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Teke Charles Ngiewih

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From Carroll to Beckett: Retrospection and Prefiguring; The Romantic and (Post)Modern Context of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland and Through The Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to identify and analyse some of the parallels that exist between Lewis Carroll's unabridged works and Romantic sensibility on the one hand, and their relationship with modern drama, using postmodern literary theory and criticism on the other. It proposes an intertextual approach to show how much Carroll may have been influenced by Romantic philosophy and poetry, particularly that of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and how his work can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of postmodern discourse, especially in the guise of Deconstruction, in modern drama with specific reference to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*.

The work is divided into two main sections. The first section grapples with Romanticism, paying particular attention to the concept of childhood and the re-collective memory, encapsulated in the hermeneutics of the self as progressive, and the psycho-aesthetics and spirituality of nature as expressed in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge and to an extent Blake and Keats. It will then proceed to Carroll's Romantic sensibility with regard to these conceptual categories. The preoccupying interpretative paradigm in this light will be the psychology of the anxiety of influence and antithesis in which Carroll's re-visionist attitude will be brought out to show his distinctive stance from the Romantics. The second part will underscore theoretical and practical aspects of postmodern discourse that Carroll's work prefigures, and draw parallels with Beckett's oeuvre. Featuring in the discourse in this vein will be aspects of language, meaning, in short the poetics of interpretation in deconstructionist discourse.

Carroll's Romantic sensibility

Carroll's preoccupation with the Wordsworthian tradition shows the continuous impact it had on the Victorian mind which he represents. Unlike Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, he wrote for an audience of children. But as will be seen in the unabridged versions of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* and *What Alice Found there*, his philosophy goes beyond the comprehension of children and points to the way he in turn romanticised the child along the philosophical lines of the Romantics. Or to put it differently, these works engage in a criticism that goes beyond the pleasure and fantasy of a child reader, and this is where most of his strength lies in critical discourse. The following part of this essay will examine the inspiring and creative process of Carroll's Romanticism; the re-collective memory of his own childhood, his observation of children, especially young girls, and his psychology of antithesis seen in the revisionist stance he takes toward the Romantics.

Carroll's Romanticism can be traced in his poetry of self-depiction. Two important poems come to mind here, "Solitude" (1863) and "Faces in the Fire" (1860), which may help in the understanding of his finding inspiration and creative potential in children. In "Solitude" a word that designates an important Romantic theme, he not only delights in the therapeutic power of nature but equally points to the nostalgic sensibility with which he treats the re-collective memory of his childhood:

I love the stillness of the wood:
I love the music of the rill:
I love to couch in pensive mood
Upon some silent hill. (1.1-4)

To live the joys that once have been,
To put the cold world out of sight,
And deck life's drear and barren scene
With hues of rainbow-light (1.21-24)

Ye golden hours of Life's young spring,
Of innocence, of love and truth!
Bright, beyond all imagining,
Thou fairy-dream of youth!

I'd give all wealth that years have piled,
The slow result of Life's decay,
To be once more a little child
For one bright summer-day. (1.33-40)

One does not need to belabour the Wordsworthian colouring of these lines. Carroll felt the importance and influencing force of his childhood, and the interplay between nature and his mind echoes part of Romanticism's apprehension of these concepts. The second poem also underscores the concept of loss while painting a past that seems to have been all that is lacking in the present. The notion of the passing of time and its eroding effect parallel, among others, Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality", the Lucy poems and Coleridge's "Dejection: an Ode" and "Youth and Age". It is this aspect of Carroll, together with his acute observation of young girls, which has established his reputation.

Both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* clearly display Carroll's deep exploration of what is represented in the poems discussed above. Though the subject matter of the works is not Carroll himself, the psychological and philosophical understanding of Carroll is not unconnected to the way he handles Alice. The circumstances that inspired the stories point to the romanticising of nature and Alice. He saw beyond the Victorian notion of eroticising children and felt that girls, specifically in their youth, embodied spirituality. The stories are therefore seen as psycho-somatic processes of growth which constantly engage the writer's own self-investigation and self-construction.

