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Facultad de Filosofía y Educación.
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Proyecto Final de Seminario de Graduación
Para Optar al Grado de
Licenciada en Lengua y Literatura Inglesa

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: A Close Reading through
Mikhail Bakhtin's Concept of Carnival

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Primer Semestre 2015

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1. Acknowledgments

I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who supported and encouraged me in the process of creation of this graduation project. Specially, I would like to thank my parents, Elizabeth and Germán, without whom I would have not even been able to think about the idea of being here; thanks to always being and not being there when the situation requires it, and thanks for always supporting me in every crazy idea, including this one, despite of how much you like them or not.

Secondly, I would like to thank Christopher Díaz for his infinite help during this whole process, for his support as my partner, as my teacher, as the bell who would wake me up every time Morpheus was about to win, and as the one who would make me laugh at the most needed times.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Mr. Pablo Villa Moreno for introducing high quality literary works in my life; for always demanding more and more in a way that made me feel that I really have the tools and the capacity to give more; for always encouraging me to keep working; and most importantly, for being such an incredible person worth to be admired as a teacher and as a human being.

2. Introduction

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is a Victorian novel written by the English author Lewis Carroll in 1865. The novel narrates the adventures of a seven-year-old girl, Alice, as she falls down the rabbit hole and explores Wonderland, facing bodily changes, as well as creatures with animals heads and human bodies, different anthropomorphized animals which talk and dress like human beings, also impersonated packs of cards, and human creatures with grotesque bodies, whose speech will have aspects of pomposity and nonsense.

The novel is placed both in narration and in publication date in the Victorian period in England. This era was characterised for a belief in which personal attitudes, culture and the set of values were highly moralistic; according to *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Victorian social code of conduct implied sexual restraint, proper language, obedience to God, and to fulfil one's individual duty within society. It is important to remember that the Victorian period was also shaped by the rapid changes in society brought by the second industrial revolution, a factor that, as well as the social code of behaviour of the time, influenced the writing of literature since novels were usually portrayals, through fantasy or horror, of Victorian society, its lifestyle and its most important issues.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll, was "a religious Oxford don, obsessive and conservative" (Rackin 398). He tried during his whole life to behave accordingly to these Victorian conservative principles that he believed in and defended. Characteristically, he demonstrated the Victorian "extraordinary need for order by obsessively regulating their everyday lives" (Rackin 398); this kind of behaviour manifested

"a deep-seated anxiety about the messiness that surrounds us, an anxiety about the morally random nature of existence" (Rackin 398). Most scholars, while describing Lewis Carroll's personality, coincide in the previous characteristics as common in him, as well, he was so organized that he used to keep a record of all the letters that he received during his life, and a record of all the dishes that were served when people assembled in his house.

As aforesaid, Lewis Carroll belongs to the tradition of Victorian writers who portrayed society and its behaviour in their writing, and that is exactly the case with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. While in Wonderland, Alice encounters different situations full of nonsense which are not commonly seen in her world outside the rabbit-hole. To begin with, she falls down through what seems to be an endless rabbit-hole, she swims in a pool full of her own tears, she receives pieces of advice and lessons from different creatures such as a caterpillar, a Duchess with a huge head, and a Mock Turtle; a baby turns into a pig, and she seats on a table where it is tea time every minute; additionally, she plays a rule-less croquet as she listens to the Queen of Hearts ordering to have everybody's heads off; she speaks with a cat that vanishes leaving just its big grin, and at the end, she attends a trial where order seems to be out of the equation.

By not paying close attention, or by just reading a plain summary of the book, it is possible to see a contradiction between Lewis Carroll's intense desire for order and the events written in the *Alice* novel. Nonetheless, the nonsense system that reigns *Wonderland* is not one of disorder if it is carefully analysed, and it can be appreciated how Carroll uses the nonsense in an orderly way to depict the nonsense of Victorian England. How the author makes nonsense perfectly work for his purpose is explained by Michael Holquist

For nonsense in the writing of Lewis Carroll, at any rate, does not mean gibberish; it is no chaos, but the opposite of chaos. It is a closed field of language in which the meaning of any single unit is dependent on its relationship to the system of the other constituents. Nonsense is "a collection of words or events which in their arrangement do not fit into some recognized system" [Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense*, 25], but which constitute a new system of their own (Holquist 390).

Consequently, by implementing nonsense in a way that creates a system, Lewis Carroll is able to keep his desire for order at the moment of writing a story that does not seem organized at first glance. Notwithstanding, it could be argued that there is some chaos, some bits of disorder in the writing of the *Alice* novel. From Alice's point of view while in Wonderland, there is no order at the moment of the development of the events since she would end up in places without knowing how she got there, or she will have to interact with figures of authority, such as a Duchess, a Queen and a King, but whose utterances imply a divorce between the grandiloquence of the words and their coherence. This implies a break in a delicate balance upon which this authority is based and the appearance of a grotesque speech reinforcing the visual one. The disorder present in Lewis Carroll's writing is seen by Mark Hennelly (2009) as a clear influence of François Rabelais's texts of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-1564) since aspects of carnival and grotesque –present in Rabelais's novel and underscored by M. Bakhtin –can be identified in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*.

According to Mikhael Bakhtin, carnival is closely related to freedom from social barriers, it is a sense of time and space that makes feel those in carnival that they belong to a whole, and the

carnal is highly present during this period; grotesque is highly connected to carnival, adding a vision of change of the body, leading to a renewal of one's body. The relation between carnival and grotesque lies in that carnival is a period of freedom from the official culture, a moment of role inversion in which the unofficial takes over, and its highest expression is carnival laughter which is both disruptive and unbridled. As a consequence, within carnival, the disbalance and exaggeration evident in grotesque manifestations are the natural outcome. These manifestations can be at the level of the body or of the speech of those who participate of carnival. Taking into account those features, Mark Hennelly (2009) is able to identify in the novel aspects that characterise carnival and grotesque, such as the crowning and uncrowning -- of the king of carnival--, as well as the changes in the bodies of some inhabitants of Wonderland, the constant drinking and eating and how it affects the body in an exaggerated way, and the language used.

Notwithstanding, according to Rackin (1991), "Carroll grew more conscious of his Rabelaisian implications sometime before writing *Looking-Glass*" (Hennelly 107). *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871) is the sequel of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and is set after six months have passed since Alice went into Wonderland. Consequently, this awareness had as response Lewis Carroll's edition of *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* by subtracting almost the sixty percent of what he considered that could be taken as proper of carnival, grotesque or François Rabelais's influence, having as a result a more structured and matured novel in *Looking-Glass* in comparison to *Wonderland*. This response from Lewis Carroll comes directly from his desire of order and his rejection of the subculture of carnival, as it would go against his set of beliefs as a Victorian gentleman.

