LEWIS CARROLL: SUBVERSIVE PRAGMATICIST

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The field of pragmatics is broad and diverse; one of its problems, as well as its glories, is the difficulty of defining it so as to cover everything and satisfy everybody. The following remarks can be considered one small contribution toward making any rigorous definition less attractive.

I like to define pragmatics as "the interesting stuff about language" - the reason many of us were attracted to linguistics. We wanted to know how language did the things it did, to us and for us; why some people used it to get their needs met, and others to get into various kinds of trouble; why using language was sometimes fun, and sometimes frightening; and so on. As I was reaching linguistic majority, there was no "linguistic pragmatics": those questions had to be put aside, as we learned to ask only serious questions: questions that assumed that form alone counted; with the presupposition, I am afraid, that if a question (or its potential answer) was likely to be communicable to a non-specialist or not likely to put such a person immediately to sleep, it was non-linguistics, uninteresting, or too easy.

Today I think just the opposite is true.

I think pragmatics is, and ought to be, the area of study that tells us what we really want to know: everything you ever wanted to know about language *but were afraid to ask*. Not, that is, *everything* about language: there is still, of course, phonology, syntax, and the rest of "central" or "core" linguistics. But no responsible person is *afraid to ask* questions about those fields. Many of us, however (and even more so, our students) are in some sense or other afraid to articulate the questions they most deeply desire the answers to, because they have gotten the idea that these questions aren't sufficiently hard-nosed, scientizable, or respectable. I feel, on the contrary, that they are the most respectable questions anyone can ask, with potentially the most important answers anyone can give or get.

You can take that, if you like, as an apology in the Socratic sense for this paper, a justification for its exploration of questions that some would define as "non-linguistic" or frivolous. They are as you will see completely linguistic, in that they are concerned with the ways in which language can be used to achieve significant effects on reality; and they are precisely as frivolous as is our need to understand the persuasive power of language, its use as a political instrument. If this be frivolity, then make the most of it.

Consider Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson). Consider his principal contributions to literature and language, the two books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. In most university departments in which

significant English literature is studied, these books occupy at best a marginal place, as "children's literature," outside anyone's Canon. At the same time, a remarkable number of important writers of English (not to mention other languages) have either written explicitly about these books, or have in one way or another incorporated them into their own works of fiction or poetry. A glance at the table of contents of probably the most significant collection of writings on the *Alices*, *Aspects of Alice* (1971) reveals contributions by (among many others): W. H. Auden, Virginia Woolf, Robert Graves, Harry Levin, Edmund Wilson, Allen Tate, John Ciardi, J. B. Priestley, William Empson, Kenneth Burke, and (oh yes) Grace Slick. So it is necessary to account for two things: the relegation of the *Alices* by serious scholars to marginality; and the recognition by those who create the culture of the centrality of these texts.

I want to suggest that the paradox is resolvable if we understand the *Alices* correctly, as perhaps the most subversive books ever written. As a result, they have been defined as "children's books" - not to be taken seriously, rendered harmless by the appellation of "nonsense." No less an American icon than Walt Disney has undertaken to sanitize the texts, make them safe and sunlit. But in their original forms, the *Alices* are works more dangerously subversive than any other writings. And the topic is relevant to pragmatics because (again unlike other subversive works) the subversive content of the *Alices* specifically undermines our culture's comfortable view of language: as an orderly, value-free, cognitive and social phenomenon. It attacks our assumptions that communicative behavior is normally rational and fair; it casts doubt on our belief that human beings are sensible and sentient. Other subversive works undermine our faith in the validity or rationality of systems *built on* communicative behaviors and capacities, e.g. politics and religion (Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* comes to mind). But Alice goes beneath and beyond Gulliver in questioning the bedrock level of those capacities that uniquely make us human: our rational and social systems, and the language that makes them possible. In this respect, Carroll's works are very deeply subversive: they overturn our assumptions about human communicative interaction - our pragmatic capacities.

They do this by raising and exploring a number of assumptions human beings - ordinary speakers and, too often, even specialists - make about how communication works. To list a few:

- (1) Our rules of pragmatic interaction are the only/best possible such rules.
- (2) Those who have power have the right to it because they think and speak better and more rationally than the powerless.
- (3) Our rules make sense in their own right (rather than as linguistic and social; descriptive and prescriptive conventionalizations).

Carroll leads us to these conclusions by constructing alternate universes which, on first sight (by his "naive" protagonist, Alice), appear to operate by the opposite of our normal pragmatic rules and (therefore) to be "nonsensical." But when they are seen on their own terms, they turn out to make just as much "sense" as our familiar system does - and therefore, either all are "sense," and therefore any choice is arbitrary; or all systems rely on our willingness to abide by rules that are "nonsensical" - and so we are all, to invoke a favorite term of Carroll's, "mad," since mad persons (or creatures) are

those who do not accommodate to "rational" systems.

