

Lewis Carroll in Darkroom

YAMAMURA Yoshio*

Abstract

This paper attempts to unravel the focused mindset of Lewis Carroll as a brilliant photographer, who has been highly evaluated for his artistic visual works recently. Alice Liddell, to whom his first *Alice* story was dedicated, was the model of his maniac photography. Gradually Carroll transformed himself psychologically from an amateur gadgeteer into a visual hunter of the fairylike and innocent images of the real Alice, trapping her in frozen and unchangeable moments. Considering that fact that several other little girls were also treated as the prey of his light-induced hunting instrument which required darkness as well, this research sneaks into the locked-down darkroom deeply located in the subconsciousness of Lewis Carroll. Photography's functions and chemical processes, sobriquet "the black art", could help us delve into his secret mentality. The remaining photographs of Alice Liddell and other girls, although they are still as metamorphosed memories and recollections of bygone days, actively escort me to his lonely and isolated hideaway.

Keywords : Lens, Hunter, Frozen Time, Darkroom, Loneliness

This paper finalizes my intuitive and geometrical research on the mentality of Lewis Carroll by focusing on him as a photographer, which was his third identity. Since 2017 I have studied his five major works: the two *Alice* stories, *Sylvie and Bruno* and its sequence, and *The Hunting of the Snark*, and have written a paper on each of them respectively over the past five years.

The new approach in 2020 as the sixth report forms a hexagon together with the former five presentations to embrace this loneliest of authors during the prosperous Victorian Era. May the smallest perfect number, which made the *Alice* stories possible, complete my Euclidian perspective.

1. Lens

After the invention of photography in the

1830s..., photographs became increasingly ubiquitous, especially after the 1850s. A stream of spectacular new visual images bombarded Victorian audiences

Victorian Popularizers of Science, Bernard Lightman

The camera is a wonderful invention, but how I wish we could take photographs in true colour so you could see for yourself what I mean.

The Piano Turner, Daniel Mason

It was on 8th of September in 1855, according to his diary, that the 23-year-old lecturer of mathematics named Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (hereafter Dodgson) at Christ Church, Oxford, who would be more famous as Lewis Carroll after 1865, was intrigued with photographs for the first time when he saw some presented by his uncle. Two days later, both of them, on his uncles'

*工学部英語系列非常勤講師 Part-Time Lecturer, Department of English Language, School of Engineering

invitation or his own request, went together to Richmond, Yorkshire to enjoy photographing.

The experience of this outing might have encouraged Dodgson to compose a short story titled “Photography Extraordinary”, which appeared in the November 13th issue of *Comic Times*. Now we can read it as one of the literary works of Lewis Carroll. The most vivid and impressive phrase in his early written product, “My brain is fire—my heart is lead!”, seems to imply the chemical process of turning the negative into the positive print before a fire.

As indicated by Charles Reade in the “The Pursuit of Innocence”, the portable film did not come into use until the 1880s, so Dodgson needed a darkroom at his disposal to focus on careful and meticulous preparation and to handle the apparatus for good photographs.

The main reason why he decided to buy such a new gadget in spite of his limited knowledge regarding the infant technology was presumably because he made his first acquaintance with Alice Liddell, her two sisters and their mother, Mrs. Liddell on February 25th, 1856. This date should be remembered as one of the most unforgettable moments in his life.

During the easter holidays next month Dodgson placed an order to purchase a camera for £ 15. Even though this amount “did not include all the other paraphernalia which were part and parcel of a photographic outfit in the collodion period”, according to Helmut Gernsheim in his *Lewis Carroll Photographer*, Dodgson must have found the price quite reasonable, being far below the £150 his father recommended that he save annually in his letter dated August 21st, 1855.

