

Surrealists in Wonderland: Aspects of the Appropriation of Lewis Carroll

The surrealist movement, springing as it did from the Dadaists who gathered in Paris immediately after World War I, had one goal, fervently stated in many different media: to break through the accretions formed on the human mind by centuries of French Cartesian logic. For this reason, the surrealists, led by André Breton and a small group of his closest followers, scorned the history of literature as a source of inspiration, particularly the romantic and realist traditions: "...[L]'attitude réaliste, inspirée du positivisme, de saint Thomas à Anatole France, m'a bien l'air hostile à tout essor intellectuel et moral" (Breton, *Manifestes* 17-18). The surrealists believed wholeheartedly that genius would not — indeed, could not — come from the old alliances with European schools of thought and technique; instead, the raw material of inspiration must spring from the human unconscious mind, finally freed of its Cartesian shackles. The reader of surrealist texts may therefore be surprised by the repeated acclamations of the literary works of a British Victorian parson and Cambridge don, who wrote with equal facility children's books, logico-mathematical texts, and some of the oddest nonsense rhyme in English literature: Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll. The link between Carroll and the surrealists is not, however, as arbitrary as it may seem; Carroll aided the surrealists in the formation of their definition of absurdity, humor, and madness; they in return claimed him as their unknowing father. In this article, I will describe the process the surrealists used to choose Lewis Carroll, and explore some of the elements of his work that appealed to them.

Although the surrealists maintained a hostile position toward the long, bourgeois history of literature, they had a definite notion of the filiation of texts. Instead of the normal process — the surrealists' admitting an alliance with authors or literary movements in the past which had influenced them — they announced which artists in the past were worthy of being called surrealist. They did not see these artists as predecessors or forerunners; rather, they perceived that some men in other times and other places had a mental, spiritual, or theoretical kinship with the surrealist movement. Breton in particular had a very specific idea of who in literature's past

could be said to be surrealist and in what way; his list varied wildly, going from century to century and genre to genre. He adopted the *fatrasies*, for instance: French nonsense poems from the thirteenth century (Éluard and Breton 11). He included a list in the first surrealist manifesto of past authors who were "surrealist" and in what way they could be said to be so; surprisingly, even a few romantics made it into the list: "Victor Hugo est surréaliste quand il n'est pas bête" (Breton, *Manifestes* 36). These authors did not necessarily have anything to do with one another; their only bond was that André Breton found some reflection of his own surrealist philosophy in their writings. In this way, the surrealists could appropriate an author or a specific text in order to make it their own.

Some of these surrealist professions of kinship, though anachronistic, respond to a certain logic. Sade, Lautréamont, and Rimbaud, for example, three authors Breton consistently cited as surrealists before their time, were adjudged outrageous or even mad by their contemporaries, and their writings were not at all typical of the period in which they lived. However, in general, Breton did not place much emphasis on the logic of a practice that appropriated the literature of past centuries for the use of a twentieth-century artistic movement, nor did the anachronisms inherent to this type of appropriation concern him. Of still less importance were the intentions of the authors with whom he claimed kinship; it was irrelevant to him what they had been trying to accomplish in their particular artistic vision. This aspect of the way in which the surrealists chose their connections was part and parcel of their desire to obtain direct access to the unconscious in artistic creation; the critical or explicative function of an artist's creative process was to be avoided as much as possible in order to gain admittance to the subconscious layers of the mind. The author's conscious explanations could only cloud and hinder the free operation of the unconscious.

Once the theory is in place that the intentions of the author are irrelevant, adoption of any work of art for any purpose whatever becomes much easier. This explains how the surrealists were able, without any apparent irony, to choose two British Victorian authors as the "Fathers of Nonsense": Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear. Carroll and Lear have several traits in common: they were both nineteenth-century British professors; they both wrote for children; and they both experimented with nonsense verse. However, "[t]heir aims are divergent, and the means of achieving them almost entirely distinct," and the two authors, however similar on the surface, were respected by the surrealists for very different reasons (Heath 5). Despite the fact that the anarchic Lear might have understood the surrealists better, and despite the fact that Carroll — both as a parson and as a logician — certainly would have disapproved of surrealist goals and practices, it is Carroll who maintains a consistent presence in surrealist references to those authors in the past who are related to their own literary efforts.