Seen in this light, the *Alices* readily transcend their traditional categorization as children's fiction, being neither. Ultimately, they deconstruct our fondest and deepest beliefs of all: in truth, certainty, and predictability. By so doing they reveal their author as a man over a century ahead of his time: not only as a pragmaticist before there was pragmatics (and an inspiration to Wittgenstein among others), but as a premature post-modernist, whose suspicion of the validity and rationality of our social and intellectual justifications for ourselves leads inexorably to the decomposition of our entire trustworthy universe.

I will give examples in the remainder of this paper of Carroll's skeptical examination of each of the above.

Let me begin with a brief bibliographical sketch of the *Alices'* creator. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was born in England in 1832. He took first class honors in mathematics at Christ Church, Oxford, in 1854, and the next year was appointed mathematical lecturer in that college, a position he held until 1881. He made a number of contributions, regarded as competent but not ground breaking, in the fields of formal logic and mathematics, and died in 1898. His position required celibacy, and he is not known to have had relationships with adult women. He was, however, very fond of little girls, and enjoyed taking them on trips, photographing them, and telling them stories he had made up. One such story he told to the daughters of Dean Liddell (co-author of the Liddell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon*), probably in 1862. In 1865, the first version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (W) was published under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass* (LG) appeared in 1871.

We might begin by looking at the pseudonym itself, especially as concerns about names and naming occur frequently in the *Alices*. It is evident that Dodgson's given names Charles Lutwidge, inverted and translated, create the pseudonym (Lutwidge = Ludwig = Louis = Lewis; Charles = Carolus = Carroll). So to create the *Alices* Dodgson inverted the unique elements of himself (his given names) - just as the books invert his, and our, reality.

Both books utilize an unusual heroine/protagonist/interpreter/experiencer, Alice. Her age is given (LG VI) as "seven years and six months," and in W she is probably about six months younger. She is a female child, of course, of upper-middle class, academic background. Drawings of her made by Dodgson's chosen illustrator, John Tenniel, show her as having unruly below shoulder length dirty blond hair, always dressed in the Victorian child's uniform of stockings, knee length dress, and pinafore, neat but not sparkling. The Disneyfied Alice, on the other hand, has pure blond hair in a shoulder-length, smooth and perfect page-boy, and bouffant spanking-clean clothing. In her pictorial form alone, Alice has been sanitized and rendered respectable by Disney.

We can reflect on the significance of Carroll's choice of intermediary between ourselves in our "safe" world, and the peculiarities of Wonderland. On the one hand, we can of course argue, as is surely correct, that Carroll chose Alice as she appears in the books, because Alice Liddell was the inspiration behind the narratives. On the

other, we can extend our investigation to include perlocutionary effect, that is, why the *Alices* have had the effect on readers that they have had for over a century; and when we do so, we can say that Carroll's choice was serendipitous: it enhances and deepens the effect of the books on us, the readers.

First of all, we note her age: around seven. It could not have escaped Dodgson (who as a condition of his employment was expected to study for and eventually take holy orders) that the Church Fathers had established seven as the "age of reason." Theology aside, we know (as Piaget has shown) that at seven the child is on the verge of making sense of the pragmatic world, intellectual and moral: is beginning to be held seriously responsible for a knowledge of politeness, is becoming clear about how and where to be direct and indirect, and, as a consequence, has necessarily had to develop and test theories about language and power: who you can be direct or rude to, who not; when and how people say what they mean, or don't; what to take seriously and literally, and what not to. So sevenish is the borderline between the infantile state where anything goes, and pragmatic generalizations are nonexistent, incomplete, or unreliable; and the adult state in which we are held responsible for those aspects of communication. Alice's forays into universes in which the rules she has been given in the Real World fail to hold are, then, highly appropriate: they exemplify the confusion of the child at this borderline age. Her obvious need for sense and clarity represents the seven year old child's urgency in the task of making sense and determining what makes sense. A child of that age therefore must be especially sensitive to the rules, and is therefore in a particularly good position to decide when something is "nonsense" - an ideal subversive.

Furthermore, Alice is a female child. That status puts her in a special position in her society - and, I might add, ours as well. She is both inferior and other, the quintessential outsider, the one who does not make the rules, and for whose benefit the rules are not made, but who more than anyone else must abide by them. That means that, in one sense, all rules even in the Real (or logical) World, are "nonsense" to her - all equally arbitrary in terms of their benefiting her, but equally requiring obedience if she is to avoid punishment - a frequent circumstance in W/LG, as much (presumably) as in her RW, and making about as much sense. And Alice in W/LG gets explicitly interpreted (and criticized, and corrected) by everyone, as is also the case for children and women in our logical world.

Although looked at superficially the *Alice* books may seem similar in their treatment of the rules and conventions of our real world, W. H. Auden (Phillips 1971: 9ff) notes an important distinction: In W, all action is chaos, all emotion, passion; things happen abruptly and unpredictably. But in LG, everything is overly rigid: there are fixed and explicit rules that dictate how things are to be done and understood - fixed but irrational (by our lights). In this sense, both W and LG represent exaggerations of our perceptions of reality as somewhere in between these boundaries: some spontaneity, some structure - just enough of each to make sense in context. But the fact that neither W nor LG is a rational place suggests that neither total freedom nor total order is "sensible" - and yet, of course, societies or their members tend to idealize one or the other - seldom a golden mean. The fact that Alice is younger in W than in LG

suggests that in W Alice (as the dreamer and therefore the creator of the system) is still situated in the childlike, primary-process system in which chaos is tolerated because order has not yet emerged. In LG she is older and somewhat wiser: having discovered that there are rules, like all new converts (and early language learners) she expects *everything* to work by those rules: she overgeneralizes.

