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Touch Monkeys: Nonsense Strategies For Reading Twentieth-century Poetry

Marion M. Parsons

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TOUCH MONKEYS:
NONSENSE STRATEGIES FOR READING
TWENTIETH-CENTURY POETRY

by
Marion M. Parsons

Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
April, 1991

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Abstract

Literary nonsense is often relegated to the nursery. I suggest that much can be gained from considering the genre of nonsense (called "Nonsense" herein) and linguistic "nonsense" as challenges to sense which do not result in a continual deferral of stable meaning. Such a view of Nonsense facilitates the reading of avant-garde and experimental poetry.

Chapter one provides a taxonomy of Nonsense criticism, and attempts to sort out the various, often conflicting, critical "definitions" of literary nonsense. Chapter two adapts and extends Julia Kristeva's theory of poetic language to make possible a substantially different reading of nonsense language, and provides sample readings of both poetry and Nonsense.

My third chapter tackles the relationship, rarely considered in criticism, between Nonsense and the body; it responds to Gilles Deleuze's suggestion that Nonsense has no direct link to the body. I note the distinction between a nonsense of the senses (perception), as in the writings of Zukofsky and Olson, and the metaphorical writing of the body of écriture féminine, and consider how Nonsense relates to notions of a primal, phonic body imagined by writers like Ted Hughes.

Chapter four examines the reliance of Nonsense upon sound. After a brief consideration of Derrida's grammatological re-writing of language, I discuss how, by playing with sound, Nonsense demonstrates the musicalization of language, and argue that Nonsense is characterized by its imposition of another (in this case musical) way of making meaning within a verbal system. A range of poets and poetics are considered here, including Sitwell, Zukofsky and Sound Poetry.

My final chapter attempts to apply some of the principles of Nonsense to works and ideas of the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry movement. Their approaches to materiality and reference are compared, and
Nonsense's re-configuration of the sign into a palimpsest is posited.

Six practical applications of the principles elaborated in each chapter are given in "inter-chapters" which come between the theoretical chapters. These demonstrate the usefulness of Nonsense's balancing of reference and materiality, meaning and "meaninglessness," in reading many types of poetry.
Acknowledgements

Before any other thanks are given, I want to acknowledge the many friends and family members who helped care for my daughter Rachel while I worked on my doctoral degree. Some were able to offer a few hours, others whole days and weeks; but all provided Rachel with excellent care, and me with much needed pockets of time for thought. Two people, however, stand out from among the rest: Alanna Reabel, who has, for three school years, been Rachel's other mother, and given her a second home and family; and my husband, who thought he'd given up single parenthood.

*

Most thought is developed over a large period of time, and is indebted to a large community of peers; this thesis is no exception. Many friends have directed me to books, poets and theorists over the years; among them, I would especially like to thank Danny O'Quinn and Robin Edwards-Davies, whose enthusiasms for literature often sparked my own. Jamie Bush kindly let me quote from his insightful essay on Ted Hughes. An earlier version of "What then is a window" appeared in Brick 38; Linda Spalding's editorial suggestions helped make the review and the resulting inter-chapter better pieces of work. Jan Zwicky patiently tried to teach me about Wittgenstein, and gave generously of her time to read and comment upon several sections of this work; whatever wrinkles remain in my treatment of philosophy are despite, not because of, her careful and lucid explanations. And Mike Groden's graduate course on Finnegans Wake initiated this whole process.

Several other friends are important not only for their intellectual engagement, but also for their continued emotional (and musical) support: Elisabeth Koster, Dorothy Nielsen, Sue Schenk and Jill Siddall. Each exemplifies the fact that education is most profitable when cooperative.
My advisers have been a source of great encouragement and insight. Martin Kreiswirth and Patrick Deane gave fresh ideas and some much needed perspective; they joined this project at its bleakest moment, and for that alone deserve many thanks. That they provided, as well, astute judgements and wonderful advice, all in the spirit of this study, makes them even more worthy of thanks. Don McKay has for years been a model for me of intellectual and pedagogical excellence, and humanity. His participation in this thesis has been a continual pleasure. Always comprehensive, thoughtful and witty, his responses and comments have added to this thesis as no one else's could. I am indebted to them all.

My examiners -- Frank Davey, Carol Farber, Elizabeth Harvey and Linda Hutcheon -- were both provocative and enthusiastic. Their questions have set my mind to spinning, and will no doubt broaden considerably the scope which this work takes in later forms.

Finally my family, in Leamington and London, deserve many thanks for various encouragements. Their continuing interest in this project urged me on. To my husband and daughter, of course, go greatest thanks; to Stan -- for patience and suggestions and patience and support and patience again; to Rachel -- for letting me fall in love with language all over again, as I watched her do so for the first time. Thanks.
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Introduction -- "No room! No room!":
Guest List for a New Mad Tea-party

"At any rate I'll never go there again!" said Alice, as she picked her way through the wood. "It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!"
(Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* 83)

The stupidest tea-party Alice ever attended is one of the seminal instances of Nonsense in English literature, rife with the sort of linguistic pratfalls that make the whole genre so marvellously and multiply miscommunicative. Puns, riddles, literalistic wrenching of words and of logic, alliteration and various other types of sound play, non sequitur, parody -- each of these literary devices makes an appearance at Carroll's party. The actual guests at the party are few, and are themselves literal jokes. The Mad Hatter and the March Hare are personifications of colloquial expressions; the never wakeful Dormouse is an exaggerated etymological exercise -- its name comes from the Latin *dormire*, to sleep (Gardner 94). Alice crashes the party.

Who would be invited if one were planning another sort of Mad Tea-party, one for the inventors, not the inventions, of Nonsense? Carroll, of course. And Edward Lear. Some lists might expand to include A.A. Milne, Mervyn Peake and Christian Morgenstern; the Marx Brothers and Monty Python's Flying Circus; or John Lennon, whose books of Nonsense verse *In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard in the Works* were published in the mid-sixties. Not much potential for a long list -- unless one were to reconsider the genre from a theoretical perspective and to examine what it has to offer the reading of other types of literature, especially, as I am concerned with here, avant-garde and contemporary poetry.

I will examine both how adaptable aspects of the thought of such literary theorists as Kristeva, Derrida, Barthes and Bakhtin are to the
study of Nonsense and nonsensical language, and how poets like Charles Olson, Louis Zukofsky, Edith Sitwell and Lyn Hejinian engage language in much the same way as writers of Nonsense do. The purpose of this thesis is not to hand out free passes to a hypothetical tea-party, or to make Nonsense writers out of writers who clearly are not working within the genre. However, if the result of this reconsideration is that possibilities broaden, that unexpected guests arrive at the party, then so much the better.

* 
Throughout this study I will use upper and lower case "n"'s to differentiate between the literary genre (Nonsense) and the linguistic or philosophical disruption (nonsense). As chapter one indicates, the former grows out of the latter, and the two are intimately connected.

Linguistic nonsense, because of its symbiotic relationship with sense, has long been the concern of philosophy; in fact it lies at the heart of much philosophical questioning. Yet it is not in a philosophical way that I intend to consider nonsense. While I touch very briefly on the general philosophical tradition concerning nonsense in the first chapter of this study, and use the writings of French philosopher and nonsense theorist Gilles Deleuze throughout this thesis, I at no time attempt to discuss the linguistic disruption or the genre as a philosophical construct.

There is, I believe, a fundamental difference in philosophical and literary approaches to the topic; for the former nonsense is, as I have suggested above, central and a potentially crippling error in thought, while for the latter it is marginal but, in my view, a playful indicator of language's ability to make meaning in many ways. Any aspects of a philosophical argument which I entertain will be recognized, implicitly or explicitly, as existing at a considerable and inevitable distance from literary perspectives on nonsense.

Though philosophical theories of nonsense have not been highly
influential in this study, many other approaches have been. Chapter one is a taxonomy of various critical responses to nonsense and its companion literary genre, Nonsense. A basis for understanding of nonsense is established by looking at the following categories into which criticism invariably places it: madness, anarchy, meaninglessness, dreams, riddles, play, philosophy and linguistic operations. These categories provide a convenient, though by no means rigid, method of organizing and accounting for often conflicting critical responses to nonsense. This chapter essentially maps out the territory of nonsense, gives the reader a sense of the terrain upon which the later chapters are played out.

Julia Kristeva's semanalytical paradigm for poetic language, developed in Revolution in Poetic Language, provides a starting point for the theory of nonsense proposed in chapter two. She holds that many linguistic disruptions (such as sound play, portmanteau words, the collapsing of word divisions, morphemic displacement) are examples of the "semiotic" erupting into "symbolic" language. Her use of the word "semiotic" is markedly different from the word's usual use as "the study of signs," and relates to the notion that the aspects of language which one "values" and dwells in before being able to make sentences and other grammatically- and syntactically-directed assertions are dramatically different from those privileged after one begins to use symbolic language, which is purely communicative and single-minded. To her, the semiotic is a linguistic mode which grows out of a "primeval" and pre-Oedipal relationship with language; it is a mode which engages the material aspects of language.

My suggestion is that nonsense is an expression of this semiotic materiality entering into discourse, entering simultaneously with the production of language itself. This simultaneity is indicative of the
symbiotic relationship between semiotic and symbolic,¹ between nonsense and sense. Susan Stewart, whose groundbreaking work -- Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature -- has been a continual source of inspiration as well as of valuable information, sees simultaneity (as in, for example, the pun which means at least two things at once) as a central characteristic of Nonsense (146-70). A related characteristic of Nonsense essential to the thought of this thesis is the balance between meaninglessness and meaning, which grows out of both symbiosis and simultaneity.

An elaboration upon and an application of the simultaneity and balance characteristic of Nonsense leads to my departure from Kristeva’s model of poetic language. Her model, when spatialized, presents the semiotic and symbolic as separated by a permeable barrier called the “thetic” which “divides” the two modes; thus she offers a three-termed system that is based upon, but does not entertain, simultaneity. She argues that the chora, a hypothetical repository of the semiotic’s inexpressible drives and pulsions, is a construct dependent upon the symbolic for its expression, but that it also “exists” before, and is necessary for the formation of, the symbolic. The two modes exist simultaneously and both contribute to the creation of poetic language. The thetic is absolutely essential for all forms of enunciation. However, it is something to be breached by one mode entering the other, not a meeting place where the two modes merge.

My theory re-conceives the nature of the intermediary term, makes it not merely another term but a combination of the semiotic and symbolic; I posit a model in which nonsense is the third term. The system is composed of meaninglessness (analogous to Kristeva’s semiotic), meaninglessness/meaning (or nonsense), and meaning (analogous to Kristeva’s symbolic). It re-designates the role played by the thetic

¹ Language often plays into a critic’s hands: “symbiotic” can be read as a portmanteau-esque combination of “semiotic” and “symbolic.”
in poetic language, making what was the thetic a zone of co-habitation rather than repression. The ramifications of this re-designation are most fully acknowledged in chapter five, where the status of the Nonsensical sign is reconstrued.

Once this subtle but important deviation from Kristeva has been established, and this new theory’s usefulness has been demonstrated in reading both poetry and classical Nonsense by Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, I move on to explore two linguistic connections implicit in the theory — that which nonsense has with the body and with sound.

Chapter three examines how nonsense facilitates the body’s dwelling in language, and discusses what nonsense as a reading strategy has to offer poetries and poetics which claim to root themselves in the body. A nonsensical body very much in the tradition of Rabelaisian carnival is proposed, a body of “shoots and branches,” which protrudes beyond its normal confines and breaks down accepted barriers between itself and the outside world (Bakhtin 316-17), a body and a self in flux. Central to the body’s fluctuating relationship with the world are the senses; this chapter also explores the importance to nonsense of this other type of “sense” by considering, among other examples, Charles Olson’s concepts of “open form” and proprioceptive verse, and Louis Zukofsky’s heightened use of synaesthesia.

The third chapter also entertains a comparison of the nonsensical body and the Deleuzian schizophrenic body, recognizing that part of the discrepancy between Deleuze’s ideas about Nonsense and my own lies in the relationship each body has with language, a relationship which Deleuze characterizes as articulated in the depths of the body and at its “sensical/sensual” surface, respectively. I attempt to undermine the polarization of these locations, using my slightly altered version of Kristeva, and Barthes’ notion of the “writable” text, which requires active participation on the part of the reader. My approach is
admittedly un-Deleuzian.

Finally the chapter considers the nonsensical language/body relation at another depth, a primordial, as opposed to schizophrenic, depth. The discussion includes such varying views of a primordial or originary body in language as Ted Hughes' "Orphans," a dramatic experiment directed by Peter Brooks; Tim Lilburn's contemporary re-working of Duns Scotus's concept "haecceitas" or the intense and essential being of an object; and the relationship between writing and the mother's body put forward by some French literary theorists. It considers as well écriture féminine's mandate to disrupt language by writing the female body into it. Here I argue against a purely essentialist reading of feminist writing and of the female body in language, suggesting instead that language is radically re-contextualized, musicalized, by the infusion of desire and drives, either female or male.

One of the areas of language in which nonsense is most anarchic is that of sound. The fourth chapter gives attention to how sound works in nonsense, how it exists as an alternative source of sense within nonsense language. After a brief discussion of Derrida, in anticipation of charges of phonocentrism, I argue that the playful use of sound in nonsense requires a modification of one principle of deconstruction; by phonically incorporating semiotic materiality, nonsense (and poetic language as Kristeva conceives it) is responding to, though not fully resolving, the lack which Derrida perceives within all language.

The semiotics of music, how sound and music mean, is then explored, using as a jumping-off point avant-garde composer John Cage's query "If words are sounds, are they musical or are they just noise" (Silence 42). Cage's radical experiments with language, sound and form provide a convenient juncture at which several of the concerns of this chapter meet. Once musical meaning has been explored, I move on to the central thrust of this part of the thesis: how nonsense language can
mean musically.

The musicalization of language involves not only Poundian *melopoeia* and rhythm, though the latter is clearly one of the most important and frequent expressions of a musicalized language. It involves as well a confluence of sign systems, in which one way of meaning is "transliterated" into/onto another; one type of language, in this case music, wraps itself around another, here verbal language, resulting in destabilized but multiple meaning. Such a transliteration whether "subtle," as in the poetry of Edith Sitwell or Colleen Thibault, or overt, as in the experiments of Cage and bp Nichol, is highly nonsensical.

Chapter four then goes on to consider poems which are progressively more musical. A quite lengthy reading of Sitwell's "Foxtrot" is followed by a look at "Privet," a poem from Louis Zukofsky's *80 Flowers* and at his highly controversial "translations," with his wife Celia, of Catullus. This section concludes with a brief introduction to some of the issues raised by sound poetry, a pure example of sound as sense, which traces its roots back to the great Nonsense writers of the nineteenth century. Here I focus primarily on the theoretical writings of Steve McCaffery, a Canadian sound and experimental poet who is loosely associated with the American "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry movement.

My concluding chapter is both theoretically and practically an extended application of the principles developed in the earlier chapters. It concerns the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" movement, a group composed of some of the most experimental poets in North America today. The term "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry is an umbrella for the work of many and various writers; most of these poets share an interest in the nature of meaning and its relationship both to the political status quo and to language's materiality. Several of the issues they address are also central to nonsense as it is styled in this study. Not surprisingly, a nonsense
strategy for reading this often difficult poetry proves extremely helpful. I explore how several of these poets, including Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman and Lyn Hejinian, understand the role of the reader, reference, referentiality, materiality and grammar, and what nonsense can offer to a reading of these matters. As a result of these discussions, I argue for the reconstitution of the sign within a Nonsensical paradigm; the re-materialized sign becomes a palimpsest through which both signified and signifier, concrete and referential qualities, may be glimpsed. The chapter concludes with readings of Gertrude Stein, one of the most important literary ancestors whom "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets have, and of Ron Silliman, a major "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poet, theorist and anthologist.

The study, as I have presented it so far, then, is a theoretical exploration of the relationship nonsense has with various aspects of language and how that relationship might facilitate a reading of poetry. There are sample readings of selected poems in each chapter, but the general tendency of the thesis is not one of practical application. In an effort to address this imbalance between theory and practice, to disrupt the generally communicative momentum established by the chapters -- this is after all a study of linguistically and structurally disruptive phenomena, so a little structural disruption is not out of place -- I have included six "inter-chapters." These offer practical applications of some of the principles discussed in the chapters surrounding them. They are also a dramatic example of my own belief that literary theory needs to have (at least) double vision; it must focus on its own "genre" of thought without losing sight of the texts to which it is intimately tied.

A nonsense style of reading may not lend itself to all types of poetry, but it does accommodate quite a wide range of writing. The poets and poems in these inter-chapters have been selected to reflect the extent of that range, the flexibility of this approach. An analysis
of Colleen Thibaudeau's "from Throgmoyle and Engestchin: A Relationship" a poem composed in an entirely invented language, precedes the first chapter. A consideration of pronounal use in e.e. cummings' "anyone lived in a pretty how town" and Lewis Carroll's "Verses from the Trial of the Knave of Hearts" follows the first chapter; a reading of Rudyard Kipling's "Road-Song of the Bandar-log," a poem connected both metaphorically and analogically to the concerns of the second chapter, comprises the third inter-chapter. The third and fourth chapters are separated by an exploration of Adrienne Rich's poem "Our Whole Life," which attempts to demonstrate that even poems which are very politically purposeful may engage a nonsense strategy. Tim Lilburn's poem "Pumpkins," an eclectic and witty play with sound, is discussed in the fifth inter-chapter, and Lyn Hejinian's My Life, a poetic "autobiography" and a fine example of "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry, is considered in the inter-chapter that precedes my conclusion.

There was a table set out under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare and the Hatter were having tea at it: a Dormouse was sitting between them, fast asleep . . . .

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it. 'No room! No room!' they cried out when they saw Alice coming. 'There's plenty of room!' said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table (Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland 74-75).

Being of the critical "camp" which tends to have little sympathy for Alice, I rarely agree with her take on things in Wonderland. I must admit, however, that this once she may be right. When one re-constructs nonsense, when one recognizes it as an extremely valuable tool for
approaching experimental poetry and acknowledges its affinities with and potential for modifications to contemporary literary theories, one soon realizes there may indeed be "plenty of room" at the tea-party table.
"Loppleton Leery"

The first three lines or "argument" in Colleen Thibaudeau's "from Throgmogle & Engestchin: A relationship" (The Martha Landscapes 53-54; see Appendix I for the text of the poem) contain its only English sentence, or its only sensible English sentence:

In which you meet Throgmogle and Engestchin and you may feel that the latter is not a fully developed character and you are probably right.

The rest of the poem is a phonic romp through the nonsensical potentialities of language. Thibaudeau doesn't write "standard" English in her poem; but she does make "words" that are phonetically possible in English by bringing together phonemes which utilize the standard sound conjunctions of the language. As well, she plays with some standard ordering principles of English -- grammar, punctuation, capitalization and typography. Those first three lines, along with the presence in the poem's latter portion of capitals and commas, elicit expectations (which will later be undone) of conventional and coherent meaning and so lure the reader unsuspectingly into a semantic morass.

T.S. Eliot claims in his essay "Dante" that "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood" (238); such is certainly the case with Thibaudeau's poem. The "argument" and ordering conventions, which appear more conspicuously later because of her unremitting phonemic anarchy, help make "from Throgmogle" a successful piece of Nonsense and of poetry, for they communicate a type of, or possibility for, meaning despite her linguistic inaccessibility. Somewhere under the apparent gibberish characters are buried, although one's a bit famished literally. So a meaning-seeking mind sets to work.

Throgmogle Fordful

11
manty overgoo
bog manty gong goppling
rill cum neck throggins.

The poem's more rounded character, if a reader can assume the argument is suggesting that only one is not fully developed, is immediately introduced: Throgmogle Fordful (Fordful -- her/his/its last name?). Tentatively Throgmogle can be called "he" and Engestchin "she" -- the sounds of Throgmogle's name are harder, more stereotypically masculine than those of Engestchin. And the ending of "Engestchin" recalls the Germanic feminine and diminutive suffix "-in."
The repetition of "manty," with its implication of reiterated meaning, encourages a reader to use repetition as a key to break Thibaudeau's "code." Other words at first seem to be English -- "bog," "gong," "rill" -- but their context makes them nonsensical despite suggestions, especially from "bog" and "rill," of landscape or setting. "Overgoo" at the end of the second line combines two words ("over" and the colloquialism "goo"); it pushes its energy across the line break (the open "oo" sound slips more vigorously out of the mouth than any other sound ending words in this stanza) and spills into "bog" -- an appropriate sliding since "goo" might be thought to have much to do with bogdom. But the connection is tenuous and offers no reliable means for deciphering the stanza.

Sound patterns give more plausible results. Though none of the lines rhyme overtly, there is a complex network of sound and rhyme, of assonance and alliteration, among the syllables: "throg," "mog," "bog"; "goo," "gong," "gop." The final word of the stanza, "throggins," circles back to echo the first syllable of Throgmogle, and the predominance of "og/go" rhymes suggests many of the other words grow out of that "name". The stanza offers a quite thorough "throggin" of its first word; each rhyme or permutation is perhaps an aspect of the rounding of Throgmogle. "Rill" is a partial rhyme with the end of
"Fordful," so the character is given back to front and front to back. All Throgmogle's sonal corners are covered.

Stanza two raises another problem in the search for the poem's "meaning." Which words are Throgmogle's, and which are Engestchin's? (Or has Thibaudeau introduced an entirely new character -- Choomin, the "in" ending may suggest, as it seems to in Engestchin, a proper noun. The first word of the stanza could then be read as an indication that 't is Choomin who is speaking now.)

Choomin:

Chillチンチン Engestchin
chanty chopcharchill
chorey chopcharchill chooley
chingle choon chingley
choodle.

The insistent repetition of "ch" makes the stanza choom along at a staccato pace which implies that the discussion is less than pleasant, and that the relationship mentioned in the poem's title is not a smooth one. As well the repetition of words ("chopcharchill") and syllables ("chill," "chin," "char," "choo") develop a chattering cacophony, a nagging insistence, which cuts short and intrudes upon the silence following the colon of the first line. "Chillチンチン" is placed as if it is part of Engestchin's name, though one might argue its role is adjetival, and "Fordful"'s adverbial. Thibaudeau's use of capitals here is no firm clue since throughout the poem there seems no comprehensibly consistent approach to their use, except for the continual capitalization of "Throgmogle," "Fordful," "Engestchin," and "Chillチンチン". Reading Chillチンチン as part of Engestchin's name allows the stanza's syllabic distortions of "Chillチンチン" and its alliterative "ch" pattern to be viewed as some more raucous name-play in the spirit of the first stanza. Here, however, the containment or cyclical completion of the previous stanza is lacking, and "choodele,"
far from being a pull back into Engestchin's name (or her adjective) seems the stanza's strongest movement away from it.

Because two variations of typeface (italic and roman) are used, this "excerpt" (the title indicates it is part of a whole, but this is the complete text of the poem as published) unfolds like a dialogue between the two characters, with one typeface attributed to each character; when Thibaudeau reads the poem publicly, she uses three "voices" -- one "narrative" voice and two character voices. If the poem's argument can be trusted (and why not try?) one of the characters is underdeveloped; I'm inclined to think it's Engestchin because the rhyming associated with her name doesn't round her out the way that associated with Throgmogle does. And if character is partially developed through "speech," one clue for attributing voice would be the sheer number of lines given each style. Maybe this underdeveloped character has little to say for herself. Since the roman-face has had more to "say," and since the phonic play on Throgmogle's name is more sustained than that on Engestchin's, perhaps Throgmogle should be associated with "roman," the more sustained typeface, and Engestchin with "italic."

But the next stanza puts a slight crimp into this:

Throgmogle Fordful?

Chillchinchar Engestchin?

There are two possible directions for identification to take here. Either one is tempted to use this stanza as a means of equating the characters with the typeface they are named in, and thereby to confirm the suspicions above about which "part" each character has. Or, maintaining the poem's sense of dialogue, one is tempted to read the stanza as vocative, a tentative naming or recognition -- as in, "Hey Throgmogle Fordful! Is that really you?" -- or a query like "Are you fordful today, Throgmogle?". (That's assuming, of course, the possibility of Throgmogle and Engestchin questioning themselves is
ruled out: are you feeling Chillchinchar today, self?, am I really Throgmole Fordful?) The poem’s dialogic structure seems to suggest that Throgmole’s "part" is "italic" and Engestchin’s "roman."

This is also the poem’s smallest, most perfectly balanced and most hesitant stanza; it is tenuous not only in its slightness and tone, but in its placement as well. This stillness in the sprightliness of dialogue seems nonetheless to participate in that dialogue. Following the implication of its questions, one realizes that Engestchin may have much more to say for and about herself than Throgmole.

Next is the poem’s longest stanza; its alternating styles of typeface make the stanza antiphonal, conversational:

Fulford mog-gle throg
Throging
Besa boom
Besa boom
Throging
 Manty choon Manty
chorey manky
manky minstven
Besa boom chorey
Choodle chin chin char
Gundalling tandy
Upert bee neery
Upert a chooble,
Laddledy leery
Upert a chooble
Min Min Nin
Besa boom chorey.
Powdler
Blanko
Upert a chooble
Nin Nin Nin

Manky Minstevne

loppleton leery,
leveling,
limpling,
leddledy lumpoling...

The inverting, asserting of names and identity begins again; this time
turning Fordful and Throgmogle inside out and upside down — a
frolicking which Throgmogle interrupts with a bullfroggish chorus
("Throgsins/ Besaboom/ Besaboom/ Throgsins"). This repeats the final
"throggs" of stanza one, and "besaboom" rhymes with the initial
"choomin" of stanza two, thereby connecting this stanza with earlier
ones. The stanza continues with this phonic play, here slightly more
lilting (because of alliterating "m"'s and "l"'s) than in earlier
stanzas, with the strains of "besaboom" intermingling occasionally.
Ironically, Throgmogle's last word in this stanza (and for some time to
come) is Blanko, a word which, although not English, has some quite
specific semantic connotations for English readers. And soon Engestchin
will be reduced to speaking a blank of a different sort. Before this
"reduction" of Engestchin, however, there are her loppeling lines which
trail off in a quite individual and non-nominal way. Perhaps
significantly, many of these words are participial, active words that
strike out in a grammatically and phonically new direction. Only one of
these words, "leery," and few of the sounds ("op," "um") have been used
so far. In a poem governed almost entirely by verbal and phonic
repetition this is a noteworthy shift away from the norm and one which
Engestchin seems not to be able to maintain or resolve; the stanza ends
in ellipsis, with an unexpected lack of energy — unexpected especially
because Engestchin has never yet seemed at a loss for words.

She regains her voice in the name play of the next stanza:

Fordful mogle
chorey chumbles
dipdum danker.
Engestchin chuh
chuh
ch
h

*

What is interesting here is not so much the introduction of new words ("dipdum," "danker") despite her earlier slip into silence, but the reduction of her own name to sputtering sounds and then, again, to silence. "Chuh" is the sounding out of the phonic unit which appears most commonly when Engestchin's name is played with. This is collapsed into the phoneme itself ("ch"), and then collapsed to "h," an aspirant, a silent breathing, and then to the silence of blank space and the asterisk. Reducing her name to air, dismantling her "self," leaves Engestchin (the name itself sounds reminiscent of "anguishing") again silent.

The rest of the poem can be read as a unit:

Para pom
tandle:
Chilchinchinchar Engestchin
chanty chop charchill
chorey chop charchill
chingle chun chingley
choodle

dooldum.

Thoogmogle Fordful
manty overgoo
rhinger minstevven
bog manty gong goppling
rill cum nakk throggins.

Para pom tandle.
The phrasing of "Para pom/tandle" -- first with a line break, then without one -- mirrors the reunification offered in this reprise (with variations) of the initial name and sound play on both Throgmgle Fordful and Chincharchill Engestchin. Such thorough-going play on the names has not yet occurred in the same stanza. But this union is qualified by the division of a word which was not originally divided -- "chop charchill" -- and which, perhaps not surprisingly, has thus far been associated with Engestchin's name. The second last stanza offers a resolution, an amalgamation which at once counters and contains the previous stanza's movement. A solution to Throgmgle and Engestchin's mutual silence, succinctly put in the isolation of "Para pom tandle."

This is a brief, so partial, and necessarily uncertain reading of some of the elements in Thibaudeau's poem, but it glimpses, at least, the delicious give and take of her language. "From Throgmgle & Engestchin: A relationship" works as poem and as Nonsense because it "lollipop leery"-s along the border between meaning and meaninglessness. Each reading offers the possibility of a new sense, a new scenario. Is this a relationship in decay (marital? parental?) making a (last ditch) effort at reunion? Is Engestchin, despite "her" verbosity, feeling her identity squelched and distorted, her individuality sapped of energy? Are the two characters blithely going about their lives, effortlessly making room for each other? Is this just the empty chatter of a cocktail party? I have an urge to imagine Engestchin cleaning kitchen cupboards and talking to herself, while Throgmgle leans in the door from the living room with an occasional comment. Any and all of these suggestions fit the poem's teasing possibilities.

While no one reading of the poem can definitively translate the
Throgmoglian dialect (who would want to, since such translation would inevitably squelch Thibaudeau's lively and witty poem?), each can reveal meaningful structures underpinning the seemingly garbled words, and dramatize the poem's movements towards and away from sense. As in the analysis of more conventional poetry, one can find alternative systems operating to create alternative ways of meaning. What at first appears to be utter gibberish has the potential for different types of meaning (most notably sound as sense) quite different from what many readers have been taught to expect. But meaning nonetheless.
Chapter I -- Runcible Relations: A Taxonomy of Nonsense Criticism and Theory

When Uncle Sam
Became a Ham
We did not care to carve him up;
He struggled so;
We let him go
And gave him to the pup.
(Mervyn Peake, from "Aunts and Uncles" 72)

A casual read through The Martha Landscapes doesn't prepare one for "from Throgmogle & Engestchin," even if Thibaudeau's use in other poems of occasional portmanteau-esque and abbreviated words (for instance "anyfool wd know it wd have to be/ a muchlessfargone Head" ["St. Thomas: the great Heat Wave of '36" 48]) have registered themselves as more than rare forays into linguistic invention. Despite the quirkiness of her style, Thibaudeau's other words seem to ground a reader in a fairly trustworthy framework of meaning. But this poem with its radically undercut gestures towards meaning is, some might argue dismissively, gibberish, sheer nonsense.

Well, is it? Implicit in my analysis of Thibaudeau's poem, in the assertion that it works as both poem and Nonsense, is an understanding of Nonsense as a positive linguistic venture. But what assumptions underlie that statement? Is "nonsense" more than a derogatory term for language that is "garbled"? This chapter provides a taxonomy, and a survey of the widely various responses to nonsense and its adjacent literary genre, Nonsense. As such, it will attempt to carve out a sense for the two by plotting them roughly on a literary and linguistic map.

Deciding what constitutes either form of nonsense is not simple.
Emile Cammaerts writes in *The Poetry of Nonsense*, the genre's first extended treatment: "It is far easier to say what is not nonsense than to say what is" (8) and Myra Cohn Livingston insists that "nonsense, like poetry, eludes definition" (123). Even a cursory glance at critics and reference sources illustrates just how slippery the concept "nonsense" is.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines nonsense as "That which is not sense; spoken or written words which make no sense or convey absurd ideas." On the other hand, Susan Stewart argues throughout *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* that Nonsense is symbiotic with common sense. And A.C. Baier in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* writes "Nonsense is parasitic upon sense and never departs so far from sense that it ceases to be part of some language, to the minimal extent of sharing its alphabet with that language" (521).

According to Lionel Trilling, nonsense, "when it succeeds, . . . makes more than sense" (quoted in Bloom 4). Dutch Nonsense specialist Wim Tigges adopts Frye's "basic types of *malos* and *opsis*, of babble and doodle ... respectively the charm and the riddle," and offers "[a]nother way of characterizing [it, as] . . . charm and riddle at the same time" ("An Anatomy of Nonsense" 41). And Richard Gott, in a review of a recent anthology, *The Chatto Book of Nonsense Poetry*, attributes to nonsense a Britishness akin to "cricket and Marmite": "Silly, usually unpleasant and meaningless, often racist and misogynist [sic], nonsense poetry is to British imperialism what Donald Duck is to the American variety" (37).

These sample definitions slide between nonsense as a linguistic venture, and Nonsense as a genre. Such sliding is endemic to the subject because the two feed each other, inform their respective definitions. Their relationship grows out of a shared approach to language, and to language's principles of order and meaning. Writing within the Nonsense genre is comprised of works, either fictive or
poetical, which use nonsense language as a focal point and a fundamental stylistic principle. Both forms manipulate language (although it may be argued that nonsense doesn't always do so intentionally); both, consequently, frustrate one's comfortably staid certainties about the way in which language transmits or, as is more to the point, makes meaning. The growing interest in nonsense language is due, in part, to an increased awareness of its literary uses and of how those literary uses reflect a changing understanding of the role language plays in the formation of the individual and society.

While critics continue to disagree about what nonsense is, the definitions above demonstrate that most critics isolate the "sense" within the "non". With the exception of Gott's (which defines it as a manifestation of the British Raj mentality) and Tigges' (which is one of the few "characterizations" of Nonsense he offers which doesn't include sense), every quotation or reference above describes nonsense and Nonsense in terms of their relationship with sense. And that seems "reasonable"; for, how can one classify something which, by its very nature, makes suspect the language with which and the systems of thought by which one attempts to classify it? How describe the limits of a concept which questions the reliability of such limits? The answer: one doesn't. Rather the word or concept is described in terms of other words, despite the fact such description, instead of "explaining" or "clarifying" the word, pushes it deeper into language, further towards abstraction. Definition and classification are actually attempts to broaden the linguistic bases of a concept, to tie it more firmly to a series of abstractions. A definition may be thought of as literal, but it is actually literary -- this is just what Alice's experiences with Looking-Glass Insects and Lear's Nonsense Botany demonstrate (see Figs.
When Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear take definitions and classifications literally, Nonsense is the "predictable" result.

Not long before her visit with the Looking-Glass Insects, Alice has an exchange with the Red Queen which makes suspect, as well, that compendium of definition, the dictionary. When Alice charges that the Queen's boast "I could show you hills, in comparison with which you'd call that [hill] a valley" is nonsense, the Red Queen shakes her head: "You may call it 'nonsense' if you like ... but I've heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary!" (Through the Looking-Glass 162-63). Ironically, the Queen's claim is true; her nonsensical statement is as sensible as the dictionary, because the dictionary (as much as it purports to contain the many "senses" of words) is highly nonsensical. Stewart writes that because "they reduce the world to discourse ... there is nothing that is so nonsensical as the dictionary, the telephone book, or the encyclopedia" (190-91). With definitions, then, one is between a rock and a hardly existent place. Taken literally definitions can result in nonsensical incongruity; taken literally definitions create a Nonsensical and hermetic world of words.²

In The Field of Nonsense, Elizabeth Sewell points out that Humpty Dumpty, the only character in Carroll who pontificates on language and meaning, sits high atop a wall in a very precarious position (122). This position is shared by those who try to define anything succinctly, especially nonsense. That being the case, I won't manufacture my own

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¹ Carroll's Looking-Glass insects also demonstrate that, as Sherril Jaffe wittily points out in a lecture/discussion led by David Bromige ("Intention & Poetry" 41), there's a very little gap between etymology and etymology.

² It's important to note that neither Nonsense nor nonsense is solely lexical in nature. Syntax often stands as the representative of "sense," or maintains its own sort of sense. The reliance is central to the symbiotic nature of both types of nonsense. As will be argued in later chapters, Nonsense works most effectively when it is either, according to Chomsky's levels of grammaticality, "grammatical" or "semi-grammatical." That is, when it preserves an at least moderately accessible/translatable level of syntactic order.
"Well, there's the Horse-fly," Alice began, counting off the names on her fingers.

"All right," said the Cat. "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."

"What does it live on?" Alice asked, with great curiosity.

"Sap and sweat," said the Cat. "Go on with the list."

Alice looked at the Rocking-horse-fly with great interest, and made up her mind that it must have been just painted, it looked so bright and sticky, and then she went on.

"And there's the Dragon-fly."

"Look on the branch above your head," said the Cat, "and there you'll find a Singing-dragon-fly. Its body is made of plum-pudding, its wings of body-lace, and its head is a nice burning in brandy."
definition. Wittgenstein's characterization, in *Philosophical Investigations*, of meaning as use is handier in this situation than are standard ways of defining. Rather than having an isolatable substantive definition, words -- for Wittgenstein -- evolve a meaning over an extended period of use; meaning becomes allied with context. I'll take my cue from Wittgenstein and from Gilles Deleuze who suggests that "meaning is not an entity but a relation" (quoted in Baum 69) -- as the "definitions" above (for the most part unwittingly) show. What follows is an attempt to let an understanding of the terms "nonsense" and "Nonsense" evolve out of their relationships with other concepts, and is an exploration of how the terms relate to linguistic and (to a lesser extent) psychic distortions in these categories or contexts: madness, anarchy, meaninglessness, dreams, riddles, play, philosophy and linguistic operations. This exploration will facilitate an organizing of, and an accounting for, the often conflicting critical responses to both forms of nonsense. These groupings seem naturally relevant to Nonsense, but others could be suggested, for instance relations with the Absurd, the grotesque, the nursery rhyme; most of these categories stretch to include other tangentially-related topics as well.

The first section, on madness, looks briefly at the historical association between Nonsense and madness and the literary tradition of the fool, and lays the groundwork for a topic which will be taken up again in chapter three -- the opposition between the Nonsense of Carroll and schizophrenic "nonsense," as discussed in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Jean-Jacques Lecercle. My consideration of anarchy in the second section deals primarily with subversion, as it is found in Lear's rigidly controlled limericks and their thematic use of violence, and in the benevolent anarchy of Bakhtinian carnival. The discussion of Bakhtin branches out into one of Julia Kristeva's adaptations of his theory, and ends with a quick detour to discuss self-reflexivity, an aspect of Kristevaan carnival which superficially seems disjunct from anarchy. The
third section, which deals with meaninglessness, notes Nonsense's differences from Absurdism and Dadaism, both of which are frequently linked with meaninglessness. It also discusses the disparity between critical contentions concerning nonsense's meaninglessness; views which can be split, roughly speaking, into two camps — meaninglessness as achieved through minimal (or literal) meaning, or as achieved through a multiplicity of meanings. As a part of the exploration of the latter contention, which I agree initiates Nonsense's gesture toward meaninglessness, theories of the portmanteau word will also be presented. Nonsense's relationship with Surrealism is considered in the fourth section on dreams; this section also includes a refutation of Elizabeth Sewell's claim that Nonsense and dream are antithetical, and a consideration of how Freudian dream-work inhabits nonsense language.

The fifth section looks at the importance of riddles to nonsense and, by extension, the nonsensicalness of religions. Carroll's use of games in the Alice books, the many co-relations between social theorist Johan Huizinga's theory of play and Nonsense, and the character of Alice as a game-player are dealt with in the section on play. The philosophical aspects of nonsense, as construed by Wittgenstein in Philosophical Investigations and more generally by A.C. Baier in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, are discussed in the seventh section. So too is the relationship some critics see between Carroll's method of "exposing" nonsense and Wittgenstein's. The final section on linguistic operations deals briefly with reference, materiality and the double-ness of language, and anticipates the second chapter's discussion of desire in nonsense language.

These groupings and contexts are not meant to offer an exhaustive reading of the area, but rather to provide a convenient way to synthesize some of the varied tacks people take when writing about nonsense and Nonsense. None of them entirely excludes the others. As M.R. Haight writes: "Nonsense shades gradually, in various directions,
into pure fantasy, pure farce, the grotesque, the Surrealist, and so on" (255). This shading is true of nonsense relationally as well as generically. Most critics blend at least two of the groups considered below: the self-contradiction which can result is particularly apt.

Essential to an understanding of nonsense, and of the tenuous blending of these groupings, is the recognition, promoted by Tigges and many other critics, that Nonsense always maintains a delicate tension between (at least) two seemingly incompatible or antithetical concepts. The issue is not one of polarity, but of duality, not of a separable either/or nature but of a multiply inclusive one.

What strings these categories together is language. For nonsense is at the heart of language; and Nonsense creates a world of words (Sewell 17). As such both forms of nonsense have much to do with semiotics, the study of sign systems -- especially with linguistic semiotics, although Nonsense's close ties with illustration indicate it is also important to visual semiotics.¹ By stretching conventional attitudes about language, by playing with words as if they were things, these two types of nonsense draw attention to, question, the way words mean, the way they relate to each other and to the things they refer to in any context.

While it would have been possible to avoid the continual interweaving of associative phenomena (dreams, madness, games, carnivals, etc.) and the logical and linguistic properties of nonsense, such interweaving demonstrates that nonsense can be dealt with in the context of a lingually constructed reality; because one relates to the world through language, and because nonsense is at all times inherent in language, it is an inescapable "presence" within all aspects of "reality" -- social, psychological, historical, literary, political.

¹ For an extended consideration of Nonsense's relationship with visual semiotics see Wendy Steiner's The Colors of Rhetoric.
The very pliable groupings used in this chapter indicate, as well, that my focus is not so much on Nonsense as a genre (though of course that will come into play) as on the act of reading and what one can bring from a reading experience of Nonsense to the reading of other, supposedly "sensical," writings.

Orchestrating opinions whose variations are sometimes great, sometimes a mere splitting of hairs, can make for a gangly and graceless dance, a pas-de-deux in hip-waders. But looking at nonsense in these ways will facilitate a slightly different approach to the works of Carroll and Lear, whose writing will be frequently used as examples; more important, these ways of looking at the two types of nonsense will introduce some of their wide range of associations, and a few of the other writers who, it is claimed, belong to the Nonsense family. According to some genealogies, Aristophanes, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Jarry, Stein, Joyce, the Marx Brothers and Flannery O'Connor are members; according to others this family emerged only with the rise of Victorian England and is very much a nuclear one (Tigges, Anatomy 138-39).

**Looking Through Dark Glasses: Nonsense and the Language of Madness**

Framing this discussion of runcible relations with madness and linguistic operations has a certain propriety because much of the language theory employed in the latter parts of this study uses madness as a means of explicating some of the ways language functions.

Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization*, writes: "Language is the first and last structure of madness, its constituent form; on language are based all the cycles in which madness articulates its nature" (100). He uses the term "language" both metaphorically and literally, suggesting on the one hand that madness can be defined in the simple structure of a discourse. . .
[which] is both the silent language by which the mind speaks to itself in the truth proper to it, and the visible articulation in the movements of the body (100).

But on the other that madness is also "of both body and soul, of both language and image, of both grammar and physiology" (100-1).

Because one engages reality through language, and because madness is, on at least one level, a socially unacceptable perception of reality, madness and language are intimate. One of the forms their intimacy takes is the kind of linguistic disruption typical of a nonsense which brings together the body and language; and nonsense is often styled as a discourse on the edge of madness.

Madness leaps immediately to mind when considering Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. This leaping may be the result of the presence of the Mad Hatter (deranged by the mercury he used in making hats), the March Hare (crazed with the Spring and the need to mate) or the Cheshire-Cat who, in a notorious passage, tells Alice: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad" (72). Such a ready association with madness is suggested perhaps by the fact that all three crazed characters are turns of phrase turned to life, or perhaps (and most likely) by the dementia of the place itself. Peter Heath argues that Alice's is "a mind driven almost to the verge of unhinging by its encounter with the dark forces and mysterious taboos of language and thought" (52).4

The connection between Nonsense and madness, however, goes back

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4 Heath insists, however, that Carroll is not a Nonsense writer but, because of his rigid adherence to logical and linguistic rules, an Absurdist (47). While Carroll's delight in following logic to its illogical ends may be a technique shared by Absurdist writers, I hesitate to label him such. The reality which he presents is not a senseless one, as is that which marks Absurdist literature; rather, as Tiges argues, it is a reality made up of senseless language (Literary Nonsense 128). The difference is subtle but important: one uses language to create a senseless reality, the other uses senseless language to create a reality (Tiges 128). As well, his use of the narrator to remind the reader continually of the status of Alice's waking world works against any desire to read the human situation in the Alice books as devoid of meaning and order. Alice's world does have order; Carroll uses Nonsense to show that, within that order, disorder is necessarily found.
much further than to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. In 1711 Addison, writing for *The Spectator*, deemed Nonsense the daughter of Falseness and the mother of Frenzy (who eventually married one of the daughters of Folly) (Ross 336), thereby placing Nonsense precariously between madness and unreality. Addison’s designation also relates Nonsense, if only by marriage, with the tradition of folly and fools. This is a relationship confessed (with clearly differing sentiments) by such critics as G.K. Chesterton, who calls Carroll’s Nonsense “a sort of defiant folly” ("Lewis Carroll" 112), Alison Rae Riese, who connects it to the traditions of the Shakespearean Fool (11), and Hugh Haughton, who claims it may be “the modern descendant of ... feasts of asses, and the culture of fools and folly” (9).^5

Nonsense’s purported kinship with fools and folly is one reason why Shakespeare is often considered kin to Lear and Carroll. King Lear’s madness and his Fool provide obvious connections with the genre. Both characters balance sense with incomprehensibility, and would be solid illustrations of the common assertion that madness is associated with a hidden truth, that the cryptic messages of prophecy or the phenomenon of speaking in tongues contain truths which challenge the limitations of verbal expression. They would be illustrations, as well, of the similar tendency on the part of many readers and critics to find

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^5 The tradition of the fool is not one that escaped Edward Lear’s notice; in his introduction to *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, Holbrook Jackson quotes Lear’s letter to his friend Fortescue asking him:

to ‘write to Lord Palmerston to ask him’ ask the Queen to ask the King of Greece to give’ him a ‘place’ specially created, the title to be ‘Lord High Bosh and Nonsense Producer ... with permission to wear a fool’s cap (or mitre) -- three pounds of butter yearly and little pig, -- and a small donkey to ride on’ (xvii). Lear connects himself more with the fool than with folly, as may be surmised from another letter, this one to his friend Drummond: “(it is not generally known,) that I refused the throne of Greece -- King Lear the first -- on account of the conduct of Goneril & Regan my daughters, wh. has disturbed me too much to allow of my attention to governing” (quoted in Noakes 169).

And as Edward Lear playfully prefers domestic lunacies (and three pounds of butter) over King Lear’s passionate madness, so too do most critics fall back onto George Pitcher’s qualification that “nonsense takes ‘n the form of something like madness” (611; my italics) and ultimately reject madness as a synonym for Nonsense.
"sense in nonsense" and "method in madness."

The garbled wanderings of King Lear's mind dramatize his initiation into "another" reality (his burgeoning awareness is clearly disjunct from his earlier understanding of his place in the world), and his language is torn by the struggle between the "syntax" of his (and grammar's) previous rule and the semi-grammatical passion of verse. Tigges rightly classes such moments in Shakespeare as "partial nonsense" (An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense 217), for he points out that the work as a whole is motivated by a desire to do more than contest the hidden mechanizations of sense. Yet it is hard to find anyone who juggles sense and senselessness, order and chaos, clarity of perception and mental upheaval with Shakespeare's grace and precision.

But while Nonsense (be it the partial nonsense of Shakespeare or the Classical Nonsense of Lear and Carroll) may be a balancing act, madness is frequently an act of excess. The two differ in the degree and intent of their linguistic disturbances. In his study of the relationship between language, nonsense and desire, Philosophy through the Looking Glass, Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues that, far from being monozygotic twins or even blood-brothers, Nonsense and madness are at best cousins-once-removed. He uses "délires" as a point of connection, something he describes as a form of discourse, which questions our most common conceptions about language (whether expressed by linguists or by philosophers), where the old philosophical question of the emergence of sense out of nonsense receives a new formulation, where the material side of language, its origin in the human body and desire, are no longer eclipsed by its abstract aspect (as an instrument of communication or expression) (6).

Délires is language "tainted by desire, by the actions and passions of
our body, by its instinctual drives" (7); it is the language of madness itself. This definition connects with Foucault's reading of classical madness which does not designate so much a specific change in the mind or in the body, as the existence, under the body's alterations, under the oddity of conduct and conversation, of a delirious discourse . . . which liberated passion from all its limits (99-100).

Lecercle's characterization of délicre does not agree with most readings of Nonsense, however, which require a complementary tension, the delicate joining of seeming opposites. He allows that Nonsense is a very mild form of délicre since it admits the incomprehensible into language and so treads on language's frontiers, but simultaneously dismisses it (especially in Carroll's works) as "a pedagogic trick ... to teach children their way into communicative language" (79). The dismissive attitude he adopts from Gilles Deleuze who, along with Felix Guattari in their jointly-authored Anti-Oedipus, dubs Carroll "the coward of belles-lettres" (135). More important, he also borrows from The Logic of Sense, an earlier work by Deleuze, the antithetical structures of surface language (equated with Carroll's work) and depth language (their example is Artaud) (Lecercle 41) which underscore his argument.

What Deleuze argues, in The Logic of Sense, is that there are three types of nonsense. One of the surface, which never fully engages the potential risks of language and which is therefore inextricably allied to the production of "sense"; this, he claims, is the nonsense of Lewis Carroll. The other two forms of nonsense are of the body, the schizophrenic body, and experience language as a physical assault; these are the nonsenses of the depths and have nothing to do with sense; such is the nonsense of a writer like Antonin Artaud. While the relationship which various types of nonsense have with madness may be radically
different, and their degree of involvement with the body may vary, I suggest in chapters two and three that no form of nonsense is unrelated to the body. Understanding Deleuze's theory of sense and nonsense will be useful for these later discussions.

The distinction between these nonsenses, between surface and depth, is one Deleuze arrives at through contemplation of Stoic causality and its implications for understanding how sense resides within a proposition. Stoic causality is re-construed in such a way that it seems to anticipate Husserl (20-21). The connection between cause and effect, between depth and surface, is split apart; causes are on one side of an un-breachable barrier, effects on another, although some initial cause must first have generated an effect. After this initial split, effects generate other surface-effects, which are in no way related to causes, to depths. Deleuze insinuates that this "causality" is almost phenomenological (21).

Sense for Deleuze, according to Ronald Bogue in Deleuze and Guattari, "seems to be something that is produced through language, a mere linguistic result or after-effect, yet at the same time, something that is presupposed by every statement as its antecedent condition" (70). Deleuze notes the three basic relations within a proposition: denotation (the association of words with the particular things which they are said to represent), manifestation (which relates the proposition to its speaker and so "manifests" the speaker's desires and beliefs), and signification (the word's relation to "universal or general concepts" and "the syntactic connections to the implications of the concept" [14]). But, he determines, sense itself can reside in none of these relations since, as Bogue explains, each of these "[presupposes] one another" and all three assume an already existing framework of meaning (70). Consequently Deleuze proposes that sense be counted as a fourth relation within any given proposition. It is "the expressed of the proposition... an incorporeal, complex, and
irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in the proposition" and is "neutral" (Logic of Sense 19).

What is commonly referred to as sense, is for Deleuze, "common sense" or "good sense" (Bogue 74). He construes sense as not meaning, per se, but an "expression" or flow growing out of, but separable from, the tripartite structure of any given proposition or word. The sense of the word "table" is not the four-legged object to which I point; nor is it that particular table which I, in writing the word, intend or believe I am referring to; again, it is not the general concept of "table" -- a flat-topped construction of variable size, propped up by legs. Deleuze insists that the linguistic functions, which are often considered to constitute meaning and are deemed interchangeable with the sense of a word, are not sense. Rather sense is the fluid border "between propositions and things" (22). "It seems," as Bogue explains, to inhere in language, but to appear in things. If one seeks it in words, it seems to be both a mere after-effect and something that is always already there. If one seeks it in things, it seems to be an event that is spatially and temporally 'there,' yet always somewhere else, always already over and about to be (73).

The sense of the word "table," then, is at once "a simulacrum, a paradoxical, contradictory entity that defies common sense" (73) and an attribute of the object itself (72).

Deleuze explains it this way:

Sense is never only one of the two terms of the duality which contrasts things and propositions, substantives and verbs, denotations and expressions, it is also the frontier, the cutting edge, or the articulation of the difference between the two terms (28).

Sense, being the boundary, the intermediary, between things and propositions, is relegated to the surface, a realm of effects and quasi-
causes, a name Deleuze gives to effects which generate other effects. It "is never a principle or an origin" (72). True causes, or "bodies" and "states-of-affairs," belong to depths from which sense and the surface are cut off, excluded, because, having left these depths (24), their natures are irrevocably altered.  

Sense is co-present with nonsense, or with "surface nonsense" of the sort which Deleuze says Carroll writes (68). Nonsense means itself and so has no sense of its own, no need of mediation between thing and proposition; but it does generate the possibility for sense: nonsense does not have any particular sense, but is opposed to the absence of sense rather than to the sense that it produces in excess -- without ever maintaining with its product the simple relation of exclusion to which some people would like to reduce them. Nonsense is that which has no sense, and that which, as such and as it enacts the donation of sense, is opposed to the absence of sense. This is what we must understand by "nonsense" (71).

But Deleuze "understands" by "nonsense," as well, the existence of two other types of nonsense, which are not surface-related but schizophrenic. These are the language of the fragmenting body, of Artaud's body without organs, and have nothing to do with the production of sense or the surface. They are akin to the type of language Artaud sought for his theatre of cruelty, a "new physical language based on signs" (Artaud quoted in Hayman 77), and to the type of language he strove for in his poetry. Precisely because of their relationship with depth, Deleuze privileges these types of nonsense over the surface nonsense which he attributes to Carroll.

Bogue elaborates upon the schizophrenic's nonsensical experience

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6 Deleuze's very specific use of the word "sense" lends itself to confusion in certain respects. His definition will not be that used throughout this study, except when he is being discussed. At all other times the less precise definition, that interchangeable with "meaning," will be intended.
of language in this way:

Schizophrenics experience words as devouring, lacerating, or jubilant physical entities within a teeming plenum of matter. They have two fundamental intuitions of the body: as a collection of dissociated body parts, dismembered, interpenetrating and mutually devouring; and as a miraculously solidified 'body without organs' . . . . For schizophrenics, words either enter the dismembered body as exploded words, wounding, rending phonetic elements devoid of meaning, or issue forth from the body without organs as glorious unarticulated sonic blocks (74-5).

Nonsense which is experienced as depth, as a lingual assault on the schizophrenic body, is the nonsense of the fractured word, of the body scream, of Lecercle's délire, not of the Jabberwock or the Queen of Hearts. Or so Deleuze and Lecercle contend. This nonsense is the result of a schizophrenic subjecting herself not merely to linguistic disruption but rather to a bombardment of words and sounds which devastates the "self." While Carroll's language remains situated at the "surface" which sense dominates, for the schizophrenic there is no longer any surface; language must be experienced bodily.  

Following Deleuze differentiation between surface and depth nonsense, Lecercle suggests that Carroll and Artaud (and so Nonsense and délire) offer different responses to the question raised by Humpty Dumpty -- "which is to be master?" (TLG 214) -- raised, that is, by the

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7 There is a great degree of difference between the writings of surface and body, but there is an unavoidable connection between them too. As chapter two will argue, there is no point at which language can be wholly divorced from the libidinal drives of the body that produces it. The type of psychic landscape which allows for such an inter-relationship is of no real interest to Deleuze because he is dealing with nonsense from a very different perspective than the one which I use, and especially because he attempts, with Guattari in Anti-Oedipus, to trounce psychiatry and its, as they claim, unwarranted emphasis on the Oedipus complex. It is at this point, where a continuum between surface and depth is denied, that I part company with Deleuze, though his ideas remain of interest and other aspects of his theory will be borrowed and set to work in my admittedly different context. This parting of ways will be more thoroughly broached in chapter three.
Humpty Dumpty who, not long after asserting his superiority over language, is made subject to the language of the nursery rhyme which plots his fate. Lecercle concludes that the dream framework of Carroll's novels detracts from his commitment to risk the physical experience of language, to suffer the painful link between body and word (32) and so effectively keeps his Nonsense on the safe side of madness.

Nonsense and délire do confront the question raised by Humpty Dumpty differently. Quite early in his study, Lecercle defines délire as that state in which the question of mastery (if not completely resolved) leans heavily in favour of language; in délire, language is master (9). This is an ironic contention, given that the body, in the delirious speech of which Lecercle and Deleuze write, is said to be the master over language; its flows and drives pulsate and break up the articulable sense traditionally associated with language.

