Nonsense Humor: A Battlefield for Ludwig Wittgenstein or a Playground for Lewis Carroll?

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Abstract

It really surprises us to see that only a few researchers have undertaken a comparative study between Lewis Carroll and Wittgenstein, and among the scant researches George Pitcher’s much celebrated article “Wittgenstein, Nonsense, and Lewis Carroll” in 1965 has remarkably demonstrated the extent and depth of the affinity between these two great writers with respect to nonsense. It is interesting, as Pitcher suggests, that “the very same confusions with which Wittgenstein charges philosophers were deliberately employed by Carroll for comic effect” (231). He begins with three similar aims to try to illustrate the affinity between Wittgenstein’s philosophical nonsense and Carroll’s literary nonsense. However, three of Pitcher’s arguments seem plausible to me and need further examination. First of all, his idea of later Wittgenstein’s opinion of nonsense negatively portrays Wittgenstein the philosopher as if he is fighting a bloody battle to “exorcize nonsense from philosophy” and “uses it like a vaccine that cures us of itself” (230). Secondly, from early to later Wittgenstein, he never says that Carroll’s literary nonsense in fantasy literature has ever exerted a profound influence on his philosophical works, but I will explore the similarities and differences between Wittgenstein and Carroll in Pitcher’s essay to look for proof of such influence. Last, Carroll’s comic humor is not given enough recognition especially when Pitcher’s argument proceeds in the direction of Wittgenstein’s train of thought with Carroll’s textual support in order to disclose that “nonsense” is negative in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Thus, I plan to apply Deleuze’s contrast between negative irony and affirmative humor in The Logic of Sense in general, and his Series 19 on Humor in particular to affirm Carroll’s nonsense humor. The aim of this article attempts to reexamine Pitcher’s alleged affinity between the philosopher Wittgenstein and the literary writer Carroll, and also his hasty argument and conclusion. The first half of this paper focuses on the transition from Wittgenstein’s early thought of logic and his later thought of language game, and how the philosophical nonsense can be approached with these two thoughts. In the second half, although Carroll’s influence on the later Wittgenstein can be proved with indirect evidence, the discrepancy between Pitcher’s hypothesis of later Wittgenstein’s Carrollian turn and his portrayal of later Wittgenstein as a bloody warrior on a battlefield makes the later Wittgenstein’s philosophical nonsense all the more ambiguous. Without taking Pitcher’s hasty argument (later Wittgenstein’s Carrollian turn) and conclusion (they might stand very close to each other, but they are worlds apart) into consideration, I can argue that the later Wittgenstein is still fighting philosophical nonsense on his bloody battlefield. Instead of drawing upon the later Wittgenstein’s philosophical nonsense, I turn to Deleuze’s argument about humor in The Logic of Sense to reassess the affirmative power of Carroll’s nonsense humor.

Keywords: nonsense, humor, Wittgenstein, Carroll, Deleuze.
荒誕幽默：維根斯坦的殺戮戰場
或是路易斯卡萊爾的遊樂園？

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摘 要

目前學界僅有少數學者針對路易斯卡萊爾和維根斯坦進行比較研究，而其中喬治皮趣在 1965 年發表的著名論文〈維根斯坦、荒誕與路易斯卡萊爾〉異常卓越地展現了兩位偉大作家在荒誕主題上深度與廣度的相似性。皮趣所觀察到的有趣現象為「維根斯坦用以指控哲學家的混亂卻被卡萊爾好整以暇地拿來大開玩笑」（頁 231）。據此，他以三個相似的論點來彰顯維根斯坦哲學荒誕與卡萊爾文學荒誕的相似性。然而，我認為皮趣所提的三組論點仍需進行進一步檢驗。首先，維根斯坦晚期荒誕的思想促使皮趣將維根斯坦負面地描繪成一位浴血奮戰的哲學戰士，誓言將荒誕逐出哲學，並「將荒誕用作疫苗般來治癒我們荒誕的病疾」（頁 230）。再者，維根斯坦從早期到晚期思想的發展中，皆未親口證實卡萊爾的奇幻文學中的文學荒誕是否對其對哲學荒誕的看法產生何種深遠的影響，但我仍將從皮趣對維根斯坦及卡萊爾荒誕對比分析的同與異中找尋後者對前者影響的證據。最後，皮趣以維根斯坦晚期對荒誕的看法為主線，佐以卡萊爾的文本證據，以求揭露維根斯坦哲學中負面荒誕的看法並無法給予卡萊爾的喜劇幽默應有的評價；因此，我將援用德勒茲《意義的邏輯》，尤其是第十九系列論幽默篇來比較負面諷刺與正向幽默。本論文旨在重新檢視皮趣所宣稱哲學家維根斯坦及文學家卡洛爾的相似性，及其未經進一步論證即遽下的主張與結論。論文前半段探討維根斯坦分別透過早期邏輯思想與晚期語言遊戲思想的透鏡是如何看待哲學荒誕；在論文的後半段中，維氏晚期思想如佐以間接證據雖可設想卡洛爾對該時期維根斯坦的影響，但皮趣暗示晚期維氏轉向卡洛爾的說法卻顯明與其將該期維氏描繪成浴血奮戰的哲學戰士的形象相左，造成晚期維氏的哲學荒誕仍是曖昧不明。但如不計皮趣的匆忙主張（晚期維氏的卡洛爾轉向）與結論（維氏與卡洛爾看似相似，其實天差地別），維根斯坦在殺戮戰場上仍視荒誕為敵。我希望透過德勒茲幽默理論的媒介，重新省思卡洛爾荒誕幽默的正向價值。

