Melody* there are such verses as the merry "Round about, round about, Magotty Pie; / My father loves good ale, and so do I" (36). Moving from drink to images of gluttony and festive eating, we meet in Thomas' *Tommy Thumb's Song Book*,

> Robin and Bobin,
> Two great Belly'd Men,
> They ate more Victuals
> Than threescore and ten (40)

In *MGM* we find Little Jack Horner who is engaged in eating his "Christmas Pie" (40) and a verse titled "A Seasonable Song" featuring piping hot peas (72). In *Tommy Thumb's Song Book* the ride to the fair at Banbury Cross results in the acquisition of several festive morsels:

> Ride a Cock Horse to Banbury Cross
> A Penny white Loaf,
> A penny white Cake,
> And a Hugey penny Pye (56)

And in the "The Yankees Return from Camp" images relating to food and nature's plenty abound, including verses that offer savoury glances of "hasty pudding", "father's cattle", a "pumpkin shell" and a "log of maple." The third verse runs,

> The lasses they eat every day,

Would keep an house a winter;
They have as much that I'll be bound
They eat it when they're a mind to. (Bumgardner)

Similarly, the nonsensical broadside "A Cabinet of Wonders" features references to plum pudding, gooseberry pie, crumpets and muffins (*Collection*).

Other hallmarks of the carnivalesque include off-colour, scatological and ribald material. Among the papers of The Tuesday Club the number of jokes referring to gaseous exhalations is, to be frank, astounding. The lower body was something of a fixation for these gentlemen. The following illustration, created by the Club Secretary, is explained as a "proper representation of the modern conundrum... a human head placed on a large brawny pair of buttocks..." (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 2:31).

Figure 17

Complete with a fools cap adorned with a bell, the image above wholeheartedly embraces the carnivalesque. Freewheeling allusions to the grotesque are never far from any text associated with nonsense. Just as children's nonsense rhymes are so closely akin to ribald limericks, so colonial newspapers often insist that humorous verse be coloured with bodily humour. On 31 December 1770, *The Massachusetts Spy* prints:

Round Royal George
The Courtiers flood - - - to gaze;
And ev'ry tongue, in flatt'ry dipt,
Bedaub'd him o'er with pratte.
"I pray you friend, says surly Bob,

> Who stood behind the chair,
> Do - - - ope that window, and let out
> This d--- corrupted air."

Scatological humour is also available in *Tommy Thumb's Song Book*:

> Little Robin Red Breast,
> Sitting on a Pole,
> Niddle, Noddle, went his Head,
> And Poop went his Hole. (31)

Paul Zall, who anthologised Hopkinson's works, was impressed enough with the presence of off-colour material in Hopkinson's work that he titled an entire chapter "In a Scatological Season". Hopkinson himself writes in defence of "excrementious matter", contending that the health of the freedom of the press may be measured by how much ribald material it allows:

> How has civilization been advanced—certainly, by vent which the press affords for the morbid minds of the people to get rid of their impurities… to discharge their minds of indigested crudities.
> (Hopkinson, *Comical Spirit* 204-5)

Sexual allusions and innuendo often run rife in a carnivalesque setting. At The Tuesday Club, this was certainly the case:

> Jonathan Grog: Why is the king's prick, in marking down a Sheriff, like an Elephant?
> Jealous Spyplot: Because it *Stands*. (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 2:84)

Off-colour sexual allusions are also locatable in Thomas texts, from Margery Daw, who sold her bed and is referred to as a "slut" (*TTSB* 24) to the Little Maid in "A Love Song". In this nursery rhyme a "little man" proposes marriage to a "little maid":

> Then replied the little Maid,
> Little Sir, you've little said
> To induce a little Maid for to
> wed, wed, wed;
> You must say a little more,
> And produce a little Ore,
> E're I make a little Print in your
> Bed, Bed, Bed. (*MGM* 12)

And there is the devious Rare Harry Parry who threatens to "come to your wedding, / without any Bidding, / And lie with your Bride all Night". (*TTSB* 52)

Perhaps the most overtly provoking quality of carnivalesque traditions is travesty: travesty of the aged, travesty of government officials and royalty and travesty of the clergy. Old people in nursery rhymes are routinely portrayed as ridiculous, scandalous or pointless. A typical thing for an old woman to do in a nursery rhyme is something absurd, such as sticking a mouse in bag and sending him off to the mill (*MGM* 13), or being tossed up in a blanket "seventeen times as high as the moon" (*MGM* vii). Old men fare no better. In *TTSB* there is Old Father Grey Beard who, we are reminded, is "Without Tooth or Tongue" (51). And there is the Old man in the velvet coat in *Mother Goose's Melody* who passes counterfeit coins (35). And then there are the truly inconsequential old people, such as the old woman who lived under a hill, and who, as noted earlier, may or may not be living there still (*MGM* 24).

Those who would consider themselves wise, or those who represent the government, are soundly mocked in Thomas' nursery rhymes. The wise, as noted several times already, either scratch their eyes out (*MGM* 55) or go to sea in a bowl (*MGM* 21). In "Who Comes Here? A Grenadier" the King's soldiers are depicted as penniless and drunk (*MGM* 42). In Hopkinson's *Battle of the Kegs* British General William Howe lies asleep in bed, oblivious to the danger surrounding his city, in the arms of the wife of one of his officers:

> Sir William he, snug as a flea,
> Lay all the time a snoring;
> Nor dreampt of harm, as he lay warm
> In bed with Mrs. Loring. (Hopkinson, *Comical Spirit* 99)

The Fort St. David's Fishing Company, another of the colonial-American ridiculous clubs, featured a "mock imperial garrison". Inside this mock military stronghold the Company kept a stuffed "hog in armor", positioned in such a way that it was juxtaposed against a

portrait of George III (Shields 196). King George III, then, has been thus far juxtaposed with a hog in armour, a gaseous exhalation and an erect penis. In Thomas' nursery rhymes English monarchs fare no better when, as we have seen, they are served joke pies and are drummed out of town by the townsfolk.[12]

As is typical for carnivalesque traditions, the clergy fares no better than government officials. The proceedings of The Tuesday Club offer this example:

> Tell me ye Sages of the Club,
> Why is a pulpit like a Tub?
>
> Because too often comes from thence
> An empty Sound devoid of Sense. (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 2:62-3)

The "emptiness" of reason coming from this pulpit echoes the physically empty pulpit in which no-one preaches (Opie, *Dict*ionary 170) depicted in George Washington's favourite song, "The Darby Ram". This idealised absence of a preacher is very like the absence of religious teaching in Thomas' nursery rhyme collections, which was a conspicuous absence. In the eighteenth century, one of the main attractions of Mother Goose collections was that they were devoid of the pious moralizing so common in children's primers. In this sense nursery rhyme collections were intrinsically impious. The popularity of Newbery-style anthologies of the mid 1700s was followed in the England of the 1780s and 1790s by a moral policing of nursery rhymes. In *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* Alan Richardson describes this new setting in which childhood innocence was to be preserved at all costs. Richardson summarises, "The 'new child'... of the 1780s and 1790s was to be held at a pristine distance... from the boisterous, immoral humour of the Newbery era..." (144). To emphasise how striking the lack of religious teaching may have been in a text intended for children one might consider the case of Maria Edgeworth, an author whose children's books were intended as morally educating for children. Mitzi Myers notes in "Impeccable Governesses, Rational Dames, and Moral Mothers..." that,

despite their enduring qualities, Edgeworth's works have been dismissed by some historians of children's literature, such as F. J. Harvey Darton, who, Myers complains, routinely view Georgian texts for children as overly didactic for their concern with moral improvement (41). And yet, despite their well-understood orientation toward moral improvement, Robert Hall, a religious leader and contemporary of Edgeworth, was of the opinion that Edgeworth's work was impious merely because it did not contain explicitly religious material. He comments,

> I should class her books among the most irreligious I have ever read... She does not attack religion nor inveigh against it, but makes it appear unnecessary by exhibiting perfect virtue without it... No works ever had such a bad effect on my own mind as hers. (Ritchie 19)

In comparison with the content of *MGM*, with its prostitutes and sexual innuendos, Edgeworth's stories are saintly by contrast. This fact cannot be understated. The secular quality of folk rhymes continued to set them apart from other, more "moral" literatures for children, the absence of any religious element being a conspicuous lack. One would naturally imagine that in Puritan-descended America this lack of religiosity would have been particularly apparent.

More provoking even than the absence of any pious undertone is the fact that the editor of *Mother Goose's Melody* has been audacious enough to replace the expected religious material with facetious "morals" and glib jokes. One rhyme, "Cock a doodle doo, / My dame has lost her shoe; / My master has lost his fiddle-stick, / And knows not what to do" is followed by the *almost* biblical sounding commentary, "He who lives upon charity shall be often affronted, and he that lives upon trust, shall pay double." (*MGM* 34) The comment makes no sense given the nursery rhyme that precedes it. The placement of a facetious moral here becomes yet more provoking when one attempts to "read" this verse. This "Cock a doodle doo" poem either describes a scene of madness, such as a dancing spree gone haywire or, possibly, a sexual intrigue. The scene is dawn, as the cock

is crowing. Dawn finds a man and women who are in a panic because they "don't know what to do." They have both lost something and the phallic imagery of the empty shoe and the lost "stick" might suggest that their compromised positions are born as a result of a passionate tryst. To respond to this ribald innuendo with a satirical, biblical sounding proverb would be to offer the reverse of what an authentic religious moral might provide.

The allusions to carnival and the lower body that run throughout the proceedings of The Tuesday Club are indicative of the fact that convivial fraternity is nurtured in just such an atmosphere, and that liberty of speech is its natural result. Shields suggests that ridiculous clubs and other private societies in the colonies used the grotesque as "a process of social formation" (176), somewhat in the style recommended by Lord Shaftesbury in *Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709). Alexander Hamilton,[13] the Secretary of The Tuesday Club, wrote what Shields refers to as a "mythical archaeology of clubbing", in which Hamilton posits that "Sylvan Deities… Pan, the Satyrs, Bacchus, Silenus, and their followers... were probably Jolly drunken Club Companions" (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1:38-39) and were the ancient source of all social progress. Hamilton is suggesting here that Greek Satyr plays and the festive atmosphere that surrounded them were the key to an emerging democracy in ancient Greece. "By these clubs", Hamilton asserts, "it is thought, [the Greeks] were first civilised." (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1:38-39)[14] And so, likewise, the "origin of [The Tuesday Club] society", Shields asserts, lay "in the friendly bibulousness of ancient table fellowship" (180). Shields also comments that "for the clubs, entertaining the possibility that the impulse for private society lay in the guts rather than the brains could be liberating" (178). And when considering the mock institutions and legal play that were so freely and enthusiastically undertaken in the liberal atmosphere of the ridiculous clubs, Shields asks whether the

ultimate purpose of the ridiculous clubs was "to parody political philosophy when it has become so obtrusive in the debate over the powers of empires and states" (207).

Hamilton's vision and "mythical" origins of The Tuesday Club, and Shield's insight into the greater purpose of fellowships of the sort, work surprisingly well with Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. As noted in Chapter One, Bakhtin writes of the carnivalesque "people have used these festive comic images to express their criticism, their deep distrust of official truth, and their highest hopes and aspirations" (*Rabelais* 269). Naturally, then, along with the topsy-turvy nonsense and grotesque carnivalesque images, we expect to find outright political comment in all these literatures. The reason being that, as Lucian, Erasmus, Shaftesbury, Hamilton and Bakhtin contend, a convivial, carnivalesque, democratic atmosphere fosters frank expression of controversial or utopian ideals.

Framing Nonsense with Political Statements

The "ridiculous" clubs of British America did provide a space for political experimentation. The main humorous activity of these clubs was to mock arbitrary systems of power. In the proceedings of The Tuesday Club it is precisely this mocking that takes up the greater proportion of Hamilton's texts, from mock trials (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 3:212-15), which echo the mock trials of medieval carnival and anticipate similar Carrollian scenes, to facetious claims of the Club Chancellor's supposed "supernatural power" (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 3:105), to childish rough-and-tumble wrestling matches intended to determine which "noble" club member would take possession of the club medallion (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 3:52-53). The club itself was founded by a "leveller" faction from "The Royalist Club", which broke off and started its

own club, led by the "rebel" George Neilson. The rhetoric in Hamilton's description of these events, written in the 1750s, is, indeed, chillingly prophetic of what would soon transpire in the colonies:

> Our hero having thus drawn his party together, they began daily to Increase and the... Royalist Club, to decline, so that in the space of one or two years there was not the least trace of the later left, this Great Revolution happened in the beginning of March, in the year 1729.
>
> The Red House [the first name associated with what would later become The Tuesday Club] being once established... Mr. Neilson applied himself Intirely to the forming of its constitution and Government... [On] the first meeting of this [club], on the first of April, commonly called April Fools Day... Mr. Neilson proposed Erecting a government by presidents... he judged that it would not be proper, In the Infancy of this Club, to propose appointing any person perpetual president... least [it] should be thought, that he Intended to seize the tyranny into his own hands, and make himself absolute... a favorer of Arbitrary power, it was therefore agreed, that this Club should be Governed by a rotation of presidents... (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1:93-94)

And, so, as the colonies headed toward rebellion, it was inevitable that the clubs' mock battles and even mock "Great Rebellions" (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 2:376) would project beyond "clubical" concerns. "The Fort St. David's Company", Shields observes, "displayed a unanimity in opposition to Britain, providing much of the leadership of the Light Horse of the City of Philadelphia…" (195).

Where nonsense lurks, systems of authority, power and government are routinely inveighed against. Shields notes, for example, that there is an evident anti-authoritarian undertone in the Crambo match described earlier. He writes, "The poem's suggestion that Apollo's reign is ended by their collaborative creation points to an interesting ambivalence concerning the nature of authority…" (168). In newspapers, references to children's nonsense and political comment are often mingled, as in this ABC printed in *The Massachusetts Spy* 22 October 1778:

> O Stands for Oliver----a name fam'd of old.
> P Stands for Parliament a name bought, and sold

And there is this "Jack and Jill" parody in reference to King George from 2 December 1779:

> They set the world a jarring round
> Whilst George is tumbling to the ground

Among Loyalists and Tories Isaiah Thomas' *Massachusetts Spy* was known, as noted earlier, as a "foundry of sedition" (Marble 62). In other American newspapers English politicians are likened to the nonsensical Wise Men of Gotham, as they slaughter America, depicted as The Goose that Laid the Golden Egg. Note also the symbolism of the sleeping lion, representing England, and the dog that is relieving himself on a map of North America (M. Jones 74-5):

Figure 18

There is also ample opportunity to view Thomas' Newbery titles as politically relevant to Revolution-era America. Note this example from *Mother Goose's Melody*:

> Who comes here? A Grenadier,
> What do you want? A pot of beer.
> Where's your money? I forgot.
> Get you gone, you drunken sot. (42)

This verse is quite clearly political and although it was first published in London, its message was relevant to the citizens of Boston, who were, before the Revolution, required to house and feed British soldiers without compensation. This was a main sticking point in Anglo-American relations leading up to the war. Other verses were similarly

suggestive. "I won't be my father's Jack" (*MGM* 20) is interesting for its potential association with a work by Francis Hopkinson. Just as the colonies spiralled toward crisis, in 1774, Hopkinson established a trope in which the name "Jack" recommended a very particular reference. Hopkinson's humorous and satiric allegory of the deterioration of Anglo-American relations, *A Pretty Story*, features "Jack", who represents Massachusetts, and his father, who represents George III (Hopkinson, *Comical Spirit* 53). Like many of Hopkinson's works, *A Pretty Story* was well known in its day; it was, in fact, the text that launched Hopkinson on the national scene. Therefore, the phrase, "I Won't Be My Father's Jack", is potentially rebellious in a way that is specifically reminiscent of the father-son rhetoric that would so often be employed during the conflict with England. Others among Thomas' nursery rhymes are similarly suggestive. In "Boys and Girls Come Out to Play", from *MGM*, there is a subtle anarchy reminiscent of the atmosphere surrounding The Boston Tea Party:

> Boys and Girls come out to play,
> The moon does shine as bright as day;
> Come with a hoop, and come with a call,
> Come with a good will or not at all.
> Lose your supper, lose your sleep,
> Come to your playfellows in the street. (*MGM* 66; *TTSB* 50)

The above verse, as presented in the 1788 American version, is accompanied by an illustration of a group of marauding boys, featured without a hoop, but whose leader is wearing an Indian headdress (*TTSB* 50), which, history tells us, is precisely how participants in the Boston Tea Party disguised themselves. The Tea Party participants were said to be [w]hooping and hollering and it is frequently noted that numerous young boys and apprentices partook in the nocturnal adventure.

50 TOMMY THUMB's

BOYS AND GIRLS.

BOYS and Girls come out to play,
The Moon does ſhine as bright as Day ;
Come with a Hoop, and come with a Call,
Come with a good Will, or not at all;
Loſe your Supper, and loſe your Sleep,
And come to your Playfellows in the Street.

Figure 19

A political intent is certainly manifested in Thomas' attempts to downplay or erase the English origins of the rhymes. "Se saw Sacaradown, Which is the way to London Town?" is, for example, replaced in Thomas' version with "Se saw Sacaradown, Which is the way to *Boston* Town?" (*MGM* 29), and it is no longer London Bridge that is falling down, but *Charlestown* Bridge (*TTSB* 28). Similarly, near the end of *Tommy Thumb's Song Book*, there is an image of children marching with a flag. Although it is still possible to discern the faint cross pattern of the Union Jack, an attempt has possibly been made to darken the emblem in order to hide the offending symbol from view (*TTSB* 64):

Figure 20

Turning next to nonsensical broadsides we note that they were often posted alongside political broadsides. In a number of cases, two poems are printed on one sheet. The sheet containing the nonsense song, "The Cabinet of Wonders", is preceded, for example, by the poem "The Soldier's Dream", which laments the cruelty of war (*Collection*). By juxtaposition, the nonsensical "yard wide foot rule" in "The Cabinet of Wonders" is linked with the impossible idea that the war-broken soldier might someday rest in "The Soldier's Dream". While it may be claimed that this juxtaposition suggests the inevitability of war, it remains equally true that the reverse concept, a utopian vision, is also suggested—a world in which soldiers rest and a foot measures a yard.

Usurpation and the Impossible Rebel

Now that the carnivalesque atmosphere within which nonsense functions and the tendency of nonsense to associate itself with subversive political thought have been established, let us examine specific instances in which nonsense was clearly utilised by colonists to further their rebellious cause.

"Yankee Doodle"

By far the most popular songs in the colonies during the Revolution were the various incarnations of "Yankee Doodle", which were sung during the war by both armies. Today the best remembered, and in some cases the only remembered, verse from "Yankee Doodle" is "Yankee Doodle went to town / Riding on a pony / Stuck a feather in his hat / and called it macaroni." Many scholars have attempted to make sense of the oddness of the American "Yankee Doodle", and American grade-school teachers today are often quick to explain that a "macaroni" was a fop's cap. In reality, the macaroni verse was not in the American original, and its addition (probably during the war) did little to improve the sense of the poem.[15] This modern resistance to understanding "Yankee Doodle" as nonsensical impedes understanding of how the song functioned.

In its earliest incarnation, in the hands of the British, "Yankee Doodle" makes perfect sense, as its verses lampoon one rebel leader after another:

> Arnold[16] is as brave a man
> As ever dealt in horses,
> And now commands a numerous clan
> Of New England Jack-asses.
> Yankey Doodle, &c.

After many similar lines the verse concludes:

> 'tis thus, my friends, we are beset,
> By all those d----n'd invaders;
> No greater villains ever met,
> Than are those Yankey leaders.
> Yankey Doodle, &c. (Opie, *Dictionary* 530-31)

When in 1775 the colonists inexplicably usurped "Yankee Doodle", the new version, titled "The Yankees Return from Camp", made decidedly less sense. One naturally expects that in commandeering the song, the Americans would simply reverse the mocking, replacing American names with those of British leaders. But this is not what occurred. The new

verses, which ostensibly relate a tour of the Continental forces at Cambridge, Massachusetts, trip from image to image with little connection between ideas. The original fifteen-verse broadside version of "The Yankees Return from Camp" (1775) is more picaresque in nature than anything else, as the hero, a young boy sporting colloquial speech, falls in and out of trouble as he wanders through the American military camp. In the end the soldiers frighten him off by threatening to throw him in a newly dug grave.

> It fear'd me so, I hook'd it off,
> Nor stop'd as I remember,
> Nor turn'd about 'till I got home,
> Lock'd up in mother's chamber.
> Yankey doodle, keep it up,
> Yankee doddle, dandy;
> Mind the music and the step,
> And with the girls be handy. (Bumgardner)

Regardless of what sense one makes of "The Yankees Return from Camp", the destiny of "Yankee Doodle", as it soon became known, was decidedly nonsensical. Verses were added that had no connection to the "story"—and it was the addition of these wanton verses that secured "Yankee Doodle" its fame:

> Yankee Doodle went to town,
> Riding on a pony.
> Stuck a feather in his hat,
> And called it macaroni.

By 1787 the character of Richard in American playwright Royall Tyler's play, *The Contrast*, quips that he knows "only 180 verses [of 'Yankee Doodle']," but that "our Tabitha at home can sing it all" (Opie, *Dictionary* 530). Verses were apparently being added at will, with no regard for the American original, as one would normally expect of a song with sacred patriotic associations.

"Yankee Doodle" appears to function in numerous ways. On 29 June 1798, the New York *Commercial Advertiser* suggests the fluidity of purpose with which the song

functioned, as it takes a stab at the French, who at the time were considered a threat to American shipping:

> Sing Yankee Doodle, that fine tune,
> Americans delight in;
> It suits for peace, it suits for fun,
> It suits as well for fighting.
> Yankee doodle (mind the tune)
> Yankee doodle dandy,
> If Frenchmen come with naked bum,
> We'll spank 'em hard and handy. ("Sing Yankee Doodle")

Another example of the political elasticity of "Yankee Doodle" is found in 1801. In that year the American poet and Federalist lawyer John Honeywood produced a verse satire that Lawrence Buell suggests is "probably supposed to be sung to the tune of 'Yankee Doodle'" (97).

> I'm rugged mat, the democrat,
> Berate me as you please, Sir;
> True Paddy Wack ne'er turn'd his back,
> Or bow'd his head to Caesar.
> Horum, scorum, rendum, roarum,
> Spittam, spattam, squirto;
> Tag, rag, derry, merry, raw head and bloody bones,
> Sing langolee, nobody's hurt, O! (Ibid)

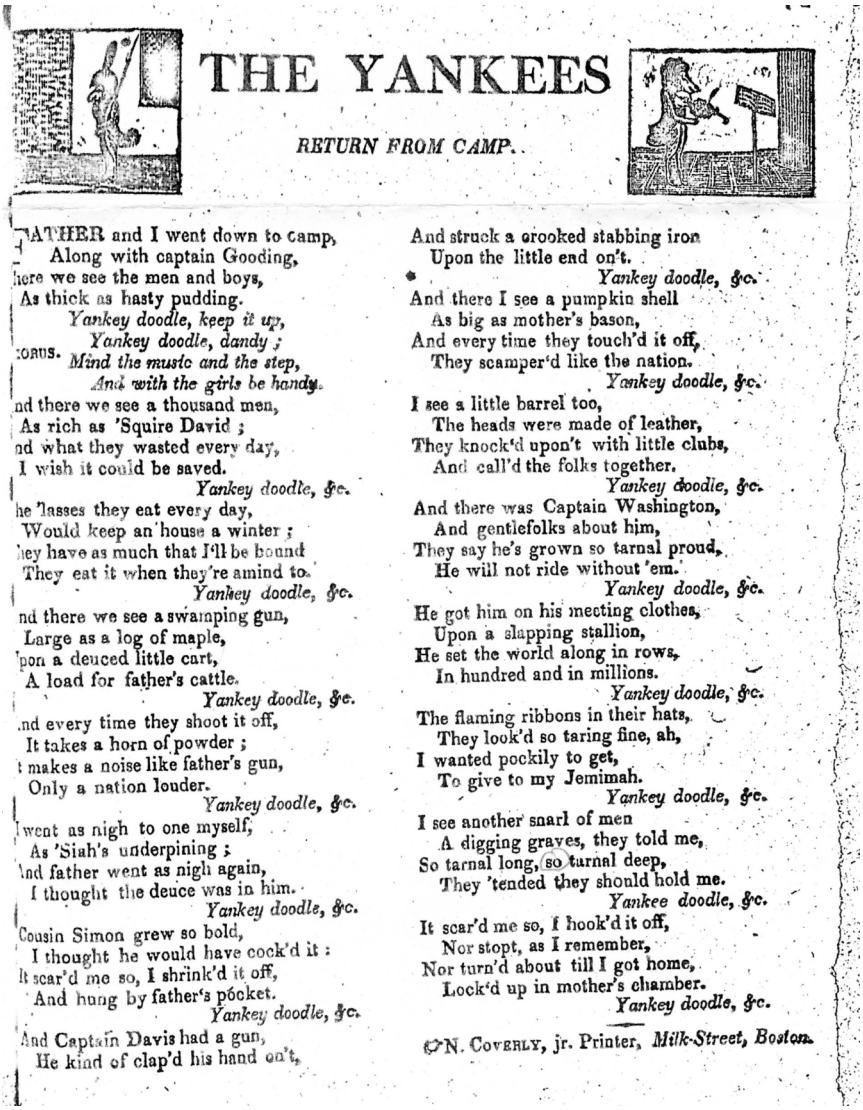
While Buell indicates that the above verses are politically motivated and directed at Mathew Lyon, a republican congressman from Vermont, it also remains true that Honeywood's second verse indicates the confidence with which a respected American politician could take a sacred political song, "Yankee Doodle", render it nonsensical, and use it to deal a blow to an opponent. "Yankee Doodle", as a sacred song, is turned into outright nonsense in the hands of Honeywood in order to confound his opponent. This is precisely how "Yankee Doodle" functioned politically during the Revolutionary War. As Cammaerts suggests, noted in Chapter One, nonsense works are impervious to parody, "You can not make fun of nonsense" (14-15). This observation explains some of the usefulness and power of nonsense when it is used during a conflict. How could the British

army (or Honeywood's opponent) effectively counter with another song about "Yankee Doodle" when the new version made so little sense? There is no knowable enemy in the American version of "Yankee Doodle". During the Revolution, the rebel appropriation of the song was very disorienting to the British. The 22 July 1775 *Pennsylvania Evening Post* reports the negative effect the American version had on the English troops, stating that "General Gage's troops are much dispirited… and… disposed to leave off dancing any more to the tune 'Yankey Doodle'" (Opie, *Dictionary* 529). Two years later, recalling the rebel victory in Boston, a British officer writes, "…it was not a little mortifying to hear them play this tune, when their army marched down to our surrender" (ibid).

If there is any doubt that this sort of nonsensical melodic piracy was a recognised tool of the rebel, one need only read the Preface to the Newbery and Thomas editions of *Mother Goose's Melody* (published respectively in c. 1780 and c. 1785), in which the "history" of the nonsense song "There Was an Old Women Toss'd Up in a Blanket" is detailed. The author of the Preface, (perhaps Oliver Goldsmith), describes an original un-nonsensical melody composed by Henry V. "Of this", the reader learns, "his enemies took advantage" (vi). The rebellious faction retain the King's melody but implant a new set of nonsensical lyrics. The scenario described in the Preface thus operates as a blueprint for the American usurpation of "Yankee Doodle".

A later version of the broadside, "The Yankees Return from Camp", printed in Boston in c. 1810, further emphasises that nonsense functioned to idealise the rebel. This broadside is topped, on the upper right-hand corner, by an illustration of a dog playing a fiddle, indicating that the printer equated "Yankee Doodle" with nonsense poems such as "High Diddle Diddle", with its musical cat, or "Old Mother Hubbard", whose talented dog was also a violinist. On the top left-hand side of this printing, however, there is a stiff soldier adorned with an imposing British Grenadier helmet. Separated by the title, and

standing with their backs to one another, the two figures clearly represent two ideologies; the stiff, sensible British soldier on the left, and the jovial, nonsensical American on the right:



THE YANKEES

RETURN FROM CAMP.

ATHER and I went down to camp,
Along with captain Gooding,
here we see the men and boys,
As thick as hasty pudding.
Yankey doodle, keep it up,
Yankey doodle, dandy ;
CORUS. *Mind the music and the step,*
And with the girls be handy.
nd there we see a thousand men,
As rich as 'Squire David ;
nd what they wasted every day,
I wish it could be saved.
Yankey doodle, &c.
he 'lasses they eat every day,
Would keep an house a winter ;
ey have as much that I'll be bound
They eat it when they're amind to.
Yankey doodle, &c.
nd there we see a swamping gun,
Large as a log of maple,
pon a deuced little cart,
A load for father's cattle.
Yankey doodle, &c.
nd every time they shoot it off,
It takes a horn of powder ;
t makes a noise like father's gun,
Only a nation louder.
Yankey doodle, &c.
went as nigh to one myself,
As 'Siah's underpining ;
nd father went as nigh again,
I thought the deuce was in him.
Yankey doodle, &c.
Cousin Simon grew so bold,
I thought he would have cock'd it :
It scar'd me so, I shrink'd it off,
And hung by father's pocket.
Yankey doodle, &c.
And Captain Davis had a gun,
He kind of clap'd his hand on't,
And struck a crooked stabbing iron
Upon the little end on't.
Yankey doodle, &c.
And there I see a pumpkin shell
As big as mother's bason,
And every time they touch'd it off,
They scamper'd like the nation.
Yankey doodle, &c.
I see a little barrel too,
The heads were made of leather,
They knock'd upon't with little clubs,
And call'd the folks together.
Yankey doodle, &c.
And there was Captain Washington,
And gentlefolks about him,
They say he's grown so tarnal proud,
He will not ride without 'em.
Yankey doodle, &c.
He got him on his meeting clothes,
Upon a slapping stallion,
He set the world along in rows,
In hundred and in millions.
Yankey doodle, &c.
The flaming ribbons in their hats,
They look'd so taring fine, ah,
I wanted pockily to get,
To give to my Jemimah.
Yankey doodle, &c.
I see another snarl of men
A digging graves, they told me,
So tarnal long, so tarnal deep,
They 'tended they should hold me.
Yankee doodle, &c.
It scar'd me so, I hook'd it off,
Nor stopt, as I remember,
Nor turn'd about till I got home,
Lock'd up in mother's chamber.
Yankee doodle, &c.

C. N. COVERLY, jr. Printer, *Milk-Street, Boston.*

Figure 21

As the nineteenth century progressed, the perception that "Yankee Doodle" was intended to be nonsensical was largely forgotten. This growing misunderstanding culminated in the twentieth-century educators' anxious scramble to find sense in the macaroni verse. Only rarely is "Yankee Doodle" understood for what it is; the *Golden Book of Favorite Songs* (1915) is an exception, its editor commenting, "The words [to 'Yankee Doodle'] which were once sung to this tune by the colonists were little more than meaningless

doggerel…". That the song was intended as "meaningless doggerel" is correct. However, the dismissive qualifier, "little more than", suggests a basic misunderstanding of the power such doggerel can wield.

"The World Turned Upside Down"

As detailed in Chapter One, the imagery of the song "The World Turned Upside Down" has an ancient history. The radical sentiment, "The first shall be last, the last first", is found in the writings of Herodotus and Ovid and in the gospels of Mark and Mathew. Printed comic verses based on this trope date back to the Medieval period (Malcolm 53-54), predictably resurfacing time and again during civil conflicts. As David Kunzle remarks in "The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society", "'The World Upside Down' [in prints and broadsheets] emerged in response to a moment in history particularly fraught with tensions and paradoxes" (76). Not surprisingly, then, "The World Turned Upside Down" was a popular song during the English Civil War in the previous century[17] and was reinvented, performed, or invoked at crucial moments during the later American Rebellion.

Like "Yankee Doodle", the history of the use of "The World Turned Upside Down" during the Revolution involves an American usurpation, and in the newer American version, the song's absurdity and nonsensicality is increased. In the setting of the English Civil War "The World Turned Upside Down" was associated with the Royalist cause, its verses intended to portray the evils of a world that has lost its King and custom. During the conflict between England and the American colonies, however, the song is uniquely associated with defeats or setbacks for the British. According to American popular tradition the British performed "The World Turned Upside Down" at

two of their military defeats. The first occasion, on 26 February 1775, was at Salem Bridge, in Massachusetts. While no shots were fired during this confrontation, the British forces were turned away by an organised group of American militia. Historian William Hillenbrand relates that, as the British retreated, their musicians performed, "The World Turned Upside Down". The second occasion, legend tells, was at the British surrender at Yorktown, 19 October 1781.[18] Significantly, these are the first and last military engagements of the American Rebellion.

It is difficult to determine with any certainty which of several possible versions of "The World Turned Upside Down" the British intended to be associated with their musical performances. Like "Yankee Doodle", the various incarnations of "The World Turned Upside Down" share a melody, but are comprised of various sets of lyrics. The song "The World Turned Upside Down" began its life in 1632 under a different title, "Marry Me, Marry Me, Quoth the Bonny Lass". During the English Civil War, in 1646, new lyrics were written for this melody and the new song was titled "The World Is Turned Upside Down". This song was decidedly loyalist and anti-Puritanical, and warned of the deleterious effect that Cromwell would have on English custom:

> Holy-days are despis'd,
> New fashions are devis'd.
> Old Christmas is kickt out of Town.
> Yet let's be content, and the times lament,
> You see the world turn'd upside down. (Montgomery)

One year later the melody was again re-appropriated. This next new version removed the lyric "world turn'd upside down", but retained the melody and the loyalist allegiance. Titled "When the King Enjoys his Own Again", this song became immensely popular in England, and for 150 years remained a staple of the British military repertoire. Historian Dennis Montgomery notes:

> Since ["When the King Enjoys his Own Again"] was performed in honor of nearly every possible occasion of national significance, the lyrics often required changing. The song was heard under titles like "A Review of the Rebellion", "Monarchy Triumph", "Since Hanover has Come", and "The Last News from France."

Therefore, when the Americans heard the British perform a melody that sounded to them like "The World Turned Upside Down"—and it is unlikely that the British would have sung the words—any number of various sets of lyrics could have been understood as intended. However, based on the custom of what was normally performed at "occasions of national significance", it is likely that the song intended was "When the King Enjoys his Own Again"—a lament, and a decidedly un-nonsensical song. These lyrics, if they had been sung, would have run:

> There's neither swallow, Dove or Dade
> Can soar more high or deeper wade
> Nor show a reason from the stars
> What causeth peace or civil wars
> The Man in the Moon may wear out his shoon
> By running after Charles his wain
> But all to no end for the times will not mend
> Till the King enjoys his own again. (Montgomery)

The Americans, however, unwilling to "hear" these lyrics, offered their own interpretation of the British performance. The earliest reference in print to the Yorktown performance of "The World Turned Upside Down" is found in *Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War in America,* published by Alexander Garden in 1822, forty-one years after the defeat of the British. Prior to that, one assumes, and since then, American popular tradition has maintained that the song performed by the British was not "When the King Enjoys His Own Again", as was probably the case, but an alternate eighteenth-century version of "The World Turned Upside Down" that shared the same melody—this version being decidedly nonsensical:

If buttercups buzz'd after the bee
If boats were on land, churches on sea
If ponies rode men and if grass ate the cows
And cats should be chased into holes by the mouse
If the mamas sold their babies
To the Gypsies for half a crown
If summer were spring
And the other way 'round
Then all the world would be upside down! (Montgomery)

This version fits neatly into the new republic's idea of itself as "other" and promotes a popular image for the American Rebellion. From the American perspective the above verses are not indicative of the tragic loss of King and custom. Instead, in the context of the British surrender, they underscore an unprecedented success—a success in alternating the order of the world in significant ways. Like the enemy in the American version of "Yankee Doodle", the "enemy" in the above verse is unpredictable and unknowable. This enemy cannot be engaged with rationally.

Nonsense in Power Relations and Protest

Nonsense also figures in protest forms during the rebellion. It may be useful here to revisit the steps by which the rebel learns to associate nonsense with power relations. Chapter One suggests that the adult perception that nonsense can be used in the negotiation of power and struggle is likely based on childhood experience. The Opies demonstrate that nonsense operates as a legislative language, and that nonsense phrases are used among children to regulate authority structures in their games and society. Pledges and agreements among children, such as oral contracts, permanent exchanges of goods, absolute possession, civic duty and truce terms, are made "legal" by the recitation of nonsense words or phrases (*Lore* 130-53). Although the Opies' examples were collected in the mid-twentieth century, it would be unreasonable to doubt that similar

methods of children's oral legislation were operating in colonial America. The Opies, for example, present examples of oral legislation that utilise nonsense words dating back six hundred years. Crying "barley" is especially ancient, dating at least to the fourteenth century (*Lore* 148), "I'll cry Laggy" is documented in 1609 (*Lore* 138n), crying "Halphers" dates apparently to at least 1659 (*Lore* 137), and "Liar Liar Lickspit" was first printed in 1744 in *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* (*Lore*, 127n) and was reproduced in Thomas' edition of that title in 1787 (*TTSB* 54). As surely as the English language, mummers' plays and other customs were transported to America, so too were traditions of children's oral legislation.

Part of the appeal of these customs for children is that any code specifically pertaining to childhood culture attains significance simply by its otherness relative to adult language and customs. Nonsensical children's oral legislation has, then, an anti-authoritarian posture in its base appeal. Moving from childhood to adulthood this aspect of nonsense is perhaps subconsciously recalled and, as such, is naturally re-invoked in times when authority figures need to be rebelled against. In adult tradition this anti-authoritarian nonsense can be invoked in various forms of protest. Chapter One, for example, demonstrates how nonsense is invoked in rough music, a protest tradition popular in England from the Early Modern era to the early twentieth century. Rough music was anti-authoritarian in that the official due processes of government were rejected in favour of mob rule, and officials understood that when a rough-musicing commenced, it was time to look the other way. The doggerels sung at these events, such as, "Ran, tan tan! The sign of the old kettle, and the old tin pan" (Thompson 512), suggest, as noted in Chapter One, that this particular form of protest is grounded in the ritual belief that by enacting youthful absurdity, justice will be achieved. Rough music did cross the Atlantic. It was known, in a lighter form, in nineteenth-century America, as a Shivaree (Thompson

470) and the French form, Charivari, was documented in nineteenth-century Quebec (Thompson 487). Peter Shaw describes a more overtly political form of rough-music occurring during the Stamp Act riots, and notes that these protest were "derived from English folk punishments" (177; 185).

The Boston Tea Party

It comes as no surprise, then, that the English tradition of rough musicing bears a strong resemblance to the event that took place the evening of 16 December 1773, namely, The Boston Tea Party. Rough music protests typically involved elaborate masking and masquerading, blackening of faces, and whooping and hollering. The participants in The Boston Tea Party performed all of these rituals. And like the English villagers from whom they inherited the tradition, the participants in The Boston Tea Party also spoke nonsense. As Wesley Griswold contends, the festival atmosphere which preceded The Tea Party involved multiple requests to "fetch more punch", which inspired the participants in The Tea Party "to try to talk like Indians as well" (97). And, as noted in Chapter One, they apparently did. An eyewitness, Bostonian John Andrews, describes the participants as disguised as Indians, then adds, "nor was their dialect different from which I conceive [the Indians] to speak, as their jargon was unintelligible to all but themselves" (95). Here it is the inexplicable behaviour—the unintelligible language—that helps separate the rebels from the establishment and create a sense of otherness.

There were other hints of nonsense attending The Boston Tea Party. A provoking letter printed in *The Boston Gazette* three days prior to the event on 13 December alerted Bostonians to the military threat posed by the British Navy, whose ships were quietly being moved in and around the harbour near the tea ships. The correspondent of this

article signs his name "Nononchrotonthologos" (Labaree 136), a nonsense portmanteau that, if roughly translated, might be interpreted as Mr. No-Time-or-Knowlegde. Then, on the 16th, on the morning that preceded The Tea Party, a new issue of *The Massachusetts Spy* was published. As a member of the radical Sons of Liberty, Isaiah Thomas, the journal's publisher, would have been informed well in advance of what was going to happen that evening. *The Spy* casually reports current events on page two, remarking, for example, that "Mr. Roach, owner of the [tea] ship Dartmouth, rather lingered in his preparations to return her to London…" (*Massachusetts Spy* 16 Dec. 1773). The entirety of page one, however, is reserved for Benjamin Franklin's latest, "RULES by which a GREAT EMPIRE may be reduced to a SMALL ONE", which is a nineteen-step self-help program for reducing empires and includes such advice as,

> Take special care the provinces are never incorporated with the mother country; that they do not enjoy the same common rights, the same privileges in commerce; and that they are governed by severer laws, all of your enacting, without allowing them any share in the choice of the legislators. (Ibid)

No doubt this satiric reversal, lying open on tables or posted prominently in taverns, was congenial to the spirit of irreverence that radiated among those preparing to participate in the protest.

The name of the event in question, The Tea "Party", is significant. The event could as easily have been dubbed the Tea Riot or the Tea Protest, but by labelling the event a "party" the colonists were underscoring the reality that the event was a festive and humorous occasion. Reportage on the event also invoked nonsense. "The World Turned Upside-Down" was invoked visually in the broadside *Liberty Triumphant*, a comical celebration of the Boston Tea Party published in the colonial press in early 1774. It depicts the map of the North Atlantic and its nations inverted.

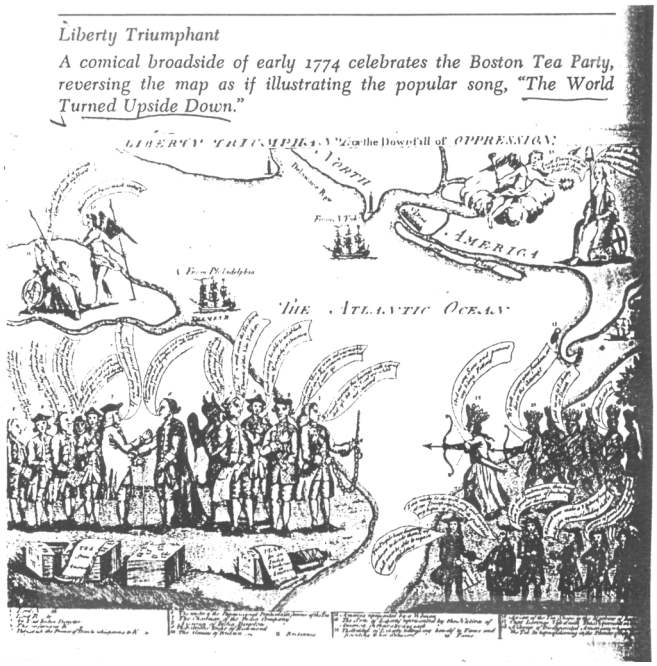


Figure 22

Historian Peter Thomas remarks, "No revisionist interpretation of the American Revolution has sought to discount the significance of The Boston Tea Party as the actual catalyst of the sequence of events wherein the colonies moved from resistance to revolution" (24-5). This "actual catalyst" was anticipated, fostered, attended and celebrated by nonsense. Ninety-two years before Alice, it was the rebel colonist who celebrated the first Mad Tea Party.

Nonsense and the American Flag

Nonsense, in significant ways, may also have informed the creation of rebellious symbols. Among his many activities Francis Hopkinson was also a designer of official symbols. Hopkinson devised numerous official ornaments and devices, such as checks appearing on bills of exchange, ship papers, and the seals of the boards of Admiralty, the Treasury, the American Philosophical Society, the state of New Jersey, the University of Pennsylvania and even the Great Seal of the United States (Westlake iii). And as Neda

Westlake asserts, “In 1777 he designed the American flag” (ibid). A U.S. government website informs,

> In a letter to the Board of Admiralty in 1780 Hopkinson asserted that he had designed “The flag of the United States of America”… Hopkinson had received nothing for this work, and now he submitted a bill and asked “whether a Quarter Cask of the public wine” would not be a reasonable and proper reward for his labors. (“History of the Flag”)

In the end Hopkinson was not paid for his trouble, but the issue appears to have been a technical one, involving his failure to produce proper receipts. The lack of official acknowledgement might also have been related to political infighting:

> Though Hopkinson’s political adversaries blocked all attempts to have him paid for his services, they never denied that he made the designs. The journals of the Continental Congress clearly show that he designed the flag. (Ibid)

Most historians do place Hopkinson first on the list of those most likely to have created the flag.[19] The popular myth that Betsy Ross created the flag, in consultation with George Washington, is entirely fictional.

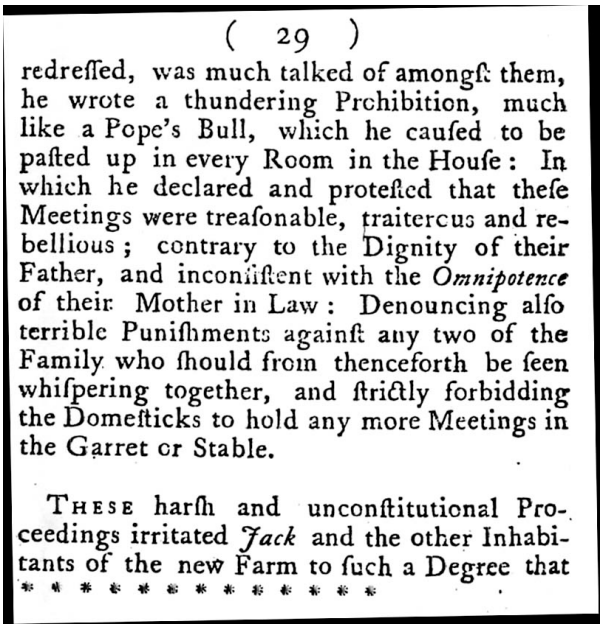
Knowing what we do of Hopkinson’s creative process, described earlier and in his own words as,

> I walk round the square and attend to all the scraps and fragments of conversation which I can pick up en passant... I write down these on separate pieces of paper; and then amuse myself with arranging them in such order, as to produce, if possible, some apparent connection of sense… (*Comical Spirit* 156-158)

it may be asserted that the flag of The United States is, most specifically, a jumbled Union Jack. Indeed, the flag of The United States does appear as if it were created by cutting the British ensign to pieces, tossing these in the air and then rearranging them back together in some new semblance of order. A children’s animated film, “No More Kings”, which was featured in the *Schoolhouse Rock* series that appeared on American television in the early

1970s, depicts this very process during a segment on the American Revolution, when a British flag goes all to pieces and is slid back together as an American flag (Ahrens).

Further, the origin of the thirteen stars on the original U.S. flag may be linked to one of Hopkinson's humorous productions. While it is clear that the thirteen stars represent the thirteen colonies, the reason for using the star motif has puzzled historians. Various theories have been suggested, including that stars appear in the heraldic arms of Hopkinson's and George Washington's ancestors, and that stars represent a new constellation. However, historians have overlooked that, prior to the Revolution, Hopkinson had already used the image of thirteen stars to represent the thirteen colonies in one of his most important patriotic works, *A Pretty Story* (1774). The aforementioned *Pretty Story*, a mock children's book, was presented at The First Continental Congress and the text concludes with an enigmatic and threatening thirteen-starred "ellipse". Here, in the final line of *A Pretty Story*, "Jack" represents Massachusetts and the "new Farm" represents the American colonies. Hopkinson writes, "These harsh and unconstitutional Proceedings irritated Jack and the other inhabitants of the new Farm to such a Degree that **********" (*Comical Spirit* 55; Westlake 29).



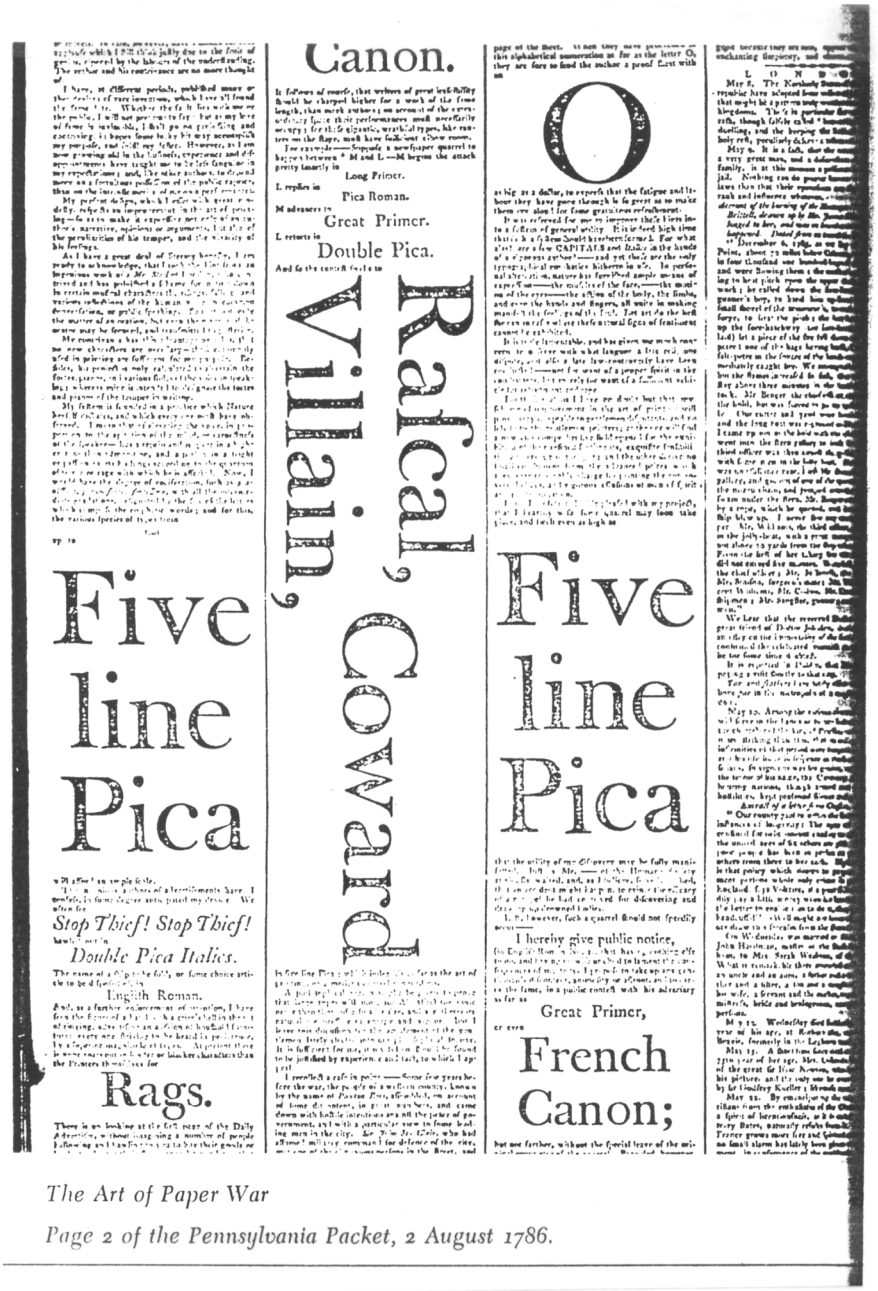
(29)

redreſſed, was much talked of amongſt them, he wrote a thundering Prohibition, much like a Pope's Bull, which he cauſed to be paſted up in every Room in the Houſe: In which he declared and proteſted that theſe Meetings were treaſonable, traitercus and rebellious; contrary to the Dignity of their Father, and inconſiſtent with the *Omnipotence* of their Mother in Law: Denouncing alſo terrible Puniſhments againſt any two of the Family who ſhould from thenceforth be ſeen whiſpering together, and ſtrictly forbidding the Domeſticks to hold any more Meetings in the Garret or Stable.

THESE harſh and unconſtitutional Proceedings irritated *Jack* and the other Inhabitants of the new Farm to ſuch a Degree that * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Figure 23

Hopkinson's "ellipse" has not been mentioned in relation to the American flag previously. One reason that the ellipse has eluded historians is because important reprintings of *A Pretty Story* (1792, 1857 and 1970) fail to recognize the significance of the ellipse, and the full ellipse is not reproduced in these editions. The 1857 and 1970 editions, for example, only reproduce five of the symbols. After 1774 then, the thirteen-starred ellipse was not reproduced for 195 years, when it appeared in Neda Westlake's 1969 facsimile. The ellipse is important, however, not only because it may be the first use of thirteen "stars" to represent the thirteen colonies, but also because of the thought process that led to its use. Like Lewis Carroll, Hopkinson was unusually fastidious—and humorously experimental—when it came to the relationship between words, symbols and meaning. Hopkinson's canon, including the aforementioned, *A New Plan for Education*, in which he imagines children play-acting the parts of speech (*Comical Spirit* 59-63), and *The Art of Paper War*, in which he recommends that certain newspaper typefaces be devoted to denoting specific emotions (*Comical Spirit* 169-78), is the canon of a writer who often sought to reach beyond the traditional confines of the written symbol and infuse greater representational value into the printed medium. Below, Hopkinson's "The Art of Paper War":



The Art of Paper War

Page 2 of the Pennsylvania Packet, 2 August 1786.

Figure 24

For the conclusion of *A Pretty Story*, then, Hopkinson invented a better ellipse—one that represents a physical reality. Just as he did in *The Art of Paper War*, he replaces inconspicuous, mild-mannered symbols with ostentatious, meaning-laden ones. The American flag, then, is born from nonsense. Not only is its pattern a jumbled British flag, but the stars originate from an incomplete sentence—a sentence that threatens anarchy and whose implications are left trailing to the horizon. It is within a text that poses as a

children's book, while experimenting with the boundaries of language, by the hands of a writer of nonsense, that the symbol of the United States came to be.

Narrative Void and Political Allegory

In Chapter One I suggested that the combination of narrative voids and obscure symbolism so common to nonsense poems assures that readers will associate such texts with subversive ideologies. Bakhtin would concur, as he believed bedlamite texts tended to invite political thinking on the part of the reader:

> [these poems are] written in such a way that the reader is induced to look in it for allusions to some contemporary or recent political events… (*Rabelais* 424)

In the following exercise, therefore, I answer Frederic Jameson's call in *The Political Unconscious* to "Always historicise" (ix), aiming to demonstrate the great felicity with which nonsense yields to historisation. For the moment I am not concerned with the veracity of my allegorical reading, but rather wish to suggest the ease with which such allegory may be culled from works that leave out key logical connectors. Jameson suggests that a proper Marxist interpretation should proceed in three stages. First, the reader must unravel the allegory, taking plot and character as signs referring to actual historical personages and a contemporary political situation (60-62).

For this exercise I will assume the position of an educated Bostonian in the year 1786 who has just purchased a new copy of Isaiah Thomas' *Mother Goose's Melody.* As an avid reader of journals I am familiar with mad political cartoons such as the aforementioned *Mal Lui Veut Mal Lui Tourne* (1780), which featured the lion, the monkey the giant table and the cow who represented England (Hopkinson, *Comical Spirit* 78; Figure 3, p. 36, this study). Further, as a Bostonian I am fully aware of Thomas'

reputation as a propagandist from the late war—that Thomas and Paul Revere collaborated on various propaganda cartoons, including the broadside, "A Monumental Inscription on the Fifth of March", which recounted the Boston Massacre in verse and illustration, and did much to solidify resistance to the British.

Opening Thomas' latest publication, *Mother Goose's Melody*, I read in the Preface that the nonsense poem "There Was and Old Woman Toss'd Up in a Blanket" concerns King Henry V and that the "The king is represented as an old woman, engaged in a pursuit the most absurd and extravagant imaginable…" (vii). On page 30 I read the following verse:

> Shoe the Colt,
> Shoe the Colt,
> Shoe the wild Mare;
> Hear a nail,
> There a Nail,
> yet she goes bare (30)

I then note that the editor of the volume has added some helpful advice on how I should interpret this verse: "That's the Way of the World, and is the Method pursued by all our Financiers, Politicians, and Necromancers" (ibid). Clearly, then, I gather that this book is intended as a work of social and political criticism. The stage is now set for me to read and interpret on my own. Turning forward one page I discover the following verse:

> High Diddle Diddle
> The Cat and the fiddle,
> The Cow jump'd over the Moon:
> The little dog laugh'd
> To see such craft,
> And the dish ran away with the
> Spoon. (32)

Reading "High Diddle Diddle" as a contemporary allegory, it is clear that "The dish" is George Washington, as in "she's a dish", a person especially appealing and desirable. The Spoon is his victory at Yorktown that he "ran away with"; this is an allegorical

"spoon/victory", by which the new nation can now reasonably hope to prosper economically, so that spoons will no longer be empty. The little dog is Lafayette (his "dogness" is understood as cunning, as in a fox, like Reynard). He is regarded as "little" because he was only second in command under Washington. As a Frenchman and an old enemy of the English, Lafayette could hardly help but "laugh at the sport" when he saw his nemesis, the British commander Cornwallis (derogatorily portrayed as a cow) sail back across the Atlantic (that is, "jump over the Moon") in defeat. That the dog represents Lafayette is confirmed by the fact that his "laugh" is readily translated as the "Lafay" in Lafayette. And it is quite clear to me, of course, that a cow must represent England, because a cow represents England in *Mal Lui Veut Mal Lui Tourne*. The Cat with his fiddle is the Continental Congress, orchestrating the war and leading the dance.

Jameson instructs that the second phase of interpretation should reflect an ideological conflict in terms of a discourse on class struggle (60-62). Heeding Jameson's advice is effortless, as "High Diddle Diddle" reads not unlike "The World Turned Upside-Down", where the impossible has occurred and natural laws have been reversed. In real life, the people, as members of a republic, have defeated a king, the leader of a mighty empire. Likewise, the verse in question celebrates *impossibilia* with joy—a cat playing a fiddle, a dog laughing, a cow jumping over the moon, inanimate objects eloping together. The dish and the spoon, particularly, as a mixed-race pairing, represent the freedom the new historical paradigm will offer to do what was once thought forbidden by nature.

Finally Jameson asks for a reading of the "ideology of form" (62), in which the form of the literary work itself represents a historical tension (60-62), the passing from the Age of Reason to the Romantic Era, for example. Here "High Diddle Diddle" is in a fixed state of resistance, and will not allow one age to pass to the next. The verse commences with a Rousseauesque romantic call to look back to the foundations of our language and

our beliefs—to a primeval time when language was musical, passionate, and sung rather than spoken (Rousseau 15), when "High Diddle Diddle" and the moon meant something more than it does now in this too practical Age of Reason. But the dog laughs at such "craft", mocking the pseudo-mythology of the opening lines. The result of this laughter is that, literally, the lines shift. The phrase "And the dish", is indented one space, emphasizing that the fluid motion of the verse must be interrupted. Finally, in the last line, the spoon sits by itself, self-consciously indented, refocusing completely the reader's attention onto the most mundane of objects, a spoon, which in its commonness is directly compared in rhyme to the Moon, an object associated with romance and dreams. For this *is* the Age of Reason and if you bring in mythology and romance you will be soundly mocked, then brought back to earth.

