Carrolludicity

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As we are in Wales, you will, I trust, have given the double *l* its appropriate pronunciation. It is the kind of language play which I imagine Carroll would have approved of. And that is what this preprandial contribution is all about: language play - the ludic function of language. Ludic linguistics, if you will. My brief from David Skilton, as specified in his letter of invitation, is to 'excite them (= you) intellectually and put them in a good mood for dinner'. I doubt whether I can do the first, given the amount of intellectual excitement you have received already, but language play, as a topic, is guaranteed to do the second.

Let me begin with a brief definition, which I shall comment on later. We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment, either for ourselves or for the benefit of others. I mean 'manipulate' literally: we take some linguistic feature, such as a word, a phrase, a sentence, a part of a word, a group of sounds, a series of letters - any of the conventionally recognized levels of language structure, in short - and make it do things it does not normally do. We are, in effect, as Robert Graves once put it, bending and breaking the rules of the language. And if someone were to ask why we do it, the answer is simply: for fun.

Carroll lived in an era which was unprecedented - and since unparalleled - for its interest in language play. As is well known, he contributed greatly to the genre himself - inventing manipulative language games from early on in his teens. I don't know of a systematic historical study of language play in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, though there are several relevant observations in Augarde (1984), but all the evidence suggests that it was widespread, diverse, and classless. Auditory games involving play with word sequences, word lists, rhyming, and riddles were commonplace in the dimly lit evenings; and, in those homes where there was literacy, supported by adequate lighting, there would be an even greater variety of games based on the written language. Classless? At one extreme, we know that the royal family were avid practitioners of language games: their interest in riddles, acrostics (especially double acrostics), and anagrams helped fuel national fashions. 'Her Majesty takes delight in a clever riddle or rebus ...', it was reported in *The Private Life of the Queen* (1897), quoted in Augarde (1984: 13). Large numbers of the middle classes joined local clubs and societies, and entered local and national competitions, often promoted vigorously by newspapers and advertisers. And at the working-class end of the scale, the first part of the 19th century saw a massive growth in Cockney rhyming slang (Partridge, 1933/1970: 273-4).

It is easy to underestimate the enthusiasm, the obsession, with language play by the turn of the century. Books of parlour games sold in their tens of thousands. Popular magazines contained regular puzzle pages and competitions. Especially popular were word squares, chronograms, palindromes, games involving taboo letters, and games in which words were hidden within other words. Here are two examples in more detail: limericks and crossword-puzzles. Limericks have had a mixed press, over the years, largely because of their risqué content. George Bernard Shaw was one who poured scorn on them; on the other hand, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was happy to try his hand at them, lampooning his friends into the bargain. Limericks were originally songs, popular at gatherings in early 19th-century Ireland, in which the exploits of imaginary people from different Irish towns were retold, with each line contributed by a different singer - the sort of thing you might find in a modern radio or TV improvisation show, such as the BBC's 'I'm Sorry, I Haven't a Clue'. At the end, everyone sang a chorus beginning with the line, 'Will you come up to Limerick?' The genre was given some degree of prestige when Edward Lear published several in his *Book of Nonsense* (1846),

though many of his limericks would now be considered rather poor examples, for often the end of the last line simply imitates the first.

> There was a young girl of Majorca
> Whose aunt was a very fast walker,
> > She walked sixty miles
> > And leaped fifteen stiles,
> Which astonished that girl of Majorca.

During Carroll's lifetime, the limerick became extremely popular, though he died before the great limerick craze of 1907-8, when there were competitions in *London Opinion* and elsewhere, with huge prizes: the first four lines of the limerick were given, and the punter had to compose a winning last line. There were soon 'limerick professors' advertising in the trade press, who (for a small fee) would provide you with a last line guaranteed to win. So popular were these competitions that a speech made to the House of Commons in 1908 during the Post Office vote reported that the purchase of sixpenny postal orders (which happened to be the entrance fee for a limerick competition) had increased fourteenfold during the first half of the year, from around 800,000 to over 11 million. Nearly 6 million were sold in the month of August alone. And the craze was also fed by the advertisers, who set up competitions where the 'last line' had to extol the product. The first prize in the first major commercial competition of that time - for a brand of cigarettes - was an assured income of £3 a week for life! There was no entry fee, but competitors had to enclose a coupon proving they had bought half-a-crown's worth of the cigarettes.

