"If you want sense, you'll have to make it yourself": Language, Adaptation, and the Myth of Visual Nonsense

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"If you want sense, you’ll have to make it yourself:"
Language, Adaptation, and the Myth of Visual Nonsense

(TITLE)

BY
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THESIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE
“If you want sense you’ll have to make it yourself”:
Language, Adaptation, and the Myth of Visual Nonsense

By

Dianna M. Bellian
For Milo, who has plenty of time...
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RESULTS ARE NOT GUARANTEED, BUT IF NOT PERFECTLY SATISFIED, YOUR WASTED TIME WILL BE REFUNDED.

--NORTON JUSTER, THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH, P. 15
# Table of Contents

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

What is Nonsense .............................................................................................................. 4

The Relationship of Nonsense to Visual Media ................................................................. 13

Key Works of Nonsense and their Visuals ...................................................................... 17

Words and Pictures in Nonsense ..................................................................................... 19

Why Illustrations Are Not Really Nonsense ................................................................... 48

Nonsense Adapted .............................................................................................................. 50

A Note on Illustration and Adaptation ............................................................................ 52

Staging Nonsense ............................................................................................................. 56

From Stage to Screen ......................................................................................................... 63

The Problem of Moving Pictures ...................................................................................... 72

The Myth of Visual Nonsense ........................................................................................... 75

Appendix I: Scene Catalogue ............................................................................................. 79

Works Cited ......................................................................................................................... 80

Filmography ......................................................................................................................... 84

Bibliography of Related Materials ...................................................................................... 85
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"If you want sense you’ll have to make it yourself": Language, Adaptation, and the Myth of Visual Nonsense

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between language and image in Nonsense texts through analysis of illustrations, animations, and live-action portrayals of scenes from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, Norton Juster’s *The Phantom Tollbooth*, and their adaptations. This study proceeds by first discussing the discrepancies between various definitions of the critical term “nonsense” as applied to a genre of literature, then moves on to critique the established term of “visual nonsense” as used within the discourse community. The analysis of word-image relationships in the sample texts demonstrates the lack of evidence of visuals being able to convey traits of the Nonsense genre without the assistance of words in a written or spoken capacity, which renders the critical term “visual nonsense” unnecessary.
INTRODUCTION

In 1865, Charles Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, published what has become one of the most well known, read, and studied children’s classics, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Shortly after in 1872, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* was published. While many artists throughout the decades have illustrated both *Alice* stories, the original illustrations by satirist John Tenniel remain the most well known. While they are still read and loved in their novel form, Carroll’s *Alice* stories are also prolific in popular culture. With a new retelling of “Wonderland” multiple times a decade, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is one of the most widely adapted pieces of literature. Carroll’s texts and their adaptations, which present readers with fantastic story worlds operating on bizarre logic, have become epitomes of the literary genre of Nonsense.

Nearly a century later in 1961, Norton Juster, an architect in New York, stepping foot into Carroll’s legacy, penned the novel *The Phantom Tollbooth*, which tells the story of a boy named Milo who travels into a world beyond his expectations and learns more than he ever thought possible. In parallel to Carroll’s texts, Juster’s work is also accompanied by iconic original illustrations penned by cartoonist and flat-mate, Jules Feiffer. Juster’s *The Phantom Tollbooth*, on a smaller scale, follows in Carroll’s creations’ footsteps and has been translated into visual media becoming a stage play, musical, and full-length feature film. With its similarities in plot, use of illustration, and delight in word-play, logic games, and riddles, *The Phantom Tollbooth* shares the *Alice* stories’ classification as being “literary nonsense.”
Texts like the aforementioned that are included as part of the Nonsense genre are often accompanied with illustrations causing some scholars to appropriate the literary term for visual media, and include illustrations as what they call “visual nonsense.” However, at the most basic level, in order to be nonsense, the work in question must bring about nonsense in its own right—that is in order for an entirely separate classification to be warranted, the visuals in a text must not just assist in the creation of nonsense but be able of effecting it when words are removed entirely. Much of what has been previously and is currently classified as visual nonsense is merely an artist’s representation of the verbal nonsense read from a page, thus the art is not what creates nonsense, but is rather just a depiction of the initial words. Although Nonsense has a close relationship with images, it is still a genre that is rooted in language. Because of this, illustrations are largely non-essential to the Nonsense genre. A nonsense poem such as the famous “Jabberwocky” from Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* remains nonsensical even when illustrations are nowhere to be found. In many ways, as discussed in the following chapter, the illustrations of a nonsense text stand at odds with the texts nonsensical nature by grounding it within the realm of fantasy. While the illustrations of texts like the *Alice* stories and *The Phantom Tollbooth* certainly add a degree of pleasure to the reading experience, they do not (and possibly cannot) contribute to the texts ability to evoke nonsense.

In order to closer investigate the relationship in question and come to a conclusion about the possibility for the existence of visual nonsense, this paper will provide close analysis of both text and illustration in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, and Norton
Juster’s *The Phantom Tollbooth*. While the improbability of the existence of visual nonsense can be proven by analysis of Carroll or Juster’s texts alone, using both authors’ works demonstrates how different narrative forms, applications of nonsense, styles of illustration, and eras of writing still result in the same relationship between elements of nonsense and illustrations in Nonsense texts. These texts have been chosen not only for their established credibility as epitomes of the Nonsense genre, but also because they follow similar paths of adaptation. Careful analysis of the way Nonsense texts change from illustrated stories, to stage plays, to live-action and animated films reveals that, regardless of the benefit images have when paired with these texts, the qualities that place a work in the genre of Nonsense are consistently found in written and spoken words rather than images. Furthermore, if visual nonsense is indeed possible, it would stand to reason that moving images, which can portray narrative structures with greater ease due to their ability to show the passing of time, might in fact be able to convey nonsense more readily than stand-alone illustrations in the novels. Because of this, it is of value to not only analyze the relationship of text and illustration, but also how each work and its nonsense elements transform when adapted to the action media like stage and film.

The following pages will first discuss the tensions that exist between various theorists who have studied Nonsense, and distinguish Nonsense as a genre and mode from other genres, modes, and movements it is often conflated with like the Absurd or Surreal. Second, the chapter titled “The Relationship of Nonsense to Visual Media” will articulate the lack of certainty surrounding the appropriation of the term “nonsense” to describe visuals, and dissect the interaction between illustrations and words in the chosen Nonsense texts in order to discover, with more precision, what the
illustrations are actually conveying. Part of the problem with the critical term “visual nonsense” is that although the term is used, very few theorists have quantified or qualified how the portrayal of nonsense changes between the written word and the visual representation of the written word. In an attempt to find the true source of nonsense, this chapter will analyze the verbal (written story) and visual (illustrations) cues throughout the text both separately from one another as individual texts, and together as two halves of a whole text. Last, “Nonsense Adapted” will discuss the manner in which nonsense is adapted to the action visual media of stage and screenplays. This discussion of adaptation will further prove the limitations of visual art in conveying elements of Nonsense.

The goal of this paper is not to admonish scholars for their interpretations of the definitions of Nonsense as a genre, but rather discuss some blatant contradictions within the field as to what should and should not be considered Nonsense and how readers experience Nonsense texts. After analyzing the way words and images work separately and together in Nonsense texts, I have reached the conclusion that whether one wishes to view illustrations apart from or included in the text, the dichotomy between visual and verbal nonsense is one that exists with very little, if any, founding. As such, the term “visual nonsense” needs to either be abandoned from our critical vocabulary, or further studied in order to accurately articulate the specific constraints that warrant the existence of such a subgenre.

What is Nonsense?

“Literary nonsense,” “nonsense verse,” and “Nonsense” are the three most common terms used to refer to texts that focus on the manipulation of language and logic. Seen
most prominently in books of rhyme and prose for children, Nonsense, as a mode or
genre, is often dated back to Victorian London; however, some scholars place the origin
of nonsense dating as far back as Ancient Greece, citing Aesop’s fables as some of the
first pieces of nonsense. Wim Tigges in his exploratory work “An Anatomy of
Nonsense,” suggests that although “nonsense is often said to have originated with Lear
and Carroll...we may safely assume that playing with language is as old as language
itself” (41). Here, Tigges explains that although nonsense as a formal genre of literature
seems to take rise in the Victorian era, its dependency on language manipulation is
derived from a much older and developed tradition. The discrepancies in the true origin
of literary nonsense also lead to large variations in definitions of what exactly nonsense is
composed of as well as what texts can and can’t be classified as nonsense.

Although the general requirement for manipulation of language and logic is
almost unanimously agreed upon by scholars, many of the specific constraints for what
makes a text a piece of nonsense are often less consistent. Some scholars, like Celia
Anderson and Marilyn Apseloff in Nonsense Literature for Children: Aesop to Seuss,
give very liberal and inclusive definitions of nonsense, citing exemplary texts from the
classics of Lear and Carroll, all the way to Absurdist playwrights like Albee and Ionesco.
As outlined in the first chapter of their book, Anderson and Apseloff, after reviewing
several formal definitions of “nonsense,” settle on an expanded version of the Webster’s
definition for “nonsense verse” as the most apt. By their definition, literary nonsense is
“humorous or whimsical [writing] that features unique characters and actions and often
contains evocative but meaningless nonce words” (Anderson and Abseloff 4).
Essentially, for their purposes, “nonsense” is any piece of writing that (1) is funny, (2)
contains unusual characters who commit unusual actions, and (3) often (but not always) uses words coined specifically for the purpose of the text. Although nonsense often does all of these things, the issue with Anderson and Apseloff using this definition is that it leaves the genre far too open. Abiding by this definition, nonsense seems almost synonymous with fantasy as a genre. Much like how all squares are rectangles but all rectangles are not squares, nonsense may be fantastical but the texts within the nonsense genre embody characteristics that impose more boundaries than merely that of fantasy.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle in *Philosophy of Nonsense* defines literary nonsense in a more rigid manner. He writes that “nonsense as a genre believes in the centrality of language...nonsense texts spontaneously treat language as hierarchy of levels, the most important of which is syntax” (Lecercle 68). His explanation expands to describe the way in which Nonsense texts purposefully play levels of understanding of language off of one another. Lecercle writes that “Once the worlds have picked out their referents, the text becomes fully intelligible...it is all a question of how the situation will fit the words...the text, to speak like Searle, has a word-to-word direction of fit, which makes it a series of performative utterances” (96). Essentially, Lecercle defines nonsense as a genre that not only believes in the importance of language, but also enacts it through careful and deliberate measures of word play. Although Lecercle seems to approach an adequate definition, he clings too firmly to literary nonsense’s foundation in Victorian sentiment. He writes almost exclusively with Carroll’s *Alice* tales in mind, which leaves little room for expansion of the definition to include more contemporary authors (Edward Gorey, Carl Sandburg, Norton Juster, or Dr. Seuss) unless they were working specifically in the Carrollonian style. Since both genres and modes of writing are generally defined by
example and qualified by recognizable patterns that appear throughout most examples, Lecercle limits his study by basing the qualifications of the genre off of a sole example causing it to be both short-sighted (not anticipating the future of the genre) and constricting (not leaving room for creative liberties and invention).

Anthony Burgess in his article “Nonsense” from Wim Tigges’ edited collection *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense* writes “nonsense is a properly negative thing—a lack of sense... a sentence makes sense if it is a logical structure. Kill the structure and you have nonsense” (17). However, what Burgess overlooks is that “nonsense,” at least of the literary variety, is a misnomer because it is not lacking “sense”—an underlying thread or point—but rather subject to a different sense than we [readers] are accustomed to. The second misperception in Burgess’ definition is that nonsense “kills” the logical structure of sentences. Nonsense, particularly that of Lewis Carroll, does not combat logic, but revels in it. Nonsense is founded in sense and logic. As Anderson and Apseloff note rather eloquently, “nonsense is not the absence of sense but a clever subversion of it that heightens rather than destroys meaning. The very notion of topsy-turvy implies that there is a right side up” (5).

In a similar expression, many scholars compare nonsense to the concept of “play”. Tigges writes, “the “game” of nonsense has its own rules or laws, but that it adheres to its self-appointed rules only voluntarily” (Tigges 54). What he is writing about is the capacity of nonsense to be understood. Although the rules of the game, so to say, are not at first apparent to readers, once the laws are discovered, the nonsense becomes decipherable within the world in which the rules are voluntarily ascribed to by characters. Anderson and Abseloff explain the same phenomena by stating “nonsense is often an
organized and coherent statement that appears incoherent on the surface and is therefore declared senseless by readers unaware of the design and intent of the author" (23). Similarly, Hurlimann in “Fantasy and Reality: Nonsense from Peter Pan to Pippi Longstocking” declares “Nonsense must be grounded in accepted conventions. If it becomes complete gibberish, it is simply mad raving rather than humor...all the nonce words invented by writers of nonsense stay within the phonemic system of the language” (54). Sense coming across as apparent nonsense is also what Lecercle describes as the “implicit philosophy of pragmatics” (70). Within the world of a nonsense text, things that readers might find unintelligible, ridiculous, or muddling are the way things are, and therefore make perfect sense. This is often why readers are led through nonsense texts by a character not unlike themselves who, although confused at first, has to learn the ropes of the world they’ve been placed into (for example, the characters of Alice and Milo in Carroll and Juster’s works).

