

Untangling the Knot

An Analysis of Lewis Carroll's The Hunting of the Snark

"A knot!" said Alice. "Oh, do let me help to undo it!"¹

"These problems were all called Knots and were told in the form of stories." Belle Moses, the author of Lewis Carroll In Wonderland And At Home on Carroll's puzzle and logic books²

In 1872, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson wrote a monograph on *The New Belfry of Christ Church, Oxford*. He used the pseudonym D. C. L., a rather elementary scrambling of his initials, last name first, for Dodgson, Charles Lutwidge. In a further story in the set, he created himself as a character, Mr. De Ciel, a phonetic sounding out of those same scrambled initials, which had the added appeal of meaning "Of Heaven" in French. "Everything has a moral," he wrote, as D. C. L., "if you choose to look for it."³ In this, he was echoing the words he'd put in the mouth of the Duchess in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* years before, which was, "Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it." Years later, he'd have Sylvie of *Sylvie and Bruno* say, "There generally is a Moral."⁴

¹ Quotation selected by Carroll to head his appendix of answers to the Knots presented in *A Tangled Tale*, Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. A Tangled Tale. London: Macmillan, 1885, p 77 ["A knot!" said Alice, "Oh, do let me help to undo it!"]

² Moses, Belle, Lewis Carroll In Wonderland And At Home: the Story of His Life New York: D. Appleton, 1910, p 208.

³ Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. Notes by an Oxford Chiel. Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1865-1874.

Amusingly, the moral in this case is quite clearly set out at the last page of the monograph under the heading "The Moral."

⁴ Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. Sylvie And Bruno. London and New York: Macmillan, 1890, p. 367 ["There generally is a moral, only he puts it in too soon."]

Dodgson was a man of God. He had been ordained as a deacon, and as his nephew wrote of him, “He was always ready and willing to preach at the special service for College servants, which used to be held at Christ Church every Sunday evening; but best of all he loved to preach to children. Some of his last sermons were delivered at Christ Church, Eastbourne (the church he regularly attended during the Long Vacation), to a congregation of children. On those occasions he told them an allegory—Victor and Arnion, which he intended to publish in course of time—putting all his heart into the work, and speaking with such deep feeling that at times he was almost unable to control his emotion as he told them of the love and compassion of the Good Shepherd.”⁵

Dodgson was a man of God first, a mathematician and logician second, and Lewis Carroll, the renowned writer of “nonsense” stories for children third. I qualify the word nonsense because, during the course of several years in which I have immersed myself in the study of Lewis Carroll’s life and writings, I have become convinced that, contrary to generally held academic opinion, Carroll’s stories are not an art form which should be appreciated for their brilliant *lack* of meaning, but rather that his stories are only *seemingly* meaningless, that they are in reality, *if we look*, the complex, multi-layered and meticulously thought out parables of a brilliant logician attempting to engage tender young minds in the most preliminary steps of critical thought, the laughing “that can’t be so!” that could then be followed with, “you think not? I’ll show you how it can be so.”

Consider *The Hunting of the Snark*, which begins with a preface in which Lewis Carroll states, “If—and the thing is wildly possible—the charge of writing nonsense were ever brought against the author of this brief but instructive poem, it would be based, I feel convinced, on the

⁵ Collingwood, Stuart Dodgson, 1870-. The Life And Letters of Lewis Carroll. Rev. C.L. Dodgson. London: T. F. Unwin, 1898, pp 77-78

line (in p. 16) Then the bowsprit got mixed with the rudder sometimes: In view of this painful possibility, I will not (as I might) appeal indignantly to my other writings as proof that I am incapable of such a deed: I will not (as I might) point to the strong moral purpose of this poem itself, to the arithmetical principles so cautiously inculcated in it, or to its noble teachings in Natural History—I will take the more prosaic course of simple explaining how it happened.” Carroll then goes on to explain that in the course of removing the bowsprit once or twice a week to varnish it, the crew often had difficulty remembering which end of the ship it was meant to be re-affixed to, and as a consequence, they sometimes put the bowsprit, which belongs on the front of the boat, back onto the rudder end of the ship by mistake. This made it difficult for the crew to tell right (starboard) from the opposite of right, larboard (or wrong!) and during these “bewildering” intervals, the ship would usually sail backwards, and the helmsman could only stand by helplessly, in tears.