Crossword-puzzles had a similar history. The puzzle was devised by a US journalist, a Liverpudlian emigré called Arthur Wynne, who was trying to think up something new for the puzzle page of the 1913 Christmas edition of the New York Sunday newspaper, *World*. Beginning with the idea of a word square, he hit on the idea of making the words across different from the words down, and slotted them into a diamond-shaped grid, calling it a 'word-cross'. The new game was an immediate success. A month later, he changed the name to a 'cross-word', and - much later - the hyphen was dropped. The grid gradually standardized into a square, though there have always been many variants, including diamonds, crosses, hexagons, and all kinds of 'real world' shapes. For over a decade the *World* was the only newspaper using crosswords, then things changed following the totally unexpected success of the first crossword book in 1924 - a compilation of 50 of the paper's best puzzles published by the Plaza Publishing Company (alias Simon and Schuster, who adopted the pseudonym because they were fearful that their newly launched publishing house would be harmed if it took on a flop). Other volumes followed, and sales soon reached over half a million. Crosswords became a national craze in the USA, an obligatory piece of travellers' luggage (especially across the Atlantic), the subject of many national tournaments and - as US humorist Gelett Burgess commented in a newspaper of the time - of many domestic trials:

> The fans they chew their pencils,
> The fans they beat their wives.
> They look up words for extinct birds -
> They lead such puzzling lives!

There were crossword costumes on sale in the fashion shops; crosswords were brought in to fuel missionary campaigns in churches; doctors expressed their anxiety over the eye-strain being caused by excessive solving. The craze reached Britain by the end of the year, with Queen Mary and the Prime Minister both among the early enthusiasts. All kinds of organizations suddenly found themselves involved - acting as potential sources of information when solvers could not find an answer using conventional dictionaries and thesauruses. At one point, it is reported, the officials at London Zoo had to make an announcement refusing to answer any more telephone enquiries about the gnu, the emu, or any other 3-letter creature.

A rather more intellectual 19th-century linguistic pastime was alphabet play - a genre which has recently been stretched to its mathematical limits by Ross Eckler (1996). Here individuals would impose constraints of increasing severity on their ability to express themselves using the letters of the

alphabet. Some would deny themselves the use of a particular letter (a *lipogram*) - *e* or *t* were favourites, as they were the most frequent (according to Samuel Morse). Others would try to put every letter into a 26-letter sentence (a *pangram*). Others would restrict themselves to the use of a single vowel (a *univocalic*). The Victorian wordsmith, C.C. Bombaugh, became well known for his variations on the latter theme. In his book *Gleanings for the Curious* (1890), he has a series called 'Incontrovertible Facts', in which he produces a univocalic for every vowel. My favourite is *O*, with line 7 surely getting the prize for univocalic poetry, and the whole thing the prize for linguistic surrealism. All words - proper names aside - are in the *OED*.

> No monk too good to rob, or cog, or plot.
> No fool so gross to bolt Scotch collops hot.
> From Donjon tops no Oronoco rolls.
> Logwood, not Lotos, floods Oporto's bowls.
> Troops of old tosspots, oft, to sot, consort.
> Box tops, not bottoms, school-boys flog for sport.
> No cool monsoons blow soft on Oxford dons,
> Orthodox, jog-trot, book-worm Solomons!
> Bold Ostrogoths, of ghosts no horror show.
> On London shop-fronts no hop-blossoms grow.
> To crocks of gold no dodo looks for food.
> On soft cloth footstools no old fox doth brood.
> Long storm-tost sloops forlorn, work on to no port.
> Rooks do not roost on spoons, nor woodcocks snort,
> Nor dog on snowdrop or on coltsfoot rolls,
> Nor common frogs concoct long protocols.

Carroll himself was swept along by this tide. Or, perhaps I should say, he was one of the major currents in swelling the tide. Enigmas, charades, rebuses ... he tried them all. He was famous for some of his anagrams of personal names, in the 19th-century manner of making the anagram appropriate to the personality, offering them to newspapers - for example, his Florence Nightingale, 'Flit on, cheering angel'. He loved palindromes, putting one into *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*:

> Sylvie was arranging some letters on a board - E-V-I-L. 'Now Bruno,' she said, 'what does *that* spell?'
> Bruno looked at it, in solemn silence, for a minute. 'I know what it *doesn't* spell!' he said at last.
> 'That's no good,' said Sylvie. 'What *does* it spell?' Bruno took another look at the mysterious letters, 'Why, it's "LIVE", backwards!' he exclaimed. ...
> 'How did you manage to see that?' said Sylvie.
> 'I just twiddled my eyes,' said Bruno, 'and then I saw it directly.'

And he had an uncanny habit of anticipating modern games. Probably the most famous instance is the one which he described in 1895, in a letter to a friend (Augarde, 1984: 70):

> If ever you want a *light* mental recreation, try the '30 letter' puzzle. ... Take 4 or 5 complete alphabets. Put the vowels into one bag, the consonants into another. Shake up. Draw 9 vowels and 21 consonants. With these you must make 6 real words (excluding proper names) so as to use up *all* the letters. If *two* people want to do it, then after drawing a set of 30, pick out a set of duplicates for the other player. Sit where you cannot see one another's work, and make it a *race*.