What better way to illustrate this difference between Nonsense and délire than the one Lecercle chooses -- comparing Carroll's "Jabberwocky" with Artaud's translation of it?

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe (TLG 153).

Il était Roparant, et les vliqueux tarands
Allaient en gibroyant et en brimbukdriquant
Jusque là où la rourghe est à rouarghe à rangmmbde
et rangmmbde à rouarghambde
Tous les falomitards étaient les chats-huants
Et les Choré Uk'hatis dans le GRABUGEUMENT
(quoted in Lecercle 34).

A friend once used "Jabberwocky" as a parsing exercise; a glance at the first stanza shows how successful that could be. One way Carroll
balances sense and senselessness is by preserving syntactical form despite the intrusion of neologisms and "non-content." Neither Carroll's early etymology (created for his brothers and sisters when a version of this first stanza was still just a send-up of Anglo-Saxon verse) nor Humpty Dumpty's "masterful" interpretation can push the verse into the realm of definitive and definable meaning. Yet the nonsense-words don't push syntax over the edge of meaninglessness either; syntactical meaning is not disrupted, so the poem makes one sort of meaning while undermining another.

Probably Artaud's version could be used as a similar parsing excercise. He keeps "rational" connectives and a fairly conventional, if unpunctuated, sentence structure. That is as it should be, though; certainly in Nonsense, words themselves are violated much more frequently than syntax (Stewart 34). Thibaudeau in "from Throgmogle" maintains a much more coherent deictical and syntactical than lexical order, although her poetic lines do cause some mild syntactic disruptions. Can one even imagine an asyntactical language? Even seemingly asyntactical compositions, like concrete poetry, usually elicit from the reader a syntactical impulse, the ordering inherent in the act of reading. Nevertheless language in Artaud's translation seems to be breeding itself -- not only are the extra, longer lines indicative of this, but also the hyper-sense of his portmanteaux. These are, if anything, beyond Joyce's neologisms in Finnegans Wake -- so much packed into one word that the suitcase pops open en route and one barely knows how to repack, how to begin sifting for meaning. Artaud offers excess where Carroll shows restraint. It is this guttural excess which Lecercle connects with the schizophrenic body; it is, he suggests, indicative of "incantation and animal noise, the scream" (35).

Lecercle, too, is guilty of an Artaud-ian excess when he says:

They [Artaud's portmanteaux] show that the phonetic laws of language go beyond the rules of phonotactics, that the
sequences of sounds that emerge from the body and are a cause of pleasure or pain go beyond the conventions that specify possible words. They also show that the attribution of one meaning to a word does not correspond to the instinctive working of language . . . . [L]eft to itself language screams, in meaningless utterances, or is riddled with ambiguity, which gives it an appearance of meaninglessness (35).

Lecercle seems to be ignoring the presence of discernible, or almost discernible, words in Artaud's translation. What about "chat-huants," for instance? It isn't entirely translatable but one can certainly make a beginning on it, as one can make a beginning on "borogoves"; the same is true of the stranger, more stuffed words like "rouarghambde." Even when one can't pin a word down to five or six meanings or cognates, there is always the affective meaning derived from sounds and shapes of the words themselves. Moreover, is it at all conceivable that language could be "left to itself"? Surely Artaud's translation isn't an example of automatic writing; and even that is controlled, conceivably, by something -- be it the unconscious, the spirit, god.

Artaud does "go beyond the conventions that specify possible words," although he is not always very far across the boundary. (And sometimes he doesn't cross it at all.) But crossing that boundary doesn't preclude meaning, as Lecercle suggests; if at times Artaud's language screams, a language of the schizophrenic body, it may still evoke some meaning in the scream, and consequently never completely evade the possibility of sensical interpretation. A mad, psychotic, excessive language rules in Artaud's "translation" but it is not without its affinities to Carroll's quieter, more controlled yelps, his more balanced Nonsense. Nor does its excess demand that Carroll's work, and
Nonsense generally, be construed as milque-toast pieces of frivolity.¹

Foucault offers a lovely image for classical unreason, which, when elucidated, may provide a metaphor for nonsense's connection to and divergence from madness. Madness is reason dazzled.

Dazzlement is night in broad daylight, the darkness that rules at the very heart of what is excessive in light's radiance. Dazzled reason opens its eyes upon the sun and sees nothing, that is, does not see" (Madness and Civilization 108).

Foucault's image appeals, in part, because it carries over the idea of madness having access to secret truth (the sun as light and knowledge), but also because it can be aptly turned to apply to Nonsense and so respond to Lacercle and Deleuze. If classical unreason is reason dazzled, then Nonsense is reason in dark glasses, looking into the eclipse of language and sometimes risking a slip of the glasses, a flash of exposure. Reason in Nonsense risks what Joyce Thomas calls "a moment, a flickering, fluttering instant of disorientation" (119). An optician would tell anyone that staring right into a solar eclipse is madness; she would insist that risking even one slip of the glasses is courting blindness.

Nonsense maintains the tension that madness forsakes. When a writer of schizophrenic nonsense stares wide-eyed into the eclipse of language, one is well aware of what will happen; suffering is palpable in her words. But when a Nonsense writer peeks momentarily above the glasses, the reader doesn't know what the result will be. This is the risk in Nonsense -- not of utter blindness (or total blindness to

¹ It should not be forgotten that, relatively speaking, what Carroll does in the Alice books, given the climate of Victorian children's literature, is almost as radical as Artaud's dissolution of language nearly forty years later. Virtually from the time of its publication, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was recognized as pivotal, an exceedingly radical addition to a canon comprised of the distressingly didactic books of Sara Trimmer and the like.
socially accepted reason) -- but the risk of not knowing, and ultimately of never knowing, if the Nonsense is finely constructed. Wendy Steiner contends that in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland "[all] the nonsense interruptions, all the spatial discontinuities and logical leaps of the book are signs of this struggle between the knower and his undoing" (Colors of Rhetoric 131). The struggle is never won; the knower is never wholly undone, but neither is she ever entirely successful. She remains suspended in the half-light of "negative capability," the discomfort and delight of uncertainty.

Loosing the Straightjacket:
Nonsense, Anarchy, and Carnival

If nonsense is not linguistic madness, is it perhaps subversion? Is Nonsense verse, as Henkle would have it, "rigidly controlled anarchy, in a straitjacket of conventional verse forms and rhyme schemes" (116)? Henkle's image appears to entertain the paradoxical nature essential to Nonsense, but it denies Nonsense any freedom of movement, any chance for risk. Once again Nonsense is deemed to be playing it safe.

Lear's limericks succeed precisely because of their balancing of a tight rhyme scheme, rigid metrics and incongruous words and behaviour. Interestingly, it is a verse form tailor-made by Lear. He adjusts the traditional five line, aabba limerick form to four lines with an aaba rhyme. The resulting b line contains an internal rhyme -- in order to find the traditional limerick rhyme scheme, Lear's reader must turn inward to the line's centre. Much as he does in a smaller way by collapsing the third and fourth rhyme, Lear forces the energy of the whole in upon itself. This turning back occurs not because of the final rhyme echoing the first two lines, but because of Lear's refusal to allow a linear progression or climax (Ede 22). Rarely in Lear's most successful limericks do his final lines stand as more than mild alterations of his first. An adjective (generally misused or purely
invented) changes slightly the subject -- be it "That lively Old Person of Ischia," "That intrinsic Old Man of Peru," or "That ominous person of Crete." The result is a sugar-coated entropy typical of Nonsense as both Ede and Stewart understand it, with its "impossibility ... to go anywhere, to proceed in a straight line towards a 'purpose at hand'" (Stewart 71).

To counter Henkle's strait-jacket image, then, there is Ede's insightful observation:

Even the limerick's formal valuation of sound over sense, its external emphasis on rhyme, rhythm and alliteration, while in one sense restrictive and perhaps repressive, is at the same time a "real" jal to make "regular" sense at all, and hence also an expression of the self, of the individual's right to manipulate his own environment for his own purposes (27). The controlling form, which Henkle implies structures anarchy, is itself unstructuring. Lear re-structures limerick form to facilitate the breaking down of sense, and the forcing of both the poem and the reading process back in upon themselves. By working against diachronic unfolding in the poem, Lear creates the static world typical of Nonsense, a world which is constantly in process but in which nothing happens.

Yet, if one takes the nonsense of the schizophrenic body, where "disorder reigns" (Lecercle 36), as an example of linguistic anarchy, then there is less reason to relate Nonsense and anarchy. Unlike the writers of "schizophrenic nonsense," Nonsense writers do not, as a rule, present language as violent or do violence to language. Violence is a major constituent of the genre, but it is present thematically,
Nonsense contains "a language of conscious subversion and evasion" which Haughton claims has attracted many modern German poets (29), but its subversion is more peaceable and playful than violently anarchic, closer to the pleasurable upheaval found in carnival, as Mikhail Bakhtin defines it in *Rabelais and His World*. There, carnival is almost synonymous with excess, transgression and spirited revelry; its foremost historical exemplar, medieval carnival, began as a poke in the eye of authority. Playfully inverting the rituals and symbols of religious feast days, it offered to the folk population a release of tension and pent-up energy before the seriousness and religiosity of sanctioned holy times like Lent. According to Bakhtin, carnival is a celebration of "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (10), a "dynamic expression" whose symbols are "filled with the pathos of change and renewal," and which exhibits

the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (*à l'envers*), of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crowning and uncrowning

(11).

Though one might argue against "dynamic" as an adjective suitable to Nonsense, for which a state of "static" process has already been claimed, this description seems applicable to both nonsense and

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*Lear* especially uses violence as part of his work. Take, for instance,

There was an Old Person of Buda,

Whose conduct grew ruder and ruder;

Till at last, with a hammer, they silenced his clamour,

By smashing that Person of Buda.

"They" are symbolic of society at large (interestingly Lear's illustration shows a threatening individual much larger than the oppressed Man of Buda), and perpetrators of innocent and eccentric people. But "their" actions are qualified by the verse's entropy, its lack of linguistic progression. By encroaching upon the containment of Nonsense verse, by smashing through into the last line which is more often than not a mere repetition of (and so an affirmation of) character, violence is not without its threat. "They" attack physically, energetically. But the linguistic resilience of "their" victim undercuts the action; the old Person of Buda is still the last word.
Nonsense.

As well, Bakhtin notes one essential ingredient in carnival, the tone of its laughter, which turns upon precisely the sense of balance essential to successful Nonsense. Carnivalesque laughter is "complex." A "festive laughter," "it is universal in scope . . . directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants." And it is "ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (11-12).

But carnival, despite its participants' tendency to engage in self-parody, lacks Nonsense's rigorous self-awareness. Nonsensical self-reflexivity, as will be argued, lends itself as much to infinitely regressive questioning and threats of stagnation as to dancing in the street. Nonsense is at heart a more serious offshoot of the folk tradition -- John Cleese to carnival's Benny Hill -- profaning similar sacred traditions but with more telling means.

Kristeva, following Bakhtin, defines the carnivalesque text, and carnivalesque discourse, in terms which can be applied almost wholesale to the Alice books. "A carnival participant," she writes, "is both actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game" ("Word, Dialogue, and Novel" 78). For both Alice and the reader, loss of identity, becomes a crucial theme from the moment Alice decides she must have turned into Mabel (29). Both are objects, observers and unwitting players of Carroll's game; and since the game is one in which the limitations of our logic, our language and our way of making sense of the world are being exposed, ultimately the limitations of the very foundations of our identities are exposed, as Lisa Ede argues so well (93). The many different sizes Alice becomes, the roles she plays, the many cases of mistaken identity she experiences (with such a long neck she must be a serpent, insists the pigeon who shoos Alice away from her nest [61-62]) all fracture her
assumed unity of being.

Kristeva continues: "The carnival first exteriorizes the structure of reflective literary productivity, then inevitably brings to light this structure's underlying unconscious: sexuality and death" (78). All three are foregrounded in Carroll's Alice books. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is infamously framed by its dreamy bookends. Such framing adds to metafictionality, to self-referentiality, according to Stewart (21-27). This reflectiveness is emphasized in the book's prefatory poem "All in the golden afternoon" (which in maudlin verse describes the original telling of "Alice's Adventures Underground," and in the book's final episode. In the latter Alice's elder sister has an equally maudlin "dream" of young Alice, Wonderland and Alice grown to womanhood. Carroll makes Wonderland the core of a telling-sequence. He tells the story; Alice tells it to her sister; her sister imagines Alice telling it to her own children. Within the story itself, there are many stories told and re-told: for instance, the mouse's tale (40) and the story of the mock turtle (102-105), and Alice's twisted attempts to recite famous poems (such as "How doth the little crocodile" [29]; "You are old, Father William" [56-57]). All of these emphasize the act of telling, and the extent to which context affects the tale told or verse recited. Alice's recitations and the other characters' stories are framed by Wonderland, as Wonderland is framed by dream, as dream is framed by earlier and later tellings. Story is continually being re-contextualized and so re-configuring itself within the paradigm of its telling.

Quasi-Freudian readings are too frequent for the unconscious sexuality of the work to need much explanation; whether or not one chooses to see the rabbit-hole and tunnel as a vagina and birth canal, the pool of tears as amniotic fluid, and Alice's physical fluctuations as pubescent, the presence of sex in the book need not be dwelt upon long. But it is worth noting that none of these sexual elements is
overt; in this instance, Carroll diverges from the carnivalesque model which Bakhtin and Kristeva present.

Nor is death a hidden component. The Queen of Hearts is continually and loudly threatening death to anyone who disturbs her. And Alice, when shrinking in the first chapter of the book, contemplates being reduced to nothing (23). No one dies in the book, of course, because that would move the zone of action away from linguistic threats and threats to language and into a realm of physical and material danger, out of Nonsense, where seemingly senseless language creates a reality and into the senseless reality of Absurdism (Tigges, *Literary Nonsense* 128). Sexuality and death express themselves in non-thematic ways too. These, as they relate to Kristeva's theory of poetic language, will be discussed in the next chapter.

When Kristeva moves on to "[figures] germane to carnivalesque language," such as "repetition, 'inconsequent' statements ... and nonexclusive opposition" (79), the reader of Alice is surely on home ground. The mad tea-party (74-84) is replete with inconsequence, repetitions abound throughout the text, and "nonexclusive opposition" is another way of naming that complementary tension which lies at the heart of Nonsense. Her insistence that "drama becomes located in language ... [which] parodies and relativizes itself, repudiating its role of representation" (79) is almost a synopsis of the tale's procedures.

Although self-referentiality seems a departure from Rabelaisian carnival (more a product of the "interior infinite" Bakhtin locates in the melancholy leanings of Romanticism [44] than the fruit of unadulterated carnival joy), this strand of Kristeva's description is so popularly and so aptly applied to Nonsense it demands consideration. Ede defines Nonsense as a "self-reflexive verbal construction" (12) throughout her dissertation on Carroll and Lear, and Sonstog, in his article on Lear and Gerard Manley Hopkins, names its strength a "tidy self-consistency" (198). Michael Holquist regards "The Hunting of the
Snark" as a poem about itself (147). This is Nonsense as Deleuze, in part, construes it: something which means itself.

Susan Stewart examines how nonsense's self-reflexivity ultimately undermines the common sense with which it is symbiotic. For her, Nonsense is "an untouched surface of meaning whose every gesture is reflexive" (4). Each gesture is a "split in consciousness ... [which] breaks open the pervasiveness of common sense" and reveals that it is both ideologically and culturally bound (49). She suggests that Nonsense has connections with metafiction:

With the construction of metafictions there is a reflexivity, an articulation of the conditions under which the fiction has come to be, and this movement is one that makes conscious aspects of the unconscious. Not only does the text itself appear as a surface replete with signification, but it also makes conscious aspects of context that would remain unarticulated in everyday life and the fictions of realism. The text thus comes to pack its own context, to carry its own set of interpretive procedures "spelled out" on its surface. This is the movement of nonsense with its impossible context -- a context that is unrealizable, that "no one can stand" in everyday life precisely because it is overburdened with consciousness (87).

Stewart argues that nonsense, by undoing what it relies upon, is always in danger of undoing itself. Since common sense is integral to nonsense and nonsense is always assaulting and exposing it, then nonsense simultaneously assaults and exposes itself. One is reminded of Hamlet's crippling self-reflexivity, and it comes as no surprise that Stewart comments upon nonsense's entropy. Such hyper-consciousness makes each word the site of struggle and upheaval. Pure nonsense is, in Stewart's words, "the most impossibly social gesture" (22). It is "'good for
nothing" (119).

The Cadence of Meaning:
Meaninglessness Intruding on Meaning

In plotting Nonsense on a linguistic map, Cammaerts wrote: "It lies in the somewhat inaccessible region where the human tongue loses all meaning" (51). His point is one with which almost all other critics of Nonsense agree to disagree. Even Susan Vigeur, in her lively "dialogue" with Foss, Edward Lear's cat, will "allow" Foss -- Nonsense's champion against an alliance with poetry -- to go no further than to assert that Nonsense has "the cadence of meaning without the content" (139). If "meaning is not an entity but a relation" -- the underlying premise and motivating structural principle of this chapter -- then cadence may have as much to do with meaning as content does; a seeming lack of lexical sense does not exclude all types of meaning. That is precisely what my preliminary reading of Thibaudeau's "from Throgmogle & Engestchirn: A relationship" tries to demonstrate. Thibaudeau's poem meets Tigges' criterion for Nonsense, that meaning be suggested and then taken away (Literary Nonsense 73) -- like most good Nonsense it always has particles of meaning resonating with the accompanying meaninglessness, it always undercuts itself.

This resonant meaning, pitted against its co-present meaninglessness, saves Nonsense from the absurdity which Heath ascribes to the Alice books' stringent logic (see footnote 4). While Carroll's Nonsense does follow a rigour of logic which may seem "absurd," it never creates Absurdism's meaningless or senseless reality. Nonsense presents both meaning and meaninglessness at once, the symbiosis of sense and senselessness. To insist that Carroll doesn't write Nonsense because he writes logically is wrong-headed. His work illustrates potential for senselessness within seemingly rigid constructions of meaning, without denying the presence of, or scorning the possibility of, sense.
Therefore his Nonsense is also unlike Dadaism, which is by intent anti-meaning. Rather, nonsense questions meaning by allowing meaninglessness to intrude upon it, and (as Stewart's discussion of intertextuality indicates) questions meaninglessness by disputing the meaning on which it depends.

How meaninglessness is allowed to intrude into meaning is an issue over which critics are split into two fairly clear camps: those who see Nonsense as reducing meaning to a minimum and those who see it as reproducing meaning ad infinitum. Lecercle, Holquist and Sewell are among the minimalist contingent. For them Nonsense's language is constrained and literalist; much Nonsense derives its initial effect from just such literal readings.

Taking literally statements like Lear's about the Jumblyes ("They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,") or the following passage, is a great part of the fun of Nonsense:

At this time, an elderly Fly said it was the hour for the Eveningsong to be sung; and on a signal being given all the Blue-Bottle-Flies began to buzz at once in a sumptuous and sonorous manner, the melodious and mucilaginous sounds echoing all over the waters, resounding across the tumultuous tops of the transitory Titmice upon the intervening and verdant mountains, with a serene and sickly suavity only known to the truly virtuous. The Moon was shining slobaciously from the star-bespringled sky, while her light irrigated the smooth and shiny sides and wings and backs of the Blue-Bottle-Flies with a peculiar and trivial splendour, while all nature cheerfully responded to the cerulaean and conspicuous circumstances ("The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World" 100).

Attributing just one meaning to each word results in the continual qualification, contradiction and confusion so typical of Lear's work --
oxymorons abound, adjectives and adverbs constantly undercut each other or the words they modify: "trivial splendour," "sickly suavity," "shining slobaciiously." This is a mild version of Stewart's self-negating Nonsense text (72).

But an advocate of meaning as multiple in nonsense, like Stewart or Rieke, might argue that the consonance and sibilance (this is possibly the most sibilant passage Lear ever wrote) get up a buzz like that of the Flies' Eveningsong, one almost "mucilaginous"; the sound itself is another form of sense. The lexical meanings of the words are almost drowned out by the possibilities of phonic meanings in Lear's language, from which they, the words, cannot be wholly separated. And what does one do with a word like "slobaciiously"? Even though it's composed of recognizable morphemes and has an identifiable syntactical role, this neologism cannot be read just literally; it has no readily definable lexical meaning, only echoes of other words (slob, slobber, gracious?, tenacious?). "Slobaciiously" becomes the final conduit for those other forms of sense (the rip in the screen where the fly gets in) and encourages one's mind to root around in its "self," to look for different ways in which these words can mean.

Lear was an inveterate user of neologisms, and Carroll, with the publication of Through the Looking Glass, revealed a similar passion (Partridge 179). Sewell says Carroll's neologisms "can scarcely be said to be words, since words should have reference but these have none" (115); but clearly she is working with a limited definition of "word" -- one which demands that a word be wholly a unit of definable lexical sense. What then of the words in Thibaudeau's poem, or in Finnegans Wake? Both works employ lingual units evocative of sense, but not entirely recognizable. Thibaudeau's poem is not meaningless, though one would be hard pressed to tie its meaning down. And even the most nonsensical (and longest) word in all of Joyce's "epic" ("bababadalgharagh-
takamminarronkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoo-
hoordenenthurnuk!" (3]) is replete with meanings, being a macaronic-
portmanteau-compendium of "thunder" and packed full of social,
theological and parodic "senses" as well.

Joyce's neologisms, and portmanteau words generally, provide a
convenient point from which to look more closely at the arguments for
and against multiplicity. Those who consider Joyce a nonsense writer,
or a writer of partial nonsense at least, use him as a prime example of
the multiplicity of nonsensical meaning; Rieke insists, throughout her
discussion of Joyce's work, on nonsense's "excess of meaning" (8). And
Stewart, writing of Joyce's language in Ulysses, comments: "Ironically,
the 'over-loading' of language with significance approaches the limits
of language. The point where the discourse bursts with significance is
the point of pure ornament and opacity" (102). Consigning Joyce's
language to the limits of language is consigning it to, among other
things, the field of Nonsense, a field with which he was quite
familiar -- if the notable presence of Lewis Carroll, the Alice books
and the Sylvie and Bruno books in Finnegans Wake is any indication.

Lecercle, however, classes Joyce among the writers who "[rely]
heavily on [the] dark side of language" (65) or délires; and it is true
Joyce writes not classical Nonsense per sé, but rather a flowing,
flowering nonsense, fecund beyond pruned reason. Joyce's hyper-
portmanteaux ("crogmagnon," "reversogassed," "expectungpelick" [20]), in
their excess, stretch the portmanteaux of Carroll's works, which Humpty
Dumpty describes as "like two meanings packed into one word" (TLG 215).
Carroll corroborates, albeit somewhat tentatively, Humpty Dumpty's
explanation ("seems ... like the right explanation for all [of them]"
["Preface to The Hunting of the Snark" 754]) and extends it by
attributing the ability to speak in portmanteaux to those blessed with
"the rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind" (754). Perhaps this is
the reason why Lecercle characterizes portmanteau words as an attempt
"to control language" (35).

There are a few problems with Humpty Dumpty's account of portmanteau words. My initial instinct, despite Carroll's assent, is to distrust his attempts at definition. This is an egg, after all, heading for a great fall at the hands of language. How much "control" does Humpty Dumpty have over the language he uses? How much understanding of the way it works? His explication of "Jabberwocky" does little to make sense of the poem, and his conversation is opaque at best; if language is a tool for communicating, Humpty Dumpty is not a very skillful user of that tool. Perhaps Humpty Dumpty is too entertaining and attractive a character, for he has always been taken quite readily as the authority he claims to be. Why trust him any more than the proprietor of the Sheep Shop, Tweedledum and Tweedledee, or the Walrus and the Carpenter?

Because of Carroll's sanction. Interestingly enough, Carroll's first etymology and explanation of the same stanza of "Jabberwocky" -- then titled "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry" -- contained some definitions different from those of Humpty Dumpty. "Tove," for instance, was initially defined as "a species of Badger. They had smooth white hair, long hind legs, and short horns like a stag. lived [sic] chiefly on cheese" (quoted in Huxley 63). Humpty Dumpty describes "toves" as "something like badgers -- they're something like lizards -- and they're something like corkscrews . . . also they make their nests under sundials -- also they live on cheese" (TLG 215). "Himsy" is first just "unhappy" (Huxley 63) and then both "flimsy and miserable" (TLG 216). If he seriously intended to corroborate Humpty Dumpty's explanation of

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10 Michael Hancher notes that the drawback to Humpty Dumpty's discussion with Alice (and one assumes with anybody) is not his use of stipulative definition, but his use of it in Looking-Glass Land where all orders are inverted (50). Humpty Dumpty is subjected to a temporal system which greatly hampers his ability to communicate; seemingly unconcerned about language's intimate relationship with temporal and causal contingencies, he chooses to speak in a manner which directly conflicts with these qualities of language.
portmanteaux, Carroll could not claim a "perfectly balanced mind" since the meanings of his portmanteau words and other neologisms shifted. Moreover, one of the words which Humpty Dumpty glosses as a portmanteau word is an actual, albeit obscure, English word: "Slithey" (which he -- and Carroll before him -- calls a conflation of "lithe" and "slimy") is a slightly modified form of the verb "to slithe," an early medieval variant of "to slide." In at least this one instance, Humpty Dumpty either speaks with his tongue in cheek or egg on his face.

Looking back at Carroll's discussion of such words reveals that he is talking about the words that go into making a portmanteau, not about the potential resonances such combinations can spawn. That he discusses only the method of arriving at portmanteaux does not mean he denies the new word any generative powers. Portmanteau words and neologisms in Carroll's Nonsense are not "overloaded" with meaning as Joyce's and Artaud's are, but neither are they as closed and confining as some critics make them out to be. Rather they indicate the ability of the word to mean beyond literalism.

Deleuze's explanation of portmanteau words offers another, and perhaps more useful, way of understanding this linguistic phenomenon. The successful portmanteau is not merely the joining or contracting of two words with a resulting proliferation of meaning (45). And it is not just the connotation of "two heterogeneous series" (45), though this latter function of connotation is important. For, by fusing two separate series, two different albeit related orders of meaning, the portmanteau anticipates one of the ways in which Nonsense itself is formed: the joining with each other or superimposing upon each other of two (or more) separate sign systems."

Moreover, a portmanteau word of the first order, according to Deleuze, has a content which "coincides with its function" (45); for example

"This principle of Nonsense will be discussed more fully in chapters three and four."
"jabberwocky," composed (claims Carroll) of "jabber" and "wocer" or "wocor" meaning "offspring or fruit" (Deleuze 45), not only denotes an imaginary animal but also a "voluable, animated, or chattering discussion," that is "a series of verbal proliferation of expressible senses" (45).

Arguing from Carroll's suggestion that the portmanteau word is evidence of a "perfectly balanced mind," Deleuze contends that this verbal form is "grounded upon a strict disjunctive synthesis" (46); he explains, using Carroll's example word "frumious," that the necessary disjunction is not between fuming and furious, for one may indeed be both at once; rather, it is between fuming-and-furious on one hand and furious-and-fuming on the other. In this sense, the function of the portmanteau word always consists in the ramification of the series into which it is inserted (46-7).

Portmanteaux initiate an endless branching off of potential meaning, and attempt to entertain all or many of those meanings simultaneously. The attempt, which Deleuze emphasizes, to balance meanings is of central importance to an understanding of nonsense as it will be construed in this study, and significantly extends Carroll's explanation of portmanteau words' structure.

There are other arguments for Nonsense's multiplicity of meaning. Puns and double entendre also generate more meaning than is literally evident in a word. And, according to Stewart, puns generate ulterior

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12 Susan Stewart makes much of simultaneity in her study of Nonsense. She contends it is an effective and frequently used method in Nonsensical writing: It is defined as the quality of existing, happening, occurring at the same time in more than one space; the quality of being coexistent in time while being contiguous in space. . . . Simultaneity is neither here nor there, but the reconciliation of a paradoxical contradiction between hereness and thereness. It is like the paradox of nothingness, for it cancels itself out--to say that two events are simultaneous is to dissolve those events into each other in time while they cannot be dissolved in space, and therefore to deny the possibility of simultaneity by saying "two events" (148).
texts as well by splitting the movement of reading into several
directions -- one to follow each connotation of the pun simultaneously
(162). Given Stewart's assumptions about nonsense's self-reflexivity,
even the most "literal" words should be seen as able to appeal to
another side of language -- each word in nonsense is a trying on and a
sending up of at least two language systems and so inherently contains
more than one meaning.

If anyone comes close to resolving the split between minimalists
and pluralists in Nonsense criticism it is Stewart, when she argues that
nonsense, fettered mainly by its own ongoing, self-
perpetuating context, becomes perhaps the most
multiply-meaningful of fictions, while, at the same
time, it becomes the least meaningful of fictions in
everyday life terms (36).

_Nonsense and Dream:_
"Things flow about so here!"

That's Alice's plaintive cry in the Sheep Shop of _Through the
Looking-Glass_ (202) and it's certainly an accurate assessment of a
trying situation. With the mere crossing of a brook (represented in the
text by a pattern of asterisks) the White Queen has turned into a sheep
who is knitting incessantly. And though the Sheep continually takes up
and uses more knitting needles so that, as Alice notes to herself, "She
gets more and more like a porcupine every minute!" (203), the shop
itself is stranger still:

The shop seemed to be full of all manner of curious things
-- but the oddest part of it all was that,
whenever she looked hard at any shelf, to make out exactly
what it had on it, that particular shelf was always quite
empty, though the others round it were crowded as full as
they could hold (202).
Things even float through the ceiling to get away from Alice's gaze. And then, of course, the shop turns into a boat, with Alice at the oars.

This passage is perhaps the most dramatically dreamlike in the *Alice* books. It may trace its roots back to the transformations of theatrical pantomime (Gray 153n), but it slides easily into Carroll's Nonsense world, which is replete with transformations and physical changes. Because such a passage is organic with the rest of the work, a closer relationship between dream and Nonsense than the one Sewell admits seems probable. The passage above is not Sewell's "concrete, clear and wholly comprehensible" (23) Nonsense.

Much of Sewell's *The Field of Nonsense* is devoted to breaking down the relationship between dream and Nonsense which critics like Cammaerts (32) and Chesterton ("Defence of Nonsense" 447) had established. She argues against the synthesis typical, for her, of dream and poetry (23) and characterizes Nonsense as dealing with "[smallness], ordinariness, artificiality, distinctness of units and a tendency to concentrate on the part rather than the whole" (101). Nonsense, a product of "the mind's force towards order" (44), is intimately related to reason and logic (5). Its world is "carefully limited," "controlled and directed by reason"; Nonsense itself is "a construction subject to its own laws" (5).

One would be foolish indeed to argue against the presence of logic in Nonsense -- looking to Carroll gives ample evidence of its importance. What undermines the strictness of Sewell's argument, however, is (ironically enough) a tendency towards inconsistency. She claims that "although Nonsense plays on the side of order, its aim and method is to defeat disorder with disorder's own weapons" (122); yet the principles of disorder creep into her own argument. Tigges (*Literary Nonsense* 13) notices her shift from the early statement that: "Nonsense verse is too precise to be akin to poetry. It seems much nearer logic than dream" (Sewell 23) -- which she has already equated with poetry.
Midway through her argument, Sewell says that "Nonsense adds to poetry's precision an element of incongruity" (102). Suddenly poetry is on the side of logic, and Nonsense nearer to dream.

More disturbing, because more subtle, is Sewell's failure to recognize order, which characterizes her Nonsense world, as a synthesizing principle. She rejects unity in favour of Nonsense's "universe in which everything goes along serially, by one and one" (56), yet order, by its very nature, contains and holds together all parts into a whole, and connects them into a system which usually fails to acknowledge its own existence. During her entire argument against "an underlying and occult unity among phenomena, created by a multiplicity of irrational relations and perceived by the dream faculty of the mind" (112), she seems oblivious to the fact that such "occult" unities do not merely connect but, like metaphor, implicitly highlight the disjunction between the combined elements. Irrational synthesis, especially as Nonsense entertains it, never loses sight of the tenuousness of combination; rather than affirming unity it illustrates the delicate and hesitant relations between parts of any whole — even between the parts of an ordered whole.

By determining Nonsense to be "a construction subject to its own laws" (5), Sewell implies that the ramifications of those laws don't apply to her argument. Unlike Stewart, who recognizes nonsense's symbiotic relation with common sense and its connection to the very process of her study, Sewell fails to recognize that nonsense spills over into and comments upon her own systems of thought. Because of this failure, she feels confident in declaring order a sure winner in the nonsensical contest between the irrational and logic; she implies that ultimately the tension between order and disorder, logic and dream, which motivates Nonsense, is resolved.

By privileging order over dream, Sewell disturbs the delicate balance essential to Nonsense. Tigges explicitly locates that balance
on the border "between the 'nightmare of logic' and the 'logic of dreams'" ("An Anatomy of Nonsense" 26), and Dennis Lee considers Nonsense "work which unites precise logic and irrationality so as to make each seamless with the other" ("Roots and Play" 48). This balance is borne out, as Lisa Ede contends, in the very structure of Through the Looking-Glass, where the dominating precision of the chess game pattern is subtly undermined from within by the novel's dream-like movement (76). This insistence on balance, on seamless unity is precisely what distinguishes Nonsense from other forms of writing, including Surrealism.

Surrealism certainly admits a friendship (if not consanguinity) with Nonsense: André Breton and many others consider Carroll a precursor of the movement, and Nonsense techniques are ingredients essential to Surrealism (Stewart 76-77, 153-54, 159-60). But Surrealist dreamwork exists because, as Breton writes, "we are still living under the reign of logic" (9). The Surrealist intent is to liberate the imagination from logic's tyranny, to find in the dream a means of solving -- irrationally -- life's fundamental problems (Breton 12). Breton tips the balance in the direction opposite to Sewel', but tips it nonetheless.

Carroll's dream frames are one reason why Surrealism and Nonsense are often made to seem more analogous than they really are. But Carroll's dreams are distinctly used for framing, for a self-reflexivity that sets them off from "reality" -- the structure outside the text, Alice's waking world -- whereas Surrealism unites dreams with perceived reality in the search for a truth. The whole concept of the dream structure becomes most interesting in the cross-over between dream and language.

Freud proposes in The Interpretation of Dreams that dreams have a latent-content, a hidden meaning made inaccessible by the Unconscious's principles of distortion -- for instance, condensation, displacement and
simultaneity. These processes can also be found in language; "A word," writes Freud

as the point of junction of a number of ideas, possesses, as it were, a predestined ambiguity, and the neuroses (obsessions, phobias) take advantage of the opportunities for condensation and disguise afforded by words quite as eagerly as do dreams (230).

Language can become the seat of dream-work, then, of condensation, displacement and simultaneity; and when it does, one form of sense is obscured by the manufacture of the Unconscious's latent sense. Freud locates much of a verbal expression of the Unconscious, very much like its expression in dream-work, in jokes (Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious 61), but the same techniques are found in nonsense's dislocations, non-sequitur, puns and portmanteaux. One of the most important connections between dreams and nonsense is that the language of each employs similar devices for the production of latent meaning.

**Because "Each" Begins with "E": Religion and Riddles in Nonsense**

Distortions of language and hidden meanings are not just dreamlike, however. Rieke cites Plato in the Timaeus where a lack of reason is associated with the prophecies of Sibyls, and the Judeo-Christian tradition in which prophecies are similarly nonsensical (9). Both Huxley (10) and Hofstadter (226) compare Nonsense to the hidden and seemingly senseless wiscons of Zen Buddhism. These comparisons hold, in part, because of Nonsense's use of "concealment" (Byrom 178) and because of the tendency in most religions to discuss the ineffable in ways that defy the limitations of sense. Visionary poets, like Blake and Christopher Smart, both of whom Haughton classes with Nonsense poets (14-5), also are part of this tradition.

Chesterton describes Lear the Nonsense poet, as opposed to Lear
the landscape artist, as "mystical" ("How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear" 123), and avows:

Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook. The well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has decided that "faith is nonsense," does not know how truly he speaks; later it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith ("A Defence of Nonsense" 450).

But, while Classical Nonsense is comparable to religious nonsense, it is not a part of this tradition. The point of religious nonsense is not to unite sense and nonsense but to reach a higher sense through nonsense; nonsense becomes a tool, a means to an end, as in Buddhist koans, and that end is considered far more important than the nonsensical process used in getting there. Moreover, Nonsense toys with sense in order to question sense and, implicitly, itself; religious nonsense may question systems of secular sense but it certainly does not doubt its own religious sense.

But two common elements of religion, the charm (a magical incantation whose words are believed to hold special efficacy) and the riddle (a cryptic naming and teaching game that is meant to reveal some hidden knowledge [Welsh 26]), do have closer affinities with nonsense. Tigges' claim that nonsense is "charm and riddle at the same time" ("An Anatomy of Nonsense" 41) has already been noted. While his contention may be slightly extreme, both charm and riddle have their function in the creation of nonsense.

Andrew Welsh, in Roots of Lyric, quotes Valéry's discussion of charms:

Magic formulas are often without meaning; but it was never thought that their power depended on their
intellectual content. ... These words work on us (or at least on some of us) without telling us very much. They tell us, perhaps, that they have nothing to tell us; that, by the very means which usually tell us something, they are exercising a quite different function (149-50).

What Valéry describes is a musical meaning that lies beyond the semantic, a practice that sounds very like Tigges' "communication without communicating" (Literary Nonsense 248), or Eliot's genuinely good poem which "can communicate before it is understood" ("Dante" 238). It is a meaning which, like that in Thibaudeau's poem, defies lexical norms by establishing meaningful cadences, part of whose efficacy resides precisely in its opposition to traditional sense. The musicality of nonsense will be considered at length in chapter four.

The emphasis often placed on the riddle's teaching function, however, doesn't argue strongly for a relationship with nonsense, unless one accepts Chukovsky's theory that Nonsense is a game intended to reinforce a child's knowledge of the world. Chukovsky is not entirely wrong; a healthy knowledge of how the world works does help highlight the nonsensicalness of Nonsense, though it isn't essential to enjoy nonsense's rhythms and sounds. But his version makes the genre too practical, too directed a pursuit. Nonsense ultimately exists for its own sake.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is infamous, however, for its "unsolvable" riddle: "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" (75)

Unsolvable? Not quite. Huxley quotes Carroll's Preface to the 1896 edition of Alice:

Enquiries have been so often addressed to me, as to whether any answer to the Hatter's Riddle can be imagined, that I may as well put on record here what seems to me to be a fairly appropriate answer, viz. 'Because it can produce a
few notes, though they are very flat; and it is never put with the wrong end in front!" This, however, is merely an afterthought: the Riddle, as originally invented, had no answer at all (21).

Certainly not the greatest of Carroll's thoughts, fore or aft. But Huxley also provides other attempts at a solution: "Because Poe wrote on both"; "Because the notes for which they are noted are not noted to be musical notes"; "Because it slopes with a flap"; "Because 'Each' begins with an E" (22). Here is the quintessential Nonsense riddle -- one which originally had no answer, no sense, proving to have more senses than it can hope to (or might want to) contain.

Welsh suggests that "a riddle is not simply the 'answer' but the process, a way of seeing that creates a space for fuller knowing" (77). In a way, then, both of the Alice books and Nonsense generally are never-ending riddles; the reader is thrown the tricks and game of language and joins in a "riddling" process about as accommodating as the Hatter's riddle. Getting away from answers is the point of the Alice books (if they can be said to have anything so definitive as a point), for answers dictate resolution, necessitate a loss of tension. If these riddles teach, they teach the reader to question. But if, as Frye contends in Anatomy of Criticism, riddles are part of the process of reducing language to a visible form (280), Nonsense is part of an inverse process, reducing visible forms -- reality -- to language.

It's not sacrilegious to appropriate a primitive religious form for such playfulness; in Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, the widely respected cultural historian and play theorist Johan Huizinga relates play to holiness (19) and contends that the indivisibility of belief and disbelief is central to play (24). Since Nonsense is in part play, the reorganizing of language as game (Sewell 25), the play of indivisibles, it is working with a shared inheritance more than with borrowed religious forms.
"Alice soon came to the conclusion that it was a very difficult game indeed": The Element of Play in Nonsense

On an obvious level, Carroll's Nonsense is play. Both Alice books include games: a card game and croquet, and a game of chess. Games are incidental to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; that is they provide actual events in the plot. But they are also structural to a degree, since many of the characters are cards. The overriding structure of the "card" section is, oddly enough, a nursery rhyme -- or the imagined results of one. When Carroll wrote the second Alice book, he seems to have taken up where the first left off in more than one way: where the first has but one nursery rhyme, the second has many; and where games are present in the first, they predominate in the second. He even includes a play-by-play diagram of the chess game structure of Through the Looking-Glass (137), and has the Red Queen explain the principles of the game to Alice (164-67).

But nonsense and Nonsense have stronger genetic ties with play than these samples of Carroll's borrowings from organized games. Huizinga's characteristics of play include: a voluntary participation (7), a separation from ordinary life (8), a limitedness in terms of time and space (9), the creation of order (10) and a tension or uncertainty about play's ultimate outcome (10). At one time or another each of these features has been attributed to Classical Nonsense.

Tigges, for instance, suggests that Nonsense adheres voluntarily to "its self-appointed rules" (Literary Nonsense 54) but adds that these rules are both present and absent, for constant and iron-clad rules would almost by definition demand meaning, a determinable terminus point, and would cramp Nonsense's self-negating style. Sewell's view of the closed field of Nonsense entertains Huizinga's second characteristic but so too does Stewart's contention that the self-reflexivity of nonsense is language at the furthest remove from ordinary common sense.
The third characteristic, however, doesn't fit with Stewart's understanding of nonsense since, despite its distance from ordinary life, she believes that nonsense remains symbiotic with common sense and so inversely permeates all sense-related activities. Sewell, as has already been mentioned, calls Nonsense a product of "the mind's force towards order" (44) and Lecercle insists it is a "meaning-preserving activity" (140) implicitly contingent upon order as an underlying principle. Nonsense creates a new order by creating a new reality and may be allied with order as with common sense. But it is not synonymous with order as Huizinga suggests play is, and as Sewell and Lecercle ultimately claim, because it must simultaneously entertain disorder. There is tension in play as in Nonsense, but in play that tension ultimately finds a resolution with one player winning, unless, as occasionally happens, the game ends in a draw.

Nonsense always ends in a draw unless its game is rejected, violated in some way -- as Alice violates it at the end of both of Carroll's books by diminishing its other players: "'Who cares for you?'' said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'" (AW 129). These are the words of a spoilsport, of someone unwilling to play the game, as she has been unwilling to play the games of the mad tea-party ("'It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!'" [83]).

Too often Alice's unwillingness is attributed to Carroll as well (as in Lecercle and Deleuze) and consequently too often his Nonsense is diminished, called the game of a spoilsport. But as Ede cogently argues (for what follows I'm indebted to her), Alice is not Carroll's mouthpiece, nor is she held up as an archetypal and most perfect participant. Alice's character is replete with quirky problems for those who are used to considering her the sweet Disneyesque dreamchild of animation. Both Carroll's and Tenniel's illustrations (the latter submitted to Carroll's very fastidious eye before being accepted for
publication) depict an often harsh and quite unattractive girl. Alice's behavior tends to be smug and unthinking; she is utterly unquestioning about the rightness of her own world and its conventions, not unlike the stereotypical North American or English tourist abroad. And she brings up subjects which cause no end of distress to the inhabitants of Wonderland; for instance, she insists on telling the mouse in "The Pool of Tears" about her cat, Dinah, and then about a little terrier she knows, both of whom are terrific mousers (33-34).

And what does one say of a girl who unconsciously turns almost every poem she recites into a textbook case of the violence of a capitalist society motivated by survival of the fittest? "How doth the little busy bee" suddenly becomes, in Alice's mouth, "How doth the little crocodile" -- a fittingly ironic evolution since she thinks her world beyond reproach or savagery. The change is most explicitly not attributable to the mood of Wonderland, for its inhabitants, the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon, turn the violence and didacticism of Mary Howell's "The Spider and the Fly" into the lovely, cooperatively lunatic "Lobster Quadrille." "For in spite, or perhaps because of its anarchism," writes Ede, "Wonderland is able to convert a poem of entrapment and violence (Victorian social Darwinism?) to a comic celebration of social harmony" (87).

Alice's is ultimately not an affirmable vision or version of the world, not an ideal way to play any game, especially not one as extreme and bizarre as Wonderland's. Alice, as game-player, is not to be imitated. Nor does Carroll urge us to accept readily her version of "fair play." As Ede remarks, by rejecting the Queen of Hearts and her court as "nothing but a pack of cards," Alice escapes the burden of knowledge. As she has all along, she uses a mad concept of language (mad because illogical and ultimately not founded on reason) to protect both her ego and her imagination from risking an encounter with the
chaos that lies outside her narrow world of social rules (111).

The play which Alice rejects is really just the play of an unsystematic and illogical language. "Alice's chief illusion concerning both language and life in general is that they are based on a coherent, consistent, inherently meaningful system which, if followed, allows one to control one's destiny" (Ede 89). Carroll, by having the Wonderland characters seem to represent logic, puts Alice in the position of having to make her own language logical and so see how untenable her position really is (Ede 89).

When Language Goes on Holiday: Philosophy's Nonsense

Wittgenstein, one of this century's most influential thinkers about nonsense, was not writing about Carroll's "fairy tales" when he noted in his *Philosophical Investigations* that "philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday" (I.38), though he could well have been. This comment about the problematics of philosophical language aptly summarizes the crux of Alice's problems, especially in Wonderland. Wittgenstein and Carroll, according to George Pitcher in his article "Wittgenstein, Nonsense, and Lewis Carroll," "had radically different attitudes towards nonsense: it tortured Wittgenstein and delighted Carroll" (611). Nevertheless there are important similarities between the intensely serious philosopher and the writer of Nonsense/logician, and a connection between literary nonsense and philosophy in general, which need to be examined.

This connection, however, is a loose one, and if not allowed to remain so can lead to misinterpretations; literary nonsense engages in many of the linguistic activities which result in philosophical nonsense, but engages in them for different reasons and to different degrees. Works of Nonsense are not easily placed within the traditional
divisions of nonsense set out by philosophers because they never wholly 
embrace those categories. Carroll's work, for instance, follows logic 
to its illogical ends, and employs what A.C. Baier calls "nonsense 
vocabulary"; it uses, too, obvious falsehoods and semantic nonsense -- 
all traditional types of philosophical nonsense. But it also engages 
language at a more material level with portmanteaux, puns, and 
personifications of words. In philosophical nonsense, disruptions tend 
to effect a very specific type of sense, that necessary for the 
communication of a precise, definable linguistic meaning. In literary 
nonsense, while such disruptions of communicative sense are absolutely 
essential, disruptions may also promote the establishment of more 
material forms of sense, related to the senses for instance, which may 
partially but not entirely interfere with the communication of sense. 
Literary nonsense, then, is not so much the interruption of sense, as 
the multiplying of sensical possibilities, the emphasizing of other ways 
to manufacture meaning. This section will not suggest that the 
connection between philosophical and literary nonsense is anything more 
than tenuous. But it may be useful to gain a general understanding what 
philosophical nonsense is, if only to help determine, for the most part, 
what literary nonsense is not.

In Section I.7 of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein talks 
of "language-games"; it is a simile which suggests that learning the 
meaning and function of a word is like learning a move in a game. 
Carroll may never have articulated this concept, but he did present 
language as a game of another sort.\(^3\) Many of Carroll's language 
puzzles have a didactic air to them, which may have contributed to 
Lecercle's claim (quoted above) that Carroll's Nonsense is that of a 
pedant. Heath too argues that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was

\(^3\) An example is the game of "Doublets" which required its player to make one word out of another (e.g. "head" to "tail") by changing one letter at a time. The catch: at no time could the player insert a letter that would not result in an English word. "Heal" would be an acceptable first move; "lead" would not.
meant to "[make] little logicians" of children (51), that it was perceived by Carroll as a "work of instruction and profit for the infant reader" and as such failed miserably since children invariably miss its point (50). He describes the book as 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 the answer (49).

Two things are striking about Heath's view of the tale: he is not entirely wrong about Carroll, and he unconsciously implies one of the connections between Carroll and Wittgenstein.

Heath is on the right track about Carroll's work, but he's wrong about the *Alice* books. The *Sylvie and Bruno* books are the clear example of Carroll trying to use fiction as a forum for preaching logic, among other things. The latter present their logical play inside a framework of didacticism so unmitigated as to be embarrassing to Carroll's devoted followers. Their twists of language and logic never challenge such fundamental issues as the tie between individual identity, society and language; never question the foundation of logic and of sense; never expose the capitalist climate of Victorian England (whose logic and values Heath claims Carroll is trying to instill in young people) as cruel, exploitative, or even limited, as the *Alice* books do. Rather the distortions (so effective, so delightful, in the early novels) become, in the *Sylvie and Bruno* books, saccharine attempts to sweeten an overly long fable brimming with the sentiments of High Victorianism and High Anglicanism. Even their prefaces are pulpits for Carroll's concerns -- the need to expurgate the Bible for children, to do up Shakespeare properly for young girls (Bowdler's version being far too indecent) ("Preface" to *Sylvie and Bruno* 280, 282) and to put an end to the
cruelties of "Sport" (the hunting, baiting and fighting of animals) ("Preface" to Sylvie and Bruno Concluded 516-7).

But for all that, the Sylvie and Bruno books employ nonsense in much the way Pitcher describes Wittgenstein's use of nonsense in Philosophical Investigations (the comparison isn't meant to reflect badly on Wittgenstein):

Wittgenstein is still as concerned as ever to exorcize nonsense from philosophy; he wants to cure us of the puzzlement, the deep disquietude, it engenders in our soul. But now he also uses it like a vaccine that cures us of itself. He may, for instance, describe some state of affairs that, according to a certain harmless-looking view or picture which he is criticizing, ought to be perfectly unexceptionable: but in fact the alleged state of affairs is radically odd, inherently absurd. The hidden nonsense is thus uncovered (592).

If Carroll is trying to teach children how to avoid nonsensical errors, his method, though fictive as opposed to meditative, is closely allied to Wittgenstein's: to teach through example, to cure through inoculation. As Pitcher argues, "the very same confusions with which Wittgenstein charges philosophers were deliberately employed by Carroll for comic effects." And some of the same philosophical doctrines are ridiculed too (593).

For instance, Pitcher notes the similarities between Wittgenstein's insistence that knowing what a word means in one context doesn't ensure knowing what it means in another (one may know how to measure distance or length, but not how to measure time) (Pitcher 598) and the definitional slides in this excerpt from Sylvie and Bruno Concluded:

"You seem to enjoy that cake?" the Professor remarked.

"Doos that mean 'munch'?" Bruno whispered to Sylvie.
Sylvie nodded. "It means 'to munch' and 'to like to munch.'"

Bruno smiled at the Professor. "I do enjoy it," he said.

The Other Professor caught the word. "And I hope you're enjoying yourself, little Man?" he enquired.

Bruno's look of horror quite startled him. "No, indeed I aren't!" he said (730).

Both writers, Pitcher points out as well, attack essentialism, the idea that "a unique set of characteristics -- constituting an essence -- . . . is shared by all and only those individuals to which a certain general term (e.g. 'table', 'tree', 'serpent') applies" (601-2). Pitcher’s examples anticipate his Carrollian example -- Alice’s run-in with the pigeon who insists that Alice, with her long neck and her love of eggs, must be a serpent (AW 61-62).

But how exactly does Wittgenstein define nonsense? For the Wittgenstein of the Tractatus, nonsense is an arrangement of words (a proposition) which could not possibly fit within an imagined reality. His ideal language or naming corresponds absolutely to Reality, is a diagram of its functioning; nonsense is an incomprehensible glitch in the diagram -- not only is it not true, it is not even false.

Later Wittgenstein moved away from this systematization of language and toward a view of it as a deed, a gesture which evolves through use and in a specific context. Philosophical nonsense, in this scenario, is language de-contextualized, language which has been mishandled, wrested from specific contexts where it is serving, gesturally, to communicate. This definition is closely related to Nonsense where language as a meaningful structure is de-stabilized, in part because of the misuse of words. As in Lear's limerick:

There was an Old Man who supposed,
That the street door was partially closed;
But some very large rats, ate his coats and his hats,
While that futile old gentleman dozed (16).

By using the adjective "futile" in what seems to be a sensically inappropriate manner (why "futile" instead of, say, "misinformed" or "deluded"?), Lear re-contextualizes it and so illustrates how much one's experience of meaning depends on the context, the use of a word. He also encourages the reader to look back and manufacture a new meaning appropriate to this new use. Lear's misuse of the word "futile" draws attention to the intertextual possibilities of every word in the rhyme; each word has other meanings and contexts which resonate behind current contextual usage. And each word has the potential to generate awkward sense if displaced. By forcing "futile" to stretch its range of meanings in order to accommodate the verse's "sense," one admits into the "background" of the limerick, as well, the possible range of meanings for its other words. Those meanings don't inundate and eradicate the sense of the poem; they are constrained, just barely, for the present moment of each word's use.

Another example of meaning being affected by context is Carroll's word "snark." One of its accepted definitions is now "an imaginary animal." However, far from having created a neologism to name the elusive object of the Baker's search, it is highly possible that Carroll merely borrowed an English dialect term: "snark" -- an intransitive verb meaning "to snore, snort"; a transitive verb meaning "to find fault with, nag." If this is the case, then Carroll, giving a rare but existing word a new nonsensical use, gave it an entirely new context and initiated a transformation of meaning and function within sentence structure. The transformation or extension of meaning was completed when Carroll's "definition" of "snark" became included in that social institution, the dictionary.

Wittgenstein doesn't provide the sole philosophical account of nonsense, of course. A quick and general look at the six types of
nonsense listed by A.C. Baier in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy may help extend one’s understanding of how philosophical nonsense works. Examples of most of these categories can be found in Nonsense, but neither the genre nor the linguistic disruption (as a literary occurrence) are limited to these types. Baier explains the types by placing them within a hierarchical paradigm -- the first type distorts sense “the least” and is comprised of the most recognizably English words and structures. As one goes through the list, she claims, nonsensical disruption enters on a progressively larger scale by assaulting progressively smaller units of sense; it moves from sentence in context (the equivalent of literary nonsense’s text or paragraph) to sentence itself, to phrase, to word.

Baier begins with “obvious falsehood” (520), a statement which is clearly contradicted by the circumstances under which it is stated. If, for instance, at the Queen’s Croquet match, Alice had told the Cheshire-Cat: “Everyone’s getting along oh-so-well, and hedgehogs are very appropriate and wonderfully accurate croquet balls,” she would have been guilty of type 1 nonsense. Watching the game for a moment would reveal to anyone that the hedgehogs in Wonderland were hopelessly useless as croquet balls and that there was considerable tension and di-ease amongst all of the players.

“Semantic nonsense” is the second type Baier lists; here “the rules or conventions violated are those tying [a] well-formed sentence to certain nonlinguistic contexts” (520). An example might be using “goodbye” as a greeting; Marx Brothers’ movies are replete with such semantic nonsense.

Baier lists “category mistakes” or “semi-sentences” next. In this third type of nonsense, a generally well-formed sentence includes a predicate which is not suitable for its subject. She admits that figurative language can break this rule without producing nonsense; “the kettle is boiling” is metonymic, not nonsensical, although it is
physically impossible for a *kettle* to boil (520). Baier acknowledges that this type of "mistake" is frequently found in Nonsense. Take, for instance, this extended category mistake in Lear's description of the Co-operative Cauliflower in "The Story of Four Little Children Who Went Round the World":

they soon found that what they had taken for an immense wig was in reality the top of the cauliflower, and that he had no feet at all, being able to walk tolerably well with a fluctuating and graceful movement on a single cabbage stalk, an accomplishment which naturally saved him the expense of stockings and shoes (102-3).

This example is more evidence of the fineness of Lear's lexical discriminations and of language's inherently nonsensical nature, the "mistake" being an extended pun on "stalk" -- as the stem of a plant or a manner of walking.

"Nonsense strings" are another form of nonsense which Baier notes. This type is made up of "strings of familiar words which lack, to a greater or lesser extent, the syntactic structure of the paradigms of sense or any syntax translatable into the familiar" (521). Such strings are related to the nearly impossible asyntactical language posited earlier, and are examples of Chomsky's ungrammatical "sentence" which will be briefly discussed in chapter five. Baier's sample -- "Jumps digestible indicators the under" (521) -- is reminiscent of work by the more radical of the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets also discussed in the fifth chapter.