The above interpretations demonstrate how nonsense often functions in the mind of the reader. While my readings may appear outlandish, they are in no way unusual when compared with other readings of "High Diddle Diddle" offered with greater conviction. As noted in Chapter One, by the eighteenth century, popular political readings had existed for some time for a number of nonsense verses featured in Thomas' children's books. Besides "High Diddle Diddle", in which the complex allegory concerning the court of Elizabeth was rumoured to lurk, political readings of "Little Jack Horner", "Sing a Song of Sixpence", "Mistress Mary", "Hark Hark, the Dogs Do Bark" and "The Lion and the Unicorn", among others, were commonly known.[20]

SECTION III: MYTHIC SPACE AND COLONIAL AMERICAN NONSENSE

Magic, Pagan Association and Otherness

Chapter One examines Elizabeth Sewell's contention in *Field of Nonsense* that nonsense says "no" to any type of magic or mysticism. Her observation is discovered to be correct on one level. There are countless occurrences in nonsense literature in which mythological and magical beliefs are lampooned, discredited and brought down to earth. At the Tuesday Club, the levelling of mythical and arbitrary systems of power was a major preoccupation. One evening the club discussed magic and wondered whether, through magic, it would be possible to

> know another man's thoughts... see into futurity... prevent the evil eye... avoid witchcraft... charm away distempers and cure them by repeating certain words... (Hamilton, Complete Ed. 2:20)

At this point the Club Secretary relates a magic cure for quartan ague, a cure that is effected by the writing out of the magic word abracadabra in a "mystical" pattern:

> a b r a c a d a b r a
> a b r a c a d a b r
> a b r a c a d a b
> a b r a c a d a
> a b r a c a d
> a b r a c a
> a b r a c
> a b r a
> a b r
> a b
> a. (Ibid)

The charm, unfortunately, has no effect, and the Club Secretary concludes,

> We are told [the charm has been] used with success for a thousand times, but somehow or other, in these our degenerate days, has lost its efficacy, probably for some necessary circumstance being omitted... such perhaps as repeating it in a certain hour of the day... or in a particular posture of the

> body... or with two stockings on one leg, or with a Jacket wrong Side outwards... (Ibid)

As noted in Chapter One, authority figures whose power is sanctified by quasi-mythological belief systems—systems that endow, for example, persons with royal lineage with rights withheld from the common folk—may suffer a certain loss of prestige in the face of a proliferation of verses that serve to bring their mythological power down to earth. The nonsense published in Thomas' children's books is eminently suited to serve this function. In "Sing a Song of Six Pence", for example King is the object of an elaborate practical joke and is served a joke pie filled with live birds (*TTSB* 53). And there is this brief comment from an ABC typeset by Thomas in 1764, "K was a King, / And he govern'd a mouse" (*TTPB*, 1764 10; *TTPB*, 1794 10). Crowns, sceptres and shooting stars are conspicuously absent from the treatments of these royal persons. It is rather with joke pies, bags of rye and mice that these nonsense poems "ordain" Kings. Several other of the texts and ephemera we have already examined, such as The Fort St. David's Fishing Company's "hog in armor" that was juxtaposed against a portrait of George III (Shields 196) and the "poem" from *The Massachusetts Spy*, in which the King's courtiers require fresh air, also serve to bring royalty down to earth, where they can be confronted without fear or superstition.

Contrary to Sewell's contention, however, nonsense does subtly ally itself with the supernatural. And through subversive allusions nonsense subconsciously encourages "pagan" or unofficial belief systems. Nonsense is almost never forthcoming about this agenda. The clues are typically left lurking quietly by themselves as a subtext. To fully comprehend how political subversion is fostered by nonsense, one must understand how this other-worldliness operates in the "genre". Consider the following verse from the 23 July 1778 *Massachusetts Spy*:

> When the white horse doth over the Lion rule,
> And great Kingdoms are guided by a mule,

When the rank Thistle doth surpass the rose
In Odour, and in smell please every nose,
When Covent Garden cross the Atlantic seas,
And Women's Heads grow bigger than their tails,
When Britons within themselves do disunite,
And Foreign Soldiers doth their battles fight,
Then England will fall, and never rise again,
This mighty Empire will be rent in twain.

One way of reading the above poem is as a straightforward political rhyme written from a loyalist perspective, suggesting that it is impossible to imagine England, represented by the Lion, as ever being defeated. A more subtle reader will discover, however, that the point of the poem is, in fact, to offer a clue as to how England *can* be defeated. If this were not its point, the poem would never have been printed in *The Massachusetts Spy*, a decidedly rebellious publication. It should be noted first that the poem references two well-known nonsense poems, "The World Turned Upside Down", in its topsy-turvy images, and "The Lion and the Unicorn", in the contest posited in the first line. The references to these two nonsense poems respectively promise inversion and the defeat of monarchs. The verse is initially rendered subversive by the line "And Foreign Soldiers doth their battles fight". By 1778 this particular "oddity" was already happening. The English had been using Hessian forces since 1776 and the Americans had only recently succeeded in luring the French to their side several months before this poem was published. With this clever allusion, positing what is already done as "impossible", suddenly all the other "impossible" ideas are rendered more likely—chief among them, that "Britons within themselves" might "disunite".

The key, however, to understanding how a victory against England will be brought about lies in the first allusion. A "white horse", in English folklore, is linked firmly with superstition. As the Opies note, "a ritual respect for the white horse has long been the rule rather than the exception" (*Lore* 208). At least since Pre-Roman Britain, a white horse has been a pagan symbol, from the White Horse of Uffington, carved into a Berkshire hillside,

to the figure of Epona, one of the most revered of Celtic goddesses, who was most often associated with a white horse. In English tradition, depending on where in England one calls home, seeing a white horse will bring either bad or good luck, and happening upon a white horse is sometimes an occasion to make a magic wish (*Lore* 206-12). According to Simpson and Roud, in *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, horses, in general, are traditionally believed to possess a "psychic awareness of the presence of evil" and placing a horse's skull in the foundation of new home was "an old heathen custom to drive evil away" (188).

Much like in the chap book examined in Chapter One, in which the key to unhinging natural laws is the union of a devil and a witch, the reader of the above poem learns that Britons will "within themselves… disunite", when the "white horse doth… rule" over the Lion. To rule over the Lion is to rule over the English King, and the only way to rule over a king is to compromise the sacredness of the monarchic system. Since the white horse is the object of so many popular pagan beliefs, it is the ideal icon by which to symbolise a force oppositional to a sacred king. Subconsciously, because the symbolic clues lurk below the surface, the reader of nonsense learns that the impossibilities described in the verse may be achieved—indeed they are already happening—but not without an attachment to that which is taboo. The message is, if you want to change the world—or if you want to change the "natural" order of things—you must engage in activities and beliefs that the establishment deems "pagan".

It is for this same reason that the participants in The Boston Tea Party masqueraded as Native Americans. While it is understood that some disguise was necessary to protect the rebels from the British authorities, the choice to dress as Mohawks has puzzled historians. As Benjamin Labaree remarks in *The Boston Tea Party*, "The reason why they dressed this way… is unknown" (143). Yet eyewitnesses to the event

make the reason abundantly clear: “You’d have thought that the inhabitants of the infernal regions had broke loose” (141). A participant, Joshua Wyeth, uses the same imagery: “We surely resembled devils from the bottom-less pit rather than men” (Griswold 101). In *The Witch in History* Diane Purkiss remarks that Native Americans could be seen “to embody the worst imaginable transgressions of the European mind” (*The Witch* 256). Rumours of cannibalism and the killing of babies “recalled the powers of witches and devils” (*The Witch* 101).

This same imagery—the portrayal of the colonial rebel as a devil—is invoked on another occasion in which rebellious activity is celebrated via nonsense. Francis Hopkinson orchestrated one of the most remarkable attacks levelled against the British during the war. In early January 1778, Hopkinson ordered the construction of a number of booby-trapped kegs of gunpowder. He had them waterproofed and set them afloat a few miles upriver from occupied Philadelphia. Hopkinson reasoned that these kegs would eventually bump into the British Ships docked at Philadelphia and when they did, hopefully, they would explode (Zall 95-6). When one keg eventually did explode, the British forces reportedly began firing into the river at anything that floated by. More damaging than the actual attack, however, was Hopkinson’s rollicking verse commemorating the event, *The Battle of the Kegs*, which spread far and wide throughout the colonies and became a favourite song of the colonial forces. In one verse Hopkinson posits the British as superstitious and fearful of a most mysterious enemy. Here a captain attempts to wake his commander with news of the bizarre “invasion”:

> Arise! Arise Sir Erskine cries
> The rebels--more’s the pity--
> Without a boat, are all on float,
> And rang’d before the city.
> The motly crew, in vessels new
> With Satan for their guide, sir... (*Comical Spirit* 99)

Recall next the American attachment to "The World Turned Upside Down" in which it was sung, "If the mamas sold their babies / To the Gypsies for half a crown..." (Montgomery) Gypsies selling their babies fits in comfortably with these other American attempts to draw themselves as heathen "others". I submit that the same strategy was employed in the choice to use the snake, the symbol of the Devil, on the first American flag (an idea reportedly invented by Benjamin Franklin and promoted by Isaiah Thomas) (Marble 87). The Devil, Native Americans, Gypsies and the White Horse—in the eighteenth century each of these figures represented an alternative belief system and thus all assert an otherness that directly confronts all that is sacred and traditional.

As Chapter One asserts, Mother Goose and other old women featured in nonsense rhymes were often depicted in illustrations as resembling witches (see Figures 4-8 pp. 54-6, this study). By 1806 the supernatural persona of Mother Goose was endorsed in the stage production *Harlequin and Mother Goose; or The Golden Egg*, in which Mother Goose is pictured as an old hag with a magic wand. And just as Mother Goose can effect a magical transformation, turning her son Jack into Harlequin with her wand, so might we infer that the black cat's talent with its fiddle is drawn somehow from its relation to the witch for whom the book is named. Thomas' *MGM* also contains "The Sow Came in With the Saddle" (63) a nonsensical sequence spoken by Beelzebub, the Prince of Darkness in the Snowshill mummers' play (*Cotswolds* 34). Yet despite what must have been at least a vague awareness of the devil imagery, the "The Sow Came in with the Saddle", like the "White Horse" poem, offers no *overt* reference to a pagan association. The connection to Beelzebub is left unspoken, the explanation for the supernatural events described—the animation of inanimate objects such as gridirons and dishes—are left to simmer subconsciously below the surface.

Another way that nonsense invokes the supernatural is through the use of temporal anomalies such as "One Bright Day in the Middle of the Night". Folk tradition teaches that twilight, the moment between night and day that is both day and night, is the instant when the world of faeries—a world in which natural laws are suspended or reversed—is briefly opened to mortals, and that humans can even metamorphose into fairies in this magic moment. Conundrums of time/space, such as "One Bright Day in the Middle of the Night", similarly invite readers into a "magic" space. Note the following examples from a riddle printed in *The Massachusetts Spy* on 23 May, 1771, in which the reader is asked to imagine a series indeterminate, impossible spaces or situations:

> It is as high as all the stars,
> No well was ever dug so low...
> As dark as night, as cold as ice,
> Shines like the sun and burns like fire...
> Hard as stone, 'tis soft as wool...
> Than the whole earth this bigger is,
> Than a small pin's point this is less…

In *Mother Goose's Melody* there are the "Three children sliding on the ice Upon a summer day" (47). In the broadside, "A Cabinet of Wonders", the reader is asked to imagine "A yard-wide foot rule" (*Collection*). The reader of nonsense, then, is being asked to envision a space or a time that is impossible, a locus that folk custom dictates is a site of otherworldly transformation.

It is in this suggestive atmosphere that metamorphosing the self into what might otherwise be deemed impossible is glimpsed, if only briefly. But if one is to metamorphose or change in some significant way then one must first lose track of one's self. An existential dilemma is required. And like Alice in Chapter Three of *Looking Glass*, who forgets her own name as she wanders in what is apparently a magical forest,

the protagonist in the following poem from *MGM* experiences an existential dilemma in which the self is hopelessly disoriented:

> I Won't be my Father's Jack,
> I won't be my Father's Gill,
> I will be the Fiddler's Wife,
> And have Music when I will.
> T'other little tune,
> T'other little Tune,
> Prithee, Love, play me
> T'other little Tune. (20)

Note first that this person can be neither male nor female. Where the phrase "I Won't be my Father's Jack" suggests the narrator is male, the phrases "I won't be my Father's Gill" and "I will be the Fiddler's Wife" suggest instead that a female is speaking. The verse is further complicated by the image that accompanies it, which is of an adult male (ibid). The narrator, then, occupies an indeterminate space, split between two selves. Further, this person is unsatisfied, and repeatedly requests a "tune" other than that which is currently being offered. Lastly, whatever the cause of dissatisfaction, this person has reached the end of his/her rope and has decided not to cow-tow any longer to any authority, father or mother. In this verse, existential confusion authorises subversion, rebellion and the desire for change. Such is often the disorienting and subversive appeal of nonsense. Similarly, the "White Horse" poem, with its many impossible spaces and its pagan allusion, leads its reader to ask, Why not imagine a time "When Britons within themselves do disunite?". *MGM* enigmatically posits a similar existential conundrum:

> I Would if I cou'd,
> If I cou'dn't, how could I ?
> I cou'dn't, without I could, cou'd I ?
> Cou'd you, without you cou'd, cou'd ye ?
> Cou'd ye, Cou'd ye ?
> Cou'd you, without you cou'd, cou'd ye ? (68)

Whatever this person is being asked to accomplish the phrase “Cou’d you, without you” seems to be the key to unlocking the central question. What could you do if you let go of yourself and became something else?

Through supernatural and pagan associations, temporal anomalies and existential dilemmas nonsense has moved beyond its carnivalesque role as a bonding agent in the formation of a convivial society of equals. It has moved also beyond its force as a “legislative language”, found in children’s oral legislation, rough music and rebel politics. Nonsense has ascended beyond these functions and has drifted into a realm where the reader might at least envision an alternate self and an alternate future. And nonsense has moved into this realm without announcing itself.

The Mystical Americans: Yankee Doodle and Mother Goose

It is the latent spiritual ascendant quality in nonsense that allows Yankee Doodle to transcend his original persona as a nonsensical country bumpkin or a failed fop. By the war of 1812 Yankee Doodle emerges as a mingling of trickster hero and sacred blessing. Among the broadsides preserved at The American Antiquarian Society are seven separate sheets, each with a set of rhyming verses that details a particular American victory from the War of 1812. The topics of the broadsides are battle specific, as in “Occasioned By the Capture of the British Packet Shallow” and “Engagement With the British Frigate Guerriere”, or they deal with a contemporary political issue, as in “Death of the Embargo.”[21] While none of the verses on these sheets are related through narrative to the original “Yankee Doodle”, they all employ the “Yankee Doodle” chorus between each verse. In this way “Yankee Doodle, keep it up, Yankee Doodle Dandy”, is now a ritualistic responsorial “amen.” “Yankee Doodle” has become a sacred chorus, a blessing

for each verse that recounts an American victory. The doggerel is now providing a unity that ties all American victories to one iconic figure, one ideal.

Later in the century, as Lawrence Buell notes, Yankee Doodle has disseminated his colloquial character into a broader category of "Yankee humour" and will metamorphose into something more sophisticated, branching off into different concepts of the ideal American. The "Yankee" will become a plain talking, homespun hero characterised by honest bluntness (Buell 97), qualities that were present in the Yankee character in the original American text, "The Yankees Return from Camp". Buell invokes Constance Rourke's observation that "The Yankee [is] the first avatar of the American folk consciousness, who then in some way only vaguely hinted at, metamorphoses into 'The Frontiersman.'" (338)[22] Rourke is envisioning nothing less than the birth of the American cowboy persona. From here the image of the Yankee metamorphoses easily into the stolid, reserved, and even romantic hero (ibid). The Yankee, according to Buell, also becomes a character representing "shrewdness", someone "wily, close-to-the-vest, [a] sharp dealer", like P. T. Barnum (338-39). In this persona the Yankee now resembles the quintessential capitalist.

Most interestingly, Buell examines the narrative voice of Emerson's "Circles" and sees in that transcendental tract a Yankee character that has blossomed into a reborn inexplicableness. This Yankee voice is that of the nonsensical, yet supernatural, trickster hero. Buell quotes Emerson: "I am only an experimenter... I unsettle all things... I am not careful to justify myself (342).[23] "In other words", Buell paraphrases, "I decline to be held responsible for my previous arguments" (ibid). Thus Yankee Doodle has come full circle. The voice of this inexplicable trickster cast forward through the nineteenth century like a spectrum, breathing life into the American character creating cowboys and capitalists, and now, once confronted, is retreating to the safety of his mystical, nonsensical persona once

again—the space the British found so unsettling during the War of Independence—the space that Cammaerts posits is impervious to parody (*Poetry* 15)—and thus the Yankee cannot be confronted or "held responsible" for anything.

Like that of Yankee Doodle, the persona of Mother Goose is imbued with mythical, patriotic associations. Peter Opie describes the special reverence Americans cultivated in their attachment to Mother Goose:

> Editions of it were particularly popular in America, [and after Thomas], further important editions, with a greatly increased number of rhymes, were published in Boston and New York about 1825 and in 1833; and no doubt it is a sign of the influence of these collections that in America the rhymes continue to be thought of as belonging to "Mother Goose." (*Dictionary* 34)
>
> ...Most English nursery rhymes are better known in the States, and in the case of the older ones, often known in versions nearer the original, than they are in their home country. (*Dictionary* 40)

The reason why Mother Goose rhymes remained truer to their original form in America is because in the early and mid nineteenth century, by association with Isaiah Thomas and rebellion in general, these rhymes were regarded as relics of the struggle for Independence, and so were preserved and set under glass, just as any piece of Paul Revere's pewter work. As stated in the 1833 preface to *Mother Goose Melodies* published in Boston and New York, the edition is intended to "preserve" the rhymes "in their primitive purity" (102)—this, despite the "updated" American locations inserted into the texts.

Continuing with the propaganda work begun by Thomas—the expunging of any allusion to the English origins of the verses—the 1833 edition emphasises that it is "The *True* Mother Goose", and mentions in bold lettering that it is "The Only Pure Edition... Compared, Revised and Sanctioned by one of The Annotators of the Goose Family" (*Melodies* 1). In Boston, it seems, there was an oral tradition that a woman by the name of Goose lived there in the 1700s, and the mention of the "Annotators of the Goose Family"

is likely a reference to that legend. Visitors to Boston today will find a gravesite of an Elizabeth Mary Foster Goose, and might be informed by wishful tourist guides that this Ms. Goose was the real Mother Goose. Ms. Goose's grave is found on hallowed ground, in the Old Granary Burying Ground near Park Street Church. She lies alongside Samuel Adams, John Hancock, the parents of Benjamin Franklin and the victims of The Boston Massacre.

Tracing the legend of this American Mother Goose is a convoluted process. The earliest extended defence of the tradition dates from 1860 when John Fleet Eliot published a pseudonymous letter in the 14 January *Boston Transcript*. According to Eliot, Ms. Goose was the mother-in-law of Boston publisher, Thomas Fleet, who, Eliot claims, produced *Song's for the Nursery; or Mother Goose's Melodies for Children* in 1719 (no copy of this ghost volume has ever been located and most scholars do not believe it ever existed). By 1860, however, the patriotic connection to Mother Goose was already firmly established. Thus, one imagines, Eliot the "historian" may have been prompted to colour the past in order to explain the present. Eliot, in fact, goes out of his way to connect Mother Goose to Puritan New England by placing Cotton Mather as the reverend who performed the marriage ceremony of Elizabeth's daughter to the publisher, Fleet. Eliot concludes, "Cotton Mather and Mother Goose thus stand in juxtaposition; and it is the former was instrumental in cementing the union, which resulted in placing the latter so conspicuously before the World, it is but just that it should be so."

Rutgers University researcher Michael Joseph asks, "Why did Eliot bother?" Joseph notes the emerging status of Mother Goose as an American national icon in the early nineteenth century and comments on the "patriotic nostalgia of Bostonians for whom Mother Goose was essentially, and importantly, American" (1). For Joseph, the historical inaccuracy of the Mother-Goose-was-an-American myth is indicative of a nostalgic stance

in which America looks back on its infancy and identifies *Mother Goose* with the fledgling republic—a symbol of innocence—and the text itself, as a forum where ideas of a childlike "potential equality" and "freedom" could be explored (2). This contention is correct, but the attachment goes beyond "nostalgia" and "innocence" and refers to historical fact. Mother Goose, and nonsense in general, are reflective of, and related to, rebel politics in colonial America, on many levels, as this chapter demonstrates.

Returning to Eliot's essay we will discover that more insight can be gained by exploring his curious juxtapositions. Eliot is closer to the truth than historians give him credit for. Though his facts are questionable, in a few respects at least he is remarkably intuitive. He mentions, for example, that Mother Goose stood in close proximity to a figure who was "instrumental in cementing the union." But what does Eliot mean by "cementing the union"? Is he referring to the marriage of Goose and Fleet, or is it possible that "cementing the union" is intended more in the patriotic sense of the phrase? In an 1860 context, at the outbreak of the Civil War, a figure who was "instrumental in cementing the union" could have decidedly positive, rhetorical, patriotic associations. As Mather was an influential figure from colonial America, Eliot could be asserting that he was involved in some vague way in cementing the union of the colonies. Eliot also contends that this figure was responsible for "placing the latter, [Mother Goose], so conspicuously before the World." The prospect arises then that the historical personage Eliot describes is not Cotton Mather, but another early publisher from Boston, Isaiah Thomas, whom Eliot mentions in passing in his discussion of Fleet. Did Fleet just confuse the names? For Thomas was indeed "instrumental in cementing the union" and was responsible for "placing [Mother Goose] so conspicuously before the World." Thus realigned, Eliot's conclusion, "it is but just that it should be so", stands remarkably correct.

Embracing this view—that although Eliot was confused and jumbled the names and juxtapositions, he had, none-the-less, some correct notions—the entanglement of Cotton Mather and Mother Goose becomes potentially quite complex. As this essay suggests, there is a magical, pagan quality to nonsense poems, and by the mid nineteenth century, the concept that Mother Goose was a witch was clearly suggested by the illustrations in a number of nursery rhyme anthologies. How the Bostonian Elizabeth Goose fits into this aspect of the discussion is curious. The Opies note that the historical personage referred to in "The Old Woman Who Lived in the Shoe" was rumoured to be Boston's Elizabeth Goose (*Dictionary* 522). Note next, that in certain versions of "The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe", such as the 1842 version published by James Halliwell, the Old Woman, like Old Mother Hubbard and Old Mother Goose, is a witness to magical resurrection: "when she came back they were lying dead. / She went to the wright To get them a coffin; / When she came back They were a'lying laughing" (*Dictionary* 524). The Old Woman Who Lived in the Shoe, then, or Boston's Elizabeth Goose, to some, was, like Old Mother Hubbard and Old Mother Goose, at least distantly associated with the peculiar nonsensical high-jinx we have come to understand as motivated by pagan belief systems. We won't call her a witch, but others may have.

At the time Eliot wrote his piece on Mother Goose there was a controversy brewing in New England that Buell refers to as, "The Great Cotton Mather Debate" (Buell 224). Mather was the magistrate who tried the witches at Salem in 1692. He authored *Wonders of the Invisible World* (an examination of witchcraft) and other paranoid texts, such as *Of Beelzebub and his Plot* (1693). We should remember also that Mather was a contemporary of James Sinclair, whose *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* (1685), makes the connection between nonsense and witchcraft explicit when he describes a witch who was "much addicted to nonsense rhymes" (Opie, *Dictionary* 358). The plot thickens when

we recall that Cotton Mather was also associated with rhymes for children, but of the sort no witch would recite:

> Repent (my soul) Believe and Pray:
> Bid every lust farewell.
> To thy Redeemer haste away,
> And scape from Death and Hell. (Mather)

By the nineteenth century, along with his negative associations with witch persecution, Mather's reputation as a pious children's poet was also a mark against him. Juxtaposed against the continued success of Mother Goose style nursery rhyme collections Mather's works were beginning to appear severely outdated.

The centre of the debate in 1860 concerned how Cotton Mather should be remembered—as a backward witch burner, or as a pious Puritan leader who helped shape the future United States—and a rift had developed over the issue, "between liberal and conservative Congregational historians" (Buell 224). The same year that Eliot published his pseudonymous remarks about Elizabeth Goose, James Russell Lowell published an indulgent review of Mather's, *Magnali Christi Americana* that treated Mather more as an amusing curiosity than a revered Pilgrim. This attitude was met with a "rise in militant orthodoxy" on the issue favouring a more strict allegiance to the Puritan father (Buell 218).

Into this imbroglio steps Eliot, pseudonymously announcing not only that Mather was fond of, and ostensibly whole-heartedly endorsed, Mother Goose, but also that Mather and Mother Goose were close personal friends. By extension, then, Cotton Mather could neither have been a witch hunter nor could he be one who promoted pious didactic verse. Cotton Mather, posing with his arm around Mother Goose, strikes a relaxed pose. This man loves nonsense, and those who write it. If Eliot did approach his mysterious essay with this strategy in mind then we must give him credit for being at least subconsciously aware of two concepts about Mother Goose that this study endorses. Eliot feels that

Mother Goose has a culturally significant patriotic connection to America, and he believes that in juxtaposing Mother Goose with Cotton Mather the one will enhance, or perhaps—like Old Mother Goose turning her son into Harlequin—even magically reverse the other's image.

We discover then that in the wake of their nonsensical intrigues during the American Revolution both Mother Goose and Yankee Doodle ascended to a unique mythical, iconic status in America in the nineteenth century, the both of them importantly ordaining even the very ideas of what it meant to be an American. The marriage of politics, magical efficacy and national mythology is implicit to the traditions of nonsense literature. And American icons such as Yankee Doodle, Mother Goose, and even the flag of the United States, are directly beholden to those traditions. The American Revolution, and the cultural products that sprang from it, indeed the very character of the fledgling republic, cannot be fully understood without due consideration of the offices of nonsense.

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[1] Malcolm's *The Origins of English Nonsense* illuminates seventeenth-century nonsense in great detail. The vast amount of material written on Victorian nonsense is well known.

[2] I attribute the production in England of *Mother Goose's Melody* to Newbery, although its release was posthumous and in the hands of his stepson, Thomas Carton.

[3] see Marble (176). Marble fails to cite her source, but the punctuation she reproduces indicates that the advertisement referenced dates from the eighteenth century.

[4] "High Diddle Diddle" (*MGM* 32); "The Sow Came in With a Saddle" (*MGM* 63); "There Was a Man of Thessaly" (*MGM* 55); "Three Wise Men of Gotham" (*MGM* 21); "Sing a Song of Six Pence" (*TTSB* 53).

[5] "She drank the cow and then the whites of the eggs."

[6] *The Massachusetts Spy* was typically published without page numbers and was usually no more than a few pages in length. Therefore, as citations, I offer dates only. My access to *The Massachusetts Spy* was via microfilms of the original series, as preserved in the collection at The American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.

[7] An early American variation on "Yankee Doodle".

[8] A "toad in a hole" was a batter pudding. The nonsensicality of the phrase is derived from the idea of a food being made from cast iron.

[9] In 1812 Isaiah Thomas bequeathed a large collection of broadsides to The American Antiquarian Society. This collection remains unpublished and is referred to in the archives as *Collection of Broadsides and Ballads*. While dating the broadsides has proven difficult, it is believed that the oldest item in this collection was printed in the late 1760s. The majority, however, were more likely printed in about 1810 or 1812. A handful appears to be older and dates from the Revolution or just after. Where appropriate, I have avoided mention of those broadsides that include historical references indicating that they must be from the later period (for example, if the text references the War of 1812—unless the historical distance to 1812 be the point). Only one of the broadsides in the collection, however, retains the antiquated *ſ* instead of s, *The Ballad of Tom Bolin*. As the change from *ſ* to s took place gradually around 1800 we may assume a greater proportion of these examples come from just before or just after 1800.

[10] See Hamilton, Complete Ed. 1:lxxvii; 3:215. See also Hamilton, *Shorter Ed.* 319n.

[11] "Sing a Song of Sixpence" (*TTSB* 53); "The Lion and the Unicorn" (*TTSB* 59); "Three Wise Men of Gotham" (*MGM* 21); the wise "Man of Thessaly" (*MGM* 55).
[12] See "Sing a Song of Sixpence" (*TTSB* 53) and "The Lion and the Unicorn" (*TTSB* 59).
[13] Not to be confused with the well-known political figure of the same name.
[14] See also Shields 180.
[15] When the "macaroni" verse was originally composed is unknown. The earliest published version of "Yankee Doodle" to include the macaroni verse was James Halliwell's *Nursery Rhymes of England* (1842). However, a rhyming macaroni joke, one that is similarly offered to ridicule fops and dandies, is published in *The Massachusetts Spy* 19 May 1774 (see page 79 of the present study), suggesting that a colonial origin, during the war, is not unlikely.
[16] Benedict Arnold, who, in 1775, was still loyal to the rebel cause.
[17] See Underdown 258 and first illustration in inset; see also Malcolm 24-5 (Malcolm quotes from John Taylor's, *Od Fashions*, London, 1642); Kunzle's "World Upside Down" (83-84); Hill *The World Turned Upside Down.*
[18] See Hill 380 and Montgomery.
[19] See Hopkinson, *Comical Spirit* 2, and Westlake iii.
[20] See Opie, *Dictionary*: "Hey Diddle Diddle", in relation to Elizabeth I (205); "Little Jack Horner", in relation to Henry VIII and the dissolution (234); "Sing a Song of Sixpence", in relation to Henry the VIII (394-95); "Mistress Mary", in relation to Mary, Queen of Scots (301); "Hark Hark, the Dogs Do Bark", in relation to William of Orange (152); "The Lion and the Unicorn", in relation to the amalgamation of royal arms between Scotland and England (269).
[21] All examples from *Collection*.
[22] Buell cites Constance Rourke. *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* 31.
[23] Buell cites Emerson's *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* 2:188.

Chapter Three

Victorian Nonsense

SECTION I: POLITICS AND VICTORIAN NONSENSE

Introduction

The chapter that follows explores the nonsensical productions of Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and W. S. Gilbert, and the texts and images featured in the journal, *Punch*. The ways in which these works function politically in the Victorian era will lead ultimately to a discussion of how the personae of Carroll and his character Alice have been transformed in twentieth century news reels, films, popular music and urban legends.

It should be noted early on that the thesis that the works of Lear and Carroll reflect or exert political influence is burdened for some by the fact that both authors denied having conceived of their texts as political in any conscious way. Despite his authorial intention, however, Carroll understood that the author alone does not determine a text's meaning. He writes,

> I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them: so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer meant. So whatever good meanings are in a book, I'm very glad to accept as the meaning of the book. (Qtd. in Gardner, *Snark* 22)

On another occasion, when asked if *The Hunting of the Snark* contained a political allegory, Carroll's answer was simply "I don't know!" (qtd. in Gardner, *Snark* 21), suggesting again that he thought the author plays a secondary role in determining

meaning. When writing on Carroll, Martin Gardner observes that Victorian nonsense has a "dark, unconscious substratum of intent…" (Gardner, *Snark* 23), and that nonsense verse and prose "can express meanings buried so deep in an author's mind that he himself is not aware of them, and they can acquire meanings entirely by accident. Nonsense writing is a peculiarly rich medium for both types of "unintended" meaning" (Gardner, *Snark* 23). As Alice allows after hearing the poem "Jabberwocky", "It seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don't know what they are." (Carroll 142)

This project, therefore, is not overly concerned with authorial intent. As stated in Chapter One, nonsense is political because the public makes it political. Still, it will be useful to understand that neither Lear nor Dodgson was apolitical. And we must also acknowledge the social situation that generated the warm welcome offered to the two writers. Further, by looking at other sources of Victorian nonsense the political bent of topsy-turvy humour in that era will be better illumined. Nonsense verse, as it is found in the lyrics of W. S. Gilbert and in the pages of *Punch*, is more conspicuously political than Alice or "The Jumblies". Gilbert's texts function as a shrewd critique of Victorian society and *Punch*, subtitled "or a London Charivari", was nothing if not a bastion of subversive political humour. By juxtaposing Lear and Carroll with Gilbert and *Punch* it will be made clear why the Victorian public naturally assumed Lear's and Carroll's works were politically motivated. Victorian nonsense, from children's books, to adult oriented print journals, to stage musicals, will be seen to reflect, embrace or disparage the most significant controversies of the day—Darwinian theory, political reform and, particularly, imperial politics. And as in Revolution-era America, nonsense literature will be shown to be a space in which a radical sense of "otherness" is explored and determined. Ultimately this examination affords insight into the role Victorian nonsense played in promoting the rise of a new, and somewhat dark, national mythology for England.

This discussion is rendered in three sections. Part One, "Politics and Victorian Nonsense", explores the political mêlée within which Victorian nonsense was entangled, looking at contemporary social and political issues, the authors' political leanings and public reaction to the texts. Part Two, "An Anatomy of Victorian Nonsense", reviews the building blocks of nonsense in terms of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, indicating the efficacy with which these literatures nurtured subversive ideologies and engendered transformative imagining. Part Three, "Eccentricity and Empire", examines the supposed "Englishness" of Victorian nonsense and how this concept is related to thoughts of, and misgivings over, Empire.

Scope

W. S. Gilbert, the librettist of Gilbert and Sullivan, is today infrequently aligned with Lear and Carroll, and therefore his inclusion in this discussion requires a brief defence. Leaving out Gilbert is a major oversight in any study of nonsense in Victorian popular culture. When Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* was published in 1872, humorist Tom Hood reviewed it enthusiastically in the journal *Fun*, and was reminded of Gilbert's 1868 release of the *Bab Ballads* (see Stedman 29). Throughout the Victorian era Gilbert's poetry and libretti were frequently aligned with Carroll's. Writing in 1891, George Smalley, Editor of the *New York Tribune*'s London office from 1867 to 1895, sees the connection in all its clarity. Writing in 1891 Smalley comments,

> It is natural to [Gilbert] to see things upside down, and turn them inside out… One who had listened to him said that nothing short of legal evidence would convince him that Mr. Gilbert had not written *Alice in Wonderland*... (Qtd. in Orel 31)

Gilbert's illustrations for his two collections of *Bab Ballads* elicit further comparison to both Lear and Carroll. Michael Ffinch comments that the "grotesque figures with

enlarged ears, imbecilic eyes and distended noses [are] reminiscent of Edward Lear's illustrations for *The Book of Nonsense*" (25). Dodgson himself was attracted to Gilbert's illustrations. In June 1868, when he was casting about for illustrators for *Through the Looking Glass*, Gilbert came to mind. Dodgson commented at the time, "his power in grotesque is extraordinary..." (qtd. in Stedman 28).

Gilbert's *Bab Ballads*, (1868) and *More Bab Ballads* (1873) represent an important contribution to Victorian nonsense.[1] Gilbert's nonsense places, such as "Spiffton-extra-Sooper" (*Bab Ballads* 18) and "Turniptoville-by-the-sea", (*Bab Ballads* 129) are populated by nonsense characters, such as "MacPhairson Clonglocketty Angus McClan" (*Bab Ballads* 186) and "Calamity Pop Von Peppermint Drop, The King of Canoodle-Dum" (*More Bab Ballads* 90). And in some cases Gilbert's verse veers off into unbridled nonsense, such as this excerpt from "Blabworth-cum-Talkington":

> Rumble, blunder, stumble thunder,
> Wrangle, tangle, jingle-jangle,
> Fluttery stuttery, bog, fog,
> Missing his tack,
> Changing his track,
> Losing his threads,
> Mixing his "heads",
> Flash! Dash! Splash! Crash!
> Slowly, fastly, grimly, ghastly
> Firstly, secondly, thirdly, lastly
> Lastly first
> Firstly last… (*Lost Bab Ballads* 74)

Historical and Political Context

Mid-Victorian England is rarely a place historians describe as a hotbed of radical reform. To most historians there was no "acute" social unrest in this period. A. N. Wilson notes, for example, that the mid Victorians were on the whole indifferent to the outcome of the American Civil War (258) and were far removed from the concerns occasioned by

the European upheavals of 1870-1871 (343-4). Wilson comments, "Conservatism, of a sort, was the dominant political creed of the second half of Victoria's reign" (331). "[O]f a sort" is perhaps the key clause here. While the prim, proper, conservative Victorian strikes the dominant pose historically in this era it remains true that there was, if one speaks specifically of the period 1865 to 1874, a radical republican impulse, of a sort.

Speaking of the Victorian era in general, Jack Zipes comments, "British society was undergoing momentous social and political changes." (132) Zipes turns to Barry Supple to outline the general social environment. Supple suggests that pressures from the industrial revolution, such as the impersonal nature of factory work and the overcrowding of cites, resulted in a "marked deterioration in the circumstances" of the Victorian public (qtd. in Zipes 114). The situation described above, though correct, is useful only as a wide-ranging description of a Victorian "era" that stretched over sixty years. In order better to understand the specific socio-political mechanisms that both triggered, and responded to, Victorian nonsense literature one must focus more precisely on the 1860s and 70s. When discussing the Mid-Victorians, for example, one may draw a comparison with the bohemian 1960s. As Donald Thomas explains in *Lewis Carroll, A Portrait with Background*:

> By the mid-1860s… [t]here was a new bohemianism in the arts and a succession of new young writers. Aestheticism and Art for Art's sake, which would have seemed intolerably self-indulgent previously, now formed an avant-garde… What is often called "Victorian" [as in prim and proper] is in truth characteristic of the later period, an age which might seem as strange to some who were young in the 1860s as to the 1960s... As surely as the alleged freedoms of the 1960s were followed by the recriminations and resentments of the 1980s and 1990s, so the youthful mid-Victorian bohemia steadied into sobriety… (D. Thomas 10-11)

While this mid-Victorian period may not be characterised as one of profoundly acute social unrest, what occurred in England in this period may be described as a general breakdown in consensus concerning numerous social, religious and political issues. The

1850s, for example, had witnessed an early feminist movement, with Harriet Taylor and, more publicly, Barbara Bodichon, campaigning for women's rights. In the wake of this movement, a number of books espousing radical ideas caught the attention of the public. In 1859 John Stuart Mill published *On Liberty*, a powerful attack on conformity. 1859 also saw the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*, a work that did nothing less than disrupt man's conception of his place in the universe and before God. Gillian Beer notes that "[by its implications] Darwinian theory…brought into question the privileged 'purity' of the 'great family'. In terms of the class organisation of his time this is clearly a deeply unpalatable view" (57). Beer suggests that the spiritual upheaval aroused by Darwin elicited distinctive textual responses, and notes that "it is hard to overestimate the imaginative turmoil brought about by evolutionary theory…" (11). Alongside Darwin the1860 publication of *Essays and Reviews* provoked religious controversy. With pieces written by prominent liberal intellectuals such as Baden Powell, Benjamin Jowett and Frederick Temple, the volume incited heated debate on the issue of free speech and questioned the authority of the Anglican Church. *Essays and Reviews* was a bestseller and led to three sensational heresy trials. Religious dissent spread to large sections of the middle class in this period. Critics such as John Ruskin and Mathew Arnold questioned many accepted beliefs and prejudices, inflaming further controversy. Though Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* had been published in the *Morning Chronicle* from the 1840s forward, 1862 saw its release in book form. In *London Labour and the London Poor* prostitutes, thieves, and beggars reveal their lives in their own words. The book lent reality—and immediacy—to the impoverished underworld revealed previously in Dickensian fiction. *London Labour and the London Poor* was at its most influential in the early and mid 1860s, as several new volumes were released successively.

In the 1860s, as in the 1960s, some English grew suspicious of powerful government. In this setting, even the formerly beloved Queen Victoria received sharp criticism. As David C. Douglas comments in his anthology, *English Historical Documents*, "The queen's long seclusion after the death of Prince Albert, and the establishment of a Republic in France [1870], created, for a brief while, a Republican movement in England..." (94). Wilson notes that Liberal party leader and Prime Minister William Gladstone's first reign, (1868-1874) "coincided with the Queen's decline in public esteem" (359). John Plunkett sees Victoria's popularity beginning to fade a bit earlier; "Rarely does Victoria come into any vitriolic personal criticism before 1861" (62). The press now began to openly mock the queen. Plunkett notes that in "The late 1860s and early 1870s… Victoria was perceived as receiving large amounts of money from the Civil List without performing any duties in return" (67). On 3 March 1872 Sir Charles Dilke motioned in Parliament that an audit should be performed of the Queen's expenses—an audit that would account for every single expense Victoria had incurred from her ascension to the throne in 1837 to 1873 (Douglas 94-5). It was in this era that *Reynolds* newspaper, the most outspoken anti-monarchist publication, reached the height of its circulation, 300,000 in 1865 (Plunkett 58). In *Punch* there were numerous "parodic versions of the Queen's speeches to Parliament" (Plunkett 113). Plunkett adds, "Even normally supportive newspapers like the *Illustrated London News* [were] scathing [to Victoria]." (113)

At the heart of the Victoria scandal were class issues that had been embroiled in contemporary debates on constitutionalism. "Constitutionalism…" Plunkett explains, "implied the absolute sanctity of certain conventions:… monarchy… [the] hereditary principle… landowners… [the] church" (16). Before this period the sanctity of these "values" had been taken for granted by many. As Plunkett notes, "the language of

constitutionalism was the principal narrative of English popular political culture up until 1867" (15). But the tide was working against Victoria. There was a major shift in public opinion in the 1860s and in 1868 the political role of the crown was reduced to that of merely ratifying elections.

Concerning foreign affairs, the ethics of Empire were called into question for some by indigenous uprisings in India (1857) and Jamaica (1865). Edward John Eyre, the Governor of Jamaica, upon his return to England in early 1866 was met with praise by conservatives for his role in subduing anarchy, and a charge of murder by liberals, who considered his brutal reprisal against the rebels repellent and unrepublican (Wilson, 270-71). Meanwhile American pressure in the form of the Fenian movement agitated heated responses to the increasingly urgent question of Irish Home Rule. Zipes notes, "there was a strong sentiment among utopian writers that the Empire had sold its soul to attain power and was using its power to maintain a system of domination and exploitation" (131).

These pockets of dissension—which led to a riot in Hyde Park in 1867—eventually precipitated an era of rapid legislative change in social and political policies. The Reform Bill of 1867 added nearly 100,000 new working-class voters to the register. Between 1868 and 1873 the cumbrous military was reorganised. The Irish Land Act of 1870 attempted to right some the wrongs done to Irish tenant farmers. In 1871 the Trade Union Act legalised the unions' right to picket. The 1872 Ballot Act allowed for secret balloting in Parliament in order to alleviate peer pressure. G. M. Young comments on this period:

> ...the return of the Liberals in 1868 dealt a threefold blow to the Gentlemanly Interest. Purchase of Commissions was abolished, the Universities were thrown open to dissenters, the Civil Service to competition. Radicalism was making itself felt again... Never, it was said, had new members talked so much as they talked in 1868. Never had they had so much to talk about: never since 1832 had there been so many of them: the quiet time was over (106).

Then, just as all these issues were surging forth, the economy collapsed in 1873, leading to a period of doubt and tension. Meanwhile Plunkett marks 1876 as a turning point in the fortunes of the Empire; here began "the subsequent decline of the British Empire and the slow fading of the Commonwealth" (67). (I will return to examine the issue of the demise of the Empire in greater detail later in this chapter.)

Into the midst of this era comes the release of Carroll's most enduring works, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Phantasmagoria* (1869) *Through the Looking Glass* (1871) and *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876). In "The Occidental Alice", Nancy Armstrong refers to the period when the first Alice text was published as "the moment in the nineteenth century when things went haywire..." (34). As apolitical as Carroll apparently believed his texts to be, it is difficult to imagine literature that could have been a better reflection of the times. In Carroll's works everything is surprising, order is reversed, hierarchy is inverted and queens are soundly mocked. As Ina Rae Hark concurs, "The overall unpredictability of nonsense land no doubt appeared to many Victorians as a not so fanciful reflection of conditions in their own rapidly changing world" (132). Read in this context, the title, *Through the Looking Glass*, takes on a deeper meaning. In Lewis Carroll, Victorian England was seeing a reflection of its topsy-turvy self.

The great body of Edward Lear's works were also released to an appreciative public in this same period. Though Lear's first work for children, *The Book of Nonsense*, a collection of sixty-nine verses in limerick form, was released in two volumes beginning in 1846, it was not until 1870 that he began publishing what are remembered as his greatest works. Although it is impossible to date with precision the composition of Lear's limericks, Vivian Noakes suggests, "most of the limericks were written and drawn when Lear was living at [Lord Derby's] house at Knowsley" (Notes 480). This would suggest that the limericks featured in both the 1846 and 1854 editions of *The Book of Nonsense*

were composed prior to 1837, when Lear left Knowsley. It also seems likely that Lear produced almost no nonsense in the 1850s. In her *Complete Verse and Other Nonsense of Edward Lear*, a scrupulously definitive edition, Noakes includes not one composition for the years 1851 to 1857. In the early 1860s, however, the nonsense style that he would be best remembered for begins to creep into Lear's personal correspondence. In a letter to George Grove dated November 1860 Lear describes toadstools near his house as "orbicular, cubicular and squambingular" (155). Hereafter Lear increasingly experiments with nonsense forms. At this same time, Lear was encouraged by the public's increasing interest in his nonsense. *The Book of Nonsense* was re-released in 1861 and became very popular. 1863 saw the first edition of *The Book of Nonsense* in America. Then early in 1865 (before the release of *Alice in Wonderland*), Lear wrote his first piece of prose nonsense, "The History of the Seven Families of Lake Pipple-Popple". It was at this time that he began producing nonsense industriously. By the early 1870s he would see the successful release of three new popular collections, *Nonsense Songs* (1870), *More Nonsense* (1871), and *Laughable Lyrics* (1876). These volumes contain such well-remembered verses as "The Owl and the Pussy-cat", "The Jumblies", "The Dong With the Luminous Nose" and "The Pobble Who Has No Toes".

Gilbert too came of age in the same historical moment. The first edition of the enormously popular *Bab Ballads* was released in 1868. The second volume, *More Bab Ballads,* followed in 1873. Gilbert's earliest theatrical piece, *Uncle Baby*, was produced in 1863 and was followed by numerous others, including a pantomime of *Cock Robin* in 1867. His first major success with Sullivan came in 1871 with *Thespis*. On his own, *The Wicked World*, 1873, and *Topsyturveydom*, 1874, proved pivotal successes and were followed by the enormously popular works with Sullivan including *Trial by Jury* 1875, *The Sorcerer* 1877, and *H.M.S. Pinafore* 1878. Although Gilbert and Sullivan's star

would continue to rise throughout the early 1880s, it was, by Gilbert's own account, in *The Bab Ballads*, and the crucial period between 1867 and 1874, that his talents were honed and his style was developed. In 1906, the year before he was knighted, Gilbert looked back on his career and noted, "I am anxious to avow my indebtedness to the author of *The Bab Ballads*, from whom I have so unblushingly cribbed" (qtd. in Ayre 46).

I note here that at least the historical situation that Bakhtin requires for a flourishing of carnivalesque imagery was clearly in place during this era. Bakhtin's "moments of crisis, of breaking points in… the life of society and man" (*Rabelais* 9), can, from a certain viewpoint, aptly describe important aspects of English culture in the 1860s and 70s. Dating from 1865 to 1876, the major works of Lear, Carroll and Gilbert coincide perfectly with this period of social insecurity and tempered radical reform.

Personal Politics

Prior to outlining the politically subversive messages in Victorian nonsense it will be an advantage to touch briefly on the personal politics of Lear and Dodgson. At the beginning of this chapter I recommend public interpretation over authorial intention when meaning is to be discussed. However, because there is resistance to viewing Charles Dodgson as radical in his political thought, it seems important to at least clarify a few points concerning his supposed conservative views. Both Carroll and Lear, in their public lives, are guilty of maintaining a certain false, fey attitude concerning politics. Neither, however, was as apolitical as he would have us believe.

Dodgson was intimately familiar with the political and religious controversies of the day. He was vigilant in his study of culture and politics and was reportedly fascinated by Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (D. Thomas 13). He was a

witness to the riots in Hyde Park that preceded the Reform Bill of 1867 (D. Thomas 13). He was a great letter writer and often published his opinions, using phrases such as "the rights of man" in heated open letters to leading journals (D. Thomas 13). He attended public court hearings frequently and on several occasions attended parliamentary sessions as an observer. Dodgson, in fact, frequently wrote to Parliament, requesting that they consider all manners of suggestions, including two published proposals for election reform, *Parliamentary Reform* and *The Principles of Parliamentary Representation* (Clarke 217).

Although Dodgson, the Deacon, was openly conservative in his views, it remains true that his conservative politics have been over-emphasised and somewhat misunderstood. His pamphlets on election reform were informed by the wish to create a fairer system, an attempt to give a more powerful voice to the many as opposed to the few. Similarly, in 1866, Dodgson supported students at Christ Church in their attempt to submit a bill to Parliament intended to alter the constitution of the college. The Canons "objected fiercely" and recoiled at the idea that "the new Governing body shall be a little Republic" (M. Cohen 249). Alone among Christ Church faculty, Dodgson stood by the students and saw them through to victory. Cohen relates:

> Parliament passed the Christ Church Ordinances (Oxford) Bill, and it received the Royal Assent on August 12, 1867. The students had successfully curbed the Dean and the Canons, and a new era began at Christ Church, one in which they achieved higher status, more money, and a forceful voice in running the House and dealing with its revenues… Charles played an important role in helping to bring the new order into being. (250)

As an ordained deacon Dodgson embraced controversial, liberal beliefs, claiming that non-Christians would not be damned for their beliefs, rejecting the concept of eternal damnation and defending the rights of women to remarry after divorce. Martin Gardner comments that "his rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment… [was a] major

departure from Protestant orthodoxy" (Gardner, *Snark* 26). Carroll was also open-minded when it came to acknowledging the validity of other belief systems. In the Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* Carroll makes use of the main tenets of "Esoteric Buddhism" to explain the altered states of awareness of the faerie realm experienced by his characters (464). Later in that same book the character Earl is discussing an Anglican Curate, a Catholic Priest and Wesleyan Minister who are all working toward the same benevolent cause, and comments, "How slight the barriers seem to be that part Christian from Christian" (ibid 609). Cohen relates that Dodgson,

> was not so much conservative as humane, and while he was indeed a Conservative by conviction, he was often radical in thought and action, a man of principle, and unafraid. (386)

It might be said that Charles Dodgson was a conservative who thought God was a liberal.

It should also be argued, however, that Dodgson's conservatism was largely a product of his distaste for disorder. It is well known how fastidious Dodgson was, and how peculiarly enamoured he was of system design and orderly thought. Among his inventions was a complex, multi-faceted, governmental charity donation system and, for his personal use, a catalogued "letter register" containing tens of thousands of pieces of correspondence, alphabetised, with summaries, and cross-referenced. Cohen relates the extremity of Dodgson's condition,

> When Charles went on a journey, even if it was only from Oxford to London or Guilford, he mapped out the route, distance, and time for the various legs of the trip. Then he determined how much money he would need at each stage and put the correct coins in successive pockets of his purse... (290)

Meticulous is putting it too lightly. Dodgson's compulsive orderliness resulted in a firm belief in what T. B. Strong describes as "rigid process" (qtd. in M. Cohen 386). The resulting conservatism that may have arisen from this condition should be thought of more as an affliction than as a heartfelt political stance. For Dodgson, the Irish question was not

a question of human rights, but a question of orderly systems. If the Irish were allowed Home Rule Ireland would become disorderly and the situation would spiral into a "gigantic catastrophe" (ibid 485); to Dodgson, the Liberal Gladstone was "A Wild Man… a wild agitator" (ibid 251) who was going to disrupt the system. And to admit female students to Oxford would "cause chaos" (ibid 485). Further, as argued in Chapter One, in the post-Freudian paradigm, the idea that any author's intention is fully available even to himself, must be questioned (see Patterson 139-40). In the case of Charles Dodgson, whose notoriously buttoned-up mind suggests a case of obsessive-compulsive disorder, it cannot be asserted with any surety whether Dodgson's unconscious self was more desirous of sense or nonsense, radicalism or conservatism. Carroll's radical literary inventions may say more about Dodgson's real self than any item he may have voted on.

Like Dodgson, Lear was politically informed and well connected. He counted among his close friends several members of Parliament and Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy of India. He had introductions to many of the noble families, hosted the Prince of Wales for tea in his studio and even gave painting lessons to Queen Victoria. Though he had little patience for political squabbles, he was, none the less, politically aware. He recalled rousing discussions of radical reform with his family in the 1830s. During the Revolution of 1848 he was caught in the middle of a political uprising in Southern Italy (Noakes, *Wanderer* 81-2). And later in life his correspondence took on increasingly weightier issues, Peter Levi observing that in the 1850s (just prior to Lear's flowering as a nonsense poet) "his comments on world events were becoming well informed… so that he sounds like a serious, upper-class critic…" (165). As he matured, Lear grew to mistrust most forms of authority, and he looked with disgust on many of the practices of government. In a serious moment he composed the following verse:

> When "grand old men" persist in folly
> In slaughtering men and chopping trees,

> What art can soothe the melancholy
> Of those whom futile "statesmen" teaze? (452)

The religious controversy of the age caught Lear's attention, as it did Dodgson's. Lear held radical, liberal ideas concerning the church. Like Dodgson he denounced as blasphemous the notion that all non-Christians were fated to be damned (Noakes, *Wanderer* 82). Concerning priests who supported this notion Lear wrote:

> Are not the priests of the age blind indeed not to discern that... some day the hour will come for them to go the way of all priesthoods? ...[a] broader creed, —a better form of worship—the cessation of nonsense and curses—and the recognition of a new state of matters brought about by centuries, science...—will assuredly be demanded and come to pass whether Bishops and priests welcome the changes or resist them. (Qtd. in Noakes, *Wanderer* 302)

He referred to the clergy as "screamy ganders... who put darkness forward and insist that it is light" (ibid).

Once we acknowledge that neither Lear nor Dodgson was indifferent to the concerns of their age, and neither of them was by any measure apolitical, it is hardly surprising that readers have perceived a liberal politic underlining their works. Further, when aligned stylistically with Gilbert—whose works openly mock institutions such as Parliament (*Topseyturveydom*), the English legal system (*Trial by Jury*), immoral church officials (*Patience*) and Her Majesties Navy (*H.M.S. Pinafore*)—the Victorian public might have naturally assumed an intentional subversive political content.

Political Readings of Victorian Nonsense

The Alice books and *The Hunting of the Snark* have always been understood as works of political and social criticism, and this politicisation commences immediately upon the publication of *Wonderland*. As mentioned briefly in Chapter One, in a review published in *John Bull* 20 January 1866, the March Hare is tied to a political tradition, and

Carroll's political bent is assumed to be radical:

> We do not know but that there is a cunning covert allusion in [the March Hare] to the famous Oxford man in the moon, and the increased payment for his hats at the time of a city election. Certainly the author's political proclivities seem to be in an opposite direction—and though good naturedly, in an extremely opposite direction. (Qtd. in Kelly 279)

In defence of the view that *Wonderland* supports a radical/liberal political vision the review goes on to cite the unflattering portrayal of the Red Queen and the parodic mock trial. Likewise the May 1869 *Contemporary Review* reports that "Mr. Carroll... verges too closely upon direct and earnest social caricature, as, for instance, in the matter of the jurors..." (qtd. in Kelly 284). The Queen of Hearts, particularly, was a focal point for those who wished to read Alice politically. Looking back with misgivings to the 1870s, G. K. Chesterton sums up the critical reaction to Carroll's work and remarks that critics "actually thought it a sort of improvement to give all that pure and happy pointlessness a point… and each of [these critics] felt almost like a Red Republican when he took liberties with the Red Queen" (*A Handful* 116).

In Carroll's most politically charged moments we find kings and queens almost uniformly depicted as buffoons, while Alice, the commoner, is raised to the exalted position of *Queen* Alice in *Looking Glass*. Carroll was adamant that the royal personages in the Alice books be depicted negatively. Commenting on the White Queen Carroll remarks that he intended her to appear "stupid, fat and pale; helpless as an infant; and with a slow, maundering, bewildered air about her suggesting imbecility…" (qtd. in Gardner, *Alice* 204). And Carroll described the character of the Queen of Hearts as the "embodiment of ungovernable passion" (ibid 86).

It is hardly surprising that critics would read Carroll's portrayal of the Queen of Hearts as anything but a lampoon of Victoria. Victoria, as was well known then, had been

referred to as "The Queen of Hearts" in the press for many years previous to the publication of Alice. Plunkett describes,

> a whole set of images portraying [Victoria] as the Queen of Hearts. It was a trope used on numerous occasions to describe the emotional relationship between Victoria and her subjects in the first years of her reign. (122-23)

Further, the connection to Carroll's texts become almost irrefutable when one discovers Victoria depicted as the playing card, the Queen of Hearts, in the 18 November 1837 issue of *Figaro in London*:

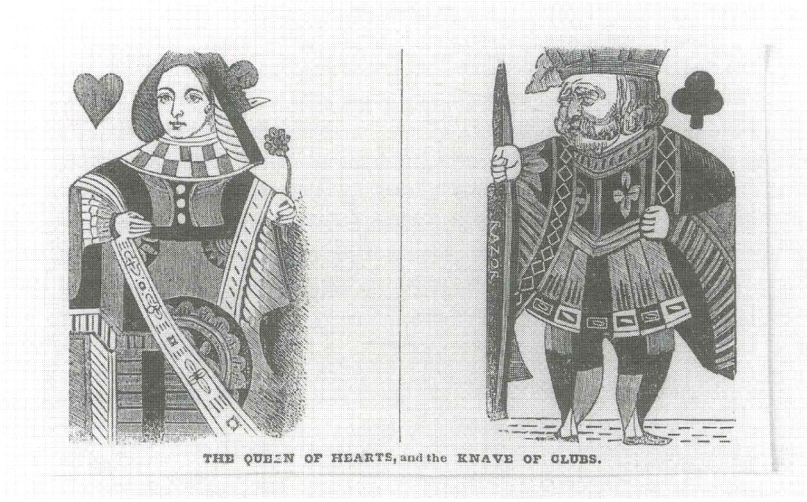


Figure 25

Writing in 1925 the poet Robert Graves suggests that *Wonderland* functioned as a rejection of Victoria's power:

> Nor did Victoria's golden rule extend
> Beyond the glass: it came to the dead end
> Where empty hearses turn about; thereafter
> Begins that lubberland of dream and laughter. (151-52)

It has been suggested that Alice, the character, was constructed as an embodiment of republican virtues, and that Carroll apparently intended this to be understood by placing clues in the text. Alice mentions, for example, that she has read a book entitled *A Cat May Look Upon a King*. Gardner invokes Morris' observation that "the book Alice read could have been *A Cat May Look Upon a King* (London 1652), [which was] a slashing attack on English Kings" published in the year Charles was beheaded (Gardner, *Alice* 91). And in

Chapter Four of *Wonderland* the White Rabbit mysteriously refers to Alice as "Mary Anne". What Carroll meant by referring to Alice as a "Mary Anne" is unclear. A common servant in Victorian England was occasionally referred to as a "Mary Anne". But Gardner points out that before the French revolution Mary Anne was "a generic term for secret republican organisations… Marianne became and still is a mythic female symbol of republican virtues…" (*Alice* 40).

