



## Lewis Carroll (1832-1898)

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Children's/Young Adult writer; Poet; Story-writer.  
Active 1852-1898 in England

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was born on January 27, 1832 at Daresbury parsonage, Cheshire, as the eldest son and the third of eleven children of Charles Dodgson, curate of the parish, and Frances Jane Lutwidge. When Charles was eleven years old, the family moved to Croft-on-Tees, where his father was appointed Archdeacon of Richmond and Canon of Ripon Cathedral. At the age of thirteen, Charles inaugurated the first of a series of family magazines for his siblings, under the name of *Useful and Instructive Poetry*, followed by *The Rectory Magazine*, *The Rectory Umbrella* and *Mischmasch*. In 1844 he entered Richmond Grammar School, and in 1846 Rugby, where he spent three rather unpleasant years: “From my own experience of school life at Rugby I can say that if I could have been [...] secure from annoyance at night, the hardships of the daily life would have been comparative trifles to bear” (March 18, 1857; *Diaries* vol. 3, 40).

In 1851 followed his matriculation at Christ Church, Oxford, where his father had taken a First in Classics and Mathematics in 1821. Only a few days later he learnt of his mother's death, which seems to have affected him deeply. The family got help from Frances' sister, Lucy Lutwidge, who took charge of the children, the youngest of whom was then only five years old.

As early as 1852, he was nominated for a studentship by Pusey, and moved to the rooms at Christ Church where he would live until the end of his life. By 1855 he became a Lecturer in Mathematics, after having received his Bachelor of Arts degree with first class honours in mathematics and second class honours in Classics in the previous year. He held the position of lecturer until 1881 when he resigned his post in order to focus on his writings. Even so, he continued to live at Christ Church until his death in 1898.

It was in 1856 that he decided to use the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, as he would henceforth be known, for the publication of “Solitude” in *The Train*: “Wrote to Mr. Yates [editor of *The Train*], sending him a choice of names, 1. *Edgar Cuthwellis* (made by transposition out of “Charles Lutwidge”), 2. *Edgar U. C. Westhill* (ditto), 3. *Louis Carroll* (derived from Lutwidge = Ludovic = Louis, and Charles), 4. *Lewis Carroll* (ditto)” (February 11, 1856; *Diaries* vol. 2, 39). From that time on he published all his literary works under the name of Lewis Carroll; his mathematical writings, however, continued to appear under the name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.

The year 1856 seems to have been extraordinary for him in many respects. In March, he bought his first camera. He had always tried to draw, ever since the family magazines of his youth, but was discouraged in this particular passion by the opinions on his work expressed by, among others, John Ruskin. As an alternative he decided to try his hand at photography and became one of the most famous amateur photographers of the time. In April, he

took his first photograph of Alice Liddell and her sisters (April 25, 1856; Diaries vol. 2, 65); it was a day he “mark[ed] with a white stone”, an expression he always used in his diaries to mark a particularly beautiful day.

Alice Liddell was the daughter of Henry George Liddell who became Dean of Christ Church in 1855. Carroll first got to know her brother, Harry, then the eldest sister, Lorina (named after her mother), and subsequently Alice and Edith. When Harry went away to school, Carroll devoted himself to the three little girls and enjoyed taking them on outings to the river and telling them stories. It was in the wake of such an outing on July 4, 1862, that he wrote down *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*. The manuscript was given to Alice Liddell at Christmas 1864; the story subsequently become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and was published at Macmillan's in 1865. In 1856 he also spent the long vacation in London, where he attended the theatre regularly. It was the year of Ellen Terry's debut, aged nine. Dodgson saw her as Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale* (Clark 95); she, then “a beautiful little creature” (June 1, 1856; *Diaries* vol. 2, 83,) was to become one of his closest friends for many years.

