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THE FUNCTION OF LINGUISTIC ISSUES IN
ALICE IN WONDERLAND
AND
THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

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INTRODUCTION

Lewis Carroll's Alice novels were often regarded as 'light reading' without communicating moralistic ideas and generally not teaching anything. Critics, though, liked the books because of their sophisticated kind of humour and use of language. It is this use of language that is most interesting both from a linguistic and literary point of view as both sciences are closely connected through language: for linguistics language is the subject of analysis and for literature it is a tool to be used. In contrast to linguistics, literary studies go one step further and interpret analytic results in the context of the work as a whole. The aim of my paper now is to provide an interdisciplinary approach towards the Alice novels. During my analysis I will summarise and comment on the linguistic issues dealt with by Carroll and each of these issues will then be interpreted towards their function in a context of literary studies.

LINGUISTIC ISSUES

During the last century the children's classics *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*¹ have both been the subject of analysis and interpretation in a wide range of scientific fields: literary studies, philosophy, psychoanalysis and linguistics. *Kindlers neues Literaturlexikon* states that there are hardly any other books that have been interpreted and commented upon more often and more contrarily than the Alice novels; nevertheless, reading the books has never ceased to be fascinating.² Interestingly, most of these interpretations stick to their field of analysis and little effort is made to come up with interdisciplinary surveys of Carroll's books.

The basis of my paper can be found in two totally different but nevertheless closely connected approaches towards the Alice novels: the first is an essay by Patricia Meyer Spacks "Logic and Language in *Through the Looking Glass*"³, an interpretation of linguistic aspects collected from the second Alice novel, and the other work of reference is a literary-semiotic analysis of the Alice-books by Winfried Nöth⁴, who, due to his field of research, does include interdisciplinary aspects.

The overall structure of my paper is loosely based upon the linguistic issues applied by Carroll. Due to the complexity of the subject this structure cannot be followed accurately throughout the paper and so there will always be links to higher or lower levels. This labelling through 'issues'

¹ Gardner, Martin, ed. *The Annotated Alice. Lewis Carroll. Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.

² *Kindlers neues Literaturlexikon: Hauptwerke der englischen Literatur 1. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Viktorianischen Zeitalters. Einzeldarstellungen und Interpretationen*. München: Kindler, 1995. p. 647.

³ Patricia Meyer Spacks. "Logic and Language in *Through the Looking Glass*". Robert Phillips, ed. *Aspects of Alice: Lewis Carroll's dreamchild as seen through the critics' looking-glasses*. London, Gollancz: 1972, pp. 317-326.

⁴ Winfried Nöth. *Literatursemiotische Analysen zu Lewis Carrolls Alice-Büchern*. Tübingen: Narr, 1980.

is mainly used to provide the reader with an adequate point of reference, to show how the different aspects and examples can be categorised.

THE MEANING OF SOUND

In this chapter I am going to discuss a poem that is reputed to be the best known nonsense poem in English: *Jabberwocky*.⁵ Nonsense literature is characterised by the following criteria: it plays with sounds and meanings of words while deliberately neglecting logical and semantic systems.⁶ My main reason to discuss the poem under the heading given can be found in this definition: it is the English language, or more specifically, the sounds of the English language, that add life to this text. It is the sound that carries the meaning. It is also the sound of the words and the sound of the verse that trigger Alice's reaction:

'It seems very pretty,' she said when she had finished it, 'but it's *rather* hard to understand!' (You see she didn't like to confess, ever to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all.) Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas -- only I don't exactly know what they are! However, *somebody* killed *something*: that's clear, at any rate --'⁷

The ironic commentary by the authorial voice on Alice's reaction on the poem makes it clear that she only understands particular words of the text. What is more important is that it "fills her head with ideas"; this is what Carroll might have had in mind when opening Alice's journey with this poem: it prepares the reader's mind for the even more fantastic adventures that are to come.

A linguistic analysis will show how this process works and how an obviously meaningless list of words can make such a big impression on both Alice and the reader. The author follows the linguistic rules of syntax and he also follows fixed rules of meter (iambus) and rhyme (abab). By doing so Carroll achieves that the reader recognises the poem for what it is. If he had violated these rules and for example had produced a dadaistic nonsense poem he would have lost his readers and for them the poem would be what it is called: nonsense. (This statement is, of course, not meant to judge dada, but to point out the difference in reception.) But phonology and morphology give Carroll enough room for his playful creations.

