5-2017

The Two-Sided Coin: Madness and Laughter as Subversion in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and The Sandman

Tessa Starr Swehla
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

The Two-Sided Coin: Madness and Laughter as Subversion
in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Sandman*

A thesis submitted for the partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in English

by

Tessa Starr Swehla
John Brown University
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2013

May 2017
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

_____
Dr. M. Keith Booker
Thesis Director

_____   _____
Dr. Robin Roberts   Dr. Sean Connors
Committee Member   Committee Member

_____
Dr. Sean Dempsey
Committee Member

Abstract

Mad female characters in Western literature have traditionally represented attempts by dominant patriarchal discourse to subjugate women's discourse: these characters are usually pathologized in both their dialogue with other characters and in their physical bodies. This subjugation by representation of mad female characters in dominant discourse parallels similar attempts to portray women as lacking in humor. This thesis studies the intersections between madness and humor and the ability of female characters that embody both to challenge and subvert dominant discourse. By examining the characters of Alice from Lewis Carroll's novel and Delirium from Neil Gaiman's graphic novel series The Sandman as a progression of these ideas, this thesis seeks to show how these characters challenge readers' schemata concerning madness and humor.

Table of Contents

"We are all mad here": Introduction

When the Cheshire Cat tells Alice that she, like the other characters in Wonderland, must be mad, she responds with skepticism and disbelief and asks it to explain why it believes itself to be mad. It responds, "you see a dog growls when it's angry, and wags its tail when it's pleased. Now, *I* growl when I'm pleased, and wag my tail when I'm angry. Therefore, I'm mad" (Carroll 58). The Cheshire Cat's definition of madness relies on a social construction that places rationality and madness on two opposing binaries: dogs represent the normative, rational practices of social discourse, and cats represent the opposing, non-normative, mad discourse. However, the Cat's logic relies on the privileging of the dog's discourse practices as normative, an assumption that cats' practices ought to be defined in relation to the dog's. Madness traditionally has been defined in these terms. It has been defined as a disease, a deviance from normative society, and one that posits a potential danger to the structures of reason, thus defining it in relationship to those structures. Madness is equated to the loss of reason, an aberration and a threat to both individual and public safety.

Michel Foucault, in his early work *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, posits that this binary opposition of reason versus madness in the construction of these terms in social discourse is actually a fairly recent one, that madness once existed in the Middle Ages and Renaissance as "an undifferentiated experience." Foucault attempts to trace how madness became pathologized in the last few centuries since the advent of the Enlightenment:

> What is originative is the caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason; reason's subjugation of non-reason, wresting from it its truth as madness, crime, or disease, derives explicitly from this point…Then, and then only, can we determine the realm in which the man of madness and the man of reason, moving apart, are not yet disjunct; and in an incipient and very crude language, antedating that of science, begin the dialogue of their breach, testifying in a fugitive way that they still speak to each other.

> Here madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved: inseparable at the moment when they do not yet exist, and existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them (ix-x).

For Foucault, reason and madness represent two parallel discourses: two distinct ways of viewing epistemology and social knowledge or the two-sided coin that Delirium refers to in Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *The Sandman* (282). The key phrase for Foucault is "reason's subjugation of non-reason," a phrase which emphasizes reason's place as part of dominant discourse or ideology. In modern terms, according to Foucault, madness has been reduced by this dominant discourse of reason to "the abstract universality of disease" thus negating its potential validity as an alternative discourse. On the other hand, Simon During goes on to point out a key difference in terminology for Foucault: "Madness (*la folie*) becomes the name for a condition which expresses a basic, not to say cosmic, lack, while mental illness is the term used to describe how society conceives of, and controls, madness" (26). The dichotomy is important as it looks at both the "experience" and the social production of madness (31). Foucault essentially in this work explores these social productions of madness, examining the different historical, cultural, and economic structures that shape the ways that society deals with the mentally ill.

One of the key philosophical movements that led to this social production of mental illness as the enemy of reason, according to Foucault, is the rise of rationalism as an epistemological and ontological foundation for dominant discourses of the past three centuries. In short, the ideology of a fixed, absolute, knowable, capitalized TRUTH has become the claim to authority and supremacy of dominant Western discourse and has pervaded social, economic, religious, and cultural discourses. Foucault writes, "A law which excludes all dialectic and all reconciliation; which establishes, consequently, both the flawless unit of knowledge and the uncompromising division of tragic existence; it rules over a world without twilight, which knows

no effusion…" (109). This "law" or reliance on rationalism as an epistemological authority shapes itself as a monologue, the one and only true discourse, thus painting any other claim to knowledge as false, fake news, or dangerous. The idea and term of madness here is shaped by this social construction of truth: madness represents a threat to this claim of authority, and any threat to this claim may be painted as mad.

Although Foucault's discussion of madness seeks to describe how dominant episteme seek to use madness as a mechanism of control on a broad, across the board level, feminist scholarship over the last several decades has focused on the intersection of gender and mental illness as playing a key role in the subjugation of women's discourses in the dominant political and social structures. Constructions of women as mad and of madness as having inherent feminine qualities have often been used by the discourse of the dominant ideology as a method of control through the representations of mad women (or women as mad) as threatening to the heteronormative, patriarchal, and capitalistic hegemony. Women are dangerous because of their madness, and dangerous women are mad in these literary and social constructions. And despite the recent efforts to de-stigmatize mental illness in societal discourse, one can still hear the gendered nature of madness in everyday conversation. I overheard two of my students describing an upcoming reading of bell hook's *Teaching to Transgress* in my freshman level writing class. One student exclaimed to another during group work that bell hooks was crazy and that she had a tendency to go on "irrational rants." I am not sure if this student knew I had overheard him or not, and I am not sure it mattered to him if I did, but the point remains that the link between women who try to critic dominant discourse and madness remains intact in the cultural conceptions of women.

Part of this mechanism of the social production of gendered madness involves associating

danger and tragedy with madness in female characters. Characters like Ophelia, Bertha Rochester, Anna Karenina, Jessica Jones, etc. all are characters overwhelmed by tragedy, pathology, or both in their portrayals. Although "the laugh of the hysteric" has become associated with madness, very few mad female characters until the last several decades have provoked laughter on the part of the reader (although there are a great many funny mad male characters). This characterization is partially due to another mechanism of control of women's discourse: women are not funny in dominant discourse. This dismissal of women's humor, as both Nancy Walker and Regina Barreca argue, works to relegate women's discourse to a subordinate and less dangerous place in social constructions. If women's humor causes the kind of "trouble" that Barreca says that it does, then dominant discourse has sought to pathologize it in the same way it has women's madness (*They Used to Call Me* 22). Although female comedians like Amy Schumer, Melissa McCarthy, and Ali Wong have risen to prominence in recent years, this dismissal can be found in almost any response to them. When the creators of the Adult Swim show *Rick and Morty* announced that they were hiring more female writers for the highly anticipated upcoming season, many of the fans who commented expressed fears that the new writers would "ruin" the show. One such commenter states, "Most successful comedians are male. Most successful writers that do comedy, are male…" (Dr. Jesus). Another commenter notes that "women just aren't funny" and in a later comment states, "The 'modern day feminists' are literal retards," (You Just Made The List) linking both the dominant discourse constructions of mental illness and dismissal of women's humor together.

In short, these constructions are still very much a part of the way woman are conceived and subjugated in the dominant discourse. The question then becomes for this thesis and for future analyses, how can these traditions of madness and humor, when combined into one female

character or text, provide new sites of subversive discourse? The characterization of the humorous mad-man may not be new, but the humorous mad-woman has only come into her own in literature and film in the past hundred years, many of these characters (though certainly not all) inhabiting alternative forms of media such as film and graphic novels. These characters have emerged in many ways as responses to these mechanisms of social control through disidentification with the representations of female madness and humor in the dominant discourse. Study of these characters can lead us to new formations of alternative discourse and can serve to undermine and subvert the reader's expectations of mad women as constructed by dominant ideology. These constructions can be revealed for what they are (mechanisms of control), and the gaps that both madness and humor reveal in these constructions can be seen as opportunities for new discourses, epistemes, and representations in the mind of the reader.

Although the number of female characters who embody both are growing almost daily in modern literature, TV, and film, I have chosen to examine two characters who embody both in order to explore a few aspects of how these characters might provide sites of resistance to dominant discourse: Alice, from Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, and Delirium, from Gaiman's graphic novel series *The Sandman*. These two mad, female, funny characters from two different historical, philosophical, and cultural mindsets can begin to provide a progression view of this type of subversion: Alice representing a sort of prototype for mad funny female characters, and Delirium one of the more modern, developed examples. Alice and Delirium are superficially similar characters (one could probably argue that Carroll's character influenced Gaiman's): both are adolescent, white (with the exception of Delirium's brief incarnation as a Chinese Immigrant Prostitute in *Fables and Reflections*), sexualized girls written by men whose are characterized in varying facets of madness and humor. They were both inspired by real-life women: Alice by

Alice Liddell (a child-friend of Charles Dodgson aka Lewis Carroll) and Delirium by musician

Tori Amos (who later alluded to the character in the song *Sister Named Desire*), feminist writer

Kathy Acker, and artist Jill Thompson (who illustrated the *The Sandman* series arc *Brief Lives*).

However, their differences are numerous as well: Alice is a young girl in Victorian England who

experiences a hallucinatory dream while Delirium is the anthropomorphic personification of

madness and part of a mythical pantheon of similar beings. One work was written well over a

century before the other, causing both historical and genre separation between the two. All of

these differences pose potential problems with critically examining them together; however,

reading the two together through a lens of the intersection between madness and humor can yield

new insights into how alternative discourse might fill the gaps provided by the dominant one,

thus revealing the double-sided nature of the coin that Delirium says represents different ways of

knowing.

Before I can begin my analysis of the specifics, the claim of Alice as a mad character

must be defended. After all, the eccentric and colorful characters of Wonderland often seem

closer to the madness of Delirium than Alice does; in fact, Alice can sometimes be dull and

logical in comparison. However, if the definition of woman's madness is a threat to the

patriarchal order of society, and the society of Wonderland can be indeed seen as a cohesive,

normative society (if only in relation to itself), then Alice does indeed fit this definition. She is

consistently dismissed or perceived as a threat to the citizens of Wonderland because she does

not conform to the accepted rules of Wonderland society. There is no indication that Wonderland

does not follow a set of rules, rules which often parody what we could call "real world" rules.

Internal to the community, these rules are mostly consistent: the residents understand one

another's language and they understand the social structure in which they are imbedded much

better than Alice does (although this does not prevent conflicts within the Wonderland community). Alice, as a human girl, provides both aberrant language (as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis) and aberrant ways of embodiment (as discussed in the third chapter) that both exclude her from this hegemony and simultaneously give her agency within it. R.D. Laing, the famous anti-psychiatrist, posited that madness occurs as a response to constructions that are in themselves equally mad: "Society highly values its normal man. It educates children to lose themselves and to become absurd, and thus to be normal. Normal men have killed perhaps 100,000,000 of their fellow normal men in the last fifty years" (28). For Laing, the construction of the idea of the normative is just as human of a construction as the idea of the mad (echoing Foucault's argument concerning the construction of binary discourses of rational discourse and sane). In this way, Alice can be seen as mad in the context of "the sane" residents of Wonderland, thus challenging the idea of who is sane and who is mad and what those terms even mean.

As Gilbert and Gubar have noted, "as psychoanalysts from Freud and Jung onward have observed, myths and fairy tales often both state and enforce culture's sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts" (36). No one is the master of modern myth-telling more than Gaiman: mythology and its function as the relationship between the human psyche and the creation and destruction of culture and society has been the central focus of his work for many years, even before *American Gods*. Gaiman is fascinated with how humans create gods who create humans, and how this cycle produces as it destroys, and how myths are not immune to change. These explorations are at the heart of the plot of *The Sandman*; the protagonist and his siblings are where both myths and psychoanalysis both reside. As anthropomorphic personifications, Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair, and

Delirium all create and reflect the deepest of human beliefs and impulses. The character of

Delirium represents one of the most nuanced versions of the mythos surrounding madness: she is

both the definition and embodiment of madness while simultaneously subverting and challenging

those definitions and embodiments. What's more, this personification of madness is female,

which evokes allusions to historical ideas about hysteria and madness as embodied in women.

Her very name (which most mental health professionals no longer use as a diagnosis) suggests an

older understanding of madness, an indirect allusion to the creations of madness of the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And the way that her subversion through humor works is

similar to the way that Alice's works, so using the already extensive scholarship on Alice would

be useful in an analysis of Delirium. She too is moving through a Wonderland, but her

Wonderland is a mythicized version of "the real" world, and she represents the other side of the

coin of knowing that she refers to.

The first chapter will look at the theoretical and historical traditions that have shaped the

dominant discourses about women's madness and humor and how both have become

mechanisms of alternative discourses in direct opposition to the dominant one, along with a few

examples of how Delirium and Alice as characters interact with these traditions, creating a

theoretical framework for later discussion. The second chapter will focus on the often humorous

linguistic mistranslations/homophonic schema failure that occurs between Alice and Delirium

and the other characters in their respective series and the way that the semiotic fluidity inherent

in the dialogue of both characters represents resistance and subversion of the epistemological

authority claimed by dominant discourse. The third and final chapter will examine the changes

that affect the visual representations of both characters (who inhabit both text and visual worlds)

and how these changes might bring about the disruption of the notion of fixed identity based on

biology or interiority.

Chapter One: Causing Trouble: Traditions of Subjugation of Women's Madness and

Humor in Dominant Discourse

In Pharamond's travel agency's reception room in the *The Sandman* series *Brief Lives*, Delirium misinterprets the receptionists request to know her name as a request to take on her name: "You don't want my name. Trust me, you really don't. Sometimes, I don't want my name, and I'm sort of USED to it by now. It would REALLY mess you UP" (178). Delirium, in Gaiman's pantheon of anthropomorphic personifications, embodies madness, and in this scene, she indicates that she understands the gravity of societal definitions of madness through names— she herself does not always want to be defined that way. As I mentioned in the introduction, it is telling that Gaiman named her after an older terminology for madness and that he made the personification of madness in his graphic novel female, for these characteristics link the character closely with the tradition of subjugation of women through madness. Delirium is also called Mania in the series, a name which again recalls an older conception of madness. Foucault notes that the use of the term *mania* was used during the classical period (a period he refers to as broadly encompassing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) as another reference to madness (125-7), but the words *delirium* and *mania* have not been used in modern psychiatry for quite some time. Justin Mellette, one of the few scholars who has written about Delirium as a character, reads this as Gaiman's authorial "gestures towards stereotypes against women and mental instability. His treatment of her, however is more complex than merely classifying her as a victim of mental unbalance. Over the course of the series, Delirium comes to stand as a vessel for reader identification, open to numerous interpretations of her bizarre mental state" (64). By creating Delirium, the mythological anthropomorphic personification of madness, as female, Gaiman is able to tap into these traditions and allow the character to interact with and subvert the

constructions of madness in women that they have formed in the current dominant discourse, in a way that creating the character as male simply would not.

These traditions of madness that developed in what Foucault's classical period inform the characterizations of Alice and Delirium, and a critical approach to these characters (and those characters like them) must consider how these traditions formed. As mentioned in the introduction, a parallel to this tradition of subjugation of female madness has a parallel in the tradition of the subjugation of female humor: the social production of mad or funny women as dangerous or pathological contain many similarities and intersect in ways that I have not found in much theory scholarship in my own research, so it is important to discuss first how these mechanisms came into being and how they are related to one another. Therefore, this chapter will primarily focus on tracing some of the origins and some of the history of these mechanisms in the past couple of centuries, as well as looking at how Alice and Delirium (and by extension, characters like them) begin to create an intersectional framework to resists the application of these mechanisms in dominant discourse and the effect of this framework on the reader. It is, of course important to note that many cultural, social, economic, and historical shifts in thought lie between Alice and Delirium, complicating the relationship between the two: Delirium's context contains decades of feminist scholarship that allows her to interact with these ideas in a much more overt and progressive way than Alice's. However, both can be read as figures of mad, funny characters who expose gaps and instability in the dominant discourse, and they can also be read as a progression of this exposure in terms of their expression of these ideas.

Monster Women

Hysteria[1] and delirium as words both have origins in female imagery. The word *hysteria*

---

[1] To take a page out of Heather Meek's article, I am using the word hysteria not as a reference to a specific condition or representation; the word has evolved and changed over thousands of historical, cultural, racial, social, and

originates from a Greek word for womb or uterus, and *delirium* comes from the phrase "out of one's furrow" (evoking phallic imagery of plow and earth). Ancient Greek and Egyptian cultures formulated what da Mota Gomes and Engelhardt call "'the gynecological explanation'" for mental instability: the womb was either "wandering" through the body or it contained an imbalance of bodily fluids, causing disease (972). Other theorists began to connect hysteria with the female nervous system instead of the womb (looking at it as the product of over-civilization), but theories connecting female sexual organs to madness persist well into the beginning of the 19th century (973). This view of the disease was based on the assumption by medical professions that "women were inherently pathological" (Meek 109). The medical field viewed the female body as a site of weakness, of enslavement to their reproductive and faulty anatomy. The menstrual cycle and the uterus were closely connected with mental instability in women: the disorder referred to as "the vapours" was believed to be the result of imbalance in the uterus affecting the brain (109). This diagnosis crossed social and economic boundaries, according to Meek, although, as Elaine Showalter points out, the treatment and level of care often was dependent on the social class of the victim's family (23). Although, as Meek notes, defining hysteria as a set of specific symptoms in an eighteenth-century context is difficult due to its almost catch-all like quality (108), Showalter says that the rise of female inmates in asylums confirmed "what they had suspected all along: that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and reproductive control" (55).