Wim Tigges writes in An Anatomy of Nonsense that many formal definitions of “nonsense” are much too wide to be workable when it comes to viewing literary nonsense as a genre (7). Tigges, combining multiple scholars’ definitions, including Lisa Ede, Susan Stewart, Vivien Noakes, Edmund Strachey, and Elizabeth Sewell, reaches perhaps the most workable definition for nonsense as a genre. He defines nonsense “as a genre of narrative literature, which balances a multiplicity of meaning with a simultaneous absence of meaning...effected by playing with the rules of language, logic, prosody and representation” (Tigges 27). For him, literary nonsense is composed of four elements: “an unresolved tension between presence and absence of meaning, lack of emotional involvement, play-like presentation, and an emphasis, stronger than in any other type of
literature, upon its verbal nature" (Tigges 55). What Tigges' definition does that others lack is not only to explain what Nonsense is, but also give genre constraints from which to isolate applicable texts from others that merely exhibit similar qualities, while still leaving the genre open enough to encompass contemporary texts and authors that have inherited Lear and Carroll's traditions.

**HOW NONSENSE DIFFERS FROM THE SURREAL AND ABSURD.** It is also important to distinguish literary nonsense from other genres it is often confused with such as the Absurd and Surreal. While Lecercle merely cites the plays of Harold Pinter as belonging to the literary nonsense tradition, Anderson and Apseloff include the Theatre of the Absurd as what they call “adult nonsense” (23). Specifically, Anderson and Apseloff write that Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Edward Albee use the techniques of Nonsense in their works; they state “these authors explored the distortion of language that paralleled the similar distortions found in impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism” (23). Examples given for this relationship are how Ionesco's *The Lesson* “slips from sense to insanity” and Albee's *Tiny Alice* as a “metaphor for the possibility of infinite regression that nonsense gives us” (Anderson and Apseloff 24). However, the relationship Anderson and Abseloff draw is tenuous at best. Even in their own words they acknowledge that the same “distortion” of language that they attribute to Nonsense elements in the plays is *similar* to impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism. Furthermore, the “insanity” and “metaphor of infinite regression” they site as examples of Nonsense, are concepts that often occur alongside nonsense elements, but are not nonsensical in and of themselves. This begs the question of if it is similar to those genres,
then what makes it Nonsense and not one of them? Furthermore, what differentiates the distortion that exists as being Nonsense rather than the Absurd? These questions are never addressed, and Anderson and Abseloff seem to be content in abiding by the idea of it being “close enough.”

The issue is that when discussing genre boundaries, one must focus on the differences of one thing and another, not the similarities. Yes, Nonsense may be similar to the Absurd, or may even share some restraints, but it is different enough to warrant a new genre. William Tigges writes that Nonsense “lies in some celestially happy medium between what is sense and what is not sense (Tigges 11). It is the idea of the realm of the “happy medium” seems to be what causes Lecercle, Anderson and Abseloff, and other scholars to conflate literary nonsense with the Theatre of the Absurd. While Absurdism does indeed share some elements of literary nonsense, such as its tendency to manipulate language, the two movements are in fact disparate enough to warrant separate genre categories. Part of the reason for this separation is that the Absurd is a genre that relies, necessarily, on the multi-modal capacities of the theatre, a constraint that, as I will demonstrate later, does not exist for literary nonsense. Furthermore, most nonsense thrives on its counterintuitive logic and language games, whereas the Absurd is not necessary illogical, but purposeless. Nonsense, while not actually illogical, has a definitive purpose to craft a story that the Absurd often (if not always) lacks. Martin Esslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd* describes the Absurd as something that blends reality and fantasy together to communicate an individual’s sense of the universe they cannot comprehend (398). He states that the Absurd, “relies on contraction rather than an expansion of the scope of language and uses language to create images rather than
arguments” (Esslin 348). Where the Absurd battles against preconceived notions of order and structure, nonsense expands on these concepts by being purposefully paradoxical; where the Absurd is characteristically deconstructionist, nonsense is—if there is such a thing—hyper-constructionist. What this means is that the Absurd often achieves the effect of being illogical by taking apart language until nothing is left but a string of incomprehensible sounds, or exploding the traditional notions of theatre—what a play should be or have. Nonsense, on the other hand, does not seek to destroy the constraints of language, logic, or method, but rather works within them. Any appearance of illogical acts or nonsensical phrases in nonsense is the result of the compounding of language and multiple levels of understanding. Similarly, where the Absurd works against traditional dramatic conventions, Nonsense always works within the conventions of a narrative. While the end products of Nonsense and Absurd can often seem similar (apparent nonsense) the procedure in which both genres reach the result is entirely different, which is cause for diversification.

Secondly, nonsense is often confused with that of visual art categories like Surrealism and other abstract movements. Part of the issue here is that literary scholars often appropriate names of artistic movements in an attempt to more adequately describe literary ones. In his essay on nonsense, Burgess states that 19th century British nonsense is the equivalent of the French surrealist movement (18). He claims that both are enclosed in the world of dreams and put “logic to sleep and [allow] the liberated brain to make structures out of free association” (Burgess 21). However, being enclosed in dreams is not a necessary attribute for nonsense as a genre. On the other hand, Surrealism is a visual art movement largely motivated by advancements in psychology and Sigmund
Freud's theories on the unconscious mind. Wim Tigges explains the distinction, stating “[Susan] Sewell rightly distinguishes nonsense from surrealism by pointing at the latter’s attempt to “suppress any conscious control of the mind’s flow of images” (36).

Surrealism is a movement, mode, and genre that is motivated by unrestrained expression of unconscious thoughts or feelings. Contrariwise, nonsense is restrained not only by the bounds of language and logic, but also by the “laws” of the story-world.

A WORKING DEFINITION. Before moving on to analysis, it is necessary to focus our now expanded definition of Nonsense as a genre. In the remainder of this study Nonsense will be defined using a combination of the definitions discussed by Tigges and Lecercle, with careful differentiation between Nonsense and the Absurd or Surreal. From this point forward, for a work to be considered Nonsense it must contain four core traits: 1) narrative structure, i.e. the ability to convey a storyline that progresses; 2) play-like presentation, which means that the work doesn’t take itself too seriously; 3) a tension between meaning(s) and understanding(s); and 4) a focus on the limitlessness of the power of language enacted through the careful, and deliberate, manipulation of it.
The Relationship of Nonsense to Visual Media

The frequent appearance of Nonsense with illustrations is notable enough to have been the topic of interest for numerous scholars in the field of literary studies. However, many of these scholars fall into the same pitfall in their discussions of conflating the text with the illustrations in works of Nonsense, incorrectly establishing two veins of nonsense: the verbal and the visual. Anderson and Abseloff write in *Nonsense Literature for Children* that “pictorial nonsense shares with verbal nonsense the tendency to cross boundaries set by everyday systems of classification, to place incongruous elements together, and to create a visual play that is a counterpart to wordplay” (178). While they suggest and reference the concept of “visual nonsense,” all of the examples they give for works of visual nonsense are taken from illustrations accompanying texts of literary nonsense, which calls into question whether or not the visual on its own is creating the effect of nonsense. While a text and its illustrations must not necessarily be analyzed as separate texts since they are two parts of a whole work, by classifying illustrations as “visual nonsense” Anderson and Abseloff, among others, have already begun to separate the words from the images in illustrated texts. Furthermore, methods for interpreting language are often very different than methods for interpreting images, which calls into question how we must go about analyzing each part and how they relate to one another. Anderson and Abseloff seem to acknowledge this difference in interpretation when they write that the “crossing of visual-verbal boundaries creates nonsense in itself” (205). However, if this were true any text that integrates pictures with words would be a piece of nonsense, which is simply not the case.
While the crossing of visual-verbal boundaries can emphasize the nonsensical nature of a text, the image itself exists in a static moment in which nonsense is impossible. This is because nonsense is dependent on communication, or conversation. In order for something to be nonsense there must be a sustained dialogue between the utterer of nonsense and the receiver. To confuse things further, Anderson and Abseloff acknowledge previous to this claim that when a disjunction between text and image occurs, the overall effect is nonsense (195). This seems to say that instances of visual nonsense occur when what we see is not what the text leads us to expect; however, in most Nonsense works the absurdity or strangeness of the illustration is exactly what the text itself leads us to imagine, and thus no disjunction exists. For instance, when Alice imbibes the contents of the “Drink Me” bottle at the beginning of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland the text describes her growing rapidly upward, so that she could barely see her feet. When we look to the accompanying illustration we see an elongated, giraffe-neck Alice looking surprised to be so tall, which is a logical visual for the text that was just read. Likewise, in Dr. Seuss’s The Cat in the Hat, the illustration of the extra-large cat wearing a top hat and bowtie is almost expected from the get-go.

When analyzing a visual’s potential to be a piece of nonsense in its own right, authors like Anderson and Abseloff encounter the pitfall of being unable to separate the image from the text. This is only a concern because visual art is then assumed to be interpreted and described in the exact same way as verbal art. The fundamental issue with doing this is that, since they are separate mediums, the viewer or reader experiences words very differently from images. For instance, Carroll describes Alice’s physical appearance very little throughout Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. By simply reading
the text one would be able to imagine all sorts of variations on the character. However, when one sees Tenniel’s first sketch of Alice, that image becomes the sole association we have for the physical representation of her character. Rather than use critical art terminology, they appropriate literary and linguistic terms to discuss art forms, such as caricatures. While appropriation of critical terminology is often acceptable, in the instance of nonsense, scholars have failed time and time again to identify the equivalence of manipulation of language and logic in the visual form. Reverse or inversed logic is relatively easy to convey in an image, since we must simply show something that would not logically occur; however, language manipulation is something that is not as easily conveyed, and both must occur to evoke nonsense. Anderson and Abseloff write that “illustrators have their own methods for highlighting contrasts between the sensible and the silly” (6). Although Anderson and Abseloff acknowledge with this statement that words and pictures operate differently, the authors prematurely abandon this assertion and fail to provide sufficient evidence or explanation of how illustrators go about creating nonsense differently from writers, and why these specific works of art should still be considered Nonsense. Since words and pictures are fundamentally different mediums (and operate on different levels of understanding), they must also be analyzed in at least slightly different ways.

Although words and images are disparate in many ways, texts that include both stress the complex relationship that can occur when they work together to create meaning. Hendrick Leeuwun in “The Liaison of Visual and Written Nonsense” comes the closest to accurately discussing the manner in which nonsense interacts with its illustrations. He outlines three types of interaction: (1) the dependence of the image upon
text, (2) the symbiosis between word and image, and (3) pictures with a reminder of the
text (Leeuwun 62). Although he is very specific about the possibility for images to exist
separately and irrevocably from a text, nowhere in his article or his suggested
relationships does he specify that an image, on its own, is able to create nonsense without
the assistance of a verbal counterpart. For him language is an idea, “an abstract means of
conveyance,” that the reader chooses to go along with or disregard, and contrary to this,
art is more concrete—what you see is what you get (Leeuwun 62). Although Leeuwun
accepts these differences as the different “rules” visual and verbal nonsense adhere to, his
claim that visual art provides more certainty than verbal art could be easily refuted by
pointing out that most aspects of visual art works serve as symbolic representations of
some aspect of reality and a circle could be a sun or a ball or simply a circle. Language,
written and spoken, works in the same way using letters and sounds as symbols that
signify some aspect of reality that is associated with them. The core difference between
visual and verbal arts is not that one is more concrete, but that viewers, regardless of
previous knowledge of visuals, more universally understand images. A language, on the
other hand, must be translated to be understood by a non-speaker of said language.

Nonsense occurs within the closed environment of a narrative. Within the world
created, the nonsense becomes sensical—how things are. This can only happen within a
form of art that can create a distinct setting or story world. Visual arts on their own (not
accompanied by text) are “static” and therefore cannot create a story outside of the
confines of their frames (Leeuwun 63). At most, a work of art can give a piece of a
story—an isolated moment from which viewers can infer the progression. Lisa Ede writes
that “one primary function of the drawing is to establish the nature of the world” (107). In
this case, the illustration serves the purpose of bringing to “life” the fantastic in a text. Illustrations follow passages and depict characters and scenes that may otherwise be hard to imagine. They don’t make the characters strange because the words that describe them do that; rather the pictures serve as a way to help the reader visualize the strange. As Wim Tigges suggests “an illustration may serve to elucidate” (51). Therefore, the illustrations that accompany nonsense texts and are often dubbed “visual nonsense,” do not create nonsense in their own right, but rather assist the reader in visualizing the fantastical characters and events described by the text of the work.