The next type of nonsense, "vocabulary nonsense," is a common, almost an essential, element of Nonsense. "Utterances which have enough familiar elements to enable us to discern a familiar syntax, but whose vocabulary, or a crucial part of it, is unfamiliar, and untranslatable into the familiar vocabulary" (521) make up vocabulary nonsense. Lear's toeless pobble and his luminous-nosed dong, Carroll's jabberwocky and
boojum, and Dennis Lee's silver honkabeest are included in this category, as are Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Thibaudieu's "from Throgmogle," and Artaud's "translation" of "Jabberwocky."

Baier's sixth and final type of nonsense is pure gibberish.

"[Neither] familiar syntax nor familiar vocabulary, still less familiar category divisions or semantic appropriateness" (521) can be found in such specimens of nonsense. Baier asserts that such nonsense continues to be a "part of some language, to the minimal extent of sharing its alphabet with that language (521)."

I quote this statement again (it was included in the initial survey of definitions) because of the importance of its claim that nonsense is never outside of language as it is broadly conceived. Because Wittgenstein's idea of meaning is inextricable from process, even the gibberish of type 6 nonsense may have a potential for lexical meaning. For instance, Carroll's new use of "snark" has found a place in the O.R.D. Since the meanings and limits of language contract and expand over time, it is at least conceivable (although currently improbable) that at sometime "vokalupeist" might be a meaningful English word. And if it is conceivable, one has to admit that gibberish can never be entirely excluded from the possibility of making sense.

Note, however, that "vokalupeist" can not be made a meaningful word by my use of it; though it does have, as a result of my use, a second order meaning -- "vokalupeist" is an example of a word that cannot be made meaningful by my use of it. Language is saved from Humpty Dumpty-ism by the public element of Wittgenstein's definition; words don't mean according to individual use. In fact, Pitcher believes Wittgensteinian philosophy, with its insistence on the distinction between "definition" and "the mental activity of meaning" (PI I.665), can successfully silence Humpty Dumpty (603). Wittgenstein argues:

But -- can't I say "By 'abracadabra' I mean toothache?" Of course I can; but this is a definition; not
a description of what goes on in me [i.e. the mental process of meaning] when I utter the word (PI I.665).
When Humpty Dumpty defines "toves," the word doesn't necessarily mean in that way for him; he has stipulated a definition which is probably utterly irrelevant to the question of what is meant.

"You've no idea how confusing it is all things being alive":
Linguistic Materiality, Reference and Innuendo

For Wittgenstein, the nonsense of language on holiday is language de-contextualized; for Carroll, it steps outside the system of what common sense deems acceptable, exposing common sense for what it is -- a constraint upon an inherently illogical and lively language. In Wonderland, and in Nonsense, language is alive. Ede offers a twist on Alice's complaint to the Cheshire-Cat -- "you've no idea how confusing it is all the things being alive" (92); she notes that the words themselves are alive though Alice fails to see this, fails to realize how her limited view of language tries to "deaden," limit and classify all the wonder in Wonderland (111). Part of that wonder, as has already been pointed out, results from the fact that turns of phrase ("mad as a hatter," "mad as a march hare") become flesh and blood.

Nonsense is a world of words (Sewell 17), and exemplifies that language is "built up," according to Haughton "between babble and Babel" (5). Not only does it disorder reference, as Sewell claims (38), but also it questions the reliability, the possibility of a reference which is not arbitrary. As such Nonsense is also frequently construed as meta-linguistic (Sewell 18, 20), as using language to talk about itself (Sutherland 119). The most obvious and obfuscating example of this is Alice's conversation with the White Knight in Through the Looking-Glass:

"The name of the song is called 'Haddocks' 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 'Have 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." (244).

Alice's confusion, and the reader's, arises from a failure to distinguish (as Carroll via the White Knight does) "among things, the names of things, and the names of names of things" (Gardner 306). Nonsense requires that one does just that however; to survive in a nonsensical world one needs to recognize the separateness of thing and word, of referent, sign and signifier. Such acute awareness of language as language, and of its naming function often leads to the inability to communicate which is rampant in nonsense.

Foss the cat, Vigeurs' Nonsensical sparring partner, follows Humpty Dumpty's lead (perhaps this should warn of a potential problem), and says that words in Nonsense have "an independence that begins in their failure to communicate meaning and ends in [their] having no representative or symbolic function at all. Language becomes material" (Vigeurs 141-42). Linguistic materiality in Nonsense will be explored in detail in the remaining chapters of this study, but Foss's reasoning in his discussion of materiality needs to be reconsidered here. Vigeurs
counters Foss with a telling point, one that, although only slightly askew from Foss's contention, provides a better way of viewing Nonsense's materiality. "Words in nonsense," she argues, "have an independent life. They are not responsible for meaning" (142). Not responsible for meaning is not the same as not having meaning. Rather it suggests that nonsensical words do not themselves strongly suggest a context of meaning — as "slobaciously" does not, as "borogoves" does not. And that the act of meaning as it is traditionally conceived is not their sole function.

But language which challenges the traditional conception of meaning often doesn't filter and make reality containable either. When nonsense occurs, language and reality fail to coincide (Steiner 107). This sounds a bit like the early Wittgenstein unless it is extended — language and the illusion of an Absolute Reality fail to coincide. Far from being a screen protecting one from reality, language reveals itself as a factor in the creation of realities.

Nonsense language often involves a type of "double-talk" (Sonstroem 198), akin to Kristeva's variations on carnivalesque or poetic language, language which is always read as at least double (66; 69). In a letter to 'the Lowrie children,' Carroll explains:

As to the meaning of the Snark? I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them: so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer meant (quoted in Sutherland 97).

Unwittingly, Carroll replies to minimalists like Sewell and Holquist (who claims Nonsense words have only one meaning [151]) by admitting the protean power of words. A literal reading of them invariably leads to miscommunication, something in which Carroll himself was so interested he used it as a working principle for much of his Nonsense. Tigges argues to include the Marx Brothers in the Nonsense canon precisely
because their movies centre on how tricky language is for communicating (Literary Nonsense 201).

Part of this doubleness, the excess of innuendo, and so potential failure to communicate (can this be read as a possibility of communicating too much?) involves the desire which is in and beneath language. Lecercle may attribute this desire to déli re only, but, as Julia Kristeva argues, it functions at some level in all language. As Alwin Baum argues in "The Semiotics of Paradox,"

If Humpty Dumpty's language is impenetrable to Alice, it is nevertheless not "his own invention," as the White Knight would say, despite the "extra wages" Humpty is willing to pay words to do his bidding. The language he describes is, on the contrary, ever present in waking life as the looking-glass reflection of social discourse -- its alter-ego, the subconscious. It is precisely the anarchy of association which social language must attempt to repress, since language is the primary vehicle through which pre-conscious desire may articulate itself (78).

The difference is not the presence of desire, but the degree to which that desire is suppressed. In "social" or common sense language, desire, like the guinea-pigs which, at that Nonsensical parody of legal order, the Knave of Hearts' trial, are slipped head-first into a canvas bag and then sat upon (AW 120), is suppressed as firmly as possible. Dé li re lets desire run rampant -- no repression here. But nonsense both represses and indulges, structures and releases, desire. My discussion of desire and language, of how desire can be seen as a link between Nonsense and poetic language, however, will be saved for chapter two.
"I see nobody on the road," said Alice. "I only wish I had such eyes," the King remarked in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too!" (Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* 223).

The White King's astonishment at Alice's ability to see Nobody, and from such a great distance, is another proof that the Nonsense universe is composed of words, and that its pratfalls are linguistic. The King thinks that Alice really can see Nobody, that "nobody" has an existence, a status similar to that of somebody, anybody, everybody else, in Looking-Glassland. Carroll is exemplifying not only the miscommunication so common in his Nonsense, but also the personification or objectification which marks one aspect of nonsense language.

This playful use of pronouns is not limited to Nonsense; in fact, e.e. cummings, one of the most "nonsensical" poets of the twentieth century, recasts pronouns as what might be called "pro(per)nouns." In "anyone lived in a pretty how town," cummings generates a multiple function for "anyone" and "noone"; they are simultaneously characters in a story and indefinite pronouns dramatizing their own grammatical function.¹

This inter-chapter briefly compares the use of pronouns in the cummings' poem with their use in Carroll's "Verses from the Trial of the Knave of Hearts" (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* 126-7; see Appendix II for the texts of both poems). As such, the approach will be quite different from that of my other inter-chapters; rather than offering a close reading of these poems, I will use them to illustrate an important difference between Nonsense and poetry: Nonsense generally maintains its balance between meaning and meaninglessness; poetry entertains both of

¹ My discussion of cummings' use of pronouns in "anyone lived in a pretty how town" is rooted in James Paul Gee's excellent reading of the poem -- "anyone's any: A View of Language and Poetry Through an Analysis of "anyone lived in a pretty how town."
these elements, but usually has at least one undefeatable movement towards meaning.

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Discussing cummings' poem solely in terms of its pronominal use may seem limiting, especially since the poem contains many other, much more disruptive linguistic and grammatical innovations. Indeed, this discussion assumes -- perhaps unfairly -- that a reader recognizes within the poem, even if she doesn't have a technical understanding of, such linguistic tricks as syntactical inversions; the changing of a word's grammatical function from, for instance, verb to noun, conjunction to adjective; and semantic distortion. I concentrate on what seems to be one of cummings' least radical linguistic moves in this poem because it provides one of the poem's strongest gestures towards meaning. Such meaningful gestures, as will be suggested in chapter two, help distinguish most poetry from Nonsense. While all of his disruptive turns of phrase help cummings to undermine and challenge normal sensical structures, his "pro(per)nouns" root the poem in a sensical tradition slightly removed from nonsense.

cummings' poem requires one to read "anyone" as a character's name or proper noun in order that it make grammatical sense. As James Paul Gee points out, "anyone lived in a pretty new town" "is a relatively normal sentence if we take 'anyone' as a proper name" (125). Since one does take "anyone" this way, and the poem clearly suggests that a reader should do so, what develops is a linguistic love story. The relationship between "anyone" and "noone" is sketched out in the verse, although it is not clear from the poem if "anyone" ever notices "noone" or is aware of her love for him.

There is another aspect to the love story "told" in the poem -- a negative aspect. The "someones" and "everyones" "in the pretty how
town" are indicative of an apathy which underscores the "relationship" between "anyone" and "noone." These adults "[care] for anyone not at all" and never notice that "noone" loves "anyone." Some of the children in the poem, however, guess "that noone loved him [anyone] more by more." Reading this line with the indefinite pronouns functioning in their normal grammatical roles further emphasizes the counter movement of cummings' poem; Gee suggests that, "Taking 'anyone' and 'noone' as pronouns, they [the children] have also guessed that people are beginning to love one another less and less" (133). "Noone"'s love for "anyone," then, is offset by the understanding that noone loves anyone anymore, a reality clearly demonstrated by the poem's "someones" and "everyones."

This narrative of love is also the personification (almost) of a grammatical rule. The close union between the characters "anyone" and "noone" is very much like the relationship between the pronouns "anyone" and "noone." "'Any,'" Gee points out,
is what Otto Jespersen has called a "pronoun of indifference."... We can say, then, in a somewhat oversimplified way, that any basically occurs in two environments, negative environments and conditional environments... . It is excluded from other environments, those basically involving simple positive (non-negative) assertions of fact (125-27).

So "noone," as "a negative element in language," creates the sort of environment in which "anyone," character and pronoun, can function happily and effectively (127). Despite his frequent abuses of grammar, and his reliance upon what Chomsky would call semi-grammaticality, cummings animates a grammatical principle. He has stretched the categorical function of these pronouns, in part, so that he can vivify their traditional function; simultaneously he unmakes and makes grammatical meaning.
The indefiniteness of cummings' pronouns allows the poem to be read in at least two ways— as a love story proper which is underscored by human apathy, and as the dramatization of a grammatical rule. While these pronouns can't be pinned down to a single referential capacity, the result is that the poem has several possible ways of sustaining meaning throughout its entirety. When Carroll plays with pronouns in "Verses from the Trial of the Knave of Hearts" such is not the case.

The most important technical difference between the two poems, at least in terms of this discussion, is that cummings experiments with indefinite pronouns, Carroll with personal pronouns. Whenever cummings uses personal pronouns in "anyone lived" there are clearly identifiable antecedents— even if these are indefinite pronouns— which fit into the sensical patterns of the poem. Moreover, both the indefinite and the personal pronouns help to stabilize the sense of the poem; once the stretch to "pro(per)noun" is made, no matter how complex cummings' linguistic play may be, the sense of the poem falls fairly easily into place. Carroll creates most of his lexical disruption with personal pronouns, which, if they have any antecedents at all, point back to other (unstable) personal pronouns. Consequently, an absolute meaning, or the locating of meaning in some solid object, is continually deferred.

The King of Hearts uses this poem as evidence to convict the Knave of Hearts, since he contends it's about the treachery surrounding the Knave's theft of tarts; as such, "Verses" would be a gloss on another, much more sensical, poem. The possible referents for most of Carroll's pronouns (and these are possible as opposed to probable since there is nothing in the poem to support the connections made) lie outside the text of the poem itself. "He" may be thought to refer to the Knave, and "She" to the Queen of Hearts, but even so the poem's sense is not clarified by these antecedents since, despite the King's rather creative attempts at rendering such an interpretation feasible (Alice's
Adventures in Wonderland 127-28), the rest of the poem doesn’t conform to the theft/trial scenario.

The absence of antecedents for the personal pronouns isn’t the sole disruption of sense in Carroll’s poem, however. The sheer number of these pronouns -- forty-two in twenty-four lines -- help to muddle meaning. This excess is typical of Nonsense; Carroll’s poem not only reveals how tenuously sense is tied to grammatical and linguistic rules, it also revels in this tenuousness. It is not enough to demonstrate this connection; Nonsense nearly always needs to inundate a reader with it. What might have been a minor disturbance to sense becomes a major upheaval precisely because of Carroll’s excess.

The scarcity of nouns (only nine in the whole poem) also adds to its lack of concrete sense. Almost all of them refer to an abstract notion or category rather than to an actual, and well-defined, thing: "character," "word," "matter," "affair," "notion," "fit," "obstacle," "secret," "rest." Even these more concrete grammatical forms are vague and obscure in their reference. Nothing in this poem points to much of anything.

Given Carroll’s quite serious disruption of referential sense, it’s interesting that he has created no syntactical disruptions at all. All of the lines in the poem are grammatically correct; the stanzas are too, though sometimes their grammatically sensical sentences don’t fit together in a completely sensical way. For instance, in stanza one, the first two lines go well together, as do the last two lines, but the join between them, while grammatically possible, is less sensically comfortable than that between either of the two smaller groupings. As well, the stanzas have no clear relation to each other, apart from the fact they are in the same poem, that is.

What Carroll has done is disrupt language at a level analogous to that of co-reference, between lines or propositions, rather than, as
cummings does, within them.² He gives a reader nuggets of sense but no sustained framework within which to place them. The poem's "logic" does hold, even if its themes are undecipherable. Unlike the cummings poem, in which several possible themes can be found, "Verses" has none. It creates sense on a small, rather than a larger, scale. cummings does the opposite -- he makes a nonsense of parts, but in the interests of over-riding sense.

Of course, many other aspects of both poems could be considered, and each of these comparisons would contribute to an understanding of how Nonsense and poetry are, and are not, alike. But a look at pronominal disruption is useful in emphasizing one important way in which the two often differ. Whereas Carroll preserves minute structures of sense but gives no overriding one, cummings assaults minutiae in a syntax much more complicated than Carroll's, but never eradicates the possibility of a sensical interpretation of his poem. Both poems, to put the distinction another way, establish the balance between meaningfulness and meaning which chapter one suggests is central to Nonsense, but by eschewing a larger framework of sense for his poem, Carroll maintains that balance. cummings does not.

These two poems, of course, illustrate the difference between Nonsense and poetry, a difference not always so readily discernible, not always discernible in this way. Sometimes Nonsense verse exemplifies less well the type of relationship with sense found in Carroll's poem, a particularly fine example of the genre. And much poetry is not as nonsensical as cummings' "anyone lived," though that, as shall be seen, is nowhere near the disruptive extreme. Rather than providing any absolute measure of Nonsense and poetry, the distance between these poems suggests possibilities for measure; their difference highlights

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² Chapter five, which deals with "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry, will consider co-reference again when discussing Ron Silliman's theory of "the new sentence."
some of the characteristics of their respective forms. The next chapter, and much of the rest of this study, is concerned with the similarities between Nonsense and poetry, or, rather, with the ways in which those similarities show the usefulness of a grasp of Nonsense strategies in the reading of poetry.
Chapter II -- "Touch Monkeys":
A Semanalytic Approach to Nonsense

Writing, like all the languages in the world, was invented, according to the ancient Egyptians, by the god Thoth, the Ibis. Scribes were represented as writing while squatting in front of an image of Thoth's sacred animal, the baboon.

(Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown* 63)

... "They have imposed on us with their pale half-fledged protestations trembling about in inarticulate frenzy, saying it is not for us to understand art; finding it all so difficult..."

(Marianne Moore, from "The Monkeys")

The notion of desire provides a useful tool for considering linguistic disruptions found in both nonsensical and poetic languages. (I use the term poetic language as Kristeva does: not as a term exclusively applicable only to a generic use, but rather as a term which applies to language that is more consciously full of meaning than the communicative language of every day use [Lechte 35].) Both types of linguistic play engage the same sorts of material practices -- condensation, rhyme, rhythm, repetition and other melodic devices, which are often attributed to the eruption of desire within language. In fact, this shared materiality is one reason for arguing that Nonsense can offer a useful perspective for the reading of poetry.

Before the relationship with desire shared by nonsensical and poetical language can be explored, however, it is necessary to look at the arguments for the presence of desire (roughly speaking a desire for the Other founded on unsatisfied unconscious drives) in language. Such arguments stem generally from Freudian psychoanalysis -- especially from the work of French Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his view that the unconscious is structured like language. The statement of this
Chapter II -- "Touch Monkeys": A Semanalytic Approach to Nonsense

Writing, like all the languages in the world, was invented, according to the ancient Egyptians, by the god Thoth, the Ibis. Scribes were represented as writing while squatting in front of an image of Thoth's sacred animal, the baboon.

(Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown* 63)

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idea most useful for the purposes of this study comes from Julia
Kristeva who, in Revolution in Poetic Language, alters and combines,
among other things, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Saussurean linguistics and
Derridian grammatology to arrive at a provocative theory of poetic
language and desire.

Semianalysis in a Banana Peel:
Julia Kristeva meets Rudyard Kipling

Kristeva's theory, though not rigidly applicable to nonsense, has
much to offer it. An analogy drawn from Rudyard Kipling's writing
provides a convenient, if oblique, point of entry. This analogy might
come as a surprise to Gott who sees Nonsense as very much of one blood
with Kipling's rigid colonialism but absolutely separate, one assumes,
from Kristeva's (and his own) Marxism (37), and from her conception of a
socio-historically revolutionary language. This would come as a
surprise, as well, to Kipling whose satiric "intent" and meaning will be
wrenched open in the entering. It might even come as a surprise to
Kristeva, whose theory concerns avant-garde writing which attacks the
very notions of a stable sense of self and society implicit in Kipling's
writing. The link I wish to forge between Kristeva and Kipling is not
analytical or theoretical; neither is it allegorical. It is analogical,
apparent only when Kipling is turned inside-out. Kipling's story
involves a society, the rules and exceptions in its formulation, and its
efforts at communication; Kristeva's theory concerns the psychic and
linguistic development of the individual.

In "Kaa's Hunting," one of the stories in Kipling's The Jungle
Book, Mowgli the Man-cub encounters the Bandar-log, the Monkey-Folk, who
"play all day" (40). Mowgli's teacher, Baloo the bear, describes them
in this way:

They have no Law. They are outcasts. They have no speech
of their own, but use the stolen words which they overhear
when they listen, and peep, and wait up above in the branches. Their way is not our way. They are without leaders. They have no remembrance. They boast and chatter and pretend that they are a great people about to do great affairs in the Jungle, but the falling of a nut turns their minds to laughter and all is forgotten (40).

These Monkey-Folk, "howl[ing] and shriek[ing] senseless songs" (41), lawless and playful and ultimately destructive, are analogous to Kristeva's idiosyncratic version of "the semiotic."

Kristeva's is a markedly different use of the word from its usual use (semiotics as a science of signs) as encountered in Chapter One. She writes in "The Speaking Subject":

By semiotic, I mean the primary organization (in Freudian terms) of drives by rhythms, intonations and primary processes (displacement, slippage, condensation). Genetically, the semiotic is found in the first echolalias of infants. Logically, it functions in all adult discourses as a supplementary register to that of sign and predicate synthesis (216).

The semiotic, then, is comprised of unconscious forces, drives, and "instincts," which, moving through the subject's body, are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body . . . by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a chora: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated (Revolution 25).

These drives, this semiotic energy, exist before and outside of "meaning" (Revolution 36), before the subject (an entity which is always in the process of becoming and whose development is connected to the
regulation of a societal or "symbolic" order (37) is even posited by the recognition, like that in Lacan's "mirror stage," of its separateness from other bodies. So the *chora* is a signifying node where the linguistic sign does not yet speak of separation or lack, doesn't demonstrate the absence of an object and so doesn't distinguish between the real and the symbolic (26).

Like Kipling's Bandar-log, then, the semiotic exists outside the Law of the "Jungle," of signification and the Other, of the symbolic which controls and orders the world in a supposedly unified and unbreakable way. It stands as a "0" to the symbolic's "1" -- "linguistic, psychic, and social 'prohibition' . . . (God, Law, Definition)" ("Word, Dialogue, and Novel" 70). It takes and twists the speech of the Other; it is a "nonexpressive totality" (*Revolution* 40), existing before language, and can only "speak" itself by breaking into and deranging the speech of the symbolic mode.

All this energy, all this drive, leads essentially to nothing. The semiotic is marked not only by its energy charges, but also by its stases -- a nonsensical and non-contradictory opposition, not unlike the entropy in Lear's limericks. The *chora*, for Kristeva, is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charge and stases that produce him. We shall call this process of charges and stases a *negativity* (28).

Kristeva argues that the semiotic *chora* is on a path to death and destruction because its negativity, its opposition [generates] a dominant "destructive wave" that is drive's most characteristic trait: Freud notes that the most

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1 Kristeva takes the *r* nm from Plato for whom it is a "receptacle . . . nourishing and maternal, not yet unified in an ordered whole because deity is absent from it" (*Revolution* 26).
instinctual drive is the death drive. In this way, the term "drive" denotes waves of attack against stases, which are themselves constituted by the repetition of these charges (28).

The semiotic's inherent duality turns against itself.

Kristeva holds language, and the "subject" or concept of the self, to be composed of several heterogeneous regions, which are, according to Lechte, "disruptive of each other because there is no communicative link between them" (75). Kristeva's subject, like language, is always "in process/on trial," always fluctuating, never stable and solidified, never consistent. The subject, and the language which articulates it, is constituted by desire, torn between the social and the stable realm of the symbolic (God/Law/Order) and the negativity of pre-Oedipal desires, the musicalized movement of origins. This unresolvable pull between the univocal symbolic and the multiple semiotic results in a negativity Kristeva likens to the death wish.

Nonsense holds in flux seemingly opposing states, too; in the first chapter of this study its heterogeneity was emphasized. Yet even while it allows these states to exist within a larger continuum, Nonsense serves as the point at which they meet -- it both bridges and contains antithetical elements. Nonsense, as a meeting place, is quite different from what Kristeva names the thetic phase, the point at which semiotic and symbolic touch (if imagined spatially), the "threshold" (48) between the two.

The thetic is the break at which the Other is symbolized, at which Meaning -- which resides in the identification of self and other, and which is in the split inherent in the signifier/signified relationship -- becomes possible. It produces a "transformation (from drive to signifier)" which is indicated by syntactical divisions (55). "All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence," Kristeva argues, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other
words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects. This image and objects must first be posited in a space that becomes symbolic because it connects the two separated positions, recording them or redistributing them in an open combinatorial system (43).

In order to communicate in a directed way, to indicate a specific request or desire, a child must recognize and acknowledge the difference between herself and the person with whom she wants to communicate, between herself and the object about which she wants to communicate. For instance, my daughter can't ask her father for her stuffed bear, Edna, if she doesn't realize either her father or her bear exist apart from herself; or, at the very least, if she cannot conceive of them as very distanced parts of herself. One's sense of wholeness must be fragmented, or stretched to breaking, if articulation is to occur.²

The child's recognition that she is not connected inextricably with the rest of the world, the awareness of her own separateness, constitutes the thetic phase, and initiates language and, implicitly, lack. Signification marks the loss of semiotic wholeness, of a quasi-Edenic unity, and marks as well a movement into the need to symbolize, to represent the self in terms of linguistic structures -- as the "signifier" rather than as what is being signified (48), rather than simply being. This act of symbolization attempts to suppress and regulate the semiotic which is a pre-condition of its very existence.

Kristeva remarks that "[because] the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (24). The choré may pre-

² *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is rife with notions of an unstable self, provides another playful illustration of this idea. When Alice, after eating currant cake she finds in the rabbit hole, "[opens] out like the largest telescope that ever was" (28), she begins talking to her far-away feet, and imagines sending them Christmas presents. She dismisses these thoughts, as she does so much else in Wonderland, as "nonsense" -- which is exactly what they are, though nonsense of quite a different sort than she supposes.
exist the subject, and so pre-exist the symbolic's attempted repression of the semiotic, but ironically it is accessible only within a signifying process, articulable only in its fusion with the symbolic. One is made aware of the *chora* only as it is incorporated within some system of meaning. Like the *Bandar-log*, the semiotic *chora* must steal an Other's words.

Such a system of meaning, Kristeva insists, is "ambiguous," "a defensive construction" because underlying it is the death drive inherent in the *chora* (49). Language, in this scheme, is an attempt to protect one's body from its own drives by linking it with the symbolic, by "making it . . . the place of the signifier" (49). But since the semiotic expresses itself through language, whether the symbolic would or not, then the language meant to set up a barrier between the body and its drives is partially in the service of the semiotic death drive which opens up that same language to a jouissance or ecstasy, and turns it "back toward the autoerotic body" (49). Language is an uneasy mix of semiotic and symbolic, a struggle to hold down and hold in the drives which ceaselessly threaten to erupt and undermine the stability of a symbolization unwittingly serving those very drives.

Lacan's principle of the "unary signifier" may add to an understanding of how the semiotic functions within language, although his system of thought does not include Kristeva's version of the semiotic. Lacan discusses the unary signifier when considering the alienation of the subject inherent in the process of signification. Signification presents the subject with a double-bind, an either/or which ultimately translates into a neither/nor (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* 210-1), because it implies a choice between being and meaning. He argues:

If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is,
strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realization of the subject, the unconscious. In other words, it is of the nature of this meaning, as it emerges in the field of the Other, to be in a large part of its field, eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier (211).

He diagrams the interaction in this way:

![Diagram of the interaction between Being, Meaning*, and Meaning]

* Unary Signifier

The principle is perhaps more concretely grasped in Lacan's use of the "fort"/"da" episode so important in Freudian theory. Freud links this childhood experience with the development of the preconscious, but Lacan ties it to the development of the unconscious (Silverman 169). Before the child uses "da," when he says only "fort," his speech lacks paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships; he is using a unary signifier, "that thing which intervenes between the drives and meaning" (Silverman 170). Kaja Silverman explains the unary signifier as the point where Being and Meaning shade into one another, an interface of non-meaning which is both nonsensical and irreducible -- nonsensical because there is no other signifier into which it can be translated, or to which it can be referred, and irreducible because it
Silverman continues:

Although the unary signifier remains external to meaning, it plays a vital supporting role. Because it is nonsensical, it sets in motion an absolutely fluid play of signification, one which has no fixed reference point. The unary signifier permits the establishment of a signifying system within which there are no positive values, only differences (172).

It is therefore, Silverman contends, the extreme opposite of a transcendental signified (172).

The emergence of "da" (what Lacan calls the binary signifier [218]), and the subsequent joining of the two words in a phonemic opposition ushers in a formal and a conceptual opposition, "a self-enclosed signifying system" (Silverman 170). But because these words relate syntagmatically, because "da" necessarily points back to "fort" rather than to the drives, this coupling results in a complete break with the drives (171). This syntagmatic relationship, this newly established discourse, is not unlike Kristeva's symbolic, referring back to itself with a solidity which denies (or, in Kristeva's version, attempts to deny) its early origin in the drives.

There are several differences between Lacan's unary signifier and Kristeva's semiotic: the relationship each has with pre-conscious drives (the unary signifier is already a step away from those drives, the semiotic is those drives) is one example. Another is that Lacan's model has no room for anything analogous to the semiotic within language (Smith 121). It is, however, their similarities that most strike one: each is based on a wholeness in which signifier and signified, self and other are one; and each is outside meaning but essential to its development.

The presence of the semiotic makes "communicative" language
uneasy. But in poetic language the semiotic erupts; it ruptures the
thetic border which separates it from the sym· lic (Revolution 62) and so "[prevents] . . . the thetic from hiding the semiotic process that produces it" (58). In much the same way that Susan Stewart says Nonsense reflects back upon common sense, the semiotic calls attention to itself and symbolic language, pointing to its own quieter presence in more "rational" discourse. Again Kipling supplies a convenient image which may serve to point up Kristeva's abstraction.

Howgli, a hostage of the Bandar-log, travels with them to the Cold Lairs, the ruins of an ancient human civilization. He sees them there, attempting to use the court and buildings, but having no idea how these places were meant to be used:

They would sit in circles on the hall of the king's council chamber and scratch for fleas and pretend to be men; or they would run in and out of the roofless houses and collect pieces of plaster and old bricks in a corner, and forget where they had hidden them, and fight and cry in scuffling crowds (53).

The monkeys' highjinks at the Cold Lairs offer a strikingly vivid image of the working of poetic language. Here are the Bandar-log playing at civilization, at humanness. They run about on the remains of some very fundamental structures, the architecture of a whole society, and make a mockery of that society.

In much the same way, the semiotic element of poetic language runs unrestrained under the architecture of our civilizing language -- lightly under syntax, but more significantly, with a heavier tread, under semantics. It is unabashedly physical in the face of a rigid and threatened culture. The semiotic picks up the communicative tools of language and uses them -- as the Monkey-Folk use the king's hall -- in the "wrong" way.

What the Bandar-log set up is a nonsensical society which, while
admittedly lacking Nonsense's self-referentiality, carnivalizes civilization and, in its gestures and articulations, holds both the thing parodied and the act of parody within a basic nihilism. And what poetic language sets up, essentially, is a nonsensical utterance which entertains Nonsense's self-referentiality, and undermines both denotation "(the positing of the object)" and meaning "(the positing of the enunciating subject)" (Revolution 58) within the framework of the very meaning it assaults.

The semiotic attacks the language through which it articulates itself; but, conversely, the semiotic is the origin from which that symbolic language is born. The vulnerability of linguistic structures which seem so strong, so unified and unbreakable, is a central tenet of Kristeva's theory. Engaged in a dialectical process, poetic language encounters its origins and goes beyond them. By passing back through the "0" of semiotics, poetic language achieves what Kristeva calls a "0-2" interval -- continuum and multiplicity -- rather than its earlier, highly symbolic "0-1" dichotomy of unicity and Law (see "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" 70). Language no longer stops at solidity and single-mindedness; its architecture has been broken down, its meaning broken open to entertain an unending polyphony, a manyness.

This reaching beyond the symbolic is the result of a breaching of the thetic border, a pouring of drives into language, and is an expression of desire, unsatisfied and unsatisfiable pre-Oedipal drives for the mother (the Other) which are psychically and physically interrelated. Such desire is negative for it seeks to satisfy semiotic needs by desiring that which exists only outside of the semiotic mode. Kristeva insists desire is "the movement that leaps over the boundaries

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{2}} \text{ It is important to be aware of a counter-definition of "desire" elaborated in } \textit{Anti-Oedipus}. \text{ In their response to the Freudian over-emphasis of the Oedipal phase, Deleuze and Guattari typify desire as in no way lacking an Other:}

Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. Desire and its object are one and the same thing (26).\]
of the pleasure principle and invests an already signifying reality -- 'desire is the desire of the Other' -- which includes the subject as divided and always in movement" (131). This desire is for the "wholeness" lost with the recognition of other bodies, for a return to a state which can be acknowledged only after it has been left. The act of desiring requires a subject who experiences lack, who already exists outside of a solely semiotic state to which it longs to return (131). Here is a double-bind which makes the fulfillment of desire impossible: the needs of a desiring subject can only be met semiotically, but can only be articulated within, and directed towards, a symbolic structure. Desire's negative nature, according to Kristeva, makes it "essentially the death wish" (131).

The poetically written text, Kristeva says, presents this dichotomy between *chora* and "code" in its genotext and phenotext. The former includes the semiotic processes [and] . . . the advent of the symbolic . . . . [It] is not linguistic (in the sense understood by structural or generative linguistics). It is, rather, a *process*, which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral (unstable, threatened by drive charges . . . ) and nonsignifying (86).

The phenotext, on the other hand, is not a process but a "structure"; it is "language that serves to communicate" (87). Every text contains both genotext and phenotext, but contains them in varying degrees.

One locates the genotext by pointing out the transfers of drive energy that can be detected in phonematic devices (such as the accumulation and repetition of phonemes or rhyme) and melodic devices (such as intonation or rhythm), in the way semantic and categorical fields are set out in syntactic and logical features (86).
For, Kristeva argues, the continued influx of semiotic drives "produces a catastrophe in the space of symbolic reference" ("The Speaking Subject" 218). It initiates the "[recreation] in ... speech [of] this pre-sentence-making disposition to rhythm, intonation, nonsense; makes nonsense abound within sense" (About Chinese Women 29-30). This catastrophe shows itself in the integration of "primary processes" -- most noticeably perhaps condensation -- within the order of syntax and word division, causing "the unity of morphemes" to break down. And she continues that "the most striking example of this process (which is only a simplification of the complex semiotic/symbolic relationship) can be found in Lewis Carroll" ("The Speaking Subject" 218) -- or, more precisely, in the explanation of portmanteau words which he gives in the "Preface" to "The Hunting of the Snark."

A Slithy Slobacious Semiotic:
Julia Kristeva Meets Nonsense

The potential for a relationship between Kristeva's theory of poetic language and nonsense is made clear in her single, brief gesture toward Carroll's work. Applying this theory to other examples, two of the pieces of Nonsense considered briefly in chapter one, will demonstrate its appropriateness for analyzing Nonsense.

The first, and most "logical," piece of Nonsense to return to is Carroll's "Jabberwocky," for in it Carroll began using the portmanteau words (like "mimsy") that Kristeva finds such apt examples of her description of poetic language's functioning. Looking at the first, and most difficult, stanza gives an indication of how the genotext and phenotext are interacting.

'Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.
As was argued in chapter one, syntactical structure, the positioning essential for communicating, is reasonably intact. So the phonotext, though not unscathed, is certainly discernible. Kristeva would probably argue that the portmanteaux demonstrate how, in some places, the syntactical divisions of the lines have collapsed—hence the condensation, for example, of "flimsy" and "miserable" (if Humpty Dumpty's word is taken on this) into "mimsy." Perhaps "brillig" is a word collapsing in on itself; Humpty Dumpty's glossing of it, read in a Kristevan framework, seems to imply as much. While one can still figure out which words function as nouns, which as verbs, there is a decided weakening of morphemic divisions.

Of course another way the symbolic organizes language into a stable system is by linking it (even if arbitrarily) to a referent: "this" means "that." In this respect, the semiotic creates numerous catastrophes. Words like "brillig," "toves," "wabe" and "borogoves" assault the denotative functioning of language; what, Alice and the reader ask, do such "words" refer to? However, because in Kristeva's system meaning is achieved through the process of establishing a "self" within a dichotomous flux, because that self is asserted only through discourse, the reader may be led to wonder not only about the sense of the word but also about the state of the subject. These words are not merely flippant coinages; they animate a tussle between the semiotic and symbolic—a tussle which the semiotic is momentarily winning. They are language in its "0-2" dimension, its carnivalized aspect, and show, despite Humpty's attempts to ground them in definition, the potential for an unruly multiplicity. Meaning, and so the self, is split apart by this semiotic infusion. Language, likened to a body, wrenches itself apart.

Equally important is this stanza's illustration of how the semiotic and the symbolic can co-exist, as they must in poetic language. Because Carroll's meaning doesn't fully dissolve, the ecstasy of
jouissance doesn't completely destroy meaning. It never can. The symbolic mode is always needed to articulate that ecstatic drive. That is why the logical structure of "Jabberwocky" is so important. Like the reeds in A.R. Ammons' "Small Song" which "give/ way to the// wind and give/ the wind away" (The Selected Poems 1951-1977 69), the symbolic gives form to the movement of desire. That is why, as was pointed out in the first chapter, even Artaud doesn't lose touch with form, though his translation of "Jabberwocky" is more desirous, less constrained, than Carroll's original.

One way of describing the genotext, according to Kristeva, is as "language's underlying foundation" (87). Part of that foundation is phonic -- so patterned sounds indicate a mixture of semiotic and symbolic. Lecercle insists that the phonetic laws of défiire overcome phonotactics (35), and that Artaud is a dramatic example of this overcoming. An even more dramatic example of sound rising up against meaning is found in the sound poetry which will be considered in chapter four. But all poetry uses sound patterns to work with or against (in Nonsense more usually against) the sense of its verse. And this stanza from "Jabberwocky" is no exception.

Its quite cacophonous balance of sounds is anticipated in the first word "'Twas." There's a flexibility of tongue required to start a word with "tw," with its dramatic balancing of hard and soft sounds. That same dramatic balancing carries over into the b, c and t/ m, s, and w opposition that marks this stanza. And neither hard nor soft can ultimately be declared winner -- an equality in struggle central to Nonsense. However, the sound patterns in this stanza produce an affective meaning -- as they did in Thibaudieau's "from Throgmole & Engeschna." "Slithy" sounds slippery and slick, even if one doesn't know its archaic meaning; "brillig" harsh and curt. The sound pluralizes an already split meaning; not only is meaning wrenched apart by the introduction of undefinable words, but it is also multiplied by
the connotations of sound patterning.

The genotext shows itself as well in such melodic devices as the regular and distracting rhythm of poetic language. In this stanza each of the first three lines is fairly regular iambic tetrameter. This bouncing rhythm leaves problematic words in its wake as the reader leaps along over pockets of unmeaning. The fourth line however changes, seems initially to fall short. Scanned // x/, this line undercuts the dominance of the iambic tetrameter by substituting a trimeter which never settles into a dominant pattern. The stanza's central rhythmic organizing principle (and rhythm, though a semiotic device, is always linked with the organization of the symbolic when it is expressed linguistically) is upset, but not entirely deposed in this final line. Here the semiotic plays hell with the order of meter, first submitting to structure, then toppling it, and finally allowing it to re-emerge momentarily.  

When the passage from Edward Lear's "The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World" was discussed in chapter one, its "mucilaginous"-ness, its buzzing intensity, was argued to be indicative of the push of a multiple and polyphonic language trying to break open unified signification. Kristeva offers a theoretical basis for just such a description; her diagnosis would be similar, her terminology different. The sound rush is not mucilaginous but semiotic; and the primacy of this pattern in which alliteration and assonance seem to dictate word choice over and above meaning shows how, in Lear's crisply structured passage, the genotext asserts itself. The "tops" of his "transitory" "Titmice" are probably "tumultuous," not because Titmice's tops tend towards tumult, but because alliteration demands it. In fact, how can the top of a Titmouse be tumultuous? The influx of sound is

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4 Rhythm allows language to mean in different, non-communicative ways, to mean musically. The semiotic's relationship with music, its ability to make language mean multiply will be discussed in the succeeding chapters, especially in chapter four.
such that either one's sense of the real, or one's understanding of the meanings of words, must be altered. Again a death drive presents itself in the form of phonic play for, by undermining one's notion of stable symbolic meaning, these excesses of sound undermine the stability of identity.

Of course there are far fewer examples here than in Carroll's "Jabberwocky" of the collapse of morphemes and the challenging of syntactic order. "Slobaciously" is the only instance of a visible break in syntactical divisions. However, Lear's oxymoronic use of adjectives and adverbs puts a strain upon syntax as a relational construct. If the symbolic maintains its grasp on the world by relating one word to another based on a very fixed notion of what each word denotes and on what terms it can relate to the words around it, then Lear's semiotic impulse negates that ordering by inserting contradiction into the relational process. How can "splendour" be "trivial"?

What one takes away from this brief glimpse of Nonsense through Kristeva's eyes is an awareness of how nonsensical language and poetic language function in very similar ways. One of the things the reader of Nonsense does is look for ways in which nonsense language works against meaning and attempts to unstructure sense within a sensical context or to infuse meaning with meaninglessness. And Kristeva's theory implies that one of the ways to read twentieth-century literature -- especially avant-garde poetry -- is to look for ways in which it, too, in structures and restructures meaning (see "Preface" to Desire in Language x).

Of course, any time poetry is analyzed one considers how formal systems of expression are shifted and distorted; one looks for ambiguities and multiple possibilities in reference. Although deconstructive readings are urging criticism away from singlemindedness, traditional and practical criticism generally relates perceived ambiguities back into a larger, thematic framework. For instance, Hopkins uses alliteration to reify a theme, to consolidate the
inscape of a poem; he wrenches words to demonstrate the inadequacy of language to express the infinite, and on and on and on. Admittedly, Christ is the transcendental signified for Hopkins, but his linguistic play can signify other ways of meaning too. Kristeva and Nonsense theory both question the ability to mean univocally -- not just in the hope of serving a higher meaning, or in an effort to negate meaning entirely. These theories explore how a poem can hold meaning and meaninglessness in a symbiotic relation, how it can work against its own inclination toward meaning. This inclination is important to acknowledge, however, because in all except the most extreme experimental poetry, it is embodied in an ultimately undefeatable gesture toward meaning.

The semiotic, in Kristeva semanalysis, is entertained in language not to reassert the validity of the symbolic's stance, but rather to shake up notions of that stance, of self and society, to insinuate the tenuousness of these "firm" ideas. Poetic language, as a burst of the semiotic within language, purposefully reveals the basis of the self in a semiotic process which the thetic attempts to hide. Wendy Steiner argues that "poetry performs the feat of returning semiotic motivation to language, of rescuing the word from its failed merging with the world" (93). And Nonsense, especially in Stewart's analysis, increasingly disrupts common sense, revealing the tenuousness of common sense as a "foundation" for society, highlighting the ideology inherent in "truths" which are commonly taken for granted.

Where Nonsense and semanalysis differ, at least in my picturing of them, is in the pairing off of their inherent oppositions. Kristeva offers a dual model, semiotic/symbolic, which might be diagrammed like this:
It could be argued that the thetic stands as a third term in Kristeva's system; if that is so the thetic (located about where I've put the slash, and taking a form similar to a slash) is a silent term. It is a holding in, a separating of the semiotic and the symbolic. Lechte explains:

the thetic is also the precondition of the difference between signifier and signified, denotation and connotation, language and referent; in effect it is the basis of all theses and antitheses, of all oppositions (135).

It is a place of rupture, not merger, as is the site of the unary signifier in Lacan's diagram (see p. 101). But the semiotic is intensely slippery, and not easily held back. Nonsense language occurs in a Kristevan framework when that third term, the thetic, is breached, when an abundance of the semiotic spills over into the realm of signification.

Nonsense, as I view it, holds a different three-termed system:

Meaninglessness

Meaninglessness/meaning (the domains of nonsense)

Meaning.

When spatialized, this system might look like this:
Meaning here is like the equilateral triangle of Kristeva's symbolic but, as in Lacan's picture of the unary signifier, it blends with Meaninglessness (what Lacan calls Being). This blending results in nonsense, not non-meaning, in a parody of the meaningful triangle whose one side bulges out in willful mockery. That bulge, at once the side of the meaning's triangle and the arc of the meaninglessness' circle is the line poetry treads. That sharp focal point at which the last vestiges of sense appear in meaninglessness is the point of traditionally-conceived madness.

There are some dramatic differences between Kristeva's theory of poetic language and nonsense. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two, and the potential usefulness of her system in analyzing Nonsense and poetry, certainly justify using Kristeva's terminology and some of her ideas. Such borrowing, of course, is in the spirit of Nonsense, which steals in order to alter, which breaks apart what it borrows.

Birth of the Bandar-logician: Nonsensical Readings of Poetry

The point of this thesis is not to equate Nonsense with poetry,
which rests between Nonsense and Meaning. Rather its intent is to relate Nonsense and poetry, to find ways in which a reading of Nonsense can serve the reading of poetry, to make readers Bandar-logicians who hunt out the "bandar-logos" in poetry, who reach out and (as David Byrne says in the film, *Stop Making Sense*) "touch monkeys."

Touch them, not become them. The intent is not, as in the epigraph from Marianne Moore, to "[tremble] about/ in inarticulate frenzy" but rather to recognize in another sort of (in)articulable frenzy, in the incursion of the semiotic, a useful way into difficult poems. Neither is the intent to produce critical Nonsense, although there are examples of that form of criticism in existence. Frances Huxley's *The Raven and The Writing Desk* and Judith Crewes' "Plain Superficiality" are probably the best examples of this type of criticism. Both approach Carroll's works "with a wry seriousness" (Huxley 8) and a wonderfully wingy logic (à la Carroll) that leaves the reader panting to keep up with their mental aerobics. Huxley and Crewes' works are spirited and exciting, but they aren't really in the realm of the Bandar-logician.

Numerous critics have noted a relationship of some sort between Nonsense and poetry since both play with language. A common cross-over point is the recognition of poetry as a game; Michel Beaujour (58) and Michael Riffaterre (14) are among those who comment upon this poetic quality. Susan Vigeois argues that "all figurative language [itself an example of linguistic play (145)] begins in nonsense and depends for its success on retaining an element of that quality" (143); like figurative language, nonsense "must be fresh enough to catch the reader off guard" (144).

Poetry has something else in common with Nonsense, another shared quality which makes the application of "nonsensical" reading techniques seem appropriate. While poetry almost always has an undefeatable gesture toward meaning (even if that meaning must, as Derrida would
insist, be read as limited by the system of thought which produced it), that gesture is not, especially in twentieth-century poetry, limited to a thematic or sententious meaningfulness. In Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language, G.L. Bruns quotes Valery: "if anyone wonders . . . what I 'wanted to say' in a certain poem, I reply that I did not want to say but wanted to make, and that it was the intention of making which wanted what I said." Bruns concludes, then, that "[p]oetry in this sense literally ceases to be an act of meaning, insofar as the intentionality of the utterance is so thoroughly of a technical order" (87). Poetry can mean, or intend, without having a definitive statement. Michael Rifaterrer argues in Semiotics of Poetry that "by saying something literature can say nothing" (17). And Canadian poet Don McKay takes over Auden's comment "poetry makes nothing happen" ("In Memory of W.B. Yeats" 82), and re-locates his stress, to insist "poetry makes nothing happen" ("Notes on Poetic Attention" 208). Rather than being powerless, having no "social" purpose, poetry is a means to energize, activate "nothing." Whether or not poetry engages social issues, whether or not it has a political point, it still can embrace the negativity inherent in signification, can in fact be more political, more active, by using semiotic devices to disrupt the language which implicitly defines social structures. The nothing which poetry makes happen is the nothingness of the semiotic, a very potent nothingness.

Poetry may well share Nonsense's dynamic stasis, its determined waffling over meaning and sense, or at least a portion thereof. It is this point of kinship, more than the ludic spirit of both poetry and nonsense, more than any other element that connects the two, which makes Nonsense a useful tool for looking at poetry. To make nothing happen, to make it happen even in a context which seems to be saying something -- this is the quality of poetry which attracts the Bandar-logic.

Looking at poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins and Dylan Thomas will demonstrate how the "nothing" of poetry is generated.
David Sonstroem, in his article "Making Earnest of the Game," contends that looking at Hopkins in terms of nonsense is a useful approach. He suggests that "Hopkins' severity is tempered by occasional frolic . . . and [that] a melancholy underlies Lear's superficial playfulness" (192-3). Both writers have a childlike element in their work; but he adds, "the greatest similarity between the two is simply in the texture and flow of their lines" (193). He goes on to list the many stylistic (nonsensical) elements which shape the flow of Hopkins' lines, the flow of his desires, as Kristeva would say.

Hopkins, Sonstroem notices, uses portmanteau words, and runs other words together -- for example "Amansstrength," "churlsgrace" -- a technique which Sonstroem considers a variant on portmanteaux. He also pulls words together by hyphenating them -- "dappled-with-damson," "seraph-arrival," "Never-eldering." In "Spring and Fall: to a young child," the first four lines are themselves a nonsense jungle. And what is nonsensical about a word like "unleaving" (which seems only a short jaunt from the "legitimate" unleafling) is not just its morphemic upheaval but also its palimpsestic functioning. It conflates the forms of verb and noun, holds activity and stasis together in one nonsensical word. The roots of this neologism are clear. "Unleaving" is itself, but it is also "leaf"/"leaves" and "to leave." Theologically this functions as an incarnation of the active verbal, the divine union of speech and act linked to creation in Genesis. It also creates a union of the temporal (static) and the eternal (active).

Hopkins uses sound, especially alliteration, to connect disparate words and establish a phonic subtext; this line from "The Windhover" shows how one alliterative pattern slides into another: "I caught this morning morning's minion, king/don of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding". Internal rhyme -- "Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion" ("The Windhover"); "Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's" ("As kingfishers catch fire") --
offers another, sometimes conflicting, pattern of sound to augment the alliteration. End-rhyme is often forced (Sonstroem 193); words are split "at the end of a line for an unusual rhyme" (194). Lists (usually adjectival ones) are frequently used (194), for example: "Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon, all on two spools; part, pen, pack" ("Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves").

After remarking upon the similarity of techniques used by Lear and Hopkins, Sonstroem entertains their differences:

Whereas the conventional poet's practice is first to make sense and yet have it come out rhyme, and the nonsense poet's practice is first to make rhyme and have it come out to the embarrassment of sense, Hopkins' practice is first to make rhyme and yet have it come out sense (200).

The emphasis on rhyme can be traced to Sonstroem's insistence that "rhyme is [Nonsense's] primary reason" (198). And, while clearly his distinction is not mine, it is of some use here. In Kristeva's terms the quotation above might read as follows: conventional poetry aims at sense and communication (phenotext) but lets in moderate amounts of sound play (desire/genotext); Nonsense overwhelmingly lets in desire until it inundates the phenotext, revealing the thetic and embarrassing the symbolic, but never eradicating the phenotext; Hopkins starts with desire (genotext) as a motivating principle but uses it to bolster the phenotext. Such a "translation" is not just a handy way to work in some thick terminology -- for each word carries with it the connotations of psychology and desire in which Kristeva's pursuit is grounded, and so widens considerably the implications of Sonstroem's distinctions. There is no denying that Hopkins is a poet of sense, of theological sense; but like Buddhist koans, his poems use nonsense to reach that sense.

Two elements of Hopkins' poetic -- "sprung rhythm" and "inscape" -- add to this nonsensicality. In his "Author's Preface," Hopkins calls sprung rhythm the rhythm of common speech, of written prose, of music
and of nursery rhyme (49). In it, he says, the first syllable of every foot is always stressed, and can be followed by slack syllables (in number ranging from none to three). The length of feet is not fast, but varies from monosyllabic feet to those composed of four syllables. What is related to the establishment of a genotext is not only the lilting rhythm this method of scanning results in, but also its tendency to "move over" (48); in this method of scanning the line breaks are discounted, feet can uninterruptedly span the end and beginnings of lines. So the rhythm, the arrangement of the sound, works against the more formal line breaks. Paradoxically, the movement of common speech, or Hopkins' version thereof, is used to undermine its more structured and conventional poetic equivalent.

Inscape, Hopkins' belief in the "Thisness" of a thing, in the presence of its being, seems at first an odd inclusion in the list of nonsense techniques and principles. But, while Hopkins clearly is working with a different, a divine sense of being, quite alien to Kristeva's notion of the being-ness of semiotic presence or to Lacan's concept of being, inscape does motivate the linguistic distortions which Kristeva attributes to the semiotic. Desire is not unlike a frustrated need to "be" in language, to fulfill the demands of an overwrought "being" in terms of representation. Within a very different framework, Hopkins seems to have isolated a similar problem: the split between being and language. Where Hopkins differs most is his eventual attribution of inscape to language, to every word, so that -- even as it seeks to express the inscape of various things linguistically -- language "becomes a counterpart of reality, not because it imitates some object, but because it acquires an inscape of its own, a self-sustaining individuality that distinguishes it from all other realities" (Korg 15). By granting language an inscape, and so removing it from the realm of mere representation, of mere symbol, Hopkins' theory of inscape in effect resolves Kristeva's dichotomy theologically. In Kristevan terms,
it allows the semiotic a recognized status within language; desire is
satisfied, the thetic unnecessary because the split between signifier
and signified is resolved, theoretically at least, by inscape. Rather
than breaking the Kristeva diagram down further, as Nonsense theory
does, Hopkins unifies the elements of the diagram and mixes together
Meaning and Being; God, Law and Desire. Rather than reading divinity as
the instigator of division, he sees it as the cure for division. His
mixture doesn't debase theology and order, though it wrenches language;
rather, in theory, it theologizes language, accords it the greater
authority of concrete existence.

A brief look at "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves" (see Appendix III for
the text of the poem) will illustrate some of these principles more
thoroughly. The poem follows the Italian sonnet form: the octave
centres on the evening, as it "strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all,
home-of-all, hearse-of-all night," and as the speaker anticipates its
descent apocalyptically as death and judgement (or in the guise of
despair). The sestet warns that dualities alone exist, that one must
choose between "two flocks, two folds -- black, white; right, wrong";
its world is perilous and bleak.

This is a difficult poem with many long, alliterative and assonant
words. These are often piled on top of each other, "Earnest, earthless,
equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous, ... stupendous." This first
line not only establishes three assonantal and alliterative groups (e,
v, s) but also, with its ellipsis, keeps one in awe, in anticipation, as
the final s pattern (a secondary theme in each of the first) is
confirmed. And the turn from a pattern of assonantal e's to
alliterative v's is set up to work against itself initially. The
breaking point is "Attuneable" -- meaning to be harmonious, equal; but
phonic equivalency (alliteration/assonance) is shifted to another
(albeit related) phoneme. Only after ellipsis, after a further break,
are the patterns made harmonious, strung together by their alliterated
Alliteration and assonance are dominant motivating principles in every line of this poem: "But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell"; "Where, selfwrung, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts against thoughts in groans grind." The genotext of this poem is almost unavoidable. Sound overwhelms sense; the thickly woven patterns eventually achieve the harmonizing effect of night, as all sounds are muffled and fade into, merge with, one another. The individuality of the poem, of its words, faces the same threat of extinction which the speaker fears from overwhelming night. He moves to accomplish linguistically the very death which he dreads, the equalizing and evening out which causes his despair. Thus the poem is a capsule of dread and desire.

The frequent hyphenating of words is another example of semiotic pressure, of the collapse which the tone of this poem so eloquently presses: "Fire-featuring," "tool-smooth," "womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all."3 This last example has also an incremental power which, because of the common denominator (of-all), implicitly joins womb/home/hearse and so runs the course of human life. Other words are run together, more solidly joined: "beakleaved," "selfwrung," "selfstrung." And the dialect word "throughther" stands as a portmanteau, as two words welded almost indistinguishably.

Other elements of the genotext lead one to perceive, beneath these tones of despair, a self-negating welcome. Words are repeated throughout the poem in various contexts -- "black" and "all," for example. The constant repetition, or rather near repetition, of words and phrases in the same line is also another mark of the semiotic's involvement. One of the clearest examples is "her earliest stars, earlstars," where repetition breaks down syntactic divisions, and the

3 Regarding a linguistic device as common as hyphenation as an incursion of the semiotic indicates that even language which seems purely communicative may have elements of semiotic upheaval.
component parts of the first blend in the second. One sees, in this near repetition, a phrase falling in upon itself, the way night works. Other partial repetitions give a sense of peering through a darkness in which words maintain only the faintest outlines of their uniqueness: "selfwrung, selfstrung"; "Her fond yellow hornlight . . . her wild hollow hoarlight" (ironically it is the "hornlight"/"hoarlight" which is most deeply immersed in the darkness of echoic play); "But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each off the other." Besides Hopkins' overt gesture of interior doubleness ("off" as opposed to "of"), this latter example engages exact repetition and homonymic repetition: that is, rhyme -- which Sonstroem, quoted above, calls Nonsense's reason for being, and which Barthes considers a "structural scandal" (Elements of Semiology 87).

