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‘THE CREW WAS COMPLETE:...’, BUT HOW MANY WAS THAT?

by Abigail E. Acland and Gregory M. Acland

In *The Hunting of the Snark*, there are commonly reckoned¹ to be ten persons on board: the Bellman, the Boots, the Bonnet-maker, the Barrister, the Broker, the Billiard-marker, the Banker, the Beaver, the Baker, and the Butcher. We would like to suggest, however, that there were only nine (9) crew members. We achieve this count by identifying the Boots and the maker of Bonnets and Hoods as the one and the same individual, for the following reasons:

- Only nine crew members are illustrated: ‘the Boots ... is the one crew member who does not appear in any of Holiday’s illustrations.’² The nine illustrated, however, account entirely for the crew if our assumption is correct. In fact, the maker of Bonnets and Hoods is only shown in one illustration himself, *The Crew on Board*. Given Carroll’s scrupulous attention to details of these illustrations, it seems unlikely that he would have allowed one, and only one, crew member to be unillustrated. An early version of this illustration, housed at Bryn Mawr College^{2a}, shows a broker with a significantly more semitic appearance. Carroll was not pleased with it, and had Holiday alter the lower right area surrounded by the window frame. Included in this area is the Bonnet-maker, whose appearance was made more prominent in the final version. While the primary reason for this change was undoubtedly the appearance of the Broker, Carroll may also have deliberately sought to make the Bonnet Maker more distinct .. However, by placing the Maker of Bonnets and Hoods in deep shadow and placing the better part of the head out of sight entirely, this entity, while rendered more distinct, is also less identifiable. In short, this illustration clearly proves the existence of this character, while it leaves the true identity in doubt. The illustration of the maker of Bonnets and Hoods is a child’s game of ‘Guess who I am?’, where the subject has covered his eyes instead of the child.

- Nowhere in the *Snark* does Carroll use the phrase ‘Bonnetmaker’. In Fit the First, stanza 3, and Fit the Fourth, stanza 14, the reference is to the ‘maker of Bonnets’. Thus, if this person is distinct from the Boots, he is the only crew member with a title not starting with the letter ‘B’.

- In the line ‘The crew was complete: it included a Boots -- A maker of Bonnets and Hoods --’, we read the phrase ‘-- A maker of Bonnets and Hoods --’ as a parenthetic, explanatory statement rather than as a listing of an additional crew member. The other two crew members named in this stanza (‘A Barrister, brought to arrange their disputes - And a Broker, to value their goods’), both have an explanation of their duties appended to their identification. This is consistent with our conclusion that ‘A maker of Bonnets and Hoods’ describes the Boots’ functions,

rather than listing an additional crew member. In fact, all the crew members are introduced with some sort of description of their person or responsibilities, except the Boots, unless one concludes that the Boots was the maker of Bonnets and Hoods.

● Nowhere in the poem does the Boots interact either passively or actively with the Bonnet-maker. In *Fit the Fourth. THE HUNTING* (stanzas 12 and 14) the Boots and the Bonnet-maker, at first glance, do appear to be referred to separately. We suggest, however, that the Boots/Bonnet-maker 'ferociously planned A novel arrangement of bows...', mentally, while simultaneously 'sharpening a spade' with the Broker.

● We believe that Carroll was using a set of nautical terms to set up a wordplay that has misled people into assuming that the Boots and the Bonnet-maker were separate people. This type of conundrum was typical of Carroll.

A *Boots* is not only a term for 'a servant at a hotel or an inn, formerly assigned to such low tasks as cleaning boots and brushing clothes.'², but is also used to refer to the most junior member of a regiment or club³, and is the nickname for a Navy or Coast Guard recruit⁴. Useage of the term *Boots* in this manner in fact predates its use to mean a bootblack in a hotel⁵, and is probably based on rhyming slang for 'recruits' (cf the term bootcamp, which dates from at least as early as the Spanish-American War⁶).

In Carroll's time the British Empire was at its zenith. Class distinction was inherent in this system, but nowhere more entrenched than in the military. The Boots (new recruits) would be assigned menial tasks for Officers such as cleaning, repairing and polishing boots and similar items of gear. Subsequently, therefore, the origin of the term 'the Boots' became confused with the role of the individual 'the Boots'. So although one is first led to assume that 'he is called the boots because he cleans boots', the reality is that 'the Boots has to clean boots because he is the Boots (meaning new recruit)'. This logical inversion should be familiar to readers of Lewis Carroll. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* the identical wordplay occurs in *The Lobster Quadrille*. The Gryphon explains that the whiting is called a whiting because "*It does the boots and shoes*". In reality of course Carroll was saying that the " 'Boots and shoes under the sea, ... are done with whiting' " because the fish is called a whiting.