My wife and her mother played a game very much like this all over last Christmas. It was called *Scrabble*.

Talking about *Scrabble*: if there was ever the need for evidence of the universality of language play, that is it. *Scrabble* is now thought to be the most widely played board game in the world, available in many languages, with a formal competitive dimension, a world championship, and associated books of commentary, all in the manner of chess. And it illustrates very well the bizarre nature of what we are doing when we play language games. In *Scrabble*, someone has given us a physical limit (a grid

on a board), assigned numerical values to letters (based on their intuitions of the frequency with which the letters turn up in the language), and then forced us to hunt out and use the most obscure (because highly scoring) words in the language. Now this is not rational linguistic behaviour. Words don't normally 'score' anything. We do not listen to a sentence, then hold up score cards to reflect its complexity, as in an ice-skating competition - even though some psycholinguists think that something like this is precisely what goes on when we process a sentence! Moreover, in *Scrabble* it is not even necessary to know what the words mean: all we need to know is that they exist. There are many publications which list all the words in English consisting of two letters, of three letters, and so on, or those which are most useful because they are highest scoring (such as *xebec*, *qaid*, and *hajj*). None of them say what the words mean. If challenged, we look them up in a dictionary. In a market survey of dictionary use a few years ago, most people said they used their dictionaries most often when they were playing *Scrabble*.

Carroll's ludic preferences and innovations of course go well beyond the playing of traditional word games and the invention of new ones. They encompass all of the levels of language referred to in my earlier definition of language play - and actually go well beyond them. Here are a few examples of each category.

Sound-based play
Carroll repeatedly goes in for sound-symbolic play - coining words for their phonetic resonance, as in the *Jabberwocky* saga, and inventing names which suit their meanings. It was an entirely conscious art, as he comments in the Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*: 'May I take this opportunity of calling attention to what I flatter myself was a successful piece of name-coining ...Does not the name 'Sibimet' fairly embody the character of the Sub-Warden?'

Typographical play
Closely related to this is his use of typographical play. He uses it to illustrate a voice, as when the small voice of the gnat is presented in tiny type (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 3). He uses it to represent the shape of an object, such as the Mouse's 'long sad tale', printed as a long tail, in progressively smaller type-size (*Wonderland*, Ch. 3). More bizarre forms include the reverse printing which Alice encounters when she first sees *Jabberwocky*.

Letter-based play
Manipulating the letters of the alphabet was one of his favourite pastimes. In the famous game of *doublets*, his own invention, one word is changed into another in a series of steps, each intervening word differing from its neighbours by only one letter. The challenge is both to form the chain of linked words, and to do so in as few steps as possible. One of Carroll's first examples was 'drive PIG into STY': PIG - WIG - WAG - WAY - SAY - STY. The game proved so popular that it became a weekly competition in the magazine *Vanity Fair* (1879). *Syzygies* is a related game, where one word is changed into another in a series of steps, but this time with each intervening word having several letters in common with the preceding word. 'Link MAN to ICE' - via PERMANENT and ENTICE. And in *mischmasch*, one player proposes a nucleus for a word, and the other player tries to find a word which will include it (e.g. *gp* in *magpie*).

His creative writing provides many examples of letter-play. He often used acrostics, as in the poem at the end of *Looking Glass*, 'A Boat, beneath a sunny sky', where the initial letter of each line makes up the name Alice Pleasant Liddell. And, to take just one example of letter-play from the main prose works (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 7):

> 'I love my love with an H,' Alice couldn't help beginning, 'because he is Happy. I hate him with an H, because he is Hideous. I fed him with - with - Ham-sandwiches and Hay. His name is Haigha, and he lives - ' 'He lives on the Hill,' the King remarked simply, without the least idea he was joining in the game ...

Morphology-dependent play:

Carroll is also ready to play with morphology, both inflectional and derivational. There are lots of examples of inflectional effects in the childish speech of Bruno (*Sylvie and Bruno*, Ch. 16):

> Bruno was at a loss, and left it to Sylvie. 'It's like a mangle,' she said: 'if things are put in, they get squoze - ' 'Squeezeled!' Bruno interrupted.

And a fine example of derivational neologisms occurs in the professor's song, in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (Ch. 17) :

> In stature the Manlet was dwarfish -
> No burly big Blunderbore he:
> And he wearily gazed on the crawfish
> His Wifelet had dressed for his tea.
> 'Now reach me, sweet Atom, my gunlet,
> And hurl the old shoelet for luck:
> Let me hie to the bank of the runlet,
>   And shoot thee a Duck!

With further verses providing examples of toplets and toelets, ducklets and doglets, grublets and froglets, and several things more, *-let* becomes one of the most productive suffixes in the entire oeuvre.