Just after he bought the equipment, he had another chance to meet the sisters of the Liddell family and tried to take photographs of them, but unfortunately failed in his first attempt simply because he was not used to the uncommon technology. Despite this blunder, he did not

hesitate at all to step into such a scientifically novel pleasure with the challenging spirit during the advance-oriented Victorian Era, especially in the 1850s, which was depicted favorably by G.M. Young, a British historian: “Of all decades in our history, a wise man would choose the 1850s to be young in.”

Dodgson would have led a different life as a researcher and teacher of mathematics with his artistic hobby of photography if he had not been mesmerized by the focused image of Alice Liddell through the lens. Two months later he photographed the Liddell children with confidence.

The first use of Lewis Carroll (hereafter, Carroll) as his nom de plume on March 1st, 1856 was not a mere chronological coincidence. His first encounter with photography in the previous year seems to have inspired the creation of his pen name. Dodgson rearranged the spelling of the Latin version of his English name in a mechanical way. In other words, this step-by-step handling to make an innate image emerge with different impressions is similar to that of photographic printing.

The lens, an optical device, was behind Dodgson’s transforming mentality to become Carroll, who discovered a peephole to glimpse a dream world where his desire dominates reality.

It was the age when visual toys such as Engelbrecht's miniature theaters or dioramas, perspective boxes, and peepshows were very popular among children and adults alike. A peepshow, for example, was a miniature magic theater to create three-dimensional images through a tiny hole, stimulating the curiosity of the British citizens of the 19th century.

It was no wonder Carroll found photography to be a more enchanting activity, which could capture the hidden reality through the lens than visiting public visual entertainments. He convinced himself that his new hobby could

create a domain where he would be the king and Alice the queen.

Carroll must have been rapturously satisfied with the solidification of passing moments which are unnoticeably confined in a chink between light and shadow. He recognized that the lens breaks its continuation to make trapped images more visible to the eye.

He was infatuated with the newly introduced magical gadget, feeling satisfied with his voyeuristic viewing, and he learned that to produce a beautiful photograph he would need a subject before his eye to locate in exactly the same way a hunter zeroes in on game within range.

2. Hunter

The hunter pursues his game as he pleases without submitting to any rules whatsoever.

Landscape and Memory, Simon Schama

You cannot hunt what you cannot understand.

The Legacy of Herot, Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, and Steven Barnes

Carroll was an introvert hunter in his early childhood according to the recollection of Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, Carroll's nephew, who wrote *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*. He remarked upon the solitary nature of Carroll's pastimes as a small boy in Daresbury, a small village approximately 120 km away from London, where he spent his early childhood until the age of eleven.

"In this quiet home the boy invented the strangest diversions for himself; he made pets of the most unlikely animals, and numbered certain snails and toads among his intimate friends". "Friends" in this record were not human beings but small creatures which he caught and kept as his living toys.

This simple hunting was just harmless play for him, and his subconscious understanding surfaced in his late novel, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, saying that God had given Man an absolute right to kill animals as a source of food, but has not given Man the right to inflict pain.

Carroll must have hated traditional hunting as a sport whose main purpose was killing. This mentality also made the mysterious poem *The Hunting of the Snark* more fascinating and memorable. In this story, Snark, the unknown creature, never appears and is not hunted. He did not allow the hunting team to capture the monster, which is an unusual ending of this type of "dragon quest" tale. He did not like "pain".

Photographers would usually prefer a studio, in which they took photographs in those days, for the equipment was cumbersome to carry around, and Carroll himself looked for a new room for his private photographing, consulting with Oscar Gustave Rejlander, an art photographer, nineteen years his senior, to find an adequate one near Christ Church in 1863.

Carroll, however, did not always stay in his own studio. He often visited the girls' homes in various parts of London and took pictures with their parents present. It was probably because he did not want to confine little girls in an enclosed room. The studios in those days seem to have been a terrible place in a sense. According to the report of Shawn Michelle Smith, Professor of Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, "those photography studios that were as much a 'torture chamber' as 'the throne room',...framed by draperies, tapestries and easels".