On board ship, the role of the Boots, as junior crew member, could well include the making and repairing of such items of nautical equipment as bonnets and hoods.

A *Bonnet* has two nautical meanings. Firstly it is a synonym in British English for A *Hood* (see below). More specifically it has a further meaning of 'an additional piece of canvas laced to the foot of a jib or foresail in moderate winds'. This meaning was current in Dodgson's time⁷ and remains so today⁸. Much earlier⁹, the term probably applied to a topsail or to an attachment above a topsail (thus bonnet). The function of a bonnet is similar to that of a *studding sail* for which the French term is *la bonnette*¹⁰.

A *Hood*, in nautical terms, has several meanings. The most relevant are 'a canvas covering for a companion hatch, skylight, &c. 'and' 'the piece of tarred or painted canvas which used to cover the eyes of rigging to prevent water from damaging them'¹¹. The term *bonnet* can be used synonymously¹².

● If there were only 8 crew members apart from the Bellman, it is possible that "supporting each man on the top of the tide By a finger entwined in his hair" was originally (and despite the illustration) meant to be *simultaneous* support of all 8 (i.e: one per finger).

● It has been previously suggested¹³, that there may be some connection between the facts that Carroll's poem has eight fits and that Carroll had eight younger siblings. In extension of this idea, one might speculate that, if the Bellman was Dodgson himself, the other 8 crew members may have represented his younger siblings (Caroline, Mary, Skeffington, Wilfred, Louisa, Margaret, Henrietta and Edwin). Hope and Care may then represent his two older sisters Fanny and Elizabeth.

Notes:

1. See, for example, footnote 19 of *The Annotated Snark*, by Martin Gardner.
2. Gardner, *op cit*, footnote 8.
- 2a. Special thanks to John Dooley of Miriam Coffin Canaday Library who was kind enough to show us the plates. This rejected version can also be seen as Plate xxxi in *Lewis Carroll's The Hunting of the Snark*, James Tanis and John Dooley ed. William Kaufmann Inc. California 1981.
3. See, eg: Oxford English Dictionary.
4. John G. Rogers, *Origins of Sea Terms*, The American Maritime Library: Vol XI, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 1984; citing: William and Mary Morris, *Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, Harper and Row, New York 1977.
5. 'Boots. The youngest officer in a mess: military: late C 18-20': Eric Partridge ed.: *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*. Seventh Edition. The Macmillan Co., New York 1970; citing Grose: *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1785.

6. 'During the Spanish American War, sailors wore leggings called *boots*, which came to mean a navy (or marine) recruit. These recruits trained in *bootcamps*': Robert Hendrickson: *Salty Words*, Hearst Marine Books, New York 1984. This is clear evidence of the application of the term *boots*, in a nautical environment, at a time (1898) close to that of the *Snark* (1876). The word is older, however, than Hendrickson realises (see 5, above). Both *boots* (for recruits) and *bootcamp* (for recruit camp) look like rhyming slang, which is typically cockney in origin. Hendrickson's comments re leggings is post facto rationalization, just as is the explanation that a boots is called that because he cleans boots.
7. 'Bonnett. An additional part laced to the foot of the jibs, or other fore-and-aft sails, in small vessels in moderate weather, to gather more wind. They are commonly one-third of the depth of the sails they belong to. Thus we say 'Lace on the bonnet' or 'Shake off the bonnet'. Bonnets have lately been introduced to secure the foot of an upper-topsail to a lower-topsail yard. The unbonnetted sail is for storm service.' Admiral William Henry Smyth *The Sailor's Word-Book*, Blackie and Son, London 1867. This book, at least, represents nautical terminology current in Dodgson's day, and was almost certainly available to Dodgson.
8. 'Bonnet ...2a: An additional piece of canvas laced to the foot of a jib or foresail' *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, G. & C. Merriam Co, Springfield, Massachusetts 1976, p251.
9. a) 'It appears to have been formerly laced to the top of the sail, or to have been itself a top-sail'. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press 1985, Vol. I, p247.
b) "Bonet = Bonnet (of a sail)". Henry Bradley: *A Middle English Dictionary by Francis Henry Statmann*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1891, p83.
10. a) 'bonnette...3. Nau: Studding-sail'. *Harrap's New Collegiate French and English Dictionary*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1977, p B:21.
b) 'Studding Sail. A sail set beyond the leeches of any of the principal sails during a fair wind'. *Oxford English Dictionary* (op. cit.), Vol II, p3107.
'Studding-Sails. Fine weather sails set outside the square-sails; the term "scudding-sails" was formerly used.' Smyth (op. cit.) p664.
11. Smyth (op. cit.) p387.
12. Webster's Third (op. cit.) pp251, 1087.
13. Phyllis Greenacre: *Swift and Carroll, A Psychoanalytical Study of Two Lives*, International Universities Press, New York 1955.