Key Works of Nonsense and their Visuals

As the favored sample texts for the genre of literary nonsense, Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (from this point *Wonderland*) and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (from this point *Looking Glass*) have developed quite the ever-growing canon of secondary literature. Reviewing all scholarly inquiry into Carroll’s *Alice* tales would be not only time-consuming but also tedious; therefore, this section will focus primarily on scholarship with reference to the relationship of text to illustration or various *Alice* adaptations.

Michael Hancher in *The Tenniel Illustrations to the “Alice” Books* provides readers with a historical and artistic overview of the compositions of Tenniel’s famous illustrations and the context in which they were created. Hancher writes that “by now Tenniel’s illustrations have become perfect mirror images of the world that Alice discovered down the rabbit hole and through the looking-glass. They make up the other half of the text, and readers are wise to accept no substitutes” (3). Although Carroll
himself did have several issues with the manner in which Tenniel portrayed his characters (their working relationship often is characterized as strained), the Tenniel illustrations as Hancher suggests are often viewed as almost as crucial to the tale as the words themselves. Will Brooker in *Alice's Adventures* states that "artists [who have depicted the *Alice* tales in visual form] worked in the shadow of John Tenniel" (105). Both Hancher and Brooker also discuss the interlocking quality of the text with the illustrations.

Hancher writes that Carroll and Tenniel designed early editions of *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* "so that the text and illustrations would be significantly juxtaposed on the page" (122). Similarly, Brooker writes that "the 'precise bracketing' of the Tenniel pictures by the text adds to their 'dramatic immediacy'" (132). The positioning of the images in this manner emphasizes their overall importance to the text, an importance stemming from its nature as a work of literary nonsense. The fact that Tenniel's illustrations have become an irrevocable part of the experience of the *Alice* stories begs the question of whether they also take on some of its nonsensical qualities in their own right, which will be explored further in the following chapter.

While the longevity of Carroll's work provides for ample amounts of scholarly attention, *The Phantom Tollbooth* (from this point *Tollbooth*) has a much more meager following. This is due in part to its status as a children's novel. Written in the 1960s before the rise of the study of children's literature as a serious scholarly discipline, Juster's work is often brought up in reference to its potential to be used in the elementary classroom to teach students critical reading techniques and inspire a love of learning. When the book is discussed in a more prestigious capacity, it is often in reference to its status as a work of literary nonsense. Anderson and Apseloff use *Tollbooth* numerous
times in order to exemplify various elements of literary nonsense. They write that “Juster acknowledges the language specific nature of the sounds that make up both nonce and real words” as well as praising his “Lockean” insistence on “the primacy of the senses as a way of knowing” (Anderson and Apseloff 55, 86). Comparing Juster further to 18th century thinkers, Wim Tigges writes that “Norton Juster carries on the Swiftian tradition of intellectual nonsense” (23). Outside of *Tollbooth’s* significance as a contemporary piece of literary nonsense, the book is largely brought up (in academic contexts at least) in reference to its use in the school room. Mary Brown in her article “Making Sense of Nonsense” interprets Juster’s novel as an “allegory of children’s learning” alongside the work of Carroll. She write that “Carroll’s and Juster's narratives operate to both diagnose and remedy children's struggles with learning: by making fun of learning, they make learning fun.”

Although the text may be taught and enjoyed semi-frequently at the elementary level, *Tollbooth* has little scholarly attention past that. However, Norton Juster’s *The Phantom Tollbooth* merits further attention. Possessing the same nonsensical nature as Carroll’s work as well as its own original, iconic illustrations by Jules Feiffer, *Tollbooth* presents readers with the same conflicts of attention as the *Alice* texts.

**Words and Pictures in Nonsense**

The first step to unraveling the complexity of the word-image relationship in nonsense is to examine the way the original illustrations of *Wonderland*, *Looking-Glass*, and *Tollbooth* interplay with the elements of literary nonsense in each text. From this, it
will be easier to focus on the translation of specific instances of nonsense into other visual forms in the film and stage adaptations of Carroll and Juster’s texts.

The relationship between illustration and text in a work of literary nonsense is a unique and complicated one. Pictures in such a text are integrated into the story and often depict aspects of the story not specifically described. Like most illustrated pieces of literature, the images in nonsense texts serve the purpose of aiding readers in the visualization of the scenery, characters, and crucial plot points. It is often thought that illustrations appear only where “words fail to express” (Elliott 79). However, within nonsense texts, the relationship of words and pictures is often muddled by pictures which reiterate and reinforce previously described scenes, causing confusion when attempting to point to the place of origin for the nonsense evoked by the text. As mentioned in the previous section on nonsense in visual media, images serve to elucidate a text; they occur in very specific places where they enhance the reading experience.

As mentioned previously, Lisa Ede suggests that the illustration in a story serves the purpose of creating the fantasy world in which nonsense can flourish (107). However, the drawings are often inspired by descriptions of the world found within the text and as Leeuwun notes “by tradition, the illustration is subservient to the story” (71). This type of image-text relationship is seen frequently in nonsense texts. Often times, authors will describe something (such as Juster does with his dodecahedron), then, breaking the fourth wall, reference the image on the same page, which offers imaginative assistance to readers.

The benefit of images in nonsense texts is that they present concrete representations of the fantastical elements in order to liberate the reader’s mind of the
burden of imagining, and allow it to concentrate more on the games and puzzles the nonsense is playing with words. For example, Leeuwun notes that “many of Carroll’s puns, which are often a severe test of the reader’s imagination, are visualized by Tenniel” (70). Since readers can simply “look below” to see how something in the text would appear, their minds are more susceptible to picking up the cleverness of the prose.

Drawing from his background as a political cartoonist, many of Tenniel’s illustrations are reminiscent of caricatures, and focus on exaggerated features and expressions. In this manner, the images do not “construct characters, but rather presents eccentricities, more often than not quirks of language. What the texts construct are speech situations, usually ones in which something goes wrong” (Lecercle 71). This connects back to the reliance of nonsense on conversation. In order to initiate nonsense, one must first establish a rational reality, which is subverted through miscommunication. Such a reality in the case of the Alice texts would be the fantasy worlds of Wonderland and the Looking-Glass and the laws by which they operate. Tenniel’s illustrations are not illustrations of miscommunications, but rather illustrations of the worlds and their inhabitants.

Much like the Tenniel illustrations of the Alice texts, Jules Feiffer’s unique illustration style stems from his previous work as a cartoonist. Wim Tigges writes that often in nonsense texts “the doodle-like quality of the drawing creates a distance from reality” (34). This distance, among other things, is what forces the illustrations of nonsense texts to represent more fantasy than nonsense. If readers and viewers are already in the mindset that what they are seeing is not real, then they will more readily accept any bizarre or unusual attributes as sensical within the world of the story.
THE OLDEST RULE IN THE BOOK. Much of Carroll’s nonsense is derived not from simple plays on words, but instead from the disconnect between Alice’s understanding of the world and that of the inhabitants of Wonderland, which is brought about through her conversations with them. The reliance of nonsense on conversation is dependent on the perceived passing of time; however, “in art, time is a static notion” (Leeuwen 63). While a conversation may last multiple pages in the text and contain numerous inconsistencies that result in nonsense, an image merely illustrates one moment and thus does not convey nonsense on its own.

Part of what make Carroll’s works such thrilling specimens of nonsense are their respective world’s operation on reverse logic. In Wonderland, characters often take Alice’s words to mean things different than she meant them and vice versa. Several situations in which Alice finds herself lost in utter nonsense occur because she clings to the logic of her own reality while the dream-world she is inhabiting turns this same logic on its head. In illustrations, this reverse-logic is nearly impossible to convey.

When Alice first encounters the Caterpillar, she is asked to explain herself, and struggles stating, “I can’t explain myself...you see,” to which the Caterpillar responds, “I don’t see” (Carroll 38). This retort is one of the first instances of nonsense to appear within Alice’s conversation with the Caterpillar. Still not used to the world she has fallen into, Alice attempts to use a common piece of figurative language, only to be combatted by the Caterpillar’s Wonderland-esque tendency to take the figurative literally. The illustration that accompanied this situation is the well-known depiction of the Caterpillar atop a mushroom smoking a hookah as Alice peers over the edge (see figure 1). While the image alone is strikingly absurd, it does not reflect nonsensical elements.
Within the fantasy world of Wonderland, it seems perfectly reasonable to assume that a talking Caterpillar would smoke hookah atop a mushroom. The image depicts no aspect of conversation other than that of an implied association, and rather acts as a “portal” into the realm of Wonderland. The reader looks to the image to get a sense of how the character and the situation would appear, then returns to the text to discover that the conversation, while seemingly normal, offers a disjunction in the communication process: Alice fails to understand the Caterpillar, while the Caterpillar fails to understand Alice.

This theme of inversion is much more liberally applied in Carroll’s second work. In addition to the set-up of a giant game of chess, *Looking-Glass* carries its name throughout, using mirrored characters and backwards logic in order to explain the workings of the world. A prime example of mirroring is Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Gardner writes in his notes in *An Annotated Alice* that “Tweedledum and Tweedledee are...“enantiomorphs,” mirror-image forms of each other. That Carroll intended this is strongly suggested by Tweedledee’s favorite word, ‘contrariwise,’ and by the fact that they extend right and left hands for a handshake” (182). However, the first image of the Tweedle bothers depicts them standing side by side arms around the other only
distinguishable by the “dum” and “dee” on their collars. In this image they look much more like twins that mirror images of one another (see figure 2). Their opposition to each other is only defined when they speak in text: “I know what you’re thinking about,” said Tweedledum: ‘but it isn’t so nohow.’ ‘Contrariwise,’ continued Tweedledee, ‘if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be: but as it isn’t, it ain’t. That’s logic’” (207). The alternation and repetition of Tweedledum’s “nohow” with Tweedledee’s “contrariwise” enforces Carroll’s intention of mirroring in these characters where the illustration fails to do so.

Within Looking-Glass, Alice has separate encounters with the Red and White Queens in which the backwards nature of the Looking-Glass world is further revealed and explained. While each of these encounters is marked by illustrations, the illustrations once again fail to capture the nonsensical nature of the world. While with the Red Queen, Alice is grabbed by the hand and told to run faster and faster. As soon as they stop, the text reads:

Alice looked round her in great surprise. “Why, I do believe we’ve been under this tree all the time! Everything’s just as it was!”

“Of course it is,” said the Queen: “what would you have it?”
“Well, in our country,” said Alice, still panting little, “you’d generally get somewhere else—if you ran very fast for a long time, as we’ve been doing.”

“A slow sort of country!” said the Queen. “Now, here, you see, 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.” (193)

The passage is accompanied by an illustration of the Red Queen and Alice hand-in-hand feet thrown out behind them and the Red Queen’s train on her gown blown back from the speed (see figure 3). The strokes in the illustration through the background are ambiguous and could signify either the movement of Alice and the Queen, or the movement of the landscape in reference to Alice and the Queen. The logical conclusion that one might make upon glancing at the image removed from the context of the story is that the Queen must be moving so fast the landscape is blurred much as the world appears to pass you by when looking through the window of a moving vehicle. It is only once the reader makes
their way to Alice’s reaction that they realize the nonsense: that the landscape moves, while the Queen and Alice must simply keep up.

Gardner writes that “Carroll was fascinated by time reversal as he was by mirror reversals” (196). This concept of “time reversal” is depicted primarily through the White Queen’s explanation of “living backwards.” The White Queen is not only able to remember the past, but also see into the future. She explains to Alice, “That’s the effect of living backwards... but there’s one great advantage in it, that one’s memory works both ways” (Carroll 222). When the White Queen begins screaming and Alice asks what is wrong, she simply replies that she will prick her finger on her broach, but once it actually happens the Queen is silent: “Why, I’ve done all the screaming already,” said the queen. “What would be the good of having it all over again?” (Carroll 224-25). These time reversals within *Looking-Glass* create the effect of nonsense by deconstructing the validity of a cause-effect circumstance. The issue with representing this in visual form is once again the static nature of the illustration. Since the images cannot denote the passing of time, readers are left with an illustration simply depicting a ragged-looking White Queen as Alice adjusts her hair (see figure 4).

In Wonderland, nonsense is often conflated with “madness.” As the Cheshire cat tells Alice about the Hatter and March

![Figure 4. Alice and the White Queen, illustration from John Tenniel, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. (New York: Castle, 2011; Print; 221).](image)
Hare: “Visit either you like: they’re both mad... we’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad... you must be or you wouldn’t have come here” (Carroll 56). The madness of Wonderland and its inhabitants is often depicted not in how they look, but in the character’s actions and language. “Madness” in Wonderland simply equates with the characters doing or saying unexpected things. For instance, in the most popular and well-known scene in Wonderland, the mad tea party, Alice struggles to work through the Hatter, March Hare, and dormouse’s confusing assertions and questions. One of the most famous instances of this is when the Hatter asks Alice “Why is a raven like a writing desk?” (Carroll 59). The famously “impossible” riddle (while at the time, it had no answer, the riddle has since developed quite the collection of possible solutions [Garner 171]), is nonsensical not necessarily in that it has no answer, but in that the Hatter asks it suddenly and without context.

