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Literary Nonsense of “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”

Acts, motivations, and reactions might often have the leitmotif of absolute absurdity. People could have a natural desire of adhering to logical principles, but some time or for the most part, they do not demonstrate logical explanations. Such a feature of humankind’s existence and function is hyperbolized and presented within literary works, which include stories, novels, poems, and nursery rhymes. Deliberate ignorance of logic, which at the same time is based on logical knowledge, generates a separate literary genre defined as “literary nonsense.” Works performed in this genre can amaze the reader—who thinks within the framework of the usual cause-effect linear relations. They also can present a unique niche of understanding of habitual life situations and the psychology of existence under the guise of works aimed at children. The most prominent example of literary nonsense is the novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* written by Lewis Carroll, and it will be used as a source to analyze and comprehend the genre.

Regardless of the second word in the definition, “literary nonsense” is not absurd prose or poetry; any work should have a grounded explanation. According to Michael Heyman (para. 6), the classification of literary nonsense should begin with an understanding that a work has a “balance between “sense” and “non-sense.” “Good” nonsense implies that a reader is invited to make his or her own interpretation within the balance which is observed owing to formal structure and grammar rules. Similarly to the structure of any prose, *Alice’s Adventures in*

Wonderland has a chronological sequence of events with a beginning, the development of the events, and the denouement. Alice's adventures begin with her being tired of her sister, seeing the White Rabbit, and following him in a rush (Carroll 7-8). The development of the events includes her attempts to return to her sister while meeting new characters and trying to help them if she has such an opportunity. The denouement is the final episode in which Alice learns that her adventure has been her "curious dream" (Carroll 107). In this way, the reader has a clear understanding of the essence of all events: they are a dream, and dreams might be deprived of logic and sense.

The prominent feature of literary nonsense is the use of language. According to Anna Barton, authors in this genre can use language as a material thing, and they can introduce puns as a means of demonstrating the ease with which language may be used (Heyman para. 13). Moreover, a pun is a convenient tool to present a humorous motif within a story because of the peculiarities of the English language, including consonance and similar spellings of words that have different meanings. The conversation held between Alice and the Duchess will be used as an example:

"You see the earth takes twenty-four hours to turn round on its axis -"

"Talking of axes," said the Duchess, "chop off her head!" (Carroll 52).

The little girl Alice is proud to demonstrate her knowledge on the subject difficult for little girls; she uses the word "axis," which is an imaginary but fixed line. The Duchess either mishears or misunderstands the word and mentions the word that is familiar to her, which is an "ax" in the plural. Apart from the ironically humorous subtext, one can consider the pun as a means of demonstrating the Duchess' unhealthy obsession with axes and chopping off someone's head.

Another example that should be mentioned is the pun based on the consonance of a word with the rapid pronunciation of two other words:

“The master was an old Turtle - we used to call him Tortoise -”

“Why did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn’t one?” Alice asked.

“We called him Tortoise because he taught us,” said the Mock Turtle angrily. “Really you are very dull!” (Carroll 81).

Non-native speakers might find it difficult to understand the reasoning behind Mock Turtle’s words, but it is indeed simple and even logical. One of the transcriptions for “tortoise” is 'tɔ:təʊs/; at this point, one should consider the transcription for “taught + us:” /tɔ:t + əs/. In this way, the reader has yet another logical explanation for the illogical thing presented through the pages of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

It might seem that literary nonsense does not strictly adhere to logic. The mentioned assumption is not true: authors play with rules of logic, but they do not deny it, which is another element of balance aimed at helping the reader understand the work of this genre (Heyman para. 2). Lewis Carroll is meticulous in the construction of puns and wordplay; he makes them meaningless and completely logical simultaneously. As an example, it is worth referring to the dialogue between the White Rabbit and the King of Heart during the trial over the Knave:

“Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?” he asked.

“Begin at the beginning,” the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop” (Carroll 103).

At the surface, the dialogue sounds absurd: the beginning and the end are abstract things, and they have no clear boundaries. Nonetheless, the second analysis of the chosen fragment reveals logical simplicity: everything will be the beginning if a person starts talking, and when the words

end, it will be the marking point to stop.

One can consider *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as collections of different puns and wordplay which present multifaceted nonsense at the surface and meaning behind the lines. At the same time, Carroll does not limit himself to nonsense in structuring the essence of what he wants to say; the author literally uses language as a thing and gives material form to words.

An important note that should be made here is that the conversation also contains a pun. Alice recalls that the Mouse promised to tell a story, and later Carroll introduces one of the puns based on the vocal consonance of words "tale" and "tail." In this way, the Mouse's tale is verbally constructed in such a way to resemble the material form of a real tail. As a matter of fact, this approach does not have any sense except for emphasizing the senselessness.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland presents meaninglessness based on rules of logic; thus, it has become a fine example of literary nonsense. In addition, one can even consider that Lewis Carroll established strict principles of the genre for the following generations. Within the book, it is possible to distinguish the balance between the "sense" and "non-sense" created with the help of formal rules related to prose's structure. There is a hint at the beginning of the story leading to the logical outcome in the denouement: all the nonsense was a dream. The structure is the hollow frame, and the language becomes a thing that fills it. Lewis Carroll carefully coined every pun and wordplay, and the analysis of each of them could reveal the simple and indestructible rules of logic. It is also the necessary balance to provide the reader with a quality book written as literary nonsense, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is worthy of being the first work to read in this genre.

Works Cited

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