Alice also represents republican virtues in comparison to Humpty-Dumpty. The character of Humpty Dumpty is most readily understood as a symbol of pride coming before a fall. That Humpty is doomed is certain. The affected way in which he offers one finger, instead of his hand, as he and Alice part ways suggests that he is a member of the aristocracy. Gardner reminds us of the "unpleasant habit, of some members of Victorian aristocracy, of proffering two fingers when shaking hands with their social inferiors. In his pride, Humpty carries this practice to its utmost offensiveness (*Alice* 231):

> "I shouldn't know you again if we *did* meet", Humpty Dumpty replied in a discontented tone, giving her one of his fingers to shake... (202)

Working from the carnivalesque tradition of mock trials Carroll frequently designs farcical legal proceedings, potentially suggesting a mistrust of the English legal system. In Alice there is the trial of the Knave of Hearts in which the sentence comes first and the verdict afterwards (ibid 117). There is also the "Mouse's Tale" in which the cunning Old Fury claims, "I'll be the judge, I'll be the jury… I'll try the whole cause and condemn you to death" (ibid 35). Carroll's fondness of mock trials is evidenced again in the Barrister's dream in "Fit the Sixth" of *Snark*, in which the Snark (wearing a white wig) serves as judge, jury and counsel for the defence (ibid 694-96). As noted earlier, the May 1869 *Contemporary Review* complained that Carroll's text contained what was perceived to be a transparent allegory involving jurors (Kelly 284). The supposition resurfaces in 1876, that Carroll intended the Barrister's dream as a lampoon of Victorian-era court proceedings.

Gardner's observes, "There is little doubt that [the] Barrister is a caricature of Edward Kenealy, counsel for the claimant [in the Tichborne Claimant case]" (*Snark* 84). Both the Barrister's outrageous behaviour, and Henry Holiday's illustrations of the character, recommend a likeness to Kenealy. The Tichborne Claimant was a case of stolen identity in which Arthur Orton, an illiterate butcher who had been residing in Australia, claimed to be Sir Roger Charles Doughty Tichborne, the long-lost heir of a wealthy family, who, in reality, had been lost at sea in 1854. Orton temporarily won his place as heir, but his deception was eventually revealed. In the trial that followed (1873-1874)--despite the fact that Orton did not resemble Tichborne, and could not explain how he had lost the ability to speak French, as Tichborne had—more than one hundred people rallied to his defence and swore false testimony on his behalf. Kenealy, who organized Orton's defence, was criticised for his outrageous behaviour and was eventually disbarred. The presence of the Butcher in the *Snark*, and the Barrister's likeness to Edward Kenealy, "gave rise to the popular interpretation of the poem: that it was throughout intended as a satire on the Tichborne case" (Gardner, *Snark* 85).

Carroll's *Snark* also instigated suspicion that the text was intended as a satire on Empire in general, and voyages of exploration in particular. Gardner points out the popular newspaper coverage of the Arctic voyages of the ships *Alert* and *Discovery* that immediately preceded the release of *Snark*. The two ships set out from Portsmouth in 1875 and returned in the autumn of 1876, exactly when Carroll decided to publish his poem. Gardner explains that it was therefore understood by the Victorian public that the book was a "satire on an arctic voyage, the Snark a symbol of the North Pole" (*Snark* 24), thus explaining the blank map by which the ship set its course.

The Alice books were also implicated in the debate on Darwinian theory. Gillian Beer, in *Darwin's Plots*, remarks, "elements of the haphazard lurked in the material of

Darwin's theory and [in 1868 William] Herschel elaborated his reaction that it was 'the law of the higgledy-piggledy' through an analogy with literary productions" (38-9). Lewis Dodgson was apparently sympathetic to Darwin's theory, as evidenced by the fact that he posted Darwin a photograph he had taken of the debates going on at Oxford concerning the issue. Carroll's inclusion of a dodo as a character in Wonderland may also allude to Darwin. Dodgson first encountered the dodo in an exhibition on evolutionary theory at The University Museum, Oxford. With Dodgson at least interested, and with the press referring to the "higgledy-piggledy"-ness of Darwinian theories, it is no surprise that two illustrations of apes in *Wonderland* were contemporarily supposed to be intended as caricatures of Charles Darwin (Gardner, *Alice* 28). And Henry Holiday, the illustrator of *The Snark,* remarked in a letter that "I hope that some future Darwin in a new Beagle will find the beast" (qtd. in Gardner, *Snark* 18) suggesting, in his mind at least, that the search for the Snark was in some way reminiscent of the search for a primordial beast implicit to Darwin's investigations.

The connection between Darwin and Carroll's works may have been subtler, however. Beer explains that one of the main obstacles that Darwin had to overcome in writing *The Origin* was a reorientation of language. Darwin sought, Beer writes, "to appropriate and to recast inherited… discourses, and narrative orders. He was telling a new story, against the grain of the language available to tell it in" (3). A major problem for Darwin, Beer relates, was that language is anthropocentric – man is placed at the centre of signification. Darwin, however, was implying "the levelling of man with other species" (Beer 61). "If the material world is not anthropocentric but language is so, the mind cannot be held truly to encompass and analyse the properties of the world that lie about it" (ibid 45). Beer suggests that Darwin's writing thus reflects the idea of "the insufficiency of man's reason [and language] as an instrument for understanding the

material universe" (46). Implicit in Darwin's writing, Beer contends, is "the emphasis… on [the] incongruence between mind and world…" (68). When considering this linguistic problem, comparing Darwin's theories to the "higgledy-piggledy" of nonsense is suddenly more justifiable. Nonsense literature in general, and Carroll's nonsense in particular, is always concerned with "the insufficiency of man's reason [and language] as an instrument for understanding the material universe". If a word, such as a pun, can have two meanings, then, by extension, the entire foundation of language is at stake. Humpty Dumpty's speech on words, and the precision with which he claims to endow them with meaning, (Carroll 196) is directly reflective of the notion that there may be an "incongruence between mind and world".

Beer adds that the world order that Darwin was envisioning was no "order" at all. It was a theory that required anomaly to function properly. In Darwin, "chance…[was posited] as the only sure determinant" (Beer 6) in the "apparently random" (ibid 7) workings of the world. Darwinian theory, Beer adds, was "a system in which there was no need to invoke a source of authority…" (12). Just as *The Examiner* notes of *Wonderland* in 1866; "here there is no plot to speak of", only an "incessant opposition of unexpected ideas..." (qtd. in Kelly 281-82) so too *The Origin* recommended a chaotic, chance-determined, and "apparently random" universe.

If Lewis Carroll was undecided about the political undercurrent in Alice, his illustrator, John Tenniel shared no such misgivings. For Tenniel, Alice was political and on four occasions Tenniel used characters from Alice in his political cartoons for *Punch*. Remarkably the first instance precedes the publication of Alice. Tenniel's frontpiece to the 1864 bound volume of *Punch* (Figure 26, p. 171, this study) features Alice tying a string of flowers around the neck of a lion (the lion representing England). Accompanying Alice are Punch and other characters that regularly mock British

government and society. The event pictured could be described as the preparations for a Charivari (*Punch* magazine's subtitle was "A London Charivari"), and thus the Lion is being readied for humiliation. He will be paraded through the town and mocked, or laughed out of town. On 1 February 1868 Tenniel again makes use of Alice. Here Alice represents a troublemaking child, the United States (called Columbia). John Bull represents the English, accused of sinking America's toy ship, the Alabama. Queen Victoria looms over the two "children" and scolds them condescendingly (Figure 27, p. 171, this study). Tenniel's next use of Alice in his political cartooning was "Alice in Blunderland", which appeared in *Punch* on 30 October 1880 (Figure 28, p. 171, this study). Here Alice represents a Londoner who, along with the Gryphon, is protesting a pompous statue erected by the unthinking Mansion House Turtle. The statue stands obnoxiously in the middle of a busy road. Alice's political manner echoes Dodgson's: "'Then', said Alice, with warmth rising as she spoke, 'I shall certainly write to the *Times*'". Finally, on 8 March 1899 Tenniel presented *Punch* with "Alice in Bumbleland". As noted in Chapter One, here Alice represents the conservative politician Arthur James Balfour, the Gryphon represents London, and the weeping Mock Turtle is the cry of Westminster (Figure 29, p. 171, this study). In this cartoon Alice, by her association with a book of nonsense, represents the type of writing that has gone into Balfour's London Government Bill. The Mock Turtle complains, "It's by far the most confusing stuff I've ever heard!"

In the first three instances Tenniel has used Alice to represent republican virtues, in each case posing Alice as the commoner who must face up to the overbearing presence of the wealthy or royal. In the fourth cartoon the book *Alice in Wonderland* is referenced in order to demonstrate the absurdity of political rhetoric and legislation. In all four cases, Alice is politicised in a frank, open and unapologetic manner:

Figure 26

Figure 27

Figure 28

Figure 29

A further impetus to the politicisation effected by Tenniel on the Alice books is the simple fact that Tenniel was the foremost political cartoonist of his age. This reputation was earned before, during and after the publications of both *Wonderland* and *Looking Glass*. Tenniel's illustrations for Alice "looked" political to the public because Tenniel was a well-known political parodist for *Punch*. In fact, Tenniel illustrated no other

children's books during his long career, preferring to work uniquely in the field of political satire. The public, then, who switched their gazes from the pages of *Punch* to the pages of Alice, saw much the same attitude. As William and Ciel Baring Gould contend, and as Gardner concurs, it was widely believed in England at the time that Tenniel's illustration of the lion and unicorn were intended as caricatures of Gladstone and Disraeli (Baring-Gould 103; Gardner, *Alice* 72). And then again in *Looking Glass*, Gardner adds that there can be "little doubt that the man in the paper hat in the railway carriage can be non-other than Disraeli" (*Alice* 181-82). Gardner also points out that The Knave in *Wonderland* carries England's official St. Edward's Crown (ibid 85) and Tenniel's illustration of the Tweedle brothers, "strongly resembles John Bull in *Punch*" (ibid 190).

Since their release in the 1860s and 70s, political interpretations of the Alice texts have been more the rule than the exception. Alice thus became an ur-text for political parody from Tenniel's aforementioned cartoons in Punch forward. After the turn of the century Donald Thomas describes several political parodies based on Alice, such as *Alice in Motorland* (1904), *Alice in Plunderland* (1910), which featured Winston Churchill as the Mad Hatter (358) and *Malice in Kulturland* (1914). And Lecercle reminds us of "interpretations of the Alice books in terms of class struggle" that were offered in the 1930s (210). Lecercle is referencing, for example, Louis Aragon's Marxist reading that "in those shameful days of massacre in Ireland… human liberty lay wholly in the frail hands of Alice…" (qtd. in Holquist 154). Aragon believed that "Carroll's nonsense writings, disguised as children's books, actually were politically subversive protests against Victorian bourgeois morality and hypocrisy" (Gardner, *Snark* 98). Also in the 1930s Wallace Donham, Dean of the Harvard Business School, published an essay that suggested The Jubjub from *The Hunting of the Snark* was intended to represent Disraeli, and the Banker, the Bank of England (Gardner, *Snark* 24). Richard Field's *Alice's*

Adventures in Atomland (1949) carried Alice and political parody into the nuclear age, and in 1957 J. B. Priestly, in *The New Statesman,* suggested there was a hidden political theme in "The Walrus and the Carpenter". Carroll's poem, Priestly claimed, should be read as an allegory of the abuses of disenfranchised workers under the capitalist system (Gardner, *Alice* 192; Priestly 168).

Compared with the Carroll/Tenniel partnership, Lear's works were better able to avoid subversive political readings. This is due, in part, to the fact that Lear was a single artist, writing and illustrating his own material, whereas Carroll and Tenniel may not have shared the same perspective on Alice and her potential meanings. Yet saying that Lear's works were relatively less likely to incite political readings is not to say that they were immune from them. In his career as an author of nonsense Lear was frequently confronted with the popular belief that his name was, in fact, a pseudonym for Lord Derby, a member of the Parliament (Carpenter and Pritchard 306). Initially Lear worked pseudonymously, signing his first *Book of Nonsense* (1846) as "Derry Down Derry", and it was partly in an attempt to quell the rumours about Lord Derby that Lear finally put his own name to the title page in the 1861 release. Upon viewing the new name, Edward Lear, the public did not, however, welcome Lear, but instead denied that "Edward Lear" was a real person. It was then that the popular paranoia was born that the name Edward Lear was an anagram of Earl Edward (another way of referring to Lord Derby). Famously, Lear was confronted with this belief on one of his rail journeys. Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard relate that Lear was once on a train sharing a compartment with a family he did not know, the child of happened to have with him, and was reading from, the 1861 *Book of Nonsense*:

> [Lear] overheard the father declare that the real author [of *The Book of Nonsense*] was Lord Derby, "Lear" being an anagram of "Earl". Moreover, asserted this gentleman, "there is no such person as Edward Lear." Lear tried to convince them of the truth: "I took off my hat and showed it all round, with Edward Lear and the address in large letters—also one of my cards, and a marked handkerchief: on which amazement devoured those

> benighted individuals and I left them to gnash their teeth in trouble and tumult." (Carpenter and Pritchard 306)

Lear was, therefore, acutely aware that nonsense texts have a tendency to evoke the suspicion of a political subtext. Lear alludes to this fact in an 1883 letter to Violet Grant. Near the end of the note, which is filled with nonsense, he advises, "swallow the document, inasmuch as if found upon them the discovery would insuredly lead to acrostic results" (450).

Political readings of Lear's works are pervaded by the central notion that his limericks tend to lament or champion the fate of the outcast and those liminal persons thrust to the fringes of society. The world Lear creates in his limericks is overwhelmingly a depiction of the various fates of those "afflicted" by difference. Lear's responses to these liminal souls may be broken into three categories, those who are punished for their difference, those who are indifferent to their state, and those who succeed in having their difference accepted. The body of Lear's total output of limericks is evenly distributed, with about one third of his characters falling into each of these three categories. In the first type, there are numerous characters who are left alone, abandoned and forgotten, such as Old Man of New York, who was "silly". Of this silly man we learn that "nobody cried though he very soon died" (100). Other characters are ostracised for physical deformities such as the Old Man of Leghorn, "the smallest that ever was born", who is devoured by his dog. And there are characters that engage in abnormal behaviour for which they are punished. There is the Old Man of Thermopylae who "boiled eggs in his shoes" and is ordered to leave town, and this example:

> There was an old Man of Whitehaven,
> Who danced a quadrille with a Raven;
> But they said – 'It's absurd, to encourage this bird!'
> So they smashed that Old Man of Whitehaven. (172)

In the second type we find characters rejected from society but who appear indifferent to the judgements being passed on them. There is, for example, the Old man of Kildare who sits "on a very high chair" alone in a field, smiling down at the people who stare up at him though a spyglass. And there is the Old Man whose nose grows twice the length of his body, but who confidently explains to an amazed crowd, "If you choose to suppose that my nose is too long, you are certainly wrong!" (158). In both cases, a crowd stares in amazement while the protagonist remains comfortable in his difference.

In the third type we find characters whose difference is the key to their successful integration into society. There is the Young Lady of Tyre, who entertains the people by playing a harp with a broom. Or there is the "Old Person of Skye",

> Who waltz'd with a Bluebottle fly;
> They buzz'd a sweet tune, to the light of the moon,
> And entranced all the people of Skye. (377)

Lear's preoccupation with the question of difference is the key to understanding political readings of his works. Linda Marsh comments, for example, in her introduction to *Limericks for all Occasions*, that limericks in the tradition of Lear work to "eradicate the violence of prejudice" (viii). Similarly, yet more stridently political, is Thomas Dilworth's reading that Lear's limericks inherently depict "a powerful allegory of… a society which abuses individuals for whom protest is… precluded" ("Society" 12). Dilworth has in mind, not only the above examples, but more pointed limericks, such as the "Old Man of Ibreem":

> Who suddenly threaten'd to scream;
> But they said, 'If you do, we will thump you quite blue,
> You disgusting Old Man of Ibreem.' (Lear 375)

Inevitably these depictions of the downtrodden for whom "protest is… precluded" evoke connotations of specific colonial or conquered peoples. Perhaps because the limerick form appears to be linked with Irish folk culture, the question of Ireland comes up now and again with regard to Lear's limericks. Lear was reportedly an admirer of the Irish character and visited Ireland several times, including visits in 1835 and 1857 (Levi 49; 152). A number of his limericks are set in Ireland, including those whose first lines end with Kilkenny, Clare, Kildare, Down, Dunblane and Grange. The issue of Irish suffering was, of course, central to Victorian politics and, given Lear's inclination to comment on the downtrodden and marginalised of society, it is not outlandish to read Lear's limericks as sympathetic towards the oppressed and starving of Ireland. The Man of Kilkenny is described as penniless, the Person of Down is "adorned with a frown". The Lady of Clare is devoured by a bear. The Person of Grange is potentially metaphorical of the mass exodus of the Irish to America and other locations, as he sets himself adrift on the seas, his eyes sunken with apparent starvation, his arms helplessly tossed in the air (359). And the Man of Kildare, who refuses to leave his field, is suggestive of those Irish unwilling to give up in the face of failed crops and forced immigration: "Here I stays, - till the end of my days" (107).

A subtle reference to the starving in Ireland might have been felt in Lear's frequent references to gluttons, such as the Old Man of the South, (and his immoderate mouth), who are described (and pictured) stuffing enormous pieces of food (or whole rabbits) down their throats (90). Several of these gluttons choke to death, while another is merely an object of disgust. In Ireland, between 1845 and 1851, one and a half million died from a famine that many in England believed could have been avoided had British landowners stepped in to help. Lear's two trips to Ireland, set in 1837 and 1856, immediately before and after the famine, assure us that he was aware of the suffering that went on there.

Lear's gluttonous fat old people, then, and their starving children, may well have inspired doubts concerning imperial ideology. When the popular mythology is added that the author of *The Book of Nonsense* is a Member of Parliament, the text then becomes potentially quite provoking.

Lear's anti-authoritarian tendencies are also apparent in his limericks. As will be detailed more extensively later in this chapter in the discussion of the carnivalesque, Lear's limericks are particularly ruthless with regards to the aged. The chokings of the Old Persons of Calcutta and of the South, and the stoning of the Old Person of Chester hint at an anti-authoritarian attitude that pervades much of Lear's work. And in the "Old Man who supposed the street door was partially closed" (165) (while his coats and hats are eaten by rats) we find the same sentiment as that expressed in Carroll's depiction of Humpty Dumpty—the character is a pompous aristocratic "futile" gentleman who is destined to disappointment. On royalty and wealth, Lear relates:

> There was an Old Person of Calais,
> Who lived in a blue marble palace;
> But on coming downstairs, he encountered some bears,
> Who swallowed that person of Calais (116)

Lear also regularly mocks Kings, both English and foreign, from the inexplicable Akond of Swat—"Does he study the wants of his own dominion? Or doesn't he care for public opinion?" (399)—to mad, screaming king Xerxes. Lear also arbitrarily juxtaposes trivial objects with royal images, as in "Houses and Kings / Whiskers and Swings", (136) thus equating the royal image with the common and every day.

One need not dig very deeply to discover the political stance offered in Gilbert's texts. And the politics functioning in Gilbert's texts are similar to those layered more discreetly in Lear and Carroll's works. Lear and Gilbert, in particular, share a similar prejudice in favour of those marginalised and outcast by mainstream society. Charles Hayter comments,

> The unifying theme of *Sorcerer, Pinafore, Pirates* and *Patience* is the tension between the individual and the laws of behaviour. In *Sorcerer* and *Pinafore*, the conflict is between the characters and the laws of caste; in *Pirates* and *Patience*, the characters struggle against the rigid dictates of moral law. (116)

And Gilbert's rebellious attitude towards class division manifests itself throughout his writings. In his nonsense poem, "Major General John", mentioned above, class division becomes the locus of an existential dilemma, as an upper class Major General is easily convinced to permanently switch identities with a private in the army:

> So General John as Private James
> Fellin, parade upon;
> And Private James, by change of names,
> Was Major General John. (*Bab Ballads* 143)

Gilbert's view of class divisions as arbitrary and absurd are also expressed in Scene One of *Topseyturveydom* when a politician describes the process by which his status and political affiliation were purchased:

> Matters were getting serious when the Conservatives took a more decided step. They bought me a Mansion in a Park, found me a coat of arms and a genealogical tree, and made me a County Family on the spot. That decided me. As a County Family I was bound to support the reaction. So I'm a Conservative. (*Topseyturvydom*)

In Scene Two the King comments, "Our Parliament is composed principally of wealthy donkeys who are elected partly because they are wealthy and partly because they are donkeys" (*Topseyturvydom*).

Punch magazine was entirely devoted to social and political criticism. In fact, *Punch* was so entirely devoted to these concerns, and the fact is so well known, that claims of its political nature need not be defended here. More pertinent to the concerns of this essay is that *Punch*'s political humour was often attenuated by, or articulated in, nonsense forms. The use of Alice by John Tenniel, *Punch* staff illustrator, has been

previously mentioned. But politically charged nonsense is invoked in multifarious ways in *Punch*. A short verse from 1868 is typical:

> Doo is a baronet.
> Doodle is a Baron.
> Diddle is a Viscount.
> Dunderhead is an Earl.
> Duckanddrakes is a Duke…" (25 Jan. 44)

Additionally, *Punch's* style of humour acknowledges that traditional nonsense rhymes are the ideal vehicle through which to launch political attack. Thus, "A Frog Would a Wooing Go" becomes "Prince Alfred Would a Wooing Go" (26 July 1873 35). The 8 February 1868 *Punch* includes "Mother Church's Nursery rhymes", all political lampoons based on traditional nonsense rhymes, including this one, based on "Jack-a-Nory".

> I'll tell you a Story
> 'Bout Mr. Mac-Rorie,
> Who'd be Bishop of Natal or none :
> I'll tell you another
> 'Bout London, his brother,
> By whom poor Mac-Rorie was done. (63)

Topical issues, such as the then new and controversial practice of eating horsemeat, are also lampooned via nonsense rhymes. "Sing a Song of Sixpence" become "Sing a Song of Horse-Flesh", "Ride a Cock Horse" is recast as "Ride a Stock-Horse", the second line of "Hickory Dickory Dock" becomes, "A Horse makes capital stock", and the second line of "Hey Diddle Diddle" becomes, "Horse-loin in the middle" (15 Feb. 1868 75). And not infrequently political lampoons are presented in Learesque limerick form. One *Punch* limerick from 1873 celebrates the madness of King Ludwig:

> There was a queer King of Bavaria,
> Who played on his fiddle an *aria*;
> He sent for his valey,
> And ordered a Ballet,
> This Lunatic King of Bavaria. (13 Dec. 242)

In Chapter Two I demonstrate how arbitrary and non-traditional narrative incites the allegorical process. My reading of "Hey Diddle Diddle" illustrates this point, positing that "Hey Diddle Diddle" could be read as celebratory of the British defeat at Yorktown. Much the same exercise is offered in an 1873 edition of *Punch.* Here we learn that a supernatural power, "Prophesy", "is latent among old Nursery Rhymes" (19 July 29). The reading is fascinating for its originality and for the alternate interpretation it provides when compared to my reading of,

> Cock-a-doodle-doo!
> Dame has lost her shoe.
> Master has lost his fiddling-stick,
> And doesn't know what to do."
>
> ...Dame, meaning old woman, is the church as represented to the Ritualists' mind by the Protestant majority. Her shoe, which she has lost, is her understanding, of course. Master stands for the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the fiddling-stick, which he has lost, for his crook, the symbol of authority... (Ibid)

The above examples, from Carroll, Lear, Gilbert and *Punch*, all demonstrate that Victorian nonsense in the 1860s and 1870s was a politically oriented medium, anti-authoritarian by instinct, and readily charged with contemporary political meanings by direct reference or by insinuation.

SECTION II: AN ANATOMY OF VICTORIAN NONSENSE

THE TROPES OF TRANSFORMATION

The Carnivalesque

Having established a political undertone in Victorian nonsense literature it remains true that this subversive set of ideas appears wildly erratic, focusing here on one contemporary issue, there on another, the disparate voices of criticism converging only in

a vague anti-authoritarian theme. But as in the era of the American Revolution, a more specific project is at hand, one that enables transformation and a re-configuring of what it means to be English. Part three of this essay will explore the emergence of this new mythological Englishman. But in order to arrive at that conclusion the building blocks by which nonsense not merely engenders political thinking, but, in fact, empowers transformation, must be examined. Through the offices of the carnivalesque the Victorian reader of nonsense will be enabled, forced even, to look beyond the material present, into a transformed, more utopian, egalitarian future.

Such transformation is dependent upon a carnivalesque presence in the literatures under consideration. Chapter One claims that because of its good nature and humour, and its close association with the carnivalesque, nonsense is normally situated in a convivial, democratic atmosphere. As Bakhtin suggests, this carnivalesque milieu, when encountered, fosters frank expression of controversial or utopian ideals. Just as the nonsense clubs of colonial America specifically invoked absurd, grotesque and topsy-turvy carnival elements as a way to kindle rebellious thought, so we witness the kindling of carnivalesque tropes in Victorian nonsense as the first step—the setting of a proper mood—by which a liberation of the imagination is effected, and alternate realities are rendered, seemingly, less impossible.

Carnival humour was defined by topsy-turvy inversion, images of gluttonous festivity and feasting, bodily humour, mock beatings, phallic and sexual undertones, and an overwhelming commitment to travesty—travesty of any authoritarian figure, political, religious or the aged. We will trace these images as they appear in the works of Carroll, Lear and Gilbert, with a few examples from *Punch* as well.

There is nothing easier to trace in the works of Lear, Carroll, Gilbert and *Punch* than the offices of the topsy-turvy. In Carroll there is almost no natural law or logical

dictum that is not reversed or turned upside-down. The Queens are buffoons and Alice, the commoner, usurps their role by becoming "Queen Alice". In the "Walrus and the Carpenter" we find the sun shining in the middle of the night (168). The opening stanza to "Jabberwocky" is written in reverse, a mirror image of itself (140). In the courtroom scene in *Alice* we learn that the Sentence comes first and the Verdict afterwards (117). Alice walks away from the Red Queen in order to approach her (148), while the White Queen lives backwards in time (181). A world in a *Looking Glass*, naturally, must be the reverse of the real world. There are numerous other examples in Dodgson's life and works that demonstrate his conspicuous interest in topsy-turvy reversal, including his curious personal habit of modifying music boxes so that they would play in reverse (M. Cohen 288).

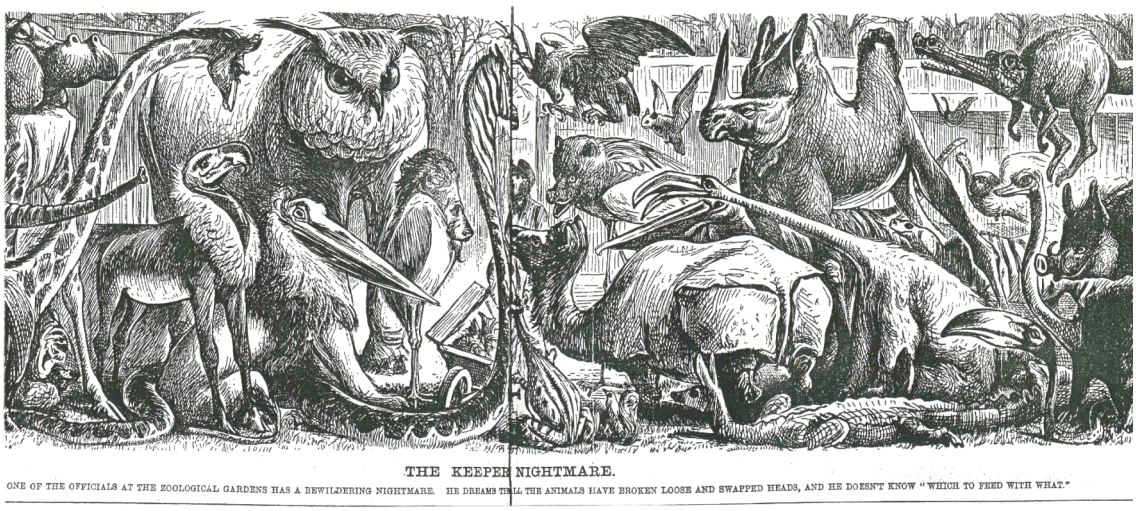
In Lear Topseyturvydom is similarly conspicuous. The anti-heroes of his limericks are frequently posed standing on their heads or spinning on their noses. The "Table and the Chair" dance on their "heads" (278) as does the Chickey Bird in "Mrs. Blue Dickey-Bird" (240). In Lear's nonsense botany we find a drawing of a flower with tiny people hanging from it by their feet. Lear has labelled it, "Manypeeplia Upsidownia" (252). And then there are the species known as the Clangle Wangle. "On summer evenings", Lear writes, "they may sometimes be observed near Lake Pipple Popple, standing on their heads and humming their national melodies" (202). Other images of reversal in Lear include frequent mention of cross-dressers. Both the Old Man on a Hill and the Old Man Who Made Bold "run up and down in his grandmother's gown" (117; 158). Grammar rules are inverted, as in the repeated final line of The Pelican Chorus, "We think so then, and we thought so still" (412).

The London press referred to W. S. Gilbert as "The King of Topsy-Turvydom", a reference not only to his libretto of that name, but to the general arc of his entire oeuvre. In "My Dream", a verse from *More Bab Ballads*, Gilbert writes,

> I dreampt that somehow I had come
> To dwell in Topsy-Turveydom!—
>
> Where vice is virtue—virtue vice:
> Where nice is nasty—nasty nice:
> Where right is wrong and wrong is right—
> Where white is black and black is white. (*More Bab Ballads* 143)

Note also the stage directions for Gilbert's musical, *Topsyturveydom*; in the King's Reception Room, "[t]here is a window, with an inverted landscape visible through it. A chandelier sprouts from the middle of the floor, and chairs and tables hang upside-down from the flies" (*Topsyturveydom*, Scene One). And there is the reversal of class position that occurs when General John with Private James switch ranks (*Bab Ballads*143).

Punch's Almanac for 1867 features "The Tables Turned at the Zoo", in which animals out for a Sunday stroll stop to gaze at caged humans (142). And in the *Almanac* for 1871 the animals in the zoo have swapped heads, inverting understanding of which part of the animal, the head or its body, should represent the whole. The zookeeper "doesn't know which to feed what":



THE KEEPER'S NIGHTMARE.

ONE OF THE OFFICIALS AT THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS HAS A BEWILDERING NIGHTMARE. HE DREAMS THAT THE ANIMALS HAVE BROKEN LOOSE AND SWAPPED HEADS, AND HE DOESN'T KNOW "WHICH TO FEED WITH WHAT."

Figure 30

In 1868 *Punch* comments on contemporary politics in terms of reversal:

> There is an operation
> On 'Change called Backwardation.
> To human civilisation… (25 Jan. 34)

And again, in that same year *Punch*'s verse, "The Dangers of Upside Down", invokes the topsy-turvy to illustrate political turmoil.

> Who'll be the Lower Orders?
> Educate the masses,
> Or, educated classes,
> You'll be the Lower Orders! (25 April 1868 184)

In a carnivalesque atmosphere allusions to festivity and feasting are highlighted. Martin Gardner believes that Carroll intended that *Alice in Wonderland* be set on 4 May 1862.[2] While the 4th of May is close to May Day, Carroll seemed to have believed that the story would be most appropriately presented at Christmas, and thus *Wonderland* begins with "A Christmas Greeting" (13). *Looking Glass* is actually set at Christmas, or perhaps Guy Fawkes Day. In Chapter One Alice asks her kitty,

> Do you know what tomorrow is?… you'd have guessed if you'd been up in the window with me…watching the boys getting sticks for the bonfire and it wants plenty of sticks… it got so cold, and it snowed… (131)

Whether they are set around May Day, Guy Fawkes Day, or Christmas, the holiday theme is established, and it is therefore no surprise that the Alice books, in the carnivalesque tradition, prominently feature images of gluttony, mad feasting, and making merry. Perhaps the most famous scene in either of the Alice books is the Mad Tea Party in *Wonderland*, while references to magical food and get-togethers, such as the croquet match, further suggest a festive atmosphere. From the Mad Hatter's proclamation that "it's always tea time" (73) to the banquet featuring pudding that speaks in the conclusion of *Looking Glass,* the adventures of Alice are rich in gastronomic and celebratory occasions.

For Lear, the correlation is direct and prominent. In his first *Book of Nonsense* Lear ties his text to carnival by claiming the pseudonym "Derry Down Derry", the fool's character in traditional Christmas mummers' plays. Then there is "The Old Person of Bar", whom Lear's illustration depicts as Harlequin (358). And May Day festivities are alluded to in "The Old Person of Wilts" whose stilts are bedecked with "lilies and daffy-down-dillies", suggesting images of Jack in the Green or mummers' hats (356). And appetite and raillery are focussed on in Lear as well. If there is one deadly sin from which the characters of his limericks most commonly suffer, it is gluttony. A large number of these unfortunate revellers are, in fact, comically choked and killed by their voracious appetites. Lear depicts people with whole rabbits protruding from their gaping jaws and introduces personages such as "That globular person of Hurst" and "the Old Man of Girgenti", who "lay on two chairs, and ate thousands of pears" (382). Lear often describes feasts and parties of every variety. In "The Pelican Chorus", the pelicans "ate and drank and danced all night" (413). In "The Dong with the Luminous Nose" the Jumblies "danced in circlets all night long" (423). At the end of *The History of Seven Families of Lake Pipple Popple*, the survivors "danced a hornpipe… gave a tea party, *and* a garden-party *and* a ball, —*and* a concert…" (204).

Gilbert's settings are equally dominated by references to festive occasions. Weddings, Christmas pantomimes and autumn fairs are frequently the locus of action in Gilbert's topsy-turvy world. His Bab Ballad "Down to the Derby", for example, is set at an autumn fair, while Act One of *The Sorcerer* features a comic wedding. In Act One of Gilbert's *The Sorcerer* we read that,

> The village rings with seasonable joy,
> …Now to the banquet we press;
> Now for the eggs, the ham;
> Now for the mustard and cress,
> Now for the strawberry jam!
> Now for the tea of our host,

> Now for the rollicking bun,
> Now for the muffin and toast,
> Now for the gay Sally Lunn!
> … Come, pass the cup around—
> I will go bail for the liquor;
> It's strong, I'll be bound,
> For it was brewed by the vicar! (*Sorcerer*)

And in "Down to the Derby", the festive occasion is described in equally gastro-rollicking terms:

> Gallons of beer, stowed away here,
> Twiggery, swiggery, quick sticks.
> Empty before, fill 'em once more;
> Women look trim in their caps, caps;
> Screaming in fun, never say done... (*Lost Bab Ballads* 15)

Punch, subtitled*, A London Charivari*, embodied a festive setting that felt not unlike a year-round Twelfth Night celebration, complete with incessant mocking and merriment. The mascot—or master of ceremonies—in the magazine, Punch himself, with his jolly red nose, represented the merriest and most gluttonous of Saturnalian characters. The 5 January 1867 edition typifies the carnivalesque mood manifested by the journal as a character laments the overabundance of the season, singing, "Lord of Mis-rule and Un-reason, Christmas doth frown upon me… Turkey's plum-puddings and mince pies!"

Mock beatings are a part of the carnivalesque tradition as well. In Alice, when the Queen of Hearts repeatedly screams, "Off with their heads!" we are reminded of Bakhtin's anecdotes from the comedic Fire festival of Roman carnival with its cry, "Death to anyone not carrying a candle!" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 248). We also find in *Wonderland* the scene in the Duchess' kitchen where a baby is violently abused (60). The overwhelming number of Lear's characters who suffer physical abuse defies inventory. There is the stoning of the Old Person of Chester (74) and the self-inflicted punishment of The Old Man of New York "who murdered himself with a fork" (100). Lear's dark humour makes light of physical abuse, ranging from jokes about plague, dismemberment or dead babies to the

murder of the entire family of Discobbolos (431).

Gilbert's humour frequently alludes to comic violence and dark humour. Cannibalism returns as theme frequently in Gilbert. There is the Bab Ballad, "King Borria Bungalee Boo" (159), who was a man-eater, and "The Yarn of the Nancy Bell", whose main character is a sailor who has eaten his fellow crewmembers (*Bab Ballads* 86). In the verse "Annie Protheroe", Annie's boyfriend is a "gentle executioner" (ibid 85-9).

For Bakhtin, laughing at death is symbolic of the concept that death is pregnant—that decay feeds growth, that winter bears spring. In deaths that are not tragic, but humorous and even joyful, a subtext of rebirth and renewal is implied (*Rabelais* 435). When combined with procreative, phallic, sexual imagery, Bakhtin sees these images as representative of progress, and of generations reborn; in this light, Bakhtin suggests that these images involve an implicit defiance to the static situation often suffered by lower classes (63-4, 255-56).

It will be unnecessary to examine phallic imagery and sexual innuendo in detail. The subject has been dealt with innumerable times with regard to both Lear and Carroll's works. In the post-Freudian paradigm it has been possible to transform everything from rabbit holes to long noses into provocative indices of the tortured inner souls of the authors.[3] Yet while it may be safer to assume that the ship in the Snark really did just get its bowsprit confused with its rudder—and no innuendo was intended—it would behove us to remember that like political readings, the disconnect between reader reception and authorial intention is often quite pronounced in nonsense texts, and thus the psychoanalytic and sexual readings of Lear and Carroll should not be heedlessly discounted. From his correspondence it is clear, for example, that Lear was a psychologically tortured individual, and among the pressures he apparently confessed to close friends was a homosexual tendency with which he was unable fully to come to terms

(Noakes, *Wanderer* 131; 134; 221; 269). It might also be noted that Lear was unusually persistent in his commitment to illustrating especially long, protracted, severed or even glowing noses, from "The Dong with the Luminous Nose" to the Man, mentioned above, whose nose continually grows. Bakhtin discusses the ubiquity of the nose-as-phallus trope in carnival humour (*Rabelais* 87) and Lear may have, for whatever reason, made ample use of this device. And despite the prevailing image Lear promoted of himself, which was that of an innocent, non-sexual uncle type, he could, when inspired, author a sensuous verse, as in, "Calypso":

> And every morn in the sea did dip so
> Whereon Ulysses seeing her strip so
> And all her beautiful ringlets drip so
> From her beautiful head to beautiful hipso… (210)

On a subconscious level Lear's limericks bear a close stylistic resemblance to schoolyard limericks in which the Old Men with long appendages are no longer so innocently engaged. In the subconscious public eye then, Lear is guilty by association with the Old Man of Nantucket, however unfair the assertion.

While there is no basis for some of the lewder accusations that have been levelled against Dodgson, another lonely man, it remains true that he at least struggled with a persistent aesthetic interest in the young female form. Although Dodgson's collection of photographs of young nude females had more to do with his keen aesthetic sense—his response to those images can be likened to his tendency to weep when he saw a beautiful church—it remains possible that images such as Alice growing and shrinking in *Wonderland* may represent some unacknowledged sexual frustration.

Gilbert's verses are relatively uninhibited and so we should not be surprised to read a contemporary review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of Gilbert's, *The Wicked World,* in which the play is described as "Vulgar, Coarse, [and] indecent" (qtd. in Hayter 12). Act Two of *Pinafore* features a philandering Captain who sings to his wife:

CAPT. I shall never be untrue to thee!
ALL. What, never?
CAPT. No, never!
ALL. What, never?
CAPT. Hardly ever! (*H.M.S. Pinafore*)

And then there is Gilbert's "King Archibald Naso". Gilbert writes, "Amused with his nose was King Archibald Naso", adding, "He fondled alone his old nose did King Naso" (*Lost Bab Ballads* 88).

It is through travesties that the subversive politics of the carnivalesque are most obviously expressed. To contemporary readers Carroll's parodies of well known, "respectable" poets would have appeared somewhat travestorial. Closer to the heart of carnivalesque traditions, however, we find authors of Victorian nonsense deriding various forms of spiritual belief such as magic or religion. Representations of arbitrary power, those symbols or institutions that imply a right to special reverence, such as royal seals, heraldic symbols, or images of the aged, are soundly mocked as well.

Carroll frequently aids and abets this anti-monarchist stance. Queens in the Alice books are beholden to arbitrary and absurd rules. And the inconsequentiality of their demands and purposes paints a particularly unflattering portrayal of royalty. In a similar vein, James Bethune finds the picture of the sleeping Gryphon in *Wonderland* satiric of "emblems of extreme vigilance" that so often populate heraldic emblazons of the nobility (qtd. in Gardner, *Alice* 98). As in Carroll, the powerful and kingly are soundly mocked in Lear. Lear bestows on royalty such ridiculous names as Princess Bink (394) and Jampoodle the King (396). He juxtaposes "Houses and Kings" with "Whiskers and Swings" (136), emphasising by association the inconsequential nature of royalty. And there are Lear's several less than flattering depictions of King Xerxes who was "Renowned for his fashion / Of Screaming with passion" (133; 268). In his passionate absurdity Lear's Xerxes resembles Carroll's Queen of Hearts.

All kings in Gilbert's verses are made to look ridiculous. Above we have mentioned the unflattering portrayals of King Borria Bungalee Boo, King Archibald Naso and the King of Canoodle-Dum. In *Topsyturveydom* we are introduced to King Imprimis the Inverted, another fool (*Topseyturvydom*). In the *Bab Ballad* "The Three Kings of Chickeraboo" we witness crownings, or mock-crownings, of various "kings", as one absurd royal bestows arbitrary adulation upon another. The English Navy, representing the Queen, is depicted as sailing to random islands and bestowing royal alliances upon the local monarchs. Gilbert's verse here emphasises the dubious qualities of "kings" and the questionable judgment of the queen who allies herself with them:

> A ship of several thousand tons,
> And mounting seventy-something guns,
> Ploughed, every year, the ocean blue,
> Discovering kings and countries new
> …If to her skirts you want to cling,
> It's quite sufficient that you're a king;
> She does not push inquiry far
> To learn what sort of king you are. (*Bab Ballads* 205)

Another traditional form of carnival travesty is disrespect for the aged (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 57; 241; 251). In Victorian politics the old were often vilified by "young" radicals. As Plunkett notes, "Radicals employed a mode of critique that relied heavily on the enduring potency of Old Corruption" (57). The vilification of Old Corruption is tied to Carnival rites in the 5 January 1867 edition of *Punch*, in which the Lord of Misrule sings, "Our Parting Kick":

> Get out, Old Year, get out, get out!
> And don't keep lingering here about,
> We don't care if you've got the gout,
> Or what's the matter, but just get out!
> You stupid, sorrowful, sad old year.
> You maundering, mischievous, mad old year… (4)

Other epithets in the poem include description of the old year as sulky, scandalous, miserly, muddling, mean, and bewildering. The New Year, by contrast, is "nice, neat, smiling, sweet" (ibid).

Lear and Carroll attend to this example with diligence. In Carroll's "You are Old Father William" the old man stands on his head, has weak jaws, admits to having no brain, and is "uncommonly fat" (50). In Carroll's poem "I'll Tell Thee Everything I Can" in *Looking Glass*, an old man employs himself with absurd tasks such as digging for buttered rolls, and ends up being thumped on the head (225-27). In his article "Alice on the Stage" Carroll describes the difference between Alice and the White Rabbit as a contrast between young and old. To Carroll Alice represents "youth, audacity and vigour", while the White Rabbit is "elderly, timid and feeble" (qtd. in Gardner, *Alice* 22).

This animosity towards the aged is overwhelmingly evident in Lear's limericks, each of which begins with either "There was an old" or "There was a young". Lear produced in total eighty-eight limericks describing old people and twenty-four describing young. Of the eighty-eight old protagonists, only two are described as happy or clever. A sampling of descriptors of the old (usually located in the final line) demonstrates Lear's dominant thematic treatment of the aged: That *wayward* Old Man of Kilkenny, That *unhappy* Old Man in a boat, That *uneasy* Old Man of the West, That *nasty* Old Man of Vienna, That *angry* Old Man of Quebec, That *futile* old person of Rhodes, That *morbid* Old Man of Vesuvius, That *bewildered* Old Man of Corfu, That *horrid* Old Man of Calcutta, That *deluded* Old Man of the Hague, That *distressing* old person of Burton, That *unlucky* old person of Ems and (to sum up Lear's descriptive treatment of the aged), That *stupid* Old Man of Melrose. By contrast, of Lear's twenty-four young protagonists, thirteen are described as happy or clever. Their last lines ring a different tune: This

courageous Young Lady of Norway, That *amusing* Young Lady of Bute, That *ingenious* Young Lady of Poole and That *accomplished* Young Lady of Welling.

Several of Lear's limericks describe open conflict between the old and young:

> There was a Young Person of Smyrna,
> Whose grandmother threatened to burn her;
> But she seized on the cat,
> and said 'Granny, burn that!
> You incongruous Old Woman of Smyrna.' (159)

> There was an old person of Chester,
> Whom several small children did pester;
> They threw some large stones,
> which broke most of his bones,
> And displeased that old person of Chester. (161)

Lear's Old Man of the West describes an elderly gentleman who is "cured" of a dysfunctional behaviour, and it is interesting to note *how* he is "cured" and brought to his senses: "So they set him to spin, on his nose and his chin, which cured the Old man of the West" (98). Implied in the "Old man of the West" is the notion that in order to enact change the old must be placed upside-down, turned around and forced through a violent turn.

In Gilbert's *Bab Ballad* "The Mystic Salvagee", an old sailor is employed along with a young crew and proves himself incapable and unqualified. At first the Captain patiently endures the old man's tendency to do everything "in the ancient way", which is always the reverse of the new way. Eventually, however, the Captain despairs, finding the old man hopeless, and abandons him on the shore of a remote island (*More Bab Ballads* 192). In Gilbert and Sullivan's *Thespis* the Gods of Olympus are depicted as old and tired. Gilbert directs, "enter Diana, an elderly goddess. She is carefully wrapped up in cloaks, shawls, etc. A hood is over her head, a respirator in her mouth, and galoshes on her feet" (*Thespis*). In this play young mortals eager to make a few changes soon replace the old gods.

The most inflammatory and blasphemous of carnival rites involved comic impersonations of church officials and parodies of religious ceremonies and holy texts, which appeared in numerous variations such as the Liturgy of the Ass, the Liturgy of the Drunkards, Cyprian's Supper and Boy Bishops. Lewis Carroll, as the Deacon Charles Dodgson, could not be expected to engage in mocking of this sort, and on several occasions he denounced those who engaged in blasphemy. Carroll himself, however, did not escape this very charge. A letter published in the *St. James Gazette* in 1890 suggests that Carroll made a travesty of "Tis the Voice of the Sluggard", (Solomon 2:12 - Book of Psalms), in his poem from *Alice in Wonderland*, "Tis the Voice of the Lobster" (Gardner, *Alice* 111). While it is more likely that Carroll was parodying the Isaac Watts version of this verse the Deacon was certainly aware of the biblical reference and he never denied the charge (M. Cohen 480). Carroll parodies the verse again when he writes "Tis the voice of the Jubjub" in "Fit the Fourth" of *Snark*. Interestingly, in the illustration labelled "The Beaver Brought Paper" in "Fit the Fourth", among other curious items, is pictured a copy of John William Colenso's *Arithmetic*. Colenso was a radical bishop whose book "reduced to absurdity the literal interpretation of the bible…[and] dismissed biblical stories as mythology" (Gardner, *Snark* 78). Though the illustration was not Carroll's work he would have approved it as he was known to be overly meticulous when working with his illustrators. And Carroll certainly intended to mock the religious authority of Catholicism in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* when he writes,

> He thought he saw an Argument
> That proved he was the Pope:
> He looked again, and found it was
> A Bar of Mottled Soap… (632)

Lear was more overtly blasphemous than Carroll. As he did with kings, Lear undermines religious authority in "Ribands and Pigs" by juxtaposing the quasi-mythological with the mundane and everyday. Thus we read, "Mitres & beams /

Thimbles & creams" (139). Lear parodies Genesis in "The History of the Seven Families of Lake Pipple-Popple". The Parrots have been warned, "if you find a cherry, do not fight about who should have it" (197). Shortly after, the Parrots come upon a tree with but a single cherry growing on it. The cherry is picked and hoarded and results in a war among the parrots until "they were all torn into little bits".

There are other biblical allusions in Lear. When in "The Four Little Children Who Sailed Quite Round the World" the ship encounters a "Part of the sea, which was so entirely full of fishes that the boat could go no further" (223) we are reminded of the story of Jesus and the fisherman and their miraculously full nets. And as in the Wedding of Cana, the Four Little Children find themselves in the uncomfortable position of not being able to entertain because they have "no tea leaves". Instead, they use pebbles, and the "Quangle-Wangle played some tunes over [the kettle] on an Accordion, by which of course tea was made directly" (226). The head and face of this miracle-working Quangle-Wangle is never once made visible in the illustrations, drawing forth mythical connotations of Jehovah, who may never be named. That Lear considered his work impious, and ideally suited to carnivalesque traditions is evident in a comment he made when *Nonsense Songs and Stories* was published in 1870. On Christmas Eve Lear writes to a friend that he has leant his only copy of *Nonsense Songs* "to the Archbishop as a pious & instructive work fitted for the season" (qtd. in Noakes, *Wanderer* 257). Lear also drew a comical version of himself in a mitre and robes that he titled, "Edward Lear, Archbishop of Canterbury" (453), which reminds one very much of the Boy Bishops tradition featured in medieval carnival:

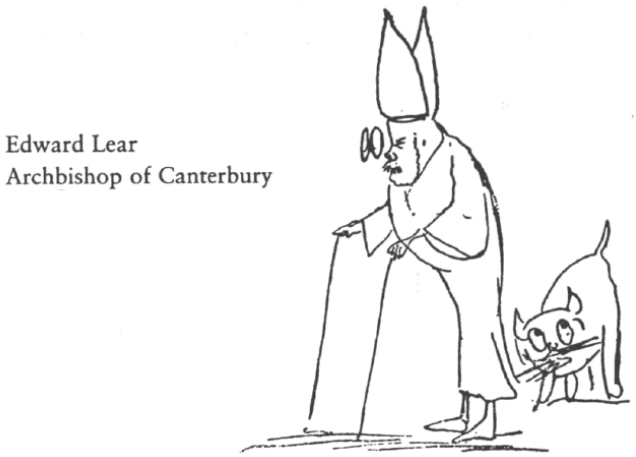


Figure 31

With Gilbert, of course, impiety is more overt, as the clergy is a standard target in his works. In the first collection of *Bab Ballads* we are introduced to the ridiculous Bishop of Rum-Ti-Foo, who yearns to learn traditional dances. In other poems Gilbert introduces The Reverend Hopley Porter who winks at girls and wears his hair in curls. There is the curate in "The Phantom Curate" who spends his evenings roaring at pantomimes, and "Gentle Alice Brown", who pays the local priest for her sins at a half-a-crown a piece.[4]

Plunkett notes that in the 1870s *Punch* "satirises the earthly vanity of those preachers achieving recognition through their [celebrity photo] cartes" (158; *Punch* 6 Aug. 1870). And in the 11 January 1868 edition we read a limerick that references a scandal concerning the Bishop of Elphin:

> There once was an old Doctor Gillooly,
> Whose tongue was a member unruly,
> And he talked at Roscommon,
> Like any old woman
> Or worse, like a bigoted Fooly. (12)

In conclusion, carnivalesque imagery—via topsy-turvy inversion, images of gluttonous festivity and feasting, bodily humour, mock beatings, phallic and sexual undertones, and a commitment to travesty—are all evidenced in Victorian nonsense. Once a carnivalesque atmosphere is established, that is to say once the reader is "drunk" with

dancing, feasting, inversion and mocking, the stage is set for the possibility of transformative thinking. Readers of nonsense are thrust, at this point, into narrative voids in which it becomes possible, or necessary even, to re-imagine the world. These narrative voids are constructed in three ways: by the placing of unacknowledged imagery from superstitions and other belief systems, by the use of narrative "blank spaces", and by the implementation of temporal anomalies.

Unofficial Belief Systems

While Sewell contends that nonsense works to disrupt mythological systems of arbitrary authority, her observation is correct only to a certain extent. Nonsense, as noted in previous chapters, also subtly allies itself with the supernatural. And like eighteenth-century nonsense, the pagan allusions of Victorian nonsense subconsciously encourage the maintenance of unofficial belief systems. For the Victorians this otherworldliness of nonsense would have been an attraction. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell in *The Victorian Supernatural*, remark,

> The Victorians were haunted by the supernatural, by ghosts and fairies, table-rappings and telepathic encounters, occult religions and the idea of reincarnation, visions of the other world and a reality beyond the everyday. (Frontleaf)

For the Victorian reader then, the fact that nonsense revels in the animation of inanimate objects, might, like a table rapping, have suggested that the uncanny was at work. Yet, as is typical for nonsense from any era, Victorian nonsense never offers to explain this anomalous behaviour. The suggestion that a poltergeist may be responsible for the moving of the inanimate objects is left unspoken. It is this unspoken quality that engages the reader to consider on his or her own how such miraculous events could occur.

As pragmatic and practical a man as Charles Dodgson apparently was, it must be clarified at the outset of this section that he was deeply fascinated with occult belief. Dodgson believed in ESP and psycho kinesis. Gardner observes that Dodgson "was an enthusiastic charter member all his life of the Society for Psychical Research, and his library contained dozens of books on the occult" (*Alice* 56). And thus we understand better the enigmatic discourse shared by Alice in the scene with the Caterpillar. Here Alice thinks silently to herself, "The other side of what?" and the Caterpillar answers aloud, "Of the mushroom" (54). This Caterpillar can read minds. As the Caterpillar smokes his hookah with a "languid" expression and offers long silences, he appears very like a caricature of an eastern mystic.

The Alice books are, in fact, rife with such occult and superstitious allusions. The settings of both books illustrate this connection. Wonderland is underground, a popular location for fairies in English folklore (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 14). Contemporary reviews explain "how little Alice became a fairy; and after her transformation, had curious conversations with a rabbit" ("The Bookseller", 12 Dec. 1865; Kelly 271). In English folk belief a looking glass is traditionally the domain of spectres that appear in the glass at midnight during divination rituals (Opie, *Lore* 274). It might also be noted that Alice is playing with a black cat when she decides that she will enter Looking Glass land. Further, cats that vanish and reappear at will, as the Cheshire Cat does, are rife with supernatural association. With cats, as with hares, the foremost association is with witches.

One of the most striking allusions to the supernatural in *Wonderland* is the white rabbit that leads Alice to Wonderland. In England, and particularly in Oxfordshire where Carroll wrote the tales, Katharine Brigg's contends that the supernatural significance of a white rabbit was well known in the nineteenth century. As Briggs notes in *Folklore of the Cotswolds*, "A white hare is nearly always a witch" (135). There are or were numerous

other superstitions about white rabbits in Britain. From material collected in the 1940s and 1950s the Opies record for example that on the first of the month, for example, upon rising and before saying anything else, children might say "White rabbits, White rabbits, White rabbits", for good luck (*Lore* 299-300). According to the Opies this was not an exceptional belief; in 1959 it was the "accepted routine throughout Britain" (Opie, *Lore* 300). White Rabbits are often confused with hares, whose fur turns white in winter. And there are occult traditions concerning hares as well. In one English folktale, "The Hare's Parliament", two children peer into a looking glass and are transformed into hares. They then join a parliament of hares dancing in a field. Briggs supposes that "in view of the magic transforming mirror, it seems almost certain that this was a gathering witches" (Briggs, *British*, 349).

And there is Tenniel's illustration of Alice emerging through the other side of the looking glass, in which two "gargoyles" have appeared in inanimate objects—in the vase and in the decorative swirl over the fireplace—both of whom are sticking their tongues out at Alice. These creatures are not mentioned in the text (135). Shortly after this incident, however, Alice mentions that the pictures on the wall "seemed to be all alive" (136). Further, the gibberish in the opening stanza of "Jabberwocky" would have appeared as otherworldly to some contemporary readers. In an 1872 article in *Macmillan*, Robert Scott suggested "Jabberwocky" was originally dictated by a ghost at a séance (qtd. in Gardner, *Alice* 160). Later, in "Mimsy Were the Borogoves", a science fiction story, Lewis Padgett reveals that the words to "Jabberwocky" are symbols from a future language, and that they explain how to enter a "four-dimensional continuum" (qtd. in Gardner, *Alice* 161). Carroll's nonsense words are functioning for these readers like the magic word "abracadabra", a word that appears nonsensical, but contains hidden meaning and secret functions.

Carroll's liberal use of all things backward and reversed has a whiff of dark magic about it as well. Briggs notes the following two traditions for summoning the devil: "If for some reason you wish to call up the Devil you should say the Lord's Prayer backwards." And, "If a girl looks a long time in the looking-glass admiring herself, the Devil will come and stand behind her and look over her shoulder".[5] Both traditions are dependent on a reversal—a reversal of speech and a reversal of image. Alice, in Chapter One of *Looking Glass*, has only just come through the mirror into the reverse world when she finds "Jabberwocky" written backwards (133-40).

Others among Carroll's characters and motifs are more vaguely associated with mythological belief. Everett Bleiler in "Alice through the Zodiac" contends that the characters in *Wonderland* are oriented to the zodiac. The "Tweedle twins allude to Gemini, the Lion to Leo, the Sheep to Aries, the Goat to Capricorn, the White Knight to Sagittarius, Humpty to Libra" (see Gardner, *Alice* 281). In a letter to Carroll dated 1871 Robert Scott remarks on the mythological undertone in the Alice books, and concludes that the tumtum tree in Jabberwocky is akin to "the great ash Yggdrasil" of Norse mythology (R. Scott 437). The Unicorn and Gryphon are openly mythological symbols, though not referred to as such in the text. Other settings in *Wonderland* and *Looking Glass* land are suggestive of myth, such as the mysterious forest in Chapter III of *Looking Glass* in which those who wander forget their names. Here we are reminded of the Druidic and Celtic belief in sacred groves, in which patches of forest were permeated by a supernatural presence. And it would be difficult to see the Jabberwock as anything other than a dragon, especially when juxtaposed against Tenniel's illustration, which recalls fantastic tales of Jack the Giant Killer and other Arthurian legends.

It is perhaps in Carroll's wildest nonsense that the magical is most fervently and mysteriously invoked. *The Hunting of the Snark*, considered by some to be Carroll's

defining piece of nonsense, revels in the mysteries of the otherworldly without ever directly admitting as much. The superstitious tone is set by the Bellman who remarks in the second verse "What I tell you three times is true" (680). Whatever sort of beast a Snark might be, the Bellman explains in "Fit the Third" that they are "handy for striking a light" (687). This fact draws up images of fire-breathing dragons and of Black Dog legends, common to England, in which the maws of a Hound from Hell glow like fire. The Captain refers to a Snark as a "Will-o'-the wisp" (685) which in folklore is a magic fairy-like creature whose mysterious lights flickering in the fens may lure humans to their deaths. The Baker, full of occult knowledge, suggests that the right way to catch a Snark is to "charm it" (689). He explains that Snarks are "peculiar" creatures "that won't be caught in a commonplace way" (689). He mentions having seen them before, "Every night after dark – In a dreamy delirious fight" (687). The Butcher recommends searching for the Snark in "a spot unfrequented by man… a desolate valley" (690), which, as Diane Purkiss notes, is a likely setting in which to find fairies, the "unmapped… the unowned…" (151). The image of the blank map in "Fit the Second" extends this allusion. The Butcher recommends that a sort of witch's brew would be useful in divining the whereabouts of a Snark:

> You boil it in sawdust: you salt it in glue:
> You condense it with locusts and tape (693)[6]

The Snark is finally sighted at the magic hour, that uncanny moment between night and day when "Daylight was nearly past" (698). At this moment the Snark returns to the underworld, by plunging "into a chasm" (689). The Baker, like many heroes of folklore who encounter fairies, "softly and suddenly vanished away" (699), presumably never to be heard from again. Any reservation that remains as to the nature of Snarks is resolved by Henry Holiday's illustration (Figure 32, p. 201, this study), in which winged gargoyles and troll-like beasts cavort in a cavern. The illustration also includes the image of pigs

performing as musicians. These pigs are particularly odd in that Carroll mentions no musician pigs in the poem. It may be that Holiday saw a connection between the creatures in Carroll's story and the mysterious otherworldly behaviour of Mother Hubbard's talented dog and the Cat with her fiddle.