*Figure 5.* The mad tea party, from John Tenniel, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: Castle, 2010; Print; 60)
The static nature of the illustration interferes with its ability to convey nonsense once again in this scene. The image that accompanies the tea party does not convey any elements of nonsense (puns, circular logic, parody, etc.) found throughout the section (see figure 5). While the first image of when Alice initially joins the table, seems somewhat bizarre—a hare, mouse, girl, and man sitting around a table set for many—it possesses only one trait that could be considered "visual nonsense" rather than simply fantasy. The Hatter as a character is drawn with an enlarged head and exaggerating his facial features. However, as mentioned previously, this is a technique common to caricatures that Tenniel inherits from his political cartooning. The exaggerated features and enlarged heads are seen several other times throughout the stories (the Duchess for instance) and are more due to stylistic drawing choices, than purposeful disruption of expectation in order to create nonsense.

SEVEN IMPOSSIBLE THINGS. There are two exceptions within Carroll and Tenniel’s works that seem, at first, to reinforce the potential for visual nonsense. The first of these is the instance of “visual puns.” In Looking-Glass an entire chapter is devoted to Alice conversing with a gnat and learning about Looking-Glass insects. The illustrations (see figures 6-8) that accompany this conversation depict three...
insects: a rocking-horse-fly, a snap-dragon-fly, and a bread-and-butterfly. While the rocking-horse-fly’s image is straightforward enough for the reader to infer its name without reader further and grasp the pun, the other two images present more of a challenge to the viewer. The gnat explains to Alice that a snap-dragon-fly’s “body is made of plum-pudding, its wings of holly leaves, and its head is a raisin burning in brandy...and it makes its nest in a Christmas-box” (Carroll 201). *The Annotated Alice* explains that “snapdragon (or flapdragon) is the name of a pastime that delighted Victorian children during the Christmas season. A shallow bowl was filled with brandy, raisings, were tossed in, and the brandy set on fire” (Gardner 174). It is only after the extrapolation of the pun is told to Alice in text that the illustration of the snap-dragon-fly pun begins to take shape and look like what it is said to be. The bread-and-butter-fly illustration could be similarly interpreted. This uncertainty of interpretation is precisely what negates the possibility of a true visual pun in these instances. While one might interpret the pun correctly from the image, one might also misinterpret it, making the written (or spoken) words necessary for the understanding and enjoyment of the pun.

In *Wonderland*, the most overwhelmingly pun-filled section is Alice’s conversation with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. The Mock Turtle, telling Alice of his lessons as a school child describes taking: “Reeling and Writhing” and “Arithmetic—Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision” as well as “Drawling, Stretching, and
Fainting” (Carroll 86). However, the illustrations in this section focus not on visual
depictions of these puns, but rather on bringing the fantastic beasts of the gryphon and
mock turtle to life (see figure 9).

Similarly, in *Looking-Glass* the flower garden illustration depicts many of the
flowers with faces, but disregards the importance of the puns on giving reason to the
flowers’ sassy conversation; for example, “In most gardens,” the Tiger-lily said, “they
make the beds too soft—so that the flowers are always asleep” (Carroll 187). However,
by looking at the image, viewers are only able to distinguish that the flowers have
humanoid features, which could just as easily be attributed to fantasy as to nonsense (see
Furthermore, the tree the Rose references as the garden's protector is not even pictured; "It could bark," said the Rose. "It says, 'bough-wough!'" cried a Daisy; "that's why its branches are called boughs!" (Carroll 186). While these puns could have possibly been translated effectively in illustration (like that of the rocking-horse-fly), they were chosen to be left as word-play alone. The lack of illustrations of the puns throughout both Wonderland and Looking-Glass points to a primary theme between the roles of text and illustration in works of nonsense: the illustration, first and foremost, must depict the make-believe characters and world, while the words are left to introduce nonsense.
There are two specific instances within the *Alice* tales where one could argue that a visual is significantly contributing to the creating of the effect of nonsense within the text. The first of these occurs in *Wonderland* when the mouse’s tale is added into the story in the form of a concrete poem that takes the shape of a mouse’s tale (see figure 11). In this instance, nonsense is evoked in the form of a pun when Alice misunderstands “tale” for the mouse’s physical “tail.” The pun is then compounded by the tale being represented on the page in the shape of a tail. Although this is a sort of visual representation, the concrete poem’s shape would have no relevance if it were not for the previous lines of dialogue and narration:

“Mine is a long and a sad tale!” said the Mouse, turning to Alice and sighing.

“It is a long tail, certainly,” said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse’s tail; “but why do you call it sad?” And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this—

(Carroll 24)

*Figure 11* The Mouse’s Tale, from John Tenniel, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: Castle, 2010; Print; 25).
The necessity of this passage means that the poem on its own is unable to enact the pun; while a reader may be able to understand that the poem is about a mouse and is intentionally shaped as a mouse’s tale, it would not seem unusual or counterintuitive for it to be shaped as such. Consequently, the elements of nonsense in this instance are still brought to readers through the words, rather than the images on the page.

A second instance where the typography of the book creates a visual effect that helps to enhance the nonsensical nature of the text, but falls short of creating it itself is in *Looking-Glass* when Alice first picks up a copy of the “Jabberwocky” poem. The poem first appears on the page printed entirely backwards (see figure 12). Alice, piecing together the reverse-logic of the new world she has entered, realizes that the book must be a “looking-glass book” and as such she must “hold it up to the glass [mirror]” so that the “words will all go the right way again” (Carroll 182). Upon doing so she is able to read the poem fully. While the backwards printing of the first stanza of “Jabberwocky” helps to reinforce the fact that Alice has tumbled into a mirror world where everything is the reverse of what one would expect, the text effect does little to create nonsense visually. It instead helps to justify the nature of the fantasy world.

*It was like this:*

![Figure 12 Looking-glass book text, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (New York: Castle, 2010; Print; 180).](image)

The poem “Jabberwocky,” however, is on its own one of the most recognized and renowned pieces of nonsense verse. This is largely due to the fact that the majority of the
words in the poem are nonce words, specifically portmanteaus. When readers first encounter “Jabberwocky” it reads as complete and utter nonsense. The image, which precedes the poem in the text, portrays a young girl with a sword facing off against a dragon-like creature one can only assume is the Jabberwocky (see figure 13). However, the illustration is unable to convey the same effect of confusion and distancing as the portmanteau words of the poem, and as such stands merely as a representation of fantasy like many of the other illustrations in the books.

“Jabberwocky” is returned to later on in Looking-Glass when Alice asks Humpty Dumpty to explain what the poem means. Humpty Dumpty begins to give her a language lesson about portmanteaus and explains that “‘slithy’ means ‘lithe and slimy’... ‘toves’ are something like badgers—they’re something like lizards—and they’re something like corkscrews... also they make their nests under sundials—also they live on cheese” (Carroll 240). He continues to explain that “gyre” is to go round like a gyroscope, “gimble” is to make holes, “wabe” is the grass around a sundial, “mimsy” is flimsy and miserable, and “borogroves” and “mome raths” are a mop-like bird and green pig.
creatures respectively (240). An illustration appears with Humpty Dumpty’s explanation that gives life to these bizarre creatures (see figure 14). However, looking at the illustration itself, one would not be able to name any of the creatures in it, nor describe them using the nonce words Carroll inserts into the poem. The creatures certainly appear as if they are some sort of fantasy creature, but seem no less illogical in appearance than a gyphon, hypogriff, or sphynx—all fantasy animals that people are accustomed to viewing. The nonsense in the case of “Jabberwocky” is not that creatures like toves are part badger, part lizard, but that the words used to describe the creatures were invented for the sole purpose of using them in the poem for amusement.

**Pick Your Words Very Carefully.** While Carrollonian nonsense is primarily subversive logic, Norton Juster takes a much more straight-forward approach to literary nonsense. In *Tollbooth* nonsense comes primarily in two forms: first, throughout the novel, the character’s personalities, appearances, and actions, often stem from a primary pun, found in their name or the role. Secondly, Juster plays with perception as Milo moves throughout “the Lands Beyond.” Much like the Cheshire Cat and Red and White
Queens’ explanations of their worlds in *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass*, each new place Milo encounters has its own ‘rules’ or ‘way of doing things,’ which results in apparent nonsense. However, these ‘rules’ of the land are derived, not through ideas of inversion and reversal or game-logic, but through the concrete interpretation of colloquialisms and idioms. In *The Annotated Phantom Tollbooth*, Leonard Marcus notes that when writing, Juster pursued a “mischievous campaign to present Feiffer with characters and situations the artist would find impossible to illustrate” (111). Where Tenniel had asked for the alteration or removal of aspects of the *Alice* stories he felt were “beyond the appliances of art,” Feiffer rose to meet the challenge (Brooker 105). As mentioned, a primary element of Juster’s nonsense is that of his character puns. Although Feiffer did his best to translate these puns into visuals, like Tenniel’s *Looking-Glass* illustrations, the visuals delivered often fall short of clearly capturing the play-on-words necessary to consider them nonsense.

Similarly to the “rocking-horse-fly,” Feiffer seems to have one primary success at penning a visual pun: Tock, the watchdog. His illustration (see figure 15) depicts a large shaggy dog with an equally large pocket watch imbedded in its middle. Any reader gazing at the image would be able to put two-and-two together and enjoy the cleverness of it all. As Marcus writes: “Feiffer’s Tock is a walking visual pun,” which “gives new meaning to the term ‘self-winding watch’” (30). However,
simply making something a pun does not denote nonsense. Nonsense is created by the interplay of tension in meaning, playfulness, and emphasis on language. While a visual pun contains all of these things, it cannot sustain them. Once the moment of discovery of the play on words has passed, the illustration becomes commonplace and simply serves as a visual representation of a character rather than a puzzle for the reader to solve. For the pun to be considered nonsense, the tension in meaning must be ever-present.

Juster sustains his pun throughout the text by using the character to introduce further wordplay concerning time. For example, when Milo first meets Tock the dog chastises him: "KILLING TIME!" roared the dog—so furiously that his alarm went off" (Juster 30). Tock’s protectiveness of “time” elaborates on the initial “watchdog” pun; as

Figure 16. Time flies, from Jules Fieffer, *The Phantom Tollbooth* (New York: Yearling, 1989; Print; 235).
the Lethargians say “He’s always sniffing around to see that nobody wastes time” (Juster 28). Tock’s nature as a pun is not simply left as an isolated instance of wordplay, but rather the kicking off point for an entire line of language games. For example, his pun-nature creates the situation in which Milo, Tock, and the Humbug are able to save Rhyme and Reason and complete their quest. As they look for a way to escape the Castle in the Air, Milo turns to Tock to suggest “Well, time flies doesn’t it?” to which Tock responds “On many occasions” and flies the team down from the Castle with Rhyme and Reason on his back (Juster 236). While Feiffer’s illustration (see figure 16) is able to capture the dog in flight, the literal interpretation of the adage “Time Flies when you’re having fun” is something that is only knowable by reading the text.

While many of the characters in *Tollbooth* are named from puns, there are several that are particularly interesting because their names have little if anything to do with their appearance. Unlike Tock, most of the characters appear relatively normal-looking. It is only once Milo engages in conversation with these characters that the discovery of their abnormality becomes apparent. The first of these characters encountered is the “Whether Man.” When Milo meets the “little man in a long coat” he there is nothing that far out of the ordinary about him (Juster 17). Feiffer’s illustration depicts a joyful looking man releasing a single balloon into the air (see figure 17). Leonard Marcus notes in *An Annotated Phantom Tollbooth* that “the drawing of the Whether man as a

Figure 17. The Whether Man, from Jules Feiffer, *The Phantom Tollbooth* (New York: Yearling, 1989; Print; 18).
“short, plump balding semi-lunatic in a toga” is Feiffer’s teasing portrait of his collaborator [Juster]” (18). While the image of the character may not be something one expects to see every day, it is not unusual enough to cause a disruption in sense. What does cause this disruption is when the Whether man asks Milo if he thinks it will rain and Milo responds “I thought you were the Weather Man,” to which the man corrects “I’m the Whether Man, not the Weather Man, for after all it’s more important to know whether there will be weather than what the weather will be” (Juster 19). The pun in his name is only made apparent through the spelling of his name (something that must be read) and during the context of his conversation with Milo when it is explained. If simply looking at the illustration, the Whether man might as well be the Weather man or even Juster himself.

The same phenomenon occurs when Milo encounters the Spelling Bee and Faintly Macabre. At first Milo is startled by the large buzzing insect. Feiffer’s illustration of the bee, although much larger than an ordinary bug, denotes nothing of the bee’s “spelling” nature (see figure 18). The Spelling Bee pun is only apparent when the bee introduces himself to Milo. Unlike Tock, the creature would be indistinguishable as a living pun if only left up to its illustration. The word play is further expanded on through the Bee’s habit of spelling out words it says for the reader; for example, the Bee cautions Milo,
“Don’t be alarmed—a-l-a-r-m-e-d.” (Juster 50).

