OPEN SEASON ON SNARKS

A. VORPAL PENN*

"His form is ungainly -- his intellect small --"
(So the Bellman would often remark) -"But his courage is perfect! And that, after all,
Is the thing that one needs with a Snark,"
--The Hunting of the Snark

In a whimsicalogical treatise entitled "For a Lewis Carroll Society" in the November 1969 Word Ways, the present writer proposed that a call be issued to all serious Lewis Carroll students and funny imitators to form a society for the hunting of Literary Snarks. A Literary Snark was defined as a Question, Observation, Speculation, Contradiction, Imitation or Invention about, on, concerning, in, of, or based upon the writings of Lewis Carroll. Several typical specimens were exhibited, with a particular provision being made for a class of Non-Snarks. It was suggested that the proposed society be called The Bold Order of Snark Hunters (BOSH), and that it be run along the lines of the Menai Bridge. Martin Gardner's two full bags of Snarks, The Annotated Alice and The Annotated Snark, were earnestly commended to readers, and those interested in the whole project were invited to write to me c/o Word Ways.

There having been no response, I have had more time free for further Snark hunts of my own. I would like to take this opportunity to display part of my recent collection -- purely in the interest of stimulating research, of course.

But first let me put down a few words on practical matters. If this type of pursuit catches on as I hope, there will be a tremendous unfelt need for an organization such as the Bold Order of Snark Hunters -- to break rules, ignore disputes, disdain prizes, and celebrate. (It would be unthinkable to allow the Centennial Year of The Hunting of the Snark, 1976, to go by quietly without some sort of celebration. Perhaps a First Annual Caucus Race and Picnic in the Wabe would be fitting. A good time for it might be brillig on the 4th of July, since that is famous as the day of the invention of the original Alice.)

Lewis Carroll, in The Hunting of the Snark, has provided the model for governing the Order. For officers there should be:

A Bellman Bold -- to act as captain, give speeches, and serve "grog with a liberal hand".

^{*} Author of "Open Season on Snarks".

A Beaver -- to act as secretary and bring "paper, portfolio, pens, and ink in unfailing supplies". (Feminist secretaries and beavers: Please don't misunderstand.)

A Banker -- to act as treasurer and have "the whole of their cash in his care". Illogically, he ought also to be in charge of all funraising events.

In "Jabberwocky" we have infallible guidelines as to the Official Greetings of the Order:

Salutation First Member: "Frabjous day!"
Second Member: "Callooh, Callay!"

Valediction First Member: "Beware the Jubjub bird."

Second Member: "Shun the frumious Bandersnatch."

It has been suggested (op. cit.) that a suitable emblem for BOSH might include a display of shoes and ships and sealing-wax (not to be confused with floor-wax) and cabbages and kings, along with the motto, Lingua in Bucca! (ibid.).

A DUBIETY OF SNARKS

Snark No. One: A Question Answered

In my 1969 article, I gave this as an example of a Question: "Sir John Tenniel's illustration of the slaying of the Jabberwock shows a youthful figure with long, blond hair wielding the vorpal sword. Is it Alice?"

It is now possible for me to give the following answer: No.

Carroll used to claim a connection between "Jabberwocky" and Anglo-Saxon literary antiquity; thus, the blond hair would simply be part of the standard image of Anglo-Saxon heroes, such as Mr. E. G. Beowulf.

My first hypothesis -- that Tenniel visualized Alice imagining herself in the role of the Jabberwock-slayer -- fails the test of sensibleness by comparison.

Snark No. Two: An Observation

After the Caucus-race in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, prizes (Alice's comfits) are awarded to all of the animals. Then, in order not to leave Alice out, and to give her equal standing with the other racers, they decide they should find a prize for her.

"But she must have a prize herself, you know," said the Mouse.

"Of course," the Dodo replied very gravely. "What else have you got in your pocket?" it went on, turning to Alice.

"Only a thimble," said Alice ...

"Hand it over here," said the Dodo.

Then they all crowded round her once more while the Dodo solemly presented the thimble, saying, "We beg your acceptance of this elegant thimble"; and, when it had finished this short speech, they all cheered.

A desperate wag thus might call the prize a status thimble.

Snark No. Three: A Question

Lewis Carroll may safely be supposed to have been the first to use the word "Snark" as a noun in print (Webster's Second, OED). Some doubt arises, however, as to the word "snarked" as a verb or adjective. Carroll's THOTS (The Hunting of the Snark, 1876) uses it in the stanza:

Then the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder sometimes:

A thing, as the Bellman remarked,

That frequently happens in tropical climes, When a vessel is, so to speak, "snarked."

But Sir Richard Burton, whose translation of The Thousand and One Nights was published in 1885-86, wrote, "... I have never hesitated to coin a word when wanted, such as 'she snorted and snarked,' fully to represent the original." Burton had been working on his translation since 1852, and other writers of English on other translations since before 1838. (See Tales from the Arabian Nights, edited by P. H. Newby, Pocket Books, New York.)