The interest that surrealists displayed in Lewis Carroll is well documented. The first reference is found in the 1928 *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, the only "canon" of key surrealist artists, interests and words. It is the nearest existing approach to a summary of surrealism produced by two of the chief surrealists themselves: Paul Éluard and André Breton. The *Dictionnaire* is by no means a complete listing of all artists and works in which the surrealists displayed an interest; indeed, part of its charm is that the entries seem to be included without any master plan. It is all the more interesting, therefore, that under C in this "dictionary," between "caresse" and "causalité," is an entry on Lewis Carroll. The entry consists of a quotation by Louis Aragon, who was at that time an important and officially recognized member of the movement. Later, the surrealists as a group adopted Carroll's creation, the Snark, into their *Bestiaire des Surréalistes* (Benayoun, *Le Rire* 63). Carroll was also reaffirmed in the surrealist canon decades later, when Robert Benayoun produced various anthologies of humor and nonsense verse. These anthologies from the 1950s and 1960s, marked with the surrealist imprimatur, all include some of Carroll's poetry and excerpts from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass* (and *What Alice Found There*), as well as from a little-known work of Carroll's, *Sylvie and Bruno*. Then, in 1970, Salvador Dalí did some drawings as illustrations for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. (I shall, for present purposes, gloss over Dalí's expulsion from the surrealist movement.) The list of surrealist works that mention Carroll or his writings is long: he undoubtedly exerted a strong — if unexpected — attraction on the surrealist mind.

Ten years after the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* was published, Breton wrote his *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, 1939, which contains a lengthy section on Carroll. Here Carroll is placed in company with authors such as Poe, Baudelaire, and Kafka: his work is praised as the "école buissonnière" of surrealist art. Breton had more than one purpose in writing his introduction to the section on Carroll, however. In addition to establishing Carroll as a sort of Victorian surrealist, he also wanted to clear Carroll's name of his association with Louis Aragon. By the time Breton wrote his introduction to the section on Carroll in the *Anthologie*, Aragon had left the surrealists for the Communist party, with bitter words on both sides. The "Front Rouge" controversy is well documented, particularly in Breton's 1932 pamphlet, *Misère de la poésie: l'affaire Aragon devant l'opinion publique*. While the entire surrealist group was indignant, Breton was particularly angry at the desertion; he had given up on his own tentative association with the Communist party years earlier (Breton, *Manifestes* 150). Breton felt that those who abandoned surrealism for political issues had lost the essential tension that had to be maintained between politics and art. Aragon no longer wanted to separate his political and artistic personas, and Breton felt his departure as a personal slight. Aragon, however, had been the only surrealist who had done any serious work on Carroll prior to the publication of the *Anthologie de l'humour noir*. In addition to his

citation in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, Aragon had done a translation of Carroll's long poem *The Hunting of the Snark: an Agony in Eight Fits*, including Carroll's lesser-known preface to the work. Despite Aragon's association with Carroll, however, Carroll is still included in the *Anthologie*; he is merely cleared of his association with the proscribed Aragon.

Breton achieves this clearing of Carroll's name by criticizing the equivalence Aragon created between Carroll's verbal and mental liberty and a specific political regime. Aragon's statement on Carroll had been shortened and altered by Breton himself for the purposes of the dictionary, but Breton quoted it in its entirety in the *Anthologie de l'humour noir*. It is instructive to compare the two, as Aragon's original contribution, quoted by Breton some years later, was much more politically oriented than was the version in the dictionary:

La Chasse au Snark paraît à la même date que les *Chants de Maldoror* et *Une saison en enfer*. Dans les chaînes honteuses de ces jours de massacres en Irlande, d'oppression sans nom dans les manufactures où s'établissait l'ironique compatibilité du plaisir et de la douleur préconisée par Bentham, alors que de Manchester se levait comme un défi la théorie du libre-échange, qu'était devenue la liberté humaine? Elle résidait toute entière entre les frères mains d'Alice où l'avait placée ce curieux homme. (Breton, *Anthologie* 134)

This was quite different from the paraphrased rendition in the dictionary, from which almost all political connotation had been removed and replaced by a vague reference to freedom of thought: "A une époque où, dans le Royaume définitivement Uni, toute pensée était considérée comme si choquante qu'elle eût hésité à se former... qu'était devenue la liberté humaine? Elle résidait toute entière entre les frères mains d'Alice..." (Éluard and Breton 6). (All ellipses are to be found in the dictionary entry.)