The prefatory poems and closing poem of *Through the Looking-Glass* are important in understanding both Carroll and what he is trying to convey through his heroine. These poems point to the fact that the stories are dealing with the re-collective memory of the poet and his aestheticising of childhood in Alice. The golden and summer days when the stories were inspired and told have vanished, and point to nostalgia, particularly on the part of the writer rather than his heroine. The prefatory poem in *Through the Looking-Glass* is particularly important for it encapsulates the basis of both stories:

A tale begun in other days,
When summer suns were glowing —

A simple chime, that served to time
The rhythm of our rowing —
Whose echoes live in memory yet,
Though envious years would say ‘forget’

Come, hearken then, ere voice of dread,
With bitter tidings laden,
Shall summon to unwelcome bed
A melancholy maiden!
We are but older children, dear,
Who fret to find our bedtime near.

Without the frost, the binding snow,
The storm-wind’s moody madness —
Within, the firelight’s ruddy glow
And childhood’s nest of gladness.
The magic words shall hold the fast:
Thou shalt not heed the raving blast. (1.13-30)

Carroll, by every indication, is voicing his own personal feelings of melancholy and loss, which enraged but paradoxically fuelled the idealist spirit of the Romantics, and he sees these qualities as embodied in Alice who may stand to reflect his dreams as opposed to his waking reality. Throughout the stories we see the narrator on the one hand, and the distinctive self-conscious personality of Alice on the other. Her adventures show the process of her growth and her struggle to figure out her world and make sense of it. Her various encounters can be transcribed as her self-consciousness in this process. Hers is a fantastic world where everything seems to be possible. For example she undergoes transformations in her size, but in her fantastic world there is always the presence of a solution to counter difficulties of this sort. The first book ends with Alice not only aware of her changes but with her prefiguring of her old age when she will narrate the bliss of her sunny days to her own children. In this sense she assumes and foreshadows a maturity while at the stage of childhood. This could point to the fact that through her can be interpreted the Romantic notion of the complete man, which consisted in seeing him as a combination of time past, present and future.

In the second book Alice encounters flowers that are personified and have the power of speech, and there is always the atmosphere of the garden present, the fields or sailing on the river, all these indicating Carroll's Romantic feeling for nature even if not with metaphysical attributes. Based on the metaphor of a chess game the issue at hand is growth and progress. The prefatory poem indicates Carroll's regret that he had not seen Alice for a long time, and most importantly, that her growing to puberty and maturity was a separating line between them, inciting his melancholia. This brings in the question of time, which plays a vital role in the understanding of the stories. Time in its linear perspective seems to favour Alice because there is a progressive turn of events in her growth, even if slow. This ties in with the romantic desire to see children grow while holding onto their past so that in old age they could use their memory to maintain psychological balance in their personality.

Carroll's psychology of antithesis: poetic misreading and revisionism

One may wonder why Carroll, even though he wrote from the Romantic perspective, did not uncritically assimilate Romanticism's ideals. His admiration of Wordsworth's poetry, and to some extent that of Coleridge, left him with the choice to revise and at times subvert their work for his purpose. Harold Bloom's theory of anxiety and the psychology of antithesis are important here. Bloom expresses the conviction that poetry's or more specifically a poem's strength lies in the poems that it manages to exclude, stressing that there is hardly any writer that is strong enough to totally exclude every crucial precursor text or poem.¹²⁷ Bloom's psycho-aesthetic theory can be convincingly said to apply to other genres such as prose, which is the main mode of Carroll's output. In this light it becomes easy to understand Carroll's revisionist stance in his prose as well as in his Romanticism-related poems. As to whether it was an entirely self-conscious engagement, it is not easy to say since it is difficult to penetrate into the secrets of his mind. Whatever the case may be, while Bloom's theory can be read from the viewpoint of influence, intertextual studies go beyond this, since there equally exist interpreta-

¹²⁷ See Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, (1973) and *A Map of Misreading* (1975).

tions which lend credence to writers' unconsciousness to existing authors or texts but which among themselves share certain affinities.

The Romantics were conscious of the growth of their children as well as of their own childhood and did not try to distinguish much between the genders. But the story with Carroll is somewhat different, and complicated. He was a bachelor who had no children, and while he might have advanced reasons for limiting his contact with, or even avoiding male children, he showed an unusually strong preference for female children. But curiously enough he fell out with them at puberty even if he wished them well as is the case with Alice in the prefatory poem of *Through the Looking-Glass*. This is a mystery that is difficult to solve but which, nevertheless, points to a change of emphasis from the Romantics and makes him distinctive. This complicates the question, as seen in Carroll's relationship with the true Alice and the heroine of his fiction. Time erodes his interest in Alice as she reaches puberty, a stage or transition period he refers to as awkward.¹²⁸ Yet it sounds paradoxical that he laments the loss of joy for his childhood and points to the fact that it is cemented in his memory. It becomes possible thus to read Alice's story as an attempt to explore the dreams of his own childhood and to see his obsession with Alice before puberty as an obsession with his own childhood that seems to have haunted him throughout his life but which he might not have attempted to reconcile with his adulthood and old age in the typical Wordsworthian or Coleridgean manner.