Despite of this rejection of Lewis Carroll to the presence of carnivalesque situations and grotesque manifestations in the *Alice* novel, traces of Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of carnival and grotesque can be identified: The change of shape and size of the bodies of certain characters, the constant eating and drinking, and an unorganized social behaviour are present in the novel. However, inside *Wonderland* there is no true disorder as its system works perfectly well for those who are inside of it. It is in this organized disorder that it is possible to see in Lewis Carroll's novel an ironic representation of Victorian lifestyle through the presence of a carnivalesque environment and grotesque representations of the characters' bodies and speech. What Carroll does through this kind of representation is that he gives the readers an ironic "insight into the highly rule-bound society of mid-Victorian Oxford, a world in which being late for an appointment could upset even a white rabbit" (Adams 232). Through an exaggeration of Victorian obsession with rituals and propriety, Carroll builds an universe in which anthropomorphized animals or deformed humans engage in ceremonies divorced from their meaning, devoided of context, and made pure signifier. Alice acts as the point of reference of that separation. Whenever she asks or questions, she highlights the anomaly that empty rituals are. How grotesque civilization may become. Therefore, mainly based on Pam Morris's (1994) account of Mikhail Bakhtin's work in *The Bakhtin Reader*, the moments of carnival and the grotesque manifestations will be identified in the first *Alice* novel so to prove that through the use of the concepts of carnival and grotesque Lewis Carroll made an ironic depiction of Victorian society so to expose the reality behind their lifestyle, rituals, and speech, opening the possibility to talk about a Victorian grotesque/carnival or a Carrollian grotesque/carnival in terms of the ironic language and imagery present in the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

3. Background

3.1. Victorian Literature

Victorian Literature appeared during the nineteenth century when England was under the reign of Queen Victoria. During this epoch a great number of scientific and social changes took place in England thanks to the second industrial revolution, and so, the appearance of new machinery and the emergence of a scientific thought are characteristic of this period; this, according to Eagleton (1983), created a sense of imbalance and disbelief in people as scientific discoveries implied that God was not the only answer for everything. Additionally, in terms of literature, the influence of the Romantic period was still in the air, shaking, as well, religious beliefs and the way social behaviour was seen since "romanticism has championed the claims of passion, and upheld the rights of the individual; the laxity in morals as witnessed during the regency of George IV has equalled that of the most unbridled periods of the eighteenth century" (Cazamian 1088). While the Romantic Period was ruled by emotions, the agitation of the soul, and dreams, the Victorian period wanted to give a twist to those aspects and centre its values in a search for balance and strict morality, something that was helped by the spirit of Puritanism present in the middle class, and so this call for order and discipline was "imposed by common consent" (Cazamian 1088) in all aspects in the life of Victorians.

In this pursuit for order, there was an adoption of highly moralistic values and social code of behaviour, being part of it the sexual restraint, the use of proper language, obedience to God and the fulfilment of one's duty within society. Henceforth, after 1830, English literature arrived as a way of delivering those moral values in order to put some order and to calm down

society by providing a reflection of the accepted way of thinking of the time, where reason prevailed among anything else. However, Victorian literature was not able to detach itself so easily from the Romantic period, as well as it could not achieve a complete sense of balance.

The English empire used literature to create a national soul which was supposed to be based on a balanced society, nonetheless, there was not a real order or balance since England was in a period of fear of people protesting and revolting against the ruling class, and this was echoed in Victorian literature as well. Even though the Victorian novel had the tendency to reflect the moral and social codes that individuals were expected to follow in that time --being that the reason why the ruling class decided to promote literature among the middle class--, it also reflected what Cazamian (1954) has called as a "special form of Romanticism" where the disturbed spirits of the individuals were present, which was manifested through an emotional unrest of the social spheres of the time. Consequently, there is an evident duality in the characters of Victorian literature since they could embody all the values that Victorian society expected them to embody, and at the same time disorder, imbalance and uncertainty were part of them.

Furthermore, this literary movement reflects a society that is more reflective on their actions, and that despite difficulties, is able to adapt to different circumstances and changes; a society that through rational thinking makes an effort to see, to comprehend, and to organize life and society; a society that tries to be intelligent and practical in order to make sense of life --something that is clearly present in the *Alice* novel. Alice while in *Wonderland* has to face a world where there is no centrality, where she changes from scenario to scenario without previous warning and, even though it is hard for her at the beginning of *Wonderland*, she has

to rapidly adapt to the new situations and new contexts that she is immersed in, and as a consequence, as the novel advances, Alice grows more as a reflective and conscious person about the events that surround her and that she is part of. But still, throughout the novel she is constantly looking for balance by wondering, by questioning everything that seems nonsensical to her, embodying one of the main characteristics of Victorian literature.

3.2. Victorian Children Literature

Children literature plays a key role within the tradition of Victorian literature. As it was already mentioned, literature of the Victorian period embodied most of the values and way of thinking of the time including those of individuals as well as those that were socially agreed or imposed. In the same line, Victorian Children literature reflects the vision of children in the period as well as the values that wanted to be transmitted to them.

First of all, it is important to understand the origin of the vision of children by Victorians, and there were two visions of childhood that were mixed. The first, having as main influence William Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*, implied a romantic ideal of childhood; the second was the evangelical view that childhood was the key point where souls could be redeemed in order to reform society. Hence, taking both views into consideration, it was commonly believed that childhood was a state of "innate innocence", of "great spiritual and sentimental significance"(Roberts 354). However, with the crisis of evangelical beliefs that characterised this period, the romantic point of view was predominant considering childhood as the state in which children could help adults to "access to the light and comfort of God" (Roberts 355). Finally, for many Victorians both views united, and children were a representation of innocence, purity, and virtue who lived separated from the corruption of the world of adults. It is for this reason, that Victorian Children literature had as aims to protect children from a corrupted world and to promote the vision of them as something pure in society.

According to Adams (2009) it was something clear that children needs of literary imagery were different from the ones of adults, and so literature for children started to be massive. In Victorian times, adults were the ones who produced children literature and adults were the ones who provided children with literature, this was done due to the concern that they had about children and the values that wanted to be transmitted to them in the "most significant phase of life" (Roberts 354).

