

Wallace in Wonderland

By Karoline Leach (first published 1998)

Was Lewis Carroll Jack the Ripper? Well, the short answer (actually the only answer) is - no. There is no evidence anywhere connecting him to the crimes, or even to suggest he was in London at any of the right times. He is, in short, a non-starter of a suspect. His life may not have been blameless or entirely without scandal, but no one has ever suggested he might have been a serial killer.

No one, that is, but Richard Wallace.

Wallace, who describes himself as a psychotherapist, pointed the finger at Carroll in his book - *Jack the Ripper, Light-hearted Friend*. He based his accusation on anagrams he constructed from Carroll's works. This argument is not, it has to be admitted, terribly convincing.

The anagrams themselves are less so.

In 1888 - Carroll, or Charles Dodgson, to use his real name, was, a successful middle aged bachelor. In addition to being a best-selling author, he was also an Oxford don and ex-mathematical lecturer. He spent part of his year in residence at his Oxford college Christ Church, and took extended summer vacations by the sea in his alternative residence of Eastbourne, a small town on the south coast. The year after the Whitechapel murders, 1889, Dodgson published 2 books: *The Nursery Alice*, a rewriting of the famous story for very small children, and the first volume of *Sylvie and Bruno* a rather diffuse and complex, but ultimately unsuccessful novel. It is Wallace's contention that these two works contain extensive anagrams that prove that Carroll and his Oxford colleague Thomas Vere Bayne, were both responsible for the Whitechapel murders. He further claims that the works were actually devised by Dodgson in their entirety as encoded 'confessions', not only to his life as a serial killer, but also to his homosexuality, and his brutalising experiences in the English public school system.

This is perhaps an interesting theory. But it founders quickly on the simple fact that Wallace cannot find anything that looks like a convincing anagram - no matter how hard he looks. When he openly cheats, which he does quite a lot, and switches letters, or leaves them out, then he can produce passages which at least have words like 'ripper' and 'whore' in them ... For example he takes this passage from Dodgson's 'Nursery Alice',

**"So she wandered away, through the wood, carrying the ugly little thing with her.
And a great job it was to keep hold of it, it wriggled about so. But at last she found
out that the proper way was to keep tight hold of itself foot and its right ear"**

and by simply dropping a few letters and changing an 'o' into an 'i' turns it into;

"She wriggled about so! But at last Dodgson and Bayne found a way to keep hold of the fat little whore. I got a tight hold of her and slit her throat, left ear to right. It was tough, wet, disgusting, too. So weary of it, they threw up - jack the Ripper"

This doesn't make much grammatical sense, but it is at least on message. But when Wallace stops cheating, stops saying things like 'if we remove eight letters, bringing the fifty letters down to forty-two we have a manifesto...' then he is almost powerless to squeeze any meaning from his 'anagrams' at all.

"Then d'file noses, lad!"

"Rip no gay peter foreskin."

"I believe the Fathers condemn penile nutrition"

"Urine! Sponge 't"

They certainly don't read like an encoded confessional, do they? They sound more like the kind of strange exclamations made by lonely and bedraggled people on late-night trains, who are having trouble with those voices in their heads:

Or how about this one:

'Dodgson and Bayne seethe, tune, hone a weird way - any way - to laud my father's holy work and let the hate vent'....

Or :

'I crave lamb coitus, save up fellatio poison'

This is Wallace's version of the title of Dodgson's anti-vivisection paper *Some Popular Fallacies about Vivisection*; Wallace tells us it's a 'hidden defence of bestiality. He doesn't, however, mention what that has to do with Jack the Ripper. But never fear - there's a lot more where that came from. In fact Wallace informs us that Dodgson's work is simply bursting with encoded confessions to sexual abuse and/or murder. *The Hunting of the Snark: An Agony in Eight Fits* is, says our man, replete with masturbatory and anal-erotic themes, and the title itself is a thin disguise for three blazing declarations:

"None hunt the King of Hearts in the gay night fits,"

"They, the Uranian kings, often hit on night fags,"

and

"The king of urnings hateth any Onanite fights."

Well quite.

Wallace, finds in these and similar statements the proof that Carroll was a disordered homosexual psychopath, with a mother-fixation, who vented his hatred of women and his resentment of his own homosexual rape in the murder and mutilation of five (or eight, or nine he seems unsure), women in the autumn of 1888.

Neither is Wallace shy of putting forward 'corroboration' of his theory. He suggests for example, that the lines from Dodgson's nonsense poem 'The Mad Gardener's Song', 'He thought he saw an Argument/That proved he was the Pope' is a reference to Mitre Square - (because Popes wear mitres). More obscurely, he asks at one point 'Is there a connection between the victim being murdered in Buck's Row, Dodgson's writings on 'sport', and the deer-stalker hat seen in the area?'

He can also see patterns in the ages of the murdered women. He observes that the number 42 was clearly significant to Dodgson. And he is undoubtedly correct, since it appears in a great deal of his fiction. "Rule 42" in Alice is "All persons more than a mile high to leave the court". In *The Hunting of the Snark* there is "Rule 42 of the Code," "No one shall speak to the man at the helm, and the man at the helm shall speak to no one,"

Which by the way, Wallace demonstrates to be an anagram of :

"No one shall spanketh the hot male meat, and the hot male meat shall spanketh no one."