The critics of the age, who enjoyed Carroll most for the ways in which he appeared to set reason aside, disliked the feeling that they got from the *Snark* that there was an obvious lesson, even if they were not sure what that lesson was. They labeled the piece a failure, and consigned the discovery of “the allegory under which Mr. Carroll veiled his secret wisdom” to a commentator of the future.⁶ Current thinking in the academic community that *The Hunting of the Snark* is meaningless—albeit brilliantly meaningless—is an opinion which is based on the seemingly unassailable fact that Lewis Carroll himself *said* it was meaningless, or perhaps more

⁶ The Spectator London: F.C. Westley v.49 1876 Jan-Jun, April 22, 1876, pp 527-528 review of The Hunting of the Snark [“We thought at one moment that we had it, fancying, doubtless in a crass mood, that Mr. Carroll had been weak enough to work out an idea, to try to extract his special fun, the fun outside reason, the fun of no sense, from the drama of human life.”]; The London Quarterly Review. London: H.J. Tresidder, vol 47 (Oct 1876-Jan 1877) pp 246-247 [*The Hunting of the Snark* judged readable, though not generally intelligible and altogether “too vague in its significance to be reckoned among works first-rate even in that secondary or tertiary class.” The reviewer suggests that what a Snark is will have to be left for time to discover, “if time will be concerned with such questions.”]

precisely, that he said he was “afraid” that it was meaningless, “afraid” that he didn’t “mean anything but nonsense.”⁷ This statement, which he made casually in a letter to a friend, has been much repeated, eclipsing the much more obscure and more widely disseminated “I don’t know” answer published by Carroll himself in 1887.⁸

How can we work our way through this knot?

Carroll, who was known for the clarity of his thought, devoted a great part of his life to simplifying the process of logical thought for both children and the general population. In his *The Game of Logic* published in 1886 he introduced his reading public to the form of logical argument known as a syllogism, which consists of two premises and a conclusion, as follows:

Some red Apples are unwholesome;
No ripe Apples are unwholesome.
∴ Some red Apples are unripe.

(The symbol ∴ is the mathematical term for therefore.)

This is the first syllogism Carroll presented in his book, and at the conclusion of his lesson on how to reason through it, Carroll wrote, “And you have now worked out, successfully, your first ‘Syllogism.’ Permit me to congratulate you, and to express the hope that it is but the beginning

⁷ “As to the meaning of the Snark, I’m very much afraid I didn’t mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them; so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer means. So whatever good meanings are in the book, I’m glad to accept as the meaning of the book. The best I’ve seen is by a lady (she published it in a letter to a newspaper), that the whole book is an allegory on the search after happiness.”

⁸ Carroll, in explaining his process in the writing of *The Hunting of the Snark* (beginning with the appearance in his mind of the last line, and the odd moments over the next year or two as the poem pieced itself together), wrote, “And since then, periodically, I have received courteous letters from strangers, begging to know whether ‘the Hunting of the Snark’ is an allegory, or contains some hidden moral, or is a political satire : and for all such questions I have but one answer, “I don’t know !” The Theatre, April 1, 1887 *Alice on the Stage* by Lewis Carroll, pp 177-184, at p 181.

of a long and glorious series of similar victories!” Having taught his students how to work out syllogisms, he next turned to the trickier task of spotting illogical conclusions by spotting “fallacious premises.”

“And so you think, do you, that the chief use of Logic, in real life, is to deduce Conclusions from workable Premises, and to satisfy yourself that the Conclusions, deduced by other people, are correct? I only wish it were! Society would be much less liable to panics and other delusions, and *political* life, especially, would be a totally different thing, if even a majority of the arguments, that are scattered broadcast over the world, were correct! But it is all the other way, I fear. For one workable Pair of Premises (I mean a pair that lead to a logical Conclusion) that you meet with in reading your newspaper or magazine, you will probably find *five* that lead to no Conclusion at all: and, even when the Premises are workable, for *one* instance, where the writer draws a correct Conclusion, there are probably *ten* where he draws an incorrect one.”⁹

Current thinking—the reasons which the academic community assert for believing *The Hunting of the Snark* holds no greater underlying meaning—can be reduced to a logical syllogism as follows:

Carroll said that the Snark had no meaning
We have no reason to disbelieve him
∴ The Snark has no meaning

As Carroll himself has taught us, whether this conclusion is sound depends on the validity of the premises which precede it; that Carroll said the Snark had no meaning, and that we have no reason to disbelieve him

⁹ Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. The Game of Logic. London: Macmillan, 1886.

It would be naïve, perhaps, to approach *any* of Carroll's statements as if the meaning we first take is the only interpretation it may have. Carroll was a notorious tease who loved to twist words. According to the Hon. Lionel A. Tollemache, who knew Carroll from Oxford, Carroll would suggest that "if a dull writer sent you a copy of his books, you should at once write and thank him, and should add, with Delphic ambiguity, that you will *lose* no time in perusing them!"¹⁰) Similarly, perhaps, his use of the word *afraid* may have been one used to intentionally obscure while holding fast to the literal truth. Reading the statement for intentional ambiguity opens it up to more than one interpretation. The meaning could possibly have been something along the lines of, "I meant to impart something important, but I'm *afraid* that I didn't achieve anything but nonsense."