Within Victorian Children Literature, the fairytale is the most common genre, and most of them had a clear representation of the ideal of childhood and the ideal image of children,

Fairytales commonly depict a protagonist who has violated a boundary or prohibition in some way and so must perform a task, which in turn becomes part of the protagonist's characterization. Eventually, the protagonist will encounter enemies, usually in the form of witches or monsters, or friends whose magical gifts enable the protagonist to deal with a new task or test (Roberts 357)

According to Roberts's (2002) definition of what constitutes a fairytale, the *Alice* novel fits perfectly the definition since Alice enters into places where she is not supposed to be in, such as the rabbit-hole to enter *Wonderland*. In this project, one of the key points to be analyzed is the irony used by Carroll in the novel; therefore, even though Alice fits perfectly the definition of the fairytales alluded by Roberts, the irony added in Alice crossing through the boundary and getting into the rabbit hole is that the fairy tale protagonist is supposed to cross a boundary to perform a task; an Alice is a protagonist who lacks one. The very concept of the journey is destabilized through this absence and through the bodily changes suffered by the protagonist as if to reflect what kind of creatures she is going to meet: more frequently talking animals

than humans, as well as special food which make her grow smaller or bigger. What is more, there is no progression between those meetings, they seem to be arbitrary and represent only specific tasks with no ultimate goal. So, Alice is able to complete these specific tasks that she has come up with after falling into the hole; nonetheless, Alice has no actual enemies in Wonderland since most of her conflicts with its inhabitants lie on the problems of communication that they have as they belong to different systems or realities.

Sometimes the protagonist must experience a temporary setback, but finally achieves success in the form of marriage, wealth, or power. Significantly, the fairytale suggests that worthy characters have the ability to transcend class boundaries, and that powerless characters can potentially achieve great power. (Roberts 357)

Continuing with Roberts's (2002) definition of fairytales, even though in the novel Alice does not achieve success by getting married, or by acquiring wealth, she could be signalled as a "worthy character" since she is able to transcend class boundaries and to gain power by disobeying the Queen of Hearts. As the Queen and Alice are in a place where carnival is predominant, it is important to say that carnival knows no rank,

"No, no!" said the Queen. Sentence first -verdict afterwards."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly. "The idea of having the sentence first!"

"Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.

"I won't!" said Alice.

"Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

"Who cares for *you*?" said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time)

(Carroll 161).

In the previous quote, set at the end of the trial of the Knave of Hearts which is accused of stealing the tarts of the Queen of Hearts, Alice does not recognize the authority of the Queen because her speech carries no authority, for Alice her speech is empty of both content and authority; therefore, as she confronts the Queen by expressing that what she talks is nonsense, Alice is able to gain power as she invalidates hierarchical ranks.

Accordingly to the definition given so far, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* belongs to the tradition of Victorian Children literature, and more specifically to the genre of fairytales, yet there is a big difference between the definition of fairytales and Lewis Carroll's books, and that is that while in most fairytales the main characters, most of the times children, do not grow up, in the aforementioned novels the reader can appreciate how Alice grows, not only from one book to another since in *Wonderland* she is seven years old, and when going to *Looking-Glass* she is seven years old and a half; but also from the beginning to the end of both books the reader grows with Alice in maturity and awareness of the worlds that surround her. This contrasts with the consent that in fairytales children do not grow up since childhood is a state that is desirable to preserve in time in order to protect it from the corruption of adulthood. The victorian need of stasis is subverted in the writing of the novel as well as the fairy tale tradition. In other words, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* fulfils the general scope of the definition of fairytales, however, due to the elements of carnival and grotesque present in the novel, it introduces dynamics of change and instability that transcend the boundaries of the genre and make the novel a deconstructing device of the Victorian self.

3.3. Charles Dodgson, Lewis Carroll and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, author of the classic *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* under the name of Lewis Carroll, was an English writer, mathematician, deacon, and photographer; he was also an inventor, specially of gadgets for entertainment, as well as, he loved to invent puzzles and riddles. Also, he was constantly creating new theories about the most unimaginable subjects or regarding current issues in England.

Those who met him described him as someone who contributed little to group conversations, just "an occasional question" (Greenacre 105). Additionally he was an extremely organised person, and he would obsessively keep record of letters, dishes, and the position of people when they gathered; this obsession was also present in his works and the consequences of it were suffered by the illustrators that Carroll hired for his works --such as John Tenniel, Henry Holiday and Harry Furniss-- as he would ask from them extreme precision in their drawings, wishing that details were clear enough so the illustrations would look as precise as in Carroll's mind. His obsession for perfection was such that when Furnis recalls what Carroll would ask from him he claims that

The author would send the illustrator quantities of photographs showing this or that feature which he found inspiring, or would request him to visit friends or even strangers to collect "fragments of faces" which Carroll had thought suitable for the illustrations. (Greenacre 108)

In this disproportionate obsession with details the roots of Carroll's grotesque aesthetics can be traced. Grotesque manifestations give a lot of importance to detail when describing, for

example, grotesque bodies.; the importance given to the details of the bodily grotesque manifestations lie on the principle that the grotesque makes human beings aware of their reality, exposing the material and making the reader wonder what is to be human.

There were some topics in the life of Dodgson that influenced his writing as Lewis Carroll: Time, eating, animals, and language. Regarding time, Dodgson avoided to be caught or trapped by time, and a way to do so was to reject invitations that specified the time of the meeting, and he would announce at an unspecified time that he would be going later. In Lewis Carroll's writing of *Alice Adventures in Wonderland*, this awareness of time is present in the figure of the White Rabbit at the beginning of the book, a character that is always worried about not being late and it always seems to be *time!*. Additionally, time is present in a static way at the Tea Party with the Mad Hatter; in these two instances, the figure of time is ironically placed as a ridiculous Victorian convention, since there is no complete and logical explanation of why it is important to always be on time.

Dodgson was also concerned with eating, and tended to draw people who were "abnormally fat or abnormally thin" (Greenacre 109), in his writing as Lewis Carroll food and drinks are important in the effect that they have in Alice's body, and consequently in the formation of a grotesque body, as it is closely related with food. In his concern for animals he would consider them superior to human beings, something that has as consequence that in Wonderland most of the characters are animals or impersonated cards, and the few humans apart from Alice that appear in the novel are depicted in a grotesque way. Finally, Dodgson paid close attention to the use of language, of the words, up to the point that he would talk nonsense as it is

demonstrated in his letter to her female children friend Gertrude Chataway when the expression "drink her health" is given more than one thought

But perhaps you will object... If I were to sit by you and to drink your tea, you wouldn't like that. You would say "Boo-hoo! Here's Mr. Dodgson's drunk all my tea and I haven't got any left!" I am very much afraid Sybil will find you sitting by the sad sea-wave and crying "Boo! Hoo! Mr. Dodgson's drunk my health and I haven't got any left!" Your mother will say [to the doctor] "You see she would go and make friends with a strange gentleman, and yesterday he drank her health! ... The only way to cure her is to wait until next birthday and then for her to drink his health." And then we shall have changed healths. I wonder how you'll like mine! Oh Gertrude, I wish you would not talk such nonsense! ... Your loving friend. Lewis Carroll. (Greenacre 111,112)

Here, as well as in the *Alice* book, the language used to communicate is taken by Lewis Carroll to its mere literal meaning doing the same process of paying attention to language that the characters of *Wonderland* do regarding Alice's speech and the way she uses the words that she uses. By doing so, it is evidenced in the language used by people everyday how social conventions about language can lead to the creation of an absurd dialogue since people are used to talking in the way that they have been taught (imposed) to without really thinking about the words used and how their literal meaning can affect the message that wants to be conveyed.

