

JABBERWOCKY

Lewis Carroll

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

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

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All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

A "Jabberwocky" Glossary: There are two main sources to assist one in understanding the poem. One is Lewis Carroll himself. In one of a series of private little "periodicals" that young Carroll wrote, illustrated and hand-lettered for the amusement of his siblings, he described a "curious fragment." After a drawing of it, he proceeded to interpret some of the words. These explanations are listed below. The other source of explanations comes from Humpty Dumpty, whom Alice meets in Chapter VI of the book. He also provides explanations of some of the words -- not always the same as Carroll. These too are listed below.

Word	Carroll's Explanation	Humpty Dumpty's Explanation
brillig	Bryllyg (derived from the verb to <i>bryl</i> or <i>broil</i>). The time of broiling dinner, i.e., the close of the afternoon.	Four o'clock in the afternoon -- the time when you begin broiling things for dinner.
slithy	Slythy (compounded of <i>slimy</i> and <i>lithe</i>). Smooth and active.	Lithe and slimy. Lithe is the same as 'active.' ... It's like a portmanteau -- there are two meanings packed up into one word.
tove	Tove, a species of badger. They had smooth white hair, long hind legs, and short horns like a stag; lived chiefly on cheese. "Toves" should be pronounced to rhyme with "groves".	Something like badgers -- they're something like lizards -- and they are something like corkscrews. ... They make their nests under sundials -- also they live on cheese.
gyre	Gyre, verb (derived from <i>gyaour</i> or <i>giaour</i> , 'a dog'). To scratch like a dog.	To go round and round like a gyroscope.
gimble	Gymble (whence <i>gimblet</i>). To screw out holes in anything.	To make holes like a gimlet.
wabe	Wabe (derived from the verb to <i>swab</i> or <i>soak</i>). The side of a hill (from its being <i>soaked</i> by the rain.)	The grass plot round a sundial ... because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it ... and a long way beyond it on each side. (Humpty Dumpty's explanation was made with some "insights" from Alice.)
mimsy	Mimsy (whence <i>mimserable</i> and <i>miserable</i> .) Unhappy.	Flimsy and miserable.
borogoves	Borogove. An extinct kind of parrot. They had no wings, beaks turned up, and made their nests under sundials; lived on veal. The first 'o' in "borogoves" is pronounced like the 'o' in 'worry'. The word is commonly mispronounced as "borogoves" ... and this misspelling even appears in some American editions of the book.	A thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round -- something like a live mop.
mome		I'm not certain about <i>mome</i> . I think it's short for 'from home' -- meaning that they'd lost their way.
raths		A <i>rath</i> is a sort of green pig.
outgrabe		<i>Outgribing</i> is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle.