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A Semiotic Overview of the Masonic References in the 1951 Cartoon Alice in Wonderland.

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Declaration

I, KARI Souad, do hereby declare that this submitted work is my original work and has not previously been submitted for any institution or university for a degree. I also take full responsibility for any future possible issues related to the originality of this work. I equally declare that a list of references is provided forward indicating all the sources of the cited and quoted information. This work was certified and completed at Mohammed KHEIDER University of Biskra.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother. A woman of exception that dedicated her entire life for her daughters.

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Abstract

The Disney cartoon *Alice in Wonderland* belongs to the fictional, absurd, nonsense literature. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to understand the plot evolution due to its incoherence. A semiotic approach of analysis is the best tool to see and understand the cartoon. This method gives a different and unique interpretation of the film. Thus, it plays the role of lenses. The intended aim is understanding the absurdity of the cartoon. In other words, giving a logical coherent meaning to the series of events and actions that are not related in any ways throughout the film. Freemasonry is the most appropriate translation for comprehending the film. The constant use of symbols during masonry rituals will serve as the foundation for the film's concrete translation. Uncovering the hidden symbols and messages in the cartoon through the point of view of Masonic symbolism gives a new tool to see, approach and analyse of literature and films.

Keywords: Semiotic approach, Freemasonry, Disney *Alice in Wonderland* 1951, Symbolism.

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General Introduction

If someone watches Disney classics as an adult, it is certain that the person's vision, understanding and appreciations will be different. As kids, we tended to only comprehend the story as it is without noticing the "between the lines" messages that each art work carries. *Alice in Wonderland* is undoubtedly one of the most strange and absurd Disney cartoons. While watching in, the viewer never stops wondering about what is going on in the cartoon. With the wrong tool; or none at all, it is impossible to understand it and appreciate it properly. Therefore, it is vital, as researches in the field of literature, to give a possible meaning to it. The approach that suits perfectly this case is semiotics. Being the concerned with symbols and hidden meaning, semiotics gives researchers a large range of possible meanings. Freemasonry, the largest secret society in the world, is the key to understand and pick out the symbolism in the cartoon. It represents the answer "Because" to the viewer's question.

Even though Freemasonry has a sort of negative connotation in the common culture, while, in fact, Freemasonry has a bright spiritual aspect. These points will be tackled during the development of the thesis. On the same path, knowing the history of the Disney adaptation from its origins to the plot will constitute a fundamental step in comprehending the core of the thesis. Understanding what each variable consists of (i.e. Freemasonry and *Alice in Wonderland*), acknowledging how semiotics as an approach works will pave the path to see how the cartoon is an invitation to a spiritual initiation according to the masonic rites. Linking the two topics can be hard to grasp at first; however, by the end of the thesis the Disney cartoon *Alice in Wonderland* would give both academics and non-academics a newly fresh perception and view on the absurd genre of literature.

According to Jay Kenny, when most people think of Freemasonry, they probably conjure up one or more paradoxical images. To them, freemasonry is either a harmless group

of elderly men dressed in strange costumes performing strange rituals or 1) a shadowy cabal of elite power brokers at society's highest levels. 2) a group of businessmen and civic do-gooders who are liberal, patriotic, and religious. 3) a clandestine network of occultists, pagans, and New Agers dedicated to the establishment of a "New World Order." Or 4) a centuries-old practice of passing down ancient wisdom and esoteric teachings. On the contrary, William Cooper: conspiracy theorist, describes the Freemasonry as being among the vilest and absolutely awful organizations on the planet. Jay Kenny explains in his book *Unlocking the Truth About the Symbols, the Secret Rites, and the History of Freemasonry* that Freemasonry, according to its own literature, its self-description is innocuous enough. Masonry is "one of the world's oldest secular fraternal societies...a men's organization concerned with moral and spiritual values. Its members are taught its precepts through a series of ritual dramas that follow ancient forms and use the customs and tools of stonemasons as allegorical guides. Despite the divergent perception concerning Freemasonry the importance and relevance of symbols and legends in their rites of initiation cannot be ignored. Those symbols will be tackled to acknowledge the spiritual meaning and the legends behind each and every symbol/rite.

The Disney adaptation *Alice in Wonderland*, just like Freemasonry itself, is a unique story with a rather odd plot and characters that are even more curious. Though their interactions with Alice appear to be completely random with no explicit meaning, they actually have a specific meaning that correlate with the plot. The first aim of this thesis is to explain the link between *Alice in Wonderland* and Masonry. In other words, to analyse the cartoon and its logical correspondence symbolically and chronologically for an initiation of a profane Mason.

If *Alice in Wonderland* is an ambiguous word, semiotics is like the appropriate dictionary to find its explanation and freemasonry would be the meaning looked for.

This thesis will look at the issue of the Masonic use of symbols in cartoons like *Alice in Wonderland* with a semiotic approach. Then, try to provide answers to the following question:

- How are Freemasonic symbols and signs incorporated withing the 1951 Disney adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*?