Syntax-dependent play

This chiefly manifests itself when somebody takes an idiom literally, and a piece of underlying syntactic structure is suddenly brought up to the surface. Here are two examples from *Looking Glass* (Ch. 2, Ch. 9):

> Alice ... explained, as well as she could, that she had lost her way. 'I don't know what you mean by *your* way,' said the [Red] Queen: 'all the ways about here belong to *me*'.
> [Alice] 'Where's the servant whose business it is to answer the door? [Frog] 'To answer the door?' he said. 'What's it been asking of?'

And here is an example of play with indefinite pronouns (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 7):

> 'I see nobody on the road,' said Alice. 'I only wish I had such eyes,' the King remarked in a fretful tone. 'To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance too!'

Lexical play

Carroll seems to have always had a gnat in his ear, because he never misses a chance to pun. The reference, of course, is to the small voice which Alice hears when sitting in the railway carriage (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 3):

> 'It sounds like a horse,' Alice thought to herself. And an extremely small voice, close to her ear, said 'You might make a joke on that - something about "horse" and "hoarse", you know.'

Most of the puns are of the straightforward 'groaning' type. These are so familiar that they need no comment. Here is an example from *Wonderland* (Ch. 9):

> 'When we were little,' the Mock Turtle went on ... 'we went to school in the sea. The master was an old Turtle - we used to call him Tortoise - ' 'Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?' Alice asked. 'We called him Tortoise because he taught us,' said the Mock Turtle angrily. 'Really you are very dull!'

And here is one from *Phantasmagoria*, giving an account of the ghost, Inspector Kobold:

> Port-wine, he says, when rich and sound,
> Warms his old bones like nectar:
> And as the inns, where it is found,
> Are his especial hunting-ground,
> We call him the *Inn-Spectre*.'

Carroll is well aware that the puns are bad. When Alice refers to her governess calling her 'Miss', the Gnat replies:

> 'Well, if she said "Miss," and didn't say anything more,' the Gnat remarked, 'of course you'd miss your lessons. That's a joke. I wish *you* had made it.'
> 'Why do you wish I had made it?' Alice asked. 'It's a very bad one.'

But the Gnat only sighed deeply, while two large tears came rolling down its cheeks.

'You shouldn't make jokes,' Alice said, 'if it makes you so unhappy.'

Sometimes the puns involve a more radical phonological change (*Wonderland*, Ch. 10):

'Why, if a fish came to me, [said the Mock Turtle] and told me he was going a journey, I should say "With what porpoise?"' 'Don't you mean "purpose"?' said Alice. 'I mean what I say,' the Mock Turtle replied, in an offended tone.

And sometimes the word-play is simply neologistic - a combination of pun and malapropism, as in the Mock Turtle's account of his education (*Wonderland*, Ch. 9):

Reeling and Writhing, of course, to begin with ... and then the different branches of Arithmetic - Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision.

Pragmatic play

Pragmatic play refers chiefly to ludic manipulation of the rules governing normal conversational discourse. There are innumerable examples in the Alice books. The characters seem to take a special delight in breaking conversational rules - rules of pronoun reference and presupposition, for example. In this first example, an empty use of *it* is interpreted as if it had a real-world reference:

[the Mouse's historical account, *Wonderland*, Ch. 3]

'Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable - '

'Found *what*?' said the Duck.

'Found *it*,' the mouse replied rather crossly: 'of course you know what "it" means.'

'I know what "it" means well enough, when *I* find a thing,' said the Duck: 'it's generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?'

The Mouse did not notice this question ...

In the next, a presupposition is being broken:

[on arriving at the mad Tea-Party, *Wonderland*, Ch. 7]

'Have some wine,' the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.

Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. 'I don't see any wine,' she remarked.

'There isn't any,' said the March Hare.

In the next, a solicitous question is interpreted as a conundrum:

'Don't you think you'd be safer down on the ground?' [asked Alice to Humpty Dumpty].

'What tremendously easy riddles you ask!' Humpty Dumpty growled out. (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 6):

In the next, the speech transgresses Grice's maxim of manner (for an account, see Levinson, 1983: 100,ff.) - the contribution should be perspicuous, orderly, and brief:

[the Duchess, giving one of her morals, *Wonderland*, Ch. 9]

'... 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.'

In the next, a basic principle of cooperativeness is being broken, as the Red Queen perversely twists Alice's meaning:

'How is bread made?'

'I know that!' Alice cried eagerly. 'You take some flour - '

'Where do you pick the flower?' the White Queen asked. 'In a garden or in the hedges?'

'Well, it isn't picked at all,' Alice explained: 'it's ground - '

'How many acres of ground?' said the White Queen. (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 9):

A different kind of perverse conversational behaviour arises in this next piece of dialogue, as the Queen engages in hyperbolical point-capping.

'I only wanted to see what the garden was like, your Majesty - '

'That's right,' said the Queen, patting her on the head, which Alice didn't like at all: 'though, when you say "garden" - *I've* seen gardens, compared with which this would be a wilderness.'