關鍵詞：荒誕、幽默、維根斯坦、卡萊爾、德勒茲。
George Pitcher’s seminal article “Wittgenstein, Nonsense, and Lewis Carroll” in 1965 is an exceptional example of investigation among the scant researches so far undertaken to compare Ludwig Wittgenstein and Lewis Carroll. It is through the bond of nonsense of these two great writers that Pitcher juxtaposes Wittgenstein the philosopher and Carroll the literary writer point by point, whereas it is also interesting to see how Pitcher illustrates the remarkable extent and depth of the affinity between them—though the ways Wittgenstein and Carroll handle problems of nonsense arising from language are superficially different—in his page-after-page argument, only to bewilder us with the sudden conclusion that they may stand very close to one another, but they are worlds apart (250). Pitcher justifies his surprisingly drastic turn by asserting that these two writers’ radically different attitudes towards nonsense make all the difference. In spite of standing on much the same ground of nonsense, the same logical terrain, as Pitcher suggests, is a delighting literary playground for Carroll and a torturing philosophical battlefield for Wittgenstein because the former “turned his back on reality and led us happily into his (wonderful) world of myth and fantasy” while the latter, “being a philosopher, exerted all his efforts to drag us back to reality from the (horrible) world of myth and fantasy” (250). Whether it is positively or negatively received, nonsense, because of different attitudes taken towards it, cannot be the same as Pitcher claims.1 And it is debatable, though tempting, to simply see the realm beyond reality as where Wittgenstein’s nonsense is situated. If his philosophical nonsense is not conveniently topographical, then what is Wittgenstein’s kind of nonsense?

Early Wittgenstein in Tractatus thinks it is logic that determines language which has reality projected by sharing a logical form in common with it. As far as the world is concerned, Wittgenstein thinks “[t]he world is the totality of facts, not of things” (T 1.1), and through projection “[w]e picture facts to ourselves” (T 2.1).2 Using his picture theory of language to explain his ontology, we can say that a “picture is a model of reality” (T 2.12) because “[w]hat a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it . . . is its pictorial form” (T 2.17) that enables itself to be a picture of what it depicts. Also, a “picture is a fact” (T 2.141) and “[i]f a fact is to be a picture, it must have

1 In addition to Carroll’s literary nonsense and Wittgenstein’s philosophical nonsense, nonsense in Elizabeth Sewell’s Nonsense School of Criticism, and Gilles Deleuze’s sense and nonsense are also to be explored later.

2 The following abbreviations are used throughout this paper: PI, Philosophical Investigations; BB, The Blue and Brown Books; T, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, LS, The Logic of Sense.
something in common with what it depicts” （T 2.16）. In a word, something-in-common logical form enables the logical picture of facts to be a mirror-image of the world, and this logical picture of facts, as Wittgenstein defines, is a thought as well as a proposition with a sense （T 3, 4）. Wittgenstein’s breakthrough at this point lies in the fact that he pits his logical form against Frege and Russell’s logical object by proposing “his fundamental idea . . . that the ‘logical constants’ are not representatives; that there can be no representatives of the logic of facts” （T 4.0312），and “[a]ll theories that make a proposition of logic appear to have content are false” （T 6.111）。Wittgenstein’s view of logic reflects two of his beliefs. First of all, he thinks what fits objects into one another like the links of a chain in a state of affairs is logical form rather than logical object whose metaphysical generality pieces all propositions together. That is, his logic is structural without content. Secondly, he thinks “[l]ogic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world. Logic is transcendental” （T 6.13）。He believes that many philosophical confusions and errors arise when language in the context of everyday communication is extracted and abstracted to serve as metaphysical doctrines or theories.3 “What can be shown, cannot be said” （T 4.1212）; therefore, “[p]ropositions show the logical form of reality. They display it” （T 4.121）。The task of philosophy as Wittgenstein deems it should

[aim] at the logical clarification of thoughts. Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of lucidations. Philosophy does not result in ‘philosophical propositions’, but rather in the clarification of propositions. Without philosophy thoughts are . . . cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries.” （T 4.112）

In order to cease the philosophical confusions and errors, the best way to do philosophy is to undo it—that is, putting an end to theorizing. Wittgenstein’s practice of self-cannibalism is evident from the beginning to the end in the self-defeating Tractatus. In the preface, Wittgenstein explains,

3 This kind of philosophical misuse of propositions is mentioned again in Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations: “When philosophers use a word—‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’, ‘I’, ‘proposition’, ‘name’—and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home” （PI, Sec. 116）?
The whole sense of the book might be summed up in the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence. Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit . . . to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable. . . . It will therefore only be in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense.” (3) 