Neither total freedom nor total rigor is a stable system (although the latter might seem to be): both worlds ultimately disappear into chaotic self-destruction, precisely when (and because) Alice finally acquires the power and expertise to question their premises and assert her right to determine meaning and make explicit interpretations (the right of the powerful). We might, then, see Alice's awakenings that terminate both books as indications of a (somewhat precocious) emergence from childhood into adulthood with its powers, but its loss of imaginative capacity (including the ability to make generalizations, linguistic and otherwise).

These are the underpinnings of Carroll's exploration of communicative possibilities. Let us look more closely at his use of and commentary on language itself. The uses of language in W/LG have been discussed frequently, directly or indirectly, especially by philosophers and logicians. Because most of these commentaries were made prior to the incorporation of pragmatics into linguistics, and mostly prior to the full appreciation of the contributions of pragmaticists like Austin, Searle, and Grice, they have tended to focus on semantic anomaly, rather than pragmatic. In this context I will reverse this focus. I will touch briefly on non-pragmatic issues in W/LG, but speak more fully about the pragmatic anomalies of the communicative systems in the *Alices*. In any case, as we would expect, even purportedly extra-pragmatic issues have pragmatic roots, explanations, and consequences.)

As is typical of a universe in which reality seems untrustworthy and chaotic, language itself in W/LG is treated prescriptively, as though by forcing language to behave logically or reliably, one can achieve control over the chaos elsewhere. One example is Alice's concern in W as to how to address a mouse:

(1) So she began: "O Mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here, O Mouse!" (Alice thought this must be the right way of speaking to a mouse: she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen in her brother's Latin grammar, "A mouse - of a mouse - to a mouse - a mouse - O mouse!") (W II).

The frequency and salience of puns in the *Alices* has often been remarked upon. Puns, of course, are the cases in which language ceases to "make sense" with respect to our usual notions of semantics, that is, where the word "makes sense" by corresponding to an extralinguistic reality. In punning, words are meaningful through their linguistic value alone (or primarily): their sounding like something else in the linguistic system; so puns constitute or refer to language as a closed system, as something meaningful in itself. Of course, if language were totally that way, communication would truly be nonsense, so it is not surprising to find puns occupying an honorable place in nonsense worlds (in which, of course, they make sense) - indeed, they make meaning, and are used for explanations of "reality" - not, as in our world,

mere "fun."

- (2) "Mine is a long and a sad tale!" said the Mouse, turning to Alice and sighing.
 "It is a long tail, certainly," said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; "but why do you call it sad?" (W III)

In our normal understanding of language, we distinguish between names and ordinary nouns: the former can be said to have reference but not meaning, while the latter have both. In W/LG, this relationship is sometimes reversed. Thus everyone's favorite semanticist, Humpty Dumpty (a large egg):

- (3) "Must a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully.
 "Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: "My name means the shape I am - and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost." (LG VI)

And a bit later:

- (4) "There's glory for you!" [said Humpty Dumpty]
 "I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.
 Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't - till I tell you. I meant, 'There's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
 "But 'glory' doesn't mean a 'nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.
 "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." (LG VI)

Alice (like many rational individuals) assumes that naming is a purely semantic exercise. But Humpty Dumpty suggests that the right to give names and make definitions has a strong pragmatic component: it is based on power. This discrepancy is the basis of the current dispute over so-called "political correctness": is the right to choose your name and make interpretations inalienable? Alice takes the conservative position: meaning is immanent in language itself, and it is pointless or irrational for humans to interfere in the process; Humpty Dumpty, for all his arrogant elitism, expresses the liberal-radical position: language is made by people and can be changed by them.

The idea of reference depends crucially upon object and personal constancy. If language is to refer reliably to reality, so that speakers can be confident of its ability to transmit meaning, those objects and persons referred to must remain, in some sense, the same. Constancy is implicit in and basic to the social contract that enables us to live as social beings, devising and using linguistic conventions and making sense to ourselves and one another. But in W/LG constancy cannot be counted upon. Thus for instance Alice, especially in W, is haunted on several occasions by the problem of whether she is, in fact, "herself" any more. She determines that she no longer has either the appearance (being variously larger or smaller) or the skills (doing sums, reciting poetry) that "Alice" had previously had. So she must be someone else (in fact a very specific someone else: Mabel) and when she goes "back home," she must lead that

person's life - quite unsatisfactory, she decides. (W II)

Pragmatically, this passage is striking in its abrogation of the Gricean maxim of Quality: Alice's failure to recognize the communicative convention of metaphor. "I'm not myself," a phrase normally used figuratively to mean "I'm not behaving characteristically," receives a literal and highly physical meaning: "I'm a different entity from the one I used to be."