Rhyming is another way Hopkins blends the poem into a homogeneous mass. The poem follows the rigorous rhyme scheme of its sonnet form (abbaabacdcddd) which, despite its relationship with the semiotic, gives some order to the poem, but is counteracted by more determined half-rhymes and internal rhymes. This pull to internal sound play is reminiscent of cynghanedd, the Welsh metrical form which rigidly requires such rhyming and alliteration. Hopkins' reader is constantly shifted away from the poem's forward movement and back into the morass of the lines themselves. The prevalence of half-rhymes, like "Earnest," "earthless," "earliest," "earlstars" and "earth," depict a coming together across numerous lines, and not just a turning back in towards the centre of individual lines. The tentative ordering of formal rhyme is greatly shaken by internal rhyme as, once again, words fold back into one another. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that Sonstroem likens Hopkins' poetry to a word game similar to Carroll's Doublets, which works on the principle that one word contains many (all?) others (200).

The splitting of "astray" in lines 5/6 is another example of the
genotext, of the semiotic's pressure. The rhyme scheme demands that the word break -- as/tray -- in order to rhyme with "stupendous" and "us."
The structure clearly favours materiality over semantic value. But this disruption seems even more dramatic than that caused by the internal rhyming and alliteration because, while all other elements of the semiotic intervention have tended to bleed things together, this one breaks them apart. The breaking open of any word inside a poetic which, because it sees a relation between the Divine Word and the poetically inscaped word, regards each word as a unique and vital thing in itself, is a serious matter. The wholeness of the word is split open. Kristeva might argue the self is shown to be fractured; her "diagnosis" would not be wholly misapplied.

In the midst of its speaker's fear of death and torment, this poem animates just such a loss of individuality. Language is so distorted by this excess of inscape that, ironically, its own principle of uniqueness is undermined. All the phonic examples of life's manyness, its continual interconnectedness lead to uniformity -- except in the one instance (dramatic in its very isolation) when one word is broken into parts. The reader is left, linguistically, with two poles: the choice between "two flocks, two folds," between the immersing or the fracturing of identity. Either all words become one word, in which case their uniqueness, their being-ness is lost, or each word becomes more than one word (and this is possibly another way to read the rhyming and blending of words), in which case, again, uniqueness is lost.

For the Bandar-logician, this poem courts union with that which it seeks to avoid. It is both a warning about the horrors of death, night and judgement, and a linguistic invitation to enter into them. As the speaker holds black and white to be the only alternatives, the only "choices," as he paints such a chilling picture of this blackness, his language blackens itself. The beauty of this linguistic blackness further subverts the seeming direction of the poem. Hopkins uses many
typically poetic conventions — rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, repetition
— but uses them with an extravagance more akin to nonsense. What is
most important to this reading is that he does so to the partial
contradiction of his "sense." The meaning of the poem is not destroyed,
but it is pluralized and relativized as it entertains its own
contradiction. Of course, a great deal more can be said about "Spelt
from Sibyl's Leaves." But the poetic strategies which a nonsensical
reading discovers have, at least, been glimpsed.

Bringing a nonsensical point of view to Dylan Thomas' poems seems
almost redundant, for he stands as a poetic homo ludens. His work is
full of jarring juxtapositions which make sense uncertain and difficult.
Connections are far from obvious. Thomas claimed to use "old tricks,
new tricks, puns, portmanteau-words, paradox, allusion, paronomasia,
paragram, catachresis, slang, assonantal rhymes, vowel rhymes, [and]
prung rhythm" ("Notes" 189) in his writing — almost all of which are
to be found in Nonsense's own bag of tricks.

The genotext of his poetry finds one of its strongest voicings in
the musical elements and qualities which make up the latter part of this
"list." His love of nursery rhymes, poems which he claims seduced him
with their rendering of language into pure sound, is a focal point in
his poetic:

The first poems I knew were nursery rhymes, and before I
could read them for myself I had come to love just the words
of them, the words alone. What the words stood for,
symbolised, or meant, was of very secondary importance.
What mattered was the sound of them as I heard them for the
first time on the lips of the remote and incomprehensible
grown-ups who seemed, for some reason, to be living in my
world. And these words were, to me, as the notes of bells,
the sounds of musical instruments, the noises of wind, sea,
and rain, the rattle of milkcarts, the clopping of hooves on
cobbles, the fingering of branches on a window pane, might be to someone, deaf from birth, who has miraculously found his hearing. I did not care what the words said, overmuch, nor what happened to Jack and Jill and the Mother Goose rest of them; I cared for the shapes of sound that their names, and the words describing their actions, made in my ears . . . . Out of them came the gusts and grunts and hiccups and heehaws of the common fun of the earth; and though what the words meant was, in its own way, often deliciously funny enough, so much funnier seemed to me, at that almost forgotten time, the shape and shade and size and noise of the words as they hummed, strummed, juggled and galloped along (185-86).

This love of "the shape and shade and size and noise of . . . words" is carried over into his own densely musical lines.

Such phonic play is augmented by other, equally nonsensical tactics: his gentle bending of syntactic rules, his metaphorical and metonymic word replacements, his sensitive exploitation of line breaks, his linking of constructive and destructive elements in single image-complexes, and his use of connotation to emphasize the reverberations occasioned by his juxtaposition of seemingly disparate matter.

Susan Vigeurs points to "Fern Hill" as an example of the apparent nonsense in Thomas' work:

rules of grammar are being ignored -- and those rules aren't arbitrary, but have to do with the way we order the world.
Words have been jolted out of their normal relationship with each other (143).

Vigeurs seems to be using "grammar" in an extremely prescriptive and narrow sense. Thomas may be quite associative in his linking of words but he has not disrupted, in any major way, the structural integrity of his sentences; his sentences are always, at the very least, semi-
grammatical, more often fully so. However, she is right in commenting on the nonsensicalness of his work -- a nonsensicalness achieved lexically more often than syntactically. Even the simple substitution of "sun" for "day," quite a practical sort of metonymic twist, begins to take meaning in a non-communicative direction, to require a different sort of attentive engagement with the words and a questioning of their referential function.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air

And playing, lovely and watery
And fire green as grass.

Such metonymic substitution, like sound play, is central to Thomas' ludic writing.

Thomas describes his process of writing in terms which could have been lifted right out of the discussion of Nonsense in the first chapter:

I let, perhaps, an image be "made" emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual and critical forces I possess -- let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within my imposed formal limits, conflict. Each image holds within it the seed of its own destruction, and my dialectical method, as I understand it, is a constant building up and breaking down of the images that come out of the central seed, which is itself destructive and constructive at the same time (quoted in Treece, Dylan Thomas 37n).

Though one might question the presence of a rigid dialectic in his work, it's interesting that Thomas believes his images work this way. It may
be more to the point to call his a poetic of noncontradictory opposition which revels in the fullness of meaning. Such an opposition, a "creative destruction, destructive creation," is what he required of fellow poet Vernon Watkins (Watkins 38). To borrow Pound's phrase, Thomas' poetry, like Joyce's prose, is "charged with meaning," with the multiplicity of meaning such critics as Rieke and Stewart relate to nonsense.

Thomas relies a great deal on connotation, on what Barthes calls "the development of a system of second-order meanings, which are so to speak parasitic on the language proper" (Elements 30), in attempting to achieve this language. Kaja Silverman explains the theory of connotation which Barthes develops in S/Z this way:

A connotative signified or sense perpetuates the play of signification. It represents the antithesis of a transcendental signified . . . . The connotative signified always refers beyond itself, appears . . . "pregnant" with additional disclosures. It constitutes a hermeneutic as well as a semic element since it prolongs the search for "truth" . . . . Reading or viewing . . . is thus a process of "skidding" from one signified to another (256).

Discussing Thomas' reliance on connotation in his notes to "Altarwise by owl-light," which is arguably Thomas' most nonsensical piece of work, Daniel Jones suggests that the sequence is held together not by the common logic of reason but by "the logic of a common relationship" (263). But such a suggestion seems limited, for the workings of connotation, of the plurality of Thomas' references and interconnections argue for many relationships. These may be held communally, but they certainly (to read another sense of "common" into Jones' comment) are not ordinary. The continual sliding of images, of relations and so of sense, works dramatically against the stability of communication which Kristeva makes requisite in the symbolic dimension
and which would necessarily, one assumes, be found underlying "the logic of a common relationship." Jones's analysis, intentionally or not, implies a tendency towards univocality in Thomas' work which is hard to hear over the din of his echoing cat calls.

The nonsensical wealth of Thomas' work deserves sustained attention, but a look at sonnet VI of the "Altarwise" sequence (see Appendix III for the text) will at least give an indication of the richness of sound, image and connotation to be found in the poem as a whole, and in Thomas' corpus. The sixth is perhaps the most indeterminate of all the sonnets in the "Altarwise" sequence. While the words engender numerous possibilities for meaning, and are densely allusive to (among other things) Christian and Classical mythology, they never settle down into any definite, definitive sense. Several of the images -- for instance Adam, the cock, the sirens, the cards -- connect with the rest of the sonnets in the sequence; others, like the sea, connect with different poems. Words are repeated within the stanza: "love,""lop,""pluck,""eye,""tallow,""wax"; so their meanings accumulate. These interrelationships don't help pin meaning down; instead they offer more ways for various lines to mean, more contexts for generating that meaning. What reverberations lie between "his" (or the water's) tallow-eyes and the "tallow" the narrator blows from the "wax's tower"? And what resonances lie between the "manwax" (the semen from sex with sea-women?) and "the wax's tower" (candle? phallus?) and the "old cock"? Such "intratextual" webbing only accents language's manyness.

But to speak of language's manyness seems almost too understated a way of designating what happens in this poem. Words not only relate to one another through deft twists of image and association, but also give the illusion of containing or bearing other words as a result of those associations. The most dramatic example is probably "the stinging siren," which almost asks to be read as "the singing siren" also. As in
Hopkins' poetry, language functions as a palimpsest; one reads through the printed word to the other possible words, or combinations of words, which continually write other senses into the poem.

Thomas' language at once combines a raw physicality with his metaphorical and metonymic tendencies toward linguistic substitution; he uses language at a remove, substituting one term for another like an intensely sensuous dictionary with metre ("What is the metre of the dictionary?" asks the first line of sonnet IV). The comparison is not intended to damn him as prosaic (who could?) or dull (who would want to?); rather the comparison is meant to link him into that Nonsense world of linguistic equivalency and play, of language taken to literal and literary extreme -- for he successfully balances both in the multiplicity of his writing.

To augment this variousness of meaning, Thomas uses adjectives which seem to have no immediately obvious relation to the words they modify. These rival Lear's "Diaphanous Doorscraper" ("The Story of the Four Little Children" 106) for sheer nonsense and fun -- for instance, "oyster vowels," those diphthongal vowels that close up on themselves. If proof of the nonsensical orientation of metaphor is needed, this image will surely serve. Yet the image can be read as a delineation of the selecting of meaningful phonemes out of the vast pool of pre-linguistic sound. These "oyster vowels" are "split through" by the "tallow-eyed" "He" of the previous line, as he "burns" sea silence on a wick of words." The sibilance of "sea silence" is already awash, an amorphous noise to be cut through, sorted out, into meaningful sound, to be sacrificed to the "wick" (of a candle, of liveliness) of words. The splitting open of the oyster vowels is analogous to the fall into language, the coming into the phonemes of the symbolic and staid reason. Such slicing open of noise, to make it more easily categorized, more univocal, anticipates the lopping of the minstrel tongue later in this same sonnet.
As well, Thomas displaces and juxtaposes words so that they modify in various directions. Because of its placement, "tallow-eyed" in the sonnet's second line could be referring not only to "he" but also to "water," though how water can be tallow-eyed is a puzzle. And to what does the first line of the stanza refer? Is "He" a "cartoon" -- a comic, or a sketch for a painting -- or is the cartoon the action which occupies the remaining lines of the sonnet? If this latter suggestion is the case, what colouring does this give to the "characters" -- to Adam and the medusa, to the "old cock" and the sirens, all figures of grave mythical import? Such relational disparity breaks the hold of the symbolic realm of representation, for it makes impossible a definitive reading of the poem. By granting words like "Adam, time's joker" a measure of independence, Thomas insinuates the potentiality for all words to slip away from representation.

There are semiotic pressures on morphology here too. The division between words is threatened; rather than using portmanteau words or running words together, Thomas joins words by hyphenating them, works against the "[lopping of] the minstrel's tongue" by forcing out words faster, in closer succession. "Tide-traced," "tallow-eyed," "pin-hilled," "bagpipe-breasted": each of these relatively unconventional juxtapositions moves towards the weakening of what syntax designates as a single word. That some of the pairs are alliterative only brings the two words closer together.

Slips in syntax and morphology are not Thomas' sole means of pulling away from singular representation. One need only mention the elusiveness of his allusions and his use of a grab-bag of myths, of possible origins and explanations which all vie for a favourable presentation. Thomas' mythic landscape is chaotic at best -- certainly an ironic comment on myths intended to order perceptions of the world; many of these mythic symbols are also intended (in the beliefs out of which they grow) to direct perception away from the order of the world
proposed by some of the very mythologies with which they are juxtaposed in this sequence. Thus, Thomas again nods in the direction of manyness.

Like his mythology, Thomas' soundscape is hardly clear-cut; the genotext is almost at the height of its musical powers in this sonnet. The stanza's alliteration and sibilance are but one aspect of this: "sea silence on a wick of words"; "stinging siren's eye"; "The bagpipe-breasted ladies in the deadweed/ Blew out the blood gauze through the wound of manwax." The onomatopoetic sound of "Pluck" is followed by a succession of equally brusque monosyllables: "cock, my sea eye." Even the rhyme pattern of this sonnet (abca'b'bcadef) is hard to stabilize. But many of these rhymes are achieved through a violent wrenching as sound refracts throughout the sonnet, as violent a wrenching, perhaps, as the opening of the first phonic oyster. Half-rhymes and near-rhymes predominate over true rhymes -- "manwax"/"index"; "till"/"tallow"; "pluck"/"cock"; "lop"/"love." Like Hopkins, Thomas engages in heightened sound play. But the thrust of his genotext is far from homogeneous; rather it constantly pulls away from any attempt to knit together.

Another nonsensical feature of the poem is its self-consciousness. The denseness of the lines, the unnaturalness of image and juxtaposition constantly remind the reader that this is a construction, an artifact, something outside the natural flow of the world, of language and of sound. How could a line like "By lava's light split through the oyster vowels" not set itself off? Moreover, if one accepts the interpretation given above, the line not only calls attention to itself because of its arcane imagery, but also reflects upon the very basic issue of the relationship between meaning and language. The awkwardness of the images frames the work with an implicit self-referentiality, and highlights the poet's difficult and skewed relations with language. He is behind all of these images, saying, "Here I am, back here, orchestrating all these oyster vowels, and it's not easy, given the
rifts in the wholeness of sound."

It would be pointless to say that in the "Altarwise" sequence Thomas contradicts his sense; it would be pointless as well to suggest that Thomas establishes a solid and reliable, albeit hidden, framework of sense. That is why Nonsense is such a useful tool in reading this poem and other Thomas poems. All these factors taken together don't make Thomas a poet who undercuts the sense of his own poems, but rather one who engages sense viscerally, who gestures towards meaning in an "un-meaningful" way. For all the abstraction which Jones notes in Thomas' poetic (263), he writes muscle onto the sinew of sense.

An important aspect of the nonsensical nature of Thomas' work lies in the fact that it plays to the senses as opposed to "sense." This seeming contradiction of the senselessness of the physical senses, the nonsense of the body, will be explored more fully in the next chapter.
"Hunting-Song of the Bandar-logician"

As soon as linguistic desires are fanned,
Critic, the semiotic gets out of hand.

The Jungle Book isn't unlike this thesis, at least structurally. Between its prose chapters or stories are poems -- tight poems, quite formal in rhyme, rhythm and stanza, augmenting some aspect of the story they're "attached" to. Poetic eruptions in the midst of a prose miscellany, their presence creates a tension, a linear disruption in line with the temporal and geographic non-conformity of the volume. While Kipling is hardly an iconoclastic or experimental poet, when he surrounds one of his poems with less materially-structured language he calls attention to the discrepancy between styles of language; the material or poetic elements of the poems' language are tougher to ignore because of their prose neighbours. "Road-Song of the Bandar-log," the companion poem to "Kaa's Hunting," demonstrates not only Kipling's strong adherence to poetic form, and so the foregrounding of material elements of language, but also the dissolution of that form when those elements get seriously "out of hand," and the semiotic establishes one order merely to supplant it by positing others.

Sure signs that the thetic has been breached are the presence in language of repetition and of a dominant rhyme scheme; the "Road-Song," not surprisingly, has both. Its first two stanzas, of eight lines each, are strongly ordered by rhyme, are, in fact, clusters of rhyming couplets. And the final couplet of the first stanza -- "Now you're
angry, but -- never mind,/ Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!" -- appears with slight variations in the final couplet of the second stanza. The change, minor as it is, establishes repetition as a force of flux (since it always occasions change) in the poem, instead of using it, as one might otherwise, as a stabilizing device; the twist in technique is important since the Bandar-log we're told in "Kaa's Hunting," communicate almost wholly through the repetition of other animals' speech, through inhabiting and distorting other creatures' language. Repetition animates the parasitic nature of the Bandar-log's speech, animates as well the subversiveness and anarchy inherent in it.

The third stanza continues the pattern of clustering couplets, and the generative change encouraged by repetition. Rather than ending with a small change to the closing couplet used in the earlier two stanzas, however, it concludes with a triplet which alters that earlier couplet, and then extends it. Reworking the form, Kipling uses this final triplet not only to lend insistence to the most important rhyming sound in the whole poem, but also to herald an even greater break from the established form: the introduction of a new stanza form, a new rhythm and a new rhyme pattern.

The last stanza changes entirely; a quatrains with considerably longer lines, it has no couplets. Rather it follows an ABCB rhyme pattern. This loosening of the poem's previously rigid rhyme scheme allows other rhyming possibilities to creep in; the phonic movement calls attention to itself by sliding (slantwise) out of one pattern and into another. The stanza's first line ends with a slant rhyme connecting it, tenuously, to all the final lines of the previous stanzas: "pines" -- "mind," "behind," "kind." And the third line of this final stanza has no rhyming co-ordinate -- except internally. In fact, the only lines in the poem without true end rhymes are also the only lines with internal rhyme.
Much of this poem concerns noise, "the noble noise" which the
Bandar-log make, stealing and jabbering the discourse of the world
around them. It's significant, then, that the most noticeable, most
jarring, break in the poem's rhyme comes at the point when the Bandar-
log jabber is named "noise." The noise of the poem, thematic and sonal,
is doubly emphasized by this breaking open of the rhyming pattern.
"Pines," though it has no true end rhyme, can still engage in some
phonic patterning without relying upon the rhyme within its line. But
if "make" is to rhyme, it can do so only by playing its sound back over
its own line, only by re-routing the forward flow of the poem's
movement.

Such turning back to the line renews attention to the changes in
rhythmic structure within it, and the other lines of this stanza, as
well. The lines of the first three stanzas each have four feet and
balance iambics against trochees. For instance, the first stanza is made
up, with very little variation, of lines composed of two iambics and two
trochees. A slight tension is created between these feet since the
verse never lets one rhythm predominate. The fourth stanza, comprised
of four lines of iambic hexameter, throws itself almost wholly over to
iambics. The stretching out of lines, and the privileging of one rhythmic
foot, allows sound, in a sense, to take over; the temporalizing of sound
becomes at once more regular (so more noticeable) and more sustained.

Like the word at the end of its third line, this stanza jars with
the rest of the poem's movement, disrupts the patterns already
established while instituting another type of regularity; a rigidity of
rhyme and a doubleness of rhythm is replaced by a doubleness of rhyme
and a rhythm of increased rigidity. Each "opposition" is orderly and
alternative, but the final stanza provides greater room for sound to
resonate and a less hesitant -- more sweeping -- rhythmic movement.
Rhyme, rhythm and sound play are used to emphasize their own abilities
to generate meaning, their versatility in exploring alternative orders.
Kipling may have styled this a poetic working through of the Bandar-log's inability to sustain any sort of order, to follow through on their intentions (a theme of both the poem and the previous chapter), but this spiralling of sound is simultaneously indicative of the semiotic's explosive unruliness. The formal structure which contains and promotes phonic play is potentially vulnerable to it.

Another equally overt indication of the chora's assault on communicative meaning is Kipling's typographical use of italics. Italics emphasize the one line truly shared by the first three stanzas -- "Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!" -- and the final disjunctive stanza. Each of these uses emphasizes one aspect of semiotic incursion already discussed here; the first repetition, almost a trademark of the semiotic, and the other the dramatic change in sound value occasioned by an undermining of the rhythmic and rhyming patterns of the earlier stanzas.

The other use of italics in "Road-Song" is more intriguing; "-- go --" which ends the fifth line of the poem is italicized. It serves a double function, acting as a parenthetical, demonstrative adjective, a gesture that points at once outside of the poem to an imagined concrete object and inside the poem to the description in the next line, the very description which, by interrupting the flow of the language, it delays. "-- go --" gives the description through gestural language and prevents, momentarily, the relaying of such a description linguistically. The technique, itself a gesture, is both futile and full, potent. The word simultaneously resonates with the rhyming pattern it supports to the detriment of the symbolic, and underlines the communicative and referential aspects of language. Similarly it offers both caesura and a partial stop for the end of a line which would, c. rwise, continue on into enjambement; the pause is inflicted, not natural. "-- go --" in this context is a highly Nonsensical word, an interface between semiotic and symbolic, serving the needs of both at the same time.
One aspect of the poem remains to be considered; its tendency to deflect speech, to leave things unstated, to . . . "never mind." The technique, repeated by Kipling in the first three stanzas, does more than add to the characterization of the Bandar-log though by emphasizing their shiftlessness and their lack of staying power it does do that. It raises the problem of nonsensical speaking, of things being said and unsaid simultaneously. Given the strength of the rhyme pattern, one is tempted either to view this "coyness" as being arbitrarily conceived in order to suit the phonic structure of the poem, or to substitute other rhyming and rhythmic possibilities, to seek out the words which may lie behind the deflections. If the former is true and Kipling chooses to squash the communicative function of language merely to play to the more material qualities of language, then the poem is surely an example of the privileging of sound as another sort of sense.

Kipling's poem animates in several ways the rule of the semiotic; not only in its use of rhyme, rhythm and sound play, in its use of italics and deflected speech, but also in its establishing and destroying of orders, the poem's language demonstrates the bandar-logical eruptions which it attempts to describe.
Chapter III -- "There was an Old Man with a nose":
Nonsense and the Body

If I subscribe to the myth that I may know a lofty something
called "Now" or "Light," I will imagine myself doing so as a
disembodied knower, an intelligence without armpit or
kneecap, who matches in his lack of physicality his
abstraction's bodiless intelligibility; the human region
south of the chin is dropped like a booster rocket.
(Tim Lilburn, "Thoughts towards a Christian
poetics" 34)

you infringe upon me in my skin. I must speak then,
squeezed like an enigmatic orange.
(Nicole Brossard, The Aerial Letter 41)

Nonsense has a special relation to the body, a relation which
goes much deeper than the obvious thematic one. True, much Classical
Nonsense uses the body, the grotesque body, as a springboard for its
humour. Lear's work is peopled with bodies seemingly out of control;
and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland still thrills strict Freudians
precisely because Alice's body is, at least until her metabolism adjusts
to the rhythms of Wonderland, uncontrollable: hysteria working from the
outside in. An intensely psychological reading would argue that Lear
and Carroll both use Nonsense as a means of working out their own
"socially unacceptable" sexuality and physicality, as frustrated
assaults on the sexual strictures of their day. Then their linguistic
upheaval would be a more or less conscious result of their physical
desires. Such readings abound, but, not surprisingly, they tend to
exaggerate or simplify each man's sexual orientation.

The theory of nonsense developed in the last chapter is shot
through with Kristeva's version of desire, pulsions, and sexuality, and
suggests that there is a more intimate and structural relation between
Nonsense and the body than that which is argued in purely thematic or
"voyeuristic" approaches, or in the approach taken by Deleuze. Nonsense

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is one result of the body dwelling in language, of the rhythms and "orders" of the psychological body disturbing sense-making structures. For many writers the body is a point from which to defy logical or patriarchal sense, and so gesture towards nonsense through a sensual intimacy and eroticism. Part of this intimacy is directly located in the senses, in how they make "sense" of the world (the Others) around them, in how they make language. For language is, like perception, based on the severing and reconstructing of what is, on the re-organizing and crystallizing of the fluid dynamic between the body and its surroundings. Such language, sensual, physiological, is a common ground on which nonsense and poetic language meet.

This ground is also shared with other "languages," most noticeably the language of schizophrenia or madness. Some of what follows is a dialogue with Gilles Deleuze, one of France's foremost philosophers and thinkers about Nonsense and "schizoid" language. As chapter one indicated, Deleuze and I approach nonsense from vastly different perspectives, and with the intention of doing vastly different things with it. He contends that there is no common, co-habitable ground between bodily nonsense and Nonsense, that gorges too deep to cross separate the two. Such a view does not accept the potentially unifying powers of the body; the nonsensical body and its primal energies, in my understanding of them, provide a zone of flux, of communion and community -- the fluid intermingling of organic systems ("animate" and "inanimate"), of species, of individuals and of nonsenses.

"Shoots and Branches":
Nonsense's Grotesque Body

The Old Man's bird-housing beard; the famous curlicue nose; the pin-pointed, harp-plucking chin; that Young Lady's w-i-d-e- eyed stare; Lear's limericks and his illustrations for them are rife with physical deformity. Such bizarre representations of human physiology can't be
put down just to dissatisfaction with his own ungainly appearance, though one might argue it is related to Lear's epilepsy and to the distortions of seizure. And it is not merely a case of "them against me," a way of singling out the eccentric, the marginal, for social abuse— though clearly physical deformity often is the butt of such abuse.

Looking to another of Lear's forays into physical science, his Nonsense Botanics (see, for example, Fig. 2 in chapter one, or Figs. 3 and 4 in this chapter), proves helpful. The ridiculous deformations that result from his parodic Latinisms and literalisms aren't quite so far off the "real" world as might be assumed; "Tigerlillia Terribilis" (see Fig. 3) does look familiarly like a tiger-lily, albeit a terrible one with its petals -- plush and purring carnivores. And "Bluebottlia Buzztilentia" (see Fig. 4) is just a few steps for the imagination beyond a bluebell. These are living flowers which exceed even the inhabitants of Carroll's Looking-Glass garden, but their elements are part of Lear's world into our own.

These excesses are the source of perhaps the least painful laughter Lear offers. But they are also indicators of the world of shifting boundaries which characterizes many of his limericks. The worlds of animal and plant, insect and plant, object and plant, mingle. In chapter one these botanies helped illustrate the nonsensical result of literalism, of taking things at their word, by pushing aside the curtain separating words and things. In this chapter a different curtain is pushed aside to reveal not the lively but limited prospect of literalism but rather a different orientation to, and within, the world.

For that is really the "crime" of the Old Man with the nose (Fig.5): not just having a big nose, but having a nose so big it demands of its viewers a slightly different understanding of the world, and of the place the body makes for itself in the world. No matter what the Old Man may say, his nose is extremely large. So large, in fact, that by ignoring it, one risks tripping over it. This is a fine example of the
There was an Old Man with a nose,
Who said, 'If you choose to suppose,
That my nose is too long, you are certainly wrong!
That remarkable Man with a nose.
nonsensical body, which metaphorically challenges the spatial limitations of the body in the world, and literally questions the relationship between the physical "self" and the world, in much the same way as the psychical body of nonsense challenges the location of the "self" in language. The nonsensical body stretches out into the world beyond and, by doing so, enters into a relationship with the world reminiscent of that found in the Rabelaisian carnival.

Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist credit Bakhtin with articulating a "semantics of the body" (299) in Rabelais and His World. It is a playful and scatological semantics which relies heavily on the ambiguous nature of excrement and genitals, and seems quite unlike the writing found in Lear's work. But Bakhtin's semantics are not merely bawdy, and they can take a reader to Lear:

The grotesque . . . is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to bodies or the world outside . . . . The grotesque body . . . is a body in the act of becoming . . . . This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus (316-17; emphasis is mine).

"That which protrudes." Step back from the new body spawned by Rabelais' out-sized bowels and phallus' and one gets the Old Man's overgrown nose, a phallus in its own metaphorical right. Even if one doesn't read into this appendage popular sexual innuendo, it is still a domesticated version of Bakhtin's "unfinished and open body" (26). What

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1 Bakhtin, writing well before Lacan, clearly does not intend his use of "phallus" to have the meaning which the type of psychoanalytic readings frequently cited in this thesis would suggest. The term is retained, however, because of its important saturnalian connotations.
Bakhtin says of the belfry with an impregnating shadow in Rabelais can be said as well of Lear's Old Man's nose, and of the nonsensical body generally: "The object transgresses its own confines, ceases to be itself. The limits between the body and the world are erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects" (310). Such fusion is also seen in Lear's many illustrations which show a person taking on the appearance of, merging with, the world around him or her (see Figs. 6, 7, 8).

As those limits are transgressed, so language is transgressed. The body which exceeds itself, visually, thematically, in Lear's limericks, is the same body which exerts itself phonically, rhythmically, playfully in the linguistic subversion of his Nonsense. It's the genotext overstepping the bounds of the thetic, taking hold of the symbolic's nose and tugging it out of shape.

The language of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland seems less phonically, bodily playful, but it is, as Gilles Deleuze points out in The Logic of Sense, no less a language related to the body in a state of becoming:

When I say "Alice becomes larger," I mean that she becomes larger than she was. By the same token, however, she becomes smaller than she is now. Certainly, she is not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present. . . . It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow without shrinking, and vice versa (1).

This "paradox of this pure becoming" (2) carries over into the language of reversal, of pull in two directions, which marks all of Alice's
There was an Old Man who said, 'Hush!
I perceive a young bird in this bush!'
When they said—'Is it small?' He replied—'Not at all!
It is four times as big as the bush!'

There was an Old Man in a tree,
Who was horribly bored by a Bee;
When they said, 'Does it buzz?' he replied, 'Yes, it does!'
'It's a regular brute of a Bee!'
adventures (3): "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!" (AW 76); "jam tomorrow and jam yesterday -- but never jam to-day" (TLG 197).

Even before she encounters the linguistic upheaval which plagues her, Alice must confront her uncontrollable body; this "becoming" body (becoming larger, becoming smaller), not language, is the initial interface between herself and Wonderland. Physical fluctuations mediate between her own limited assumptions and a seemingly incomprehensible environment. Her elongated neck, her far-away feet: these require of Alice, as much as of the inhabitants of Wonderland, a shift in vision to accommodate her "renewing" self. And it is this aspect of Alice's body that serves my purposes best now.

There is something comic and carnivalesque about Alice's contracting and expanding body, and it blends with Wonderland. It is most Bakhtinian in its role as conduit, as a point of intersection:

> The events of the grotesque sphere are always developed on the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection. One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image (322).

Such intersection is genital and excremental, related to the lower stratum of the body whose symbolism Bakhtun tries to exonerate from what he considers a simplistic and prudish rejection of good "clean" debasement. But the genital regions are not the only regions which interact with, and affect, the world.

The senses (perception) and skin (the surface which mediates between insides and outside) may also be construed as points of intersection. For it is through and at them that the body meets the world, transmits the world around it, or is altered by that world. How the nonsensical body and such points of intersection may be rendered in language will be considered next.
Replacing the Senses: The Possibility of a Perceptually-based Language

In one way or another poetry has always played with the senses. Its roots in music, which will figure in the next chapter, attest to its intimacy with hearing. And imagery has always appealed to the eyes of both mind and body. When, however, poetic language seeks to be what Daphne Marlatt calls a "direct transmission" (Bowering 66), rather than a translation, of the senses' perception, it risks nonsense. An odd twist since, as Rieke notes,

*Sense* begins with physiology, the body as it takes in data with the five senses. These sensations translate into mental phenomena, perceptions as understanding. Our spoken and written language then transmit the meaning or sense that is supposedly in our heads (6).

Why then should an attempt at an "unmediated" linguistic experience of the senses result in nonsense?

Because by breaching mediation, the senses are breaching a version of the thetic, joining with the semiotic's revolt against the symbolic imposition of order. The purpose of the thetic, as the last chapter demonstrated, is to mediate between, to separate, the semiotic and the symbolic. The thetic may be seen to stand as a similar point of purported impasse between the actual physical experience of the body and the world, on the one hand, and the linguistic embodiment of that experience, on the other. The key term in Rieke's explanation is "translate." The thetic is the point at which sensual perception is recognized as foreign, as garbled, and where an attempt to split the body from its dynamic communion with the world is made, where verbal relations are translated into a language deemed sensical by the symbolic, tidied up before being articulated.
It is not merely, as André Breton believed, that the senses could, if allowed, "lead" to "a wider horizon [than is] available even to the conscious mind" (Sheringham 73), though clearly the way that Breton engaged the senses in his poetry produced some very nonsensical work. For, while Surrealists try to "dépayser la sensation," to "delocalise" the senses, as Sheringham translates it (74), in order to leap right over rationality and into the unconscious, nonsensical writers approach language by retrieving the senses from rationality (rather than removing rationality from the senses). That is: it is rationality which, by winnowing out the perceptions of the senses, by translating their effects into organizable phenomena, actually dislocates, delocalises them. Theoretically at least, Surrealism, like rationality, takes the senses to a further remove from their source in the world, although these removes are quite remote from each other.

The problem is not so much how to displace the senses as how to replace them, how to keep them at the edge, "the cutting edge" of humanity and the world (Olson, "Human Universe" 62), while in language. And how to do this in a way which produces an actual perceptually-based language, rather than a mimetic version of such a language. Not all of the writers considered in this chapter succeed in their attempts to create this language, as not all are successful in their efforts to write the body. In fact, I regard the phrase "the body in language" as figurative speech; a truly physical language is gestural, not verbal. The body in language is, for me, most closely realized in the semiotic in Kristeva's model of poetic language discussed earlier. This is a psychical, not a physical, body.

A perceptually-based language, however, does not attempt to write the body, but rather to allow the least possible amount of interference (ideally no interference, though such is literally impossible) in the transmission of the senses to words. This would require an attunedness not to the body and its rhythms, though psychically they may influence
the shape of the language, but rather to the actual experience of perception. Often the point at which the theory and practice of writing from the senses differ is this point of attention; when there is another "agenda," one to privilege the body for instance, the status of perception is lessened and perceptual language may be lost to the conscious mimesis of an unconscious experience.

Listening to the listenings of the body:
The nonsense of perception

A poet greatly concerned with creating a language of unimpeded senses, and one who had a measure of success in doing so, was Charles Olson. In "Human Universe" he insists,

What makes most acts -- of living and of writing -- unsatisfactory, is that the person and/or the writer or simply themselves that they can only make a form (what they say or do, or a story, a poem, whatever) by selecting from the full content some face of it, or plane, some part. And at just this point, by just this act, they fall back on the dodges of discourse, and immediately, they lose me, I am no longer engaged, this is not what I know is the going-on (and of which going-on I, as well as they, want some illumination, and so, some pleasure). It comes out a demonstration, a separating out, an act of classification, and so, a stopping, and all that I know is, it is not there, it has turned false (55).

Olson's answer to the problem of writing a perceptually- and physically-based language is the poem of body and breath.

With the other Black Mountain poets, he sought an "open" form or "projective verse" that constituted an opening up of the poet to the surrounding world, a less active engagement of the selective process which weeds through, or shapes, the world and exalts the human over the
non-human. The distinction, as Olson makes it, is "between language as the act of the instant and language as the act of thought about the instant" (54). His prose manifesto "Projective Verse" hollers that "always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!" (17); he "[puts] it baldly" down to the physiology of the poet -- "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE

the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE" (19).

The best, most kinetic or energetic poetry, he suggests, comes out of a listening to the workings, the listenings, of the body, out of a transliteration of those listenings.

Louis Zukofsky's solution is different from Olson's; his language, which Rieke calls a "dance of the senses" (149), results from synaesthesia, the joining of senses to produce a tangible language. Synaesthesia could result from crossing any two senses, though (as Zukofsky goes on to say),

Let's say you start with a body, the way a kid does when it's born, and it cries almost immediately. It takes a long time for its eyes to focus, a month I suppose. But anyway, the eye concerns the poet; the ear concerns the poet because he hears noises, and like the kid he's affected. And you can do all sorts of things with the noises. You can imitate natural things, and so forth. I like to keep the noises as close to the body as possible, so that (I don't know how you'd express it mathematically) the eye is a function of the ear and the ear of the eye; maybe with that you might feel a sense of smell, of taste even. So much of the word is a physiological thing . . . that its articulation, as against that of other words, will make an "object" ("[Sincerity and Objectification]" 267).

Like the language sought through Olson's poetics, this is a language which resists translation, but does so in a very specific
manner. Rather than opening up lines of communication and feeling between psychical, mental and physical realms as Olson seeks to do ("the HEAD, by way of the EAR"), Zukofsky conflates sensical experience, "describes" one sense in terms of another. He does not remove the experience of sight, for instance, to the realm of simile, instead he displaces it to the realm of sound. What "translation" does occur, does so within a wider range of senses and physical response.² Peter Quartermain says Zukofsky's "Text is a movement of languages, of a number of frames of reference, held in the language of the poem simultaneously, at once. And it is a felt world" (223). Feeling, the felt, the perceived, the sensed, underlie sense and may be, in Zukofsky's view, "the most important part of the whole definition of the word sense" (Rieke 141).

But the "felt world" of his poems is not a linearly sensical one. "I's (Pronounced Eyes)" (see Appendix V for the text of the poem), is one of Zukofsky's more accessible poems and an example of the seen world transmitted by the ear, the joyful music of the eye, where synaesthesia waylays concrete sense. In the poem's title, Zukofsky has already anticipated the movement of its language; revolving around the "I" of the poet, the title initiates the auditory pun which energizes the entire poem. For "I" can be read/heard as "eye"; sight is the most precious sense for the poet, to Zukofsky's mind ("[Sincerity and Objectification]" 267). From the very outset of the poem, the auditory "pronounced" has permitted a metamorphosis between "I's and "eyes," has established the poem as a place where sight has a direct link to the ear.

As the poem begins, Zukofsky names, re-names, his form; haiku, the

² Zukofsky's technique is strongly related to a principle of nonsense which will be discussed later in this chapter, and in chapter four; that is, nonsense superimposes one sign system upon another, one way of meaning, or in this case, perceiving, upon another, and so creates a palimpsest. Alternative sign systems are conflated in order to generate several types of meaning and to expose, simultaneously, the artificial structures of such meaning.
delicate poem of the eye, born of the visual intensity of an image
glistening in the moment of perception, is lent to the ear: "Hi,Kuh."
If Zukofsky's poem stretches the limits of its form quite radically, so
too does his "auditory translation," his homonymic play, undo the
literary and critical respect usually given the haiku and animate the
subversive potential of his poetic; "Hi, Kuh" is also, as Rieke notes, a
greeting to a cow -- "'Kuh' is German for cow" (126).

The route between eye and ear is kept open throughout the poem as
each sight is shaped by sound, as the entire landscape of the poem is
musicalized. Zukofsky uses metalepsis to draw an auditory picture of
the sea, its foam shifting phonically as well as visually as it "claws"
and "cloys" its way up the sand. The "ah" of the first vowel closes
over as the water becomes "close," closer to the seer. Close sounds for
the seeing ear; each push of water just fractionally, phonemically,
nearer the hearing eye. And the flashing instant of "AZURE," the colour
of "A SEA" ("A B C"), falls into a linguistic lapping, a sounding of ebb
and flow -- "as ever/ adz aver" -- as 'er, always, the water and the
senses do: the rushing and receding of perception, the tidal pull of a
becoming body. Because of the sensual engagement of his language, the
music of this and other Zukofsky poems puts pressure on sense,
orchestrates it. Sense becomes a roving and twisting dancer, no longer
stable and stolid.

Zukofsky seems to privilege the senses of sight and hearing. But
others also work themselves into language. Luce Irigaray argues for a
"womanspeech" which is tactile; her erotics of a woman's language
concentrates on touch: "For in what she says, too, at least when she
dares, woman is constantly touching herself" (This Sex Which Is Not One
29). Such touching circles back not only to Bakhtin's carnival of
genitals, in an admittedly more enlightened way, but also to Alice's shifting body. For touch almost inevitably involves the skin, what Olson calls "the meeting edge of man and external reality ... where all that matters does happen" ("Human Universe" 60), and the place where, Deleuze argues, Carroll works out all his nonsense, in a language of the surface, through the logic of sense (93).

_Skin, Deep: The Nonsense of the Surface, and Beneath_

Olson and Deleuze use the term "skin" and understand the relationship between skin and language in different ways, but both equate it with a conscious-bound surface. For Olson, skin is a physical thing, the tissue which mediates between the world and the body; for Deleuze it is a psychical construct as well as a physical reality. Yet for both, mere skin is not a satisfactory place for energized language to dwell. It is, they would contend, too rooted in Sense, in surface organization, to be a forum for anything but a very negligible form of nonsense or subversion.

In "Proprioception," an "essay" which modifies his earlier views, Olson locates two surfaces: the physiological surface, "(senses -- the 'skin': of 'Human Universe') the body itself -- proper -- one's own 'corpus'"; and the psychological surface, "the surface: consciousness as

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2 It's important to note the limitations of Bakhtin's carnival of genitalia. He makes a concerted effort to justify what has long been considered Rabelais' hostility toward women by tying her debasement to the cycle of birth, by making her a symbolically regenerative and walking womb (240). Yet he fails, as Wayne Booth points out in "Freedom of Interpretation," to prove that women are in any way liberated by this spirit of carnival, by the laughter directed at, and through, them. Irigaray also, it might be argued, offers a carnival of genitalia and, like so many other theorists (Kristeva included -- see Revolution 223-5), seeks through laughter an initial form of liberation (This Sex 183). Her carnivalesque appeal for a re-vivification of woman's "lower stratum," of her countless erogenous zones also suffers from a biologically- and essentialist-based appeal, and so participates, in a lesser way, in Bakhtin's own errors. But at least Irigaray's argument does, ironically enough, provide a scathing critique of the patriarchal thought which initially established the limiting dichotomies it at once adheres to and tries to dismantle.
ego and thus no flow because the 'senses' of same are all that sd contact area is valuable for, to report in to central" (1). Since Olson urgently demands that poetry get "rid of the lyrical interference of the ego" ("Projective Verse" 24), it comes as no surprise that he writes so condescendingly of the psychological surface, of the conscious ego. But this newer, fragmented, chart-like essay, seems to turn as well from the skin he has earlier cited as an essential location for the poetic act.

"Proprioception" is "the cavity of the body," home to the viscera, location of "the old 'psychology' of feeling, the heart; of desire, the liver; of sympathy, the 'bowels'; of courage -- kidney etc -- gall" (1). And it is to this place, this viscera, that Olson wants experience brought:

The advantage is to 'place' the thing, instead of it wallowing around sort of outside, in the universe, like, when the experience of it is interoceptive: it is inside us/ & at the same time does not feel literally identical with our own physical or mortal self (1).

Proprioception is the knowledge of the body's depth; "the 'body' itself as, by movement of its own tissues, giving the data of, depth" (2). And if this depth of the body, this inner movement, is the place of poetry, of poetic energy, it seems that skin no longer is where what matters happens.

What, I think, Olson desires in "Proprioception" is not the flaying of the skin, but a swallowing of it, a meeting of inner and outer. Skin is still where what matters happens, where the world and the individual meet; but the body's cavity is where the "skin" needs to be "processed." The skin, as a surface, must not be a barrier between the world and the body, but rather a conduit for their interchange. It must be folded into the gut of the poet, into an absolutely physical vision, in a motion the reverse of that advocated in his earlier poetic manifesto. Now it is the ear, by way of the head, to the syllable; the
breath, by way of the heart, to the line. Here is another incarnation of Bakhtin's grotesque body in which the "outward and inward features are often merged into one" (318). More important, here Olson gives his poetic a slightly different angle, a more Kriste van and a more radically nonsensical one.

For what Olson describes is -- oddly enough for a man who rejects the Freudian notion of the unconscious -- a heightened intensity in the breaching of the thietic he has already implicitly called for in "Projective Verse." In this case the physiology of the body, the organs symbolic of desires and emotions, rather than pulsions and drives in which psychoanalysis seats them, embody an unconscious which he defines as "the body itself," "the universe flowing-in, inside" (2). Rather than the semiotic leaping into the symbolic, however, the symbolic is pulled inside, into the semiotic womb. Language inhabits the body, the body language. Of course, in Kristeva's diagramming of the process of poetic language, an accomplished return to the womb is impossible: the semiotic has no stable shape in which to house consciousness because the chora is an indeterminate, even hypothetical construct; and the unconscious requires the conscious to articulate it, so a smothering of the conscious in the unconscious would result in an almost inarticulable mass of language quite unlike anything Olson ever produced. Nevertheless, Olson moves closer to articulating the inextricable link between language, nonsense and the body.

Deleuze's opposition between body and skin, or surface, is not so easily reconciled; since it challenges the sort of relation I argue for between the body and nonsense language, and the potential endorsement of such a relationship found in Olson's writing, this opposition is worth considering in some detail.

The inarticulable, indistinguishable mass of language which would result from a strict experience of Olson's new poetic is reminiscent of what Deleuze refers to as "schizoid," the language of the broken body,
of the dissolved surface, language which he describes in this way:
when the surface is rent by explosions and by snags, bodies
fall back again into their depth; everything falls back
again into the anonymous pulsation wherein words are no
longer anything but affections of the body -- everything
falls back into the primary order which grumbles beneath the
secondary organization of sense (125).

As the first chapter of this study demonstrated, Deleuze opposes
the type of nonsense which is characteristic of this schizoid language
with surface nonsense. The latter is the type of nonsense he claims
Lewis Carroll writes, and it is intimately related to, "co-present"
with, sense (68). This co-presence is not unlike the symbiotic union
integral to nonsense. Indeed, Deleuze argues that this type of nonsense
is essential for the production of sense.

Sense, as he sees it, is part of the "skin" of things, "not
localized at the surface, but . . . rather bound to its formation and
reformation" (104). Sense is the result of a process of infinite
regress because of "my impotence to state the sense of what I say, to
say at the same time something and its meaning" (29). In other words,
one can't say "I'd like to fry that cat" and simultaneously explain just
what "to fry" is, and what a "cat" is, and which cat "that" cat is, and
how a cat could be fried. So the sense of that sentence exists at a
remove, in the sentence or phrase which explains it. His is a type of
relational sense which grows, perhaps obliquely, out of Saussurean
linguistics, in which sense (the sense of each word) is paradigmatically
and syntagmatically relational.

But nonsense, the nonsense word and what Deleuze names the
"esoteric" word ("it," "that" etc.), "says its own sense"; "[it] is a
word that denotes exactly what it expresses and expresses what it
denotes" (67). Deleuze's brand of nonsense adds a dash of entropy to
the regress of sense because it doesn't accommodate explanation; how,
Deleuze wonders, does one explain what a "Snark" is (67). For, to adapt Gertrude Stein, a snark is a snark is a snark. In the word lies the thing. Its only clear meaning is linguistic; its definition is contingent upon its paradigmatic relations, unless Carroll's "answer" to the whole mysterious Hunting is used as a way to get out of this mess: "For the Snark was a Boojum, you see." But, as Deleuze implies (66), "Boojum" is as problematic a word as "Snark". For a boojum is a boojum is a boojum, you see.

And it is just this momentary pause in regress, this point of temporary stasis where the word is the thing, which "donates" to sense some signification (69), which grounds sense. Deleuze argues that, within any given series of signification, a term "has sense only by virtue of its position relative to every other term" (70). Such a position involves both its placement and function in a sentence, and its systemic relationships with these other terms. However, this relative position itself depends on the absolute position of each term relative to the instance-x [that is, the self-defining word]. The latter is determined as nonsense and circulates endlessly throughout the series. Sense is actually produced by this circulation as sense which affects both the signifier and the signified. In short, sense is always an effect (70).

Deleuze hastens to add that this effect "is . . . an effect in the sense of an 'optical effect' or a 'sound effect,' or, even better, a surface effect, a position effect, and a language effect" (70), which is part and parcel of its cause. Nonsense at one and the same time breaks and strengthens the chain of sense; its challenge to sensical deferral merely provides the pivot upon which that deferral may more successfully, meaningfully, turn. L'ecercle, following Deleuze, explains it this way:

Nonsense is a meaning-preserving activity: its implicit goal
is to save meaning by maintaining the correspondence between
signifier and signified which communication requires.
Nonsense may fiddle with the upholstery buttons, but only to
check that they are sewn on firmly and in their proper
places (140).

Lecercle's reading of Deleuze condemns Nonsense; not only does he
dismiss many important facets of Nonsense, but he also dismisses several
Nonsense works from the canon. Many of Lear's limericks, for instance,
are implicitly banished -- not surprisingly, perhaps, since Lecercle
mentions Lear only once, and briefly at that, in his book. Also one can
detect a tendency to ignore the many other ways in which nonsense exerts
itself linguistically, its points of communion with poetic language.

Deleuze is right in his assertion of the co-presence of sense and
nonsense, and in his attribution to nonsense of an active role in the
manufacture and deferral of sense and meaning. But the "effect" which
he claims for nonsense, that of offering a moment's stability to sense,
isn't any more important than other "effects" of nonsense, such as its
exposure of how meaning works. He speaks often of the paradox of sense
and nonsense, and it is indeed paradoxical that the nonsense word which
grounds sense also reveals, as Stewart argues so deftly, the whole
process of sense-making. However, by revealing it, the nonsense word
opens this process up to a critical probing which Deleuze does not
acknowledge.

Nonsense helps expose the very process which it supports; and that
fact surely suggests that nonsense (and Nonsense, as chapter two argued)
is much more than a meaning-preserving activity. Nonsense
simultaneously "stabilizes" (in Deleuze's rendering of it) and questions
meaning, perhaps stabilizes meaning precisely to question it. This is
not exactly a "preservation." Nonsense actively cuts open, cuts
through, the illusion of a Stable and Meaningful Language, which it
creates.
Deleuze borrows an image of cutting from Emile Bréhier's explanation of how the Stoics used the act of cutting as one paradigm to demonstrate two very different levels of being, and employs it to an end quite different from my use of the image above. He quotes Bréhier in *The Logic of Sense*, and equates this Stoic paradigm with his own levels or types of nonsense:

when the scalpel cuts through the flesh, the first body [the knife] produces upon the second [the flesh] not a new property but a new attribute, that of being cut. The attribute does not designate any real quality ..., it is, to the contrary, always expressed by the verb, which means that it is not a being, but a way of being (quoted in Deleuze 5).

A way of being, then, is part of the "plane of facts, which frolic on the surface of being, and constitute an endless multiplicity of incorporeal beings"; it is not part of "profound being," of "force" (quoted in Deleuze 5). It is not corporeal.

As chapter one indicated, Deleuze argues that a new form of causality has been posited by the Stoics, one that separates cause from effect, groups causes together and effects together, and even allows a certain unity among causes, a unity among effects. It is a dualism which ultimately "refers ... back to language, either to the existence of a declension of causes or, as we shall see, to the existence of a conjugation of effects" (6).

Incorporeal as this surface language may be, it is nonetheless fragile. A large enough crevice will force the collapse of the surface, allow "a terrible primordial order" (82) to rush over and "consume" the "secondary organization" of sense (82). The questions which I see Nonsense (and nonsense) as asking, then, are: how deep a cut? how large a crevice can the surface sustain before it dissolves? is there a path between incorporeal and corporeal, a link between attribute and quality? is there a point at which the cleavage between cause and effect is
soldered? Because the surface is fragile, and its sense is constructed upon a hesitant amalgam, a delicate partnership of opposition which works only in, according to Deleuze, nonsense's not working. Is the breaking down of that sense, the frustated exaggeration of its hesitancy a way of altering the opposition between surface and depth?

These questions, of course, are ones which Deleuze absolutely would not ask, and rhetorically imply conclusions which are not viable within his understanding of Nonsense. But I wonder to what degree, to what level of intensity, nonsense may stop the flow of sense, may "mean" itself, and still preserve meaning. For providing its own sense isn't merely the provision of its own syntactical and signifying relationship; there are other ways that nonsense can mean, that it can be a self-defining object. Nonsense can mean visually (as do Lear's limericks, whose sense is significantly altered by the accompanying illustrations) and musically (as the next chapter will demonstrate).

Nonsense functions, I am suggesting, as the articulation or transliteration of a different sign system within a verbal one. Such a suggestion extends Deleuze's ideas about portmanteau words, discussed in chapter one, to a larger scale. Nonsense, like the nonsensical portmanteau word which acts as an intersection point for two linguistic series, is created by the merger of two, three, four, possibly more, separate sign systems. Not the merger of codes or languages -- of literary and legal language, of French and English, of male and female, or any other sub-category of a verbal system -- but the blending of different ways of meaning: musically, linguistically, visually, physically, the one transliterated into another.

The metaphor of transliteration is not an entirely stable one, and a little misleading, for it suggests that these other ways of meaning are languages and that they somehow displace or take the place of the first. While such systems may be analogous to language, they are not truly languages: the unconscious may be structured like a language, but
it is not definable as one. Neither are music, the visual arts, or the body—despite their usefulness as forms of communication and one's readiness to translate them into, and explain them through, language. It is this fact which makes nonsense so radical, and so subversive; it contains within one system elements of another (an Other).

Each system or way of meaning is suspended in a state of partial alienation: music that has adopted the terms of a verbal alphabet but not given itself over to the meanings of wholly composed words; words that have moved towards articulating the body without relinquishing their own means of articulation. The result is the excess of sense(s), the stretching of meaning, spoken of in chapter one. Nonsense does far more than stabilize sense; it pluralizes sense, leaving no one sense, or way of establishing sense, stable. It finds systems of meaning layered upon other, alternative systems of meaning, surfaces beneath surfaces, and so finds surfaces to be, at times, depths, interiors. The implicit hierarchy in Deleuze’s theory is questioned when various systems of meaning merge, when the verbal surface of sense dissolves into another sensical “surface,” and one mode of being breaches the “boundary” separating it from another mode of being.

Such a view ultimately questions Deleuze’s claim about the separateness of the “body of language,” its forms and functions, and the “language of the body,” that schizoid articulation which finds its highest and lowest point in Artaud. And, as was noted in chapter one, such a view attempts to reconcile these oppositions, seeks a resolution which Deleuze himself would find lacking, based as it is in an offshoot of Freudian theory. While his firm differentiation between the types of nonsense is not mine— I argue for a connection which is not tenable within his paradigm—Deleuze’s elaboration of these poles of body and surface help temporarily to localize some of the many, seemingly disparate, movements of nonsense.

Even though the tactics and techniques of schizophrenic language
are shared by Nonsense, Deleuze severs it from Nonsense, which he
insists is a product of the surface. Rather than Classical Nonsense, he
finds in schizoid language two other types of nonsense, separate from
that which is co-present with sense. These types, which "have nothing
to do with" surface nonsense (91), are
passive and active: the nonsense of the word devoid of
sense, which is decomposed into phonetic elements; and the
nonsense of tonic elements, which form a word incapable of
being decomposed and no less devoid of sense. Here
everything happens, acts and is acted upon, beneath sense
and far from the surface. Sub-sense, a-sense, Untersinn --
this must be distinguished from the nonsense of the surface
(90).
The means for determining the poles of nonsense is the presence or
absence of sense; surface nonsense is absolutely not devoid of sense
(71), schizophrenic nonsense is. And it is devoid as well of grammar,
of syntax, and, at its most extreme, of articulation.