Wallace then tries to show that all the murdered women's ages were 'connected' to the number 42, and he does it like this:

Emma Smith, (who Wallace claims as the first victim), was forty-five years old. Forty- five, of course, is exactly three more than forty-two. Martha Tabram was killed with thirty-nine stab wounds - and she was thirty-nine years old. Thirty-nine - as Wallace points out - is three less than forty-two.

And thus, we have a 'pattern'.

Elizabeth Stride, of course, was 45. Again 3 more than 42.

Catherine Eddowes was 43, which seems to break the pattern. But, Wallace thinks she cannot really count, because, having just been released from jail, she couldn't have been 'selected' in advance.

A rush job, in other words - no time for the fine details.

Mary Kelly, the last of the 'Canonical five', was apparently 25. But, Wallace argues reasonably, Dodgson might have thought she was 24 - after all he had a lot on his mind, and several modern authors make the same mistake. 24, of course, is 42 backwards.

Could all of this be coincidence?

But the ace up Wallace's sleeve - more powerful even than his anagrams is 'The Druitt Connection'.

Montague Druitt - another and very reasonable suspect for the Whitechapel murders was a graduate (in 1880), of New College, Oxford, and can thus be seen as a sort of 'colleague' of Dodgson's. He was a teacher at Blackheath - until his sudden and untimely death, apparently by suicide on December 1888. There is, admittedly, no evidence that Druitt and Dodgson ever met but - Wallace is quick to point out - no actual proof that they didn't. So from this - and from a mention in Dodgson's diary of a man called 'Drewitt' - different spelling and most definitely not our Montague - whom Dodgson put up for the night on Dec. 12 1878 - Wallace constructs a theory.

He connects Bayne with Druitt by figuring that they *might* both have been involved with the Rev. Samuel Barnett's East End mission. Though he doesn't actually say why. And he connects Dodgson with Druitt's home, Blackheath, by pointing out that he knew a girl who lived there.

'Very tenuous connections' he writes - 'or are they?'

Well, yes actually, they are. But never fear - Wallace has a way with evidence. He continues:

'As we complete the analysis of a Dodgson/Druitt relationship, it is worth examining the suicide note found among Druitt's belongings'

And he does - and, he discovers - an *anagram!*. Apparently, the *real* meaning of Montague's tragic little letter is not 'Since Friday I felt I was going to be like mother, and the best thing for me was to die' but

'I fib, idiots. I - we- are fine faggot killers. C.Dodgson, T.Bayne threw me into the Thames'

The rest of Wallace's book is slightly confused and unclear - but I think he concludes from this that Dodgson was blackmailing Druitt - to make him go mad. Or alternatively (he isn't sure), that it was part of a complex plot to disparage the monarchy, or possibly the Jews. Anyhow - Dodgson pushed Druitt into the Thames and then fabricated an (anagrammed, obviously) suicide note. And all because of 'Rule 42 of the Code'.

But in case anyone is, inexplicably, inclined to doubt this, Wallace tells us ominously - 'There were 42 pupils at the Blackheath school where Druitt taught'.

Pretty chilling isn't it.

Unaccountably, his readers and reviewers have tended to be less convinced than Wallace is himself. It has been observed by one such, Edward Wakeling, the editor of Dodgson's published diaries, that Wallace's theory tends to ignore some slightly crucial details. For example he points

out that on 3 April 1888 when Emma Smith (whom Wallace claims as the Ripper's first victim) was murdered, Carroll was in residence at his Oxford college, unable to walk due to an attack of 'synovitis' of the knee.

On 31 August, the day Polly Nichols died, he was at Eastbourne in the company of an actress friend, Isa Bowman, who was staying at the same boarding house with him, and would probably have noticed an extended trip to London and subsequent blood-soaked return. On Sept. 8, when Annie Chapman died, and Sept. 30, the night of the double-event, Carroll was still at Eastbourne, still with Isa.

Thomas Vere Bayne, meanwhile, his supposed accomplice, went to France on Sept. 1 and remained there until October 5.

Wallace also has to contend with the fact that Bayne, the trusty sidekick, was nearly sixty, and suffering from such acute back pain that during the summer he wrote in his diary - 'can barely move - pain great.' Wallace is aware of this - but counters it brilliantly by pointing out that the word 'bosses' appears in Bayne's diary between Aug. 1 and 16 . A fact of such obvious import that he does not even bother to tell us what it might mean

However, on Nov. 9, the night of Mary Kelly's murder, both men were back in Oxford and 'could' as Wallace points out have taken the train to Whitechapel to do the deed. So, providing we have no problem with the idea of two elderly and slightly infirm gentlemen hobbling painfully around Whitechapel looking for ladies of doubtful virtue, asking them their ages, doing a quick bit of figuring on the back of an envelope, and escorting them creakily off to a quiet spot. - then Wallace is okay here.