Poetry in W/LG violates semantic and pragmatic rules, yet "makes sense." In the *Alices*, Carroll creates a great deal of poetry, which tends (unlike poetry for the sophisticated, but not unlike the didactic use of poems to inculcate morality in Victorian children) to be used not as disembodied "literature" unrelated to the text; but with both function and intended meaning - sometimes, to be sure, only to show whether Alice is or is not functioning as "herself"; but often, to gloss the workings of W/LG, to provide real-world "meaning" within those contexts, as the RW uses prose. (So again, our conventions are turned around.) Some of the most famous examples in W/LG violate semantic assumptions:

(5) Jabberwocky (LG I)

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
(The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!)
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought -
Then rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
Oh, frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.

The problems in "Jabberwocky" lie purely in the realm of lexical semantics. And indeed, our ability to understand the poem perfectly well on its own terms (except for the first stanza, which is helpfully glossed by Humpty Dumpty in LG VI) shows that context is crucial in understanding language. Since only content-words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) and only some of those, are represented as "nonsense words," we can use the rest of the language to clarify the puzzling instances; and once we identify the genre of the poem as heroic, our understanding of the genre allows us to fill in still more. Pragmatics (an understanding of context, from sentence structure to discourse genre) explicates semantics. Another case is more complicated (W XII):

(6) "They told me you had been to her
 And mentioned me to him:
 She gave me a good character,
 But said I could not swim.

He sent them word I had not gone
 (We know it to be true):
 If he should push the matter on,
 What would become of you?

I gave her one, they gave him two,
 You gave us three or more;
 They all returned from him to you,
 Though they were mine before.

If I or he should chance to be
 Involved in this affair,
 He trusts to you to set them free,
 Exactly as we were.

My notion was that you had been
 (Before she had this fit)
 An obstacle that came between
 Him, and ourselves, and it.

Don't let him know she liked them best,
 For this must ever be
 A secret, kept from all the rest,
 Between yourself and me."

Here the problem is in text semantics, and more specifically deixis. Since deixis involves both semantic and pragmatic criteria, pragmatics alone cannot "make sense" of this poem. It remains at one level perfectly transparent; at another, perfectly opaque. The language is extraordinarily lucid; but because the pronouns are not deictically anchored, within the poem or outside of it, the apparent lucidity yields only greater

confusion: we feel we *ought* to understand, but can't. Even those personal pronouns whose reference is normally obvious (first and second persons) are of uncertain referential status to the reader (and Alice), since the poem appears in the form of a letter that is read in a courtroom, the identity of its writer and intended recipient to be determined in the judicial process. It is worth noting that this poem functions as major incriminating evidence in the trial (of the Knave of Hearts). This is interesting because the job of the reader of the poem is analogous to the task of the judging body in a trial: to match the identity of the perpetrator with that of the defendant: is the "he" who committed the crime the same as the "he" sitting in the dock? As in a real trial, the evidence is frequently ambiguous or vague, and yet "meaning" must be found. Alice (who has been growing bolder as she gets larger) declares that she doesn't "believe there's an atom of meaning in it," which is literally true - yet the poem functions as evidence. If nonsense makes sense, what is sense, and what is nonsense?

A poem like Haddock's Eyes (LG VIII) also moves between semantic and pragmatic anomaly.

(7) "I'll tell thee everything I can:
There's little to relate.
I saw an aged aged man
A-sitting on a gate.
'Who are you, aged man?' I said,
'And how is it you live?'
And his answer trickled through my head,
Like water through a sieve.

"He said, 'I look for butterflies
That sleep among the wheat:
I make them into mutton-pies,
And sell them in the street.
I sell them unto men,' he said,
'Who sail on stormy seas;
And that's the way I get my bread -
A trifle, if you please.'

"But I was thinking of a plan
To dye one's whiskers green,
And always use so large a fan
That they could not be seen.
So having no reply to give
To what the old man said,
I cried, 'Come tell me how you live!'
And thumped him on the head.

"His accents mild took up the tale:
He said, 'I go my ways,
And when I find a mountain-rill,
I set it in a blaze;
And thence they make a stuff they call
Rowland's Macassar Oil -

Yet twopence-halfpenny is all
They give me for my toil.'

"But I was thinking of a plan
To feed oneself on batter,
And so go on from day to day
Getting a little fatter.
I shook him well from side to side,
Until his face was blue:
'Come tell me how you live,' I cried,
And what it is you do!'

"He said, 'I hunt for haddocks' eyes
Among the heather bright,
And work them into waistcoat-buttons
In the silent night.
And these I do not sell for gold
Or coin of silvery shine,
But for a copper halfpenny,
And that will purchase nine.

"I sometimes dig for buttered rolls,
Or set limed twigs for crabs:
I sometimes search the grassy knolls
For wheels of Hansom-cabs.
And that's the way' (he gave a wink)
'By which I get my wealth -
And very gladly will I drink
Your Honour's noble health.'

"I heard him then, for I had just
Completed my design
To keep the Menai bridge from rust
By boiling it in wine.
I thanked him much for telling me
The way he got his wealth,
But chiefly for his wish that he
Might drink my noble health.

