

# Nonsense!

By Samantha Thomas

What is our attraction to the nonsensical? We seem to be drawn to nonsense by some magnetic power. Oh, how we love Lewis Carroll for giving us:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

**Jabberwocky, from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872**

Why do so many old folksongs have whimsical choruses of “fiddle-ee-diddle-eye-doe” and “hey-ninnie-ninnie?” And why do we still sing them?

Music and poetry go together naturally, as they both speak the language of lunacy. It is a truly natural language, much like the one we probably used in the Garden of Eden. It is the language of the birds. We don't require them to mean something. Many of our leading philosophers spend their days analyzing the words of poems, looking for meaning in them. When they “uncover” the meaning, does it really mean anything? Perhaps not.

Maybe we like nonsense for reminding us of childhood, when the World was all a game. Of course, we grow up. Little by little, we come to our senses (fiendish and inept liars that they are), and we realize that life is serious and things should make sense. You've got to survive in this World! So, craving useful and marketable information, people scurry about madly, trying to secure their survival. We pursue the understanding of knowledge as a quarry, as we have a sense that the more we understand, the better our chance of survival will be. At the very least we'll be “normal,” and won't look odd. Life seems a lot like a formal dinner party, and we don't want to risk showing up dressed as a flamingo, because we were confused and thought it was a costume party. We want to be accepted and approved.

After high school, we go to college to look for *real* knowledge and understanding. We get married, and that just confirms that life is about survival. Then we have children, and we laugh at their nonsense, when we have a moment. We go to graduate college for more knowledge. We are out in the World using and getting and buying and selling and making and breaking and slicing and dicing our knowledge and understanding. We're busy! Time is flying by, and we don't want to get behind. There surely isn't enough time to consider any nonsense about philosophy or existence. Then it's time to retire, and younger people shake your hand and wish you all the best. You've arrived! You look back on your life and see that you've missed a lot. Where did the time go? You're left with a sense of confusion, sincerely wondering what it all meant, if it meant anything at all.

This uneasiness is much like Alice's response to reading Jabberwocky:

“It seems very pretty,” she said when she had finished it, “but it's rather hard to understand!” (You see she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all.) “Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas — only I don't exactly know what they are!” (ibid.)

Maybe the meaning of life is no meaning, and the sense of it is nonsense. All this time that you thought life was about surviving and making it through, it was really just a musical or poetic thing. You were supposed to dance or sing, while the music was playing.