Faintly Macabre, “the not-so-wicked Which,” is the embodiment of plays on both the word “macabre” and “witch,” yet her appearance is much more similar to that of a grandmother. During her conversation with Milo and Tock, Faintly explains she is often confused for a “Witch” when in reality she is a “Which” who was in charge of choosing which words were to be used for all occasions, which ones to say and which ones not to say…” (Juster 67). Feiffer’s illustration (see figure 19), depicts an old woman complete with wrinkles, shawl, and knitting needles. The previous image of Faintly even adds a rocking chair to the character’s persona (see figure 20). Feiffer chose for his illustration to not only combat the slight hideousness Faintly’s name implies, but also to not play into the witch-which mix-up. In this way, his illustration does create a sort of tension between expectation and reality. This tension
would support Anderson and Abseloff’s claim that a dislocation between text and image can create the effect of nonsense (195). However, once the witch/which confusion is remedied, the illustration no longer contradicts reader expectation of what a “witch” looks like, and the illustration serves the purpose to then represent an element of fantasy pertinent to the story world of Dictionopolis: what a “which” looks like.

What started as make believe. The difficulty with illustrating lands that derive their names from logic puzzles, word play, and idiomatic phrases, is that they are bound to fall short in depicting the impact that the name has on the setting. Through the naming of Milo’s destinations in peculiar, yet clever ways, Juster crafts a brand of nonsense that truly revels in the irony of life and language. The Lands Beyond are places where the people and events that occur are extensions of the places they occur in. For instance, when Milo enters the Land of Expectations he is greeted by the Whether Man, who wants to know what to expect of the weather. The Whether Man informs Milo that “Expectations is the place you must always go to before you get to where you’re going” (Juster 19). Expectations is described as a place where “the sun sparkled, the sky was clear, and all the colors he saw seemed to be richer and brighter than he [Milo] could ever remember” (Juster 16). This description seems fitting for a place called “expectations” because people generally expect things to be much better than they actually are--a fact reinforced by Milo’s immediate turn into the gray and monotonous “Doldrums” after leaving Expectations. Feiffer’s illustration of Expectations (see figure 21) depicts Milo driving through a pleasant countryside filled with greenery and sun. There is even a small bridge that appears to cross a creek. While the illustration captures Juster’s description
perfectly, it leaves out the nonsense created by the irony of a place called “expectations” being where you go before you get to your destination.

Figure 21 Expectations, from Jules Feiffer, The Phantom Tollbooth (New York: Yearling, 1989; Print; 17).

Feiffer’s illustration takes on a similar role when Milo encounters a boy named Alec Bings in a place called “Point of View.” While admiring a view, Milo comments that is beautiful to which he receives a reply of “Oh, I don’t know...It’s all in the way you look at things” (Juster 102). Milo discovers that the speaker is a boy about his age who stands several feel in the air (Alec later explains that in his family everyone is born in the air and grows down to the ground). Feiffer’s illustration of this encounter depicts a boy standing in the air of a forested area while Milo quizzically stairs at the boys shoes
(see figure 22). Although the image itself is definitely jarring, without the words of the text, the viewer would have no context for Alec’s unusual altitude and most likely conclude that he was flying or levitating by some means. The picture itself is an image that corresponds nicely with the make-believe world Milo is visiting, but takes on new meaning when coupled with Juster’s play on perspective. The nonsense here, like in many situations, is that Milo meets someone with an entirely opposite lifestyle and point of view than his own in a place called “point of view” causing him to look at things in a new light.

In a second play on perspective, Alec directs Milo to speak to the Giant, who in turn directs him to the Midget, who then tells Milo to speak to the Fat Man, who sends Milo to the Thin Man. As Milo soon discovers by knocking on each man’s door, the Giant, Midget, Fat Man, and Thin Man are all the same person. Feiffer’s illustrations appear two to a spread and are the same sketch of a man opening a door in all ways but the plaque that hangs above the doorframe (see figure 23). By repeating the image four times, the man’s ability to classify himself in four opposing manners is reinforced. The joke, while being successful visually, still requires the text to justify how an average
sized man can be a giant, midget, etc. This is also an example of a place in which the primary effect of nonsense in illustration is still being conveyed through the written word by the name plate above the door.

In a twist on the cautionary idiom “don’t jump to conclusions,” Milo and his traveling companions end up suddenly vising the Isle of Conclusions in the Sea of
Knowledge. When asking a man they meet how they got there, Milo received the following explanation: “You jumped, of course,” explained Canby. “That’s the way most everyone gets here. It’s really quite simple: every time you decide something without having a good reason, you jump to Conclusions whether you like it or not” (Juster 168). The literal interpretation of the figurative idiom is a perfect example of Juster’s manipulation of common phraseology. The only illustration in this excursion in which the island can be seen in an image that shows Milo and Tock driving along the shore line in their automobile and the Humbug up in the air above the water. The isle can be seen in the distance filled with palm trees, and depending on the viewer’s interpretation, the Humbug is angled towards the island (see figure 24). Similar to the image of with Alec in Point of View, the illustration does not manage to capture the effect of the play on words that is sending the Humbug away. For all the viewer knows, the Humbug could just be flying (bugs do that). Had the illustration held some sort of label for the island much like the Giant/Midget images, the image might have been able to more clearly portray the nonsensical elements of the text. However, as it is, it serves the purpose of illustrating the Humbug’s flight without spoiling Milo’s discover that they are on Conclusions after the page turn. Feiffer’s illustrations of the lands

Figure 24 Jumping to Conclusions, from Jules Feiffer, *The Phantom Tollbooth* (New York: Yearling, 1989; Print; 165).
often depict only what is necessary to provide atmosphere for reader’s accompanying Milo on his journey.

Two of the most interesting instances of word play and compounded logic occur when Milo meets with King Azaz of Dictionopolis and the Mathmagician of Digitopolis. During the banquet in Dictionopolis, Milo is invited as a special guest of King Azaz himself. When Azaz tasks Milo with giving a speech Milo beings simply enough “Your Majesty, ladies and gentlemen…” (Juster 87). However, as the rest of the table proceeds to make speeches, Milo soon learns that speeches in the Kingdom of Wisdom are not quite what he thought. When he’s delivered his dinner, Milo exasperatedly tells the King, “I didn’t know that I was going to have to eat my words,” to which the King responds “everyone here does...you should have made a tastier speech” (Juster 88). After several other faux-pas caused by the turning of a phrase, Milo eventually learns to choose his words more carefully. This instance however, represents perfectly a space in the text where the illustration, although amusing in its own way, doesn’t translate the misunderstanding of logic represented in the text. Similar to the scene of the mad tea party in Wonderland, the banquet image merely depicts a long table filled with people

Figure 25. The Royal Banquet, from Jules Feiffer, The Phantom Tollbooth (New York: Yearling, 1989; Print; 84-85).
(see figure 25). Without the written text to guide the reader through the logical mishaps that Milo encounters, one would simply interpret the image as your average dinner party.

A similar event occurs when the Mathmagician invites Milo up to his laboratory. When Milo and the Humbug ask to see the “biggest” and “longest” numbers the Mathmagician misinterprets their question and instead shows them a very large three and a very wide eight. The images paired with these queries are not illustrations, but rather a text effect (see figure 26). This visual acts similarly to the concrete poem of the Mouse’s Tale in Wonderland. While the visual reinforces the play on words that occurred, it does not create it. If taken separately from the text, the enlarged numbers alone would be meaningless to a viewer; however, if not accompanied by the enlarged numbers, the turn of phrase would still exist and elicit amusement from the reader. In these instances, the organization of the text on the page becomes a sort of illustration, but at the same time remains rooted in language. Just as the illustrations of the Giant, Midget, Fat Man, and Thin Man use words combined with images to evoke nonsense, the biggest/longest number bit combines Arabic numerals with textual effects to create nonsense. In both instances, although technically visual, the nonsense comes from the use of characters of language (alphabet letters or numerals). While the old adage “a picture is worth 1,000
words” can be true in many circumstances, in works of Nonsense, words can be much more important than a picture.

**Why Illustrations Are Not Really Nonsense**

Pictures have the unique ability to be understood, in some capacity, by anyone regardless of their age, education, or native language. A native English speaker can recognize an image of a young girl as what it is, just as easily as a native Spanish, French, or German speaker. In this sense “visual perception varies less throughout the world than languages do” (Elliott 77). Nonsense, however, relies on variability of language in order to create its effect. While written nonsense manipulates the duplicity and arbitrariness of language, nonsense itself is not subject to interpretation; “nonsense in fact restricts a “floating” meaning, especially its emotional value, by making as concrete a statement as possible” (Leeuwun 63). Illustrations, on the other hand, as works of visual art are subject to a simultaneous ease of understanding and mutability of meaning. While anyone could look at an image of a girl and know that it’s a girl, any number of people may derive a different meaning for the image by crafting their own individual answers to questions like who is she? What is she doing? Where is she going? Why is she there?

In “The Liaison of Visual and Written Nonsense,” Leeuwun writes that “in order to achieve this [nonsense], visual art must play about with concrete and recognizable images, or with language” (63). However, as suggested above, visual art can only be so concrete and recognizable. At a certain point, all art is subject to interpretation, a luxury that nonsense cannot afford. Furthermore, if the image is playing with language, isn’t it still words that are creating nonsense, not the image itself? Nonsense is “not a universe of
things, but of words and ways of using them, plus a certain amount of pictorial illustration” (qtd. in Tigges 13). In this sense, illustrations in a nonsense work are not “visual nonsense” but a “plus” to the nonsense created by words. The illustrations are additives that help ground the work in the fantasy realm it exists in order for the nonsense to be decipherable, and not just a gathering of signs signifying nothing.
Nonsense Adapted

Carroll’s Alice stories—due in part to their iconic illustrations—are frequently adapted to stage and film. Charles Dodgson (Carroll) in his lifetime was very enthusiastic about transitioning Wonderland and Looking-Glass to stage, but he also wished to mediate its transition with a strict hand. In the early years after the books’ initial publications, Carroll himself attempted to take action to prevent the adaptation of the Alice stories without his permission by compiling all of the speeches in each story and having them registered as dramas (Lovett 22). After the first Alice-related stage production in December of 1874, Carroll had increasing amounts of specifications to make concerning the adaptation of his work (Lovett 24). Firstly, he specified that “he objected to interpolations, and meant any future dramatic version[s] to be the book itself” (Lovett 31). Similarly, Carroll requested that “only one of the two stories should be dramatized” at a time believing that most audiences (especially children) were adverse to mixtures (Lovett 37). For the most part, early stage adaptations did their best to adhere to Carroll’s stringent rules for the adaptation of his works; one of the best being Savile Clarke’s Alice in Wonderland in 1886 where act one was Wonderland based followed by act two taking place in the Looking-Glass world (Lovett 51). Charles Lovett in Alice on Stage writes that “with familiar words and familiar pictures, in the form of the costumes based on Tenniel’s drawings, this ‘dream-play’ truly brought the story of Alice to life, and this living version of a favorite tale delighted the audience” (60).

Although Lovett’s work is largely a historical survey of early attempts at staging Alice, he does express the critical opinion that “Alice is not essentially a dramatic work” (105). He further explains that “Dodgson’s dialogue works marvelously in a theatrical
context, and many individual scenes, such as the Mad Tea-party and the Mock Turtle’s story, transfer quite well to the stage, but the work as a whole, which was not written with the intention of being staged, has no real dramatic unity” (Lovett 105). This lack of “dramatic unity” stems largely from what he characterizes as the “episodic nature” of the book. However, if the Alice texts are so un-dramatic in their original form, why are dramatic adaptions (both on stage and film) so prevalent? Lovett suggests that “one of the chief elements which has attracted dramatists to the story... is [the] group of characters, well known and loved by youngsters and adults, upon whom the dramatist can hang his own ideas and interpretations” (105). Regardless of the true reason for its appeal, Carroll’s Alice tales have indeed been adapted countless time, but do any of these adaptations truly capture the beautiful lunacy of the literacy nonsense in the base text?

Citing Disney’s 1951 animated adaptation, Brooker also discusses how visual adaptations of Wonderland and Looking-Glass not only share the Tenniel-esque character depictions, but also “a skeletal narrative structure” and “a core of key scenes that also involves a shared bank of dialogue and basic templates of character and setting” (202). With over twenty film or television versions of the Alice tales in the twentieth century alone, “without a doubt Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland has become one of the most dramatized works ever written” (Lovett 104). The sheer quantity of films seems to suggest at least a small scholarly interest in Alice adaptions; however, as Brooker discovered in Alice’s Adventures there is surprisingly little scholarly inquiry of the adaptations, which does not regard them as “inherently and inevitably second-rate next to their literary originals” (109). While Brooker is right in his assertion that adaptations of Alice deserve their own attention as pieces of art in their own right, part of the large-scale
dissatisfaction of many adaptations that are unfaithful to the original texts, stems from their inability to accurately depict the literary nonsense, which litters Carroll’s text and provides it with its carefree, playful aesthetic.