  Not only do these views of hysteria confirm biological essentialist assumptions about the female body, they also provide the means of social control of women. Many eighteenth-century

---

economic situations (106). Rather, the word hysteria represents the way in which madness and mental health have been gendered in the past several hundred years.

theorists, according to Meek, subscribed to the idea that marriage was the cure for hysteria, believing "that male semen somehow kept the womb in order" or that having children would cure the condition (117). Therapy became one of the means of ensuring that women would submit to these domestic and social roles: failure to do so could result in violent means of coercion, in the name of curing the ailment (116), thus punishing the mad for being mad (as Foucault notes on page 266). Meek writes, "Hysteria then is linked to a rebellion against marriage and domesticity, and…when women submit to the conventional gendered hierarchy— usually within the married state—symptoms disappear" (118). In any case, hysteria has often been assigned to women as both the diagnosis and the cause of threat to men, becoming what Meek calls "a powerful cultural metaphor, a catch-all that explained everything that was wrong with women; it confirmed their inherent pathology, their weakness, their changeability, and their inferior reasoning" (107). Foucault described the treatment of the mad as a means of correction or coercion to return to what dominant ideology termed the normative order: "to return to the world, to entrust oneself to its wisdom by returning to one's place in the general order of things, thus forgetting madness, which is the moment of pure subjectivity" (175). Hysteria or mental illness becomes not only a description of social or legal deviance on the part of women in the patriarchal discourses, but it also is solidified as part of the representation of women as a whole, a universal feature of their biological and social identification in the dominant ideology.

This gendered representation of madness continued into the 20th century and, with Freud, found itself tied more and more into mechanisms of control for women's sexuality. In Freud's famous case study of Dora, he explores how his theories of psychosexual trauma could lead to hysterical symptoms (7). In *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, Freud relates his treatment of an eighteen-year old woman he called Dora (a pseudonym for Ida Bauer) for

symptoms of hysteria: she had frequent migraines, coughing fits, depression, belligerent behavior with her family, and at times, an inability to speak. Her parents asked Freud to examine her after finding a suicide note (22-3). Freud, upon speaking with Dora, learned that her father had made friends with a married couple (referred to as Frau and Herr K), and that Dora claimed to have been sexually propositioned by the older Herr K on several occasions (beginning when she was fourteen) and the most recent being at a lake during a vacation with her father and the K's. Herr K denied all of these accusations and instead accused Dora as being obsessed with sex (27-28), a symptom of madness and hysteria at the time. Although both Herr K and her father said that her accusations were made up, Dora explained to Freud that her father and Frau K were having an affair (33), and that she "had been handed over to Herr K. as the price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife; and her rage at her father's making such a use of her was visible behind her affection for him" (34). Mairead Hanrahn points out that in this situation, Dora's insistence on her own version of the events at the lake challenges this "tacit agreement" between her father and Herr K and threatens the social and personal comforts of both men while compromising her own (49). Thus, Dora's diagnosis of hysteria becomes a way of undermining her veracity while protecting the status-quo.

Ultimately, Dora's case becomes a prime example of how effectively dominant ideological mechanisms and frameworks concerning gendered madness assert and overpower alternative formations of gender. Hanrahn notes that while Freud appears to believe Dora's version of the events rather than her father's, he refuses to accept her explanation for her symptoms at face value but instead spends several pages proving that the underlying cause was in fact Dora's love for Herr K. (49). Freud believes that Dora's refusal of Herr K is a symptom of hysteria rather than the cause, as he believes that a sexual situation should have aroused her, and

instead, she repressed that arousal and reacted in a way that was "entirely and completely hysterical" (28). This conclusion is based on Freud's heteronormative assumption that women are attracted to men, regardless of age or preference. Freud sees Dora's symptoms as a "displacement of the pleasure that she had felt," (Hanrahn 49), again playing into the idea that women who do not prescribe to heteronormative gender roles (or to his paradigm of female sexuality) then they must be mentally ill. Hanrahn argues that here "Freud is someone determined to see her, rather than the situation in which she finds herself, as the problem, the abnormality: someone moreover, who, far from being a being a neutral observer, is part of the system of repressing her…" (51). Dora has given Freud the reason for her illness, but as her explanation does not fit into the dominant discourse that Freud both espouses and contributes to, it is disregarded in favor of the all too familiar identification with sexual deviance on the part of the mad woman. It is perhaps significant that one of the symptoms of her hysteria was her inability to speak, since her ability to be heard was stripped from her by both her guardians and Freud himself.

Alice and Delirium as characters interact with this appropriation of Dora's speech/her inability to speak in two distinct ways: her voice is either excluded from the narrative by the other characters or her voice is appropriated by Carroll himself through memory loss. The first way, through exclusion, is illustrated by the Mad-Tea Party scene in the novel. There is a definite patriarchal feel to this scene: three male characters (who are called mad, but who appear to understand one another's discourse much better than they do Alice's) interact with a female character in some condescending and unpleasant ways, yet cause the audience to laugh at their antics. First, the group wishes to exclude her from their table, shouting "'No room!'" (when there is, in fact, room) and then responding to her observation that it was rude to offer her wine when

there was none by explaining to her that it was rude of her to sit down without being invited (60). The exclusion of Alice in this scene is palpable: she is literally being denied a seat at the table, but the Hatter furthers this exclusion at the end of the Tea-party scene by telling her that she should not talk (67). One interpretation may be that she is an outsider to their community, but the fact that she is female and that the rest of the scene includes the male characters trying to trick her into linguistic traps in a rude and dismissive manner, the symbolism here can be related to previous theories about exclusion of women from dominant discourse.

The second way Alice illustrates this symbolic control of women's discourse through the control of her voice is through Carroll's authorial control of her speaking voice. Alice is unable to remember what she had learned previously in the "real" world, and when she attempts to speak, she often says something that she did not mean to. An example of this disconnect between speech and brain occurs in the scene with the Caterpillar. Alice tells the Caterpillar that she is unable to remember things she has learned: "'I've tried to say '*How doth the little busy bee,*' but it all came different!'" The Caterpillar then asks her to repeat "You are old, Father William," and Alice complies, but the words are incorrect, which the Caterpillar notes when she is finished (42-45). These scenes of Alice attempting to speak and something very different coming out of her mouth represent moments in which Carroll, as the author, appropriates Alice's voice for his own ends, specifically for his desire for parody. These nonsense poems that come out of the unwilling Alice's mouth are elaborate parodies of specific Victorian poems that were taught to children like Alice in school ("You are old, Father William" parodies Robert Southey's "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained them") (264). These poems were designed to teach children moral lessons and subscribed to a Samuel Johnson/Enlightenment theory of literature as designed to exemplify the right way to live. Lydia Murdoch points out Isaac Watt's poetry as a particular

example of this attitude: Watt wrote poetry designed to teach children to resist what he saw as their "inherent" sinfulness (15), thus his poetry became a mechanism to educate children into the practices of dominant discourse. However, Murdoch argues that Carroll's work resists this notion by "drawing on the Romantics" and rewriting some of his lyrics into nonsense and playful imagery (16). These parodies resist the idea of a fixed moral goal on the part of dominant discourses of rationalism; however, this is more Carroll's concern than Alice's. Alice as a character is unable to speak as she wants but instead must speak as Carroll writes, thus illustrating the control Carroll has over the character's voice, reminiscent of the control that Freud and Dora's guardians had over her voice.

Delirium's character also reflects the way that these traditions of madness seek to silence the voice of the mad. When she first appears in the graphic novel, the first words that her brother speaks to her are "hush, little sister," indicating that he needs her to be present in order to have all the Endless at his meeting, but that he does not want her to contribute to what is said (549), reminiscent of the Hatter telling Alice that she should not speak. Delirium is also more reluctant to speak than Alice. She, like Alice, says that she has difficulty remembering things, causing gaps to form in her dialogue. But unlike Alice, these gaps are not co-opted by Gaiman, but rather she has hesitations in her speech. These hesitations take the form of frequent ellipses, umms and uhhhs, and sometimes "I don't remember." These types of hesitations indicate two influences that cause Delirium to lose her voice: the first is the actual memory issues, and the second is the way that her siblings have shaped her inability to speak by either disregarding what she has to say or by interrupting her and telling her to be quiet, like Destiny. Delirium herself is hesitant to ask Desire, Despair, and Dream for assistance with her quest to find Destruction because she clearly believes that they think that they are superior to her. Thus, Delirium's voice is weakened

by her doubts in her own confidence, doubts that in large part seemed to be caused by her siblings' dismissal of her voice. Again, this characterization of Delirium's problems with speaking allows the readers to interact with the allusion to Dora who was unable to speak in Freud's assessment of her condition.

The use of madness as a means of patriarchal control as illustrated by Freud and other members of the medical and psychological fields is reflected in the characterization of mad women in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature, characterizations that inform the context for Alice and Delirium. Gilbert and Gubar point out that male authors, who have controlled much of the dominant discourses concerning gender and madness, have often employed a binary dialectical approach to women's representation as a mechanism of enforcing patriarchal superiority: female characters are usually figured as either angels or monsters (17). Gilbert and Gubar cite the anthropologist Sherry Ortner: "in every society 'the psychic mode associated with women seems to stand at both the bottom and the top of the scale of human modes of relating'…women 'can appear from certain points of view to stand both under and over (but really simply outside of) the sphere of cultures hegemony'" (qtd. 19). Gilbert and Gubar take this line of reasoning further into the idea of the denial of female autonomy through authorship. Because women cannot represent themselves in literature, they become the symbols of "those extremes of mysterious and intransigent Otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing" (19). These representations become the site of social discipline, of conformity, from the eighteenth century until the present.

The idealized angel both represents and creates the space for women in a patriarchal society through what Gilbert and Gubar call "the creation of those 'eternal feminine' virtues" which regulate women's participation in society (23). Domesticity, submission, selflessness, and

heteronormative views of sexuality and beauty all are embodied by this angel character in the dominant discourse, firmly rooted in religious language in order to create and enable the means of control: these so-called ideals of femininity were espoused in novels of manners such as *Pamela*, poems such as "The Angel in the House," and even in the children's poetry that Carroll often parodied.

If the angel-woman character represents the higher extreme of Otherness, the ideal, then "the monster-woman" represents the lower extreme. She "embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author's power to allay 'his' anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained 'place'…" (28). As noted by Gilbert and Gubar, these characters can be both sites of the production of patriarchal control (much like the angel character) and the site of the subversion of that control (even when the author's intentions are otherwise). As far as control goes, female autonomy and the associated characteristics of dominance, assertiveness, deception, etc. are all portrayed as "unfeminine" and monstrous and are again linked to faulty female anatomy, which is also connected, once again, to their female anatomy and sexuality (30) in a similar way that the patriarchal imagination link madness and hysteria to female reproductive organs. This "monster woman" is often equated with madness; Gilbert and Gubar note that in nineteenth century literature, the "monster woman" was often associated with "spleen" and "vapours," two words that, in the dominant discourse, were part of the gendered constructions of madness (33-4). In the end, these two opposing extremes of Otherness function as a method of coercion to conformity: women in male authored literature are either "a sweet heroine inside the house" or "a vicious bitch outside" (29). By employing this dialectic method of constructing women's place in the patriarchal hegemony, the dominant

discourse seeks to coerce women into conformity through threat of punishment of ostracism or ridicule, creating a separate space for them inside the ideology. Women who do not conform or provide alternative modes of discourse are discredited and safely locked into their place in the system, eliminating them as a threat to the dominant ideology.

Female characters are linked with monsters often in Carroll's Wonderland and Looking Glass land. In *Through the Looking Glass*, the White King refers to the White Queen as "a dear good creature" and then the Unicorn, Haigha, and the rest of the King's court discuss Alice's status:

> …and he [the Unicorn] was going on, when his eye happened to fall upon Alice: he turned round instantly, and stood for some time looking at her with an air of the deepest disgust.
> 'What—is—this?' he said at last.
> 'This is a child! Haigha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her…'We only found it today. It's as large as life, and twice as natural!'
> 'I always thought they were fabulous monsters!' said the Unicorn. 'Is it alive?'

The Unicorn then goes on to introduce Alice as "a fabulous monster" and the court continues to talk about her in the third person as "Monster" (205-7). Although the court does not specify that Alice's "monster" status is related to her gender, the fact that Carroll made his representative child female makes this designation part of the nineteenth century context of monster women that Gilbert and Gubar identify, much in the same way that Gaiman creating Delirium as a woman places her in the context of mad women stereotypes. The way that the King's Court (which is completely comprised of male characters) discuss Alice as "a monster" and as "it" conforms to the way that Gilbert and Gubar argue that nineteenth century male authors discuss female characters who do not conform to social norms, as evil, pathological creatures.

Delirium as a character especially reflects this angel woman/monster woman identity split in her representational change from Delight to Delirium. We will discuss the identity shift

from Delight to Delirium in Chapter 3 in detail, but this shift closely mirrors the way that

Foucault describes the shift in the way dominant discourse defined madness as an inferior

discourse. Michael Saler's ideas concerning disenchantment in the modern era could shed some

light on the issue. Saler notes that the word *enchantment* as used in the Middle Ages

encompassed the ideas of both "'delight'" and "'delusion,'" but that the move towards modernity

(and disenchantment) reflected a view of the binary between enchantment and rationalism: "the

binary discourse…defined enchantment as the residual, subordinate 'other' to modernity's

rational, secular, and progressive tenets" (9). As enchantment lost its value in modern discourse,

it became more associated with groups considered inferior, such as women and the poor (Saler

9). This disenchantment that Saler describes as part of the adoption of rationalism in dominant

discourse reflects Foucault's theory of the subjugation of mad discourse by rational discourse,

and the shift from Delight to Delirium in the *The Sandman* mythos reflects this change in the

valuation of these ideas. When Delirium was Delight, she has the appearance and role of the

"angel woman" character; when Delirium remembers Delight in Destiny's garden, she

remembers "Dancing men came to me from a far world, bringing tribute, of birds and flowers and fine gems. They were grateful for…for what?" Dream replies, "Happiness, perhaps?" Delirium hesitates, "Mm…SOMETHING like that" (see fig. 1). As

Figure 1. Delirium remembers Delight in Destiny's garden (278).

Delight, the female personification's main subjects appear to be men who idolize her for giving

them the enchantment, the delusion, that Saler describes, a delusion of happiness or "something like that." This role encapsulates the angel woman role as transactional: the angel woman is idolized and worshiped for conforming to the desires and needs of the male members of society. However, when Delight becomes Delirium in what Mellette calls "a fall," she becomes a much more monstrous image due to her nonconformity with the angel role. This shift (which we explore more in Chapter Three) reflects the devaluation of the mad discourse as part of the devaluation of enchantment: when dominant discourse no longer was "delighted" with enchantment, it became a sign of madness. The breakdown of the transactional value of the angel role is seen in a scene in which Delirium thanks an older homeless man for taking care of her dog Barnabas. She offers him "a present," but he refuses saying "T'ain't safe to ask favors of your kind, even if I earned 'em. Otherwise I could find myself spitting out flower petals and silver dollars every time I speak." The old man clearly knows who Delirium is (he is mad as well; he says that he is "kind of yours anyway"), but he is unwilling to take anything from her, thinking that he could be endangering himself (60). This scene shows that Delirium does not have the transactional value in the man's mind that perhaps Delight may have had, thus illustrating the breakdown of the system.

On the other hand, these monster characters can also function as subversive to the paradigm in which they have been placed. This subversion is especially apparent when placed in the hands of women writers (who often struggle to resist this binary representation), but Gilbert and Gubar note that this subversion can be read even the work of male writers whose "monster" female characters become too big for the page. Gilbert and Gubar also argue that the monstrous woman characterization is a mechanism of subversion in the way that she reclaims her agency and reasserts the validity of her alternative discourse: "a life of feminine submission, of

'contemplative purity,' is a life of silence, a life that has no pen and no story, while a life of female rebellion, of 'significant action,' is a life that must be silenced, a life whose monstrous pen tells a terrible story" (36). It is here that a gap in the dominant discourse exists; alternative discourses (usually feminist ones) can resist the enclosure of the mad woman in the identification of monster by embracing the danger the figure poses to the dominant discourse. Through disidentification, subversion can occur. We will see that Alice performs this disidentification, but Delirium takes it to another level by subverting stereotypes of madness while simultaneously being the personification of madness.