Lewis Carroll liked to befriend children, preferably girls, and he did so throughout his whole life. Even in the years prior to his death, he had child visitors in Eastbourne who would spend some weeks over the summer with him. These friendships have led to speculation with regard to Carroll's motives in befriending — and photographing — little girls. Morton N. Cohen remarked that, even if Dodgson had harboured paedophilic desires, he would never have violated propriety or transgressed religious values and norms. Carroll's own diary entries, which are replete with self-recrimination, have fuelled rumours as to the reasons for his seemingly troubled conscience. Suggestions of paedophilia actually go back to an article written by Goldschmidt, “*Alice in Wonderland Psychoanalyzed*”, in 1933, which spurred Freudian readings of Carroll. Recent criticism by Karoline Leach assumes that both his diaries and his love poetry, particularly the poems written between 1859 and 1868, such as “Three Sunsets” and “Stolen Waters”, allude through their erotic content to an attraction to Lorina Liddell, the Dean's wife and Alice's mother, and provide evidence for an affair between her and Lewis Carroll (cf. Karoline Leach, *In the Shadow of the Dreamchild: A New Understanding of Lewis Carroll*). Cohen, on the contrary, suggests that Lewis Carroll wanted to marry Alice, a conjecture built mainly on a diary entry from June 27, 1863, which, as Cohen put it, “a Dodgson heir later razored out”: “[...] Wrote to Mrs. Liddell urging her either {the word “either” has been crossed out} to send the children to be photographed, {and the next page of the journal is missing}” (vol. 4, 214). The next entry is for June 30: Most probably the entries for two days are missing (cf. Wakeling, vol. 4, 214). A breach in the friendship between Carroll and the Liddell family can thus be noticed. Although they resumed friendly terms again soon (the next entry in his journal about the Liddell family is from December of that year), they could never return to the relaxed atmosphere of their former relationship. Still, Carroll dedicated the sequel to *Wonderland*, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, published in 1872, to Alice Liddell.

In 1867, Carroll went to Germany and Russia for two months with H. P. Liddon, his friend and colleague from Christ Church, who was later to become Canon and Chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral. *The Russian Journal*, a record of their journey, was published separately in 1935 (ed. J. F. McDermott; it has since been included in the complete edition of Carroll's diaries). They travelled via Brussels, visited Cologne Cathedral and moved on to Berlin, Danzig and finally St. Petersburg. From there, their journey went on to Moscow and Nijni Novgorod. During their return journey they visited several cities, among them Warsaw, Breslau, Dresden, and Paris. It was the only time that Carroll was ever to leave the British Isles.

After his return to Christ Church, he moved into new rooms where he had more space for his photography. When, in the summer of 1868, his father died suddenly, his sisters had to leave the rectory in Croft. As all of them were still unmarried, and only Mary was going to marry at all (the Reverend Charles Collingwood; it was their son who became Carroll's first biographer), Carroll had to find them a house. They moved to “The Chestnuts” in Guildford. Thirty years later, Carroll wrote to an unidentified correspondent that the death of his father was “the greatest blow that has ever fallen on *my* life” (qtd. in Collingwood 131; *The Life and Letters of*

Lewis Carroll). His father had always wanted to see his son settled in the Church. Carroll, however, never took full orders. It was in 1861, almost five years after taking his MA, that he was ordained deacon of the Church of England. One reason for this procrastination was “his delight in the theatre” (Clark 114), another certainly his stammer, which always made him insecure when it came to preaching. In search of a cure for his stammer, he took reading interviews and sought therapeutic care for himself and his sisters with James Hunt at his practice in Hastings and, after the latter’s death, with his successor Henry Frederick Rivers (editor of James Hunt’s *Stammering and Stuttering, their Nature and Treatment* (1861)). It was in Hunt’s practice in 1860 that he had met George MacDonald, whose son Greville said about *Alice in Wonderland* that “there ought to be sixty thousand volumes of it” (Qtd. in *Diaries*, vol. 4, 197n198, May 9, 1863). The two authors became and stayed friends (Stoffel 67; Clark 105).

The 1870s were very productive in terms of both literary and mathematical writings: in 1869, *Phantasmagoria*, a collection of poetry, was published, followed by *Looking-Glass* at the end of 1871, his first pamphlet *Discussion of Procedure in Elections* with a suggestion for altering voting methods at his college in 1873, the nonsense poem *The Hunting of the Snark* in 1876, and among his mathematical writings a treatise on Euclid in 1874 and 1875, very much in the tradition of Oxford mathematical scholars, followed by *Euclid and His Modern Rivals* in 1879. Although it has often been said that Dodgson’s mathematical achievements were no more than mediocre, one of his writings, *An Elementary Treatise on Determinants* (1867), has recently “excited the attention of combinatorialists” (*Oxford Figures*, eds. Fauvel, Flood, Wilson).