In this article in the *Anthologie*, Breton makes the claim that Carroll never presented political satire in any form. "C'est pure et simple supercherie d'insinuer que la substitution d'un régime à un autre pourrait mettre fin à un tel ordre de revendication" (Breton, *Anthologie* 134). Instead, according to Breton, Carroll's revolt is the rebellion a child shows to all those who try arbitrarily to limit its field of experience. In other words, it is the aesthetic and not the political or ethical side to Carroll's writing that interests Breton as a surrealist. Carroll's own aesthetic was appropriated in several ways by the surrealists: his humor, manifested in the absurd; the linguistic elements of his work; his use of metaphor, verbal tension, and

metamorphosis; and the elements of madness and the dream that are to be found throughout his work.¹

The first way in which Carroll is linked with the surrealists is through humor. Breton himself described humor for the surrealists as one of the traits that creates a hierarchy among men. Breton used Freud's definition of humor (*Witz* in German) as a basis for his own, but he drew the distinction between the surrealist *humour noir* and other variations on that theme, such as wit, satire, irony, laughter, and joking. Using Freud's definition, Breton said that humor is essentially a method of sparing oneself pain and of liberating the mind from the trammels of the outside world. Breton's example is the condemned man who, going to his execution on a Monday, cries, "Voilà une semaine qui commence bien!" (Breton, *Anthologie* 16). As such, humor is in the same category as other things that liberate the mind: laughter, play, ecstasy, drunkenness, and even madness. Freud (and Breton) elevated humor above these other things, as it denotes the complete triumph of the ego over the obstacles presented by daily life. However, the other manifestations of the ludic spirit were also important to the surrealists, and Carroll found his niche among them for this reason.

Nonsense and the absurd are part of the surrealist definition of the ludic, and serve the same purpose as humor: the liberation of the mind. When the surrealists chose Carroll and Edward Lear as the Fathers of Nonsense, their claim was that both men make their readers aware in different ways of the elasticity of language and free them from some of its bonds. But they drew a distinction between nonsense and the absurd. Lear's genre is, properly speaking, nonsense. He wrote letters, for instance, whose form and punctuation were correct, but whose words were utterly meaningless gibberish. For Lear, the rules of language are to be destroyed, but he suggests nothing to put in their place — not even rules that make communication possible.

Rules, however, are an essential part of Carroll's created world. Authority, and especially the authority of logic and reason, is not necessarily to be defied or even seriously resented. Instead, its orders are to be carried out to their decidedly illogical end. This presence of authority and rules transforms Carroll's genre from nonsense into the absurd. Carroll's absurdity arises not from logic itself, but from a voluntary, willful — even experimental — misuse of rules masquerading as logic, to the confusion of common sense. "The humor lies not in any arbitrary defiance of principle, but in seeing a reasonable position pushed or twisted by uncritical acceptance

into a wholly unreasonable shape" (Heath 4). Rules abound in Carroll's mirror-world, from manners to beheadings to the distribution of jam.

"You couldn't have [jam] if you did want it," the Queen said. "The rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday — but never jam today."

"It must come sometimes to 'jam today,'" Alice objected.

"No, it can't," said the Queen. "It's jam every other day: today isn't any other day, you know."

"It's dreadfully confusing," said Alice. (Carroll, *Alice* 177)

Alice comes from the waking world with one set of rules, and in order to survive is forced to adapt them to the rules of the dream world. Carroll threatens the rather severe adult arena in which his readers live by presenting another, mirror world, which still has rules and logic, but whose logic turns the logic of our everyday world upside down and backwards.

The book... [is an] account of Alice's logico-philosophical misadventures in which she appears, for a change, under her true colors — no longer as the sweet little girl of tradition, but as a mind driven almost to the verge of unhinging by its encounter with the dark forces and mysterious taboos of language and thought. (Heath 7)

Carroll's humor is therefore "... une manière d'affirmer, par-delà la révolte absolue de l'adolescence et la révolte intérieure de l'âge adulte, une révolte supérieure de l'esprit" (Breton, *Anthologie* 14). Even such a fundamental rebellion has its own set of formal rules, however; Wonderland is not as chaotic as it appears.