The aims of this thesis consist of providing an overview of Freemasonry and its basic symbols. Offering an overview of semiotics as the approach chosen for the analysis of the symbols in the cartoon and examining the cartoon's scenes in order to highlight the often invisible Freemasonic symbols. In the belief of showing a new semiotic analysis data that is Freemasonry. The first chapter will deal with both Freemasonry as a secret society, its origins and rites, and the tale of *Alice in Wonderland* from its book to the Disney adaptation. The second one will tackle semiotics as an approach of analysis in literature. Finally, the last chapter will highlight scenes and events from the cartoon and their meaning in the Masonic symbols.

Chapter One: Freemasonry and the Disney Cartoon

Introduction

Background information is defined, in the USC library website, as identifying and describing the history and nature of a well-defined research variable(s) with reference to the existing literature. Consequently, it is a critical component in understanding documents. This one element can often make or break the reading comprehension accuracy. To fully comprehend this document, it is a necessity to acknowledge the two parts of this chapter each one aside. When it comes to Freemasonry, it is important to determine the frame work of information needed (i.e. their rites and spiritual guidance). Topics like “Freemasons’ domination on the world” are completely irrelevant and will not be presented under any kind of aspect. Moreover, a proper comprehension of Freemasonry and its history is needed. As for the Disney cartoon *Alice in Wonderland*, an overview from the origin of the story, how it ends up being adapted into a cartoon by Walt Disney Pictures to the struggles of the scripts. The two variables (i.e. Freemasonry and the cartoon) addressed in this section of the document serve as a foundation for the analysis that will be presented in the third chapter.

1. The Freemasonry Fraternity

Since the eldest times and up until now mankind have always tried to go beyond limitations. Prayers, religion, spirituality, esoterism, science, holly writings, meditation... etc are all different ways that serve one purpose: explaining, understanding and evolving. Religious men and women talk about God, only one that created and controls everything that is known and unknown. Atheists and scientists talk about energies, how the universe is inter-connected and everything is linked to one another. Others believe in a link relating both beliefs.

In the Freemasoninformation website, it is briefly explained that Freemasonry is a post-collegiate fraternity devoted solely to the spiritual growth of the initiate, how they associate to the Divine, and their contribution to the world. This message is communicated through a succession of progressive degrees that lead the candidate to a deeper level of understanding and membership. Finally, the raised Master Mason is given allegorical tools to continue working on and developing their Masonic intuition. (Freemasoninformation.com)

The freemason.org website explains Freemasonry (or Masonry, for short) as one of the world's most historic membership organizations, a 300-year-old worldwide fraternity of like-minded people committed to bettering themselves and their communities. Masonry encompasses a series of moral teachings based on allegory and the symbolism of ancient stonemasonry. But they are so much more than their history. They are a way to find friendship, purpose, and connection. It is fundamentally about: (freemason.org)

- **True friendship:** Freemasonry is where many members meet their best friends. That's because Masonry provides a unique combination of shared traditions, shared purpose, and a shared commitment to fostering lifelong relationships.

- **Personal development:** The ancient Freemasons were primarily concerned with the construction of structures. Today's Masons are concerned with character development. We believe in strong values and strive to live them out through our actions, relationships, and service to others.

- **Community service:** Masons feel obligated to help those around them. Masons contribute in a variety of ways, from local charity drives to international organizations.

1.1. Origins of The Fraternity

The Britannica encyclopaedia retraces Freemasonry as the teachings and practices of the fraternal (men-only) order of Free and Accepted Masons, the world's biggest secret

society—an oath-bound society solely dedicated to brotherhood, moral discipline, and mutual support that hides at least some of its rituals, customs, or activities from the general public (secret societies do not necessarily conceal their membership or existence). Freemasonry has remained most popular in the British Isles and other countries that were once part of the British Empire. Estimations of Freemasonry membership in the early twenty-first century ranged from about two million to more than six million. Freemasonry progressed from the Middle Ages guilds of stonemasons and cathedral builders. As cathedral construction declined, some lodges of operative (working) masons began to accept honorary members to supplement their declining membership. From some of these lodges arose modern symbolic or speculative Freemasonry, which adopted the rites and trappings of ancient religious orders and chivalric brotherhoods, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. The first Grand Lodge, an association of lodges, was established in England in 1717.

On the same way, the History website explains that Freemasonry began as a guild of skilled builders during the Middle Ages in Europe. With the decline of cathedral construction, the society's focus shifted. Today, "Freemasons are a social and philanthropic organization meant to make its members lead more virtuous and socially oriented lives," says Margaret Jacob, history professor at the University of California, Los Angeles and author of *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. Based on the book, the organization "still conveys [the era's] core values, religious tolerance, thirst for knowledge [and] sociability," according to Cécile Révauger, a freemason, historian of Freemasonry, and professor at the University of Bordeaux. However, it is not a secret society in the traditional sense, it does have secret passwords and rituals that date back to the medieval guild, according to Margaret Jacob: "In the original guild, there were three stages: Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Masons who oversaw everyone working on a site." These degrees are now more philosophical."

Delclos and Caradeau trace the speculative origin of Freemasonry, in their book *La Franc-maçonnerie: Des Origines À Nos Jours*, to the creation of the world. In other words, it went back to the origin of Adam and Eve. They argue their remarks by the idea that Adam; having been created in the image of God (The Architect of the Universe) would, therefore, be the first mason initiated by God.