At the end of *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein concludes, “[m]y propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)” (T 6.54), and “[w]hat we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (T 7). What cannot be said? At the first glance, Wittgenstein seems to suggest to us that only facts in the world can be exempted from those things that cannot be spoken about—for example, all the things in the world (T 1.1) and all those things that are higher, transcendental like ethics and aesthetics (T 6.421). Nevertheless, the fact that the ladder-like propositions that have been climbed up only to be discarded after the climb is done are hushed into silence makes us come to realize that the facts in the world that we once mistook as realm within are actually outside the limit, too. That makes all the propositions in *Tractatus* meaningless. Why all the sweat for nothing? What else can be spoken? Is everything in the world hushed on the other side of limit—side of nonsense? From the viewpoint of eternity, Wittgenstein’s “mystical” is a feeling of the world as a limited whole (T 6.45), and there are indeed some mystical things “that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*” (T 6.522). To draw a limit, a sharp boundary in language is Wittgenstein’s method to distinguish sense from nonsense, sayable from unsayable. Hence, the nonsensical realm beyond limit includes higher, metaphysical, transcendental values of things in the world such as ethics, aesthetics, and also the totality of things and facts of which the world is fundamentally made up. However, Proposition 6.53 seems to indicate the assumption that all the facts in the world

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4 When references are given to propositions, the decimal numbers after *T* in parentheses indicate individual propositions at different levels of logical importance. Otherwise, the numbers in parentheses, when references are given to elsewhere (e.g. preface here), indicate regular page numbers.
are on the side of nonsense seems to be standing on a shaky ground. Also, it points out why Wittgenstein gives such sweat-for-nothing kind of lesson of philosophy. As far as the correct method in philosophy is concerned, Wittgenstein maintains that philosophy should really be saying “nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy,” or philosophy could as well be demonstrating one has failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions when expressing something metaphysical \( (T\, 6.53) \). Since “[p]hilosophy is not one of the natural sciences” where all the true propositions are \( (T\, 4.111) \), any propositions that are meant to be philosophical cause confusion and thus should be passed over and left on the side of nonsense. In other words, language can only speak about true propositions that serve as pictures of the facts that reflect the knowledge of natural sciences; contrariwise, nonsensical pseudo-propositions cannot be spoken about because nonsense, as Pitcher suggests, is “viewed as the major target for the philosopher’s destructive weapons” \( (229) \). To sum up, early Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* has two findings that are worth summarizing: first of all, nonsense is received negatively here; secondly, any sign of influence of Carroll’s literary nonsense upon early Wittgenstein cannot be possibly observed throughout *Tractatus*. Does the early Wittgenstein in *Tractatus* accord with the later Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* in terms of his attitude towards nonsense? Does Wittgenstein’s conception of nonsense take any Carrollian turn? One thing is certain here: if we say logic is so characteristic of early Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, the concept of language game apparently has eclipsed logic and taken its important place in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy.

Noticing that his scheme to undo philosophy constantly backfires—“taking it as a matter of course” mentality fosters the retrogression “from patent nonsense to something which is disguised nonsense” \( (PI, \text{Sec. } 524) \)—later Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* continues his battlefield fighting against philosophers’ nonsensical utterances by saying: “My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense” \( (PI, \text{Sec. } 464) \). Pitcher maintains that because disguised nonsense “has a surface air of plausibility and naturalness about it,” “has the

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5 Two kinds of parenthetical citations will be used when giving references to Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. If a citation source is from *PI*’s Part I, an abbreviated word “Sec.” and its section number will be put after the italicized book title *PI* with a comma set between—for example, \( (PI, \text{Sec. } 464) \). If the citation source is from *PI*’s Part II, a page number will be put after the italicized book title *PI* with a space set between—for example, \( (PI\, 217^c) \).
semblance of sense,” Wittgenstein wants to carry on the fight to reveal the “inherent absurdity” of hidden nonsense to make it manifest, and then “exorcize nonsense from philosophy” (230). Wittgenstein’s therapeutic fight against nonsense simply reverses the philosophical abstracting of ordinary words from their everyday contexts: “What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use” (PI, Sec.116). Meanwhile, Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations also undertakes a critique of his earlier thinking. Early Wittgenstein lays more emphasis on the essence of things when he refers to the general form of a proposition: “This is how things stand” (T 4.5). Later Wittgenstein turns to repudiate this fascinating picture theory of language that actually “held us captive” (PI, Sec. 115) because when “[o]ne thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing’s nature over and over again,” “one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it” (PI, Sec. 114). Another critique is delivered against his onetime core of early thought—logic. According to him, “the crystalline purity of logic was . . . not a result of investigation: it was a requirement,” and the ideal of a logically perfect language cannot tolerate vagueness, uncertainty and conflict so it requires us to get “on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal” (PI, Sec. 107).

Nevertheless, the finding of an ever sharper conflict between language that has been more narrowly examined and the now becoming-empty pure logic’s requirement makes it clear to us why we constantly fall and split our legs on this smooth, slippery, and frictionless surface. Wittgenstein explains, “just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground” (PI, Sec. 107)! He expects us not to be sloppy thinkers but to think on our own on this rough ground of ordinary language.