This view was close enough to the surrealists' own position on rules that they accepted it with delight. According to the surrealists, the unconscious is a domain that has its own law, which does not — and need not — conform to the expectations of the waking world. Still, its precepts do exist, and any understanding of the function of the unconscious mind depends upon them. The strict rules invented for the games the surrealists played show most clearly the unexpected surrealist adherence to regulations: for example, the verbal or pictorial games of *cadavre exquis*, *Si/Quand*, and *Qu'est-ce que?... C'est* were played with careful attention to the laws of the game. The rules of these games ensured that the players would not know the context of what they were writing, so that they could allow their unconscious mind free rein. Other standards about order and syntax ensured that the game would produce an intelligible result; in the absence of the communicative function between layers of the mind, entry to the subconscious would be worth nothing. Rules were intended to neutralize the mind's resistance to an image's full development and to its communication. "The confinement

1 Jeffrey Stern addressed the overlap between the surrealists' conception of the dream and Carroll's in his essay "Carroll the Surrealist" in *Lewis Carroll: A Celebration* (see Stern 1982). He chiefly indicated the ways in which Carroll's work presaged the surrealist affinity for techniques such as automatism and the visual juxtaposition of incongruous elements — Lautréamont's fortuitous encounter of an umbrella with a sewing machine on a dissecting table, for instance.

imposed and maintained in word games... is accepted gladly on the optimistic premise that restrictions of certain kinds actually serve to guarantee artistic freedom" (Matthews 101). This emphasis on the beneficial aspect of rules helps to explain why the surrealists maintain their interest in Carroll, while the whimsical Mr. Lear is mentioned only in passing: Lear's anarchy does not contribute to the mapping of the unconscious, while Carroll's dream rules are its very terrain.

The linguistic elements of Carroll's work, wildly inventive as they are, intrigued the surrealists, who also worked to break down barriers in rational language. Since part of the surrealist goal was to rebel against specifically Cartesian rationalism, so intimately bound up with language, the surrealists welcomed Carroll's linguistic chaos. "Cette grâce typiquement anglo-saxonne presque indéfinissable... frappe finalement notre entendement français si prosaïque et si rationnel" (Benayoun, *Les Dingues* 11). Carroll did not hesitate to invent words, such as those in "Jabberwocky," and in fact the first work of Carroll's to be included in Benayoun's anthology is that poem, carefully translated into French. Nor did Carroll hesitate to invent new meanings for words that already existed. "The only visa... needed to pass into the semiotic world of Wonderland is an active imagination and a willingness to leave behind conventional conceptions of how words should behave" (Kirk 68). Humphry Dumpty, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, sums up Carroll's and the surrealists' view of the use of language:

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

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean different things."
"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master — that's all." (Carroll, *Alice* 193)

Breton echoed this sentiment in the first surrealist manifesto, when he said that "Le langage a été donné à l'homme pour qu'il en fasse un usage surréaliste."

Carroll himself expressed a similar view when asked about the "meaning" of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: "Words mean more than we mean to express when we use them, so a whole book ought to mean more than the writer means. So whatever good meanings are in the book, I'm glad to accept as *the* meaning of the book" (Phillips xxii). The traditional correlation of one word to one meaning had been shattered, along with syntactical function. This fracture was exactly what the surrealists had tried to accomplish in their rebellion against the Cartesian world of reason and logic. This aspect of Carroll's work was part of what attracted Aragon — still a surrealist at this point — to the project of translating *The Hunting of the Snark*; he had to be creative with language and vocabulary in order to do justice to the translation of a text as elusive as the Snark itself.

The centrality of the signified/signifier relationship was an important part of the traditional correlation of language and reality that the surrealists had doomed to destruction; the surrealists used words interchangeably, in order to destroy the link between a word and the reality it is supposed to represent. This practice was an attempt to recapture the language state of childhood, where nothing is as yet fixed. "[L'enfant] préférera donc désintégrer le monde à l'infini, le superposer en plans interchangeables.... Le jeu des fausses définitions est donc d'un âge essentiellement mineur" (Benayoun, *Les Dingues* 24). This breakdown in the relationship between language and reality is a constant in Carroll's work. In various ways, Carroll makes it clear that what an object is *called* is not necessarily what that object *is*; he thus brings the entire denotative relationship into question.

"The name of the song is called 'Haddock's Eyes'."

"Oh, that's the name of the song, is it?" Alice said, trying to feel interested.

"No, you don't understand," the Knight said, looking a little vexed. "That's what the name is *called*. The name really is 'The Aged Aged Man'."

"Then I ought to have said, 'That's what the song is called'?" Alice corrected herself. "No, you oughtn't: that's another thing. The song is called 'Ways and Means': but that's only what it's *called*, you know!"