"And now, if e'er by chance I put
My fingers into glue,
Or madly squeeze a right-hand foot
Into a left-hand shoe,
Or if I drop upon my toe
A very heavy weight,
I weep, for it reminds me so
Of that old man I used to know -
Whose look was mild, whose speech was slow,
Whose hair was whiter than the snow,
Whose face was very like a crow,
With eyes, like cinders, all aglow,
Who seemed distracted with his woe,

Who rocked his body to and fro,
And muttered mumbly and low
As if his mouth were full of dough,
Who snorted like a buffalo -
That summer evening long ago,
A-sitting on a gate."

The problems with this poem extend between, and blur the lines between, semantics and pragmatics. If we felt a need to be splitters, into what pile would we put the aged man's (and the narrator's) job descriptions? They would appear to represent both semantic anomalies (how can butterflies become mutton-pies?) and pragmatic impossibilities (what is the interactive utility of dyeing your whiskers green, if you then use a fan large enough to hide them?)

The linguistic problems here begin with the poem's very name. The White Knight, who recites it, begins by saying:

(8) "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 quite 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*.'" (LG VIII)

Alice here is forced to reinterpret common, if imprecise, ways of talking: all of the expressions in the passage cited are commonly used with similar meaning, but the Knight insists on distinctions. In one sense this is a semantic problem, one of definition or extension. In another, it's pragmatic: the Knight is unwilling or unable to play by the normal rules of everyday conversation, including those of conversational implicature. The Knight requires his interlocutor to adhere strictly to the maxims, but as his behavior within the poem itself demonstrates, he does not hold himself to the same high standards of clarity.

In the poem itself we encounter repeated violations of conversational logic and speech act felicity. It is often remarked by adults that when the *Alices* were given to them as children, they found the books disturbing, even frightening. One reason may well be Carroll's playing fast and loose with hallowed pragmatic principles - frightening for a child just beginning to understand their provenance in the real world! If we can no longer count on the felicity of speech acts; on "normal" computations of illocutionary force; on the appropriate use of Gricean Maxims and conversational implicature; on politeness principles - then first of all, a great deal of "normal" discourse ceases to make sense - raising the specter of psychological and social danger unto annihilation (indeed, the conclusions of both *Alices* end in the annihilations of the worlds they create). Pragmatic incoherence both includes semantic confusion, but goes beyond it

in its dehumanizing capacity; and therefore, the anomalies in the *Alices* make it clear that those who have the power to create and enforce pragmatic conventions (whether explicitly or not) have power indeed.

Consider some specific cases in the poem. Its first two lines flout Quantity and Quality, especially since a long poem follows. The dialog of the poem is framed in a Q-and-A format, suggesting that the narrator/questioner needs the information the aged man can provide, and therefore is willing to listen (cf. Austin 1962 and Lakoff 1972). It further assumes that the aged man's utterances will make sense; or if they do not, that will be the reason that valid communication does not take place. These are the implicit rules of consensual dyadic discourse. As the poem unfolds, these expectations are repeatedly shattered. It might be objected that poetry allows violations of ordinary discourse conventions; but when poetry represents a conversational dyad, it is highly unusual (perhaps unique here) to find the rules of both conversational logic and conversation analysis blatantly violated.

As one example, many of the narrator's conversational seconds are worse than dispreferred: e.g., after receiving a perfectly informative (by its terms) response to his question, "How is it you live (stanza 1)?" in stanza 3 the narrator indicates no perception of the answer at all, not even of the fact of there having been a reply, and "thumped him on the head" - hardly a permissible response. In terms of conversational logic and indirect illocutionary force, both characters express their conversational agendas early and often. The narrator wants information; the aged man, money. To this end he utters two indirect and formulaic requests (stanzas 2 and 7, and perhaps still less directly 4). But the narrator ignores them at first, and when he finally hears one at all proceeds to take it literally (st. 8). So while the poem superficially resembles a cooperative interchange, in fact both participants are so engaged in their own needs and subjectivities that they make no connection at all. And although readers can understand the poem perfectly well, as a representation of a discourse event, it exemplifies a threatening form of illogic - conversational illogic. And while, finally, on its face the non-dialog looks to us absurd and improbable, has not everyone, in this world of safety and reason, experienced somewhat analogous interchanges, in which each "side" refused to "get" what the other was after, and while appearing cooperative was using the presumptive rules of cooperative conversational interchange deceptively, to exacerbate political imbalances (sts. 2, 5) rather than legitimately, to exchange information or solidify social connections.

Pragmatics might also be defined as the field concerned with the communicative assumptions shared by humans as members of a society or a culture. In more "central" linguistics, asterisked examples often are used to illustrate extreme cases, to which the rules of grammar do not extend, and which therefore illustrate the boundaries of the applicability of the rules. W/LG communicative behavior constitutes analogously asterisked examples: the recognition of bizarre interactive patterns highlights their antitheses. Then the rules we do observe come into sharp focus. But just as starred examples may lose their stars in appropriate contexts, so the interactions of W/LG, absurd when contextualized (by Alice or by readers) within the *normal* world, become perfectly intelligible seen from within the contexts of W/LG as reasonable alternative

worlds which utilize alternate pragmatic systems.