His approach to little girls for photographing accounts for his gentleness to reduce their psychological burden at least in front of the machine, although they were requested to keep still for approximately one minute.

Carroll also sometimes went outside to take

photographs to expand his imagination. One good example of his tactics is the photo of Alice Liddell titled “The Beggar Maid” taken in summer of 1858.



The title of this picture leads me to a lyric of Alfred Tennyson, one of the poets whom Carroll admired. The poem has the same title as that of the above-mentioned photograph. It begins:

Her arms across her breast she laid;
She was more fair than words can say;
Bare-footed came the beggar maid
Before the king Cophetua.

According to the web-based Oxford Reference, Cophetua was a legendary African king who fell in love with and married a beggar girl, Penelophon, and the story is told in one of the ballads in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). She was not a mere wretched child but a fortunate girl to be proposed to on their intuitive encounter.

Tennyson might have been consentingly influenced by his British ancestors' appreciation of politeness to women, emphasized by Percy in the introduction of the 18-century ballad collection.

It is no wonder that Carroll did not hesitate to put Alice into a similar story-telling situation. The king was of course Carroll himself. He must have understood that it was too early to consider marriage with Alice, even though he had mentioned marriage in the subject of insurances on July 31, 1857 in his diary, “If at any future period I contemplate marriage, (of which I see no present likelihood), it will be quite time enough to begin paying the premium then.”

While he was thinking about saving money, he might have been faintly aware of the fact that Edgar Allan Poe tied the knot with his beloved Virginia in 1836, when she was thirteen years old.

When painting the fancy portrait of a girl apart from the religious concept was popular, Carroll triumphantly discovered a shorter method of hunting the moment of a girl as game in front of him, to be preserved without burdening the subject long posing, or killing it – unlike taxidermy – which made three-dimensional representations of animals for permanent display, and which was popular among Victorians.

Carroll succeeded two-dimensionally in extracting a lovely moment of a girl by freezing time. The brave new technology made him a visual hunter.

3. Frozen Time

Freezing time in its flight, photography offered a new way to record reality.

“Photography Stops Time to Document Reality”
Time History's Greatest Events

Everyone's life has a private part, a part that belongs only to memory.

Vagabonds, Hao Jingfang (Translated by Ken Liu)

As Peter Burke, a British historian, evaluated the uses of images as historical evidence in his book, *Eyewitnessing*, artistic paintings, sketches and photographs reflect the visions of the time when they are produced. Even wall paintings in the remote past could convey the lifestyle of people in ancient times.

The most outstanding aspect of photography among these static media is not only the technological support behind it, but also the objectivity of the image it provides. The original mission of photography was, from its inception, to

discover reality. A photograph was regarded as an objective record without modifications, defying the artistic adornment personally crafted by a painter or the inadvertent failure in the drawing. It goes without saying that this simple fact-capturing method made modern journalism jump to this technology to distribute the latest news to convince truth seekers.

Carroll liked photography as his productive pastime from the beginning simply because, from the technological point of view, it required much less time to create a portrait if he only followed mechanical and chemical procedures correctly. Photographic portraits, however, invited him to an unknown realm quite different from traditional painted pictures.

What Carroll found in this black-and-white image was the phantasmal replacement of the subject captured in the frame and he was unconsciously mesmerized by such mysterious efficacy, induced by the function of light.

In other words, the remaining impressions of photographs that he produced were different from the mental images in his visceral memories, which were apt to be blurred or biased toward selfishly convenient and meaningful judgement in the course of time. Photographers back in the mid-19th century successfully caught and clipped out one moment of time for the first time in the early days of the advancement of photography, and Carroll was, of course, one of them. Photography froze time, transforming an ephemeral moment into a printout to be preserved forever.