One such disidentification occurs in Helene Cixous' reclamation of the figure of Dora. In the 1970's, the French feminist movement sought to reclaim hysteria as a transgressive and subversive act on the part of women. Her play *Portrait of Dora* seeks to rewrite and call into question Freud's analysis by avoiding what Hanrahn calls "the universalizing effect of the narrative standpoint adopted by Freud in his text" (52). She writes of Cixous' version of Freud as someone who is determined to read himself and a patriarchal version of the events in question on the subject of Dora: "not only in that his sympathies lie explicitly with the one person, K, whom she considers responsible for her suffering, but that just as the others see her as a means to their sexual gratification, Freud uses her as a means to his intellectual gratification" (51). By giving Dora and other characters in the play voices and by showing different interpretations and reinterpretations of the same events, Cixous calls into question the "neutral observer" persona of Freud and allows Dora to subvert the voice of Freud with her own, revealing him to be part of the systemic controls placed on her by the designation of madness. Her inability to speak at times becomes a site of resistance to Freud's explanations instead of sites of subjugation. Dora's speech reveals an alternative form of discourse, one that is shaped by its conflict with the

dominant discourse and inhabits the gaps and spaces of that discourse.

Echoing Foucault's formation of madness as "a flight from the world," Gilbert and Gubar suggest that in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, madness is portrayed as an escape from injustice and imprisonment (341). They suggest that madness in the novel stands in for repressed rage on the part of the heroine, reflected in several other female characters throughout the novel such as Ms. Temple, Helen Burns, and culminating in Mr. Rochester's mad wife Bertha (345). Gilbert and Gubar see Jane and Bertha as doubles: Bertha represents all the rage and suppressed autonomy that Jane feels (361-62). This rage is also reminiscent of Freud's description of Dora's "rage" towards her father upon being commercialized in his exchange with Herr K. So, here, female madness can also be the physical and emotional expression of anger towards the dominant ideology that both controls them and pathologizes them. This feminist reading of the rage of the monster woman or Dora at not having a voice, at not having a mechanism to counter the dominant culture with the alternative discourses available to women, can provide another site of subversion through anger, an anger that will be important as we discuss the interactions between Alice, Delirium, and the other characters in their respective novels.

The Trouble that Women's Humor Makes

This anger also provides us with an intersection between madness and humor in our discussion of Delirium and Alice. Neither character likes to be laughed at: Alice often thinks that the characters who make fun of her are rude and unfeeling, and Delirium especially exhibits paranoia and sometimes anger when she suspects that one of her siblings is laughing at her (showing a progression from the discomfort of Alice to the outright fury of Delirium). When she is introduced in the prologue to *Season of Mists*, she screams at Desire "Don't laugh at me" during a family meeting (17). She says of Dream in the first issue of "Brief Lives" that "I'm

always scared he's laughing at me, behind his face" (140). The dismissal of her alternative mode of discourse provokes the rage and anxiety that Gilbert and Gubar espouse in their framework of representations of female madness. Rage is an important part of the function of the tradition of women's humor, and much of that rage comes from the dismissal of women's discourses through the perpetuation of the representation of women as incapable of humor in the tradition of dominant discourse. Just as women were pathologized mentally and physically in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, their production of humor and their ability to appreciate humor has also been greatly critiqued and dismissed in dominant discourse. Nancy Walker in her book *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture* discusses the historical and social factors that have shaped the cultural view that women are incapable of producing or appreciating humor. She notes that critical collections of humor almost always leave out the long tradition of female comics; one of the most important factors in this suppression, in her view, is that "humor is at odds with the conventional definition of ideal womanhood. Humor is aggressive; women are passive. The humorist occupies a position of superiority; women are inferior" (12). Barreca quotes Reginald Horace Blyth as a representative of this attitude towards women; he claims that "women are the undifferentiated mass of nature…and they are the unlaughing at which men laugh'" (qtd. in *Untamed and Unabashed* 14). Thus, women's voices that sought to find expression in humor are silenced in the same way that Freud's voice silences Dora's.

This representation of women as unfunny has many similarities to the angel/monster paradigm that Gilbert and Gubar present as the literary tradition of knowledge production for societal control of women: in fact, Barreca calls this "the Good Girl/Bad Girl split" (*They Used to Call Me* 8). She notes that, while there are a few exceptions,

when there is a witty woman in a man's novel, she is all too often a version of Becky Sharp: sexually manipulative, slyly nasty, and emotionally dishonest. Or she is the generic discount-hooker-with-a-heart-of-gold, just a phase a man goes through before he gets to the love of his life. In contrast to the wild and witty woman—one thinks of the endless and nameless barmaids populating both the English and American novels—the hero inevitably chooses to marry the witless woman with whom he will settle down—and for whom he settles. The bad woman with the sense of humor is shut out of domesticity; she forfeits the right to a husband when she makes her first wisecrack (17).

In this framework, female characters (when written by male authors) who are humorous are the monster women; they are removed from the patriarchal structure because they refuse to conform to the rules that make them suitable for heteronormative domesticity. They are a threat to the systems of power and thus have been often demonized in the same way as mad women have: Barreca links women's laughter with danger by citing the mad laughter of Bertha "as she goes to burn down her husband's house" (*Untamed and Unabashed* 22). What Barreca calls "the witless woman" is linked to the patriarchal ideal of the angel: this type of female character does not question the authority of the system and thus is not presented as a threat. Instead, she usually becomes successful through marriage, that is, successful within the institution that the dominant discourse has assigned her. Thus, humor joins the ranks of such unfeminine qualities as assertiveness and autonomy. Here again is the intersection between madness and humor: they are both used in female characterizations to form mechanisms of control over characteristics that the patriarchal ideology wishes to eliminate.

Barreca also sees humor as a locus of social control for women: jokes have often been on women more than not, as another form of social control. Barreca illustrates this idea by telling a story about a professor who challenged her during a question/answer session at a conference: he says that the political and social climate had changed from when he first started teaching to the end of his career, restraining the kinds of jokes he could tell in the classroom for fear of what he called "'feminist humor police.'" He then tells a joke the punchline of which heavily relied on a

stereotype concerning the garrulous nature of women: "How do you know if a skeleton was a male or a female?...If the mouth is open, it's a woman. They never stop talking!" Barreca responds by pointing out that this type of joke actually becomes part of the means of social ideas about the voice of women in the classroom: "And can't you see that the first time this young woman wants to raise her hand to ask a question or make a point, she might hesitate because she doesn't want to appear to you like one of the non-stop talking bag-of bones you described earlier?" (*Untamed and Unabashed* 13). Barreca here demonstrates how humor can be used as mechanism to produce social constructs about women that in turn serve to discourage women from engaging in autonomous activity such as asserting an opinion in a classroom environment (in much the same way the monster woman representation was used as a specter to silence women).

This particular method of ideological control through humor has another method of silencing its opposition: if a woman challenges the joke or does not find the joke funny, she is accused of not being able to "take a joke." If a woman (or man, but this response is much more common for women) object to the stereotype or control inherent in the joke then there must be something wrong with her. Barreca credits this view of women as humorless as a reaction by male authors and readers to women not finding them funny; if women do not find a joke told by a male author humorous, the joke is not considered unfunny, but the woman might be (7). This mechanism of control is similar to that of the use of hysteria as a means of societal control in the nineteenth century medical fields: all protest or deviance from accepted social normative behavior is explained through a perceived biological weakness on the part of women: in this case, that they are not able to comprehend humor.

This use of the perception that a relationship between women and humor is tenuous (if

not incompatible) is reflected in Delirium's paranoia and anger at being laughed at. She does not want to be the butt of the joke of the dominant discourse because it lessens her agency and authority within the dominant ideology. It is with Dream that the root of her paranoia is revealed for what it is: she sees his laughter as a method of superiority, of control. When Dream apologizes to Delirium for his distracted behavior, she asks him if he is making fun of her: "All that apologizing. You've never apologized to me. You just act like you know stuff I don't know that makes everything you do okay" (163). This quote illustrates that Delirium understands the mechanism of control that the patriarchal discourse (here represented by her older brother) exerts over her: Dream believes that he is superior in reason and knowledge to Delirium (based on Foucault's understanding of the preference of reason in dominant discourse) and thus can disregard and override her opinion. This statement also challenges patriarchal superiority about perceived female weaknesses that are confirmed in jokes about the hysterical woman and the "you can't take a joke" woman representations: if one acts like one know things that women do not know, then one has power. The Mad Hatter provides a parallel example of this attitude in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. He treats Alice as inferior based on what she does not know, thus excluding her from the discourse of the tea-party (but more on that in Chapter Two). If dominant discourse can define women as inferior, then the construction of superiority makes dominant discourse able to dismiss what those women say.

Alenka Zupancic, in her work, defines these types of humor on a more abstract level: she believes that comedy can challenge human epistemes concerning the nature of reality (7). However, she does not adhere to traditional idea of humor as being automatically subversive. For Zupancic, comedy can both be part of the dominant ideology and part of the subversion of that ideology, what she calls "true and false comedy" (30). The key difference lies in the role of

happiness in maintaining ideology. For contemporary ideology, the role of comedy is important because it provides the necessary "ironic distance" to make people believe that they are free of ideology, when in fact they are not (4). Zupancic argues that comedy, when used as a tool of ideology, functions as an invisible restraint, a way of maintaining the ideology without alerting the subject to its existence.

However, Zupancic critics the current ideology's move to make comedy and happiness analogous as a useful way of maintaining the construction of normativity: "it has become imperative that we perceive all the terrible things that happen to us as ultimately something positive…Negativity, lack, dissatisfactions, unhappiness, are perceived more and more as moral faults—worse, as a corruption at the level of our very being or bare life" (4). She terms this belief as "bio-morality," which equates happiness with good and unhappiness with evil (4). The difference between this idea and what she terms "the classical entrepreneur formula" is one of agency:

> the bio-morality mentioned above is replacing the classical notion of responsibility with the notion of a damaged, corrupt being: the unhappy and the unsuccessful are somehow corrupt…In other words, the problem is not simply that success and efficiency have become the supreme values of our late capitalist society (as we often hear from critics of this society)—there is nothing particularly new in this; social promotion of success (defined in different ways) has existed since time immemorial. The problem is, rather, that success is becoming almost a biological notion, and thus the foundation of a genuine racism of successfulness (4-5).

Zupancic's theory of "bio-morality" through happiness and humor as a site of control by the dominant ideology is remarkably similar to the pathologizing of hysteria in the nineteenth century. If success in the nineteenth century (if not now) for women was to be Gilbert and Gubar's angel woman (quiet, domestic, subservient), then the lack of said success indicated corrupt or diseased biology (the monster woman). The construction of bio-morality then could be said to be an intersection between gendered experiences of madness and humor, and as an

explanation for why Barreca says that woman is accused of not being able to "take a joke." If women do not find the joke funny, then there must be something wrong with them.

So, if subversive laughter is not analogous to happiness, then where is it to be found? Zupancic argues that "true comedy" questions the inviolability of the universal (referring to Hegel's symbolic Universal) by demonstrating how the universal arises from the concrete particular (or the Material), which is itself abstract, thus demonstrating gaps in the existing social order (30-2). For Zupancic, "true comedy" occurs as split between the abstract and the concrete realizations of a universal ideal, allowing us to discover the paradoxical workings of the universe, both symbolic and contingent. She gives the example of a comedic story of a baron falling into a puddle and then immediately pretending that nothing of the sort had occurred (30-1). For conservative comedy, the joke would focus on the unconnected dualism of the concrete and universal aspects of the scenario: "the aristocrat (or king, or judge, or priest, or any other character of symbolic stature) is *also* a man…The emphasis is, of course, precisely on the 'also': the concrete and the universal coexist" (30). This insistence allows the audience of the joke "an identification" with the ego-ideal without challenging the "purity" of the universal concept of aristocracy. However, "true" or subversive comedy knows that both the concrete and the universal are both abstract and that the universal is merely a privileged version of the concrete: "an aristocrat who believes that he is really and intrinsically an aristocrat is, *in this very belief*, a common silly human" (32). Here, the joke allows the audience to disidentify with the ego-ideal (the representation of the ideal "universal), to realize it for what it is: a construction of dominant discourse.

This description of "false" and "true" comedy can be applied to humor both as told in the form of jokes or in narrative humor. The joke the professor told Barreca can serve as an example

of what Zupancic calls "false" or "conservative" humor: the concrete skeleton with its mouth open serves as a symbolic representation of the (supposedly) universal concept that women talk a lot. It reinforces the dominant ideology through showing a dualistic relationship between the universal and the concrete, rather than questioning the universal as an extension of the concrete. The stereotype of women being talkative is "the ego-ideal" and the joke, through the concrete image of the skeleton with its mouth open, allows the audience identification with the universal without questioning the sanctity of that universal. Carroll's parody of authority figures in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* provide an example of the opposite, Zupancic's "true comedy." By having figures such as a King, Queen, and other characters who, as Beatrice Turner points out, occupy positions of authority as adults to the child Alice (247) spout proclamations and arguments that Alice perceives as nonsensical, rude, and ultimately ineffective, Carroll allows the reader to see the "short circuit" between claims to universal authority and the tenuous nature of those claims, thus creating laughter.

Barreca's theory of women's humor as subversive directly relates to Zupancic's theory of "true comedy. For Barreca, women's humor is "often directed at the bizarre value systems that have been regarded as 'normal for so long that it is difficult to see how ridiculous they really are (*They Used to Call Me* 185). She gives the example of comedian Elayne Boosler, who in one of her sketches tells a subversive joke about the members of the pro-life movement: "You ever notice that the same people who are against abortion are for capital punishment? Typical fisherman's attitude, throw'em back when they're small and kill'em when they're bigger" (qtd. *They Used to Call Me* 14). This joke gains its subversive edge according to Zupancic's theory in its ability to show that the supposedly "sacred" right to life that the pro-lifers claim as an ego-ideal, when compared with the concrete fishing metaphor, is really just an identification

constructed by the dominant ideology: it is just as human a construction as the concept of fishing is. Barreca finds that women can generate alternative discourses to challenge and subvert the systems of control the dominant discourse utilizes: "Much of women's comic play has to do with power and its systematic misappropriation. Women's humor is about our reclamation of forms of control around our lives" (*They Used to Call Me* 12). Women, according to Barreca, are able to do this through turning their humor towards what are often considered untouchable topics such as abortion, sex-education, power structures in work place environments, etc. (*They Used to Call Me* 14)

In the end, however, Barreca points out that the very existence of female humor can undermine the supposed "Universal" of male constructions of reality. She writes that when men write about issues, these issues are generally seen as universal, human issues, whereas, when women write about issues, these issues are seen as strictly women's problems (*They Used to Call Me* 22-3). She states, "In exploring laughter, women are exploring their own powers; they are refusing to accept social and cultural boundaries that mark the need or desire for closure as a 'universal' (*They Used to Call Me* 30). So, women's humor can be seen as a specific application of Zupancic's theory of "true comedy" as a short circuit between this "universal" privileging of the male experience with the concrete experiences of women, thus revealing the privileged nature of the construction of "universal." This disruption of what is considered universal reflects the very resistance that Foucault states madness represents in the construction of the dominant discourse: the rationalism that dominant discourse espouses relies on the idea of a fixed, universal truth as its epistemological authority. Women's humor and madness challenge this authority in some very specific ways: we will explore two of those ways (linguistic and visual) in the following chapters.

Methods of Subversion

This chapter provides much of the theoretical context and traditions that Alice and Delirium exist in (though it is important to note that due to genre and chronological differences, the contexts vary for each character). There are two more notes that need to be made concerning how these characters interact with these traditions in their respective texts.

The first is in the area of disidentification. As we have mentioned previously concerning Cixous's interpretation of Dora, disidentification with the traditions of madness through humor allow these characters to reveal the "short circuit" between the universal and the concrete. One of the key points that Zupancic makes about subversive or "true" comedy is that it employs disidentification with the "ego-ideal" in this way. Many women's scholars give the example of "the dumb blonde" stereotype as a classic example of this. Both Walker and Barreca note how the character Marilyn Monroe plays in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* reflects how disidentification works through comedy. When Lorelai returns the compromising pictures to Beekman (in which he was pretending to be a python strangling her as a goat), she tells him with breathless sincerity that she was sure "Lady Beekman would never believe you were just being a snake!" The joke here is not just in the pun about snakes but also in the implied joke that he is "a snake" for cheating on his wife. Thus, the word snake becomes symbolic for his actions and his character. Because Beekman only hears the first meaning, he completely misses that Lorelai is laughing at him and at the system that both forces and allows her to exploit him. The character as a disidentification with the dumb blonde allows us to see how the dominant discourse has shaped and informed such characters instead of merely reflecting a "universal" idea. That is not to say that stereotypes are not found in self-deprecating humor; however, when posed in a sympathetic way, these stereotypes become subversive to the dominant culture rather than supportive of it.

Walker discusses how women's humor looks to the results of "cultural conditioning and subordination" in order to critique the cause (30). Alice begins this disidentification by learning how to challenge the dominant discourse of Wonderland through her confrontation with the court of the Red Queen, but Delirium especially gains agency through her disidentification with the identity constructed for mad women in dominant discourse: both characters challenge what it means to be a mad female in dominant discourse by taking on that identity and subverting it through challenging the epistemological and ontological authority on which it is based.