In the same way as Delclos and Cardeau, Charles Bernardin et al, trace the origins of Freemasonry in his book *Histoire de la Maçonnerie*, Adam explaining the existence of the oldest lodge on earth in which Adam was the Venerable Master.

During the late 1710s, modern freemasonry emerged as a specialized form of voluntary and self-organized sociability within the associational world of urban London, explains Andrea Önnersfors. He adds that modern freemasonry evolved its spiritual message, rituals, and organizational forms to fit the new age of Enlightenment and scientific culture, building on the previous traditions of medieval stonemasons. Despite repeated prohibitions and a steady stream of printed so-called exposures and apologies, freemasonry spread successfully to the continent and colonies from Britain during the 1720s and 1730s.

All its origins come together for one and the same goal, proven that masonry is ancient and, therefore, the credibility of a single force. This force being that of spirituality, fraternity and union for a common goal.

2. *Alice in Wonderland*:

Alice in Wonderland is one of the most famous children's books ever, adapted into cartoon and films many times; it also has a darkly twisted adult tale. The story of Alice following a rabbit down a hole and coming to live inside her dream. It tells her adventures in

this strange world, which includes meeting the Hatter as well as encountering all manner of bizarre creatures.

One of the most well-known works of Victorian literature, its narrative, structure, characters, and imagery have had a significant impact on popular culture and literature, particularly in the fantasy genre. The book has been translated into 174 languages and has never been out of print. Its legacy includes film, cartoons, radio, art, ballet, opera, musicals, theme parks, board games, and video games.

2.1. Genesis of the Story

On July 4, 1862, Lewis Carroll and Reverend Robinson Duckworth row up the Isis River in a boat with three young girls which inspires him to write *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Lorina Charlotte Liddell (thirteen years old), Alice Pleasance Liddell (ten years old), and Edith Mary Liddell (eight years old) are the daughters of scholar Henry Liddell. (Britannica)

The journey begins in Oxford at Folly Bridge and ends 5 miles (8 km) later in Godstow, Oxfordshire. During the trip, Carroll narrates a number of stories, each one more bizarre than the previous. Alice Liddell, then, asks Carroll to write it down because, unlike other stories he had told her, she wishes to keep this one. More than two years later, she received the manuscript. Carroll writes down a first manuscript of 18000 words that he labels "*Alice's Adventures Under Ground*." Months later, he decides to add couple scenes to his story which ends up with 35000 words. Three years after telling the story to the three little girls, the book is published with the title "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (Figure 1). (Britannica)

2.2. The Walt Disney Adaptation

In 1920, Walt Disney releases *'The Alice Comedies,'* his first successful short film. It is about a real girl named Alice who lives in a fictitious world. He plans to make a film based on Lewis Carroll's story since.

In 1931, Walt Disney purchases the rights to the Tenniel illustrations. He considers making a live-action/animation version of the story with Mary Pickford as Alice. Some color screen tests of her are made in 1933. Due to Paramount's 1933 live-action adaptation, Disney put the project on hold. (d23)

Nonetheless, Disney is not completely put off and later picks up the film. In 1938, he certifies the title with the Motion Picture Association of America and hires storyboard artist Al Perkins and art director David S. Hall to create a plot and illustrations for an all-animated screenplay. The tale is completed in 1939, but Walt Disney feels that Hall's designs are too similar to Tenniel's drawings, making them hard to animate. He also thinks that Perkins' script is too grotesque and dark generally speaking. The project is again postponed due to the amount of work required for the film and World War II.

Disney does not begin seriously producing the film until June 1947. Aldous Huxley, a British author, is tasked with rewriting the script. Once more, Disney is dissatisfied, believing that Huxley's version was a too textual adaptation of Carroll's book. He, however, is fond of background artist Mary Blair's designs because they are not as sketchy as Tenniel's drawings and use bright colors. The script is then rewritten to emphasize comedy, music, and Carroll's whimsical side (Figure 2). (Disney wiki)

It gains popularity in the 1970s due to the "drug" culture fandom at the time, it is released in 1974, and then again in 1981. By the 1980s, the initial consensus is proved to be outdated. One of the biggest cult classics in the animation medium, the film gains critical

praise and becomes one of the most popular Disney films of all time, as well as one of the most commercially successful Disney films (ironically considering its initial disappointment). Today it is not only universally considered the best film adaptation of Lewis Carroll's novel, but one of Disney's greatest classics. (Disney wiki)

Conclusion

Now that the useful and explicit information are extracted, it makes good sense that to fully understand the last chapter of this thesis the data above constitute thresholds of knowledge about both topics of “Freemasonry” and “Disney cartoon *Alice in Wonderland* (1951)” Understanding the topics to make coherent sense of what is being read is a cautious task. But to do this well, a foundation of knowledge about the topics is needed. Otherwise, as studies have shown, readers can get caught on the “seductive details” (Garner, Gillingham, & White, 1989) of a text—highly interesting and entertaining information that is only tangentially related to the topic—which can distract the reader and disrupt the comprehension.