Figure 32

Aside from the previously mentioned frequent animation of inanimate objects, one finds in Lear a host of supernatural images that are derived from pagan and superstitious customs. In "Some Incidents in the Life of my Uncle Arly" the protagonist discovers a cricket perched atop his nose (457). The cricket never leaves him for all his life and changes Uncle Arly's fortunes for the worse. Although Charles Dickens believed that crickets were lucky, English folk belief tended to hold that having a cricket in the house was bad luck. In fact, crickets were thought to be a sign of death and, indeed, Uncle Arly dies with the cricket still on his nose. Simpson and Roud suggest that crickets were seen, not unlike black cats, "somewhat in the light of a domestic familiar" (83).

In “The History of the Seven Families of Lake Pipple Popple”, five of the seven families are represented by animals regularly associated with superstitious belief—storks, owls, cats, geese and fish. And there is the Old Man of Carlisle who “lived wholly with snakes” that danced with him (380) and the Man with a Flute who charms a serpent out of his boot (162). In “Calypso”, Lear asserts Calypso’s association with witchcraft as she charms Ulysses with “kurls and kobwebs and kustards and kisses” and goes on to chant,

> ‘Gip so, whip so, cripso, and quip so
> Flip so, bip so rip so and zip so’
> O naughty Calypso. (210)

Lear makes other, more veiled, allusions to witches. Two of his female Old Persons speak like witches. The Old Person of Wick, says “Tick-a-tick, Tick-a-Tick, Chickabee, Chickabaw” (338) and the “The Old Woman of France, [teaches] little ducklings to dance, by saying ‘Tick-a-tack!’” (346). That “Tick-a-tack” might be a witch’s incantation may be asserted by its similarity to the phrase, “Ting-*Tang* Ting”, which, as noted in Chapter One, was a phrase witches in Oxfordshire invoked when they wished to call forth evil spirits (Briggs, *Cotswolds* 136). Lear also depicts a witch’s familiar, a raven, soaring about on a broomstick in an 1870 alphabet (265).

Another subtle allusion to the dark arts is found in “The Old Person of Hove / who frequented the depths of a grove / Where he studied his books, with wrens and the rooks” (352). Like Carroll’s magic patch of forest, one is reminded of the Druidic and Celtic belief in sacred groves, while wrens and rooks are both beholden to superstitious association in English folklore. It would appear that the Old Person of Hove has found the ideal place to study the dark arts, accompanied by witches’ familiars, not unlike Arthur studying in the forest while Merlin abides, in Owl form, watching over him. Further, one finds in Lear odd satanic allusions, as in “The Four Little Children”, where a boy attacks

the adventurers with "Lucifer matches" (230) and in "The Moon Journey" where we read about a planet called Buzz that is not surrounded by satellites, but "satanites" (436).

For the reader of most Victorian nonsense the references to the supernatural mentioned above are subtle and on a conscious level remain "unread". In *Darwin's Plots* Gillian Beer suggests that "Ideas pass more rapidly into the state of assumptions when they are unread" (4). Beer points out, for example, that because Darwin omits a discussion of humans, "man is a determining absence" (7) in *Origin of the Species*. For Beer, "the absence of any reference to man…made the text subversive… deeply disquieting" (54). In that absence, Beer contends, there "is the subtext [that] *The Origin* simply [is] unavoidably full of human reference" (57). Similarly, because nonsense normally does not acknowledge the presence of supernatural or occult allusions there is possibly an "unread" quality to them, and following Beer's reading of the "Unread", nonsense texts can then become unavoidably full of supernatural reference.

In Gilbert the frequent references to magic and the spectral are not presented as subtle undertones, as they are in Lear and Carroll, but are asserted quite openly. Yet in their ubiquity the fairies, the Gypsies and magic potions that so often direct the plot in Gilbert's verses take on a weighty significance. One feels certain nothing useful or interesting could occur in Gilbert's land of Topsyturveydom were it not for magic. This fact was a sticking point for Sullivan, who complained to Gilbert that he depended too often on magic potions to move his plots. The Fairies in *The Wicked World*, the spectres in the *Bab Ballad* "The Ghost, The Gallant, the Gael, and the Goblin" and the love potions in *The Sorcerer* all illustrate Gilbert's fascination with the supernatural. In Scene One of *The Sorcerer* we are introduced, in limerick form, to Gilbert's best-remembered magician,

> Oh! my name is John Wellington Wells,
> I'm a dealer in magic and spells,
> In blessings and curses
> And ever-filled purses,
> In prophecies, witches, and knells.

Gilbert goes on to explain the length and breadth of Well's occult knowledge:

> … With mirrors so magical,
> Tetrapods tragical,
> Bogies spectacular…
> Sprites of earth and air--
> Fiends of flame and fire--
> Demon souls,
> Come here in shoals,
> This dreaded deed inspire!…
> Ye fiends of night, your filthy blight
> In noisome plenty yield! (*The Sorcerer*, Scene One)

Others among Gilbert's characters share similar talents. In Act I of *Pinafore* comes the warning "But take care! The poor bumboat woman has gypsy blood in her veins, and she can read destinies" (*Pinafore,* Act 1). Occasionally references to the occult are presented with more obscurity. In Scene II of *Topseyturvydom* it is casually commented that "in those chairs and tables our guardian spirits dwell" (*Topseyturvydom*, Scene Two). In *More Bab Ballads*, there is a verse dedicated to "Phrenology" (201), the divination of a person's destiny through the reading of the bumps on his scalp. And perhaps most obscurely there is "The Cunning Woman", "MacCatacomb DE Salmon-Eye" (*More Bab Ballads* 198), whose name is a cryptic reference to Celtic mythology and the all-knowing one-eyed Salmon, who shares a close thematic relation of the all-knowing, one-eyed Odin of Norse mythology.

With Gilbert, Lear, Gilbert, *Punch*, and particularly with Carroll then, we acknowledge a peculiar undercurrent in which unofficial belief systems are referenced. To further understand how this undercurrent functions in nonsense we may turn to a discussion of Victorian gothic as it is defined in Julian Wolfreys' *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*. Wolfreys' text is "uncannily" helpful in that his understanding of the gothic echoes current understandings of nonsense literature, as described in my essay and elsewhere. Both genres are routinely defined, for example, in terms of their grotesqueness, or conspicuous barbarous violence. Other common

elements between nonsense and the gothic include texts that portray uncontrolled environments; texts with a peculiar flatness of character; texts that rely on the reader's part to supplement the narrative with internal imaginings; texts that seem to explore a craving of the forbidden; a tradition that thrives on paralysing the reader with a pure lack of meaning; texts that present a fundamental absurdist state, or texts that do not openly seek verisimilitude or pragmatic utility.

Further, Wolfreys comments that the uncanny "destabilises the cognition of temporal order… The spectral is therefore, a matter of recognising what is disorderly" (5), a comment that echoes the central contention concerning nonsense made by Elizabeth Sewell, that nonsense is a game with sense as its ultimate goal (1). Wolfreys sees a social function being performed in the revealing of what is disorderly. He invokes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and paraphrases,

> The function of the gothic was to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions… it became the great liberator of feeling through its acknowledgement of the non-rational. (11)

If one replaces the word "gothic" with the word "nonsense" in the quote above, the statement is equally true. Wolfreys also asserts that the spectral and uncanny inhabit a liminal space, which is neither dead nor alive. From the perspective of my argument, this liminal space is very like the space posited in the "One Bright Day in the Middle of the Night" conundrum typical to nonsense and which I claim in Chapter One opens a door to a consideration of magical spaces and transformative thinking.

Temporal Anomalies, Impossible Spaces and Narrative Voids

The uncanny, suggestive atmosphere of nonsense collides with temporal anomalies and the reader is pushed imaginatively well beyond the limits of this world. The setting of

Carroll's "Walrus and the Carpenter" is typical of the temporally impossible spaces posited by nonsense:

> The sun was shining on the sea,
> Shining with all his might:
> [. . . . .]
> And this was odd because it was
> The middle of the night. (168)

Earlier we encountered Lear's final line of "The Pelican Chorus", "We think so then, and we thought so still" (412), which in its act of linguistic displacement forces a similar temporally impossible zone. In Gilbert's *Bab Ballads* we read of Policeman Peter Forth who, "If he were asked the time of day", would reply that it was "a quarter past thirteen" (192).

Sometimes in nonsense it is a physical impossibility that is posited, such as a ship, *The Snark*, which can manage to get its bowsprit confused with its rudder (Carroll 684). In "The Four Little Children" Lear posits a ship that is approaching "an island made of water quite surrounded by earth" (221). And there are the directions Lear offers in "The Poonah Observer" that he [Lear] might be found "on the wrong hand as you descend the level road" (408). And there is the character in Act I of Gilbert's *Thespis* "who discharged a function on the North South East West Diddlesex Junction" (*Thespis*). These temporally and spatially impossible locations resemble those found in folklore that unlock access to mythological spaces such as Avalon or the fairy Otherworld, access to which was restricted to liminal moments, or temporal shifts. The doors to these utopian otherworlds, as noted previously, might only open at sunset, when the sun was neither up nor down, when the time was neither day nor night.

"Drunk" with utopian carnivalesque revelry, haunted by an unspoken magical efficacy, and pushed into an impossible temporal space, the reader of nonsense is next presented with narrative holes and textual leaps that request readers to fill in blanks that

are not merely unread, but are unwritten. Like Beer's "absence" that is so "full of reference", these passages are unusually provoking. In Chapter Two, for example, I cite Hopkinson's *A Pretty Story*, a text that ends with an incomplete threat: "These harsh and unconstitutional Proceedings irritated Jack and the other inhabitants of the new Farm to such a Degree that **********" (*Comical Spirit* 55; Westlake 29). Hopkinson's ellipse serves to thrust the colonial American reader into a blank space that can only be filled by thoughts of revolution and anarchy. Though not intended as political Carroll's "conclusion" of the Mock Turtle's poem, "And when I found the door was shut, / I tried to turn the handle but—" (202) forces the same act of creation on Carroll's reader as Hopkinson forced on his. And in Chapter V of *Looking Glass*, when Alice jumps over a stream and arrives inexplicably inside a shop, a similar blank space is created and, much like Hopkinson, Carroll uses a fourteen-starred ellipse to fill the narrative gap (184). The reader here is forced to respond creatively to this blank space—to solve the anomaly with the only tools that could explain it—unofficial belief systems—and this solution, when reached, results in a heady sense of freedom for the reader, as he or she has, like the text itself, moved *miraculously* from one place to the next. This reader is solving problems without the aid of official belief systems. This reader is, as it were, forced into a box or trap that may only be escaped by thinking "outside the box".

In 1888, in the first critical essay published on nonsense literature, Sir Edmund Strachey comments, "In each creation some touch of art which escapes analysis makes the grotesquely impossible, a living, flesh-and-blood reality" (360). In positing that nonsense makes the "impossible" a "reality", Strachey is suggesting a generative function for nonsense. By entering this spectral, unlimited otherworld, the Victorians were able to peer out from the other side of the looking glass and re-imagine themselves, and in the process they built a new vision of the mythical Englishman.

SECTION III: ECCENTRICITY AND EMPIRE

The Enemy Within

A problem with viewing Victorian nonsense as politically subversive is that, unlike in the American Revolution, the "enemy" is not clearly determined. An obvious rebellious stance that has been attributed by several critics of Victorian nonsense to Lear and Carroll casts their texts as working in opposition to the tightly knit, buttoned-up collars of Victorian prudery, manners and conventions. Jack Zipes argues, for example, that Carroll was a part of "a rebellion against the "norms" of English society…" (122) and that Carroll was "a critic of the absurd rules and regulations of the adult Victorian world" (123-24). While it is difficult to argue with Zipes on this score, we must not say that nonsense is merely anti-authoritarian, or merely a reaction to rigidity and custom. There is a more specific, deeper psychological misgiving that is meted out in Victorian nonsense literature.

On 13 August 1868, a reviewer for *The Times* suggests that there is something uncomfortable about reading Carroll's work:

> Certainly we enjoy the walk with *Alice through Wonderland*, though now and then, perhaps, something disturbing almost causes us to wake from our dream. (Qtd. in Kelly 277)

There is a similar misgiving, perhaps, in Strachey's suggestion that there is something about Victorian nonsense that "escapes analysis" (360). From a contemporary view, 1888, Strachey is correct. A great distance of time needed to elapse before the deepest criticisms implicit to Victorian nonsense could emerge with clarity. Below and beyond prudery or any contemporary political issue—be it constitutionalism, *The Origin of Species*, Reform, or *Essays and Reviews*—below and beyond all these surface tensions Victorian nonsense

was concerned with a more deeply seated disquiet: that is, the issue of "Englishness" itself, and particularly the Englishman's idea of himself in terms of empire and world order.

Remember that nonsense, in its most seditious persona, plays a more prominent social role during civil wars than during wars characterised by a unified defensive position. That is to say nonsense is employed in the battles in which a society needs to split from itself. Nonsense therefore makes its most productive impact where the "otherness" of an enemy must be creatively asserted, or wholly invented.

The English Eccentric

In the first decade of the twentieth century the American Journalist Henry Adams looks back on his experiences in London in the mid 1860s:

> The commonest phrase overheard at an English club or dinner-table was that So-and-So "is quite mad." It was no offence to So-and-So; it hardly distinguished him from his fellows... Eccentricity was so general as to become hereditary distinction. It made the chief charm of English society as well as its chief terror. (199)

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1881), Oscar Wilde's character Sir Thomas confirms the English identification of themselves in like terms:

> The Americans are an extremely interesting people. They are absolutely reasonable. I think that is their distinguishing characteristic. Yes… an absolutely reasonable people. I assure you there is no nonsense about the Americans.
> "How dreadful!" cried Lord Henry. "I can stand brute force, but brute reason is quite unbearable." (37)

While Wilde may intend to describe the American's in the passage above as simply business-like or practical, the conversation that leads and follows this passage are both absurd. The actual existence of America is questioned and the subject of "paradox" is

mentioned. Into this comical passage comes the claim that "brute reason is quite unbearable" and the texts begins to distinctly echo of Carrollian nonsense. And in claiming that the Americans are "no nonsense" and that this attribute is "dreadful" an ideal Englishman is posited. In the two examples above Adams and Wilde may be expressing early visions of an emerging concept that the English themselves would nurture—that the English have a special affiliation with unreason and nonsense. Formally, the idea of an innate English eccentricity is first fully articulated in the earliest literary discussions of nonsense. Near the turn of the century, Chesterton asserts that nonsense literature is peculiarly English. In an essay on Lewis Carroll he refers to "the strange nation of the English" and writes,

> In a certain subconscious world of the English spirit, of his whole home and tradition and ancestry, there is something rather deeper than [the game of logic]. There was something that a man must perhaps be an Englishman to understand. (*A Handful* 118)

Chesterton's assertion that "the strange nation of the English" manifests a special relationship to nonsense literature is reaffirmed in 1926 in Emile Cammaerts' treatise, *The Poetry of Nonsense*:

> There seems to be in the English temperament a certain trend of broad humour which predisposes it to appreciate the freaks of the nonsense spirit, and to enjoy a joke if there is no point to it. (74)

He adds that, "there is ample evidence to show that… nonsense is practically neglected in other countries… I have tried in vain to discover anything similar in French or German literature" (76; 79). Similarly in 1932, Townley Searle, in his Introduction to the *Lost Bab Ballads*, remarks that "The topsy-turveydom of Gilbert's humour… was something entirely new and withal entirely English…" (vii). The opening line to Robert Graves' 1925 poem, *Alice*, is illustrative of the deep sense of connection England had developed to its Victorian nonsense. Graves describes Alice as "that prime heroine of our nation,

Alice... She set herself with truly British Pride" (151-52). The 1933 release of Dame Edith Sitwell's *English Eccentrics* furthered the emerging association between Englishness and eccentricity. Sitwell's popular volume formalised, in a way, the phrase "English Eccentric", and in her catalogue she describes the typical English personality in terms that are distinctly Learesque: There was the aquatic Lord Rokeby, whose beard reached to his knees and who spent most of his time in a bath tub (58-52), or Captain Thicknesse, who in his last will and testament, left his right hand to his son, instructing that it should be cut off after his death (159). Or there is the case of John Mytton, who, in an attempt to scare the hiccups away, purposefully set himself on fire (111-12).

Chesterton's, Cammaerts', Searle's and Grave's theories concerning the Englishness of nonsense are still very much alive in the opinion of the lay person today, as confirmed by my own experience in conversation with British and American readers. Nonsense generally, and Alice in particular, are popularly understood to have a special resonance with the English spirit. The reality, however, is that nonsense is, after all, an international phenomenon. There was, for example, a similar bubble in the interest in nonsense in France between 1872-1887, as represented by certain works of Arthur Rimbaud, Charles Cross, and Charles Baudelaire. The very popular German nonsense poet Christian Morgenstern produced nonsense in German in the style of Lear and Carroll in the beginning of the twentieth century and Michael Heyman's recent anthology of nonsense from India, *The Tenth Rasa*, confirms the wide appeal of nonsense across cultures. But this reality of the appeal of nonsense across cultures does not lessen the importance of the fact that at precisely the moment when Britain' empire was beginning to feel strained, and immoral to some, a new mythology was born out of the study of nonsense literature—that the English have a special reverence for the absurd. Albeit hesitantly, and with sincere regard to English literature and history, the thought occurs

that, historically, it might be rather too convenient a moment to conceive of such a mythology. Set against the backdrop of the fading of Empire, the simultaneous emerging English claim to a native absurdity is akin to pleading insanity in court. If the English are inherently absurd, then how could they be held in any way accountable, or concerned with, the idea of Empire itself, or the dismantling of the Empire and the Commonwealth?

National Identity, Folklore and Victorian Nonsense

To discover the origins of the "English eccentric" we must look at how national spirit was determined in the Victorian era. The nineteenth century was a time, perhaps more so than any other, when nation building—in the sense of defining a national spirit—was a prevailing activity among politicians and folklorists across Europe. In Italy and Germany this search for a literary national spirit helped unify once fragmented peoples into supposed homogenous units. Folk material was central to this cause. In Germany the Brother's Grimm helped define how Germans looked at themselves, and subsequently, through the worldwide popularity of the tales, defined how other nations looked at Germany. In Ireland, and among Irish-American factions, the Fenian Brotherhood, founded in the late 1850s, based its name on the Irish legend of Finn Mac Cool and the Fianna Clan of Irish mythology. In England, however—a nation that was relatively united already by common custom and language, (I refer here specifically to England, and not Great Britain), the culture of nation building was asserted via folk material in a more complex fashion.

According to Jennifer Schacker in *National Dreams: The Remaking of Fairy Tales in Nineteenth Century England*, Victorian-era collections of imported popular folklore helped English readers define themselves in terms of the otherness of foreign peoples:

> The reading of popular tales—transcribed, translated, transnationalized—emerged as a form of cultural and historical adventure, a space in which to encounter and then reflect upon national identities and differences. (2)

Schacker points out the relative lack of prose folklore collections based on English material in the early and mid-Victorian periods. She asserts, then, that instead of relating to English folklore the English looked to translations of Irish, Norse, German and Egyptian lore. Because the material in these collections was *folk* material it was implied that the national character of a people was represented in the legends and customs described. The English reader was thus able to determine what he *was* by examining what he *was not*. Collections of foreign tales published in English defined the foreigner as innocent, simple, exotic, barbaric, pagan or absurd.

As an example of this process by which foreign folktales determine what the English are not, Schacker invokes Edward Lane, a nineteenth-century chronicler of the *Arabian Nights*. Schacker quotes Lane's footnotes to *Studies from A Thousand and One Nights*, in which he writes,

> The Arabs and other Mohammadans enjoy a remarkable advantage over us in the composition of works of fiction… in the invention of incidents which we should regard as absurd in the extreme. (95)

Schacker notes that the Egyptians featured in the illustrations in Lane's edition are routinely occupied by "indefinable activity" (100) and that Egyptians occupy "a marvellous world for which there could be no British analogy" (115).

If the Victorians were defining themselves via foreign folklore, as Schacker asserts, and if those assertions were bound up with images of the foreigner as absurd, then might we not inquire what opinion did absurd Victorian nonsense express regarding indigenous English Folklore? Schacker invokes Simpson and Roud when she notes,

> It is now accepted as truth that "the English have never used [English] folklore to assert their patriotic identity," and they certainly did not do so in the way many of their European neighbours did. (3)[7]

While Schacker, Simpson and Roud are correct that there was in Victorian England a conspicuous lack of indigenous folklore collections, the observation must be limited to the subject of prose material. Schacker does admit that regarding verse, the situation was somewhat different. James Orchard Halliwell's *Nursery Rhymes of England* was a popular collection that was in print continuously between the 1840s and 1860s. William Thoms, the founder of English "Folk Lore" established the journal *Notes and Queries* in 1849, and remained its editor until 1873. *Notes and Queries* featured, among other facets of folklore studies, numerous scholarly references, as well as rumours, regarding the history of nonsense poems. The Victorians, Halliwell and Thoms, enjoyed a wide popularity and are the predecessors of modern scholars of rhymes and nonsense, such as the Opies and the Knapps. As Donald Thomas notes, "Dodgson was a regular reader of [*Notes and Queries*] and had a bound set on his bookshelves" (50). Dodgson was also an owner of Halliwell's collection (Gardner, *Alice* 237), and it may be asserted that both Lear and Dodgson were naturally predisposed to participate in the nineteenth-century vogue for collecting and appreciating folklore, be it from one culture or another. It should be pointed out that unlike other Victorian writers, an ample use of *English* folk material, via nonsense rhyme, is evident in Lear, Carroll, Gilbert and in *Punch*.

Schacker describes the nineteenth-century folklorist as one concerned with a "field-based authenticity" (2). This preoccupation with detail and authenticity was evident in both Lear and Dodgson. Dodgson's notebooks from his journey to Russia in 1867 are filled, not with descriptions of the dignitaries and church officials whom he met, but with detailed descriptions of the peasants and commoners, whom he eagerly sought out, studied and interviewed. Dodgson's diary for 15 August states that the party applied,

> at a peasant's cottage for bread and milk, as a pretext for seeing the interior and the mode of life. The cottage we applied at contained two men, an old woman, and six or seven boys of various ages. The black bread, and the milk, were both very good, and it was very interesting to be able to realise

> for oneself the home of the Russian peasant. I tried two sketches, one of the interior, one of the exterior… (Carroll, *Diaries* 5:326)

Edward Lear was, by profession, necessarily concerned with "field-based authenticity". As a travel writer, Lear went to great lengths, and took many risks, to reach, fully examine and describe remote corners and customs of the Mediterranean world. What Schacker describes as "Explicating the manners and customs of the source culture for the general English reader" (79) is what Lear did for a living, and his nonsense reflects that aspect of his career. A chapter of Lear's "History of the Seven Families" is titled "*Habits* of the Seven Families", and his nonsense trees and nonsense botanies humorously reflect his interest in maintaining "a field-based authenticity".

It was with the same mentality that Lear and Dodgson studied, and mined, the customs and traditions of England, particularly regarding folk verses. In *The Making of the Alice Books: Lewis Carroll's Uses of Earlier Children's Literature*, Ronald Reichertz meticulously demonstrates where Carroll's work is reflective of published books for children from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. While Reichertz's catalogue is impressive and informative, showcasing for example Carroll's use of World Upside-Down literature and Looking Glass books, the volume could yet include one further chapter, one devoted to folk material and oral tradition. For just as *The Queen of Hearts* was a children's book from 1805, as Reichertz notes, so too was the verse known prior to that in the eighteenth century and probably arose from oral tradition (Opie, *Dictionary* 427-28). As an avid reader of *Notes and Queries*, and because of his guiding interest in folk custom, Carroll's books are populated by characters from nonsensical English folk rhymes: The Queen of Hearts, Humpty Dumpty, The Lion and the Unicorn, Tweedledum and Tweedledee. In *Looking Glass* Carroll refers to other Mother Goose poems such as "Hush-a-By Baby" and "I would if I could". And in Chapter VII Carroll refers to "I Love My Love with and H" which was printed in Dodgson's copy of *The Nursery Rhymes of*

England (Gardner, *Alice* 237). Humorous exchanges in Carroll's works appear to be based on folk material. Note the following example from the scene with the White Knight where the Knight explains that his forthcoming song,

> "either brings tears into their eyes, or else—"
> "or else what?" Said Alice, for the Knight made a sudden pause.
> "Or else it doesn't, you know." (224)

Here Carroll is invoking the same self-evident humour found in oral nonsense poems such as "There was an old woman / lived on a hill / and if she's not gone / she lives there still" (Opie, *Dictionary* 519).

In Lear folk custom is invoked in references to traditional fools and clowns, such as the aforementioned Derry Down Derry from the mummers' play, or in "The Old Person of Bar", whom Lear's depicts as Harlequin (358) and the May Day festivities alluded to in "The Old Person of Wilts" whose stilts are bedecked with "lilies and daffy-down-dillies" (356). English folk songs and dances are alluded to when Lear sings "Fiddle de-dee", "dum diddle", "Ding-a-dong, Ding-a-dong", "higgeldipiggledy" and in the many verses in which he describes jigs, reels, hornpipes or flutes.

Traditional English nonsense rhymes are frequently referenced in Lear. In Lear's "The Nutcracker and The Sugar-tongs", the line "The cups and Saucers danced madly about" (273) is drawn directly from Mother Goose's "Hey Diddle Diddle" and "Odsplut! Said the Gridiron", in which similar inanimate kitchen utensils dance to life. Like Humpty Dumpty, Lear's family of Discobbolos sit precariously atop a wall, destined to fall: "Up on this wall they have all been born, / And not one of the twelve has happened to fall…" (430). Lear's Old Man of the Hague who goes up to visit the Moon in a balloon (72) is very like the Mother Goose rhyme "What is the News of the Day", in which the moon is reached in the same manner. Like Peter Piper, who locks up his wife in a pumpkin, Lear's Man on some Rocks, "shut his wife up in a box" (170), and the Old

Person of Harrow puts his wife in a Wheel Barrow (381) and thus reminds us of the traditional rhyme, "When I was a Little Boy", in which a man collects his wife in the very same garden vehicle. Lear's Man of Berlin is baked in a cake (77), reminding us of numerous like circumstances in traditional rhymes and folk tales. Lear's alphabets, such as "A Was Once an Apple-Pie" and "A Tumbled Down", have close affiliates in folk rhyme and are clearly derivative of traditional forms. Like the nonsense rhyme, "There was a Man of Thessaly", in which a man scratches his eyes out and then scratches them in again, we meet in Lear "The Old Man of Nepaul", who is split in two and yet is miraculously mended again (81).

W. S. Gilbert's works derive from similar material. Gilbert made free use of folk material and in 1867 produced a Christmas pantomime based on the poem "Cock Robin". In *The Bab Ballads* traditional rhymes are alluded to frequently. We read in "The Rival Curates", for example, about a character who "lives on curds and whey" and lambs that dance to a piper (*Bab Ballads* 18). In "The Precocious Baby" Gilbert references Bo Peep, and Jack Sprat (ibid 100). The name of the ship in "The Bumboat Woman's Story" is The Hot Cross Buns (*More Bab Ballads* 20). "Hey Diddle Diddle" appears in *Patience* and Derry Down Derry in the *Mikado*.

In the pages of *Punch*, as we have seen, references to traditional rhymes abound, such as the aforementioned verse based on "Jack-a-Nory" (8 Feb. 1868 63). "Oranges and Lemons, Say the bells of St. Clements" is turned, in *Punch,* into "From this bench I shall bolt, Says the Lord Justice Rolt" (15 Feb. 1868 73). In *Punch* "The Lion and the Unicorn" becomes "The Tenor and the Baritone" (29 Feb. 1868 92) and "Cock Robin" becomes a lament on animal cruelty in "Who Killed the Cat?" (4 Apr. 1868 144). "Humpty Dumpty" is referenced in an article on the absurdity of fashion (ibid 154). And previously we noted *Punch*'s use of "Sing a Song of Sixpence", "Ride a Cock Horse", "Hickory Dickory

Dock", "Hey Diddle Diddle" (15 Feb. 1868 75) "Jack and Jill", and "A Frog Would-a-Wooing Go" (26 July 1873 35).

Admittedly, however, the use of these folk materials by the masters of nonsense was a corruption. Victorian nonsense writers did not collect nonsense as folklorists or anthropologists might, treating the material like museum specimens. Instead the Victorian author of nonsense attained a vast knowledge of the traditional texts, but then manipulated this folk material and increased its absurdity. Consider, for example, that Lear's "Owl and the Pussycat" is distantly inspired by "High Diddle Diddle". The cat no longer simply dances to a fiddle. The cat now sings and is married to an owl and lives "where the bong-tree grows". Meanwhile the spoon is no longer just a spoon. It is a "runcible" spoon. Runcible being a nonsense word, the absurdity of the spoon is thus multiplied. Similarly Lear does not have a Golden Goose, but a Golden *Grouse* (392). Characters do not go to sea in a bowl, but in a sieve—and they don't sink (253). In Lear's "History of Seven Families", it is not a beanstalk that sprouts up overnight; it is a giant head of lettuce (201). A is not an Archer, but is now an "Area Arch" (306). In place of Beelzebub's verses in the mummers' play or Mother Goose's "Odsplut! Says the Gridiron" where ladles and gridirons dance about, Lear has a shovel, a poker and tongs out for a romantic coach ride in the park (241). Similarly we discover that Carroll's "Queen of Hearts" no longer simply makes some tarts, she plays croquet with a flamingo. And the traditional English dance, The Lancer's Quadrille, resurfaces in Carroll as The Lobster's Quadrille (104). In Gilbert's *Mikado* Bo Peep becomes Peep Bo.

What then, of the building of national spirit via folk material? In England, at least, two forces were at work. There is Schacker's observation, that via international folklore, the English were defining themselves in opposition to the "absurd" other. And yet more popularly, Victorian nonsense literature was corrupting and emphasising the absurdity of

English folk rhyme, and by inference, the absurdity of England itself. Amid the contemporary European quest to divine national spirit from local folklore, the English were subtly informed by Carroll, Lear and Gilbert—via manipulated folk forms—that there was something fundamentally absurd in the British experience. With the Alice books thus epitomising Englishness, England had quite unexpectedly become a land that delighted in a vague, absurdist ideal. That the English regarded *Wonderland* as a text representative of them, is subtly asserted by *The Spectator* as early as 1869:

> There is much complaint of the dearth of original production in this country... our drama is notoriously an imported commodity... For the comfort of those Englishmen [in despair over this problem] we can point to at least one notable victory in [the] field... *Alice in Wonderland*... Alice, having already made all English-speaking children her subjects is about to extend her dominion to the nurseries of France and Germany.
> (7 Aug. 1869; Kelly 285)

In distinctly colonial terms Alice, as a monarch over English-speaking children who are her "subjects", will "extend her dominion" to foreign lands. In place of the Queen that so many felt the Alice book mocked, "Queen Alice", is the newest representive for the English in their quest for domination.

Nonsense and Empire

As described above, the emergence of the idea of the English eccentric can be traced as a development that took place between Adams' assertion that the English value eccentricity, in the mid 1860s, and the release of Sitwell's *English Eccentrics* in 1933. This period coincides with growing misgivings over the practices of the British Empire, and the beginnings of its demise. In *Who Killed the British Empire* George Woodcock awards partial credit to liberal and radical traditions among British politicians:

> [E]ven the greater part of the ruling class were not imperialists... here the individuals are too numerous to name, for one would have to compile a roll-call of British liberal and radical thinkers and propagandists. (332)

It was early 1866 when, as noted previously, Edward John Eyre returned to England and was accused of murder by liberal politicians, who considered his brutal reprisal against the rebels in Jamaica unlawful (Wilson, 270-71). On 19 July 1866 John Stuart Mill delivered a report from The Jamaica Committee in which a charge of murder was sought against Eyre. The moral position Mill claimed was that it was the Committee's duty to uphold "the obligation of justice and humanity towards all races beneath the Queen's sway..." and claimed that "great legal and constitutional principles... have been violated... and deserted by the government" (qtd. in Nemesvari, 669). Events surrounding the Fenian resistance of 1867 and, later, reports of British brutality in the two Boer wars (1880-1881 and 1899-1902), occasioned further reprimands from liberal and radical thinkers. By the turn of the century, with the increase in brutality that marked the empire in this period, there was a growing resistance to imperial policies. Zipes comments—as noted earlier—that there was a growing number of "utopian writers" who felt the "Empire had sold its soul to attain power and was using its power to maintain a system of domination and exploitation" (131). G. K. Chesterton, a writer and defender of nonsense literature—and one who claimed nonsense as typically English—comments on the deceptive and selfish aspects of British entrepreneur and promoter of empire, Cecil Rhodes:

> Rhodes had no principles whatever to give to the world. He had only a hasty but elaborate machinery for spreading the principles he had not got. What he called his ideals were the dregs of Darwinism which had already grown not only stagnant but poisonous. (Qtd. in Wilson, 604)

While the practical dismantling of the Empire is understood to begin in earnest after World War II, the seeds of its demise may be traced to the period between 1867 and 1930, which was not only maked by growing misgivings over colonial practices, but was

also the era in which Dominion and Commonwealth statuses were established, and imperial rule gave way to increasingly autonomous self-governance on the part of former colonies. As Woodcock notes, Canada, being the first British territory to achieve Dominion status in 1867 "set on foot a transformation of the Empire" (138). The rights afforded to Canada in 1867 amounted to "constitutional changes that... reduced the areas of imperial power [in Canada] to a symbolic vestige..." (157). Without the Canadian example, Woodcock claims, Mohandas Ghandi would not have had a framework from which to launch his own bid for Indian independence (330). Woodcock describes 1930 as "The Year of no Return" (241). It was in 1930 that Ghandi struck an informal agreement with the Viceroy of India, that the British abandoned Weihaiwei to the Chinese, and officially confirmed the autonomous nature of Commonwealth status in the Statute of Westminster (17). Woodcock explains:

> [I]n the year 1930... the strains that the Empire had endured from its beginnings at last showed themselves in irrevocable structural flaws that were manifested in three crucial incidents [noted above] in which fateful and irreversible decisions presaged the approaching failure of resolution in all the imperial directions—in India, in the colonies, in the dominions. (16-17)

Between 1867 and 1930, while the Empire continued to expand geographically, imperial power was simultaneously loosened by degrees. New Zealand achieved limited self-governance in 1862 (Woodcock 218), and Canada, as noted above, achieved a more comprehensive self-governance in 1867. The Irish cause was the focus of heated debates on "Home Rule" in the 1870s. Australia was granted an early form of Commonwealth status in 1901. The term "commonwealth of nations", as a way of describing the emerging special nature of the Empire, was coined by the Earl of Rosebery in 1884 (*Britain and the Process of Decolonisation* 46). In 1897 Joseph Chamberlain notes that "regards the self-governing colonies, we no longer talk of them as dependencies. The sense of possession has given place to the sentiment of kinship" (ibid 46).

Challenges to empire came from numerous directions in this period. "During the later nineteenth century the rivalry of both France and Germany restricted and therefore shaped the final form of The British Empire" (Woodcock, 329). Similarly, geographical, logistical and political strains led Britain to give up its rights to the Panama Canal in 1901 (Woodcock 143). Additionally, the difficulties encountered in the Second Boer War (1899-1902),

> encouraged the challengers of empire... In Ireland the prolonged and difficult struggle which the British had to wage in order to subdue the Boers was followed by prospective rebels as if it were a war game organized for their instruction (Woodcock 92).

The voice Irish nationalism would make itself heard most resoundingly in the Easter Day uprising of 1916, and the establishment of the Irish Free State would follow in 1921. In this same period, "the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 was a triumph for the Afrikaans, achieved because the Boer leaders...adopted a technique of moral pressure not unlike that which Ghandi [would deploy]" (Woodcock 226). Meanwhile World War I (1914-1918), Woodcock claims, underscored a certain military unpreparedness on the part of Britain (328). In "Decolonisation and the End of Empire" John Darwin suggests,

> The historiography of imperial decline begins with the crisis of Empire that followed the First World War. Anti-British revolt in Ireland, India, Egypt, and Iraq, and the spread of Bolshevism abroad and unrest at home, revealed to some anxious Imperialists the nightmare vision of an Empire far gone in irreversible decay, brought down by a genetic flaw in the structure of its politics (541).

In the period between 1919 and 1927 the push toward the diplomatic independence of the colonies increases. And while vestiges of the old-style Commonwealth lingered until the 1960s, the great dismantling of the empire was at least implicitly threatened by 1930, which Woodcock describes, as noted above, as "The Year of No Return". To a certain extent this threat was for some emotionally completed by the Government of India Act of 1935 which granted Indian provinces autonomy and suggested that Provincial

assemblies should include more elected Indian officials. It was this event that reportedly caused Rudyard Kipling to wander about London in an existential daze.

The development of a vision of the English as naturally predisposed to appreciating nonsense, and the simultaneous and related identification of the English eccentric (1865-1933), then, coincides exactly with the unfettering of the colonies and the slow but steady loss of a belief in the moral position of old-style imperial power.

The connection between nonsense literature and the loss of empire is apparent when one observes the complex allusions to imperial politics found in Victorian nonsense. In the wake of India and Jamaica, nonsense emerges and begins referencing or parodying ideas like exploration, conquest and colonisation. Thus nonsense texts took the imperial fantasies of Ballantyne and Henty and the exotic appeal of foreign folklore collections, and dashed their assumptions and desires to higglety-pigglety bits. When Alice is falling into Wonderland, the first question she asks herself is what latitude or longitude she has arrived at (17) and Alice's encounters with exotic personalities such as the Caterpillar suggest that she is experiencing a colonial adventure. It is perhaps with this vision in mind that Graves' poem describes Wonderland as "this chance-discovered land" (151). Importantly, however, Donald Rackin reminds us that "Alice's dream does not come to any satisfactory conclusion" (480), and thus the colonial dream is rendered insecure.

The colonial perspective is further emphasised in noting Carroll's belief that the lands described in separate poems, published in separate volumes—those lands inhabited by the Jabberwock and Snark—were, in fact, the same place: a foreign island. Carroll explains that the scene of the Snark is "an island frequented by the Jubjub and the Bandersnatch—no doubt the very island where the Jabberwock was slain" (qtd. in Gardner, *Alice* 161; *Snark*, 38). Eight nonsense words that appear in both "Jabberwocky" and *The Snark*, such as Jubjub, Bandersnatch, frabjous, beamish, and galumphing, suggest

that Carroll's nonsense words were not so much anomalous inventions as they were attempts to depict a plausible exotic foreign language. In *The Snark* it is said that the ship travelled in "tropical climes", a typical setting for imperial adventures. And, as noted earlier, it was believed in the Victorian era that *The Snark* was a parody of the adventure of two real ships of exploration, *Alert* and *Discovery*, that set out from Portsmouth in 1875 (Gardner, *Snark* 19). It should be noted that "The [Snark's] impossible voyage of an improbable crew", as Gardner puts it, is, like Alice's colonial adventure, doomed to failure. The crew do not find that which they seek. The Snark proves elusive, and the crew get themselves lost in the process. In Gardner's words,

> …because we possess no information about where we are or whither we drift… the ship's bowsprit gets mixed with its rudder and when we think we sail west we sail east… we will ultimately be devoured… [this is an] absurd… nonsense voyage… from nowhere to nowhere. (*Snark* 28)

Several of the comments made by the Bellman undermine the sanctity of empire. In "Fit the Fourth" he states,

> For England expects – I forbear to proceed:
> 'Tis a maxim tremendous, but trite (689)

"England expects that every man will do his duty" was Admiral Nelson's celebrated signal flown in Popham's telegraphic code before the battle of Trafalgar. The victory won at Trafalgar guaranteed a certain freedom of the sea for the English and was instrumental in helping the British dream of empire to flourish. Calling Nelson's hallowed words "trite" would have bordered on blasphemy at the time, and one imagines that any sailor who'd said anything of the sort might have been soundly flogged. Additionally, in quoting Nelson, the Bellman is also hinting at doom, as Nelson was killed only moments after ordering the signal.

There is a more prominent colonial subtext to the life and works of Edward Lear. Among the old men and women celebrated in his limericks are characters from Calcutta, The Cape, Corfu, Quebec, Jamaica, Cashmere, the East, China, and Hong Kong. Locations such as "The Torrible Zone" and "The Gromboolian Plain" are, then, merely imaginative extensions of factual imperial geography. Indeed, in Lear's "Seven Families", we read that "You only have not to look in your Geography books to find out all about them" (193). And in "The Later History of the Owl and the Pussy Cat" Lear identifies the island where the Owl and the Pussy lived as the "North East Coast of New Guinea" (450).

Like Carroll's, Lear's foreign island is a cohesive realm, where species and creatures of his various tales all live together. The Bong Tree is described in "The Owl and Pussy Cat" and in "The Dong with the Luminous Nose". The Dong appears in his own tale as well as that of "The Quangle Wangle's Hat". The Quangle Wangle appears in his own tale and in "The Story of the Four Little Children", while The Jumblies also appear in "The Dong". Jellibolee is mentioned in "The Absolutely Abstemious Ass", "The Scroobius Pip" and in "The Duck and Kangaroo". The Hills of Chankly Bore are mentioned in "The Pelican Chorus", "The Jumblies" and in "The Dong". The Gromboolian Plain appears in "The Dong" and in "The Daddy Long Legs and the Fly". Noting the geographic wholeness of Lear's nonsense land we are provided with a deeper insight into W. H. Auden's comment, in the poem "Edward Lear", that "He became a land" (qtd. in Noakes, Introduction, xviii).

Further, Lear's plots are often centred on great sailing voyages, and on those who venture to far off climes. *The Story of Four Little Children Who Went Round the World*, and *The Jumblies*, who "sailed to the Western Sea", are cases in point. The Owl and the Pussy Cat "went to sea" and "sailed away for a year and a day, to the land where the Bong Tree-grows" (238). The remoteness of these foreign locales is often stressed: "Few and

far, far and few, / are the lands where the Jumblies live". And in "The Quangle Wangle's Hat" we read that "very few people come this way" (391). Lear was, as noted above, a travel writer by profession, and the title of Vivian Noakes biography, *Edward Lear, The Life of a Wanderer*, emphasises the importance of travel to Lear's experience and creative productions.

Yet even as one who truly had travelled to exotic locations such as India, Egypt and Palestine, Lear's vision of his persona as an explorer was always mocking, as he produced cartoonish self-portraits of himself riding on an elephant (401) or dressed as a fakir (408). Lear's vision of the British Empire was portrayed in a similar mocking tone. The activities of the "Four Little Children Who Sailed Quite Round the World" are typical. These explorers are most concerned with making tea, and when they arrive at an exotic location they attempt to impress the natives with this habit. Lear writes, "the boat was drawn up to the shore and they proceeded to make tea in front of the [natives]" (226). And in the conclusion of this story the children manifest the darkest shades of colonial philosophy: "As for the Rhinoceros, [who had helped them in their adventure] in token of their grateful adherence, they had him killed and stuffed directly, and then set him up outside the door of their father's house" (232). In the "The History of Seven Families" a reverse fate awaits the explorers. Here the colonial explorers are captured, pickled in jars, and placed in an obscure museum in the exotic City of Tosh (205-6). Once rid of the colonial adventurers, the survivors of this imperial mayhem—that is, the indigenous peoples—"all met together to rejoice over their good fortune" (204).

Gilbert too, perhaps more so even than Lear, was attracted to the themes of empire and colony. In the *Bab Ballad* "Ferdinando and Elvira" one character exclaims, "Seven weary years I wandered—Patagonia, China, Norway…[the] Andes…[and the] Arctic" (57). Like Carroll in *The Snark* and Lear in "Four Little Children", we find Gilbert

enamoured of silly ships, such as those found in *H. M. S. Pinafore* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. And in Gilbert's sea-worthy hands the audience is ferried to the far corners of the empire: "Twas in the good ship Nancy Bell / That we sailed to the Indian Sea" (*Bab Ballads* 86). True to their iconoclastic nature, Gilbert's lyrics uniformly mock Empire and all its trappings, from his numerous satiric portraits of The Queen's Navy to his treatment of colonial politics. In "The Three Kings of Chickeraboo" (*Bab Ballads* 205), for example, as in "The King of Canoodle-Dum", there are scenes that mock the benefits of alliance with England: "Alliance with Kings of Europe / Is an honour Canoodlers seek" (*More Bab Ballads* 91). And, as noted above, in the "The Three Kings of Chickeraboo" the Queen's Navy sails to random islands and bestows royal alliances upon any random monarch it encounters, "She does not push inquiry far / To learn what sort of king you are (*Bab Ballads* 205). In "A Discontented Sugar Broker" Gilbert takes particular aim at the capitalism inherent to imperial economics. Gilbert notes, "East India broking was his game", and we witness this character's increasingly dysfunctional policies undermining his own venture. This unfortunate gentleman proves too greedy for his own good, and we read how,

> the dreadful story ended…
> …perseverance blind
> Completely wrecked the peace of mind
> Of this East India broker. (*Bab Ballads* 120-26)

In the final scene the Broker gorges himself on imported sugar and dies in the shape of huge, world-shaped ball (126).

In *Punch*, likewise, we read of numerous, and humorous, absurd imperial adventures, such as this Gilbertesque verse from 1868:

> To the land of the gorilla
> Went the dauntless Major Brown
> Took he neither scrip nor siller
> When he left his native town… (1 Feb. 45)

Also in 1868 *Punch* offers the "Adventures of a Monastic Missionary" in which an English priest is consumed by an ostrich and a flock of vultures (22 Feb. 1868 80-1). A Christmas pantomime in an 1873 issue of *Punch* is set on the coast of Africa and the characters include "Doodle and Noodle", (27 Dec. iii) the names denoting the nonsensicality of the place and the subject. And the Tenniel drawing for the cover of the 1876 issue of *Punch's Almanac* features the character Punch leading a parade of Indian followers accompanied by elephants, cheetahs and exotic dancers:

Figure 33

Plunkett notes that *Punch* was fond of depicting Victoria in mock state visits to the South Pole, and as entertaining absurd characters, such as "The Emperor of Lapland" (Plunkett 41).

Victorian nonsense consistently reveals an underlying commitment to the nonsensicality of empire. Yet in a diabolical twist—and in opposition to the trend to use foreign folklore as a way to see foreigners as absurd—in Victorian nonsense the absurd foreigner turns out, after all, to be an Englishman.

The Absurd Foreigner as an Englishman

Upon superficial examination it may appear that the absurd lands and creatures that figure in Victorian nonsense aid and abet the project, described by Schacker, of positing foreign peoples as absurd. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that the imperial view in nonsense is not engaged in a discussion of "Us vs. Them", but rather, delineates an "Us vs. Us" dynamic. A scene from Gilbert's *Topsyturveydom* demonstrates this point. Here Satis, a British government official, speaks with his servant:

> SERVANT: Gentleman to see you, sir.
> SATIS: Who is he?
> SERVANT: Can't say, sir. I think, from his standing on his head and wiping his head on the doormat and blowing his boots with his pocket-handkerchief, he must be a foreigner.
> SATIS: Foreigner? Nonsense! Some member of the late Government who don't know whether he's on his head or his heels.
> (*Topsyturveydom,* Scene One)

Gilbert routinely fuses foreignness with Englishness. As Chesterton remarks, "There is not, in the whole length of *The Mikado*, a single joke that is a joke against Japan. They are all, without exception, jokes against England" "Gilbert and Sullivan" 152). And Gilbert's oeuvre posits a peculiar arbitrary topsy-turvy geographic quality to the earth in which exotic locations are envisioned as local. In the *Bab Ballad*, "Brave Alum Bey":

> They left Madegaskar away on their right,
> And made Clapham Common the following night
> Then lay on their oars for a fortnight or two,
> Becalmed in the ocean of Honololu. (103-4)

Like Gilbert, Lear muddles geography and posits a world in which foreign and local are equally at hand. In a Letter to Anna Duncan, Lear describes a family of frogs who are planning "to emigrate to Malvern and Mesopotamia" (191). One of Lear's child friends, Hubert Congreve, recalled that when Lear introduced himself to the boy the inexplicable gentleman "proceeded to tell me a long, nonsense name, compounded of all the languages

he knew" (Noakes, Wanderer 256). Similarly with Gilbert, exotic names are juxtaposed with incongruous English locales, as in "Effendi Khan Backsheesh Pasha Ben Allah Achmet… he lived at Hooe in Sussex" (*Bab Ballads* 198).

In Lear and Gilbert, characters who are otherwise English have distinctly foreign characteristics. In Gilbert exotic first and last names are accompanied by English middle names, as in "Pasha Bailey Ben" (*More Bab Ballads* 38). References to cannibalism abound in descriptions of otherwise overtly English characters. Where Lear has a large number of his protagonists baked in pies or prepared in ovens, Gilbert portrays sailors who consume their brethren (*Bab Ballads* 86). Denoting a similar transformation of the Englishman to a "wild native", Lear's Old Person of Tring has "embellished his nose with a ring" (170) and the Old Person of Cheam plays a drum and wears rings on his thumb (381). And Lear, even when depicting himself, does so in a way that suggests an innate exotic quality. Lear writes, for example, in "The Poonah Observer" that he has caused "so much sensation in our city by having become a Fakeer" (408):

Figure 34

Blurring the lines between foreign and local even further Lear's "foreigners" appear peculiarly English as well. The Old Man of China has daughters named Amelia, Olivia, and Dinah. Even as far off as the Moon, Lear tells us, the flora and fauna turn out to be English. For, upon the Moon, the trees grow "silver six-pences" (436). The characters and creatures that populate Lear's exotic locales can, often, be none other than

the English. The parents in the "Seven Families" "gave [their children] each eight shillings" (196). Numerous of his fanciful creatures drink tea, including the Quangle Wangle and the mice in "Calico Pie" (245). The Old Man of Calcutta likes to eat muffins while The Old Man of Columbia has a taste for beer. The Jumblies have an affection for "Stilton Cheese". The Seven Families eat sago pudding and Cheshire cheese.[8] And occasionally Lear's descriptions of foreign peoples feel remarkably like satires on the English aristocracy. Of the inhabitants of the Moon, for example, Lear notes, "the moor educated classes have a pensively perverse and placid expression, - not unlike the countenance of an Oyster" (436). And in the "Seven Families" the population is described as "distinguished, and select, and responsible, and ridiculous" (205). Likewise the habits and customs of the "foreign", absurd peoples of Wonderland and Looking Glass Land are overwhelmingly suggestive of the English. They have tea parties. They play croquet. The Queen of Hearts was a well-known moniker for Victoria and, as mentioned earlier, the Knave carries England's official St. Edward's Crown. In Victorian nonsense literature, the absurd foreigner was, no doubt, the Englishman himself.

Lear's opinions on the foreignness of the English themselves may have shifted over time. In Lear's early alphabet "A was an Ant" (1846), the letter X is represented by a depiction of King Xerxes. Here Xerxes is depicted in unflattering terms, as a tyrannical easterner bedecked in a turban and pointed slippers; but by 1870, in the alphabet "The Absolutely Abstemious Ass", while Xerxes is depicted as equally disreputable, his costume is that of an English King:

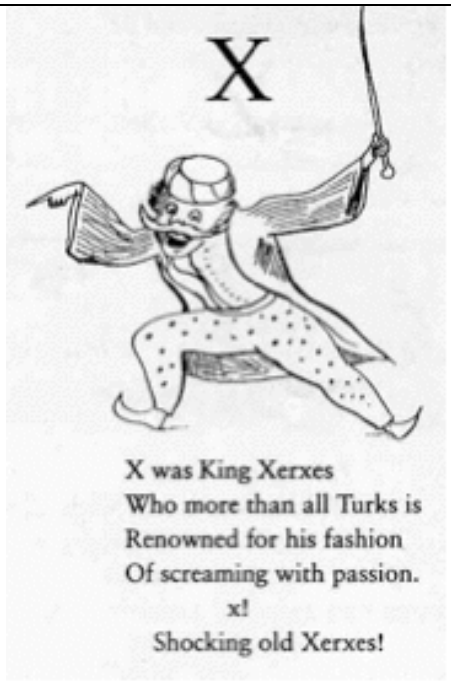


Figure 35

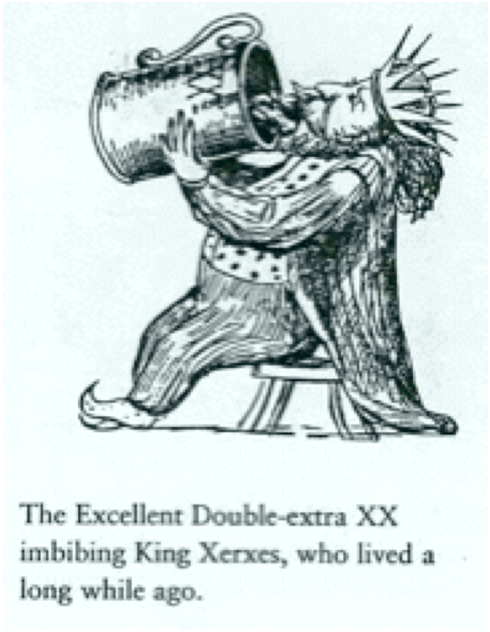


Figure 36

The Caterpillar in Wonderland undergoes a similar transformation. In Tenniel's 1865 illustration in *Alice* the Caterpillar appears typically eastern, as he mysteriously reads minds and smokes his hookah. But in an 1873 illustration for *Punch* Tenniel has re-oriented the image. Here the Caterpillar is still surrounded by mushrooms, but now instead of hookah, he holds an umbrella and has what Lear might have termed, an aristocratic "countenance of an oyster". What we had mistaken as mystic foreigner from the rear view turns out, once we see him square from the front, to be an Englishman after all:

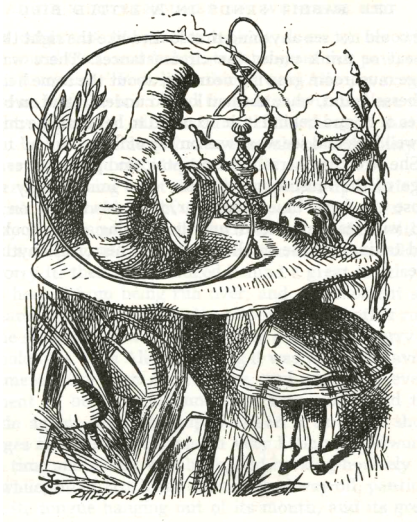


Figure 37

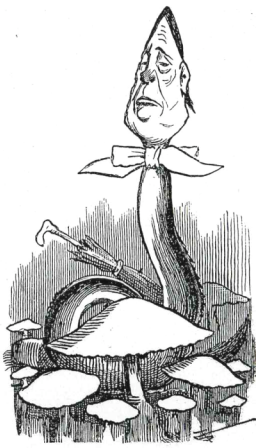


Figure 38

If the Englishman is turning out to have distinctly exotic and foreign characteristics, at stake in this image, is the idea of the foreigner within—that there is something fundamentally alien, false or absurd about the English. As Jack Zipes comments, in the Victorian era "there was a strong sentiment among utopian writers that the Empire had sold its soul to attain power and was using its power to maintain a system of domination and exploitation" (131). Carroll, Lear and Gilbert, expressing the utopian undercurrent so common to nonsense, are a part of this resistance. Ultimately, via a corruption of the imperial dream, Victorian nonsense teaches us that the English are eccentric, that the real "foreigner" lurks within the Englishman, and that the imperial dream is absurd.

The foreign/local situation of Victorian nonsense literature is summed up in Lear's limerick, The Old Man on the Border:

> There was an Old Man on the Border
> Who lived in the utmost disorder;
> He danced with the cat, and made tea in his hat,
> Which vexed all the folks of the border. (353)

This Old Man, as a maker of tea, is an Englishman. Dancing with his cat, perhaps the talented feline from "High Diddle Diddle", he at once embraces English folk material and allows such material to inform his daily actions—allows it to define who he is. But this man is torn. He occupies a liminal, bordering space, not quite here and not quite there. This schizophrenic sense of place has created "the utmost disorder." Importantly, his position is equally vexing to people from both sides of the border, the Englishman and the foreigner.

Popular Fantasies of Colonisation

Like the American adoption of Mother Goose as a national symbol in the early nineteenth century, the English attachment to *Alice in Wonderland* presents itself as a conspicuous and unusual national obsession. This connection to Alice is perhaps problematised by the fact that, increasingly, especially in the later half of the twentieth century, readers have routinely commented that *Alice in Wonderland* frightened him/her as a child; and that as an adult reader he/she finds it tedious. Add to this the popular suspicion that Lewis Carroll was a paedophile, or that he was a drug addict, and the cultural identification is rendered all the more mysterious. As Donald Thomas comments,

> Dodgson remains one of the few historical figures, like Sade, or Marx, or Freud, who suffer the popular fantasies of succeeding ages, sometimes benign if fatuous, sometimes malevolent. (4)

Alice, or more specifically, Dodgson's relationship to Alice Liddell, provokes a response that is neither literary nor simply perverse. In *Child Loving* James Kincaid addresses this topic and suggests that society is fascinated by accused paedophiles because, by measuring ourselves against them, our own dubious innocence is rendered benign by comparison. Be that as it may, I wish rather to focus on a similarity in power relations, as

manifested in popular understandings of Dodgson's relationship to Liddell and the similar power structure employed between an imperial government and its colonies.

I am not the first to point out that there exists a relation between Victorian fiction, imperial politics and indecent sexual relations. *In Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Women in the Colonial Text*, Jenny Sharpe argues, for example, that the gang rape of an English woman and the subsequent arrest of an innocent man in Paul Scott's *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966) "is intended as an anti-imperialist allegory in which the literal rape signifies the coloniser's violation of the colonised" (1). Neither am I the first to address the complications that arise when that sexual other is posited as a child. As Peter Hunt and Karen Sands summarise in "The View from the Center: British Empire and Post-Empire Children's Literature",

> Matters are complicated for children's literature by the view that it is the site, metaphorically and romantically, of the colonization of childhood by imperialist adulthood, with all that implies in terms of social and sexual control and exploitation... (41)

And, naturally, I am also not the first to invoke Alice in this context, and more specifically, to invoke the Dodgson-Carroll/real-fictive Alice as a unified paradigm working culturally from a colonial perspective. Nancy Armstrong in "The Occidental Alice" suggests that Dodgson's photograph of Alice Liddell as a beggar represents an emerging Victorian ideal of "an elite body" with "a pastoral backdrop" (14).

Figure 39

Then, shifting to the Alice texts Armstrong notes, "It becomes apparent that [Alice's] tumble down the rabbit hole initiated a new moment in the history of desire" (17).