The second important item to note is the difference between a character who makes the reader laugh knowingly and a character whom the reader laughs at. Alice represents the latter character, while Delirium, as we have noted and will continue to note, represents both at varying levels. Scholars like Barreca have observed the connection between hysteria and humor before in the laughter of the hysteric's ability to turn the mirror back on the society that seeks to identify them as other and different and to pathologize the patriarchal construct of normalcy itself (32). Once you have gone through the looking glass, the constructed nature of the side you came from becomes apparent. However, these connections have often focused solely on the laughter of the hysteric instead of the laughter of the audience. Rochester's mad wife Bertha in *Jane Eyre* may indeed laugh and laugh subversively, but the reader is not laughing with her or even really at her. The reader is not in on the joke.

There appear to be two different kinds of being laughed at: dismissive laughter and endearing laughter. For Alice and Delirium, the laughter is directed at them by the reader; however, the laughter is endearing rather than the dismissive laughter that Delirium fears. This endearing laughter is in large part due to the likeability of the characters, directing the reader's laughter away from the supposed "flaws" of the characters and focusing it on the system which

they are subverting. Through realizing that the identifications that they are challenging through laughter are extensions of the concrete, we find ourselves on the same side as Delirium and Alice, laughing at the trouble that they cause.

Chapter Two: Words Don't Mean Anything, We Just Think They Do: Semiotic

Mistranslation as Subversive Humor

Near the beginning of the *The Sandman* series arc Brief Lives, Delirium experiments with

language by repeating a word said to her by another character several times: "Change. Change.

Change. Change...CHANGE. Change. Chaaaange. When you say words a lot they don't mean

anything. Or maybe they don't mean anything anyway, and we just think they do" (Gaiman 129).

Delirium's statement illustrates an important point about the constructed nature of language and

challenges assumptions about the cause and effect relationship between meaning (the signified)

and words (signifiers). This same discussion occurs in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* during

the Mad Tea Party scene, when Alice claims to be able to "guess" the Hare's riddle (hoping to

have some "fun"):

> 'Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?' said the March Hare.
> 'Exactly so,' said Alice.
> 'Then you should say what you mean,' the March Hare went on.
> 'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing,
> you know.'
> 'Not the same thing a bit! said the Hatter. 'Why you might just as well say that 'I see
> what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!'
> 'You might just as well say,' added the March Hare, 'that 'I like what I get' is the same
> thing as 'I get what I like'!'
> 'You might just as well say,' added the Dormouse, which seemed to be talking in its
> sleep, 'that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!"
> 'It is the same thing with you,' said the Hatter…(Carroll 61)

Alice describes her inability to understand the discourse community of the Tea-Party as

linguistic confusion: "The Hatter's remark seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it yet it

was certainly English" (62). Yet when she voices her confusion, the others ignore her and

continue the conversation about the riddle.

This piece of dialogue and the reactions of both Alice and the other tea party members

tells us much about how schema disruption through language can alter views of discourse. The

March Hare (and his friends) here is espousing a view of language as having a fixed or absolute

meaning, a view that John Pollack indicates is the result of Enlightenment discourse

requirements that privilege rationalism (75). The March Hare believes that "you should say what

you mean," implying that the signified has a direct relationship with a signifier; in other words,

that there is no other signifier that can accurate convey the signified. The Hatter, March Hare,

and Dormouse's use of Wonderland logic (defined by Turner as "a secret system that appears

meaningless to those outside it") is reminiscent of the use of logic/reason by dominant discourse

to discredit the alternative discourses produced by madness that Foucault observes in *Madness*

and Civilization. Alice is cowed into silence by this appeal to reason, as she is many other times

in the narrative by characters who appeal to often flawed logic to establish their epistemological

authority. The way that she (and then Delirium) interacts with language and dominant discourse

that seeks epistemological authority through language is significant in its ability to disrupt the

reader's understanding of how language works.

The way this disruption is accomplished in both texts is mainly focused in humorous

dialogue between the mad female characters and the other "sane" characters in their novels.

Humor particularly is useful when discussing the subversion of language in dominant discourse:

Zupancic writes, "a joke also brings to the fore something in which we are embedded deeply and

permanently, without necessarily being aware of its functioning: the paradoxical, 'illogical,' non-

linear and precarious constitution of our symbolic universe through speech" (142). Many

scholars have noted that this idea is an important theme in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*'s

language and discussions about the systems of language that are incorporated into oppositional

discourses (and the authority that dominant discourse imbues itself with): Carroll's linguistic

humor undermines the idea of the inherent authority in dominant discourse by disrupting the

reader's sense of language as having a fixed set of meanings. He accomplishes this in the framework that Zupancic applies for subversive humor by demonstrating how a character's (or characters') insistence that his or her discourse is the correct or universal one is in fact a privileged construction of a particular aspect of language. In other words, dominant discourse may claim its authority comes from the universal, but in fact, Carroll reveals through humorous dialogue and characterizations, this authority is an arbitrary emergence from the concrete.

The aspect of this linguistic humor that will be the focus of this chapter occurs in the numerous instances of mistranslations that occur in Alice's conversations with other characters—mistranslations occur when two characters misunderstand each other due to conflicting schemas associated with the meaning of a particular word or phrase. For Carroll, these mistranslations occur most frequently in the form of puns: Alice will mistranslate a word or phrase that a Wonderland character utters and vice versa, causing schema confusion on the part of Alice and schema disruption on the part of the reader through humor. Many scholars have written about Carroll's use of mistranslation as a way of undermining epistemological authority, but very few (if any) have discussed Gaiman's use of similar subversive mistranslation on the part of Delirium (who often mistranslates in the same way that Alice does via puns). These characters are not only showing the constructed nature of language for what it is, they are essentially illustrating what we might call mad discourse (in opposition to rational or dominant discourse) thus revealing the two-sided coin. This chapter will first explore some of the scholarship and analysis of how mistranslation (specifically through puns) works as a subversion of the epistemological authority of dominant discourse in *Alice's*, and then discuss how those same linguistic subversions progress in Gaiman's *The Sandman* to form a more overt and sympathetic mad discourse.

Puns and Mistranslation in the Dialogue of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Dominant discourse ideology concerning the fixed nature of epistemological authority undermined through language in conversations between the Alice and other, more "rational" characters of Wonderland. Any reader of Carroll's work is aware of his obsession with language and its structures: Elizabeth Sewell writes, "He is almost as much interested in the system as in the substance. His works are not merely in words, they are frequently about words…In his Nonsense world Carroll endows practically everything with the power of speech, so that endless exchanges of words become possible" (18). Most of these exchanges are between Alice and the residents and landscapes of Wonderland (although there are several that are between the residents of Wonderland), and humor through mistranslation is abundant in each. These mistranslations often also provide the most humor as these conversations reveal the conflict between the discourses of the characters. The larger the gap between the discourse of Alice and the discourse of the Wonderland character she is speaking with, the funnier the exchange is to the reader, who is usually laughing at both Alice and the character's failure to communicate. Walter Nash describes this kind of joke as one of "'contractual failure'" in the structures of discourse: "conversation…is a contract involving the agreed conduct of various acts of assertion, direction, performance, verdict-giving, promising, inviting, requesting, *etc*. When the contract is broken, whether innocently or designedly, the effect may be funny; may illuminate a character or situation; or may designate some critical defect in a relationship" (116-17). In the case of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the "'contractual failure'" between Alice and the Wonderland characters (and on many occasions the reader) performs all three actions, and serves to undermine dominant discourse claims that privilege a specific ideology and authority, in this case, an ideology that privileges patriarchal and rationalist discourse.

Nash's "contractual failure" definition of mistranslation causes what Sameera Abbas and Rubina Rahman call schema disruption on the part of the reader concerning the nature of the conflict between mad discourse and dominant discourse (2). Schema is what J.P. Gee calls "a figured world," a mental shorthand that individuals use to navigate encounters with various types of discourses. Gee says that these "figured worlds are linked to simulations in our minds...We build worlds in our minds." He goes on to say that these mental simulations are based in social and cultural realities through "books and other media, in knowledge we can gain from what other people say and do, and in what we can infer from various social practices around us" (100). Gee also points out that "figured worlds" can also serve to marginalize certain experiences: "to set up what counts as central, typical cases and what counts as marginal, non-typical cases" (97), in effect constructing what is considered normalized in a particular schema and what is not. According to Gee and others, individual's "figured worlds" or schemata are different depending on cultural, social, ideological, and a variety of other factors that create the background knowledge or context of that particular individual. Abbas and Rahman discuss how Carroll uses schema disruption to create a "text-world" with the reader and to show how a conflict between discourses can be caused by conflicting schemata on the part of individual characters, causing the "contractual failure" or mistranslation to occur.

This schema clash is revealed the most clearly in the mistranslation that occurs in the "contractual failure" joke commonly referred to as a pun. A key literary marker of this mistranslation comes from Carroll's use of puns as a central part of his humorous dialogue. Puns fell out of favor in public perception in England and Europe around the same time that Foucault identifies the first break in the dialogue between the discourses of reason and madness. Pollack in his critical history of puns writes that the privilege that Enlightenment discourse placed on

rationalism as part of dominant ideology did not allow for the fluidity of language demonstrated by puns: "puns themselves became a litmus test of one's views on language, meaning, and the possibility of defining absolute truth…many came to view pun's very ambiguity as a serious flaw" (75). Pollack notes that this emphasis on the fixed nature of reality, coupled with the rise of the printing press and a higher importance placed on language as a status symbol, discouraged the use of language that questioned those factors (76-9). Again, here we can see the dominant discourse—Foucault's discourse of reason—exerting its epistemological authority over language by emphasizing the fixed nature of the relationship between language and meaning.

This disregard for puns as flawed forms of language is a result of the same type of classical literary interpretative frameworks that Wolfgang Iser says that the Enlightenment espoused (and that have persisted into many schools of criticism even today). He writes that this type of framework seeks "the referential reduction of fictional texts to a single 'hidden' meaning…This paradigm took itself for granted that art, as the loftiest mode of knowledge was representative of a whole, if not the actual form of truth itself" (11-3). The idea that a text has a "fixed" meaning that the literary critic must uncover represents an ideological claim about the fixed meaning of language and discourse. If meaning is fixed, and dominant discourse claims to have found the meaning, then its claim of epistemological authority is valid.

However, Alice's mistranslations with the Wonderland characters illustrates that this claim is tenuous at best, non-existent at worst. Carroll subverts this claim by employing what many scholars of linguistic humor call homophonic puns. Nash defines homophony as "pairs (or more) of words having the same sound but different meanings, *eg: rain/reign, sighs/size, urn/earn, need/knead* (138). Abbas and Rahman explore what they call a "manipulation of homophony" in the Caucus race scene in chapter three of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

When Alice and the other characters in the group are wet from swimming in her tears, the Mouse tells them, "'Sit down, all of you, and listen to me! *I'll* soon make you dry enough!'" (24). Abbas and Rahman point out that the word *dry* can be used literally or metaphorically: "The reader or listener interprets the meaning according to context. In this instance, the word 'dry' should have been taken literally but instead the mouse uses it metaphorically and starts telling 'dry' accounts of history (6). Alice continues in this scene to mistranslate the Mouse's dialogue through homophony; she mistakes *tale* for *tail* and *not* for *knot* (Abbas and Rahman 6). Alice's schema is well established in these first chapters: she is a young Victorian child who has definite formed opinions and knowledge that she has gathered from past experience and her education. She has a schema related to the idea of mice: a mouse that talks and tell stories is not a part of that schema, so words that normally are associated with intellect and conversation are not part of the schema either. Instead, words relating to the anatomy of the mouse (like *tail* or having a *knot* in a tail) are most closely related to the image of the mouse in her schema, causing her to misinterpret those words.

Carroll's usage of puns in this scene not only is a clever humorous linguistic game; it also calls the assumptions of rationalist discourse into question in the same way that Iser says that "art and literature react against the norms of the prevailing aesthetic theory in a manner that is often ruinous to that theory" (11). The mistranslation through puns demonstrates that the idea of absolute truth (or a fixed meaning) is not only a construction of dominant ideology, but that such an idea is laughable. Shires discusses the importance of fantasy, nonsense, and parody in Carroll's (and other Victorian writers') use of language as a means of subverting the epistemological authority of the dominant discourse: "they explode or transgress the frame of "the real" and thus open up a space of uncertainty. Pushing toward the realm of non-signification

where nothing is stable, these forms open a gap between signifier and signified which makes a definite meaning or absolute reality impossible to attain" (267). The interactions between Alice and the residents of Wonderland demonstrate the multitude of discourse available based on the different schemas involved. Carroll explores the fluidity and multiple interpretations of language through many different means (such as nonsense, rhyme, etc) but the most humorous often come through gaps created through mistranslation through puns and similar "contractual failures" of language, thus causing Zupancic's short circuit between the "universal" ideal of fixed meaning and the concrete disruptions of dialogue.

Alice's mistranslation of the Mouse's story seems to encourage another of the characters of Wonderland to voice his own mistranslation of language, and in doing so, they create a moment of schema disruption on the part of the reader. In a rare moment of mistranslation between two Wonderland characters, the Mouse and the Duck get into an argument over the meaning of the rather vague pronoun *it* (Abbas and Rahman 8). The Mouse uses the word as part of the discourse conventions of his narrative ("the archbishop of Canterbury found it advisable"), but the Duck does not understand this convention of discourse and instead refers to his own schema when interpreting the phrase *found it* ("I know what 'it' means well enough, when I find a thing…it's generally a frog or a worm") (8). Abbas and Rahman write,

> The account narrated by the mouse is a text inside a text... The historical account does not carry any sense for the Duck because its schema is too different from the schema in this particular narrative. By exploiting the notion of schema both in the readers and his characters, Carroll has been able to arouse laughter among his readers (8).

In other words, Alice, the Mouse, and the Duck are all using their individual schemas to translate each other's dialogue into meaning, but their schemas are all so different that they are mistranslating one another. Because some of the words they are using are homophones, these words provide the site for the mistranslation, the points at which the alternate schemas and

discourses are revealed, causing the reader to laugh at the multiple meanings that the word *it* contains. Pollack writes that homophonic puns function in this way to create disruption of the reader's desire to create a fixed narrative or schema of the text: "perhaps, more than any other type of humor, homophonic puns both drive and depend on this ambiguity. For a split second, they manage to hold open the elevator doors of language and meaning as the brain toggles furiously between competing semantic destinations, before finally deciding which is the best answer—or deciding to live with both" (52). Thus, the reader of Carroll's dialogue realizes the gap involved between the respective semantic schemas concerning the word *it* for the Mouse, the Duck, Alice, and their own understandings of what that word means, thus collapsing the possibility for a fixed definition of what *it* means in the Mouse's story, creating cognitive dissonance on the part of the reader and highlighting the multiplicity of schemas available in discourse.

To highlight the place that Alice occupies in Wonderland discourse, Alice herself is aware that the mistranslation is occurring but finds herself unable to prevent it from happening because of the gap between her schema and the other characters. Alice herself is obsessed with language in Wonderland; she is constantly worried that she is saying the wrong thing and that her use of language will offend someone or that she will commit the crime of rudeness. This fear is most clear in her first meeting with the Mouse. It does not respond to her greeting at first, so Alice attempts to speak to it in French: "'Oú est ma chatte?'" which was the first sentence in her French book (21). Alice does not realize (or consider) that the phrase "Where is my cat?" might terrify the Mouse (who jumps in fear) (21). In her schema, the word cat is most associated with her cat Dinah, a positive association with her home and her pet. The Mouse, however, associates cats with predator and death, and Alice realizes her mistake almost immediately, apologizing.

However, she continues to talk about her cat Dinah and then about a dog that kills rats due to her inability to separate her schematic understanding of these animals from the words she is speaking, causing even more fear on the part of the Mouse (22-23).

Alice's attempts to overcome this schema confusion become part of the dialogue featuring mistranslations. Her realization of the mistranslations and her inability to rectify them can also be seen in her conversation with the Mad Hatter about the meaning of the word *time* (63). In Alice's real world schema, time is a unit of measurement; she relates the idea of time to the Hatter's watch and keeping rhythm in music. In the Mad Hatter's schema, Time is personified and takes on human characteristics. The resulting "contractual failure" results in one of the more fantastical exchanges between the two characters in which Alice discusses "wasting" and "beating" time (which horrifies the Hatter) while the Hatter discusses conversations with Time and how Time used to do favors for him. The joke is further extended when the Hatter relates a story in which he offended Time while singing: "'I'd hardly finished the first verse…when the Queen bawled out 'He's murdering the time!...and ever since that…he won't do a thing I ask!'" (64). The joke here relies on a series of mistranslations: the Queen is adhering to the same definition of *time* that Alice is (time as a unit of a measurement in keeping rhythm) but by using the word *murder* to mean that the Hatter was keeping rhythm incorrectly, Time as a personification mistranslated the Queen's statement to mean that the Hatter was actually attempting to kill him. So, the Hatter mistranslates Alice and the Queen, and Time mistranslates the Hatter and the Queen, even though Time as a personified character exists as a construction of the Hatter's existing schema.