But being ungrammatical, asyntactical and inarticulable doesn't
free a language from the burden of sense. There is always the
possibility of affective meaning which was noted in chapter one.
Schizophrenic nonsense may, as Deleuze implies, entertain the possibility
of a "word" which Nonsense never would, may offer syntactical units
composed of seemingly impossible arrangements of letters; but it cannot
escape a limited form of sense as long as it is relayed in a sense-
producing medium. Types of nonsense which share the same alphabet, the
same fundamental sign system, are not so utterly separate. They exist
at different points on the same trajectory. Implicit in the notion that
a shared alphabet indicates a potential for a shared method of sense--

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4 One needs to consider, too, the linguistic versus the alphabetic
ground; a transliteration of the words of one language into the alphabet
of another can result in seeming nonsense though the words, when
pronounced, would have sense for anyone versed in the language which had
been transliterated.
making, is a possibility which should, at the very least, be raised. The path between corporeal and incorporeal, between the present and the absent, may be located in the path of writing.

An interview which Roland Barthes gave in 1974 extends the notion of writing as a cutting through, apart, the surface of sense. Writing, for Barthes, is more than the scratching of symbols onto a piece of paper -- that could be either writing or "transcription." Writing (*écriture*) is process-oriented, the infinite play of the world (the world as function) [before it] is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages (*S/Z* 5).

I would suggest that in *écriture* lies a potential link between both of Deleuze's poles of nonsense. For Barthes argues, in the interview mentioned above, that

[in] writing, what is *too* present in speech (in a hysterical fashion) and *too* absent from transcription (in a castratory fashion), namely the body, returns, but along a path which is indirect, measured, musical, and, in a word, *right*, returning through pleasure, and not through the Imaginary (the image) ("From Speech to Writing" 7).

The body musicalizes language, alters and shapes it according to its own pulsions and drives -- so Kristeva contends in the case of poetic language, and Barthes in that of the "writable" text.

Kristeva's conception of a relationship between language, the body and history, a relationship which "[allows] the speaking animal to sense the rhythm of the body as well as the upheavals of history" ("The Ethics

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5 I use here Rosalind Coward and John Ellis' translation of Barthes' term (*Language and Materialism* 45), rather than Miller's "writerly," which seems less of an encouragement to the reader to join in the process.
of Linguistics" 34), suggests an alternative to Deleuze’s unbridgable separation between levels of nonsense. The ready application of her theories to Nonsense, and her willingness to locate in Carroll’s portmanteau words a capsulized version of poetic language, indicates that the levels of nonsense which Deleuze describes could be seen as part of a sliding scale.

Such a scale is easily accommodated on the diagram of nonsense in chapter two. The most extreme form of active and passive nonsense, of corporeal nonsense, would dwell in or beside the point of madness which lies deep in the semiotic, yet is still attached to nonsense. And the most surface and sensical nonsense which Deleuze locates would tread the line where nonsense becomes poetry. But the thetic separating the semiotic -- which may well be analogous to the "terrible primordial order" (Deleuze 82) of Deleuze’s schizoid body -- from the "symbolic" is always permeable.

"IN OMBOLON BULLORGA":
Nonsense, Other Bodies, and Going Deeper Still

Bodies meet with their environments and the objects surrounding them in many ways; senses and skin may organize the world around them, or may be organized by elements of that world. In Lear, the latter is often the case. It is not at all uncommon to find, in the illustrations of his limericks, that the people who are the subjects of the poems are also subject to some startling physical change directly related to the other things which populate their poems and their "lives." Take for instance "the Old Man who said, Hush" (Fig. 6), the "Old Man in a tree, Who was horribly bored by a Bee" (Fig. 7), or the "Old Man with an owl" (Fig. 8), on page 143. Each of these characters takes on the characteristics of the animal or insect he is depicted with. Such confusion or submersion of identities confirms the shifting of boundaries in Lear’s world. The Old Man and his owl are perhaps the
best examples found in Lear; even the verse, with its pronouns which slide between the two possible antecedents (man or owl), never clearly establishes a division between the two. A simple trick of punctuation and grammar on Lear's part has man and owl bothering, howling, sitting and drinking in a linguistic merger.

Poetry often works, usually in a serious vein, toward a similar spirit of nonsensical sympathy between humanity and the environment. In an attempt to de-humanize the universe, to under-privilege the status accorded to people and to their sense, just such mergers occur. The reasoning for this may lie in the correlation Stephen-Paul Martin makes, in *Open Form and Feminine Imagination*, between the "open form" of verse and the "open systems" of life. "Note, for instance," he writes, the similarity between the notion of open form . . . and the notion of open systems presented by the Nobel Prize winning chemist Ilya Prigogine. Instead of dividing the universe into living and non-living matter, Priogogine claims that everything is "alive" but that some things sustain themselves through dynamic interplay with the environment (open systems) and others are more or less independent of ongoing interplay with it (closed systems) (53).

It is in responding to this animated world, be it closed or open, that poetry again articulates nonsensically. Responding to? Responding with. For, as Zukofsky says, poetry of "direct contact" is a "thinking with the things as they exist," beginning "in a physiological response" (quoted in Dembo, "Louis Zukofsky: Objectivist Poetics and the Quest for Form" 285). And it requires tapping into a primal energy, one which is the experience of the semiotic in an other form of life. It requires the implementation of the pre-linguistic.

In a paper on Ted Hughes's language, Jamie Bush discusses Hughes's attempt to put the natural into words:
For Hughes . . . the term "pre-linguistic meaning" has a special significance. His effort to make vocal the inner essence of things, and so to connect with the elemental energies in the natural world, is . . . evident in the usually tightly restricted, synchronic rather than diachronic temporal line of the poems, and in the tendency to bore in on one thing -- a pebble, an animal, or a fern's frond -- and then either to describe it in a proliferation of metaphors, or to adopt its perspective, or to personify it (3).

But as Bush notes, and as Hughes's invention of an entirely new language for "Orghast" (Peter Brook's experimental dramatic "work-in-progress") attests, conventional language, one that is all, or almost all, phenotextual, doesn't serve the needs of someone who is "so concerned with expressing what lies between and beneath and inside the interstices arbitrarily fixed in the conceptual continuum" (3).

What Bush has described as Hughes's method, this boring in, is a secular version of what Tim Lilburn calls "Haecceitas . . . the insight of Christified sensibility, a knowing-in-love; . . . the source of what is strong and strange in verse" ("Thoughts" 35), an outgrowth of Duns Scotus' haecceitas, "'the ultimate reality of the being'" (35), and a close friend of Hopkins' inscape. It is the "thisness" of a pebble, an animal, a fern's frond, of a stone, a pumpkin, a tree, "as it exists in relation with its loving observer, the tree-known-in-love" (35). As the reading of Hopkins in chapter two illustrated, such "thisness," caught up in language, stretches it considerably.

Haecceitas . . . in fact, stretches language almost to the point of nonsense. Thinking of such a poetics of presence, of thisness, in terms of Deleuzian nonsense is intriguing, for his surface nonsense posits the relationship between signified and signifier -- invests the word itself with its own sense. Following part of Lilburn's definition can lead to
a more plausible union between nonsense and inscape than might initially
seem likely. Inscape, haecceitas: it requires a presence, usually in
both objects and language, found in systems of thought which recognize
the existence of an Absolute, a "transcendental signifier" at which the
sense stops for good: the hub of the wheel which stabilizes.

And inscape requires an Idealist turn of mind in its positing of
the existence of an "essence" -- the essential tree, the essential
stone, articulation through the essential word. Such Idealism,
gen般ly considered to be quite far removed from the materialist forum
of nonsense, does not necessarily assume an essential link between word
and thing, but it does seek to infuse the word momentarily with the
essence of a thing, even if such infusion requires the wrenching of the
word.

If surface nonsense provides stability, in an admittedly parodic
version of a transcendental signified, if it offers the temporary
status in which the word and the sign "mean" together, then it offers as well
the means to express a faith in presence which language, as the
materialist system it is currently cast to be, does not allow. This is
one of the most paradoxical and slippery functions of nonsense yet; it
undermines univocal Sense, but it simultaneously incarnates
linguistically just what and how that Sense would be, if it could be.
By being its own sense, nonsense is essentially the naming of its own
essence as well. This may be another reason why nonsense so often is
made to serve religious ends.

It seems only natural for Martin to insist that the process of
locating those elemental energies which Hughes prizes, the writing out
of the fullness of being of the "object," lies in employing
"unconditioned physical senses," the listening to the listenings of the
body so important to Olson and Zukofsky. Unfettered perception
facilitates an organic materialism that allows in-dwelling and is best
articulated in the very rhythms within which it falls. Such perception,
he suggests, allows one to become "an ignorant man again," as Wallace Stevens requires in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction." For, "no longer seeing only what we have been taught to see. . . [we] find ourselves in a vivid non-rational world where the interplay of elemental energies re-assumes the prime significance it had in ancient matriarchal societies" (Martin 142).

Because Hughes finds conventional, "civilized" language lacking when he seeks to infuse it with the life of thisness, he seeks his "ignorance" in a "primitive language," one related, for him, to the originary condition

in which man was an integral part of the natural world and, accordingly, did not subscribe to a metaphysics of deferred presence, but was in contact with the elemental power circuit of the universe. . . . And the primitive language corresponded to this existential fullness, for men communicated intuitively, through a language of sound, a non-conceptual language of essential presence (Bush 9).

In this language of sound, the voicing of phonic articulation, Hughes locates human primal energies, their kinship, blood-relation, with the world around them.

Hughes's convictions about language find their greatest realization in the "Orghast" experiment. In creating Orghast, he purposely attempted to leave behind the arbitrariness of language (Smith 42), "to offer the actors sounds from a physiological basis, which would, in the most literal sense, embody the mythic narrative he was composing" (43). Sometimes he used onomatopeia; other times he would "concentrate on what was to be expressed, and intuitively seek the sound for it" (44). Here's a sample of Orghast with the translation Hughes provided for the actors:

**BULLORGA OMOBOLOM FOR**  **SHARSAYA MULSULDA BRARG**

darkness opens its womb  I hear chaos roar
IN OMOBOM BULLORGA
in the womb of darkness
FREEASTAV OMOBOM MILD US GLITTALUGH
freeze her womb rivets like stars (50).

Because of its heavy reliance upon sound and the physiological
production of language, Orghast was meant to speak "directly through the
body," to be a language in which "all conceptual thought was a metaphor
of what the body, first, had perceived" (51). Hughes's statement seems
naive; the consistent use of "ombolom" for the word "womb," for
instance, implies a good deal of conscious determination. And, while
one can certainly understand the need for a translation like the one
above, especially during the workshopping of "Orghast," its existence
does seem to curb, in part, the spirit of Hughes's probings. A sensical
language seems unavoidable as a foundation.

Orghast was, however, at the very least, an attempt to devise "a
language that reveal[ed] the body as a map of human experience" (78).
So it's not surprising that, while creating it, Hughes thought about the
relationship which the body has with language generally. "The deeper
into language one goes," he explained to Smith, the chronicler of
Brook's theatrical experiment,

the less visual/conceptual its imagery, and the more
audial/v._ceral/muscular its system of tensions. This
accords with the biological fact that the visual nerves
connect with the modern human brain, while the audial nerves
connect with the cerebellum, the primal animal brain and
nervous system, direct. In other words, the deeper into
language one goes, the more dominated it becomes by purely
musical modes, and the more dramatic it becomes -- the more
unified with total states of being and with the
expressiveness of physical action (45).

While Hughes's intensely physical and pre-lingual language is
unrealizable, the implications of his ideas are exciting: buried beneath the sense and abstraction of language are ways of articulation which oppose or undermine linear, linguistic sense. The body, music, sound -- these elements are borrowed from other ways of meaning, earlier ways of being, to build up the verbal system. These are the same elements which, when resurrected in excess, can break open the system whose foundation they contributed to.

It's a very little leap from this Hughes to the Bandar-log running riot in the Cold Lairs or the chora huffing and puffing at a straw-house-thetic. For Hughes's claims of the originary status of sound, the sound which he appeals to for a pre-logical and nonsensical language, is an Idealistic echo of the importance sound plays in Kristeva's genetext, in articulating a subtextual, contradictory "sense."

"The ape is too distant to be sedulous": Feminism and Nonsense

One needs only look to the writing coming out of the Feminist movement to question those critics who suggest that "women don't favour nonsense" (Haughton 31). Such a statement suggests not only an overly narrow definition of Nonsense, or nonsensical writing, but also a failure to recognize shared methods of disturbing sense. Much feminist writing dwells on and in women's bodies. Sexually and erotically energized, écriture féminine, feminist writing at its most nonsensical makes demands:

Woman must write her body, must make up the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes, and rhetorics, orders and codes, must inundate, run through, go beyond the discourse with its last reserves (Cixous "Sorties" 94-5).

The basic premise of this writing and this movement is the oppression of women in all socio-historical matters, but especially in the matter of discourse, since the world is determined by language.
Daphne Marlatt considers the language around her and wonders what part women's physical experiences actually have in it:

so many terms for dominance in English are tied up with male experiencing, masculine hierarchies and differences (exclusion), patriarchal holdings with their legalities. where are the poems that celebrate the soft letting-go the flow of menstrual blood as it leaves her body? ("musing with mothertongue" 47)

Because men hold most of the positions of power in society, many feminists argue men also have the power to create a way of speaking which reflects only their world view, their selves.

This is a concern which echoes that of Virginia Woolf's character Mary Beton/Seton/Carmichael, who, in A Room of One's Own, puts forth the need for a woman's sentence:

It is useless [for women] to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure. Lamb, Browne, Thackeray, Newman, Sterne, Dickens, De Quincey -- whoever it may be -- never helped a woman yet, though she may have learnt a few tricks of them and adapted them to her use. The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully. The ape is too distant to be sedulcus (73).

Woolf insists that even those women, Emily Brontë and Jane Austen, who have found their own, non-masculine sentences, seem to exclude an essential part of femininity -- the friendship between women. The sexuality of women's bodies, which Marlatt seeks to incorporate in the sentence, is never broached. This absence is the concern of contemporary feminists influenced by the French Feminist movement.

It is true that language doesn't accommodate any aspect of the
body with ease. The God/Law/Definition, which Kristeva associates with the symbolic, is often construed as the seat of an "androcentric" power (one I'm not overly inclined to distribute according to gender, though throughout history men have certainly been seduced by it) which actively curbs the semiotic. It is endemic in language, however, that the "social" should attempt to prevent the "individual," the sexual, from disturbing language. A sexual and sensual decorum demands that certain physical experiences be excluded from language, and limits one's abilities to express other seemingly inoffensive (usually non-human) experiences.6

The evocation of sexuality or desire, be it male or female, arises only in a disrupted language. For instance, Marlatt abandons punctuation, lets association, rhyme and rhythm guide her through this prose love poem:

eating

a kiwi at four a.m. among the sheets green slice of cool going down easy on the tongue extended with desire for you and you in me it isn't us we suck those other lips tongue flesh wet wall that gives and gives whole fountains inner mountains moving out resistances you said ladders at the canyon leap desire is its way through walls swerve fingers instinct in you insist further persist in me too wave on wave to that deep pool we find ourselves/it dawning on us we have reached the same place "timeless" you recognize as "yes" giving yourself up not in we come suddenly round the bend to it descending with the yellow canyon flow the mouth everything drops away from time its

6 It's important to keep in mind, while exploring briefly Feminism's contributions to an understanding of how the body relates to nonsense, that there are at least two liberations in progress -- the liberation of women (and men) from patriarchal oppression, and that of the body (male as well as female) from a linguistic repression based on limited notions of what sense is, how it functions, and what is appropriate for language to express.
sheets two spoons two caved-in shells of kiwi fruit (Touch to My Tongue 24).

The words Marlatt uses are not "different," or difficult; nor is her syntax disturbed irretrievably; by exploiting the rush of words, the associative blend of ideas -- articulated by pulling punctuation, the stops, out of language -- she attempts to bring her poem, sensually, to an edge of sense. The poem at once imitates the flow of desire and captures the dissolution inherent in such desire. The symbolic tendency toward compartmentalization, division and linear structure is, in part, defeated by Marlatt's eclipsing of sentence divisions. Her use of the stream of consciousness technique imitates the unconscious' associative ordering principles, which stand in opposition to those of the symbolic.7

There is a reason, then, to see in feminist writing a connection with nonsense; in feminist theory, too, connections can be found.

"Women have served all these centuries," writes Woolf, "as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (35). In Speculum of the Other Woman, Irigaray extends this metaphor claiming that women must either reflect a narrow, grown-up, masculine world view, and so corroborate it (which creates, philosophically, artistically, psychologically, Pygmalions who can do just that) or be silent; preferably both. She concludes that woman becomes "another specularization. Whose twisted character is her inability to say what she represents" (134).

The twisted character of reflected woman reveals her inability to speak herself. To speak she must twist in another direction, a direction which brings her into contact with the bandar-logical poet, whose twists have revealed the mirror itself to be twisted, and so who

7 A similar attempt to depict the flow of sexuality and desire by using a stream of consciousness technique can be found in Joyce's Ulysses, when the rampant physicality of Molly Bloom is evoked in her infamous monologue.
has shown up and parodied the dominating sense system. No matter how close they stand to each other, though, Irigaray's womanspeech and nonsense are looking different ways: feminism claims to infuse language with the body in order to reclaim both, and thereby to acquire woman's self-determination; nonsense infuses language with the body for less pointedly political and practical reasons. Not self-determining but self-referential, nonsense language ingests the drives of the body for the exposure of sense -- a potentially political act with no programmatic intention or direction.

Women must twist language because they are excluded from it by the nature of words themselves, argues Irigaray. She quotes Jacques Lacan to show that this is not just a perception held by women, but that the perspectives about this exclusion may be quite different:

There is no woman who is not excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words, and it must be said that, if there is something they complain a lot about at the moment, that is what it is -- except that they don't know what they are saying, that's the whole difference between them and me (quoted in Irigaray, This Sex 87).

Lacan's arrogant attempt at what one hopes is humour gives more than a different take, albeit a confirming one, on woman's exclusion from language. He is, after all, the one who holds that language and the human unconscious are organized along the same lines, and his theories make up the major point of access for those who link sexuality and writing. This remark, taken in the general context of his theory, can be made to argue for the need to articulate women's sexuality, to let women know what they are talking about, and how they are saying it.

The articulation of women's sexuality is precisely what Irigaray, Cixous and the other proponents of écriture féminine are after. They envision a discourse which relates, in several ways, to a highly-sexualized female body. One way is the entertainment of the Other.
Cixous talks of writing as the experience of an other, of a multiple "oneing" within the individual:

Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me -- the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live -- that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? -- a feminine one, a masculine one, some? -- several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars (85-6).

She attributes the ability to write in this way to a bisexuality, which is not a matter of sexual orientation, but rather of the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes, evident and insistent in different ways according to the individual, the nonexclusion of difference or of a sex, and starting with this "permission" one gives oneself, the multiplication of the effects of desire's inscription on every part of the body and the other body (85).

She finds the most natural model of this entertainment of the other in maternity, the housing and nurturing of a child within the womb (90). Kristeva, in an interview quoted in Leon Roudiez's introduction to Desire in Language, makes a connection along the same lines, with an admittedly different emphasis. "The arrival of a child is," she says, ". . . the first and the often only opportunity a woman has to experience the Other in its radical separation from herself, that is, as an object of love" (10).

There are startling implications here. If language is born of the continual, and constantly unsuccessful, search for union with the Other, and if that sense of lack (articulated by the symbolic but expressive of the semiotic) can be even momentarily assuaged by the experience of pregnancy and childbirth, then it would seem that woman (or at least the pregnant woman) is closer somehow to the semiotic than men are, that the
desire to return to the womb can be realized by carrying a child in the womb, that the womb has a direct link with the *chora*. And that pregnancy and childbirth can temporarily *erase* the thetic rather than merely facilitate the breaching of it.

These are implications, not assertions, and they do lean towards a biologism which can be unhealthy in either pro- or anti-feminist writings. Freud’s "dark continent" of femininity could certainly be seen from some of these vantage points. In light of Kristeva’s theoretical writings, I’m hesitant to adopt these implications without amendment. Pregnancy may well be one way of experiencing the Other, of momentarily filling the lack which motivates language. But different modes of erasure are conceivable: the madness dealt with in Kristeva’s dissertation is another. Kristeva certainly doesn’t exclude men, who are excluded from the actual physiological experience of pregnancy, from the production of semiotically-sated literature; her doctoral thesis, part of which has been published as *Revision in Poetic Language*, deals exclusively with male writers. She’s not as prone to the traps of essentialism and biologism which much of the French feminist movement falls into.

Irigaray offers another reason for linking proliferation, division and disorder with femininity. Women’s sexual "organs" and erogenous zones are prolific and scattered:

*woman has sex organs more or less everywhere.* She finds pleasure almost anywhere. Even if we refrain from invoking the hystericalization of her entire body, the geography of her pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its

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* Cixous doesn’t limit this woman’s writing to women either. Her example of a man capable of this sexual stretch is Jean Genet (84). It’s not so much Genet’s sexual orientation which makes this stretch possible, as his ability to infuse his texts with the presence of an Other, and another "order." Cixous cites the tendency of Genet’s texts to "divide," "dismember," and "regroup" as indicative of a "proliferating, maternal femininity" (84). This tendency to derange is indicative of femininity because women are outside the structure of order as defined by the current discourse of sense; they are by nature "derangers" (85).
differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined (This Sex 28).

In Irigaray’s configuration of things the body’s sexual geography is the key to syntax. Male sexuality is limited to the penis, she says with disturbing insensitivity, hence the univocal, “one-way thinking” (Brossard III) attributed to systems, even language systems, arranged around male sexuality." Because women have a multidirectional sexuality, Irigaray contends they require a multifoliate language: a fluid, "[wholly] fluent" (This Sex 216) syntax, released from the "shadow shaped something like the letter ‘I’" (Woolf 95). Such a syntax is, I believe, unachievable because the body which dwells in language -- the semiotic -- requires the symbolic for articulation. Even Irigaray admits this syntax is hard to define, but, she speculates,

there would no longer be either subject or object, "oneness" would no longer be privileged, there would no longer be proper meanings, proper names, "proper" attributes . . . . instead, that "syntax" would involve nearness, proximity (134).

This idealized form of women’s writing must be disruptive, circular, blurring; their writing must be in the “white ink” of their breast milk (Cixous 94), steeped in the blood and rhythms of their physical, periodic experience and so outside of culture (Clément 8). It must "steal into language to make it fly. . . . pleasuring in . . . routing the sense police" (Cixous 96). Irigaray’s discussion of sexuality and syntax, of language as multifoliate once it entertains the rhythms of the body, is a startlingly exact description of what a purely semiotic language, were one possible, would be.

* Such diffuse and scattered eroticism is exactly what F. preaches in Cohen’s Beautiful Losers, though a reader isn’t expected to follow his teachings verbatim. Still, a pan-orgasmic body is envisioned -- "Down with genital imperialism! All flesh can come! Don’t you see what we have lost? Why have we abdicated so much pleasure to that which lives in our underwear? Orgasms in the shoulder! Knees going off like firecrackers!" (34).
A seeming insensitivity to the problem of articulating any sexuality is an example of the biologism which Toril Moi finds so problematic in Irigaray and Cixous. Moi claims that both subscribe to a biological or "metaphysical" viewpoint (102-49, especially 123, 139) which ironically is promoted by patriarchal thought. Subscribing to the idea that woman embodies "the flip-side of all those dualities which preface Cixous's essay "Sorties" -- day/night; sun/moon; culture/nature; head/heart (Cixous 63) -- even if it is to find in the subversive embrace of them a sort of liberation, is still to be defined by sexuality organized around a male principle. Not only are they working with an idealized (born of Idealism?) vision of woman, a primal Earth-Mother-Goddess not so far from Hughes's primitive originary beings, but Irigaray, at least, evokes a "naive" version of male sexuality. She is falling prey to the lure of the phallus as omnipotent sexual organ -- or at least to the myth that men need and want no other sexual identity than that found in the penis. As Ann Rosalind Jones contends, sexuality is by and large a cultural, not a biological, reality (367). If one chooses to define feminism and femininity through biological definitions, the source of the definitions that are oppressing women, how can feminism create any forward-moving change (369)?

The writing envisioned by Cixous and Irigaray could be construed as a nonsensical writing if it acknowledged as well the need for the symbolic, for the sexual energy and multiplicity which they advocate requires an intensely semiotic voice. It is by definition subversive, and is in many ways a "feminine" writing (if such oppositions are necessary) since it does move closer to imitating the rhythm. women's bodies, and the rhythms of any body in the world, through its engagement with the drives of the body. But the term "feminine writing" in their context remains uncomfortably close to a sort of literary biologism. Despite this weakness, Cixous and Irigaray go a long way toward creating and promoting a writing which works against the rigidities of the
symbolic.

Drawing a distinction between feminist texts and feminist writing, Nicole Brossard (herself at times seemingly guilty of biological oversimplification) argues that the body is not a specifically feminist domain:

Though we may speak of feminists texts, it seems to me that we cannot speak of feminist writing. Insofar as I conceive of writing as a way of using the body, that is, how the body physically asserts itself to gain its formal status in linguistic terrain, I can speak only of feminine and/or lesbian writing. Certainly, the body has ideas and feminist thoughts but the body itself is not feminist . . . .

Feminism can make a place for a 'body politic' but it cannot offer us a writing of the body or of the skin. However, feminist consciousness nourishes and transforms the body's cognitive and perceptual modes (91).

Brossard's definition of writing, the body exerting itself linguistically, is a Barthesian one. The influence is clear; she alludes to him in "The Aerial Letter" (68). But her notion of writing as it applies to women steps past his idea of "language lined with flesh" (The Pleasure of the Text 66), an idea which many feminists pick up and elaborate upon. Brossard's feminine writing results when the body meets the world from a feminist point of view, when selection of sensory perception is governed by an informed feminist consciousness. Feminine writing must go beyond the mere recording of the body and its unconscious rhythms; it must use that semiotic energy within a clearly-formed, politicized sensory framework.

There's another direction to turn in the search for the relationship between nonsense, the body and feminist writing: back to the womb. The return to the womb is a return to the pre-linguistic, whose importance to writers like Hughes and theorists like Kristeva has
already been seen. It is certainly central to Marlatt who claims, in an interview with George Bowering, "Everything is prelinguistic. & as soon as you get into linguism, language, humming it, uttering it, you get back into the problem of translating" (58). What Marlatt suggests is that writing is an attempt at the impossible, a return to the inarticulate body; "the inarticulate is ground" (59), she continues. And the most inarticulate time of life is the time in the womb; birth is the movement towards and into organized language.

Gail Scott suggests that the rhythms of the mother's body, heard in the womb, give to all infants an oral language. But the break in relations between boy's and their mothers which occurs at the Oedipal stage (the time of language acquisition) results in the narrowing of their speech; they become fluent in "the 'fathertongue' of education, the media, the law" (67). Girls, because of their double relationship with the mother (their confused and never completed separation during the Oedipal phase), develop a double relationship with the oral speech of the mothertongue, a voice still vaguely heard despite attempts to speak in the official language of society.

The suggestion has some wonderful ramifications. First is the idea that one's "first language," the pre-linguistic semiotic, is originally the "language" of another body and not one's own. Consequently both languages, that of the genotext and the phenotext, are languages of Others. In trying to articulate this primary (primal) language, by disrupting the flow of symbolic language with the "articulation" of the body (those drives and pulsions which mark the genotext) one speaks the mother's body, the rhythms learned whilst in the Other who is now lacking. "The writer," says Barthes, is someone who plays with his mother's body . . . in order to glorify it, to embellish it, or in order to dismember it, to take it to the limit of what can be known about the body: I would go so far as to take bliss in a
disfiguration of the language (Pleasure of the Text 37).
The pulsing rhymes and rhythms of genotextual nonsense are very much a
movement towards the womb, a calling out in the aqueous language
learned by the fetus.

Another ramification of Scott's ideas about an oral womb-language
is the importance lent to sound. An oral and rhythmic language
necessarily privileges sound and sound patterns. Chantal Chawaf writes
in "Linguistic Flesh": "If a music of femininity is arising out of its
own oppression, it materializes through the rediscovered body" (178).
It's easy, and justifiable, to turn this phrase around and say that if a
language of the "rediscovered body" is arising, it is materializing out
of a music of femininity, out of that "animal music" which so appeals to
Hughes, or the visual music which marks Zukofsky's work. Or at least
out of the musical relations of sound explored in the next chapter.
"Becoming Visceral"

"Our whole life a translation/ the permissible fibs" begins
Adrienne Rich’s "Our Whole Life" (See Appendix VI), a poem of vivid
social and political commitment, one in which words mean intensely
according to their "accepted" definitions, despite Rich’s cry against
the limitations of language, the curbing of political minorities’ speech
by official (oppressive) language. In this poem two apparent paradoxes
resonate with each other. It may seem a paradox that Rich writes such a
powerful poem in a language which (so the poem itself suggests)
pressures her -- language may not be true to her experience, but it
allows her to voice her objections. It may seem, as well, paradoxical
to find a poem so bent on communicating a specific meaning entertain the
subversive impulses of the semiotic. But that's what one finds upon
reading this poem closely. Beyond, beneath, the rhetoric of Rich's poem
are movements straining against the poem's perceived order. These
semiotic incursions may well be examples of a voice jarring with the
language it uses; whatever reasoning one applies to them, there is no
denying the tensions which they animate throughout the poem.

"Our Whole Life" transforms its speaker into word; she becomes
word, by association, because of the inadequacies of language to express
her experience. Her life "is" a translation. I put that "is" in
quotation marks because in a very real sense the speaker "is not."
There is a noticeable absence of the verb "to be" in this poem; the only
appearance it makes is negated -- "there are no words for this." If
Marilyn Farwell is right, and Rich’s tendency is to emphasize
experience, to see a poem "as a verb instead of a noun" (196), then this
lack is a substantial one. It is still a substantial lack if one reads
Rich’s poetry not as verb-oriented (or polarized diachronic) but as
adjectival poetry. A poetry which frees attributes from a
substantivizing or stable centre, and whose movement away from a
noun/verb opposition is emphasized by the shifting images created by her
use of adjectives.

The poem concerns a life of absent or negated existence, of
missing words and "dead letters." It is essentially a series of
disinations or fragments, a form which challenges at least one possible
interpretation of the title: "Our Whole Life" — "whole" as "unified,"
as "complete." But in many sections of the poem, and often between the
sections (or stanzas) themselves, there are no firmly articulated
connections; words are suppressed. The poem establishes a hesitant
balance between speech and silence, between saying something and saying
nothing (or perhaps more to the point here — not being able to say
something), which is highly reminiscent of Nonsense. Words and meanings
which are never raised in the poem are entertained in it nonetheless,
because of the power of Rich's use of silence, metaphor and fragment;
these devices become palimpsests covering possible other ways of saying
and meaning. Allowing associative meaning where more direct "truths"
cannot be stated.

Lines and sections resonate with meaning, build toward the final
three sections which stand as one disjointed unit. Indeed, the
sectioning of the poem itself is unstable; associations that lurk in the
silence between the sections suggest various ways of realigning the
lines. And since the poem has no complete sentences, the logic of
grammar and punctuation don't contest these realignments. Capital
letters are structural rather than syntactical, and so lump the lines of
the poem into groups of four, then three, then two, and finally six.
They are indicators of a possible order other than that presented by the
section breaks themselves, an order spanning the silence of the breaks.
The most obvious order which the poem seems to establish, the order of
the section breaks (two stanzas composed of two lines and then one
composed of one line) is quickly, nonsensically, undercut. By joining
what should be the next single line stanza and so should, structurally
speaking, stand alone, to the following stanza of two lines, Rich is
destabilizing the poem's expected stanzaic structure. The number of lines in the poem is sufficient to continue the stanza composition, mentioned above, three times; the poem quickly undermines that order, however, with stanzas composed of three, two and finally one line. So the line count of stanzas reads: 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 3, 2, 1; the last three stanzas set up a pattern of diminishment which will be discussed later.

This slide away from the earliest stanza patterning is facilitated by the poem's only simile, its only outright statement of "this is like that." Throughout the poem, Rich speaks covertly, relying upon metaphor to say, without saying, her meaning. While her use of a simile here is still a deflection of direct speech, a reliance on a figure of speech to relay a point which cannot be stated outright, this simile is the most overt of all her images, the closest she comes to a declarative statement in "Our Whole Life." It is a breakthrough of speech in the poem and affects its structure. Always the poem has been spoken at a remove, with the words which forge connection between ideas and images remaining unspoken. This one "like," connected to its horrifying image, requires that the poem be restructured. The poem's tendency to be associative, to restructure itself in order to speak its message more openly, urges a non-centrist and asyntactical reading, one which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, which moves toward the grasping of a "whole life" at once.

"Our whole life a translation/ the permissible fibs" -- there is a leap in logic here as two seemingly disparate things, "translation" and "fibs," are associated, casting doubt upon the validity, the veracity of translation, positing the unreliability, instability, of language. This suggestion of failure is heightened when the "fibs" are followed by "and now a knot of lies," a correlation which at least tentatively implies a causal connection and which, despite the shift in intensity, provides a bridge between the first two sections, and almost threatens to pull the second line away from the first, tying it up to the third line.
The first line, as well, links up with the third last, by virtue of a parallel structure: "Our whole life a translation"; "his whole body a cloud of pain" -- the structure supports the analogies of our life/his body, translation/pain, joining the speaker and the unnamed Algerian as they experience inarticulate oppression. While the second and second last lines do not continue the paralleling, the association of fibs with a lack of words furthers the idea of language lying, or feigning a reality which it is not capable of presenting.

The knotting of the lies in the third line is not only an entangling in, and so a trapping, but also a phonic negation: knot, not. Such sound and word play is central to both feminist and nonsensical writing because it reveals the "lie" which the symbolic makes of language in trying to exclude the body, the semiotic, from articulation. Sound can allude to other, homonymic meanings, or to musical meaning. In Rich's poem, the lies are a translation into a language in which adequate words are not allowed to exist; such lies, by their very existence, negate experience and "silence" the speaker.

The fourth line, "eating at itself to get undone" carries over the idea of entrapment, indeed sounds almost reminiscent of an animal gnawing at itself to get free of a trap, and speaks of a movement not unlike that of the semiotic as it works against the symbolic's restraint, distorting and disfiguring the very language which it must rely upon to express it. While this fourth line has some alliance with the third line, with which it's paired, there is a strong pull at the line to join the fifth line, which stands alone, turning in upon itself in the act of devouring -- "Words bitten thru words." This shortened, commercial-ese, form of "thru" looks partially eaten already, and exhibits the sort of semiotic collapse which results from a heightening of the sound value of a word, and the undermining of standard notions of words and word uses. The difficulty of envisioning this line's reference (just how do words bite through words?) also challenges the
way language works.

There is no metaphorical carry over, no drawing together of the fifth and sixth lines. Rather than expanding further the images of devouring, Rich turns to quite another image, equally aggressive: "meanings burnt-off like paint/ under the blowtorch." Using an image of paint stripping, in the process of which a paint surface blisters with heat and then is removed, Rich seems to question the relationship between meaning and a word; a word, the more physical, concrete thing which is merely covered over, adorned by a removable meaning.

Momentarily, this section floats by itself, dislocated, surrounded on both sides by quite unrelated sections. But the idea of "burning" connects with the twelfth line, where that participle describing the Algerian floats by itself, isolated from the poem and from the "village" by the only punctuation mark in the poem. Meanings, like the Algerian, are burnt; the Algerian, burning, becomes a word himself, the only word for himself; his pain, meanings d' troyed, devoured, the only means of truly speaking within the "oppressor's language."

The fifth stanza, too, stands alone -- "All those dead letters/ rendered into the oppressor's language." The "dead letters" can be both lifeless bits of alphabet, or undelivered mail, messages written but never received. Whether the letters were dead when written, or are dead because unread, whether the silence is caused by complete lack of articulation or the suppression of what meager attempts at articulation occur, is unclear. A subtle thematic link turns upon the verb "rendured," for it can mean "surrendered," "depicted," "given over," and, quite significantly, "translated" or "reduced by heat." The reading of the verb supports either reading of the silence, supports either form of imposition. As well, the resonance of translation means that a link between the first line and the ninth does, in fact, exist, but more or less obscured by language.

The poem seems to reach a natural division between the fifth and
sixth sections; the sections, after the fifth, are much more clearly connected than the earlier ones, and, through Rich's use of simile, the poem is located in a more concrete political reality than it previously was. These sections progress in a pattern of diminishment -- three lines, two lines, one line -- underscorung the breaking down of language to its gut meaning, the rendering of language to a more visceral speech. This diminishment is also styled in the first half of the poem through Rich's use of capitals.

Thus the poem can be read nonsensically, despite the relative scarcity of more "traditional" Nonsense strategies -- phonemic collapse, rhythm and rhyme. Its sensical movements and arrangements work against each other; lines move away from their partners, seem drawn through metaphor to other lines, sections seem only loosely united within and, sometimes, without themselves; capitals and themes urge a unity which the gaps and spaces between lines and between metaphors "silence" at one level. Spaces between sections, however, are highly active, saying as much as the words of the poem do. "Our Whole Life," formally, turns in upon itself, like the words that bite themselves. As the lines elide, as the form fluctuates against itself, the nature of the poem becomes the critical speaking which cannot be articulated in the words of the symbolic, the "oppressor's language." In a sense, the poem too is on fire, burning like the Algerian, becoming visceral.
Chapter IV -- "as birds as well as words":
Nonsense and Sound

That makes a sound that gently sings that gently sounds but
sounds as sounds It sounds as sounds of course as words but
it sounds as sounds. It sounds as sounds that is to say as
birds as well as words.
(Gertrude Stein, "What is English Literature" 30)

The fish is indeed the most oral of animals; it poses the
problem of muteness, of consumability, and of the consonant
in the wet/palatalized element -- in short, the problem of
language.
(Deleuze 135)

The Duchess was wrong, or partly wrong. "Take care of the sense,
and the sounds will take care of themselves," she advises Alice (AW 97);
but in Carroll’s Wonderland, and in Nonsense generally, sounds not only
take care of themselves, they "take care" of sense too. Even her moral
is proof. While she moralizes, taking care with the sense, a slight
phonemic shift grants a traditional axiom ("Take care of the pence and
the pounds will take care of themselves") a liberation of sound; the
very liberation, independence, which her moral implies.

Of course, such phonic liberation reverberates in the heart of
nonsense. The language of nonsense sounds, as Stein puts it, "as birds
as well as words" ("What is English Literature" 30). Every theory of
Nonsense includes a consideration of how manipulations of sound, like
the frequently cited pun, can fracture the sense of ordinary language.
Locating nonsensical sound in the psychical body, however, relating it
to a "feminine," animal music, as chapter three has done, is not common.

Deleuze, for instance, categorically denies the location of
classical Nonsense in the body. His insistence on calling most forms of
nonsense (and Nonsense) incorporeal has already been noted. "What
renders language possible," he writes -- and it should be remembered

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that, for Deleuze, Nonsense is integral to the production of linguistic sense --

is that which separates sounds from bodies and organizes them into propositions, freeing them for the expressive function. It is always a mouth which speaks; but the sound is no longer the noise of a body which eats -- a pure orality -- in order to become the manifestation of a subject expressing itself (181).

Language exists, in his theory, as a result of its distinction from other bodily noises (grunting, yawning, farting) (165), even as musical sounds are distinct from noise. But that separation is for the purpose of expression, a purpose already shading away from the functional realm of the nonsensical semiotic.

Such a distinction lies in Deleuze's notion of the "event" (181). Foucault, in his essay on Deleuze's early works, "Theatrum Philosophicum," summarizes Deleuze's position:

An event is not a state of things, something that could serve as a referent for a proposition (the fact of death is a state of things in relation to which an assertion can be true or false; dying is a pure event that can never verify anything...). An intangible meaning with one side turned toward things because "dying" is something that occurs, as an event to [someone] and the other toward the proposition because "dying" is what is said about [someone] in a statement. To die: a dimension of the proposition; an incorporeal effect produced by a sword; a meaning and an event; a point without thickness or substance of which someone speaks and which roams the surface of things. We should not restrict meaning to the cognitive core that lies at the heart of a knowable object; rather, we should allow it to reestablish its flux at the limit of words and things
(173-4).

To summarize: at the limit of dense bodies, an event is incorporeal (a metaphysical surface); on the surface of words and things, an incorporeal event is the meaning of a proposition (its logical dimension); in the thread of discourse, an incorporeal meaning-event is fastened to the verb (the infinitive point of the present) (175).

Deleuze's event, as it relates to language, is sense, that same sense which is so intimately dependent upon what he describes as surface nonsense. The event mediates between the cause and effect of his radically reconstrued causality in much the same way that nonsense joins sense and senselessness, by validating the former through the latter. The event "de-substantializes" or de-materializes the physical core of cause and effect, extracts their component being as articulable but ultimately kinetic, incorporeal; the event is the abstract and constantly repetitive occasion which links the bodies of cause and effect.

But nonsense, as was argued in chapters two and three, is another sort of mediator. Poised between language and the body, it is one of the many frontiers of language where distinctions begin to break down, just the sort of distinctions which are rendered feasible by Deleuze's theory of the event. If the event occasions language by making sound incorporeal, then nonsense as I understand it reverses the event. For nonsense is an attempt to re-substantialize, re-materialize, language, and to do so in its own kinetic fashion. Nonsense explores the kinesis, the instability of the body by re-materializing language, infusing it with the roaming, and never stable, chora.  

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1 As I pointed out in chapter three, I depart from Deleuze's understanding of Nonsense when I imbue it with a level of materiality which he claims is found only in schizoid language. Nonsense, as Deleuze conceives it, is wholly incorporeal, is in fact a meaning-event. I argue that while nonsense and Nonsense may serve the function which Deleuze attributes to them (stabilizing the continual deferral of sense), they simultaneously reveal the process of sense-making and super-impose upon verbal language other (often more material) systems of meaning. I propose a multiple and material
The music of the rediscovered feminized body proposed by Chantal Chawaf at the end of chapter three is linked to Kristeva's notion of poetic language. That rediscovered body is inevitably, for Kristeva, the mother's. She argues that one vital component of "rejection," the process which "interjects" semiotic devices into language, is

oralization: a reunion with the mother's body, which is no longer viewed as an engendering, hollow, and vaginated, expelling and rejecting body, but rather as a vocalic one -- throat, voice, and breasts: music, rhythm, prosody, paragrams, and the matrix of the prophetic parabola (Revolution 153).

Nonsense simultaneously establishes and undermines sense, and it does so with the help of a "vocalic," polyphonic (but genderless) body. How such a musicalized body enters nonsense and poetry is the subject of this chapter.

Curse of the Mummy's Tomb: Nonsense, Poetry and the Possibilities of Sound

When asked if there would be a dictionary of Orghast, Ted Hughes replied "Where is the dictionary of music?" "There is one -- in your body" (Smith 209). Hughes's rhetorical question and his surprise response recall one of his statements quoted earlier:

The deeper into language one goes, the less visual/conceptual its imagery, and the more audial/visceral/muscular its system of tensions... the more dominated it becomes by purely musical modes (Smith 45).

Hughes ties the body and language together at a primal level; it is, as

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function for nonsense which Deleuze does not accept, he stands here, as does his theory of the event, as a basis to change, or upon which to build.
has already been suggested, a similarly primeval position that Cixous points to when she locates in women's bodies "the first, nameless love [which] is singing" (93).

Even if one removes this originary notion, this primeval myth, from the body and music, an undeniable connection with language remains. The body produces the sound which informs language, or at least spoken language, so it must interact with language. In "Lyric's Larynx," Steve McCaffery writes: "It is sound more so than meaning binds/ the body to language" (North of Intention 178). A writing like Nonsense which is intimate with sound is bound to the body.

An obvious counter-argument: poetry and nonsense are usually written forms, meant to be read silently. Avant-garde composer R. Murray Schafer takes just such a stance when comparing music and language. Despite the numerous similarities between the two, he concludes that:

In language words are symbols standing metonymically for something else. The sound of a word is a means to another end, an acoustic accident that can be dispensed with entirely if the word is written, for then the writing conveys the word's essence, and its sound is totally absent or unimportant. Printed language is silent information (202).

Print is a "sarcophagus" (171) for sound, he contends.

There is a limited logic here. Superficially at least one has to admit that the printed word is silent, voiceless. But to what extent does the printed word constitute language or, going to the opposite extreme, to what extent is it a notational form, a scoring for language? What one must ask oneself is not does language, unlike music, exist to communicate (that will be dwelt upon later) but rather what is the relationship of the printed word to language. For surely the written alphabet, the visual medium of language, is not language per se, not the
entirety of language. To suggest that the printed word is the ultimate or only incarnation of language is to sell short our communicative system. If writing is considered in part a notation for language's intimacy with sound, or considered only one facet of language (whether or not, as is usually the case, that language is directed at a meaningful end), then one can begin to open up language to its phonic possibilities. Print may be silent, but the reader of print is not -- even as I write and re-read these lines my mind's ear hears each word, syllable, letter. The same is true of all silent readings.

Such questions about sound and writing cannot be asked, and such tentative conclusions can't be reached, without confronting Derrida's grammatological deconstruction of the privileging of speech. He argues in his early works, *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*, that the opposing of speech and writing, and the subsequent privileging of speech over writing are the result of western civilization's historical worship of the logos, a transcendental absolute which is an unprovable figment of its own philosophy. Such a hierarchy presupposes a presence, a fullness of being, associated with speech which is not, or cannot be, found in writing. Such an opposition implicitly defines writing as "a parasitic and imperfect representation" of speech (Culler 100).

Derrida, however, claims that writing, or what is meant by his re-definition of writing, precedes speech. Christopher Norris explains it this way:

Writing, for Derrida, is the 'free play' or element of undecidability within every system of communication. . . .

Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge (28-9).

It is the "arche-trace" which is present in, and so comes before, all origins. Speech is not indicative of a fullness, of a link to the
All language is "written," then, even that which is spoken, for all language bespeaks a state of lack.

As soon as nonsense admits a participation simultaneously within language and within pre- or non-lingual modes, admits its incorporation of a Derridean arche-trace, it reconstrues one of the premises of deconstruction. By willfully incorporating Kristeva's semiotic within its articulation in a very definite and disruptive way, by identifying that "free play" with the musicalized "maternal" body, nonsense is responding to lack and differance. The breaching of the thetic doesn't eradicate lack or desire; chapter two indicated that, because the
semiotic must be represented within the symbolic, the desirous lack which motivates the semiotic's assault on repression is never satisfied. The interdependence of these two modalities precludes either of them ever being singularly satisfied. However, poetic language and, to a greater extent, nonsense go a considerable distance towards responding to this lack and towards blurring the boundaries which separate lingual and pre-lingual modes. They entertain and exploit this lack self-consciously.

Rendering an account of "human delusion," voicing, that is, his version of the Rousseauistic premises central to phonocentric civilization, Derrida writes:

Man calls himself man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementarity: the purity of nature, of animality, primitivism, childhood, madness, divinity. The approach to these limits is at once feared as a threat of death, and desired as access to a life without differance. The history of man calling himself man is the articulation of all of these limits among themselves (Of Grammatology 244-45).

What Derrida, in order to expose humanism's binary basis, sets up as the factors oppositional to Rousseauean lingual humanity are some of the many elements related to nonsense. Nonsense is not childhood, madness, divinity, nature, animality or primitivism; yet, as the taxonomy in chapter one argued, it participates in almost all of them, through its engagement with play, the irrational and materiality. It spans or blurs the sorts of opposition which deconstruction seeks to undermine.

Such blurring of boundaries is integral to nonsense's difference from deconstruction. The deconstructive principle is, according to Vincent Leitch, one which emphasizes the gap between traditional oppositions in order to encourage a questioning of the premises upon which these binaries are constructed. He suggests:
This strategic inversion and stubborn exposé [of binary oppositions] produce an unexpected gap, forcing the emergence of a new concept, which nameless mark neither neutralizes nor reforms the old opposition. Rather it functions as a disorganizing structural force that invisibly inhabits and transgresses the opposition somewhat [sic] like the Unconscious of Freud (180).

Nonsense inverts and highlights such oppositions as well, but does so not to open up a gap between them but to close one down. Rather than replacing meaning with the meaninglessness of a constantly receding meaning, nonsense requires the two, meaning and meaninglessness, to coexist.

And if nonsense is that place where meaning shades into meaninglessness, where sense shades into senselessness, it is no less the place where other oppositions blend while still maintaining their oppositional force. Each pole is demonstrably a function, an integral and parasitic resident of its opposite. Nonsense implies, to apply Charles Bernstein's words on a different (albeit marginally related) topic, a "deeper reality of the interpenetrability and interdependence of all oppositions as appositions" ("I Think I Understand Alan Davies" 287). Meaning is as parasitically related to meaninglessness as meaninglessness is to meaning. And speech is as parasitic to writing (in the common sense of the word, not Derrida's) as writing is to speech. Yet integral as these oppositions may be to each other, they retain their own integrity. Unlike the traditional dialectic process in which thesis and antithesis merge to make a higher, more valuable synthesis, nonsensical blending, as is the case with negative dialectics, never devalues its "thesis" or "antithesis," never privileges its "synthesis" over its component parts.

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2 One reason why the term "bandar-logic" fits this theory of nonsense so nicely is that it phonically reflects the way nonsense banterers/banters with logocentricism.
Many of the writers I have been and will be discussing might be termed phonocentric, whether or not one conceives of it as a pejorative term. That does not mean, however, that nonsense is phonocentric. A phonocentric writer would find a grounding in sound, which nonsense does not have. I'm inclined to borrow Foucault's description of Deleuze's theory as "phonodecentring" ("Theatrum Philosophicum" 180) to describe nonsense. Nonsense is an intimate and tenuous meeting of sound and print; as such, it is at once both, and neither, phonocentric and graphocentric; the same movement that centralizes sound, de-centralizes it. Lear's limericks delicately poise the visual and the linguistic with and against each other; the illustrations, as was shown in chapter one, illustrate, extend or undermine the verses. The same is true of the inter-relationship between sound and print in nonsense. Because nonsense is at heart a balancing act, neither sound nor print can ever tip the scales.

To return to Schafer's metaphor: if print is a "sarcophagus" for sound, then nonsense is a Saturday-afternoon-at-the-movies-grade-B-quasi-Freudian-flick -- "Curse of the Mummy's Tomb." Sound may be buried but it's not dead yet; it's undead, or won't stay dead. Those elements of sound stalk through printed language raising the reader's spirits, spirits of a wholly other sort. Schafer might even give qualified assent to this suggestion; in The Thinking Ear, he quotes a small boy he once taught who defined poetry as "when words sing" (235), a definition which hardly suggests the printed language of poetry has both feet in the grave.

Nonsense relies on the hesitant fusion of speech and writing, of sound and print. But sounding out words in the mind, weighing their

\footnote{Foucault attributes this neologism to Deleuze's work because it is very much concerned with orality ("the mouth where the profundity of an oral body separates itself from incorporeal meaning" ["Theatrum Philosophicum" 179]), but Deleuze's continual exploration of the margins of accepted philosophical schools of thought breaks away from the defining and confining traditions of logocentrism.}
sound against their printed version, also facilitates poetry. 
Zukofsky's definition of writing is more than the "thinking with things as they exist" related in chapter three to a perceptually-based language; it is also, as he continues his statement, "directing them along a line of melody" (Prepositions 12). The organic life of the object is best reflected in the organic, melodic life of the word, in what Martin calls the "re-affirmation of its physical properties, its visual shape and aural resonance" (38). One way Zukofsky works towards such a re-affirmation is to write "skinny poems" (Hatlen 346); often lines are composed of only two or three words (see for instance "A-19"). The words seem more like separate entities than part of a syntactical whole, though syntax itself is preserved. Because the flow of the line doesn't pull her through the poem briskly, the reader is encouraged to dwell on each word as word, to turn it over visually and aurally. Such turning, such renewed listening and looking, gives the phonic inter-relationships of words the opportunity to challenge and supplement lexical and grammatical sense. "As such," Hatlen continues, the words "are perhaps best envisioned as pulses of energy, . . . as material artifacts, and as notes in an unending melody" (346).

Schafer contends that "Music is sound as sound" (202). This being the case, Zukofsky's poetics come startlingly, but not surprisingly, close to music. He succinctly presents them in "A-12":

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{music} \\
\text{speech}
\end{array}
\]

An integral
Lower limit speech
Upper limit music ("A" 138).

He sees his poetry as an integer composed of both speech and music, as a
mediator between them. Writing and print, one notes, isn't mentioned; Zukofsky stands firmly on the side of sound. An even clearer articulation of his phonocentrism is found in "A Statement for Poetry," in which he posits the possibility of imagining a speech wholly separated from writing, one that is purely "a movement of sounds." This is the "musical horizon of poetry" (Prepositions 20), a horizon which will be explored, after the relationship between music and language has been considered.

Rubbing Against the Grain: Language and the Semiotics of Music

This discussion risks imprecision. When, if ever, does the use of the term "musical" cease to be metaphorical? Kristeva points out that "the best metaphor" for the rhythmic assertion of the chora is "a piece of music or a work of architecture" (Revolution 126), but her paradigm allows for a non-metaphorical use of the term as well. Before looking more closely at how nonsense and poetry can mean musically, it will be helpful to determine what is meant by "music" and how it differs from language.

In Silence, John Cage asks "If words are sounds, are they musical or are they just noise?" (42). The question is part of "Composition as Process," a lecture comprised entirely of questions. It is also part of his larger attempt to question the limits of music and language, to promote a phonic continuum in which sound is never silent, and music incorporates all sorts of sounds -- even unplanned noises. His ideas are important to this discussion because they provide an alternative to Deleuze's theory that language is made possible through its distinctness from sounds.

For Deleuze, words are not sounds, or at least are sounds severely qualified by their dissociation from the body. Cage acknowledges such distinctions by highlighting their arbitrariness. "Yes," he might say,
"but what's the nature of those distinctions, and why are they made?"

He purposely incorporates bodily noises into some of his lectures, pencils in when to cough or blow his nose (see "45' for a Speaker" in Silence), so that the idea of such distinctness can be questioned.

These bodily noises become part of the "meaning-event" (Foucault "Theatrum" 174)' which is his presentation, the process of inquisition which evokes sense. By virtue of their inclusion within the lecture's structure, they resonate with meanings. But they resonate with imprecise meanings which cannot be individually defined apart from the sounds' broadly gestural flaunting of the conventions of language and lectures. No one cough means separately from the other coughs, sneezes or snorts; yet each means beyond the realm of basic bodily signification. Cage's sounds challenge Deleuze's theory by presenting incorporeal meaning corporeally, and thereby questioning the rigidity of his divisions between sound and language. Cage's experiment also confronts the distinction between sound and music; if, as has been suggested, music is an arrangement of sounds meant to be listened to (see Schafer 18), then Cage's words as well as his snores, grunts, hisses and gargles are also music. For they have been arranged to be heard.

Cage's probing of the border between language and sound, and between music and sound, may put a crimp in Deleuze's argument, but it doesn't supply a ready answer to his own question -- "If words are sounds, are they musical or are they just noise?" This question raises

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4 My borrowing of this term from Foucault displaces its sense slightly. Foucault uses it to explain Deleuze's "event" theory this way: "This meaning-event is always both the displacement of the present [tense of the verb to which it is fastened and which posits the event] and the eternal repetition of the infinitive" of the same verb which "introduces meaning into language and allows it to circulate as the neutral element to which we refer in discourse" (174). I intend its use here to incorporate not only the attribution of some sort of meaning to these noises by their inclusion in the structure of Cage's lectures, but also as a term for the form of the lecture itself. Cage never asserts one crystalized meaning; many of his explorations are aleatory processes which evolve or seek out meaning in their delivery rather than prescribe it. In a way, his method of writing and delivering his lectures reflects the manner in which language grows out of a "meaning-event" -- "[introducing] meaning into [his lecture] and [allowing] it to circulate as the neutral element to which we refer in discourse."
another problem which Eduard Hanslick had already anticipated -- a "fundamental difference" exists between language and music:

while sound in speech is but a sign, that is, a means for the purpose of expressing something which is quite distinct from its medium, sound in music is the end, that is, the ultimate and absolute object in view (The Beautiful in Music 67).

Language, unlike music, has a field of reference outside of sound (Springer 506), so it is, on at least one level, "sound as sense" (Schafer 202).