Chapter Two: Semiotics

Introduction

If semiotics isn't the sexiest topic you could study, it's definitely one of the most fascinating. Also known as semiology, it is the study of signs and how they are used. The concept of semiotics as an interdisciplinary field of study emerged only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the independent work of Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Semiotics is an interdisciplinary study that could be conducted by an anthropologist, economist, scientist, or sociologist. To comprehend the true meaning of a sign and thus act appropriately, researchers must first understand the context in which it is communicated. In order to interpret a sign's meaning, researchers most often need to understand what is going on around it as well as the sign itself. Semiotics is an important tool for ensuring that intended meanings are clearly understood by the person receiving them. If someone does not understand the true intention of a message, there are usually good reasons for this, and semiotics can help unravel that confusion, ensuring clarity of meaning. Semiotics is a very powerful and controversial field of study because by using signs, students can learn a lot about various fields such as literature, art, architecture, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and so on.

1. Semiotics in Literary Studies

1.1. Definition and Historical Foundation

According to the Oxford dictionary, semiotics is defined as: /semi'ɑ:tɪks/ noun, it is the study of signs and symbols and of their meaning and use

Semiotics is the study of sign processes (semiosis), which are any activity, conduct, or process that involves signs, where a sign is defined as anything that communicates something to the sign's interpreter, usually called a meaning. The meaning can be intentional, such as a word spoken with a specific meaning, or unintentional, such as a symptom indicating a medical condition. Signs can also communicate feelings (which are not usually considered meanings) and can communicate internally (via thought) or externally (via any of the senses: visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or gustatory) (taste). Contemporary semiotics is a scientific discipline that investigates meaning-making and various types of knowledge. (Campbell et al. 352-381)

In the Britannica website, we can read “semiotics, also called semiology, the study of signs and sign-using behaviour. It was defined by one of its founders, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, as the study of ‘the life of signs within society.’”

According to Saussure: “A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable...I shall call it semiology (it will)...show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them” (Saussure 1974: 16).

1.2. The Importance of Semiotics in Literary Studies

Semiotics is significant because it reveals how signs communicate ideas, attitudes, and beliefs to us. Semiology explains how images are used to represent and relay information to the audience in the context of television, film, newspapers, and other forms of media. This, of course, assumes that the audience has the necessary knowledge and appreciation, or societal conditioning, to decipher these signs.

Semioticians investigate how signs convey meaning and shape our perceptions of life and reality. They pay close attention to how signs are used to convey meaning to their

intended audience and seek ways to make sure that their meaning is clearly conveyed. (Danesi)

1.3. The Relationship Between Semiotics and Communication

Communication is defined as the process of transferring data and-or meaning from a source to a receiver. Hence, communication theorists construct models based on codes, media, and contexts to explain the biology, psychology, and mechanics involved. Both disciplines recognize that the technical process cannot be separated from the fact that the receiver must decode the data, i.e., be able to distinguish the data as salient, and make meaning out of it. This implies that there is a necessary overlap between semiotics and communication. (Danesi)

In *Messages and Meanings: An Introduction to Semiotics*, Marcel Danesi (1994) suggested that semioticians should prioritize signification research over communication research. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, a musicologist, takes a far more extreme approach, believing that the theoretical study of communication is irrelevant to his application of semiotics.

1.4. Components of Semiotics

Semiotics, or semiology, is the study of signs, symbols, and signification. It is the study of how meaning is created, not what it is. Below are some brief definitions of semiotic terms, beginning with the smallest unit of meaning and proceeding towards the larger and more complex:

- **Signifier:** any material thing that signifies, e.g., words on a page, a facial expression, an image.

- **Signified:** the concept that a signifier refers to.

Together, the signifier and signified make up the

●**Sign**: the smallest unit of meaning. Anything that can be used to communicate (or to tell a lie).

●**Symbolic (arbitrary) signs**: signs where the relation between signifier and signified is purely conventional and culturally specific, e.g., most words.

●**Iconic signs**: signs where the signifier resembles the signified, e.g., a picture.

●**Indexical Signs**: signs where the signifier is caused by the signified, e.g., smoke signifies fire.

●**Denotation**: the most basic or literal meaning of a sign, e.g., the word "rose" signifies a particular kind of flower.

●**Connotation**: the secondary, cultural meanings of signs; or "signifying signs," signs that are used as signifiers for a secondary meaning, e.g., the word "rose" signifies passion.

●**Metonymy**: a kind of connotation where in one sign is substituted for another with which it is closely associated, as in the use of Washington for the United States government or of the sword for military power.

●**Synecdoche**: a kind of connotation in which a part is used for the whole (as hand for sailor).

