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**“But when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket...*”:
*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Time***

PORTO ALEGRE

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UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
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**“But when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket...*”:
*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Time***

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—No puede ser, pero *es*. El número de páginas de este libro es exactamente infinito. Ninguna es la primera; ninguna, la última. No sé por qué están numeradas de ese modo arbitrario. Acaso para dar a entender que los términos de una serie infinita admiten cualquier número.

Después, como si pensara en voz alta:

—Si el espacio es infinito estamos en cualquier punto del espacio. Si el tiempo es infinito estamos en cualquier punto del tiempo.

(Jorge Luis Borges, *El Libro de Arena*)

El tiempo es un río que me arrebató, pero yo soy el río; es un tigre que me destroza, pero yo soy el tigre; es un fuego que me consume, pero yo soy el fuego.
(Jorge Luis Borges, *Otras Inquisiciones*)

RESUMO

Quase cento e cinquenta anos após a primeira publicação de *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a obra de Lewis Carroll é ainda amplamente lida por pessoas das mais variadas idades e países. Seus diversos jogos de palavras, desafios lógicos e personagens cômicos oferecem um mundo de nonsense e aparente caos que não pode ser explicado de acordo com as regras do conhecimento científico ou do senso comum. Ao cair pelo buraco do coelho, Alice perde-se em meio a uma terra habitada por animais falantes, criaturas mitológicas e cartas vivas. Mas, acima de tudo, o que ela encontra é um universo no qual a arbitrariedade parece ser lei absoluta. Estando assim confrontada com as diferenças intrínsecas entre os sistemas de acordo com os quais o seu mundo e Wonderland operam, Alice tem dificuldade em encontrar o sentido das coisas e em entender o comportamento dos habitantes daquela terra. Tal dissonância é mais claramente representada através dos funcionamentos divergentes do tempo. Qual dos dois é o correto, afinal: o relógio de Alice ou o do Chapeleiro Maluco? Deve-se referir-se ao tempo como se ele fosse uma pessoa, tal qual o faz o Chapeleiro Maluco, ou um fenômeno natural? O tempo constitui uma progressão linear do passado, ao presente e ao futuro, ou é uma corrida circular sem início nem fim, como a Caucus-race? O objetivo deste trabalho, portanto, é explorar estas e outras questões acerca das disparidades entre o funcionamento do mundo de Alice e o funcionamento de Wonderland. O foco da análise dá-se nas representações do tempo ao longo da narrativa. Para isso, quatro cenas foram estudadas com mais atenção: (a) a queda pelo buraco do Coelho; (b) a Caucus-race, (c) o chá do Chapeleiro Maluco e (d) a história da Mock Turtle. Os comentários tecidos acerca da questão do tempo são embasados por ideias de diferentes pensadores, de Santo Agostinho a Frank Kermode.

Palavras-chave: Literatura inglesa, Crítica literária, Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Representações do tempo

ABSTRACT

Almost one hundred and fifty years after the first publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll's book is still widely read by people of all ages and nationalities. Its several puns, logic games and comical characters present a world of nonsense and apparent chaos that cannot be explained according to the rules of scientific knowledge or common sense. When falling through the rabbit hole, Alice finds herself lost in a land inhabited by speaking animals, mythological creatures, living cards, and other strange beings. But, above all, what she ultimately meets is a universe in which arbitrariness seems to be the predominant law. Being thus confronted with the intrinsic differences between the systems through which her world and Wonderland operate, Alice has difficulty in finding the meaning of things, and in understanding the behavior of the inhabitants of that place. This dissonance is most clearly represented through the divergent workings of time. Which one is right, after all: Alice's or the Mad Hatter's clock? Is time to be referred to as a person, as the Mad Hatter does, or as a natural phenomenon? Does time constitute a linear progression from past, to present and to future, or is it like a circular race, with no definite starting and ending points, as the Caucus-race? The objective of this work, therefore, is to analyze these questions concerning the functional disparities between the workings of Alice's world and the workings of Wonderland. The focus of the analysis lies on the representations of time as they appear in the story. For that purpose, four scenes were examined more attentively: (a) the fall into the White Rabbit's hole; (b) the Caucus Race; (c) the Mad Hatter's Tea Party and (d) the Mock Turtle's story. The comments about the different aspects of time are supported by ideas of different thinkers on the subject, from Saint Augustine to Frank Kermode.

Key words: English literature, Literary criticism, Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Representations of time

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INTRODUCTION

In 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was first published by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, under the pen name Lewis Carroll. In 2015 we will celebrate its 150 anniversary, with an astonishing number of events, plays and new adaptations taking place all over the planet. Many years have elapsed since “all in the golden afternoon”, “beneath such dreamy weather”, three eager tongues together begged for a tale, demanding that there “be nonsense in it”, and pursuing to move “through a land of wonders wild and new” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 7). And yet, after such a long time and having crossed so many different nations, Carroll’s dream-child story is still capable of casting a dazzling spell on readers of all ages and backgrounds. In 2014, we are still embraced with Alice in her amazement as she rows through a world of wonder and unpredictability. And we are still compelled by her curiosity to abandon our most solid truths in exchange for perplexity and mystery.

Although it is a cliché to introduce a discussion about *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by evoking its enduring magnetic effect along the years, one cannot help but wonder about what this story possesses that maintains it always up to date, always so incredibly entangled in our collective imaginary. Since my acquaintance with Alice dates back to my own years as a child, I have dedicated a great many hours to this reflection, and have come to conclusions as diverse as an open-ended universe of possibilities would allow me to. But of all these ideas that have eventually crossed my mind, one in especial always survives the transient flow: that the reason why *Alice* is so compelling a tale is that it takes us readers through a journey towards the *ultimacies* of existence.

When Alice falls in the rabbit-hole, she encounters a world in which nothing she knows applies. It is a land where you can curtsy while falling through a well to the center of the earth; where in one moment you grow as tall as to hit your head on the ceiling, just to turn so small in the next instant as to acquire the size of a caterpillar; and where Time is a resentful old fellow who quarrel with individuals and decides to stop

running. But, above all, what she meets is a world ruled by other kinds of laws, a world where she feels helplessly lost for she cannot control or predict what happens next, since anything at all can happen and she is just one more absurd possibility amidst the dreadfulness of its infinity. Being there, she feels that nothing partakes of an absolute existence. Everything is relative. Everything is arbitrary. And, as I intend to show in the following pages, through her *limbical* situation between a reality that used to be the only one possible for her but which is now fading away, and a present reality in which she cannot fit, she comes to understand that what truly makes her world different from Wonderland has nothing to do with any sort of nature or essence but, rather, with the existence of two divergent foundational *fictions* operating in one case and another. Thereby, I would like to propose that one of Carroll's story's most relevant suggestions is that time – or at least what we know about it – is nothing but a construction: a construction that could even be replaced by any other. Which one is right, after all: Alice's or the Mad Hatter's clock? Is time to be referred to as a person, as the Mad Hatter does, or as a phenomenon? Does time constitute a linear progression from past, to present, and to future, or is it a circular race with no definite starting and end points, like the Caucus-race?

I guess the moment has come for me to explain the second half of my title: why have I chosen to talk about time, after all? In the eleventh book of his *Confessions*, (c. 400) Saint Augustine says that the present is that instant of time which cannot be divided into smaller particles of moments; it is the indivisible moment of *now*, no longer past and not yet future. In the following paragraph, he takes the “current” year to be the present, but he soon realizes that it can be divided into months, from which results that only the current month *is* present, and the other eleven are either past or future. But, then, a month can also be split into days, and days can be divided in hours, and hours are nothing but an amount of minutes, constituted by seconds... Where does this chain of subdivisions end? Where lies the *present*? – Is there such a thing?

Saint Augustine was not the only soul tormented by these unanswered questions. There is a whole philosophy of time that reflects upon these and many other issues. Physics, as well, has gone from an absoluteness of time up to its complete denial – and it is now trying to reconcile these things through theories such as superstring theory, causal triangulation theory, and more. Carroll himself was much troubled by this

enigmatic, though essential, component of our lives. In the very first page, *Alice* gives us the promise of a narrative that will deal very closely with the issue of time. When the little girl sees the White Rabbit, what truly catches her attention is not the fact that he speaks; she is not surprised by that at first. However, when the animal actually takes a *watch* out of his waistcoat-pocket and looks at it uneasily, she starts to her feet and is completely taken by curiosity. That is when everything begins.

I believe, therefore, that in *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll engages in a reflection upon the nature of time. Along the story, he develops a crude exploration on the abstract idea that it represents as well as on the fundamental arbitrariness that characterizes its relation with the clock. Following the path of many other writers and philosophers, the question raised in the end is this: is time a mental – and therefore an inner – device or is it an outward autonomous event?

Since the purpose of introductions in academic works is usually to offer a space for the author's subjective and affective reminiscences, I would like to tell you one more thing regarding my experience as a reader of *Alice*. When I decided to bring Alice's story into the realm of my personal academic studies, the first thing I did was to buy a fine hardcover copy of Martin Gardner's *Annotated Alice – The Definitive Edition*. My desire at the time was to dedicate myself, one day, to the reflection and production of academic material on Carroll's works, coming eventually to become a researcher. But my sweet prospects were all of a sudden tainted by an unexpected outburst, in the first lines of the introduction, uttered by Gilbert Chesterton, where he expresses his "dreadful fear' that Alice's story had already fallen under the hands of scholars and was becoming 'cold and monumental like a classic tomb'" (GARDNER, 2000, p. xiii). His declaration affected me in such a way that I began to partake on his dreadful fear as well, which in my case was intensified by the prominent risk of becoming one of those scholars myself. I even considered abandoning the idea of reading Alice through the academic lenses, for I surely did not want to turn an open-ended story as that into a square and shallow "classic tomb". But I eventually changed my mind – as you have probably realized – and decided to make use of my final monograph to reflect upon and, as I hope, enlarge the possibilities of interpretation of such a heterogeneous narrative. Chesterton's dreadful fear, however, accompanied the creation of every line of this text, and influenced its

production in the sense that I tried, in the end, to create a horizon of flourishing doubts and questions instead of conclusive assertions or final truths.