However, does Wittgenstein’s exorcising nonsense from philosophy, in Pitcher’s term, have anything to do with his new concept of language game? This can be dealt with at two levels—what is Wittgenstein’s language game and how does his language game relate to “nonsense” in discussion? In the course of Wittgenstein’s thinking evolution, we see a transition from picture theory to tool-box theory, from meaning to use. In his tool-box theory, Wittgenstein wants us to imagine language as a tool, an instrument: “Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, nails
and screws.—The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects” (PI, Sec. 11). His instrumentalist theory of language arises because “the uniform appearance of words” confuses him a lot and that their “application” is not very clear (PI, Sec. 11). Language is as complex as the world and any simple articulation of either incurs recurrent challenges. Wittgenstein sees our language as an ancient city: “a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods” (PI, Sec. 18). In this sense, our language is never enclosed within high walls of all-encompassing philosophical doctrines or theories, but is expanding its rhizomatic network every minute. In his definition of a language game, Wittgenstein asserts, “I shall . . . call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the ‘language-game’” (PI, Sec. 7). Wittgenstein’s language game as a tool box is an improvement upon his early analytic philosophy of logical atomism and analysis. In Tractatus, he holds that language can be broken down into smaller and smaller parts until a not-further-analyzable object that can be named is found, and that a logical generality of language is the logical form that is structural without content and determines an object’s possible occurring in states of affairs. His early thought still stays at the phase of naming, but “naming and describing do not stand on the same level: naming is a preparation for description. Naming is so far not a move in the language-game—any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess” (PI, Sec. 49). Wittgenstein needs a move in our language as a move on a chessboard, and a move in his “language game” means getting to see its application, action and description. He suggests that a new sense of the word “meaning” “can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (PI, Sec. 43). However, it is still not very clear to us why Wittgenstein explains language with his new concept of “game” even with the knowledge that “use” plays such a central role in his discussion of language. In Robert E. Gahringer’s article, “Can Games Explain Language?” he proposes in 1959 that the new way of philosophizing focuses no longer on the fruitless discussion of the ontological status of meanings but “has settled for the fact that a language is an ‘activity’ simply there to be understood rather than reduced to something else, that this activity is defined by rules of some sort in some sense determined in the activity itself, and that this activity is to be understood in its connection with human life (‘a form of life’)” (661). In Gahringer’s opinion, the idea of game, as Wittgenstein applies in Philosophical Investigations, serves not only as a form of language but as a form of life.
With regard to the analogy of language and game, Gahringer states, “Games . . . are activities, existing only through the agency of rules which define the nature of the activity” (662). Also, he suggests, “a game in play is a kind of community, and as such is an occasion of a communication between players” (663). From his argument, we can understand that a communication between players in a community explains why language as a game is “a form of life.” Gahringer’s view that language is similar to game in rules is also shared by Christopher Cherry and Leila S. May. In the 1975 article “Games and Language,” Cherry holds the doctrine that “language-using and games-playing share the common feature of being rule-governed activities” (532). In the 2007 article “Wittgenstein’s Reflection in Lewis Carroll’s Looking-Glass,” May thinks Wittgenstein’s epigram, “a language as a form of life,” stresses the social nature of linguistic activity: “A language-game, then, is not simply a linguistic artifact; it is a set of rule-governed social practices” (82). Thus, it is understandable to see later Wittgenstein discusses language with his new concept of game because “language using” resembles “game playing” in that they are both rule-governed activities, and, based on that, linguistic activities of a language game are further comparable to rule-governed social practices of human life in that their common social nature, whether of language or of life, exists in the form of community where communication between players takes place. A move on a chessboard, in language or in life, counts on its rule-governed use, and this understanding builds up to Wittgenstein’s famous assertion: “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (PI, Sec. 19).

Is the new concept of language game a more destructive weapon that can expel nonsense from philosophy? As far as the hidden nonsense is concerned, Wittgenstein protests, “[i]f one tried to advance theses in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them” (PI, Sec. 128). Hence, through his philosophical investigations, he crashes into hidden nonsense and uncovers “bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language” (PI, Sec. 119). To him, these bumps make him see the value of the discovery: “When I talk about language . . . I must speak the language of every day” (PI, Sec. 119-20). The plausible disguised nonsense is exactly what Wittgenstein wants to reveal because it is nonsensical that theories coming from confusion find their royal way to genuine philosophical theses that are totally unquestionable. To bring words back to their everyday use, Wittgenstein has a unique therapy that cures us of the metaphysical puzzlement. Pitcher maintains that later
Wittgenstein uses nonsense

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. (230)

The harmless-looking disguised nonsense is Wittgenstein’s target, but he does not hurry to discard it because that way its surface stays plausible and natural. Instead, he gives us the vaccination against disguised nonsense by examining it carefully with his new concept of language game: “one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home” (PI, Sec. 116)? In doing so, the consequences of the hidden nonsense come out not as we expect, and thus its inherent absurdity turns manifest.

A comparative study of Wittgenstein’s early and later thoughts shows some continuities and discontinuities between his two phases. In terms of discontinuities, early Wittgenstein uses logical clarification of thoughts to give a sharp boundary between sense (knowledge of natural sciences) and nonsense (any propositions that purport to be philosophical), whereas later Wittgenstein uses language game to examine whether a word is used in its original home, so that any nonsensical misuse of everyday language for metaphysical use can be rectified. In the light of continuities, Pitcher suggests, “Wittgenstein is still as concerned as ever to exorcize nonsense from philosophy” (230). That is, nonsense is still received as negatively as ever, and later Wittgenstein picks up his new destructive weapon (language game) in place of the old one (logic) to continue his battlefield fighting against nonsense. From the comparison of Wittgenstein’s early and later thoughts, I shall not be able to draw the conclusion that “language game” must be a more destructive concept weapon than “logic”; however, I shall be able to say that if logic continues to play a central role in later Wittgenstein’s thought, its “craving for generality” will definitely put shackles on his further philosophical investigations and it is not likely for him to continue the fight against nonsense. Thus, his fight against nonsense can be compared to a fight against craving for generality.