"One of the hardest things in the world," he would later write to another friend, "is to convey a meaning accurately from one mind to another."¹¹ In that regard, consider the following statement made by a contemporary of Carroll's who was renowned for his work in logic and reasoning, "a word can have no meaning but in the mind of somebody, and that meaning in every case can be no other than the intellectual effect produced, or, what is equivalent, the idea raised up by the word."¹² In other words, if the idea was not conveyed, it would have no meaning. This sentiment was published in 1863 by British Philosopher Samuel Bailey, whose *Theory of Reasoning* discussed the value of syllogisms in the reasoning process. There is absolutely no doubt that Carroll would have been familiar with Bailey's work as he himself was also devoted to the ways in which children and the general populace could learn to think and

¹⁰ Tollemache, L. A. 1838-1919. (1908). *Old and odd memories*. London: Edward Arnold, p 311. (You would lose no time in perusing them as you would *not* be perusing them!)

¹¹ Collingwood, Stuart Dodgson, 1870-. *The Life And Letters of Lewis Carroll*. Rev. C.L. Dodgson. London: T. F. Unwin, 1898, p 331, excerpt of a letter to Dora Abdy circa 1896.

¹² Bailey, Samuel, 1791-1870. *Letters On the Philosophy of the Human Mind: Third Series*. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1863, p 103.

reason more clearly through the use of syllogism to reach a reasoned conclusion, or, as the characters in his *Sylvie and Bruno* called it, a *sillygism*, by which you could produce a delusion.¹³

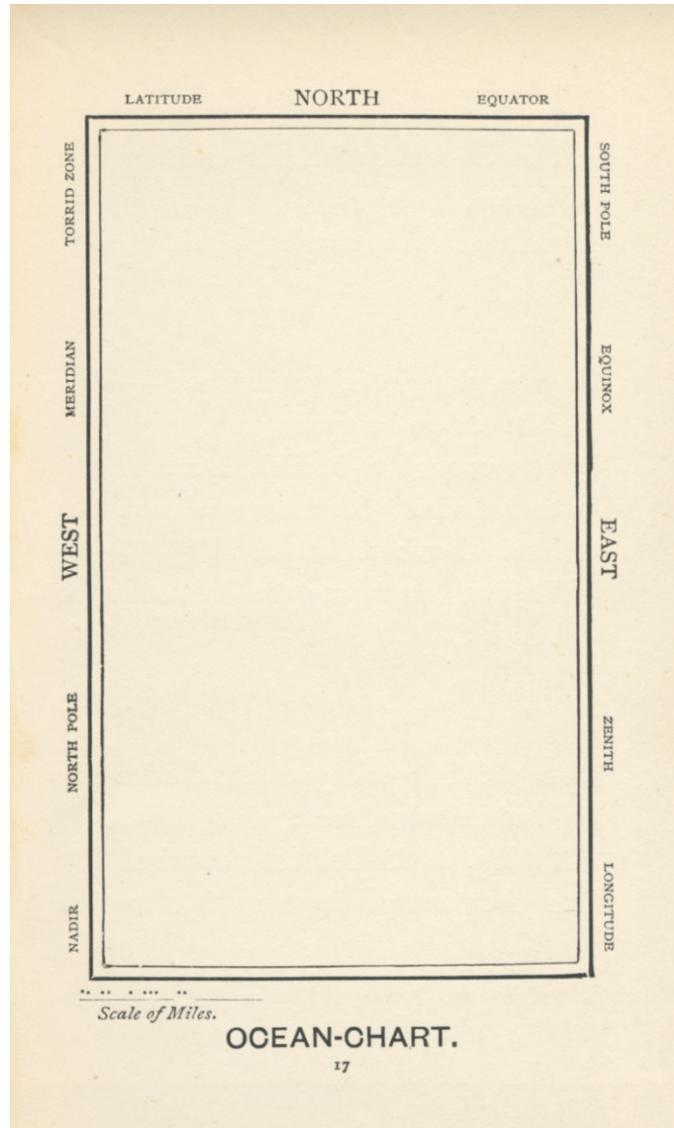
If a reasonable doubt has been raised in your mind regarding the firmness of the premises, you should now be in a position to consider evidence that *The Hunting of the Snark* was an allegory with an intended meaning. The key to solving the allegory behind Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* lies in his essay *Eternal Punishment*; an essay which was not published until after his death. In that essay Carroll posited, as others had before him, that an error made in translating the Bible into English had created religious difficulties in the understanding of the nature of the form of punishment which God would impose for sin. This was the translation of the word αἰών/aeon as eternal, a translation which suggested that God could impose infinite punishment for finite sin. Carroll took his analysis one step further, drafting the "religious difficulty" which he believed this had caused into the form of a logical syllogism, a logical argument involving three propositions, (I) God is perfectly good, (II) To inflict Eternal Punishment on certain human beings, and in certain circumstances, would be wrong, and (III) God is capable of acting thus. Because Carroll could not reconcile this conclusion with the premises, he determined that it was in fact untrue. He characterized the difficulty which this introduction of human error had caused *in naval terms, citing specifically the difficulties it would cause in navigation*. He wrote, "To accept as a just and righteous act, the infliction on human beings of infinite punishment for finite sin, is virtually the abandonment of *Conscience* as a guide in questions of Right and Wrong, and the embarking, without compass or rudder, on a boundless ocean of perplexity."¹⁴

¹³ Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. *Sylvie And Bruno*. London: Macmillan, 1889, p 259.