The *Alice* novel is within the frame of Victorian Children Literature, more specifically, it belongs to the genre of fairy-tales, but according to Demurova (2006), it is "close to this English ironic development of the fairy-tale tradition" (Demurova 157). In this irony, Lewis Carroll situated his work as a defining point in children literature --according to Roberts (2002)-- and the author was able to create a tale for children with the "complexity and literary value to equal adult literature" (Roberts 360).

In his writing of the *Alice* novel, Lewis Carroll not only embodied the topics that were of more concern in his personal life, but also he was able to embody Victorian values with a sense of irony so to laugh at the conventions imposed and accepted by the society of the time, these conventions are depicted in the novel to be analysed, as immersed in a carnivalesque environment full of grotesque manifestations.

4. Theoretical Framework: Carnival, Grotesque and Irony

In this project, three concepts will be used in order to analyze Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: Carnival and grotesque based on Mikhail Bakhtin's development of the concepts in relation with François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Based on the *Gargantua and Pantagruel* books, Mikhail Bakhtin evidences how the transition from Middle Ages to Renaissance is depicted through the carnivalesque environment in which the books are set, along with the grotesque manifestations that it contains. To this, it will be added the ironic tone in which Lewis Carroll describes the events of his novel.

To understand the concept of carnival, it is important to go back to its origins: The marketplace. The marketplace was seen as the place where all that was unofficial would take place, where, following Morris's account of Bakhtin's work in *The Bakhtin Reader* (1994), folk culture would manifest in three different ways: (1) Ritual spectacles, (2) comic verbal compositions, and (3) genres of billingsgate. In the first case, the marketplace was the place where ritual spectacles would take place, having parodies of celebrations directly taken from the church or celebrations before religious celebrations such as Lent took place, so they would offer "a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations" (Morris 197). Closely related with the previous, comic verbal compositions implied a parody of sacred texts, presenting them in a way that would not be accepted in serious religious manifestations. Finally, taking into account these two, genres of billingsgate were part of the marketplace since people used certain tones, words, and idioms in their speech that they would not use outside of the marketplace, outside of the carnival context. These events occurring in the marketplace would be the simplest and first

manifestation of a carnivalesque inversion, a moment of exception, a period where people would have a second life outside of what was considered official, a "two-world condition", ultimately expressed in the celebration of pre-lent carnival. In this two-world condition, the nonofficial culture is the manifestation of the folk consciousness and culture where people will have a utopian sense of "community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (Morris 199).

One of the main aspects of this second life of people so to be embraced by carnival is the presence of the "feasts" that took place in the marketplace. Carnival celebrated a temporary liberation of all that was official, this is to say a liberation from the established order, the norms, hierarchical ranks and prohibitions. According to Morris (1994), carnival is closely related with spectacles but is not one of them as in the feasts that took place during carnival time, there are neither performers nor spectators, but all the people are the performers since nobody can be outside of carnival. In this feast, people would eat, drink, scream, dance, and do a huge number of corporeal manifestations to their hearts contents, because to do so implied a change and renewal of the body.

Along with feasts, laughter also played a key role during carnival time, inasmuch as laughter during carnival rituals freed people from the official, being one example the parodies of the church cult. Additionally, laughter implies a victory over fear of prohibitions, violence, limitations and taboos that are imposed by the official culture. According to Bakhtin in his work *Rabelais and His World* (1965), one character who embodies the spirit of carnival and who is present during feasts and moments of laughter is the clown, who takes the place of the king of carnival; the clown "is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people", as well as "[h]e is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over" (Morris 223).

Taken together, laughter and feasts during carnival are ways in which the official and the unofficial culture come into a conflictive dialogue where the unofficial seeks to take away, to defeat the official as long as carnival lasts; during this period, "[t]ime has transformed old truth and authority into a Mardi Gras dummy, a comic monster that the laughing crowd rends to pieces in the marketplace." (Morris 225), and this is achieved by a consensus of the people to enter this carnivalesque mood. Therefore, in this consensus, carnival laughter contains three aspects: Firstly, festive laughter which "is the laughter of all the people"; secondly, "it is universal in scope" as "it is directed to all and everyone, including the carnival's participants" (Morris 200); thirdly, it is ambivalent since it is gay and mocking, triumphant and deriding, it implies death and revival, change and renewal. In this last point, ambivalence is key to understand the change of places between the official and the unofficial since there is an inversion of the structures of power, vanishing all the seriousness and stability and replacing it with parodies. In this ambivalence given by laughter, the images of death and birth are also present so to lead to a new world where images and their meanings can be separately presented, and so each of them "reflects a single concept of a contradictory world of becoming", this is to say, during carnival time these ambivalences of the images of the world, of society, and their meaning give evidence of the reality of the old --official-- world and give birth to the new --unofficial--visions present during carnival.

All things considered, according to Morris's (1994) account of Mikhail Bakhtin's work, carnival can be understood as the moment when people experience life outside of what is stated as official. It is an "escape from the serious aspects of their class culture which are official and authoritarian" (Morris 209). It is the time when heteroglossia is present and the official and the unofficial seek to change places. During carnival, laughter is the most

powerful expression; carnival "knows no inhibitions, no limitations" (Morris 209), and everybody is part of it (Morris 209)

The main manifestation of carnival laughter is the "grotesque style." The first characteristic of the grotesque is that it implies exaggerated and excessive representations of bodies, rituals, and speech. In these exaggerations, the grotesque needs a sense of openness and multiplicity in order to resist totalizing concepts that may limit the understanding of the representations --a polar opposite to the likes of official culture that seeks to totalize the concepts that help people to live and experience their reality. This openness and multiplicity evidences the power that the grotesque has as it "eliminate[s] borders: it can reveal how the boundaries between the 'normal' and 'abnormal' are fluid, not fixed, and how grotesquerie can lead to an erasure of common distinctions" (Edwards and Graulund 9).