1.5. Branches of Semiotics

According to Keller review, there are three main branches to semiotics, namely:

●**Semantics**: relation between signs and the things to which they refer; their denotata, or meaning

●**Syntactics**: relations among signs in formal structures

●**Pragmatics**: relation between signs and the effects they have on the people who use them

1.6. Subfields of Semiotics

- **Biosemiotics:** a developing field that studies the production, action, and interpretation of biological signs and codes. Biosemiotics attempts to integrate findings from scientific biology and semiotics, representing a paradigm shift in the western scientific view of life by demonstrating that semiosis (sign process, including meaning and interpretation) is an immanent and intrinsic feature of life.. (Barbieri)

- **Literary semiotics:** approach to literary criticism influenced by sign theory or semiotics Semiotics, which is closely related to the structuralism pioneered by Ferdinand de Saussure, was extremely influential in the development of literary theory out of the early twentieth-century formalist approaches. (Culler)

- **Pictorial semiotics:** It is inextricably linked to art history and theory. However, it goes beyond them both in at least one fundamental way. While art history has focused on a small number of pictures that qualify as "works of art," pictorial semiotics focuses on the properties of pictures in general, and how artistic conventions of images can be interpreted through pictorial codes. Pictorial codes are the unconsciously familiar artistic conventions of images that viewers of pictorial representations appear to decipher automatically. (Göran)

- **Syntactics:** the subdivision of semiotics concerned with the formal relations between signs or expressions in abstract concept from their denotation and interpreters, or, more broadly, with the formal properties of symbol systems (specifically, with reference to linguistic signs, syntax).

- **Film\ cinematic semiotics:** the study of the various codes and signs of film and how they are understood

2. Definition of Cinematic Semiotics

Monaco defines it as the study of the sign process (semiosis), or any activity, conduct, or process involving signs, including the production of meaning, as these signs pertain to moving pictures. Every art form contains hidden symbols that are left up to the audience to interpret

2.1. Relationship Between Semiotics and Cinema

Semiotics in film is an important and perplexing element in any film. It is the interpretation and communication of signs and symbols in order to develop a plot and define specific events that occur within the plot. Semiotic storytelling employs images combined with text to provide the target audience with a deep understanding of the message being articulated.

Following that, audiences draw on their own personal and cultural experiences. To translate the images or signs that are presented to them. As a result, the underlying correlation and significance are unique to those who see the content.

2.2. History of Cinematic Semiotics

-Russian formalism (1910s–1930s):

Eichenbaum and Tynyanov, two Russian formalists, took opposing approaches to interpreting film signs." Tynyanov described cinema as providing the visible world in the form of semantic signs generated by cinematic procedures such as lighting and montage, whereas Eichenbaum associated film with "inner speech" and "image translations of linguistic conventions. (Stam et al.)

-Structuralism and post-structuralism (1950s–present)

When post-structuralist thinkers began to criticize structuralism in the 1960s, the concept of film language became more intensely investigated. Semiotics also gained popularity in academia. Early research in this field was concerned with "contrasting arbitrary signs of natural language with motivated, recognizable signs of cinema." (Stam et al.)

2.3. Concepts of Cinematic Semiotics

-Denotation and connotation

Film communicates meaning denotatively and connotatively. What the audience sees and hears is denotative, it is what it is and they do not have to strive to recognize it. At the same time these sounds and images are connotative and the way the scene is shot is meant to evoke certain feelings from the viewer. Connotation typically involves emotional overtones, objective interpretation, social values, and ideological assumptions. According to Christian Metz, "The study of connotation brings us closer to the notion of the cinema as an art (the "seventh art")."

Within connotations, paradigmatic connotations exist, which would be a shot that is being compared with its unrealized companions in the paradigm. A low angle shot of a rose conveys a sense that the flower is somehow dominant or overpowering because we unconsciously compare it with an overhead shot of a rose which would diminish its importance. Syntagmatic connotation would not compare the rose shot to other potential shots but compare it with actual shots that precede or follow it. The meaning adheres to it because its compared to other shots we actually see. (Monaco)

-Narrative

Narrative is commonly understood to have two components: the story presented and the process of telling it, or narration, which is also known as narrative discourse. Film narrative theory seeks to reveal the deeper system of cultural associations and relationships conveyed

through narrative form by unearthing the seemingly "motivated" and "natural" connection between the signifier and the story-world. (Stam)

-Tropes

Daniel Chandler explains that Metonymy alludes to a sign's representing something completely while literally only being a part of it. The Eiffel Tower, which is a metonym for Paris, is an example of this. Metonyms are frequently used in film because they rely on the external to reveal the internal. Another effective semiotic tool for filmmaking is the use of metaphors, which are defined as a comparison between two unrelated but similar things.

Conclusion

Every film critic seems to have been a theorist. Today, we tend to laugh at this attitude; at the very least, we believe, more or less confidently, that the criticism of individual films says everything there is to assume about film in general. And, without a doubt, film criticism—or film analysis—is a vital endeavor: it is the film-makers who create the art of cinema; it is through reflection on those individual films we have liked (or disliked) that we have gained insights into the art of cinema in general. Whether good or bad, each film is, first and foremost, a work of cinema (in the way that one speaks of a piece of music). Semiotics is indeed a powerful and controversial field of study because by using signs, people can gain a huge amount of information on numerous domains such as literature, art, architecture, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and so on. Its use in cinematography and its unique and varied nature makes it a wide and diverse field of study. Its significance in film making is vital because finding, understanding and giving meaning to implicit messages requires the use of an adequate methodological approach.