Many of the anomalies of the *Alices* arise because the context is so markedly different from that of the normal world. For one thing, the latter demands an essential distinction between "real behavior" and "games." A big attraction of games is that they offer an escape from reality, where behavior has real consequences; where words and actions are normally sincere; where behavior is logically connected to its context; where people are usually presumed to behave with some degree of spontaneity. In games, on the other hand, rules are made explicit at the start, and typically are rigid and non-negotiable; "winning" and "losing" are only intra-game and are explicitly noted, yet not of "real" consequence; people are not "sincere" in their actions in the same way. But in both W and LG the action itself constitutes a game (and one with particularly complex and unbending rules: cards in W, chess in LG); and just as we would see it from *within* any of these games, to the inhabitants of W/LG their behavior seems "real," sincere, and spontaneous, although to the outsider it does not. In W/LG, it is impossible to distinguish games from real life: one *is* the other. So the W/LG characters fail to distinguish (presumably) spontaneous conversational turns from "turns" in a game:

- (9) "...However, this conversation is going on a little too fast [said Humpty Dumpty]: let's go back to your last remark but one."
 "I'm afraid I can't quite remember it," Alice said, very politely.
 "In that case we start afresh," said Humpty Dumpty, "and it's my turn to choose a subject---" ("He talks about it just as if it was a game!" thought Alice.) (LG VI)

On the other hand, fixed non-spontaneous forms of discourse that normally are inserted into dyadic conversation as set pieces (jokes, puns, riddles) turn up in W/LG as if they were fully spontaneous conversational turns:

- (10) "You should learn not to make personal remarks," Alice said with some severity: "it's very rude."
 "The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this, but all he said was, "Why is a raven like a writing desk?" (W VII)

So just as "game" blends with and becomes "reality," so "nonresponsive discourse" blends with that which is fully contextually meaningful. In the same way, human behaviors that are stylized (like games) yet, to us, logical, meaningful, sincere and thus "real" (like trials, wars, or formal banquets) become in W/LG inextricably confused with nonsensical games: they begin as abruptly, their rules are as arbitrary, they are as soon forgotten. Indeed, Carroll can be said to have anticipated the Wittgensteinian notion of communicative interactions as games (and vice versa).

The meta- and extralinguistic frames we count on to give sense to our linguistic enterprises are often absent or distorted in W/LG, with the consequence that, to Alice, meaning is hard to ascertain. As an example, a favorite general framing convention applied to all kinds of situations is dichotomous or discontinuous categorization (cf. Lakoff 1990, ch. 10). Things are assigned to category A or category B, not partially to both, and our interpretations and responses to them are based on that rigid

categorization (which we assume others are using too).

One persuasive example cuts across moral and intellectual perspectives: the tendency to consider things, persons, events, etc. as either "good" or "bad," "right" or "wrong." The ability to do so, and count on consensus for that assignment, makes both communication and interactive life generally much easier, but also contributes to stereotyping and rigidly judgmental behavior. In W/LG this comforting if dangerous dichotomization frequently proves unusable, much though Alice tries to invoke it. Thus, in LG IV, Tweedledee recites to Alice a long poem, "The Walrus and the Carpenter," in which the named protagonists entice a group of oysters to take a walk with them, and subsequently eat them.

"I liked the Walrus best," Alice immediately responds at the conclusion of the recitation, "because he was a *little* sorry for the poor oysters." Alice thus frames the poem as an exercise in relativistic morality: who was the least bad? Tweedledee counters: "He ate more than the Carpenter, though. You see, he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn't count how many he took." So what Alice took for morality (compassion) is revealed to be a deceptive sort of utilitarianism. Alice is forced to distinguish between right expression and right action, a conflict she tries to resolve. "That was mean!" she says. "Then I like the Carpenter best - if he didn't eat so many as the Walrus." "But he ate as many as he could get," says Tweedledum, now moving the moral conflict to one between right action based on virtue, and on necessity or compulsion. Alice's simple Victorian precepts fail her: the Looking Glass world does not allow the convenient categorizing frames of the real world. (Older and wiser readers might notice here a convergence between the worlds, much as conventional morality denies it.)

Another comforting real-world distinction is that between writing that is "factual" and that which is "fictional." One of the fruits of postmodernism is the questioning and manipulation of these formerly distinct categories; but the fondness of the sophisticated for playing with them only reflects everyone's concern with the possibility of finding and retaining boundaries.) As Searle notes (1979), we do not expect literal verisimilitude of descriptions within writings defined as "fiction," but we do expect something like "plausibility": actions should unfold by the same laws of physics, probability and social interaction as in the world we know; or the writer has the responsibilities of explaining why not, locating the fiction within some mutually recognized alternative genre (e.g., science fiction), and remaining internally consistent.