One of the common representations of grotesque is the grotesque body which takes the principles that constitute the concept. In grotesque realism "the material and the body are highly present" (Morris 205). The body and the material are tightly connected with eating and drinking as they are "the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body" (Morris 228) helping the body to own the qualities of openness and multiplicity, so that the body must be incomplete, unfinished and open, so people are aware of their bodies and in order to be able to continually grow and renew themselves; in this way, everything that is bodily grotesque "becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" (Morris 205). Ambivalence is also a key point of the grotesque body as the images of death and birth are present in the formation of a "double body" (Morris 234), and so "[i]n the endless chain of bodily life it retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the

preceding, older one" (Morris 234). The grotesque body is important in the sense that, according to Edwards and Graulund (2013), it tries to make people aware of their repressions as it is "familiar and old, for it is formed in the mind and yet becomes alienated from the subject through repression" (Edwards and Graulund 6). In close relation with the grotesque body, banquet images are crucial due to their undeniable link with feasts and festivities. Moreover, banquets are intimately linked with speech, as it is supposed that during this time conversation must be wise and truthful; consequently, speech also becomes grotesque as in its abuse a great number of ambivalent cases can be perceived. In grotesque manifestations during carnival, for example, "offensive words can be affectionate as well" (Morris 203), also they can humiliate and revive, or mortify and renew, consequently, words must also be open in order to allow multiple readings, and it evidences that speech does not have to be necessarily truthful or wise.

Within the grotesque, movements are also a key part, being the main example of grotesque manifestations the underworld, where carnival, the grotesque body and speech are supposed to take place. Hell, or the underworld, is the crossroad of official and unofficial (popular tradition) culture. As noted before, ambivalence is a key characteristic of the carnival and the grotesque, and the underworld is another ambivalent manifestation as downward is earth and upward is heaven. So to understand it better, in Morris's (1994) words, "[d]egradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time" (Morris 206). Therefore, there is an invented relation with the outside world, as hell is supposed to take place on earth; in this game, the underworld being part of the grotesque seeks to make people aware of their position, and so carnival takes place in earth, in the marketplace, in front of official culture, or what's more, within official culture being

replaced by the unofficial aspects of carnival. In a grotesque representation of the underworld where the downward movement is of key importance, "[a]ll who are highest are debased, all who are lowest are crowned" (Morris 240). In this sense, the representation of Victorian reality in the *Alice* book is clear since its very beginning as Alice falls down through the rabbit hole so to get access to Wonderland; in this verticality it is understood that Alice "down the rabbit hole" has access to a carnivalesque representation of the reality of the time, a reality which is put down, at the same level of the underworld, where carnival and its manifestations take place.

All these grotesque manifestations of the body, the speech in the use of billingsgate, and the upside down movements are present in the grotesque so to make the familiar defamiliarized, strange and dislocated so, according to Edwards and Graulund (2013), to make the readers aware of their realities and to stimulate critical thinking; a process in which Alice is involved.

All things considered, based on Bakhtin's conceptions of the carnival and the grotesque, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, it is possible to appreciate how these elements are present so to ironically portray Victorian society. In this sense, and based on Colebrook's (2004) conceptions of the concept, the irony present in the *Alice* novel will be understood as a device used by Carroll in which he would include the conventions and figures of his context -- Victorian period-- so to effectively convey his message and expose the nonsense of the thought and rituals of the time.

If we could secure a stable context of human recognition then irony would be a device or event within life and language; irony would be a deviation from the proper and

common sense. There would be a literal language and a present world of truths and facts, which could then be ornamented or arrived at through irony (Colebrook 50).

In this quote taken from Colebrook's *Irony* (2004), a relation can be drawn between Carroll's use of irony in his novel as he ironically portrays Victorian society in *Wonderland* as one with a stable definition of its own identity and context having a sense of secure balance; therefore, in the use of irony, Carroll is able to arrive to and to expose the truths of Victorian times. It is important to bear in mind that by doing so Carroll does not use irony just as a mean of "signalling the opposite of what was said" (Colebrook 52), but what he did was to express the two sides of the coin "at once in the form of contradiction" (Colebrook 52).

Consequently, the use of the grotesque in a carnivalesque environment unmask the conventions and traditions imposed by the Victorian social system in which the book is set; thus, the carnival and grotesque manifestations and the use of irony in this process of unmasking, will help in this work to show how Lewis Carroll put in evidence the artificiality of people's images of themselves, their rituals, and conventions.

5. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: A Close Reading

In this project, it is proposed that Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, despite of the author's rejection of them, contains a significant number of elements of carnival and grotesque in order to depict ironically Victorian society, in order to expose the nonsense of the conventions of the time. It is for this reason that the aforementioned novel will be analyse so to make explicit where carnival, grotesque, and irony take place.

Carnival is the place and the moment where everything that was considered to be part of the official culture, of the norm, of the established, is replaced by the unofficial culture, giving place to disorder, laughter and grotesque representations. One of these grotesque representations was the ambivalent figure of the underworld. When talking about the underworld it is not only the most general view of it as what is down, of hell; but also, according to Morris (1994), there is an ambivalence present in this concept and that is the fact that the underworld makes an immediate reference to earth, as in this game of the double image what is up is heaven and what is down is earth. Therefore, when Alice falls down into the rabbit hole before getting to Wonderland, all the events and characters present there are not a representation of what is underground, but a representation of the life on earth; this is to say, a representation of the Victorian system and society in which Lewis Carroll lived and in which the novel is set.

Other two important elements of carnival and its relation with grotesque are present in food and the body; these two are enormously important when representing Victorian society since in the novel they play a key role every time that Alice eats or drinks something. The grotesque

body needs an openness so to allow multiple dialogues in order to renew the body, by consuming cakes and drinking brewages in a exaggerated manner. In drinking and eating, the bodies of the participants of carnival, the body of Alice, are eligible to be renewed. The first time Alice's body changes is because she drinks something that is supposed not to be harmful, but still her body suffers certain changes: When she drinks the bottles tagged with "Drink me!" sings, she grows uncontrollably, and when she eats the cakes tagged with "Eat me!" signs, it is hard to say how much her body will shrink. At the beginning of these processes, Alice declares to feel very curious about them, coining the popular phrase "curiouser and curiouser!"(Carroll 35), and compares the way she shrinks and grows bigger with the way a telescope would do. However, there is a time where she cannot control the growing of her body, something that makes her cry, that makes her sad; this contradicts one of the principles of the image of food in carnival, and that is that "[n]o meal can be sad. Sadness and food are incompatible" (Morris 229), and so Alice is not fully immersed in the carnivalesque environment of Wonderland, consequently, her body is not able to be renewed yet. It is important to remember that this occurs at the beginning of the book, so Alice still is a faithful representation of the official culture entering into conflict with the unofficial culture.

