

# CALL IT WHAT YOU WANT:

THE 'DEATH OF THE AUTHOR', INTENTIONALITY AND NARRATIVE CONTROL

## JABBERWOCKY, LEWIS CARROLL

What is it about? → no correct/wrong answers (since it doesn't seem to make much sense)

- Warning about mythical monsters
- Prophecy? It happened in the past and will happen again
  - Past repeating itself
    - First and last stanza are the same
- Killing, decapitation → =D
- Use of sounds to make meaning instead of using words
- Form: ancient heroic text (like Beowulf) → sort of epic
- Short fairytale telling a whole story but in poetic way
  - Defeating the monster; happy ending
- Language:
  - Non-conventional words
    - 'brillig': chilly, cold, BBBRRR
      - Sensation/mood OR time period/temporal
    - 'slithy': slimy, slippery
      - Adjective, describing something
    - 'toves': stove, shoes/toes, landscape (hills?, rocks?)
    - 'gyre' 'gimble': sounds a bush makes, movement
    - 'wabe': wind, a general area

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, LEWIS CARROLL

Are you satisfied with Humpty Dumpty's explanations? → yes/no

- He's focused on making the words themselves make sense; poem itself has no actual meaning
- Seems incomplete, 'something like...' → "something like badgers—they're something like lizards—and they're something like corkscrews" → no actual definition of what it is
- Presents himself as authority as if he's all knowing about the poem
  - Except he didn't write it

## PREFACE TO 'THE HUNTING OF THE SNARK', LEWIS CARROLL

- He acts like it's not his poem; he should know what it means (but it doesn't mean anything)
- "seems to me the right explanation for all" → as if he wasn't the author and that he doesn't know what it actually means
  - Makes it sound as if there is only 1 right explanation; except we still don't know what this 1 explanation is
- Carroll as Humpty Dumpty 2.0 → a specific explanation (pronunciation) evading the actual topic of meaning

- Whose interpretation is more convincing – Humpty-Dumpty's, or Carroll's?

- Author's explanation is least convincing
- Does Carroll's explanation invalidate our own interpretation(s)?
  - Each interpretation is only part of the whole meaning
  - Authority over how it's pronounced takes away some of your own interpretation
- 'Given that Dodgson devotes some time to lampooning textual scholars in the person of Humpty-Dumpty and his interpretation of 'Jabberwocky' [...] it is (perhaps) surprising that so much scholarly ink has been spilt on interpreting genuine nonsense.' (Peter Hunt)
  - Text thrives on wordplay
- How does it make you, as the reader, feel, when an author explains how to read his or her text? Can you think of any examples where this has happened?
  - Guide can be very helpful (e.g. rare names in fantasy books)
    - Knowing the correct pronunciation can be helpful
  - Too much information can ruin the reading
    - E.g. J.K. Rowling explaining how wizards' poop (can ruin the reading experience)
  - Author giving interpretation sometime feels restricting for readers
    - Feeling like you have to feel the same way
    - However, there are instances where authors are open to many interpretations
  - Depends on when the explanation comes
    - At the end: making you feel like you have wrong interpretation

## SONGS

Dear Reader, Call it What You Want, This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things

- The more background you know, the more restricting your own interpretation is
  - Knowing her story makes it harder to relate to her songs from personal experiences

3 songs with 3 different 'vibes' → wanting to connect with her audience, each song has a different attitude

- She lets the audience take control of their lives
- Balancing act of taking control and giving control

Progression in the amount of control that is taken and given

- What is their tone
- What is the relationship between speaker and audience
- What do they say about control
- What do they say about interpretation

Dear reader:

- Resilience / solitaire
- Unreliable narrator
  - She's falling apart

She's a "guiding light" for her listeners, but she's unreliable as she's falling apart

## ARTICLES

Affinity magazine:

- Swift fans have the strong desire to figure out meaning:

**Need to find out what the author intended/ what or who it is about**

- Song can function as a way to relate to own life
- Can also try to figure out who Swift talked about

#### THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY

Fallacy = sort of trap you might fall into (by making false assumptions)

Intention = design or plan

How is the reader to find out what the poet tried to do

- Looking at biography/backstory
- Letters/messages/blogs/social media
- Looking at time period at was written (any major events) → historical context
- If alive: ASK
- Interviews
- Other literary work → whole oeuvre/body of work
- Reviews by other scholars
- Allusions: looking at texts that have been referenced
- Peer review
- Author's note's/preface → paratext
  - Notes can be interpreted in multiple ways
  - They too are a construct and we would have to think about their intention
- Cipher character: character being the author (e.g. Brontë)

'The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art'. Do you agree?

- Yes/no
  - Can be interesting to look at the intention of the author
  - You can't take the whole intention of the author away
  - Subjectivity of value: every author tries to publish something that is good (doesn't always succeed)
  - Audience is really important, you have to involve the reader
    - Novel can't be called great if no one has read it (can't be great without having an audience – has to be known before it can be called good/bad)
  - Implied reader: everything is written with a particular person/group in mind

#### THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

- Author is a modern character
  - Invented by capitalism and individuality

Quest: unlock the meaning

- Makes it the goal for there to be a hidden meaning

- Radical possibility that we can decide what a text means; doesn't matter what author meant
  - Reader has important role

#### GOOGLE DOCUMENT

Anxiety of influence → always bringing ideas/citations into your own work

- Nothing is fully original

Other questions to think about:

- Does Taylor Swift's music and fashioning of her own image suggest that the author is 'dead'?
- As readers, how much weight do you give to the author's intention when reading a text?
- Can one ever have control over one's own narrative?
- How might authors attempt to exert control over their narratives (historically and now)?