Having considered the short-time process of photography, he might have imagined himself as a visual stenographer, overwrapping his memory of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, in which David became a shorthand clerk. It was one of Carroll's favorite literary works after he read the first installment of the story in 1849. He wrote about his favorable impression in his lengthy

letter to his sister Elizabeth just after he read it.

It is not reasonable to compare these mechanically and physically different methods for quick recording, but they share the same purpose at least, which pack what the brain hears or sees into two dimensional materials on the spot.

My mere speculation regarding the possible fusion of photographing and storytelling can lead me to another opinion, that Carroll enjoyed adding an idiosyncratic twist to his visual creations. He transformed the photograph into an illustration accompanying a story printed in a book. One remarkable example of this is an image of a disguised Alice in the photo entitled "The Elopement".

He wrote about it in his diary on October, 9th, 1862. "Photographing most of the day: took a composition picture, "the elopement", Alice getting out of her bedroom window, with a rope ladder..." Alice, the model of this photograph was not Alice Liddell but Alice Jane Donkin (1851-1928), who was the daughter of Edward Donkin.



The reason why Carroll chose and put that Alice in such a seductive and risky scene was probably because the image is the sudden visualization of his hidden desire. It was his mental ejection rather than an artistic epiphany.

The title sounds romantic, as long as the sudden and hurried flight of a mutually loving couple escaping their oppressed life without parental approval for their marriage turns out to have a happy ending.

As indicated in semiotics, the window is the

symbol of freedom or the boundary between inside and outside. Her posture is sensational because her whole body is completely out of the window, which, in this context, symbolizes stepping in to a new world. What is the hidden message of this photograph?

The year when Carroll created such a visual message was approximately eight months before when Carroll recorded his enjoyable but final meeting with Alice and her mother on June 25th, 1863. The sensual message buried under the photograph could have forced Mrs. Liddell to cast a concerning doubt over his possible courtship to Alice. It seems to me that these sequent incidences including the same given name involved were not a mere appellational and chronological coincidence.

Carroll produced the illustration-like photograph in such a way that he could express a story buried deep in his consciousness, which was comfortably embraced in the dark space. It was his own wonderland, where his dreams could be materialized, at least, two-dimensionally.

4. Darkroom

I think I became an art historian because, as far as I knew, no other fields allowed one to stand in a dark room with the audience's eyes trained, not on the podium but on a beam of luminous images.

Ribbon of Darkness, Barbara Maria Stafford

... he took the film back into the darkroom and shut the door. He worked fast and clumsily, spilling developer and fixer all over the ground. Soon the images were developed.

The Three-Body Problem, Cixin Liu (translated by Ken Liu)

To start this section, let me invite a British journalist named Ethel Arnold. She was one of

several child friends of Lewis Carroll in the 1870s and wrote an article, "Reminiscences of Lewis Carroll" in the June 1929 Issue of *The Atlantic* just before she died in 1930.

Her memory was so vivid even at her old age that she could recall her experience in the darkroom of Lewis Carroll. This passage is quoted as a remark in *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll*. It was June 5, 1871, when she was only seven years old.

She wrote, "But I never catch a whiff of the potent odor of collodion nowadays without being transported on the magic wings of memory to Lewis Carroll's dark room, where, shrunk to childhood's proportions, I see myself watching, open-mouthed, the mysterious process of coating the plate, or, standing on a box drawn out from under the sink to assist my small dimensions, observing the still more mysterious process of development."

She must have been escorted into his secret workshop to have a closer look at his handling of the plates, from which her figures emerged. The chemical fragrance worked as a harbinger to stimulate her memory.

Being allowed to go into the darkroom to watch his magical operation was probably a more exciting moment than receiving the finished product.

Carroll did not write down his own sensation about this event in his diary, but he must have discovered that his darkroom was another world to finalize the captured little girls to be preserved as they were forever. One of their photographs with her sister Julia (on the left) taken in the following year is attached here.



The darkroom turned into a cocoon to Carroll, helping him to metamorphose himself into a different person with another personality, in addition to a mathematics lecturer and a storyteller. It was a photographer.