Nöth's analysis of the poem's morphology⁸ has produced the following results: while the indexical morphemes, i.e. functional, derivational and inflectional morphemes ("Twas, and, -s, -y, -ing), are those commonly used in English, the lexical morphemes (the stem of a word: brillig, tove-, slith-) are nonsensical since they have no connection to real life, no semantic relation – these words do not exist in the English language. Although these words have no meaning the reader can

⁵ Gardner, pp. 191.

⁶ cf. Günther und Irmgard Schweikle, ed. *Metzler Literaturlexikon. Begriffe und Definitionen*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990, p. 481.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 197.

⁸ Nöth, p. 83.

still label the words according to their grammatical categories: nouns (toves, wabe), verbs (gyre, gimble), adjectives (brillig, slithy), etc. By inventing the words and following certain phonological rules Carroll loaded these nonsense words with a special meaning. This is what makes Martin Gardner write: “Although the strange words have no precise meaning, they chime with subtle overtones.”⁹ This is what fills Alice’s head with ideas. The question still is: how is this done?

My first step was to look for a super-ordinate pattern, which certainly can be found in the structure of the poem: the first and the last stanza are the same and form a frame within which the actual plot of the poem is realised. The second and the sixth stanza are direct speech and portray the motivation of the hero. The action develops in stanzas three to five and culminates in the fifth stanza, when the hero fights the Jabberwocky. A more detailed analysis shows that the phonological pattern closely follows the structure presented above.

The first stanza is an introduction to the poem preparing the reader for what is to come. The last, identical with the first, serves a similar function: it leads the reader out of the poem. The first three lines of this stanza are dominated by mid and high front vowels and nearly all consonants are voiced. This demands a rather light and cheerful intonation. The only exceptions are the rhyming words and the fourth line: mid and low back vowels are used. The fourth line, demanding a more theatrical intonation, opens the story. Judging from the sound of the words (lines 1-3) the reader may picture a pleasantly shaped landscape in his mind whereas the diphthongs and the voiceless consonant used in last line imply something dangerous.

In the second stanza mid and low back vowels dominate and the word order used suggests that the vowels of the first words of a line have a long quality (beware, frumious, jaws + claws) which leads to a rather emotive intonation. The monster’s names, on the other hand, demand the contrary: there are no long vowels and the names end on voiceless consonants. This contrast underlines the danger associated with these creatures and it is also carried on to the attributes given to the monsters (bite, catch). Here the reader’s awareness is raised to the danger that awaits the hero.

The stanzas three and four are used to create suspense: the hero’s ‘vorpal sword’ gives the impression of a deadly weapon with ‘vorpal’ vaguely reminding of ‘venom’ and the length of the vowel implying a rather long weapon. A similar effect is created with ‘manxome’ where the stem in the written form implies that the creature is a long-time enemy of man; the spoken word also implies a rather nasty connotation. In *The Annotated Alice* Martin Gardner tries to give detailed explanations of these (and of other) nonsense words but he does not come up with satisfying solutions¹⁰ and it is this what makes the poem extraordinary: nearly every reader will have a different explanation for the nonsense words but all of them will convey the same emotion. Good examples for this

⁹ Gardner, p. 192.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pp. 195.

theory are the words ‘uffish’ and ‘whiffling’, the first describing the hero’s state of mind and the second characterising the Jabberwocky. For me ‘uffish’ pictures a positively aggressive state of mind and the sound of the word ‘whiffling’ implies fastness and reminds of gusts of wind. Gardner gives different explanations but the central idea remains the same.¹¹ Another nice example, which also found its way into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is ‘galumphing’. Everybody will associate the word with ‘galloping’ and ‘triumphant’. It is used in the last line of the fifth stanza where we can picture the triumphant hero returning home the shortest way possible.