Adapted on a smaller scale, with only one stage play and a single film adaptation, *Tollbooth* provides for a better investigation into what happens to the nonsense elements in a text when adapted to primarily visual mediums. This is due, in part, to the lack of previous scholarship to sway the direction of analysis, but primarily to the manageability of the sample-size. Generally, the first adaptation of any novel to stage or film first and foremost seeks to be like the novel. With the sheer amount of adaptations of *Alice*, directors are bound to have taken further liberties with the text than the pioneering versions did, thus making the investigation of what happens to the nonsense elements that much more difficult. With *Tollbooth*, it is safer to assume that the stage and film versions seek to be like the book, and in that respect, seek to implement nonsensical elements.

**A Note on Illustration and Adaptation**

Since, as discussed previously, it is important to examine all possible scenarios in which visual nonsense could in fact exist, it is necessary to address some basic principles of illustration and film as well as the process of adaptation. Firstly, most two-dimensional visual arts (painting, drawings, etc.) create works that exist as impressions of moments. Two-dimensional art might attempt to replicate movement or imply the passage of time, but the work itself is restricted by its static nature. As Kamilla Elliott notes in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, illustrations in books, just like other two-dimensional artworks, are single frozen moments (18-19). As discussed earlier, nonsense is often dependent on
and defined by its relationship to narrative structure and the passing of time. As will be discussed in the following chapter, much of the nonsense that exists in Carroll's *Alice* texts occurs in the dialogue included, and conversations must occur within a space that allows for the passage of time.

Stage productions, while in some ways the "best of both worlds" since they often seek to retain an important connection to literary roots and focus much more on dialogue than films, still suffer from some dilemmas of both illustrations and film when attempting to create nonsense. Erwin Panofsky in "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures" notes that regardless of its nature as an "action medium" "in theater, space is static, that is, the space represented on the stage, as well as the spatial relation of the beholder to the spectacle, is unalterably fixed" (43). The static nature of theatre, although in a different capacity than that of the image, still hinders the effect of nonsense. Panofsky writes that "in return for this restriction [of static space], the theater has the advantage that time, the medium of emotion and thought conveyable by speech, is free and independent of anything that may happen in visible space" (43). The restriction of space, then, forces the stage play to depend on actors' action and dialogue in order to create the effect of being in a different space. The result of needing dialogue to create space is that any nonsense that could potentially occur, is most likely still coming from words in the form of utterances and not from the visual spectacle itself.

Panofsky notes that in film, this situation is reversed (43). Since neither time nor space are limited, a film can create fantastic environments as such does not carry the same dependence on dialogue or its script. In his words:
The invention of the sound track in 1928 has been unable to change the basic fact that a moving picture, even when it has learned to talk, remains a picture that moves and does not convert itself into a piece of writing that is enacted. Its substance remains a series of visual sequences held together by an uninterrupted flow of movement in space...and not a sustained study in human character and destiny transmitted by effective, let alone “beautiful” diction. (Panofsky 43)

The precedence of the visual in film seems to solve the issues that arise in theatre; however, new issues surface in the relationship of text (verbal) and image (visual) and the prospect for visual nonsense. Although both stage and film productions begin on the page, “the script recedes into the background as it changes from a verbal to visual text, so that by the time the film has been complete, the words have been translated into images...the process of filmmaking is one of deverbalizing, deliterizing, and dewording verbal language to make film “language”” (Elliott 83). This “deliterizing” that occurs in film means that visual takes precedence over verbal; action takes precedence over dialogue. As far as marketing films goes, this is a significant accomplishment because as Dudley J. Andrew in Concepts in Film Theory suggests “the language of film is universal” since “visual perception varies less throughout the world than languages do” (qtd. Elliott 77). Universal language means universal audiences. However, in the case of a genre like Nonsense, which relies on the variability of language, a universal language is not accommodating.

Nonsense works like those of Carroll and Juster are ideal targets for adaptation due in large part to the books’ already crafted dialogue, unique and interesting characters,
and aesthetically challenging settings. Books like *Wonderland*, *Looking-Glass*, and *Tollbooth* are playgrounds for the imagination, and as such present their adaptors with a unique joy in bringing a fantastic story world to life. However, viewers of these adaptations are not given the liberty to let their imaginations run wild because the film or play has already done all of the imagining for them. When viewers sit down to watch a play, they are simply recipients of the director and actors’ interpretation of a work. As Ben Brady notes in *Principles of Adaptation for Film and Television*, “the only way a playwright can reveal a character’s thoughts is through the use of dialogue, action and images: that is, by what people in the story *say* and *do*, and by what the audience is given to *see*” (3). This causes each play to be presented as if the story is occurring in present time—as if it is actually happening—and this in turn, “necessarily reject[s] the viewer’s imagination” (Brady 7). This becomes an issue when adapting Nonsense texts because as Brady also notes, “while reading we have taken several left and right turns that actually had nothing to do with the protagonist’s problem” (7). These “mental turns” are moments of introspection when the readers’ imagination is active—an experience that embodies the main intention of many Nonsense texts: to make the reader think, and enjoy thinking.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the main reason illustrations cannot evoke nonsense on their own is their static nature. Nonsense relies on conversation and communication (or miscommunication), and as such requires the passing of time. A single pun does not denote nonsense, but a sustained series of puns, such as what we see in *Tollbooth*, likely qualifies a text to be categorized as Nonsense. It would stand to reason then that when adapted to moving pictures and depicted as either a live-action film, animated film, or stage-play, images may in fact be able to convey Nonsense in
their own right. However, through an examination of stage and screen productions of Carroll and Juster’s works, this is discovered to not be the case. When Nonsense texts are adapted to action mediums (stage and film), their capacity to evoke nonsense is diminished rather than retained. While images, particularly moving ones, are able to convey narratives and the passing of time as well as depict conversations, the images themselves are unable to fulfill perhaps the move important constraint for Nonsense as a genre: the centrality of language.

**Staging Nonsense**

Nonsense texts, with their reliance on dialogue, seem at first to be the best texts to adapt to stage. A book that is primarily dialogue essentially provides a script for actors and all that is left is to fill in the characters and settings. Due to illustration, the visualization of the characters and settings are also often provided by the original work. However, the fact that all of this is already provided actually hinders the adaptor more than helps. Part of the wonder of a play is that the director is able to interpret the work in a variety of ways, and alter the performance to suit a specific desire. This liberty is the reason stage productions are successful; one could view the same play multiple times, with different actors and directors, and each time it would be reimagined into something new. With the *Alice* stories, and by relation *Tollbooth*, this directorial autonomy is subverted by the texts already established and well-known atmosphere. Since these texts are so prevalent in popular culture, viewers go into the theatre expecting things to look a certain way or certain things to happen, and when they don’t viewers are often disappointed, confused, or even angry. Furthermore, when bringing a Nonsense text to
stage, the adaptor must find the proper balance between bringing the text to life in a new and exciting manner, and staying true enough to the original that it retains its playful cleverness.

This idea of a Nonsense text requiring a true-to-form adaptation is precisely why Carroll in 1872 had all of the speeches in the *Alice* books written out and registered at dramatic works (Lovett 22). Carroll did not want the text to be reproduced without his permission and guidance, and as such spent many years negotiating with writers, directors, and actors trying to bring his artistic vision to life. Juster has been similarly involved in the adaptation of his works. He and playwright Susan Nanus adapted *Tollbooth* to stage in 1977, and in 2007, Juster wrote his own script for the musical version with the aid of Sheldon Harnick and Arnold Black for the musical score and lyrics. Due to the variability of stage productions, seeing as the actual production is entirely dependent on the individual creative vision and efforts of the director, designers, and actors, the following analysis will not contain photos from live performances, but rather reference excerpts of the scripts and scenes as they are performed in video recordings of performances (see filmography and works cited).

*WONDERLAND and LOOKING-GLASS on Stage.* While there are numerous scripted versions of the *Alice* stories, the most frequently used are the 1898 Emily Prime Delafield version, which conflates both books into a series of seven acts, and 1932 Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus version, which depicts *Wonderland* in Act 1 followed by *Looking-Glass* in Act 2. The Delafield script, being much briefer, is favored by children’s theater productions, while the Le Gallienne and Friebus version was written originally for
Broadway and an adult cast. The overall trend in both these plays and theatre in general is towards attempting to retain the intrinsic qualities of the original books. Writers often use, word for word, Carroll’s dialogue to piece together scripts, while directors often favor costuming based off of Tenniel’s illustrations. Charles C. Lovett, in *Alice on Stage*, writes that Carroll’s “dialogue works marvelously in a theatrical context, and many individual scenes, such as the Mad Tea-party and the Mock Turtle’s story, transfer quite well to the stage” (105). Because the dialogue is rarely altered in stage productions and that theatre, although a visual art, places considerable importance on speech, the theater versions of the *Alice* tales are often capable of retaining their classification as Nonsense. However, just as in the novels the Nonsense comes from the written word, rather than the illustrations, on stage, the Nonsense comes from the spoken word, rather than the actors’ movements or the play’s set.

In 1983, PBS studio taped a revival of Le Gallienne’s 1932 play directed by Kirk Browning and starring Kate and Sir Richard Burton. This performance, although not exactly as it would look on stage (due to some visual manipulation and special effects), further emphasizes that although the *Alice* tales have a close relationship to their illustrations, the Nonsense exists purely in a linguistic capacity. The costuming and set of the play draw from Tenniel’s illustrations so extensively that in many scenes the set appears to be outlined in pen and ink. This give the play the feeling of one walking through a book rather than being transported into another world. While visually stunning, the set and backdrop of the play have little effect on the overall Nonsense.

Without any knowledge of the fact that this place is supposed to be Wonderland, and that Wonderland operates off of a different type of logic than the “real” world, a
viewer would safely assume that the surrealist atmosphere of the set is supposed to convey that the play takes place in a fantasy land. The knowledge that the land is full of “mad” people and the laws don’t make “sense” comes from either pre-established knowledge from reading the books, or from witnessing bizarre occurrences and being introduced to abnormal characters, rather than from the atmosphere created on stage. For instance, when Alice meets the Caterpillar, the stage is relatively sparse. The backdrop depicts a house the door of a cottage surrounded by pen and ink drawings of flowers much the same as Tenniel’s illustration in *Wonderland*. While the Caterpillar seems to be sitting on a large mushroom, it isn’t particularly defined and the only colors come from the Caterpillar and Alice’s costumes (see Appendix I, listing 6). Simply viewing the scene, one would not be able to know for certain whether Alice is as small as the Caterpillar, or the Caterpillar abnormally large. Only viewers who have read the books, or hear Alice’s plea to be larger than three inches, would know it was the latter. The word-play throughout this scene is spurred forward by Alice’s admittance that she cannot answer the Caterpillar’s question of “Who are you?” because she has changed too many times in the past day to possibly know. Because the stage and set does not accurately convey Alice’s changing size, her conversation with the Caterpillar seems drastically less important. Even if the set had done a better job of making Alice look small by enlarging everything depicted on the backdrop, the atmosphere created would still only be visual surreal, rather than nonsensical in itself. Within the story, there is consistently a reason why Alice grows or shrinks (e.g. the two sides of the mushroom). These reasons bar her size alterations from being visually nonsensical; however, they do not make the scenery
any less foreign and unknown to Alice or the viewer—solidifying the scenery as fantastic and otherworldly.

Furthermore, the assumption of fantasy the audience possesses from the world created by backdrops and sets prevents the assumption of realism. The expectation set forward by the scene is that this “book world” will be different, exciting, and possibly magical, and it is this expectation of the fantastic that makes it so audiences are unsurprised when characters look or act strange. Knowing that the play is taking place in a world of fantasy prevents audiences from being astonished at the fact that many of the people Alice meets in this world are talking animals such as the White Rabbit, Caterpillar, and the Frog and Fish doorman and messenger. For instance, by the time Alice has run into Humpty Dumpty, she has already learned that in this world many of the inhabitants are strange and assumes that the egg-shaped man is real and will be able to converse with her (see Appendix I, listing 8). It is not nonsensical that the characters are shaped or dressed oddly because within the confines of the story, which audiences have chosen to view as fantasy, it is perfectly natural for a flower, card, or egg to be anthropomorphized.

Since viewers must embrace many of odd visuals as part of the make-believe world they are watching, the physical appearance of both the environment and characters within the environment cannot be considered nonsensical. What is left to examine then, is the actions of the characters themselves. For example, in Browning’s Mad Tea Party scene, Alice joins the March Hare, Mad Hatter, and Door Mouse for at their table but aside from some shuffling about with pieces of cloth that seem to have writing on them, little other action occurs. While this scene could be portrayed in a much more flamboyant
fashion (see discussion of film versions of this scene on page 60), this more reserved version is no more or less capable of evoking nonsense (see Appendix I, listing 7). This is because without Alice’s conversation with the Hare and Hatter, audiences would not be queued that something was “wrong,” and would continue to observe a rather boring tea scene. The Hatter’s riddle and the Hare’s logical quips towards Alice are what give this scene its air of madness and qualify it as Nonsense.