Alice's encounter with Humpty Dumpty also brings to question Carroll's broodings over Romantic poetry. The question with regard to Dumpty's poetic talents seems to point to the subversion and parodying of Romantic poems to suit the overriding theme of nonsense and the difficulty at arriving at any possible explanatory meanings. The piece Dumpty claims to have been written entirely for Alice's amusement is not unconnected to certain Romantic poems that have assumed a canonical reputation.

‘In winter, when the fields are white,
I sing this song for your delight —

¹²⁸ After a period of his separation from Alice Liddell, Carroll met her in May 1865 and entered the following comment in his diary, “Alice seems changed a good deal, and hardly for the better — probably going through the usual awkward stage of transition,” (*The Diaries of Lewis Carroll*: vol. I 70).

‘In spring, when the woods are getting green,
I’ll try and tell you what I mean.’

‘In summer, when the days are long,
Perhaps you’ll understand the song:

In autumn, when the leaves are brown,
Take pen and ink, and write it down.’ (*Alice’s Adventures*, 189-90)

The four stanzas may be interpreted as follows: the first has a close affinity to Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” where the frost is said to be performing its secret ministry while the poet contemplates his sleeping child as an unavoidable Other in the psychological construction of his own life. The second alludes to Wordsworth’s “Lines Written in Early Spring” where the poet is celebrating the regeneration and revitalisation of nature in correspondence to poetic creativity and spiritual exuberance. The fourth can be seen to share a close affinity with John Keats’s “Ode to Autumn,” which can convincingly be read as expressing maturity in terms of poetic and aesthetic achievement, as well as death, which is seen from a cyclical view. Alice’s reactions are unequivocal; these expressions apparently do not make sense and they put her out (*Alice’s Adventures*, 190). For a child audience this is real nonsense and appeals to their fancy, which engages no real serious move to conceptual meanings. But in the light of a modern reading in the context of intertextual studies, Carroll can be seen here to be misreading and revising great poems in a devalued style and content to foster his fabric of nonsense.

Another instance that justifies Carroll’s revisionist engagement is the Knight’s singing of “A-sitting on a Gate” for Alice’s comfort (*Alice’s Adventures*, 214). The question of the true title (“Hard-docks’ Eyes”, “The Aged Aged Man”, “Ways and Means” and finally “A-sitting On A Gate”) of the so-called beautiful song already shows Carroll’s intention of devaluing and simplifying a supposedly great Romantic piece by Wordsworth, “Resolution and Independence”. Though Wordsworth’s poem deals with his socialist and humanist preoccupations, Carroll’s distortion of it fits well into his nonsense aesthetics. As with the Jabberwocky poem, it is difficult to

conceptualise real meaning from the poem, but this subversion has nothing to do with the intellectual mind-frame of children.

The foregoing section has attempted to see the perspectives from which Carroll's Romanticism can be approached. Using the intertextual approach in relation to Bloom's psychological theory of anxiety and antithesis, it has underscored the conscious use by Carroll of typical Romantic traits in the weaving of his own artistic design. He is, therefore, not only a personifying embodiment of traditional Romanticism, but also a self-conscious artist with a distinct identity and vision.

Carroll and (Post)Modernism

Like Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism are complex terms to define. Modernism can be seen as an expression of the scientific, psychological and philosophical innovation and anxieties of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In specific literary terms, it can be seen as the radical shift in aesthetics characterised by a deviation and rejection of traditional techniques as writers struggled to represent the realities of the changing times. With the increasing technology of the Industrial Revolution and the impact of the First and Second World Wars, the literary landscape was almost completely altered as a new political, social and psychological order emerged. The devaluation of the arts, the rejection of previous modes of writing were to reflect these changes. One thing, however, that remains certain is that Modernism cannot completely extricate itself from the past given that it is dealing with the same issues that have characterised human life and experience for ages but which are viewed from a different literary, aesthetic and philosophical perspective. Seeing it as the tradition of the new is to relate it to the past from which it struggles to deviate or free itself. Postmodernism has been regarded by some critics as a negative continuation of Modernism, its most radical form being Deconstruction, especially the Derridean, de Manian and Millerian sort.¹²⁹