As Alice moves on within Wonderland, she bumps into a caterpillar which is seated on a big mushroom and establishes a dialogue with Alice where it asks her who she is, but Alice struggles to answer that question because she has suffered so many changes since she entered Wonderland that she is no able to confidently and exactly tell who she is. At the end of their conversation, the Caterpillar gives as advice to Alice that half of the mushroom where it was seated will help her grow big and the other half will help her grow small,

"And now which is which?" she said to herself, and nibbled a little of the right-hand bit to try the effect. The next moment she felt a violent blow underneath her chin: it had struck her foot!

She was a good deal frightened by this very sudden change, but she felt that there was no time to be lost, as she was shrinking rapidly: so she set to work at once to eat some of the other bit. Her chin was pressed so closely against her foot, that there was hardly room to open her mouth; but she did it at last, and managed to swallow a morsel of the left-hand bit (Carroll 74).

In this excerpt, it can be appreciated how she, with a bit of fear, starts experimenting with the growing of her body in a more confident way, and this demonstrates how Alice little by little is each time more immersed in the carnival mood, as during this time the eating represents one's "encounter with the world in the act of eating, [it] is joyful, triumphant; [man] triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage." (Morris 228) As she goes on eating the mushrooms, her neck keeps growing in such a way that she loses sight of the rest of her body and is only able to see a green mass that hides her body; this is an expression of the grotesque body which "seeks to go out beyond the body's confines" (Morris 233). While she is looking at the landscape from the sky with her immensely long neck, she is delighted with the view and gets "curioser" about what she can find there –apart from her body, in a moment in which its body is being covered by the thick forest –which means that she accepts this open condition of the grotesque body becoming fully grotesque herself, something that completely detaches her from the official forces --associated to the head/reason binary--, closed, Victorian society that she belongs to outside Wonderland.

Now that Alice is fully immersed in Wonderland and in its carnivalesque and grotesque mood, Lewis Carroll's ironic representations of Victorian society start to be clearer. Keeping with the presence of grotesque bodies in the novel, the first clear example is the Duchess who is described with a huge head and an enormous chin. The first words that the reader gets from her during the croquet game --which is played with flamingos as croquet clubs and hedgehogs as balls-- come from her conversation with Alice, where the former declares that "[e]very thing's got a moral, if only you can find it." (Carroll 120), and she does so, she finds the moral of each of the topics that she and Alice cover, nonetheless, her "morals" are pure nonsense and teach little or nothing.

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Alice, who had not attended to this last remark. "It's a vegetable. It doesn't look like one, but it is."

"I quite agree with you," said the Duchess; "and the moral of that is—'Be what you would seem to be'—or, if you'd like it put more simply—'Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.'"

"I think I should understand that better," Alice said very politely, "if I had it written down: but I can't quite follow it as you say it." (Carroll 122)

Previous to the exchange in the excerpt, the Duchess and Alice were discussing the nature of mustard, which Alice declared to know that it is a vegetable, and from here the Duchess takes another moral which, as well expressed by Alice, does not have much sense at first glance – and neither at a second one. Therefore, in the clownish and grotesque image of the Duchess it is possible to see an ironic representation of the speech of the time since, despite of this moral

being told by someone who is supposed to be the embodiment of authority, her words are not reliable, and a moral, something which is supposed to teach people, especially children, how to live, ends up being just a bunch of words that people may fake to understand --and here the criticism to Victorian society-- or just laugh at it as in the mood of carnival.

According to Hennelly (2009), the grotesque body is also present in the figure of the Cheshire cat and its big grin, as its grotesque body is so immersed in the sense of openness and renewal that it is able to vanish leaving behind just its grin. In the Cheshire cat's bodily experience, the author of the novel is able to criticize hierarchical ranks such as the ones of the King and the Queen as in the croquet game the cat makes its appearance and the King of Hearts gets upset at it having the Queen order that the cat is to be beheaded, but they fail to see a problem in the grotesque body of the animal

The executioner's argument was, that you couldn't cut off a head unless there was a body to cut it off from: that he had never had to do such a thing before, and he wasn't going to begin at his time of life. The King's argument was that anything that had a head could be beheaded, and that you weren't to talk nonsense. The Queen's argument was that, if something wasn't done about it in less than no time, she'd have everybody executed, all round. (It was this last remark that had made the whole party look so grave and anxious.) (Carroll 116, 117)

In this sense the incomplete and open body of the Cheshire cat exposes how the authorities not always have the right answers, as well as that they not always have answers at all, and in order to avoid making a fool of themselves, they take extreme measures of punishment such as beheading people and creatures. With no doubt, this is an important point when talking

ironically of Victorian society and its conventions, notwithstanding, the Cheshire cat exposes the life's of Victorians in a deeper way in its first meeting with Alice when she asks in which way she should go,

"In that direction," the Cat said, waving its right paw round, "lives a Hatter: and in that direction," waving the other paw, "lives a March Hare. Visit either you like: they're both mad."

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.

"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."

"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.

"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." Alice didn't think that proved it at all (Carroll 89)

The previous dialogue is based, according to Gardner's (1968) notes on *The Annotated Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, on the common idioms of Carroll's time "mad as a hatter" and "mad as a March hare" (Carroll 90); additionally, it is important to remember that Wonderland is set on the underworld, but as previously noted, this movement to what is down –to the underworld –refers to a movement towards the earth. The movement downwards is a transition to a materiality which Victorian society painstakingly refuses to dwell into. However, Carroll seems to direct every single word and gesture happening in the novel to a carnivalesque inversion that underlines the inevitability of this materiality not only in Wonderland but in Victorian society. So the cat's words "we're all mad here"(Carroll 89) go beyond Wonderland as they are a downright description of the dichotomic rejection-assertion of the Victorian psyche.

Going back to the importance of eating during carnival time, feasts are the most adequate places where carnival laughter is present, a laughter that can be triggered by a grotesque body and/or a grotesque speech during festive times. The most significant representation of the previous in the novel is the "Mad Tea Party" where a huge table is served, a table that despite of having place for more than four guests it is only used by three creatures before Alice joins them. When Alice first sees the table, she notices that there is no lively conversation between the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse. In carnival, ambivalence is a key point, even more in grotesque events, and in this dialogue with the official culture all elements present in carnival are opposites to it; therefore, according to the official culture of Victorian society, the kind of conversation held during tea time and the mood of people must be one of respect, composure, and wisdom; yet, according to Bakhtin's work those attitudes are far from being part of carnival. While there was a code of conduct during tea time, the grotesque "does not have to respect hierarchical distinctions," something that would explain why there is not much thought about the seat that the characters occupy in the tea time table (Morris 231). Nonetheless, if the aspect of seriousness is taken away from the official conception of tea time, "[n]othing is left but a series of artificial, meaningless metaphors"(Morris 229).