Chapter Three: An Initiation Tale

Introduction

To help convey aspects of lodge ritual practice, Freemasonry has borrowed and modified a variety of religious and quasi-religious symbols. Many of these symbols, when taken at face value, may appear or feel odd or eccentric in and of themselves. However, when viewed in the context of the larger collection of symbols, they illustrate a broad allegorical story of morality, fraternal association, and life lessons from which the newly initiated Mason may come to understand the organization's teachings. The way Freemasonry employs symbolism reveals information about the term itself. Masonic symbolism is based on the concept of construction: construction, becoming, and making. The rites and symbols enable everyone to become themselves: to realize that they are all creators of meaning; to recognize themselves and others as sources of light that contribute to the overall light, while accepting that no single flame can shed light everywhere. This transformation occurs during a journey through various landscapes, among forms and colors, during which each of us is transformed. A spiritual journey is not a package tour. There are no directional arrows. The Freemason can only gain access to the Order's esoteric teachings through the medium of a legend or a symbol. The risk of becoming disoriented, of sliding back when attempting to move forward, is what gives birth to the unexpected. The intertwining of danger and promise allows for understanding and the concept of freedom. These pictorial representations of initiation rituals are used everywhere (novels, paintings, cinematographic films, cartoons...). While some movies and cartoons do not seem to make any sense at first glance, most of their meaning is hidden. Freemasonry's symbols are a part of everyone's culture and of everyone's lives, in the spiritual, intellectual and ethical realms as well as in the ordinary daily routines but to

understand them fully it is vital to see what a symbol stands for. After what, linking it to other symbols from the same topic would be a simple task a fulfil.

1. The Masonic References in the 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*

It may seem absurd and completely insane at first glance. But to have a deep understanding of cartooning, you need to have the right tools. These tools serve as glasses, they adjust and clarify the dark and hidden meaning of the cartoon. the "tool" used here is the Masonic ritual for spiritual initiation through self-examination. this is done through several steps featured in the cartoon. Freemasonry is not a belief based on social or financial status, rather, it is “a divine symbolic language perpetuating under certain concrete symbols the sacred mysteries of the ancients” (Hall, 26). On the same note, Greer explains that the actions that take place inside a temple leave no longstanding physical vestige, and even when such traces do exist, it is infrequently possible to trace them back to the ideas and actions that inspired them. In other words, that everyone's temple builds itself and leaves no external physical trace.

1.1. The White Rabbit

The white rabbit is used as a symbol all around the world: from China to the native American passing across Egypt, it has numerous meanings but one is common to all. The rabbit is a twilight animal, in other words, it sleeps mainly during the day time and is active at night time. The ancient civilization created symbols from the observation of nature, and by seeing every morning rabbits, they made it a lunar animal that symbolizes the sunrise; the passage from darkness to light. It represents a trigger event. Alice follows the white rabbit in the rabbit hole and ends up falling in a hole. Here, it is a reference to a phrase used in both freemasonry and alchemy and that could be shortened to “V.I.T.R.I.O.L.” *Visita Interiora*

Terrae Rectificando Invenis Occultum Lapitem – Visit the interior of the Earth and rectifying you will find the hidden stone (Béresniak, 21). In other words, for a person to truly understand himself s/he must dig deep down inside them to find their true nature. This idea is reinforced when; while falling, Alice says, « what is I should fall right through the centre of the earth and come out the other side where people walk upside down. » (*Alice in Wonderland*, 1951. [00:06:19]) this metaphor of introspection is rich in meaning. It is not on the outside nor in the material things that one finds its core but only inside the self (Figure 3).

1.2. The Doorknob

In Freemasonry, the low door is an invitation to humility. All recipients, regardless of rank and fortune, must bow down in the same way. The low door represents equality and also a way of placing the recipient in front of his ignorance, facing the illusion represented by his ego. It also represents a changing point, in other words, there is a shifting state before and after crossing the door. This idea is represented in the cartoon when Alice arrives in front of a door too small for her to pass through. Her mindset, beliefs and understandings start changing the moment she crosses the door.

Alice drinks a jar of liquid that makes her smaller then eats a cookie that makes her bigger. It is a representation of a masonic thought “what is lowered will be raised and what is raising will be lowered”. This statement is for the apprentice masons; it means that some things need to be lowered such as the ego, the anger and the prejudices, in order to let other things raise like empathy, love and understanding. It is a behaviour that needs time and efforts to be fully controlled (Figure 4).

1.3. Polarity Principle

In the hermetic philosophy that inspired the freemasonry, there are 7 universal principles. One of them is the polarity principle which is defined in *The Kybalion* as

“Everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree.” (*The Kybalion*,32) The easiest example of that is hot and cold, we know cold because we experienced heat and we know heat because we experienced cold, hot and cold are one and same thing: temperature, but at different degrees. This principle is represented by the sun and the moon in nearly all the esoteric disciplines and is present in the walls of most freemasonic temples. Once the door crossed and back on land, Alice meets two characters “Tweedledee and Tweedledum” that embodies the polarity principle, in the cartoon, they turn into a moon and a sun when they start narrating a tale and the screen is divided into night and day (Figure 5).