Carroll's works point to some of the features that characterise modern art and Postmodern critical discourse. An examination of his work shows striking similarities to Beckett's plays, lending credence

¹²⁹ For further reading see Peter Zima's *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002).

to the premise that Carroll prefigures modern drama, especially in the guise of the Theatre of the Absurd, and provides fertile ground for postmodern discourse. Beckett's drama was an example of the great changes occurring in the arts. In the subversion of some traditional principles of theatrical aesthetics laid down by Aristotle, he was to present what most have considered to be the grim nature of man with a radically new notion of setting, time, action, language, dialogue and plot. Man is seen as disintegrated physically and psychically, and his society presented as increasingly deconstructing and irrecoverably fragmented. This absurd image of man is not unconnected to Carroll's philosophy of nonsense which significantly engages questions of life and existence.

The following section of the paper is structured as follows: the question of meaning, space and time, the cyclical, repetitive nature of beginnings and endings, characters and the question of identity, and the chess game motif.

The question of meaning

One of the important aspects of modern literature as discussed in post-modern critical discourse is the question of meaning and conceptualisation of works, which demonstrate the conflict that has been raging between exponents of conceptual readings of works on the one hand and those who advocate the impossibility of attempting to read works as meaningful wholes. This problem clearly finds its roots in Carroll. Though his main objective was to write for the entertainment of children, Carroll was obviously conscious of the puzzling and enigmatic nature of meaning in his works. This indicates his awareness that an intellectual audience would not be uninterested in finding out possible layers of meaning embedded in it. The quest for meaning becomes the greatest issue of the two books not only for Alice in relation to the characters she encounters in her adventures, but for the critical reader too. Beckett was to echo the same question about possible meanings in his works.

In the stories there are several instances to substantiate Carroll's preoccupation. Alice's encounter with the Caterpillar (*Alice's Adventures* 40-46), the riddle she is asked to demystify in "A Mad Tea Party" (*Alice's Adventure* 60-63), the inverted nature of the Jabber-

wacky poem and Humpty Dumpty's supposed mastery of semantics in explicating the poem (*Alice's Adventures* 131-34, 186-89), and the confusing ramblings of the Knight (*Alice's Adventure* 205-17) throw light on the difficulty of interpretation and conceptualisation of meaning. These instances seem to point to meaning but at the same time resist and defy meaning. They therefore aptly substantiate the deconstructionist poetics of unreadability, semantic instability and terminal linguistic and conceptual impasse. Alice is usually seen struggling to figure out sense, 'the Hatter's remark seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English' (*Alice's Adventures* 62), "it seems very pretty, but it's rather hard to understand", 'Somehow it fills my head with ideas — only I don't exactly know what they are' (*Alice's Adventures* 134). The issue of meaning becomes highly problematic not only for Alice but also for the critical reader who is always baffled by the complexity of circumstances. In fact, *Through the Looking-Glass* is a subversion or inversion of meaning; it is a reversal of values. This (im)possibility of meaning brings to light postmodernist difficulty at extracting meaning from texts in terms of theoretical and practical criticism.

Beckett's handling of the matter shows a lot of affinities to Carroll. In his "Three Dialogues" he says,

There is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.¹³⁰

A deconstructionist who sees art as a mere play of linguistic components and dismisses any recourse to conceptualisation and meaning would be at ease with this comment even though it tends rather to express a paradoxical conviction. Beckett is known to have said that his drama expressed nothing beyond what he wrote and that any attempts at interpreting his work above the surface level of their expression was or might prove a useless exercise.

In line with this conviction is Christopher Innes's argument in *Modern British Drama* (1992). He quotes Beckett: "No symbols where none is intended . . . My work is a matter of fundamental

¹³⁰ Excerpted from Ruby Cohn, *Disjecta* (1984) (138-45).

sounds,” to posit the thesis that “Beckett’s philosophical premise is that ascribing any meaning to existence falsifies reality, his plays are designed to be experienced and not intellectually comprehended” (429). But this should not be taken uncritically. His work shows an obligation to express and he effectively expresses what one can take for man’s predicament, but one would certainly be entangled in contradictions and ironies as in Carroll. Even though Beckett’s language is devalued, his words are not meaningless; his engagement of action in certain circumstances could be absurd and nonsensical but not meaningless or insignificant. But the fundamental question remains as to what is really meant as shown in the Alice stories.¹³¹ *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are very puzzling examples. What do they really mean as texts? Who are the characters and how can they be identified, especially Godot? Why do Vladimir and Estragon persistently wait when Godot constantly postpones his coming? What does Lucky’s long speech mean? Why the title *Endgame*? Why are Nagg and Nell in trashcans? These questions cannot find satisfactory answers just as the Jabberwocky poem and Dumpty’s explanation tend to provide no real clues to meaning to Alice or to the critical reader.

