

# Indexer nascitur, non fit— Lewis Carroll as indexer again

August A. Imholtz, Jr.

Further discussion of Carroll's indexes, including *Sylvie and Bruno*, and in particular of his system for a letter register to record personal correspondence.

How curious it is, Alice might have thought, that a novel should have an index, moreover an index prepared by the author himself! But as Hans H. Wellisch points out in his recent article in this journal,<sup>1</sup> 'Lewis Carroll as Indexer', that is precisely the case with Lewis Carroll's two late novels *Sylvie and Bruno* and *Sylvie and Bruno concluded*. Professor Wellisch focuses on the comic elements of Carroll's indexes to the *Sylvie and Bruno* books without attempting to put Carroll's lifelong interest in indexing into perspective. In focusing exclusively on the humorous entries of the *Sylvie and Bruno* novels, besides, he unfortunately overlooks a significant development in Carroll's indexing and in his fiction itself.

Professor Wellisch quotes some of the famous examples of Carroll's indexing, e.g.:

- Boots for Horizontal Weather; I.14
- Bread-sauce appropriate for Weltering; I.58
- Horizontal Weather, Boots for; I.14
- Spherical, advantage of being; II.190

In Carroll's combined index to both novels, which appeared in 1893 in the first edition of *Sylvie and Bruno concluded* issued during Carroll's life, the Roman numeral 'I' following the entry refers to *Sylvie and Bruno* and 'II' refers to *Sylvie and Bruno concluded*. Both are followed by the page number of the text upon which the entry is to be found. These two novels by Lewis Carroll differ from his other fiction in a number of ways in addition to having their own indexes. Each of them, for example, is several times as long as either of the Alice books; but more importantly, the *Sylvie and Bruno* books were written with a MORAL—something studiously avoided in the Alice books and almost all of Carroll's other fiction written during his adult years. Hence amid the comic entries in Carroll's index, like those cited above, we find the following references to serious subjects seriously discussed:

- 'Doing good,' ambiguity of the phrase; II.43
- Paley's definition of virtue; I.273
- Spencer, Herbert, difficulties in; I.258

Most important of all, we find:

- Loving or being loved, Which is best? I.77

Indeed, there are many discussions of 'love' and 'being loved' in addition to that on page 77 of *Sylvie and Bruno*, and that discussion of love, in the view of some, sad to say, is the culmination of Lewis Carroll's creativity. Typical of the saccharine message that Carroll delivers in these novels is the conclusion of *Sylvie and Bruno concluded*:

Sylvie's sweet lips shaped themselves to reply, but her voice sounded faint and very far away. The vision was fast slipping from my eager gaze; but it seemed to me, in that last bewildering moment, that not Sylvie but an angel was looking out through

those trustful brown eyes, and that not Sylvie's but an angel's voice was whispering

'It is Love.'

Sadly, when the *Sylvie and Bruno* books have been reprinted in those one-volume tomes purporting to be 'The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll', the indexes to *Sylvie and Bruno* are regularly omitted. The publishers either do not appreciate their importance and novelty, or, more likely, do not wish to incur the expense of adjusting the page references.

Lewis Carroll's earliest works, however, the hand-printed and illustrated magazines he produced for his brothers and sisters during their childhood at Croft Rectory, contain indexes with entries just as amusing as some of the comical terms in the indexes to the *Sylvie and Bruno* novels. Thus we find in *The Rectory Magazine*, a family magazine produced when Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was thirteen years old and some forty-three years before he would write the first of the *Sylvie and Bruno* books under his famous pseudonym 'Lewis Carroll', the following handwritten entries:

- A tale without a name (W.S.) 3, 15
- General, Things in (Ed.) 25
- Name, A tale without a (W.S.) 3, 15
- Rubbish, Reasonings on (Ed.) 1
- Things in General (Ed.) 25
- Twaddle on Telescopes (Ed.) 85<sup>2</sup>

Nor can it be said that this early work foreshadows only the indexing technique of the later Carroll. Some of the verses in *The Rectory Magazine* remind today's readers of something, however indistinct, about the famous Alice books. Consider just one example:

- The Queen she fell into a swoon
- The porter in a fit
- The messenger looked round the room
- And then went out of it.<sup>3</sup>

Much later in life, after Dodgson had become a lecturer in mathematics and logic at Christ Church, Oxford, he suggested that some members of his family, presumably by way of recreation, construct an index to Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'. This *Index to In Memoriam*, produced with Tennyson's permission, was compiled by Dodgson's sisters and edited by him.<sup>4</sup> It was published in London in 1862 by Edward Moxon & Co. and contains key-word-in-context-like entries of the following kind:

- ANGUISH
- 19.4 My deeper a.
- BELL
- 8.1 rings the gateway b.
- 10.1 I hear the b.
- 28.1 The Christmas bells

As humorous as Carroll's indexes to his childhood magazines and late novels may be and as serviceable, if uninspired, his index to Tennyson's famous poem is, it is in the indexing system that Carroll devised for his personal correspondence that his real genius as an indexer may be seen. Lewis Carroll was a prolific correspondent (he once said that 'One third of my life seems to go in receiving letters, and the other two thirds in answering them.'<sup>5</sup>), writing to child friends, colleagues in academic disciplines, churchmen, publishers, theatre folk, politicians such as Lord Salisbury, etc. So numerous was his incoming and outgoing correspondence that he developed a letter register, a system for keeping track of the date, names, and subject matter of letters sent and received.