"Well, what is the song, then?" said Alice, who was by this time completely bewildered.

"I was coming to that," the Knight said. "The song really is 'A-Sitting on a Gate': and the tune's my own invention." (Carroll, *Alice* 218)

This question of names and identities haunts the Alice books; in both of them, Alice spends a great deal of time trying to remember who she is and finding various ways of identifying herself, from her appearance to her memories. "C'est que Lewis Carroll fut possédé par la hantise de l'identité" (Benayoun, *Anthologie* 176).

The signifier/signified relationship is also shaken in *The Hunting of the Snark*, in which the Baker is so forgetful that he has forgotten his own name. Rather than giving any determinacy to the mysterious man, the crew call him whatever they like and his "name" varies wildly:

He would answer to "Hi!", or to any loud cry,

Such as "Fry me!" or "Fritter-my-wig!"

To "What-you-may-call-um!" or "What-was-his-name!"

But especially "Thing-um-a-jig!" (Carroll, *Snark* 50)

In the same poem, the map of the ocean brought along by the Bellman is completely blank. The Bellman, loudly praising his own choice of map, demands to know the

benefit of normal navigational tools such as meridian lines, and the crew responds enthusiastically, "They are merely conventional signs!" (Carroll, *Snark* 55). Such "signs," with their normal indissoluble relationship of signifier to signified, are abolished in Carroll's world as well as in that of the surrealists.

This kind of linguistic play is the most obvious reason for Breton's choice of the chapter, "The Lobster Quadrille," from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, for inclusion in the *Anthologie de l'humour noir*. This chapter contains several of Carroll's famous poems — "The Lobster Quadrille" itself, "Soup of the Evening," and a peculiar version of the instructive Victorian poem, "'Tis the voice of the sluggard," which for Alice comes out, "'Tis the voice of the lobster." However, in this part as in the rest of the book, the creatures surrounding Alice play with words until language loses all sense. "No wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise," said the Mock Turtle.... "Don't you mean 'purpose'?" said Alice. "I mean what I say," the Mock Turtle replied in an offended tone" (Carroll, *Alice* 100). These puns do not translate very well into French, but the general sense that language exists to do with as one pleases is very strong. This was undeniably appealing for the surrealists, for whom language was a means rather than an end: once again, Breton's strong statement, "Le langage a été donné à l'homme pour qu'il en fasse un usage surréaliste," is the banner under which they marched (Breton, *Manifestes* 42).

One of Carroll's favorite linguistic games was to play with proverbs, especially in the form of moralistic texts for children. In Victorian England, children were taught at school to memorize instructive poems such as "How doth the little busy bee...," by Isaac Watts, and "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them," by Robert Southey (Milner 246-47). Carroll used the lens of Alice's bewildered mind to turn such poems upside down, with such parodies as "How doth the little crocodile," "You Are Old, Father William," or, a parody more accessible to his American readers, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat." Paul Éluard and Benjamin Péret had experimented with exactly this sort of play in the early surrealist text *152 Proverbs*. Their aim was to bring new life to proverbs that had been repeated so often as to lose all meaning. Thus the traditional "tempest in a teapot" becomes "Une trombone dans un verre d'eau," and Julius Caesar's famous "Veni, vidi, vici," is transformed into "Je suis venu, je me suis assis, je suis parti" (Éluard and Péret 159-60). These texts force the reader to participate in the creation of a new proverb, by identifying the original text and noticing the difference. Carroll's poems, designed to shock a mind too used to verses with a moral, have the same effect on his readers.

[Carroll's]...underlying message is concerned, no less than critical philosophy itself, with the bounds of sense and the limitations of reason. The form of the message is that of a *sottisier*: a horrendous catalog of philosophical blunders, logical fallacies, conceptual

confusions, and linguistic breakdowns, which not only entertain but persistently tease the reader, compelling him to ask himself, 'What has gone wrong here? Why won't this do?' and to find that it is not always perfectly easy to supply an answer. (Heath 6)

The reader's involvement in the linguistic interpretation and creation of a text is very much a surrealist function, and one that Carroll also exploits in the very form of his stories and poems. In surrealist texts, this is performed through narrative cover, something that tells the reader from the beginning what sort of thing he or she is reading, whether that is an epic poem, a novel, a play, or a version of a Bible story. (The notion of narrative cover is admirably explained in Laurent Jenny's *La Terre et les Signes*, as well as in Michael Riffaterre's *Semiotics of Poetry*.) Carroll does likewise. The two Alice books, for example, are introduced in a way absolutely typical of children's stories of the Victorian era: the child falls asleep, dreams, learns a moral lesson in the dream, and wakes a newly polite, or gentle, or generous child. The first scenes in Carroll's books set the reader up for exactly such a reading of such a story: but Carroll deliberately dashes their expectations in a book which sets all moral lessons on their heads.