Theodor W. Adorno, in discussing *Endgame* as a debate on meaning and a parody of philosophy in *Aesthetic Theory* (1997, [1970]), asserts that the absurdity of Beckett’s plays lies not in the absence of meaning, stressing that they would be irrelevant if that was the case, but because they put meaning on trial (153). He further states:

His work is ruled as much by an obsession with positive nothingness as by the obsession with a meaninglessness that has developed historically and is thus in a sense merited, though this meritedness in no way allows any positive meaning to be reclaimed. (153)

Adorno highlights two important issues in the Theatre of the Absurd that are worth examining, nothingness and meaninglessness which may find substantial evidence in the guise of both Vladimir’s and Estragon’s consciousness that there is “Nothing to be done,” and Clov’s “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly fin-

¹³¹ The Caucus-Race, the fight between Tweedledee and Tweedledum and the supposed horse riding skills of the Knight all prefigure the seeming purposelessness and meaninglessness of action in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*.

ished . . . Grain upon grain, one by one, and one by day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap." In postmodernist terms which see the fragmentariness, futility and purposelessness of life in art as metaphors for the overwhelming impossibility in critical and theoretical investigations he seems to be making a plausible point, though, not unsusceptible to criticism. It also shows Beckett's oeuvre as echoing the nonsense and apparent meaninglessness of Alice's adventures. So it can be said that Carroll stands as a precursor of the postmodern critical debate on meaning.

Space and time

Space and time are undeniably important aspects of the Carroll stories. The previous section pointed to the concept of time in the Romantic understanding of it as self-consciousness in personal growth and identity and therefore linear. Time can be seen in Carroll as a reflection of the Victorian age. This concept can be traced in terms of Alice's own personality through the two stories so that one can see them significantly as the passage of time and Alice's growth to maturity. Within this linear time framework can be interpreted its relativity. What is meant here is time seen to be fast or slow. There are marked instances when one seems to slowly engage in the passing of time with Alice and suddenly or abruptly leaps into a seemingly new and different time frame (*Alice's Adventures* 146, 148, 174, 218). *Through the Looking-Glass* indicates an advancement of Wonderland though the impression in both is that of being in her dreams and coming back to waking reality where time again can be seen as operating within itself, that is, a process whereby she undergoes changes within the context of her dream-world to come back to her real self with apparently no linearity nor change. This is the point that is of interest in Beckett, the seeming stagnation of time. But an unanswered question remains as to whether time controls man or man controls time.

Given that the issue at hand is progress, space becomes broader and extensive, since it transcends duration and implicates linear distance and intervals between points. Alice's wanderings in Wonderland connect the space-time concept from the time she falls into the rabbit-hole through the various episodes, and the time she enters the

Looking-Glass House and progresses through the chess board squares to become a queen.

The space-time theme takes a complicated and more philosophical turn in Beckett's plays. While time can be easily treated in linear and cyclical terms in Carroll, there still remains the question of whether there is real progress or change at all. The existential questionings of Beckett have to do with the question of whether there is consciousness of time at all, and the effect this has on the minds of his characters is the problem. That Vladimir and Estragon have been blathering for fifty years in the wait for Godot while doing nothing engaging that points to waiting or expecting; that "Time is zero and everything is zero," time is as usual and "All is corpsed" in *Endgame* all point towards the complexity of the matter.

In terms of linearity, time seems to be passing, even though the characters are cut off from their historical context and past lives. In Part One of *Waiting for Godot* the tree has no leaves, pointing to barrenness and nothingness, Pozzo can see and Lucky can make speech utterances. In the second part the tree has developed a few leaves, Pozzo is blind and Lucky is mute. Pozzo does not remember having met anyone, and Godot's Boy claims to see them for the first time, while he seems to have been frequenting them constantly as a bearer of Godot's massages. This subverts memory and consciousness of time. In *Endgame* Hamm expresses consciousness of the passing of time, "We change! We lose our hair! Our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals." He and his wife have traces of their past lives, but everything is disjointed since they have lost their sense of time's meaning. The overall impression is that modern life seems to have lost its consciousness of time or any value that is attached to it. So while time seems to be passing, nothing seems to change. It offers no genuine future; in fact, it engenders what one may rather call a progressive regression or a situation where the plays are systematically repeating themselves.