The schema disruption on the part of Alice realizing that the Hatter is discussing Time as a personification allows her to realize something about the Hatter's context: it is always six pm

in the Hatter's schema which is why the table is always set for tea (64). Without the realization

of the fluidity of the meaning of the word for *time*, Alice's schema and the resulting discourse

would have remained hopelessly at odds with the Hatter's on this particular subject, not allowing

her to create a new schema that includes the personification of Time as part of her understanding

of language (this process is called schema refreshment). What is problematic here of course is

that while Alice is willing allow for cognitive dissonance and refreshment (in this scene at least)

and to add the Hatter's understanding of Time as a personification to her existing schema, she is

ultimately unable to overcome the mistranslation due to the Hatter's (who as we discussed in

Chapter One is a representation of patriarchal discourse) unwillingness to do the same.

This unwillingness on the part of the Hatter and many of the other characters in

Wonderland comes from the same type of claims that rationalist dominant discourse makes for

epistemological authority. Dominant discourse dismisses mad discourse as invalid and incorrect;

it seeks to obliterate mad discourse rather than to give it equal epistemological value. The object

of the Hatter, March Hare, and the Dormouse is not to understand Alice or acknowledge her

existing schema as perhaps an alternate mode of discourse but to win the argument, to make her

acknowledge that her use of language is incorrect. If she questions their authority in a way that

they do not approve of (such as her asking questions about the logic of the arrangement of the

table or the Dormouse's story), they either dismiss her, change the subject, or tell her to be quiet,

in a manner that I observed in Chapter One to be similar to the way that medical professions such

as Freud dealt with hysterical patients such as Dora.

Turner examines the tension between language and meaning in these scenes of

mistranslation as establishing linguistic authority over Alice: "the entire narrative may be

considered a complex linguistic joke at the expense of Alice and the reader, neither of whom

possesses the requisite knowledge to make sense. Whatever rules are being adhered to here, they are ones to which Alice is denied access, and as such she almost always comes out second best in the debates in which she is engaged" (247). While Turner explores in her article the tension in authority between adults and children in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, I would argue that this idea can be applied to the idea of authority through dominant discourse through schemas of patriarchy and mental health as well. Alice in the Mad Tea Party scene and elsewhere in Wonderland is actively excluded from the discourse of these three patriarchal figures not only based on her symbolic stature as the only female member of the group but also on the basis of her inability to conform to the existing constraints of their schema. She lacks authority in this situation because she is unable to participate in the dominant discourse because of the conflict of said discourse with her existing schema and the insistence of the dominant discourse that her schema is incorrect or invalid. What's more, Alice recognizes her lack of authority, her positioning in this universe as a child speaking to adult characters, and so she is willing to defer to them, for the beginning of the novel, and to learn how they use language so she can too gain authority.

However, it is in the opposite realization of the arbitrary construction of dominant discourse that Alice finally finds authority in Wonderland. The novel hints at this realization in the first encounter with the Cheshire Cat: when the Cheshire Cat says that it growls when it is happy, Alice challenges this word choice, "'*I* call it purring, not growling.'" The Cheshire Cat responds, "Call it what you like." (58). The Cheshire Cat, perhaps of all the residents of Wonderland, is the most aware of the fluidity of language and the tenuous relationships between signifier and signified, and unlike many of the other residents of Wonderland, is willing to acknowledge Alice's alternative discourse and epistemological authority through language. It

appears to the be the only character in Wonderland who is willing to meet Alice halfway, and she begins to get angry at her treatment by the other characters in the next scene at the Tea Party, causing her to storm out of the party (67), again reflecting the rage that Gilbert and Gubar write as the madwoman's reaction to dominant discourse. However, it is much later that Alice is able to assert this alternative discourse as a method of resistance to the dominant discourse in the courtroom scene near the end of the novel. Once she realizes that the rules of the authority figure of the King (who represents the dominant discourse) are simply made up and as such are arbitrary, she is able to resist the logical traps of the discourse by calling it out for what it is. This escalates until the final realization that the authority figures in this case are "'nothing but a pack of cards'" (109). Alice is here able to recognize the conflation that the dominant discourse is making between the universal and the concrete: a pack of cards calling itself aristocracy has no epistemological authority for this claim; the signifier here is just a signifier.

Perhaps most frightening here for Alice (and the reader) is the reaction of the representations of the dominant discourse, which, having failed at containing Alice within language, attempts to do so with violence: "At this the whole pack rose up into the air, and came flying down upon her" (109). This moment in the text also represents the potentially dangerous consequence of confronting the representations of dominant discourse with their own absurdity: physical violence as a reaction to a challenge to authority (again reflecting Foucault's theories of punishment as therapy during the classical period). However, it is at this moment that Alice awakens from Wonderland; it is the realization of the lack of epistemological authority of the dominant discourse in Wonderland that allows her to escape.

Foucault writes, "Language is the first and last structure of madness" (100). By looking at how humorous mistranslation is used in Alice, readers are able to glimpse the divide between

different types of discourse—the discourse of Alice and the discourse of Wonderland—causing disruption in their own schema of the relationship between rationalist discourse and mad discourse. Abbas and Rahman see Carroll's novel as directly confronting the reader's schema through language: "Carroll's manipulation of social and linguistic context and schemas in this literary piece has created a non-sense world that disrupts the reader's existing schema and yet they accept and even identify with it by the end of the narrative" (1-2). The text-world of Wonderland relies on the reader's schema derived from "the real world" in order to function but through schema disruption creates a deviant or unknown world that can lead to new understandings concerning the "real world," including new understandings about how mad discourse is constructed in the dominant one. In the case of Alice, her interactions with Wonderland and the mistranslations between her and other characters result in her learning about how language can subvert the epistemological authority of dominant discourse, but the real impact of this occurs in how these mistranslation result in the disruption of those schemas of epistemological authority on the part of the reader. The reader of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* may begin to question exactly who is mad in this text and who has the epistemological authority in language based on this reading of mistranslation by revealing the tenuous relationship between language and meaning.

Subjectivity of Alternative Discourse in *Brief Lives*

Some of Carroll's critics see the ending of the novel as a return to the dominant discourse, of the triumph of order and domesticity. After all, she gets to return to her Victorian home and society that is filled with the dominant discourse of patriarchy, a discourse that cannot be dismissed by simply calling it what it is. In any case, Alice perhaps leaves us a gap that Delirium can fill. There is a lot of pun humor via homophony in Delirium's dialogue that

functions similarly to Carroll's usage of puns to illustrate mistranslation, and in this section, I will explore how Delirium as a character in the *The Sandman* series arc *Brief Lives* takes the disruption even farther by adding a layer of subjectivity and agency in her awareness of herself as the author of an alternative discourse, and this subjectivity allows a further disruption on the part of the reader as the linguistic games cannot be read as a simple mistake or dream.

Gaiman's very characterization of Delirium is associated with the fluidity of speech: her dialogue bubbles are multi-colored and the lettering is hand drawn in order to produce an asymmetrical effect (Bender 38). There are very few moments of dialogue between Delirium and the other characters that do not involve "the contractual failure" that Nash indicates is the basis of homophonic humor. An example of this mistranslation via pun occurs within the first few frames of her appearance in *Brief Lives*: we first see Delirium huddled up on a doorstep to keep out of the rain with an old woman who is begging passersby for money. The old woman, who is unaware of Delirium's identity as one of the Endless and mistakes her for a runaway, attempts to converse with her but runs into the difficulty of any conversation with Delirium: mistranslation. When she tells Delirium to call her parents, Delirium responds that she does not have parents (which, according to *The Sandman Overture,* is technically incorrect). The old woman responds with the word *lost* as a euphemism for death: "You lost both parents? Tsk. Poor Dear." Delirium does not understand euphemisms, however. She takes *lost* to mean misplacing an item or person: "I didn't lose my parents. I lost my brother..." The old woman is still operating under the euphemistic meaning of the word *lost*: in her linguistic schemata, the word is linked to death. When she asks Delirium how her brother died (dropping the euphemism), Delirium responds angrily, "He's not DEAD. I just lost him. Okay?" (128-9).

Delirium here displays negative emotion when it comes to mistranslation much more

readily than Alice (who only becomes annoyed with a few citizens of Wonderland after her meeting with the Cheshire Cat), probably because Delirium has a more complete understanding of how her alternative discourse is considered damaged by the dominant one. She understands what it is like to not be heard or to be ridiculed because of mistranslation, and unlike Alice, she is torn between the hesitation created by the superiority of her siblings and confidence in her own alternative discourse (with a few exceptions) to insist on being heard. This insistence often comes across as rage, the same rage that Gilbert and Gubar attribute to women's madness. Delirium's rage and her willingness to stand up for herself and her dialogue contrasts with Alice's initial unwillingness to offend the inhabitants of Wonderland. This shift in characterizations indicates the change in cultural context that exists between the two characters: Delirium is a character informed and shaped by over a hundred years of women's rights movements and development in feminist scholarship and ideas. Thus, Delirium can be read as a progression of the ideas that Alice begins to explore: Alice may have to learn how to call out dominant discourse on its absurdity, but Delirium begins *Brief Lives* already able to do so.

Schema confusion is also an important part of understanding Delirium's relationship to language and discourse, much as it is with Alice. Later in her conversation with the old woman, Delirium has another moment of mistranslation in a scene that closely mirrors the same type of mistranslation in the scene between Alice and the Hatter concerning the word *time*. As I have mentioned, the word *change* is an important one in *Brief Lives*, both its relationship to the characterization of Delirium (and in her shift in identity from Delight to Delirium) and to the series arc as a whole. When the old woman asks a passerby if they could "spare some change," Delirium mistranslates the word from a term for money to a term for the metaphysical idea of making or becoming different, "Change. That was always kind of the problem, kind of...um

some days I feel like Rita Marlowe in The Wayward Bus. You ever see that movie?" (129). But more importantly, like Alice with the word *time*, she realizes that the beggar woman did not mean the same word that she does, prompting her to comment on how words "don't mean anything anyway, and we just think they do." She then leaves the doorway to look for her sister, and the beggar woman asks her where she is going. Delirium replies, "I need a change…" (129). This insistence on the need to make something different complements the woman's begging for money. They both "need" change, a word here that is imbued with two different meanings based on the different understandings and requirements produced by their individual schemata.

This scene evokes the earlier passage of Alice's mistranslation of the word *time*, but it also continues the argument that Delirium is a progression of Alice: unlike Alice in the first part of her journey into Wonderland, Delirium begins her journey aware of the constructed nature of language. She understands the fluidity of language. Although there are many scenes in which she mistranslates a word, a phrase, or a meaning from other characters (to the other character's great confusion and the hilarity of the audience), she is not as bewildered as Alice that she does not understand the other characters (or that they do not understand her). Mistranslation of the word *change* in this scene is a purposeful co-opting (or disidentification) of the signifier to signify something in her own alternative discourse, to use the old woman's need for money to reflect her own need for (as we will find out) family who accepts her.

Delirium herself (much like Alice) is interested in communicating despite the mistranslations; however, unlike Alice, she is aware that these mistranslations are a part of the tension between dominant and mad discourses. Much of Delirium's dialogue takes the form of questions: she is constantly asking the people around her (usually her siblings) for words or ideas that she has forgotten. In the first chapter, she tries to verbally remember the name for "the

gunky stuff inside people's. eyes" twice and then asks Despair if she remembers (the answer is Vitreous Humor) (138). However, Delirium also asks for the names of things that do not exist in the language of dominant discourse (or at least, standard English). She asks Dream at the beginning of chapter three, "What's the NAME of the word for the PRECISE moment when you realize that you've actually forgotten how it felt to make LOVE to somebody you really liked a long time ago?" (177). A few pages later, she asks, "Is there a word for forgetting the name of someone when you want to introduce them to someone else at the same time you realize you've forgotten the name of the person you're introducing them to as well?" (179). These types of questions are common for Delirium: the questions themselves are funny, but in contrast to Dream's deadpan short answers of "There isn't one" and "No," they are hilarious. These answers indicate Dream's strict adherence to the dominant discourse's understanding of the rules of language and his dismissal of Delirium's mad discourse as an inferior understanding of vocabulary; however, Delirium's questions indicate that she understands that there is a gap between her discourse and the dominant one. In fact, her questions might even prompt the readers to reconsider why there is not a word for forgetting the name of the person you are introducing, thus challenging why some words exist and others do not. What is telling here is that the Standard English that is employed by dominant discourse does even employ signifiers for her signified, revealing that the way that dominant discourse constructs language is often based on privileged epistemological ideology. Dominant ideology which prizes reason over madness (as Foucault noted) does not need words for these types of experiences, so none exist. The comic sequence ends with Delirium asking, "Um. What's the name of the word for things not being the SAME always. You know, I'm sure there IS one. Isn't there? There must be a WORD for it…the thing that lets you know TIME is happing. Is there a word?" While their

driver says that she does not know, Dream states succinctly "Change," thus referring to a word that functions as an important thematic motif in this series. Delirium replies "I was afraid of that" (195). Change is an important motif for both Delirium and Alice, and we will discuss how change is important to visual representation in Chapter Three, but in the context of our current discussion about language, Delirium finally is able to find a word that translates what she is attempting to communicate into Dream's conception of dominant discourse. However, the fact that she states that this word makes her afraid indicates that his ability to translate her mad discourse into dominant discourse scares her. She was seeking change earlier; the concept does not terrify her in the same way that it does Dream. What makes her uncomfortable is his ability to finally pin down with one word what she has described in her mad discourse.

Although much of the humor of Delirium occurs in unintentional mistranslation (much like it does for Alice), these instances of deliberate mistranslation on the part of Delirium illustrate her agency in her subversion of the dominant discourse, an agency that Alice does not possess. When Desire exasperatedly commands "pull yourself together" during one of what she refers to as Delirium's "bad" moments, the divided two frames show Delirium's annoyed reaction and then an image of a cloud of multi-colored butterflies in the next frame, implying that she burst into butterflies (see fig. 2). This bit of humor, playing with the phrase "pull

Figure 2. Delirium "pulls herself together" in Desire's realm (134).

yourself together," is Delirium rebelling against Desire's notions of superiority by deliberately mistranslating her command. Desire wants Delirium to compose herself emotionally (to become more rational), so Delirium resists the idea of rationality (as signified by this phrase)

by mistranslating *pulling together* as a literal *pulling together* of physical form (incarnation) and then does the exact opposite by falling apart physically. When she does reintegrate into her humanoid form on the first frame of the next page, she asks Desire "I'm together. Aren't I? I…I know I used to be." Desire replies, "Yes. You used to be" (135). This implies that Desire sees Delirium as a broken version of her former self (Delight), reflecting the dominant discourse notion that madness is a disintegration of reason or health (echoing the way that Foucault states that rationalism defines madness as "non-being" or "nothing") (113). However, Delirium responds to this assertion with "I don't know" (135), which passively calls into question this interpretation.

Delirium's agency is further exemplified through her ability to actually make jokes herself using homophonic humor. When Dream visits her in her realm to apologize and convince her to continue to journey with him to find their brother, he finds her sitting next to a broken sundial with the phrase "Tempus Frangit" emblazoned across the front (268). *Tempus Frangit* means time breaks (again reflecting the themes of fragmentation) and is a pun for the saying *tempus fugit*. Although Delirium's realm is characterized by chaos and aberrant language, sights, and sounds, the pun here appears to be on purpose (Delirium in *Seasons of Mists* remarks about time that "it is always in the last place you expect," again playing with the definition of the word), indicating participation on the part of Delirium in the joke (556). The fact that she would have to be aware of the existence of the phrase *tempus fugit* in order to make the joke implies that Delirium is, through humor, subtlety acknowledging the way dominant discourse works and

disidentifying with it in order to create her own discourse.

However, the key scene in *Brief Lives* that reveals Delirium's agency when it comes to disidentifying with the dominant discourse occurs when she confronts Destiny over his treatment of Dream. She tells him, "There are things not in your book. There are paths outside this Garden. You would do well to remember that." Destiny responds that "it is…refreshing…to see you so collected;" the word *collected* is reminiscent of Desire's *pull yourself together*, again echoing the motif of madness being associated with fragmentation. After Destiny leaves, Dream notes that Delirium's eyes are the same color (blue), to which Delirium responds, "So? I can do that. I can do that if I have to" (283). The visual representation of Delirium's speech bubbles alters as well in this scene. Each speech bubble is a solid color instead of the shifting multi-colors in her previous speech bubbles, and the text inside the bubbles is much more uniform (see fig. 3).

While Chapter Three will focus more on the changes in Delirium's (and Alice's) visual

Figure 3. After Delirium's confrontation with Destiny.

representations and how they impact the reader, this scene illustrates that Delirium understands the basis on which dominant discourse claims its epistemological authority: its construction of itself as the sole knowledge of fixed nature of both language and meaning. Destiny here stands as a patriarchal representation of this ideology; after all, he is the incarnation of knowing the rules, of knowing the secret meaning of what has happened and what will happen. But she challenges this authority by claiming to know things that he does not, things that he is unable to know due to his privileged place in his own sites of

discourse (the book and the garden). Thus, she reveals that her madness is actually the site of an alternative discourse, a mad discourse that undermines the epistemological claim of the dominant discourse to know everything.