"Pig," for instance, is more than a group of sounds strung together. It denotes that porcine animal which all too often ends up on the breakfast table, or which, in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is just "a phonemic breath away" from a fig (Miller 70). That seems to be the case, at least, when Alice tells the Cheshire cat about her experience with the Duchess and her baby, who has turned into a pig. The cat interrupts Alice to ask: "Did you say 'pig' or 'fig'?” (74). Edmund Miller commenting on this passage in "The Sylvie and Bruno Books as Victorian Novel," contends that the "sound image floats free to attach itself to any other sound with which it has the slightest association" (70). His point is that, in this Nonsensical world, the baby is only a hair's-breadth away from being a 'fig,' or a 'wig,' or a 'twig,' or any other 'ig'-word one can think of. The content, "what" the baby becomes, matters far less than the actual sounds of its name.  

But there is no avoiding the fact that whether or not sounds govern the sense, as the Cheshire cat's question implies, the sound also relates to a sense. The baby did become a pig, the physical referent of the sound-

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5 To a lesser extent this is also true of the songs which Alice sings and the poems which she recites while in Wonderland. The "revised" texts of these typically Victorian poems are too pointedly satirical to merit being called pure sound play, but they demonstrate that music has a mind of its own. Or, in more Freudian terms, they demonstrate that music is one outlet for repressed emotion; the songs which Alice sings reveal the dark side of Victorian morality and capitalism.
word. Nonsense nods towards the referential function of language; it may show such references to be arbitrary, but it exploits reference and controls it through sound.

Music points to nothing outside of itself, however. And because this is the case, music is itself concrete; it "stands for the concrete experience of the unique, sensed reality of sound in process" (Orlov 133). Like a Deleuzian nonsense word, which means itself, music has no "recognizable identity" (135) beyond itself. Since each note refers to nothing it is undefinable; no other meaningful note lends it substance. The same is true of musical compositions as a whole: each piece of music, Winn suggests, "must establish within itself the 'conditions for understanding it'" (293). Even variations on an pre-established musical theme can do no more than perpetuate a regressive referral back to music, and so to itself. If a snark is a snark is a snark, then a note is a note is a note.

Walter Ong comments upon the phonocentric paradox: sound's evanescence contributes to its concreteness, to its presence in the present because it must "emanate from a source here and now discernibly active" (112). This is precisely the tradition which Derrida responds to, but in the field of music this tradition is less susceptible to his skepticism. Even its notational system doesn't ground music since the notes point only to their phonic counterparts and to nothing else. Whatever music may evoke (and the responses it elicits, like those elicited by humour, drama, and colour, are culturally determined [Orlov 136]) is entirely separate from what it "means."

If music conveys any meaning at all, that meaning is its form. As John Blacking claims, "In music, code and message are inseparable: the code is the message" (185). Contemporary literature's tendency to unite form and content finds a perfected counterpart here, and so does nonsense's inclination to mean itself. Blacking goes on to argue that any attempt to make music symbolize something outside of itself
nullifies it; when "music is treated as an arbitrary symbol in
essentially social, political, economic, or religious interaction, . . .
it ceases to have meaning as music" (185). This does not mean music is
senseless -- it is too rooted in the physical senses for that to be the
case; both Hanslick (49) and Zukofsky (Bottom 423) urge this
understanding of music. But it does mean that music is more useful than
verbal language "for revealing the purely structural requirements for a
symbol system" (Blacking 186). There's no meaningful baggage to trip up
a person wending her way through musical structure, no abstractions
tempting her to detour from the immediacy of the sound.

Kristeva takes Blacking's contention one step further by calling
music the furthest limit of a sign system. Actually it is not, she
argues, a system of signs at all because it has no signified; the
signifier, signified and referent of music have all melted into one
(Language 309). Perhaps this blending of disparates is one reason why
nonsense is equated with music by some critics; Cammaerts considers
classical Nonsense to be "by its very nature, pure music" (52). Both
reach across the gap of signifier, signified and referent. But music,
according to Kristeva, fuses the three; nonsense joins them while
retaining their individuality.

Music, like language, is a differential system. But it has, for
Kristeva, no semantic meaning (310) and so can be regarded as
exclusively semiotic (in her re-definition of the term) (Revoluto 24).
Language is musicalized when it is
drawn out of its symbolic function (sign - syntax) and is
opened out within a semiotic articulation; with a material
support such as the voice (Revolution 63).

Her argument seems pulled toward paradox since music is so rigidly
structured; even jazz with its improvisational form is dependent upon a
series of accepted structures and quite dependable rhythms. But as will
be seen later, rhythm, despite its highly structured nature, is integral
to the semiotic; structure per se is not found solely in the realm of the symbolic and of syntax.

Henry Orlov sees language and music as "autonomous and mutually complementary domains, each having "its own sets of patterns and values, field of competence, and view of reality" (132). Though such a view is not wrong-headed, it prevalence has led inadvertently to an almost habitual pairing off of music against language in criticism. They are made to fall into binary oppositions: expressive/communicative, nothing/something; emotion/intellect; concrete/abstract -- such dualities can be found in a range of critics. These oppositions are often useful because they provide a clear, simple and dramatic view of one particular perspective, but they almost all reduce or misrepresent either language or music. For instance in response to claims that music is expressive and emotive (a myth that Winn claims rose with German Romanticism 259-70), Pierre Boulez offers Stravinsky's insistence that music doesn't express anything, it merely orders (4). And language, because it involves a sensical referent, extracts a meaning from sound, but that does not eliminate its sound component. Language can't be qualified as merely abstract, only as more abstract than music; Gerald Bruns, in Modern Poetry and the Idea of Language, contends that "[l]anguage, being sound, appears as a malleable substance capable of being shaped into an infinity of forms" (18).

Cage writes: "Nothing more than nothing can be said" (Silence 111) -- a statement that might, given that the context is a lecture on nothing, be taken as a pun; when talking about nothing nothing can be said. Such re-emphasizing is reminiscent of the many claims, introduced in the first two chapters, that poetry says nothing. Cage's logical paradox (he's clearly saying something, even if it's nothing) can be

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* One of the ironies of phonocentrism is its tendency to invest sound with a present but separate meaning rather than let sound, in itself, be a meaning. Nonsense strives towards such a resonate meaning: sound as sound.
taken as a qualified "nothing," however. It is obliquely related to his
appeal for an ideal language rooted in a musicalized landscape. An
ultimately ineffective, empty something is, in Cage's book, a nothing:

Since words, when they communicate, have no effect, it dawns
on us that we need a society in which communication is not
practiced, in which words become nonsense as they do between
lovers, in which words become what they originally were:
trees and stars and the rest of primeval environment (Empty
Words 184).

Which brings one back to an insistent relationship between words, things
and beings similar to that found explicitly in Hughes and implicitly in
Lilburn.

The idea of words being germinated in the surrounding world is
appealing on many levels; it's an idea that Nonsense embraces and
rejects simultaneously. But it is also an idea which moves full circle
to a theoretical position that has already been left behind. Such
circling is an acceptable Nonsense strategy, a sort of active stasis,
but it does not work in a theoretical argument. And neither,
ultimately, does Cage's contention about a metaphorical, almost
mystical, tie between language and music. It is necessary to break
language down into its component parts, to encounter it from an ignorant
position, in order to confront its similarities with music. This may be
arguing the obvious, but it is essential for the understanding of how
language can work musically.

Facing language out of ignorance or unfamiliarity is, in effect,
fac ing it musically. Deleuze writes:

If the child comes to a preexisting language which she
cannot yet understand, perhaps conversely, she grasps that
which we no longer know how to grasp in our own language,
namely, the phonemic relations, the differential relations
of phonemes (230).
Language is at its most musical (or is appreciated with a most musical frame of mind) when it is not comprehensible, when its phonotextual aspects are short-circuited. That’s why people may appreciate the sheer “music” of poetry read in a foreign language. And why the “pig/fig” example, discussed above, so strongly demonstrates the musical rebelliousness of Nonsense; it isolates the phonemic instant in language, makes that instant of ignorance and new recognition count as much as meaning does.

Deleuze’s suggestion about an ignorant grasping of phonemes unwittingly supports Springer’s contention that the phonemes, the smallest units of language, offer “the most significant parallels” between linguistic and musical theory. Phonemic systems relate, Springer suggests, to scales (509). A partial proof for this suggestion can be found in ancient Egyptian vowel music. Egyptian priests, while singing hymns, would utter vowels in succession; “the sound of these letters,” according to Demetrius in On Style, “[was] so euphonious that men listen[ed] to it in preference to flute and lyre” (quoted in Winn 2). The sounds were appreciated sensuously (3) and behaved very much like the “neume,” of which Derrida writes in Of Grammatology -- it is “pure vocalization, form of an inarticulate song without speech, whose name means breath,” “a song and an inarticulate language, [a] speech without spacing” (249). Here, at the level of the phoneme, or of breath, music and language coincide.

In The Music of Poetry, T.S. Eliot describes the music of a word as a product resulting from the intersection of both the relationships the word has with the other words in its immediate context and the range of its lexical meanings (intended or not) (19). While some of a word’s contextual relationships may well be phonic, Eliot’s version of music is, for the most part, cerebral and metaphorical, as sensically compromised as language itself; that compromising of sound is the whole problem of music in language. Following Springer, I would argue that a
word can come closest to a "literal" music via the phonemes which combine to create it. This notion of "literal"/letter-al music is something to take up later in this chapter, when considering the translations of Catullus done by Celia and Louis Zukofsky.

Since music is material, one way language can move toward musicality is by downplaying its phenotextual or abstract aspects in order to emphasize its phonic and phonemic interrelations. "The anteriorities/ of language" are carried by sound, writes McCaffery in "Lyric's Larynx" (179). But his is not another Cagean plea for a return to primeval language. One doesn't need to return nostalgically to the anteriorites he speaks of because they exist in and with language: "the body at all times houses the / linguistic and pre-linguistic" (178). One wonders, then, if the anteriorities of language are carried by music as well. The suggestion may be that music and language are different growths from a similar source. Such an extrapolation is hardly Derridean, but it is Kristevan. McCaffery is well-versed in Kristeva's theory of poetic language and it is evident in his work. If those anteriorities constitute the semiotic, or part of it, then it seems likely that they are also found in music and so form one possible interface between it and language. Nonsense explores and exploits this interface when playing with language's most minimal and musical elements, phonemes.7

Barthes turns to Kristeva to offer another interface, or to put that interface into different words. In an essay entitled "The Grain of the Voice" (not to be confused with the book of interviews by the same name), he names the interface "the grain, the grain of the voice when the latter is in a dual posture, a dual production -- of language and of music" (181). Of course, he is concerned for the most part with the singing of lyrical music, but his argument can be applied to a poetry

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7 Admittedly, deconstruction attempts to break the phoneme down even further to the trace and the arche-trace (Leitch 28).
intended to be read, to the "written" poem and poetic language.

Barthes speaks of the "geno-song,"

that apex (or that depth) of production where the
melody really works at the language -- not at what it says,
but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its
letters -- where melody explores how the language works and
identifies with that work (182).

This is a language of the "mother tongue," the body's articulated
materiality (182). It is the language in which  \textit{\textsc{scripture}} is written,
that form of writing posed in the last chapter as a conduit between the
body and nonsense. This "voluptuousness" of which Barthes writes, this
sound-body of letters, is embodied in the grain of the voice. But that
grain works against another grain -- the grain of a phenotextual
language, the grain of music and literary criticism which want to keep
language and music distinct. This chapter's final section, a delving
into sound poetry, will sample what is perhaps the most deeply grained
realization of this melodic exploration and identification of language.
But how the grain inhabits the written word ("the body . . . in the hand
as it writes" [188]), how it pushes language towards melody is the issue
considered next.

\begin{quote}
\textit{"Akin jabber":}
\textit{Nonsense, Poetry and the Rhythms of Sound}
\end{quote}

"Above everything else," writes Wallace Stevens in "The Noble
Rider and the Sound of Words," "poetry is words; and . . . words, above
everything else, are, in poetry, sounds" (32). Nonsense, poetry and
poetic language have everything to do with sound. Ede finds some parts
of Lear, especially "The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went
Round the World," to be language functioning as pure sound (58), while
Cammaerts, as was noted above, equates Nonsense and music (52).
Certainly the pronouncedly rhythmic disposition of Nonsense verse to
which Cammaerts appeals lends a measure of credibility to his claim. Dennis Lee's "Quintin and Griffin," for instance, whether one classifies it as poetry or nonsense, patterns sounds with tongue-twisting revelry:

Quintin's sittin' hittin' Griffin,
Griffin's hittin' Quintin too.
If Quintin's quittin' hittin' Griffin,
What will Griffin sit'n'do? (Garbage Delight 11).
Lee's verse is not pure music, nor, despite Cammaerts' claims, Nonsense; but Cammaerts' observations lead in the right direction for an exploration of the musical elements in Nonsense and poetry.

Rhythm is sound considered in its temporal dimension, and is inextricable from Kristeva's *chora*. Toril Moi highlights the relationship between the two: "The *chora* is a rhythmic pulsation rather than a new language" (162). Because the *chora* is the "source" of the semiotic and therefore central to this bandar-logical theory, its rhythms are integral to nonsense. Robert Hass perhaps intuited as much when he argued:

Rhythm is always revolutionary ground. It is always the place where the organic arises to abolish the mechanical and where energy announces the abolition of tradition (98).

He contends that "[n]ew rhythms are new perceptions" (98), but even old rhythms offer alternative perspectives. As chapter two showed, strongly articulated semiotic rhythms can shift emphasis from sense to sound, from meaning to material, and in the process can foreground how sense is made. That in itself is revolutionary.

The symbolic is aptly summarized as "God/Law/Definition"; each of these elements is rich in structure, but none of them exhausts the possibilities of structure. Criticism of Nonsense's tendency to use rigid structures misses the point because structure is not antithetical to the semiotic or a writing of the body. Lear's limericks, as was argued in chapter one, are no less nonsensical for their tight form.
Some of the most nonsensical works of modern and contemporary literature, for instance *Finnegans Wake*, embrace intricate, albeit unusual, structural rigors. In fact it seems appropriate to conflate Kristeva's terming of music as pure semiosis with the seemingly opposite, and frequently given, definition of music as pure structure to argue that the semiotic is pure structure. Pure structure as (opposed to) pure meaning; form as opposed to content, and form which points to itself as content.

Content, information, communication are irrelevant or non-existent in the semiotic. All disorders are orders of another ilk. An infusion of the *chora* into grammatical language can pervert its structure without doing away with grammar; the semiotic can superimpose another structure onto an anterior one, or can bring two or more opposing ways of meaning together. Boulez writes that structure is the point of contact between poetry and music and "that poets [among them Joyce] who worked on language itself are the ones who left the most visible imprint upon the musician" (53). Such a cross-over implies that musicians and experimental writers are, as this chapter is, most concerned with the structure of sound.

Robert Brighurst and James Winn each characterize Joyce's work as *chordal* (116; 297). That is an especially helpful term when read in light of Winn's description of chords as "intersections of contrapuntal lines" (334).\(^8\) This definition points towards a facet of intertextuality, or what Kristeva calls "transposition," that "passage from one signifying system to another," which emphasizes the manyness, the polyvalence of each enunciated object. As was suggested in chapter three, this passing from one signifying system to another best characterizes the relationship between nonsense and music. Nonsense is

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8 Winn bases his definition on ideas found in Ezra Pound's *Anthem and the Treatise on Harmony*.

9 Kristeva has re-named "intertextuality." Although she intends Bakhtin's sense of the term, she calls it "transposition" to avoid confusion with its popular and imprecise use (see *Revolution* 60).
a converging, inter-mingling, transliterating that moves in and out of various sign systems and, in doing so, takes with it the residues of those systems.

When the rhythmic structures of music move into language, two sign systems are walking in step. Sometimes, when she was small, my daughter (a confluence of ancestors) would plop herself onto my foot, wrap her arms around my leg and ask me to walk her into the next room. Something similar happens when a confluence of several sign systems (musical, visual and verbal have been mentioned, though several others, including mathematical and philosophical as Carroll's work proves, are also possible) situates itself in language, transposes itself into a medium which, laden with all these elements, must radically alter its movement. Nonsense is a silly walk. Of course because the nonsense considered here is linguistic in nature, it always toes in towards language. But a nonsense that toes towards music, or mathematics, or any other component is conceivable too.

Cage, for instance, creates a form of nonsense in his poem sequence "Empty Words" which is arguably more musical than linguistic. Following Norman O. Brown, he calls syntax the "arrangement of the army" (EW 11), and insists upon the "demilitarization of language: a serious musical concern" (184). He attempts to demilitarize it by moving through its five component materials (sentences, phrases, words, syllables, letters [11]) until his poem's final section offers only an arrangement of letters on the page (see Fig. 9), language gone AWOL. It's a matter of perspective whether "Empty Words" is nonsense or gibberish, but the sequence does juggle a meaning, and quite a polemical one, encoded by some seemingly random and supposedly meaningless letters which actually refer back to earlier sentences and phrases.

Cage has not escaped Springer's contention that even nonsense words have "rudimentary morphemic associations" (508) -- though there are few morphemes here. However he has in part reduced language to a
68: EMPTY WORDS

Fig. 9
tonal construct, has made it "multidimensional," multifoliate; it has been given a manyness of meaning (Orlov 114). But is he left with language or with a visual representation of its anteriorities? Is this a musical "score" or a concrete poem? It is possible that he has pushed language over the edge that separates it from music, as he suggests (65). However, if he has done this, he has pushed language into a nonsensical music. His use of letters in "Empty Words" allows a symbolization which threatens its ability to mean musically, or so Blacking would contend. Rather than transposing music onto language, he may have transposed language onto music. Moreover, this nonsense only exists musically if one accepts the premise that disorder is a form of order, and so accepts the existence of an unidentifiable structure within the work. As literature, Cage's work is closest at this point to sound poetry, a category of literature which bends notions of poetry almost to breaking.

A different example of language being articulated as music is found in bp Nichol's Book 5 of The Martyrology. This is no surprise coming from Nichol, a renowned sound poet and experimenter with the tonal and visual aspects of language. In Book 5, Nichol tries to establish "a system for using text to generate melody" (Dutton 9) by writing part of the text on a musical staff. Paul Dutton explains that "when a letter in the text was the name of a note, the text moved to the line or space corresponding to that note, remaining on that line or space until the next note-name letter occurred" (9). (See Fig. 10 for a sample.) The text is chanted; the duration of each pitch depends on the amount of text on the given line. The resulting music sounds, according to Dutton, "somewhat reminiscent of Gregorian chant -- or should I say, given its aleatoric basis, Gregorian chance?" (10). Though Nichol's experiment, in this instance, doesn't quite match Cage's for sheer flaunting of the musical residue in language, his playful exploitation of the alphabetical intersection of musical and linguistic notation
dour yo unmeet
honest task
yell upon year home
as was t
he or
her opens

there is nothing left to be written/
twice head east repres-

ed from twasow/the or/b excised/were(random)ive ty this

c ness/of that old life/he has said too much/ for fin-

ments/ions him a thing/own love do/in e fingers ever

hr each/hou sin/non sun/sense and i die/thirst

noodrecon own marginals up conscious how//there is no-

nothing left to be written/he writes in a note to himself/

there Halifax earlier times each/i still/not of thir-

by third home is no g/isa ed from twasow/the or/b

excised/were(random)ive ty this e ness/head east/wonders
points to the possibilities inherent in viewing written language as a notational system for its more concrete aspects. Jonathan Albert, in his essay "A Language of Spoken Movement," suggests the alphabet can be viewed as a "series of directions" rather than as a "naming system" (14-15). As such it is a symbolic representation which shares similarities with musical notation. By forcing certain letters of the alphabet to incorporate their musical functions within a lingual context, Nichol implies the musical possibilities for all letters.

On a more accessible and, one might argue, more insidious level, rhythm,¹⁰ the temporalization of sound, is working in grammatical language when it remains on this side of the border between language and music. In "How to Read," Ezra Pound gives his now famous definition of melopoeia, a poetry in which

the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning . . . . [and have]

a contrary current, a force tending often to lull, or to distract the reader from the exact sense of the language.

It is poetry on the borders of music (170-72).

Melopoeia is "a function of language in which the rhythmical organization is developed internally" (Welsh 234). It matches Valéry's story about the primacy of rhythm in writing, and how that rhythm is related to the body. Valéry relates in "Poetry and Abstract Thought" being "gripped by a rhythm" one day while walking in Paris, and then by

¹⁰ Henri Meschonnic, in his important study Critique du rythme: Anthropologie historique du langage argues for a different understanding of the term "rhythm." For him, it is "the continuous movement of signification constructed by the historical activity of a subject" (Bedetti 93) and "exposes the subject (sujet d'énonciation) through a body language" (93). He argues that rhythm, as he construes it, is more important than meaning, and that "as the organization of the subject in and by its language, has no further tie, except historically, with structuralism, or with its home, polemics" (96). Consequently he challenges the binary nature of the sign, its split between "langage/langue" and contends that the linking of rhythm and materiality maintains such a split, as does, in his view, Kristeva's definition of rhythm "in terms of the irrational versus the rational" (101). While his approach differs from mine, his intent is, in part, similar — to reconsider the nature of the sign (in my case, the nonsensical sign) through an understanding of how the body can "dwell" in language.
another rhythm, so "certain strange transverse relations were set up between these two principles" (61). These rhythms were, he concludes, the result of the confluence of the external world, the body and the mind (62). And they were the physical experience of the rhythmic body spawning ideas. While he says these particular rhythms were too complicated to be worked into poetry, he uses the story to acknowledge that poetry often finds its impetus first in a rhythm, not an idea.

Much of Andrew Welsh's *Roots of Lyric* deals precisely with this melopoeic poetry, which he links with "primitive" charms and chants whose sole motivations are sound and rhythm respectively (145, 162). His quotation of a translated song of the Inuit from the Coppermine River region finds an unlikely counterpart in Zukofsky's "A-23":

The big bow, he constantly sends it straight.
He constantly bends it, i yai ya i ai yai yai ya

(Welsh 163).

we see knee (windsong bis)
we knee we see hay
io we hay we see
hay io we see knee
hay io we how we
see hay io we see,
no wee knee no wa-- ("A-23" 539).

Ironically the translation of the Inuit song seems to dwell in the English language more peacefully than the poem actually written in English does. Both, however, use nonsensical syllables ("ai," "yai" and "ya" in the Inuit song; "io" and "wa" in Zukofsky's case) to supplement a governing rhythm, though Zukofsky's "io" may be a reference to the lover of Zeus in Greek mythology.

Where Zukofsky's writing departs most from the chant is in its insistence on making rhythm govern this portion of his poem's sense entirely. For him the sound of words is ninety-five per cent of their
poetic presence (Corman 315); rhythm, not metaphor, is a poem's most important element (Dembo 287). Nowhere does this come through as clearly as when sound and rhythm fracture an initially sensical sentence, leaving the sense scattered throughout the phonic permutations of the lines. What is left may be "akin [to] jabber" ("A-23" 539), but it is also a poetry which, to use Cage's phrase, "[allows] musical elements (time, sound) to be introduced into the world of words" (Silence x).

**Not for Wallflowers: Sitwell's Rhythmic Disposition**

Edith Sitwell calls the preface to her Collected Poems "Some Notes on My Own Poetry," though she might well have entitled it "Notes for Wallflowers" because in it she defends her experimental writing style from the criticisms of those unwilling to enter into her poetic dances. In order to stretch itself beyond the over-worked stylistic clichés found in poems influenced by the high Victorians, her writing

[inquires] into the effect on rhythm and on speed of the use of rhymes, assonances, and dissonances, placed at the beginning and in the middle of lines, as well as at the end, and in most elaborate patterns (xvi).

"Rhythm," she holds, "might be described as, to the world of sound, what light is to the world of sight. It shapes and gives new meaning" (xv). Following this metaphor, Sitwell choreographs her poems, gives them the aural shape of nursery rhyme and of dances like the waltz, the polka, the mazurka and the hornpipe; she chooses over and over again to let sound and movement dictate her use of language. The result: wonderfully flowing poems which augment their distinctive rhythms with strangely catachrestic images. A nonsensically-timid, wallflower-ish reader is left quite out of any intelligible dance, tapping her foot.

Sitwell's "dances" are intelligible, though in a somewhat
irregular way. "When sounds become signs," writes Charles F. Altman in "Intratextual Rewriting," "their sound value is all but discarded, for to play it up would 'becloud the intelligibility' of language" (49). But this is precisely what Sitwell does: play up the concrete aspect of her language, not to becloud sense but to re-vitalize it. And though the resulting language is hardly staid, it still maintains a discernible, albeit subordinated, meaning. Or rather, it maintains a meaning in part constituted by rhythm. Often the poems in her best known volume, Facade, are named after particular dances, a clear gesture that the movement of the poem is a particular node around which meanings collect. Such is the case with "Fox Trot" (137-8). (See Appendix VII for the text of the poem.)

"Fox Trot" is given essentially from a child's perspective. In it, Sitwell conflates innocent perceptions of the nursery with the nursery rhyme and with the basic one-two-three-pause rhythm of the fox trot. The poem meets Zukofsky's poetic requirements -- "a 'context associated with 'musical' shape" (Prepositions 16) -- explicitly, letting its shape and order grow out of its musical patterns. It does so most appropriately, because the poem deals in part with order growing out of the rhythms of life, and with the way human activity (symbolized by hunting, farming, reigning and the eating of the egg [a mythic allusion to the creation of the world] at afternoon tea -- itself a civilizing ritual) enhances, controls, directs and protects the fertility of nature.

But that merger of form and content, that decidedly musical intent, results in an obscuring or estranging of sense, a shifting quasi-surreal movement resulting from Sitwell's belief that "rhythm is one of the principal translators between dream and reality" (xv). Her work is not nonsense and the semiotic does not erupt into the symbolic with such vigour as to collapse words in upon themselves or make portions of the poem indecipherable. But the reader is caught in the
struggle between meaning and movement, the struggle of meaning as movement. She must decide whether to sift through the thickly rhyming sentences and order their mythic and commonplace allusions into some sort of message, or to forsake all that and let her tongue do some "pantomimic dancing" (Paget, Human Speech 202).

"Will you, wo'n't you, will you, wo'n't you, will you join the dance?" (AW 108) run the lyrics of "The Lobster Quadrille"; the Mock-Turtle and Gryphon's "invitation" to join the dance is an opportunity to accept a set of rules which defy the narrow perspective of Alice, who neither understands the quadrille nor wishes to join it, indeed is happy to see it end. Sitwell's poem, though its language is less permeable than that of "The Lobster Quadrille," offers the same opportunity: to join this dancing poem, but at the cost of the reader's pre-existing notions about how words mingle and poems mean.

The first three slow and firmly pronounced lines, or steps ("Old/Sir/ Faulk"), are followed by longer, brisker lines made up of several stressed and unstressed syllables -- the unstressed syllables, quick steps before a pause. The strongly articulated rhythm, though decidedly more intricate than those of nursery rhymes, still maintains part of that flavour. But its changes in speed distinguish it from the more regular movement of the nursery rhyme. Those first three downbeats are repeated throughout the poem in various configurations -- "Tall as a stork"; "Sit/And/Sleep"; "Meadows/Where"; "Water/Hissed."

More akin to nursery rhymes are "Fox Trot"'s quite regular end-rhymes: gun/sun; sheep/sleep/weep; cry/sigh; Meg/peg/egg; he/tree/the; crane/strain/again. Sometimes these true rhymes are placed right next to each other ("why cry?"; "I sigh"), giving, as Sitwell supposes, the effect of "[leaping] into the air . . . [as] light and bodiless endings" (xxiii). It is ironic, considering the sense of the words themselves, that Sitwell would give them these added lilts, lilts which are unignorable in their placement at the ends of succeeding lines. They're
twice as springy because that first little leap ("why cry?") is so soon repeated ("I sigh").

Sitwell adds complexity through her tightly woven internal rhymes. Such sound play folds lines back in upon themselves, or over other lines: "Oh, the nursery-maid Meg/ With a leg like a peg"; "Picked it up as spoil to boil for nursery tea, said the mourners in the." These true rhymes underscore the rhythm of light and lightness which she aims for, and are representative perhaps of patches of light in amongst the moving shadows of country landscape, as Sitwell suggests (xxvii), or rare glimpses of the fox (itself associated with light in the image "reynard-coloured sun") darting (trotting) through the early morning cornfields. Reading the true rhymes in this latter fashion suggests that the poem's title is a punning with the reader and a playful inquiry into the metaphorical nature of the dance's name.

The fact that the fox is never literally named gives it the tenuous, slinking presence it must have for Sir Faulk, the huntsman who is, one assumes, chasing it away from the hen house. The fox here is both a presence and absence, seemingly dramatizing the behaviour and character of the semiotic. That his pseudonym ("sun") finds a true rhyme in "gun" is a loaded gesture which ultimately reveals an innocence of vision; in this poem lion and lamb, or rather hunter and fox, share lullabies.

But the poem is, according to Sitwell, not merely an attempt at incorporating the kinetic rhythms of dance in language; it is also an experiment with assonance and dissonance, those sound patterns which make up the various shades of darkness in her rhythmic landscape. As such she pairs off words like Faulk/tall/stork/stalk/walk/smock -- "dissonances, so subtle they might almost be assonances" (xxvii). These function in much the same way as the internal true rhymes, overlapping lines and sentences, but they never quite let the edges meet, a faint lisp to counterpoint the more innocent true rhymes. At times they give a
hesitant unity to contraries, not unlike that found in nursery lore; the slant-rhyme of "huntsman" and "reynard-coloured sun," especially in line 15, "The huntsman and the reynard-coloured sun and I sigh," strengthens the nonsensical tie between hunter and hunted.

Sitwell lets assonance "smooth" out her lines. A line like "Among the pheasant-feathered corn the unicorn has torn, forlorn she claims, "might consist of one word only were it not for the change from sunniness to darkness" (xxvii). Such a view may be hard to swallow, but it indicates an important underlying assumption -- these words exist for their sound far more than for their sense. That sound runs them into one another with a washing flow similar to dance music and to the dark rhythms of Hopkins' "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," though with decidedly different results. Sitwell's poem may leave the reader with the upside of civilization -- staving off the Flood -- but she is nevertheless inundated by an ocean of sounds, a rising and falling tide of rhyme which leaves her wondering if the best reader of Sitwell doesn't have gills, perhaps, or sport a shell.

Dancing is in many ways a nonsensical pursuit -- a series of motions that have meaning only within their own context, that define themselves. It falls into many of Huizinga's categories of play -- especially his contention that play involves a set of arbitrarily established rules which set the governed action apart from the outside world. Valéry, comparing dance to poetry, calls it "a system of acts, but acts whose end is in themselves. It goes nowhere" (207). While Valéry's concern is poetry's refusal to communicate on a merely business-like or prosaic level, his analogy holds for Sitwell's work twice over. Set against the "progression" of the dance (a movement through a series of prescribed steps only to return to the first step and begin again) is the regression of the rhyme, a continual turning back in upon itself, joining hands with the words that have gone before and resisting each line's attempt to go "somewhere" -- that is, on to
the next line. Not only, then, does the actual incorporation of so
dominant a rhythm introduce a semiotic nonsensicality to the poem, but
also the tightly woven, almost incestuous play of these rhymes echoes
and forestalls the action of the dance precisely because they turn in
upon themselves.

"on edge primmed private privet":
The Sense of Zukofsky's Sound

"But I would remind you, first," writes Eliot in The Music of
Poetry,

that the music of poetry is not something which exists apart
from the meaning. Otherwise, we could have poetry of great
musical beauty which made no sense, and I have never come
across such poetry (13).

Eliot's position is open to a criticism of rigidity and unfairness, even
though it does allow for a musical poetry which parodies, as opposed to
makes, sense. His example of such parody is Edward Lear; "his non-sense
is not vacuity of sense: it is a parody of sense, and that is the sense
of it" (14). Since Lear's poetry has a sense, Eliot feels justified in
praising its musicality, which at times, he contends, is related to the
"blues" (14). Eliot can stretch his notion of the sense and sensibility
of music in poetry enough to accommodate Lear, but his brief comments on
Lear's nonsense miss its complex and radical response to traditional
sense, and one wonders if he could stretch much farther. Could he
stretch it far enough, for instance, to embrace the works of his
contemporary Zukofsky? If the works of anyone challenge Eliot's notion
that there cannot be a musical poetry without sense, Zukofsky's do.
Some of his poetry relies so heavily on the orchestration of linguistic
tones that its lexical meanings can elude the reader almost entirely.
Such poems rest almost on the edge of sense -- private, musical,
linguistic puzzles.
Take, for instance, "Privet" from 80 Flowers:
League gust strum ovaly folium
looped leaf nodes winter icejewel
platinum stoneseed true ebony berries
gray-jointed persistent thru green hedge
ash-or-olive order white panicles heavy
with daffodil doxy red blood pale
reign paired leaves without tooth
on edge primed private privet

The title gives a starting clue, and, having wended her way all the way through the poem, the reader is rewarded with the title reiterated as an italicized, emphatic summary. This circling motion implies a totally enclosed world of sound and words, a universe akin to that of Nonsense.

Despite the disconcerting and unrelenting juxtapositions between its title and its final word, this poem has an alternative order relating back to the visual/aural synaesthesia that Zukofsky is so fond of. The "syntax" of this poem, gesturally maintained despite its lack of punctuation, is the line of the poet's sight as he explores a privet hedge, taking in leaves, branches, berries, seeds. An important part of this exploration concerns the words themselves, the components of this lingual hedge. The visual order is equally rooted in a thick series of sounds not unlike the density of the privet Zukofsky contemplates.

Each word, juxtaposed with other, seemingly incongruous words, resonates, sends out sonal shoots. Sometimes those shoots anticipate words that aren't there. Cid Corman, by picking up on the equation of ashes and death, finds in "ash-or-olive" the phrase "dead or alive." Other times, the sounds hide words which are actually there, nesting within a weave of syllables. The first line, for instance, is a homophonic translation of the Latin name for privet -- Ligustrum ovalifolium (Corman 308); it hides the Latin original underneath its English phonic equivalents. The line begins the intertwining so typical
of the poem: the "gu" of "League" branches out into "gust," whose final
two letters edge into "strum"; the "um" in "strum" slips around to the
end of "folium" while the first and last syllable of "ovally" meet in
the middle of "folium." Other sound patterns work throughout the piece
too: alliteration ("looped leaf"; "ash-or-olive order"; "daffodil doxy";
"primmed private privet"), a sort of hind-end alliteration or the
sharing of final phonemes ("red blood"), internal rhyme
("strum"/"folium"/ "platinum") and slant rhyme ("pale"/"paired") all
make appearances.

As Corman argues "the ear finds its way to sense -- if attentive"
(308); Žukofsky's "thrust [is] towards getting us to SOUND the words and
discover the sense -- to bring us into play -- to participate" (306).
His language is not reduced to empty sound, as Tigges writes is the case
with Nonsense (Anatomy 155)," but rather aptly fits Orlov's
characterization of tone as "multidimensional" (134). The reader is
"left off-balance" (Quartermain 204), and language is over-burdened with
meaning which resides in the intimate associations of words. Žukofsky's
poem publicizes the private struggle of the semiotic to move meaning
toward sound. In response to this struggle, in the face of its
overwhelming affront to stable and stolid sense, the reader reads
"Privet" from a position of ignorance, as one coming to a new language
and hearing its particles musically. Each word in the poem, by meaning
phonically as well as sensically, opens the horizons of the poem; once a
reader pierces the privacy of Žukofsky's meaning she's inveigled into
leaping the hedge, residing in a field which is circumscribed (as is the
poem) by privet. The sounds of the poem generate associations ad
infinitum; they crescendo and fade away. And in doing so they tie
together separate words, break other words down into syllables,

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11 Language, as has been argued throughout this chapter, can never be just sound since even the
smallest units of linguistic sound carry the residue of language's sense. Tigges overstates his case in
order to emphasis the primacy of sound at times in Carroll's work, like the Cheshire cat's pig/tig
question discussed earlier.
morphemes, phonemes as the language shifts, grows, a living plant.

Zukofsky and his wife Celia use a similar sound-sense in their "translations" of Catullus. The translations were widely maligned within the community of Latin scholars, who failed to understand the Zukofskys' intention and the rigorous method which governed their work. One critic, in fact, was so confused and outraged by their Catullus he questioned their sanity (Hatlen 351).

The translating principle which so offended the critics was a homophonic one. Each word of the original becomes for the Zukofskys a nugget of sound to be partially transliterated into English; each translation contains the same number of lines and syllables as the original and "as far as possible the length and the sound of the English syllables echo Catullus's Latin syllables" (Hatlen 349). In their introduction to the translations, the Zukofskys explain that they have "[followed] the sound, rhythm, and syntax of his Latin--[tried], as is said, to breathe the "literal" meaning into him" (n.p.). "The Zukofskys remind us," writes Burton Hatlen, "that the 'littera,' the letter, is an aural and visual shape, not a "meaning" (348). They privilege the sound of the poetry, treat each word as a series of sound units and try to translate the aural shape, the kinesis they find in Catullus's poems over and above his meaning. This return to the littera of literal is the essence of musicalized poetry. By breaking language down to its most basic element, the Zukofskys, and the sound poets considered later, "reduce" it to its most scalar level, its clearest point of intersection with music.

Louis and Celia Zukofsky come closest to writing pure Nonsense here, where their words mean first musically. They refuse, Hatlen insists, to "[assume] that words are mere husks, to be stripped away so that we can get at the 'meaning'" (347). The same can be said of many sound poets. Lines like these from the translation of Catullus' poem 32 show just how closely the Zukofskys followed the sound of the poem:
nequis liminis obseret tabellam (line 5)
no case, limb, menace, obscure your tableland;
pertundo tunicamque palliumque (line 11)
pert under the tunic, pulling up the quilt.
Pulled out of context, of course, these lines make even less cerebral
sense than they do in the translations. They do however make the sense
of sound, hearing, the operative link between poet and reader. And they
demonstrate how important the relationship between the Latin original
and the English "version" is, as sound is echoed in the translation,
ever reduced to an accoutrement to sense which can be easily shed. The
substance of Catullus is as much sound as sense; the rhythm, cadence,
and sound is at least as important as the meaning. The Zukofskys move
towards language as "pure sound value" (Hatlen 351).

The result is, according to Rieke, another sort of sense that
looks like nonsense (128). As Hatlen argues, the Zukofskys actually
maintain the essence of Catullus's sense as "a half-heard melody" that
"hovers behind the words" (349), and they extend that sense to
incorporate its implicit ramifications. To recognize this sense
requires a long hard look at and listen to the words, but the attentive
care rewards a reader; the Zukofskys succeed in fusing Poundian
melopeia and logopoeia (Hatlen 352).

A brief glance at just one element in Hatlen's reading of poem 32
demonstrates this roving and expanding meaning admirably. For instance,
he argues that the sonal/metaphorical translation of the first word
"amabo" into "I'm a bow" was "latent" in the Latin version, just
"waiting to be freed" (351). The bow, to Hatlen's mind, is not a
literal bow -- though the association of the bow with Cupid and so with
love couldn't have been lost on the Zukofskys -- but an erect penis.
Which is "a 'bow' in at least three senses: it curves like a bow, it is
aimed at an object of desire, and it is ready to shoot" (351). Hatlen's
metaphor underlines the sexual, often bawdy nature of Catullus' poetry.
The transliteration goes farther, though, offering a homonymic reading of bow as "beau" -- murmuring underneath the metaphorical sensuousness of the English, which Hatlen so astutely identifies, is a quaint, countrified, innocent sexuality as well, a witty and incongruous conflation made possible only by the sonal quality of the writing.

There are lines in these translations where, as Guy Davenport puts it, "Catullus has come alive, as alive as if he were breathing garlic in your face" (369). Davenport's light-hearted description implies that the Zukofskys have done what they set out to: "breathe the 'literal' meaning with him" (Catullus, "Preface" n.p.). Their breathing together with Catullus, their "conspiracy," holds the grain of his verse. By letting the letters, the sounds, of Catullus mean equally with the sense, these translations exploit and explore that Barthesian, Kristevan, nonsensical interface between language and sound.

The Zukofskys are not alone in their use of homophonic translation, of course. Numerous examples of this technique exist, some less serious in intent than theirs. For instance, Mots d'Heures: Cousses, Rames The d'Antin Manuscript uses the homophonic translation of forty Mother Goose rhymes into French as the basis for a wonderfully witty parody of scholarly pretention. The "discoverer, editor and annotator" of these poems, Luis d'Antin van Rooten, claims the curious verses were part of the meagre possessions of one Francois Charles Fernand d'Antin, retired school teacher, who died at the age of ninety-three in January of the Year of our Lord, 1950, while marking papers ("Foreword" n.p.). And, while he himself could do little more than annotate parts of the poems, he "[hopes] some more perceptive scholar, with the help of [his] notes, will bring greater clarification to these esoteric fragments" ("Foreword" n.p.).

Van Rooten then goes on to present the poems. The first, a homophonic translation of "Humpty Dumpty," and a few of its annotations,
will suffice to illustrate the flavour of the work and how the book challenges meaning not only through its emphasizing of sound but also through its literal misdirections:

Un petit d'un petit
S'étonne aux Halles
Un petit d'un petit
Ah! degrés te fallent
Indolent qui ne sort cesse
Indolent qui ne se mène
Qu'importe un petit d'un petit
Tout Gai de Reguennes.

The footnote explaining the first line claims "Un petit d'un petit" is "the inevitable result of a child marriage." A much longer one, glossing "Ah! degrés te fallent," reads:

Since this personage bears no titles, we are led to believe that the poet writes of one of those unfortunate idiot-children that in olden days existed as a living skeleton in their family's closet. I am inclined to believe, however, that this is a fine piece of misdirection and that the poet is actually writing of some famous political prisoner, or the illegitimate offspring of some noble house. The Man in the Iron Mask, perhaps? (n.p.)

The footnotes supplied by van Rooten do more than send up scholarly pretensions which overlook the obvious for the obscure; they exemplify the nonsensical pull that marks this book. Susan Stewart comments that footnotes are one way of splitting the direction of a text, because they fracture the unity of direction and view which may be offered (74). Such is certainly the case in Mots d'Heure: Gousses, Rames; the movement of the homophonic translation to let sound mean as sound, or as sonal likeness, is continually interrupted by van Rooten's sham explanations. Even that initial movement, however, is hardly
unified since the words which van Rooten uses to translate Mother Goose
do not, as is the case with the Zukofsky's *Catullus*, relay any of the
sense of the original nursery rhymes. The poems, then, mean on at least
four levels all the time: they mean as sound, and they mean according to
the original meanings of their English equivalents, according to their
literal French translations, and according to their annotations. It is
this confluence, conflict, of meanings which urges these playful phonic
puzzles towards nonsense.

"A New Way to Blow Out Candles":
The Nonsense of Sound Poetry

Steve McCaffery once quipped that sound poetry is just "a new way
to blow out candles" ("Sound Poetry: A Survey" 18). He was making light
of something which he recognizes as an intensely important exploration
of language. Sound poetry, of all the poetries and poetics touched on
in this study, is perhaps most akin to nonsense; its overt
musicalization of language makes finding any directly communicable
meaning in it almost unheard of. In a more serious mood, McCaffery
names it an attempt at "the deformation of linguistic form at the level
of the signifier" ("Text-sound, Energy and Performance" 72), and the
exploration of language at the purely phonic level of the phoneme.
These explorations were pioneered by, among others, German Nonsense
writer Christian Morgenstern and the Lewis Carroll of "Jabberwocky"
(McCaffery, "Sound Poetry," 6); this heritage ties it with Classical
Nonsense too. The phonemic exploration of sound poetry has been
furthered considerably by the Dadaists and Futurists of the early
twentieth century, and by the numerous avant-garde artists influenced by
them. Among them were Gils Wolman and Francois Dufrene who in the
1950s, according to Steve McCaffery's survey of the history of sound
poetry, gave it "megapneumes," highly reminiscent of Derrida's ancient
neumes, by "[pursuing] language back beyond the threshold of the word

McCaffery, who performed in Canada's most important sound poetry ensemble, The Four Horsemen, with Paul Dutton, Rafael Barreto-Rivera and bpNichol, relates sound poetry to Kristeva's theory of the subject-in-process ("Lyric's Larynx" 183n). This attribution, even more than his earlier claims about ancestry, or about the influence of the Nonsense tradition upon it, places sound poetry squarely in the range of the nonsense theory put together in chapter two.

Saussurean linguistics posited
a system of language from which
the agency of
the subject was
excluded. The sound poem (or
a text-sound writing) re-inserts
the primary agency of the subject
as an instinctual
body-as-self (181).

In his very much "not-sound" poem, "Lyric's Larynx," McCaffery theorizes and poeticizes about the nature of sound poetry. He asserts that sound poetry is not merely a return to the materialistic basis of language (181), not merely semiotic: "it is an agency for desire production, for releasing energy flow, for securing the passage of libido in a multiplicity of flows out of the Logos" ("Text-sound" 72). It is not, he argues, "any kind of nostalgic return to a pre-sociosymbolic matrix" ("Nothing is Forgotten" 124). McCaffery isn't denying the link between the body and sound, or that the sound of language is related to the pre-linguistic (a distillation of Kristeva's ideas). Rather he contends that, like all works of the Kristevan subject-in-process, sound poetry blends the semiotic and the symbolic.
It requires the symbolic, if only to have something to break down as it releases libidinal forces. Though it is closer to the absolute disintegration of lingual madness than, say, Lear's limericks, even sound poetry is not without its thetic restraints.

Winn suggests that the centrality of meaning to poetry and the inevitable association of meaningful concepts with phonemes and morphemes make a semblance of sense inescapable in sound poetry (321). That's the premise behind my earlier reading of Colleen Thwaudeau's "from Throgmogie & Engestchin," which might be considered a very mild and syntactically restrained variant of the contemporary sound poem. After all, even musicalized language, according to Kristeva, "is not without signification" and so must contend with and cross the thetic (Revolution 63).

When McCaffery talks about how the "acoustic" poem works, his words are reminiscent of Hughes's discussion of the physicality of music quoted at length in chapter three, and recalled earlier in this chapter:

The acoustic poem bypasses the cortex and addresses itself to the Central Nervous System. Energy transmits as fragmented linguistic particles, sound, vibrations and electrochemical forces to the spinal column ("Text-sound" 73).

What is essential here is the skirting around the cortex, "that interface of language and matter . . . the deciphering department of the mind" (72). Both Hughes and McCaffery seek a language which, though it inevitably incorporates the symbolic, acts on a directly physical level. The fact that a theory of nonsense is useful for understanding this newly evolving language of direct contact can be extrapolated from McCaffery's call for "a whole new critical vocabulary based on a semiotics of drive and flow and patterned over a schema of the neural"
Other sound poets, like Britain's Bob Cobbing, play up the "pre-sociosymbolic" origins of sound poetry more -- "PARTLY it is a recapturing of a more primitive form of language, before communication by expressive sounds became stereotyped into words, when the voice was richer in vibrations, more mightily physical" (39). But even Cobbing emphatically puts qualifications on this relationship with the primeval by writing "PARTLY" in the upper case. Larry Wendt comes close to the mark when he writes that sound poetry is an amalgam of nature and technology (70), of the "primal" and the "civilized." Here is another way in which sound poetry is nonsensical; nonsense, as was argued earlier, urges the meeting and mingling of such nature/culture distinctions.

This hesitation to embrace "primitive" sound as the sole source of sound poetry doesn't completely eradicate the primeval sounding which Cage calls for in Empty Words, and which Hughes and Lilburn articulate in wholly different manners. Nor does it prevent one from attributing to sound poetry a portion of the orality which Deleuze saves for schizophrenic language. Once again a reader is faced with a language, like Cage's noises, so involved with its own material production and with the way the body can modulate sound (and how the machine can then distort and mix that sound), that Deleuze's distinctions are rendered vulnerable. Once again noises -- especially when tape recorders are used -- become incorporeal, in Deleuze's terms, but retain so much of their corporeality that they do not and cannot mean abstractly. Sound poetry is a nonsense of the body, a "singing" of the desires over against the demands of communicative expression.

17 McCaffery might also have called for a new critical form, as well as vocabulary, to appropriately treat sound poetry, though it is perhaps just that a written paper cannot possibly do justice to any actual sound poem since it can't "reproduce it." These poems participate entirely in Ong's presence of evanescence; even their textual notation (which often borders on concrete poetry or abstract art) can give no precision. In sound poetry, the moment of performance is everything.
Cobbing and his sometime collaborative partner Paula Claire make their sound poetry not only a nonsense of their own bodies, but also of other bodies. And in so doing, they have dramatically changed the notion of what can be considered textual notation. They often "[receive] 'song signals' from natural objects: a cross-section of a cabbage, a stone, a piece of rope, the textures surface of bricks, cloth etc" (McCaffery, "Sound Poetry: A Survey" 14); these signals are perhaps analogous to the "signals" Lilburn received when he imagined how a pumpkin would sing. As Claire writes in "The Notation of my Sound Poetry":

I began to realise that all patterns and markings could be considered as primitive codes, dictating to human perception much earlier than alphabets, provoking a response in sound (56).

And she describes a group sounding at which she and her audience dropped to the floor and "read" the woodknots in the auditorium's floor (62). However, Claire and Cobbing don't just read the objects around them; they also make use of the "optophonetic" notation (the use of "typographic variations in size to indicate proportionate variations in pitch and volume" (McCaffery, "Sound Poetry" 8)) developed by Dadaist Raoul Hausmann and still quite prevalent in sound poetry circles. Like other sound poets, they use drawings and collages (often valued as much as works of art as they are as scores) which even more loosely chart vocal renderings. (See for instance Figs. 11, 12). It is, perhaps, when its notation reaches these extremes that sound poetry most challenges traditional notions of what poetry is. One would be hard pressed to justify calling a cabbage a poem (as opposed to the inspiration for a poem), but if the notational rendering of sound poetry is its text, its cues for performance, then that is just what Claire's and Cobbing's experiments require.

A loose interpretation of Claire's statement, quoted above, might
lend itself to Derridean interpretation -- patterns and markings being a
physical manifestation of the arche-trace which precedes and informs
speech and sound. But McCaffery's qualification of the idea of a text
upsets such an interpretation, revealing the priority of sound over
writing and demonstrating just how far from traditional poetry this
"writing" stands, how much the grain is emphasized:

Text itself [sic] as a dialectic term, not a score (the
anchor of repeatability) but the thetical surface from which
a performer reacts, projecting out into the unique flowings
of the fissure created by that rebellion against the fixed
("Text-sound" 73).

The acoustic text becomes a radical example of "borderblur" -- a term
Nichol borrowed from Argentinian poet Dom Sylvester Houedard to describe
the generic indeterminacy of much postmodernist "writing" ("Primary
Days" 19). And it is only in its privileging of sound over writing,
despite the inventiveness of its texts, that sound poetry risks
exclusion from a nonsense canon.

Writing out of the highly politicized poetic of the
L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement, McCaffery views sound poetry as an assault on
the capitalistic denigration of language, on its reduction of language
to a merely meaningful commodity. "Against the order," he writes,

word, meaning, nomination
and syntax (i.e. against the
socio-cultural system of communication)

place the gestural body, attaching
itself to sound and rhythm
as autonomous discharges (expenditures)
outside the utilitarian
production of meaning ("Lyric's Larynx" 182).
The radical infusion of sound in experimental poety is an attempt to place this gesturing, polyphonic body into or next to language. The writing which results is often nonsensical. Some of the most adept practitioners of a musicalized poetic, Gertrude Stein and the poets associated with the journal \textit{L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E}, remain to be considered. This other variant of nonsense, the writing "outside the utilitarian/production of meaning" so central to their work, will be the concern of the last chapter of this study.
"O jongleurs, O belly laughs"

The first thing the eye meets on the page of Tim Lilburn’s "Pumpkins" (Names of God 42-3; see Appendix VIII for the text of the poem) is a huge patch of “o”’s; big and little, they proliferate, reckoning the shape of the pumpkins whose praises the poem sings. The page is the garden, thick with vegetable letters, a "rioting plot" whose long lines tumble about, sinuous vines stringing together those pumpkin-esque vowels. The other thing that immediately strikes the looker — Lilburn is a poet whose embrace is as wide as the page, sometimes wider.

But this poem is not just a rush and tangle of verbiage or herbiage. Lilburn takes full advantage of the play of the voice he hears in the pumpkins, the voice with which he imagines a pumpkin would sing if it could. His answer to the implicit question of how does a pumpkin sing: clearly from the diaphragm, the seat of phonic fullness. The "Oompah Oompah Oompah" of these pumpkins rolls out of the mouth with the roundness and substance of a pumpkin of mammoth proportions. A brassy, bass "tuba girdled" pumpkin. A pumpkin with lungs to match.

The "oo" of "Oompah" is voiced again in the rest of the pumpkin's songs: "Booomph," "Doo dee doo dee doooo," "Carro-carroo." These are onomatopeic, words which mean what they sound, as well as Deleuzian nonsense words, which mean themselves. They are a point of intersection between music and word, and also between hoer and hoed. For the sound, the song’s musical sense, is woven into the speech of, and picked up by, the speaker "I, weeding farmer, I, Caruso" that

... , dung-booted serf, whose unhoed brain,
the garden’s brightest fruit, ones
communion with the cowfaced cauliflowers,
cucumbers twinkling like toes, and you,
clown prince,
sun dauphin of the rioting plot.
The "identity" of the "weeding farmer" grows directly out of the song of
the pumpkin ("carroo"/"Caruso"); he joins, "dung-booted," in the "oo"
sound play, when he names the pumpkins "My Poohs."

Creating within the poem's genotext an echo of the nonsensical
body (with its distorted and blending borders mentioned in chapter
three), sound functions as a way of "merging" pumpkin and farmer, and as
an indicator of Haecclitas The interdependence of identity that the
pumpkins and the farmer share argues for a mimetic co-presence, an
earthy imitation of the bodily presence which is so fundamental to the
Christian (especially the Roman Catholic) principles of the eucharist
and the incarnation.¹ For the genotext establishes a type of communion
between the characters of pumpkin and farmer, and articulates a
contemplative (as opposed to actual) in-dwelling on the part of the
poet.

There is another unity of sound, an alliterative and assonantal
unity, which mirrors the oneness, the communal "oneing" of poet and
plant as well. Lilburn's stretching of this word's use, making it work
as a verb, reinforces the all-inclusiveness of that communion. Verb and
noun stand joined: "one" now contains active and static, being and
object, open and closed systems of life. And it is this "joy esperanto,
[this] intense Archimedean aha / of yellow," the music of praise, which
underscores such closeness. "Communion with cowfaced cauliflowers,
"cucumbers," "clown prince"; "bruited busied, blessed these being-ward,
barn-big/, bibulous on light"; "puffing like perorating
parliamentarians"; "self-hefted on the hill and shot" — the genotext of

¹ I don't intend to suggest that all versions of the nonsensical body are theological or pose proofs
for the doctrines of transubstantiation, consubstantiation or incarnation. However, given Lilburn's
theological background (he was a Jesuit priest for years) and the influence which that background
appears to have upon his poetic statements, it seems appropriate to note the affinities which the
nonsensical body has with the doctrines mentioned above. All of these require one to reconsider the
orientation of specific bodies within the world as a result of the (metaphorical, in some cases) merger
or union of seeming oppositions, be it spirit and flesh or symbolic mode and semiotic mode.
this poem doesn't engage just a few letters. The wild writing and writhing of sound employs the entire exuberant, "exultant" alphabet.

Partial rhymes and internal rhymes that fold lines back in upon themselves or span whole stanzas add to the proliferation of sound: "Oompah"/"Boompah"; "suburban"/"burp"/"brumph";
"popeyes"/"apoplexies"/"flexed"; "dolphin"/"dauphin"; "Carro-carroo.
Are you well." Such rhymes lace the poem with an attempt (not entirely unlike Hughes's) at primal energy, the energy of growing, blossoming life that spills out in its long lines, and leaps across stanza breaks: ". . . How do? How do? How do? // Doo dee doo deh doo doo."

The repetition of individual words supplants this primal energy too. Such repetitions in a row, like the one quoted above, do more than multiply the poem's sound games. They help move sensical words into the realm of nonsensical words; "How do? How do? How do?" begins to define itself as its echoing reiteration pushes it over the edge into the pure sound of "Doo dee."

