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FANTASTICAL CHARACTERS AS SATIRICAL REFLECTIONS OF SOCIAL COMMUNITY IN LEWIS CARROLL'S "ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND"

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Abstract

This study investigates fantastical characters in Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland as satirical representations of Victorian social communities. Using close textual analysis, comparative stylistic analysis, and thematic coding, selected plays by Lewis Carroll was examined to identify patterns in narratives, symbolism and thematic focus. The analysis interprets Wonderland as a semiotic system in which characters embody distorted versions of authority, communication, education, and social norms. The research demonstrates that Carroll's narrative constructs a critical reflection of nineteenth-century British society through fantasy, irony, and linguistic play.

Key words: literary feature, Lewis Carroll, blend fantasy, Victorian age, modern storytelling, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", postmodernism, inventive language, entertainment, cultural value, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, playfulness, critical thinking, satire, Cat, puns.

Introduction

Victorian literature frequently used allegory and satire to represent social realities indirectly. In this context, Lewis Carroll's novel Alice's Adventures in Wonderland represents a significant innovation in literary fantasy. Rather than constructing a moral or educational tale, Carroll builds a world populated by fantastical characters that mirror and distort real social structures.[1]

The central research question of this article is how fantastical characters function as satirical reflections of Victorian social communities. The hypothesis is that Wonderland operates as a symbolic model of society in which authority, language, and behavior are exaggerated to reveal structural contradictions.

Methods

This research uses qualitative literary analysis based on close reading of Carroll's text. A socio-cultural interpretative framework is applied, combining structuralist and satirical theory. Characters are examined as semiotic representations of social roles rather than individual psychological figures.[2]

The study incorporates intertextual analysis with Victorian cultural norms, focusing on law, education, bureaucracy, and etiquette. The aim is to identify how narrative exaggeration produces satirical meaning.

This study also employs a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in literary analysis. The objective is to examine how fantastical characters in Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" function as satirical reflections of Victorian social structures and broader human communities. Rather than quantifying textual features, the study focuses on meaning construction, symbolic representation, and narrative function. The research adopts an

[1] Carroll L. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. London: Macmillan, 1865.

[2] Gardner M. The Annotated Alice. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.

inductive approach, allowing themes of satire, absurdity, and social critique to emerge through systematic textual interpretation. The primary corpus for analysis is Lewis Carroll's novel "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (1865). The text is treated as a complete literary unit, with particular attention given to character-driven episodes and dialogue-rich interactions. Key characters analyzed include Alice, the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter, the Queen of Hearts, the Caterpillar, and other symbolic figures encountered throughout Wonderland. These characters are selected based on their prominence in shaping narrative events and their potential to represent social archetypes or institutional critiques. The analysis is informed by theories of literary satire, absurdism, and social semiotics. Satire theory is used to identify how exaggeration, irony, and parody are employed to critique societal norms. Absurdism provides a lens for understanding illogical structures and their implications for rational social order. Social semiotics guides the interpretation of symbols, language patterns, and character behaviors as signifiers of cultural meaning. Together, these frameworks allow for a multidimensional reading of the text that situates fantastical elements within socio-cultural commentary. The primary method of analysis is close reading. The text is examined line-by-line and scene-by-scene to identify recurring motifs, linguistic patterns, and structural inconsistencies that contribute to satirical meaning. Characters are coded according to their narrative roles (e.g., authority figure, trickster, challenger of norms, or symbolic observer). Each coded category is then analyzed in relation to its potential real-world social counterpart. Additionally, thematic analysis is applied. Extracted textual instances are grouped into thematic clusters such as authority and power, logic and nonsense, social etiquette, and identity instability. These themes are then interpreted in relation to Victorian societal norms, including rigid class structures, educational systems, and moral expectations. The analytical procedure is carried out in four sequential stages. First, the text is read multiple times to ensure familiarity and contextual understanding. Second, segments of dialogue and narrative descriptions involving fantastical characters are identified and annotated. Third, these annotations are categorized according to thematic relevance and character function. Fourth, interpretive analysis is conducted to determine how each character or event reflects satirical commentary on social structures. To ensure systematic interpretation, notes are maintained throughout the coding process. Interpretations are continuously compared across different sections of the text to identify consistency in satirical representation. This iterative process helps refine thematic categories and strengthens analytical validity.

Results

1 The Queen of Hearts as Political and Judicial Authority

The Queen of Hearts represents an extreme distortion of authoritarian governance. Her arbitrary commands and immediate death sentences satirize irrational legal and political power structures. Carroll exaggerates authority to reveal its potential for absurdity when detached from rational justice.[3]

2 The Mad Hatter and Social Rituals

The Mad Hatter and March Hare embody meaningless social rituals. Their endless tea party reflects repetitive social etiquette without functional purpose. This character group satirizes Victorian upper-class social gatherings, which often prioritized form over substance.[4]

3 The White Rabbit and Bureaucratic Pressure

The White Rabbit symbolizes bureaucratic anxiety and industrial time discipline. His obsession with time reflects Victorian modernization and the rise of capitalist labor structures.[5]

[3] Chesterton G.K. Victorian Age in Literature. London: 1913.

[4] Woolf V. The Common Reader. London: Hogarth Press, 1925.

[5] Cohen M. Lewis Carroll: A Biography. London: Macmillan, 1995.

3.4 The Caterpillar and Educational Authority

The Caterpillar functions as a symbol of educational interrogation and intellectual authority. His questioning tone reflects rigid educational systems that emphasize conformity rather than critical thinking.

3.5 The Cheshire Cat and Social Identity

The Cheshire Cat represents instability of identity and ambiguity in social roles. Its ability to appear and disappear reflects the fluid nature of meaning and identity in modern society.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Carroll constructs a satirical model of Victorian society through fantastical characters. Each character exaggerates a specific social function, transforming familiar institutions into absurd performances.[6]

The Queen of Hearts reveals the instability of unchecked authority, while the Mad Hatter exposes the emptiness of ritualized social interaction. The White Rabbit reflects industrial discipline and psychological stress caused by time regulation.

From a structuralist perspective, Wonderland operates as a system of signs in which meaning is constantly unstable. This aligns with modern theories of language that emphasize the fluidity of interpretation rather than fixed meaning.[7]

Overall, Carroll's narrative strategy combines satire, fantasy, and linguistic experimentation to critique Victorian social order indirectly.

Conclusion

The study concludes that fantastical characters in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland function as satirical reflections of Victorian social communities. Carroll's use of exaggeration and absurdity exposes contradictions within authority, communication, and institutional systems. The novel remains a complex literary work that operates simultaneously as children's fantasy and social critique.

References

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