From 1 January 1861 until 8 January 1898 Carroll maintained his letter register, which reached 24 volumes. Alas, none of the register volumes have survived, but we do know that the last entry number used was 98721.<sup>6</sup> He explained how to create and maintain such a letter register in a little pamphlet entitled 'Eight or Nine Wise Words About Letter Writing' published in 1890. Here are excerpts from his instructions together with a copy of some of his sample pages without which the instructions are of less utility. Unfortunately, it takes more than eight or nine words. Having procured a blank notebook, Lewis Carroll recommends that one proceed as follows:

Have a line ruled, in red ink, down each margin of every page, an inch off the edge (the margin should be wide enough to contain a number of 5 digits, easily. . .)

Write a *precis* of each Letter, received or sent, in chronological order. Let the entry of a 'received' Letter reach from the left-hand edge to the right-hand marginal line; and the entry of a 'sent' Letter from the left-hand marginal line to the right-hand edge. Thus the two kinds will be quite distinct, and you can easily hunt through the 'received' Letters by themselves, without being bothered with the 'sent' Letters; and vice versa.

I begin each page by putting, at the top left-hand corner, the next entry-number I am going to use, *in full* (the last 3 digits of each entry-number are enough afterwards); and I put the date of the year, at the top, in the centre.

I begin each entry with the last 3 digits of the entry number, enclosed in an oval (this is difficult to reproduce in print, so I have put round-parentheses here). Then, for the first entry in each page, I put the day of the month and the day of the week: afterwards 'do' is enough for the month-day, till it changes: I do not repeat the week-day.

Next, if the entry is not a letter, I put a symbol for 'parcel' (see Nos. 243, 245) or 'telegram' (see Nos. 230, 231) as the case may be.

Next, the name of the person, underlined (indicated here by italics).

If an entry needs special further attention, I put [ at the end; and, when it has been attended to, I fill in the appropriate symbol, e.g., in No. 222, that an answer was really needed (the 'x' means 'attended to'). . .

I give each entry the space of 2 lines, whether it fills them or not, in order to have room for references. And, at the foot of each page I leave 2 or 3 lines *blank* (often useful afterwards for entering omitted letters) and miss one or 2 numbers before I begin the next page.

At any odd moments of leisure, I make up the entry-book, in various ways, as follows:

(1) I draw a *second* line, at the right-hand end of the 'received' entries, and at the left-hand end of the 'sent' entries. This I usually do pretty well 'up to date'. In my Register the first line is *red*, the second is *blue*: here I distinguish between them by making the first thin, and the second thick.

(2) Beginning with the last entry, and going backwards, I read

29217	/90.	
(217) sendg, J., a	Ap. 1. (Tu) Jones, Mrs. am as present from self and Mr. white elephant.	27518 225
(218) grand	do. Wilkins & Co. bill, for piano, £175 ros. 6d. [pd	28743 221, 2
(219) to borr	do. Scareham, H. [writes from Hotel, Monte Carlo'] asking ow £50 for a few weeks (l)	
	(220) do. Scareham, H. would know object, for wh loan is and security offered.	like to asked,
218	(221) Ap. 3. Wilkins & Co. in previous letter, now before me, undertook to supply one for decling to pay more.	you £120:
23514 218 228	(222) do. Cheetham & Sharp. written 221 — enclosing previous letter — is law on my side?	have us let-
(223) G. N. dressed 'very	Ap. 4. Manager, Goods Statn, R. White Elephant arrived, addressed to you — send for it at once — 'savage.'	226
29225	/90.	
217	(225) Ap. 4 (F) Jones, Mrs. th	anks,
230	but no room for it at present, am send- ing it to Zoological Gardens.	send-

over the names till I recognize one as having occurred already: I then link the two entries together, by giving the one, that comes first in chronological order, a 'foot reference': (see Nos. 217, 225). I do not keep this 'up to date', but leave it till there are 4 or 5 pages to be done. I work back till I come among entries that are supplied with 'foot references', when I once more glance through the last few pages, to see if there are any entries not yet supplied with head-references: their predecessors may need a special search. If an entry is connected, in subject, with another under a different name, I link them by cross-references, distinguished from the head- and foot-references by being written *further from the marginal line* (see No. 229). When 2 consecutive entries have the same name, and are both of the same kind (i.e. both 'received' or both 'sent') I bracket them (see Nos. 242, 243); if of different kind, I link them with the symbol used for Nos. 219, 220.