The following pages are divided in three sections. In the first, I analyze Alice's experience as she falls through the rabbit-hole, suggesting that this is a transitional space of crucial importance for setting the tone of the future events, and I also reflect on the White Rabbit's behavior and its symbolic allusion to some features of modern society. The second and largest part of this work intends to explore Wonderland's temporality in its intrinsic circularity and repetitious motion. Finally, the third section offers some observations, from the perspective of physics, regarding Wonderland's location and its consequences for time measurement.

And, in order to close my introduction, I would like to dedicate a poem to this long acquaintance of mine, who is so deeply embedded within my very spirit that more than once I've got myself wondering whether I have not been changed for this curious little girl (for, you see, so many out-of-the-way things have happened lately...):

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.¹

¹ "The Place Where We Are Right", Yehuda Amichai

DOWN THE RABBIT-HOLE

1.1 “Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end?”

In a hot summer afternoon, sitting bored by her sister on a riverbank, Alice is feeling sleepy when her sight is suddenly crossed by a formally dressed white rabbit who whispers to itself ““Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!”” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 11). At first, her drowsiness prevents her from reacting with the astonishment that such a scene would normally evoke. However, her state of rest is soon broken off when the animal actually takes a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket, looks at it, and then hurries on. Starting to her feet, she realizes “that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 12), and, burning with curiosity, she decides to stand up and go after it. Her chase finally leads her to fall through a hole that she discover to be so incredibly long that, after some time, she gets herself wondering if it actually has an end: “Down, down, down. Would the fall *never* come to an end? ‘I wonder how many miles I’ve fallen by this time?’ she said aloud. ‘I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth’” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 13).

Alice’s fall through the rabbit-hole is a moment of significant importance because it establishes the *modus operandi* according to which all the narrative is going to function. Along its course, we find it to represent a boundary that separates, on the one side, the “real” world Alice comes from – where she has a sister and a cat named Dinah – and, on the other side, an unknown universe that – as she soon realizes – works according to its own rules and presents a very singular temporality. In this boundary space, her overground² knowledge no longer applies. The main character – and the reader, by extension – are submitted to a process in which their most internalized truths are gradually deconstructed, up to the point that Alice’s very identity and the concreteness of her past are put into question.

² Along the text, the expressions “overground world” and “underground world” will be used to refer to Alice’s homeland and Wonderland, respectively.

In an abrupt and continuous fashion, the reader's expectations are all frustrated, leading us to an almost complete loss of references. When the beginning of the fall is announced, for instance, we tend to imagine, based on our previous knowledge, that what will follow is a rapid movement in the middle of which Alice will lose the control of her body and, when finally meeting the ground, get seriously injured. And Alice herself seems to share on the same belief, since she acknowledges that there is something wrong and wonders what could possibly be the cause for such a long fall: is the well so very deep, or is her speed too low?

Nevertheless, what actually happens is beyond her imagination and goes against all known physical laws. During the fall, Alice not only manages to observe attentively the cupboards on the walls around her, but she also gets to read the labels on the objects as well as to pick some of those things, putting them back on the shelves later on. Moreover, she stops herself from dropping a marmalade jar for "fear of killing somebody underneath" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 13). Now, on such a fall as that, moving increasingly fast down to the center of the earth, would these things ever be possible? The answer is no, for sure. And, as pointed out by Martin Gardner, "Carroll was aware, of course, that in a normal state of free fall Alice could neither drop the jar (it would remain suspended in front of her) nor replace it on a shelf (her speed would be too great)" (GARDNER, 1999, p.13). In chapter eight of *Sylvie and Bruno* (2008)³, for instance, Carroll's acquaintance with these questions is explicitly shown through the description of the difficulty of having tea inside a falling house; but the fall that is here narrated is radically different from that presented in *Alice*. In the former, physical laws are properly applied and the speed of two objects falling at the same time is described as being exactly the same (differently from what happens in the rabbit-hole):

But if we were all falling together, it [the book] couldn't be trying to fall any quicker, you know: for, if I let go, what more could it do than fall? And, as my hand would be falling too – at the same rate – it would never leave it, for that would be to get ahead of it in the race. (CARROLL, 2008, p. 303)

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, therefore, Carroll depicts a situation of fall that deliberately diverges from the physical knowledge of his time. His objective is neither to be verisimilar nor to theorize over the consequences of a "real" fall towards the center of the

³ "The publication of *Sylvie and Bruno* marks an epoch in its author's life, for it was the publication of all the ideals and sentiments which he held most dear. (...) For this very reason it is not an artistic triumph as the two "Alice" books undoubtedly are. (...) But from a higher standpoint, that of the Christian and the philanthropist, the book is the best thing he ever wrote." (DODGSON, 1899, p. 144)

earth. What the author seems to propose, on the other hand, is the creation of a transitional space where the reader's expectations are gradually subverted and where Alice herself gets more and more alienated from the references and knowledge intrinsic to the overground universe. The category of time, as well, acquires a new shape that is completely different from that with which she used to be acquainted, since the fall takes place within a slower time, a time that allows her to curtsy, look down, and even reflect upon such deep matters as this: Do cats eat bats?

And suddenly, when Alice had just fallen asleep and begun to dream that she was walking hand in hand with Dinah: *thump, thump!*, the fall was over.

1.2 The White Rabbit and the modern temporality

After getting out of the hole, Alice looks around but, due to an intense darkness, she can see nothing but a long passage through which the White Rabbit slowly vanishes away. Trying not to waste any second, she jumps to her feet and gets herself running after the sound of his wailing: "Oh my ears and whiskers, how late it's getting!" (CARROLL, 2000, 14). Similarly to what happens in the beginning of the story, the White Rabbit appears in Alice's horizon during a moment of sleepiness (she was almost sleeping by her sister when she first saw him and she was in the middle of a dream when the fall finally ended). In both situations, he functions as the element that removes her from a state of rest and activates her motion, prompting her to chase him – but without ever actually reaching him. Once again, like in the opening of the narrative, what stands out in his figure and in his discourse is the question of time. Or, rather, of lateness.

In his article on time and stress in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Calvin Petersen (1985) discusses about the apprehensions that were taking form among the Victorian society, in the second half of the nineteenth century, regarding scientific progress and where it was actually leading to. For him, "during this earlier 'Era of Progress,' reason and faith were already approaching their modern opposition" (1985, p. 430). According to Alison Kjeldgaard (2009), the Victorians were in a transitional situation in which the Romantic ideals were being overcome and giving place to the increasingly stronger phenomenon of industrialization. Petersen explains that Carroll was a clerical scholar who focused much of

his “irony on the positivistic spirit of the age and all of the temporal, rational, objective, and orderly concerns such a nontranscendent view of reality entails” (1985, p. 430). During this period, the advances brought by the industrial revolution were starting to create – and to impose – new types of relations between individual and society, work, space and, chiefly, time. More and more submerged in a mechanistic and productivist conception of life and the world, the Victorians came to relate to time from an entirely new perspective, conceiving of it as something placed far ahead, always running further, something that needed to be constantly chased, without ever being actually reached. Kjeldgaard sagaciously identifies the steam engine as one of the chief triggers of this transformation, arguing that this invention altered the rhythm of the individuals and their relations with space, since longer distances were now covered in a shorter period of time. This “Era of Progress”, in Petersen’s words,

had brought neither the millennium nor utopia, but an "all devouring, all destroying," "dark resistless stream." It may be that the stream and the conception of time which it carries that bring on the stress of modern existence - life ever rushing from its own perplexity, progress as a thin veneer against a darker truth. (PETERSEN, 1985, p. 432)

In Carroll’s story, one of the many features of this *darker truth* is symbolically represented by the figure of the White Rabbit and his obsession with time. His first speech when Alice sees him (“Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late”) reveals his central issue, which is reiterated in his second appearance as soon as the fall is over, as we have seen. Curiously, the Mad Hatter and he are the two only characters in the whole story who possess – and carry along with them – a personal watch. In a way, he is the embodiment of what Weber designated as a purposive-rational orientation. According to Espen Hammer (2011):

Under the impact of the purposive-rational orientation, agents increasingly orient themselves towards the future, while being prepared to lessen the influence and authority of the past as a source of guidance for the present. At the same time, the clock, and clock-time, with its quantification and neutralization of time, and its role in the commodification of time, starts to mark out temporal experience in general as both transient and repetitive (HAMMER, 2011, p. 37).

For Westmoreland, “[t]he White Rabbit has not yet experienced the actual future event. What he experiences now is the expectation of a time to come” (DAVIS, 2010, p. 169). Thus, his incessant worry about being late is the consequence of an attitude essentially

oriented towards the future. The past has no fundamental relevance in as much as what he desires is to be ahead of the present and free of the danger of lateness. He is constantly accompanied by the preoccupation of getting to a specific place or event – for which he is late – but, curiously we never learn what place or event it really is. Means, for him, have an importance hierarchically inferior to that of the ends.

