

# Jabberwocky



By Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson)

`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 Jujub 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 wook,  
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.

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

## Made More Stir Than Anything Else

By Eleanor Graham

"Jabberwocky", the strange nonsense poem printed in *Looking-Glass characters*, made more stir than anything else in the book and some wild assertions were made about its origin. The truth was, however, that Dodgson had made up the first verse years before, as a young man in his early twenties, when he had printed it in his private magazine, *Misch-Masch*, as "A Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry". He printed them both in Anglo-Saxon and modern characters, with a glossary, ending with a literal translation of the passage into crude English. The meanings in that glossary were a little different from

those in *Through The Looking Glass*, so the translation read: "It was evening, and the smooth active badgers were scratching and boring holes in the hill-side, all unhappy were the parrots and the grave turtles squeaked out". Dodgson added to it a few years later during a verse-making game played with his cousins when he was staying near Sunderland one summer holiday.

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There is no reference in *Through The Looking Glass* to their Anglo-Saxon origin. These verses are simply presented as being in lookingglass language.

## DISCUSSION:

1. What aspects do the telling of *Beowulf* to soldiers around the camp fires have in common to the reading of the poem *Jabberwocky* to children? In what ways are they alike? How are they different?
2. What are the characteristics of the hero presented in *Jabberwocky*?



## ***The Development of Middle English (1066 - 1400)***

### **Historical Background**

In 1066, the Normans, from northern part of France, invaded England. They brought with them their civilization which was more organized and more intricate than the Anglo-Saxon society and was organized under a Feudal system of government. It was a society prepared for war, not only with other countries but also between the barons and nobles themselves in frequent disputes for lands.

The church developed into an incredibly powerful institution. It was a world of constant war, diseases and violence thus, the Medieval man turned to the Church. Membership in the Church guaranteed for him a place in society; to be excommunicated meant to be ostracized from society. Education was the domain of the Church; prior to the invention of the printing press, manuscripts were tediously written down by hand in the monasteries. Monks and priests were responsible for the dissemination of the culture of Greek and Roman scholars as well as the teachings of the Scriptures. Oxford and Cambridge came to formally be known as universities during this period as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Church was also closely involved in political affairs. It was the medieval belief that Church and King were instruments of the Divine scheme necessary for keeping order in society. In 1170 a famous dispute happened between King Henry II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was the head of the English Church, and some of the King's supporters murdered the bishop Thomas A Becket inside the Minster at Canterbury.

He was canonized and Canterbury turned into a favorite place of pilgrimage..

The prevalent religious restlessness of the Middle Ages inspired the famous religious movement known as the Crusades, whose object was to free the Holy Land from the Muslims. Kings, knights and commoners united to rise in the "Holy War". Although the wars, which lasted two hundred years, were unsuccessful they spurred a great number of men to explore the world. Knights from the cold fortress castles of England visited the palaces of Venice and saw the luxuriant cities of Asia Minor. Inspired on these new horizons civilization advanced slowly.

Gradually England became unified. Wales was incorporated into the Crown, it took many years for Scotland, which was inhabited by tough Celts, to be subdued, however. The wool-trade helped England to develop but the French interfered with English shipping. This resulted in the 100 Years War between the France and England. Ultimately England lost the war and lost her part in the French territory, but one beneficial effect resulted: it ended the quarrels between Normans and Anglo-Saxons; then all were Englishmen.

The Feudal system gradually began to fall apart as the economy prospered. Craftsmen joined together in guilds and serfs began to find freedom. The powers and methods of the Church were being questioned as well as the idea that man had a fixed place in society.

### **Cultural Influences**

The Feudal system developed around the Knight, the mounted warrior who became the symbol of Chivalry. A well-born boy trained to be a knight first as a page and then as a squire to a lord. The lord's wife taught him the elaborate code of courtesy and manners which a knight needed to pursue. He practiced to be a horseman and ultimately was dubbed Knight and swore to uphold the code of Chivalry - loyalty to the Church and King, and reverence towards ladies. The institution of Chivalry smoothed the roughness of medieval life. It bound the frequently lawless warrior by a code. It promoted the status of woman and gave her a greater status in life and in literature as well.