The downside to retaining the original structure and dialogue of Carroll’s work is that although the Alice stories appear to have all the makings of a great play, “the work as a whole, which was not written with the intention of being staged, has no real dramatic unity” (Lovett 105). This lack of unity makes for a play that seems “pointless”—more like a series of repetitive actions, than a real story. This apparently pointlessness, could arguably place stage productions of the Alice tales in the category of Theatre of the Absurd; however, many productions overlay an implied narrative arc overtop of the script in order to keep productions from diving off into the deep-end of the avant garde. Browning does this in his version by opening on an actress playing Alice in a production trying to memorize the poem “Jabberwocky” in her dressing room. The actress is then transported into the world of Wonderland and becomes “Alice.” Her journey through the world of the play becomes the linear thread audiences need in order to view the production as a work of fantasy more than an Absurd spectacle.

TOLLBOOTH ON STAGE. Similarly to the stage adaptations of the Alice stories, The Phantom Tollbooth’s stage adaptation seeks to retain as much of the original dialogue from the book as possible. However, much like with Browning’s Alice in Wonderland
(1983), an imposed linear narrative is also applied to Juster’s *Tollbooth*. However, rather than adding to the beginning and end in order to create an appearance of a comprehensive plot, the novel version of *Tollbooth* underwent a significant degree of cutting in order to unify it dramatically. In an interview with Sheldon Harnick and Norton Juster concerning their 2007 musical adaptation, Harnick said that he and Arnold Black “really wanted to stick very closely to what was in the book, and Norton kept saying ‘Look the book exists, we can change it’” (Music Theatre International). Where Carroll went to extreme lengths to try to preserve the original wit of his work when it was adapted to stage, Juster seems to have been open to embracing other aspects of the story in the stage renditions—namely the capacity to focus the story more narrowly and create a great adventure story from it. While the removal of numerous encounters for Milo makes the plot easier to follow and tell a classic “rescue the princess” tale, the streamlining of the script is at the cost of the Nonsense within the novel.

The script for the full length play co-authored by Susan Nanus and Juster eliminates almost all of Juster’s manipulation of idiomatic phrases and turning of abstract concepts like “expectations” into literal places. Milo’s journey through the lands beyond is essentially reduced to time in Dictionopolis, Digitopolis, and the Mountains of Ignorance. Within the script there is very few suggestions as to set or props, leaving most of the atmosphere up to the director to decide on. In the a production of *The Phantom Tollbooth* directed by Chuck Balgenorth and performed at the McCallum Theater in May 2013, the cast is clothed in bright circus-like costumes, while minor props and partial backdrops are used to depict the ever changing landscapes (TallProblem). The lack of a physical backdrop to the performance places emphasis on the characters’ actions and
conversations rather than their appearances. In the same interview mentioned previously, Harnick states that “everything is in the dialogue” (Music Theatre International). Harnick’s readiness to point viewers towards the dialogue and the lack of specific direction for visual aspects of the play seem to suggest that if one is looking for Nonsense or meaning in the place, the only place it could be found is in the verbal aspect of the play.

Regardless of the elimination of certain places such as Point of View and Conclusions, many of unique and playful characters still appear in the stage production. The appearance of characters like the Whether Man, Tock, and the Spelling Bee, on stage is quite different than the same characters as illustrated in the novels. The visualizations of the puns is often difficult on stage because of costuming, as well as the lack of a distinction between word spelling and definition. Often in stage productions of Tollbooth, actors resort to the integration of written words in order to make the Nonsensical elements clear. For example, in Balgenorth’s production the Whether Man costume has “w-h-e-t-h-e-r” spelled out on the back of the yellow raincoat to emphasize the pun (see Appendix I, listing 18). Likewise, when in the word market, Milo and Tock encounter several stands selling words. The actors use cardboard prop words in these instances to emphasize the language play in this scenario. These props and costumes show that even when Nonsense is visualized, it is only through the written word.

From Stage to Screen

Film, to a larger degree than stage, is focused on aesthetic spectacle. Since film began as a silent art, the focus of a movie is not on the words or conversations had, but on the
images seen and what they can evoke. Because of this, the adaptations of *Wonderland*, *Looking-Glass*, and *Tollbooth* to film are not focused on retaining the nonsense elements of the text, but on depicting fantastic and surreal landscapes and absurd characters. In animated versions, such as those done by Disney (*Alice in Wonderland* 1951) and Chuck Jones (*The Phantom Tollbooth* 1972), nonsense elements are further diminished because viewers have no expectation of reality. In a cartoon, viewers expect that anything and everything could happen, and more readily accept the eccentricities of the story world. Through the use of special effects, live action films can yield a similar result. This is not to say that the film versions do not contain any elements of Nonsense—in fact many which draw dialogue straight from their original texts contain quite a bit—but that the Nonsense in film is still conveyed through verbal and auditory means rather than visual ones. Similarly to the previous section, film stills have not been included beside analysis. This is due to the fact that film as an action media and is not accurately represented through stills alone. Time sequences for the scenes discussed have been provided in Appendix I.

**THE ADAPTED ALICE.** The 1955 release of Disney’s animated classic *Alice in Wonderland* was quite a disappointment for its audiences as well as Walt Disney himself. While audiences felt that “Disney had failed to capture the atmosphere and intellectual humor of Lewis Carroll’s story,” Disney thought that there were still too many characters in the film and suffered from a “lack of heart” (Rooy). Although it can hardly be considered the most accurate film adaptation of Carroll’s *Alice* stories, Disney’s *Alice in Wonderland* is perfect example of the inability of the image to convey nonsense.
The film begins, like most Alice adaptations with Alice spotting a white rabbit in a waistcoat, chasing the rabbit and subsequently falling down the rabbit hole. The rabbit hole scene is perhaps one of the most visually interesting scenes in the film because it marks Alice’s transition from the “real” world into Wonderland. The rabbit hole is the first place that cues the viewer that this new world is one which will not operate off of the same principles as the world they are accustomed to. In the Disney film, as Alice descends downward her skirt balloons out slowing her fall as if it were a parachute (see Appendix I, listing 1). One could assert that this in itself is visually nonsensical, since a girl’s skirt, no matter how voluminous, would hardly be able to act as a parachute; however, the floating furniture, clocks, and objects Alice passes in the duration of her fall mark the rabbit hole as a place where gravity does not work how it is supposed to. The scenery of the rabbit hole prepares the viewer for accepting the surrealist world of Wonderland, and sets up the rest of the film as a dream scenario. These dream scenarios are further emphasized in the scene in the Tugley woods where Alice breaks down and sings the song “Very Good Advice.” In this scene the bizarre Wonderland creatures begin to cry along with Alice and slowly disappear until she is left alone in the dark (see Appendix I, listing 5). The somberness of the visuals here suggest that the creatures of Wonderland are controlled by Alice’s imagination and reinforces the “it was all just a dream” superimposed plot.

A similar depiction of surreal dream worlds occurs in the live action Alice Through the Looking Glass (1998). The film begins with a grown-up Alice (played by Kate Beckinsale) reading the book version of Looking-Glass to her daughter. She continues to yawn numerous times and apologize for being tired before investigating the
mirror in the room and falling through the looking glass into the surreal landscape of the Looking-glass House (see Appendix I, listing 9). The dream-like setup is reinforced throughout the film by Alice’s multiple costume changes, which seem to occur each time she crosses into a new square of the chessboard landscape. The continuous alteration of her appearance gives off the effect of a dream-atmosphere where anything could happen simply by thinking about it. To a lesser degree, this is shown when Alice wishes to get to the flower garden on the hill and is lifted off the ground and flies there (see Appendix I, listing 10). Her brief, but sudden flight is in contrast to Carroll’s Alice’s realization that in order to get to the garden in this world, she needed to walk away from it because every time she walked toward it, she found herself at the door to the house again. Where Carroll’s Alice must solve the reverse logic of the world, making it seemingly Nonsensical, Alice Through the Looking Glass (1998) simply transports her to the garden in the most efficient and magical way possible.

The issue with setting up and depicting Wonderland and the Looking-Glass world as surrealist dreamscapes is that it negates the possibility for these scenes to be visually conveying nonsense. As discussed in the introduction, Nonsense as a genre and mode is distinguishable from Surrealism in that the surreal is that which attempts to depict unconscious and unrestrained expression, while Nonsense is constantly restrained by the bounds of language, logic, and discourse. Surreal visuals attempt to explode the imagination and frequently depict bizarre images. The rabbit-hole, with its floating clocks and falling girl, as well as the other scenes discussed above, illustrate the bizarre appearance of the world Alice’s adventures occur in but do not explain in any capacity how such a world operates. The hows and whys of the world, or in other words the story-
world laws, are the source of most Nonsense found in the *Alice* texts. For example, *Looking-Glass*'s entire narrative is based from the story world's operation as a chess match.

While a large portion of the visuals in *Alice* adaptations are based on Tenniel's original illustrations, many film versions of *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* take it upon themselves to craft intriguing appearances for the lesser known characters. One of the frequent trends in adaptation is to anthropomorphize the physical appearances of creatures in the film. Many, if not most, of the characters in the *Alice* tales are humanized or talking versions of toys (chess pieces, cards, etc.), food (bread and butterflies, an egg, etc.), or plants and animals (cats, rabbits, flowers, etc.). Within the text, although these characters talk with Alice, Tenniel's illustrations rarely impose human qualities. Out of the few animals that are anthropomorphized the Dodo (given human hands in order to accept Alice’s comfits) and the Caterpillar (also depicted with human hands in order to smoke hookah) are the most obvious. However, Tenniel also integrates traits into his drawings such as the small faces that appear on the rose buds in the garden.

The film versions take these small visual cues and expand them, giving additional object or animal characters human traits. For example, in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, the flowers in the garden are portrayed as women in bright colored face paint and headdresses designed to look like the flowers they portray. Similarly, in Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) all of the flowers in the garden are given human faces and use their leaves as hands. The increased anthropomorphism in these films stands in contrast to the 1999 *Alice in Wonderland*, which simply used voice overs to create the effect of the flowers speaking (see Appendix I, listing 11, 3, and 12). The most apparent increase in
the amount of anthropomorphism occurring is in the Disney version where they gave the door knob in the chamber a face and voice. The Door knob (which is just a door knob in the books and other films) instructs Alice on how to go about changing her size (see Appendix I, listing 2). The increased amount of human attributes visually given to characters makes it less of a surprise that Alice is able to hold conversations with most of them. When audiences see a door knob, they do not expect it to talk. However, when they see a door knob with eyes, a nose, and a mouth, the possibility seems much more likely. This increased likeliness of animals and objects to think and speak generally adds to the fantasy elements of the novel or film, not the nonsense elements. Talking animals is almost to be expected in fantasy and fairy tales. The commonness of the occurrence of anthropomorphized creatures reinforces the idea that while an object or animal’s ability to talk may be strange, within a story or fantasy world it is perfectly logical. The fact that an animal/object can talk in stories like the Alice tales is fantasy, what it says, on the other hand, can absolutely be nonsense.

The last visual aspect that one might mistake for Nonsense in film versions of the Alice tales is the actions that characters make which seem quite absurd. One notable occurrence of this is when, in Disney’s Alice in Wonderland, the Mad Hatter dips a saucer in a cup of tea then takes a bite out of it. This scene is “nonsensical” in the sense that the Hatter’s action seems to be completely void of purpose. The question of “why would he eat a plate?” is never answered. This added action in the film is incredibly weird, but also, in a way humorous. But the humor seems more slapstick than clever, causing it to be physical rather than intellectual, and the humor given off by Nonsense is largely intellectual. Later on in the Mad Tea Party scene the Hatter puts butter and jam
inside a watch in order to “fix it.” When this goes disastrously wrong, the March Hair
smashes the watch with a ridiculously large hammer screaming “Mad Watch! Mad
Watch!” (see Appendix I, listing 4). The scene with the watch is interesting because
although it is inspired by Alice’s conversation with the Hatter about how his watch tell
what “o’clock” it is. Where in Carroll’s story, Alice’s conversation with the Mad Hatter
and the March Hare reveals their non-sequitur logic, the Disney’s Alice’s encounter
seems to dissolve into a series of absurd actions—eating saucers, buttering watches, and
putting jam on the Door Mouse’s nose to name a few. While these actions are certainly
weird, they do not visually represent any of the elements of nonsense found in the story.
Weird is often, as is the case in these instances, motiveless. There is no deeper reason for
the action past that of startling audiences. Nonsense, on the other hand, operates from an
underlying sense. Nothing in Nonsense occurs for mere shock value. Therefore these
visual actions represent not Nonsense, but Absurdity.

TOLLBOOTH ON THE BIG SCREEN. The film adaptation of Juster’s The Phantom Tollbooth
encounters many of the same dilemmas as the stage adaptations. Because of the major
condensing of the plot that occurs, much of the Nonsense of the original text is removed
altogether and cannot be examined as possible instances of visual Nonsense. However,
like Alice adaptations, in the scenes where Nonsense is retained it appears in merely a
verbal capacity and is downplayed, if not overwhelmed, by the visuals.

The Phantom Tollbooth (1972) was written and directed by Chuck Jones, who is
best known for the Looney Toons style. The film begins as a live action movie, then when
Milo crosses through the Tollbooth into the Lands Beyond, the film changes to an
animated feature with Looney Toon-esque cartoon characters. This transition visually captures what the tollbooth and the rabbit hole represent within their respective stories: a transition into a surreal fantasy world. In Milo’s case, since he does not fall asleep beforehand, this fantasy seems to be one of the imagination rather than dreams. The idea of his trip being “imagined” is visually reinforced by the tollbooth building itself or the use of his toy car as transportation through the booth (see Appendix I, listing 13). When Milo returns to the “real world” and changes back from cartoon to a live action person at the end of the film, this idea is brought full circle when he discovers he had not been away for days, but merely five minutes.

In addition to emphasizing Milo’s trip from the “real” world to the “surreal” world, the combining of live-action and animation sets up viewers to expect absurd action. In a cartoon, viewers expect the characters and landscapes to look and act strangely. This expectation combats any possibility of Nonsense where the world operates on reverse-logic because the logic of the real world is much different than the logic of the cartoon world. For example, in the Looney Toons when Wiley Coyote runs off a cliff, he gets several feet out in mid-air and doesn’t fall until he looks down. This type of action, although absurd and humorous, occurs so frequently in cartoons that it becomes an expected trope and as long as it is expected, it can be considered logical within that media.

Since the Alice tales are so prevalent in popular culture, their adaptations do not suffer from too much alteration. While portions of the stories are removed and Wonderland and Looking-Glass are often conflated, many of the core scenes and dialogue are left in. The Phantom Tollbooth (1972) on the other hand, suffers from severe
condensing of the story. Much like the stage versions, the film eliminates large portions of the plot and several minor characters to create an easier to follow adventure-like plot. Unfortunately, this reduction comes at the cost of many of the sections of the original text that contribute the most to the effect of nonsense, such as Point of View and Conclusions. If the sections from the book that contribute to its classification as Nonsense are eliminated for the film, then the visuals have no hope of depicting nonsense or conveying a similar atmosphere. A more specific example of such removals is when Milo, Tock, and the Humbug are in the Mathmagicians Lab (see Appendix I, listing 17). In the book, Milo and his friends ask to see the “biggest” number, which results in the Mathmagician taking them literally at their word and showing them a very large number. Eventually, Tock cleverly asks for the number of the greatest magnitude and their intended question is finally answered. The film eliminates the confusion over the connotation and denotation of the word “biggest” and the result is that Milo and his friends encounter with the Mathmagician is drastically less confusing.

Although much of the Nonsense aspects from the original text are removed, the film version of *Tollbooth* does retain several of the important puns from the novel such as the Whether Man, Faintly Macabre, and Tock. The issue with purely visual representations of these puns is that in order for the pun to be understood, one must also see or hear the word. The Whether Man, who is an odd stout fellow with a bald head that repeats everything multiple times, has no visual cues to his characters nature as a pun. Instead, this is revealed through his introduction to Milo. The same thing occurs when Milo is placed into the dungeon and encounters Faintly Macabre, the not so wicked Which. Milo and Tock are initially startled by what seems to be a spooky shadow of a
“witch” on the wall, but are they greeted by a fairy-godmother-esque women in periwinkle. The visual contrast between expectation and reality is visually depicted through the contrast between Faintly and her shadow; however, the “pun” would not exist unless she was named as a “witch/which” through written or spoken word. Without the context that the dialogue provides, the visuals for the encounter would at most be simply ironic. Tock, at first, seems to be the only visually successful pun—combine a dog and a watch together and, voila, you have a watch-dog—however, the animators crafted Tock so that his “watch” aspect was hidden underneath his fur. This makes is more startling and entertaining when Tock “opens” his fur, but harms the overall sustainability of the pun visually (see Appendix I, listing 14, 15, and 16). Without the watch ever-present visually, the pun is easily forgotten by the viewer and Tock becomes just another talking dog.

**The Problem of Moving Pictures (Why nonsense loses power in film)**

In order to be successful, plays and movies rely on the audience’s sustained suspension of disbelief. However, the issue with suspension of disbelief in Nonsense settings is that once the audience has agreed to be transported into the story world, any pieces of logic that seems “nonsensical” must be accepted as the norm within the confines of that story world. When audiences watch cartoons or fantasy films, they expect the unexpected, and therefore embrace oddities such as talking doorknobs or animals that can converse like humans as part of the fantasy world.

The dialogue in action versions of Nonsense stories, even when taken directly from the original text, becomes less effective because it is rarely decipherable. When
reading you have more time to digest Nonsense and work through the games played with language and logic. This is mainly because you are not forced to comprehend visual and auditory cues simultaneously. Watching a scene in a film, while also trying to listen to conversations that are based in Nonsense logic, becomes overwhelming to the viewer. Consequently, much of the nonsense is misunderstood, or missed in its entirety, and if one cannot revel in the joy of figuring out the language puzzles, then there is little reason to include them at all—and many adaptations do indeed leave out much of the Nonsense of the novels.

While a large portion of this exclusion of Nonsense is due to the necessary condensing of plot points for an entire book to fit into the time-span of a play or feature film (Approx. 95 minutes for children’s films), many of the decisions to reduce or remove certain aspects of the texts are due to an attempt to create a single clear narrative story arc. In their original texts, Milo and Alice’s stories are largely episodic in nature. Each chapter moves forward to a new encounter with different characters. Within the Alice stories, there is very little plot—no real rising action or climax; within Tollbooth most of the book is rising action leading up to the climax and resolution all occurring in the final few chapters. While this structure works well for a novel with a primary focus of exploring language and logic in diverse and subversive ways, the same structure does not work as well on stage or in film; in fact, when a film version attempts to stick as close to book as possible, viewers are left with a movie that is relatively dull to watch and seems to drag on forever.

Charles C. Lovett notes that “The episodic nature of the book works quite well on the page, but drama requires a firm plot structure to hold it together. The audience must
be curious as to what will happen next and what the consequences of the current action will be. (105). This need for consistency and dramatic unity, causes adaptations of the *Alice* stories and *Tollbooth* to veer far enough away from their original texts, that with each small alteration the elements of nonsense they contained further deteriorate. Stage performances, being restricted by the space of the theatre and realistic possibilities for sets, costumes, and actions, rely much more on speech to transport audiences into a new world. Characters in plays often talk to each other about what they see or do, which allows the audiences to imagine what is clearly visible. Because of this, stage adaptations can more easily retain and sustain elements of Nonsense.

Film adaptations, however, are first and foremost designed as moving pictures. Because of their nature, films adaptations focus on how one can adapt a work to a visual form that can tell the story with as little dialogue as possible. Many films, including the *Alice* and *Tollbooth* adaptations, are constructed in such a way that if one were to watch them sans soundtrack (on mute), they would make just about as much sense as they do with the soundtrack playing. Aspects of the original texts that are crucially important to their qualifications as a works of Nonsense are not crucially important to their narratives. Films first and foremost seek to relay visual interpretations of a narrative, and often, if not always, overshadow the verbal Nonsense with depictions of surreal scenery, fantastic characters, and absurd actions.
THE MYTH OF VISUAL NONSENSE

If visual nonsense were to exist in some capacity, it would need to be sustainable in an atmosphere entirely void of language. We see an attempt at this in the Royal Ballet Company’s version of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. While ballet as an art form can, and generally does, take on a narrative structure, it lacks the ability to carry the other, possibly more important, qualities of what makes something Nonsense. When attempting to define and/or classify things, it is often useful to return to basic theories of categorization in philosophy. Originally outlined in Aristotle’s Metaphysics and other works, the most useful principle in the dilemma at hand is the concept of essential and accidental properties of objects. In the simplest terms, “an essential property of an object is a property that it must have while an accidental property of an object is one that it happens to have but that it could lack” (Robertson and Atkins). In the instance of the genre of Nonsense, scholars have defined the following as essential properties of nonsense: an intentional focus upon language and what it can and cannot do, purposeful reversal or subversion of logic and expectation, and a narrative structure in which characters can interact. Other qualities that Nonsense works often, but not always possess, are things such as humor, fantasy, etc. Illustrations, being unable to fulfill the essential properties outlined for Nonsense as a genre, are left to become accidental properties in themselves of Nonsense texts. While most Nonsense texts have illustrations, the text does not cease to be Nonsense if they are removed.

Part of the importance of images and visual arts is their universality of understanding. When audiences view or watch something occur, they can comprehend it at least on a basic level. Images and symbols, in a way, are a universal language.
Nonsense, however, is a mode of writing and a genre that plays with the intricacies of language and toys with the variability of understanding. This method is part of the reason why most works of nonsense are not translated from their original language, and, if they are, do not have the same effect in other languages. Idiomatic phrases, puns, and other language games are reliant on the pronunciation, denotation, and connotation of words in a specific language or geographical region. Trying to capture an effect that is so dependent on the differentiation of language and logic in a form (the visual arts) that is purposefully crafted to be universally understood is simply not a fruitful endeavor.

While the possibility for a work of visual nonsense could exist in theory, as the definitions of Nonsense currently stand, visual arts continue to fall short of being able to accurately and consistently capture Nonsense’s preoccupation with language. When wordplay is visually translated the images created often fall short, resorting to implementing written words within them in order to capture the essence of the pun or other language game. Images can, however, accurately convey bizarre or topsy-turvy logic. The best example of this within the *Alice* texts is Tenniel’s illustrations of Alice as far too large or too small. This visualization of distorted perspective also occurs frequently in the drawings of artist M.C. Escher. While Escher’s drawings use mathematic logic to manipulate perspective, they cannot be considered Nonsense in a formal right because they lack the other qualifications outlined by scholars when defining the genre. Much like how a single pun does not denote Nonsense, an image that distorts perspective or plays with the ideas of relativity, does not contain enough elements to be classified as Nonsense.
The solution to resolving the myth of visual nonsense is to take one of three paths: alter the restraints of the genre of nonsense to be more accepting of visuals; further differentiate the term of “visual nonsense” from its linguistic counterpart to resolve issues of lazy appropriation of terminology; or, accept the inability of visuals to effect nonsense and accept illustrations in Nonsense works as accidental properties, rather than essential genre constraints. While each of these paths presents its own struggle and complications, the current lack of specificity concerning the constraints of the subgenre of Nonsense labeled “visual nonsense” is a larger problem on its own. Art and literature are categorized within movements and genres in order to better understand and compare similar works. If the genre or subgenre provides no distinct qualifications to help decide whether a work is or is not part of that genre, then the category has no real reason for existing in the first place. Visual nonsense, as it is currently discussed in the works of Anderson and Abseloff or Leeuwun, is defined by example in the sense that scholars will list illustrations or images they consider visual nonsense with little justification for each. However, these examples, as repeatedly discussed, are often mere illustrations of nonsense texts. This lack of qualification of images leads to the problem of not knowing what makes or does not make a specific illustration Nonsense. Do illustrations just have to depict the unreal or bizarre? If so, all images of the fantastic would be nonsense. Do illustrations have to be drawn in a specific style? If so, then out of sheer coincidence all cartoonists would be drawing nonsense. Visual nonsense is not restrained or explained enough in any current work to be effective as a subgenre. Furthermore, “visual nonsense” as a scholarly term does not help to clarify what one is looking at, but rather leaves one wanting for clarity. However one looks at it, much like Alice we are left with one
question for our all-knowing Cheshire cats of the academy: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" And the answer remains the same: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to" (Carroll 55). Just remember, you’re sure to get somewhere, if only you walk long enough.
# APPENDIX I: SCENE CATALOGUE

<table>
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<th>Film Information</th>
<th>Scene Description</th>
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<td>Rabbit-hole descent</td>
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<td>Talking doorknob</td>
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<td>Tugley Woods</td>
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<td><em>Alice in Wonderland</em> PBS Revival, 1983</td>
<td>Alice meets the Caterpillar</td>
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<td>Alice meets Humpty Dumpty</td>
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<td>Walk through the Looking-glass</td>
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<td>Alice takes flight</td>
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<td>Tock the Watchdog</td>
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<td>Faintly Macabre</td>
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<td>The Mathmagician's Lab</td>
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Bellian 81


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<td>and Dave Menahan</td>
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<td>and Dominic Best</td>
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<td>Chuck Balgelnorth</td>
<td>2013</td>
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