Moreover, in both situations mentioned above, the White Rabbit functions as a catalyst, as an element responsible not only for activating the main character's movement but, especially, for inflicting a *direction* and a *mode* to it. It is instigated by the sight of the White Rabbit, for instance, that Alice decides to chase him and ends up by falling through the rabbit-hole and entering Wonderland. It is also in an attempt at going after him that the girl crosses the long passage, as soon as the fall is over, and gets to the hall surrounded by doors. It is the Rabbit the one who drops the fan that, later on, makes her grow taller and reach the key to one of the doors. And it is also him that, at the end of the story, reads her name in the court and summons her to testify as a witness (in chapter twelve). What all of the interventions above and others have in common is the fact that they establish a *direction* for Alice's journey: it is in consequence of her race after the Rabbit that the little girl is impelled towards all of the adventures depicted in the story; and it is this same pursuit that establishes her route after all. Besides, he is also responsible for establishing the *mode* assumed by her journey, in the sense that the motion activated by him presents very clear characteristics: Alice leaves from a specific point at the beginning of the story and advances through space, crossing a variety of territories, till she finally gets to an endpoint, which is different from her starting point. Her journey, therefore, encompasses beginning, middle and end, and presents a linear progression throughout the narrative.

2. THERE MUST BE MORE TO COME: PROLEPTICAL THINKING AND CIRCULARITY

2.1 A *tick* without a *tock*

As soon as Alice goes in the rabbit hole and along the whole narrative, it is possible to recognize an asymmetry between the little girl and the inhabitants of that fantastic land. This asymmetry is mainly originated from mutual failures of understanding, which are ultimately derived from the existence of two fundamentally divergent temporalities and ways of relating to the world. When Alice enters that fantastic land, she sees herself lost in a universe ruled by laws different from those with which she used to be acquainted. This strangeness becomes explicit in her reaction to the experience of being there. In the first chapter, for instance, after the fall is over, she expresses her wish of being able to shut up like a telescope and she actually acknowledges the possibility of such a thing: “For, you see, so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 16). And after growing larger and smaller a couple of times, the little girl starts to question her own identity, for she could no longer say with certainty which person she was: “Who in the world am I? Ah, *that’s* the great puzzle!” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 23). Finally, she decides to test her knowledge through the recitation of a poem and, to her great astonishment, “How doth the little busy bee” comes out in a quite strange – and surely incorrect – way.

Feeling lost in an endless sea of nonsense where she cannot find reasonable explanations nor the slightest coherence, Alice constantly struggles to structure the events within a linear succession that encompasses beginning, middle and end. As a visitor from a world in which time is understood as a progress from past to present and to future, and where history is conceived as a narrative construction that borrows from this linearity, Alice can only achieve comprehension as long as some sort of pattern can be recognized. So it is that in chapter seven, when confronted with the Mad Hatter’s famous riddle – Why is a raven like a writing desk? – the little girl gets enthusiastic about the possibility of finding an answer

to an enigma. Understanding that a riddle encompasses the present moment of the question as well as a future outcome that will bring a solution, she makes an effort to find it and, when she realizes she will not be able to think of an answer, she gives it up and turns to the Hatter in the hope that he would provide her with a solution, as long as he was the one who proposed the challenge in the first place and, as it is expected, should also be aware of its answer. But to her great disappointment, the Hatter's only remark on the subject is that he hasn't "the slightest idea" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 72), on which he is followed by the March Hare, who states in accordance: "Nor I".

In chapter nine, as well, there is another explicit instance of Alice's desire for recognizing a pattern and apprehending the entire linear story, from the start to the outcome. After meeting the Gryphon lying in the sun, Alice is taken by the creature to the Mock Turtle's rock, where the sorrowful animal is invited to tell her his history. Amidst tears, the animal requests his listeners to sit down and not to speak a word till he has finished. For several minutes, though, the three characters, including the Mock Turtle, remain in complete silence. Then, Alice starts to get impatient and whispers to herself that she does not "see how he can ever finish, if he doesn't begin" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 96). After that, the Mock Turtle finally speaks, but as soon as his speech begins, the three characters once again fall in a very long silence. At this point, Alice is so impatient that she nearly gets up and leaves them behind; but then she retreats and decides to wait a little longer because "she could not help thinking there must be more to come"⁴ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 96).

In his book *About time* (2010), Mark Currie explains that both the present of a fictional narrative and the lived present outside of fiction are experienced in a future anterior mode. In a sense, both are "experienced in the preterite tense in relation to a future to come" (CURRIE, 2010, p. 71). The author affirms that, in our daily life, we always live and conceive of the present as a past moment regarding an imagined future, because we are constantly performing proleptical inferences towards a time to come. In other words, we never experience a total presentification of the present, as long as each moment is always permeated by the three modes of past, present and future, all at once. In the scene previously described, it is possible to see that, based on her previous experiences as a story listener, Alice knows that the structure of a story comprises a beginning, a middle and an end, and therefore the sentence "Once I was a real Turtle" would necessarily be followed by a

⁴ Underlined by the author of this monograph.

development and an outcome. That is the reason why she decides to stay after all, even though the creature will not stop sobbing. And in chapter seven, it is also her previous experiences with riddles and her capacity for proleptical thinking that make her believe that the Mad Hatter's enigma has an answer, and that he knows it. Because she experiences the present moment of the question "why is a raven like a writing desk?" in a future anterior mode, she is able to understand it as the past of a future revelation, and therefore she expects this revelation to be fulfilled at any moment.

Mark Currie also presents the idea of *anticipation of retrospect*, which he affirms to be "a temporal structure which lies at the heart of the human experience of time, as Heidegger taught us, but also at the heart of narrative, both in its mode of fictional storytelling and as a more general mode of making sense of the world" (CURRIE, 2010, p. 70). The anticipation of retrospect also demands proleptical thinking, and the present is as well experienced in a future anterior mode as the object of a future memory. According to the author, it comprehends a process of depresentification, "well known as a kind of schizophrenia involved in the act of self narration: when an experience becomes both the subject and the object of a narration" (CURRIE, 2010, p. 96). In this sense, structuring the present as the object of a future memory "installs in the present an anticipated future from which the present will be re-experienced as a representation of the past, or an infinite sequence of future presents from which the moment can be recollected" (CURRIE, 2010, p. 97). The anticipation of retrospect therefore refers to the act of self narration, in which the present is experienced in relation to an imagined future.

Several times along the narrative, Alice conceives of her present moment as the object of a future memory, in an anticipation of retrospect. This happens, for instance, during the fall through the rabbit hole, in the first chapter, when she thinks to herself that: "After such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling downstairs! How brave they'll all think me at home!"⁵ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 13). And, in chapter five, finding herself stuck in a house almost as big as her body, she wonders what could possibly have happened to her since she went down the hole and exclaims that: "There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up I'll write one"⁶ (CARROLL, 2000, p. 39). Both scenes correspond to moments in which Alice explicitly experiences the present as past, or as the object of a future memory. And I bring them here in order to show two specific points that are especially

⁵ Underlined by the author.

⁶ Idem.

important for the construction of my argument. The first is that these scenes depict Alice's ability to detach herself from the present moment and make inferential journeys to past and future, as in the kind of schizophrenia involved in the act of self narration pointed out by Currie. The second is partially a result from the first. By the depresentification of the present, Alice acknowledges the intricate relation established between the moment she is living "now" and what is still to come, to the point of comprehending that the future – be it fictive or not – not only influences, but can actually *create* the present moment through the anticipation of retrospect. It is possible to see therefore that Alice conceives of her own history linearly, as a structure that shares with fictional narratives the encompassing of an introduction, a development and an outcome, or beginning, middle and end. Such a linear perspective is at the heart of Alice's temporal experience, and it is hence extended to her discursive constructions, as well as to her very time-space movement along the story.

However, the main character soon realizes that the temporal logic experienced by the inhabitants of Wonderland is essentially different from hers. While her ability to make projections into the future allows her to wonder, in "A mad tea-party", what happens when the characters move round as many times as to come to the beginning again, the creatures around the table find themselves incapable of answering such a question, and the March Hare quickly proposes: "Suppose we change the subject" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 74). The same thing happens as Alice is listening to the Mock Turtle's explanation about their lessons in the sea and, moved by her curiosity to always know what happens next, she realizes those lessons would necessarily come to an end on the twelfth day:

"Ten hours the first day," said the Mock Turtle: "nine the next, and so on."
 "What a curious plan!" exclaimed Alice.
 "That's the reason they are called lessons," the Gryphon remarked: "because they lessen from day to day."
 This was quite a new idea to Alice, and she thought it over a little before she made her next remark. "Then the eleventh day must have been a holiday?"
 "Of course it was," said the Mock Turtle.
 "And how did you manage on the twelfth?" Alice went on eagerly.
 "That's enough about lessons," the Gryphon interrupted in a very decided tone. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 99)

In both cases, Alice performs an inferential journey towards an imagined future, which allows her to predict a logic end to those repetitive actions. But the questions she

produces are curiously ignored by the other characters, who quickly turn to another subject when the girl's struggle to identify a linear plot becomes more evident.

Frank Kermode, in his book *The sense of an ending* (2000), takes the clock's *tick-tock* to be a model of what we call a plot, "an organization that humanizes time by giving it a form" (KERMODE, 2000, p. 45). For the author, the interval between *tick* and *tock* represents pure successiveness, an empty and homogeneous time that must be "humanized" in order to acquire a – discernible – shape and organization. *Tick*, he states, is a "humble genesis", while *tock* is a "feeble apocalypse". Our efforts are constantly employed in filling this gap with something, a plot, thus creating a structure of beginning, middle, and end and avoiding its tendency to empty itself. The interval, as he says, "must be purged of simple chronicity, of the emptiness of *tock-tick*, humanly uninteresting successiveness" (KERMODE, 2000, p. 46). Kermode explains that "we live from the End", in the sense that the attribution of a future ending – even if the world should be endless – is responsible for the creation of our present moment.