Latin and French verse used meter and rhyme and these were introduced into English

poetry. During this period ballads were very popular and were sung and danced to by the common people. The ballad narratives were direct and swift moving and usually concerned love, courage, enmity and death, for death was part of the everyday pattern of medieval life. The ballad introduced verse, refrain and chorus, which remain the essential elements of popular songs even today.

Poems of Allegory and Courtly Romance were popular among the elite. Medieval allegory had a moral purpose and usually took the form of a dream narrative with a moral meaning. Courtly love romances of French origin stemmed from the code of Chivalry and the formalized and ritualized code of conduct towards women, much of which still exists today.

## The Development of the Language

At first the ruling Normans replaced Old English with French which was their own language. French then became the official language but was never adopted as the common language due to the class difference between the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans and the great numerical superiority of the latter. Further wars against the French increased nationalist sentiments and a tolerance of Old English. As the society prospered, English spread up from the base and in 1362 English was declared the official language.

French and English grammars differed greatly and could not be blended. The English grammatical plan emerged although the influence of French words upon the English vocabulary was extensive. As the Saxon and Norman societies merged, more and more French words, because they were more expressive and extensive, were introduced into English.

The difference in relations between the Normans and the Saxons can be seen from the Saxon names for the food animals which the Saxons tended, on their farms, and the French names for the meats the Normans ate at the dinner table; Deer-Venison, Pig-Pork, Cow-Beef, Calf-Veal, Sheep-Mutton.

French words relating to government, law and business were also adopted; such as crown,

state, courtier, justice, equality, felony, petition, executioner. As the cultural interests and opportunities of the Saxons grew, many cultural ideas and more words in the areas of literature, art, medicine, fashion and social life were added from the French.

English became more simplified from 1066 to 1400. It became a language of relatively few inflections, and different word endings to express grammatical relationships lost these distinctions. For instance 'good' in A.D. 700 had ten different forms, by 1350 it was down to two and shortly after only one. As endings were dispensed with, the grammatical relationships which they expressed were taken over by patterns and arrangements of words, so that Modern English has become a phrasal language more than an inflected language.

The most important city was London and for that reason the dialect spoken in that part of England came to be considered the 'King's English' - the official dialect of England. It was in this dialect that the famous author Chaucer chose to write in 1370. A century later, Caxton, who introduced printing to England, used the speech of London as the standard for printing, thus further establishing this dialect as 'Standard' English.

## The Ballad

The text below is 'The Ballad of Bonnie George Campbell', a traditional Scottish ballad which describes the frequent tragedy of border warfare which took place between the Scots and the English. The song appeared in Smith's 'Scottish Minstrel' 1820-1824 - but there is no identification of George Campbell, a member of one of the Great Scots clans, however, he obviously met a sticky end, leading to this lament

### The Ballad of Bonnie George Campbell

Hie upon Hielan's<sup>1</sup> and laigh<sup>2</sup> upon Tay<sup>3</sup>,  
Bonnie George Campbell rade oot on a day,  
Saddled and bridled, sae gallant tae see,  
Hame<sup>4</sup> cam' his guid horse but never cam' he.

5 Saddled and bridled and booted rade he,  
A plume in his helmet, a sword at his knee.  
But toom<sup>5</sup> cam' his saddle a' bluidy tae see,  
Hame cam' his guid horse but never cam' he.

<sup>1</sup>Highlands.

<sup>2</sup>low.

<sup>3</sup>river in Scotland flowing down from the Highlands into the North Sea at Perth.

<sup>4</sup>home.

<sup>5</sup>empty.

Doon ran his auld mither greetin'<sup>6</sup> fu'<sup>7</sup> sair<sup>8</sup>,  
10 Oot ran his bonnie bryde reivin'<sup>9</sup> her hair.  
"My meadow lies green and my corn is unshorn  
My barn is tae build and my babe is unborn."

Hie upon Hielan's and laigh upon Tay,  
Bonnie George Campbell rade oot on a day.  
15 Saddled and bridled, sae gallant tae see,  
Hame cam' his guid horse but never cam' he.

<sup>6</sup>grieving.

<sup>7</sup>full.

<sup>8</sup>sorely.

<sup>9</sup>pulling out.

## DISCUSSION:

3. How is the style of writing in the ballad different from Anglo-Saxon epic verse?
4. State the poetic devices which are used in this ballad.
5. How is the narrative typical of ballads? In what way is it effective?
6. How does this ballad reflect the society and times in which it is written?