In the fifth stanza Carroll gives an onomatopoeic description of the fight between the hero and the Jabberwocky. With his choice of syntax, elliptical sentences and short sentences linked with ‘and’, he pictures the speed of the fight. This can also be seen in his choice of words with short vowels, e.g. in the use of ‘blade’ (short vowel) instead of ‘sword’ (long vowel). The best example, though, is ‘snicker-snack’, which normally would be associated and used with ‘scissors’ but in this case it illustrates the speed of the hero’s sword strokes.

The sixth stanza verbalises the hero’s triumph. The use of high front and back vowels and diphthongs force a cheerful intonation. The last line, still dominated by high vowels but not containing direct speech, ends the story and links it to the last stanza. This being the same as the introductory one restores the initial pleasant feeling and even the discordant sound of the last line has no influence on the reader’s feeling: evil has been defeated.

The phonological facts Carroll based his strategy on throughout the poem can be summarised as follows: high vowels and voiced consonants are easier associated with pleasant images than low vowels and voiceless consonants. By combining similar phonemes (e.g. vowels with voiced consonants) the sound of a text can be unified and influences the reader’s subconscious. Violating these patterns creates suspense. The reader subconsciously associates sounds of unfamiliar words with sounds of familiar words, the meaning of which is applied to the unknown words.

When comparing the linguistic analysis of *Jabberwocky* to the definition of nonsense literature given in the beginning we can see that the poem does match the criteria. But when taking the term ‘nonsense’ as an antonym of the term ‘sense’, labelling the poem as nonsense poetry is not quite satisfying: it is ‘only’ on the semantic level that the poem does not fulfil scientific demands. As we have seen above, it technically works well on the morphological and syntactical level and on text level it meets all characteristics of a ballad with epic, dramatic and lyrical features. On the pragmatic level the text is perfectly well formed; the most distinguishing factor is that most of the story

¹¹ *ibid.* p.196.

is not transported through the meaning of words, as the word-stem does not carry any meaning, but with the ‘meaning of sound’ influencing the reader’s subconscious.

THE MEANING OF WORDS

In her essay on “Logic and Language in *Through the Looking Glass*” Patricia Meyer Spacks constantly refers to the importance of language in Carroll’s book. Language, though, is not only the central idea of *Through the Looking Glass* but also of *Alice in Wonderland*. It is most important to note that the books were intended to be children’s books where humour often plays a central role. At a time when the philosophy of semantics did not exist in its present form Lewis Carroll raised the question on the arbitrariness of human language and communication. It is this arbitrariness that Carroll applies to create humour but on the other hand uses to satirically criticise the basic functions of human language and man’s attitude towards language. In his books Carroll constantly doubts that human language and communication are logical and accurate¹²; compared to the historical context in which the books were published – e.g. the Darwinist view of nature – these doubts are perfectly comprehensible.

The following paragraphs will give a detailed picture of how Carroll works with language and I will speculate about his intentions in doing so. The first part will concentrate on the pun, referring to the looseness of language, and in the second I will focus on the important role of meta-language in Carroll’s novels.

THE PUN

The mechanics of the pun are deeply rooted in the field of semantics where, according to Saussure, the meaning of a word (sign) arises from the interaction of signifier (the physical or arbitrary existence of a sign) and signified (the mental concept). Throughout the Alice books this interaction is violated and the main reason is that Alice and her counterparts do not share the same mental concept associated with the signified. And this is exactly how the pun works: when mixing up signs that are connected through lexical relations the difference in the signified creates humour.

The following examples are taken from both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* and will be used to outline at least some of these relations; at the same time they can be seen as examples of the unique attitude Lewis Carroll applies towards language. Here I have to add that I can only concentrate on a few examples, and so I will try to pick out some of the most astonishing and most clever ones, as a detailed analysis of the puns in the Alice novels would present enough material to fill books.

¹² cf. Meyer Spacks, p. 325.

HOMOPHONES

Homophones are pairs of words that are different on the level of orthography and meaning but that have the same pronunciation. Humour based on this relation normally only works with spoken language; seeing the pun written often lessens the fun. This is why Carroll often adds a third level to these jokes: the level of graphology with which the pun works perfectly in written form. The first example¹³ is from *Through the Looking Glass*, the second¹⁴ from *Alice in Wonderland*:

She stood silent for a minute, thinking: then she suddenly began again. `Then it really *has* happened, after all! And how, who am I? I *will* remember, if I can! I'm determined to do it! But being determined didn't help much, and all she could say, after a great deal of puzzling, was, `L, I *know* it begins with L!"