One of the most important elements of a surrealist text is the verbal tension that results from two disparate objects or ideas being brought together, as they are in a metaphor.

L'image est une création pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus ou moins éloignées. Plus les rapports des deux réalités rapprochées seront lointains et justes, plus l'image sera forte — plus elle aura de puissance émotive et de réalité poétique. (Breton, *Manifestes* 30)

In his commentary on Carroll in the *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, Breton claims that Carroll's creativity — and its manifestation, the absurd — result from exactly this type of tension: a conflict on the one hand between his Christian faith and his logic as a mathematician, and on the other hand between his sharp poetic awareness and the fact that the rigors of his professional duties did not allow him ceaselessly to exercise that poetic awareness. This multifaceted conflict, according to Breton, found its natural issue with Carroll both in the absurd and in the imaginative world of children, which is the one way to reconcile action and dream that does not lie open to adults (Breton, *Anthologie* 133). The playing child lives on two planes:

Mi-dupe, mi-lucide, il a la conscience simultanée de ce qu'il est et de ce qu'il joue, il donne l'exemple d'une existence vécue sur deux plans, à mi-chemin entre la réalité qu'il perçoit

objectivement et qui lui sert de point d'appui, et ce qui, dans son imaginaire, confère au monde la signification et le sentiment du rêve. (Guignon 262)

This union or fusion between disparate elements, between dream and reality, also manifests itself for the surrealists in the transformation of one object into another. "Surréalisme, critique à l'égard de la réalité, tente de troubler l'ordre du monde en créant, à partir des objets quotidiens, des objets en mutation, transitoires dans leur fragilité" (Guignon 259). This tension and its resultant transformation, according to Breton, results in the electric spark of creative genius, making metaphor and metamorphosis the sovereign act of creation.

Breton claims that Lewis Carroll makes use of this electric or "atmospheric" verbal tension in his work whenever he brings together two things that would never ordinarily be found in conjunction with one another. This type of verbal play with the unexpected is significant throughout his work: the Rocking-Horsefly and the Bread-and-Butterfly of the mirror world, for instance, and the White Knight's hypothetical pudding, made of blotting-paper, gunpowder, and sealing-wax; not to mention the baby which turns into a pig in Alice's arms. "Did you say pig, or fig?" inquires the Cheshire Cat, complicating the issue still further (Carroll, *Alice* 64). The surrealist function of this verbal tension is particularly evident, however, in the choice of "The Mad Gardener's Song" for inclusion in Benayoun's anthology. In this poem, one thing transforms itself into another with great rapidity: the gardener's response is not to question the transformation itself, but rather to react to the new object that presents itself.

He thought he saw a rattlesnake
That questioned him in Greek:
He looked again, and found it was
The middle of next week.
"The one thing I regret, he said,
Is that it cannot speak!"
...
He thought he saw a Garden-Door,
That opened with a key:
He looked again, and found it was
A Double Rule of Three:
"And all its mystery, he said,
Is clear as day to me!"

He thought he saw an Argument

That proved he was the Pope:
He looked again, and found it was
A bar of Mottled Soap.
"A fact so dread, he faintly said,
Extinguishes all hope!" (Benayoun, *Anthologie* 409-10)

This poem is the very incarnation of the surrealist aspect of Carroll's metaphorical pairing of unrelated ideas. The quick metamorphosis from one object to another, the objects' lack of practical usefulness, and the fragility of their respective identities mark both the mad gardener's visions and peculiarly surrealist objects (Guignon 262). Once again, surrealist games bear an uncanny resemblance to Carroll's brand of the absurd. "L'un dans l'autre", for instance, was a game in which players were to bring together two unlikely objects or people as illustrating one another, that is, having an essential, if invisible, kinship. This game produced pairings of just the sort found in "The Mad Gardener's Song": Alouette / Tramway; Bille / Sac à Main; assassinat du duc de Guise / Ver Luisant (Benayoun, *Le Rire* 83). The "Cartes d'Analogie" created the same kinds of metaphors, but graphically: different images dealt randomly like playing cards were taken to represent or illustrate a chosen object or person. This, too, came up with rather eclectic, transformative descriptions: most famously,