Early Wittgenstein’s logical view of ontology indicates a fixed link between language and reality, and often looks beneath the surface of language for an underlying structure of
language. This kind of thought contributes to his craving for generality which determines how he looks at word-thing relationship and word-word relationship—either can cause philosophical confusions and puzzlement. Wittgenstein’s therapeutic self-reflection begins with the question in The Blue and Brown Books: “What is the meaning of word” (1)? His critique of craving for generality attempts to cure not only himself but us of the liable mistake: “We are looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an object co-existing with the sign... looking for a ‘thing corresponding to a substantive’” (5). His begins his attack on his early belief in a fundamental name-object relationship by implying that ostensive definition can be misunderstood and by suggesting that ostensive definition is made possible by training, not by explanation (BB 1; PI, Sec. 5). On the other hand, he expands his critique of craving for generality to word-word relationship based on analogy, points it out as another liable mistake: “When words in our ordinary language have prima facie analogous grammars we are inclined to try to interpret them analogously; i.e. we try to make the analogy hold throughout” (BB 7). In response to misleading analogies, he presents a grammatical investigation to examine the semblance of two words or phrases on the basis of grammatical similarities: “Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language” (PI, Sec. 90). Philosophical problems, confusions, and errors arise because of misuse of everyday language when naming brings out the relation between name and thing in ostensive definition, or when a particular example is hastened into a general conclusion. This linguistic engine runs in neutral gear when picture theory of language or ostensive definition is working, when higher, transcendent, metaphysical use of ordinary language is underway, and when “a craving for generality” is unstoppable. This understanding causes Wittgenstein to say, “philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday” (PI, Sec. 38). His therapeutic self-reflection thus can be concluded that language is not fixed by fundamental laws; instead, its true meaning hinges on how it can be used in language games. In terms of language games, it is surmisable that St. Augustine’s ostensive definition asks for what they have in common while Wittgenstein sets his eyes on their multiplicity (PI, Sec. 23-4). Language games are used by later Wittgenstein as a tool

7 More discussions of “craving for generality” can be found in Wittgenstein’s The Blue and Brown Books: pp 17-8, 27, 55.
for counteracting craving for generality. His fierce attack on ostensive definition invalidates his early logical atomism, so that one of two liable mistakes—fixed word-thing relationship—is cleared away. Still, misleading analogies remain in sight. In Pitcher’s opinion, one of many theses lying at the heart of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy is that, “much of the nonsense and puzzlement to be found in philosophy is the direct result of one fundamental kind of mistake—namely, that of wrongly treating a word or phrase as having exactly the same kind of function as another word or phrase, solely on the basis of the fact that they exhibit superficial grammatical similarities” (245). The second liable mistake—misleading analogies caused by grammatical similarities—is the target for later Wittgenstein’s grammatical investigations. However, Pitcher observes, “the very same confusions with which Wittgenstein charges philosophers were deliberately employed by Carroll for comic effect” since “Carroll’s wit lies precisely in his prodigious ability to exploit this particular human frailty” (231, 246). Wittgenstein’s ladders or bumps imply that he is the type of philosopher who has to become a helpless victim of vaccine-like or madness-like nonsense first before he can recover from his illness. What is the result of later Wittgenstein’s self-cure of insanity? Does the philosopher’s mind suffer from an Alice’s mad world internalized or does his conception of nonsense take any Carrollian turn (Pitcher 250)? Are Carroll and Wittgenstein standing “close to one another” or “worlds apart” (Pitcher 250)?