The first example is a rather tricky one, totally based on the rules of phonology¹⁵: Alice is not thinking of her last name 'Liddell' as Gardner interprets it¹⁶. Her last name, by the way, does not occur in any of the books, except in the acrostic poem at the end of the second novel. What she is wondering about is her first name of which she can only remember the first two letters: [æɪ]. The sound of these is nearly the same as of the English grapheme 'L': [eɪ]. So this example is no allusion to the author's world (Gardner) but a highly sophisticated pun based on the homonymic character of the graphemes

`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?' And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:--

`Fury said to a mouse, That he met in the house,
"Let us both go to law: I will prosecute YOU. --Come, I'll take no denial; We must have a trial: For really this morning I've nothing to do."
Said the mouse to the cur, "Such a trial, dear Sir, With no jury or judge, would be wasting our breath."
"I'll be judge, I'll be jury," Said cunning old Fury: "I'll try the whole cause, and condemn you to death."

¹³ Gardner, p. 226.

¹⁴ *ibid.* pp. 50.

¹⁵ cf. Nöth, pp. 99.

¹⁶ Gardner, p. 226.

‘Al-‘ and ‘L’.

A similar process can be found in the second example: here again the pun can be found in the homonymic character of the words ‘tale’ and ‘tail’. The level of printing is added to let the pun work also in written form: the mouse’s tale is realised in the graphic form of a tail.

Both Carroll’s books are crammed with homonymic puns and as I have pointed out in the beginning these do work best in speech; as there are only a few examples of graphemes, orthography and layout functioning as a catalyst to let the puns work in written form, we have to assume that the books were primarily intended to be read, or as in Carroll’s case to be told to the children. This assumption can be proven by the fact that in the Victorian era people did enjoy to be read to.

MIMES

Mimes are phonetic similitudes and the process involved can be compared to that of the homophones, only that the process cannot be explained so exactly as it is the case with homophones. One rule that can sometimes be applied is that the intended words mimed by the words used are rhyming words. The example taken from *Alice in Wonderland* shows that this rule cannot be taken for granted and so solving the pun can be very difficult.

The master was an old Turtle--we used to call him Tortoise--'
`Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?' Alice asked.
`We called him Tortoise because he taught us,' said the Mock Turtle angrily: `really you are very dull!' [...]
`Reeling and Writhing, of course, to begin with,' the Mock Turtle replied; `and then the different branches of Arithmetic--Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.' [...]
`Well, there was Mystery,' the Mock Turtle replied, counting off the subjects on his flappers, `--Mystery, ancient and modern, with Seaography: then Drawling--the Drawling-master was an old conger-eel, that used to come once a week: HE taught us Drawling, Stretching, and Fainting in Coils.' [...]
`Hadn't time,' said the Gryphon: `I went to the Classics master, though. He was an old crab, HE was.' `I never went to him,' the Mock Turtle said with a sigh: `he taught Laughing and Grief, they used to say.'¹⁷

What the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon are talking about are, of course, subjects taught in school. I can imagine that it must have been extremely funny for Victorian children to puzzle out the connections to real life school (e.g. reeling and writhing vs. reading and writing), especially when thinking about Victorian schools in general and teaching methods in particular.

HOMONYMS

Homonyms share the spelling of a word but can be split into different meanings. In the Alice books it is mostly in dialogues that homonymic puns are used. The reason for this is that normally the context establishes the meaning of homonymic words. In dialogues it is the speakers who have to de-

¹⁷ *ibid.* pp. 129.

termine the meaning of a word. If the speakers do not share the same mental concept of a homonymic word there is a humorous misunderstanding which can be classified as a homonymic pun. The example below outlines how it works and my main reason for choosing it is that it is an example that continually used in linguistics when talking about homonyms.

