ALICE-SLICE-SLICK-SLACK-SNACK-SNARK

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Lewis Carroll, inventor of Doublets (word ladders), would no doubt have been charmed by the one given in the title, connecting ALICE with SNARK in a minimum number of steps. He would have been even more pleased with Boojum!, a musical comedy on his life, work and ideas, composed by Australian brothers Peter and Martin Wesley-Smith, and presented at the 1986 Adelaide Festival of the Arts and four times in November 1988 by the Sydney Philharmonia Society.

As **Word Ways** readers are no doubt aware, Lewis Carroll (in real life Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) was a mathematics don and Church of England deacon who, in addition to writing Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, played with problems of meaning and logic, dabbled in magic and chess, and took photographs of little girls. (Although he sometimes photographed them with their clothes off, it is untrue that one could say of CHARLES LUTWIDGE DODGSON that O! THE WAG DON CUDDLES GIRLS!) Building on these historical facts, the Wesley-Smith brothers have constructed a libretto based on Carroll's famous nonsense poem, The Hunting of the Snark. In it, the protagonist is split into two personae -- the moralistic, repressed, Church-of-England Dodgson who mourns the fact that his many Alices inevitably outgrow the "golden afternoons" of boating and story-telling, and the ever-playful Carroll, an intellectual Peter Pan. Whom did his Alices really love -- Carroll or Dodgson, myth or reality? The quest for the answer is cast in the form of the search for a Snark, who (if one is not careful) may turn out to be a Boojum instead. And what is the Boojum? Wesley-Smith hints that it is Time, the great alterer and destroyer, but the listener may well detect other messages: the musical, like Dodgson himself, is stretched between dream and reality, emotion and rationality, religious faith and existential despair.

Word Ways readers will be interested in various sorts of wordplay built into the work. To begin with the word ladder of the title is found in the descriptive material accompanying the libretto, as is the anagram given above. There are internal rhymes such as

> Tick tock tick tock ...
> We've got a fantasTICK little crew, the arisTOCKracy of flair,
> And an eclecTICK point of view, sound the TOCKsins ev'rywhere..

It's very easy to be CYNical
It's strange we're not deLINquent
Really, we've been rather SWINdled

We're the same in ev'ry WRINkle
Really it's quite ignoMINious
It goes on ad inFlNitum
We're most annoyed, fair DINkum
  It's no fun to be a TWIN.

At the beginning of the second act, Lewis Carroll writes a BASIC program to anagram his name into phrases such as LC: ALL WORRIES, CROWS RILE ALL, WORSE: CARL ILL, SLICE RAW ROLLS, LC IS WELL (ROAR!), and LC: ERROL WAILS. (Snark-hunters CARL, ERROL, WAL, CORA, AL and CLARRIE are named from the letters in LEWIS CARROLL.)

The play begins with an Acroustic (acoustic acrostic) on BOOJUM:

> B e-hold the Bellman's tragic tale
> O de to mankind's Holy Grail
> O pen your hearts, your minds set free
> J a-ded though your spirits be
> e U logise with us the Baker
> e M barking on his agony.

One of the most extended bits of letter-play is contained in the first-act ODD SONG (an anagram of DODGSON) in which the notes spell out the words DEAF AGED CABBAGE DEAD:

Lewis Carroll: Give me an **E**

> [Eric plays an E]

Lewis Carroll: a **G**

> [Eric plays a G - and so on]

Lewis Carroll: an **A** .. and a **D** .. EGAD! That's a word! Let's try another .. say, "cabbage". Let's see: C .. **A** .. **B** - how many B's are there in CABBAGE? Two B's or not two B's? Another **B**, I think .. and another **A** .. a **G** .. and finally an **E**

> [Eric doesn't play anything]

Lewis Carroll: Oh, of course; it's a silent E! So, there we have a **CABBAGE**. Let's have a **DEAF** .. **AGED** .. **CABBAGE** .. who dies - he's **DEAD** .. Not a bad tune! DEAF AGED CABBAGE DEAD sounds like this:

> [Eric plays whole tune]

Lewis Carroll: We need some words to it. Let's see now ..

Dodgson: Fell asleep .. Had a funny dream .. Laughed! .. Then beastly Boojum came .. It was .. a .. scream!

The **anagram generator** mentioned previously is cleverly titled: ANAGRAMESSAGENERATOR, exploiting word-overlap much as did REAGANAGRAMS in an earlier **Word Ways** article.