The number of photographs that Carroll took continued to increase and reached its peak in 1879, including controversial nude photographs of innocent girls, one year before his complete abandonment of photography in 1880

In other words, his mental transformation was a manifestation of one of the ancient wisdoms depicted in *Tao Te Ching, the Book of the Way*, rendering, “Being the world’s riverbed of eternal unending power is to go back to be newborn.” Likewise, Thomas Mann once wrote that a person is born out of darkness and dies into darkness.

In this context, the power of darkness is very powerful. It was also the very foundation of sublimity, whose origin could date back to the age of cave painting, when ancient people devoted themselves to drawing their memories and visions on the wall inside.

The darkness in underground space might have terrified, fascinated, and intrigued Carroll as a small boy as well when he visited the island of Anglesey, approximately 120 kilometers away from his home in Daresbury with his family. He had a chance to explore the dark maze-like passages of Beaumaris Castle on the island constructed in the 13th Century.

At that time the Carroll-would-be boy was engulfed by the terrifying and dominating force of darkness. Thirty years later, what he discovered in the darkness of his own creation was its healing power to soften his loneliness while he was working on development in his darkroom.

It was the place where he satisfied his desire to return to the comfortable womb of his mother whose early departure had made him feel lonely for a long time. It was also the purposeful

intrusion of night-time into the diurnal life, which encouraged him to feel excited and inspirational.

5. Loneliness

Creation would be possible only at the far side of solitude.

“Nietzsche and Nihilism”, Albert Camus, translated from its the Japanese language version by the author

The loneliness is the worst part of getting old, I think — not the aches and pains,...— but being lonely.

Insomnia, Stephen King

The final part of this paper starts with a phrase presented by Dickens in *David Copperfield*. It says, “ You surely do not *expect* a ‘lone, lorn creature’ like me — a wretched old bachelor — to cloud the happy day by his sombre presence?”

Carroll used this part in his letter dated July 4, 1893 to Kate Terry Lewis. He was sixty-one years old then and must have anticipated he would die in the not so distant future, for it was difficult even for wealthy and healthy people to reach their seventies in those days. Actually, he died of pneumonia at the age of sixty-six in 1898.

It seems that in his later life, he might have been suffering from his psychological loneliness even though he enjoyed the literary reputation of his works and a steady life as a scholar at Christ Church. The letter mentioned above is just one piece of the evidence to see his solitude.

Kate Terry Lewis was one of the two children of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, whom Carroll mentioned as his friends in his letter to Lilia MacDonald, one of George MacDonald’s daughters, dated April 3, 1870. Kate was only two years old at that time and since then Carroll had exchanged letters with her on several occasions in the course

of her growth.

Carroll sent the letter to Kate because she was to get married, two weeks later, on July 18, 1893. To her he offered, as an old friend, his sincere wishes for her happy marriage leading to a bright and peaceful life. It turned out, however, that the letter became a sad, hopeless, and dejected monologue just to heal his loneliness. He could not follow the steps of David Copperfield, who spent a meaningful and loving life through several struggles and hard times.

When Carroll composed the letter, he must have recalled that the Doctor in the novel got married to an extremely young woman. The fictitious doctor was sixty-two when David met him one year after his late marriage with the teenage woman. They were a happy couple, each loving the other.

In this sense, Carroll was a mere loser in his real life. However, even such a pessimistic and negative mentality could trigger a positive outcome when it encounters another negative element. In Carroll's case it was the power of darkness. The combination of these two gloomy situations created unprecedented literary works as the multiplication of two large minus figures results in a much larger positive number.