‘Aren't you sometimes frightened at being planted out here, with nobody to take care of you?’
‘There's the tree in the middle,’ said the Rose: ‘what else is it good for?’
‘But what could it do, if any danger came?’ Alice asked.
‘It could bark!’ said the Rose.
‘It says "Bough-wough!" cried a Daisy: ‘that's why its branches are called boughs!’¹⁸

The explanation to this can be found in the homonymic relation of ‘bark of a tree / bough-wough (child language for the sound of barking)’ and the ‘bark of a dog / bough of a tree’. The reader's first reaction to this pun will certainly be amusement but on second sight the pun triggers a process of linguistic criticism and the reader starts reflecting on language. Another example giving a homonymic phrase works on the same level: it sharpens the reader's awareness of the arbitrariness of language.

Alice turned round, ready to find fault with anybody. ‘Where's the servant whose business it is to answer the door?’ she began angrily. ‘Which door?’ said the Frog. Alice almost stamped with irritation at the slow drawl in which he spoke. ‘THIS door, of course!’ ‘To answer the door?’ he said. ‘What's it been asking of?’ He was so hoarse that Alice could scarcely hear him. ‘I don't know what you mean,’ she said.¹⁹

The homonymy can be found in the word ‘answer’ which in the phrase metaphorically means ‘to open the door’ but taken literally it can be seen as ‘give an answer to the door’. By using these linguistic devices Carroll hints at the fact that our (the reader's) use of language is largely arbitrary and unaccountable. By questioning these arbitrary relationships Carroll antedates modern-day linguistic philosophy.

PUN METAPHORS

This process of linguistic criticism becomes even more obvious in the pun metaphors where the source of the pun can be found not in the sign or the signifier but in the signified. It is here where the difference between real world and dream world language becomes most obvious.

‘Well, there's the Horse-fly,’ Alice began, counting off the names on her fingers. ‘All right,’ said the Gnat: ‘half way up that bush, you'll see a Rocking-horse-fly, if you look. It's made entirely of wood, and gets about by swinging itself from branch to branch.’ ‘And there's the Dragon-fly.’ ‘Look on the branch above your head,’ said the Gnat, ‘and there you'll find a snap-dragon-fly. Its body is made of plum-pudding, its wings of holly-leaves, and its head is a raisin burning in brandy.’
‘And then there's the Butterfly,’ Alice went on, after she had taken a good look at the insect with its head on fire, and had thought to herself, ‘I wonder if that's the reason insects are so fond of flying into

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 202.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 328.

candles -- because they want to turn into Snap-dragon-flies!' `Crawling at your feet,' said the Gnat (Alice drew her feet back in some alarm), `you may observe a Bread-and-Butterfly. Its wings are thin slices of Bread-and-butter, its body is a crust, and its head is a lump of sugar.'²⁰

In this example even Alice, who normally ignores lectures on language use by dream world inhabitants, starts to wonder about the way language works. Since the publication of the Alice novels critics have assumed that the illogic, disorder and the nonsense is to be found in the novels itself.²¹ But it is the contrary: in the dream world language is used without arbitrary meaning rooted in a logical connection between the signifier and the signified. The nonsense and illogic originates from the different mental concepts applied on language by both Alice and the reader and the dream world inhabitants.

META-LANGUAGE

Carroll uses the linguistic devices portrayed above to apply linguistic criticism onto his mother-tongue: by making the reader aware of the processes and rules underlying a perfectly working language he draws the reader towards a more reflective use of language. Carroll uses the creative power of language to demonstrate itself. By culminating linguistic devices the unobservant reader is easily seduced into talking about nonsense and illogic. So what Carroll does throughout his books is to point out the creativity but also unaccountability of language. As his books were intended to be children's books this motivation becomes perfectly clear: he wants to raise his reader's consciousness towards language and he wants to point out that language does not only function as means of communication. As long as language follows certain rules (e.g. morphology, syntax) it can be used for almost anything with both good and bad intentions in mind.

In this context I also have to point out that there is a difference between *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*: in the first language as subject of discussion is less important although Carroll uses the same devices to create humour. In the latter, language, here especially the connection of logic and language, is the central theme of the novel. In comparison to *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass* is crammed with allusions to the philosophy of today's linguistics, a science that at the time Carroll wrote his books was at its very beginning. In some cases Carroll's language even becomes meta-language and the perfect example is the episode of Humpty Dumpty²².