Did Carroll, perhaps unconsciously, pluck his word from the literary "climate" rather than "out of the blue"?

(Burton, curiously enough, was one of several mid-Victorians who set out on bootless expeditions to find the Source of the Nile -- an enterprise which may well have helped to inspire THOTS.)

Snark No. Four: An Observation with Comment

The famous first/last stanza of "Jabberwocky" (too famous to require quoting here) is full of shibboleths -- words that, when pronounced correctly, assure one of being in, but contrariwise, incorrectly, out. Let us at this time consider "borogoves."

Fastidious Lewis Carroll, in the Preface to THOTS, wrote,
"... the first 'o' in 'borogoves' is pronounced like the 'o' in 'borrow.' I have heard people try to give it the sound of the 'o' in 'worry.'
Such is Human Perversity."

And Martin Gardner, scholar and gentleman, added, in The Annotated Alice: "The word is commonly mispronounced as 'borogroves' by Carrollian novitiates, and this misspelling even appears in some American editions of the book."

Now be it recorded that the late Walt Disney, whom few would call a wicked man, in the lyrics of the Jabberwocky song on a promotional disk accompanying his feature-length "Alice in Wonderland" cartoon, perpetuated both of the above perpetrations. The cartoon, which was free of this particular error, appeared in 1951 and disappeared almost immediately, but the song lingers on, to the shame of American civilization.

Snark No. Four-and-a-Half: Merely an Anticipation

Those who have been concerned with the problem of whether the Cheshire Cat was intended to be a Manifestation from the Fourth Dimension may soon be provided with inconclusive evidence.

Those who have not been concerned may not.

Snark No. Five: Another Question

What is the arcane significance of the title of Chapter V of Looking-Glass: "Wool and Water"? The first thought that comes to mind is that the two things combined produce a bad smell.

Snark No. Six; Miscellaneous

Carroll seems to have been delighted by pigs. In Wonderland the Duchess's baby turns into a pig. In Looking-Glass Humpty-Dumpty alleges that "a 'rath' is a sort of green pig." In "The Walrus and the Carpenter" the famous list of conversational topics alluded to earlier ends with: "And why the sea is boiling hot -- And whether pigs have wings." Pigs abound in his logic problems.

And Carroll seems to have been appalled by trials. There are two in Wonderland -- the threatened one in the Mouse's tale and the attempted one in the case of the Knave of Hearts.

At last, in the Barrister's Dream in THOTS, a pig is put on trial. As the farce is drawing to a close, the defense argues,

"In the matter of Treason the pig would appear To have aided, but scarcely abetted ..."

giving Carroll a crack at those thundering redundancies in the language of law: "cease and desist," "will and testament," "devise and bequeath," and the rest.

Finally, A Non-Snark

One of Dover Publications' numerous substantial, durably constructed volumes (I did not say "ponderous tomes") of frivolous, whimsical trivia is A Nonsense Anthology, collected by Carolyn Wells, "the great verse anthologist." My copy is a 1958 reprint of a book "fifty years old," according to the back cover. There is an appropriately brief and amiable Introduction, but little else in the way of scholarly

embellishments or, alas, facts. When an author is named, that is most probably the only clue to a verse's origins in space and time.

"Jabberwocky" is accorded its proper honor by being placed first in the book. For that, and for the other 240-odd inspirational poems, one must be grateful. But a Carrollian must also report that, quizzically, THOTS is represented by only 23 random quatrains out of a possible 141 -- and uninitiated readers are never given reason to suspect that anything has been omitted.

The Wells anthology is the earliest source I know for the ensuing Non-Snark. (The poem appears there with an anticlimactic "Moral", here omitted.) I classify it as a Non-Snark because I do not know if it is in any way related to Carroll's writings. I do not know whether it existed in his lifetime, but I think that if he had read it, he would have appreciated it.

Once--but no matter when--There lived--no matter where--A man, whose name--but then I need not that declare.

He--well, he had been born, And so he was alive; His age--I details scorn--Was somethingty and five.

He lived--how many years I truly can't decide;
But this one fact appears:
He lived--until he died.

"He died," I have averred, But cannot prove 'twas so, But that he was interred, At any rate, I know.

I fancy he'd a son, I hear he had a wife: Perhaps he'd more than one, I know not, on my life! But whether he was rich Or whether he was poor, Or neither--both--or which, I cannot say, I'm sure.

I can't recall his name, Or what he used to do: But then--well, such is fame! 'Twill so serve me and you.

And that is why I thus, About this unknown man Would fain create a fuss, To rescue, if I can,

From dark oblivion's blow, Some record of his lot: But, ah! I do not know Who--where-when--why--or what.

And to cap the joke it is signed Anonymous!