Alice didn't dare to argue the point, but went on - 'and I thought I'd try and find my way to the top of that hill - '

'When you say "hill",' the Queen interrupted, '*I* could show you hills in comparison with which you'd call that a valley.'

'No, I shouldn't,' said Alice, surprised into contradicting her at last: 'a hill *ca'n't* be a valley, you know. That would be nonsense - '

The Red Queen shook her head. 'You may call it "nonsense" if you like,' she said, 'but *I've* heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary!' (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 2)

You may have heard something like that before - the 'we were poor' sketch from *Monty Python*:

    A: We used to live in this tiny old house, with great big holes in the roof.
    B: House? You were lucky to have a house! We used to live in one room ...
    C: You were lucky to have a room! We used to live in a corridor!
    D: Oh we used to dream of living in a corridor...

But not only do characters break pragmatic rules; they also reflect on what the rules are, or should be, in relation to such matters as conversational openings and appropriateness of subject-matter:

You've begun wrong!' cried Tweedledum. 'The first thing in a visit is to say "How d'ye do?" and shake hands!' (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 4)

There was a rather awkward pause, as Alice didn't know how to begin a conversation with people she had just been dancing with. 'It would never do to say "How d'ye do?" *now*,' she said to herself: 'we seem to have got beyond that, somehow!' (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 4)

Alice thought it would never do to have an argument at the very beginning of their conversation (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 5)

'Who are you?' said the Caterpillar.

This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. (*Wonderland*, Ch. 5)

And in Carroll's world, it is critical to know how to talk to things that don't (usually) talk:

[Alice cut a slice of the Plum Pudding] and handed it to the Red Queen. 'What impertinence!' said the Pudding. 'I wonder how you'd like it, if I were to cut a slice out of *you*, you creature?' It spoke in a thick, suety sort of voice, and Alice hadn't a word to say in reply: she could only sit and look at it and gasp. 'Make a remark,' said the Red Queen: 'it's ridiculous to leave all the conversation to the pudding!' (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 9)

We have to wait a century for a comparable conversation, between Zaphod Beeblebrox and the Dish of the Day in the Restaurant at the End of the Universe (Adams, 1980: Ch. 19).

Metalinguistic play

Several of these examples show how professional a language player Carroll is. And real ludic professionals go a stage further than just playing with language. They play with the terms for talking about language, and build explicit references to them into the dialogue:

Speak when you're spoken to!' the Queen sharply interrupted her.

'But if everybody obeyed that rule,' said Alice, who was always ready for a little argument, 'and if you only spoke when you were spoken to, and the other person always waited for *you* to begin, you see nobody would ever say anything ... ' (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 9)

Characters are even allowed to introduce their own rules:

[Humpty] 'This conversation is going on a little too fast: let's go back to the last remark but one.'

'I'm afraid I ca'n't quite remember it,' Alice said, very politely.

'In that case we start afresh,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'and it's my turn to choose a subject - ' (*Looking Glass*, Ch. 6)

And real ludic professionals are always ready to play with the way *other* people play with language. Parody, for example, is a form of metalinguistic play. Poets, playwrights, and novelists are already playing with language. Satirise someone's style and you make your reader step back from it,

encountering two levels of language awareness simultaneously. An example is Carroll's mock-Longfellow preface to 'Hiawatha's Photographing' (1857):

> In an age of imitation, I can claim no special merit for this slight attempt at doing what is known to be so easy. Any fairly practised writer, with the slightest ear for rhythm, could compose, for hours together, in the easy running metre of 'The Song of Hiawatha' ...

Yes it's easy to continue, and indeed it's hard to stop it, once you've got into the habit. But I must move on to -

There are no bounds to a professional language player. Different languages set no bounds. 'Why is Agnes more learned in insects than most people?', Carroll wrote to his friend Agnes Hull. He had to explain his answer: 'Because *she* is so deep in entomology' (throwing in a final pun, for good measure):

> Of course you know that 'she' is '*elle*'? (At least, if you don't, what's the good of your having French lessons?) 'Well!' you will say. 'And why is "*elle*" deep in entomology?' Oh Agnes, Agnes! Can't you spell? Don't you know that 'L' is the 7th letter of 'entomology'? Almost exactly in the middle of the word: it couldn't be well deeper (unless it happened to be a *deeper well*, you know).

Even your name isn't sacrosanct, if you're a professional - Lewis Carroll itself being a playful word order manipulation of a playful back translation (Charles Lutwidge > Carolus Ludovicus > Carroll Lewis). Nor are you ever off duty. A normally boring task, such as proof correcting, simply provides a further opportunity for play. In designing the layout of *Sylvie and Bruno*, for example, he can't just make a correction: he has to make a game out of it.