Since his appearance in *Through the Looking Glass* Humpty Dumpty is known as the principal spokes-man of modern semantics and he is cited in numerous books on this subject. What all these books have in common is the fact that Humpty Dumpty's attitude towards language does not

²⁰ *ibid.* pp. 222.

²¹ cf. Meyer Spacks, p. 318.

²² Gardner, p. 261-276.

work as language is neither God-given nor man-made. The origins of language can be traced back thousands of years and throughout the history of man there has been a steady development of language. But language has never been altered with far-reaching consequences by single persons, i.e. without a majority of people accepting the change, but only by the need or agreement of whole peoples.

A lot of critics now assume that Carroll the logician and mathematician criticises the semantic relations of language²³ and opts for a more logic and concrete use of language. This can be refuted by a citation given by Martin Gardner taken from one of Carroll's books on logic: "[...] I maintain that any writer of a book is fully authorised in attaching any meaning he likes to any word or phrase he intends to use [...] I will meekly accept his ruling, however injudicious I may think of it."²⁴ What Carroll is talking about is literary language that, as we can also see from the Alice novels, is totally different from real-life language. What would happen to human conversation if everybody adopted Humpty Dumpty's attitude can not only be seen in the episode itself but also in the short story *Ein Tisch ist ein Tisch* by Peter Bichsel: human communication would break down.

On the other hand it is correct that most dialogues in the Alice books do break down. But this is because the participants associate different mental concepts with the words used; it does not result from a intentional violation of semantic rules; it results from a different cultural background. It is this background that often makes conversations difficult in real life. A rather sophisticated example for Humpty Dumpty violating existing sets of rules is his 'translation' of *Jabberwocky*: as I have pointed out above, the meaning of the nonsense words in the poem is not to be found on a semantic level but on the level of sound, the meaning of the poem is to a large extent communicated through phonological elements, not through the lexicon. With Humpty Dumpty explaining the nonsense words, they lose their magical quality and reading the poem with the 'translation' in mind leaves it for what it is: nonsense.

"When I use a word,[...] 'it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less."²⁵ This is what Humpty Dumpty rather arrogantly believes. Yet alone the idea of words being paid for what they should mean uncovers the nonsense rooted in this supposition. It is true that language in general and the meaning of words in particular can be 'bent' to some extent, due to semantic relations, but not in a way Humpty Dumpty suggests. What he does forget is the power of language, the power of an 'organism' that has developed over centuries, an 'organism' that takes care of itself and has the power to defend itself. A German quotation literally depicts Humpty Dumpty's fate: *Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall*.

²³ cf. Meyer Spacks; Gardner p. 263 (marginalia no. 2)

²⁴ Gardner, p. 269. (marginalia no. 6)

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 296.

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Throughout the books the dream world characters try to teach Alice about the nature and the power of language: by naming things you label them and therefore you give them existence; the meaning of a word cannot be found in the word itself but meaning is attributed. Alice, as we can see, does not respond to these lessons and up to the end of the book she does not realise this intention, as she is very confused by the White Knight philosophising on the name of his song.

The fact that language and names do have a certain power is no invention of linguistics but it is deeply rooted in popular superstition, dating back to ancient cultures and retaining some importance even nowadays. The superstitious belief in the power of names can be summarised as follows²⁶: the name of a person, a thing, or an animal is closely related to its soul and the name can determine its fate. Throughout centuries and cultures naming is seen as an act of highest responsibility. Names do play an important role in magic where knowing the name of someone or something means possessing certain power over him/her/it; this can either be used for white or black magic. Examples for such assumptions can be found in a broad variety of sources, so for example in the Latin citation *nomen est omen*, in the fairytale *Rumpelstiltskin*, or in the Bible (Jesaja 43,1). This certain power of names can also be experienced in the Alice novels. In the first novel the Caterpillar hurts Alice's feelings by not telling her his name.²⁷ We can see Alice reassuring herself when being in court by being proud of knowing nearly all the names of all the things.²⁸ In these and some other scenes²⁹ where the name of something or someone plays a central role, we can see the starting point for a process that is even more emphasised in *Through the Looking Glass*.