(3) Beginning at the earliest entry not yet done with, and going forwards, I cross out every entry that has got a head- and foot-reference, and is done with, by continuing the extra line *through it* (see Nos. 221, 223, 225). Thus, wherever a *break* occurs in this extra line, it shows there is some matter still needing attention. I do not keep this anything like 'up to date', but leave it till there are 30 or 40 pages to look through at a time. When the first page of the volume is thus completely crossed out, I put a mark at the foot of the page to indicate this; and so with pages 2,3, &. Hence, whenever I do this part of the 'making up', I need not begin at the beginning of the volume, but only at the *earliest page that has not got this mark*.

All this looks very complicated, when stated at full length: but you will find it perfectly simple, when you have had a little practice.<sup>7</sup>

In an exhaustive study of the principles at work in the letter register, Professor Francine Abeles has shown that Carroll's letter register 'employed in embryonic form twentieth century database concepts'.<sup>8</sup> She phrases the elements of Carroll's

223	(226) do. <i>Manager, Goods Station, G. N. R.</i> please deliver, to bearer note, case containing White Elephant addressed to me.	of this elephant	228	(237) Ap. 11. <i>Cheetham and Co.</i> re-	turn letter enclosed to you. [ x
223	(227) do. <i>Director Zool. Gardens.</i> (enclosing above note to R. W. Manager) call for valuable animal, presented to Gardens.	ms., (en-	245	(238) do. <i>Morton, Philip.</i> Could you lend me Browning's "Dramatis Personæ" for a day or 2?	Person-
229	(228) Ap. 8. <i>Cheetham &amp; Sharp,</i> you misquote enclosed letter, limit named is £180.	222	(239) Ap. 14. <i>Aunt Jemina,</i> leaving house at end of month: address "136, Royal Avenue, Bath."	236	[
	(229) Ap. 9. <i>Director, Zoo. Gardens.</i> case delivered to us contained 1 doz. Port—consumed at Directors' Banquet—many thanks.	227	(240) Ap. 15. <i>Cheetham and Co.,</i> returning letter as reqd, bill 6/6/8.	237	244
	225 (230) do. <i>T Jones, Mrs.</i> why doz. of Port a 'White Elephant'?	230	29242 /90.		
	(231) do. <i>T Jones, Mrs.</i> 'it was a joke.'		(242) Ap. 15. (Tu) <i>Page &amp; Co.</i> bill for books, as ordered, 15/6	233	[
29233	/90.		(243) do. ¶ <i>do.</i> books	247	] 247
242	(233) Ap. 10 (Th) <i>Page &amp; Co.</i> Macaulay's Essays and "Jane Eyre" (cheap edtn).	orderg Eyre"	240 (244) do. <i>Cheetham and Co.</i> understand the 6/8 — what is £6	an un-	for?
(234) 2 or 3	do. <i>Aunt Jemina</i> — invitg for days after the 15th.	[ 236	(245) Ap. 17. ¶ <i>Morton, P.</i> "Dramatis Personæ," as asked for. [retd	238	249
(235) & Co.	do. <i>Lon. and West. Bk.</i> have recevd £250, pd to yr Acct fm Parkins Calcutta.	[en	221 (246) do. <i>Wilkins and Co.</i> with bill, 175/10/6, and ch. for do.	[en	
234	(236) do. <i>Aunt Jemina</i> — can possibly come this month, will write when able.	not write	243 (247) do. <i>Page and Co.</i> bill, postal J 107258 for 15/- and 6 stps.	15/6,	6 stps.
239		f	(248) Ap. 18: <i>Cheetham and Co,</i> it was a "clerical error" (l)	244	
			245 (249) Ap. 19. <i>Morton, P.</i> returning Browning with many thanks.		
			(250) do. <i>Wilkins and Co.</i> receiptd bill.	246	

register in terms of modern database fields: e.g., received/sent, name, precis, etc. all may be viewed as separate fields. Consider what she has to say about the use of header and footer and fields:

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the letter register from a database point of view is his use of footers and headers. The two received/sent files are connected through them on the Name key field used to identify a record. For a pair of letters, the one that is chronologically first has a foot-reference; the other a head-reference. This establishes a linked list of records in logical order where each of the two link fields holds the address of the next record in the sequence. Actually, this is a doubly linked list indexed by Name, starting with the footer and ending with the final header. . . He used a second linked list for letters on the same subject, with the letter chronologically later having the notation in its key field. This type of cross-referencing would now be called multi-threading. It places the same record in one or more chains, letters having references to other letters, without making a duplicate entry. His objective probably was to link chains of letters that could be of interest because they involved the same subject. Since each letter or other item was entered into the register sequentially by date, the doubly and singly linked lists provided direct (random) access by the value of the key field, name or subject, respectively. After retrieval, the letters could be processed sequentially using a key value.<sup>9</sup>

All of this stems from the intensely orderly mind of Lewis Carroll, who created in the *Alice* books the greatest nonsense literature in the English language, and much more besides.

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August A. Imholtz, Jr is an executive editor with CIS (Congressional Information Service, Inc) in Bethesda, Maryland. He is a past president of the Lewis Carroll Society of North America, member of the British, Dutch, and Japanese Lewis Carroll Societies, and the author of a number of articles on the works of Lewis Carroll.