> My readers may perhaps like to amuse themselves by trying to detect, in a given passage, the one piece of 'padding' it contains. While arranging the 'slips' into pages, I found that the passage, which now extends from the top of p. 262 to the middle of p. 264, was 3 lines too short. I supplied the deficiency, not by interpolating a word here and a word there, but by writing in 3 consecutive lines. Now can my readers guess *which* they are? (Preface to *Sylvie and Bruno* - he gives the answer in the Preface to the sequel)

Carroll illustrates better than anyone else I know the range and variety of language play - the different ways in which you can enjoy yourself by bending and breaking the rules of the language. And his enthusiasm for this behaviour carries a message which all linguists should take on board - especially those linguists who are concerned to establish descriptively adequate accounts of our language behaviour. For, when we begin look at 20th-century accounts of language, notions of enjoyment and fun are conspicuous by their absence. It's a pretty serious world, the world of linguistic theory - or even the world of linguistic descriptions, as encountered in dictionaries and grammars. What is language for? The conventional answer talks about people 'communicating' with each other, in the sense that one person sends a meaning, a message, a thought, an idea, and another person receives it. The whole point of language, it is assumed, is to foster the transmission of knowledge, however this is defined - as concepts, facts, opinions, emotions, or any other kind of 'information'. Why use language? - for 'the expression of thought', says the *Oxford English Dictionary*; for 'expressing thought or feeling', says *Chambers*; for 'communicating ideas or feelings', says the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language*.

Traditional linguistics reflects this view, thereby ignoring the ludic function of language - or, at best, sidelining it, considering it to be a matter fit only for sociolinguists (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1976). In virtually all contemporary introductions to language study, no reference is made to language play at all. Even the most recent handbook on language acquisition (Fletcher & MacWhinney, 1995) - a domain where you would really expect its presence to be central, given its importance to young children - makes no reference to it. There *is* some recent interest among phonologists (e.g. Bagemihl, 1995), interested in the phonological properties of some forms of language play (they call them *ludlings*). But we have to look back as far as Otto Jespersen (1946) for any serious attempt to illustrate the topic within a

'mainstream' language essay. Yet, if linguistic theory is supposed to be providing us with an account of the way we use language, it can hardly justify its continued ignoring of ludicity. And if there is something which Lewis Carroll can continue to teach us, in the new millennium, it is the importance of keeping this topic centre stage.

The view of language function solely in terms of 'the communication of ideas' has little explanatory force when it comes to language play. We can see this from an examination of contemporary examples, as well as from Carroll. The practice of language play has no way diminished in the 20th century - notwithstanding the rise of radio and television. There may be fewer parlour games played today, but language play is alive and well, and living in our streets, offices, and homes. Here is an example, recorded for another project (Crystal, 1998), a fragment of a conversation between four people: Janet and John are husband and wife, as are Peter and Jane. The two couples are friends, and they live near to each other. They have got together for an evening, and the extract is taken from a point about 1.5 wine glasses into the occasion. It's easy to see what is happening. Jane's inspired piece of ingenious word-formation, *catfrontation*, has sparked off a word-play mood. Peter and Jane try to outdo each other by finding words beginning with *cat-* which can be plausibly related in meaning to the conversational topic. Eventually John joins in, abandoning his mock-reluctance - and actually adds *catapult* to the list a few minutes further on.

Janet:	... And so there was a sort of confrontation between Crumble and Splash -
Jane:	Catfrontation, you mean. (*Laughs.*)
Janet:	Well, alright, catfrontation, if you insist - and they stood by the -
Peter:	Near cat-astrophe, if you ask me. (*Groans all round.*)
Janet:	I wasn't asking you, Peter!
Peter:	Sorry, I didn't mean to be categorical. (*More groans all round.*)
Jane:	This sounds like it's becoming a catalogue of disasters. (*Peals of laughter.*)
Peter:	I don't think John approves of all this jocularity, when Janet's trying to tell us a perfectly serious story.
Jane:	You know what John's being, though, don't you.
Janet:	What?
Jane:	A catalyst! (*More laughter all round.*)
Peter:	I thought that was what happened to moggies when they'd drunk too much. (*Further groans.*)
Janet:	Oh, that's Christmas-cracker standard.
Peter:	Of course, you know what Splash would get if he stayed outside for too long?
Jane:	What?
Susan:	Catarrh. (*More laughter all round.*)
Janet:	Anyway, to get back to the point ...
John:	Yes, get on with your catechism, Janet. (*Mock cheers.*)

Judged by any professional standards of comedy, the efforts of these four conversationalists range from the pathetic to the brilliant. But that is not the point. The real point is that all are having an excellent time. They do not mind that the conversation has been temporarily disrupted, and are happy to keep the main story in suspension. They applaud each other's cleverness, using groans and laughter, and nothing else seems to matter. The humour bounces back and forth between them, in an almost competitive spirit - which is why this kind of behaviour has sometimes been called 'ping-pong punning' (e.g. by Chiaro, 1992).