Moreover, "banquet images preserve their initial meaning: their universalism, their essential relation to life, death, struggle, triumph, and regeneration. This is why banquet imagery went on living in the creative live of people" (Morris 229).

Even though the fixed tradition of tea being taken at an specific time was not set until some time after the writing of the book, the Mad Tea Party is not only arranged in a way that they

would gather to take tea at the same time, but also they are trapped by time in an infinite loop, making of tea time something decadent rather than sublime.

"And ever since that," the Hatter went on in a mournful tone, "he won't do a thing I ask! It's always six o'clock now." A bright idea came into Alice's head. "Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?" she asked.

"Yes, that's it," said the Hatter with a sigh: "it's always tea-time, and we've no time to wash the things between whiles."

"Then you keep moving round, I suppose?" said Alice.

"Exactly so," said the Hatter: "as the things get used up."

"But what happens when you come to the beginning again?" Alice ventured to ask.

(Carroll 99)

This infinite loop draws again the impossible connection between sadness and food, making a sad moment out of one which is supposed to be solemn, having a decadent tea time. In this grotesque representation of time during tea time, Lewis Carroll evidences how people are forced by external forces to behave in a certain way during this kind of calm feast, and in this way the decadents participants of tea time are neither the three animals nor Alice, but Victorians.

Another aspect present in this decadent Tea Time is the language used as long as it lasts.

"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.

"Exactly so," said Alice.

"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.

"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know."

"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"

"You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"

"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, which seemed to be talking in its sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!"
(Carroll 95)

For Alice this dialogue makes little sense, and from it two aspects can be grasped. The first one is that in this gay use of the language; Alice and the reader are expected to start being aware of the language they use since during carnival the ambivalence in the meaning of words can lead to misunderstandings as well as to no understanding at all between the speakers. Additionally, in this dialogue the non-understanding is also possible because the characters are unable to understand Alice's speech. According to Adams (2009),

[w]hen the characters at the mad tea party demand that Alice speak in logically rigorous language, they absurdly fail to appreciate that the conventions governing everyday social life are fundamentally arbitrary. When logic is applied outside its proper sphere, it can seem mere bullying – which is what Alice encounters in most of her attempts at conversation. (Adams 232)

In conclusion, Lewis Carroll ironically creates a set of dialogues, during the well known English ritual of the tea party, where nonsense is present in each of them at the moment of

Alice and the participants of the Mad Tea Party trying to reach an understanding in the messages that should be conveyed during their conversation; in this failure at conveying meanings, it is exposed that actually there is no meaning at all in their conversation. In this empty conversation the author is able to ironically depict the emptiness of that particular Victorian ritual through the nonsense present in the characters' speech so to humorously make the contrast with the seriousness and grandiosity given to this ritual at the time. All things considered, in this absence of a truly sublime and meaningful speech during the feast of tea time, there is no possibility of the existence of a truthful and frank atmosphere in the table, despite of Rabelais's belief that the table was the place to achieve that goal.

Another symbolic representation of the carnivalesque environment in the *Alice* novel, as well as a grotesque manifestation is the relationship between the Queen of Hearts and Alice along with the trial of the Stolen Tarts, and to understand it clearly, the next quote will help,

He [the man] is aware of being a member of a continually growing and renewed people. This is why festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts." (Morris 210)

Once Alice gets into the mood of the carnivalesque Wonderland, her strongest conflicts are with the Queen of Hearts. Within the unofficial culture, just by her name, she is the queen/clown of carnival, and she represents an authority whose visceral speech makes no sense to Alice. To begin with, the Queen of Hearts is a mockery to the system of the monarchy

as Carroll gives the reader a queen whose solution for even the smallest problem is decapitation, a queen who will not listen to reason, and a queen who thinks is making total sense in their actions, which demonstrate to be not only ridiculous, but also empty exaggerations. The previous quotation mentions a victory of man over death, over power, and this is exactly the process in which Alice goes through in relation with the Queen of Hearts, and the first step for Alice's victory is her first encounter with the Queen,

"And who are these?" said the Queen, pointing to the three gardeners who were lying round the rose-tree; for, you see, as they were lying on their faces, and the pattern on their backs was the same as the rest of the pack, she could not tell whether they were gardeners, or soldiers, or courtiers, or three of her own children.

"How should I know?" said Alice, surprised at her own courage. "It's no business of mine."

The Queen turned crimson with fury, and, after glaring at her for a moment like a wild beast, began screaming "Off with her head! Off with —"

"Nonsense!" said Alice, very loudly and decidedly, and the Queen was silent.

The King laid his hand upon her arm, and timidly said "Consider, my dear: she is only a child!" (Carroll 108,109)

At this time, Alice is convinced that a pack of cards will do her no harm, and because of that she dares to confront the queen. Later on, Alice fakes the execution of the gardeners whose identities the Queen was asking for in the previous quotation, being this a concrete challenge to the Queen's authority, who at the end has no authority at all. Afterwards, Alice attends the trial of the Knave of Hearts, who is accused of having stolen the tarts that the Queen had made. During the trial, Alice can appreciate how there is no relevant dialogue that would make

sense or that would help in the development of the trial. The King of Hearts claims that the guilty is with no doubt the Knave of Hearts, the Queen wants as fast as possible a sentence for the thief, the witnesses are asked questions that have nothing to do with the stolen tarts, and the jurors do not seem to write something of key importance in their papers, what's more, when one of the juror loses its pen, it starts writing with its finger, so he writes nothing. This carnivalesque trial and all the grotesque manifestations of bodies and speech that took place in there, are a way to ironically demonstrate how the official culture lives a life in which rituals and official ceremonies are deprived from having meaning, and how society is used to them, up to the point that they would do nothing but observe an absurd trial, even though the life of a creature depends on it.

Alice, little by little becomes the hero, the queen of carnival; she is mocked at the beginning and at the end she also mocks others, she uses abusive language and participates in the uncrowning of the previous kings of carnival. Alice is able to achieve the openness of the grotesque body and by the end of the novel, the reader faces a renewed Alice who is more aware of her body, her language, and the body and language of others. Alice demonstrates how people's bodies are incomplete and how the process of carnival and grotesque manifestations help in the death of the old body and give birth to a new one. But in the process, the grotesque imagery, according to Edwards and Graulund (2013) brings ambiguities that will lead to a sense of instability and uncertainty.

