

Victorian Nonsense Literature

Spring 2021

Course description

This is a one-semester seminar that aims to bring the concept of nonsense closer to students interested in Victorian literature. Apart from offering an introduction to the lives and works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll in general, the two best-known exponents of the genre, the course also involves the close reading of some of these authors' most well-known and representative pieces such as Lear's limericks and Carroll's Alice tales. The study of these works will be complemented by reading further pieces of nonsense by other authors from and around the same period on the one hand and getting familiar with some basic critical texts on nonsense literature on the other.

Instructor

SÁNTA Balázs, PhD student, ELTE

Timing

Wednesdays, 17:00–18:30

Scheduled topics

- Introduction: the concept of nonsense literature in the Victorian era
- Edward Lear, *A Book of Nonsense*
- Other works by Edward Lear
- Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
- Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*
- *The Hunting of the Snark* and other works by Lewis Carroll
- Contemporaries: (traces of) nonsense elsewhere (from Carolyn Wells's *A Nonsense Anthology*; excerpts from Dickens's novels and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*)
- Critical approaches: Carolyn Wells, Elizabeth Sewell, Susan Stewart, and Jean-Jacques Lecercle
- Student presentations

Requirements

There are two ways to earn a grade for this course (class attendance being the minimum requirement in both cases):

- a) **Course work (grade offered):** earn points by completing tasks as laid down in the table below. Five points can be earned altogether; the grade thus offered is equivalent to the number of points you earn (e.g, four points give you the grade 4). Attendance as the minimum requirement is worth one point. If you do not accept this grade, you can still choose plan b).
- b) **Exam:** a written exam at the end of the term. Attendance is a prerequisite for taking the exam. Besides the set texts from the primary reading, you will also have to read excerpts from the critical literature for success.

Tasks for the Course work plan [a]:

Task	Proof
Attendance (1 point; obligatory): a maximum of three (3) absences is tolerated	Attendance tracking
Reflections (up to 2 points): 1–2 minute talk on the set text(s) for each class dedicated to close reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 points for missing only 1 or 2 occasions • 1 point for missing 3 or 4 occasions • no point for missing more than 4 occasions In the event you are absent from one or more of such classes or come unprepared (have not read the set text), you can make up for it by submitting your notes of reflection on the missed occasion(s) in writing (300–500 words).	Verbal delivery in class / electronic hand-in file(s)
Home paper (up to 2 points): an academic paper of 1000–2000 words using minimum two critical sources on a topic of your own choice related to the course. Complying with formatting requirements is worth one point, logical structure is worth one point as well.	Electronic hand-in file (deadline: April 26, 9am CET)

Home paper formatting requirements: A4 size paper, 12 point Times New Roman font, 2.5 cm margins, single-spaced, body of text flush left, first line of paragraphs indented by 1.27 cm except after title. Citation: MLA style. Indicate ISBN/ISSN numbers (if applicable) on the Works Cited page.

A **critical source** (for this course) is a piece of secondary literature, available either in electronic or printed form, with an ISBN/ISSN number. Please indicate the ISBN/ISSN number on the Works Cited page. You may use further sources in addition; those do not have to comply with this requirement.

Electronic hand-in files are to be **submitted** in compressed (ZIP) folders in Neptun to the relevant task (“Feladat”) for the course. **Name** your ZIP in the following way:

Firstname_Lastname_reflections_dateofclass/taskname (e.g., John_Doe_notes_210210.zip or John_Doe_home_paper.zip).

Suggested topics for the home paper

- Introducing the excerpt from Lecercle
- Introducing the excerpt from Stewart
- Introducing the excerpt from Sewell
- Introducing Wells’s Introduction
- The life of Edward Lear
- The life of Lewis Carroll
- An analysis of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* from one aspect
- An analysis of *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* from one aspect
- A comparison of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*
- An analysis of *The Hunting of the Snark* from one aspect
- An analysis of an Edward Lear poem
- Edward Lear’s limericks
- A theoretical approach to nonsense literature (what is nonsense, what is not)

Reading list

Compulsory

Several editions of the below are available in print as well as online; no distinction is made for this course.

Works by Edward Lear:

- Limericks from *A Book of Nonsense* (1846, 1855, 1861)
- “The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World” (1871)
- “The Owl and the Pussy-Cat” (1871)
- “The Jumbles” (1871)
- Limericks from *More Nonsense, Pictures, Rhymes, Botany, Etc.* (1872)
- “The Courtship of the Yonghy-Bonghy Bò” (1877)
- “The Dong with a Luminous Nose” (1877)
- “How Pleasant to Know Mr Lear!” (1888)
- “(Some) Incidents in the Life of My Uncle Arly” (1895)

Works by Lewis Carroll:

- *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)
- *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1872)
- *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876)

Poems from **Carolyn Wells (ed.), *A Nonsense Anthology*** (1910)

Excerpts from

- Charles **Dickens**, *The Pickwick Papers* (1837); *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839); *Great Expectations* (1861)
- Oscar **Wilde**, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1899)

Excerpts from critical sources (see below)—**only for the exam** (plan b), see above)

Suggested reading

Primary:

- Lear, Edward. *The Complete Nonsense and Other Verse*. Ed. Vivien Noakes. London: Penguin, 2001.
- Any of a complete (illustrated) edition of the works of Lewis Carroll.

Critical:

- Lecerclé, Jean-Jacques. *Philosophy of Nonsense. The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Sewell, Elizabeth. *The Field of Nonsense*. 1952. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2015.
- Stewart, Susan. *Nonsense. Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Wells, Carolyn. Introduction to *A Nonsense Anthology*. 1910. *Project Gutenberg*, November 2005, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9380/pg9380-images.html>. Accessed 30 November 2020.