¹⁴ Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. *The Lewis Carroll Picture Book: a Selection From the Unpublished Writings And Drawings of Lewis Carroll : Together With Reprints From Scarce And Unacknowledged Work*. London: T.F. Unwin, 1899, pp 345-355. [Carroll's essay *Eternal Punishment* was intended for inclusion in a planned but never published book on religious difficulties. It reads in part, "All he needs

The Hunting of the Snark is an allegory for the journey of life which Carroll crafted very carefully to include “difficulties” which he believed had come about because of human error. [The illustration included below is Henry Holiday’s rendering of the Snark’s boundless ocean.] Life as a journey by boat had long been a favorite metaphor of Carroll’s. In this case the tale would not be of a sweet row on a placid river, but one of a voyage filled with fear and bewilderment and dread. And the moral, that despite our bewilderment, we would all be saved through God’s love and compassion in the end.

here to be told is that the interpretation of the passages, which are believed to teach the doctrine of “Eternal Punishment,” depends largely, if not entirely, on the meaning given to one single word (αιών). This is rendered, in our English Bibles, by the word “eternal” or “everlasting” : but there are many critics who believe that it does not necessarily mean “endless.” If this be so, then the punishment, which we are considering, is finite punishment for finite sin, and the original difficulty no longer exists.]



In *The Hunting of the Snark*, a group of living beings, literally “B” ings, a Bellman, a Baker, a Beaver, a Banker, a Barrister, a Butcher, a Billiard Marker, a Bonnet Maker, a Broker, and the helmsman Boots are sailing together on a boundless, unmapped ocean, on a journey in which the bowsprit of their sailing ship often gets taken off and put back on the wrong end of the boat, making it difficult to navigate. Their guide, the Naval Code, is virtually useless as the Bellman has added language which has made it impossible for the helmsman to properly instruct the crew.

These hapless beings are on a snark hunt. A snark hunt is an allegory on temptation and sin, and the word snark is likely a portmanteau word combining the words snake and shark; a transposition of snake, the symbol for sin in the Garden of Eden, with that of shark, a symbol for danger at sea, as the sea is the setting in which this particular tale takes place.

There is a man on board the ship who will try to warn his fellow passengers about the dangers of the snark. He is the Baker, a man who only bakes bride cakes (representing love). He has three pairs of boots (representing the holy trinity), and his fellow passengers don't know his name because, although he has told them his name before, he did so in Hebrew, Greek, Dutch and German, and they had not understood. (These are all versions of the Bible, which was, for example, originally written in Hebrew and first translated into Greek.) The Baker is the son of a poor but honest man and woman, and he left behind forty-two crates on the shore with his name on them before embarking on his journey. The Baker represents Christ, and his voyage will end with a moment of transcendent glory on the mount when he takes on, and dies for, our sins. The forty-two crates with his name on them, which he has left on the shore, symbolize the forty-two generations from Abraham to the birth of Jesus which are detailed in the Bible in the Gospel of Matthew (generations being those things which are left behind you when you set off on your voyage on the sea of life).

Discussion of the use and symbolism of the number 42 in the Bible was widespread during Lewis Carroll's lifetime. A version of the New Testament published in London in 1862 included statements that "the sixth seventh brings us to Christ," as well as "the number forty-two signifying in Scripture a time of trial leading to rest."¹⁵ A popular mnemonic poem of the time intended for bible study read as follows:

¹⁵ The New Testament of Our Lord And Saviour Jesus Christ, In the Original Greek. New ed. London: Rivington, vol 1 1862, p 5.

The generations from Abraham, to David are fourteen,
And from David unto Babylon, is a like division seen,
And from Babylon unto Jesus, the same again we view,
Three times fourteen generations, makes the number forty-two.¹⁶

The Hunting of the Snark reaches its climax when, as the day is waning and night approaches (a favorite metaphor of Carroll's for the approach of death), the voyagers see their Baker, "their hero unnamed—On the top of a neighboring crag, Erect and sublime, for one moment of time." As the Baker vanishes into a chasm, he calls out to his fellow voyagers, to tell them that the snark they were pursuing was a boojum. This passage has been nearly universally interpreted as suggesting that this particular snark was one which was more dangerous than most. I, however, believe the meaning of boojum to be something quite different. The scene, as I interpret it, is a reference to Christ's crucifixion; that moment in which Christ as the Baker, "met with" and atoned for our sins, and on dying, "vanished" from life.