I wonder if later Wittgenstein feel otherwise about language’s going on holiday especially when he seems, as Pitcher implies in footnote five, to be influenced by Carroll’s literary nonsense at this point of his life, and when a couple of direct and indirect examples of Carroll’s influence throughout Philosophical Investigations can be identified. In addition to misuse of everyday language for metaphysical use, is it possible to explain Wittgenstein’s language going on holiday as a possible world merely different from ours—his thought taking a Carrollian turn? On the ground of several reasons, Pitcher believes conservatively but firmly that “Carroll exerted a profound influence on the later Wittgenstein” (230). First of all, “it is known with certainty that Wittgenstein did read and admire Carroll” because anyone living in England, particularly in Cambridge during Wittgenstein’s time, “could not fail to have read Lewis Carroll” (230). Secondly, three significant “friends of Wittgenstein . . . have kindly provided me with the information about his acquaintance with the works of Carroll” (231). Last, it is reported that Wittgenstein not only read some of
Carroll’s works, but “used to cite, as a good grammatical joke, the Mock Turtle’s remark ‘We called him Tortoise because he taught us’” (231). All of the three facts above support the view that later Wittgenstein must have read Carroll’s works at this point of life, and this point of view can be further illustrated by citing three or more examples from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* as textual evidence of Carroll’s influence upon later Wittgenstein. For example, direct citation of Lewis Carroll’s name can be demonstrated in Section 13 and Page 198. In the former example, Wittgenstein states that words of language can be distinguished from words without meaning like those found in Lewis Carroll’s poems. In the latter, other than a direct citation of Carroll’s name, his reverse mirror image is appealed to in order to explain a picture turned around—upside down or inside out—, though a most exact representation, may not be recognizable. Besides, Wittgenstein’s “Pleasure” resembles Alice’s middle name “Pleasance.” A most quoted but indirect example of Carroll’s nonsense poem is in Section 282 in which Wittgenstein argues, “‘But a fairy tale only invents what is not the case: it does not talk nonsense.’—It is not as simple as that. Is it false or nonsensical to say that a pot talks. . . . Even a nonsense-poem is not nonsense in the same way as the babbling of a child” (*PI*, Sec. 282). In this sense, it is implied that “nonsense” in a nonsense-poem, similar to the babbling of a child, speaks its own unique sense. From Section 13 to Section 282, it is a transition from “words without meaning” to “nonsense speaks its unique sense” in Carroll’s nonsense poems. Nonsense is what Wittgenstein calls “a grammatical joke” right at the depth of philosophy: “Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be deep” (*PI*, Sec. 111)? Though “[p]hilosophy,” implied by Wittgenstein, “is a fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert upon us” (*BB* 27), the second liable mistake—misleading analogy due to grammatical similarities—turns into a wonder. If early Wittgenstein’s “logic should go beyond the limits of the world,” later Wittgenstein’s language games, needless to say, should cross them to “view those limits from the other side as well” (*T* 5.61). If any true value of Carroll’s nonsense is there on the other side, all Wittgenstein needs is Carroll’s looking-glass: “Why, it’s a Looking-glass book, of course!

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8 Lewis Carroll arranges an acrostic at the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*. One is advised to read the initial letters of each line downward to spell Alice Pleasance Liddell. Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland, Through the Looking-Glass, and The Hunting of the Snark: Backgrounds and Essays in Criticism*, ed. Donald J. Gray, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1992) 209.
And, if I hold it up to a glass, the words will all go the right way again” (116). Leila S. May poses a question concerning the logical or social possibility of such insane worlds humorously depicted in Carroll’s books: “Isn’t Wittgenstein bound to declare that here language has gone on permanent, irrevocable holiday, and that the Cheshire Cat is indeed correct in his declaration, ‘we’re all mad here’” (84)? Is Carroll’s Wonderland a site of insanity or a possible world that is merely different from ours? In response, May raises two examples from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* to explain a possible presence of an alternative form of life. In Section 185, Wittgenstein challenges our imagination by giving the example of “odd” method of adding to show the pupil’s alternative form of counting a series beyond 1,000. Instead of counting 1000-1002-1004-1006, he writes a different series 1000-1004-1008-1012. May asks us: “Can we imagine a culture in which this person’s apparently very odd method of adding would be the natural one” (85)? Similarly, is it possible for us to “naturally” react to “the gesture of pointing with the hand [\(\bigstar\)] by looking in the direction of the line from finger-tip to wrist, not from wrist to finger-tip” (PI, Sec. 185)? When things are getting “curiouser and curiouser” for Alice, it seems to her that above-ground rules are broken and nonsense happens. When Alice rejects the idea that a garden is a wilderness and a hill is a valley, the Red Queen replies, “You may call it ‘nonsense’ if you like . . . but I’ve heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary” (125). In her interpretation of Wittgenstein’s “language goes on holiday,” May thinks Wittgenstein is actually suggesting: “the rules have not been broken; rather, they have been understood differently by players from somewhat different language-games” (85). Thus, from the overall argument about Wittgenstein’s use of the word “nonsense,” we find two kinds of “nonsense” in *Philosophical Investigations*—either it is nonsensical misuse of everyday language for higher, metaphysical use, or it is nonsense in Carroll’s books that invents what is not nonsense. On the side of nonsense, Wittgenstein seems to open a door to the affirmative power of Carroll’s nonsense humor; however, there is a crowd already inside who can really appreciate Carroll’s deep grammatical jokes.

Carroll’s literary nonsense in 1930s is gaining its momentum when Walter de la Mare publishes *Lewis Carroll* in 1932. His comments on Carroll’s two *Alices* are in many ways a manifesto made to pave the way for the Nonsense School of Carroll scholarship. In his