The author also makes a distinction between two different kinds of time. *Chronos*, he says, is successive and quantitative time, "'passing time' or 'waiting time' – that which, according to Revelation, 'shall be no more'" (KERMODE, 2000, p. 47). *Kairos*, on the other hand, refers to "a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (p. 47). According to Kermode, the notion of fulfillment is essential here, as long as *kairos*, originating from the idea – or the sense – of an ending, transforms and ultimately creates the past.

According to Kermode, the human tendency to invest the interval between *tick* and *tock* with a plot has to do with our necessity to visualize an organized structure dictated by an apprehensible future ending. This space delimited by a beginning, or genesis, and a conclusion, or apocalypse, is then provided with order and a certain degree of predictability. Alice's attitude to time is essentially clock-based and structured within Kermode's *tick-tock* model. Her way of thinking, her behavior and acts present what the author calls a *temporal integration*, or a convergence of perception of the present, memory of the past and expectation of the future, in an interconnected framework. She conceives herself and the world within a plotted, linear structure that encompasses beginning, middle, and end and takes place between the creational *tick* and the apocalyptic *tock* – which, although always

belonging to the future, is nevertheless materialized through its constant projection from the present.

However, Alice soon realizes that Wonderland's temporality is not constituted within a structure of beginning, middle and end. As long as the end – or the *tock* of death – is not set, the present moment is not organized in terms of what will come in the future: it is not provided with expectation. The establishment of an end – even a fictive one – is critical for the definition of an interval and, most of all, for the attribution of meaning to it. To say, as the Mad Hatter does, that time stopped, is the same as to say that it will never stop – or never come to an end – for when time is deprived of its genesis and apocalypse, of the moment of birth and the moment of death, it becomes mere chronicity, a mere succession that both starts and finishes nowhere and, consequently, goes nowhere, never changes. It becomes a total presentness deprived of past – memory – and future – expectation. Contrasting to *kairotic* time, what we find in Wonderland is an empty accumulation of *ticks*, a merely quantitative passing of minutes. The characters' constant movement around the table, at the mad tea party, embodies in a sense what Stuart Sherman (1996) defined as "a *tick* without a *tock*", as long as they keep on reproducing the same movement without predicting an end to it, or a purpose, so as to perform an action so concerned with the performance itself that a structure encompassing beginning, middle, and end is unthinkable. Alice's capacity of seeing in advance, which leads her to ask what happens when all the cups get used up, produces a question that the other characters cannot effectively answer, for their mechanism of behavior – and thought – is thus imprisoned within a repetitious, monotonous, and empty succession of ticks that the increasing subdivision of time and action leaves no space for middles, and every end becomes also a beginning, that ends up without properly finishing, and so on, and so on...

Therefore, from this asymmetry between Alice's and the Wonderland inhabitants' conception and experience of time derives a series of mutual failures of understanding. Alice's constant efforts to find an end from which to establish an anticipated retrospective view always come out unsuccessful, and being thus immersed in a universe with which she cannot produce a meaningful communication makes her feel helplessly lost, unable even to attribute to herself a coherent identity. And it is so because our fictions about time work as a collective binding that makes our communication both possible and meaningful. Society as a whole not only demands that we believe in this and other kinds of fiction, but its very

existence and maintenance depends upon our acceptance of their validity. In a certain degree, more or less consciously, we are all aware of the *fictive quality* of our fiction about time, as pointed out by Kermode. Although the level of awareness may vary from one individual to another, the sharing of this fiction is still effective in maintaining a common ground of (self) knowledge and understanding. When the fictive quality of time, however, is so exposed as to reveal the ultimate arbitrariness of its nature, its sole existence as a construction – that could even be replaced by any other – the common ground on which we walk is at once withdrawn and a world of nonsense and chaos emerges instead. And that is what happens to Alice as soon as she goes in the rabbit hole. On the one hand, she finds it very hard to establish a coherent dialogue with the inhabitants of that land because, as we have seen, they represent two fundamentally different temporalities. On the other hand, her spatial and temporal detachment from the overground world also causes her to feel distanced from its linear structure, enabling her to perceive its fictive quality and, ultimately, its inexorable arbitrariness. She can no longer recognize the world outside of her, in as much as she cannot comprehend what has happened to her or the person she has become: “Alice said nothing: she had sat down with her face in her hands, wondering if anything would *ever* happen in a natural way again” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 107).

2.2 An endless repetition

As we have seen, then, Alice feels helplessly lost when confronted with Wonderland’s characters and temporality. Her state of confusion becomes explicit through her incapacity of conceiving her new self as a continuum in relation to the person she used to be just the day before. Feeling unable to identify herself with that girl who used to “know all sorts of things” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 23), including Geography, the Multiplication-table and how to say “How doth the little busy bee”, the poor little girl starts to cry and, after growing smaller one more time, she soon finds herself surrounded by a great pool of tears. In the following chapter, having met a bunch of small animals who got sopping wet in Alice’s tears as well, the whole party gets assembled around a circle and decides to come up with a plan that would finally get

them dry, and the Rat announces that he has an idea. With an air of importance, he requests everyone's silence and recites an excerpt of what seems to be a history book, explaining that this is the *driest*⁷ thing he has knowledge of.

“Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him; and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable – ‘Found *what?*’ said the Duck. ‘Found *it,*’ the Mouse replied rather crossly: ‘of course you know what ‘it’ means.’ ‘I know what ‘it’ means well enough when *I* find a thing,’ said the Duck: ‘it’s generally a frog, or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?’” (CARROLL, 2008, p. 36)

We can identify a strange confusion in this passage. Firstly, it is possible to see that the Rat is acquainted with neither the meaning nor the purpose of the excerpt uttered by him – which corresponds to a history book, according to Martin Gardner (2000)⁸. Secondly, we are soon informed by the Duck, through his question, that the audience has no idea of what is going on as well. In the event of coming across a similar speech, any individual from the overground world would tend to wait more patiently for the completion of the sentence, since he or she would know that the meaning of *it*, in this kind of construction, would be revealed in the words to follow. In the present moment of enunciation, the word *it*, in this context, is empty: it is deprived of any specific content. Its meaning is always to come in the near future. What this passage exposes, first of all, is that the Rat, the Duck, and the other animals are incapable of exceeding the present instant of enunciation towards a future that is not yet, from which derives their difficulty in making any sense out of the excerpt in question. Their mode of reasoning presents a logic essentially different from that which constitutes the history books, characterized by a linear narrative development. The Rat’s misunderstanding and the Duck’s confusion reveal their complete unfamiliarity with a type of structure that advances in space and time, going from one specific point to another, successively. Just like the characters around the tea table, as we have previously seen, the animals Alice meets in the second chapter are also unable of executing what Currie defines as an anticipation of retrospect,

⁷ There is confusion around the word *dry*, and a mixing up of its literal and metaphorical meanings. While the plan was to come up with an idea that would get them *literally* dry, the Rat’s suggestion emphasizes the metaphorical sense of the word: as long as he cannot establish a meaningful dialogue with a historical narrative, he cannot make any sense out of the passage recited by him; it is empty, dry.

⁸ “Roger Lancelyn Green, editor of Carroll’s diary, identifies this dusty passage as an actual quotation from Havilland Chepmell’s *Short Course of History* (1862), pages 143-44. [...] Chepmell’s book was one of the lesson books studied by the Liddell children.” (GARDNER, 2000, p. 30)

which would allow them to understand the functioning of this linguistic structure and, as a result, foresee the disclosure of the meaning of *it* at the end of the sentence. In a sense, they are unable to perform a mental projection towards the end of the sentence because they are helplessly stuck within the limits of the present moment. Differently from Alice, they are deprived of what Kermode calls a *temporal integration*, defined by him as “our way of bundling together perception of the present, memory of the past, and expectation of the future, in a common organization” (KERMODE, 2000, p. 46).

Thus, after the complete failure of the Rat’s suggestion, the Dodo decides to propose a second plan and all the animals, followed by Alice, start to run circularly, in a race that presents no beginning and no end:

First, it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, (“the exact shape doesn’t matter,” it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no “One, two, three, and away!” but they all began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 31)

And in spite of the arbitrariness and the total inexistence of rules, moments later they achieve their final goal and all of the creatures get dry again.

In this chapter, as well as in several other moments along the story, the characters, their actions and ideas allude to a circular pattern, to an eternal return to the same point, and to a complete lack of progression. The Caucus-race starts nowhere – or nowhere specifically –, goes through the same course repeatedly and do not present any defined endpoint. In a sense, it is a reflection of the very system of thought of those characters. Their inability to make sense out of a historical narrative results from their incapacity of conceiving a linear progression of events, a succession encompassing beginning, middle, and end, or before, now, and after, or even past, present, and future.