Carroll initially breaks the word boojum down into two parts, boo, and something which "sounded like" jum, as follows:

Then followed a torrent of laughter and cheers;
Then the ominous words "It's a Boo—"

Then, silence. Some fancied they heard in the air
A weary and wandering¹⁷ sigh
That sounded like "—jum!" but the others declare
It was only a breeze that went by.

¹⁶ Eisenbeis, Louis, 1835-. *The Amen Corner, And Other Poems*. West Chester, Pa.: F. S. Hickman, 1897, p 290 [excerpt of poem titled *Matthew-First Chapter*].

¹⁷ The phrase "weary and wandering" was a well-used trope of the time, *often* used to refer to the long suffering when they were called at last to God on death.

In his preface to *The Hunting of the Snark*, Carroll addressed the concept of portmanteau words, words which contain “two meanings packed into one word.” He did so under the guise of explaining the word “frumious,” which appeared in the related poem *The Jabberwock*, and by explaining the name “Rilchiam” as a combination of the names William and Richard. Carroll offered Rilchiam (which does *not* appear in earlier works) as an understandable response to a demand made by a character in Shakespeare’s play *King Henry the Fourth*, “Under which king, Bezonian? speak, or die.”¹⁸ As Carroll specifically addressed the concept of portmanteau words in the preface to *The Hunting of the Snark*, a wise reader might consider themselves put on notice that portmanteau words might appear in the *Snark* itself.

Having previously asserted my belief that snark is a portmanteau word likely combining the meanings of snake and shark, I turn now to Boojum. The word Boojum is broken down into two parts in the story itself, appearing as “a Boo—” followed by a silence, which is followed shortly thereafter by a weary and wandering sigh that “sounded like jum.” Carroll wrote specifically regarding “jum” that it was a word that the Baker vanished in the *middle* of trying to say, implying that jum was the first part of a longer word, so that we have:

Boo + Jum ____

Carroll, in his essay *Eternal Punishment*, expressed his belief that God used fear to motivate good behavior in those who were not yet morally advanced enough to reject sin based on the love of goodness, and *The Hunting of the Snark* literally includes a Boo! moment. (“It’s a Boo —.” Then silence.) It is possible that the Boo in Boojum stands for no more than Boo!, an expression of Carroll’s beliefs regarding sin and the necessity of fear of the consequences of sin.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the choice of “which king” in *King Henry the Fourth* is not between a Richard and a William, but between King Harry the Fourth or King Harry the Fifth.

And yet, while Carroll believed that there was “some eternal *necessity*, wholly beyond our comprehension, that *sin* must result in suffering,” and that this principle was in some way related to “the unfathomable mystery of the Atonement,” he could *not* believe that this requirement extended to the infliction of infinite punishment for finite sin. As we have seen, the way Carroll came to this conclusion was, in a fashion ever so typical of Carroll, through the use of syllogism. In this, he was fulfilling the express wish of the Philosopher John Locke who lived from 1632 to 1704. Locke, who like Carroll was also educated at Christ Church in Oxford, was considered to be the Christ Church representative of English philosophers,¹⁹ and a marble statue of the great philosopher stands in the college’s library there. Locke had written in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* about the “jumble” of syllogisms regarding God and punishment and had decried that they must be worked into a less jumbled state. “I must beg pardon for calling it jumble,” Locke wrote, “till some body shall put these ideas into so many syllogisms, and then say, that they are less jumbled, and their connexion more visible...”²⁰ This is precisely what Carroll believed he had done in his *Essay on Eternal Punishment*, and I have little doubt that Carroll was aware of himself as *that* man, that “*some body*” who Locke had implied must come along to make these logical connections more visible before the reasoning underlying God and Punishment should cease to be called a jumble.²¹ Locke had also stated that while *philosophers*

might try to reason through these syllogisms, in general, “men in their own inquiries after truth

¹⁹ Thompson, Henry Lewis, 1840-1905. Christ Church. London: F. E. Robinson and Co., 1900, p 222 [“John Locke is the Christ Church representative of English philosophers.”]

²⁰ Locke, John, 1632-1704. An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding: In Four Books. 5. ed. London: Awnsham & J. Churchill, 1706, Book IV Of Knowledge and Opinion, Chapter XVII Of Reason, pp. 569-571.