In the second Alice novel the magic character of names and the power that is carried out by using names is a central idea. The power of names demonstrates the power of language. The episodes of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Humpty Dumpty, and The Lion and the Unicorn exemplify that names are strongly connected with the souls of their bearers. At the beginning of the chapter Tweedledum and Tweedledee, who like the other characters originate from nursery rhymes, do in no way resemble the characters portrayed in the nursery rhymes: by starting the discussion on reality they prove that they are highly sophisticated thinkers. But their fate is determined: although they appear as rational beings they, in the end, start to fight over a rattle, being forced to by the power of language fixed in a nursery rhyme. The fact that Carroll develops his characters in the different episodes by adding yet unknown dimensions (as they are not given in the nursery rhymes) even intensifies the effect he wants to achieve: "The sense of fatality caused by the existence of a certain set

²⁶ Bächtold-Stäubli, Hanns. ed. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*. Bd. 6. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1927-42, pp. 950.

²⁷ Gardner, p. 68.

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 144.

²⁹ cf. *ibid.* p. 28, 43, 88, 108, 144, 157.

of words is even stronger in the case of Humpty Dumpty, whose pompousness has an undertone of pathos because of the inevitability of his fall.”³⁰

The demonstration of the power of language comes to its ultimate when Alice plays the children’s game called “I love my love with ...”³¹. Here it is not a fixed set of words that determines the fate of the messenger Haigha but it is Alice herself. Even at this stage she does not realise what the dream world creatures try to teach her: the power of language that manifests itself in the name of things and people. Throughout the books Alice never consciously learns her lesson (“I never should *try* to remember my name in the middle of an accident! Where would be the use of it?”³²) although from the beginning she unconsciously realises the importance of names.

In both his novels Carroll deals with the arbitrary nature of language and nearly all dream world characters deal with a different aspect of this highly complex topic but it is the White Knight that directly hints at the issue dealt with in the book as he reveals Alice that there is a difference between what the name of a song is called, what the name of a song really is, what the song is called and what the song really is.³³ This summarises the work of logicians and semanticists trying to find a concrete explanation for the meaning of words. In a way it is not surprising that the theme of the books is given away by the White Knight, who by literary critics has been associated with Carroll himself since the publication of the books.³⁴

CONCLUSION

In the chapters presented above I have shown that language is the underlying theme in both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, with the latter being even more influenced by this topic. I have also continually pointed out that Lewis Carroll’s intention can be found in raising the reader’s awareness towards the use of language and language itself. What Carroll wants to achieve in his novels is to reveal the difference of appearance and reality communicated through language. W. H. Auden summarises this fact as follows: “We can lie in language and manipulate the world as we wish, but the lie must make sense as a grammatical proposition.”³⁵

In my analysis I have encountered different linguistic issues used by Carroll to demonstrate his matter of concern: in the poem *Jabberwocky* he reveals how the sound of language can influence the listener. With his constant use of the pun he hints at the looseness of meaning in language. Dream world characters as the Gnat or Humpty Dumpty argue with Alice about the meaning of

³⁰ Meyer Spacks, p. 323.

³¹ Gardner, p. 279.

³² *ibid.* p. 325.

³³ *cf.* Gardner, p. 306.

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 296. (marginalia no. 4)

³⁵ Meyer Spacks, p. 318.

words and their relation to reality. Finally, Carroll demonstrates the power of names and the power of language in general by exemplifying the issue with nursery rhyme characters and their fate determined in fixed sets of words.

Now it is known that Carroll's books were loved by children not only because of their humorous and fantastic nature but also because they were seen to be less didactic than the average Victorian children's book. Here I have to emphasise that this is not true: both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are highly didactic, trying to teach children the very nature of language. Carroll's genius can be found in his ability to disguise his didactic intentions with humour and fantasy and at the same time having these features exemplify his intentions. It is also not by chance that Carroll chose his books to be dream narratives. Over centuries the dream has been seen as a state where the human being is in close contact with supernatural beings. Since the ancient Greeks the dream was always used to disguise statements or criticism on didactic, philosophical, and religious topics. In the Alice novels it is linguistic criticism that is disguised within a dream narrative.

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