Carroll is creating a new genre, with new rules of cohesion and plausibility, in the *Alices*. But the break with convention is deeper than this. One of our prevailing assumptions is that, at least sometimes, nonfiction writings may prove predictive of future events, and/or explanatory of current or past events. But fictional ones per se cannot play this role. In the *Alices* the two merge, and fiction or fantasy achieves predictive and explanatory power, while Alice's real world knowledge, ordinarily a predictor of future events, often proves useless. Thus nursery rhymes (sometimes known only to Alice) presage events. While Alice sees a deterministic relationship between the poems she quotes and their actualizations, the characters within W/LG perceive themselves (as we like to see ourselves) as acting in a non-predetermined

fashion, with control over events. Alice is thus a proto-Whorfian: her language creates not only her perception of reality, but her own and everyone else's actual reality. On the other hand, the laws of physics she brings from RW have no predictive value in W/LG. The Cheshire Cat appears and disappears in all kinds of unpredictable ways; Alice grows and shrinks almost randomly; the objects for sale in the Sheep's shop rise from their shelves when stared at (perhaps a foreshadowing of the Uncertainty Principle, but certainly at odds with contemporary Victorian physical theory).

W/LG ignore or override rules of politeness and conversational implicature. The creatures are regularly intolerably rude to one another and Alice (even as they insist on playing by the rules of etiquette, as in (12)); Alice is rude out of tactlessness on frequent occasions, with her violations generally emanating out of her awareness of a power discrepancy between herself (or her pet) and her addressees, thus moving from mere non-politeness to rudeness (13):

(12) "But what am I to do?" said Alice.

"Anything you like," said the Footman, and began whistling. (W VI)

(13) "And who is Dinah, if I might venture to ask the question?" said the Lory.

Alice replied eagerly, "Dinah's our cat. And she's such a capital one for catching mice, you can't think! And oh, I wish you could see her after the birds! Why, she'll eat a little bird as soon as look at it!"

This speech caused a remarkable sensation among the party. Some of the birds hurried off at once.... (W III)

Example (14) involves multiple confusion of illocutionary force and conversational implicature.

(14) "Now [said the White Queen] I'll give *you* something to believe. I'm just one hundred and one, five months and a day."

"I can't believe *that*!" said Alice.

"Can't you?" said the Queen in a pitying tone. "Try again: draw a long breath, and shut your eyes." (LG V)

"Belief" is one of the underlying ("essential," in Searle's (1969) sense) conditions on the successful performance of assertive speech acts - it isn't, as the Queen would have it, a conversational gambit in itself. Alice's rejoinder would normally constitute a polite way of saying that the Queen's utterance is untrue, though it is framed literally as a statement of her own incapacity via conversational postulates (Gordon and Lakoff 1971). The Queen, however, takes it literally and further assumes that what it conveys is regret at that incapacity; so she offers advice on how to overcome Alice's weakness. Yet the advice itself is aberrant, violating a preparatory condition on that speech act: you don't correct psychological incapacity by physical interventions. Carroll forces us to see our normal use of implicature and indirectness as interactive games we play; the Queen here refuses to play when it is in her interest - as we might wish to on occasion, but generally dare not. (But she's the Queen.) In this way the denizens of W/LG play havoc with a basic human assumption about how "sense" is made and both cognition

and social cohesion achieved: through consensus and convention. In W/LG these are flouted where useful, adhered to where useful, insisted upon inappropriately where useful - and therefore become totally arbitrary. But since all participants (except Alice) accept the non-systematic system, that meta-system itself is consensual, so nonsense makes sense.

That suggests that the whole notion of "nonsense" as distinguishable from "sense" through some explicit and obvious formal distinction will not hold. Nonsense is not a particular way of talking, thinking, or acting. Elizabeth Sewell (1952) offers a partial definition: Nonsense is "a collection of words or events that do not fit into some recognized system. (25)" The crucial word here is *recognized*, i.e., "consensually agreed-upon by all participants in the interaction." So W/LG should be continually and totally chaotic and uninterpretable, but in fact neither is - because their rules (or absence of rules) constitute a system subscribed to by all inhabitants. Rationality, like sanity more generally, arises out of sharing belief systems - it has a functional, not a formal, definition.

Hence Carroll's frequent invocation, in both *Alices*, of madness. Looked at from the outside, the inhabitants of both are "mad" and therefore frightening - unpredictable by external consensual rules. But functionally all are "sane," because all subscribe to the same system. In this respect too Carroll is a premature postmodernist in the sense of Sass (1992), who sees postmodernism and schizophrenia as more similar than different: for example, in questioning or disavowing certainty, consensus, invariant selfhood, and object constancy. Carroll's worlds share the same assumptions, and so (when viewed by a non-consenting outsider like Alice, or the reader) are "mad"; but when viewed from within, are meta-consensual, that is, postmodern.