But this phonic merging doesn't create an onslaught of sound of the sort in "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves." The pace of 'Pumpkins" keeps the sounds from massing, lends to the poem a serious frivolity. And this pacing is, perhaps surprisingly given the "lungs" those Oompah booomphah's imitate, really quite puffy.

Caesura helps create that puffing effect throughout the poem; it is present more often than not as commas, full stops, or just large gasps between "Oompah"s. But as caesura accrues and alternates with more fully-breathed lines, the puffing becomes a chug, the chugging a rocking momentum verging on dance:

. . . dancing (thud), dancing (thud,
brumph, thud, brumph) with the Buddha-bellied sun.

This movement is found in the very first lines:
Oompah  Oompah  Oompah, fattening
on the stem, tuba girthed, puffing like perorating
parliamentarians,
The large spaces between the first three words close down to the mere wisp of a pause, the gulping of breath before the line's energy pushes over in enjambement to the second line. Again there is caesura, though brief. But after each caesura the cluster of words grows, gains length and so breath-force till the next caesura-laden line is reached: "Boompah Booomph Booomph. This line repeats the same process of lengthening and expanding breath and, after a brief end stop, plunges into the first full line without a caesura. Such play with full and partial stops mid-line energizes the whole poem.

A central source of the energy, too, is the epithets that run throughout it; they are an outpouring of the reverence, the spirit of this psalm. And, because they never appear in isolation, they continue to generate the puffing-chugging-rocking dance.

... God's jokes, O jongleurs, O belly laughs
quaking the matted patch, O my blimpish Prussian generals, O garden sausages, golden zeppelins.

Popeyes, my dears, muscular fruit

my sweets, pleasure things, my baubles, my Poohs

clown prince,
sun dauphin of the rioting plot.

Each string of epithets does more than augment the rollicking rhythm of "Pumpkins," though. Some measure of alliteration adds fuel to the momentum which accretion is building up. But of equal importance is the zany juxtaposition of "items" within these strings; Lilburn brings together in these moments, and throughout the poem as a whole, a slew of seemingly disparate bits and pieces of life. This bricolage both adds humour and seriousness to his attempt to cross barriers. If a poem can
work as well as this one does and still cross the borders that seemed to exist between Zen Buddhism, German opera, Easter Island, St. Francis, the suburbs and cauliflower, then the stretch between pumpkin and poet is minimal at best.

Such juxtapositions and the images which grow out of them, out of the poem's spiritually and religiously flexible world view ("vegetables on a ball and chain"; "garden elephants... yahooing a yellow/which whallops air"), share the whimsy of the finest of the Nonsense tradition; think of the odd mixing together of "The Owl and the Pussy-cat [who] went to sea/ In a beautiful pea-green boat," or the many creatures (the Stork, the Duck, the Frog, the Fimble Fowl with a Corkscrew leg, the small Olympian bear, the Blue flute-playing Baboon and the Attery Squash, among others) who went to live in the Quangle Wangle's hat on the Crumpety Tree, or the Jumblies who went to see in a sieve (they did!). Here is Nonsense's non-contradictory opposition, a type of "co-presence."

Lilburn's is a psalm, a particularly, peculiarly serious psalm, whose nonsense reaches past dour-faced religiosity to an harmony achieved through a vegetative gesture towards transubstantiation, the "bodily" mixing of poet and plant, word and music. This harmony is neither pantheistic nor monistic

because the union between poet and stone, poet and tree, poet and history is not a oneness of substance, but a oneness in relation, in election, in solidarity. The bonds are affective not physical, though the recognition of these erotic bonds completes the physical form of things.

Streams, persons, hills, the dead -- all are fully what they are when they are known as linked, in community with one another ("Thoughts" 36).

Such community, such harmony, grows out of his unique use of nonsense.
Chapter V -- "A Silly Corpse"?
The "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" Poets, Stein and the Nonsense of Reference

If the aim of philosophy is, as Wittgenstein claims, to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle, then the aim of poetry is to convince the bottle that there is no fly.

(Steve McCaffery, *Evola* n.p.)

The move from purely descriptive, outward directive, writing toward writing centered on its wordness, its physicality, its haecceity (thisness) is, in its impulse, an investigation of human self-sameness, of the place of our connection: in the world, in the word, in ourselves.

(Charles Bernstein, "Three or Four Things I Know About Him" 32)

Writing about a paragraph of experimental prose by Barrett Watten, Ron Silliman wittily comments, "referentiality is not merely dead, it makes for a silly corpse" ("The New Sentence" 78). Silliman's comment isn't only a quip, however; it's indicative of a serious query, about the status of reference and referentiality in language, which is central to much of the work by those writers loosely called "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets. Not surprisingly, that query finds many and various answers in the experimental works of this "group," but all of these answers involve the relationship between the world and the word, and the ways language helps construct one's perception of reality.

The movement, whose members usually deny it is a movement, is named for convenience after L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, an American journal which offered a forum for their poetic investigations during the late seventies and early eighties; Silliman claims L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E was "the first American journal of poetics by and for poets" ("Language, Realism and Poetry" xvii). The purpose of the journal, according to Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, editors of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and of The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book (an anthology based on the first three volumes of
the magazine), was to "[foreground] compositional issues and styles of reading" ("Repossessing the Word" ix). As a result of such foregrounding, almost all of its participants engage in dramatic questionings of the nature of meaning and its relationship with the political status quo, and with language's materiality. To do so they cite such writers and thinkers as Thoreau, Dickinson, the Russian Futurists, Stein, Zukofsky and Olson, Wittgenstein, Barthes, Derrida and Kristeva, among others, and offer an alternative poetic tradition radically opposed to New Criticism and its formalist and "modernist" offshoots.

The list of names from which this various poetic springs may already suggest an affinity with nonsense as it has been construed throughout this study. This final chapter will endeavour to show that a nonsensical style of reading actively addresses some of the concerns about language which many of the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets raise. After a consideration of the role of the reader, reference, referentiality, materiality and grammar -- some of the several issues which participants in the movement confront -- the chapter concludes with brief readings of two writers: Gertrude Stein, arguably the movement's most important literary ancestor; and Ron Silliman, a major "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poet, theorist and anthologist.

"The Writes of the Reader":
Another View of Audience, Author and the Self

First, to re-think the name. Many "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets object to being collectivized by this term because their inquiries are not specialized or made unique by virtue of their engagement with language. Almost all poetry maintains an intimate, probing relationship with language, and by its nature highlights language's delicate workings. But "conservative" poetry is less partial, goes further towards making
its exploration and exploitation of linguistic principles subtle, quiet. It doesn't demand of its casual reader a conspiracy of "wording." A "L=A=N=G=E" poet's questioning of, disruption of, language and linguistic norms cannot be overlooked; it occurs at such a basic level, in such a dramatic manner, that a reader is required to participate, to question, to probe, to leap from word to syllable to sound, to disorganize and re-organize the words presented.

A writer of "L=A=N=G=E" poetry writes most successfully when readers willingly join in the process. Jackson Mac Low, a literary precursor of the movement, argues

it may be most correct to call such verbal works [as characterize the movement] 'perceiver-centered' rather than 'language-centered' (and certainly rather than 'non-referential'). Whatever the degree of guidance given by the authors, all or the larger part of the work of giving or finding meaning devolves upon the perceivers. The works are indeed 'perceiver-centered' ("'Language-centred'" 494).

Mac Low contends that the reading process is one "in which perceivers are perceiving their own minds at work" (495), not, as in more-traditionally conceived writing, the minds of the authors.

"L=A=N=G=E" poetry is not inscribed with a readily discernible (some would say "consumable") meaning. Rather, its meanings are "inseparable from the language in process" (Messerli 3). Lyn Hejinian argues in "The Rejection of Closure" that such "open" writing is generative rather than directive. The writer relinquishes total control and challenges authority as a principle and control as a motive. The "open text" often emphasizes or foregrounds process, either the process of the original composition or of subsequent compositions by readers (134-5).

There is for these writers no one hypothetical mind supplied with the
background details necessary to infer an author’s intention. Their works are geared to a complex of readers, unique individuals who share one common trait, an acceptance of the re-definition of reading which Bruce Andrews gives in "Text and Context" -- "READING: not the glazed gaze of the consumer, but the careful attention of a producer, or co-producer" (36). Such a reader might serve many modernist texts no less well than she would these "postmodernist" ones. Likely it is a matter of the degree of involvement required which separates Andrews' reader from that of Pound or Eliot.

Such a reader would be quite unlike Alice, that spoilsport in a verbal Wonderland. As Michael Palmer points out in an interview with Lee Bartlett, a reader "[has] to decide what [her] relationship to the poem is. It is a kind of poetry that insists that the reader is an active part of the meaning, that the reader completes the circuit" (128). Alice may escape Wonderland by skeptically confronting its inhabitants -- "Who cares for you? . . . You're nothing but a pack of cards?" (129) -- but the responsible reader of "perceiver-centered" poetry has no such out. She "cohabit[s]" (Grenier, "Notes on Coolidge, Objectives, Zukofsky, Romanticism, and &" 533) with the poem, its writer, its language. She chooses to remain in Wonderland for the whole of the text, and longer since the lines drawn between text and world are tenuous at best.

Hejinian's My Life, as the final inter-chapter will demonstrate, is in many ways typical of the movement. It offers a fabric of verbal resemblances which seem rooted obliquely in the world as one knows it; "A pause, a rose, something on paper" (7) -- these are words and grammatical forms which one recognizes, which one might even be able to pin to exterior referents, yet which function within the volume as a whole in ways beyond one's normal expectations of a word, and of poetic convention. These "refrains" not only accrue meanings through frequent repetition and re-contextualization. They also achieve a heightened
status as words. Because they continually appear within new frameworks, they begin to matter as matter, as arrangements of letters, syllables, as sounds which mean in relation to the other arrangements of sound surrounding them. They become reconfigurations of the other letters, syllables, sounds, around them, fluid nodes which crystalize, for the space of a moment, aspects of the verbal weave of Hejinian’s work. Hejinian’s words are possibly more accurate representations of reality than the staid words which typify a more intentionally communicative discourse, like that I’m engaged in here. And she needs a reader like the l. . . L. A. Hatter, or the Cheshire-cat, or the Mock Turtle -- one who will play her (quite serious) game.

It is this insistence on the participation of the reader in the making of the text’s meaning, in the playing of its “lar’ag” games” (Wittgenstein’s term is frequently adopted by these writers), which supplies an opening for a strategically Nonsensical reading. In The Raven and the Writing-Desk, Francis Huxley defines Nonsense, the genre not the philosophical error, in this way:

Nonsense, then, is a logical game played with feeling by at least two people, in a spirit of self-contradiction, in such a way that one thing leads on to the other to the constant surprise and mutual enthusiasm of both parties (10).

Huxley’s definition is more restrictive, more rooted in logic, than the physical and subversive version of Nonsense construed in this study. By suggesting that Nonsense resides solely within a logical continuum, he ignores the psychically disruptive effects and implications of Nonsense; he fails to clarify that, as a logical game, Nonsense involves alternative forms of logic, and that often a poet’s (or Nonsense writer’s) logic is “illogic” (Palmer 136).

However, Huxley’s Nonsense reader plays, contradicts herself and what she has been taught to be the fundamental indications of self and world. Chapter one established the importance of play’s relationship
with Nonsense. That important relationship is borne out in "perceiver-centered" writings as well, in what Vicki Mistacco calls "ludism," although her definition seems to argue for a proliferation of meanings, rather than the stretching of meaning or the multiplicity of ways to mean crucial in nonsense:

'Ludism' may be simply defined as the open play of signification, as the free and productive interaction of forms, of signifiers and signifieds, without regard for an original or ultimate meaning. In literature, ludism signifies textual play; the text is viewed as a game affording both author and reader the possibility of producing endless meanings and relationships (quoted in McCaffery, "Language Writing: from Productive to Libidinal Economy" 149).

"L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry urges play and participation by using many of the materialist strategies which are central to nonsense and Nonsense -- puns, juxtaposition, phonemic variation, the privileging of sound and rhythm -- and also by using metonomy and parataxis. Exactly how these strategies function in "perceiver-centred" work will be discussed later in the chapter.

Such poetry is also based fundamentally on self-contradiction. This is not the self-contradiction which Huxley intends, for "language-centred" writing's contradiction undermines the notion of self, a stable and fixed identity. Here is another affinity with a bandar-logical style of nonsense and with Kristeva's notion of the subject-in-process. Kristeva argues for a self continually fluctuating and re-constituting itself, continually being shaped by its intercourse with all forms of language, events and instinctual drives. This self in flux, continually unmaking and remaking itself, is central to the slipperiness of nonsense and its location within the world of the text. The protean forms of Nonsense, which itself seeks to construe and construct a verbal
universe, imply a reality in perpetual metamorphosis. For 
"L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets especially, this implication extends to the very 
being of writer and reader, and can be related to a Heraclitean 
recognition that all things are in continual flux. Randa Dubnick argues 
that Stein's use of repetition indicates such a Heraclitean reality 
(21). This fluctuating self can easily be related to the slipperiness 
of "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writing with its diminution of the role of poetic 
voice and its reconceiving of author and audience, as well.

Marjorie Perloff, in "The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry in 
the eighties," contends that "the poet's voice functions as no more than 
a marginal presence, splicing together the given 'data'" (221). Rather 
than language being the medium through which the poet's voice or 
personality (or that which she assumes for each poem) is transmitted, 
the poet's voice sparsely supplements the transmission of a linguistic 
"reality," serves as the almost invisible thread which sews the poem's 
verbal patchwork together. The "voice" presented in "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" 
poetry resonates in the fractures and leaps, the fissures and echoes of 
the words themselves. It appears often as nothing more than the 
principle governing "selection," as the eye (rather than "I") which 
collects and directs data. Since such writing works against a 
transparency of meaning, it evokes the shifting of a subject engaged in 
the very process of "being" which constitutes the act of writing and 
reading the text. The process by which the reader ferrets out the 
potential meanings of the text is also the process by which she relates 
the "vocal" idiosyncracies of the "author" to the idiosyncracies of her 
own perceptual world.

Charles Bernstein, in a telling critique of some extra-textual 
applications of Derridean theory, argues:

The lesson of metaphysical finitude is not that the world is 
just codes and as a result presence is to be ruled out as 
anything more than nostalgia, but that we can have presence,
insofar as we are able, only through a shared grammar. That our losses are not based on the conceptual impossibility of presence in the face of the "objects" of presence not being "transcendentially" locked into place, but rather on grounds that each person must take responsibility for -- the failure to make ourselves present to each other, to respond or act when the occasion demands ("The Objects of Meaning" 182).

This kind of relationship with language or a "shared grammar" of meaning in use or context (Bernstein admits a strong Wittgensteinian influence), results in a social, albeit fluctuating, self. It is a self, or presence, constructed out of the physical (as opposed to metaphysical) structures of language whose meanings are communally agreed upon. Such presence, tentative in comparison to the crystalline logocentricity of formalism, is constructed through verbal agreements, interactions, explorations, through the graphic, phonic and sensical elements of a language which continues to "be," in flux.

Bernstein's stand on presence and language provides a useful response to radical deconstructionists; but it may also be borrowed to serve, if slightly stretched, as a cogent defence for Nonsense against charges of phono-centrism and metaphysicality. Nonsensical presence, as Lilburn's "Pumpkins" demonstrates, is communal, genotextual; it determines its own axis for the production of meaning and invites a reader to participate in a community-creating reading. By co-creating a shared grammar which articulates a limited presence, Nonsense and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry blend, in admittedly differing ways, the roles of reader and writer. What Bruce Andrews says of "perceiver-centred" poetry can equally be said of Nonsense:

Language work resembles a creation of a community and of a world-view by a once-divided-but-now-fused Reader and Writer. This creation is not instrumental. It is immanent, in plain sight (and plain-song), moving along a surface with
all the complications of a charter or a town-meeting ("Text and Context" 35).

This communal process is self-determining in several ways; not only does it enable reader/writers to determine, temporarily, their "selves," it is also established for individuals or a community by themselves and so not imposed upon them as are most forms of meaning. Andrews' poetry bears this out too, as the following passage from a poem in Wobbling (quoted in Hartley 40) shows:

    gaps
    shocks through
    absorbing
    hover
    the subjunctive
    we're
    less
    thoughts

Strange as it may first seem, the poem is a strong argument against culturally imposed constraints on reading, and for seeking out new ways of reading and constructing meaning. Reading as one would normally attempt to -- line by line, top to bottom, left to right -- little "sense" can be made.

It's quite likely that much of the poem's impact would be lost if it were performed, since performance would probably limit the range of interpretative strategies available to the reader/listener; the performer would take on much of the burden of re-organization which, in the written version, falls to the reader. What Andrews' poem demonstrates is that alternatives, in the style of reading and expectations of the outcome of that process, do exist and can result in various forms of sense. One can try to follow the traditional manner of reading and end up concentrating on each word individually; one can read
from bottom to top, from right to left, or randomly. The most sustained
and normative sense seems to result from reading inwards from the left
margin -- reading the words in an order based on their proximity to that
margin; this method at least results in grammatically-acceptable
phrases: "thoughts absorbing less hover we're gaps shocks through the
subjunctive."

This sense culled from the poem also supports, in terms of
content, Andrews' claims about form and thought. Thoughts do hover,
stand in still-motion, when they aren't absorbing, working with,
responding to their surroundings; though one wonders what they absorb
"less" of. And it doesn't seem a theoretical stretch for Andrews to say
"we're gaps" -- especially if "we're" hovering through language in
neutral, not actively engaging it or experiencing its process. If one
doesn't work with and through language, one is a hole, a fissure in the
communal constitution of the world; she is a "shock" (disruption)
"through the subjunctive" (the conditional/self of existence). I
wouldn't want to contend such a reading of/into Andrews' poem is its
ultimate or intended meaning; that would be contrary to the spirit of
the poem and the poem itself. However one decides to re-configure it
and to deal with its scattering of words,¹ the poem questions the
process of reading, and calls for a new, exploratory relationship
between writer, text and reader. These oddly spaced words are a means
for community.

The issues of the self, the reader and the writer, are tied to a
much larger concern for many "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets. In "An Interview
with Tom Beckett," Bernstein points out:

It's a mistake, I think, to posit the self as the

¹ The poem, with its scattered appearance, presents the illusion of randomness but is not an
actual random or chance text. There is some element of conscious choice which determines at least
one axis of the poem -- for instance, Andrews chose the words of the poem, and chose ones which
could be configured into a more or less meaningful text. Such a contention implicitly challenges the
possibility of the random text; even the chance works Cage produced using the I Ching have behind
them the conscious choice to use the I Ching as a method for producing a text.
primary organizing feature of writing. As many others have pointed out, a poem exists in a matrix of social and historical relations that are more significant to the formation of an individual text than any personal qualities of the life or voice of an author (408).

Bernstein is not discounting the value of the author's "patterns of language . . . and corresponding behavior or relevant quirks" (Hejinian, "If Written is Writing" 30) scattered throughout a poem in order to be forged into a tenuous communal meaning here; rather he is recognizing that the socio-political context, more so than the author or reader, forms and informs the meanings of a text. Jerome McGann, in "Contemporary Poetry, Alternative Routes," writes that, for the writers of "perceiver-centred" poetry, "language is taken as the representative social form per se -- the social form through which society sees and presents itself to itself" (643). Language as a social form and force, or, more specifically, the political expedience of reference, is the concern of the next section.

To Shew or Eschew the Fly?:
Nonsense and the "L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E" Poet's Concern over Referentiality

"What is your aim in philosophy? -- To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle," muses Wittgenstein in Philosophical Investigations I.309. This is his response to the restrictive classifications, grammatical and referential, of Russell and Moore as they argued for a philosophical use of language devoid of flux or socially generated meaning, a use whose hard and fast classifications created rather than resolved paradoxes. For instance, since the word "mind" is a noun, Moore and Russell contended that in philosophical discourse it should behave as a noun does -- have location and attributes, some sort of concrete existence. But this, of course, contradicts the "sense" of
mind. Wittgenstein’s metaphor implies that the "fly" is always, would
always be, free of the linguistic bottle if philosophers paid attention
to the ordinary usage of language. Language’s general, social and
material functions prove the non-existence of the fly bottle. What
Wittgenstein argues for, here and in other places, is a renewed
consideration of the social character of language and, in part, a re-
materialization of language.

When McCaffery uses the metaphor as a springboard in the opening
of Evoba,2 his meditations on the Investigations, he leaps in quite a
different direction, and urges poetry to leap with him. The purpose of
poetry, McCaffery suggests, is to prove to the fly-bottle there was
never any fly — no reference, no contained or containable meaning.
McCaffery’s metaphorical twist departs from Wittgenstein’s original in
several ways, not the least of which is his use of fly (or my
understanding of that use) to connote some sort of stable meaning. A
socially-based meaning such as Wittgenstein promotes is not stable or
containable in the long run. McCaffery’s fly cannot exist in
Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Whether McCaffery’s bottle can be convinced
by poetry of the fly’s nonexistence, a fly (or many flies) do(es) exist.
In an attempt to liberate language McCaffery goes far beyond de-
contextualizing and twisting Wittgenstein’s metaphor, however; he posits
the impossible — a non-referential language.

The notion that reference is culturally determined is widely
accepted by almost all of the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets; their position
grows out of readings of theorists like Sapir, who promotes the highly
controversial theory that people live "at the mercy of the particular
language which has become the medium of expression for their society"
(quoted in "Disappearance of the Word" 7). But McCaffery has extended
that notion in some quite radical ways. He argues, like many other

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2 See the first epigraph to this chapter.
"L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets, that capitalist society and its distinctly classist version of reality are transmitted through language by de-materializing it. However, he goes on to characterize and condemn reference purely in terms of a capitalist market economy.

The Capitalist rationale is: you can produce and consume everything and everywhere providing it flows and providing it's exchangeable. Reference marks a point of extreme liquidity in the Sign. It is, in fact, the line along which the Signifier liquidates itself, exchanges itself for the Other by means of the flow occurring along the surface of a grammatical meaning ("From the Notebooks" 161).

Reference, he suggests, being an exchange-oriented commodity, is merely a "surplus-value" (McAffery, "Diminished Reference and the Model Reader" 13). In fact, McCaffery goes so far as to suggest that reference is an example of commodity fetishism in language:

This linguistic promise that the signified gives of something beyond language I've come to feel as being central to capitalism (the fetish of the commodity) and derived from an earlier theologicolinguistic confidence trick of "the other life" ("Intraview" 189).

What he wants is a language of use-value, not of surplus-value, a language which emphasizes the signifier and so the production, not the consumption, of language ("Diminished Reference" 14). Such a view is purposefully polemical; like the other writers of this movement, McCaffery takes an extreme stance, pushing the issue of materiality as opposed to reference to an illogical, almost Idealist, limit.

In his often insightful study, Textual Politics and the Language Posts, George Hartley suggests that:

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7 This essay appeared in an earlier version titled "The Death of the Subject: The Implications of Counter-Communication in Recent Language-Centered Writing."
McCaflery imagines a point at which one can transcend meaning and achieve a pure presence of the material signifier, a pure use-value or -- to the extent that "use-value" carries with it instrumentalist connotations -- a pre-use-value (67). 4

What this call for a "pure presence of the material signifier" suggests is that McCaffery really wants a non-referential language. Or wanted -- he admits in "Nothing is Forgotten but the Talk of How to Talk: an Interview by Andrew Payne" that aspects of this approach have "certain naiveties" (124); indeed this approach's extremity pushed it into the realm of the unrealizable. A purely material language does not exist, unless perhaps as music or gesture; it has no linguistic incarnation. Such a language is also not nonsensical, since, to borrow McCaffery's early terminology, nonsense needs both use-value and surplus-value, both materiality and reference to be effective.

However, while McCaffery admits there are limitations to his initial emphasis on the purely material, he still contends that even if reference is not entirely fetishistic, 4 and if the invitation to the reader to join in the process of creating/completing the text smacks of "ideological contamination," literature should be read "not as forms and structures, but as operative economies. Here," he continues, the notion of expenditure, loss, the sum total of

4 It is important to note that while Hartley offers a sound analysis of some of McCaffery's work, he ultimately presents a lop-sided view, wholly ignoring all of McCaffery's more "conventional" writing -- conventional in the sense that he uses whole words, phrases, sometimes even syntactically correct sentences. Every piece by McCaffery, which Hartley refers to, is a graphemic "collage" or sound poem. Thus, while Hartley gives a good reading of McCaffery's theoretical stances (better of his earlier ones than his later ones), he fails to consider many of McCaffery's writings that are more muted, less radical. McCaffery is willing and able to use referential language in exciting and innovative ways; he doesn't limit himself to a pure materiality.

5 Jackson Mac Low offers a telling response to McCaffery's original claim of fetishism in "Language-centered" when he asks: "What could be more of a fetish or more alienated than slices of language stripped of reference?" -- if it could be, that is. Mac Low contends that it's impossible to subtract all reference from language (492).
effects of a general economized nature, would emerge to relativize the more "positive" utilitarian ordered reading (124).

McCaffery represents the extreme version of what can be called, roughly speaking, one side of the split over referentiality among "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writers. His is a radically anti-capitalist interpretation of the workings of language, an approach which, finally, is neither easily combined with nonsense nor a successful defence of non-capitalistic linguistic interaction.\(^6\) Nonsense's inability to respond to or alleviate the concerns expressed by this essentially non-referential position is ironic since some of McCaffery's theoretical work (as chapter four has shown) contains many ideas which can be construed as sympathetic toward nonsense. However, nonsense is not ever, as chapter one's taxonomy indicated, entirely non-referential, nor for that matter is language. Balancing meaning and non-meaning, sense and not sense, requires, not that reference be completely undermined, but that on some level reference be employed (often against itself) within Nonsensical writing.

That is what Ron Silliman's approach to reference argues. Silliman, an influential and important "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writer, begins from what appears to be the same point as McCaffery. But through some fine discriminations, he develops a much more workable (and, incidentally, nonsensical) understanding of the relationship between language and reference, an understanding which is not as radical or as self-defeating as McCaffery's is.

\(^6\) One of the most problematical aspects of relating reference with capitalism is the fact that reference existed as a central function of language long before capitalism existed. While some "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets might defend their position by suggesting that the advent of written language initiated a division in society between the literate and the non-literate, and by extention the upper and the lower classes, such a defence seems naive, and uses an extremely loose definition of capitalism. The capitalist system may not urge an engagement with language's materiality, but neither do many non-capitalist societies. At best, then, the terminology used to criticize and explain capitalism can be used metaphorically to provide one way of interpreting how language may function.
In a pivotal essay first published in 1977, "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World," Silliman links lingual transparency with the emergence of capitalist society. When words and meaning are "surplus," when they are blindly and blandly consumed, they become transparent. The title of the essay, in fact, says it all; Silliman's contention is that only by dulling the experience of language to a point where one looks through, not at, language, can a capitalist society appear as the "given" it would like to be. The implication is that an appreciation of the materiality of language could insidiously lead to a dissatisfaction with a society which emphasizes a continual abstracting, moving away from the physicality of making, using, doing.

"Surplus-value," and its resulting consumerism, is passive and inert. The vast majority of people are isolated from the processes of production by it, and, Silliman contends, they are equally isolated from involvement in the production of language. "What happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development," he suggests,

is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its expository, descriptive and narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of "realism," the illusion of reality in capitalist thought. These developments are tied directly to the function of reference in language, which under capitalism is transformed, narrowed into referentiality (10).

As Jerome McGann points out (640), Silliman makes an important distinction between reference and referentiality. To be fair, given his corpus of essays on this problem, it is referentiality not reference which is the silly corpse Silliman writes of. That words refer is not the problem; the problem is, for Silliman, that capitalism requires words to do nothing but refer, to reside inertly on the page with a
readily discernible meaning waiting to be culled from them by a reader who demands of her thinking faculties the least possible effort. And capitalism, Silliman suggests, in order to remain pre-eminent, requires that these words refer to its notion of the world. Lee Bartlett's characterization of the movement's general response to reference is in accord with Silliman's:

The issue is not, then, reference per se, but a reaction to a prevailing poetics which seems to be unaware of the social implications which hover just above its acceptance as a first given of an unquestioning referentiality ("What is 'Language Poetry'?" 748).

A frequent metaphor for this blandly referential aspect of words is the window. In "Writing Social Work & Political Practice," Bruce Andrews puts it this way:

One mode of writing tips its hat to assumptions of reference, representation, transparency, clarity, description, reproduction, positivism. Words are mere windows, substitutes, proper names, haloed or subjugated by the things to which they seem to point (133).

Of course, these windows, one assumes, are well-washed -- without dirt, grit, or scratches; and no screens, nothing to impede the clarity of view, the transmission of vision. Not all windows, one should be quick to say, can be so easily looked through and dismissed; some, like the stained glass in Hejinian's My Life are beautiful in and of themselves, foreground their own materiality -- their colour, texture, subtle imperfections -- while simultaneously offering a transformed view of "reality" beyond. As the final inter-chapter will show, Hejinian's is a language of colour and artistry, a language which refers to itself and to referents. Like stained glass, it is a language which makes itself obvious.

For far too many people, however, language functions in a
transparent manner — it informs, it is not continually reform. To argue in favour of such a use would indicate, at the very least, a naive view of language. But the insistence that this function of language is capitalistic in nature and intent overlooks obvious counter-arguments and extends itself into overstatement. For instance, the Socialist Realism of the Stalinist era bred what is arguably the most polemical and uninteresting use of language in this century. Silliman would, I think, lay the blame on the use of "realism," capitalism's "illusion of reality" (10); however, even this defence can't deny that the problem is realism more so than capitalism, and that, no matter who developed it, realism is available for the dissemination of any socio-political viewpoint.7

Silliman also argues that literature's movement from communal event to individual pastime can be traced from the birth of the printing press right back to the invention of the alphabet, "the initial, pre-capitalist, division of labor in language" ("Disappearance of the Word" 12). The implications of this attribution of lingual labour division, that written language is the precursor to humanity's socio-political fall, are blatantly phonocentric and suggest a surprising naivete.

Another position which Silliman takes in the essay which seems, at first, to be equally problematical is his idealization of gestural language, something he locates contemporarily in the nonsense syllables

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7 In a fascinating essay, "Strangeness," Lyn Hejinian meditates on the possibilities of another form of realism. She says,

I don't mean after-the-fact realism, with its emphasis on the world described (the objects of description), nor do I want to focus on an organizing subjectivity (that of the perceive-describer); nor, finally, am I securing the term to a theory of language. I propose description as a method of invention and of composition (32).

Hejinian uses the analogy of scientists or early explorers who, not knowing what about their new discoveries would be valuable, made note of all things equally. Such realism revels not in ordering the world, but in pointing to it. She suggests,

it is exactly the strangeness that results from a description of the world given in the terms "there it is," "there it is," "there it is" that restores rea1ness to things in the world and separates things from ideology (44).

What she calls for is a realism which escapes the constraints of genre and which, recognizing the fullness of language, presents a reality "ordered" sensually and linguistically. This, as will be seen, is the order of My Life.
of various tribal cultures. In the unrevised version of "Disappearance of the Word," Silliman praises gesture as the earliest and most independent form of reference:

In its primary form, reference takes the character of a gesture and an object, such as the picking up of a stone to be used as a tool. Both gesture and object carry their own integrity and are not confused: a sequence of gestures is distinct from the objects which may be involved, as distinct as the labor process is from its resultant commodities (L=A=N=G-U=A=G=E Book 125).

A gestural language, one assumes, requires activity, production, participation and completely precludes "consumptive" referentiality.

Silliman's model is not a verbal language and does little to suggest what the nature of the reference between object and gesture is, or how that nature can be translated in words; does the picking up of a stone for a tool refer to the stone? to its availability as a tool? Is it perhaps an example of metaphor? Is it a radical example of meaning as use -- the picking up of a stone means tool because I use it this way? How does such a model entertain the referential capabilities of nouns? Since all gesture is active, is a gestural language entirely constructed out of active verbs?

His model of how the expressive purity of such gesture is to be carried over into language (through its material nature -- rhythm, rhyme, nonsense syllable) creates a tempting solution, however. This is especially true since, as I have already argued, the materiality of language is what, in the usual act of referring, interferes with its

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8 Silliman's text, originally printed in A Hundred Posters 14 (1977), appears in its unrevised version in The L=A=N=G-U=A=G=E Book (121-32). A slightly modified version is in Silliman's volume of collected essays The New Sentence. All references to the essay, except the one to which this note is appended, are from the modified version. Part of the quotation which follows has been removed in the newest version of the essay; this removal does not alter Silliman's stance about gestural language. Because the unrevised version fits more smoothly and clearly into the process of my argument, I have chosen to use it here.
abstract referential powers; rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and other materialist techniques are the scratches and impurities on the referential window of language. They incorporate process into language, and in doing so they divert attention from pure referentiality. It's a charming paradox -- the remnants of a primary form of reference disarm passive referentiality. And it brings quite dramatically to the fore the notion that the importance of the act of referring is not to be dismissed out of hand. Rather an untempered, passive gleaning of reference, the debasing of the word to referentiality (to reference only), is.

Ten years after the publication of "Disappearance of the Word," Silliman locates in realism, the genre for which a transparent referentiality is central, the sort of conundrum which his earlier views of gestural language implied. "The utopia of realism," he writes:

was not merely one of the transmission of unmediated signifieds but also of a language rendered pure by just this process. ... Searching for the signified, the realists discovered the signifier. Seeking to abolish style, they empowered it, in all of its partiality, multiplicity, and omnipresence. Intending to create, at long last, the whole word, the unified sign, they instead blew it apart ("'Postmodernism': Sign for A Struggle, The Struggle for the Sign" 37).

The signified, realism and referentiality rely on the signifier, the very thing they intend the reader to ignore, to look through. Such a reliance has built into it the need for a stylized attention to the signifier, a preservation and polishing of it to ensure its functioning which results in its appearance, not its disappearance.

Bernstein agrees that it is not the end of reference which "perceiver-centred" writing seeks; "Not 'death' of the referent," he writes,
-- rather a recharged use of the multivalent referential vectors that any word has, how words in combination tone and modify the associations made for each of them, how 'reference' then is not a one-on-one relation to an 'object' but a perceptual dimension that closes in to a pinpoint, nail down (this word) ("Semblance" 34).

One way to recharge the use of "referential vectors" is by "[making] the structures of meaning in language more tangible and in that way allowing for the maximum resonance for the medium" (35). It is this which "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry and Nonsense seek -- a reverberating sort of reference, a language which, like Wittgenstein's fly, has been shown the way out of the fly-bottle, not eschewed; how this is achieved will be discussed next.

"The Condition of its Wordness":
The Shared Materiality of "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" Writing and Nonsense

One of the major premises of this study is that nonsense is the expression of semiotic materiality erupting into the communicative and rational aspects of language, an eruption which is absolutely simultaneous with the production of language. That is, without the symbolic's transparent repository for language the semiotic 
\textit{chora} would have no place to erupt; and conversely the symbolic cannot exist without the hypothetical pre-existence of the same 
\textit{chora}. This symbiosis is essentially the paradoxical relationship often acknowledged between reference and materiality within "Language-centered" writing.\footnote{I should reiterate that this "movement," like any other group of people, is not in complete agreement over any of the issues raised. This generalization indicates a point of relative consensus which is attended by a great many subtleties and points of contention.} That the principles of Nonsense and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry are so closely aligned is clearest in the extremity of their methods for making
language material.¹⁰

In "Thought's Measure," Charles Bernstein speaks of the "desire: To make language opaque so that writing becomes more and more conscious of itself as world generating, object generating" (71)." Rather than merely list those Nonsense techniques which are shared by "perceiver-centered" writing, I will offer a series of parallel examples dramatizing these techniques. My intent is to provide a survey of materialist methods and an indication of the range which the term "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry covers. A brief summation of the function of these techniques will follow the examples. Because the political intent of Nonsense and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writing differs, the "content" of the latter may appear to be more sophisticated than that of the former; it's important to bear in mind that the techniques are as relevant as the content, and that, whether or not these gestures are overtly political and polemical, they all are linguistically anarchic.

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Alliteration: One of the many "musical" techniques employed in both of these styles of writing, as well as in almost every other type of poetry and in many non-poetic "texts", alliteration is found in at least two

¹⁰ It's important to note that there is one very large difference between Nonsense and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry -- the same which exists between Nonsense and écriture féminine. Nonsense is avowedly apolitical, drawing attention to the politics of our structures of meaning but offering no one polemical response to that political nature. "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetics are for the most part Marxist or Socialist in perspective and point their linguistic revolutions in those directions.

¹¹ Clearly Bernstein makes a distinction between critical and creative writing here. While many "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poets, including Bernstein, produce theoretical and critical writings which defy the traditional and communicative norms of such genres, the attempt to write about abstractions in re-materialized language emphasizes the limitations of a fully material means of communication. The quotation from Bernstein to which this note is appended, for instance, would be vastly different (and possibly less effective) if he used language which approached the level of materiality which McCaffery originally sought.
forms. The traditional form of this technique often appears in Lear's prose, especially as a means of naming: "Diaphanous Doorscraper," "the Co-operative Cauliflower" and "the Tropical Turnspits" are just a few examples ("The Story of the Four Little Children" 106, 102, 94); however, the best example is the long passage describing the Even-song of the Blue-Bottle Flies quoted in chapter one. Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark" is equally rich with its entirely alliterative cast of Baker, Bellman, Boojum, Barrister, Bandersnatch, Broker, Beaver and others. Even the Snark turns out to be a Boojum.¹²

This device is also found such in "Language" poetry as Susan Howe's Defenestration of Prague:

Right or ruth
rent
to the winds shall be thrown

words being wind or web

What (pine-cone wheat-ear
sea-shell) what

("from 'Speeches at the Barriers','" quoted in Messerli,
"Language" Poetries: An Anthology 34).

Certainly in Lear's case, sense is directed by the sound; the meaning or applicability of a word is made secondary in importance to an often arbitrarily determined phonic pattern; the doorscraper may be labeled "diaphanous" because the sound of the word fits the patterning of the prose. So the music of a word matters as much as, if not more than, its relatively abstract designatory functions; such an exaggerated material

¹² Reading Carroll's poem from this perspective helps one respond to those critics who claim "The Hunting of the Snark" is a working through of existential angst. The animating tension of the poem is "to 'B' or not to 'B'" as opposed "to be or not to be."
function is typical of nonsense. While the alliteration in Howe's poem does not reach the excesses one often finds in Nonsense verse, one still suspects that word choice has been limited, if not entirely governed, by the phonic patterns working within her text.

A more interesting and less common form of alliteration also found in Nonsense and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry might be called "alphabetization"; this involves a sequence of "poems" governed by the alphabet, in which the whole of each "poem" is built around one letter. Again Lear provides the most obvious Nonsensical example with his many "alphabets." Take for instance the letter "V" from "Twenty-Six Nonsense Rhymes and Pictures":

The Visibly Vicious Vulture,

who wrote some Verses to a Veal-cutlet in a

Volume bound in Vellum (219).

by Nichol’s Aleph Beth Book bases each of its 26 concrete poems on a letter of the alphabet (see Fig. 13). And Tina Darragh, commenting in "Procedure" on her interest in the dictionary¹³ and alphabetical organization, says:

what interests me is the coincidence and juxtaposition of the words on the page in their natural formation (alphabetical order). In reference to each other, they have a story of their own (108).

In such poems as this one from On the Corner to Off the Corner, she meditates on the relationships between dictionary entries:

"'oilfish' to 'old chap' for 'C'"

Performing military service for the king and bearing a child have a common medieval root. The progression to this point is first academic, then technical. Textbooks give way to

¹³ The organizational premise of the dictionary, as chapter one pointed out, is itself nonsensical.
WE MUST BE TO FREE

IN OUR LIVES.

Fig. 13
textiles which lead to T-formations and T-groups. We pause to add "th" and proceed through Mediterranean anemia, deep seas, Greek muses, pesticides, young shoots and the instinctual desire for death. It is there that we find "thane" to be followed by all manner of "thanks", including the "thank-you-ma'am" — a ridge built across a road so rain will roll off (Messerli 156).

Peculiar tensions arise, and unexpected connections are revealed between words, when the alphabet is used as a governing logic for poetry. These tensions indicate simultaneously the arbitrariness of the alphabet which directs thought and ordering principles, and the chance relationships generated between elements of any order.

**Homonymy:** Both groups of writers explore homonymic constructions, and the disparity between the written form and the sound of words. Lear's most famous example is probably this song found in his story "The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-Popple":

>'Lettuce! O Lettuce!
>'Let us, O let us,
>'O Lettuce leaves,
>'O let us leave this tree and eat
>'Lettuce, O let us, Lettuce leaves! (116).

Silliman uses a homonymic construction to enact one aspect of the very poetic it states: "Wayward, we weigh words" (quoted in Hartley 87). These homonyms exploit the sign's arbitrary character, make meaning out of linguistic anomaly. By pitting the sound value of words against the signified, homonyms encapsulate the very spirit of nonsense, and dramatize one aspect of "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry's exploration; both reference and materiality are crucial for a homonym to function. Without the signified the examples above would provide merely playful refrains of sound; with the added benefit of reference, they demonstrate
the fact that language exists in several different ways simultaneously.

**Juxtaposition:** Another shared technique, juxtaposition appears most often in Nonsense as an anarchic dislocation, or the joining together of phrases or referents which have no clearly articulated, or sensical, connections. It has already been briefly considered in the context of Lilburn's "Pumpkins." Contemporary Nonsense author/illustrator, Edward Gorey, however, uses a juxtaposition more akin to that found in the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writers. The Helpless Doorknob, a "Shuffled Story," is a series of twenty cards which can be read in "2,432,902,736,640,000 different ways" (n.p.) and which is meant to be shuffled into an almost infinite number of non-sequiturs and juxtapositions. Its only organizing principle is alliterative; each sentence and every proper name begin with the letter "A":

Albert left for Peru. Agatha taught Adolphus to dance the one-step. Ambrose took an overdose of sarsaparilla. A mysterious urn appeared in the grounds. Agatha pedalled to the neighbouring village for help. Andrew received a post-card from Amaryllis.

Gorey's story carries Nonsense's use of juxtaposition into the realm of the seemingly random, an area already entered by writers like John Cage, who relies heavily on what he calls "chance operations," or bp Nichol, whose anthology of concrete poetry, The Cosmic Chef, and poem, Still Water, are boxed books which can be read in a multiplicity of orders.

Other, slightly less radical, examples of juxtaposition abound in this poetic movement. Hejinian's My Life, the subject of the next inter-chapter, shows her use of non-sequitur, and stands as a fine example of her own theory of a realism of "strangeness" being enacted. A remarkably witty and successful example of juxtaposition and collage is David Bromige's "My Poetry," a ten-page prose piece which blends together snatches of reviews (laudatory and critical) of his work with a
refreshingly cavalier response to criticism. Here's a short (and metaphorically relevant) excerpt:

My poetry is "curiouser & curiouser" as it makes a descent into the rabbit-hole where descent becomes the subject of the poem's concern: a dazzling dimwittedness that makes sense of its mackerel-textured absence. A respectful abstinence from knowing what I'm doing? Therefore, my style seems to have fallen apart, deteriorated in the three-year interim between books; some kind of decadence has set in; it has become problematical, not to say impossible, because if it limits itself to the traditional language & form of a literature it misses the basic truths about itself, while if it attempts to tell those truths it abolishes itself as literature (11).

**Palindromes, Paragrams and Play:** Reading words backwards or fragmenting them to find other words is another shared technique. Sylvie and Bruno in Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* consider the palindrome EVIL/LIVE (*Complete Works* 529). Nichol's *The Martyrology* is rife with the dis-assembling and re-assembling of words; one of its basic techniques is the breaking open (and secular personification/canonization) of words which begin with "st"; "striking" becomes "St. Riking," "strange," "St. Range"; "stand," "St. And" and so on.14 Such language play defies traditional orders of reading and regarding words. The word becomes a sequence of elements to be re-configured, re-arranged, re-read.

**Phonemic Shifts:** Carroll's use of such shifts and their implications has

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14 Nichol's playful re-configuration of language here uses another technique, abbreviation, which is also potentially nonsensical since it alters and draws attention to a word's material nature (visual, phonic) while maintaining its referential nature.
been discussed quite extensively in chapter four's look at the "pig"/"fig" question in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. A similar instance of this shift occurs earlier in the novel when Alice, falling down the rabbit hole, wonders "'Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?' and sometimes 'Do bats eat cats?' for, you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't much matter which way she put it" (20).

Hejinian's My Life engages in such phonemic rambunctiousness too: "Between plow and prow" (65); "The grass in my glass" (68). And Darragh's "'oilfish' to 'old chap' for 'C'" quoted above, demonstrates as Marjorie Perloff points out, "the vagaries of words that can, with the shift of a single phoneme or two, mean such different things as 'thane' and 'thanks'" ("The Word as Such" 216).

Repetition: Like many of the techniques considered in this section, repetition is commonly found in many other forms of writing. An exaggerated or distorting use of it, however, is typical of Nonsense and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry. In Nonsense, repetition can take many forms: the repetition of single words, phrases, lines or refrains. Less covers the whole range of repetitive styles — from the repeated last words of his self-enclosing limericks, to the more traditionally poetic refrains of "The Pelican Chorus":

Pluffskin, Pluffskin, Pelican jee!
We think no Birds as happy as we!
Plumskin, Ploshkin, Pelican jill!
We think no then, and we thought so still! (232)

In "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry, repetition is rarely a refrain, but words, phrases and lines are frequently repeated or re-used in varying contexts. Such repetition, as will be demonstrated later, is central to My Life and is also a major structural factor in Silliman's Ketjak. It frees words from a singleness of meaning, allowing them simultaneously to accrue other meanings based on their new contextual uses and to
acquire a structural and phonic meaning. They begin to mean as textural components, as nodes around which the text composes itself; and perhaps even more importantly, they begin to mean as sound.

Rhyme and Rhythm: Chapter four has already argued for the importance of these two elements in a Nonsensical writing/reading of poetry. In classical Nonsense rhyme and rhythm are companions as constant as Lear's Owl and Pussy-cat.

The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
'O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!' (61)

"L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry rarely uses such overt end rhyme since it resists conventional forms; rather rhyme and rhythm tend to be subtly internalized as in these "sentences" from My Life and Ketjik respectively: "Raisins, cheese, the Japanese" (64); "This day's reaches features peaches" (20). The latter example features assonantal as well as true rhyme. Because this use of rhyme is internalized, its subversiveness is more textural, less structural, than the strongly defined and definable rhythmic units found in much Classical Nonsense. Yet in both types of rhythmic and rhyming incursion -- subtle or overt -- sound manipulates, challenges, sense's normal place of privilege. The musical movement of the words vies with their meaning for supremacy.
All of these techniques, and many others (such as puns, neologisms, and anagrams) are attempts to centre language and poetry on "the condition of [their] wordness" (Bernstein, "Three or Four Things" 29-30). When one subscribes to the myth that the referential capacity of language points solely to the exterior object for which each word is a sign, or when one ignores language's innate abilities to point simultaneously to an exterior object and to itself, then language -- as the writers of perceiver-centred work argue -- is de-materialized. If one's perceptions and understanding of the world are filtered through and expressed by language, then fabricating and privileging a world which is linguistically transparent and transcendental results in the loss of a variety of possible worlds, in the linguistic textures which would make those worlds viable. Through a careful attention to linguistic detail in the process of reading or writing, however, one can dwell in the signifier. A new awareness of language, with a heightened attention to its part in the creation of sense, can allow one to experience the making of meaning. Then one can re-integrate her view of the world into a balanced materiality.

Such a material language needs, however, neither to undermine skeptically the material existence of the exterior world nor to nullify the possibility of presence within that world. Bernstein pleads for "the deeper reality of the interpenetrability and interdependence of all oppositions as appositions" ("I Think I Understand" 287), a simultaneous merger and co-existence which a semanalytic approach to Nonsense maintains is typical of this genre and this type of linguistic deformation. In "The Objects of Meaning," Bernstein argues as well for such a bridging, conflating or blending of the function of the signifier and signified (a very Nonsensical prospect) when he writes

One might say, against Derrida, that desiring production is the "primary signified," if that is understood as production of a form of life, where words have
Calling attention to the material processes of language as a type of meaning, and splitting or momentarily diverting a reader’s attention from (as opposed to destroying) traditional sense in this manner allows for the combination of the functions of signifier and signified and the reconstitution of the sign within a Nonsensical paradigm. The sign becomes a palimpsest which lets both signified and signifier show through it; abstract and concrete qualities reside in it simultaneously. When different sign systems are situated upon each other in order to put pressure on the sign -- and it should be pointed out that many of the techniques used to heighten a word’s rational nature are as much musical or painterly (for instance, cubist juxtaposition) as they are lingual -- the nature of the sign itself is challenged and changed. To re-materialize language, then, is to re-define the signifying process, to re-locate it within the realm of the signified and so fundamentally alter the structure of the sign.

Author a Grammar: Towards New Grammatical Forms

Such alteration of course causes serious ripples in grammar, but does not call for its overthrow or elimination. While grammatical principles can be used to promote linear and one dimensional language, grammar is not, as McCaffery claims,

a huge conciliatory machine [which assimilates] elements into a ready structure. This grammatical structure can be likened to profit in capitalism, which is reinvested to absorb more human labour for further profit (“From The Notebooks” 160).

Grammar is an absolutely essential factor in the manufacture of the type of linguistic experiment which interests both Nonsense and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writer. Not only does it, as one manifestation of the
Kristeva's symbolic, make possible the expression of the chore, those material energies which re-establish language within the body and the physical world, but it also throws into relief the immensity of the avant-garde's subversion of language. If all semblance of structure and reference has been nullified, then the subversiveness of the gesture is overwhelmed by the pure physicality of the moment; the complete eradication of the thetic (as such a nullification would indicate) could only suggest a psychic upheaval of such magnitude that one would be thrust back into the a pre-symbolic wildness of the newborn.

Chomsky's three levels of grammar -- grammaticality, semi-grammaticality and ungrammaticality -- help illuminate the ripples within signification caused by the creation of the Nonsensical, palimpsestic sign in a more practical way. Marianne DeKoven, in A Different Language, her insightful study of Gertrude Stein, suggests that it is semi-grammaticality, not ungrammaticality, which makes possible avant-garde writing.\footnote{It should be noted that the text of sound poetry constitutes a special case which is, if anything, agrammatical -- especially if McCaffery's characterization of the texts for sound poetry as a thetic interface is accepted. Since the thetic is not a part of the symbolic, merely the point of transition into, or the point of creation of, the symbolic, the thetic can claim no real degree of grammaticality. Rather it has a peripheral relationship which does not actively participate in grammatical production or destruction. Such is the text of the sound poem; the actual performance however is, according to McCaffery, the oral release of libidinal drives and so is usually an ungrammatical assault on meaning and order.} Phrases like Chomsky's example of this second degree of grammaticality, "colorless green ideas sleep furiously," are, De Koven argues, "meaningful, readable, suggestive, resonant" (10). Semi-grammaticality, she continues, not only undermines or fragments coherent meaning, it also subordinates meaning altogether to the linguistic surface, the signified to the signifier: we notice the strangeness or freshness of the verbal combinations themselves -- the words "stand out" \textit{as words} -- before we register consciously their dedetermined, unresolved articulations of lexical meanings (11).
While De Koven’s description of the process of semi-grammatical signification differs from my view of the dynamic of Nonsense in her insistence on the primacy of the signifier over the signified (a palimpsestic sign requires that uneasy balance which is integral to Nonsense), it should make clear the fact that in semi-grammaticality the re-aligned “power” structure of signification finds its most cogent expression. Pure grammaticality is a grammar of the old sign, where the referent and referentiality stand as privileged components; ungrammaticality is a grammar of a completely defused sign -- defused in terms of potential to function within a signifying system, and defused in terms of its organization, that is, broken apart. If semi-grammaticality is to make “sense,” it requires participatory reading and shared grammar, the authoring of a communal grammar -- a theme that has reverberated throughout this chapter. Before looking at samples of work by Stein and Silliman which engage this semi-grammaticality, I’ll consider the rules of one communal grammar which has become quite widely accepted within the “L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E” movement -- Silliman’s notion of “the new sentence.”

Silliman’s theory takes the sentence as the limit of grammatical or lingual organization. “The sentence is the horizon,” he contends, “the border between . . . two fundamentally distinct types of integration” (“The New Sentence” 87). These types of integration are, on one hand, the arranging of lingual units into sentences, and on the other hand “higher orders of meaning -- such as ev . . .” (87) which integrate collections of related or independent sentences. The paragraph is no longer “a unit . . . of logic or argument” (90) but rather a “quantity, a stanza” (90). That being the case, Silliman suggests the torquing which is normally triggered by linebreaks, the function of which is to enhance ambiguity and polysemy, has moved directly into the grammar of the sentence. At one
level, the completed sentence (i.e., not the completed
thought, but the maximum level of grammatic/linguistic
integration) has become equivalent to a line, a condition
not previously imposed on sentences (90).

Silliman's is a unique kind of semi-grammaticality. Each
sentence, viewed in isolation, appears to be grammatical. But when a
group of sentences is read in a sequence, it reveals the non-sequentious
nature which generates its energy, and so erupts normal grammar at the
level of what linguistic pragmatism calls co-reference. These
sentences, read as a unit, require a dramatic re-reading, re-conceiving
and re-integrating. Collectively, new sentences encourage a perpetual
parallax, a continually further shift from the traditional semantics in
which, individually, they can be read. Silliman wants a syllogistic
movement which is "limited," and "controlled"; consequently he tries to
create a syllogism which lies between sentences and orchestrates the
overall movement of the paragraph in order to "[keep] the reader's
attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often
at the sentence level or below" (91).

It is precisely this syllogistic movement which makes Silliman's
new grammar a forum for the Nonsensical sign; the words of this type of
sentence stand as referential and as material. For instance, "But trees
are not orderly" (Ketjak 53) is a workable, grammatical form, albeit
fragmentary; one can cull a referential meaning from this sentence on
its own. When, however, such a sentence fragment is juxtaposed with
other sentences, its grammatical relations are undermined and the
material aspect of the sentences and the words must be consulted to
form new patterns of meaning.

But trees are not orderly. How propose to release the fly
from the bottle. Bigger, to serve you better. The moth
that destroyed Cleveland. Close cover before striking (53).

These words don't cease to refer to trees, flies, bottles, moths,
Cleveland, covers. However, they do not refer to just these things; they also "refer" to, or enact, slogans or quotations which accumulate without imposed order, to themselves as language with a pre-existing and constantly shifting identity. With a reach that stretches in two directions, outward and inward, as a sort of double-headed indicating arrow, each word eclipses the referential and material function within a fluctuating grammar which exists to emphasize that eclipse.

"A continual athleticism": Tender Buttons and Nonsense

Despite Wim Tigges' claim that Gertrude Stein is an absurdist and not a writer of Nonsense (Anatomy 41), a Nonsensical strategy rewards the reader of Stein, and especially the reader of Tender Buttons. Considered by many to be Stein's most successful experimental work, this small volume of prose poems or meditations is divided into three sections -- one on objects, one on food and one on rooms -- each of which is further sub-divided into individual pieces on, for the most part, examples of objects, food and rooms, respectively.

This glimpsing of Stein's prose is meant to illustrate a means of reading and not to confront the whole of Stein scholarship with its dramatic split over whether Stein's works has, literally, no coherent meaning (as De Koven argues throughout her study 16) and so exists solely to glorify the signifier, or whether it is a cryptic encoding of social and sexual meanings which can be teased out through subtle manipulations or intricate twists of logic and etymology (a position taken in varying degrees by, among others, Rieke, Perloff and Steiner).

However, I will admit I don't accept the contention that Stein's

16 Although I don't agree with all of De Koven's conclusions, her study is a fine application of Kristeva's theory of poetic language to Stein's work and well worth the careful consideration of anyone interested in reading Stein's work from either a Kristevan or Nonsensical point of view.
work in *Tender Buttons* is wholly non-referential or unrepresentational. In an interview with Robert Hass, Stein discussed her method of writing *Tender Buttons*:

I used to take objects on a table, like a tumbler or any kind of object and try to get the picture of it clear and separate in my mind and create a word relationship between the word and the things seen (quoted in Copeland, *Language & Time & Gertrude Stein* 88).

