

INTRODUCTION

(a) “Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll
(from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872)

Questions:

Alice is puzzled by this text but is sure that she understands something about it—“Somebody killed something,” she says to herself, “That’s for sure.” Why is the text both intelligible and unintelligible at the same time? Is a story communicated? Why is the story enclosed by a stanza that discusses what we may call the landscape of the action? Would the story be damaged by excluding the last stanza? Suppose that all the words in the poem were reputable English words rather than nonsense syllables, would the story be enhanced or diminished?

(b.) “The Steadfast Tin Soldier” by Hans Christian Andersen

Questions for discussion:

Attempts at analysing a story normally depends upon identifying a central agency as a source of action. As Alice nearly said, “Someone or something does something to someone or something”. But here the central figure is not a source of action but a source of reception—things are done to this figure. The gimmick, of course, is that passivity itself is treated as an activity. Is the device just a clever joke played upon our narrative expectations? If so, how does it sustain our interest, since the joke is evident almost from the start? The dancer, too, is passive, but her immobility is differently interpreted. How does the difference fall in with our expectations about differences in gender? In many ways, the story follows a familiar pattern about manly virtue and the winning of an apparently unobtainable love—a common theme in fairy-tales, where low types—tailors and farmers and fishermen—are always winning the love of princesses. Does the story mock the fairytale ideal or ratify it? How does the passivity of the two main agents modify the application of our *basic schematism* to this case?