It is difficult to see how ping-pong punning can possibly fit in with the view that the purpose of language is to communicate ideas. For what new knowledge is being transmitted between the participants, as they bounce jokes off each other? None. What have they learned, at the end of the sequence, that they did not know before? Nothing. There seems to be a tacit agreement that none of their language is to be taken at its face value, while the exchange is in progress - that no sentence is to

be interpreted as containing any real information. The feline situation is not truly a catastrophic one. John is not really being a catalyst. Nor would Splash really develop catarrh. The rules governing literal discourse have been suspended, while everyone delights in verbally showing off.

This conversation gives us an insight into what the world of language play is like. It is not that it lacks rules: when we play language games - as any games - there must always be rules. Rather, the rules of ludic language are different from those which govern other uses of language. In particular, there are special ways of speaking, and often special facial expressions, to show that an utterance in a conversation is intended as a piece of word-play. The part of the word which is the focus of the pun (*cat-*, in this conversation) is usually pronounced in a more careful or prominent manner, and the speaker often looks quizzical or smug. Listeners are expected to make energetic use of just a small range of possible responses, such as the forced (or real) groan. And - very important - the participants must not make the same pun twice in a single sequence. We would never find an exchange like this:

Jane: This sounds like it's becoming a cat-alogue of disasters.
Peter: I think Splash must have read about it in a cat-alogue.

No-one would consciously re-use someone else's pun, any more than they would listen to someone telling a joke, then tell the same joke all over again. (However, unlike jokes, instances of word-play *are* available for re-use *later* in the same conversation.)

If the *catfrontation* exchange were an isolated instance, it would hardly deserve an extensive commentary. But pun-capping sequences of this kind are a very common feature of informal conversations, especially between people who know each other well. As James Boswell said, 'A good pun may be admitted among the small excellencies of lively conversation'. Men and women seem to use them equally. Nor do they seem to be restricted to particular ages, professions, or educational backgrounds. While the *catfrontation* conversationalists were evidently educated enough to be able to use such words as *catalyst*, ping-pong punning as a genre of word-play does not rely upon learnèd examples, and usually taps into words which most people know. For example, in another conversation, the sight of a chair with an arm missing elicited the quip *Don't worry, it's 'armless* - a pun that has probably been made (along with *'armful* and *out of 'arm's way*) thousands of times around the English-speaking world, by people from all educational backgrounds, as they encounter damaged armchairs or someone with an arm in plaster.

Personality, of course, can't be ignored. To say that 'everyone engages in language play' is not to say that everyone engages in the *same kind* of language play. Some people are good at puns, and never miss a chance to drop one into a conversation; others never use them, and cannot stand people who do. Jonathan Swift remarked: 'Punning is a talent which no man affects to despise, but he that is without it'. But, as we shall see, those who do not wish to be involved in ping-pong punning do not thereby cut themselves off from the world of language play. People who do not practise one form of language play always favour another. If it is not puns, then it might be puzzles. If not puzzles, then panel games. If not panel games, then poetry. Ludic language exists in hundreds of different genres, and adds enjoyment to our daily lives in many routine ways. It is not just a matter of humour, or laughter: enjoyment encompasses much more.

I think that it is part of the normal human condition to spend an appreciable amount of time actively playing with language within some of these genres, or responding with enjoyment to the way others play. Some people - the real enthusiasts - devote excessive amounts of time to it. Some, the lucky few, can even make their living by it - I am thinking especially of advertising copy writers, newspaper headline writers, literary authors in general, and children. You can't avoid playing with language, when interacting with children - as the whole of Carroll's creative writing suggests. Language play is catching. The children catch it from the baby-talk of their parents, as soon as they are born. Or maybe it is, as some have suggested, that we have a language instinct (Pinker, 1994). And if we do, it must be for language play.

Language play is important socially. It brings people into rapport with each other, as we have seen in the 'catfrontation' episode; groups of people bond by sharing each other's language play. Word games may be the means of bringing people into organized relationships, such as a club or a competition; or they may simply help people break the ice, as when a comment on the day's crossword puzzle may be the only vocal exchange allowed to break the silence in a commuting railway compartment. Permitting others to play with your name (a pet name or nickname) is an important signal of intimacy; rejecting someone's use of that name is just as important an intimation of distance. Enjoying others' language play is a sure sign of a healthy social relationship; and disaffection with someone's language play is just as sure a sign that a relationship is on the way to breaking down. When you get annoyed by someone's silly voices, find their mock regional accents extremely irritating, or their favourite word-game pointless and boring, then all is definitely not well. As George Eliot put it, in Daniel Deronda (Book 2, Ch. 15), 'A difference of taste in jokes is a great strain on the affections'.