Space further shows how intriguing the situation is. Alice is in her dream-world while sitting in the same place. So she creates spaces within space given that all her transformations are in her dream rather than real life. Beckett's treatment of space is seen in the domain of setting which is reduced to a spot in *Waiting*, or in *Endgame*, where characters are confined to a very limited space of a

room. This actually indicates the caged nature of the world and nothingness in time. Vladimir and Estragon are confined to a point on an indeterminate road from where they cannot part, which totally subverts its metaphysical aspects of the unbounded or unlimited extension in all directions. Nagg and Nell are confined to thrash cans, which seem to contain their entire world and its value. Clov and Hamm describe the world outside their refuge as death, another hell, no sun, no darkness, no light — just grey. The space of their existence seems to have more value, however restricted, merely as zero time.

Characters and the question of identity

There are a number of characters in Carroll's stories that prefigure Beckett's treatment of characters. The parallels are seen both from the psychological and physical points of view. The Duchess and her baby, the Hatter, the Queen of Hearts, Tweedledee and Tweedledum, Humpty Dumpty and the Knight are characters that either have a physical or psychological deficiency, or both. Carroll's portrayal of these characters' physio-psychical deficiencies interestingly points to the way Beckett reduces humans to irrational pathetic figures in his plays. For example The Mad Tea-Party and its illogical and non-constructive dialogue championed by the Hatter, foreshadows a typical Beckettian atmosphere of purposelessness and meaninglessness. The Hatter lives in the conceit of a meaningful life while he lacks any sense of analytical or logical direction. Tweedledee and Tweedledum are not far from tramps and prefigure their modern counterparts Estragon and Vladimir or Clov and Hamm. Their verbal exchange only points to the difficulty of codifying possible meanings and, like Beckett's characters, they seem to have no society, no history, no occupation, no real personality or identity except their names, and are very dependent on each other, which mutual dependence only helps to generate incomprehensibility and indeterminacy.¹³²

The chess game motif

¹³² As already pointed, Tweedledee and Tweedledum can be taken as two parts of the same personality as is the case with Vladimir and Estragon or Hamm and Clov. But Tweedledum's identity is further put to question when one learns that he is merely part of the Red King's dream, and so is Alice. This only leads to arbitrariness, unpredictability and undecipherability of any clear identity.

A very interesting parallel to be drawn between Carroll and Beckett is the game of chess on which *Through the Looking-Glass* is based and which concerns Beckett's *Endgame*. In *Wonderland* we see Carroll's use of the game of cards, a motif which he changes to chess in the second story. Alice's adventures can, therefore, be marked as movements from one square to the other with the ambition of arriving at the final goal of being crowned. In her case it can be seen as her psycho-somatic progression whose end-point, probably her puberty, starts a significant phase of her life. Beckett was obviously a chess player and *Endgame* suggests that he must have mastered the game, but interpreting the motif in his work is difficult. It could represent the last stage of a chess game in which Hamm is the King, Clov a Knight, and Nagg and Nell are captured pawns. It could be the inevitable end of life, the journey from the womb to the tomb symbolised by life to death or stalemate.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper has been an attempt to work out possible parallels between Carroll and Romanticism on the one hand and Postmodernist discourse on Beckett on the other. Though not exhaustive in its treatment, it has pointed out certain interesting affiliations of Carroll to the two sides of the debate. Carroll is a Romantic, but his assimilation of this tradition is critical as his own experiences and intentions in his artistic engagement are clearly mapped out to show a significant individuating deviation. In this perspective, his revisionism points particularly to the subversion or the parodying of Romantic texts to achieve his primary goal of the aesthetics of non-sense literature. As to the prefiguring of (post)Modernism, his works tend to show certain singular aspects that were to interest Beckett in his drama, and postmodern concepts with regard to language and meaning, space and time, character and identity, and the chess game motif.

*Teke Charles Ngiewih*¹³³

¹³³ Higher Teachers' Training College (Ecole Normale Supérieure Yaounde), The University of Yaounde I (Republic of Cameroon).

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