"Freud: Taupe Etoilée né aux pieds du Sphinx de Gizeh dans le cercle paléocartique, jouant au jeu de l'Oie dans *Le Cri* d'Edvard Munch et voyageant dans *Le Radeau de la Méduse* pour pratiquer le Viol," ce portrait-idéogramme vaut bien nombre de livres oubliés sur le père de la psychanalyse et tient le coup comme oriflamme, blason, ou porte-clés, si l'on en cherchait un. (Benayoun, *Le Rire* 84)

The relationships between these pairings, intended to stimulate the mind to creative activity, are very similar to Carroll's Garden-Door/Double Rule of Three "metaphor."

In this way, Carroll's verse can easily be appropriated by the surrealists.

The final element in Carroll's work that is important to the surrealists is the constant reoccurrence of the themes of madness and the dream. The surrealists looked on madness as the ultimate path to the unconscious mind: insanity removed inhibitions, liberated the mind from conscious constraints, and resulted in the perfect union of the personality. "Ce n'est pas la crainte de la folie qui nous forcera à laisser en berne le drapeau de l'imagination," Breton wrote in the 1924 manifesto of the movement (17). In *Les Possessions*, part of *L'Immaculée Conception*, Breton and Éluard explored the creative and poetic dimensions of madness, trying to evoke perfectly *vraisemblable* mad discourse while remaining eminently sane (Matthews 73). It is solely

the esthetic value of madness that interests the surrealists. In *Le Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie*, Breton says,

L'hystérie est un état mental plus ou moins irréductible se caractérisant par la subversion des rapports qui s'établissent entre le sujet et le monde moral duquel il croit pratiquement relever, en dehors de tout système délirant.... L'hystérie n'est pas un phénomène pathologique et peut, à tous égards, être considérée comme un moyen suprême d'expression. (Breton and Aragon)

This could be a summary of Alice's adventures — especially the subversion of relationships between Alice and the waking (sane) world from which she thinks she derives.

Within the confines of the text, Carroll takes madness for granted. It is simply a part of the creative world of Wonderland, as stated nonchalantly by the Cheshire Cat: "Oh, you can't help that, we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice. "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." (Carroll, *Alice* 62-63). Wonderland is a madhouse, and, if its nonsense were not funny, it would be very disturbing indeed (Heath 63). However, madness does not have the same connotations in Wonderland as it does in the waking world. The Mad Hatter and the March Hare are the only two characters in the Alice books who are specifically said to be mad, but they show in their behavior neither the frightening instability which marks real madness, nor indeed any difference from the chaotic and irrational behavior of the rest of the characters, from the sociopathic Queen of Hearts to the White Queen who insists that "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards" (Carroll, *Alice* 177). Alice sees so many strange objects and events that the "mad" characters seem no different from all the rest. As with the surrealists, it is the madness of the dream world that constitutes its creative power and thus its reality: within the creative world of Alice's dream, there is no real distinction at all between madness and sanity.

Still less is there any distinction between dream and reality. One of the surrealists' chief goals was to combine the dream world and the waking world as much as possible. Indeed, this is the very definition of surrealism: "Je crois à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de *surréalité*, si l'on peut ainsi dire" (Breton, *Manifestes* 24). Breton recognized in Lewis Carroll the achievement of this goal. "Le jeu de l'enfance, comme moyen perdu de conciliation entre l'action et le rêve en vue de la satisfaction organique, à commencer par le simple 'jeu de mots,' se trouve de la sorte réhabilité et dignifié" (Breton, *Anthologie* 133). The surrealist ideal, as in madness, was to unify

the two halves of the mind — action and dream, waking and sleeping — and to gain thereby as much information from the unconscious mind as possible.