Language play is important personally. It adds to our quality of life, providing opportunities for personal enjoyment that are both free and unlimited. If we perceive it as a challenge, in relation to some of the games I mentioned earlier, then it is one to which few sports can compare, except perhaps a game like golf, where there is You, The Ball, and That Hole - nothing else counts. With language play, there is You and The Language - that's all. You can set your own targets for achievement. And if you choose to engage in competitive language play, then if the course of language acquisition has run smoothly, everyone starts on a level playing field.

And language play is important creatively. Elsewhere (Crystal, 1998) I have tried to pay a respectable amount of attention to the many domains in which people express themselves creatively through language. I cannot prove it, but I do believe that the more children are given opportunities to play with language and respond to language play, as they move up through the school, the more sophisticated will be their eventual prowess in the verbal arts. Poetry has to be the critical factor here; it ought to be presented to all children as a natural expressive medium, as soon as they walk into school.

These are some of the reasons why language play is so important, as a topic of enquiry. And also why it is surprising to see that it has been so much ignored in our definitions and descriptions of language. The ludic function of language is generally not mentioned in dictionaries or introductory texts - or is at best marginalized. Yet it is one of the most important dimensions of language. How can it have been so neglected? Perhaps because our academically enquiring minds, over the centuries, have been taught to look steadfastly only in one direction - that of 'language as information'. Or perhaps scholars have unconsciously dismissed language play as being too trivial a topic for serious study. I do not know. But I do know that the situation shouldn't stay that way.

In my view, the Carroll phenomenon helps us see more clearly that we need to alter our definitions of language to give proper recognition to the importance of language play. And this, in turn, will bring us one step nearer to a satisfactory understanding of what is involved in linguistic creativity. But I cannot send you into dinner with such heavy words echoing in your ears. Let me therefore conclude with a brief demonstration of the underlying reason for our presence here at this conference, using the kind of linguistico-numerological technique which Carroll would have approved of. I don't think he actually ever used *gematria*, but he certainly thought along similar lines, from time to time. Gematria was a medieval mystical technique, devised to investigate the Hebrew scriptures, with the aim of bringing to light the secret messages God was thought to have hidden within the letters of the words. One way of applying it to modern English is like this. You take the letters of the alphabet, and assign them numerical values from 1 to 26, in serial order. You then take a word, and obtain a total by adding up the values of the letters it contains. If two words have identical totals, gematria practitioners would consider this to be highly significant. Other significant relationships are when

two words have adjacent totals (such as 62 and 63), reverse totals (62 and 26), or totals separated by 100 (62 and 162).

A few examples of the supposed significance. If you add the numerical value for *arm* to that for *bend*, you get the total for *elbow* (57). *King* + *chair* = *throne* (80). *Keep* + *off* = *grass* (64). Identical totals are found in *back* and *ache* (17), *bird* and *seed* (33), *lay* and *eggs* (38), and *girl* and *guide* (46). Adjacent totals are there in *film* and *camera* (40 and 41), *tick* and *clock* (43 and 44), *cut* and *knife* (44 and 45), and *nut* and *shell* (55 and 56). Reversals are there in *judge* and *jury* (47 and 74) and *cork* and *bottle* (also 47 and 74). Some people say that the whole thing is just a string of coincidences, partly influenced by the way letters are not used randomly in words, within a language, but reflect certain regular distributions and frequencies of occurrence. They say that there will always be hundreds of numerical correspondences, if any sample is large enough, and the fact that some words display semantic links is not at all surprising.

What do they know? The evidence is before our eyes, if we only look. Why are we all here? What is the mystery number which links us all at this conference? Let us go to our source. Charles Dodgson: 140. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson: 241 - excellent, separated by a hundred and an adjacent. Alice Wonderland? 140. Looking Glass? 141. Off With His Head? 141. Let us go deeper. Who was the person to invite me here this evening? David Skilton: 140. And who was invited to give the opening talk? Morton Cohen: 140. The only error of judgment was in the venue, which should have been Pontypridd (141), not Cardiff (a pathetic 47).

And why am I here giving a talk on Carroll this evening? David Crystal - 138. Close, but not quite there. I need a 139 to link me to the subject. Mock turtle? 138. Not good enough. Still, it's not every day you're linked mystically with a mock turtle. How's about linking person and venue: Carroll: 79, Wales: 60. Splendid, 139. You want further proof? Slithy + mome = 139. Not enough? Take all the nonsense words in the first verse of Jabberwocky (115, incidentally the same total as Peter Naish), and you get 775, exclude mimsy (79) which is the same as Carroll (79) and you get 696. Do keep up. Divide 696 by 5, which is the number of letters in Lewis, and you get 139.2. There we are. I wouldn't have come, otherwise.

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