

"Jabberwocky"

by Lewis Carroll

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

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

"And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"
He chortled in his joy.

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

Analysis

Prologue

This poem was read at my brother-in-law's funeral. He was first introduced to it at Brentwood High School in the '80's and it quickly became a lifelong favourite. When I chose this poem, it was in effort to understand how this poem captivated a sensitive young man. He memorized it and recited it for his children. The real reasons remain an enigma, but as I study the Jabberwocky in depth I move closer to appreciation of the work that wholly caught his imagination.

Teacher's notes:

From time and memorial parents have told frightening tales with explicit, underlying messages. These tails are meant entertain and sneak in a moral cautionary lesson. The ethereal "boogeyman" in Carroll's poem is the Jabberwocky, included in his novel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*. The creature's size and teeth do not terrorise the child to heed his father's warning. Instead, the protagonist brandishes his sword and slays the behemoth giant, much to his father's incredulous joy. It is a poem that reveals the challenges of youth. Carroll's lesson is to stand your ground with faith before you move forward to conquer your struggles.

This is quintessentially a David and Goliath biblical narrative; a small, righteous boy conquers evil despite the odds. Aside from Christian mores, there are many similarities to the 14th century legend, *The Lambton Worm*, from the County Durham. As the folktale goes, John is unable to catch a fish in the River Weir, hence he curses the river. At that very moment, he catches a little black worm. Offended he tosses it away. Seven years later John returns from the crusades to learn of a worm-beast that has transformed into a poisonous, live-stock eating, terrorising worm/dragon. It is said to have grown so big it wraps itself around a hill 7 times. A witch advises John to kill the beast but, to avoid a curse, he must also kill the first living thing he sees immediately thereafter. At this triumph, John's father is so overcome with happiness, he forgets the witch's prophesy and rushes to his son's side. As a result, nine generations of Lambton suffer the witch's curse; they cannot die a peaceful death.



Carroll's inventive words captivate the reader at the first line; "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves". This playful use of phonetics shadows great writers' such as Shakespeare and the Brothers Grimm. The poem is a treasure-trove of lexicon that is a delight to listen to and ponder. Carol wrote simple, schematic lines appealing directly to children. He is said to have asked publishers to print the poem as a mirror; another indication of his mischievous schemes meant to charm the child in all of us.

Carroll uses many sonic devices in this poem. His use of onomatopoeia with words such as "Tumtum", "burble", "snicker-snack" bring verve to these nonsensical words. Verbs such as "galumphing" perfectly describe and dramatize how one would run triumphantly home with good news.

The invention of neologisms or portmanteaux such as "mimsy", "slithy" and "manxome" beg contemplation and query. For example, "frabjous" sounds like a mixture of "fabulous" and "joyous". Word mash-ups lend themselves to endless word play.

Alliteration is used throughout the poem; "gyre" and "gimble", "beamish boy" and "snicker snack" are several examples. "Slithy and mimsy" is an example of how the use of assonance lends a light-hearted tone. "He left it dead, with its head" has musical overtones, one can literally hear a thump as the head drops on the earth. The poem contains seven verses, each stanza is a quatrain or abab, aaaa or aabb rhyme scheme and iambic meter.

The mixture of old language "thou hast" echoes the writer's era. The verse was written in 1871. The lyrics mimic a Scottish brogue that is so beloved, especially those of Scottish descent, which inspires a visceral reaction to the accent. The poem's simplistic yet satirical format allows the reader to focus on the lyrical jargon, going from unstressed to stressed four times in each line, apart from the last line. The cadence of the rhyming scheme adds dramatic effect to the reading, especially in the Scottish lilt. Carroll relies on sight and sound rather than tastes or smells. Emotions range from fear, terror, courage, pride and to success and happiness.

Our brain is hardwired to understand language. There is enough fodder for a child to understand the scary platitudes, whilst seeking to make sense of the text. Children love fantasy and the narrative ballad employs fantastical characters and places: "toves", "borogroves", "Mome Raths", and "wabe". Even Alice admits, "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! However, somebody killed something: that's clear, at any rate."