As opaque as her writing may be in these "still-lifes" (Perloff, "Poetry as Word-System" 99) of objects, food and rooms, Stein is attempting to (re)present some external object. But she is trying to do so through the interiorities of language. Her sub-titles are not empty gestures; as De Koven notes, they "make as well as mock meaning," for they focus each piece (or poem), and in doing so give the reader a concrete referent as a grounding location (79). De Koven argues that these titles are "arbitrary" (79), but I would urge that they are so only in terms of Stein's choice of an object to respond to or with; they are not names merely pulled out of the air and appended to writings which are completely separate from them. The pieces in *Tender Buttons* are samples of what Randa Dubnick calls a "mimesis of the intersection of the present moment of consciousness with an object" (28); they are samples of the blending of Hejinian's descriptive realism, a realism of "strangeness" (see footnote 5), with an associative linguistic presence. The end result of such blending is what Bob Perelman, in an untitled reading of Stein, calls "a continual athleticism, leaping free of the gravity of the familiar" (199). It is a leaping free of gravitational forces (and linguistic ties) which bind one, tightly and permanently, to the earth, the object, and simultaneously a leaping free of the grave seriousness of language. For the most overwhelming qualities of Stein's *Tender Buttons* are its passion for and intimacy with language, and its wit.
Strongly marked by her interest in and understanding of Cubism, 
Tender Buttons "paints" its subjects in a fractured language that 
attempts to relate the presentness of the moment in which the subject of 
the piece is experienced. There is no conventional description in the 
volume; one doesn't find a piece on potatoes, say, that runs along these 
lines:

A potato's shape is usually oval or a rounded oblong. Unripe 
potatoes are green, new ones have a thin skin, flecked with 
tan, older ones a thicker brown skin. Inside, potatoes are 
a whitish-cream colour but they turn quickly to brown when 
exposed to air. Small protuberances, known as eyes, are 
really the beginning of roots. The potato grows 
underground.

Rather, Stein's three potato pieces, printed one after the other, are 
brief and wholly uninformative, if one is looking for the size, weight, 
colour and texture of this tuber. It is the verbal "reality" of the 
potato, and how that reality occupies, with sly humour, her ever lively 
consciousness, which Stein depicts:

**POTATOES.**

Real potatoes cut in between.

**POTATOES.**

In the preparation of cheese, in the preparation of 
crackers, in the preparation of butter, in it.

**ROAST POTATOES.**

Roast potatoes for (51).

Stein's decision to include three takes on potatoes, and to put 
them side by side, may indicate her belief that all things change 
continually, that nothing, not even a potato, remains the same from one 
moment to the next. It also indicates that she is not trying for visual
veracity; these are clearly not attempts to correct each other, but to extend the impressions created, to play the game a bit longer.

None of these pieces are complete sentences, but neither are they ungrammatical. Her language is accessible, simple and plain as potatoes. "Roast Potatoes," one of the most often quoted of the pieces, is a fine example of Stein's semi-grammaticality. The three words function together as a sentence fragment, and that fragmentary nature makes the role of "roast" ambiguous: the title suggests the word is an adjective describing the type of potatoes; a probable alternative, however, is that it is an imperative verb urging someone to roast potatoes for . . . whomever. That's left uncertain. As well, considering Stein's extremely rare use of punctuation, especially of commas, it is legitimate to consider "roast, potatoes" -- a sort of list or an appositional "menu" -- as another possible reading. As Neil Schmitz says in "Gertrude Stein as Post-Modernist", "[w]ords as buttons fastening side to side, signifier to signified, become tender, pliable, alive in the quick of consciousness" (1207).

The fanciest Stein's language gets in these pieces, and that's none too fancy, is in the second piece which stands like potatoes au gratin (and she includes, one might add, almost all of the ingredients for this dish -- cheese, butter, crackers -- in the passage) to the plainer boiled and roast. This second piece involves a rhetorical flourish in the repeated formula of its phrases: "in the preparation of." Joining together the three phrases in a single sentence fragment

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17 In "Poetry and Grammar," Stein outlines her contempt for the comma:
As I say commas are servile and they have no life of their own, and their use is not a use, it is a way of replacing one's own interest and I do decidedly like to like my own interest my own interest in what I am doing. A comma by helping you along holding your coat for you and putting on your shoes keeps you from living your life as actively as you should lead it and to me for many years and I still do feel that way about it only now I do not pay as much attention to them, the use of them was positively degrading (219-20).

Stein's ironic use of commas in the midst of such scathing condemnation is a delightful poke at herself.
underscores a musical materiality where words, by virtue of their repetition, have their sense underplayed and their sound accentuated. And it encourages a momentum flatly undercut by the very abrupt ending of the pattern "in it"; the flatness of the ending puts extra weight on "it" — an ambiguous pronoun with no clearly established antecedent. This may be a tactic for undermining any attempt at a literal decoding of the piece -- the reader is left, ultimately, wondering what "it" is.

Stein also writes a series of four "Chicken" pieces; the final one uses sound very playfully in its two sentences:

Stick stick call then, stick stick sticking, sticking
with a chicken. Sticking in a extra succession,
sticking in (54).

Here the semiotic pushes Stein's words quite far into the realm of sounds. What "sticking" has to do with "chicken" is mostly sonal; in fact what each of these phrases has to do with "chicken" is sonal. To suggest that Stein is flippantly rhyming here, and that the rhyme gets out of control, would be wrong. There are rules operating, but rules which don't necessarily conform to the usual ways of making meaning; Stein doesn't balk at playing havoc with the structures of meaning, or at stretching them to a breaking point, but she creates such disturbances through a very structured and rigorous sort of play.

"Number" sequences and repetition are vital to the organization of the passage; for instance, twelve is a central to the prose poem's configuration. The first sentence is made of three phrases spliced together. The first two phrases each have four syllables, the third has six; the increase in syllables, however, is to accommodate "chicken" the "subject" of the piece, which is mentioned just once at what turns out to be its exact centre. The second sentence has two phrases, one of nine syllables one of three, making a total of twelve syllables. The phrases are structured so that twelve syllables precede "chicken" and twelve follow it. The number four is also important since both "stick"
and "sticking" are repeated four times. This repetition increases the
sheer musicality of the passage; if "Chicken" is about anything it may
be about the music of the word naming this wholly unmusical bird.

That musicality is carried further by the primary structural
feature of the "poem" -- rhyme. Each phrase begins with a word or
syllable rhyming with the first syllable of "chicken" and ends with one
rhyming with its final syllable -- "then," "-ing," "-en," "-ion," "in."
Consequently each of the phrases has a "frame" that is little more than
a sonal shift from "chicken," but which is never used twice: "stick-
then," "stick-ing," "stick-en," "stick-ion," "stick-in."
This phrasal
framing is quite appropriately rhyme, however, since the "frame" which
contains this piece is entirely made up of rhyme. The passage as a
whole is a stretching out of rhymes on "chicken," and the phrases are
similarly a stretching of that rhyme to the point where other words and
rhymes can be inserted into the midst of the elongated rhyme.

The elongation of the rhyme is most noticeable, and most
vulnerable, in the first phrase of the second sentence. Previously a
pattern had been established -- the four syllable phrases followed by
the third phrase of six syllables seem regular enough, especially since
the extra syllables of "sticking with a chicken" forcefully re-iterate
the subject (chicken), rhyme pattern, and movement (the poem as a whole
"sticks" with chicken) of the passage, and as I mentioned above, form
its syllabic centre. However, the phrase "Sticking in a extra
succession," while maintaining the rhyme pattern, completely disrupts
any seeming system of four syllable phrases. What Stein does is, quit
literally, stick in "a extra succession" of syllables whose rhythmic and
verbal flat-footedness is further emphasized by the use of the improper
article ("a" not "an") -- this is a phrase which loses the tune. The
"extra succession" is really an over-extension; for the twelve syllable
rule to be met, "sticking in," which is tacked on to the end of the
sentence, can only have three syllables. Once again the key is flat.
In a piece like "Chicken," Stein is not a Nonsense writer; while reference exists at some level, most of the meaning of the poem "wells in the actions of the signifier. There is no delicate tension between the signifier and the signified; the balance is upset. Yet a reader's refusal to abandon reference in the face of "Chicken"'s obvious semiotic overload can still serve her reading of it. By retaining a vestige of the title's referent, a reader can counter-point the semiotic music of the poem with the actual music of the bird; in this case the stubborn refusal to admit there is not a literal chicken in the poem rewards the reader with what may well be Stein's witty implication -- that this poem is about as musical as a chicken gets, and carries a tune for about as long as one can, too.

\[ \text{Jinese Bandar-logic:} \\
\text{Silliman's Ketjak} \]

In a parenthetical note to his brief consideration of Ron Silliman's work, Stephen Fredman reveals that "'Ketjak' is the Balinese monkey chant from the Ramavana" (144). That's an appropriate preface for a Nonsensical/bandar-logical reading of Silliman's volume. Ketjak is both bandar-logical and musical, perhaps musical because bandar-logical. Fredman observes that "the experience of reading" Ketjak, and Silliman's formally similar work Tianting,
is akin to the experience of modern music . . . or art, in which the exfoliation of formal patterns -- of repetition and variation defined by complex operations -- gives the aesthetic pleasure (144).

That there is a formal pattern governing Ketjak is easily discernible from a quick glance at the book's first page; to discern how complex it is takes more careful looking. Silliman established rules for the writing of Ketjak, made it a language game that borders on Nonsense. The page has three and a half paragraphs on it -- separated from each
other by a large white space. Each paragraph is markedly larger than the previous one. A quick counting of sentences proves that the paragraphs’ number of sentences is continually doubled: the first paragraph has one sentence, the second two, the third four, the fourth eight and so on. The twelfth and final paragraph is forty-five pages long and almost one half of the length of the whole book, a far cry from the two word paragraph that begins the volume.

While Silliman doesn’t regulate the length of individual sentences, he does place more demands on his work than just the number of sentences per paragraph. Each sentence, sometimes in its exact form and sometimes slightly modified, is repeated in every paragraph. The first paragraph becomes the first sentence in each succeeding paragraph. As well as being a crucial structural principle, Silliman’s use of that placement for this first "paragraph" ("Revolving door.") provides insight into a reader’s experience of the text, since the book often feels like trips through just such a door -- each run through longer and faster. Barret Watten compares the work itself, with its fascinating variations on repetition, to "a fractal curve of an experience that might be reduced to ‘revolving door’" ("Ron Silliman, Mohawk and Ketjak" 271).

This clearly marked structure of Ketjak offers more than "aesthetic pleasure"; it dramatizes many of the aesthetic principles, and works through many of the problems of reference, which have been issues in this chapter. Charles Bernstein, commenting on Silliman’s "poetry of visible borders," writes:

Such poetry emphasizes its medium as being constructed, rule governed, everywhere circumscribed by grammar & syntax, chosen vocabulary: designed, manipulated, picked, programmed, organized, & so an artifice, artifact (40-1).

Silliman’s repetitions certainly function this way, revealing a programmatic “code” behind the self-generating paragraphs; but so too do
the other materialist techniques which he uses.

Not surprisingly, there is a good deal of sound play here. Puns like "the eye is the limit" (26) -- which could also be an aesthetic comment -- are fairly frequent. And so are clusters of words which seem meditations on sound: "Wept, swept, slept" (37); "An harbor, Ann Arbor" (37); "Ontic antics in the attic" (26); "Ives jives" (29); "Cupcake corral" (58); "Sea-sick sea serpent" (71); "Never fear, chandelier" (70). Many of these words seem to be grouped together solely because of their sonal affinities, but their humour lies equally in the possibility of their being referentially active as well, in striking a temporary balance between sound and sense. It is not just the sound of "Cupcake corral" which is funny, but, like Carroll's Looking-Glass entymology, the momentary imagining of such a thing, and, as a friend notes, of the showdown which might occur there.

The same is true of other sentences which are not examples of sound play so much as combinations of words which, because of their improbability or strangeness, emphasize themselves without completely obscuring the often humourous potential of literalness: "This tapestry concerns the mass capture of rabbits" (15); "Brushing dry leaves off dead poets" (26); "Garbage mind pearl diver" (47).

Many of Silliman's sentences are phrases and expressions culled from the world around him; advertising slogans, cartoons, nursery rhyme, popular songs -- nothing is free from his borrowing pen. Sylvester the cat, from Warner Brothers' Tweetie Bird cartoon, is represented by his favourite saying "Suffering succotash" (48); Cecil the sea-sick sea serpent, from the "Cecil and Beanie" cartoon also appears (71); a line from a fifties song is altered to "Who put the bob in the Baba Ram Dass" (50); and every matchbook ever made finds a voice in "Close cover before striking" (53). He not only represents the world as words, he also incorporates the world of public words.

Juxtaposition is probably the most obvious technique Silliman
uses, and, when combined with the required repetition of sentences, one of the most humourous, as the following excerpt shows. These are the last few sentences from paragraphs four through eight; while it would be possible to quote the endings in such a way as to incorporate both of the final sentences from paragraph four in each succeeding quotation, for reasons of length, I will restrict myself.

A sequence of object, silhouettes, which to him appears to be a caravan of fellahen, a circus, dromedaries pulling wagons bearing tiger cages, fringed surreys, tamed ostriches in toy hats, begins a slow migration to the right vanishing point on the horizon line. We ate them (4).

A sequence of objects, silhouettes, which to him appears to be a caravan of fellahen, a circus, dromedaries pulling wagons bearing tiger cages, fringed surreys, tamed ostriches in toy hats, begins a slow migration to the right vanishing point on the horizon line. The implications of power within the ability to draw a single, vertical straight line. Look at that room filled with fleshy babies. We ate them (5).

The implicit power within the ability to draw a single, vertical straight line. That was when my nose began to peel. Look at that room filled with fleshy babies, incubating. A tall glass of tawny port. We ate them (7).

That was when my nose began to peel. Get aboard. Look at that room filled with fleshy babies, incubating. Points of transfer. A tall glass of tawny port. The shadows between houses leave the earth cool and damp. A slick gaggle of ambassadors. We ate them (9).
Shadows between houses leave earth cool and damp. Retina burn. A slick gaggle of ambassadors. Astronauts hold hands, adrift in the sky. We ate them. The flag (14).

Many of Silliman's techniques are evident in a comparison of these passages. The incongruity of juxtaposition and the black humour created by the repeated and abrupt ending -- "We ate them" -- is extremely effective. The juxtaposition is especially so, illustrating as it does the working principles of Silliman's theory of the "new sentence." A continual barrage of non-sequiturs demands that a reader continually shift her stance on the sentences, on how they fit together. Sometimes sentences seem to fit together at first, as in this other example -- "Where is JFK's brain. Yonder" (73). Or in the gruesome "cannibalism" implicit in one of the examples above: "Look at that room filled with fleshy babies. We ate them" (5). But the continually expanding context ultimately puts an end to any narrative unity.

Silliman's repetition, or as the examples above illustrate his near repetition (sometimes the change is as subtle as the lack of pluralization on one word), requires that each sentence be re-integrated not only within its own paragraph but also within the movement of the paragraphs as a whole. What is demanded, then, is a continually precise attention to the sentences or propositions presented and the structures of meaning which Ketjak generates, or requires the reader to generate. It is not enough to have read once about fat, fleshy babies and then to glide over that sentence's other incarnations -- to do so would be to lose out on all sorts of meaningful combinations for that sentence.

Silliman intersperses these paragraphs with sentences which may be deemed directly or metaphorically relevant to his aesthetic stance. For instance:

Attention is all (5).

18 Silliman's choice not to use question marks in Ketjak undermines the referentiality of some of its sentences; interrogative words don't function in their traditional sense.
Every word is either current, or strange, or metaphorical, or ornamental, or newly-coined, or lengthened, or contracted, or altered (13-4).
Refuse connectedness (14).
A writing that grows out of itself, a poetry of mould (16).
Patterns of possibility come together, intersect, disperse (17).
What if these words don't mean what I believe they do (57).
Language did not emerge from ratiocination (57).

But it is wrong to assume that since these seem to be theoretical statements they are more important than any of the other sentences in Ketjak. The rapid and eclectic accumulation of sentences and the susceptibility of each to change make clear that no one sentence is to be valued over another, because each is itself a dramatization of problems inherent in the manufacture of meaning.

One of the most frequent ways in which Silliman directly questions reference is by using the demonstrative pronoun, "this." In "Language, Realism, Poetry," he calls "this" "a pronoun of presence which foregrounds the referential dimension of language" (xv). "This" always, or should always, point to something, but in Ketjak it generally points to itself. "This this this this" (22) is Silliman's most radic 1 example. The repetition isolates the word's sound, but also offers a base for an infinite regress of reference -- which this?: this, this this, this this this, this this this this. . . . With the lack of a noun modified by "this" the adjective or acting as an antecedent to "this" the pronoun, one is left with the material presence of a non-referential referral. It is a deferral that underscores the tenuousness of lingual reference and the need for language to define itself in terms

19 Since Ketjak is published by This, a small press in San Francisco, Silliman's many references to "this" may be playfully self-referential too. They may also "refer" to the magazine by the same name. It is actually This magazine which Silliman is discussing in "Language, Realism, Poetry" when he comments on the nature of the word "this."
of other pieces of language, it is to mean the way one is used to it meaning. Silliman’s use of “this” is an extreme example of the language of the new Nonsensical sign.

"This" appears in many other instances where Silliman seeks an immediacy of reference:

This before, this after (29).
This sentence has five words (27).
You read this sentence before (34). [This sentence creates a nice paradox the first time around.]
This sentence is not what I intended (43).
Here is an empirical fact, this word is used like this (50).
This list (50).

In each case, the referential gesture towards an exterior object is turned back upon itself, partially frustrated so that the words of the sentence become the exterior object referred to.

Within the precision of the structure he sets out for Ketjak, Silliman creates a work which is vibrant and strangely lyrical, one whose wit and linguistic particularity is uniquely intertwined with its governing rules. Indeed, the work is almost a paradigm of the fusion of materiality and "Rule," of semiotic and symbolic. Neither structure nor particular takes precedence over the other; rather they complement each other. By calling this relationship complementary I don’t intend to suggest that meaning resides in an easy and static way in Ketjak. Sense constantly makes and unmakes itself; meaning is both conservatively coherent (occasionally, temporarily) and constantly constructed. There is a symbiosis which "resolves" itself naturally here; a reader never forgets the presence of the structure, she even reads for it, but that structure is never read to the exclusion of its individual elements.

The paragraphs in Ketjak are monkey chants, a sort of bandar-logical lingual enactment of the type of discourse the Bandar-log brag about in Kipling’s "Road-Song of the Bandar-log"; but so, then, is most
"L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry:

All the talk we ever have heard
Uttered by bat or beast or bird --
Hide or fin or scale or feather --
Jabber it quickly and all together!
Excellent! Wonderful! Once again!

Now we are talking just like men (66).

This talk of sound and word is never precisely referential but neither can it escape reference; and the people whose verbal universe is jabbered are poets who clearly, whether or not one agrees with their ideas or appreciates their work, are as passionate about language as they are anxious about its socio-political manipulation. While Nonsense does not necessarily share their political mandate, it most certainly shares their conviction about the importance of the signifier. Nonsense can serve the writing and the anxiety of the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writers: it exposes and embraces the structures and elements of language with a passion similar to theirs; it alters the sign in such a way that many of the problems about conventional language which they write can be addressed; it sympathizes with their concerns, plays their games enthusiastically, and enters their community. But it never loses its apolitical nature, its individuality.
"What then is a window"

Lyn Hejinian's My Life meanders lovingly over its own minutiae. Or perhaps leaps is a better word for the vigorous shifts and the continual non-sequiturs that mark this "autobiography," with its probing and passionate language ebbing and flowing over a lifetime. In both the first and second editions Hejinian withholds the stable reassurances of genre and form. Rather than titled or numbered chapters, there are long paragraphs -- 37 in the first edition, 45 in the second. Each paragraph begins with an italicized phrase, seemingly unrelated to what follows, and each, Hejinian suggests, is "a time and place, not a syntactical unit" (96). Gone are clear divisions between poetry and prose, lyric and narrative. Gone is any clear association of history with memory.

Hejinian belongs to the "L=A=N=G=E" poetry movement, so it's no surprise that her autobiography challenges the function of verbal expression and the nature of meaning, as well as genre, by overlaying itself with a musical arrangement of language, or emphasizing of the material aspects of words. Meaning is everywhere in this text -- and yet nowhere for one unwilling to listen closely. For Hejinian's meaning is neither traditionally conceived nor stable. Her "life" is a clustering of phrases and fragments, where sequences of more than three clearly and semantically linked sentences are quite rare; it is a dramatic working through of Ron Silliman's theory of the "New Sentence." The reader must sift through and re-shape the text. No easy way through or out of the book is offered; nor should it be, because My Life is the articulation not just of Hejinian's own life, but of a reader's as well.

"What follows a strict chronology has no memory" (13).

Charles Olson talks of "selection" in his essay, "Human Universe"; writing and even living, he says, are a whittling down of "that lovely
"riding thing, chaos" (59). Each involves the organization of a universe, of poem or person, through selection from an incomprehensibly rich mass of stimuli and sensations, bits and pieces. "For any of us, at any instant," he claims, "are juxtaposed to any experience, even an overwhelming single one, on several more planes than the arbitrary and discursive which we inherit can declare" (55). Selecting inevitably betrays the flow between these planes, creates a flaw in one's perception of a universe that does not revolve around humanity's limited means of expressing itself.

Since writing and living are a betrayal of one's "lived" experience, what is memory? Born in. Lived at. Schooled at. Married him. Bore her. Stories of such turning points or times of shift, even when thick with description, thin one out. Where are: the postcard of Emily Brontë's dog; the red and white package of Hungarian Mammoth Squash seeds (world record -- 451 lbs! Absolutely the largest squash you can grow!); the blue plastic E with feet; cobalt therapy, a flying squirrel; postage stamps on a "s.a.s.e."; a stamped thin tin bird with fuschia wings; ants crawling out of peonies my mother cut for my sixth grade teacher; dandelions, from this window, from this angle; blossoms on the m.e.e tree. Where is the language for the plenitude of which such details are only crude indicators?

Lyn Hejinian offers a selection. But what she selects, how she re-organizes her life, produces not a chronology of significant events, but a sonal and visual dramatization of how language constructs one's "reality" and one's memories. She presents an intuition of the "pure duration," the on-goingness, the presentness of time, and simultaneously the wonderful plasticity, the expansive, procreative embrace of both memory and language.
"Thinking about the time in the book, it is really the time of your life" (55).

Not only is the book the lived time it recounts; it is the time spent writing the book, and reading it. Beyond this, Hejinian's language -- her fragments, her repetitions, her memories and echoes -- assault the notion of a language whose logic flows with time, which can be read or experienced only in a forward-moving or progressive time frame. By constantly and variously re-working words and phrases so they reappear seemingly spontaneous, non-sequential and almost unmotivated, Hejinian tries to break out of narrative and linguistic chronology.

Which is not to suggest that My Life has no narrative progression. The subtle movement of language from a distilled child's voice (more recalled than re-enacted) to the more "mature" sensibility of a crafter of words, together with the increase of "theoretical" asides,1 produces an understated portrait of the artist. But Hejinian is more immediately concerned with linguistic and temporal "transgression," with resisting traditional and staid notions of the time of language, by revealing its spatial nature, rendering it an object to be not remembered so much as renewed ("I heard it anew not again" she writes [82]). Memory is a useful means for renewing language and experience both; it musses up chronology, adjusts or shifts "reality" dragging history into (making history into) the present.

"Is that a basis for descriptive sincerity. I am a shard, signifying isolation -- here I am thinking aloud of my affinity for the separate fragment taken under scrutiny" (52).

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1 These theoretical statements, like those in Silliman's Katink discussed in chapter five, are of no more or less importance than any other sentence in this text. To privilege any one of them would be to undermine one of the book's (and the movement's) premises -- that language is valuable as much for what it is as for what it points to or means.
Hejinian's minutiae: "A pause, a rose, something on paper" (7); "Foxtails, the juice of a peach, have fallen on the flesh of this book" (39); "What I felt was that figs resemble kidneys" (55); "Those hard white grains of sand are flea eggs" (62); "The calves of the cowboy's legs are rubbed shiny, left with no hairs. Pelicans hatch naked from the egg" (86).

Here is an exquisiteness of detail so lyrically precise, so supple, that Hejinian's is not the only life reclaimed. Just saying the title includes the reader. Each time I read this book, I feel the weight and wonder of my own childhood slinking up the skin on my arms, smell the summers of too-many-barbecues and ketchup-cooking-at-the-factory; I find another moment of my life waiting to be rediscovered. Things once extraneous are loved into an intensity that selection had denied them. And more importantly, as will be argued later, words are given an intensity, a thisness, of their own; they begin to exist as words, rather than as linguistic referrals to a greater and other "Outside."

What helps excavate these "extraneous" elements and moments in life is the seeming lack of selection, the apparent randomness with which fragments seemingly peripheral to the major events of a life are thrown together. For instance, Hejinian doesn't describe giving birth, but remarks instead, "When the baby was born I lost considerable importance, surrendered it to him, since now he was the last of his kind" (64). The observation is, as usual, a non-sequitur:

Yet I admit I'm still afraid of something when I refuse to rise for the playing of the national anthem. The sailor on the flood, ten times the morning sun, made of wooden goldfish. When the baby was born I lost considerable importance, surrendered it to him, since now he was the last of his kind. "Fundamental dispersion," he said, and then, "no nozzle." The coffee drinkers answered ecstatically,
pounding their cups on the table (64).
This type of dislocation requires that one read not for a definitive
meaning, but rather to engage the process of the making of meaning and
to discover the web of potential relations that resonates between
sentences. Their connection is one of interwoven tissue, the texture of
muscle rather than the firm definition of bone.

"Only fragments are accurate. Break it up into single words, charge
them to combination" (55).

If this text charts a life-line, it traces it from one striking
detail to another, from incarnation to new incarnation of individual
words, from point to point. "A point, in motion, is a line" (33) writes
Hejinian, and the points that constitute her life are in constant
motion. "Strange," Rilke writes, in the first Duino Elegy,
to see meanings that clung together once, floating away
in every direction. And being dead is hard work
and full of retrieval before one can gradually feel
a trace of eternity. — Though the living are wrong to
believe

in the too-sharp distinctions which they themselves
have created (155).
With each recurrence in My Life of a phrase, of an image, eventually of
a word, meaning does not merely gather; "language [becomes] restless"
(17) and "meanings . . . [float] away/ in every direction" (Rilke 155)
— lodging temporarily with an old friend, a new companion, until the
individuality, the creases and crevices of each word-image-phrase are
momentarily enlivened. "But a word is a bottomless pit" (8). There is
always more to retrieve and imagine. Hejinian's act of retrieval, while
it still involves a degree of selection, undercuts those "too-sharp"
distinctions of the resolutely or obsessively "selective," those living
who are so busy hewing out their own world they neither revel in chaotic source, nor acknowledge that they have indeed selected, shaped, their world.

"Language which is like a fruitskin around fruit" (43).

Life as language: "The dictionary presents a world view... [T]he bilingual dictionary doubles that, presents two" (79). Hejinian adds her eloquent "voice" to the many others insisting that the world and the self are composed of language. Her version is partly comprised of theoretical statements. Single sentences (for instance, "To some extent, each sentence has to be the whole story" [67].) give outright and as completely as possible her belief that life is built with and upon language. But these sentences are rarely presented as something beyond the thoughts of a particular moment. They are organic with the process of observation from which such asides grow. And while theoretical statements are signposts, they are not maps. No one can claim authority on how to interpret the signs Hejinian leaves. Each reader finds her own paths through this labyrinthine text.

In The dance of the intellect, Marjorie Perloff talks of Hejinian's creation of "a language field that could be anybody's autobiography, a kind of collective unconscious whose language we all recognize" (225). Hejinian mentions "a portrait bowl" (25); I think of a linguistic "play box," a first-cousin-once-removed to the one James Reaney creates in Colours in the Dark, and comments upon in his preface to it:

The theatrical experience in front of you now is designed to give you that mosaic-all-things-happening-at-the-same-time-galaxy-higgledy-piggledy feeling that rummaging through a play box can give you (v).

But My Life doesn't have the "ancestral coffin plates" and "school
relics" (or the eventually cohering world vision) that are in Reaney's play box (v). Hejinian's toys and eccentric ephemera are words; her game is language.

"Mischief logic; Miss Chief" (29).

Hejinian handles words. She picks them up, turns them over, looks at their underbellies. Some she turns over and over -- each use a different game, a new possibility; some she discards as broken; some she breaks. This handling allows an almost continual breaching of the thetic; the semiotic values of sound and matter assert themselves throughout this text, requiring that its reader at the very least register linguistic disturbance, but more usually revel in such disruption.

Juxtaposition is part of the game. Hejinian's juxtapositions sit a serious meditation next to a commonplace assertion to see what friction comes of such elbow rubbing:

If I was left unmarried after college, I would be single all my life and lonely in old age. In such a situation it is necessary to make a choice between contempt and an attempt at understanding, and yet it is difficult to know which is the form of retreat. We will only understand what we have already understood. The turkey is a stupid bird. And it is scanty praise to be so-called well-meaning (53).

The wit here is more subtle than that in Hejinian's revision of Williams -- "No ideas but in potatoes" (70). But the subtlety is invigorating; the reader is called to play along. Rejoice in displacement, illogic; recognize the suppleness, the plasticity, of language and of meaning not firmly bound by conventional expression. "Collaborate with the occasion" (29).
Aphorisms abound: "Pretty is as pretty does... See lightning, wait for thunder" (7). As Perloff points out, these aphorisms are "just slightly out of sync," a result of "the language of adults [impinging] on the child's world with all its prescriptions, admonitions, and 'wisdoms,'" (224) and of the often witty juxtaposition of sentences throughout the book. Clichés are questioned too, or at least called to a reader's attention, though not with the unrelenting thoroughness of Christopher Dewdney's "The Dialectical Criminal: Hand in Glove with an Old Hat" (Predators of the Adoration 168-69): "You cannot linger 'on the lamb'" (11); "We 'took' a trip as if that were part of the baggage we carried. In other words, we 'took our time'" (47). Grammatical rules are rephrased: "Pronouns skirt the subject" (77). Some are "contradicted": "After C, I before, E except" (68). Hejinian toys with wandering letters, as in "I've heard that it once was a nauron" (77) or in the frequently repeated phrase "a name trimmed with colored ribbons" (14 et passim) which finds its "source" in "a pony perhaps, his mane trimmed with colored ribbons" (15). In all these instances, she calls attention to how language changes, how literalism tampers with meaning and with the world constructed out of language.

She exults in the phonic play of words, the rhyming slip of letters, the compelling nature of rhythm: "Between plow and prow" (65); "Raisins, cheese, the Japanese" (64). Such phonic play illuminates the limitations of "sense." A reader soon finds herself lingering not over meanings, but over the tumble of the words themselves -- "The grass in my glass" (68); "I was not afraid in the dark, hearing the low owl, in the light, the bird knocking in the sun. I hear it anew not again" (82).

"If words matched their things we'd be imprisoned within walls of symmetry" (70).
Because the narrow language of the symbolic, in its transparency, cannot contain and express the many planes on which any thing exists, such language "stops" that thing, moves away from its fluctuating reality. Hejinian remarks on this in her essay "The Rejection of Closure":

Children objectify language when they render it their plaything, in jokes, puns, and riddles, or in glossolaliaic chants and rhymes. They discover that words are not equal to the world, that a shift, analogous to parallax in photography, occurs between thing (events, ideas, objects) and the words for them -- a displacement that leaves a gap (138).

This gap shows in My Life: "I insert a description: of agonizing spring morning freshness, when through the open window a smell of cold dust and buds of broken early grass, of schoolbooks and rotting apples, trails the sound of an airplane and a flock of crows" (48). Self-consciously she names this "a description" -- she is not offering a landscape, a setting. She is giving words instead.

Yet her continual repetition of words in a changing context lets them shimmer with varying resonances and dramatizes how the longing for a union between word and thing can be superseded by the pure power of a word which means itself, fully, intensely. For Hejinian the union between word and object can be had only by making the word itself an object, not by joining it to the object to which it refers. By saying things intensely, she marks the movement away from referential fusion of word and world, and farther still, marks the deflection of a potentially stable meaning. The randomness of repetition and re-orientation suggests that, despite Hejinian's careful joinings and juxtapositions, meaning travels of its own accord. Words become glorious in their new oldness. They stand intensely as themselves.
"We had been in France where every word really was a bird, a thing singing" (85).

"One of my favourite words was birds and will be. If they are but flights to a conclusion, I will wait patiently to look at them (89).

Stein claims that language can exist "as birds as well as words" ("What is English Literature" 30), and that words are a part of the strangeness of the world. Certainly, the insistent rise and fall of words is a source of strangeness in My Life; the continual repetition (or "insistence" as Stein suggests -- in "Portraits and Repetitions" [166-67] -- it might more properly be termed) of the commonplace speech which marks life. Michel Foucault has commented that "[w]e live in a world completely marked by, all laced with, discourse, that is to say, utterances which have been spoken, of things said, of affirmations, interrogations, of discourses which have already occurred" (Rivas, "An Interview with Michel Foucault" 177). This is very much Hejinian's world. Her writing of it is an intense listening.

"The obvious analogy is with music, which extends beyond the space the figure occupies" (57).

"When you speak you play a language. The obvious analogy is with music" (82).

It would be a poor listener who did not pick up on Hejinian's "obvious analogy" with music since it is an important theme (and a theme more musical than literary) throughout My Life. Not only because it self-reflexively accounts for the repetitions ("The new cannot be melodic, for melody requires repetition" [62]), but also because it suggests something important about meaning in this book. Because most statements are decontextualized, and because the reader must "make" her own sense, meaning is clearly an issue here. Hejinian raises the
question of meaning in many of her theoretical musings: "What is the meaning hung from that depend" (16). How much does one need to mean, to be intelligible, and why? What sort of assumptions about language hang on a desire to mean? "What is one doing to, or with, the statement (the language) or the stated (the object or the idea) when one means it" (42).

Or, how does one mean? Ultimately the how overrides the what. How Hejinian means is musically — not merely with correspondence between word and thing, not purely referentially. She is not striving for a referential, or Kristevan symbolic, meaning. Sentences, like A pause, a rose, something on paper (7), are themes (in the musical definition of the word); they are repeated in ever changing configurations, and even as they accrue associative and contextual meaning, they develop a potent sound value. Their continual echoes stand as musical ideas, aural images that vary and combine to create an "intuitive" lyric which speaks intimately, trustingly.

"Sensual," reverberating sense challenges logical, cerebral sense; dislocations challenge knowable order. Despite the rigour, the concentration, the extreme exertion which goes into creating them, music and the musical language of My Life move beyond the cerebral. "[But] though I could say the music brought these places 'home' to me," Hejinian writes,

the composition itself grew increasingly strange as I listened again, less recognizable, in the dark, as when one repeats a word or phrase over and over in order to disintegrate its associations, to defamiliarize it (113). A work of this intensity which tries so hard to construct one grammar out of another, to defamiliarize the very substance of one's world and "self," is an act of incredible control and precision. What makes Hejinian so successful is her "lack of clarity," her leap beyond pure idea to emotion, spirit, rhapsody.
"Through the window of Chartres, with no view, the light transmits the color as a scene. What then is a window" (65).

"L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" writers frequently use the image of the window to symbolize the transparent language which the semiotic attempts to undermine, a language which exists solely to refer to a stable, outside world. Hejinian offers another take on this metaphor; there is a type of "window-language" which is not transparent, which lets both window and language exist as, and for, themselves, to demonstrate their own beauty. If language must be a window, why not a window like the stained glass of Chartres, why not one of colour and texture, a composition which is its own landscape, which adds tincture to the world outside and noticeably alters the "reality" one perceives through it? What then is a window.
Conclusion -- Killing the Rhino:
The (a)Political Nature of Nonsense

As for the Rhinoceros, in token of their grateful adherence, they had him killed and stuffed directly, and then set him up outside the door of their father's house as a Diaphanous Doorscraper (Edward Lear, "The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World" 106).

In the early 1960s, Jacques Ferron and others founded Quebec's Rhinoceros Party, a parody political party meant to be at once a send-up and indictment of the Canadian political situation of the day, an anarchic exposure of the absurdities inherent in a government dominated by a Liberal party which didn't, in Ferron's opinion, represent the needs or the best interests of the province or the country. To be put forward as a candidate for the Rhinos, one had to be smart enough to play the fool and deeply committed to losing (Ellenwood 4-5). The affinities with Nonsense are clear.

When Ferron died in 1985, the party threw him out -- a suitable end to a pseudo-political career. The gesture is not unlike that made by Violet, Slingsby, Guy and Lionel, in Lear's "The Story of Four Little Children Who Went Round the World." As an expression of their gratitude to the rhinoceros who carried them on its back for so much of their return journey they had it killed and stuffed.

*

If Nonsense is not political, contrary to Gott's belief (noted in chapter one) that it is essentially a literary playground for the British reactionary, what is it? I've used the term "apolitical" several times when comparing Nonsense to what I consider to be its closest apparent relations, feminism and "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry, both
of which are avowedly and intensely political. This apolitical nature should not be misconstrued, however; Nonsense is politically enabling, but it is not politically programmatic. It is political in the way that the Rhinoceros party is political: its "platform" is at once ridiculous and (often gently) ridiculing. As such it allows one to re-contextualize stands taken by more traditional parties/language. This conclusion will attempt to suggest, briefly, ways in which this theory of Nonsense could be construed as (a)political.

The Nonsensical sign discussed in chapter five is one of the most useful tools for this re-contextualization, for it exposes, as does nonsense generally, the process of meaning production. Like "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poetry, which is perhaps the closest equivalent to Nonsense currently being produced in the English-speaking world, nonsense language shows that purely referential language is impossible, and that to read as if language were purely referential is not to engage language at all. By emphasizing jointly the materiality and referentiality of the signifying process, the Nonsensical sign reveals how language itself can be exploited for political purposes; it proves the lie in the "realistic" and "transparent" sign. But at the same time, by demonstrating that reference is absolutely necessary for a sign to function within verbal language, nonsense questions the political kidnapping of the sign by those who espouse radical materiality, like that proposed in the early theoretical writings of "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" poet Steve McCaffery.

This palimpsest Nonsensical sign, through which both signified and signifier show, undercuts Idealism and McCaffery's somewhat Idealistic rendering of the material sign, and undercuts as well the theory that meaning is constantly deferred. Within this sign reside both meaning and meaninglessness, since (as Deleuze argues and I discuss in chapter one) the true Nonsense word means only itself and so disrupts the flow of sense production; such words are at once sign, signified and
signifier. The Nonsensical sign (the bandar-logos) finds its prototype and one of its strongest articulations in the Nonsense words of Carroll and Lear. Disrupting the production of sense, these Nonsense words reveal how that production is carried out; they demonstrate as well the ability of words to mean as sites of confluence, as the coming together of two or more linguistic series, and (even more important) of various sign systems. It is this coming together of sign systems, the "transliteration" of one way of meaning (be it visual, musical, or gestural) \(^1\) onto verbal language in order to facilitate the musicalization of language, which I have suggested characterizes nonsense; by "musicalization" I mean letting language call attention to its material and structural aspects. Music, as chapter four suggested, is purely material, purely formal. It refers only to itself, and to its principles of arrangement. Not even nonsense language can do that, but it can move toward adopting some part of the workings of music in order to qualify its referential capacity.

Of the two writers of classical Nonsense considered here, Lear is undoubtedly the most musical writer; he frequently employs sound against sense, letting sound patterns dominate and dictate the words he chooses. This attentiveness to the sound of language is one point of connection between nonsense and poetry. In fact, the closest ordinary language comes to the Nonsensical sign is in the homonym. It encapsulates the balance between materiality and reference essential to the Nonsensical sign; each is needed for the homonym to function successfully.

Most of the poets treated in this study challenge language's more communicative features by imbuing it with phonic and rhythmic orders to the disturbance of illusory univocal sense. Sound becomes a means of

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\(^1\) The alternative ways of meaning I have mentioned are non-lingual, one could argue pre-lingual, and distort the verbal sign/sign system in the process of inhabiting it. Of course, ways of meaning which are not as easily related to the pre-lingual can also inhabit verbal language and create nonsense; however, since this study is concerned with the incursion of the pre-lingual, or semiotic drives as they are construed by Kristeva, as a shaping force within nonsense, I chose to consider those ways of meaning which are more closely affiliated with the semiotic.
"apoliticization," a way to qualify meaning or to posit alternative systems of meanings within a poem and thereby challenge existing sense structures, but without the sort of overt political content often found in literature. Of course, politically motivated poets, like Rich, also orchestrate sound to underscore, and occasionally to undermine, their stated positions. However, the latter use, be it conscious or not, is "apolitical." For writers like Lilburn and Hopkins, sound is also a means of embodying the "thisness" of language itself, of emphasizing the nature (the "being") of the medium for reference. Thus sound implicitly creates a link between nonsense language and poetic language; both nonsense and poetic language require of a reader an alertness of ear to which the "transparency" of language is beside the point. Such alertness, or attentiveness, usually initiates inquiry (just how is the sound working in each poem?); and such inquiry may challenge or extend traditional or conventional models of existing linguistic structures.

The musicalization of language has much to do with what Julia Kristeva calls the "oralization" of the mother's vocalic body. In fact, many French theorists (some of them proponents of écriture féminine, some not) suggest that writing (écriture, that writing which produces Barthes' "writable" as opposed to "readable" text) is both a writing out of, and towards, the mother's body. If this is the case, musicalized language is by its very nature politicized, absorbed by the feminist venture.

I suggested in chapter three that musicalization is part of the way any body "manifests" itself in language -- not an actual indwelling, a physical presence, it is rather a psychical one. While theories of a literally "physical" language have much to offer to a reader of nonsense, the body in language, as I understand it, is the incursion into language of pulsions and drives as evidenced in, for instance, morphemic displacement, phonic play and rhythmic upheaval.

This out-pouring of what Kristeva calls the semiotic into the
structures of rational discourse (her symbolic) challenges the univocal illusion of communicative language, and injects into it a bandar-logical element -- alternative (and often parodic) rhythms and orders of meaning. The semiotic is not chaos (nor "chaotic" in the traditional sense of having no order). It, too, is structured; but it has the structure of desire, and so is vastly different from the symbolic. Within this Kristevan paradigm, within its balance between traditional and disruptive ways of speaking, is rooted my own articulation of nonsense. I suggest that such language is a product of the speaking of the semiotic, and can be read according to a slightly modified version of Kristeva's theory of poetic language. Where I differ from Kristeva is in my re-designation of her third term. The thetic -- her permeable barrier between semiotic and symbolic -- for me thus becomes nonsense itself, something not conceivable within her framework. This permits me to argue for a sliding scale of nonsensicality.

Because the semiotic (in both Kristeva's and my understanding) is in some way present in every articulation, all language is potentially nonsensical and all language, to a lesser or greater degree, writes the body -- but does so from a psychological/metaphorical position. This position is a radical departure from that of Gilles Deleuze, who separates language and nonsense(s) into those expressions which deal with the "surface" of the body, and so are allied to sense, and those which bombard the schizophrenic body, and so create nonsense. Much of his criticism of Nonsense rests upon the relationship which it has (or, more to the point, does not have) with the body.

A slightly different take on bodily or physical language can be found in perceptually-based language; this language is involved in the interplay between body and language, between the semiotic and the symbolic, but is so involved while attempting, at the same time, to permit the minimum of interference between perceptual/sensical experience and the relation of that experience. Writers like Zukofsky
attempt to push linguistic expression as near as possible to the actual experience of the senses. He writes of "synaesthesia," in which he attempts to maintain sensual integrity by "translating" the experience of one sense into the realm of another sense. Olson and Marlatt also seek a more "direct transmission" of experience, a less "selected" version of reality. These approaches suggest that a perception/body-centred writing is viable; and they imply, as does nonsense language, that the orders of the senses and the body are equal in importance to those of the more traditional logical forms which establish political and social norms.

* 

By the rubbish in our wake, and the noble noise we make,  
Be sure, be sure, we're going to do some splendid things!  
(Kipling, "Road-Song of the Bandar-log" 66)

How does a physical/musical bandar-logical version of nonsense relate to earlier theories? Certainly this new reading of nonsense departs from or challenges many of the ways of looking at nonsense (considered in the first chapter of this study) which were advanced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While I have derived many of my ideas about nonsense from these theories, I have attempted to extend the understanding of the term, and to free it from the charge of being overly conservative in its relation to language. My understanding of nonsense does not remove its associations with dream or play or anarchy or even philosophy, but it does establish a new, perhaps more critically useful, range of associations.

I have followed Susan Stewart, the foremost American critic of nonsense, in arguing the importance of its relationship with all forms of language and literature, but I emphasize (as she does not) the role of the semiotic in producing nonsense, and I place more importance upon
nonsense's relationship with the body than she does. For her, Nonsense
as genre or as linguistic disruption does not initiate strategies of
reading capable of illuminating difficult writing. Rather, she regards
nonsense as part of a literary and oral continuum and critique. Our
perspectives (more than our actual stances upon the interaction of
nonsense with the rest of literature) differ.

That an understanding of nonsense can promote a subtler reading of
"sensical" writing than is often generated by traditional reading styles
has, I think, been shown in the six inter-chapters and in the brief
analyses of poetry provided in chapters two through five. Reading
poetry at both the material and the referential levels, letting these
two levels challenge as well as corroborate each other — in other
words, not assuming that all patterns work towards the articulation of a
single sensical sentiment, but rather allowing for the (sometimes
balanced) co-existence of conflicting systems within a literary work —
makes for richer, deeper readings. It allows literature the same
spirited inconsistency which makes nonsense so often unpredictable, so
vital and so protean.

* * *

"There’s plenty of room" Alice says indignantly to the March Hare,
the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland 75)
when they try to dismiss her from their party. Alice is right about
that and, by extension, she is right about nonsense too. There is
plenty of room at the tea-party table: room for Nonsense and nonsensical
writers, room for traditional and experimental writers, room for politic
rhinos and subversive monkey-folk. There is room at critical and
theoretical tables for nonsense too. In fact, nonsense as a critical
and theoretical tool has much to offer literary studies.

It is almost as though there were a game of infinite "deferral"
going on at the March Hare's table. The more room one sees, the more room there is. Let Alice be seated, and suddenly Violet, Guy, Lionel and Slingsby are there. Soon Kipling and Thibaudelau, Ferron, Lilburn, Joyce, Hejinian and Hopkins are pulling up chairs. But nonsense is not just a tea-party. It has its own (a)political clout, and packs a punch while punch is poured.
Appendix I

from Throgmole & Engestchin: A relationship

In which you meet Throgmole and Engestchin and you may feel that the latter is not a fully developed character and you are probably right.

Throgmole Fordful
manty overgoo
bog manty gong goppling
rill cum nack throggins.

Choomini:
Chillchinchar Engestchin
chanty chopcharchill
chorey chopcharchill chooley
chingle choon chingley
choodle.

Thogmole Fordful?
Chillchinchar Engestchin?

Pulford mog-gle throg
Throggins
Besaboom
Besaboom
Throggins
Manty choon Manty
chorey manky
manky minstevan
Besaboom chorey
Choodle chin chin char
Gundalling tandy
Upert bee neery
Upert a choodle,
Laddledy leery
Upert a choodle,
Nin Nin Nin
Besaboom chorey.
Powdler
Blanko
Upert a choodle
Nin Nin Nin
Manky Minstevan

  loppleton leery,
  laveling,
  limpeling,
  leddledy lumpoling . . .

Fordful mogle
chorey chumbles
dipdu danker.
Engestchin chuh
chuh
ch
h

*

Para pom
tandle:
Chillchinchar Engestchin chanty chop charchill chorey chop charchill chingle chun chingley choodle
     ooldum.
Thoogmogle Fordful manty overgoo rhinger minsteven bog manty gong goppling rill cum nack throggins.

Para pom tandle.
anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men (both little and small)
cared for anyone not at all
they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
sun moon stars rain

children guessed (but only a few
and down they forgot as up they grew
autumn winter spring summer)
that noone loved him more by more

when by now and tree by leaf
she laughed his joy she cried his grief
bird by snow and stir by still
anyone's any was all to her

someone's married their everyones
laughed their cryings and did their dance
(sleep wake hope and then) they
said their nevers they slept their dream

stars rain sun moon
(and only the snow can begin to explain
how children are apt to forget to remember
with up so floating many bells down)
one day anyone died i guess
(and noone stooped to kiss his face)
bussy folk buried them side by side
little by little and was by was

all by all and deep by deep
and more by more they dream their sleep
noone and anyone earth by april
wish by spirit and if by yes.

Women and men (both dong and ding)
summer autumn winter spring
reaped their sowing and went their came
sun moon stars rain
"Verses from the Knave of Hearts' Trial"

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 she 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 she 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.
"Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves"

Earnest, earthless, equal, attuneable, vaulty, voluminous, . . .

stupendous

Evening strains to be time's vast, womb-of-all, home-of-all,

hearse-of-all night.

Her fond yellow hornlight wound to the west, her wild hollow

hoarlight hung to the height

Waste; her earliest stars, earlstars, stars principal, overbend us,

Fire-featuring heaven. For earth her being has unbound; her dapple

is at end, as-

tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs; self in self steeped and

pashed -- quite

Disremembering, dismembering all now. Heart, you round me right

With: Our evening is over us; our night whelms, whelms, and will end

us.

Only the beakleaved boughs dragonish damask the tool-smooth bleak

light; black,

Ever so black on it. Our tale, O our oracle! Let life, waned ah let

life wind

Off her once skeined stained veined variety upon, all on two spools;

part, pen, pack

Now her all in two flocks, two folds -- black, white; right, wrong;

reckon but, reck but, mind

But these two; ware of a world where but these two tell, each off

the other; of a rack

Where, selfwring, selfstrung, sheathe- and shelterless, thoughts

against thoughts in groans grind.

307
"Altarwise by Owl-light"

Sonnet VI

Cartoon of slashes on the tide-traced crater,
He in a book of water tallow-eyed
By lava's light split through the oyster vowels
And burned sea silence on a wick of words.
Pluck, cock, my sea eye, said medusa's scripture,
Lop, love, my fork tongue, said the pin-hilled nettle;
And love plucked out the stinging siren's eye,
Old cock from nowhere lopped the minstrel tongue
Till tallow I blew from the wax's tower
The fats of midnight when the salt was singing;
Adam, time's joker, on a witch of cardboard
Spelt out the seven seas, an evil index,
The bagpipe-breasted ladies in the deadweed
Blew out the blood gauze through the wound of manwax.
Appendix IV

"Road-Song of the Bandar-log"

Here we go in a flung festoon,
Half-way up to the jealous moon!
Don't you envy our pranceful bands?
Don't you wish you had extra hands?
Wouldn't you like if your tails were -- so --
Curved in the shape of a Cupid's bow?

Now you're angry, but -- never mind,
Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!

Here we sit in a branchy row,
Thinking of beautiful things we know;
Dreaming of deed that we mean to do,
All complete, in a minute or two --
Something noble and grand and good,
Won by merely wishing we could.

Now we're going to -- never mind,
Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!

All the talk we ever have heard
Uttered by bat or beast or bird --
Hide or fin or scale or feather --
Jabber it quickly and all together!
Excellent! Wonderful! Once again!
Now we are talking just like men.
Let's pretend we are ... never mind,
Brother, thy tail hangs down behind!
This is the way of the Monkey-kind.
Then join our leaping lines that scumfish through the pines,
That rocket by where, light and high, the wild-grape swings.
By the rubbish in our wake, and the noble noise we make,
Be sure, be sure, we're going to do some splendid things!
Appendix V

"I's (Pronounced Eyes)"

Hi, Kuh,

those
gold'n bees
are I's,

eyes,

skyscrapers.
*

Red azaleas
    make this
    synagogue
Not the
    other way
    round.
*

Fiddler Age Nine
(with brief-and violin-case)

Sir Attache Detache.
*

HARBOR

The winds
agitating
the
waters.
*
FOR

Four tubas
or
two-by-four's.
*

Angelo
the Superintendent's
Porto Rican Helper --

See
I work
already start roof pla'form
n scratching floor
on
Eight

if
I
can do
you
good.
*

SEVEN DAYS A WEEK

A
good man
when everybody
is draping
the flag on a holiday
he's behind a box
or stamp or information
   window in the
   Post Office.
   *
   TREE-SEE?
   --I see
      by
      your tree
   --What
      do you
         see
   *
   A SEA
   the
   foam
   claws
   cloys
   close
   *
   ABC
   He has wit--
   but who has more--
   who looks
   some way more

   withal

   than
one eye

weeps, his voice

AZURE

Azure

as ever

adz aver
Appendix VI

"Our Whole Life"

Our whole life a translation
the permissible fibs

and now a knot of lies
eating at itself to get undone

Words bitten thru words

meanings burnt-off like paint
under the blowtorch

All those dead letters
rendered into the oppressor's language

Trying to tell the doctor where it hurts
like the Algerian
who walked from his village, burning

his whole body a cloud of pain
and there are no words for this

except himself
Appendix VII

"Fox Trot"

Old Sir Faulk,

Tall as a stork,
Before the honeyed fruits of dawn were ripe, would walk,
And stalk with a gun
The reynard-coloured sun,
Among the pheasant-feathered corn the unicorn has torn,
    forlorn the
Smock-faced sheep
Sit
And
    Sleep;
Periwigged as William and Mary, weep . . .
'Sally, Mary, Mattie, what's the matter, why cry?'
The huntsman and the reynard-coloured sun and I sigh;
'Oh, the nursery-maid Meg
With a leg like a peg
Chased the feathered dreams like hens, and when they laid an egg
In the sheepskin
Meadows
Where
The serene King James would steer
Horse and hounds, then he
From the shade of a tree
Picked it up as spoil to boil for nursery tea, said the mourners. In the
Corn, towers strain,
Feathered tall as a crane,
And whistling down the feathered rain, old Noah goes again --
An old dull mome
With a head like a pome,
Seeing the world as a bare egg,
Laid by the feathered air; Meg
Would beg three of these
For the nursery teas
Of Japhet, Shem, and Ham; she gave it
Underneath the trees,
Where the boiling
Water
Hissed,
Like the goose-king's feathered daughter -- kissed
Pot and pan and copper kettle
Put upon their proper mettle,
Lest the Flood -- the Flood -- the Flood begin again through these!
Appendix VIII

"Pumpkins"

Oompah Oompah Oompah, fattening
on the stem, tuba girthed, puffing like perorating
parliamentarians,
Boompa Boompa Booompah,
earth hogs slurping swill from the sun,
jowels burp fat with photons, bigger, bigger, garden elephants,
mirthed like St. Francis, dancing (thud), dancing (thud,
brumpht, thud, brumpht) with the Buddha-bellied sun,
dolphin sweet, theatrical as suburban
children, yahooing a yellow
which whallops air. Pure. They are Socratically
ugly, God's jokes. O jongleurs, O belly laughs
quaking the matted patch, O my blimpish Prussian
generals, O garden sausages, golden zeppelins. How do? How do?

         How do?

Doo dee doo dee doooo.
What a rabble, some explode,
or sing, in the panic of September
sun, idiot praise for the sun that burns like a grand hotel,
for the sun, monstrous pulp in a groaning rind, flame seeded.
Popeyes, my dears, muscular fruit,
apoplexies of gruntled energy flexed from the forearm vine,
self-hefted on the hill and shot
putted in the half-acre.

Carro-caroo. Are you well,
my sweets, pleasure things, my baubles, my Poohs,
well?
I, weeding farmer, I, Caruso
them at dawn crow in the sun
cymballing mornings
and they Brunhilde back, foghorns, bloated alto notes
baroquely happy.
Not hoe teeth, not Rhotenone, but love,
bruited, busied, blessed these being-ward, barn-big,
bibulous on light, rampantly stolid
as Plato's Ideas, Easter Island
flies lumps of meaning, rolling heads
in my 6-year-old nightmares,
vegetables on a ball and chain, sun anvils
booming with blows of temperature.

Come, phenomena, gourds of light, teach
your joy esperanto, your intense Archimedeian aha
of yellow to me, dung-booted serf, whose unhoed brain,
the garden's brightest fruit, ones
communion with the cowfaced cauliflowers,
cucumbers twinkling like toes, and you,
clown prince,
sun dauphin of the rioting plot.
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