Therefore, the points of uncertainty in Carroll's novel are the ones that will help Victorian society to move on, and to realize how static they are, and how used to an imposed order they are. Almost at the end of *Wonderland*, it is noticeable that the most frequent words uttered by

Alice are to express that she was never "so ordered" in her life before going to Wonderland, however, this is not about whether Alice was "not ordered" in a bigger or smaller amount before or not, this is about the process of carnival in which Alice went through so to realize that she was "ordered" to do something all the time. At the beginning she would eat and drink without questioning the signs, or she would follow what the Dodo and the Caterpillar would advice her without giving it a second thought; therefore, in this process of carnival where Victorian society is depicted in a carnivalesque, grotesque, and ironic way, Alice was able to realize of all the nonsensical actions that she is asked to do and that she has naturalized before going through Wonderland.

Throughout the whole novel it is possible to appreciate how with the presence carnivalesque feasts and rituals along with the presence of food, traditional Victorian rituals such as the Tea Party, the croquet game, and trials are exposed as full of meaningless speech and gestures. A contrast is made between the carnival laughter in *Wonderland* and the seriousness that Victorians would adopt in their lifestyles as one of the main characteristics of the time, a seriousness that in the ironic depiction of Carroll is proved to be one aspect to accompany their speech and rituals in order to give them more credibility, but that still are empty ones. The serious and pompous speech of the time is illustrated by the inhabitants of Wonderland in a way that as a result, their speech is grotesquely serious and nonsensically serious, exposing again through humour how it actually lacked of real content and it was most of the time just for Victorians to wear the masks of being informed, witty, and full of authority. Furthermore, it is important to remember that Victorian conservatism was constituted by a rejection of materiality, mainly expressed as a rejection of the flesh; nonetheless, the anthropomorphized animals, and the grotesque bodies of the figures of authority in the novel, as well as the

grotesque bodily manifestations that Alice experiences in her contact with food, reveal that despite of this rejection, through negation, materiality is always present in Victorian England, it is just that society does not want to see it or acknowledge it. One of the reasons for this rejection of materiality was the Victorian need for stasis due to the events that threatened the -- arbitrary-- balance in which their traditions and lifestyle were thought to be; notwithstanding, *Wonderland* was full of situations of imbalance and instability, which is demonstrated through the grotesque manifestations in the illustrations of the figures of authority, as well as in the grotesque bodies whose purpose is to seek for a renewal of the self; hence, in all the grotesque manifestations of the body and speech which gave no balance at all to the events in *Wonderland*, it is uncovered how there was actually a threaten to the balance that official Victorian society pursued, leading to a sense of imbalance of the self and of the society as a whole, and even though, in this stasis the official culture would avoid any kind of renewal, there was actually an oppressed desire of it.

All in all, through the use of carnival and its manifestation in the grotesque, Lewis Carroll was able to ironically depict Victorian society as one that despite of all its attempts to embody seriousness, clever content and rituals, it was only in the surface, while deep down, it was a society full of empty speech and rituals with an oppressed desire for change and renewal. In this sense, the figure of Alice, as a disruptive character in *Wonderland*, demonstrates that the novel as a whole is a deconstructive device of the Victorian self.

6. Conclusion

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), written by Lewis Carroll, is a novel which events, characters and dialogues are immersed in a carnivalesque environment where grotesque manifestations at the level of rituals, body, and speech take over in order to ironically depict the emptiness and artificiality of Victorian England.

Alice, as a reflection of children during Victorian times, shows throughout the novel a desire for a kind of communication that is at the same level of the one of an adult, since it was common for the time that children were raised as little adults, and as it was common, she thought it was correct to express herself like that and never questioned it; nonetheless, while in Wonderland Alice grows aware of the language she uses and the literal meaning of words. In this sense, grotesque speech is shown in the novel in a way that it is absurd up to the point that it can be offensive for those who take words so seriously. Therefore, through the use of grotesque, the reader is able to defamiliarize what was familiar and unquestionable before accompanying Alice through Wonderland. As a consequence, while and after Wonderland, Lewis Carroll tried to make the reader aware of the arbitrariness and the emptiness of the speech of the time.

Keeping with the grotesque manifestations in this carnival Wonderland, the grotesque bodies of the authorities, of Alice herself, of the Cheshire cat, and the rest of the characters, provide more evidence that society does not question what is imposed by the official culture, even if what imposed is the most absurd thing ever. Then again, what Lewis Carroll may have tried to do through these grotesque and ironic representations of authority was to tell the reader that is

time to start to question the order of things --if there is a real order; it is time to start questioning the mysteries and wonderful things of life, of our bodies, of language, so there is no longer fear of the official culture, of the norm, of the imposed. It is time to start wondering about everything that is in one's surroundings.

All things considered, this ironic representation of Victorian society in *Wonderland*, made in order to expose its reality, was possible through the use of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of carnival and all its implications in grotesque manifestations. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, however, there are no such feasts, exaggerations, grotesque representations of the body and its process of eating and defecating as they are present in Rabelais's texts --from which Bakhtin bases his work on the aforementioned concepts. In contrast, in the *Alice* novel the carnivalesque setting and the grotesque manifestations are delineated through the use of ironic language and imagery, and so these manifestations are present in more subtle ways --taking one of the main characteristic of the grotesque-- defamiliarizing what is familiar to the reader, depicting the nonsense, artificiality and emptiness present in the actions of Victorian society. Therefore, by the analysis of the novel according to Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of carnival and grotesque, it is possible to speak of a Carrollian account of a Victorian Carnival, where the unofficial culture will represent all that is repressed by the official one, having serious carnivalesque tea parties, croquet games, and trials replaced by carnivalesque ones; serious, pompous, grandiloquent, and arbitrary forms of Victorian speech replaced by grotesque seriousness and nonsensical speech; the official culture's rejection of materiality being replaced by a grotesque one in which the body will exceed its limits; all this in order to break the balance and non-mobility of the official culture and to replace it with a carnivalesque representation of Victorian society where the environment and the grotesque

manifestations will lead to the renewal of the body, of the self of those who are embraced by carnival.

Finally, it is important to take into consideration that the reality exposed by Lewis Carroll is not restricted to Victorian times only, since by looking at the reality of the present time, carnival, grotesque, and irony, can get together again to make the individual question the events going on, the kind of speech that is currently used, the rituals that are followed, and how grotesque the authorities are. Therefore, it is time to bring Wonderland to the earth again and to start to wonder about it.

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