In a discussion about the relations established between inner and outer time – or our personal experience of time and time as an autonomous event outside of us – Currie explains that the “impossibility of separating the mind from the world, or language from the world” is what “gives supplementarity its character as a way of thinking about phenomenological and cosmological time together” (CURRIE, 2010, p. 168). Thus, from this perspective, Ricoeur and Derrida come close together upon the question of the reality of time, since “both may view narrative as a kind of discourse in which the

objective and subjective dimensions of time can find their most unified treatment” (CURRIE, 2010, p. 168). As Currie points out, for Ricoeur, the objective and the subjective aspects of time must be thought about in combination. For the philosopher,

“[T]he complex embedded structure of memory, and the reverberation of one character’s solitary experience within another solitary experience produces a kind of network of temporal experience. This network, in turn, ‘confronts’ what he calls monumental time, the audible experience of which is the striking of clocks throughout the narrative” (CURRIE, 2010, p. 171).

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, this “network of temporal experience” can be apprehended based on the characters’ interactions and on the kinds of discourses produced from hence. Being time an invisible thing – entity? phenomenon? force? – whose existence we generally do not put in question, although we cannot rationally explain it⁹, how are we to analyze its representations in a fictional narrative, if not by examining the way it is experienced by the characters, through their linguistic constructions and the relations they establish with one another?

In this sense, I think it is possible to say that what we have in Wonderland is a circular temporality, very clearly illustrated in the instance of the Caucus-race, as well as in the characters’ movement around the table at the mad tea party. In this land, teleological time – with its definite categories of past, present, and future – is replaced by a circular time in which nothing is ever finished and nothing really begins; it is a time founded upon homogeneity instead of heterogeneity, repetition instead of succession, suspension instead of progression:

Representative of the Victorian obsession with time, the Wonderland and Neverland characters move in circular patterns, emulating the motion of a clock. However, though the characters are in perpetual motion, they do not connect their movement with progression. The characters themselves are not temporal beings since they do not anticipate an ending to their repetitious motion. Instead, the characters could be more accurately described as mechanisms that never progress outside of their strict, rhythmic movements. (KJELDGAARD, 2009, p. 3)

⁹ “Who can even in thought comprehend it, so as to utter a word about it? But what in discourse do we mention more familiarly and knowingly, than time? And, we understand, when we speak of it; we understand also, when we hear it spoken of by another. What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not” (AUGUSTINE, 2001, p. 175).

From this incapacity of anticipating an end and conceiving a purpose to their actions results a temporal attitude that is essentially mechanical, as long as it is deprived of any attempt at reflexive thought. As Kjeldgaard proposes, the characters' movement emulates the motion of a clock, but it is a broken clock, a clock that no longer reproduces the progression from one hour to the next, from one specific moment to another. From this perspective, time is not suspended just for the creatures around the tea table, for whom it is always six o'clock; it is also stopped for the Queen of Hearts, for whom the only possible solution is, always: "Off with her head", no matter what happens. But, ironically, her commands are never fulfilled, since no one ever loses his or her head. Again, an action linearly structured, with a beginning and an end, cannot possibly be found. As soon as the Queen utters her orders, before they even begin to be put in practice, the King dismisses them from behind her back and everything continues as usual, nothing changes. For the Duchess, as well, things always go back to the same point. No matter the topic or the context, she can only make sense out of the situations as long as she understands that they have got a moral, whether she can find it or not: "'Tis so,' said the Duchess: 'and the moral of that is – Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round!'" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 91).

2.3 "I told you butter wouldn't suit the works": Of broken clocks and timelessness

It is hard to imagine, but what would it be like if time, for some reason or another, stopped right now? I am typing at this very moment, and this very moment has already vanished away. The moment I started last sentence is no longer the same moment as now. And although I am still typing, what I am writing is not the same as before. My mind has as well travelled through other thoughts as I think about time. I am not looking at a clock right now, but I know time is still running. And I know that because I feel it, I feel it in its intrinsic movement. And even if I stopped writing, and even if I stood motionless, it would keep on running. And I would know that because I cannot help perceiving the changes, I cannot help acknowledging that this moment is essentially –

and entirely – different from the instant I began writing this sentence. Following Saint Augustine, I ask myself: how do I know that if, when questioned about it, I cannot explain what it is, how exactly it works? I do not know, and no one will ever be able to answer this question with certainty. But still I wonder. And these thoughts inevitably lead me to another question: is time, then, an external event to which I – and everything that exists – is submitted, or is it something internal which I and everyone else will keep experiencing up to the moment of death? Or is it both, perhaps?

I was a child the first time I read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It produced in me a kind of amazement I had never experienced before. I fell through the rabbit hole as well, and I was sucked by its labyrinthic phantasy (I was never sure if I ever got out). But I was also perplexed. The same things which caused in me such a strong enchantment were also the things which made me most horrified, because I could not possibly find an explanation for them. And deep inside, I was scared. I felt, and I still feel, threatened. The nonsense that makes me laugh from beginning to end, as I later on realized, is the same nonsense that terrifies me to the bone. It threatens me. And after reading it over several times, I finally came to see why: because it threatens my very humanity. Facing those characters endlessly repeating the same actions, endlessly performing the same movements, endlessly returning to the same point is funny. But it is funny because, in a way, it is like looking to a distorted mirror, a mirror that shows an image with which I can partially identify, and which is partially unfamiliar – an unfamiliarity, though, whose actual possibility I cannot help but acknowledge. Those creatures in Wonderland are not seen by me as inhuman due to the fact that most of them are animals or cards. They speak, they walk in two legs, they feel (the Mock Turtle sobs, at least). Humans do that too. But, still, they are deprived of something.

We, readers, are embraced with Alice in her feeling of estrangement. One of the reasons for that, of course, has to do with the narrative's strong focalization through her. However, it is also like that because, along with her, we are afraid of never getting out again, of remaining forever stuck in that land, within the stagnant limits of its mechanism. Our fear, after all, is to become like one of those characters. We cannot deny their existence in that fictional universe, and we know we share something in common in our nature (if it was not for that, Alice would not be able to communicate with them in the first place). Nevertheless, we perceive in them an ultimate tragedy – that, by

extension, could eventually come upon us –: they are completely and helplessly deprived of *change*.

In chapter seven, the Mad Hatter explicitly says that Time has stopped for him and the two other creatures at the tea table:

“Well, I’d hardly finished the first verse,” said the Hatter, “when the Queen bawled out ‘He’s murdering the time! Off with his head!’”
 “How dreadfully savage!” exclaimed Alice.
 “And ever since that,” the Hatter went on in a mournful tone, “he wo’n’t do a thing I ask! It’s always six o’clock now.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 74)

The temporal suspension described above is physically reproduced through their endless movement around the table, which represents the exact instant within which they are stuck:

A bright idea came into Alice’s head. “Is that the reason so many tea-things are put out here?” she asked.
 “Yes, that’s it,” said the Hatter with a sigh: “it’s always tea-time, and we’ve no time to wash the things in between whiles.”
 “Then you keep moving round, I suppose?” said Alice.
 “Exactly so,” said the Hatter: “as the things get used up.”
 “But what happens when you come to the beginning again?” Alice ventured to ask.
 “Suppose we change the subject,” the March Hare interrupted, yawning. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 74)

Since they keep reproducing the exact instant that time came to an end, they do not perform the whole procedure of having tea, for this is an activity that, like any other, has duration, and thus can be divided into shorter moments, that can also be split into smaller parts, and so on¹⁰. Their movement, therefore, becomes an attempt at grasping this elementary instant, the piece of time that represents the total and extensionless present within which they are stuck, no longer vanished into past and still not advanced into future. An immediate consequence of this is that the three characters will never finish their tea, and they have also never begun (for a beginning would necessarily imply

¹⁰ To the extent that it becomes really hard – if not impossible – to get to “the elementary” point of time within which they are stuck. In as much as every piece of time is always composed by shorter instants (an hour has 60 minutes, a minute has 60 seconds, a second has a thousand milliseconds, a millisecond has one million nanoseconds, etc), this process of division could go on infinitely and we would never get to any elementary component whatsoever. This situation is magnificently depicted in Jan Svankmajer’s *Alice (Neco z Alenky)* from 1988. In the “Mad tea party” scene, which can be watched from 1:03:00 on, the Mad Hatter is a puppet whose behavior is entirely mechanical. He keeps drinking cups of tea and changing places around the table, and his action gets faster and faster as well as increasingly incomplete as time passes by.

time). In a way, it becomes a tautological circle: since there is no beginning and no end, there is no time (for time implies change, and change implies beginnings and ends); and since there is no time, there is no beginning and no end.

In this sense, the Mad Hatter's assertion that time has stopped *at six o'clock* becomes inevitably tricky. The reason for that is fundamentally logical: in a universe in which there ever was a "six o'clock", there also was a "five o'clock", a "seven o'clock", and so on, for *six* only exists in relation to the rest of the numerical system. If it was six o'clock, consequently, it had necessarily been, at some point, five, four, three o'clock. Thus, even if time had eventually stopped, it had not always been like that. At some point, there was a shift. But, since a shift constitutes change, it would imply time. How come in one moment there is time, and in the following moment there is not anymore?