Dreams figure heavily in Carroll's work. "If by dreams are meant realms which have no connection with the ordinary life of the dreamer, places where hidden wishes are fulfilled and ultimate frustrations bubble up into imaginative realization from a person's unconscious mind, then the Alice stories may or may not be Dodgson's dreams" (Kirk 69). For instance, the dream plays a large role in *The Hunting of the Snark*. The entire voyage described is very like a dream, in which objects metamorphose at random and certain words have a heavy but inscrutable meaning. Carroll himself mentions this uneasy metamorphosis in his preface: "If — and the thing is wildly possible — the charge of writing nonsense were ever brought against the author of this brief but instructive poem, it would be based, I feel convinced, on the line, 'Then the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder sometimes.'" (Carroll, *Snark*). More clearly still, "Fit the Sixth" is entitled "The Barrister's Dream." Carroll places this lengthy dream narrative on an equal footing with the waking story of the Butcher and the Beaver, and the dreaming Barrister is the only person in the poem who "...saw the creature quite plain/ That his fancy had dwelt on so long" (Carroll, *Snark* 84). It is evident that the dreaming world is both safer and clearer than the waking world, for the other ill-fated Snark hunters see only the Boojum, and their fate is to "softly and suddenly vanish away."

The same ambiguity between dreaming and waking is found in the two *Alice* books. Both of these stories are ostensibly dreams, but whose? At the end of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, there is a brief attempt to suggest a naturalistic interpretation of the dream: nearby sounds have made their way into her sleeping mind and influenced the course of her dream. At the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*, however, there is no such attempt; the dream world is considerably more "real" than the waking world. In her dream world, Alice behaves (as best she can) as if she were awake: she repeats her lessons, she is unfailingly courteous, she tries to make sense of the absurdity that surrounds her. Her efforts to impose a rational order on the chaos of the mirror-world, however, fail to make any impression on its denizens. Alice is in this sense the perfect surrealist that the surrealists themselves could never be. She has perfectly resolved the balance between the waking world and the dreaming world: she dreams, and accepts the dream as reality.

Carroll not only recoils from conforming to the normal distinction between waking and sleeping, he also refuses to make a clear distinction between the relative "reality" of the dream world and the waking world. The title of the last chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass* is "Which Dreamed It?" Earlier in the book, Tweedledum and Tweedledee reduced Alice to tears by insisting that she was not real, but only a part of the Red King's dream. Alice, even once she is awake, cannot decide whether she was

the dreamer or whether she is only a "sort of a thing" in the Red King's dream. "If he is not just a projection of Alice's unconscious, and she, after all, is only a projection of his, he cannot be identified with anyone on her (merely fictional) level, and must inhabit a plane of existence more authentic and inclusive still" (Heath 240). This calls into question not only the use of language, but the whole nature of reality in relation to the dream world (Spacks 274). The question — which dreamed it? — is never resolved in Carroll's text: a perfect outcome for the surrealists, for whom set answers were anathema.

Charles Dodgson, mathematician, British Victorian parson, poet, and professor, is at first glance among the least likely possible candidates for a surrealist hero and figurehead. Yet his stories about the Snark, Alice, and the denizens of the mirror world of Wonderland enchanted the surrealists as they did so many others. The surrealists had more particular reasons for crowning Lewis Carroll 'Father of Nonsense' than their enjoyment of his work, however. The aesthetic of Carroll's fiction was compatible in several different areas with the surrealist aesthetic. First and foremost is Carroll's humor, which manifests itself in the absurd; he creates formal rules for a world in which rules can be nothing but a travesty. This arrangement suited not only the surrealists' own manifestation of humor and the absurd, but also their own use of rules, particularly in their games. Next is the linguistic aspect of Carroll's work, which breaks down rational bonds that connect word to meaning, signifier to signified. Since surrealism was directed at breaking down Cartesian logic, which itself is intimately linked with language, the surrealists welcomed the *Jabberwocky* and its fellows with open arms. Metaphor and metamorphosis play a central role in Carroll's work, so too with surrealism, in which this sort of unexpected transformation is the supreme act of creation. And finally, Carroll included in his volumes of prose and poetry a whole world of ambiguity between madness and sanity, waking and dreaming. This balance between the two worlds was ideal for the surrealists, who sought so avidly the key to the unconscious mind, both in dreams and in psychoanalysis.

The surrealists appropriated Carroll's work in several different ways and at different times, and his name figures prominently as part of their canon. Since they were not concerned with anachronisms, the surrealists were able to say that Lewis Carroll, sixty years before they came into existence as a group, had prefigured their interests and goals in a story for children. However, the surrealists, who were uninterested in finding morals to stories, found no transcendent meaning in the idea that Carroll had been a kind of Victorian surrealist. To cite the King of Hearts in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, with whom the surrealists would no doubt concur, "If there's no meaning in it, that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn't try to find any" (Carroll, *Alice* 117).

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