More importantly, Delirium employs her understanding of dominant discourse in order to disidentify with it, indicating her own agency. She accomplishes this by utilizing Destiny's own discourse in order to make herself heard in a way that he has to acknowledge, according to his own rules. She speaks here in what is traditionally seen as a rational format with no mistranslations or digressions points to her ability to participate in dominant discourse, showing that she can do so if she is forced to (she tells Dream that if he cannot do so, then she must). However, this position is not sustainable for her: "I don't know how much longer I can BE like this. It hurts very muchly" (283). The slippage into the old speech patterns and the fact that it pains her to continue speaking in such a way implies that this ability is temporary because she herself does not fit into the mold that dominant discourse has designed for her. So, for Delirium, the agency that she has to recognize the existence of multiple discourses allows her to resist but not to fully participate in the dominant discourse. And moreover, forcing herself to reflect the values of the dominant discourse is painful to her. Delirium's suffering in reaction to forcing herself to participate in dominant discourse norms reflects Foucault's theory of confinement of the mad as a punishment for madness itself during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: "Ultimately, confinement did seek to suppress madness, to eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find its place within it" (115). According to Foucault, if the classical understanding of madness is a "manifestation of non-being" or "nothing" (which is reminiscent of Delirium's motif of fragmentation) then "confinement cannot have any other goal than a correction (that is, the suppression of the difference, or the fulfillment of this nothingness in

death)" (116). Foucault's creation of a link between the correction of madness and death and elimination of the figure of the mad person is played out in the pain Delirium experiences when she has, to borrow Desire's words, *pull herself together*. She is killing part of herself in order to act and speak in such a way, eliminating her mad discourse in favor of the dominant one, if only for a few pages.

My last point concerns the final way in which Delirium indicates a progression from the way Carroll creates schema disruption on the part of the reader through language. The way Delirium tells stories about events in the graphic novel creates an actual representation of her schema as an alternative discourse through the creation of a text world that challenges the text world of the dominant discourse (aka the text world of the other characters and the author). The readers read and view the events of the graphic novel in a mostly linear way, reading each panel left to right, top to bottom on each page. However, there are several instances when Delirium relates the story over again to a newly introduced character that presents the sequence of events in a different light. The longest, and funniest, example of this is when Dream and Delirium finally find Destruction, and Delirium relates their journey to him.

> It was ME that thought of it. I thought of it in my HEAD. I thought, I MISSED you, and I thought, if we went to FIND you, then we'd FIND you, and that would make everything always BETTER for ever…So I WENT and Looked for you and First of All Desire was at this party and she said she wouldn't help and then Despair showed me her RATS and she had a SAD man in a mirror but she wouldn't come with me and I went to see Dream but First I went home and CRIED a little bit. SO I went to see Dream and I thought HE'D say NO but He gave me little chocolate lovers and he said okay. And we saw this travelling man and I made little FROGS and this lady wanted my name, and I went on an AIRPLANE. I LIKE airplanes. I like anywhere that isn't a proper place. I LIKE in-betweens. There was a lady named Ruby only SHE got burned all up but that was LATER. And there was a lawyer too but HE got all burned up too. I mean he got squashed. And the Etain Lady ran away because her house went boom and the Alderman wasn't in the world any more and I found Tiffany and She was with the DANCING lady. And then I did DRIVING and I was really GOOD. Then We went to the Dancing Lady and Dream talked to her and I made this man give Tiffany all his Dollars, then we went away. Then Dream said he would'nt go with me any more and I went HOME and CRIED

a little bit, but then he said he was sorry and really WOULD come with me again, because…I don't remember. Something. And that he'd be NICE to ME. Friends. THEN we went to NOWHERE and then we went to Destiny's GUARDING. And then Dream went all spoggly and I had to put me all…I..I HAD to…I had to be…It hurt. And THEN we went over there and I ate some cherries and the stones said I was going to be a kangaroo when I grow up and then we came HERE. So it was ME. Um. That's all (300-301)

This rather lengthy section is remarkable because it is the longest piece of uninterrupted monologue that Delirium has in the entire run of the series. Twelve of the thirteen panels that encapsulate this monologue focus on her face: one reflects Dream and Destruction's reactions to her story (their faces provide a frame of her face; see fig. 3) and a small one on the second page shows Dream's shame in recollecting how Delirium stood up for him against Destiny (*Brief Lives*). Even more telling, as she relates each part of the story, the physical appearance of her face and hair shifts to reflect her physical appearance at each part of the journey, starting with her half-shaved head with orange and green streaks and ending back with her appearance thus far at Destruction's house. However, her clothing remains the same: the simple white coat with no shirt on underneath that she has been wearing since arriving at Orpheus's island, implying that she is aware of an audience and the rhetorical and physical restrictions concerning her storytelling.

This monologue indicates Delirium's understanding of the events, and through her use of mad discourse, allows her to challenge the text-world that Gaiman's graphic novel has created with the reader thus far. As readers, we recognize almost every part of her story as we are able to link it back to an event that we read earlier in the plot. However, the first sentence indicates that Delirium sees herself as the instigating agent of the journey to find Destruction (undercutting Dream's suspicions that Desire made Delirium want to find Destruction, something both Desire and Delirium deny). Delirium here places herself in the position of the main protagonist of the

narrative. This positioning replaces the view that the reader has of Dream as the protagonist of

the graphic series. Mellette links Delirium and Dream both to Joseph Campbell's traits of a hero

character but does so in order to defend Delirium as an equal partner to Dream in the graphic

narrative of *Brief Lives* as a whole (69-70). However, I argue that in Delirium's version of the

story, she characterizes herself as the hero, and minimizes Dream's involvement to the role of

the side-kick or helper. In fact, in this version of events, he seems to get in Delirium's way more

than help her. Delirium's retelling of the events with herself as the protagonist also forces the

reader to reevaluate what the important events of the series were and how they actually occurred.

Readers may have a faint memory of the scene in the airplane as one devoted narratively to

getting the characters from one place to another, but Delirium sees it as an important scene in her

narrative: she pauses at this scene and an entire panel is dedicated to her observation that she

likes airplanes because they are "in-between places" (see fig. 4). The fact that she is framed in

Figure 4. One panel from Delirium's narrative (300).

this image by the faces of Dream and Destruction as they listen to her indicate that here, at least, she is the focus of this narrative. Some of the events in her narrative are in the wrong order as well, indicating that, as the reader potentially

suspected previously, Delirium's perceptions of time are not the same as the reader or the other

characters. There are also gaps in her appearances in previous scenes in the novel that she fills in

here in her monologue, such as her crying off page in her realm. These details and positioning in

Delirium's narrative cause disruption with the text-world that the reader has constructed through

the reading of the series thus far, causing the creation of a new text-world and creates doubt in

the mind of the reader as to whose perspective should be trusted or privileged in the interpretation of the events of the novel.

More importantly, this uninterrupted block of narrative coming from Delirium distinctly sets her apart as a progression of Alice. Even though readers are allowed to see Alice's internal monologue concerning the events of her journey through Wonderland and her reaction to the other characters, her thoughts are edited, framed, and commented on by the narrator's voice—the two voices sometimes even fuse into one as we have noted earlier in Chapter One with the way that Carroll appropriates Alice's voice during her recitation of poetry. The reader is constantly being told how to interpret Alice's thoughts and dialogue by the narrator, indicating the complete authorial control that Carroll seeks to have over Alice (we will discuss this more in Chapter Three). The Wonderland characters have no interest in hearing Alice's narrative from her perspective (not even the Cheshire Cat or the Caterpillar), and when she finally does relate her version of the narrative to her sister when she awakens, the narrator does not allow the reader to hear what she says, but rather gives us his summary: "And she told her sister, as well as she could remember them, all these strange Adventures of hers that you have just been reading about…So Alice got up and ran off, thinking while she ran, as well she might, what a wonderful dream it had been" (110). The issue with the last sentence is that it exists in the text-world that the narrator has created with the reader, the text-world that relies on the idea that this is all a "wonderful dream." Alice may not have thought the dream was so wonderful; there were certainly times when she was frustrated/scared/sad. But the narrator's interpretation of these adventures is privileged in the novel over Alice's. Rackin observes that the "urbane and detached narrator" protects the reader from the more horrific implications of Wonderland and Alice's adventure in it (116), but in the process, the narrator's voice eclipses Alice's. Who knows how

Alice actually told the story? Would it have come out more like the narrator's version or more like Delirium's? Many re-imaginings of Alice as an adult (such as in Alan Moore's *Lost Girls* and Christina Henry's *Alice*) give a different view of Alice's adventures without the narrative voice of the original novel.

In the creation of this text-world, Delirium can been seen as the progression of the ideas that Carroll began to suggest in his characterization of Alice: that humor through mistranslations and puns create doubt in the readers as to the epistemological authority in language. By revealing the multiplicity of discourses available in language and by challenging the presumption of authority of the dominant discourse, these characters are able to disrupt the reader's schema concerning the superiority of dominant discourse and the inferiority of mad discourse. This disruption creates cognitive dissonance on the part of the reader as to who has epistemological authority in these narratives (and by extension in "the real world"); however, it is only one example of how these characters can challenge dominant discourse. As we will see in the next chapter, issues of representation and embodiment as they relate to identity construction are also explored by these characters.

Chapter Three: "I'm just drawn that way": Shifting Visual Representations of

Identity

In the film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, Jessica Rabbit says, "I'm not bad, I'm just drawn that way." This moment in the film indicates the interpretative link that dominant discourse often attributes between visual representation of the body (in this case, the female body) and identity, as well as the tenuous nature of that interpretative mode: Jessica Rabbit attempts to point out the way that the cartoonist has created her identity through his visual representation of her (*Who Framed*). This "drawing" of identity onto visual representation that Jessica Rabbit refers to reflects Judith Butler's language concerning gender/sex identity as "an enacted fantasy or incorporation" that is "inscribed on the surface of the body" through the repetition of various signifying acts on the part of the dominant discourse. She writes,

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means…In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.…if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity (173-4).

For Butler, the idea of a stable gender identity produced by an interior gender identity combined with exterior signifiers of gender (biological signifiers) is a constructed one in the dominant discourse, designed as a way to produce cultural and societal norms that control the bodies and practices of the individual.

The relationship between body and identity in dominant discourse is key to the relationship between image and character identity in graphic novels due to the way that readers recognize characters through the visual representation of their bodies. Will Eisner argues that the

visual representations of human body are actually more valuable in interpretation than the accompanying text (106). For Eisner, the reader's ability to understand the meaning of the words involves their ability to "read" the image, particularly when it comes to the portrayal of characters through visual representation of their bodies: the author of the graphic novel "must draw upon personal observations and an inventory of gestures, common and comprehensible to the reader. In effect, the artist must work from a 'dictionary' of human gestures" (104). Eisner's observation about readers' interaction with human body language is similar to that of the idea of schema introduced in the last chapter. For visual texts, it is important to see the way that representations of body can either confirm or disrupt the schema of the reader concerning the embodiment of certain characters. Jared Gardner argues that there is a binary tension in comics and graphic novels between image and words and that "*all* comics necessarily leave their binary tensions unresolved. It is at heart a bifocal form, requiring double vision on the part of reader and creator alike" (176-7). The way that the body is portrayed in the textual descriptions of the character as well as visual representation of those descriptions create in the text-world of the reader a sense of character identity, based on the reader's schema that attempts to compare the image with images from past experience in order to create meaning.

As we have discussed in Chapter 1, embodiment and identity have been interconnected issues in the way that dominant discourse has shaped and subjugated mad discourse in the past. Hysteria, delirium, and any nonconformity to heteronormative sexual or gender roles were treated as a manifestation of the pathology of the female body, thus mad bodies were constructed as monstrous. So, in this chapter, I will explore how both the visual representations of Alice and Delirium challenge reader's expectations concerning the embodiment of identity through changes and fragmentation in their visual representations, in their subversion of the dominant

discourse that views identity and bodies as fixed modes of interpretation.

While the *The Sandman* series are classically graphic novels, Carroll's novels can be read as proto-graphic novels because of the original illustrations by John Tenniel. Many other editions have had new illustrations, and there are a few film adaptations as well, emphasizing the visuality of this particular text. Both Delirium and Alice themselves are inextricably linked to visual representation, both in the written text's descriptions of their bodies and in the visual representation of their bodies in drawings and images. Alice herself is drawn primarily the same way in Tenniel's original illustrations and in visual adaptations of her character (with a few exceptions): she is pictured as an adolescent girl with long blonde hair and a dress (in many adaptations, this dress is usually blue), an apron, white stockings and black Mary Jane style shoes. Delirium is consistently recognizable by her mismatched eyes (one blue and one green), her often overlarge punk grunge garb and her multicolored speech bubbles. However, these representations undergo change and fragmentation both in the written text and in the images. Alice experiences significant chan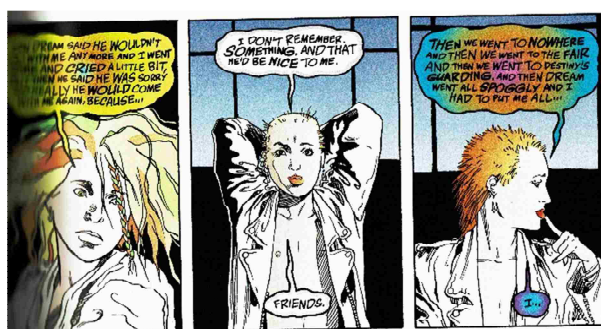ges in stature and size due to eating and drinking different substances in Wonderland, while Delirium constantly changes the color and length of her hair and her clothing throughout the series (sometimes even mid page or even panel; see fig. 5). I will explore how these representations and their subsequent alterations and changes cause the characters to evolve their own conceptions of their self-identity as well as how they interact with the construction of their identity by other characters.

Figure 5. Delirium often changes visually during the narrative, even sometimes mid-frame (301).

Growing and Shrinking in *Alice's*: Visual Representations of the Child/Adult

The growing and shrinking of Alice's body in the textual and physical representations of

her character functions as points of identity confusion on the part of Alice and causes her to

examine how the two are related. When Alice first shrinks in the narrative, she does so in what

appears to be the fulfillment of a wish that she could "shut up like a telescope" in order to pass

through the small door (13). She then almost immediately sees a bottle that instructs her to drink

the contents, and after checking to mark sure it does not advertise itself as poison, she drinks it.

As she shrinks, she echoes her earlier wish by comparing the act of shrinking to "shutting up like

a telescope'" (14). These changes in size result in Alice questioning her identity; she worries

about how far she will shrink: "'for it might end, you know,' said Alice to herself, 'in my going

out altogether, like a candle. I wonder what I should be like then?' And she tried to fancy what

the flame of a candle looks like after the candle is blown out, for she could not remember ever

having seen such a thing" (14). The telescope metaphor continues when she grows (due to eating

a cake) and she says that she is "opening out like the largest telescope that ever was" (16). This

comparison of her body to inanimate objects allows Alice to express her confusion over her lack

of control over the size changes in her body, but more importantly, they suggest a fragmentation

and externalization of her ideas about her identity as uniquely tied to her body. The comparison

of the idea of her shrinking into physical nonexistence to that of the snuffing out of a candle

flame also calls into question Alice's self-conceptualization of her own identity if she becomes

non-corporeal (symbolic of course of her own death). What part of her is left if her body

disappears? Where is the line between body and identity? These questions reflect Butler's

assertion that dominant discourse has constructed a fixed identity through its narratives inscribed

on the body; when the body can change in such an abrupt and unnatural way, this construction of

identity is called into question. This fragmentation of self-conception of identity continues in

Alice's personification of individual body parts. When she grows for the first time, she looks

down at her feet and tells them goodbye: "'Oh, my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your

shoes and stocking for you now, dears?" (16). She then discusses how she will send them boots

for Christmas and how she would address the package with the boots to her feet (17). These

conversations between Alice and her limbs serve to continue the fragmentation of her self-

conceptualization of her identity.

Alice's self-conception of identity as intimately linked to body continues through her

growing confusion as she keeps growing and shrinking through the narrative. When the

Caterpillar asks her who she is, she responds, "'I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I

know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since

then'… 'I ca'n't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day

is very confusing'" (41). Part of the issue, from Alice's perspective, is the constant fluctuations

in size; when the Caterpillar asks what size that she wants to be, she replies that, for her, the size

does not matter, as long she stays that size (45), indicating that what Alice really wants is

stability in her identity through stability in her physical body, thus returning her to her fixed

identity within dominant discourse.

Alice's identity confusion as the result of physical change becomes a site of cognitive

dissonance through the doubling of Alice's inner monologue into a dialogue, furthering the idea

of fracture as the result of the changes in physical representation. Alice begins to speak to herself

as to a separate person: "this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people" (15).

She even begins to wonder if she really is Alice and not another person altogether:

> 'I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up
> this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the

same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!' And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them (18).