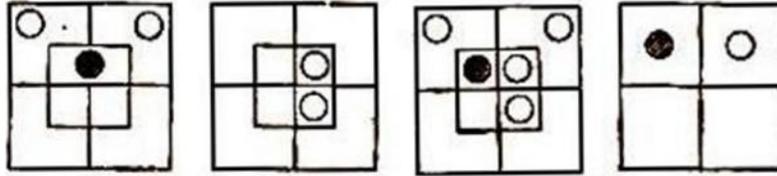
²¹ Carroll simplified Locke’s “jumble of five or six syllogisms” down to one logical argument involving three propositions. Of this, he would have been rightly proud. Did he leave a signpost to his answer to Locke’s call in the Butcher’s math lesson to the Beaver in which he proposes “taking three as the number to reason about” and proceeds to delineate an equation beginning $3 + 17 \times 992$? Locke’s call for a logician to reason through the jumble of syllogisms regarding God, sin and punishment can be found in Locke’s essay Of Human Understanding, Chapter 17 : Of Reason, Library Catalog Code 992.

never use syllogisms to convince themselves [or in teaching others to instruct willing learners.]” Carroll, however, was *more than glad* to instruct willing learners if in doing so, they might gain a clearer understanding of religious truths. In a letter Carroll wrote to one of his sisters in 1896, he stated his belief that the work he was doing in simplifying the process of logical thought, “to make the study of Logic *far* easier than it now is” would “be a help to religious thought” by enabling people to work out religious difficulties for themselves. “So I do,” he wrote, “really regard it as work for *God*.”²²

Boo for fear of the consequences of sin
+
Jumble for the jumble of syllogisms regarding sin
=
A fear of the consequences of sin based on false reasoning.

We are used to reasoning with words and phrases, such as the ripe/unripe apple syllogism Carroll opened his *Game of Logic* with, but there are times when a subject is too complex to trust to words alone. Because this is so, Carroll was not content to merely teach his readers how to figure whether a syllogism was valid, he devised a novel form of charting, and transformed the process into a game which used both red and grey counters. (The counters represented binary true/false variables; the red counters standing in for true, and the grey for false.) This “game” might, he hoped, be both a source of endless amusement, and give the Players a little instruction as well. “But is there any great harm in that,” he asked, “so long as you get plenty of amusement?”

²² Ibid., pp 330-331



An example of the charting out of a syllogism in this way appears above, and it is clearly not a manner in which most people are accustomed to think.²³

Carroll's game was an extension of a form of "symbolic" logic which had been developed by a British mathematician and logician by the name of George Boole, who published the seminal *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought on which are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic and Probabilities* in 1854. Like Carroll, he was a mild, quiet man, and his work was considered only academically interesting for many years. This connecting of thought and mathematics, this new tool for better thinking that Boole had created, this method of stripping the ambiguity out of verbally based thought through binary true/false truth tables, would eventually become the method by which our modern computers think.²⁴ Boole's novel mathematical theories of logic figured very prominently in Carroll's books on logic, *The Game of Logic*, *Curiosa Mathematica*, and *Symbolic Logic, Part I*²⁵ and a search of Boolean logic often

²³ This diagram is of "A Syllogism worked out" with which Carroll opened his book *Symbolic Logic*. The syllogism: "That story of yours, about your once meeting the sea-serpent, always sets me off yawning; I never yawn, unless I'm listening to something totally devoid of interest." The first two boxes represent the premises separately, the third, the premises combined, and the fourth, the conclusion; "That story of yours, about your once meeting the sea-serpent, is totally devoid of interest." (Considering Carroll's stated purpose of helping his readers to use logic to reason through religious difficulties, can it be coincidence only that his *The Game of Logic* opened with a syllogism about an apple, and his *Symbolic Logic* opened with a syllogism about a serpent?)

²⁴ Halacy, D. S. 1919-. *Computers, the Machines We Think With*. [1st ed.] New York: Harper & Row, 1962; Boole, George, 1815-1864. *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought: On Which Are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic And Probabilities*. London: Walton and Maberly, 1854.

²⁵ Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. *The Game of Logic*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1887; Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. *Curiosa Mathematica*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1894; Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. *Symbolic Logic: Part I, Elementary*. London: Macmillan, 1896.

reveals Lewis Carroll's name, as he is recognized as having performed important early work in this field.

It is Carroll's connection to Boole that raises the strong possibility that the Boo in Boojum refers not only to Boo! for fear, but to *Boole*; a nuanced interpretation which would signify Carroll's belief that Boole's logic might be used to work through the false reasoning which created the fear of infinite punishment for finite sin, just as Carroll himself had, to reach the conclusion that finite sin would not lead to infinite punishment because God was a God of love and compassion.²⁶

There are paths other than Carroll's essay *Eternal Punishment* by which a researcher can reach the conclusion that the concept of eternal punishment is at the heart of *The Hunting of the Snark*. Goetz Kluge of Munich, for example, has proposed that Carroll used Rule 42 of the Naval Code pondered by the Bellman to describe a total disconnect from God as a consequence of the 42nd of Thomas Cranmer's short-lived 42 Articles of Religion. In that article, Cranmer rejected the doctrine of Universal Salvation, writing, "All men shall not be saved at the length. They also are worthy of condemnation, who endeavour at this time to restore the dangerous opinion that all men, be they never so ungodly, shall at length be saved, when they have suffered pains for their sins a certain time appointed by God's justice."²⁷ Kluge's theories can be found at <https://snrk.de> an excellent blog on *The Hunting of the Snark* in which Kluge incorporates his theories on the relevance of Carroll's use of the number 42.