1.4. Self-control

The gavel, explains Mackey, and the chisel are two very important tools, nearly impossible to disassociate. The gavel is active because it is used to kick. The chisel is passive because alone it is useless. Even though the chisel is passive it still has a huge importance due to its position between the gavel and the stone – he is the vector of the act. The gavel and the chisel represent the self-control, a strong kick would take off too much material; and it’s impossible to go back in the process, while a light kick does not take enough material which makes the chisel useless. In the cartoon it is represented in the tale Tweedledee and Tweedledum narrates to Alice. It is the tale of a carpenter and a seal that want to cook oysters, but the seal eats all oysters alone which leads the carpenter to lose his temper, chase and hit the seal. The carpenter has a gavel attached to its belt but has no chisel, as a result he loses his self-control (Figure 6).

1.5. The Garden of Live Flowers

In all esoteric disciplines including freemasonry, each flower has a specific meaning. Roses, for instance, are related to knowledge and thus are assumed to be the wisdom's jewel (Béresniak, 80) When Alice arrives in a garden full of beautiful flower she is rejected and called “weed.” In the vegetable world’s language, weed represents the continues come back of the same undesirable obstacles and struggles. To put it differently, the same obstacles will come across the profane’s path again and again until s/he solves them properly (Figure 7).

1.6. The Caterpillar

At this stage of the initiation, it is common to feel lost and not know who the person is or where s/he is going. This stage of the process is pictured in the discussion between Alice and the caterpillar:

Caterpillar: Who Are You?

Alice: I hardly know, sir. I’ve changed so many times since this morning, you see...

Caterpillar: No, I do not “C.” Explain yourself.

Alice: I’m afraid I can’t explain myself sir, because I’m not myself, you know.

Caterpillar: I do not know.

Alice: Well, I can’t put it any more clearly, sir, for it isn’t clear to me. (*Alice in Wonderland, 1951 [00:33:34]*) (Figure 8).

1.7. The Look of Others

The confrontation between what the person knows about himself/herself vs how others perceive the person is the most frightening contrast to face. Though one could try and convince others that their perception is wrong, it is; in most cases, a useless process. For Alice, it is her conversation with the bird after turning into a giant that shows this sequence.

Bird: A SERPENT! HELP! HELP! A SERPENT!

Alice: I'm not a serpent!

Bird: You? Indeed? Then just what are you?

Alice: I'm just a little girl.

Bird: Little? Little? hah!

Alice: Well, I am... I mean, I was.

Bird: And I suppose you don't like eggs, either?

Alice: Yes, I do, but....

Bird: I knew it! I knew it! Serpent! Serpent! (*Alice in Wonderland, 1951*
[00:37:24])

Though Alice knows she is a little girl, for the bird; because she eats eggs, she is a serpent. On the other hand, no matter how hard Alice tries to convince the Bird that she is not a serpent but a little girl, the Bird does not see the difference and Alice will remain a serpent in its eye (Figure 9).

1.8. The Tea Party

In the spiritual teachings that inspires Freemasonry, it is never a question of temporality. The speed of each individual's evolvment is unique. It is not a matter of accomplishing a specific step of the quest in a given period of time. The arriving point is the same for everyone, but the starting point is unique to each individual. In a spiritual path, time does not exist. It does not matter when a person starts his/her introspection as long as they fulfil it entirely. It is shown in the cartoon at the tea party with the Mad-hatter. The "Happy Unbrithday" song, the hatter taking a watch and literally destroying it while screaming "Mad Watch" song (Figure 10).

1.9. The Mirror

The mirror is a very rich symbol in numerous of disciplines, it represents self-knowledge and face the person to itself. In freemasonry, the mirror has a particular use. Deniel Béresniak explains in his book *Symbols of Freemasonry* that during the rites of initiations; the profane is first invited by the Venerable Master to scan the room in search of a hypothetical enemy, then turn as he argues "It is not always in front of you that encounter enemies, most often fear being behind". The profane turns and then finds himself in the mirror which returns once more his own image. Image, he has to face not to reject with disgust, or to accept with satisfaction. See that it is his own enemy. The mirror is the beginning of the work of the apprentice. This Masonic work carries on by itself a real autopsy. The apprentice must go beyond appearances. This is the beginning of self-knowledge. The mirror is the perfect emblem of this introspection. In the cartoon, Alice faces a mirror in the forest while trying to find her path (Figure 11).

1.10. Renewal

By the end, Alice arrives in a kingdom where cards are painting white roses to red and a Queen of Heart that cuts everyone's head off. The symbolic decapitation during an initiation quest is very important because it represents the end of a cycle and a renewal. The head is the headquarter of the thoughts, it contains the hobbits, the prejudices, the fears... etc. The head contains all the things that obstacle the progression during the quest. The decapitation symbolises the extinction of all these matters and invites the profane to think differently (not in a materialistic way, but in a spiritual way) (Figure 12).

1.11. The Escape

Lastly, Alice tries to run away from the queen and observes herself sleeping from the door of the beginning. All her adventure in this Wonderland happened inside of her mind. This sequence is a reminder that introspection constitute the majority of initiatory quests and that it all happens inside the person's mind (Figure 13).