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9 Ibid.
10 Walter de la Mare’s “On the Alice Books” in *Aspects of Alice* is extracted from his *Lewis Carroll* published in 1932. The subsequent discussion and quotations are drawn from his “On the Alice Books.”
“On the Alice Books,” Mare echoes other Carroll scholars that serious academic attention should have given Carroll’s seemingly light literature its due credit, and bemoans against the ignorance of Carroll’s “ingenious design” in his deep-running literature: “the genius in Carroll seems to have worked more subtly than the mind which it was possessed by realized” (58). Mare’s critical contribution lies in his capture of the queerly paradoxical and nonsensical element in Carroll’s literature that has been scarcely noticed. What interests Mare is the opposite of pure nonsense. In his Alice stories, Carroll plays joke on Duchess’s moral “Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it” (70). He removes Duchess’s ugly, uncomfortably sharp chin of all-encompassing moral from Alice’s shoulder by his nonsense humor that makes a “garden” “wilderness” and a “hill” “valley,” and also prepares no solution to a riddle and no meaning to a name, for he doesn’t think Duchess’s moral teaches a thing. Two things can be summarized about Carroll’s literary nonsense: first of all, it speaks some sense though under the guise of nonsense; secondly, it is as elusive as a lovely, beyond-reach dream-rush in the old Sheep’s magic store. Mare famously defines Carroll’s elusive nonsense as “the sober-sided order of nonsense” (60). In his 1959 article, “A Burble through the Tulgey Wood,” John Ciardi provides a similar view on Carroll’s nonsensical word-hunting game. He raises examples from Carroll’s nonsense poem “Jabberwocky” and argues “the long way round” is characteristic of the “second sort of performance” which “involves a great deal of ‘sense’” (260). That is, in his opinion, “non-sense,” the first performance, is without any sense while “nonsense,” the second sort, still has a great deal of sense. Both Walter de la Mare and John Ciardi find in Carroll’s elusive nonsense something other than non-sense and thus a second genus is respectively introduced in their different terms: Mare’s “sober-sided order of nonsense” and Ciardi’s “second performance of nonsense.” Therefore, it makes sense to say that Ciardi’s “non-sense” is similar to Mare’s “drunken-sided” order of nonsense in their pure nonsense. From the 1960s on, nonsense literature begins its full blossom thanks to Elizabeth Sewell’s critical contribution to Carroll’s literary nonsense, and other scholars’ critiques of her 1952 book The Field of Nonsense.11 As Donald J. Gray notes, “Sewell considers,” in her “The

11 Unfortunately, Elizabeth Sewell’s The Field of Nonsense is not available, but her “The Balance of Brillig” in Donald Gray’s Norton Critical Edition, 2nd Ed. is partly reprinted from The Field of Nonsense (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd., 1952) 116-29. To make up, I draw upon Sewell’s “Lewis Carroll and T. S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets,” “The Balance of Brillig,” and Kathleen Blake’s Play, Games and Sport: The Literary Works of Lewis Carroll and Richard Kelly’s Lewis Carroll to enhance.
Balance of Brillig,” “how nonsense uses language so that words and syntax maintain a balance between a disorder of discrete objects entirely without relation to one another . . .” (380). In the critique of Sewell’s *The Field of Nonsense*, Kathleen Blake suggests, “Her thesis is that nonsense is founded on the dichotomy between play and dream, the forces of order and disorder in the mind” (64). To sum up Gray and Blake’s words, Sewell’s nonsense keeps a fine balance on the tightrope of language, and the acrobat, as Sewell suggests in “The Balance of Brillig,” is exactly Carroll’s Humpty Dumpty sitting on the top of a high, narrow wall (384). Sewell’s world of nonsense is a universe made of purely words, “a closed and consistent system on its own,” “a strict self referential framework” (Kelly 49-50). Sewell’s nonsense in language, with “a fear of nothingness” as well as a “fear of everythingness” in mind, is also “a game with words” “where ultimately words fail completely” (Sewell, “Balance” 384, 387-8). In her “Lewis Carroll and T. S. Eliot as Nonsense Poets,” Sewell agrees with Chesterton on his insightful announcement in 1904 about nonsense as the literature of the future, and firmly believes that “most of our philosophy is shaped on Nonsense principles” (119). Further, she asserts “[a]ll tendencies towards synthesis are taboo. . . . Whatever is unitive is the great enemy of Nonsense, to be excluded at all costs”; therefore, a Nonsense poet “faces a constant paradox of self-denial” (120).

In spite of the fact that many Carroll scholars can find in his deep grammatical jokes something profound to tell, few can give as insightful a discussion as Gilles Deleuze in his *Logic of Sense* in terms of the affirmative power of Carroll’s nonsense humor. Deleuze’s relation of sense and nonsense is not of order-disorder dialect, following the law of negation. On the contrary, they “have a specific relation which can not copy that of the true and the false, that is, which can not be conceived simply on the basis of a relation of