A similar conclusion can be drawn when we analyze the Mad Hatter's assertion that Time has been stopped *since last March*. Ellis McTaggart, in his famous article from 1908 on "The unreality of time", divides time into three different series, by which it is simultaneously constituted: the A series corresponds to the notions of past, present and future; the B series encompasses the relations of earlier and later; and the C series comprehends the permanent relations of terms¹¹. For him, the A and B series are equally essential to time, though not equally *fundamental*. While the A and C series are ultimate, the B series is not, for it "cannot be got out of the A series alone. It is only when the A series, which gives change and direction, is combined with the C series, which gives permanence, that the B series can arise" (McTAGGART, 1908, p. 464). If the A series, which comprehends the notions of past, present and future, is fundamental to time – to the *existence* of time – as pointed out by McTaggart, then it is possible for us to contemplate Wonderland's reality through this perspective in order to analyze whether it presents or not such a temporal series. At the mad tea party, the Mad Hatter explains to Alice that he and Time had quarreled and that, as a result, time had stopped for them last March. The expression *last March*, applied to a context in which time is no longer

¹¹ In order to understand it clearer, you can picture the following situation: the C series is the road that goes from Uruguaiiana to Florianópolis (it is permanent and all of its points exist simultaneously). The A series is you at the present moment while you drive along this road, inflicting change and direction to your movement (the distance you drove by is the past and the miles you are still to drive are the future). Finally, the B series is the actual distance you drove in the end, from one point to another, and its consequent relations of "earlier" and "later". For example: if you go from Florianópolis to Porto Alegre, you have a certain B series, but if you go from Porto Alegre to Florianópolis, you have a different order and, therefore, a different B series.

running, is indeed very curious and makes one wonder. By using the word “last”, the character is positioning this event in a specific moment in the past, from which we could conclude that a lapse of time exists between *last March* and the present moment at the tea table. However, if that was the case, then time would not have stopped at all. Now, if we assume that time has actually stopped for those characters – or at that place, which brings us to the opposition between inner and outer time – we must also admit, by extension, that, since last March, it *has always been* last March and it *will always be* last March. In other words, in a situation in which time no longer changes, last March – considered its endpoint – will never be another thing but last March. Last March corresponds exclusively and simultaneously to the three categories of past, present and future, from which derives that past, present, and future, being all the same thing, do not exist as three different categories. In this sense, taking up McTaggart’s definition of the A series as representing past, present and future, and accepting his argument that this series is fundamental to the existence of time, we could say that, in a way, the reality to which the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse are submitted is a *timeless* one. Since every moment is exactly the same, and considering that past, present and future no longer exist as three different things, it is possible to say that their reality is not inserted within a temporal A series, and hence it is deprived of change.

Trying and comprehending a universe in which time has never existed is difficult, but it is even more difficult to make sense of a world in which time *once* existed, and no longer does. However, diving deep into this question, which is essentially tautological, would not provide us with any conclusive answer. The point I am trying to show, however, is this: we will never know what it would be like if time eventually stopped¹², but we can read this chapter and ask ourselves, in the end, if these characters have ever lived “within time,” if time has not always been stopped for them. Has ever *actually* existed a “before” for these creatures? Will it ever come an “after”? Since time is stopped, they are perpetually bound to the endless repetition of the same instant, and the logical answer for both questions would be negative.

Although we only have it explicitly said that time has stopped in chapter seven, the same circular, repetitive, and homogeneous pattern can be found in other moments throughout the narrative. In chapter nine, for instance, Alice is “invited” by the Queen to

¹² Unless it eventually stopped, in which case we would.

listen to the Mock Turtle's history. As she gets there, she meets a creature "sitting sad and lonely on a little ledge of rock (...) sighing as if his heart would break" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 95), and she soon discovers that his sole activity consists of sobbing all day long. The Mock Turtle has not quarreled with time, as long as we know, and therefore it is not always six o'clock for him. But, just like the characters around the tea table, his actions are also stuck within the same repetitive movement. And like the Mad Hatter, the March Hare and the Dormouse, as well, the origins of his present movement can be traced back to a relatively remote *past*: in the first case, to the time when there was *time*; in the second, to the time when he lived in the sea:

"When we were little," the Mock Turtle went on at last, more calmly, though still sobbing a little now and then, "we went to school in the sea. The master was an old Turtle – we used to call him Tortoise –" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 96)

And then he goes on telling about his education in the sea, being eventually interrupted either by Alice's questions or by his heavy sobbing. His story does not present a linear structure, and it ends in as abrupt a manner as it begins. Besides, similarly as with the characters around the tea table, whose tricky timelessness makes one wonder about the actual existence of a moment "before" and a moment "after", a curious statement from the Gryphon encourages us to doubt the existence of a real sorrow – and, by extension, we could also put in question the historical veracity of the Mock Turtle's story about having ever lived in the sea:

They had not gone far before they saw the Mock Turtle in the distance, sitting sad and lonely on a little ledge of rock, and, as they came nearer, Alice could hear him sighing as if his heart would break. She pitied him deeply. "What is his sorrow?" she asked the Gryphon. And the Gryphon answered, very nearly in the same words as before, "It's all his fancy that: he hasn't got no sorrow, you know."¹³ Come on!" (CARROLL, 2000, p. 95)

As readers, we do not know to what extent we can trust the Gryphon's assertion, or even how to make sense of it (what does he mean by "he hasn't got no sorrow", after all?). But, like in the chapter about the mad tea party, the Mock Turtle presents us with a very curious situation: there is a "primordial" moment, let us put this way, when the Mock Turtle supposedly lived in the sea. Then something – we do not know what –

¹³ Underlined by the author of this monograph.

happened and there was a shift, from which the Mock Turtle quitted both being a *real* turtle and living in the sea. From this moment on, he became bound to a life of eternal sorrow “on a little ledge of rock”, where he is constantly sobbing and telling pieces of a fragmented and disconnected story. In both cases, the characters’ present moment is, “has been” and, possibly, “will be” characterized by a sort of longing for a distant past¹⁴, be it actual or not, which they keep reproducing through a repetitive and incessant act, and which have curiously unified past, present and future as the same monolithic event.

So far we can identify a pattern that keeps showing up in most of the chapters: 1) the Wonderland characters’ movement, be it physical or discursive, is characterized by an intrinsic circularity and by a constant return to the same point; 2) assuming from their relations with one another as well as from their linguistic constructions, it is possible to say that their temporal experience is non-linear, and therefore it does not encompass succession, or beginning, middle and end; 3) the characters are bound to the constant reproduction of the same actions, being thus deprived of change and unpredictability; 4) in this sense, Wonderland’s time can be described as homogeneous, repetitive and empty¹⁵.

2.4 Mythical temporality and the eternal return

At this point, we could ask ourselves: what kind of temporality emerges from this frame? Or, rather, what does it remind us of? There are many possible ways in which these questions could be answered, but I would like to suggest one in special: that the Wonderland characters’ attitude to time, which is essentially circular and depicts a sort of timelessness, resembles, in some aspects, the kind of temporality we use to find in mythical narratives. In order to make my argument clear, let us take a brief journey through Mircea Eliade’s (1959) notion of the *myth of the eternal return* first.

¹⁴ Which corresponds, on the one hand, to the time when there was *time* and, on the other, to the time when he lived in the sea.

¹⁵ It is empty in the sense that, since it is not structured according to Kermode’s *tick-tock* model, the present moment is not constituted – and therefore not filled with meaning – by its relation with an imagined end.

In his book *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1959), Eliade analyses the religious expressions of several “archaic” cultures, explaining that it is necessary to understand the rites performed by these societies as activities that aim at returning to the mythical age, to the primordial act (of creation). According to the author, “neither the objects of the external world nor human acts, properly speaking, have any autonomous intrinsic value. Objects or acts acquire a value, and in so doing become real, because they participate, after one fashion or another, in a reality that transcends them” (ELIADE, 1959, p. 4). He asserts that the meaning and the value of the human acts “are not connected with their crude physical datum but with their property of reproducing a primordial act, of repeating a mythical example” (ELIADE, 1959, p. 4). In this sense, through the paradox of rite, concrete time is transformed into mythical time: “Through repetition of the cosmogonic act, concrete time [...] is projected into mythical time, *in illo tempore* when the foundation of the world occurred” (ELIADE, 1959, p. 21).

According to Eliade, “there is everywhere a conception of the end and the beginning of a temporal period [...] and of the periodic regeneration of life” (ELIADE, 1959, p. 52). There is, in other words, a constant need for purification and regeneration of time, expressed, among other things, through the calendar systems adopted by most of the “archaic” societies studied by the author, but also by the Judeo-Christian culture: “The Judeo-Christian Sabbath is also an *imitatio dei*. The Sabbath rest reproduces the primordial gesture of the Lord, for it was on the seventh day of the Creation that God ‘... rested... from all his work which he had made’ (Genesis 2:2)” (ELIADE, 1959, p. 23). These calendars present a cyclical shape characterized by the constant renovation at the end of a season or an era. In some of the cases, the temporal organization is dictated by the natural cycles (seasons, moon, and so on). In other cases, it is structured according to mythical narratives of heroes and/or gods. What most of them have in common, however, is the intrinsic circularity that characterizes their temporal system, which becomes especially explicit in their need for eternally returning to the beginning, when the end of an epoch approaches. Therefore, according to Hammer (2011), Eliade understands that:

Like the natural fluctuations of decay and regeneration which, beyond man's will and with inevitable necessity, form the model upon which such societies construe their conceptions of temporality, time is here perceived not as a succession of mutually independent and self-sufficient instants but as structured around the endless repetition of cycles consisting of cosmogonic creation, decay, and regeneration. (HAMMER, 2011, p. 139)

In Lewis Carroll's story, there is no repetition of any sort of cosmogonic act and there is also no intent of, as far as we know, achieving a periodic regeneration of life. I am not trying to say, with this exposition, that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* consists of a mythical narrative in a strict way. However, I believe that it partakes with it in many of its fundamental aspects, especially when we consider the *performative* patterns of rite and of the Wonderland's characters' actions. Similarly to what happens among the cultures analyzed by Eliade, the creatures in Wonderland seem to have a circular understanding of the world and of themselves. Their actions and linguistic constructions reveal an essential unfamiliarity with any sort of linear models, be it physical or mental, as we can see in the following conversation:

"Read them," said the King.
The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. "Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?" he asked.
"Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end: then stop." (CARROLL, 2000, p. 121)

The fact that what the King says in reply to the White Rabbit's question is the most obvious truth, added to the White Rabbit's acceptance of this answer as original and satisfactory, intensifies the comicality of the whole situation and adds up to its nonsensical character. But it also reveals that we are dealing with a world in which successiveness and linearity do not apply¹⁶. Instead, what is shown is a reality governed by repetition and the endless coming back to the same point.