²⁶ Carroll published [The Hunting of the Snark](#) twelve years after Boole's death.

²⁷ Cranmer's 42 Articles, which were an attempt to codify the essential beliefs of the Anglican Church, were quickly overturned during the reversion to Roman Catholicism under Mary I, and Article 42, in which Cranmer condemned the doctrine of Universal Salvation, did not make it into the 39 Articles which were codified during the reign of Elizabeth I.

I personally had not been exposed to Cranmer's short-lived Article 42 before I reached my conclusions set forth in this article. My research consisted wholly of Carroll's work, *The Hunting of the Snark*, his essay *Eternal Punishment*, and statements taken from biblical analysis predating Carroll's work which suggested that the number 42 was relevant both as the number of generations preceding Christ, and as symbolizing life as a time of trial leading to eternal salvation. This fit well with an allegory which dealt with the concepts of sin and punishment. However, Kluge's path to theorizing that the concept of eternal punishment is at the heart of *The Hunting of the Snark* is also very compelling. How is it that both Kluge and I were able to apply such apparently dissonant interpretations to reach such a similar end result? The inescapable conclusion is that Carroll was referencing Cranmer's Article 42 with his Rule 42, especially as the concept of eternal punishment upheld by Article 42 is *the conclusion forced by the translation of the word αἰών/aeon as eternal*. It was simply one more signpost in a poem riddled with allusions and clues.

There are *many* allusions to the Bible in *The Hunting of the Snark*. The narrow, dark valley that the Beaver and Butcher venture into symbolizes the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Here, they are frightened by the sound of the Jubjub bird, which, when you "hear" it approaching makes you recall your childhood (and reflect on your life). The Jubjub bird acts as the Angel of Death. Its name is a likely reference to a lesser gospel known as the Book of Jubilees, which is abbreviated as Jub., and which describes the four classes of angels who interact with man, including one which presides over the phenomena of nature and natural processes (such as death). The Jubjub bird is described as living in perpetual passion (the Latin *passionem* means "suffering"), and it is a creature who collects but cannot be bribed. (As in "All your money won't another minute buy." *Dust in the Wind*.) But all is not lost, there is relief in death when

heaven in the reward. The Butcher and the Beaver, natural enemies in life (as the butcher could only kill beavers), become close friends after death. They are the wolf and the lamb of Isaiah 11:6,7 which reads, “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”

There are also many *more* allusions which remain to be uncovered, and which deserve the attention of rigorous academic thought. There is, for example, the Barrister’s farcical dream, in which he attempts to prosecute a pig for deserting its sty. This dream suggests the meaninglessness of man’s laws in contrast to those of God, but that it occupies a “fit” of its own suggests that it must have deeper meanings still. In addition, there are, as Carroll wrote, the poem’s “noble teachings in Natural History.” These references are, on their face, indicators of mortality supporting the voyage of life allegory. Kluge, however, has done very good work tying these references to Darwinism and its impact on man’s relationship to God. There also remains the Beaver’s math, the repeated use of the prime 17, a more complete analysis of the rule of three (on its face, an obvious reference to syllogisms), and the *raison d’être* of the more minor characters. My favorite part of *The Hunting of the Snark* is the riddle of the identity of the Bonnetmaker. He appears in the story in one line only, which is as follows:

The maker of bonnets ferociously planned
a novel arrangement of bows.

This is a riddle which, like so many other of Carroll’s riddles, is based on the ambiguous meaning of words. Because the Bonnetmaker makes bonnets, which are largely decorative, the meaning of bows is understood in that context.²⁸ In fact, the rhyme which follows this line—

²⁸ Yet another facet: a bow, as it is understood in this line when taken at face value, is something which is looped and knotted. This is notable as Lewis Carroll called his logic problems knots.

while the Billiard-marker with quivering hand was chalking the tip of his nose—forces that understanding as in line with the rhyme (i.e., bows/nose rather than bows/cows). And yet, a bow (pronounced like cow), figures prominently in *The Hunting of the Snark* as that part of the ship (the front end of the ship) upon which the bowsprit is supposed to be placed. And, most notably, the bow is the part of the ship which in an unusual and strikingly *novel* fashion, is sometimes mixed up with the rudder end of the ship. For that matter, the word “novel” has its own ambiguous meaning. It can mean new and inventive, as it appears to do here, and it can also mean a work of fictional prose. Based on the foregoing, it is my opinion that Carroll is representing himself here in cameo as the maker of Bonnets and Hoods. I was helped along in reaching this conclusion by my longstanding belief that Carroll also represented himself as the Hatter in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. This is something which Carroll’s nephew Stuart Dodgson Collingwood implied when he insisted after his uncle’s death that someone who ate at his uncle’s undergraduate dining table (a group of roughly six) still lived on in *Alice* as the Hatter. Scholars have largely overlooked the obvious, that Carroll himself ate at his own dining table.²⁹ And,.. what else is a maker of bonnets, but a hatter?