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13 For the source of the quote, please refer to footnote 14 in Kathleen Blake, *Play, Games, and Sport: The Literary Works of Lewis Carroll* (London: Cornell UP, 1974) 64. Significantly, Blake also mentions in the same note her own objections against Sewell’s view on nonsense: “her claim that nonsense is in the verse, not the prose; her insistence that it must exclude reference to reality . . . her dissociation of play and the aesthetic and play and dream . . .” (64).
exclusion. . . [Deleuze’s] logic of sense is necessarily determined to posit between sense and nonsense an original type of intrinsic relation, a mode of co-presence” (LS 68). And this co-presence of sense and nonsense, as Deleuze concludes his Series 19, is humor. “Deleuze’s argument,” James Williams suggests, “is that some things can only be learnt with humour because they are resistant to rational demonstration and to forms of propositional understanding” (17).14 When an unanswerable question is asked, Carroll’s kind of comic humor is applied. In Deleuze’s instances, in response to Plato’s definition of man as “a biped and featherless animal,” Diogenes the Cynic brings forth a “plucked fowl” (LS 135). While Plato is, in Deleuze’s words, ascending to attain the Essences, Diogenes is busy with giving examples in his descent. Humor is an art of descending, a form more capable of thinking events than Socratic irony, Platonic ascent. What matters is to act quickly with high speed: “The important thing is to do it quickly: to find quickly something to designate, to eat, or to break, which would replace the signification (the Idea) that you have been invited to look for. All the faster and better since there is no resemblance (nor should there be one) between what one points out and what one has been asked” (LS 135).15 Comic humor is contrasted with tragic irony throughout the humor’s adventure from heights to depths, and then back to the surface—a transition from irony to humor. The adventure of humor starts with a fall from the heights “[w]hen significations hurl us into pure denotations, which replace and negate them” until “we are faced with the absurd as that which is without signification” (LS 135). The journey then continues with a plunge into depths “when denotations in turn precipitate us into the destructive and digestive ground” until “we are faced with the non-sense of the depths” (LS 135-6). Nevertheless, this expedition of language is not complete if we are not led back to the surface. It is a surface of Stoic sage, the void, the Aion in which objects-events are developed without ever filling it up. The event is the empty form, straight line with both directions at once—“never

14 James Williams, Gilles Deleuze’s Logic of Sense: A Critical Introduction and Guide (Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2008). While citing from Williams’s text, I keep his spelling of “humour” as it is. However, I prefer to spell it “humor” in my argument and in any citation from Deleuze’s Logic of Sense.

15 This echoes Red Queen’s “fast sort of country”—an example of Carroll’s comical but nonsensical scenario. Alice is asked to run “faster and faster” to keep up with the Red Queen. The rule is: “it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that” (126-7)!
present, but always already in the past and yet to come” (LS 136). It is a return back to the
surface of nonsense, pure events and singularities, a not-to-be-attained site which is
independent of spatio-temporal actualization, free from all individuals and persons. It is a
place where there is no more denotation or signification, where pure sense is produced.
“Across the abolished significations and the lost denotations, the void is the site of sense or
of the event which harmonizes with its own nonsense. . . . The void is itself the paradoxical
element, the surface nonsense, or the always displaced aleatory point whence the event
bursts forth as sense” (LS 137).

The tragic nature of philosophical irony—be it classical irony (individuals) or
romantic irony (persons, “I”)—is in its illusory promise of freedom with destined shackles
when faced with the question “Who speaks?” As a classical response, “[c]lassical irony acts
as the instance which assures the coextensiveness of being and of the individual within the
world of representation” (LS 138). Made possible by the universality of the Idea and
model of a pure rational language, Socratic irony operates by having “individual” as the
speaker, and then by transcending the derived individual which God created (sensible
particularity) toward a supremely individuated God (the universal form, Idea). As a
romantic response, “[r]omantic irony determines the one who speaks as the person and no
longer as the individual. . . . It is defined by the coextensiveness of the I and representation”
(LS 138). “What all the figures of irony have in common,” according to Deleuze, “is that
they confine the singularity within the limits of the individual or the person “ (LS 139; sic).
In Williams’s words, irony may stand side by side with humor in their critique of
reason, but its deficiency of the fully affirmative power of humor often puts itself in the
danger of nihilistic cynicism because the ironist closes down new possibilities while
negating old ones, whereas humor remains open to them by refusing to separate sense from
nonsense. Irony displaces once, but humor performs ongoing and multiple displacements
(18). The faceless, rumbling Ground, Dionysus, speaks esoteric language with “a two-fold
power—that of shattered phonetic elements and that of non-articulated tonic values. The
first of these threatens and overturns classical discourse from within; the second threatens
and overturns Romantic discourse” (LS 140). It is the ground of nonsense that dissolves
both individuals and persons, saving us from a fall into an undifferentiated ground and
groundless depth, setting free the singularities of the surface. A fully affirmative power of
humor, a nomadic comedian is thus introduced by Deleuze:
The tragic and the ironic give way to a new value, that of humor. For if irony is the co-extensiveness of being with the individual, or of the I with representation, humor is the co-extensiveness of sense with nonsense. Humor is the art of the surfaces and of the doubles, of nomad singularities and of the always displaced aleatory point. (LS 141)

Through Pitcher’s splendid parallels between Carroll’s and Wittgenstein’s treatments of nonsense, we are led to believe these two great writers, in literature and philosophy, are standing very close to each other, only to be surprised by Pitcher’s unexpected “worlds apart” conclusion. He first endorses the idea that later Wittgenstein’s conception of nonsense took a Carrollian turn, but then maintains that the same confusions caused by grammatical jokes with which Wittgenstein charges philosophers on his battlefield are employed by Carroll for comic effect on his playground. In my opinion, Pitcher’s conclusion that their fundamentally different attitudes toward nonsense make the same logical terrain a playground for Carroll, a battlefield for Wittgenstein should be treated with more caution because that way he is implying Wittgenstein’s “language goes on holiday” is precisely a grave concern about the misuse of everyday language for metaphysical use only, nothing else. This study has indicated that Pitcher’s hasty conclusion might not be as valid as he thought, and points to new possibilities for future research on whether Carroll’s nonsense humor has exerted a profound influence upon later Wittgenstein in an affirmative way.

**Works Cited**