The circularity and eternal return to which the characters in Wonderland are submitted is of a different nature of that exposed by Eliade. It does not presuppose a new Creation and the repetition of the cosmogonic act in the way that it does for the societies analyzed by the author. However, their actions do present a ritualistic aspect in the sense that they do account for a necessity of repeating a primordial example in order to acquire reality, identity. The Mock Turtle's memory of his life in the sea and the Mad

¹⁶ As it becomes explicit along the whole chapter, in which the characters are performing a trial but they do not even know what comes first, the sentence or the verdict, etc.

Hatter's recollection of the tea time at six o'clock, in fact, possess an ontological status very similar to that of the myth. Both narratives are placed in a remote past that cannot be traced back through a linear retrospective in as much as they do not belong to the same "temporal dimension" as their present moment. In "A mad tea party", their movement repeats an activity primarily situated "within time", in opposition to their current timeless situation. They cannot say that their last tea at six o'clock occurred two days or even three years ago because, in their timeless reality, calendars and clocks no longer run. Their action becomes, in a sense, a failed attempt at rescuing an existence "within time" by endlessly reproducing the last instant in which it could actually be apprehended. As for the Mock Turtle, the lack of defined temporal markers (such as "twenty years ago", for example) in his story and the use of expressions such as "once," "when we were little," "when I was a real turtle" to evoke an idyllic time also account for a temporal distance that cannot be measured in terms of years and months, as long as this life in the sea belongs to another temporal experience, to an existence that can only be accessed through the performative act of storytelling. It represents, in a way, the opposition between a present moment of sorrow and emptiness – concrete time – and an ideal existence "when we were little", *ab origine, in illo tempore* – sacred time.

At this point, the historical existence of a previous life in the sea, put in question by the Gryphon's statement, has no deep relevance as long as "now", at their present moment, it has no longer an actual existence whatsoever and can only be apprehended through narrative recollection (storytelling) and even physical reproduction (in the following chapter, "The lobster's quadrille", the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon perform a traditional dance from the life "under the sea"). Both the Mock Turtle's story and the three characters' six o'clock tea are narrative and performative constructions that present a function and an ontological nature closely related to those of the myth. Similarly to what happens among the cultures studied by Eliade, the present in which these characters are inserted is created by and "acquires (...) reality solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act" (ELIADE, 1959, p. 5). Their eternal return to the same specific moment placed in a remote "past", thus, is responsible for giving an identity to and even *creating* their present situation. In a way, while the rites in Eliade's "archaic" societies function as bridges for them to overcome profane time towards a transcendental and sacred reality, the Wonderland's characters repetitive motion also represents an attempt at overcoming an empty existence made out of contingencies by

inserting it within a broader framework and filling it with meaning. A failed attempt, though, as we are going to see.

According to Eliade, from the seventeenth century on, the increasing scientific advances and the spreading of the positivistic ideology, German historicism and secular humanism led to a socio-cultural shift that originated a new understanding of the history, as possessing no archetype and consisting of a linear succession of temporal unities. Sacred time, which in archaic societies used to be accessed through rite, was replaced by an absolute profane time, now closely calibrated by the clock and constituted by a homogeneous, linear and endless succession of instants. The author opposes the members of “archaic” and modern societies, arguing that, while the former participated in the sacred through the paradox of rite and thus were able to fill every event with a definite meaning, the later were left with nothing but their own capacity to generate meaning. According to Hammer:

Modernity, for Eliade, essentially means contingency. It means that the inevitable struggle with natural necessity and the reality of separation, loss, pain, and death can no longer be given any sense by invoking transcendent authorities whose influence was once expressed and validated through cultic action and the enactment of collective memory embodied in myths, stories, and images. (HAMMER, 2011, p. 141)

Modern peoples, therefore, lack any sort of defense against the arbitrariness and relativity of contingencies, or what Eliade calls the “terror of history” (ELIADE, 1959, p. 151). Likewise, Hammer argues that the process of secularization initiated in the Enlightenment originated “a tremendous spiritual confusion, self-centeredness, and social fragmentation” (HAMMER, 2011, p. 130). Living historically means, among other things, to be deprived of an unquestionable symbolic authority capable of providing order and purpose to the social body. The result is a fragmented, *present-driven*, mechanically rational and, to a certain degree, chaotic framework.

Myth, which used to attribute meaning to the concrete and profane existence, and which was responsible for weaving together otherwise sparse events within a coherent and transcendental narrative, was replaced in modernity by what Nietzsche referred to

as “a world torn apart and shattered into individuals” (NIETZSCHE, 1999, p. 52)¹⁷. For the Victorians, in especial, this situation was interestingly aggravated in so far as they were situated in a transitional point in which the ideals of the Romantics were fading into the past and the modern industrialization “became clearer on the horizon” (KJELDGAARD, 2009, p. 2). The results of an increasingly mechanistic worldview were strongly felt by the Victorians themselves, as Thomas Carlyle writes, in 1829, that theirs is “the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practises the great art of adapting means to ends”¹⁸ (CARLYLE, 1829).

Wonderland and its inhabitants reflect the Victorians’ transitional situation in a great number of aspects. Firstly, the characters’ behavior, being essentially mechanical, translates the general obsession, mentioned by Carlyle, with adapting means to ends. Almost every character can be interpreted through this light. Just to mention some, we can think of the Queen and her mania for ordering everyone’s beheading in all kinds of situation. Her desire for having the sentence being decided previously to the verdict, during the trial in the last chapter, is very illustrative of her complete indifference to each context’s singularities and to the paths that must be traversed before getting to the ends. As long as everybody gets beheaded, nothing else is really relevant. The same can be said about the Duchess and her habit of always extracting a moral from the events and conversations, even though they generally do not claim for that.¹⁹ Likewise, it is also possible to cite the Mad Hatter and his eternal obsession with finishing his tea; the White Rabbit and his obsession with time, after which he is always running in order not to be late (to what, exactly, one never learns); and so on.

As to the circular motion, discussed above, to which most of the characters are submitted, especially the creatures around the tea table and the Mock Turtle, its resemblance to the myth’s performative aspect go so far as to evoke a ritualistic nature and a mere *attempt* at overcoming a total presentness towards a non-fragmented and non-empty existence. However, the homogeneous motion they keep reproducing

¹⁷ In his book *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche presents the rebirth of the myth of Dionysos as one of the only hopes against a world sunk in individuation, fragmentation and meaninglessness.

¹⁸ Underlined by the author of this monograph.

¹⁹ From which results the statement of such disconnected and arbitrary morals as this: “Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.” (CARROLL, 2000, p. 93)

essentially differs from the paradox of rite in “archaic” societies in as much as it consists of a movement that has already lost its connection to the primordial act, to the origins. It is a series of empty and repetitive gestures that no longer participate in a transcendent reality, because they constitute purely successive time, *chronos* – as opposed to *kairos*.

Modernity, deprived of the symbolic authority of myth, needs to find another unifying fiction to weave together its sparse fragments within a non-contingent and coherent narrative. As pointed out by Sherman, Benjamin identifies, in the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, a cultural shift from Messianic to homogeneous, empty time – a time closely calibrated by the clock and consisting of pure successiveness. The abandonment of Messianic time, though, left a gap, an absence of meaning that had to be filled with another kind of fiction: for Benjamin, this new unifying narrative was *progress*. Progress took the place of Messianic time in the attribution of cohesion and purpose to the social body. But, as Petersen remarks, in the England of the second half of the nineteenth century, the positivistic promises of scientific progress were already revealing their fragility, and many intellectuals – Carroll was one of them, according to the author – had already realized that progress was but “a thin veneer against a darker truth” (PETERSEN, 1985, p. 432).

In a way, therefore, Wonderland is a reflection of this world once again abandoned to the emptiness and fragmentation of contingency. While *kairotic* time represents a time structured according to a beginning and an end – a *tick* and a *tock* – within an organization “charged with past and future” (KERMODE, 2000, p. 46) that hence purges the interval of simply successiveness; what we have in Wonderland is a reality deprived of a unified fiction capable of rescuing those creatures from the humanly uninteresting flow of chronicity. Myth no longer plays this role in modernity. Progress, while constantly defying the religious absolute truths, up to the point of bringing their legitimacy to the ground, was also starting to lose its symbolic authority. Nothing was left for those individuals but themselves, in face of a world and an existence that escaped any attempt at explanation or integration.

Similarly, nothing is left for the characters in Wonderland but the repetitive reproduction of a motion that, although had once had a connection to the primordial act it intends to bring about, now only consists of a series of homogeneous and empty gestures that no longer participate in a transcendent existence, that are no longer

charged with *meaning*. The lack of a unified fiction, such as the myth for Eliade's "archaic" cultures, also means, by extension, the absence of beginnings and ends: there is no longer genesis, nor apocalypse, as well as there is no longer the expectation of the Lord's – or any other Messias' – return. In face of such an abandonment, hence, nothing remains but the linear succession of endless instants, all homogeneous and deprived of change, and an emptiness of meaning crudely evoked by those characters' reproduction of the motion of a – broken – clock.