Working from these perspectives I wish to trace the trajectory through which, in the twentieth century, the Dodgson-Carroll/real-fictive Alice relationship was increasingly represented in colonial terms. Dodgson's creative narratives overwhelmed and colonised the real life of Alice Liddell, and following Dodgson's death in 1898 the press began to scrutinise the real Alice in terms that suggested this colonial perspective. The rapidly collapsing empire predicated this perspective, Alice Liddell's quest for autonomy from her fictive self functioning as a subliminal allegory of those nations that sought independence from Britain, but that, in the British fantasy, were bound to prove themselves unable to survive on their own. The message garnered from interviews and newsreels of Alice Liddell confirms—one might even say, affirms—that like a colony recently awarded its independence, Alice was incapable of surviving on her own without Carroll's imperial spectre looming over her.

This fantasy of the failed independence of a former colony is affirmed in the discussion of Alice's later years in Morton Cohen's biography of Carroll. When Alice is living—or attempting to live—without Lewis Carroll in her life, or on her mind, Cohen states, "everyone who knew her commented on an air of sadness" (518). Alice "grew lonely in the huge house" (518). Stressing her financial dependence on Carroll Cohen notes that she had to sell off "the gifts that Charles had showered upon her" (518-19). In a reference that stresses the dominance of her childhood with Dodgson over her later years, Cohen adds that she was a "solitary woman sitting for hours underneath [a] painting of the three Liddell sisters" (519), these being the three sisters who were in attendance when Carroll invented the first Alice narrative. And like a colony mourning for the trappings of British culture, Cohen remarks, "gone were the dinner parities, the flow of dignitaries, the shooting parties; gone her two soldier sons" (519). Alice, according to Cohen was "a once bright creature made dull by dullness" (519).

Things change, however when Carroll comes back into her life; "But in 1932, the hundredth anniversary of Charles birth, Alice was suddenly transformed" (520). Cohen's colonial fantasy reports that now "people from all nations were ready to celebrate [Carroll]" (ibid). Alice, however, does not *agree* to go on a promotional tour to New York, "she *succumbed*" (ibid). But once she "succumbed" she was blessed with a "police escort… [and] a suite at the Waldorf-Astoria…" (ibid). She was "received by society, and paid homage… [and] received an honorary doctorate from Columbia" (ibid). She appeared in a Paramount newsreel and addressed the American people "on the radio reading from the letters she had received from Charles" (ibid). Cohen concludes, "Alice blossomed" (ibid). And in a final confirmation of both the debt she owed Carroll, and her error in not *succumbing* to his wishes, Cohen adds, "All this because of her friendship, so long ago, with the rejected Mr. Dodgson" (521).

Then, back in England, Alice again makes the mistake of striving for her independence. She declines an invitation to unveil a statue of the White Rabbit, and in the next sentence Cohen remarks, "she... felt isolated" (ibid). Alice comments at this time that she is "tired of being Alice in Wonderland . Does it sound ungrateful? It is…" (ibid). In 1948 Allen Tate's poem, "Last days of Alice", communicates the very same message—that Alice was forever haunted by her fictional double:

> Alice … Declines upon her lost and twilight age;
> Above in the dozing leaves the grinning cat
> Quivers forever with his abstract rage:
> [. . . . . .]
> She cannot move unless her double move,
> The All-Alice of the world's entity... (253-54)

It should be no surprise that the real Alice should fall pray to this colonial fantasy, for it had always been so with the fictive Alice as well. Tenniel's 1868 illustration in *Punch* depicting Alice as an errant child, The United States, in trouble with its gigantic mother, Victoria, looming behind her anchors the origin of this perspective in the Victorian period.

Figure 27

Above the fictive Alice is juxtaposed politically from a colonial perspective. Moving from the fictive Alice to one of Dodgson's real life subjects, his desire to fictionalise and idealise the young female form in a colonial perspective is apparent. In an 1873 photograph Dodgson poses Xie Kitchin in oriental costume:

Figure 40

This image and others that Dodgson fashioned, such as photographs of nude children cast forlorn on a foreign shore, emphasise the colonial perspective within which Dodgson routinely framed his female child friends:

Figure 41

Recall next Schacker's observation that in Victorian-era English interpretations of foreign lands, "the effect is an exoticization…" (116). If the Alice texts and *The Hunting of the Snark* both function as allegories of a failed colonial adventure then the forced exoticisation/colonisation of both the fictive and real Alice serve in tension to that allegory. Carroll/Dodgson, it would seem, is a "man of the Border." The exoticisation/colonisation of the fictive and real Alice represents Britain's romantic longing for empire, while the nonsense in the texts serve as a critique of empire. Alice culture is, and always has been, coloured with this tension, schizophrenic in the perspectives with which it aligns. This split personality is available in the original Alice texts, Carroll's romantic/melancholic passages about summer days and lost youth that open and close both Alice books, have never sat comfortably with the radical nonsense between them. While the nonsense looks bravely forward, seeking to topple Britain's "absurd" colonial pursuits, the romantic/melancholic bookends suggest a preference for stalling—static in its romantic addiction to Edenic lost worlds. In an important way this tension in Carroll's text reflects the very tensions that will cause the demise of the British Empire. As Woodcock observes in *Who Killed the British Empire*,

> [Britain] was subordinating vast areas of the earth to its arbitrary will while carrying on an internal evolution in political forms and philosophies that ran diametrically counter to its imperial policies and practices. (327)

Curious juxtapositions between Carroll and Queen Victoria further point to the longevity of the theme of Alice as colonised. Consider the spurious paranoid theory published in 1984, *Queen Victoria's Alice in Wonderland,* a tome that attempts to prove that Victoria herself wrote *Alice in Wonderland* (*Queen Victoria's Alice* vii). While this particular theory is clearly false, it affirms that readers of the Alice texts perceive something imperial, or oppressive, hovering in the Alice experience. Juxtapose next two images spread over a distance of more than eighty years, that both invoke a colonial

perspective: Tenniel's image of Alice as the daughter of Britain (1868) and Richard Field's *Alice's Adventures in Atomland in the Plastic Age* (1949). In Field's image Alice stands pensively, like a native Pacific islander, an insignificant witness to the nuclear tests conducted by her colonial landlords. Both Victoria and the mushroom cloud serve the same function, visually dominating the child subjects below them.

Figure 27

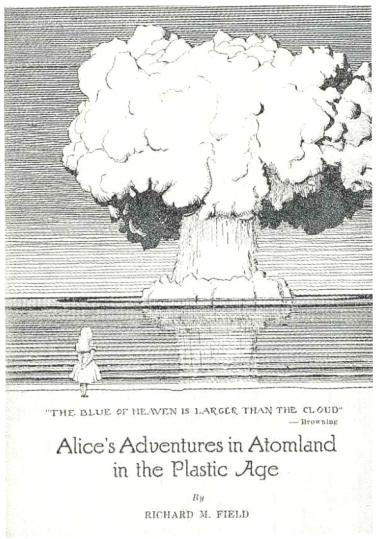


Figure 42

Since the 1960s, as post-colonial studies intensified and historical awareness of the oppressive aspects of Britain's empire increased, the relationship between Dodgson and Liddell has, similarly, been subjected to deeper scrutiny.

Jonathan Miller and the Sixties Alice

Although the perspective I describe above has been available for consideration since *Wonderland* was published in 1865 a key moment in the formation of modern insecurity regarding Alice and Carroll is the release in 1966 of Jonathan Miller's BBC

Television production of *Alice in Wonderland*. An avant-garde filmmaker recently graduated from the satirical stage review *Beyond the Fringe* and a friend of Andy Warhol, Miller appears to have identified and exploited the key features of the argument at hand by referencing a supposed illicit relationship between Charles Dodgson and the real Alice, and by infusing a colonial perspective into the themes and atmosphere of his film. In a 2003 interview Miller describes the typical modern response to the Alice texts when he comments, "Like many children I was slightly disturbed and disconcerted and even frightened by [*Alice in Wonderland*] when I was young" ("Commentary" 00:29). Miller goes on to suggest he intended the film to reference the idea of an Edenic vision of a lost world:

> I was very much influenced by... William Empson who [discusses] the way... writers of the nineteenth century looked back on childhood as a strange lost period of vision and innocence. (Ibid 03:10)

This "looking back" at a "lost period" hints strongly at an adult colonisation of childhood, and the colonial perspective is rendered more directly political, and focused on the idea of Empire, by Miller's decision to employ Ravi Shankar on sitar as the ideal soundtrack to the film. Miller comments on this decision:

> Well here is this work written in the late 1860s at the height of the Empire when... Alice as a child would have leafed through the pages of *the Illustrated London News* and seen engravings of, photographs of, derbas, and when Queen Victoria was the Empress of India, and on this hot summer day somehow there were strange feelings of that Indian world. (Ibid 15:50)

Miller adds, "I think Alison Legit played the Queen very much as if she were Queen Victoria" (ibid 45:00). Miller also comments that he intended that the film provide a comment on those who rule and those who are ruled:

> I think *Alice in Wonderland*, like so many novels of the nineteenth century... are pictures of a vanished world the egalitarianism of the twentieth century overtook— the social arrangement. It's a world where servants are subservient. ("Commentary" 44:20)

Shifting from the oppressed status of servants to that of children it might be noted that Alice—unlike all other characters in the film—is unable to move her lips. In most cases, when we hear Alice's thoughts or dialog, it is through voice-over only. Miller comments, "children were said to be seen and not heard" (ibid 44:40). In Victorian society this rule would have as readily applied to servants as it did children.

The darkness and seriousness of this film is further emphasised by its allusions to Alice as a sexual creature. Alice, for example, is not cast as a child, but as a rather more alluring fourteen-year-old whom the Queen's son is pursuing. And in a scene with the Duchess the spectre of paedophilia is clearly hinted at. It should be noted that despite the flowing gown, the Duchess is played very obviously by a large middle-aged man:

> Duchess: I dare say you're wondering why I don't put my arm around your waist. Well the reason is I'm doubtful of the temper of your flamingo. (Miller, *Alice* 47:00)

If that comment were not enough to raise the eyebrows of BBC censors Alice's response is yet more suggestive; she remarks, "I haven't got a Flamingo anymore" (ibid 47:10). This episode and others, such as a scene featuring the image of a raging river running beneath the floorboards of a room (*Alice* 40:00), suggest a Freudian undertone. Not surprisingly, Miller recalls, "the press wrote about it as if it was a Freudian piece of sexual innuendo" ("Commentary" 1:09:30). Miller's decision that the film be shown not in the daytime, but in evening only, complicated matters. Miller relates,

> The press got hold of the wrong end of the stick. "Trendy Jonathan Miller thinks it's for adults only. It's obviously... sexually violent and abusive"—they didn't yet know the word paedophilia but I think some of them might have told them that Lewis Carroll had this reputation for himself for being a paedophiliac with his photographs. There were questions in Parliament. "Can Mr. Miller explain why it is that this masterly novel for children is now being shown for adults only as if it were in a pornographic shop in Soho?" (Ibid 1:08:00)

Circulating throughout the film are references to the real Alice and the real Dodgson, thus binding the real and fictive Alice universes into a whole. In reality, for example, Queen Victoria's son did pursue Alice Liddell, very nearly marrying her. Also, Miller claims he used black and white film for the project because he intended to capture the look of Dodgson's photography ("Commentary" 31:00). The visual reference to Dodgson's photographic work immediately provokes insecurity over his preferred subject matter, Alice Liddell, and other, occasionally nude, little girls. In fact the sexual life, or potential sexual life, of the real Alice Liddell is referenced in the film. One scene, set in a garden, involves Alice, the Queen, her son, and a photographer who is attempting to take a picture of the group. Dodgson, in fact, photographed the Queen's son, Prince Leopold, and it is possible, even likely, that Dodgson was made somewhat jealous by Leopold's later pursuit of Alice Liddell. Miller has placed Charles Dodgson in Lewis Carroll's fantasy, in a scene that therefore potentially references an implied love triangle between the real Alice, Price Leopold and Dodgson. While it is possible that no such "love triangle" existed, this doesn't matter. Miller has them all there, all together, and the two worlds of Alice, real and fictive, are hopelessly intertwined.

Miller, then, has created in his film a microcosm of the theory I am positing, that the reception of the Alice texts is frequently imbued by insecurity and that they are specifically implicated by Dodgson's relationship to the real Alice and the spectre of colonialism that plays through and with this relationship.

Miller's film was perhaps a springboard for the dark turn the image Alice would take in the late 1960s. A year after Miller's BBC production John Lennon invoked Alice in two seemingly drug-oriented songs, "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds" and "I am the Walrus". Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" (1968) was more direct in its positing of Alice as one who has lost her innocence in a world of mind-altering substances. A 1968

film (by John Donne) and a 1970 book (by Thomas Fensch), both titled *Alice in Acidland*, further popularised this emerging theme. Also, in 1971 Simon and Schuster published the anonymous, *Go Ask Alice: A Real Diary*, allegedly a work of non-fiction that traces a teenager's decent into drug addiction. These drug related songs, books and films worked together to form a new legend, that Dodgson was an opium fanatic, a legend that has steadily increased in popularity since its introduction in the 1960s.

Yet while this legend concerning Carroll's alleged use of drugs may appear tangential, in fact it is yet another manifestation of Alice culture exploring ideas related to oppressive force and colonialism. Note, for example, that in the drug related texts, books and films listed above, it is Alice and not Carroll who is invoked. In the popular vision, then, Carroll is the fanatic while Alice is the victim who, one might guess, succumbed to Carroll's invitation to "Drink Me". As a dominating force, one that ends up ruling and somehow, unfairly, oppressing its victims, drugs function upon the individual not unlike a colonial oppressor. Just as many Aboriginal Canadians and Native Americans were lured into various "addictions" in the colonial period—guns, ammunition and alcohol addiction among them—and thus became dependent upon colonial agents such as the Hudson Bay Company to provide their fix, so the abuser of drugs does not ask to be lorded over, nor does she intend to lose control or to lose her "innocence" in the process, and yet she does so while hoping somehow to free herself of this overbearing, oppressive force that keeps her down—keeps her from her freedom. Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" was the perfect expression of this perspective, Alice's drug addiction, posited in the lyrics of the song, serving as a metaphor for the hopelessness of an "addiction" to an oppressive entity—the peculiar march tempo of the song echoing the military apparatus that had campaigned one hundred years earlier to impress its doctrines on the "innocent" and "liminal" of the world.

In his observations on Kincaid's *Child Loving*, Wolfreys hints at the colonisation of childhood,

> The child's world is… a made-up world, creative rather than mimetic. In recognising this, the adult may recognise a certain lost world, and seek to punish its other for the loss of that which we failed to keep within our grasp. The adult haunted by the spectres of the child and childhood. (Wolfreys 40)[9]

Note in the above comment that "That which we failed to keep within our grasp" is juxtaposed with the idea of being "haunted by the spectres of the child". These images are readily transferable to concepts of empire as well. The Empire that "we failed to keep within our grasp" is readily compared with the lost empire of childhood with which both Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear were so inordinately preoccupied. So rather than view Lear and Carroll's interest in children as a cathartic outlet—as a way for a mostly unhappy man to share some happy moments with an innocent child—the quote above posits that adults can be jealous of, even haunted by, those who possess childhood, and that adults may seek to possess and colonise that "lost world".

In 1860, in a letter to Chichester Fortesque, Lear daydreams, "Over the world I would rove, North South East and West. I would [end up] Marrying a black girl at last, and slowly preparing to walk into Paradise!" (154). In *The Sorcerer* Gilbert versifies on the same dream:

> To a maiden fair,
> With bright brown hair,
> And a sweet and simple smile,
> Who waits for me
> By the sounding sea,
> On a South Pacific isle. (*The Sorcerer,* Act II)

In the above examples foreign-exotic and Edenic ideals collide with the visions and desires of Victorian authors of nonsense. It is partly for this reason that Carroll and Lear spoke so harmoniously to the Victorian mind. And it is the guilt of this desired

colonisation that lingers so darkly over the legend of Lewis Carroll, and that fascinates and mildly disturbs the modern reader of Alice.

The modern reader then, the reader who uses words like "insecurity", "fear", "drugs" and "paedophilia" when discussing Alice, is reflective of both false popular legends and a great underlying truth. That great underlying truth is that Alice (in the real and fictive imbroglio) engenders deep misgivings over the concepts of power, empire and oppression. That the Alice texts are also routinely posited as representative of England and the English is therefore a provoking and potentially troubling observation. However, a second thought must be added here. As mentioned above, the Alice texts are schizophrenic in the perspective they promote. The nonsense in them is radical in significant ways, and the texts also function as a site expressive of freedom—a democratic space within which empire and authority are mocked. The English, with their long tradition of honouring republican ideals, from the Round Table and Robin Hood, to the Magna Charta and the English Civil War, may see in the Alice texts the two sides of their divided self-image—both the radical freedom and the oppressive imperialism. As Henry Adams claims of English eccentricity, "It made the chief charm of English society as well as its chief terror" (199). The image of the English eccentric, which emerged out of public appreciation for, and early discussions of, Victorian nonsense, is beholden to both of these ideals and has coloured over the last century the very idea of Englishness; for the English eccentric, as popularly understood, is free to laugh at the incongruous and to wear the odd coloured stocking, but simultaneously he must keep a stiff upper lip—maintain control—and above all, keep a close lock on the romantic vision of the child within.

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[1] A third collection, *Lost Bab Ballads*, was released posthumously in 1932.

[2] In his *Annotated Alice*, Gardner theorizes that Carroll intended that Alice's trip underground occurred on 4 May 1862 (77) and her trip through the looking glass on 4 November 1862 (144). May Day and Guy Fawkes Day are thus placed in proximity to the commencement of the two narratives.

[3] For more information see Dilworth, "Society and the Self in Limericks and Lear" and "Edward Lear's Suicide Limerick: The True Meaning of Lear's Picture-Limerick From his 1879 Collection, More

Nonsense". See also the section on "Freudian Interpretations" in Robert Phillips' *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's Dreamchild as Seen Through the Critics' Looking Glasses, 1865-1971*, which includes eight separate essays on psychoanalytic approaches to *Alice*.

[4] All examples from Gilbert, *Bab Ballads*: "The Reverend Hopley Porter" (22); "The Phantom Curate" (142); "The Bishop of Rum-Ti-Foo" (90); "Gentle Alice Brown" (219); "The Reverend Micah Sowls" (115).

[5] see Briggs, *Cotswolds* (142). For more on the relation between "backwards" and the supernatural see the following: On reading the Psalter backwards for an evil purpose, see Briggs, *Cotswolds* (70); witches saying their prayers backward, see Opie, *Lore* (1-2); wish-making and backing trains, see Opie, *Lore* (220); the use of ringing bells backward to indicate trouble, see Briggs, *British* (84).

[6] Carroll also wrote a rhyming witch's brew recipe for the stage production of *Alice*. The cook in the scene in the Duchess' kitchen recites:

> Boil it so easily,
> Mix it so greasily,
> Stir it so sneezily,
> One! Two! Three!

(qtd. in Gardner *Alice* 62).

[7] see also Jack Zipes, "The Flowering of the Fairy Tale in Victorian England", in *When Dreams came True: Classical Fairy tales and their Tradition* (111), in which he wonders at "The late flowering" of English fairy tales, as compared to the other European nations.

[8] "The Old Man of Calcutta (74); "The Old Man of Columbia" (76); "The Jumblies" (255); "Seven Families" (196).

[9] Wolfreys is working from Kincaid (221).

Chapter Four

Nonsense and the 1960s

Hickory dickory dock
The crowd ran up the block.
A cop struck one,
A rock got thrown;
Hickory dickory riot.

(From *The Inner City Mother Goose*, by Eve Merriam, 1969)

SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

A Microcosm of 1960s Nonsense

On 14 November 1967 Screen Gems Music in Los Angeles released the fourth album by the rock/television performers, The Monkees. Entitled *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn and Jones*, the album became number one in the *Billboard* music charts within two weeks of its release (Sandoval, *Pisces*). In their original incarnation The Monkees were intended to be a safe alternative to the Beatles' increasingly sophisticated output. As products of corporate strategy, the four Monkees were hired individually, then prepped, trained and recorded over the spring and summer of 1966. With their television show and soundtrack album launched in September that year The Monkees arrived in the spotlight within a month of John Lennon's infamous comments on the relative popularity of The Beatles to Jesus. Audiences eagerly welcomed this safer, corporate pop band. Times

being what they were, however, the four Monkees ultimately disabled the safety mechanisms that bound them. After the release of their second album, in January 1967, The Monkees rebelled against their Dr. Frankenstein and threatened to leave the project if they were not allowed to create their own albums, without any assistance or musical direction from "The Man" (Sandoval, *Headquarters*). Alarmed at the prospect of losing their stars, Screen Gems (incredibly) granted The Monkees total control of their musical output. With this newfound freedom The Monkees began to communicate in terms that better reflected the mood and atmosphere of 1967. Of the twenty-four tracks released on their first two albums—those songs hand picked by New York television executives—each and every one of them made narrative sense. But with their debut as musical directors, the album *Headquarters*, released in March 1967, nonsense was added. The tracks "Zilch", "No Time" and "Randy Scouse Git" each made use of nonsense. By their fourth album, *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn and Jones*, the Monkees use of nonsense is remarkable for the harmony it demonstrates with the strategies examined in the present study. On side two of the album, tracks three, four and five, as a trilogy, perform as a microcosm of my main arguments. Track three is an absurd spoken-word nursery rhyme:

> Peter Percival Patterson had a pet pig named Porky
> This Pet Pig named Porky loved pie
> He loved pizza pie, pumpkin pie, pineapple pie, mince tarts
> and Peter Percival Patterson's pet pig Porky loved
> Pie for breakfast, pie for lunch, pie in the afternoon and pie before he went to bed.
> Peter Percival Patterson's pet pig Porky ate so much pie,
> Do you know what he did?
> He popped. (*Pisces*, Track 9)

Dispensing with the customary moment of silence between tracks, the word "popped" is followed immediately by the opening guitar riff of the following track, "Pleasant Valley Sunday", a song critical of the blind conformity and consumerism of Middle America:

> Another Pleasant Valley Sunday
> Charcoal burning everywhere
> Rows of houses that are all the same
> And no one seems to care
>
> See Mrs. Gray she's proud today because her roses are in bloom
> Mr. Green, he's so serene. He's got a TV in every room
>
> Another Pleasant Valley Sunday
> Here in status symbol land
> Mothers complain about how hard life is
> And the kids just don't understand
>
> Creature comfort goals
> They only numb my soul, and make it hard for me to see
> My thoughts all seem to stray, to places far away
> I need a change of scenery… (*Pisces*, Track 10)

"Pleasant Valley Sunday" concludes with a notorious finale of feedback, rising violently and cascading into a strange chaotic crash. Two tracks in a row, then, end with a violent allusion. While the overindulgence of the pig results in his popping, the overindulgence of the adults in "creature-comfort goals" results, similarly, in an audible explosion.

The following track, "Daily Nightly", emerges from this crash with its own strange electronic hum, thus aurally connecting itself with the finale of "Pleasant Valley Sunday". "Daily Nightly" is a specimen of psychedelia composed by band member, Michael Nesmith. Nesmith explains that the enigmatic lyrics of "Daily Nightly" were inspired by the riots on Sunset Strip in Los Angeles in the summer of 1966, in which police and Hippies clashed. Nesmith comments, "That was the first time 'those crazy kids' had got out of control… I was amused by the obvious inability of the press to digest this [event]." (Sandoval, *Pisces*) Nesmith's lyrics offer an inscrutable Dylanesque version of the event that was meant to be indecipherable to the establishment:

> Startled eyes that sometimes see phantasmagoric splendor
> Pirouette down palsied paths
> With pennies for the vendor.
> Salvation's yours for just the time it takes to pay the dancer.
> And once again such anxious men
> Find questions, but no answers.

The song concludes with a reference to an alternate belief system, a threat, and a temporal anomaly:

> Tarot signs look down upon a world that glitters glibly.
> And mountainsides put arms around
> The unsuspecting city.
> Second hands that minds have slowed are moving even faster
> Toward bringing down someone whose found
> The questions but no answers. (*Pisces*, Track 11)

In Chapter Two I discussed the effect of juxtaposing nonsense rhymes and political statements, as when the eighteenth-century broadside framed the utopian "Soldier's Dream" with the nonsensical "Cabinet of Wonders", the two functioning as an ensemble by their proximity, the one lending meaning to the other. In the above trilogy the same framing strategy occurs. That "Peter Percival" is not accompanied by music immediately causes the listener to lend the track special attention. The listener to "Peter Percival" is thereby forced to think in terms of medium, wondering about the use of words without music on a rock album. The listener is also called to pay attention to the confines of language, as each utterance of the letter P is rendered with an audible *pop*, the microphone set so that the P sound will better foreshadow the popping of the pig itself. As in Francis Hopkinson's "Art of Paper War" (Figure 24, p. 127, this study) the popping Ps are an attempt to increase the representational value of a sign, reaching beyond the paradigmatic confines of traditional language. This nonsensical, absurd and carnivalesque verse about a gluttonous pig is then followed by a song critical of mainstream society, where parents are viewed as delusional and children are the enlightened. As the two tracks are aurally connected, without a silent break between them, the mind of the listener enters "Pleasant Valley Sunday" with notions about representational value, and questions about how something can mean *more* than it normally does, lurking in his or her subconscious. The listener then encounters the lyrics of "Pleasant Valley Sunday", which list the complaints

of a dissatisfied youth, who dreams of abandoning the old paradigm and entertains visions of a utopian otherworld:

> My thoughts all seem to stray, to places far away
> I need a change of scenery… (*Pisces*, Track 10)

The temporal anomalies of the next song show the avenue through which this youth might seek such an escape. The title, "Daily Nightly", is itself a temporal anomaly, and the phrase, "second hands that minds have slowed are moving even faster", evokes the impossible space through which all that is impossible becomes possible. Clearly, the listener is being asked to think outside the box—to imagine the unimaginable. The "tarot signs" mentioned in the lyrics combine with the title of the album, "*Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn*…" to affirm that change will only take place if one operates outside the accepted, mainstream, belief system. The extremes to which this youth will turn in order to change his world are hinted at in coded references to the youth riots in Los Angeles, and by the violent crashing sound that follows "Pleasant Valley Sunday" and precedes "Daily Nightly". The youths envisioned in "Daily Nightly" want to "mean more" and are represented by the ominous mountain whose arms reach to envelope "the unsuspecting city". The object of the impending violence, Nesmith explains, is the Los Angeles Police Department. As the youth feels the "second hands moving even faster" his concern is with "bringing down someone who's found / The questions but no answers". The police, the press and parents—all words that start with a P—look at the youths and believe that the "kids just don't understand". These authority figures, then, are the ones who have "questions but no answers". The emphasis, then, is on a paradigm shift that prevents the establishment from understanding the younger generation. Once the three tracks are thus juxtaposed, they naturally suggest that the "pig" in "Peter Percival" is intended as a metaphorical "pig", or policeman, as contemporary slang would have us understand the term. His demise, by violent explosion is, then, a victory for youth culture.

To qualify the above reading I should add that I do not necessarily believe that The Monkees intended that these three tracks function in this particular way. They may have, but it is equally possible that The Monkees were, quite naturally, communicating instinctively in terms that resonated with the times. Further, my suspicion is that, by and large, although The Monkees' audience understood these messages, it is likely that they understood their deepest meanings only subconsciously. For the majority of young listeners the triumvirate of tracks described above simply sounded "right on" or "far out". So long as adult authority figures found these same set of tracks inexplicable, no deeper analysis was required. The achievement was to communicate subversive meanings in such a manner that authority figures were rendered distant or alien.

1960s Nonsense: A General Introduction

The following section serves as a general review of nonsense in the sixties and means to demonstrate where it was found, how ubiquitous it was, and how conspicuously it was ultimately utilised by both mainstream and counter-culture. It should be noted that, in line a convention used in other studies on sixties' culture (see, e.g., DeKoven 3) the period examined in this chapter might best be termed "The Long 1960s", a period spanning from 1954 to 1974, which is equivalent to the era of social unrest that included the Civil Rights Movement, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the sexual revolution, the feminist movement, the age of Vietnam War protests, the Spring of Prague and the Watergate scandal.

That nonsense would be a hallmark of the sixties rebel is predicted in 1954, a year before the phrase "rock and roll" was coined. Columbia Pictures' *The Wild One* was the first of many films in the 1950s that explored (or exploited) an emerging trend in juvenile

delinquency in America. As rock and roll was yet to be identified with youth, the delinquents, a motorcycle gang led by Marlon Brando, are described as "jazzed-up hoodlums." Like the participants in The Boston Tea Party, who spoke a nonsensical jargon on their night of public destruction, the "jazzed-up hoodlums" in *The Wild One* take over a small town, turn it upside down, and use a special "jazz speak" that is unintelligible to the adults and other authority figures they encounter. One scene involves two "hoodlums" in leather and an elderly bartender attempting to converse with them. "Hoodlum One" has just finished playing his harmonica along with a bee-bop record on the jukebox:

> Hoodlum 1: Hey Pops, gimmie one of those crazy beers will ya man?
> Hoodlum 2: Man that was real cool.
> Hoodlum 1: Thanks Daddy-o
> Hoodlum 2: Fine ole playin'-o Oh, we got to get this beer-o
> [*Elderly bartender hands him beer*.]
> [...]
> Hoodlum 2: [to bartender] Hey Pops, thumb me will ya daddyo? Come on! That's it. Thumb me.
> [*The old man looks confused, but reaches out and touches thumbs with Hoodlum 1*]
> Hoodlum 2: Now gimmie some skin and ooze it out just nice...
> [*Old man looks confused*]
> Hoodlum 1: Pop's, do you pick up on this jive man?
> Old Man: What?
> Hoodlum 1: Do you pick up on this jive... Did you dig the re-bop?
> Old Man: What?
> Hoodlum 1: The re-bop Dad, the re-bop!
> Hoodlum 2: [To Hoodlum 1] He's a square man. [To Old Man] Don't you get this at all? For you take the brew on the side on the time and you take bob brite beeble-da-bop-da-bow, an iffy you tu-bonna an du-take an innel-drink an you all leave O-dupano o-do-bing... (Benedek 22:30)

With their love of African American music, black leather jackets and special "jazz speak", the hoodlums in *The Wild One* were the ideal harbingers of the youth that would soon embrace rock and roll and sixties-era nonsense.

As Marianne DeKoven remarks in her study of sixties culture, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the emergence of the Post-modern*, "No cultural phenomenon is more

characteristic of the sixties than rock music." (116) The attention to popular music is, of course, in keeping with earlier chapters in this study. As the title Mother Goose *Melody* implies, folk rhymes were regularly sung to familiar tunes. And just as "Yankee Doodle" and "The World Turned Upside Down" were popular songs in colonial America, so we note that Gilbert was best known as a lyricist. Even Lear made a habit of setting his nonsense to music (see Noakes, *Wanderer* 252; 287); thus explaining the titles of his most influential works, *Nonsense Songs* (1870) and *Laughable Lyrics* (1876).

Sixties rock music was a bastion of nonsense. A word on the origins of the use of nonsense in sixties music is appropriate here. Like rhythm and blues and soul, nonsense was an African American musical tradition. In the early and mid 1950s, African American rhythm and blues artists—working from oral traditions in jazz, such as scat and vocalese, recorded tracks laden with folksy nonsense rhymes, such as LaVern Baker's "Bop-Ting-a-Ling", "Humpty Dumpty Heart" and "Tweedle Dee". Richard Penniman, known by fans as "Little Richard", was another rhythm and blues artist who tapped into nonsense in his songs. Recorded in 1955, Penniman's "Tutti Frutti" was one of the most successful of the era:

> Tutti frutti, oh rutti, Tutti frutti, oh rutti,
> Wop bop a loo bop a lop bam boom! (Penniman et al)

Jalacy Hawkins (whose stage name was "Screaming Jay Hawkins"), another African American rhythm and blues artist, resembled Little Richard in a number of ways; he dressed outrageously, screamed quite a bit, and knew the value of a good piece of nonsense. Hawkins, who was often banned from U.S. radio for being too outrageous, penned "Little Demon" in 1956, one of the more vibrantly nonsensical recordings of early rock and roll:

> He pushed back night, brought in afternoon
> He even made Leap Year jump over the moon
> He took the 4th of July and he put it in May
> He took this morning, bought back yesterday...

> He did the moon back up, he even pushed back time
> Took the tooty out of fruity, had the devil drinkin' wine
> MAMMAMMBL...
> That cat was mad! (Hawkins and Nahan)

The direct reference, "Took the tooty out of fruity", and the song title, "Little Demon" suggest that the composition was intended as a direct challenge to Little Richard. It is interesting to note the terms with which Hawkins challenges Richard. After removing the "tooty out of fruity" Hawkins then tops the nonsensical phrase "Wop bop a loo bop" with the less intelligible "MAMMAMMBL...". Hawkins also ups the anti by adding a new level of illogic by way of several topsy-turvy temporal anomalies; time is running backwards, the night has become the afternoon and July now occurs in May.

Background vocals and choruses featuring nonsense continued as a staple of popular music throughout the early years of rock and roll and into the mid sixties, from Neil Sedaka's 1962 chorus, "Come-a Come-a Down Doo Bee Doo Down Down", to Manfred Mann's, "Do wah diddy diddy dum diddy do" (1964) and on to Shirley Ellis' unlikely number three hit of 1965, "The Name Game":

> Shirley, Shirley bo Birley Bonana fanna fo Firley
> Fee fy mo Mirley, Shirley! (Elliston and L. Chase)

With the influence of the Beatles the use of nonsense in popular music becomes more complex, as a literary element is added to the popular folk rhymes and the rhythm-and-blues and rock forms. A devotee of Spike Milligan and, most importantly, of Lewis Carroll, John Lennon had a profound effect on how nonsense was utilised in sixties-era psychedelic music. Lennon suggested that "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was laced with imagery from *Alice in Wonderland* (*Anthology* 242) and that his song "I am the Walrus" was directly influenced by Carroll's "Walrus and the Carpenter" (ibid 273). Carroll even appears on the cover of The Beatles' album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*:

Figure 43

Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant" (1967) and Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" (1968) are typical of the numerous rock groups that experimented with or referenced nonsense forms in this era. Among them are The Monkees, The Doors, The Who, The Small Faces, The Velvet Underground, The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, The Crazy World of Arthur Brown, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention and Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich, whose "Zabadak" was *astoundingly* nonsensical; equally astounding was its placement at number three in the British charts in 1967:

> Zabadak, Zabadak Karakakora Kakarakak Zabadak Shai Shai Skagalak
> Zabadak, Zabadak Karakakora Kakarakak Zabadak Shai Shai Skagalak.
> Look for meaning not in words but in the way you're feeling…
> (Blaikley and Howard)

Another conspicuous area in which nonsense flourished in the long 1960s was in children's books. While in-depth discussion of children's texts in this chapter will be limited to the work of Dr. Seuss, creator of the most celebrated children's nonsense books of the era, it should be noted that Seuss was not alone in his championing of nonsense. Shel Silverstein was publishing his nonsense poems throughout the sixties, eventually compiling these verses in his much-treasured anthology, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, in 1974. Other children's book authors produced equally intriguing collections of nonsense, including John Ciardi's *The Man Who Sang the Sillies* (1961) and *The Monsters Den*

(1966), Spike Milligan's *Silly Verse for Kids* (1959) and *A Book of Milliganimals* (1968), Edward Gorey's *The Wuggly Ump* (1963) and *The Utter Zoo* (1967), Maurice Sendak's *One Was Johnny* (1962) and *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* (1967), Lewy Olfson's *Glimmer Glimmer Glumpkin* (1968) and Eve Merriam's *Inner City Mother Goose* (1969), to name but a few.

Sixties culture also manifested a conspicuous interest in experimental modern authors such as James Joyce and Gertrude Stein and the popularity of counter-culture authors such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs should not be considered an unrelated phenomenon. In her book on the emergence of the post-modern DeKoven characterises the typical sixties text in a way that sounds distinctly Bakhtinian:

> In Steinian experimental writing, as in Burroughs' cut-up and fold-in method, conventional word associations, syntactical patterns, and literary sequences are broken apart to make room for new modes of thought. These literary methodologies aspire to change the world by opening out new possibilities of thought-in-language, on the assumption, common in sixties countercultural ideologies, that revolution must come not through politics alone but through an accompanying, or even preceding, changed consciousness as well. (165)

On British radio in the mid and late 1950s the absurd BBC radio program *The Goon Show* was destined to have a profound effect on the surreal and nonsensical qualities of Sixties rock music, film and television. Spike Milligan (mentioned above as a nonsense poet for children), was a major force behind the Goons, and was an iconic hero to the youths who would, within a few years, become The Beatles and the *Monty Python* team. A typical *Goon Show* broadcast in 1958 includes:

> The P.M. addresses the House:
> P.M.: I, mems, ma'ams and mums, I have just received dread news. The Atomic Commission have ascertained that when a nude Welshman holding a rice pudding is struck by an atomic bomb, he turns into a fully clad Number Eight Touring Company of *The Desert Song*.
> Voice: Then Britain leads the world! (Milligan et al)

The Goon Show informed the rise of theatre of the absurd and satirical stage reviews such as *Beyond the Fringe*. In cinema, The Beatles required that their film director be Richard Lester, because he had made films with Spike Milligan and The Goons (Lennon et al, *Anthology* 128). With the popularity of nonsense and the absurd conspicuously on the rise, BBC television endorsed a commitment to such programming, with *The Magic Roundabout* (1965-1968), *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (1967-1969), Spike Milligan's *Q5* (1969), *Monty Pythons Flying Circus* (1969-1975) and *The Goodies* (1970-1982). In the United States a similar brand of humour was developing and programs that revelled in the absurd were among the most popular of the decade, including *The Monkees* (1966-1968), *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (1967-1970), *Laugh In* (1968-1973), *Sesame Street* (first aired 1969), and *The Banana Splits* (1968-1970). *The Smother's Brothers*—a comedy team whose absurd humour was often based on puns and Tommy Smothers' childlike, befuddling, misunderstandings—was not untypical of the humour offered in many of the aforementioned programs:

> Tommy Smothers: You can tell who's running the country by how much clothes people wear.
> Dickie Smothers: Who's running the country?
> Tommy: Yeah, but you can tell by how much clothes the people wear by who's running.
> Dickie: Now what do mean? Like some people can afford more clothes on and other people less clothes on?
> Tommy: That's right. Exactly. See, some people, the ordinary people, are the less-ons. See?
> Dickie: Ah ha. The less-ons. Well, who's running the country?
> Tommy: The more-ons. (Qtd. in Muldaur 00:11:07-30)

Anyone discussing the popularity of nonsense in the 1960s must also consider the most curious case of Stanley Unwin. Unwin, a BBC electrical engineer, became famous in the 1960s for speaking nonsense. He called his new language "Unwinese", and produced books written in Unwinese, spoke Unwinese on the radio and on numerous variety shows. Perhaps at no other time than the 1960s could someone achieve this level

of celebrity simply by speaking gobbledygook. Unwin's crowning achievement came in 1968 when the British mod rock group, The Small Faces, invited Unwin to record a story that would be interlaced throughout their psychedelic concept album, *Ogden's Nut Gone Flake*. Unwin's introduction to track seven is typical of his style: "Are you all sitting comfty bold two squares on your botty? Then we'll begin." (Unwin)

Lastly, the 1960s also witnessed political acts of nonsense as protest. From John Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Bed-Ins" to the provoking shenanigans of Abbie Hoffman's Yippie party—to nonsensical protest signs that were waved from Paris to Washington DC, the sixties rebel, as this chapter will ultimately suggest, used nonsense as a weapon on numerous occasions. Cultural forces being what they were, nonsense was destined to be *in* during the Sixties, and the period this chapter examines was to be remembered, not only for political protests and social upheaval, but also as the decade that embraced absurd cultural products and texts that turned language norms inside out. The sixties were to be the decade of the phantasmagorical, the scrumdidilyumptious, and the supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.

Three Iconic Figures: Lennon, Dylan and Seuss

DeKoven suggests that because of their comic and anarchistic lyrics, John Lennon and Bob Dylan are the most characteristic songwriters of the era (161). The same may be said of the texts of Dr. Seuss. Importantly, Dylan, Lennon, and Seuss are also similar in that they were each destined—over the last forty years—to become iconic, larger-than-life, mythic figures—in much the same way as Mother Goose ascended to iconic status in America in the nineteenth century, and as Lewis Carroll did in the twentieth. Further, I

contend that it was, in part, for their clear commitment to traditional nonsense forms that Lennon, Dylan, and Seuss achieved this iconic status.

It will be remembered that the exercise concerning The Monkees' album, *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn and Jones*, utilised three related, though distinct, types of texts: "Peter Percival" is an absurd childish nursery rhyme, "Pleasant Valley Sunday" is a straightforward, clearly expressed social commentary, and "Daily Nightly" is a coded psychedelic piece, at once anti-authoritarian and reflective of surrealist or beat poetry. The following study will regularly move between these three realms of expression, as it is only in doing so that the ideologies of 1960s nonsense can be fully explored. For if the argument that opens this chapter were contained to "Peter Percival", for example, and ignored the two tracks that follow it, nothing would be learned of the rhyme's ultimate function. This chapter then will move freely, for example, from Lennon's nursery rhyme-like verses such as "Mean Mr. Mustard", to his clearly posed social commentaries, such as, "Revolution", to his enigmatic and psychedelic pieces, such as "I am the Walrus". Similarly, the examination will cover Bob Dylan's nonsense rhymes, such as those featured in "I Shall Be Free", his direct political statements, such as "Blowin' in the Wind", and his enigmatic pieces, such as "Ballad of a Thin Man". Like the texts of his contemporaries, Lennon and Dylan, Seuss' texts will be seen to move freely from simple Mother Goose-like nursery rhymes, such as those found in *Dr. Seuss' ABC*, to straightforward works of social commentary, such as *The Sneeches*, and on into wild and surreal inventions, such as the letters that come after Z in *On Beyond Zebra*. None of this means to suggest that "Pleasant Valley Sunday", "Blowing in the Wind", "Revolution" (or every phrase in "The Sneeches") are nonsensical. They need not be. It is only through their proximity and juxtaposition to nonsensical forms that these texts are evaluated. It is only within such a scope that the fullest purpose and import of 1960s era nonsense can be revealed.

John Lennon and Nonsense

Given that he was a devoted student of rock and roll, one could legitimately expect that John Lennon acquired his sense for nonsense from his exposure to early rock artists such as Little Richard and Screaming Jay Hawkins. In part, this is the case. The Beatles recorded several Little Richard compositions, and while warming up for the *Let it Be* sessions, they performed Screaming Jay Hawkins' "Little Demon". In 1999 the guitar John Lennon had used in the 1950s as a member of his high school skiffle group, The Quarrymen, came up for auction at Sotheby's. Along with the guitar came a briefcase filled with Lennon's record collection, which his aunt had preserved and set aside in the 1950s. Alongside the Elvis Presley, Lonnie Donegan and Buddy Holly recordings was found a 78 of Spike Milligan's "Ying Tong Song" (Davies 261), a song reminiscent of both *The Goons* radio program and Milligan's collection of children's nonsense verse. Released by Decca Records in 1956, the song included the verse:

> Ying tong ying tong
> Ying tong ying tong
> Ying tong iddle I po
> Ying tong ying tong
> Ying tong iddle I po (Milligan, "Ying Tong")

Quarrymen band member, Rod Davis, remarks, "John was a big fan of The Goons, as we all were." (Qtd. in Davies 261-62)

Despite these musical influences Lennon's introduction to nonsense was, in fact, through oral folklore and literature. Pete Shotton's memoir, *John Lennon In My Life*, recalls his childhood in Liverpool, where he grew up with Lennon as his closest friend. Shotton notes that in Lennon's song writing for the Beatles he was known to quote from oral folk poems they had known as children. Shotton, for example, recalls that as schoolboys he and Lennon knew the nonsensical witch's brew "a yellow matter custard, green slop pie, / all mixed together with a dead dog's eye" (qtd. in Davies 114), which

Lennon quotes from in "I am the Walrus". And as the Opies record, the city of Liverpool was the subject of at least one oral folk poem that combined strategies found in the "World Turned Upside Down" and "One Bright Day in the Middle of the Night":

> 'Twas in the month of Liverpool
> In the city of July,
> The snow was raining heavily,
> The streets were very dry.
> The flowers were sweetly singing,
> The birds were in full bloom,
> As I went down the cellar
> To sweep an upstairs room. (*Lore* 24)

Moving from the schoolyard to the literary experience, Shotton comments on Lewis Carroll's importance to both he and Lennon:

> *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* were like the Bible to us both. (John must have recited the poem "Jabberwocky" to me at least a few hundred times.) From a very early age, John's ultimate ambition was to one day "write an Alice" himself. (Shotton and Schaffner 11)

Lennon himself comments on his childhood and teen years and confirms, "I was passionate about *Alice in Wonderland* and drew all the characters. I did poems in the style of "Jabberwocky". I used to Love Alice..." (*Anthology* 8). At age twelve, Lennon drew this illustrated version of Carroll's "Walrus and the Carpenter":

Figure 44

Lennon corroborates Shotton's contention that his earliest ambition was to write nonsense. By the age of fifteen this interest had blossomed into a career goal: "I wanted to write *Alice in Wonderland*" (*Anthology* 9). Speaking in 1980 Lennon admitted that his fascination with Alice had been lifelong: "I *always* wanted to write *Alice in Wonderland*. I was determined to be Lewis Carroll… I think I still have that as a secret ambition" (*Anthology* 176). Though rock and roll waylaid this plan, Lennon notes that it was nonsense and not music that he first shared with the Beatles:

> When they met me I was already [writing nonsense]. After a week of friendship with them or after a couple of weeks, I probably brought out things and said, "Read this." So this came before the other: the guitars came second. (Ibid)

Nonsense, then, and not music, was what first drew the future Beatles to one another. Shotton recalls the content of some of John's early writings:

> One story was about a carrot in a potato mine. Another was about Davy Crutch Head which was a skit on Davy Crockett. These stories were interspersed with news flashes, such as a weather report. "Tomorrow it will be Muggy, followed by Tuggy, Wuggy and Thuggy". (Qtd. in Davies 24)

Shotton adds:

> These stories were mainly rude or crude but they were also literary, with references to things he liked, such as *Alice in Wonderland* or Edward Lear. (Ibid)

Lennon did eventually publish several volumes of nonsense in the style of Lewis Carroll, and the influence of Alice was keenly apparent in Lennon's song writing for the Beatles. As mentioned above, Lennon explained that Carroll's stories and poems directly influenced the lyrics of two of his most influential songs, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" and "I am the Walrus". In a 1980 interview Lennon was commenting that his particular talents as a songwriter made him feel alone in the world, that he looked around himself and seemed to see things that no one else saw. At this point the interviewer, David Sheff, asks, "You never found people who shared your visions?" Lennon responds,

"Only dead people in books, Lewis Carroll..." (qtd. in Sheff and Golson 169). That the writings of Lewis Carroll profoundly influenced the most popular songwriter of the 1960s should not be overlooked. Although Carroll's influence on Lennon's lyrics has been noted frequently, the extent to which Carroll affected Lennon's total aesthetic outlook and politics has not been fully examined. No other single influence, with the possible exception of Elvis Presley, was more important to Lennon.

The influence of nonsense literature on the works of The Beatles was apparent long before Lennon's psychedelic period. Lennon and, to a lesser extent, the other three Beatles, manifested an attachment to nonsense throughout their common career. The name of the group itself, The "Beatles" is a case in point. The naming of the band is credited to Lennon. Wanting to emulate Buddy Holly's band, The Crickets, Lennon struck on the idea of being the "Beetles" but shunned the proper spelling in favour of making a pun on the beat music then popular in Liverpool. For future Beatles manager, Brian Epstein, it was the oddness of the name that first attracted his attention. Epstein recalled,

> seeing it on a poster advertising a university dance... and I remembered thinking it was an odd and purposeless spelling... I wonder sometimes whether there is not something mystically magnetic about the name "Beatle?" ... the Beatles defy analysis as to the specific ingredients to their success but I do wonder whether they would have been quite as big if they had been called, for example, The Liverpool Four, or something equally prosaic. (Epstein 94-5)

This portmanteau, "Beatles", started a fashion among 1960s-era rock groups of misspelling their names, The Monkees and The Byrds being two of the more popular groups that imitated the form. These misspellings function in three important ways; they invoke childhood via an implied unfamiliarity with proper spelling, and yet, since they are offered by adults, these misspellings are also wilful rejections of hierarchical language conventions. Further, the misspelled names also leant a sense of individuality, or alien

otherness, to the musical group.

In 1961, a year before The Beatles landed their record contract, Lennon was publishing nonsense in the local music journal, *Mersey Beat*. The material, though impenetrable, was popular among *Mersey Beat* readers. An excerpt from 14 September 1961 is loosely based on *Mersey Beat'*s "Entertainment Guide" and possibly reflects the influence of Stanley Unwin: "The Peer Hat is very popularce for sun eating and boots for nude brighter are handys when sailing" (Lennon, "Around and About" 3).

Once signed to EMI records The Beatles (Lennon in particular) warmed up very quickly to their musical producer, George Martin, when it was revealed that he had worked with the Goons (Epstein 119). Martin had recorded numerous novelty and nonsense songs with Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers, including Milligan's "You Gotta Say Oww!" (1956) and Seller's "A Drop of the Hard Stuff" (1958). In the year leading up to his first meeting with The Beatles, Martin had been recording surreal comedy for the *Beyond the Fringe* cast, including "Aftermyth of War" (1961) (Martin, Disc Two, all selections). The six degrees of separation intensifies when, as noted above, it is revealed that The Beatles chose Richard Lester to direct their films mainly because he had worked with The Goons as well (see Lennon et al, *Anthology* 128). With a musical producer and a filmmaker who had both worked with well-known nonsensical comedy acts, The Beatles knew early on that they were in good hands.

The title of The Beatle's debut single, "Love Me Do" (1962), penned by McCartney, may seem, in its inverted grammatical construction, to hark back to the antique language of courtly love. Yet, from a grammatical perspective, the phrase "Love Me Do" is ear-catching and curious in precisely the same manner as the name of Dr. Seuss' character "Sam I Am", featured in Seuss' most successful book, *Green Eggs and Ham*, released in the United States two years prior to the release of "Love Me Do" in

Britain. The juxtaposition of these two like phrases, "Love Me Do" and "Sam I Am", need not be taken to indicate that one influenced the other; rather, it suggests that the time was right for popular cultural expressions that advertised their appeal in terms of inverted grammar. Both phrases are anti-authoritarian in their refusal to communicate along established norms. The titles of subsequent early Beatles hits penned by Lennon involve further play with words and nonsensical phrasing; so, for instance "Please Please Me"[1] is a pun on which Lennon commented, "I was always intrigued by the double use of the word 'please'" (qtd. in Sheff and Golson 179), "Eight Days a Week" is an example of impossibilia, and "A Hard Days Night", of a temporal anomaly.

Peter Noone, singer for the pop group *Herman's Hermits* recalls the strange attraction that the title of the film, *A Hard Days Night*, exerted on him, and does so in terms similar to Brian Epstein's response to the pun he encountered when he first saw the name, "Beatles". Noone relates:

> To get this title as a movie was like, really bizarre, you know, cause they'd [previous rock films] all been called "Summer Holiday" and "The Girl Can't Help It" and here's something that doesn't make sense. (Shenson 00:39:33-52)

Interestingly, however attractive the title proved to youth, it provoked an apparently opposite reaction in adults. Walter Shenson, the film's producer explains:

> ...So we phoned our distributor in New York and we said we had a title and we said it's called *A Hard Day's Night* and I sort of had dead air on the end of the phone for a few seconds, [then, after apparently meeting some resistance] I said well, why don't you ask the young people in the office, the young secretaries and the office boys... and see if they like the title, and I got a call back from New York the next day and they said that everybody [all the young people] loves the title. (Shenson 00:39:08-33)

With the Beatles contributing material to Alun Owen's script, and with director Richard Lester's fresh from his experiences with the Goons, *A Hard Day's Night* naturally revelled

in non-sequiturs and nonsense throughout, as exemplified most succinctly perhaps by the mock interview session:

> Interviewer to John: How did you find America?
> John: Turn left at Greenland.
>
> Interviewer to Ringo: Are you a Mod or a Rocker?
> Ringo: I'm a Mocker.
>
> Interviewer to George: What would you call that hairstyle you're wearing?
> George: Arthur.

Film critic Roger Ebert and American film Institute archivist Mike Clarke offered the following comments on the political implications of *A Hard Days Night*:

> Ebert: I don't think that people often go the movies and have their ideas changed but I think they go to movies and have their feeling changed, and then feelings lead to ideas. *A Hard Day's Night* is obviously not a political film in an overt way and yet out of *A Hard Day's Night* came the Sixties.
>
> Clarke: It represents a kind of creative and optimistic and friendly way of breaking all the rules and finding a way of doing things your way. The movie has never ceased to be an example for me in the last thirty years of how to react to an ossified world about you. (Shenson 00:54:53-55:38)

Lennon summarises the film in terms that emphasise both its relation to nonsense and to rebellion: "we were the sons of *The Goon Show*. We were of an age. We were the extension of that rebellion..." (*Anthology* 128).

In late 1963, after the first year of Beatlemania, Lennon returned to Liverpool and gathered up his old nonsense poems and stories from his school days (Davies 97). Then, shortly after the release of *A Hard Days Night* (1964), Lennon released his first collection of nonsense literature in book form, *In His Own Write* (1964). The book garnered favourable reviews and rapidly ascended into the top ten on *The Times* bestseller's list (*Anthology* 132). It was in this volume that Lennon's interest in Lewis Carroll was first publicly embraced. Carroll's,

> 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
> All mimsy were the Borogoves,
> And the Mome Raths outgrabe. (*Looking Glass* 140)

may be neatly compared with Lennon's,

> Thorg hilly grove and burly ive,
> Big daleys grass and tree
> We clobber ever gallup
> Deaf Ted, Danoota, and me. (*IHOW* 68)

When *In His Own Write* was published Lennon denied familiarity with Edward Lear, though he admitted that he had heard his name, at least (*Anthology* 176). It is unlikely, however, that a child reared in England could have entirely missed exposure to Lear's verse. Shotton suggests that Lennon *was* familiar with Lear at an early age (Davies 24). Be that as it may, after the release of *In His Own Write* Lennon became curious about Lear because of literary reviews that compared their works. It was then that he purchased a volume of Lear's work (*Anthology* 176). In his second book of nonsense, *A Spaniard in the Works* (1965), Lennon includes the curious phrase "Reaching for him with a Knowsley Hall" (15). "Knowsley Hall", near Liverpool, is famous for its association with Edward Lear, who composed his first *Book of Nonsense* there in the 1830s. And in Lennon's second volume of verse his style does at times appear distinctly Learesque:

> And so we growt and bumply
> Till the end of time,
> Humpty dumpty bumply
> Son of Harry Lime.
>
> Bumble Hubledy humbley
> Bumble Tum. (Thank you) (36)

Lennon also admitted to being "very keen" on the nonsense writings of James Thurber and the surreal illustrations of Ronald Searle (*Anthology* 134). A further reference to a "telephant" in *IHOW* (16) suggests the possibility of the influence of another nonsense author, Laura Richards. Richards' poem "Elephony", collected in numerous anthologies of nonsense verse, also contains the word "telephant".

Among the literary critiques of his two volumes of nonsense Lennon was particularly intrigued by Kenneth Allsop's review. Allsop suggested that Lennon would

do well to utilise his unique literary style, and references to his childhood, in his song writing for The Beatles. Lennon considered this review a "significant day in his song writing career" (*Beatles Story*).[2] When interviewed on The Dick Cavett Show in 1971 Lennon was asked about his progress as a songwriter over the years. In his response, the only significant advance Lennon noted was that of bringing his nonsense literature into his song writing:

> I used to write, sort of, like *In His Own Write*, and the books I'd write, like *Spaniard in the Works,* with one half of my brain and the other half I would sort of turn out pop songs, and then, with the advent of Dylan or a few other interesting people I'd meet or hear about I'd suddenly realize that I was being silly, that I should put all my energy into writing the [melody] into the lyric, so then I transferred any [literary] writing ability I had completely to the songs and the song lyric got better and the structure of the words got better and they became as important as the tune then.

Lennon's decision to include his literary nonsense in his song writing would have a profound effect on sixties popular culture, this pivotal swing representing nothing less than the birth of psychedelic rock.

While Lennon's psychedelia was inspired by many sources, one cannot overstate the direct influence of Lewis Carroll on this period of his work. For example, popular culture critic Michael Roos suggests that the influence of Carroll on Lennon is not only apparent in his lyrics, but in his musical production and experimental arrangements. Roos sees Lennon's legendary experiments with music recorded backwards, as featured on the songs "Rain" and "Tomorrow Never Knows" (both 1966), as inspired by the reverse looking-glass concept used in the Alice books, as when Alice must hold the poem "Jabberwocky" up to a mirror in order to read it properly. Lennon also composed "Because" (1969) after listening to Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" backwards (Sheff and Golson 201). While the connection Roos posits may well be correct, he need not have looked to Carroll's texts for his example. Charles Dodgson, in fact, regularly listened to backwards music, having ingeniously rigged several music boxes to perform this very trick (M. Cohen 288).

Another trope of nonsense that Lennon used is the random cut-and-paste method. In Chapter Two we observed Francis Hopkinson in the eighteenth century collecting haphazardly overheard bits of conversation: "I write down these on separate pieces of paper; and then amuse myself with arranging them in such order, as to produce, if possible, some apparent connection of sense…" (*Comical Spirit* 156-58). As noted in Chapter One, Carroll offered writing advice that promoted a similar technique, where the author of a poem should write a sentence, chop and mix the words, and then reassemble them "Just as they chance to fall" (790). In February of 1967 Lennon did exactly that—except not with lyrics, but with a musical phrase. While working on the album *Sgt. Pepper*, and the carnivalesque "For the Benefit of Mr. Kite", Lennon recorded a series of individual organ notes. Then marking the tape where each note began and ended, he took scissors in hand and cut the string of notes into individual pieces, each piece containing exactly one note. Lennon then threw the pile of individual notes into the air. Retrieving the bits, he spliced them back together in the order in which they had chanced to fall. The end result was used as the crescendo to the song ("The Making of Being for the Benefit").

It was at this time that Lennon began referring directly to Alice in his lyrics. There was a popular theory in the 1960s (and beyond) that "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was a song about LSD. Lennon, who was notoriously forthcoming about controversial matters, always denied this rumour. Lennon's son, Julian, who had presented a drawing to his father of a fantastic flying character, dreamt up the phrase "Lucy in the sky with diamonds" (*Anthology* 242). Inspired by this phrase, Lennon turned to Lewis Carroll to inspire him in the composition of a song based on the character his son had invented. Lennon explains,

> The images were from *Alice in Wonderland*. It was Alice in the boat. She is buying an egg and it turns into Humpty Dumpty. The woman serving in the shop turns into a sheep, and the next minute they're rowing in a rowing boat somewhere – and I was visualizing that. (Ibid)

As previously shown (Figure 43, p. 258, this study), when *Sergeant Pepper* was completed, Lennon placed Carroll on the cover. Lennon's "I am the Walrus", released later that same year, is one of his most intriguing and ominous compositions. Lennon comments that "I am the Walrus" is one of his favourite Beatles tracks and that it was based on Carroll's poem, "The Walrus and the Carpenter", from *Through the Looking Glass*; further, Lennon states that the song "became symbolic of me" (*Anthology* 273). Shotton, who was witness to the composition of "I am the Walrus" recalls Lennon asking, "How did that "Dead Dog's Eye" song go Pete?" (qtd. in Davies 114), a reference to a schoolyard nonsense poem both had known as children. Of "I Am the Walrus" Lennon comments, "I was just using the mind that wrote *In His Own Write* to write that song." (Qtd. in Sheff and Golson 194) Lennon was always forthright about his dependence on nonsense and when questioned on various songs comments, for example, on "A Day in the Life" (1967), "It was nonsense verse, really" (*Anthology* 247) and of the track "Come Together" (1969), Lennon remarks, "it's gobbledygook" (qtd. in Sheff and Golson 210). Interviewers and the public were not satisfied with these explanations, assuming that Lennon was being glib in such responses. In fact, he was not.