Later in life, Carroll would address the issue of meaning through a song which his “mad” gardener of *Sylvie and Bruno* sings in mockery of a fat, food obsessed Baron. The offended Baron is told that the song “had no meaning at all” at which the gardener adds helpfully that he “never means nothing.”³⁰ (This is, of course, a double negative whose more precise meaning

²⁹ Collingwood, Stuart Dodgson, 1870-. *The Life And Letters of Lewis Carroll* (Rev. C.L. Dodgson). New York: The Century Co., 1899. P 47 [“In Mr. Dodgson’s mess were Philip Pusey, the late Rev. G. C. Woodhouse, and, among others, one who still lives in “Alice in Wonderland” as the “Hatter.””]

³⁰ This familiar insistence of no meaning appears in *Sylvie and Bruno* in regard to a song in which Carroll’s mad gardener mocks a Baron (a fat man referred to by another character as “your Adiposity”) by singing that he’s seen a hippopotamus and that if it stays for dinner, “there won’t be much for us.” Although the song is quite pointed and its meaning obviously clear, the offended Baron is told that the song “had no meaning at all” and the gardener adds that he “never means nothing.” (This is, of course, a double negative whose more precise meaning would be that the mad gardener *always* means something.)

would be that the mad gardener *always* means something.) Carroll has a habit of including himself in his stories. He's appeared as Mr. De Ciel (a man who didn't know if he was dreaming or going mad), as the mad hatter, as the bonnet maker, and as the mad gardener, and *he never means nothing*.

The fuller text of the letter in which Carroll disavowed that he had meant anything by *The Hunting of the Snark* is as follows:

As to the meaning of the Snark, I'm very much afraid I didn't mean anything but nonsense! Still, you know, words mean more than we mean to express when we use them; so a whole book ought to mean a great deal more than the writer means. So whatever good meanings are in the book, I'm glad to accept as the meaning of the book. The best that I've seen is by a lady (she published it in a letter to a newspaper), that the whole book is an allegory on the search after happiness.³¹

Carroll's statement judging one of the meanings his readers had offered as "best" suggests that there *was* a meaning which could be guessed at and that he was aware of. That "best" claim, the claim which most closely approached Carroll's intended meaning, was that the *Snark* was "an allegory on the search after happiness." The proof of the meaning of *The Hunting of the Snark* is in the completeness of the fit. It is an allegory on life, and the happiness which Lewis Carroll believed awaited us after its end. He'd worked through the jumble of syllogisms of man's beliefs regarding God through the use of Boole's symbolic logic in a manner which he believed revealed the greater truth, the logical conclusion, that God was not capable of imposing infinite punishment for finite sin, and he believed specifically, that Christ had tried to teach us that this was so.

Carroll, Lewis, 1832-1898. Sylvie And Bruno. London: Macmillan, 1889. pp 90-92.

³¹ Collingwood, Stuart Dodgson, 1870-. The Life And Letters of Lewis Carroll (Rev. C.L. Dodgson). New York: The Century Co., 1899, p 173.

In closing, I leave you with the excerpt of another letter of Carroll's, one written at that same period of his life in which he wrote and published *The Hunting of the Snark*:

“I find that as life slips away (I am over fifty now), and the life on the other side of the great river becomes more and more the reality, of which this is only a shadow, that the petty distinctions of many creeds of Christendom tend to slip away as well—leaving only the great truths which all Christians believe alike. More and more, as I read of the Christian religion, as Christ preached it, I stand amazed at the forms men have given to it, and the fictitious barriers they have built up between themselves and their brethren. I believe that when you and I come to lie down for the last time, if only we can keep firm hold of the great truths Christ taught us—our own utter worthlessness and His infinite worth; and that He has brought us back to our one Father, and made us His brethren, and so brethren to one another—we shall have all we need to guide us through the shadows.”³²

We would, Carroll believed, have all we need to guide us through the Valley of the Shadow of Death without fear if we could only find some way to see through the jumble of “religious difficulties” created by man, if we could only untie the knot by keeping firm hold of the great truths Christ taught us about God; because “the Snark *was* a Boojum, you see.”

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³² Ibid, p. 340.