But consensus is more complex than it seems. In all worlds - Carroll's and our own - what we see and how we see it are not really free for all to determine as they wish. Rather, those with power (political, physical, or social) have a great deal to say about how to see "reality," and how to talk about it: by controlling language they attempt to control, and frequently succeed in controlling, everyone's reality and possibilities. In W/LG Alice and the other characters frequently come to conflict over *who* controls language; *what* language can be made to mean; *whether* control over language is ipso facto power. What is unusual in W/LG, as opposed to the Real World, is that these conflicts are openly discussed. The Red Queen in LG tells Alice how to talk and how to think:

(15) At the next peg the Queen turned again, and this time she said, "Speak in French when you can't think of the English for a thing - turn out your toes as you walk - and remember who you are!" (LG II)

Humpty Dumpty makes the relationship between language and power famously explicit:

(16) "The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."
(LG VI)

In this perspective, one of the oft-commented upon eccentricities of the W/LG creatures makes perfect sense - that they order Alice around continually and (to Alice) pointlessly, mostly for the pleasure of doing so. But this is of course just what Alice, as the powerless outsider, experiences from the powerful - the adults - in the "sane" RW. Authority and language in RW and W/LG reinforce and create each other. While she is within the system and accepting of its rules (or silently acceding to them), Alice cannot interfere or comment. But once she transcends the system, partly because (W) she gets bigger than any of the others, partly because (in both) she begins to be a competent user of the system (as she is doing in RW), partly because things are getting so far out of control that she must transcend the etiquette of silence, break out of politeness - by making explicit the irrationality she perceives in the alternate worlds, she causes them to explode and vanish. In the Real World, this danger is circumvented (usually) either by convincing the powerless that they deserve and indeed enjoy their status; or by bringing outsiders within the system and awarding them the privileges of insiders when they get "big" enough to constitute a threat. But W/LG fail to neutralize Alice in this way, so she neutralizes them.

Some conclusions are now possible.

1. The least powerful and most isolated members of a consensual or cooperative system are often its sharpest and severest critics. For them, the rules aren't the way they are because they logically ought to be, because they don't see themselves as benefitting from the status quo. But as with Alice, they often remain effectively silent, even when they speak: they are allowed to remain critics because they don't have to be listened to.

2. The most flexible and ambiguous system is the most lasting and the most comprehensive - if the most frustrating. We saw that W represented one end of an authoritarian continuum, LG the other, and both as a result are fundamentally unstable, and explode if examined. This may suggest something to us about the sort of theoretical models and descriptive systems we want to construct.

3. Nonsense is not truly illogical - as long as its rules are determined and adhered to by mutual consent. Madness is defined by isolation, not by any superficial form of behavior per se.

4. "Nonsense" as a literary genre has its own rules. In the first place, despite the name, it must be intelligible by the mutual agreement of writer and reader. But in approaching works of nonsense (like genres such as poetry), readers agree to do extra work (even as writers do by performing acts of extraordinary yet controlled creativity). It is true that all human interaction necessarily depends on trust: trust in one's own and other participants' rationality and cooperation. But this is especially true in the nonsense genre: the reader must trust that the writer will continue to make sense, that the writer will provide enough cues and clues to let the reader navigate the rocky terrain; the writer must trust the reader to persevere in the face of chaos and uncertainty. Nonsense literature therefore flourishes in a homogeneous society in which it is presumed that everyone is following the same communicative principles and shares most cultural rules - the same sort of society, that is, in which irony is most apt to

succeed. This may be why nonsense had such an efflorescence in Victorian England, and seems on the decline today.

5. And so we can see the *Alices* as:

a. a sociopolitical critique of existing systems: not only political and social, but communicative, at several levels. The realization that the way we are is not necessarily *a* much less *the* logical way to behave as human beings.

b. a commentary on power, its uses and abuses; its capacity for blindness and its fondness for predictability, true or false.

c. a realization (presaging Wittgenstein and Freud) that in our daily lives we are neither spontaneous nor logical. Freud (1917) argued that one reason people were loath to accept psychoanalysis was that it represented a third diminution of human importance: Copernicus removed Earth from the center of the universe; Darwin dethroned Man as just another primate; Freud showed that Man was not even in control of his own psyche. Carroll provides a fourth diminution by showing that we are the slaves of our ingenious communicative systems, not their masters; and that the systems we depend on were not selected because they were particularly sensible or universal.

d. a proto-postmodern questioning of the very possibility of certainty: truth, identity, authority, reason, and finally reality itself are revealed in the *Alices* as no more than convenient constructs - not eternal verities.

The above propositions imply a pragmatic perspective, involving as they do a relationship between language form and function; intention and understanding; the importance for the understanding of language of psychological and social context. The conclusions a reader can draw from Carroll's treatment of these issues are pragmatically daring and controversial, that is, threatening to our human sense of uniqueness, rationality, and importance; and our assumption that our shared systems of knowledge and understanding, are shared because they are rational. I would argue, following Carroll, that the causality of the last statement ought to be reversed. Our communicative systems are rational and meaningful *because* they are shared and to the extent that they are consensual. If we accept these premises, our understanding of what makes us cognitively and socially competent must be significantly reorganized.

This is why I call the *Alice* books highly subversive - in a way that strikes at the core of human identity and pride. At the same time these books illustrate and extend our understanding of pragmatics and its necessary systematicities. For these reasons *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are worthy of deep and respectful pragmatic investigation.

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