Throughout 1968 Lennon—and McCartney—continued to utilise nonsense in various recordings, such as "Glass Onion", "All Together Now", and "Ob La Di Ob La Da". Inspired by the absurd lounge act parodies produced by The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band Lennon and McCartney had begun the recording of "You Know My Name, Look up the Number" in 1967, but waited until 1969 to complete the track. "You Know My Name" is outrageous for its excessive randomness, its lack of narrative cohesion and its absurd humour. The Beatles eventually released "You Know My Name" on the flip-side to their final single, "Let it Be" (1970). Nonsensical through and through, "You Know My Name" remains the most overtly humorous piece recorded by the Beatles, and

chronologically speaking, it was the last word offered from them as a group. Like bookends then, "Love Me Do" and "You Know My Name"—side one of their first single and side two of their final single—suggest that the tropes and mores of nonsense were never far from the appeal of The Beatles.

As Lennon moved into his solo career in the 1970s, and as his song writing became more overtly political, he maintained his dedication to nonsense. In "Give Peace a Chance" (1969) he sings:

> Ev'rybody's talking about Ministers,
> Sinisters, Banisters and canisters
> Bishops and Fishops and Rabbis and Pop eyes,
> And bye bye, bye byes
> All we are saying, is give peace a chance.

From his favourite childhood rhymes through to his flowering as a songwriter and war protester, then, the influence of nonsense on John Lennon cannot be understated.

Bob Dylan and Nonsense

Martin Scorsese's recent documentary, *Bob Dylan: No Direction Home*, features a clip of Dylan from the spring of 1966, at the height of his fame. Dylan stands outside a pet shop in Knightsbridge, examining two signs that hang on opposite sides of the shop entrance. Dylan proceeds to read the signs aloud verbatim, first the sign on the right, and then the left. A third, smaller sign that hangs on the door itself and states, "Jumble Sale", is not read aloud:

ANIMALS & BIRDS BOUGHT - OR - SOLD ON COMMISSION	Jumble Sale	WE WILL COLLECT CLIP BATH & RETURN YOUR DOG ---------- KNI 7727 CIGARETTES AND TOBACCO

Dylan then continues to read the signs over several times, each time jumbling the order of the words. With each new rendition Dylan is more animated, so that by the final "reading" he is shouting and standing on one foot. His complete performance is transcribed herein:

> I wanna dog that's gonna collect and clean my bath, return my cigarette, and give tobacco to my animals and give my birds a commission.
>
> I'm looking for somebody to sell my dog, collect my clip, buy my animal and straighten out my bird.
>
> I'm looking for a place to bath my bird, buy my dog, collect my clip, sell me cigarettes, and commission my bath.
>
> I'm looking for a place that is going to collect my commission, sell my dog, burn my bird and sell me to the cigarette.
>
> I'm gonna burn my buy, collect my will, and bath my commission.
>
> I'm looking for a place that's gonna animal my soul, knit my return, bath my foot and collect my dog.
>
> Commission me to sell my animal to the bird to clip, and buy my bath and return me back to the cigarette. (Qtd. in Scorsese, disc 2, 0:15-1:40)

The performance described above was not unusual for Dylan, particularly during his most surreal period, 1965-1966. In this period Dylan frequently indulged in visual pranks and verbal gymnastics, as he did, on another instance, in the now well-known promotional film for his song, "Subterranean Homesick Blues" (1965), in which Dylan holds up large flash cards that feature only the rhyming words of the song, struggling, not all that well, and with comic effect, to keep up with the lyrics as they play.

Dylan's unique relationship to words, chaos and absurdism was developed through exposure along a number of avenues. As for Lennon, rock and roll would have been one of those influences. One of Dylan's earliest compositions, a song he performed in a high-school talent contest, was an ode to his then hero, titled "Little Richard", during performance of which the young teen screamed uncontrollably and unintelligibly until he was laughed off the stage (see Scorsese, disc 1, 10:30-11:09).[3] By all accounts, however, Bob Dylan's most significant influence was Woody Guthrie. Accordingly, any discussion of Dylan's art must commence with a look at that artist whom he admired most. Guthrie was the reason Dylan came to New York at age nineteen. The young folksinger hoped to meet the author of *Bound for Glory* and *Dust Bowl Ballads*. While it is well known that Guthrie was a political activist and a protest singer—a man who has been described as a "patron saint of American rebelliousness" (Klein 469)—it remains largely unrecognised that Guthrie manifested a profound affinity for nonsense. Guthrie, an admirer of Rabelais (Klein 259), frequently peppered his correspondence with nonsensical passages. Guthrie biographer, Joe Klein, remarks:

> Sometimes [Guthrie] seemed drunk with words, playing with them, rhyming them, reversing them, turning them every which way: "vice versa" might become "verse visa" or "visalia Vesuvius" or a dozen other things. (58)

Friend's of Guthrie recall that in casual conversation he would recast names like Herbert Hoover as "Hoobert Heever", "Heebert Hoover" or "Hobert Heeper" (Klein 207) and in

correspondence his writing often trailed off into mad ramblings such as the following, extracted from a letter to his wife:

> Just dizzy. Woozy. Blubberdy. And scrubberdy and rustety, tastlety, I was saying. Fantiffy, fantiffy, fantoy, fantoy. Poodle de doodle de dum dum. Doodle doodle dum. Cockle a doodle daylight... (Qtd. in Klein 318)

Children who grew up living near the adult Guthrie recall that he would spend hours with them creating nonsense songs:

> Ubangi, Ubanger, Youbangie, You
> You bang Teeny and Billy bangs Sue (Qtd. in Klein 194)

At the time Dylan met Guthrie the Okie songwriter was, in fact, best known for his children's songs. Guthrie's two albums of children's music, produced in the mid and late 1940s, had, during the previous fifteen years, consistently outsold his more serious offerings. It was also noted that in the studio Guthrie took the production of children's music far more seriously than he did his political songs (Klein 326). Reviewer Steven Stolder remarks that Guthrie's children's songs, such as "Howjido", "Jiggy Jiggy Bum", "Make A Blobble", and "Bling-Blang" are "as spontaneous and nonsensical as baby babble".

Guthrie also communicated his political protests via nonsense. On stage in 1939 he remarked, "Capitalist papers are so far ahead of the news that they know tonight what happened tomorrow" (qtd. in Klein 155). As a columnist for the communist newspaper, *People's World*, Guthrie adopted the voice of an absurd hillbilly, as in this piece on the national debt:

> I heard a senator on a radeo a-saying that we owed somebody 15 jillion dollars. I don't know their name but I remember the price. Called it a national debit. If the nation is the government, and the government is the people, then I guess the people owes the people, that means I owe me and you owe you, and I forget the regular fee, but if I owe myself something, I would be willing to just call it off... (Qtd. in Klein 129)

People who knew Dylan in his early days as a folksinger noted that he modelled his persona almost completely on Guthrie:

> Dylan decided to remake himself in Woody's image. He learned all the songs, and held his guitar the way Woody did in pictures, and dressed as he thought Woody might (and loved the fact that his hair was curly like Woody's) and invented a rambling past. (Klein 444)

Dylan's first album features a song he wrote for his hero, "Song to Woody", and when it came time for Dylan to make his debut at Gerde's Folk City he performed wearing one of Guthrie's suits that had been given to him (Klein 447). With Dylan's intimate appreciation for Guthrie's life and work it is unlikely that he was unaware of Guthrie's penchant for nonsense. Indeed, in some cases Dylan's nonsense sounds very like Guthrie's, such as this example, sung in the voice of a befuddled hillbilly, from Dylan's "Talkin' World War Three Blues":

> Half of the people can be part right all of the time
> Some of the people can be all right part of the time
> But all of the people can't be all right all of the time
> I think Abraham Lincoln said that. (*Lyrics* 65)

Unlike Lennon, Dylan's name is not normally associated with nonsense literature. If one turns to pages 482 to 487 of *The Chatto Book of Nonsense*, however, the inclusion of the lyrics of several of Dylan's songs indicates that the careful observer acknowledges Dylan's affinity for nonsense. Dylan's early music is richly indebted to nonsense forms in particular, and children's literature in general. The discussion of Dylan's nonsense will make more sense thematically if we first describe his ready interest, generally, in children's literature and the voice of the child. In 1964 Dylan writes:

> Well, I ain't got my childhood
> Or Friends I once did know
> No, I ain't got my childhood
> Or friends I once did know
> But I still got my voice left
> I can take it anywhere I go (*Lyrics*, "Guess I'm Doin' Fine" 108)

According to Dylan then, although his childhood is in the past, the voice of his inner child remains. And so we find that on his most influential albums of the 1960s, Dylan freely conjures Tom Thumb, Little Bo Peep, Cock Robin, Little Jack Horner, the Pied Piper, Cinderella, Aladdin and his Lamp, Robin Hood, the giant from Jack and the Beanstalk and puppets and elves.[4] His most popular single of that era, "Like Rolling Stone", begins "Once upon a time" while the track that follows it, "Tombstone Blues", uses the phrase "happily ever after".[5] [6]

In *Dylan's Visions of Sin* Christopher Ricks confirms, "Dylan loves to make play with nursery rhymes" (123), and he identifies the possible influence of numerous nursery rhymes in Dylan's work, including "Over the Water and Over the Lea", "I Had a Little Nut Tree", "The Cuckoo is a Pretty Bird", "The Maid Was in Her Garden" and "My Mother Said I Never Should / Play With Gypsies in the Wood".[7] Ricks goes so far as to suggest that the phrasing of "Bye Baby Bunting" influenced "The Times They Are A-Changin'" (262). The preponderance of references to nursery rhymes suggests that the influence of children's literature on Dylan was far from insignificant. In 1969 Dylan sings: "Saddle me up my big white goose / Tie me on 'er and turn her loose" ("Country Pie", *Lyrics* 245). Dylan here is picturing himself like Old Mother Goose herself, as she is so often pictured, riding atop a large white goose.

Along with their references to nursery rhymes and fairy tales, Dylan's lyrics in the 1960s often portray a vivid world of madcap carnivalesque escapades set among merry-go-rounds, circuses, organ grinders, jugglers and clowns, magic wands and mermaids. Like the unpredictable world of nonsense poetry, Dylan sings about comic, inexplicable and violent events, such as a paint can that falls on his head ("I Shall Be Free", *Lyrics* 68), or bowling balls that appear out of nowhere rolling down a road and knocking him off his feet ("Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", *Lyrics* 150). In Dylan's topsy-turvy world a fish can

laugh ("When the Ship Comes In", *Lyrics* 93) and a Guernsey cow can give directions to the local jail ("Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", *Lyrics* 148).

The introduction of a talking cow shifts us thematically from children's literature in general to nonsense literature specifically. In August of 1965 interviewers Nora Ephron and Susan Edmiston ask Dylan whether his interest in rock and roll, or his interest in folk music, came first. Dylan responds that he was interested in rock and roll first and adds glibly that "I became interested in folk music because I had to make it somehow" (qtd. in Ephron and Edmiston 63). Dylan rambles for a moment and then shifts to a discussion of why folk music is not "simple". The seeming shift in topic is fascinating because Dylan's answer becomes essentially a defence of his own art. Dylan is now responding to claims, levelled at him in the summer of 1965, that by revelling in absurdism and surrealism, he was somehow abandoning the perceived simplistic forms of folk music. His answer reveals not only that his attraction to folk music continues, but also points to a particular, nonsensical, aspect of folk music that attracts him:

> I thought [folk music] was great music. Certainly I haven't turned my back on it or anything like that... Folk music is the only music where it isn't simple. It's never been simple. It's weird... I've never written anything hard to understand, not in my head anyway, and nothing as far-out as some of the old songs. They were out of sight.
>
> Interviewer: Like what songs? (Ibid)

Dylan offers four titles, two of which are traditional nonsense songs, "Little Brown Dog" and "Nottamun Town" (ibid). "Little Brown Dog", is a stream-of-consciousness folksong that shares a tall-tale quality with "As I was Going to Derby", the nonsense song of which George Washington was so fond. In "Little Brown Dog" the listener learns of a dog that had legs that were "fourteen yards long / his ears they were broad / Round the world in half a day on him I could ride / Sing terry O' day" ("Little Brown Dog"). The song moves along inconsequentially, detailing, for example, a flock of sheep that yield feathers

and give birth to geese. "Nottamun Town" is much like the nonsense verse, "One Bright Day in the Middle of the Night", in that it is based entirely upon temporal anomalies and impossibilia:

> They laughed and they smiled, not a soul did look gay,
> They talked all the while, not a word they did say.
> [...]
> Sat down on a hard, hot cold frozen stone,
> Came a stark-naked drummer a-beating a drum,
> With his heels in his bosom come marching along. ("Nottamun Town")

Folk music historian Lenny Kaye notes,

> [Nottamun Town] was likely a product of the early mummers' plays, in which local actors would blacken their faces and turn their clothing inside out to escape recognition. Bob Dylan was not only influenced by the song's jumble of mixed-up, fantastical lyrics... but also melodically, as he borrowed the tune for "Masters of War". (Kaye)

It is interesting to note the question that prompted Dylan to list these two very nonsensical songs. He had been asked when it was that he became interested in folk music. In listing two traditional nonsense songs in his answer Dylan asserts, inadvertently perhaps, that he became interested in folk music because he felt an affinity for the surreal quality of nonsense songs. Dylan's comment that he has produced "nothing as far-out as some of the old songs" is less to say that traditional songs are actually a step odder than his, and more to assert that the surreal material he was releasing then (1965) was, in fact, connected to a well-established folkloric tradition. Before completing his response Dylan adds that the songs he has mentioned are "full of myth". The interview continues:

> Interviewer: And contradictions?
> Dylan: Yeah, contradictions.
> Interviewer: And chaos
> Dylan: Chaos, watermelon, clocks, everything.
> Interviewer: You wrote on the back of one album "I accept chaos but does chaos accept me."
> Dylan: Chaos is a friend of mine. (Qtd. in Ephron and Edmiston 63-4)

Other traditional nonsense songs that Dylan performed in his early days as a folksinger include regular renditions of "The Muleskinner Blues" and a performance in late 1962 at the Gaslight cafe of "The Cuckoo Bird", a traditional nonsense song popularised by Clarence Ashley. In his review of *The Anthology of American Folk Music* C. J. Schexnayder describes "The Cuckoo Bird":

> The song, although it resembles a linear ballad, resists any straightforward interpretation. It is, instead, filled with strange imagery and phraseology. Musicologist Andrew Hultkrans described it as "an exquisite corpse". A Frankenstein's monster of verse parts exhumed from disparate traditions and sutured into a reanimated whole. (Schexnayder)

In an interview from February 1966, Dylan comments, "traditional music is too unreal to die. It doesn't need to be protected." Then adds, "I think its meaninglessness is holy." (Qtd. in Hentoff, *Playboy*) At the height of his fame, then, Dylan is claiming that "chaos", "unreal[ity]" and "meaninglessness" are the measures through which he determines the value of music.

Indeed, many of Dylan's early songs are chaotic, comic, absurd fantasies that revel in the impossible and disorderly. Such is the case with "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", in which a human "foot comes through the telephone line" (*Lyrics* 150), and "Tombstone Blues", in which "The sun's not yellow, it's chicken" (*Lyrics* 169). In "On the Road Again" Dylan sings,

> Well, I woke up in the morning
> There's frogs in my socks
> Your mama, she's a-hidin'
> Inside the icebox
> Your daddy walks in wearin'
> A Napoleon Bonaparte mask… (*Lyrics* 147)

"On the Road Again" and other Dylan compositions from this period, such as "I Shall Be Free" and "Ballad of a Thin Man", are overtly nonsensical. While there have been many and various readings of "Ballad of Thin Man", including John Lennon's belief that the

song was about suicide, I cannot see it as anything other than as wild, random, comedic, nonsense:

> Now you see this one-eyed midget
> Shouting the word "NOW"
> And you say, "For what reason?"
> And he says, "How?"
> And you say, "What does this all mean?"
> And he screams back, "You're a cow
> Give me some milk" (*Lyrics* 175)

Critics have almost unanimously missed Dylan's connection to nonsense. An exception is Mike Marqusee, who comments in *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Bob Dylan's Art* on the atmosphere that pervaded Dylan's "Basement Tapes" sessions of the late 1960s:

> The freedom of the Basement Tapes allowed Dylan to indulge his appetite for nonsense to the full…. The playfulness, the casual improvisatory approach can be heard in the dry babble of "Tiny Montgomery:"
>
> > Scratch your dad
> > Do the bird
> > Suck that pig
> > And bring it on home
>
> In the Basement tapes Dylan adopts a relaxed attitude toward the grotesque, the bizarre, the inexplicable. (216)

Dylan's language invites comparisons to nonsense literature in numerous ways. His phrases, such as "jingle jangle morning" and his description of a "humdinger, folksinger, deadringer, for a thing-a-majigger", and playful expressions, such as "Just a-fumblin' and a-mumblin'" "He's a linkin' and a-slinkin'"… "He wiggled and he wobbled",[8] reveal a kinship to nonsense verses in which sound often generates its own meaning. Dylan also engages in the creation of portmanteau words such as "Motorpsycho" (*Lyrics* 122) and "Winterlude" (*Lyrics* 261). And he uses puns freely, as in the double entendre intended in his notorious chorus, "everybody must get stoned" (*Lyrics* 191) and in "love to spend the night with Peggy Day" (*Lyrics* 241).

Occasionally Lewis Carroll hovers spectrally in Dylan's creations. Inanimate objects that come to life, for example, can inhabit Dylan's fantasy worlds. Like Rabelais

and Carroll, Dylan turns playing cards into living characters, such as The Queen of Spades in “I Want You”, the jacks and the queens in “Farewell Angelina”, “Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts” and the Joker in “All Along the Watchtower” and “Jokerman”. And The White Knight’s indignant belief that a song can be named one thing, but called another (Carroll 224), supplies a source for Dylan’s curious habit of titling a song with words that do not appear in the lyrics, and that do not in any way refer to the subject of the song. One well-known example is “Rainy Day Woman #12 X 35”. The title of the song is “Rainy Day Woman #12 X 35”, but it’s called “everybody must get stoned”. Perhaps in emulation of Dylan, other sixties era songwriters, such as Arlo Guthrie and Michael Nesmith, adopted the habit of using titles that do not reference the lyrics of their songs in any way.

While it has often been asserted that Bob Dylan had a profound effect on John Lennon’s song writing, critics have neglected to note that Lennon’s book of nonsense inspired Dylan. When asked if he was influenced in any way by The Beatles Dylan remarks,

> ...As for Lennon, well, I was encouraged by his book [*In His Own Write*]. Or the publishers were encouraged, because they asked me to write a book and that’s how *Tarantula* came about. (Qtd. in Rosenbaum 127-28)

During 1965 and 1966 Dylan worked at the composition of *Tarantula.* A brief quote from page one should suffice to give a feel for the style:

> aretha/ crystal jukebox queen of hymn & him diffused in drunk transfusion wound would heed sweet soundwave crippled & cry salute to oh great particular el dorado reel & ye battered personal god but she cannot she the leader of whom when ye follow, she cannot she has no back she cannot... (*Tarantula*, 1971 1)

In 2004 Scribner released a revised edition of *Tarantula*, the rear cover of which advises that the book “captures the tone and spirit of the turbulent times in which it was written” *Tarantula* 2004). The thought here seems to be that a lack of adherence to narrative

conventions is expressive of the social turbulence of the sixties. In a March 1965 interview Dylan comments on the difficulty in finding an appropriate title for the project as well as on the method by which he has been composing a "completely free" text:

> Dylan: The book can't really be titled, that's the kind of book it is... I haven't really gotten into writing a completely free song [yet]. Hey you dig something like cut ups? I mean, like William Burroughs?
> Interviewer: Yeah, there's that cat in Paris who published a book with no pagination. The book comes in a box and you throw it in the air and, however it lands, you read it like that.
> Dylan: Yeah, that's where it's at. (Qtd. in Robbins 45)

The method of composition described above, as has been noted several times previously, is precisely the curious method recommended by Francis Hopkinson and Lewis Carroll, and which John Lennon will soon use himself.

While DeKoven misidentifies the genre, she correctly groups Lennon's *In His Own Write* with Dylan's *Tarantula*, claiming that they are specimens, as she terms it, of the "comic fantastic." Considering what the two volumes have in common DeKoven notes,

> In this writing the determinate, sense-making function of communicative language is disrupted, replaced by open-ended, polysemous, suggestive linguistic juxtapositions, which are subversively, and utopically, liberatory (117).

With Dylan, however, it is more than just his writing that leads one to consider the mores of nonsense. There is also a case to be made that in his public demeanour Dylan personified nonsense. Dylan's onstage visual persona, for example, provokes a comparison to the aesthetics of nonsense illustrations. As mentioned previously, nonsense illustrations most typically appear to be hastily scribbled, a few black and white lines scrawled, apparently, without much thought or care (Cammaerts 67), as in the artwork of Edward Lear, G. K. Chesterton, James Thurber, John Lennon and Shel Silverstein. Compare this aesthetic to a description of Dylan's live appearance at a U. C. Berkeley in 1964: The form of the show itself is described as "haphazard" with a distinct "lack of

props and dramatic lighting" (Farina 2). One reporter notes, "Dylan appeared as usual in well-worn clothes, said whatever occurred to him at the time and sang his songs in no particular order." Another interviewer reports to Dylan the criticism that he dresses in a style that is "self-consciously oddball and defiantly sloppy" (Hentoff, *Playboy*).

And while Dylan's style and stage demeanour remind us of the typical characterisation of nonsense illustrations, we find in interviews that Dylan often plays the part of the nonsensical jester:

> Interviewer: Do you paint?
> Dylan: Yeah, sure.
> Interviewer: What sort of painting?
> Dylan: I painted my house. (Qtd. in Henshaw 58)

> Dylan: I do know what my songs are about.
> Interviewer: And what's that?
> Dylan: Oh, some are about four minutes; some are about five...
> (Qtd. in Hentoff, *Playboy*)

> Interviewer: ... what made you decide to go the rock-'n'-roll route?
> Dylan: Carelessness. I lost my one true love. I started drinking. The first thing I know, I'm in a card game. Then I'm in a crap game. I wake up in a pool hall. Then this big Mexican lady drags me off the table, takes me to Philadelphia. [And then, after a multi page nonsensical extravaganza...] The first guy that picked me up asked me if I wanted to be a star. What could I say?
> Interviewer: And that's how you became a rock-'n'-roll singer?
> Dylan: No, that's how I got tuberculosis. (Ibid)

Bob Dylan, then, from his influences such as Woody Guthrie, nonsensical folk songs, and later, John Lennon, to his writing style and public persona, was an artist steeped in the traditions and mores of nonsense. As such, and as the Scribner flap copy to *Tarantula* claims, Bob Dylan, was, [like John Lennon], eminently well equipped to "capture the tone and spirit of the turbulent times in which [his work] was written" (Dylan, *Tarantula*, 2004, back cover).

Dr. Seuss and Nonsense

The nonsensical qualities of Lennon and Dylan's works share many qualities with the works of Dr. Seuss. In *Dr. Seuss: American Icon* Philip Nel defends Seuss' texts as works of literary nonsense. Nel covers Seuss' phraseology, his use of portmanteaus such as "Gargel-orum" or "Grinch" and his fascination with the arbitrary qualities of symbol and meaning. Nel concludes by dubbing Seuss America's "Laureate of Nonsense" (15). One reason Nel undertook such a task—that of locating Seuss firmly in the nonsense tradition—is because "purists" of nonsense have not universally regarded Seuss' works as nonsensical. It may be argued, for example, that the traditional narrative constructions of many of Seuss' stories preclude his inclusion in the canon of nonsense literature. Many of his tales have clear beginnings, middles and endings, and often come with a subtle, but intended, moral. As argued in Chapter One, however, nonsense is not so much a genre in need of definition, independent of all other genres, as it is a collection of devices, tropes and imagery that may be disassembled and reassembled for use in multiple genres. Seuss should be viewed as a traditional storyteller who depended heavily on the devices, tropes and imagery of nonsense.

As is the case for his contemporaries, Lennon and Dylan, Seuss' texts often revel in wild and surreal inventions, such as the letters that come after Z in *On Beyond Zebra*:

Figure 45

Nel suggests that Seuss' unpredictable and strategic use of shifting meter and rhythm is adroitly yet chaotically performed so that it "enhances the accretion of ridiculousness…" and amplifies the outrageousness of his scenarios (18-19). Seuss, Nel continues, is a creator of "illogical extremes". Nel's defence of Seuss as a creator of nonsense is "concrete and fastidious" (to quote Lear) and since an elaborate defence would merely reiterate Nel's conclusions, none is offered here. Briefly, however, I will note that Seuss often depends on impossibilia, as in *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish,* in which he asks, "Did you ever fly a kite in bed? Did you ever walk with ten cats on your head?" (50) or in his *ABC* book which features a camel casually walking upside-down across the ceiling (*Dr. Seuss' ABC*). Such topsy-turvy inversions in his texts will be further highlighted in the discussion of the carnivalesque later in this chapter. His language games, some of them intended as reading exercises, are notoriously random or outlandish. In *Hop on Pop* the child reader is asked, "What does this say?"

Seehemewe
Patpuppop
Hethreetreebee
Tophopstop (64)

Requiring brief defence, perhaps, is the notion that Dr. Seuss books were at the height of their cultural importance during the Long 1960s. Though Seuss' publishing career stretches over fifty years, I am in agreement with Nel that there is a crucial period to his output (5; 85). Nel dates Seuss' crucial turning point to 1957, when both *The Cat in the Hat* and *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* were both published. Nel writes, "Dr. Seuss, as we think of him today, begins in 1957, the year he became an icon of children's literature" (168). I would push Nel's date back a few years and recommend 1954's *Horton Hears a Who* as the crucial moment. Until 1953 Seuss was juggling three careers. He was a children's book author, a filmmaker and an advertising executive. Seuss dropped his other two commitments in 1953 (Morgan 140) and the result was a significant improvement in his work. Prior to 1954 and after 1974, Seuss' works are, with few exceptions, less effective. Within this crucial period Seuss released his best-remembered titles, including *Horton Hears a Who!* (1954) *On Beyond Zebra* (1955), *If I Ran the Circus* (1956). *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957), *Yertle the Turtle* (1958), *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960), *The Sneeches* (1961), *Dr. Seuss' Sleep Book* (1962). *Dr. Seuss' ABC* (1962), *Hop on Pop* (1962), *Fox in Socks* (1965), *I Had Trouble in Getting to Solla Sollew* (1965), *The Lorax*, (1971), *Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now!* (1972), *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are?* (1973), and *There's a Wocket in My Pocket!* (1974). With the possible exceptions of his first and final books, *And to Think That I Saw it On Mulberry Street* (1937) and *Oh the Places You'll Go* (1990), none among Seuss' other twenty-three titles for children compete with the popularity, or critical appraisal, of the books listed above. *The Butter Battle Book* (1984) is more notorious than popular, eliciting numerous poor reviews and sceptical glances from educators, critics and children alike. 1954 to 1974 is, not coincidentally, the period that many would describe as the crucial years of

rock and roll as well as being the era of social unrest termed "The Long 1960s". Like Dylan and Lennon, Seuss was a sensation in the 1960s, and also like Dylan and Lennon, his works resonated with nonsense forms that endeared him to his public.

SECTION II: POLITICS AND 1960S NONSENSE

Politics in Lennon, Dylan and Seuss

It is often mistakenly asserted that The Beatles avoided making political comments until 1966, when they first announced in an interview that they were against the UK's support of the American war in Vietnam. Two years previous to this announcement Lennon had published *IHOW*, in which, we read:

> You Might Well Arske
> Why were Prevelant ze Gaute, unt Docker Adenoid getting so friendly? You might well arsk. Why was Seldom Loyled sagged? Why did Harrassed macMillion go golphing mit Bod Hobe? Why is Frank Cunnings and the T.U.C. against the Common Margate? You might well arsk. Why is Duck of Edincalvert a sailing mit Udda Fogs? Why did Priceless Margarine unt Bony Armstrove give Jamaika away? You might well arsk. Why won't Friendly Trumap give his Captive his pension. (55)

Lennon recalls that critics looked at *IHOW* and "[They said] 'he's just satirising the normal things, like the Church and the State,' which is what I did" (*Anthology* 176). Lennon's general attitude to the news events of early 1964 suggest that he was suspicious of authority and government, and his suggestion that "You Might Well Arske" indicates that he thought it would be a fine thing if his audience were suspicious as well.

In other passages from *IHOW* Lennon shows himself aware of, and opinionated about, the most significant political issues of the era. In "A Surprise for Little Bobby" a young soldier gets his hand shot off in a war—as a birthday surprise (70). In "Partly Dave" Lennon describes a character who is unaware of "the coloured problem", and asks

the reader, "would you like your daughter to marry one?" (15). And in "Scene Three Act One" a character comments, "Yer all the same you rich fat Bourgies, workin' uz poor workers to death and getting all the gelt and going to France for yer 'olidays" (39). In the same volume the reader is also introduced to "A big fat catipalyst boss" (38). While these last two quotes are offered humorously, they nevertheless reveal Lennon's emerging socialist tendencies, an ideology to which he would give full vent in the early 1970s in such songs as "Power to the People".

In *ASITW* Lennon's commitment to social comment continues. In one passage he writes:

> I fixed his breakfast of bogard, a gottle of geer, a slice of jewish bread, three eggs with little liars on, two rashers of bacon, a bowel of Rice Krustchovs, a fresh grapeful, mushrudes, some freed tomorrows, a basket of fruits, and a cup of teens. (33)

As affirmed in Chapter One, like "High Diddle Diddle", we cannot call this cogent social commentary. It is nonsense. But like the best nonsense literature the above passage is highly suggestive by its juxtaposition of key phrases such as "Bogard", "little liars", "Krustchovs", "mushrudes", "freed tomorrows" and a "a cup of teens". No particular meaning is obvious, but if one stops to consider the signifiers and the order in which they are placed a "reading" of sorts, may emerge. Can this passage suggest that Khrushchev is a little liar and that the threat of a mushroom cloud is merely a boggart, and that a couple of teens could be involved in a free tomorrow? Perhaps. As asserted in Chapter One, an author of a piece of nonsense need not have meant anything specific, but a reader may work with his suggestive juxtapositions and solve the "riddle".

Elsewhere in *ASITW* Lennon suggests that M.P.s means "Mentals of Parliament" (41), announces that "Harassed Wilsod won the General Erection with a very small marjorie over the Torchies" (40) and provides an illustration of a toilet with a sign reading "Vote for harrold" hanging above it (41).

Lennon will continue to use nonsense in his political activities. Lennon described the song "Come Together" as "a campaign song" written in support of the radical Timothy Leary, but adds, as noted earlier, "it's gobbledygook" (qtd. in Sheff and Golson 210). Even when performing his most public political manoeuvres, such as returning his MBE, Lennon could not do so without including a non sequitur. His letter to Queen Elizabeth reads,

> I am returning this MBE in protest against Britain's involvement in the Nigeria-Biafra thing, against our support of America in Vietnam and against Cold Turkey slippin down the charts. (*Anthology* 184)

At Lennon's and Ono's "Bed Ins" (which were intended to be protests of the Vietnam war, and which will be discussed in more detail shortly) nonsense was a fixture, as evidenced, for example, by the pun "Hair Peace", which hung on the wall behind the couple. At the second Bed In in Montreal, reporters ask Lennon what President Nixon should do with regards Vietnam. Lennon response is a typical play with words: "He should declare peace." (Qtd. in Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:30:43-47) Lennon's popular anti-war chant "Give Peace a Chance", as noted earlier, communicated via nonsense: "Ministers, / Sinisters, Banisters and canisters / Bishops and Fishops and Rabbis and Pop eyes..." (Lennon, "Give Peace a Chance"). In Washington, "Give Peace a Chance" was taken up by war protesters, and according to one witness, "the song became the national anthem of the anti-war movement."[9] A film from 1969 appears to confirm this, as hundreds of thousands of protesters stand outside the white house singing "Give Peace a Chance" (Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:40:05-41:05). It was in this period that Lennon had the honour of being placed on Richard Nixon's enemies list. Publisher Felix Dennis comments, "The authorities were terrified of him." (Qtd. in Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:58:13-16) As revealed in David Leaf and John Scheinfeld's documentary *The U.S. vs. John Lennon: Artist. Humanitarian. National Threat*, Nixon instructed immigration officials to

find some way to have Lennon deported. After five years of deportation proceedings Nixon's inappropriate meddling in the case was revealed (see Leaf and Scheinfeld 01:24:59-25:22), the case was dismissed, and Lennon was allowed to stay in the USA. On 27 July 1976, the day he received his green card, Lennon was asked if he bore any grudges against the politicians who tried to get him deported. Lennon's answer is typical, his comment at once nonsensical and political. Quoting from Groucho Marx Lennon even manages a sly reference to Nixon's removal from power: "No, I believe time wounds all heels" (qtd. in Leaf and Scheinfeld 01:31:00-31:06).

Thus it was through nonsense that Lennon expressed his political voice. Lennon's "Duck of Edincalvert" in *IHOW*, his "Rice Krustchovs" in *ASITW*, his "gobeldy gook" in "Come Together", his "Declare Peace" comment to Nixon at the Bed In, his "Bishops and Fishops" in "Give Peace a Chance" and his spoonerism, "time wounds all heels" as he succeeded in his struggle to stay in the United States, each confirm the same general principle: that nonsense was Lennon's preferred political language.

Organizing a view of Dylan's political "platform" in the early and mid sixties is an interesting assignment. Dylan addresses four major contemporary concerns: civil rights, communist fear mongering, anti-war sentiment and the more general category of songs that champion the downtrodden. In each category, Dylan presents his case in both straightforward and nonsensical terms. He sings, for example, unenigmatically about the civil rights movement in "The Death of Emmett Till", "Oxford Town", "Maggie's Farm" and "Blowin' in the Wind". In the opening track to *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1962) Dylan straightforwardly asks, "How many years can some people exist / Before they're allowed to be free?" "Blowin' in the Wind", *Lyrics* 53). At the opposite end of the album, on the final track, however, is a nonsense song entitled, oddly enough, "I Shall Be Free". "I Shall Be Free" is a series of disconnected absurd vignettes involving anyone from

President Kennedy to Mr. Clean. None of the verses appear to relate to one another in any relevant way. In one verse we meet a politician:

> Now the man on the stand, he wants my vote.
> He's running for office on a ballot note.
> He's out there preachin' in front of the steeple,
> Tellin' me he loves all kinds of people.
> He's eatin' bagels.
> He's eatin' pizza.
> He's eatin' chitlins (*Freewheeling*, Track 13) [10]

In an attempt to align himself with various ethnic groups this insincere politician gorges himself in a way that is reminiscent of Lear's numerous old men who gorged themselves, and of Rabelais' overindulgent Pantagruel. In one of the verses that follow in "I Shall Be Free" a can of black paint falls on the narrator's head. Hoping to clean the paint off he heads in to town to "get a scrub", but is told that he may only sit in "the back of the tub". The implication is that his black colour forces him to the back, exactly as African Americans were cordoned off to the back of the bus in the American south. The two songs, "Blowin' in the Wind" and "I Shall Be Free" both clearly contain comments on politics and the civil rights movement, but in its disconnected absurd structure, "I Shall Be Free" engages the issues in strictly nonsensical terms.

In the second category of political songs we find Dylan incensed by the fear mongering of those threatened by the "evil" spectre of communism. He addresses that concern without ambiguity in songs such as "Talkin' John Birch Paranoid Blues", "Playboys and Playgirls" and "Motorpsycho Nightmare". "Motorpsycho Nightmare", featured on the album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964), is a narratively cohesive comedic romp. The protagonist, a young man, attempts to upset an older authority figure. In order to provoke the gentleman the protagonist remarks, "I told him I like Fidel Castro and his beard" (*Lyrics* 123). This revelation infuriates the older gentleman, who grabs a rifle, and a heated chase ensues. In reacting so extremely the older gentleman reveals

himself to be, in no uncertain terms, a bit of a fool. This comedic, but straightforward, comment on communist fear mongering is preceded, two tracks earlier, by the song "I Shall Be Free No. 10". Like the earlier "I Shall Be Free", "I Shall Be Free No. 10" is a series of absurd, disconnected vignettes. In one verse Dylan imagines,

> I don't know, but I've been told
> The Streets in Heaven are lined with gold
> I ask you how things could get much worse
> If the Russians happen to get there first
> Wowee! Pretty scary! (*Lyrics* 123)

The verse that precedes this verse concerns a random assemblage of numbers and images of Cassius Clay. The verse that follows it concerns the question of the narrator's daughter's marriage to Barry Goldwater. In its isolated randomness, the verse above, concerning Heaven and the Russians, must be addressed therefore on its own without reference to any narrative. In the absurdity of a race for the gold in heaven, Dylan has at once confronted communist fear mongering, capitalist greed and religious righteousness.

Dylan's straightforward and clearly articulated anti-war chants include "Let Me Die in My Footsteps", "John Brown", "With God on Our Side", and "Masters of War", a verse of which runs:

> You fasten the triggers
> For the others to fire
> Then you set back and watch
> When the death count gets higher
> You hide in your mansion
> As young people's blood
> Flows out of their bodies
> And is buried in the mud (*Lyrics* 55)

"Masters of War" is a fearless and direct attack on those who benefit from war. What many listeners did not realise, however, is that the melody for "Masters of War" was not Dylan's own. The melody was taken from the nonsense song, "Nottemun Town",[11] mentioned previously. "Nottemun Town", which revels in temporal anomalies and

impossibilia, is a curious choice for a melody, and why Dylan chose it remains unknown. While Dylan may simply have found the music haunting, it remains possible also that the image of the bizarre drummer with "his feet in his bosom" featured in "Nottemun Town" might have reminded Dylan of a mangled casualty of war, or if not, the absurdity of "Nottemun Town" may have gracefully suggested an attendant absurdity, the absurdity of war. The juxtaposition between a clearly articulated pacifist manifesto and an absurd nonsense song that revels in temporal anomalies reminds us again of the example from the eighteenth century in which the pacifistic "Soldier's Dream" shares the page with the nonsensical "Cabinet of Wonders", the two functioning as an ensemble by their proximity, the one lending meaning to the other.

While only Dylan himself and other students of folk music would have recognised the melody of "Nottemun Town" it remains true that "Masters of War" has a more obvious nonsensical cousin. Once Dylan's album, *Freewheelin'* (1962), is flipped, the listener discovers "Talkin' World War Three Blues", a song in which the protagonist dreams what life would be like in New York City if he were the sole survivor of a nuclear war, and then relates this dream to his psychiatrist. As the patient nears the end of his description of the dream the psychiatrist interrupts and announces that he has had the same dream. He adds that his was "a little different you see / I dreamt that the only person left after the war was me / I didn't see you around." Shortly after this exchange Dylan concludes with the aforementioned quote:

> Half of the people can be part right all of the time
> Some of the people can be all right part of the time
> But all of the people can't be all right all of the time
> I think Abraham Lincoln said that (*Lyrics* 65)

Both “Masters of War” and “Talkin’ World War Three Blues” are effective anti-war chants. In the former Dylan directly confronts the greed of the warmonger in no uncertain terms. In the later he subtly posits the absurdity of war generally, by juxtaposing the horror of war with nonsensical passages.

A remaining group of Dylan’s political songs champion the lowly and downtrodden. The lyrics of these songs are often engaged in a discussion of the divide between rich and poor and/or depict a corrupt system riddled with unfair practices. “Long Ago, Far Away”, “Seven Curses”, “Only a Pawn in Their Game”, and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll”, are examples of this type in which the narrative is straightforward and clear. “Seven Curses” concerns a corrupt judge who takes advantage of the desperation of a young woman, forcing sex upon her and killing her father. Another song, “Who Killed Davey Moore”, is an exploration of a system infested with unaccountability and in which the choices of unthinking individuals lead to the death of young boxer. While “Seven Curses” is straightforwardly rendered, “Who Killed Davey Moore” is styled on the nonsense poem, “Cock Robin”:

> Who killed Davey Moore
> Why an’ what’s the reason for?
> “Not I” said the referee…
> Who killed Davey Moore
> Why an’ what’s the reason for?
> “Not us” said the angry crowd… (*Lyrics* 73)

“Seven Curses” and “Who Killed Davey Moore” were both featured alongside one another in Dylan’s live performances in 1962. In all his platforms of protest, then, Dylan equally presents his case in terms both narratively cohesive and nonsensical.

Like Lennon, in his public persona Dylan asserts that political questions are best confronted with absurdity. Dylan would only very rarely answer a political question with a logical answer. Typically, his responses were in the style of that given in this 1966 exchange:

> Interviewer: Well, let's suppose that you were the President. What would you accomplish during your first thousand days?
> DYLAN: ... the first thing I'd do is probably move the White House. Instead of being in Texas, it'd be on the East Side in New York. McGeorge Bundy would definitely have to change his name, and General McNamara would be forced to wear a coonskin cap and shades. I would immediately rewrite The Star-Spangled Banner...
> (Qtd. in Hentoff, *Playboy*)

Seuss political leanings are readily gleaned from his texts for children written during the aforementioned "crucial" period, 1954-1974. Considering how very subversive Seuss' texts were in this era, Selma Lanes, in *Down The Rabbit Hole* concludes, "It is entirely possible that history will judge Seuss as the Patrick Henry of today's nursery set" (Lanes 87). Seuss, in fact, has had no known impact on any law, as a Patrick Henry may have. Seuss' revolution is located in the mind, rather, and the long list of ways in which Seuss texts have been used to support radical or liberal political causes is impressive. As always, Philip Nel's research is exhaustive in this regard. Nel details the many and varied ways in which Seuss' texts have been interpreted, appropriated and misappropriated by political concerns. He comments, "In the public imagination, Seussian rhyme has become a popular mode for social commentary" (170), adding, "Seuss characters… are shorthand for political conversation" (173) and that the Cat in the Hat is "a wily subversive" (183).

Any discussion of Seuss' politics should be preceded by an acknowledgment that he was a government-trained propagandist. As Richard Minear has ably documented in *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*, Seuss worked for the U.S. government during World War II as a member of The Signal Corps stationed at "Fort Fox", serving in the film propaganda unit that included Chuck Jones and Frank Capra. Throughout his life Seuss maintained an active participation in national politics and local government, whether it was fighting fascism in the 1930s and 40s, campaigning to ban roadside advertising in California in 1956 (Morgan 146-47), editorializing on the economic crisis in the 1970s,[12] or creating

anti-drug messages in the 1980s (Nel 59). In the "Long 1960s", then, Seuss was as politically aware and politically motivated as he always was and would be. It so happens, though, that in "The Long 1960s" Seuss' combination of nonsensical strategies and subversive politics struck a chord with the times. Seuss was never quite so politically in-tune with his public as he was then.

In *Horton Hears a Who* (1954), in which a planet the size of a speck of dust succeeds in making its voice heard to the universe beyond, Seuss teaches, "A person's a person no matter how small". This message, it has often been claimed, coming as it did, within twelve months of the birth of the civil rights movement, struck a serendipitous chord. The text expresses the belief that even the "smallest" voice can turn the tide, as it is the smallest person who adds a tiny "Yopp" to the chorus, and saves the planet. The message that every voice counts, even the voices of those who might feel oppressed, or normally incapable of being "heard", was heady, subversive politics in the mid and late 1950s, especially in the wake of Rosa Park's defiant "yopp", as she refused to give up her bus seat to a Caucasian.

A similar championing of the lowly, via a "First Shall Be Last / Last First" message is endorsed in *Yertle the Turtle* (1958). Yertle is a tyrant king who has built his "empire" literally on the backs of all the other turtles. Standing on top of a pile of turtles, Yertle rules the land for as far as he can see. In *Yertle* the character Mack, described as a "Plain little turtle", calls up to the king:

> I know up on top you are seeing great sights,
> but down at the bottom we, too, should have rights.

Mack, the seemingly insignificant individual on the bottom of the social hierarchy is eventually able to topple the arrogant king Yertle. The closing couplet of *Yertle the Turtle* would have seemed particularly apropos during the civil rights movement:

> And the turtles, of course… all the turtles are free
> As turtles and maybe, all creatures should be.

Seuss continues on this theme in *The Sneeches* (1961). In this story Seuss teaches that it is best not to judge by appearances. The Sneeches are involved in a class war based on an identifying mark—a star on the belly. The star is used to denote the upper class. In the end, Seuss' story of levelling finds all the Sneeches on equal footing, their visual markings rendered hopelessly confused. Seuss himself saw *The Sneeches* as influenced by the Nazi persecution of Jews, and coming as it did just before the Eichmann trial of 1961-62 Seuss had hit yet another serendipitous chord. For those who missed the Jewish allegory it was just as easy to read *The Sneeches* taking a stance in a pro civil-rights polemic, wherein the opposing colours—black and white—were represented in Seuss story by a similar visual key, the presence of a star (or lack there of). At the end of the story we learn that,

> That day they decided that Sneeches are Sneeches
> And no kind of Sneech is the best on the beaches. (*Sneeches,* 24)

Even a book as innocuous in appearance as the early reader *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* (1960) has been adapted as an anthem to diversity. Nel reminds us of Johnny Valentine's *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads*, a children's book—pseudonymously attributed to "Alyson Wonderland"—that advocates same sex partnering. Nel explains why this use of *One Fish* is appropriate:

> Even though *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish* is not one of Seuss' "message" books, it could be read as embracing diversity and therefore as an apt inspiration for *One Dad, Two Dads Brown Dads Blue Dads*…[Seuss writes] "Some are fast. / And some are slow. / Some are high. / And some are low. / Not one of them is like another. / Don't ask why. / Go ask your mother." The matter-a-fact tone in which he enumerates these differences and the line "Don't ask why" suggests that variety ought to be accepted. (171-72)

Like Dylan, Seuss also confronts the spectre of nuclear war. *Horton Hears a Who* strikes a particularly resonant chord in this regard. Seuss dedicated the book "to Mitsugi

Nakamura of Kyoto Japan". As Horton struggles to save the planet from annihilation, (the planet is the size of a speck of dust), it falls from his grasp. The miniscule size of the planet, like an atom, and all the lives that depend on its existence, draw clear allusions to the atom bombs dropped on Japan. The Mayor of the miniature planet explains that when the planet hit the ground "we landed so hard that our clocks have all stopped". It was widely reported that in Hiroshima all the clocks in the city stopped at precisely the moment when the atom bomb exploded—a few seconds past 8:15 a.m. The juxtaposition of a dedication mentioning Japan, combined with this well-known imagery of nuclear war, becomes more suggestive when Horton exclaims,

> I know there's a person down there. And, what's more,
> Quite likely there's two. Even three. Even four.
> Quite likely…
> … a family, for all that we know!
> A family with children just starting to grow.

Horton's perspective, looking down at the tiny planet, peering through the clouds and squinting to see its tiny inhabitants, is reminiscent of the films of the Enola Gay, the U.S. plane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Flying at high altitude to avoid detection, the films of the bomb-drop over Hiroshima provide a vision of Japan as tiny, distant, and far, far below, just like Horton's view of Whoville. And, of course, the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki destroyed all, including families "with children just starting to grow". In this context it has been possible for some critics such as Ruth MacDonald, to read *Horton Hears a Who* as history re-written, positing Horton, the "American", as the saviour of Japan (MacDonald 75). While this reading may have some merit, it remains also true that Seuss could have been simply tapping into a more local fear. *Horton Hears a Who* strikes a chord with the widespread paranoia that the Soviets would be dropping nuclear bombs on the United States at any moment. In the mid 1950s, the era of "duck

and cover" films, fears of nuclear annihilation were widespread and ever-present in popular culture.

Seuss would return to the imagery of nuclear war again. Louis Menand, in *The New Yorker,* examines *The Cat in Hat Comes Back* (1959), in terms of the red scare, pointing out that the plot of *Comes Back* involves the spread of a pink stain. Menand here reads "pink" as pinko, commie, or red. The analogy may seem far-fetched until you note that the problem of the spread of pink is solved by "Voom!", a tiny atom-like magic dot that eradicates the colour pink entirely (*Comes Back* 59). *Comes Back,* then, contains a satire of the arms race that anticipates the more focused attack offered in *The Butter Battle Book* (1984).

In 1965, at the dawn of public criticism of the war in Vietnam, Seuss published *I had Trouble In Getting to Solla Sollew*. *Solla Sollew* is not about Vietnam. Its main purpose is to suggest that trouble cannot be avoided in life. There is a passage in *Solla Sollew*, however, that would have made warmongers grimace. The protagonist, a young man searching for a perfect life, finds himself suddenly drafted by an incompetent and purposeless military.

> There's a war going on! And it's time that you knew
> Every lad in the land has his duty to do…
> So get in line, you're a Private First Class.

The young man joins the army, but at a crucial moment the military unaccountably retreats and leaves him stranded in a strange foreign land. This passage, offered to 1960s America shortly before young men began publicly burning their draft cards, suggests that it might be unwise to trust the military, and also suggests that war is an arbitrary and absurd practice.

Moving from civil rights, nuclear threats, Vietnam and on to the problem of capitalism, Seuss takes two stabs at consumerist culture. *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*

(1957) is, if nothing else, an attack on consumerism. The Grinch's realisation, "Maybe Christmas... doesn't come from a store…", must have irked the advertisers of the 1966 animated television version. Commercialism is thus rendered suspect and, by extension, so is consumerism's parent ideology, capitalism. The point is argued more overtly in Seuss' 1971 environmentalist tract, *The Lorax*. *The Lorax* is a pointed critique of the practices of big business. Industrial greed is stripping the land of its trees, beauty and health, thus rendering the planet uninhabitable. The Lorax himself, an odd creature that pops out of a recently decapitated tree, announces, "I speak for the trees". Published one year before the first Earth Day celebration, the contemporary political message is clearly driven home when the Lorax comments, "I hear things are just as bad up in Lake Erie", Lake Erie being at the time a centre of environmentalist concerns. In the 1960s, Lake Erie was officially pronounced "dead". An algae introduced by humans had killed off the dominant plant species, covering beaches in a slimy moss and killing off native aquatic species by soaking up all of the oxygen.[13] The environmental message of the Lorax continues to resonate today. The Marion National Forest in South Carolina has been renamed The Dr. Seuss Lorax Forest (Nel 174).

When thinking politically about Seuss it is also important to consider his two most popular titles, *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) and *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960). While these two stories are not overtly political, both books are widely understood now as subversive in significant ways, particularly *The Cat in the Hat*. *The Cat in the Hat* features two children who let a wild and bizarre cat creature into their home. This Cat proceeds to turn the house upside down, breaking all the rules normally imposed on children. Among his activities are flying kites indoors and eating cake in the bathtub. At the end of this fantastic tale, as many critics have pointed out, Seuss appears to suggest that there are certain things a child may not want to tell his/her parents. Concerning whether or not the

children should confess their adventure to their mother, Seuss asks, “What would you do?” (61) There is no correct answer offered or suggested and the riddle is left ambiguous. One implication that a child might garner from this ending, however, is that parents may not understand if you try to tell them what you’ve been up to—particularly when you’ve been up to nonsense. This reading encourages a generation gap; authority figures simply won’t understand. The polemic that Seuss has tapped into here—that of the great gulf that yawns between a nonsensical youth and an uncomprehending authority figure— has been alluded to previously in this study when discussing in Chapter Two the artwork of the broadside, “The Yankees Return from Camp”, in which the jovial nonsensical American is juxtaposed against the serious-minded, uncomprehending British soldier. The same polemic is used in Bob Dylan’s “Ballad of a Thin Man” in which a bizarre set of absurd verses are each bracketed by the refrain “Something is happening here and you don’t know what it is, do you Mr. Jones” (*Lyrics* 174). In both *The Cat in the Hat* and “Ballad of Thin Man”, authority figures are kept at bay, unable to comprehend the nonsense culture of youth.

Meanwhile *Green Eggs and Ham* depends upon a generational reversal. In this book it is a youth who is trying to encourage a reluctant adult to try a new food. We know from his small size and his optimism and determination that Sam-I Am represents youth, and the blind stubbornness of the larger fellow clearly indicates that he is the adult (12-13). But like a child, the adult refuses to try a new food. Ultimately he gives in, realizing that the child was right to make him try. Underlining this topsy-turvy story is the idea that the young know best and that the old should be taught new tricks.

By the 1970s Seuss himself was aware that it was his subversive messages that had most significantly endeared him to his public. In 1977 he received an honorary doctorate

from Lake Forest College. His commencement address was an anti-establishment rhyming verse poem ending with,

> …as you partake of the world's bill of fair,
> That's darned good advice to follow.
> Do a lot of spitting out the hot air.
> And be careful what you swallow. (Qtd. in Morgan 234-35)

The Morgans relate,

> As Geisel sat down, there was bedlam. Students shouted, cheered and flung their caps into the air. He was startled, for it was his first experience with the fervor with which many young Americans had begun to canonize Dr. Seuss. These graduates were of the generation most critical of the Vietnam War, and from their earliest memories of Dr. Seuss books they had assumed that he too must be sceptical of the establishment. Now they'd heard evidence from the master's lips. (Ibid)

Political Acts of Nonsense in the 1960s

As the sixties advanced, the connection between nonsense and politics, as manifested linguistically in the works of Lennon, Dylan and Seuss, found resonance with public manifestations of protest. Banners and protest signs, for example, took on nonsensical qualities. One such sign from 1969 is based on a reverse portmanteau, in which one word becomes two. The reverse portmanteau is achieved by taking the word "helicopters", changing its spelling, capitalising the H, and shrinking the font size of the remainder of the word after its initial "hel". Reproduced, the sign reads,

> GET THE
> HELL_{ICOPTERS}
> OUT OF
> VIETNAM (Qtd. in Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:23:11)

Mark Kurlansky, in *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* reports that during the social unrest in France in the spring of 1968, "there was a frenzy of free expression, new

proverbs were created and written or posted on walls and gates all over the city" (227). One, among the many, read, "I am a Marxist of the Groucho fashion" (228). While many a casual activist must have thought the motto humorous, but entirely benign, the anonymous author had, in fact, tapped into one of the more inflammatory ideologies of 1960s-era rebellion. For, "I am a Marxist of the Groucho fashion" could easily have been the motto for Abbie Hoffman, the founder of the Yippie movement. Kurlansky explains:

> In his entire lifetime, perhaps in all of history, there was no year that was better suited for Abbie Hoffman than 1968. It must have seemed extraordinary to him that year that the world had come around to his way of doing things… He was the New Left's clown… he understood that the New Left was in need of a clown, that a clown could publicize their issues, that a clown was not ignored… Like all good clowns, he was very funny. (93-4)

Beginning in late 1967 Hoffman organised a series of outlandish political protests. On 21 October of that year Hoffman and a group of followers stood outside the Pentagon in Washington and attempted to exorcise the building. The day had begun with a march that included a chant reminiscent of jump-rope rhymes and the "unofficial" language of the schoolyard, "1 2 3 4. We don't want your fucking war" (qtd. in Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:12:01). After the march the plan was for the protesters to sing mystic chants until the Pentagon levitated and turned orange, thus driving out the evil spirits and ending the war in Vietnam. Despite a concerted effort, the Pentagon remained bound to the earth.

On the following New Year's Eve, legend tells, "rolling around on the floor" in a fit of carnivalesque, substance-induced laughter, Hoffman and associate Jerry Rubin founded the Yippie party (Kurlansky 14). Ostensibly Yippie stood for "Youth International Party", but the name is better understood as a portmanteau that collided Hippie with the exclamation, *yippee!*. The Yippies went on to garner much publicity in 1968. Among their activities were the hosting of "snake dancing lessons" and games such as "Pin the Rubber on the Pope" (ibid 274) at the Democratic National Convention, and

the election of a hog, Mr. Piggasus, to run for President (ibid 273-75). Hoffman also threatened to pull down the pants of pro-Vietnam presidential candidate, Hubert Humphrey (ibid 276). Meanwhile Yippee cofounder Jerry Rubin attended a House Un-Americans Activities Committee meeting dressed in a Santa Claus costume (see Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:53:03).

Inspired by the Yippies, other youth protest groups adopted their tactics. In 1969 the women's liberation group, WRAP, dressed in witch's garb and hexed the head of the University of Chicago Department of Sociology, Morris Janowitz, in response to the firing of Marlene Dixon (Medina). At Columbia University a certain Colonel Akst was delivering a speech on the importance of the Selective Service (i.e., the draft) when he was interrupted by a "hairy fife and drum corps" playing "Yankee Doodle". Before the Colonel knew what was happening he had been smashed in the face with a coconut cream pie (Kurlansky 194). Groucho Marx, indeed. The impact of the Yippies is difficult to measure, but the establishment apparently found their nonsensical tactics deeply troubling. During the 1968 Democratic National Convention *The Chicago Sun-Times* commented on the Yippies and suggested that "never before had so many feared so much from so few" (qtd. in Kurlansky 276).

Nonsense is also the key to unpacking Lennon and Yoko Ono's "Bed Ins" held in Amsterdam and Montreal in 1969. The events, which Lennon and Ono described at the time as a protest against the war in Vietnam, featured films of the couple in their hotel bed, in their pyjamas, sipping tea, amid posters that read "Bed Peace", and the aforementioned pun, "Hair Peace" (qtd. in Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:25:09). Lennon was adamant that this unusual protest was exactly what the war movement needed:

> We thought about this for months. This is the best possible, most functional and effective way of promoting and protesting against violence that our minds, combined, could think of. (Ibid, 00:25:09)

The event, as planned, was inexplicable to the establishment's political analysts who viewed the images. Donald Zec of the *Daily Mirror* is typical of the perplexed state with which the media received the event, commenting, "You can't get peace on a kingsize divan" (ibid, 00:27). Meanwhile *New York Times* columnist Gloria Emerson complained in an interview with Lennon that "You've made yourself ridiculous" (ibid 00:43:25). But as Ono explains, noted in Chapter One,

> We mustn't be traditional in the way we communicate with people—especially with the Establishment. We should surprise people by saying new things in an entirely new way. Communication of that sort can have a fantastic power… (Qtd. in Thomson and Gutman 176)

Lennon's childhood friend, Pete Shotton, equated this episode in Lennon's life to the nonsensical jokes Lennon had revelled in, in his youth:

> The sort of stunts and jokes he did as a Beatle were much the same as the daft things we'd done as boys.
> The whole Bed In business was one gigantic piss-take...
> Just because you have a serious point, you don't have to make it seriously. That's the part he liked - knowing people wouldn't know whether to keep a straight face or not. He kept a straight face, but was laughing inwardly at the time. (Qtd. in Davies 131)

Referencing the Bed Ins, Lennon describes the same strategy that the Americans used in their usurpation of "Yankee Doodle" during the American Revolution —that of disorienting the establishment:

> If you wanna really change the [world] do it subtly in a way the establishment can't attack i.e. Theatre in Court [a reference to Abbie Hoffman] and/or bed events... things the establishment don't understand, therefore they can't kill it. (Lennon, "Interview")

Revolutionary and editor of *New Left Review*, Tariq Ali (who also authored *Trotsky for Beginners*, a cartoon book) comments on the Bed Ins,

> That action that he and Yoko did, of course it was attacked and mocked and there were contemptuous articles written about them but on our generation it had a fantastic effect. I remember being absolutely thrilled and saying "At Last! Well done! Great!" (Qtd. in Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:28:18-35)

Despite Shotton's contention that Lennon's political antics were one and the same as his

nonsensical pranks of childhood, Lennon and Ono, of course, had also learned a few "new tricks" from Abbie Hoffman and the Yippies. The title of the event, a "Bed In", was derivative of other nonsensical, intentionally humorous "ins" organised by Hoffman in 1967 such as his "sweep-in", "smoke in", and "wed-in" (Kurlansky 98-9). Of course the sign, "Hair Peace", should have been a clue. As a pun, "Hair Peace" promises that the tropes and mores of nonsense were at work in this event. The point was to operate outside of normal experience, to thrust nonsense at the viewer in the hope of moving the viewer beyond his or her own normal expectations. It was a strategy of disorientation.