She goes on to think if she has transformed into one of the other children that she knows, basing her conclusions on the characteristics that she most associates with them: she is not Ada because her hair is not curly, and she is not Mabel because she is intelligent—again, here Alice relies on the dominant discourse assumption that interior and exterior characteristics constitutes identity in the same way Butler argues that it does not. Furthermore, Alice says that the difference between herself and Mabel is that "*she's* a she, and *I'm* I" (18). In this moment in the text, the uncontrollable changes in physical representation strip away Alice's relationship between identity and interior/exterior characteristics that supposedly construct identity. All Alice is sure of in this scene is that there is an *I* as opposed to a *she*: Alice is convinced that she is a person, but she is no longer sure of what makes up that person. All she has left is a sense that there is an I who is different from others. She knows that there is a person thinking (her) and a person being discussed (also her), but she is unsure now of the relationship between what creates identity and what her identity is due to the fluctuations in the representation of her body, causing a fragmentation in identity and cognitive dissonance. Abbas and Rahman give a possible explanation for this identity doubling to be in the way that Alice as a character "is shuttling between two worlds her physical world that we term as real world and the world of the textual narrative into which she has landed" (7). This doubling here is the result of a cognitive dissonance between the schema of the "real world" Alice who knows that such growth and shrinkage cannot be possible (and that one cannot send packages to one's own limbs) and is terrified of these developments and the schema of the "text" Alice who is calmly accepting all of these new developments as possible because they are happening undeniably in her own body,

thus continuing the fragmentation of her sense of identity.

The narrator's inclusion of this part of Alice that calmly accepts all these events as happening, despite the terror that the cognitive dissonance of identity loss brings her, actually allows the reader to contemplate this identity fragmentation without becoming afraid of or for her. Rackin points out that many of the events that occur during Alice's journey should be more terrifying than funny (almost drowning in her own tears, encountering unsympathetic adult figures, falling a great height into a rabbit hole, etc) (104). Nancy Willard argues that the narrator's (and Alice's) calm, matter of fact reaction to the events around her indicate that she is in a dream which allows the reader to mitigate their understanding of Alice's danger by realizing that the threat that the other characters and her environment pose to her can never be realized as it exists in a state of play, and her conversations between her doubled identity "interrupt the narrative and diffuse the sense of isolation and helplessness (55). In other words, through the juxtaposition of the tranquility of Alice's reactions with the sheer fantastic-ness of her journey through Wonderland, Alice's loss of a sense of fixed identity becomes one to laugh at instead of to fear, disrupting the reader's schema in a way that allows the reader to experience Alice's cognitive dissonance along with her without becoming terrified.

What furthers this schema disruption on the part of Alice's self-conceptualization of her own identity as a separate entity from other identities is the way that other characters often mistake her for someone or something else. The White Rabbit calls her Mary-Ann (34), the Pigeon argues that she is a serpent (48), and the Cheshire Cat says that she is mad. Turner attributes this trend of mistaken identity to the adult role that these characters play in relation to the child Alice: "They use this control in a very adult way too: they exercise the adult's right to tell the child what she is," reflecting the way that adult authors of children's literature often seek

to tell the audience what a child is. She goes on to point out that Alice is unable to convince the Pigeon of her identity as a female child because of the "physical and mental changes" that have occurred in the narrative. Instead, the "adult" characters get to impose their versions of her identity through the authority granted to them through linguistic control (249). This treatment of the female character as a child in a world of adults (the majority of which are masculine authority figures) reflects what Cixous calls the tendency to conflate the identity of the woman and the child in dominant discourse. She writes that dominant discourse seeks to frame women as "still close to childhood, needing good manners—conventions that keep them under control. They *have to be taught how to live*" (29). The Wonderland characters also try to exert their control over the physical representation of Alice using this adult/child paradigm not only by telling her what her identity is but by telling her how her body (visual representation) needs to change to fit their standards. The Mad Hatter tells her, "Your hair wants cutting" (Carroll 60) and the Mock-Turtle asks her if she studies washing (85). This attitude of control over Alice's body, when combined with the scholarship on the pathologizing and control of the mad female body during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, illustrates the control that these characters seek to have over her body, the female body that represents a threat to their dominant discourse through its madness.

Of course, speaking of the adult/child paradigm in a novel written during the Victorian age is rather tricky as the construction of those terms were still forming during that time. The term adolescence cannot be used to describe Alice as that idea was not really formed until the 20th century. The idea of the child as a construction is also a classed one: Lydia Murdoch discusses how at the beginning of Alice we understand that she is an upper-class child in Victorian England because she has time for leisure activities such as reading outside with her

sister, and the reader is reminded of this understanding throughout the novel because Alice

herself keeps reminding the characters of her education (which includes French and music).

Lower-class children were part of the labor force and often had to work alongside their parents in

textile factories or in mines (Murdoch 13-14). Murdoch argues that Carroll was participating in a

reshaping of the child as a construct to better fit with Victorian ideals of "domesticity": rebelling

against the moralism in children's verse and prose that often painted working class children as

corrupt and in need of education (much like hysterical women) (15-16). Although she notes that

Carroll's visual representations of Alice Liddell in photography reveals his class bias in regards

to children (Alice dressed as a "beggar child" look much more adult and sexual than when she is

dressed "in her best"), Murdoch writes, "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* marks the shift in

Victorian ideals of childhood from work, discipline, and essential sinfulness to education, play,

and innocence, however fleeting" (17). Thus, Carroll participates in molding a more modern

construction of the child as an innocent and as a separate entity from an adult.

However, Alice's changes and their subsequent fragmentation of her self-

conceptualization of her identity speak to how problematized separation of these adult and child

identities are. When Alice grows and fills the room in the White Rabbit's house, she says "when

I grow up, I'll write one [a book]—but I'm grown up now…at least there's no room to grow up

any more *here*…shall I *never* get any older than I am now? That'll be a comfort, one way—never

to be an old woman—but then—always to have lessons to learn!" (33). Alice's self-

conceptualization of her identity of that of a child comes from a conflation of ideas about size

and age. On the one hand, she knows that size is related to the idea of adult status, thus by

growing she is now "grown up" (at least in the space that she finds herself in). On the other hand,

she recognizes that age also is linked to adult status, so the fact that she has not aged creates

cognitive dissonance with the fact that she has grown, causing yet another disruption in her schema of what it means to be an adult. At the end of the novel, the concept of growth as linked to adult status allows her to gain adult authority over her environment. Turner writes that when she wins the argument with the King of Hearts that her identity shifts towards being an adult in this scene due to size, "Until this point, her attempts to point out logical inconstancies have been ignored or shouted down. It is only when she possesses an advantage in size, much as an adult over a child, that she confidently believes that Wonderland's logic is faulty" (247). Thus, Alice, as a child character, can gain adult authority through a change in her visual representation to reflect an adult identification marker (size).

This schema confusion and disruption of what it means to be an adult reveals how much visual representation is linked to the idea of adulthood (and adult authority) in dominant discourse. By conflating the ideas of size and age (and then ultimately using this conflation to her benefit), Alice becomes a child/adult character, existing in neither world and both simultaneously. This representation calls into question ideas in dominant discourse concerning the positioning of both children and adults as binary identities, one subordinate to the other. This development also calls into question the child-status of the mad female character in the text, for here is a character who is framed by the author and the text as a child in need of education but she gains authority by the rules of the dominant discourse which set up the adult/child paradigm in the first place, while still technically remaining a child. By occupying both positions in the discourse, she causes the binary to collapse, thus subverting the system.

The visual representations of Alice by Tenniel in the illustrations of the character and their criticism by Carroll reveal both Carroll's and Tenniel's individual and somewhat conflicting interpretations of Alice as a child/adult. Tenniel's images of these physical changes

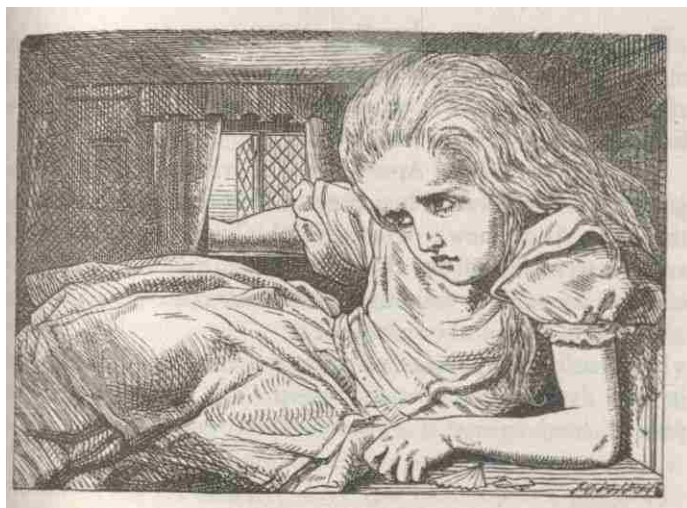are not proportional (see fig. 6) intentionally distorting the representation of Alice as neither adult nor child. Martin Gardner in *The Annotated Alice* points out that Carroll was disappointed with Tenniel's illustrations of Alice, saying he got her proportions wrong (82). Carroll's concern indicates that he as the author would like complete control over Alice's visual representation, keeping her proportionally a child while changing her size,

Figure 6. Alice grows in the White Rabbit's House. Here, Alice's head and limbs are not proportional (Carroll and Tenniel 33).

effectively leaning more towards the positioning of Alice as a child caught in an adult world rather than as a child/adult character.

To borrow the words of Gilbert and Gubar, Carroll is here attempting to "kill" the character Alice into his construction of the child (14). Turner argues that all child characters who are written by adults are in fact constructions of childhood or "an adult hiding behind a representation of a child" (252). It is impossible for an adult writing about a child character to write about a real child because there is a "gap" between the fiction of the child (as imagined by the adult) and the "'real' child outside the book (244). Cixous explains this construction of the child as "the mirror of the adult; the fairy mirror that gives the right answer" (27). As mentioned before, Carroll's construction of the child is formed by his desire for Alice to maintain intellectual and sexual innocence: Veronica Schanoes points out that Carroll in his poetry preceding and following the text of *Through the Looking Glass* links Alice's impending sexual and marital experiences with death, and that the physical changes in *Alice's Adventures in*

Wonderland are often marked by near death experiences. She writes, "Despite Carroll's unhappy poetry, Alice Liddell was not dead in 1871, when *Looking Glass* was published. Indeed, she was alive and well at the age of 19. Dodgson's close relationships with little girls sometimes, though not always, ended when the child-friends entered puberty…Dodgson kept his fictional Alice in prepubescence" (37). Carroll, by writing Alice as a perpetual child, in effect, is attempting to save her from this fate, but in doing so, ends up killing her anyway into a "phantom" that haunts him (37). The fantasy of keeping the child Alice pure ends up linked to death in another form, that of killing the real woman into his construction of the ideal/angel woman, which, in his case, is a construction of childhood. This construction of Carroll's even further links the figure of the woman with the figure of the child.

However, Tenniel's visual representations of Alice through his illustrations form a more complex relationship between the changes in size and Alice's positioning as a child/adult, allowing for the interpretation of Alice as an adult/child and opening up the "gap" that Turner argues exists between the fictional and real child in the schema of the reader. Even Carroll's original drawing for this scene distorts the image of Alice, according to Rackin, thus undermining his complaint concerning Tenniel's illustration. The visual representations here resist the characterization of Alice as a perpetual child by making her image disproportionate (see fig. 7), which disrupts readers' (and Carroll's) schema of what a child or adult should look like, thus denying any attempt to inscribe an interpretation of her identity on her body by the reader. The construction of the child as innocent is mixed with the

Figure 7. Alice's disproportionate body as drawn by Tenniel (16).

growth associated with adulthood and maturation, resulting in a monstrous image (the Pidgeon even calls her a snake), recalling some of the images associated with the social anxiety about mad women in Gilbert and Gubar's explorations. However, this monstrous image does not frighten the reader because Alice is inherently a likeable character; instead, we laugh because the image itself illustrates the short circuit between the supposedly universal concepts of adulthood and childhood and the concrete human body, which looks absurd when visualized.

This subversion of the interpretative framework that dominant discourse often utilizes the female body in its construction of identity opens the possibility for new kinds of identification and undermines the authority of the dominant discourse to tell a child/woman what she is. As in the last chapter, however, a problem with this subversion occurs with the conclusion of the novel in which Alice wakes up from her dream, again resuming a child positioning in a world of authority figures.

Delight to Delirium: Visual Fluidity

Delirium as a more overtly mad female character brings this discussion of visual representation and the fragmentation of identity through the discourses of madness, gender, and women's movements of the end of the twentieth century (discourses that did not exist in the context of Carroll's novel). The concept of adolescence as a developmental period between childhood and adulthood had been formed in scholarship and cultural mindsets before Delirium was written; therefore, in our ongoing juxtaposition of the two characters, we can see Delirium as a continuation and modification of those themes of visual representation and fragmentation of identity in light of this change in context. Her first appearance in the *The Sandman* text was in the 21st issue which was published in December of 1990, the same year as Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Although it is difficult to know if Gaiman was

inspired by or responding to the types of queer performative gender identity theories that Butler is famous for, her text provides us insight into the type of identity subversion that Delirium as a character embodies through the numerous identity shifts through fluctuations in her visual representation. Delirium provides more overt points of subversion to the ideology concerning the fixed nature of identity than Alice, indicating a progression in the ways that female mad characters can act as sites of subversion to dominant discourse. While Alice's fluctuations in visual representation blur the boundaries between child and adult identities, Delirium more directly disrupts the idea of fixed identity based on representation, creating an unstable relationship between her physical body and the construction of her identity either by herself or others, including the reader. There are two types of shifts in physical form emphasized in the series concerning Delirium. One is the constant fluidity of her form as Delirium; the other is the shift between her previous identity as Delight to her current one as Delirium.

Delirium, like Alice, encounters many changes in her visual representation; however, Delirium's physical changes are not in height, but the images of her are constantly changing, sometimes mid-frame. She, like Alice, is also framed as a child/adult (or in twentieth century terms, adolescence) (*Season of Mists*) (551). She is much shorter in height than the rest of her family; she is constantly looking up at them when in dialogue; however, her position of authority as one of the mythological Endless and the overt sexuality of her character through clothing choices (though Delirium herself shows almost no interest in sex and could be read as an asexual or queer character) position her in the realm of the adult (much has been written about how Alice is sexualized by Carroll as well). Like Carroll's framing of Alice as a female character "killed" into a child forever, Delirium's characterization as a perpetual adolescent is framed as a tragedy as well (551). She is viewed by the other members of the Endless as their kid baby sister: some

are protective of her (especially Death and Destruction), others dismissive. Rarely is her voice/discourse taken seriously or in any way as authoritative, and much of this is due to her positioning in the text as a child/adolescent to the adult figures of the other Endless.

Like Alice, the identity of Delirium is based on the change in visual representation is also marked by fragmentation, both of her self-conceptualization of her own identity and the way the other characters conceptualize her identity. The only other constant in Delirium's appearance besides her frozen adolescence are her "badly matched" eyes: "one eye is a vivid emerald green, spattered with silver flecks that move; her other eye is vein blue" (551). As I have discussed in previous chapters, Delirium tends to physically disincarnate, again emphasizing the fragmentation of her visual representation. She does this in response to Desire's "pull yourself together" and in another scene in *Brief Lives* when she searches from Destruction mentally by

Figure 8. Delirium disincarnates or "lets herself go" (210).

allowing herself to look for him through the minds of others (thus blurring the lines between herself and other bodies in a similar way that Alice does with Mabel) (see fig. 8). These moments of disincarnation seem to provide a possible answer to Alice's question of what would happen if she shrunk out of existence like the snuffing out of the candle flame: Delirium's fractured psyche is linked to the disintegration of her physical body and the fragmentation of the idea of a fixed identity.

However, it is in the transition from the Delight identity to the Delirium identity and the changes in visual representation that truly question the use of the body as an interpretive lens for

identity. Readers do not get much of an impression of the Delight identity outside of her physical representation: the most we get to see of Delight occurs in flashback scenes when she is already beginning to change into the identity of Delirium, so it is difficult to discuss any characteristics besides the visual representations of the character. The first representation of Delight in is a portrait that Destiny keeps in his study, and is strikingly like the one that many readers associate with Alice (especially as drawn by Tenniel): long wavy hair, blue dress with long skirt and sleeves, pink sash around her waist, etc. This portrait associates Delight with

Figure 9. Portrait of Delight in Destiny's gallery (8).

traditional ideas of femininity and middle to upper class children in the Victorian era (see fig. 9). Other representations of Delight show her as anywhere between a child and an adolescent, always in overtly traditional feminine garb and style of appearance.