Audio version

Reading of "The Jabberwocky" in a Scottish brogue:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGIC5bhhhNY>

Visual Aids





THE JABBERWOCKY YER. 3



26TH
AUG
2011

Poem 2

Lambton Worm Song

One Sunda morn young
Lambton went

A-fishing in the Wear;

An' **catched** a fish
upon **he's heuk** (=caught) (=his hook)

He **thowt leuk't vary queer.** (=thought looked very strange)

But **whatt'n a kind ov** fish it
was (=what kind of)

Young Lambton cudden't
tell-

He **waddn't fash te carry'd
hyem,** (=could not be bothered to carry it home)

So he **hoyed it doon** a well (=threw it down)

(Chorus)

**Whisht! lads, haad yor
gobs,** (=Be quiet, boys, shut your mouths)

**An' aa'll tell ye aall an
aaful** story, (=I'll tell you all an awful)

Whisht! lads, haad yor
gobs,

An' Aa'll tel ye '**boot** the
worm. (=about)

Noo Lambton felt inclined
te **gan** (=go)

An' fight i' foreign wars.

He joined a troop ov
Knights that cared

For **nowther wonds** nor
scars, (=neither wounds)

An' off he went te Palestine

Where queer things him
befel,

An **varry seun forgot about** (=very soon forgot about)

The queer worm i' tha well.

(Chorus)

But the worm got fat an'
grewed an' grewed,
An' grewed an' aaful size;
He'd greet big teeth, a
greet big gob,
An' greet big goggly eyes.
An' when
at **neets** he **craaled about** (=nights) (=crawled around)
Te pick up bits o' news,
If he felt dry upon the road,
He'd milk a dozen **coos**. (=cows)

(Chorus)

This **feorful** worm would (=fearful)
often feed
On caalves an' lambs an'
sheep,
An' **swally** little **bairns** alive (=swallow) (=children)
When they laid doon te
sleep.
An' when he'd eaten **aall**
he cud (=all he could)
An' he had had he's fill,
He craaled away
an' **lapped** he's tail (=wrapped)
Ten times roond **Pensha Hill**. (=Penshaw Hill, a local landmark)

(Chorus)

The news ov
this **myest** aaful worm (=most)
An' his queer **gannins on** (=goings-on)
Seun crossed the seas, **gat**
te the ears (=soon) (=got to)
Ov brave an' **bowld** Sor
John. (=bold)
So **hyem he cam an'**
catched the beast, (=home he came and caught)
An' **cut 'im in twe haalves**, (=cut him in two-halves)
An' that seun stopped hes
eatin' bairns
An' sheep an' lambs an'
caalves.

(Chorus)

So **noo ye knaa hoo aall
the foaks** (=now you know how all the folk)

On **byeth** sides ov the Wear (=both)

Lost lots o' sheep an' lots o'
sleep

An leaved i' mortal feor. (=And lived in mortal fear)

So **let's hev one te brave
Sor John** (=let's drink to brave Sir John)

That kept the
bairns **frae** harm, (=from)

Saved coos an' calves
by **myekin' haalves** (=making halves)

O' the **famis** Lambton
Worm. (=famous)

(Final Chorus)

Noo lads, **Aa'll haad me
gob,** (=I'll hold my mouth. Stop speaking)

That's **aall Aa knaa
about** the story (=All I known about)

Of Sir John's **clivvor** job (=clever)

Wi' the aaful Lambton
Worm.

Poem 3

A Strange Wild Song

By Lewis Carroll

He thought he saw an Elephant
That practised on a fife:
He looked again, and found it was
A letter from his wife.
'At length I realize,' he said,
'The bitterness of life!'

He thought he saw a Buffalo
Upon the chimney-piece:
He looked again, and found it was
His Sister's Husband's Niece.
'Unless you leave this house,' he said,
'I'll send for the police!'

he thought he saw a Rattlesnake

That questioned him in Greek:
He looked again, and found it was
The Middle of Next Week.
'The one thing I regret,' he said,
'Is that it cannot speak! '

He thought he saw a Banker's Clerk
Descending from the bus:
He looked again, and found it was
A Hippopotamus.
'If this should stay to dine,' he said,
'There won't be much for us! '

He thought he saw a Kangaroo
That worked a Coffee-mill:
He looked again, and found it was
A Vegetable-Pill.
'Were I to swallow this,' he said,
'I should be very ill! '

He thought he saw a Coach-and-Four
That stood beside his bed:
He looked again, and found it was
A Bear without a Head.
'Poor thing,' he said, 'poor silly thing!
It's waiting to be fed! '

He thought he saw an Albatross
That fluttered round the lamp:
He looked again, and found it was
A Penny-Postage Stamp.
'You'd best be getting home,' he said:
'The nights are very damp! '

He thought he saw a Garden-Door
That opened with a key:
He looked again, and found it was
A Double Rule of Three:
'And all its mystery,' he said,
'Is clear as day to me! '

He thought he saw a Argument
That proved he was the Pope:
He looked again, and found it was
A Bar of Mottled Soap.
'A fact so dread,' he faintly said,
'Extinguishes all hope! '