Conclusion

Of the various modes of communicating instruction to the uninformed, the masonic student is particularly interested in two; the instruction by legends and that by symbols, argued A. G. Mackey in his book *The symbolism of Freemasonry*. He also added that the initiated is indebted to these two for everything he knows, and everything he can know, about the philosophic system taught in the institution. All of its mysteries and dogmas, which represent its philosophy, are committed to the profane for communication. Freemasonry still cleaves to the ancient method, and has preserved it in its primitive importance as a means of communicating knowledge. "The symbol is a visible, and the legend an audible representation

of some contrasted idea. Both the legend and the symbol relate to dogmas of a deep religious character”, said A.G. Mackey. To study the symbolism of Masonry is the only way to investigate its philosophy. The Disney cartoon *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) is the metaphor of a spiritual initiation through an introspective quest for self-understanding. A detachment from the material and a focus on the spiritual.

General Conclusion

Though the Disney *Alice in Wonderland* appeared to be a cartoon that has no sense, it turned out to be actually a quite meaningful cartoon. Its deep significance, however, can only be understood from a Freemasonic perspective. The history and secrecy of the brotherhood that is kept in the walls of the lodges gives it an occult aspect as a negative connotation. But then again, the focus of the thesis is on their spiritual practices and nothing else. On the other hand, the field of semiotic cinema is a recent field of studies that, when understood correctly, provides the researcher with great tools of understanding. *Alice in Wonderland*, then, finds all its sense and meaning through the absurd tales, events in, characters and plot evolution.

Throughout the thesis, all of Freemasonry, *Alice in Wonderland* and semiotics history, definitions and explanations were tackled to better serve their use in the last chapter. First, separately to constitute a background knowledge about each topic, then, combined for the purpose of the thesis that is: analyse the cartoon its correspondence at a symbolic level of the spiritual initiation.

Alice in Wonderland represents the steps of an introspective initiation as it is practiced in mostly all Freemasonry lodges. It shows the path that an individual must go through in order to evolve spiritually and let go of all the material constraints. Though it is hard to, both, understand and apply, Alice plays the role of landmarks to guide the profane in staying in the course.

Appendices

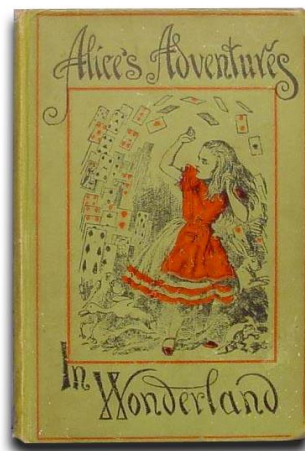


Fig.1 Lewis Carroll. *Alice in Wonderland* (1898). First edition book.



Fig.2 Kathryn Beaumont. *Kathryn Beaumont modelling for Alice* (1951)



Fig.3 Alice falling in the rabbit hole. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).



Fig.4 Alice and the doorknob. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).



Fig.5 Tweedledee and Tweedledum. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).



Fig.6 The tale of Walrus and the Carpenter. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).



Fig.7 The golden afternoon song. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).

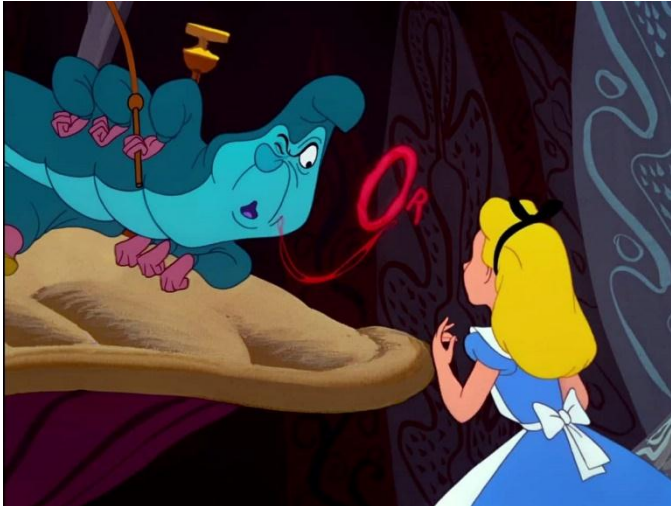


Fig.8 Alice and the Caterpillar. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).

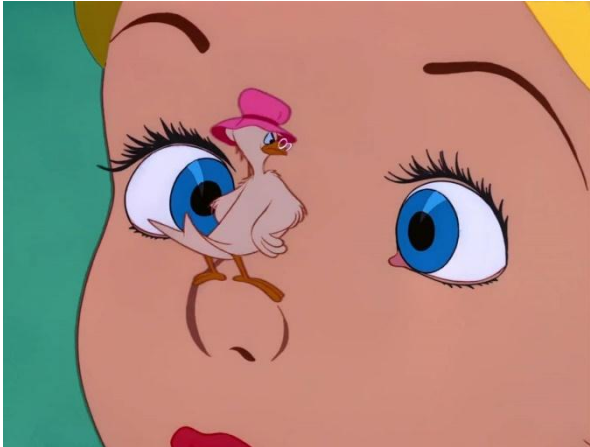


Fig.9 Alice and the Bird. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).



Fig.10 The Madhatter. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951)



Fig.11 Alice in the wood. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951)



Fig.12 Alice with the queen of hearts. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).



Fig.13 Alice running towards the door. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951).

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