Disorientation was also a strategy employed at one of the most remarkable moments at Woodstock, Jimi Hendrix's reinterpretation of the American national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner". Performing solo, Hendrix played the melody of the national anthem on his electric guitar, inserting wild flights of musical fantasy into the melody. Through the use of feedback, distortion and free-form elaborations, Hendrix subverted the meaning of the song. In one section of the performance Hendrix manipulated his guitar in such a way that it mimicked sounds of war, clearly imitating machine gun fire and crashing explosions following long whistling streaks. Hendrix was subtly alluding to the Vietnam War; and like other authors examined in this study, he was toying with the representational value of his artistic medium. In Hendrix's performance "The Star Spangled Banner" was sent through the looking glass, if you will, twisted like the reverse image of "Jabberwocky", and fed back through a psychedelic rabbit hole. For that one moment, "The Star Spangled Banner" represented an "other" America. In 1777, Francis Hopkinson performed a similar feat when he deconstructed the British ensign and stitched together the first U.S. flag. Hendrix and Hopkinson understood that revolution was not possible without a complete breaking down of established hierarchies of sense, meaning and symbol.

Nonsense also celebrated the downfall of Richard Nixon. One of Dr. Seuss' more inexplicable books is *Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now* (1972). *Marvin K. Mooney* has no obvious moral or point. The "story" is simply that the adult is tired of the child Marvin, and so Marvin is being sent away: "You can go in a boat… You can go on a goat… just go go go". There is no motivating factor. It is simply time for Marvin to leave. Yet, despite its lack of any political content the *Marvin* text was destined to be politicised. As mentioned in Chapter One, just prior to President Nixon's resignation, Seuss created an altered version of the text, replacing the words "Marvin K. Mooney" with "Richard M. Nixon" and asked Art Buchwald to run the parody in his column in the *Washington Post*. Within nine days of the appearance of Seuss' text, Nixon went (Morgan 221). Then, in much the same style as rough music traditions, the day before Nixon resigned protestors clattered metal street-signs outside the White House and sang choruses of "Jail to the Chief" (Ambrose 3:423).

SECTION III: TROPES OF TRANSFORMATION

The Carnivalesque

As in previous chapters, it is necessary to place 60s nonsense firmly in its carnivalesque milieu in order to understand its special relationship to themes of rebellion and revolution. As argued previously, a carnivalesque setting is a site of social formation and is the first step in building an atmosphere within which controversial topics or utopian desires may be confronted. As in other periods, there is nothing simpler to trace in 60s nonsense than the carnivalesque tradition of the topsy-turvy. As Lennon sings in "Everybody's Got Something to Hide Except for Me and My Monkey":

> Your inside is out and your outside is in.
> Your outside is in and your inside is out.
> [. . . . . .]
> The deeper you go the higher you fly.
> The higher you fly the deeper you go.

In "Happiness is a Warm Gun" the reverse directions of up and down are manipulated so as to create a disembodied psychedelic topsy-turvyness:

> I need a fix 'cause I'm going down.
> Down to the bits that I left uptown. (Lennon and McCartney)

In Lennon's books of nonsense genders are routinely confused. In *IHOW* we meet a character named "King Anne" (54), while in *ASITW* we learn that the "handsome Prince was really Miss Cradock" (23). As Lennon writes in *IHOW,* "There was Great disorder to look on" (38).

Dylan's lyrics in "Talking New York" (1962), one of his earliest compositions, feature topsy-turvy inversions using language similar to Lennon's: "I landed up on the downtown side" and "I blowed inside out and upside down" (*Lyrics* 3). In "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" we learn that "the waitress he was handsome" (*Lyrics* 149). In "It's Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleedin'" we hear of someone who can "Walk upside-down inside handcuffs" (*Lyrics* 157) and in "Denise" the title character is said to be smiling "inside out" (*Lyrics* 132). In "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again" the reversals become truly absurd:

> But the Post Office has been stolen
> And the mailbox is locked

and

> An' he just smoked my eyelids
> An' punched my cigarette" (*Lyrics* 198)

And while not nonsensical, Dylan lyrics in "The Times They Are-A Changin'" invoke a carnivalesque topsy-turvy scenario:

> The loser now will be later to win
> The slow one now will later be fast
> And the first one now will later be last (*Lyrics* 81-2)

In Seuss' nonsense alphabet, *On Beyond Zebra,* we meet a creature called The Quan and are asked to consider, "Is his top-side his bottom? Or bottom–side top?" In *Hop on Pop* we learn that "Mr. Brown" is "upside-down" and we see that that the fish are in the trees (43; 20). In *Dr. Seuss' ABC* we are witness to turtles, instead of fish, nesting in the trees, and we see a Camel walking across the ceiling (11). And Seuss' most popular book, *Green Eggs and Ham*, is devised entirely on the inversion and reversal theme: The adult will not try the new food that the child struggles to get him to taste, and reversal of order is further emphasised by the character saying "Sam I am" instead of "I am Sam", and instead of ham and eggs, it's eggs and ham.

Further establishing the carnivalesque setting, 1960s era nonsense was often populated by images of carnivals, circuses and freak shows. And images of carnival make frequent appearances in 1960s era popular music. In the psychedelic period especially, carnivalesque costuming and pageantry were highlighted, as in the colourful exotic covers of The Beatles' album *Sergeant Pepper* (1967) and the Rolling Stones album, *Their Satanic Majesties' Request* (1967). And the most important music festivals of the era, Monterey Pop (1967), Woodstock (1969), and the Isle of Wight (1970), revelled in grotesque and carnivalesque imagery and custom. In this same period pop musicians began idealizing a vision of rock music as a travelling circus train: The Rolling Stones captured the spirit of this moment in their television film, *Rock and Roll Circus* (1968), which featured Lennon, Eric Clapton, the Rolling Stones, The Who and others performing under a colourful circus tent surrounded by gypsy caravans and merry-go-rounds. *Rock and Roll Circus* set designer Chip Monck nearly convinced The Who and other acts to take to the rails in earnest, suggesting that a real circus train featuring a theatre and a

recording studio would be the ideal way to conduct a tour (see Hogg 00:02:31). The Beatles' vision in their film *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967), which featured a fat lady and dwarves, was an early instigator of this popular vision.

In *IHOW* Lennon describes a show that is "new and exciting…", filled with thrills and spectacle. He adds, "(sometimes a dwarf was used)" (27). This imagery resurfaces in his song, "For the Benefit of Mr. Kite" the lyrics of which are taken verbatim from a carnival poster (*Anthology* 242). And Lennon frequently conjures up images of jesters or jokers as he does in "Come Together" or in "I am the Walrus": "Don't you think the joker laughs at you? Ha ha ha!" In Lennon's "Sun King" Lennon describes a festive scene where "everyone is laughing", and then adds three lines of nonsense. The mock Spanish is meaningless and is peppered with language that conjures images of Mediterranean carnival:

> Quando paramucho mi amore defelice corazon
> Mundo pararazzi mi amore chicka ferdy parasol
> Cuesto obrigado tanta mucho que can eat it carousel

In *No Direction Home* Dylan recalls the circuses that would come through his hometown, commenting that what was interesting about the "carny midways" were the various oddball entertainments, such as "George Washington in blackface, Napoleon wearing blackface... [juxtaposed with] weird Shakespearian things." Dylan sums up the appeal; it was "stuff that didn't really make any sense" (qtd. in Scorsese, disc 1, 06:04-06:34). In early interviews Dylan routinely fabricated legends about his supposed carnivalesque youth. "When I was thirteen, I was travelling with a carnival through upper Minnesota and North Dakota..." (Qtd. in Hentoff, "The Crackin'" 27) In his autobiography, *Chronicles*, Dylan describes the atmosphere of Greenwich Village at the time when he was just starting out as a folksinger as distinctly carnivalesque, with folk acts routinely sharing the stage with ventriloquists, female impersonators, magicians,

hypnotists and acrobats (10). With the spectacle of carnival so present in his experiences, and even in myths he told about himself, it is not surprising to discover a heady carnivalesque imagery populating his lyrics. In "Long Time Gone" Dylan recalls, "I remember when I's ramblin' / Around the carnival trains – I remember the children's faces the best" (*Lyrics* 28). In his song "Dusty Old Fairgrounds" the narrator announces, "We'll shoot for the carnival route" (*Lyrics* 76), and in "Desolation Row" we learn of the main character that "He's going to the carnival tonight" (*Lyrics* 181). Dylan's verses in the early and mid 1960s are often set among circuses and Ferris wheels, and this festival world is inhabited by jokers, jesters, clowns, jugglers, tight rope walkers, stilt walkers, organ grinders, Gypsies, fortune tellers and dwarves. In the nonsense song "Ballad of a Thin Man" we meet a freak, a sword-swallower and a "one-eyed midget" (*Lyrics* 174-5). Of Dylan's nonsense song, "On the Road Again" Marqusee notes, "the mood and method are carnivalesque" (Marqusee 138).

Seuss books have a carnival feel as well. Seuss' most popular character—and the trademark image Seuss chose for his company—The Cat in the Hat, acts very much like a traditional clown and performs as a juggler in his debut text (*Cat in the Hat* 15). Books such as *If I Ran the Circus* and Seuss' bestiaries feature exotic and rare beasts from the far corners of the planet. In *If I Ran the Circus* the narrator claims,

> I'll bring in my acrobats, jugglers and clowns
> From a thousand and thirty-three faraway towns

And the settings pictured in Seuss' illustrations so often depict colourful festive cities that appear more like a collection of flimsy circus tents in a festival than permanent structures:

Figure 46

Bakhtin requires that carnivalesque imagery rely to a certain extent on images of revelry, appetite, festivity and drinking (see *Rabelais* 62; 279-82; 298) and adds elsewhere that parodies of Christmas carols were consistent with a carnivalesque mood (*Rabelais* 15). Each December the Beatles' recorded a holiday message, pressed the recording onto a 45 EP, and mailed it to the members of the Beatles fan club in time for Christmas. If one listens to the slurring articulation featured on these joyful recordings it is clear that there really *is* a party going on. The four Beatles are inebriated, *muchly* (as Seuss would put it), and Lennon in particular, as he sings nonsensical travesties based on "Good King Wenceslas", sounds like Bacchus himself.

> Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the feast of Stephen
> As the slow ray round about, deep and crisp and crispy
> Brightly show the boot last night, on the musty cruel
> Henry Hall and David Lloyd, Betty Grable too-ooo-ooo
> (*Christmas Collection* 1963)

Near the end of the 1964 message Lennon offers his listeners a "Happy uh, Cri-mus and a merry goo year. Crimble Maybe".[14] In Lennon's nonsense stories, the festive mood continues. In *IHOW* Lennon notes that "When harvest time came along all the people celebrated with a mighty feast and dancing…" (26). And there is the passage in which we read about a little seashore pub [in which the people are] "drinking and making melly…" (42). In "I Dig a Pony" Lennon sings "Well you can celebrate anything you want / Yes you celebrate anything you want".

Bakhtin reminds us that overindulgence, manifested in images of gout, was considered one of the "gay diseases" (*Rabelais* 161) and that the image of "the gaping mouth is related to swallowing, [being the] most ancient symbol of death and resurrection" (ibid 325). Like Lear, Lennon often mocks those who wallow in gastronomic extravagance, such as this example from *ASITW*:

> He's on a diet now you know
> From eating far too much
> They say if he gets fatter
> He'll have to wear a crutch (19)

Meanwhile, in "Country Pie", Dylan sings,

> Raspberry, strawberry, lemon and lime
> What do I care?
> Blueberry, apple, cherry, pumpkin and plum
> Call me for dinner, honey, I'll be there. (245)

and in "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", the protagonist visits a restaurant:

> The waitress he was handsome
> He wore a powder blue cape
> I ordered some suzette, I said
> "Could you please make that crepe"
> Just then the whole kitchen exploded
> From boilin' fat
> Food was flying everywhere
> And I left without my hat. (149)

And as Dylan dances beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free, we can assume—as he states in "Dusty Old Fairground"—that he's been "Drinking red wine" (or something stronger) (*Lyrics* 76).

With Seuss, celebration and feasting are never far off. Titles such as *Happy Birthday to You* revel in the festive spirit. And we must remember what it is that the Whos down in Whoville do at Christmas:

> Then the Whos, young and old, would sit down to feast.
> And they'd feast! And they'd feast!
> And they'd FEAST!
> FEAST!
> FEAST!
> FEAST! (*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*)

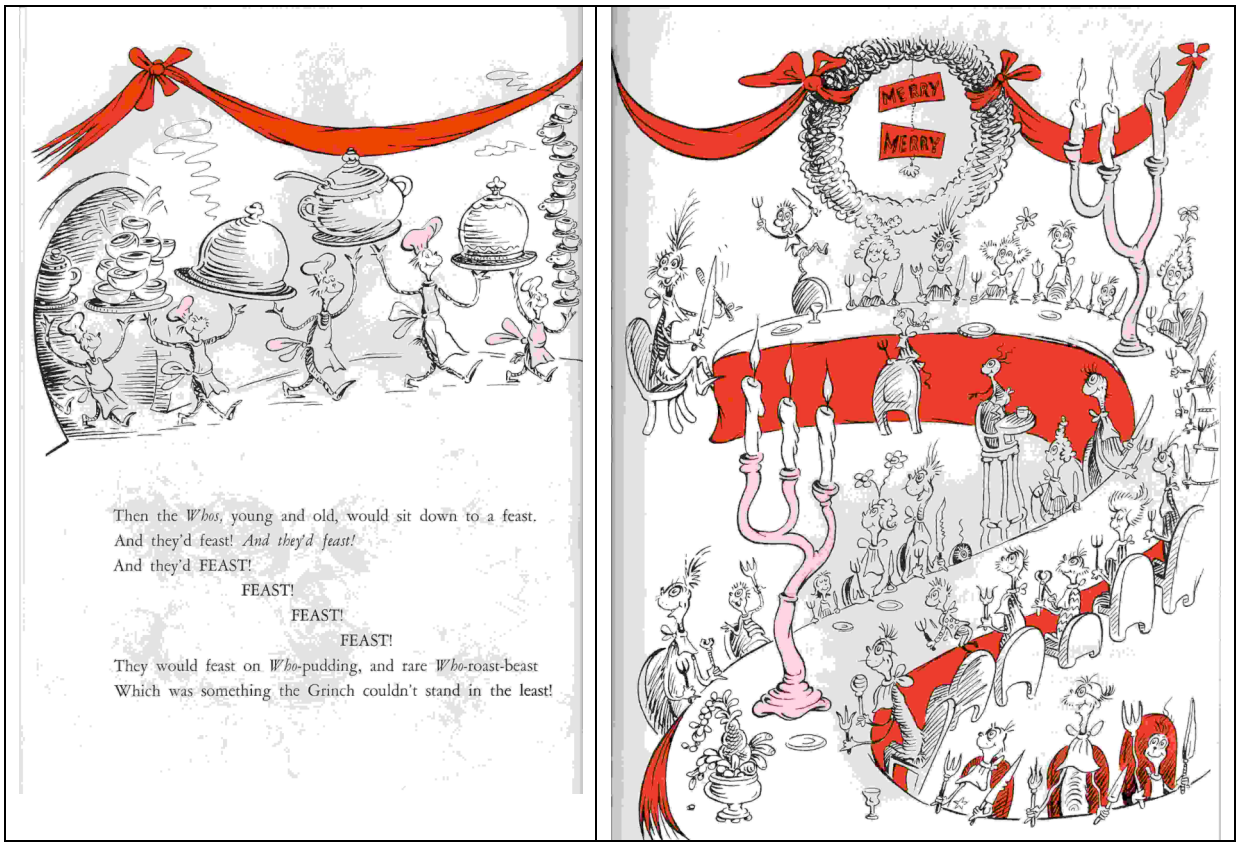

Figure 47

Carnivalesque literatures often promote vulgarity and gorging and perhaps do so because it is precisely the vulgarity of the body that authoritarian manners deny (see *Rabelais* 147-8; 175-6). Abounding in sexual, scatological and off-colour material, the carnivalesque mood is deeply irreverent of any such repression. Lennon, who famously posed nude for the album cover of *Two Virgins* (1969), frequently indulges in excremental humour in his books of nonsense, and does so in a style that echoes schoolyard profanity. Here Blackpool becomes "Blackpoo" (*IHOW* 75) and Greenold Place becomes "Greenold Bladder" (*IHOW* 32). In *ASITW* he changes gentleman to "genitalmen" (28), The General Election to "The General Erection" (40), The Happy Hunting Grounds to the "Happy Humping Grounds" (30) and Jack the Ripper to "Jack the Nipple" (28). In "Give Peace a Chance" Lennon sings,

> Revolution, evolution, masturbation,
> flagellation, regulation, integrations,
> meditations, United Nations

Here the mock beating, "flagellation" is juxtaposed with sexual imagery of "masturbation" and "evolution". But Lennon's inclusion of several political images, "revolution", "integration" and "United Nations" suggests that all these words belong together.

Dylan once commented, "Art, if there is such a thing, is in the bathrooms; everybody knows that." (Qtd. in Hentoff, *Playboy*) Dylan's comment, a reference to the ribald drawings and limericks so often found in lavatories, is telling. Dylan was far from averse to dipping into off-colour material. In "I Shall Be Free No. 10" there is a character who complains of an acquaintance who "When my name comes up he pretends to barf" (*Lyrics* 119). In the nonsense song, "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" the narrator walks into a bank and asks for a loan, "They asked me for some collateral / So I pulled down my pants" (*Lyrics* 149). In "Desolation Row" "The blind commissioner" has one hand on "the tightrope walker / The other is in his pants" (*Lyrics* 181). In "I Shall Be Free"

President Kennedy calls Dylan on the telephone and asks him for advice on how to make the country grow. Dylan responds:

> My friend, John, Brigitte Bardot
> Anita Ekberg
> Sophia Loren
> (Put 'em all in a room with Ernest Borgnine!) (*Lyrics* 68) [15]

In the verses quoted above, authority figures, (a banker and a politician), are "confronted" with "inappropriate" sexual humour. The jokes are subversive in that they attempt to answer questions of official policy with "unofficial" folk humour. And the sexual innuendoes serve to undermine the status quo of official policy, by suggesting images of birth, growth and change, as opposed to static policy.

In *Yertle the Turtle* Seuss' makes similar use of an off-colour joke, and the effect it has on an arrogant king is significant:

> Mack decided he'd had enough and he had
> That plain little turtle got a little bit mad
> And that plain little Mack did a plain little thing.
> He burped!
> And his burp shook the throne of the King!

Mack's burp sets off a chain reaction and Yertle's kingdom is literally toppled. In the "Long 1960s" contemporary adult perceptions on the need for propriety in books for children prevented Seuss from making overt references to more extreme forms of off-colour material. Yet there remains in Seuss' artwork a subversive sensual aesthetic that both children and critics have identified. Seuss had, in the past, overtly indulged in ribald material. In 1939 he published *The Seven Lady Godivas,* a tale for adults that included not only the nude heroine but also the characters of the seven "Peeping" brothers, (including Tom). But even in Seuss' books intended for children the ubiquitous curves and mounds in Seuss' art, is, for Maurice Sendak, "sensuous" and "exotic" (qtd. in Nel 89; 94). For Sendak, the "sensuality" in Seuss' art is more than simply sexual, however. In a 2002

interview, Sendak explained to me that he believed that one of the ways Seuss' art garnered its popularity among children was via its likeness to bowel movements. What is for many a smooth, sensual curvaceous line is for Sendak an excremental subconscious rebellion against all adult authority—toilet training included. Sendak explains in no uncertain terms:

> [I told Seuss that his] books are all about anarchy – and the child – and you have the child shoving everything off, saying "Fuck you" and even from the point of drawings looking like stool… I think the *Cat in the Hat* was incredibly important because then – under the guise of being a proper book I am telling you can revolutionize your house. You can cover it with shit. Literally. His drawings all look like bowel movements… in the literal sense [Seuss' artwork] is shitty… that book is all about getting rid of the tyranny of parents—Cleaning up the house. Forget toilet training. Forget everything kids. Laugh it up at will… (Sendak)

Sendak's reading of the secret of Seuss' success may challenge certain conservative critics, yet as a child I distinctly recall discussion of this quality of Seuss artwork among my friends at school. The controversy concerned Seuss' book, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. In this story a magic wish gone awry turns rain into "oobleck", a gooey mud-like green substance. My classmates eagerly explained to me that oobleck was, in fact, supposed to be the product of bowel movements. The urban legend went that Seuss' original colour for oobleck was brown, but that the publishers had turned it green to avoid the direct reference to faeces. Seuss' appeal, then, rests, in part at least, in his ability to conjure an off-colour and ribald interpretation. This is a distinctly carnivalesque function, the faecal quality implying not simply anarchy, but abject waste—the key element upon which all new growth is based—life and youth out of death and waste (*Rabelais* 147-8; 175-6).

In Lennon's *ASITW* the black, the ribald humour of the phrase, "Last will and testicle" is followed by the comment "as I lie in the ground getting eaten" (76). Here the grotesque allusion of a corpse being eaten by worms is juxtaposed with a sexual image, a

"testicle", and the full circle of birth, death and rebirth is neatly completed. Also in *ASITW* there is an illustration of a naked pregnant woman lying on top of what looks to be a coffin. Before her there is a suggestively shaped sign reading "This Way" pointing between her open legs. Here again, birth, death and rebirth are juxtaposed:

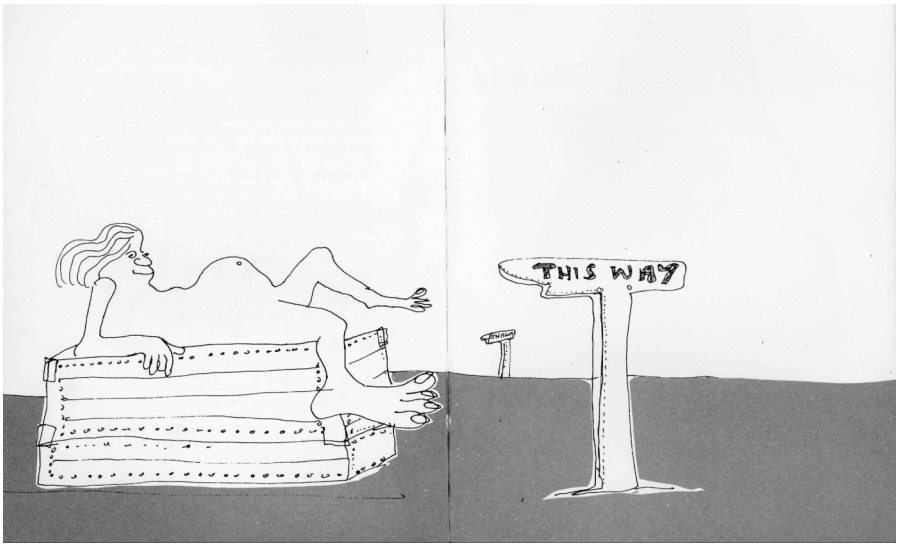

Figure 48

Also carnivalesque are the various forms of travesty; political travesty, travesty of the aged, and travesty of superstitious and religious beliefs. An adept practitioner of the first category, political travesty, Lennon mercilessly lampoons royalty and government. In his books of nonsense Lennon refers to "Richard the Turd", "the Dupe of Bedpan", "Buckinghell Parcel", the "Horses of Parliamint" and the "Chasing of the Guards".[16] Benjamin Disraeli becomes "Benjamin Distasteful", Queen Victoria is referred to as "Queen Victorious".[17] In the songs of the Beatles the Queen Mother fares no better. In Lennon's "Mean Mr. Mustard" the Queen is subjected to inappropriate language. Mr. Mustard's sister,

> Takes him out to look at the Queen,
> Only place that he's ever been.
> Always shouts out something obscene,
> Such a dirty old man…

Dylan's depictions of political figures are so frequently irreverent that Marqusee remarks, "contempt for authority is omnipresent in these songs. Whether it's employers, cops, politicians, preachers, or generals, they are always both dangerous and preposterous" (Marqusee 163). There is the "drunken politician" in "I Want You" (*Lyrics* 196), the "mad" Vice President in "The Clothes Line Saga" (*Lyrics* 283), a police officer described as "crazy as a loon" in "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" (*Lyrics* 148) and the head of the Chamber of Commerce in "Tombstone Blues" who is equated with Jack the Ripper (*Lyrics* 169). Corrupt judges and corrupt politicians appear in "The Death of Emmett Till", "Seven Curses", "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "Only a pawn in Their Game". In "Absolutely Sweet Marie" Dylan explains that "to live outside the law you must be honest" (*Lyrics* 206).

Reversing the place of the victim in the nonsense rhyme "Humpty Dumpty" Dylan sings in "Ballad in Plain D" that "The king and the queen / Tumbled all down into pieces" (*Lyrics* 129). And in "Gates of Eden" he posits a required levelling of social class when he sings, "There are no kings inside the Gates of Eden" (*Lyrics* 154). In the nonsense song "I Shall Be Free No. 10" (1964) Dylan reverses the position of conservative Presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater—who voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964—so that the politician is on the receiving end of his own racist policies:

> If you think that I'll let Barry Goldwater
> Move in next door and marry my daughter
> You must think I'm crazy!
> I wouldn't let him do it for all the farms in Cuba. (*Lyrics* 118)

In Seuss we have previously noted the "burp" that "shook the throne of the King!" As in many nursery rhymes, silly kings populate Seuss' verse, such as the childish monarch in *The King's Stilts* who shuts his eyes to all other concerns, preferring to play on his stilts day in and day out. In his early reader books, Seuss routinely places figures of authority in ridiculous circumstances, bringing them down to earth. In his ABC book he

describes, for example, a "King's kerchoo", the "The quick Queen of Quincy and her quacking quacker-oo" and a "Policeman in a pail":

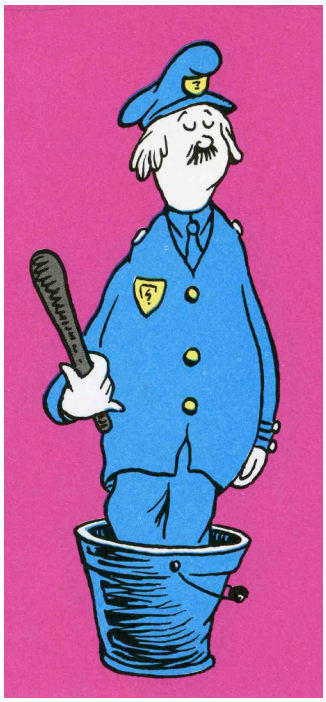

Figure 49

The civil unrest of the 1960s was largely defined by an emerging, and extreme, generation gap. The vast chasm that had opened up between young and old was succinctly expressed in the 1968 catch phrase, "Never trust anyone over 30". Like Lear, Carroll and most authors of nonsense literature, Lennon is irreverent with regards to the aged as well. In *ASITW* an eminent critic is referred to as a "borein' owld gasbag" (60) and in the poem "Our Dad" the children refer to their father as a "shrivelled little clown" (83). His antiquated ways prove insufferable, and he is summarily rejected:

> It wasn't long before old Dad
> Was cumbersome – a drag.
> He seemed to get the message and
> Began to pack his bag. (Ibid)

In "Henry and Harry" (*IHOW*) Lennon creates a conversation between a father and son concerning the "honourable" nonsense profession of "Brummer Striving". Typical for Lennon, the father in this episode is painted as blind to his own pathetic state:

> "But Brummer Striving is a farst dying business, Father," said young Henry, a young lad. His dad, Harry replied quickly.
> "None of thy nonsense, Hensy. All thy fathers before have, and before even that before me were Brummers and that's a fact." With that he pulled his stumps nearer the fire. (66-67)

The mother in this story is described in no less glowing terms, being "a right old hag who was living with them" (ibid). Lennon exhibits a similar contempt for the concept of pride in one's family heritage. In "No Flies on Frank", for example, he mocks the sanctity of the family line, writing,

> Lo!... my brother Geoffrey whose father Alec came from Kenneth – through Leslies, who begat Arthur, son of Eric, by the house of Ronald and April – keepers of James of Newcastle who ran Madeline at 2-1 by Silver Flower, (10-2) past Wot-ro-Wot at 4/3d a pound? (*IHOW* 18)

In Lennon historical becomes "histerical" and precious antiques are "old things that are fakes" (*IHOW* 54).

In "Masters of War" Dylan's contempt for the aged is biting:

> How much should I know
> To talk out of turn
> You might say that I'm young
> You might say I'm unlearned
> But there's one thing I know,
> I'm younger than you
> And even Jesus would never
> Forgive what you do (*Lyrics* 56)

In "The Times They Are A-Changin'" Dylan states his position on the generation gap in direct and uncompromising terms:

> Come mothers and fathers
> Throughout the land
> And don't criticize what you can't understand
> Your sons and your daughters
> Are beyond your command
> Your old road is rapidly aging… (*Lyrics* 82)

In Dylan's nonsensical and comic songs the situation is no different, from the father in "Motorpsyco Nightmare", depicted as a fool who is easily manipulated, to the uncomprehending Mr. Jones in "Ballad of a Thin Man". In "Ballad of a Thin Man", as mentioned previously, a bizarre set of absurd verses are each bracketed by the refrain "Something is happening here and you don't know what it is, do you Mr. Jones". The verses are so dislocated and surreal that, of course, Mr. Jones (the authority figure) could never even hope to understand them. Of "Ballad of a Thin Man" Marqusee writes,

> The wall of incomprehension between the conscious vanguard and mainstream society has become impenetrable... here a demarcation was being celebrated, part generational, part political, part cultural… the refrain epitomized the hip exclusivity that came naturally to those young people who saw themselves as having possession of a deeper insight than those around them… [and although the message was delivered in nonsensical terms], to young people in the end, the message was clear enough. (160-62)

Mothers and fathers in Seuss' books are also painted in unflattering terms. The mother in *Horton Hatches the Egg* is irresponsible and selfish, abandoning her child, and many critics have commented on the neglectful mother in *The Cat in the Hat* who leaves her young children alone all day in an unprotected environment. In *Hop on Pop* the father is depicted as a glum, uncomprehending oaf, alternately portrayed on his back looking surprised as the children trample him (40), or slouching with a sour expression, his belly sagging, with the text "Dad is sad... He had a bad day" running beside him (32-3). And, as noted earlier, it is the youth who must enlighten the adults in *Green Eggs and Ham*. Similarly, in *Fox in Socks,* it is the older gentleman, Mr. Knox, who has trouble pronouncing difficult passages and finds himself sewn into a box while the youthful character is able to manipulate language with skill. In *I Had Trouble in Getting to Solla Sollew* adults are routinely depicted as people who will misdirect you and waste your time:

> He sat and he worked with his brain and his tongue,
> And he bossed me around just because I was young.

As Elizabeth Sewell claims in *Field of Nonsense*, nonsense is frequently intolerant of magic, superstition and religious beliefs (see 171-72). In Lennon's nonsense, religion is frequently travestied. McCartney recalls Lennon's early work done in his school days:

> He had a drawing that he'd done when he was younger of Jesus on the cross with a hard-on, which was brilliant. It was very hard hitting teenage stuff... (*Anthology* 176)

In *IHOW* there is an illustration of a priest with a halo above his head. On the facing page, among other drawings, is an illustration of a man with a fish on his (46-7). The juxtaposition is meaningful, and sacrilegious. In *ASITW* the Lord's Prayer is lampooned. Lennon writes, "In the name of the Father, Sock and Micky Most" (91), [18] "Harrold be thy norm" (68) and "Give us thisbe our daily tit" (36). In *IHOW* Christmas and decorations become "Chrispbut" and "desicrations" (29), while in *ASITW* Lennon takes the lord's name in vain when the Royal Mail encourages the public to "Post early for Christsake" (41). Allegorical sermons are also lampooned. In "I Believe, Boot…", in *ASITW*, a bishop discusses "Griff", the Supreme Being:

> In Griff's eye, we are all a bunch of bananas – swaying in the breeze – waiting as it were… to be peeled by His great andunderstanding love – some of them fall on stoneycroft – and some fall on the wainscoat (90)

And in "Give Peace a Chance" Lennon juxtaposes "Bishops and Fishops" and "Rabbis and Popeyes", thus exactly paralleling the irreverent treatment of religious symbols in Lear's "Ribands and Pigs" in which absurd everyday objects are juxtaposed against "Mitres and Beams" (Lear 139) and "Tea Urns and Pews" (Lear 145).

Dylan's lyrics in "Highway 61 Revisited" hark back to medieval carnivalesque traditions in which passages in the bible were parodied:

> Oh God said to Abraham, "Kill me a son"
> Abe said, "Man, you must be puttin' me on"
> God say, "No." Abe say, "What?"
> God say, "You can do what you want Abe, but
> The next time you see me comin' you better run"

> Well Abe say, "Where do you want this killin' done?"
> God says, "Out on Highway 61" (*Lyrics* 178)

And if Dylan wants to emphasise the disreputableness of an immoral character, he will disguise him as clergy. The Phantom of the Opera in "Desolation Row" appears as "a perfect image of a priest" (*Lyrics* 182) while in "Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts" the underhanded actor/thief "hurried by in the costume of a monk" (*Lyrics* 342).

While writing *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* in 1957 "[Seuss] agonized for months about how to keep the ending from seeming trite or religious." (Morgan 191) Once it came to making the animated television special, (1966) this problem returned. Children's holiday specials, such as, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (1965), which featured quotes from the New Testament and other popular children's Christmas specials such as *The Night the Animals Talked* and *The Little Drummer Boy* were inspired directly from scenes of the nativity. But when confronted with the storyboards Seuss announced that he would not allow a star to come beaming down from the heavens at the end of the story. Seuss opted not to let the religious iconography be created from on high, shining down on to the lowly; instead he directed that the star be created by the communal love of the Whos. He created a scene in which the Whos stand together in a circle and chant a nonsense song, "Bah who door ay, bah who door ay", and the star originates from inside this circle, a product of their love for one another. In a reversal of the biblical story the star then ascends from the people to the sky, eventually settling in the heavens where it represents community rather than god (ibid). Ultimately, the inverted origins of the star amounted to an ennobling of the commoner—the Whos—and a disenfranchising the almighty. In this way Seuss' utopian ideology was akin to Lennon's "Imagine", in which the listener is invited to "imagine no religion… a brotherhood of man…" Like Lennon would wish it, The Whos create their star from a communal "Instant Karma". The Morgans note that in the final edit, "the filmed Grinch emerged as a rare Christmas special

without religiosity" (ibid). In the topsy-turvy inversion of the star *The Grinch* was subtle, subversive and amounted to an ideological reversal of the Christian adoption of Saturnalia.

Unofficial Belief Systems

As noted in previous chapters, once a carnivalesque atmosphere is established, that is to say once the reader is "drunk" with dancing, feasting, inversion, mocking, and travesty, the stage is set for the possibility of transformative thinking. Readers (and listeners) of nonsense are thrust, at this point, into narrative voids in which it becomes possible, or necessary even, to re-imagine the world—to remap the boundaries and beliefs by which society and the self are governed—if only for a moment. These narrative voids and transformative tropes are constructed in four ways: through imagery of alternative belief systems, narrative "blank spaces", temporal anomalies and existential dilemmas.

As noted in previous chapters, while nonsense works to disrupt mythological systems and arbitrary authority, nonsense also subtly allies itself with the supernatural and with various unofficial belief systems. Through their open experimentation with mind-altering drugs and public engagement with Hindu spirituality, the Beatles readily supported this subversive tactic. In place of Christianity (it is presumed) Lennon prescribes a milieu of alternatives in the lyrics of his songs. In "Mind Games" Lennon describes "Chanting the mantra", the "soul power" of the "karmic wheel" and recommends, "doing the ritual dance in the sun". In "Across the Universe" Lennon sings "Jai Guru De Va Om", which is the name of a Hindu guru with whom Lennon was acquainted. In "I am the Walrus" Lennon juxtaposes occult images with nonsense, as in the phrases, "Crabalocker fishwife pornographic Priestess" or "Elementary penguin singing Hare Khrishna". Lennon conflates eastern mysticism with nonsense in other songs also. In "#9 Dream" Lennon sings "Two spirits dancing so strange / Ah! böwakawa

poussé, poussé". Lennon admitted that although the words to this chorus sound vaguely authentic, "Ah! böwakawa poussé, poussé" was, in fact, meaningless nonsense, and that he had dreamed the phrase. But given Lennon's well-publicised interest in eastern religion, and the authenticity suggested by the umlauts and accent marks (provided in the album artwork), listeners routinely assume the phrase is a religious chant from the east.

Though Lennon complained about the slavish religious adulation his fans, he nevertheless courted such devotion, perhaps inadvertently. In 1966, for example, he commented that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Lennon's incautious remarks were borne out, and Barbara Ehrenreich confirms, "Beatlemania soon reached the proportions of religious idolatry" (Ehrenreich 13). In 1966 it had been some time already since fans had begun bringing handicapped people and paraplegics to Beatles' concerts, in an effort to get one of The Beatles to touch them (*Anthology* 143). Lennon's increasingly ambiguous lyrics could have only fuelled such devotion. In his nonsense song, "I am the Walrus", Lennon sings "I am he / As you are he / As you are me", an existentially confusing phrase that vaguely echoes Yahweh's words, "I am who am." Lennon acknowledged at that time that fans were interpreting "I am the Walrus" as if he were saying he were God (*Anthology* 273). Then, in one of Lennon's spiritual anthems, "Come Together" (1969) he describes himself as "one holy roller", who will bring the people together, "over me".

The paradox of a spiritual leader who sings, "imagine no religion" is truly perplexing, especially when one considers the multiple alternative belief systems represented in Lennon's lyrics. Ultimately Lennon represented something akin to a guru who, if he had adopted a church, might have felt welcome in Timothy Leary's new religion, "The League for Spiritual Discovery", an alternative belief system oriented around psychedelic music and alternative experiences. Indeed, Lennon confirms that

"Come Together" was written in support of Leary's movement (see Sheff and Golson 210).

In "Glass Onion", a song featuring numerous nonsensical images, Lennon sings that the audience should "see how the other half live". Considering how varied his spiritual references were, the lines might be rewritten, "See how the other half *believes*". In that same song Lennon describes the way in which someone might reach an understanding of this alternative belief system. He sings, "see how the other half live / Looking through a glass onion". The *way* to spiritual rebirth, then, is via "looking through a glass", or as we might reword it, *Through the Looking Glass.* And this *way* is similarly marked in "#9 Dream" in which Lennon directs the disciple "thru the mirror go round, round". In both instances Lennon is referencing Lewis Carroll. For Lennon, then, Alice's trip through the looking glass is both the *way* to, and is, *the* ultimate alternative spiritual experience.

Bob Dylan was also looked on as a spiritual leader in the 1960s; he writes in *Chronicles* that by the mid and late 1960s he was attempting to stifle the image of a "Prophet", "Messiah" or "Saviour" that popular culture had assigned him (119; 124). Like Lennon, Dylan's prophet status was largely a result of his obscure song-writing style, and the prophetic pose of the narrative voice in his songs. In "The Times They Are A-Changin'" Dylan sings "Come writers and critics / Who prophesize with your pen" (*Lyrics* 81), and then proceeds to predict that a social revolution is imminent. One week after the single's release John Kennedy was assassinated. For many, Kennedy's assassination was the turning point of the 1960s, after which followed an acute social revolution. Inadvertently, then, Dylan *was* the writer and critic who prophesised with his pen, and the timing of the single's release assured Dylan that he would be remembered as that prophet.

But if Dylan were a prophet, what sort of belief system would he represent? At first glance Dylan's lyrics appear to empower a number of alternatives. Dylan sings as readily about the Old Testament as he sings of superstitious beliefs in wishing wells and white horses. Specifically, however, and most importantly, Dylan sang in the voice of a Gypsy prophet. There is the conspicuous presence of fortune-tellers and Gypsies populating Dylan's lyrics, as found in songs such as "Idiot Wind", "Went to See the Gypsy" and "Desolation Row". Concerning "One More Cup of Coffee" Dylan comments:

> It's a gypsy song. That song was written during a gypsy festival in the south of France one summer. Somebody took me there to the gypsy high holy days which coincide with my own particular birthday.
> (Qtd. in Zollo 273)

The "mad mystic hammering" (*Lyrics* 116) described in "Chimes of Freedom" is, no doubt, some form of Gypsy divination ritual. In the song "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window" Dylan sings of a character who, "If he needs a third eye he just grows it" (*Lyrics* 186). A third eye is a Gypsy (and ancient Celtic, Hindu and Buddist) belief concerning those given the ability to see beyond the physical world, or who can read the future. In "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" Dylan sings in the voice of a Gypsy medium as he stares into a crystal ball, creating a list of images that is as much prophesy as it is arbitrary:

> I saw a newborn baby with wolves all around it
> I saw a highway of diamonds with nobody on it
> I saw a black branch with blood that kept drippin'
> I saw a room full of men with their hammers a-bleedin'
> I saw a white ladder all covered in water
> I saw ten thousand talkers whose tongues were all broken
> I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children.
> (*Lyrics* 59)

The ambiguous collection of images above, in their randomness, and in their tendency to invite interpretation, exhibit the same relation between nonsense and the occult as do the examples discussed in Chapter One, in which witch craft and superstition are repeatedly

shown to be associated with folk nonsense. Dylan's lyrics also manifest an interest in Gypsy curses, as in "Seven Curses":

> These seven curses on a judge so cruel:
> That one doctor will not save him
> That two healers will not heal him
> That three eyes will not see him
> That four ears will not hear him
> That five walls will not hide him
> That six diggers will not bury him
> And that seven deaths shall never kill him (*Lyrics* 75)

Magic curses seem to affect the lives of many of Dylan's characters. In "Just Like a Woman" he comments, "your long-time curse hurts" (*Lyrics* 202). The narrator is cursed in "Stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again" (*Lyrics* 199) and in "The Times They Are A-Changin'" Dylan sings that "The line it is drawn / The curse it is cast" (*Lyrics* 82).

In "Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window" Dylan sings about a group of friends who "rearrange their religion" (*Lyrics* 186). Exactly what this new religion is, and how this conversion is achieved, is not described, but there are clues in other sets of Dylan's lyrics that assist the interpretive pilgrim. In "Went to See the Gypsy" Dylan describes how one may reach enlightenment:

> Go on back to see the gypsy
> He can move you from the rear
> Drive you from your fear
> Bring you through the mirror… (*Lyrics* 260)

Unwittingly perhaps, Dylan is heralding "the dawning of the Age of Aquarius", an age that in reality saw the dawning of New-Age belief in astrology, tarot, Gypsy religion, prophesies, crystals and pyramid power. And like Lennon, the key to entering this spiritual alternative is by dabbling in unofficial belief systems—you must "go see the gypsy"—and only thus may the disciple pass, like Alice, "through the mirror".

The settings, characters and devices in Seuss' texts often invite consideration of the otherworldly as well. Among Seuss' mystic settings are the haunted forests implied in the sequence involving the pants-eating plants in *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are* and in *What was I Scared Of*, which feature a disembodied pair of pale green pants. In Seuss' *ABC* book the image of the mumbling mice is inexplicable until you read that the mice only mumble under a full moon at midnight—the witching hour. And the household in *There's a Wocket in My Pocket* is clearly haunted. The narrator asks "Did you ever have the feeling there's a wasket in your basket" or "the feeling there's a zlock behind the clock?" Depending upon "feeling" implies that the uncanny is at work, manifesting itself in that eerie sense of being watched—of not being alone when one is supposed to be alone—a device so frequently used in ghost stories. And the creatures in *Wocket* are hidden in places normally associated with ghouls and other house bogeys—in closets, under beds, in basements, and in chimney flues.

Seuss also makes reference to mythic sources. In *Solla Sollew* Vent Number Five leads to the underworld, and when the protagonist descends into it he stays underground for three days, the same length time Jesus is supposed to have spent in the underworld before rising, and that numerous classical heroes are portrayed as travelling the nether-regions as well. And like Hercules and Odysseus the character in *Solla Sollew* encounters strange and monstrous creatures while underground. And in *The Lorax* the land of the Truffula Trees is a veritable Eden, complete with forbidden trees that should not be touched and a selfish creature that proves unequal to the task of caring for the animals.

The creatures that inhabit Seuss' universe are often derived from superstitious folk beliefs. In *The Lorax* the villain, known as The Once-ler, is witch-like in his habits and description. He only appears "on special dank midnights", is green, and requires not only fifteen pence to tell his tale, but also a witch's brew of a rusty nail and "the shell of a

great-great-great-grandfather snail". Further, the Once-ler's face is never shown, suggesting that he is like the devil of folk custom, whose name must not be spoken aloud or image represented—as doing so will act as a summons. This occult figure, the Lorax, is like tree sprites of western folk tradition who, when a tree is cut down, rise out of the newly hewn trunk to bother those who did the chopping. The Lorax is also quite unaccountably endowed with the power of flight (he has no wings) and in the end he soars into the sky like so many Julie Andrews in *Mary Poppins*.

In both *The Cat in the Hat* and *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, fairy-like creatures or miniature magic cats appear and, like the shoemaker's elves—and the brownies of Scottish folklore—provide a complimentary clean up service: "We will clean up that snow if it takes us all day! If it takes us all night, we will clean it away!" (36). Another fairy-like creature is the Key-Slapping Slippard in *Solla Sollew*. Not only is he tiny and green, but he is also mischievous, and we are told that you "can't kill the Slippard. It's very bad luck." There is the sleepwalking "army" in the *Sleep Book*, known as the Curious Crandalls, who have the eerie habit of marching with candles as they sleepwalk by the hundreds. These creatures are reminiscent of the legions of ghosts who comprise sleeping armies, such as the Knights of Alderley Edge in English folk custom (Simpson and Roud 3). And then there is the god-like Mr. Brown, about whom we learn, "Mr. Brown makes thunder! / He makes lightning!" No practical explanation is offered as to how Mr. Brown performs these feats. This otherwise unexceptional gentleman is simply pictured as Thor-like, surrounded by lightning bolts.

The accoutrements and devices found typically in a fairy realm are routinely depicted in Seuss' books as well. *The Cat In the Hat Comes Back* and *Marvin K. Mooney* each feature magical hats—one hat produces enchanted creatures, the other hat can fly. Marvin, by the way, is also offered the chance to fly on a broomstick. A magic wish is

described in *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish Blue Fish,* and in *Solla Sollew* a special golden key, a device used in numerous fairy tales, unlocks the key to the magic city. In the *Sleep Book* the reader learns of a machine that "listens and looks into everyone's home" to see if you are asleep. For a child the immediate connotation here is that the machine is very like Father Christmas, and, indeed, when we turn to the next page we read that the characters have "talked quite a bit about Santa Claus".

Whether you are talking about Krishna consciousness invoked in a John Lennon song, Gypsy superstition in Bob Dylan, or fairy tale magic in Dr. Seuss, 1960s nonsense shows another way—an alternative belief system. In Seuss' *What was I Scared Of* the message is quite clear. The disembodied pair of pants is never explained logically. But in the end they are enthusiastically welcomed. One message that can be gleaned from this ending is that you should trust in the inexplicable, and put your faith in unfamiliar magic (64).

Filling the Narrative Void

Paul McCartney's introduction to Lennon's *IHOW* warns, "There are bound to be some thickheads who will wonder why some of it doesn't make sense, and others who will search for hidden meanings" (11). McCartney's words are prophetic. As soon as Lennon introduced the aesthetics of nonsense into his song writing in the mid 1960s, The Beatles were no longer perceived as simply musical. Suddenly they were regarded as a political entity. Overnight, it seemed, and quite to their dismay, reporters and fans began asking The Beatles about their views on political issues. Lennon, in particular, was bemused by political "readings" of his nonsense songs and at turns either denied that they meant anything or—enjoying the havoc he could wreak—purposefully egged his audience on.

Lennon's "Glass Onion" is a prime example: "Well here's another clue for you all / The Walrus was Paul". Lennon comments, "I threw in that line... just to confuse everybody a bit more." (Qtd. in Sheff and Golson 208) Lennon's occasional intentional play with his audience aside, however, the beginnings of the misunderstandings and readings of "hidden" meanings of Beatle songs rests assuredly in the narrative voids and blank spaces of Lennon's Carroll-inspired lyrics. Lennon's comments on Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter" establishes this connection:

> To me it was a beautiful poem. It never occurred to me that Lewis Carroll was commenting on the capitalist and social system. I never went into that bit about what it really meant, like people are doing with the Beatles' work. (*Anthology* 272)

As soon as Carroll was significantly involved in Lennon's creative process, the readings of Beatle imagery became prolific and ominous. Kurlansky notes that the ultra-conservative John Birch Society took one look at *Sergeant Pepper* and "claimed that the album showed a fluency in the techniques of brainwashing that proved the Beatles' involvement in an international communist conspiracy" (189) The Beatles albums, *Revolver*, *Sgt. Pepper, Magical Mystery Tour*, the "White Album" and *Abbey Road* became, for the public, a set of clues that needed to be worked out.

Political readings were not the only types of interpretation to which The Beatles lyrics and artwork were subjected. Through elaborate "understandings" of these "secret messages" Charles Manson, for example, was incited to go on a murder spree in 1969 (Coleman 394). Less tragically, Paul McCartney woke up one morning that same year to read in the newspaper that he was, in fact, dead, and had been replaced with a look-alike in 1966. What is remarkable in this episode is that the conspiracy theorists who concocted the "Paul is Dead" theory did so by cribbing from Lewis Carroll's strategies. R. Gary Patterson, author of *The Walrus Was Paul: The Great Beatle Death Clues*, notes:

> With Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* in mind, I experimented with a small, flat mirror held at an angle to certain spots on *Sgt. Pepper's* cover. I became particularly interested in the bass drum, when I read that the designer was a mysterious Joe Ephgrave. The last name surely was a [portmanteau] of *epitaph* and *grave* (55).

Later, in this same volume, Patterson discusses "I am the Walrus" and manages to invoke Humpty Dumpty, who, Patterson asserts, was like the dead McCartney in that Humpty Dumpty "also had a tragic accident and cracked his head". Patterson feels that The Beatles were masters at placing such clues and concludes that "Lewis Carroll would have been proud" (83). The "Paul is dead" rumours were no small affair. There was even a television broadcast in which the famed attorney, F. Lee Bailey, questioned "witnesses", including Beatles Manager, Allen Klien, and Peter Asher, the brother of McCartney's one-time fiancée (R. Patterson 32). A living, breathing, Paul McCartney being told that he has been dead for three years is, indeed, very like Edward Lear being told that he does not exist.

Yet despite McCartney's anticipatory impatience in his Introduction to Lennon's first book, the fact remains that the "thickheads" have always, and will always, look for hidden meanings in texts that leave out key logical connectors. Lennon's two books of nonsense, along with numerous of his songs, lack traditional narrative cohesion and are thus bound to produce any assortment of varied readings. As we have seen, of course, as evidenced by the lyrics of "Glass Onion", ("here's another clue for you all / The walrus was Paul"), Lennon invited such readings. He comments,

> In those days I was writing obscurely, a la Dylan, never saying what you mean but giving the impression of something, where more or less can be read into it. It's a good game. (*Anthology* 273)

Shotton recalls that the impetus to create "I am the Walrus" was born in part from a conscious desire to create a track laden with "hidden meanings". Recalling a day in 1967 Shotton remarks,

> I dipped into a [mail] sack... and pulled out a letter which happened to be from our old school, from a pupil at Quarry Bank. He said that his English teacher was getting them to read and analyse Beatles' lyrics, find out the hidden meanings, what they were really all about.
>
> This started John off remembering lines we used to recite when we were at school... he started scribbling "Yellow matter custard dripping from a dead dog's eye..."
>
> When he finished, he turned to me and said, "Let the fuckers work that one out, Pete." (Qtd. in Davies 114)

In "Tomorrow Never Knows", his first psychedelic song, Lennon sings that the listener should,

> Lay down all thought, surrender to the void,
> It is shining, it is shining.
> That you may see the meaning of within,
> It is speaking, it is speaking,

These lyrics expressly request that voids be filled with meaning. Is it any wonder, then, that his audience, including The John Birch Society, when examining "A Day in the Life", for example, would assume that a song that also mentions reading the newspaper, the English Army, a war, and a member of the House of Lords, had a political meaning?

Many of Dylan's lyrics are similarly constructed. "Let Me Die in My Footsteps", "Walkin' Down the Line", "Bob Dylan's Blues", "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall", "Ballad in Plain D", and many of the songs on the albums *Bringing It All Back Home*, *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde* rely partly on this blank-void strategy for their appeal. In the song "Gates of Eden", Dylan paints the surreal image of a "lamppost [that] stands with folded arms", and also sings,

> With a time-rusted compass blade
> Aladdin and his lamp
> Sits with Utopian hermit monks
> Sidesaddle on the Golden Calf
> And on their promises of paradise
> You will not hear a laugh
> All except inside the Gates of Eden (*Lyrics* 154)

What does this mean? Like Lennon, it is unlikely that Dylan *meant* anything specific. While Dylan has been less forthcoming about the lack of intended meaning in his songs, folksinger and former girlfriend, Joan Baez, has claimed on behalf of Dylan that he often meant nothing in particular in his writing. In *No Direction Home*, Baez recalls with a smile, and adopts a mock Dylan voice:

> You know, a bunch of years from now all these people, all these assholes are going to be writing about all the shit I write. I don't know where the fuck it comes from. I don't know what the fuck it's about, and their gonna write about what it's about. Ha ha ha.
> (Qtd. in Scorsese, disc 1, 1:40:56-41:05)

Despite any authorial intention, or lack thereof, the listener may cull meaning from Dylan's enigmatic lyrics. If approached a certain way, for example, the biblical references in the verse quoted above—"The Golden Calf", "paradise" and "the Gates of Eden"—may be fused with the youthful image of "Aladdin" and "utopia" to suggest a generally hopeful milieu—one in which we "will not hear a laugh" at the thought of "promises of paradise". While other meanings may certainly be garnered, the above reading is as valid as any other. Dylan himself notes that he considers meaning relative:

> Words have their own meaning, their different meanings, and words change their meanings. Words that meant something ten years ago don't mean that now. They mean something else. (Ibid, disc 2, 30:43-52)

In this view, Dylan is close to Carroll, who wrote, as quoted in Chapter three,

> ...words mean more than we mean to express when we use them: so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer meant. So whatever good meanings are in a book, I'm very glad to accept as the meaning of the book. (Qtd. in Gardner, *Snark* 22)

Dylan seems particularly attracted to narrative voids. Even in his public persona, Farina comments, Dylan had a habit of seeming to mean more than he said. During interviews and conversation, Farina recalls, Dylan "brought the manifestation of the pregnant pause to uncanny perfection". He adds that while some found this quality of

Dylan "discomforting... everyone agreed his smirk implied a certain something left unsaid" (6). As has been noted earlier, what is left unsaid, more often than not, as in Freudian dream analysis, is met with a "reading" that expresses a repressed or subversive desire, one that conflicts in some way with authority. And it is for this reason that numerous of Dylan's songs featuring narrative voids inspire the consideration of subversive political thought. In fact, two of the most controversial political organisations founded in the sixties, The Black Panthers and The Weatherman, each founded their identity, in part, via the narrative voids of Dylan's lyrics. In his book, *Seize the Time*, Black Panther founder Bobby Seale notes that it was while listening to the lyrics of "Ballad of a Thin Man" that he and co-founder Huey Newton came to believe that Dylan was predicting an uprising in which the poor black African American population would defeat their white oppressors. And it was this "secret message" that provided them with the courage to organise their platform (Marqusee 208). Similarly, The Weatherman, a terrorist faction of the radical New Left, named themselves after a lyric in Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues", "You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows" (see S. Cohen 218 and Jerome 97). "Subterranean Homesick Blues" is a vaguely conspiratorial, hip and coded amalgam of beat slang:

> Maggie comes fleet foot
> Face full of black soot
> Talkin' that the heat put
> Plants in the bed but
> The phone's tapped anyway
> Maggie says that many say
> They must bust in early May
> Orders from the D. A. (*Lyrics* 141)

Besides their association with sixties-era terrorist organisations "Ballad of Thin Man" and "Subterranean Homesick Blues" share only two other qualities; they are both constructed with an enigmatic narrative and adorned with playful language.

While Seuss is generally more traditional in his narrative construction it remains true that what Seuss leaves out is often what readers remember most. In *If I Ran the Circus* a character is asked to jump several hundred feet into a fish bowl. Before the harrowing sequence takes place Seuss leaves the predicament behind, commenting simply, "Don't ask how he'll manage. That's his job. Not mine." In his endings especially, Seuss often revels in ambiguity. In the final sequence of *On Beyond Zebra* the reader is presented with a wild swirl of looping and zagging lines, representing some no doubt unpronounceable letter. Rather than explain what the letter represents, Seuss asks, "What do you think we should call this one, anyhow?" and thus the "story" ends. The endings of *The Cat in the Hat*, *The Lorax* and *The Butter Battle Book* are all similarly ambiguous; *The Cat in the Hat* concludes with a question on the relative value of telling your parents the truth, and the Lorax brings his presence in the narrative to a close by leaving behind a single word, "Unless". Seuss adds, "Whatever that meant, well I just couldn't guess" (*Lorax*). And *The Butter Battle Book* "concludes" with the world on the brink of nuclear annihilation; the two protagonists stand facing one another atop a wall, both threatening the other by holding out a metaphoric atom bomb which they are threatening to drop. The final words in this text are "We will see…" Here I should invoke again an obvious parallel to Francis Hopkinson's *A Pretty Story* which concludes with "These harsh and unconstitutional Proceedings irritated Jack and the other inhabitants of the new Farm to such a Degree that ********** ."(Zall 55; Westlake 29)

The strategy in using these narrative voids is one of inclusion. That is, the reader is incited to reach beyond the normally passive act of reading (or listening) and is incited to interact creatively with the text. Ultimately Lennon, Dylan's and Seuss' narrative voids inspire a certain personal responsibility for meaning. This practice can readily be compared to the sixties-era insistence on the concept of "participatory democracy". As

DeKoven remarks:

> Participatory democracy is the primary informing concept of the profoundly influential 1962 document, *The Port Huron Statement,* written by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). (123)

In *The Port Huron Statement* the SDS, which went on to be an important force in a number of key sixties-era radical movements, campaigns for an increase in the level of individual responsibility of each of its constituents. Similarly, when John Kennedy says, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country" he is emphasizing the superiority of the active over the passive citizen. Kennedy is envisioning a citizen who wants to be involved in determining what his country "means". Likewise, with the texts of Lennon, Dylan and Seuss, full meaning is achieved only via active participation on the part of each individual listener or reader. When Lennon's solo album, *The Plastic Ono Band*, was released in 1969 it was heralded by a print advertising campaign that featured a torn page from a telephone directory. The page was comprised of entries for various people with the surname Jones, and was inexplicable to many who looked at it. Lennon explains that the ad campaign was intended to suggest to his audience "*we* are the Plastic Ono Band and the *audience* is the Plastic Ono Band... You're in it. Everybody's in it." (Qtd. in Sheff and Golson 218) In significant ways the "texts" of Lennon, Dylan and Seuss are basically incomplete until the listener makes a participatory move.

