



COMPARATIVE LITERATURE GRADUATE THESES & DISSERTATIONS

The Play of Nonsense in Modernist Creation

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Boulder

Date of Award

Spring 1-1-2013

Document Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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Abstract

This study examines the play of nonsense elements and devices in the works of four particular modernist authors. The term nonsense here refers not to unintelligible gibberish but to the genre of literary nonsense popularized in the nineteenth century by Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, whose influence on the modernist movement and international avant-garde has heretofore received scant notice. In selected works of James Joyce, Vicente Huidobro, Macedonio Fernández, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the study details how nonsense elements coincide with the use of play as a mode of creation. In this view, play, though lighthearted and childlike in aspect, also is revolutionary, subversive, and a fundamental means of innovation. Literary play generally involves departing from established conventions and systems of representation. By employing nonsense devices and incorporating nonsense elements in their art, modernist authors frequently defer, deny, withhold and/or ambiguate sense. In doing so, they play with and often overturn readers' expectations and sense-making strategies and break with tradition. Inasmuch as it produces rupture, play with nonsense thus enacts a quintessential modernist effect. No wonder, then, that Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, arguably the quintessential modernist text, has also been called "our greatest monument to literary Nonsense" (Rieke 23). From the *Wake*, the study moves to consider three writers whose work has rarely been mentioned in the context of literary nonsense. Huidobro's poetry bears a striking likeness to Joyce's text in that the creative play of both authors involves the radical combination of disparate elements. In the case of Macedonio's *Museum of Eterna's Novel*, what combines are multifold levels of fiction, resulting in a decentered structure—like the *Wake's*—that is conducive to play. The final chapter of the study reveals how Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby* may best be seen in the ludic light of literary nonsense. Like the *Wake*, *Gatsby* is an intricately patterned text, subtly edging readers to reconsider their methods of interpretation. Diverse and multifaceted, the modernist play of nonsense explores what is unfamiliar, fantastic, disorienting, and inexplicable in our world, innovating new ways of writing and inviting us to re-think ways of making meaning.

Comments

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Recommended Citation

Fobes, Alexander Starkweather, "The Play of Nonsense in Modernist Creation" (2013).

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How to use nonsense in a sentence. Example sentences with the word nonsense. nonsense example sentences. She couldn't help wondering if Evelyn really understood that going to his home country would mean she'd hear this kind of nonsense all the time. 91. 70. If I hear this nonsense again, I'll send you outside the walls to deal with this mess personally. 60. 41. The older men, who thought it undignified to amuse themselves with such nonsense , continued to lie at the opposite side of the fire, but one would occasionally raise himself on an elbow and glance at Morel with a smile.