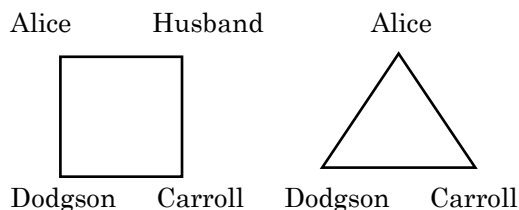
If he had not taken to photography at all, or had started it much later in his life, he could not have produced his literary works. *Alice* did not fall into the rabbit hole, neither did she step into the mirror, *Sylvie and Bruno* did not appear in this world, and even *Snark* and *Boojum* were not summoned.

When Michael Ende, a German storyteller, composed the German version of a stage drama of *The Hunting of the Snark*, he featured Carroll and Dodgson side by side on the stage as if they were different persons. In this act, Dodgson said lamentably that Carroll extracted his secret sorrow of loneliness from the deep bottom of his mind and changed it into literary works. The

German author focused on the duality of Carroll and Dodgson.

If Alice is added to these two different personalities, a triangle is formed. Generally speaking, a triangle implies harmony or the sacred symbol if it is equilateral, but to Carroll this shape was supposed to be rather doomful because the top corner, where Alice alighted, could be a vanishing point when it was put into a perspective.

What Carroll desperately needed was a square with four right angles. It means stability. The four corners consist of Dodgson, Carroll, Alice, and Husband, whom Carroll longed for till the very end of his life. The miserable fate for him was that he had to stay in the triangle throughout his adult life.



The time has come to finish my private research on Lewis Carroll and his works, having written six papers since 2017, and I am very much pleased to wrap up my private exploration with another important number for Carroll, which is seven (four + three), leading me to “forty-two” after it is multiplied by six.

I just hope the simple multiplication of six and seven will help other Carroll researchers have a different view to the meaning of “forty-two.”

The conclusion to complete the last paper is very simple.

It was photography that made Lewis Carroll produce the ostensibly wonderful but internally antiromantic stories.

References:

- Benjamin, Walter, translated by Esther Leslie (2016) *On Photography*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London
- Burke, Peter (2019) *Eyewitnessing*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London
- Carroll, Lewis (1973) *Complete Works*, Lowe & Brydone Ltd, Thetford
- Cohen, Morton N. ,editor (1979) *The Letters of Lewis Carroll in two volumes*, Macmillan London Limited, London
- Collingwood, Stuart Dodgson (1898) *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*, The Century Co., New York
- Dodgson, Charles Lutwidge (1971) *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll in two volumes*, Greenwood Press Publishers, Westport
- Ende, Michael, Der Jagd nach dem Schlarg, (2002) 丘沢静也 訳『スナーク狩り』 エンデ全集 11, 岩波書店
- Flusser, Vilém, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* (2022) 室井尚訳『写真の哲学のために』 勁草書房
- Gattégno, Jean, translated by Rosemary Sheed, (1977) *Lewis Carroll fragments of a looking glass*, Biddles Ltd., London
- Gernsheim, Helmut (1969) *Lewis Carroll Photographer*, Dover Publications, Inc., New York
- Lao Tsu, translated by Ursula K. Le Guin (1997) *Tao Te Ching*, Shambhala, Boulder
- Mann, Paul Thomas, Der Zauberberg (2007) 高橋義孝訳『魔の山』 岩波文庫
- Oxford Reference <https://www.oxfordreference.com/>
- Prodger, Philip (2018) *Victorian Giants The Birth of Art and Photography*, National Portrait Gallery Publications, London
- Smith, Shawn Michelle and Sharon Sliwinski (2017) *Photography and the Optical Unconscious*, Duke University Press, London
- Sontag, Susan (1977) *On Photography*, Picador, New York
- Stafford, Barbara Maria and Frances Terpak (2001) *Devices of Wonder*, the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
- 高階秀爾 (1986) 『想像力と幻想』 青土社
- 辻茂 (1995) 『遠近法の誕生』 朝日新聞社
- 安井泉編著 (2013) 『ルイス・キャロルハンドブック』 七つ森書館