Temporal Anomalies

Another trope of transformation is the temporal anomaly, as instanced in "One Bright Day in the Middle of the Night". Temporal anomalies function as a magical, liminal space in which everyday hierarchal constructions of order no longer apply. In nonsense literature temporal anomalies can disorient the reader and thus serve to

momentarily remove him or her from common, everyday conceptions of what is normal or possible. Just as folk belief dictates that it is at the "magic moment" (twilight), when day and night collide, that the portal opens into the utopian otherworld of fairies and magic, so the reader of nonsense, when confronted with a similar collision, such as a bright day in the middle of the night, is invited to envision alternate realities or utopian fantasies.

Lennon posits these very spaces when he makes use of phrases such as "A Hard Day's Night", (a phrase invented by Ringo), which Lennon liked and used as a song title, a film title, and as a phrase in his first book of nonsense (*IHOW* 35). In *ASITW* we read of people "Wot lived when were dead" (44). In the song "I'm Only Sleeping" Lennon's sings about floating upstream. In "Tomorrow Never Knows" he suggests that the listener should "play the existence to the end / of the beginning". Where Lewis Carroll in "The Walrus and the Carpenter" has the sun shining in the middle of the night, Lennon, in "I am the Walrus" suggests "If the sun don't come, you get a tan from standing in the English rain."

Dylan posits the temporal anomaly or impossible space just as readily. In "My Back Pages" the chorus is "I was so much older then / I'm younger than that now" (*Lyrics* 125). In "Idiot Wind" Dylan sings that "springtime turned / slowly to autumn" (*Lyrics* 337). In "Tombstone Blues" a character claims, "He could die happily ever after" (*Lyrics* 170). In "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" the listener learns of a place "Where black is the colour, where none is the number" (*Lyrics* 60). In "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" Dylan posits "darkness at the break of noon" (*Lyrics* 156). While it is conceivable that noon could be dark, the phrase "break of noon" complicates the temporal location, as the phrase usually runs "break of dawn". In either case, at dawn or at noon, darkness is the opposite of what would normally be expected. And in the nonsense song "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream" there is a wilful temporal confusion. The song commences at the arrival of

the Mayflower in the New World and the characters attempt to "buy up the place with beads". But the visitors to the New World discover restaurants, banks, jails, and pay phones, and when the protagonist returns to New York Harbour he finds a parking ticket strapped to the mast of his ship (*Lyrics* 150). And on the way out of New York Harbour the Mayflower sees the ships of Christopher Columbus just arriving—when in reality the Columbus expedition would have arrived 129 years before the Mayflower.

Seuss posits impossible locations in numerous ways. Mathematically, as in *The Sleep Book,* the reader is introduced to an Offt that weighs "minus one pound". And like Lennon and Dylan he experiments with temporal spaces that merge two separate times. In *On Beyond Zebra* he mentions the month of "Sept-Umber", and in a text from 1977 Seuss requests, "please try to remember the First of October" (*Please Try to Remember*). In *The Sleep Book* there is a clock in which the numbers of the hours are hopelessly confused. Of this curious time piece Seuss tells us that it "doesn't tick tock. How it goes is tock tick" :

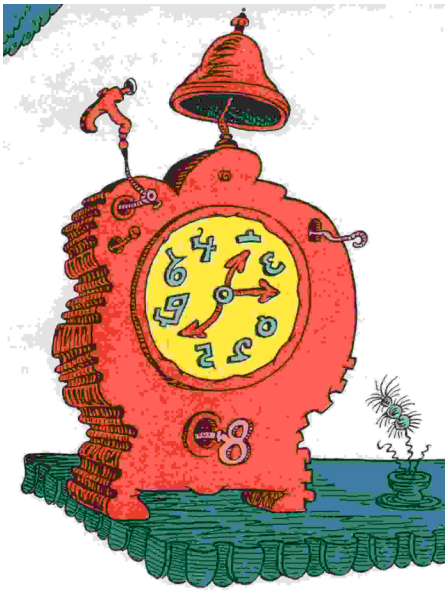

Figure 50

Such a clock, one that inverts a tick-tock, and plots the hours of an obviously alien world, posits the existence of a place that is entirely other.

Existential Dilemmas

Unofficial belief systems, narrative voids and temporal anomalies all have a disorienting effect, and thus it should not be surprising to discover characters in nonsense texts who are experiencing existential dilemmas. Just as a pun underscores the fragility of absolute meaning, so nonsense in general underscores the arbitrary nature of society and its rules. The reader of nonsense is forced beyond the scope of what is normal or accepted and, if only for a moment, is required to re-map or re-imagine the boundaries and rules by which society and the self are defined. And so the existential dilemma sets in. That existential dilemmas were de rigueur for the quintessential sixties experience is observable in a number of ways. They were, for example, an integral facet of psychedelic drug culture. In fact, having an existential dilemma was almost *the* point of a sixties drug experience—to get out of your self and be able to see yourself and your world from a new perspective. In the psychedelic film, *The Trip* (1967) Peter Fonda plays a character who takes LSD. Like Alice, who forgets her name while lost in the forest in *Looking Glass*, Fonda's character forgets his name while he is under the influence of the drug. He also is confronted with a series of iconic images and fails to recognise them, including images of President Johnson, Jesus on the Cross and The American Flag (Corman 00:35:00-36:40). This contemporary insistence on the importance of stepping outside of one's self explains why R. D. Laing's study of schizophrenia, *The Divided Self* (1965) was so popular and was, as DeKoven describes it, "another key sixties text" (205). Laing's study, while questionable by today's standards in many of its claims regarding psychiatry, is non-the-less a "key sixties text" because it is founded on existential analysis, on fantasies of transcendence, and is concerned with the topic of considering one's "false self".

In Lennon's *ASITW* we read of a budgie (a bird) that is at first referred to as "Jeffrey". Then, for no apparent reason, the narrator relates, "I cried and called him Ronnie… although his name was Arthur" (18). In *IHOW*, after a particularly confusing courtroom scene, we read that "Many people answered 'On the other hand who are we to judge? I mean who are we?'" (48) and there is this image, also from *IHOW*, of a character who is quite literally, of two minds:

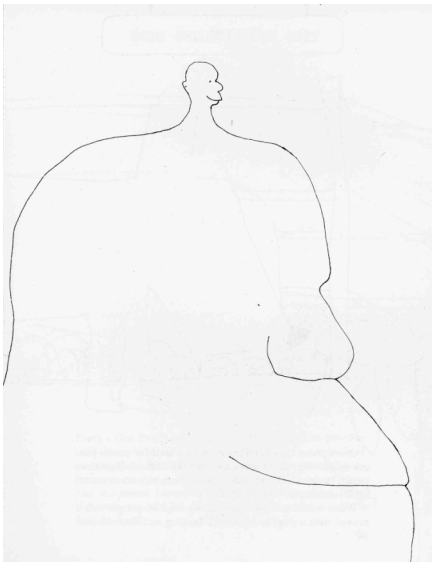

Figure 51

In "Strawberry Fields Forever" Lennon sings,

> But you know I know when it's a dream.
> I think I know I mean a "Yes".
> But it's all wrong.
> That is I think I disagree.

At its most basic level it appears that this verse concerns a perplexing discovery of multiple voices and/or relative truths of the narrator's multiple selves.

Comparing the above lyrics from Lennon to the following verse from Dylan's nonsensical "Ballad of a Thin Man" reveals another of the strategies the two writers shared:

You raise up your head
And you ask, "Is this where it is?"
And somebody points to you and says
"It's his"
And you say, "What's mine?"
And somebody else says, "where what is?"
And you say, "Oh my God
Am I here all alone?" (*Lyrics* 174)

In both Lennon's and Dylan's verses, then, the existential state is one of impenetrable confusion. Several other of Dylan's characters lose track of themselves as well. Dylan's most popular song in the sixties, "Like a Rolling Stone", is a text dedicated to the idea of being disoriented and having lost track of one's foundations: "How does it feel / to be all alone / with no direction home". Ultimately, the existential dilemma this character experiences is quite dramatic; Dylan sings, "You're invisible now" (*Lyrics* 169). In "Visions of Johanna" the narrator complains, "I can't find my knees" (*Lyrics* 193). In "Positively 4th Street" Dylan posits a truly perplexing, and humorous, existential dilemma. The person to whom he directs his lyrics is someone Dylan is not fond of. Dylan wishes that for just one time "you could stand inside my shoes / And just for that one moment I could be you". The end result of this exchange would be that "You'd know what a drag it is to see you" (*Lyrics* 185).

Similarly, in Seuss' *The Big Brag* a worm with unusually strong eyesight looks around the world and sees the back of its own head. In *Did I Ever Tell You How Lucky You Are* we meet Poor Harry Hadow who hasn't any shadow:

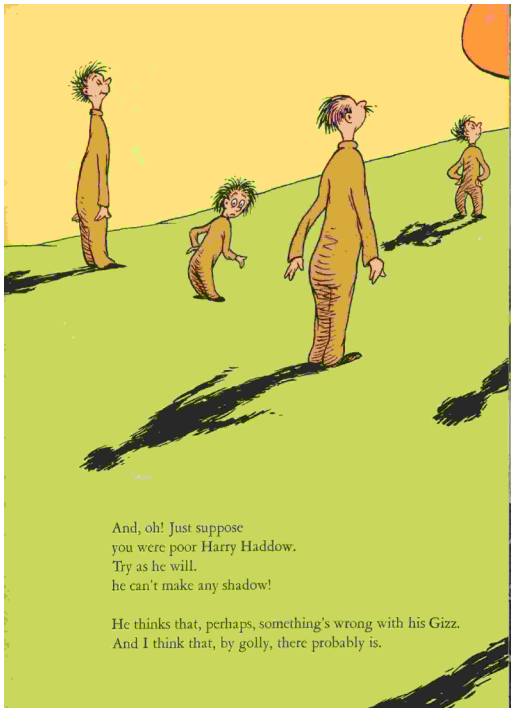

Figure 52

And in *On Beyond Zebra* we meet two creatures, a big one and a small one. Seuss explains that "the big one, you see, has the smaller one's shadow" and vice versa. These characters have all lost track of an essential part of their being, or are seeing themselves in profoundly new and unusual ways. The fate of the Sneeches sums up the results of exposure to the existential dilemmas of nonsense:

> …neither the Plain nor the Star-bellies knew
> Whether this one was that one… or that one was this one
> Or which one was what one… or what one was who. (21)

In the sixties it was thought that real social change might only be attained if a new image of the self could be envisioned. And so we find the characters of nonsense, in their struggle to become something other, losing track of their own "shadow" or witnessing the growth a new self (in Lennon's drawing, via a second head).

In Seuss' *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* we find the image of a sign post with two signs pointing in opposite directions. One sign reads "Near", the other sign reads "Far" (33). In this image Near and Far appear to be equally distant, or equally close.

Politically, and socially, nonsense attempts to achieve this levelling—this bringing of the "Far" onto equal footing with the "Near". What was once thought of as too far, and unfamiliar, is now as readily reachable as what is near and familiar. The existential dilemmas of nonsense perform the same function on the level of the individual, suggesting the equidistant proximities of the known self, and the possible self. And so nonsense puts the individual, as Lennon sings, where "your inside is out and your outside is in. / Your outside is in and your inside is out"; near and far, again, are equally distant.

Figure 53

Figure 54

Nonsense is a literature that invites intimate speculation on what might be, if only one can see beyond the confines of the present paradigm, if only one can envision that what was once impossibly distant is now close at hand. And it is within the confines of that nonsensical paradigm of relative equidistance that Lennon asks us to envision a topsy-turvy world where genders are confused, where love is more important than money, and where politicians are "arsked" difficult questions in a "new" language—a nonsensical language that will confuse and disorient authority; it is within the confines of that paradigm also that Dylan asserts that "something will be happening", but the new signs and symbols will be so disorienting that Mr. Jones won't know "what it is." The only hope for anyone who wants to succeed in the new world will be to undergo an existential

dilemma, and transcend it to achieve a new status that was once far but is now near and then subscribe to an entirely new set of symbols and relations. A new language —a new set of signs—is being used for communication, and the establishment is just not going to understand:

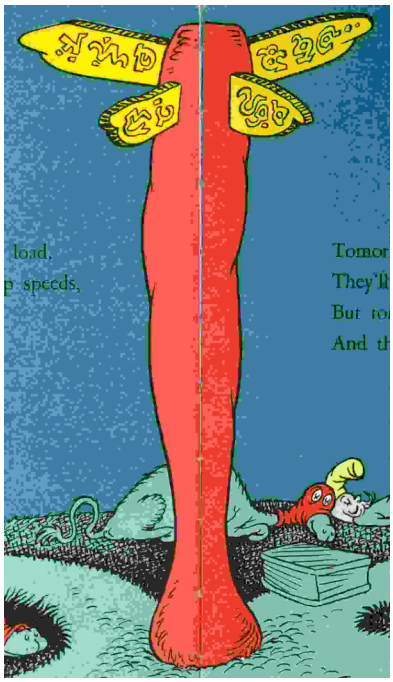

Figure 55

Characters in nonsense texts often see beyond what the normal person can see or understand. In Seuss Horton is able to see the Whos' tiny planet when no one else can, and we meet a child in *On Beyond Zebra* who claims to know letters of the alphabet that come after Z.

> When I picked up the chalk and drew one letter more!
> A letter he never had dreamed of before!
> And I said, "You can stop if you want, with the Z
> Because most people stop with the Z
> But not me!
> My alphabet starts where your alphabet ends!"
> [. . . . . .]
> There's no end
> To the things you might know,
> Depending how far beyond Zebra you go!

And there is the Cat in *The Cat in the Hat,* who says,

> "I know some new tricks…
> I will show them to you.
> Your mother
> Will not mind at all if I do."
> Then Sally and I
> Did not know what to say.
> Our mother was out of the house
> For the day. (8)

The Cat, of course, is not being honest when he says that the mother will not mind if he teaches them some "new tricks". And that is why the children consider keeping the truth from their mother at the end of the book. Mother will not understand these new tricks. The Cat's ways are incommensurable with Mother's ways. The children are being tempted with a new paradigm, being asked to experiment with anti-establishment ways—being shown that a new *way* is easy, close and desirable. In *What Was I Scared Of*, the story of the disembodied pale green pants, the title suggests that Seuss is attempting to teach children to deal with and resolve unfounded fears. Yet there is a second level of meaning in this text. If the point were merely to suggest that the odd pants should not be feared one might imagine that the "magic" in them would have been disabled—the text would have proven the pants were not as they seemed. But this is not what happens. Instead, the nonsensical, inexplicable empty pants are simply accepted and the child moves into a new paradigm in which empty pants that walk by themselves are normal:

> And, now, we meet quite often,
> Those empty pants and I,
> And we never shake or tremble.
> We both smile
> And we say
> "Hi!" (64)

SECTION IV: MYTH, LEGACY AND APPROPRIATION

Alice's Restaurant

Arlo Guthrie's song, "Alice's Restaurant" (1967), demonstrates a curious relationship between nonsense, protest and national spirit. While the song references nonsense it also functions as a protest against the draft. Interestingly, the song has undergone a curious mythic ascendance. Now Guthrie's most famous song, "Alice's Restaurant" has been appropriated as a traditional Thanksgiving Day song in the United States. While the song's narrative mentions Thanksgiving Day, the canonisation of this highly satirical, critical and demonstrably unpatriotic song, as a staple of such a revered national holiday, appears to be a rather anomalous occurrence. Other than "Alice's Restaurant", in fact, the United States has no other traditional Thanksgiving song. Despite the anomaly, radio stations, such as WZLX in Boston, will eagerly announce and promote the annual playing of the song across their airwaves on the afternoon of Thanksgiving. As the story revolves around an illegal trash dumping and a failed psychiatric exam, the mystery of the song's appeal on a family holiday deepens. Is it possible that Americans would like to believe that humorous nonsensical hippie protest songs represent America in some way? On Thanksgiving Day Americans are ostensibly supposed to be thanking god not just for their blessings, but specifically thanking him (or her) for America. Thanksgiving, as it was for the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1621, is about taking stock in what this new "Eden" means to Americans. One possible connection to the "idea" of America is Guthrie's repeated chorus, "you can get anything you want / at Alice's Restaurant", a phrase that cheerfully mocks the capitalist/free market utopia that America promises. Yet there seems more to the song's appeal and message than just that. The key to

understanding this new American tradition of playing Guthrie's song on Thanksgiving lies in the opening verse, which echoes the White Knight's claim that a song may be named one thing and called another:

> This song is called Alice's Restaurant, and it's about Alice, and the restaurant, but Alice's Restaurant is not the name of the restaurant, that's just the name of the song, and that's why I called the song Alice's Restaurant.

If the message of this opening verse is that something can be called one thing, but really be another, is it possible that Guthrie's anthem reveals a misgiving over what America calls itself, and what it really is? Regardless of the answer to that question it is this iconoclastic song, steeped in the nonsense tradition, to which Americans listen on Thanksgiving Day, and which somehow lends a deeper meaning to the holiday. What can be claimed for certain is that, on some level, the audience—in canonizing this song—is acknowledging that nonsense, rebellion, civil protest and an image of nationalism may neatly be tied up together.

John Lennon

The three artists with whom this chapter has been primarily concerned, Lennon, Dylan and Seuss, like Guthrie's ballad, have been made sacrosanct in the public's eyes and their respective fames may be described as mythic in their ascendance. What does it mean to be mythic? Certainly something supernatural is posited when the term mythic is used. One implication concerning one who is mythic is that he or she has sought solutions to problems by means unnatural to mere mortals. By "unnatural" here, I mean that, in the cases of the artists in question, their texts have functioned either beyond or below the radar of everyday experience. Either via the subconscious of their listeners or via the conscious envisioning of that which is impossible, the nonsensical strategies of these artists have

tapped into a vague otherworldly human experience. And, indeed, these artists are mythic in their influence. Just as a mythic giant heaves his magic axe and leaves behind a fertile valley where once there was a mountain, so these mythic heroes have changed the forms of the media they worked in. And each has become an icon of the decade in which he rose to fame.

John Lennon's death at the hands of a gunman in 1980 did nothing to lessen his secular-religious prophet status. And along with the spiritual persona, Lennon has become the poster-child of the 1960s era jester/intellectual/revolutionary, as is affirmed by the recent release of Maureen Muldaur's anti-Bush documentary, *The U.S. Vs John Lennon*: *Artist, Humanitarian, National Threat.* This chapter has shown the ingredients and practices of Lennon's texts that built this legacy for him, demonstrating particularly a significant dependence on the strategies he acquired from his tutelage under Lewis Carroll.

Bob Dylan

Bob Dylan hovers just beneath Lennon in his status as prophet—lower only because he is still living, one suspects. Confirming his unusually eminent fame and status, in 1997 Dylan was summoned for an audience with Pope John Paul II. John Paul wished to acknowledge Dylan's influence on underground movements in Eastern Europe before the Iron Curtain fell. And while it is acknowledged that straight-forward songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind" clearly helped deliver Dylan's message, his nonsense songs, as carnivalesque frames, and as agents of transformation, deserve acknowledgement as well. Dylan, the Gypsy-prophet, intuitively utilised nonsense forms to better deliver his ideological message.

Dr. Seuss

The final chapter in Nel's book on Seuss is titled "American Icon, American Iconoclast". The iconic status of Seuss cannot be denied. Of Seuss' characters, for example, Nel admits, "they have achieved the status of myth" (173). Just as the Cat and her fiddle are carved into the stonework of a church in North Leach England, and the characters from Alice have been preserved in stained glass, so we discover that NASA attempted to acquire permission to name one of its space probes DRSEUSS (Nel 135).

While Seuss' mythic status is undeniable, it is less certain, of course, what his image and influence will mean one hundred years from now. The examinations performed in Chapters Two and Three, concerned with "Yankee Doodle", Mother Goose, Alice and Lewis Carroll, have one advantage over the present chapter, namely, historical hindsight. Nearly 235 years has passed since the American colonial forces usurped "Yankee Doodle" and it has been nearly 145 years since *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was published. This great distance affords certain advantages for one who would trace the cultural significance, and ideological uses of particular cultural products. It being only sixteen years since Seuss' death, the depth and breadth of his cultural and ideological impact are, comparatively, more difficult to ascertain. While Nel believes, as do I, that the overall effect of an exposure to Seuss' work is liberating and subversive, Nel worries over Seuss' posthumous destiny: "The iconoclastic Seuss risks being overpowered by the marketing icon Seuss—faithful to profit, one hundred percent." (167) Nel's concern is well founded, considering the empire of Seussian products that have been created since the author's death in 1991. Nel is concerned, for example, by what he terms, "The Disneyfication of Dr. Seuss" (130). There is a Seuss theme park in Orlando now, just minutes from Disney. *Seussical*, a Musical, was a major Broadway production, and there are the recent,

worrisome, film adaptations of *The Grinch* and *The Cat in the Hat.* Nel points out the disturbing transformation that Cindy Lou Who underwent in her move from Seuss' control to Ron Howard's. In Howard's film Cindy supports a "quintessentially American narrative", manifesting the idea that "if you work hard anything is possible! Young blonde, and spunky, Cindy-Lou Who is equal parts social worker, therapist, and investigative reporter" (Nel 133). Nel also notes the careless blending of Seuss characters with Jim Henson's in a hybrid book series called *Wubbulous* (155). Nel warns, "turning Seuss into another Disney threatens to make "Seuss" synonymous with the ambiguous power of global capitalism" (136). The 1999 release of *Seussisms for Success: Insider Tips on Economic Success by the Good Doctor* would seem to confirm Nel's worst fears (Peters).

What concerns Nel is partly a function of the author's unprecedented success. Nel points out the irony, for example, that while Seuss' *Grinch* criticises the commercialisation of Christmas, the book and film of *The Grinch* are fabulously successful commodities that have earned millions of dollars (130). Christmas just wouldn't be Christmas if one didn't own a copy of the book—or the 1966 animated special. Therefore, despite the Grinch's claim to the contrary, Christmas *does*, in fact, come from a store. Similarly, it cannot be denied that Seuss is one of the most successful children's book authors in history. By 1986, *Green Eggs and Ham* was "the third best selling book in the English language. Ever" (Stofflet 17). By 1998 400 million Dr. Seuss books had been sold (Nel 131). These oft-reported numbers, which sound like a Seussian tall tale, may serve inadvertently to connect Seuss' success with an American capitalist ideal in which all that matters are extremely high numbers. In a few cases the texts themselves implicate Seuss in precisely this way. It has been argued, for example, that Seuss books are distinctly American in that they are boastful, exaggerated and violent.

Oh! The Places You'll Go (1990), for example, found criticism in the voice of Alison Lurie, who objected to the definition of success prescribed in the book: "Anything less than absolute success is seen as failure" and the book depicts "no human relationships except that of competition" (163). Unless the protagonist in *Oh! The Places You'll Go* is a star on his own television show, he is not considered successful.

And so, while Seuss' texts generally espouse the views of the subversive/liberal/ radical, his unprecedented success, coupled with his love of exaggeration, is representative of all that is enormous and unyielding about American corporate enterprise. Consequently there is a struggle to appropriate Seuss' image, as radical/socialist and conservative/capitalist parties vie for its ownership. Note, for example, two competing series of images from recent years, mentioned also in Chapter One: In hip California boutiques we discover a popular Cat in the Hat t-shirt that depicts Seuss' Cat smoking a joint and giving the peace sign (Morgan 292). And there is the following advertisement, headed, "Tye-Dyed Rasta Cat", featured on eBay. This product is advertised as:

> The Cat in the Hat
> With Dread One and Dread Two
> Playing some hacky sack in front of their VW bus
> In the parking lot with you!
> [The license plate reads, "He's Gone"]
> ("Cat in the Hat Tie-Dyed Rasta Cat")

Figure 56

Meanwhile in 1997 Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer wore Seuss' Cat's hat and necktie for photo opportunities that supported the National Education Association (Nel 183). Similarly, just as Seuss' environmental tract, *The Lorax*, is a text that has created "real enemies" among logging concerns (Nel 175), so on 1 March 2001 Seuss' Cat in the Hat rang the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange and that night the Cat's hat was emblazoned in electric colours up one entire side of the Empire State Building (see "Read Across America"). Seuss' Cat, then, has become emblematic of both counter-culture and the establishment. This struggle to appropriate Seuss' image thus mirrors in certain ways the schizophrenic appeal of Alice in England, where the radical nonsense in Alice is perhaps just as descriptive of the national spirit as is the static, romantic vision of adult/child colonisation. Similarly, usurpation of Seuss' cultural products to support capitalist concerns mirrors, in a way, one of the cultural functions of the Yankee character, as described in Chapter Two, whom Buell likens to P. T. Barnum (see Buell 338-39), the quintessential capitalist (see present study 141).

The struggle to appropriate Seuss' image goes all the way to the top. In a speech by George W. Bush, in which he promotes his "Early Childhood Initiative" Bush discussed Seuss' *Hop on Pop*, and Seuss' philosophy that "children want the same things we want, to laugh, to be challenged, to be entertained and delighted" (Nel 188). By repeating these very words again a few minutes later—but this time in a defence of his own policies regarding childhood—Bush, as Philip Nel observes, "aligned himself with Seuss" (ibid). Shortly after this speech the website *SatireWire* ran a parody of this press conference. The parody suggests, as does a recent issue of *Mad Magazine*, that Bush developed all his policies based on Dr. Seuss books (Nel 190-91). In the *SatireWire* parody Bush is speaking with Colin Powell and is attempting to solve the problems in the Middle East. The exchange concludes,

> Powell: Mr. President, I don't believe Voom actually exists.
>
> Bush: So, we'll make some. We got a big defence budget, and if we need more money, we'll just cut taxes again. (Qtd. in Nel 191)

So, while Bush would align himself with Seuss in his political speech, Bush's critics simultaneously use Seuss to mock the President. According to sociologist David Brooks, in *Bobos in Paradise* (2000), this struggle for the appropriation of radical culture from the 1960s was typical of American culture in the 1990s. Brooks identifies the emergence of a new social elite in America at this time, a class he dubs, "Bobo." Bobos, according to Brooks, are typified by a blending of the bohemian 1960s with the conservative 1980s. Brooks points out the irony, for example, that in the 1990s "the one realm of American life where the language of 1960s radicalism remains strong is the business world" (110). Brooks notes,

> Like billionaire Abbie Hoffmans, it's Burger King that tells America, "Sometimes You Gotta Break the Rules." It's Apple Computers that lionizes "The crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers." It's Lucent Technologies that adopted the slogan "Born To Be Wild." It's Nike that uses Beat writer William S. Burroughs and the Beatles song "Revolution" as corporate symbols. It's *Wired* magazine and its Silicon Valley advertisers who use the colour schemes of 1968 Jefferson Airplane street posters. (110-11)

Because of his ambiguous stance, as an author of radical texts that at the same time represent enormous financial success, it is no wonder that Seuss would be front and centre in this struggle. I am reminded here of "The Great Cotton Mather Debate" of 1860, discussed in Chapter Two, in which I suggest that Mother Goose's image was appropriated in an effort to enhance the image of one side in a quarrel "between liberal and conservative" forces (Buell 224). The same situation appears to be happening with Seuss' image. President Bush (like the witch-persecuting Cotton Mather) puts his arm around an author of nonsense and strikes a relaxed pose.

Whatever the outcome of this push to appropriate Seussian images, what is certain is this: Seuss' most famous character is older than the cat who has dawned its costume. It is older than "Yankee Doodle" in fact. It is the nonsensical rebel, historically produced when needed. And like Mother Goose and Lewis Carroll, Seuss' ascendant image will be highly provocative, transformative, and will lend itself readily to any discussion on the connection between nonsense, politics and national mythology.

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[1] Like Michael Roos, I assume Lennon was the primary songwriter of the tracks on which he was the lead singer. McCartney and Lennon acknowledged this was usually the case, suggesting they wrote as a team only during the year and half following the spring of 1961. After the autumn of 1962 the two would present nearly completed compositions to one another. Please note, however, that in the Works Cited section of this study I have separated the texts attributed only to Lennon from those legally ascribed to both Lennon and McCartney. A further demarcation, cited as "Lennon et al" indicates that the creation is attributed to all four Beatles.

[2] See also Sheff and Golson (163-64; 188-89). Allsop is misspelled "Alsopf" in this interview.

[3] The song performed is credited to Dylan and is titled "Little Richard" in the end credits. See also Bob Spitz (50-2).

[4] See Dylan, *Lyrics*: Tom Thumb (179); Little Bo Peep (69); Cock Robin, as implied by the structure of the song (73); Little Jack Horner (245); Pied Piper; (170); Cinderella (181); Aladdin and his Lamp (154); Robin Hood (182); "Fee-fi-fo-fum" [from "Jack and the Beanstalk"] (44; 118); puppets (162); and elves (162).

[5] See Dylan, *Lyrics*: "Once Upon a Time" (167); "happily ever after" (170).

[6] In a one-page prose poem, *Alternatives to College,* (alternatively dated 1964 or 1965) Dylan references Simple Simon, Felix the Cat, a Gingerbread Sergeant and leprechauns.

[7] see Ricks, *Dylan's Visions*: "Over the Water and Over the Lea" (85); "I Had a Little Nut Tree" (409); "The Cuckoo is a Pretty Bird" (78); "The Maid Was in Her Garden" (129); "My Mother Said I Never Should / Play With Gypsies in the Wood" (78).

[8] See Dylan, Lyrics: "Mr. Tambourine Man" (152); "I Shall Be Free" (69); "All Over You" (45); "Bob Dylan's New Orleans Rag" (42).

[9] Unidentified filmmaker who covered the 1969 war protests in Washington DC. See Leaf and Scheinfeld 00:40:43-47.

[10] Note: The lyrics to "I Shall be Free" are different in their published form than they were recorded on *The Freewheeling Bob Dylan* LP sessions. In the published anthology, *Bob Dylan: Lyrics 1962-2001*, the final two line of the verse in question are "He's eatin' chitlins / He's eatin' bullshit!" (69).

[11] See Kaye; see also www.bobdylanroots.com/notta.html.

[12] See Nel (81). "The Economic Situation Clarified" was published originally in *The New York Times Magazine* (15 June 1975) 71.

[13] When notified that conditions in Lake Erie had improved Seuss had the Lake Erie verse removed from future editions, (see Morgan 276).

[14] qtd from the 1964 Christmas message. The Beatles Christmas recordings have never been released to the general public. The only known "official" pressings, then, are the original, exceedingly rare, 45-rpm discs sent to The Beatles fan club members in the 1960s. As is not surprising, then, my bootleg CD copy of the recordings is unlikely to provide reliable publishing information. The disc is marked, "Yellow Dog Records, 1994 (Made in Hungary)".

[15] The recorded version leaves out the reference to Borgnine.

[16] Lennon, *ASITHW*: "Richard the Turd" (54); "the Dupe of Bedpan" (71); "Buckinghell Parcel" (27); "Horses of Parliamint" (27); "Chasing of the Guards" (27)

[17] "Benjamin Distasteful" (Lennon, *ASITHW* 42); "Queen Victorious" (Lennon, *IHOW* 54).

[18] Micky Most was the producer of the pop group, The Herman's Hermits.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

The Innocent Critic

Failing to understand the political nature of nonsense generates a failure to understand the artist who makes use of nonsense. Such misunderstandings are common. In the extreme there is Albert Grossman's biography, *The Lives of John Lennon*, in which Grossman suggests that Lennon's nonsense writings were the result of an undiagnosed learning disability. According to Grossman, Lennon's interest in musical inversion and the creation of portmanteau words were a happy accident. In Grossman's words, "Even more pronounced than the possible effects of dyslexia on Lennon's music was the way his lexic dysfunction appears to have effected his literary style" (46). Similarly, upon the release of Lennon's first book of nonsense, British M.P. Charles Curran stated in Parliament that the book proved that Lennon was illiterate, and Curran used the text as an example that highlighted the poor state of education in Liverpool (221). Later in the sixties, the befuddlement of the reporters gathered around Lennon at his and Ono's "Bed-In" further emphasises the almost total lack of comprehension of how nonsense functions and what its purposes are. While it is granted that disorienting members of parliament and the press was really the *point* of Lennon's nonsense, it remains simultaneously true that Lennon's art remains partially misunderstood by many.

One the most misunderstood moments in Bob Dylan's career, and by all accounts a crucial turning point in his art, occurs in 1965 when, coincidentally, he first appeared on

stage playing an electric guitar. To some folk enthusiasts this move to electricity indicated that Dylan had sold out to corporate rock and roll. Frustrated by this view, Dylan clashed with his audience. In Martin Scorsese's documentary, *No Direction Home*, audiences from the spring of 1966 are heard chastising Dylan with labels such as "traitor" and "Judas".[1] Responding to the "Judas" comment, Dylan fires back, "I don't believe you" (qtd. in Scorsese, disc 2, 01:26:39). While the issue of electricity is routinely posited as the sole reason for these confrontations, it is overlooked that when Dylan began experimenting with an electric guitar his song writing became more surreal and absurd. Dylan's final all-acoustic album, prior to the celebrated switch to electric, was *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, released in late 1964. In contrast to his earlier work*, Another Side of Bob Dylan* is significant for its lack of straight-forward political commentary, Dylan preferring to rely more on the political bite of absurdist extravaganzas such as "I Shall Be Free No. 10", "Motorpsycho Nightmare", and the temporal anomaly that anchors "My Back Pages"— "I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now." In 1965 Dylan released two albums, *Bringing it All Back Home* (half acoustic/half electric) and *Highway 61 Revisited* (all electric). As in *Another Side of Bob Dylan* the politics of these 1965 albums are laid below the surface. By now Dylan has officially abandoned the direct political commentary featured in his earlier works, such as "Masters of War", "Blowin' in the Wind," and "The Times They Are A-Changin'". In place of these overtly political tracks Dylan embraces instead the absurdity manifest in his early albums and boosts the nonsense. Together, *Bringing it All Back Home* and *Highway 61 Revisited*, present the greatest flowering of Dylan's nonsensical works. Along with the verbal gymnastics of "Subterranean Homesick Blues" we find "On the Road Again", "Bob Dylan's 115th Dream", "Tombstone Blues", and his most subversive nonsense track, "Ballad of a Thin Man", all of which are tracks that I discussed at length in the previous chapter. To those

who wished that Bob Dylan would represent a political movement, the absurd and surreal lyrics were upsetting because, to the casual listener, they failed to attack the establishment. And, to one who listens to Dylan's critics in the spring of 1966, content and not electricity, is clearly the issue.

> Audience member: "What happened to Woody Guthrie Bob?"
> Dylan: These are all protest songs. (Ibid, disc 2, 01:47:00-56:00)

> Interviewer: Why don't you sing protest songs any longer?
> Dylan: Who said that? All my songs are protest songs. Every single one of them. That's all I do is protest. (Ibid, disc 2, 04:03-17)

In the Scorsese interview, scenes of adulation at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival are followed by, and juxtaposed against, the absurd nonsensical pet shop sign dialog quoted in Chapter Four and the film of Dylan defending his political relevance against the interviewer who asks, "Why don't you sing protest songs any longer?" in the spring of 1966. Sandwiched between these scenes of alternating audience adulation and frustration, is a clip in which Dylan discusses a shift that was occurring in his art at the time:

> [I took] all the elements that I've ever known to make wide-sweeping statements which conveyed a feeling that was a general essence of the spirit of the times. I think I managed to do that. I thought that I needed to press on and get as far into it as I could. (Qtd. in Scorsese, disc 1, 01:52:02-25)

In other words, in Dylan's view, as he moved forward artistically through *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964) and the albums from 1965, he saw his work as shifting deeper into the spirit of the times, not away for it, as some of his audience perceived. And if we trace that shift lyrically, the most prominent feature is an increased dependence on absurdity, a move toward a more mature and purposeful use of nonsense forms.

Further insight into this lyrical shift is gained from a contemporary interview from October 1964, conducted during the recording sessions for *Another Side of Bob Dylan*. Interviewer Nat Hentoff looks over the lyric sheets for the songs in production and reports,

"there were indeed hardly any songs of social protest in the collection" ("The Crackin'" 18). That same evening Dylan comments to Hentoff,

> ... a lot of people are doing finger pointing songs. You know—pointing to all the things that are wrong... like I once wrote "Emmett Till"... From now on, I want to write from inside me, and to do that I'm going to have to get back to writing like I used to when I was ten—having everything come out naturally. ("The Crackin'" 16)

According to Dylan, then, his lyrical shift in 1964 was a turn to the voice of the child. And according to Dylan's comments to Scorsese as he looked back on that shift, it was at this moment that he was getting "as far into" "the spirit of the times" as he could, and by doing so, as he assured his confused audience in 1966, he was able to produce a repertoire consisting of what he described at the time as "all protest songs." Less than the presence of the electric guitar, then, it was the shift to the voice of the child, and to an increased dependence on absurdity, that alienated a certain portion of Dylan's audience in 1965 (and simultaneously endeared him to many more).

In the same moment that his song writing began to revel more in absurdity Dylan fashioned his public persona as a something like a living representation of Yankee Doodle. Like Yankee Doodle, Dylan's mid-sixties persona refused to be contained, cornered or defined. In the Hentoff interview from late 1964, Dylan comments, "I do a lot of things no Movement would allow... It's like politics... I just can't make it with no organisation" ("The Crackin'" 29). And just a Dylan refused to identify himself with any political party, so too did he purposefully obfuscate understanding of his lyrics: As quoted in Chapter Four:

> Dylan: I do know what my songs are about.
> Interviewer: And what's that?
> Dylan: Oh, some are about four minutes; some are about five... (Hentoff, *Playboy*)

In 1964 Dylan began answering, "Z", to the question, "Why?", and in so doing, he strengthened the subversive power of his absurd songs. Dylan wished to be unknowable. And in adopting this persona he epitomised the absurd other, against whom—as against Yankee Doodle—the establishment would have no defence. Dylan's refusal to be defined as a member of any group also resembles nonsense's refusal to be defined as a genre. Like nonsense, Dylan is not a genre; he is a series of provocative devices. The popular myth that Bob Dylan moved away from "protest" music in the mid sixties is a misunderstanding of his art and intention. In reality Dylan moved from overt to covert protest, and in doing so, he more firmly established his place as an iconoclast.

Rebellion to What End? Utopian Dreams and Difference

Bakhtin emphasises that the carnivalesque had an "indissoluble and essential relation to freedom" and "utopian radicalism" (*Rabelais* 89). Those who experienced carnival festivities "entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, [and] equality..." (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 9). Consider, for example, the carnival traditions associated with utopian kingdoms such a The Court of King Petot, "where nobody knows the difference between masters and servants" and "where all are equal" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 264). Historically nonsense has similarly and frequently associated itself with utopian visions. Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) commences with quotes and translations from "The Utopian Alphabet", a nonsense language that, when translated, results in curious formulations or illogical double negatives.

> Utopos me General[2] from not island made island...
> Willingly I-impart my-things, not not-willingly I-accept better-ones. (3)

While More's *Utopia*, described by the traveller Raphael *Nonsenso*, appears somewhat totalitarian by modern standards, it is yet a republic that holds frequent elections, a land

where gold and money have no value, where a certain religious freedom is tolerated, where there is no fear of death, and where, though war is scorned, women fight alongside men when war is proved unavoidable. More's Utopia, posited as an island somewhere in the New World, is derivative of folk legends of utopian islands that have been popular along the west coast of Europe for millennia. Atlantis is the oldest traceable of these legends, but the English legends of Avalon, The French legend of Cockayne, and the Irish legend of Hy-Brasil and the related Spanish legend of El Dorado, are of the same ilk. Notable in the context of the present study is that these utopias (Atlantis, Utopia, King Petot) are places of controversial political experimentation where natural laws are suspended by, for example, promises of eternal youth (Avalon, Cockayne, Hy-Brasil and El Dorado) or, as in Utopia, where the fear of death is outlawed. The Land of Cockayne is similar to Utopia in that, as the legend matures and is transferred from France to England, Cockayne comes to be associated with special rhyming nonsensical slang language. Combined, these legends securely tie utopian, youth-oriented political dreaming to nonsense.

In Malcolm's *Origins of English Nonsense* references to utopia and a utopian tongue are ubiquitous, as represented, for example, by his inclusion of Henry Peacham's "In the Utopian Tongue", Martin Parker's "Sir Leonard Lack-wit's speech to the Emperor of Utopia" and John Taylor's "Poem in the Utopian Tongue".[3] Malcolm ties the concept of a utopian tongue with an earnest desire in the seventeenth century to discover a universal language, "which would map out systematically the real essences of all existing things in the world" (107). Malcolm notes for example the mnemonic experiments of George Dalgarno, whose nonsensical *Ars signorum* (1661), was designed as "a method of representing things or qualities in writing which would be equally valid for all languages" (109).

The concept that nonsense is related to visions of worldwide unity is enhanced by the fact that one of the few recurring motifs in nonsense literature is The Man in the Moon, whose figure has firmly been associated with nonsense verses since the English Civil War, and may have so been associated even earlier, as in More's Utopia, which is described by Raphael Nonsenso as an island in the shape of a crescent moon, (49) or Hy-Brasil, which was described as a perfect circle. In nonsense literature for children, from the cow who jumps over it, to the old woman toss'd up seventeen times higher than it, to numerous other nonsense poems recounted by the Opies, to Lear's "Moon Journey" (435-437), the Moon, or the Man in the Moon, may be fairly said to represent nonsense. And the Moon, which is intimately associated with madness and transformation, is also a unifying symbol, since it is represents one of the only two heavenly bodies that can truly be said to be shared by all mankind, the other being the Sun. But the Moon, conveniently, is also naturally a subversive force. Unlike the Sun, which is, ostensibly, the more overtly powerful and authoritative force, the Moon, in its madness, functions in the reverse realm, operating "covertly" at night, thus "unofficially," I would claim, and yet the Moon still manages to exert its force and control the shifting tides, whether the Sun likes it or not.

Another utopian association with nonsense may be claimed by the existence of a conspicuous group of texts that use nonsense in an exploration of difference among peoples. Perhaps the first text in which difference and nonsense are juxtaposed is the story of the Tower of Babel, an origin myth that both explains and laments difference via the incoherent babbling of multiple tongues. The tragedy implied by the story of The Tower of Babel is that when one voice speaks another hears only babbling; one's speech is mere nonsense to another's ears. Here, essentially, nonsense is used to lament difference. And yet we see in the seventeenth-century texts noted above the repeated phrase "utopian tongue" associated with nonsense, which implies the reverse impulse, an aim to use

nonsense in a bid to elicit universal understanding. Manifesting a similar focus on difference, you find that in the whole history of nonsense, from the medieval period to today, there are frequent depictions of oddballs and eccentrics, those who are forcefully kept away from mainstream society because they fail to "communicate" properly. Lear would seem to have been centrally concerned with this issue, but there are many other examples from the Old Woman tossed up in a blanket in *Mother Goose's Melody* (vii), to Paul McCartney's character from the "The Fool on the Hill", who are both cast aside and left alone in their mystic oddness. Although McCartney's character is "The man of a thousand voices... nobody wants to know him. They can see that he's just a fool".

In another significant group of nonsense texts, difference is rendered obsolete. In Lear's "The Scroobius Pip" a strange creature is asked by representatives of several branches of the animal kingdom to identify and define itself as a member of one branch or another. The creature appears not to understand even the concept they are inquiring about, and replies repeatedly and "gaily" that "my only name is the Scroobious Pip" (389). Ultimately, the various branches of the animal kingdom come to understand that the creature is an amalgamation of all of them—of fish, insects, birds and beasts (and men—In Lear's illustration, the creature has a pair of human legs). Upon the realisation that this one creature represents all creatures, there is a joyous finale:

> Then all the Beasts that walk on the ground
> Danced in a circle round and round,
> And all the Birds that fly in the air
> Flew round and round in a circle there,
> And all the Fish in the Jellybolee
> Swam in a circle about the sea,
> And all the Insects that creep or go
> Buzzed in a circle to and fro -
> And they roared and sang and whistled and cried
> Till the noise was heard from side to side -
> 'Chippetty Tip! Chippetty Tip!
> Its only name is the Scroobious Pip.' (390)

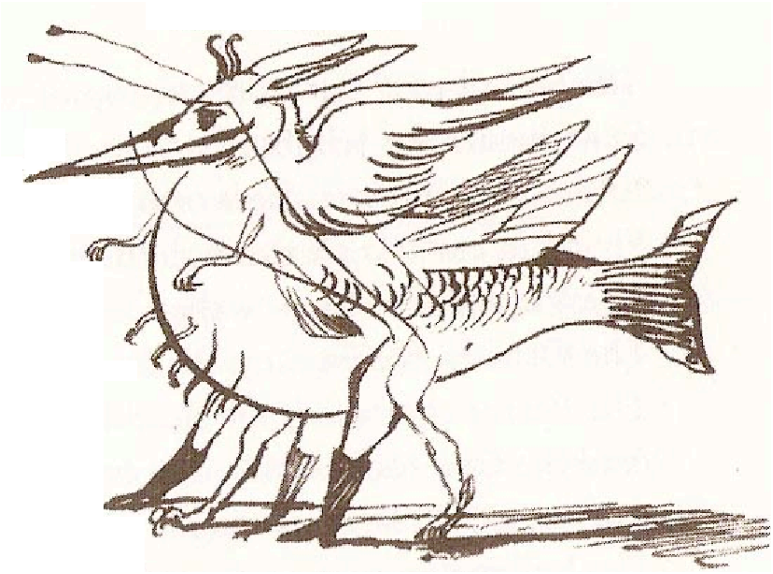

Figure 57

Lear's "Scroobious Pip" is typical of numerous nonsense monsters that are rendered as an amalgamation of various animal parts. For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque chimeras of folk custom, "fantastic forms combining human, animal, and vegetable elements", are the "quintessence of the grotesque" (*Rabelais* 96). In Bakhtin's understanding of carnivalesque chimeras the separate parts are, importantly, posited as equal: plants, humans, animals and silly monsters—all levelled and of the same worth. Similarly, in Lear's "Scroobius Pip" it is in the joyous acknowledgement of biological connectedness that the utopian desire is revealed.

A similar amalgamation, and thus a similar utopian desire, may also function in the implied elimination of geographical difference that is typical of nonsense texts. In Chapter Three it was noted, for example, that in Gilbert's nonsense, English and exotic locals are fused:

> They left Madegaskar away on their right,
> And made Clapham Common the following night
> Then lay on their oars for a fortnight or two,
> Becalmed in the ocean of Honololu. (*More Bab Ballads* 103-4)

There is a similar disregard for location manifested in Lear's *Book of Nonsense*, as the denizens of his topsy-turvy world are in one panel, from Asia, the next from Africa, and in others are drawn readily from Britain or the Americas. And very like Lear's amalgamous Scroobius Pip was the author's penchant for introducing himself with nonsense names "compounded of all the languages he knew" (Noakes, *Wanderer* 256). Moving to Carroll, in an 1869 article covering the translation of *Wonderland* into French and German, *The Spectator* comments,

> In the fairy world there are no foreign parts, and in the centre of the Earth or the other side of the Moon we are as much at home as on the Thames or the Weser. (7 Aug. ; Kelly 286.)

Similarly, Seuss happily mixes the foreign with the local, his texts jumping as commonly from Timbuktu or China to Lake Erie or Main Street. Gilbert's, Lear's, and Seuss' texts erase the distance "from there to here" and thus posit themselves as occurring in geographic amalgamations of the entire world.

Kornei Chukovsky's *The Cockroach* resembles Lear's "Scroobius Pip". Chukovsky, a Russian child development theorist who wrote in defence of nonsense in his Treatise, *From Two to Five* (1925), was also an author of nonsensical children's texts. In *The Cockroach* (1924), a text of occasional reckless abandon and flights of fancy, numerous animals from all parts of the animal kingdom come together to defeat a common enemy, the cockroach. In the end the animals learn that their enemy was not so much the cockroach as their fear of him. During the joyous dance that follows, the Moon is dislodged by all of the jumping up and down and falls to the Earth. The final climactic scene is a utopian vision of all the animals of the world gathered together as they climb up to the sky and nail the Moon back in place (158-65). Here the Moon, both as a symbol of madness and as a unifying force, is witness to a utopian coming together of disparate "peoples".

With Dr. Seuss' *Sneeches*, the lesson is similar. Via madness, jumbling and nonsense, a formerly divided people discover that "Sneeches are Sneeches / And no kind of Sneech is the best on the beaches" (24). Seuss' text, as noted in the previous chapter, was created in response to Nazi war atrocities, and resonated with the civil rights movement when it was published in 1961. The underlying utopian message of much of Seuss' work is rendered more subtly in the surreal architecture found in his artwork. Fantastic, dreamlike structures of soaring towers and dangling parapets balance atop impossibly thin structural underpinnings. These images, which threaten collapse on the one hand, also tap deep into human desires and function as a vision of impossible perfection, in which humans live without fear or care for natural laws—a visual representation, if you will, of More's *Utopia*, in which fear of death is outlawed.

For John Lennon, nonsense was the ideal vehicle through which to express his utopian dreams, as in, "Give Peace a Chance", with its multiple random assemblages such as "Bishops and Fishops", and "Come Together", a song that mingles disparate images with a call for spiritual togetherness. While not nonsensical, Lennon's utopian visions expressed in "Imagine", in which it is posited that "the world will live as one" and Bob Dylan's more cautious "Blowin' in the Wind", which asks, "How many years can some people exist, before they're allowed to be free?", demonstrate what is often the ultimate longing of an artist enamoured of nonsense—a world in which prejudice is no longer tolerated. And yet while togetherness and sameness are posited in these utopian visions, there remains a practical side to the typical utopian vision of nonsense. Via the ennobling of eccentricity and anomaly that is so common in nonsense texts, nonsense acknowledges that difference is not so much to be avoided as it is to be valued.

Harlequin's Army

In consideration of the above, and all that has been posited in this study, the intuition of Marilyn Apselloff and Celia Anderson in *Nonsense Literature for Children: Aesop to Seuss*, "that nonsense literature contributes to the civilizing process" (108) appears undeniable. Like Bakhtin, who wrote of Carnival and its attendant texts that they "liberate human consciousness and permit a new outlook…" (*Rabelais* 274), so too does nonsense literature perform those same functions, and does so via the same rituals and tropes as carnival texts. The image that emerges is a vision of nonsense as integral to progress in humanism, politics and social justice. And while I have built this claim by looking at a great number of historical figures and texts stretching back over a four-hundred-year period, I would be remiss not to mention one last personage, and his close relationship to nonsense literature. Lorenzo de Medici, who in so many ways embodied and fuelled the Renaissance, was a lover of nonsense. According to Malcolm, de Medici kept only seven books in his bedroom, "the Gospels, Boethius, a medical treatise, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Burchiello" (69). Il Burchiello, Malcolm explains, was the nickname of the Florentine, Domenico di Giovanni, who took up the genre of "absolute nonsense" and made it his own (69). At this time, in the late fifteenth century—when the likes of de Medici, Michelangelo, de Vinci, Savonarola and Machiavelli were coming of age—Florence was a cauldron of new ideas and witnessed intense battles, political and cultural, in which humanism and republicanism were central concerns. Malcolm notes that is was in this time that there developed "a popular fashion" for Italian nonsense poetry (69). Italian Renaissance scholar, Lewis Gordon, asks, "Was there ever such a popular [collection of] of nonsense rhymes as [Burchiello's] *sonetti caudati*?" (121). Gordon goes on to note that in the last three decades of the fifteenth century Burchiello's nonsense went

through no less than a dozen "sizable" printings in northern Italy, his popularity thus matched only by that of Dante, and surpassed even Petrarch (121). Note also that it was only a few years after this period, in the early sixteenth century, that Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly* (1509) was published, a text that functions handily as an elaborate defence of nonsense, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), in which a forward thinking utopian political dream is connected to nonsense, and Rabelais' *Pantagruel and Gargantua* (1532), in which the connection between nonsense and social commentary is implicit. Lorenzo de Medici's choice of which seven volumes to keep at his bedside takes on special significance when one notes that he was the chief collector of the Medici Library, a collection unmatched in Renaissance Europe, which would eventually hold 11,000 rare volumes and manuscripts. While the general utility and benefit to the mind that the Gospels, Boethius, a medical treatise, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio provide is quite clear, what purpose Il Burchiello's nonsense texts served in de Medici's opinion is not known, but the arch of the present study suggests that it may have been thought to be as central and formative as any of these other texts.

Bakhtin suggests that carnival texts express "the people's hope's of a happier future, of a more just social and economic order..." a "happier future of a general material affluence, equality, and freedom" (*Rabelais* 81). And it is through the players in carnivalesque traditions and via authors of nonsense literature that these utopian desires are envisioned. In *The Play in the Bower*, written in 1262 by the troubadour Adam de la Halle, criticism of authority is offered by a fool and a lifting of hierarchal rules is authorised by a marching column described as "Harlequin's Army", who go tramping by in their jingle-bell laden uniforms (see Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 258). In this play, the fool, or madman, criticises a decree of Pope Alexander IV that reduces the privileges of scholars. Merriment ensues while a representative of the official church remains asleep nearby,

comprehending nothing (ibid 257-59). This image of Harlequin's Army, as a force that sanctions political critique, removes barriers, and functions without the comprehension of the powers that be, reminds us of the authors considered in this study. Lennon, Dylan, Seuss, Lear, Carroll, Gilbert, Hopkinson and the Mother Goose and Yankee Doodle poets, taken together, are not unlike Harlequin's Army. And to recall again how Bakhtin describes the authors of carnivalesque texts, so might we consider these authors of nonsense literature as,

> ...writers who reflect essentially and deeply the great moments of crisis in world history. These writers deal with an uncompleted, changing world, filled with the disintegrating past and with the as yet unformed future. A peculiar positive and one might say objective incompleteness is inherent in these writings. They are imbued with an only partially expressed future for which they have to leave the way open. Hence their many different meanings, their apparent obscurity… Hence also the apparent monstrosity, that is, the lack of connection with canons and norms of all completed, authoritarian, and dogmatic eras. (*Rabelais* 127)

Arguably, the texts of Mother Goose, Lewis Carroll and Dr. Seuss are some of the most popular, and most influential in the canon of children's literature in English. The texts of each are viewed as key advances in the field, and a view of their common denominators is revealing. Each of these three iconic figures shares a considerable dependence upon nonsense. Along with this textual brotherhood they also share the fact that each came of age at a time of conspicuous social unrest and, as the present study suggests, each of their texts were inexorably bound up in the politics of the day. While these facts are routinely overlooked, there is another feature in these texts that, while often claimed for the individual authors, has not been claimed as a similarity shared among them. Generations of critics inform us that, ostensibly, the texts of Goose, Carroll and Seuss derive their great success from their ability to speak from a childlike perspective. Just as eighteenth-century Mother Goose collections are posited as successful because they shun adult-authorised, moralistic, didactic lessons, and instead revel in frivolous fun,

the same is claimed in relation to the successes of Carroll and Seuss. Contemporary reviews of *Wonderland* that praise it as a text free of moralistic bombast are typical of the day,[4] and foreshadow the reaction to Seuss' oft-reported success as he who killed the Dick and Jane books. In all three cases, Goose, Carroll and Seuss, it is the siding with a childish perspective—the embracing of a childish view—that is posited as ensuring their literary success.

And it is with the claim of this childlike perspective that the issue of childhood innocence complicates a clear view. How is it that Seuss, often referred to as "The child's friend"—a writer who believed that his success was due to his ability to see the world from a childlike perspective—how could this "child's friend" so eagerly concern his texts with nuclear war and Nazi war atrocities? A solution to this paradox is to eliminate the divide between these supposed adult and childlike perspectives, positing instead a continuum. Ultimately, the comparisons presented in the present study suggest a fusion, or blurring, of adult and childish concerns. In the sixties—the age of The Flower Children—this blurring of adult and child-centred cultural products was particularly apparent. The absurd BBC television comedy, *Do Not Adjust Your Set*, Terry Jones recalls, was intended as a children's program[5] and was therefore initially broadcast at 4:30 in the afternoon. But the program's appeal to adults was such that the second series was broadcast twice, once at 4:30 for children, and again at 7:00 p.m. for adults.[6] *Do Not Adjust Your Set* shared a style with, and was directly influential to, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, a program, featuring cartoons and nonsense, that was ostensibly directed at an adult audience. The Beatles also represented a similar blurring of the adult with the child, from Lennon's embrace of Lewis Carroll to the animated film *Yellow Submarine*. Even the Beatle's Little Lord Fauntleroy Eton-style suits, worn in their early stage performances, suggest that their appeal lay in part in a blurring of the adult with the child.

Further, if there is anything like a "childlike" perspective, it is typically a rebellious one. Anglo American childhood developmental theories often view childhood as, essentially and necessarily, a series of rebellions in which the child progressively earns more independence. A continuum, or bridge, exists between this instinctual childhood rebel and the politically savvy, adult rebel. From the nonsensical oral legislative language employed by children to regulate their private society, to the child who answers, "Z", to the question, "Why?", to the rough musicing of wife beaters or U.S. presidents, and on to the texts of adult authors of nonsense literature for children, we discover nonsense functioning in a rebellious stance that seeks both to disorient the establishment and simultaneously to liberate the subject. Through nonsense, the childhood rebel is the rebel of every age.

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[1] qtd. in Scorsese: "Traitor" (disc 1, 01:09:47); "Judas" (disc 2, 01:26:31)
[2] "Utopos me General" sounds uncannily like the verbal inversions manifested in "Sam I Am" and "Love Me Do".
[3] All texts from Malcolm, *The Origins of English Nonsense*: Henry Peacham, "In the Utopian Tongue" (129); Martin Parker, "Sir Leonard Lack-wit's Speech to the Emperor of Utopia" (176); John Taylor, "Poem in the Utopian Tongue" (139))
[4] See for example *The Literary Churchman*, 5 May 1866, (Kelly 279); *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, 1 June 1866, (Kelly 281); *The Illustrated Times*, 16 December 1865 (Kelly 272).
[5] Palin et al, disc 2, Special Features, "Interview with Terry Jones", 00:00:35.
[6] Ibid 00:02:31.

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[1] Alternatively dated 1964 or 1965, this one-page prose poem may have first been published in *Penthouse Magazine*, May 1965.

[2] Because most libraries did not subscribe to *Playboy* at the time, and because collectors have driven up the cost of vintage issues, I was forced to rely on a transcription published on the web.

[3] The DVD mislabels the appearance as occurring in 1975.

[4] The original publication date of *Tom Thumb's Play Book* is occasionally misstated as 1762.