When Delirium is first introduced in *Season of Mists*, the juxtaposition between the images of the Delight/Delirium identities is the first impression that the reader has of the character. Destiny calls a meeting, and as each one of the Endless emerges from their portraits, they look almost exactly like their representations right down to the way they dress. However, when Destiny calls for Delirium through her portrait, the representation of her in the picture is one of her in figure 3—a young girl wearing a blue dress, with a straw hat and flowers in a landscape of green (*Season of Mists* 8). When she emerges from the portrait in the next frame at the top of the next page, her appearance is completely different. She now has a bright orange buzz-cut (a visual traditionally associated with masculine imagery), ripped fishnet stockings and

undershirt and a black leotard, reminiscent of Annie Lennox from her "Sweet Dreams" music video. Her overly large clothing (which seems to be a favorite on the part of Delirium) also emphasizes the adolescence of the character as well as accentuating the flatness of her chest and hips in contrast to the traditional feminine sexual characteristics of the Delight identity. To accentuate the change in representation even more, the portrait behind Delirium from which she emerges now only contains the white silhouette of Delight, indicating that the Delirium identity has eclipsed the previous one (see fig 10). The contrast between these two images in the same panel causes the reader to link the change from the Delight identity to the Delirium identity firmly with the idea of change in visual representation. The juxtaposition of the two visual representations also interacts with the idea of gender as a performative act in contrast to the dominant

Figure 10. Delirium emerging from the portrait of Delight (9).

discourse which insists that gender identity is fixed. For our analysis of Delirium, this theoretical framework means that the idea of "woman" as a stable identity is a construction of the dominant ideology and reflects the performance of certain signifiers that have been deemed by that ideology to be appropriate to that identity.

To subvert the role of the body in the interpretative framework of the dominant discourse even further, the reader is never told why Delight became Delirium; the process seems to have

been both precipitated by a tragedy or trauma of some kind and also a long slow process that

Delirium herself either had absolute control over (as indicated by her conversation with Destiny

in which she says that she "stopped being Delight") or she had no control over (as indicated by

her conversation with Destruction in a flashback scene in *Brief Lives*). Mellette notes the

omission as a gap that the reader can fill with "her or his experiences in her character" (64).

However, he goes on to argue that the change is associated with "growing up or growing older,"

(66) similar to the way that Alice's changes in size are related to her growth from child to adult.

He writes, "Her fall is emblematic of a general fall from innocence, an awakening of an

undefined nature. Potentially a metaphor for blossoming sexuality, Adam and Eve's expulsion

from the Garden of Eden, or just recognition of the cruelty of the world itself…" (66). Here,

Delirium's change in visual representation mirrors the struggle in Carroll's representation of

Alice: to remain in the "innocent" child state forever is impossible. However, Gaiman, instead of

killing Delirium into Delight forever, allows the character to mature into something else.

What we do know is that none of the other Endless have changed in such a way:

generally, if one of them dies, one of their potential replacements takes their place in order to fill

the vacuum of their absence. This process has occurred at least twice; once with Despair and

once with Dream (Destruction refuses to kill himself as he says that it would just be passing on

his problem to someone else), illustrating the supposedly timeless and immutable characteristics

of these personifications. In fact, Mellette cites Gaiman as once stating that the plot of *The

Sandman* essentially is "The Lord of Dreams learns one must change or die, and makes his

decision" (qtd. 72). By this definition, Delirium functions as a double to Dream: she does not die

or wish to die, so she transforms from one identity to another but is still considered the same

personification. Destruction even hints that such a transformation may again happen to her in the

future (cite), indicating that Delirium, of all the Endless, may continue to change and adapt. Bender quotes Gaiman stating that the character experiences multiple changes: "She's been one thing, she's become something else, and eventually she'll change into something else again" (Gaiman qtd. 241). Delirium has mastered the lesson that Dream ultimately cannot learn, what Mellette describes as "the ability to endure" (73).

When Delirium thinks of her past identity while waiting for Dream to return from his meeting with Desire in *Brief Lives* (see fig 11), this doubling of images reflects the doubling of identity that Alice experiences as the result of her size changes. While Delirium does not engage in an internal dialogue with herself the way that Alice does, she does interact with the image of her Delight identity through memory, causing her to realize a fracture in her self-conceptualization based on the fracture in her concept of past and present. Mellette describes this image as illustrating how the stark change that has occurred in the character affects the change in the identity (66), but I would posit that this is another example of the kind of cognitive dissonance that Alice experiences in her novel. Here, Delirium is thinking about herself, remembering the exact moment when she realized that she "was no longer Delight" (166). She is now a self that is remembering another self who realized that she was no longer the self she used to be. The image here is not divided into panels (as Mellette notes) and does not have a gutter between the representations, allowing the reader to experience the cognitive dissonance with Delirium by holding the two images simultaneously in the same frame, both representations of the same

Figure 11. Delirium remembers Delight (166).

character, thus again, undercutting the external signifiers that dominant discourse applies as constructions of identity.

What is most intriguing is how Delirium's self-conceptualization of her identity as fluid and fractured interacts with her sibling's conception of her identity. For the most part, the other members of the Endless seem to refuse to acknowledge Delirium's identity as a legitimate one, reflecting their belief in her fixed identity based on their idea that Delight is the "correct" identity. For one, the fact that Destiny has not updated any of his images of Delight to reflect her new identity as Delirium reflects his inability to accept this change. When Delirium looks at the image of herself as Delight and says that she was pretty, Dream's response is that she used to be pretty, implying that she is not anymore. Almost all of the Endless refuse to call Delirium that name; they prefer the familiar nickname Del, which allows them the ambiguity of either meaning Delight or Delirium. These responses to Delirium's change show that the identity of Delight is the preferred identity of the dominant discourse; the Delirium identity is not considered legitimate. This preference for the Delight identity over the Delirium identity reflects the idea of the mad woman as occupying a space of non-being inside the dominant discourse, but it also places Delirium outside of the norms prescribed for her identity by the dominant discourse in terms of Butler's performativity of identity.

For Delirium, the constant shifts in visual representation, beginning with the juxtaposition of the Delight and Delirium images as cognitive dissonance on the part of the reader and then continuing through the fluctuations in Delirium's representation, challenges "the fantasy" (Butler 173) of a stable gender identity by confronting the reader's ability to "read" the body in the way that Eisner says is necessary for the interpretation of image in graphic text. After all, this theory states that graphic art relies on the reader's ability to recognize and decode images

based on schema or past experience. The way that a reader recognizes character in this theory is through repetition: the reader has seen the visual representation of the character previously and is able to identify the character (and thus creates character identity) through the existing schema the text and reader have created. For example, the character of Death in *The Sandman* is easily "read" by the reader because of her black hair, cat eye makeup, black clothing, and silver ankh around her neck that is her sigil. We as readers believe that Death is a woman in Gaiman's universe because her visual representation fits into our schema of a "fixed" female identity: her performance of identity conforms to what dominant discourse defines as female. Most of the Endless are recognizable as characters in this way (although Desire does not have a stable gender identity; but that is another argument altogether): Destruction even calls the Endless "patterns" in his description of them (312). He means this description on a mythological anthropological level, but the word *pattern* can be applied to reader recognition and creation of character identity through visual representation. For the Endless, the ultimate pattern occurs in their sigils which function as symbolic representations of their characters: Destiny's is a book, Death's is the ankh, Dream's is a helmet, Destruction's is a sword, Desire's is a glass heart, and Despair's is a fish-hook. These sigils represent characters in a way easily accessible to the reader because their meaning in this text is a fixed representation of identity.

However, Delirium, with her shifting representations, challenges this way of recognizing identity through visual representation by confronting the idea of pattern in the recognition of character. To be sure, we as readers know that we are still viewing Delirium because of a certain amount of repetition on the part of the character (mainly through her multi-colored speech bubbles and her mismatched eyes). However, the amount of repetition is limited to only a few things: the reader has to check if the speech bubble is multi-colored in order to make sure that the

character is in fact Delirium and not another character. Thus, the boundaries between one character and another are blurred in the schema of the reader, a schema that relies heavily on visual identification of character. By playing with the schema in this way, the character of Delirium subverts the expectation of character recognition based on visual representation, thus exposing how much the reader relies on these images as clues to identity. It is perhaps fitting that she, unlike the other members of the Endless, does not have a fixed symbolic sigil, but rather her sigil is a field of shifting, shapeless color.

Conclusion

We discussed in the previous chapter how the humor dependent on the subversion of linguistic constructions can disrupt the schema of the reader concerning the nature of epistemological authority in the previous chapter; the same theoretical framework can serve to discuss how these texts and their characters undermine the interpretative authority of dominant discourse to extrapolate identity from visual representation or body, specifically when it comes to madness. Alice and Delirium here show a progression of this type of character who resists through madness and humor, and who may begin to indicate new methods of identity instead of relying on biological or interior theories of identity construction. Delirium especially, as a more developed character who overtly addresses these concerns through her transformation from Delight to Delirium and through her fluid visual representations, suggests perhaps a move beyond a notion of identity that relies on even intersectional politics that seek, as Jasbir K. Puar says, "the knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time, relying on the logic of equivalence and analogy between various axes of identity and generating narratives of progress that deny the fictive and performative aspects of identification" (336). To borrow Puar's terminology, Delirium de-stabilizes these constructions through the fragmentation of her

physical form and the constant shifting of her external characteristics in a way that causes the reader to constantly re-evaluate what it means to recognize a character and what it means to have a mad identity. In the end, perhaps Delirium isn't mad, she is just drawn that way.

Conclusion: A Call for Future Study

As I have mentioned several times now, this thesis is not an exhaustive study of mad female characters. It is not even an exhaustive study of the ways one could discuss Alice and Delirium. However, the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that this type of study is possible and to indicate the need for more. Characters like Harley Quinn, Luna Lovegood, Ellie from *Skins* all interact with the traditions of madness in ways that disidentify from the stereotypes that these traditions create and create disruptions in the reader's schema that open the gaps in dominant discourse, allowing for subversion of that discourse. Part of this subversion, for some characters, is allowed by their placement in fantasy or imaginary settings. Saler says that the purpose of virtual imaginary worlds in modern society is manifold. He writes,

> On the one hand, imaginary worlds are autonomous from the real world, avowedly fictional spaces that provide an escape from a disenchanted modernity into self-subsistent realms of wonder. On the other hand, these worlds are inextricable from ordinary life and interpersonal engagements…they provide safe and playful arenas for their inhabitants to reflect on the status of the real and to discuss prospects for effecting concrete personal and social changes. They challenge their inhabitants to see the real world as being, to some degree, an imaginary construct amenable to revision. As a result of collectively inhabiting and elaborating virtual worlds, many become more adept as accepting difference, contingency, and pluralism: at envisioning life not in essentialist, "just so" terms but rather in provisional, "as if" perspectives (7).

Saler's vision of fantasy or "imaginary worlds" here is imbued with the idea of schema disruption on the part of the reader, constantly creating dissonance and refreshment, allowing new schemas to emerge. Instead of the "essentialist," fixed views that dominant discourse often seeks in terms of epistemes and identity, fantasy often allows the reader to explore other views or ways of knowing which can cause them to challenge or revise the constructions of dominant discourse. Alice and Delirium as fantasy characters inhabiting fantastic worlds allow the reader to revise their ideas away from the essentialism and subjugation of women's madness and humor by dominant discourse and towards an understanding of the alternate discourse that mad, funny

women can represent. Pedagogically, these kinds of characters and texts are important to teach because they allow students to encounter these schema disruptions with ideas of madness and to provide a place to discuss these conceptions of epistemology, representation, and identity. By teaching these texts, these characters, students can become better equipped to understand the influence of dominant ideology and to resist it. For students who struggle with issues of mental illness, they can relate to these characters and find empowerment through the subversion they represent.

To conclude, I would like to return to the image of the two-sided coin that Delirium claims represents different ways of knowing. Near the end of the series, Delirium reveals to Dream that she may in fact be more aware of how the existence of the Endless affects the fabric of reality than he is. She says, "I know LOTS of thinks. People think I DON'T but I REALLY do. I know more about us than ANY of us. That's just one of the things I know" (717). Delirium represents a return to the parallel discourses of madness and reason, an understanding of the multicity of different ways of knowing. And in the end, she may be able to see things that others cannot.

Works Cited and Consulted

Abbas, Sameera, and Rubina Rahman. "Schema Disruption and Identity in Lewis Carroll's
     Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland." *The Journal of Humanities and Social
     Sciences* 21.3 (2013): 1-10. *ProQuest.* Web. 19 Jan. 2017.

Barreca, Regina. *They Used to Call Me Snow White, But I Drifted*. Viking, 1991.

--. *Untamed and Unabashed: Essays on Women and Humor in British Literature*. Wayne State
     UP, 1994.

Bender, Hy. *The Sandman Companion*. DC Comics, 1999.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1999.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. Oxford UP,
     2009.

da Mota Gomes, Marleide, and Eliasz Engelhardt. "A Neurological Bias in the History of
     Hysteria: From the Womb to the Nervous System and Charcot." Arquivos de Neuro-
     Psiquiatria, vol. 72, no. 12, 2014, pp. 972-975, doi:10.1590/0004-282X20140149.

Dr. Jesus. Comment on "Rick and Morty Season 3: Voiceover Work Begins, Potential Release
     Date, and More." Den of Geek, 13 March 2016, 11:48pm,
     http://www.denofgeek.com/us/tv/rick-and-morty/248392/rick-and-morty-season-3-
     voiceover-work-begins-potential-release-date-and-more#comment-2568333865

During, Simon. *Foucault and Literature*. Routledge, 1992.

Eisner, Will. *Comics and Sequential Art*. W.W. Norton and Company, 2008.

Foucault, Michael. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.

Freud. Sigmund. *Fragment of An Analysis of A Case of Hysteria*. 1905. PDF.

Gaiman, Neil. *The Sandman Omnibus*. DC Comics, 2013. 2 vols.

Gardner, Jared. *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling*.
     Stanford UP, 2012.

Gardner, Martin, editor. *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*. W.W. Norton and
     Company, 1999.

Gee, J.P. *How to Do Discourse Analysis: A Toolkit*. Routledge, 2010.

Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the*

Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. Yale UP, 2000.

Hanrahan, Maireád. "Cixous's "Portrait De Dora": The Play of Whose Voice?" The Modern
Language Review, vol. 93, no. 1, 1998, pp. 48-58.

Laing, RD. *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise*. Penguin, 1970.

Meek, Heather. "Of Wandering Wombs and Wrongs of Women: Evolving Conceptions of
Hysteria in the Age of Reason." English Studies in Canada, vol. 35, no. 2/3, 2009, pp.
105.

Mellette, Justin. "Agency through Fragmentation?: The Problem of Delirium in *The Sandman*."
Feminism in the Worlds of Neil Gaiman: Essays on the Comics, Poetry and Prose, edited
by Tara Prescott and Aaron Drucker, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2012, pp. 59-74.

Murdoch, Lydia. "Alice and The Question of Victorian Childhood." *The Age of Alice: Fairy
Tales, Fantasy, and Nonsense in Victorian England*, edited by Ronald Patkus, Vassar
College Libraries, 2015, pp. 11-19.

Nash, Walter. *The Language of Humour: Style and Technique in Comic Discourse*. Longman
Group Limited, 1985.

Pollack, John. *The Pun Also Rises: How the Humble Pun Revolutionized Language, Changed
History, and Made Wordplay More than Some Antics*. Avery, 2012.

Puar, Jasbir K. "From Intersections to Assemblages." *Intersectionality: A Foundations and
Frontiers Reader*, edited by Patrick R. Grzanka, Westview P, 2014, pp. 332-339.

Rackin, Donald. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and through the Looking Glass: Nonsense,
Sense, and Meaning*. Twayne Publishers, 1991.

Saler, Michael. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary PreHistory of Virtual Reality*.
Oxford UP, 2012.

Schanoes, Veronica. "Fearless Children and Fabulous Monsters: Angela Carter, Lewis Carroll,
and Beastly Girls." Marvels & Tales, vol. 26, no. 1, 2012, pp. 30–44.,
www.jstor.org/stable/41702489.

Sewell, Elizabeth. *The Field of Nonsense*. Chatto and Windus, 1952.

Shires, Linda M. "Fantasy, Nonsense, Parody, and the Status of the Real: The Example of
Carroll." Victorian Poetry, vol. 26, no. 3, 1988, pp. 267–283.,
www.jstor.org/stable/40001965

Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture (1830-1980)*.
Penguin Books, 1985.

Turner, Beatrice. ""Which is to be Master?": Language as Power in Alice in Wonderland and through the Looking-Glass." Children's Literature Association Quarterly 35.3 (2010): 243-54. ProQuest. Web. 26 Feb. 2017.

Walker, Nancy A. *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture*. University of Minnesota P, 1998.

Who Framed Roger Rabbit. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Touchstone Pictures, 1988.

Willard, Nancy. "The Invisible Teacher." *The Age of Alice: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Nonsense in Victorian England*, edited by Ronald Patkus, Vassar College Libraries, 2015, pp. 43-57.

You Just Made the List. Comment on "Rick and Morty Season 3: Voiceover Work Begins, Potential Release Date, and More." Den of Geek, 10 Feb. 2017, 1:39am, http://www.denofgeek.com/us/tv/rick-and-morty/248392/rick-and-morty-season-3-voiceover-work-begins-potential-release-date-and-more#comment-2568333865

Zupancic, Alenka. *The Odd One In: On Comedy*. The MIT P, 2008.