In 1880, the last known photograph was taken by Lewis Carroll; he returned to drawing and even took lessons with Gertrude Thomson. She eventually illustrated the posthumous work *Three Sunsets*.

After resigning his post as lecturer in 1881, Carroll became curator of the Christ Church Senior Common Room in 1882. Although he was no longer a lecturer, he had not lost his interest in mathematical education and started to teach logic to child friends and at women’s colleges. In 1887 especially, there are numerous entries in his diaries concerning his teaching of female students, whom he also instructed individually. He also contacted “Miss Bishop at the High School”, “to talk about the lectures [...] I have undertaken to give there”. In May, he writes in his diary: “Gave first lecture at High School, on *Game of Logic*. There were 20 girls (elder ones), some former scholars, and some mistresses. They seemed interested in the lecture, though it was all about the ‘x,y’ square only” (May 5, 1887; *Diaries* vol. 8, 331). His main interest lay in the playful teaching of logic and mathematics, which becomes evident in the title of the following publication, the *Game of Logic* which was followed by *Symbolic Logic*, Part I in 1896; unfortunately, he never managed to finish the second part of *Symbolic Logic*. He did, however, complete his *Sylvie and Bruno* books which also consist of two parts. Carroll thought them to be the best books he had ever written. *Sylvie and Bruno* was published in 1889, while its sequel, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, appeared in 1893. The idea for the books went back to a story published in Aunt’s Judy’s Magazine in 1867, “Bruno’s Revenge”.

Lewis Carroll died on January 14, 1898. During his Christmas visit at his sisters’ he had caught bronchitis which became worse over the New Year, and he eventually died of it two weeks before his 66<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The earliest biography on Lewis Carroll was published almost immediately after his death in 1898 by his nephew Stuart Dodgson Collingwood. He was the only person ever to use all the diaries for his publication. After *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*, four of thirteen adult diaries were lost, the earliest dating from at least 1853 with a gap of three months in 1855 and of four years between 1858 to 1862; it has been assumed by most of Carroll’s biographers that they were most likely destroyed by the family, and it is known that Menella Dodgson, one of Carroll’s nieces, admitted to having cut pages from them (cf. Cohen 100). Roger Lancelyn Green published a two-volume selected edition of them in agreement with — and under the supervision of — the family in 1953. In 1969, the surviving volumes of diaries were purchased by the British Library. Most recently, Edward Wakeling edited the only complete publication of the nine surviving volumes (1993-2006).

Carroll was also a busy writer of letters, which are the second primary source for biographical details. He went so far as to register all the letters he received and sent for the last thirty-seven years of his life, some 98,721 messages during this period of time. In “Eight or Nine Wise Words about Letter-Writing”, first published in 1890 together with the Wonderland Postage-Stamp-Case, he advises his readers as to “how to begin” a letter and “how to go on” with it. It is partly a sort of “instruction manual” providing several rules, partly a record of mistakes commonly made in letter-writing that he found most disturbing (such as illegibility, no full dates given etc.). The last part is about “Registering Correspondence”, a principle that he followed himself.

Many of Carroll’s possessions were burnt or sold immediately after his death. One of the two executors of his will, Wilfred Dodgson (the other executor, Edwin Dodgson, the younger brother, was out of the country) arrived in Oxford two weeks after Carroll died. Wilfred consigned everything that seemed saleable to an auction, and within four months most of Carroll’s belongings, collected over a lifetime, were sold. Most of the letters and papers were given to and kept by the family; Leach reckons that “something like 80 per cent of them were never seen again” (Leach 46). Apart from selling belongings, Wilfred apparently burnt documents, perhaps according to his brother’s instructions. A reconstruction of his belongings, particularly of his library, from auction catalogues was published in 1981 by Jeffrey Stern (*Lewis Carroll’s Library*). A recent publication by Jenny Woolf, *Lewis Carroll in His Own Account*, gives further insights into Carroll’s life. She found his bank account, which covers the years from its inception in 1856 through to 1900 when Wilfred closed it, in the archives of Barclays Bank in Manchester. It shows how Carroll spent his money, including payments to several charities and to friends in need; this is, to date, the latest discovery related to his biography. However, there are still many mysteries surrounding his life, and many questions are yet unanswered.

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