And what is it that results from the lack of defined beginnings and ends? What is it that emerges from the absence of order and interconnectedness? It is chaos. Chaos is the inexistence of limits. Chaos is endlessness. Chaos is contingency. And if there is one thing by which Wonderland is constituted, after all, it is this: *contingency*.

3 AT THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

3.1 Wonderland and temporal suspension

When talking about time, chapter seven represents one of the most interesting parts of the story. And it is so because, in “A mad tea party”²⁰, Time plays a central role and almost acquires the status of a character, since it is personified by the Mad Hatter as a “he” with whom he came to quarrel at some point.

It is noteworthy the fact that, in physical terms, time is *actually* suspended for the creatures in Wonderland, and not only for the characters around the tea table (or it is so, at least, in relation to an external point of reference, as Alice’s world overground). Through a great number of suggestions along the story, mainly during Alice’s fall, and even when considering the manuscript’s title, *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, the reader is driven to associate Wonderland’s location to a specific point inside the earth. And the implications of that, especially in what concerns temporal measurement, are a great deal relevant for a richer comprehension of the story as a whole. Firstly, it is of general knowledge the fact that the further away from the earth’s surface, the lesser the movement of rotation can be apprehended from hence. In this sense, the bigger the proximity to the center of the earth, the lower the relative speed of its spinning around its axis²¹. If Wonderland is really located somewhere near the center of the earth, it is no longer possible to consider the movement of rotation to measure the passage of time. In other words, there are no longer days of 24 hours – and there are no hours at all, indeed. The day, according to the current definition, refers to the interval before and after which the sun “occupies”²² approximately the same position in the sky. In the “real” world, we consider that this interval has the duration of 24 hours, which

²⁰ This chapter was not present in the original manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures Underground*. It only came to be added to later editions.

²¹ In physics, by definition, the axis around which there is a circular movement is stopped relatively to this movement.

²² Of course, here I am talking about our illusory perception of its movement.

corresponds to the duration of a complete spin of the earth around its own axis (rotation). In Wonderland, however, since the movement of rotation is not expressively sensed, the sun will only come to occupy the same position in the sky within an interval of 365 days, or after the earth completes a full spin around this star. Of the movements performed by the earth, therefore, only translation can be applied for temporal measurement in Wonderland. The months, on the other hand, are equivalent to those of the overground world, for they are determined by the motion of the moon, which keeps on spinning around our planet regardless of our point of reference in it. In this sense, it is with great surprise that Alice notes that the Mad Hatter's clock tells the *day of the month*, but does not tell what *o'clock* it is:

“Why should it?” muttered the Hatter. “Does your watch tell you what year it is?”
 “Of course not,” Alice replied very readily: “but that’s because it stays the same year for such a long time together.”
 “Which is just the case with mine,”²³ said the Hatter. (CARROLL, 2008, p. 69)

Although such an answer does not make a lot of sense at first, when we consider Wonderland's proximity to the center of the earth and all of its implications for time measurement, the Hatter's assertion becomes quite clearer: in this universe, it stays the same hour and the same day for a long time – a time that is equivalent to the duration of a year in the overground world; and thus it makes much more sense that his watch shows the day of the month, as long as the motion of the moon is not altered at all when perceived from the center of the planet.

Therefore, to a certain degree, time – understood as the succession of hours and days – is actually *suspended* in Wonderland. It does not present any progression, it does not advance linearly, and its circularity is echoed on every level of existence of these characters. The three creatures' constant movement around the tea table reminds us, indeed, of the functioning of a clock, as remarked by Kjeldgaard. It is as if these three characters, taken to represent the second, the minute and the hour hand, were actually trying and reproducing the mechanism of a clock, in order to recreate and set in motion again a time that is, ironically, helplessly suspended. They become, consequently, its “physical embodiment” (KJELDGAARD, 2009, p. 9) without ever, however, registering any kind of progression.

²³ Underlined by the author of this monograph.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Alice learns a number of lessons along her adventures in Wonderland. These lessons, however, have nothing to do with geography or the multiplication-table. They are of a different kind of those one learns in school. She experiences them, she lives them, and she achieves learning through the challenges imposed by this journey. One of the first and most important things she comes to realize results from the following orientation given by the Caterpillar, in chapter five:

“One side will make you grow taller, and the other side will make you grow shorter.”

“One side of *what?* The other side of *what?*” thought Alice to herself.

“Of the mushroom,” said the Caterpillar, just as if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight.

Alice remained looking thoughtfully at the mushroom for a minute, trying to make out which were the two sides of it; and, as it was perfectly round, she found this a very difficult question. However, at last she stretched her arms round it as far as they would go, and broke off a bit of the edge with each hand. (CARROLL, 2000, p. 53)

As Alice observes, the mushroom is perfectly round. The caterpillar’s advice sounds inadequate for the situation. How can she possibly find the point in which one side ends and the other begins? A square, for example, has four sides clearly delimited by four corners. If the mushroom was square, therefore, she would just have to look for the corners in order to know exactly where one side begins and the other ends. The same logic would apply if it was triangular. But the thing is round, to her great disappointment. There are no limits, nothing to orient her. And so she decides to embrace it with her arms wide open, positioning one hand in total opposition to the other. And through this act, she picks two random points and establishes where one side begins and the other ends. She could as well have positioned herself in a different place in relation to the mushroom and then have chosen any other two pieces. And the sides hence established would not have been any more – or any less – valid than the ones she actually defined.

This situation resembles her experience at the Caucus-race. While deprived of any sort of rules, it also lacked absolute beginnings and ends. They could start running any time they liked, and since it was a circular course, there would be nothing to tell them where or when exactly to stop either: *any* point could be the beginning, and *any* point could be the end.

At the Mad Tea Party, as well, one never learns where the table actually begins or where it finally ends, for it is as round as the mushroom and the Caucus-race course. While the characters in Wonderland echo this physical circularity in their own mental structures and discursive constructions, Alice can only make sense out of her experiences as long as they take place within a plot, which entails the existence of defined starting and end points. Thus, a doubt that would seem so obvious to her – “what happens when you come to the beginning again?” – would have never occurred to the three mad creatures.

The circularity that is materially reproduced in the three situations above actually engenders Wonderland in all of its levels. From that, what results is a world solely ruled by arbitrariness in which the inexistence of limits, or defined beginnings and ends, ultimately means that every point could be the beginning and every point could be the end. In a way, it is possible to say that those creatures are stuck within the interval between *tock* and *tick*, which Kermode designates as a space of simple chronicity, emptiness, “humanly uninteresting successiveness” (KERMODE, 2000, p. 46). While *tick-tock* encompasses order, *kairotic* time, an existence within a plot; *tock-tick* means contingency, absence of order, chaos. In the sphere of time, the consequence is that this land presents a temporality deprived of the notions of past, present and future. Since past is what has once been but no longer is, and future is what will come after “now” but is not yet, these are categories that imply change, succession and linearity. Wonderland has none of the three things.

In a land thus doomed to eternal stagnation, Alice represents the element of change. While in each chapter the characters are stuck within a repetitive and circular motion that endlessly returns to the same point, Alice is moving in space and time, crossing a variety of different territories, and sensing the transformation in her very personality – she does not even know who she is anymore – and body – she is constantly having her size changed. And since the narrative presents a strong focalization through

her character, the result of this equation that involves two divergent temporalities is that the reader engages with the little girl in the impression that this is a land of unpredictability, for one never knows what is coming next.

Finally, it is possible to suggest that those characters are stuck within the movement of a broken clock both because they physically reproduce its circularity and because, structurally, the narrative itself can be interpreted as reflecting the format of a clock. This idea becomes clearer when we consider that, when the story begins, Alice is sitting by her sister on a riverbank. Then she – in theory – falls asleep and begins her adventures, crossing exactly twelve chapters, which is the same quantity of numbers displayed on an analog watch. In chapter twelve, Wonderland is then imploded and vanishes in as abrupt a manner as it came into existence, and Alice is once again back to her sister's company on a riverbank, the place where the story starts. In a sense, it is as if she had executed a complete spinning around the clock, coming back to the beginning in the end. This theory would also explain why time is stopped from the Wonderland creatures' perspective. Assuming that each chapter corresponds to an hour of an analog watch, we can associate their temporal suspension to the fact that each and every number of a clock coexist simultaneously, as well as never changes. Although it may be five o'clock from an external point of reference, for the watch's number three, it will never be five o'clock. The motion of time, in a clock, is materialized through the movement of the hands (hour, minute, second). That is how an external individual comes to know what time it is at a specific moment. But if this same individual were not outside, but inside the clock, stuck in the place that corresponds, let us say, to number three, he would not be able to apprehend the movement of the hands and therefore would not perceive the change from one hour to another. Time would not be running for him at all, just like it is not running for the characters in Wonderland.

A hundred fifty years have passed since the first publication of Alice's story. The world has gone through so many transformations since then, that it even sounds strange to speak of it as if there was any sort of continuum despite the changes. And although so many years have elapsed, this tale still serves as fresh food for texts, such as the present one, that dedicate pages and pages for its reflection, to get in the end to a closure as full of doubts and astonishment as had flourished in the beginning. Isn't it curious? The conceptions of time have also changed, but still the ideas proposed by Carroll give rise to

the most ardent discussions and walk side by side with the newest theories of physics and philosophy. For me, this fact only testifies to what he had already proved over a century ago: that time is not linear whatsoever. The present, after all, is nothing but an amalgam of crossed temporalities which we try now and then to mould as to give an illusion of coherence and successiveness – almost always monumentally failing.

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