But sadly there are other major and seemingly fatal inconsistencies in Wallace's thesis. For example 'The Mad Gardener's Song from *Sylvie and Bruno*, from which Wallace draws several of his anagrams, may have been published in 1889, as Wallace says - but it was actually written two years earlier, and was sent to the illustrator on 27 August 1887. So, if he wants to find anagrammed confessions of the Whitechapel murders in this poem, Wallace has to explain how Carroll could have written them a whole twelve months before the murders actually happened.

And of course, in the final analysis, Wallace's theory is rendered nul by the fact that one could rearrange the words in any piece of writing anywhere and make half-connected sentences suggestive of just about anything. The very first sentence on the opening page of *Winnie the Pooh*, for example:

'Here is Edward Bear coming downstairs now' can be turned into:

'Stab red red women! CR is downing whores - AA' (Obviously the 'CR' is Christopher Robin, who is thus revealed as an infant psychopath).

For anyone who knows Dodgson's work, and his mastery of all word-games, the idea that he could perpetuate 'anagrams' as messy and meaningless as the ones Wallace 'finds' is almost more unbelievable than the image of him hanging round Whitechapel with a big knife. In fact all

Wallace really succeeds in demonstrating is that Dodgson used the same alphabet as everyone else in the western world, and that, therefore his words can be rearranged to make other words - including rather rude ones about having sex with sheep, ripping ladies open and throwing young men into rivers.

From an historical and biographical context Wallace's contention is valueless. Yet his belief that Carroll was the Ripper has more in common with mainstream carroll-scholarship than might at first be thought.

'Carroll' has always been at the centre of a powerful mythology. His 'Alice' books have tapped into the depths of the collective psyche in ways we cannot and never will fully understand. In some curious way he seems to have told an allegorical story of what it is to be human, confused and alone in a mad and infinite universe. And the 'shy clergyman' at the heart of this story has become that strange and inexplicable thing - an icon. A symbol of some collective human need. He was seen as a 'scholar-saint' who avoided the adult world; a 'perpetual child' who could only relate to children; a tragic deviant, whose lifelong passion for a child - Alice Liddell - fired his burning creativity. For almost a century his image has been repeated and repeated, embellished and embellished, repeated and embellished in reputedly 'scholarly' biographies, dramatised by Dennis Potter and Jonathan Miller. - Yet he never existed. The 'shy clergyman', with his incapacitating stammer, social isolation and unrequited passion for the 'real Alice' is as invented as his name - 'Lewis Carroll'

The real man -Charles Dodgson - was none of those things. The prima facie documentation surrounding his life - his letters and his diaries - show conclusively that he led a recognisably normal life. He was an ambitious man, who was keen to succeed as writer and photographer. Socially competent, with a passion for the bohemian world of theatre and art. A bachelor, who enjoyed serial-friendships with women -some married, some not - that often brought him into conflict with the 'moral majority' of his time. But the reality of his life - with its suggestions of sexual activity, its moral ambiguities, small selfishnesses and ordinary grubby adulthood, was simply not what anyone wanted to believe about the author of 'Alice'. And, so, after his death, he was simply rebuilt, in a different, 'better', image. For the Victorians and Edwardians he became the ultimate symbol of Innocence, of the elf-like and unworldly soul of Man before the Fall, whose life must be seen to have been beyond the taint of adult corruption. For the modern world he became the symbol of hypocrisy, of secret appetites; the disordered sage, the patron saint of Freudian deviancy.

Looked at in this way, Richard Wallace's claim that Dodgson was Jack the Ripper is only an extreme expression of the existing trend. There is no evidence at all - anywhere - to support Wallace's claim. But then there is no evidence at all - anywhere - to support the story of Dodgson's supposed marriage proposal to child-Alice. - and that has never stopped anyone believing in it, and asserting it with massive authority.

All these images - of 'Carroll' as saint, or Carroll as Dennis Potter's sweaty-palmed deviant, or indeed Carroll as the Whitechapel murderer are about the triumph of imagination over reality. They are not any kind of truth. They were never about truth. They are about the aspiration to believe. They belong to the reaching and hope-filled end of the historical spectrum, where things

are believed because they cannot be disproved, rather than for any positive evidence in their favour. Where Elvis and the Loch Ness monster cavort happily together, where alien spacecraft abduct peaceful citizens from their beds. So, when the Carroll world collides with the even more feverishly fanciful world of Ripper-studies, the first casualty is probably bound to be sanity.

Beware of theorists bearing suspects. Almost every white male (or occasionally female) who was alive and within three thousand miles of the killings at the time has at some time or another been put forward as a new suspect in the Whitechapel murders. To name only a few and in no particular order: 'Prince Eddy'the Duke of Clarence, Madame Blavatsky, Doctor Gull, 'the Masons' (all of them?), Weedon Grossmith and his brother George, Thomas Neil Cream (who was in jail at the time, but these things don't tend to get in the way of some theorists), Montague Druitt, King Leopold II of Belgium, Francis Tumblety, George Chapman, Abraham Kosminski, and Queen Victoria; all these and many many more have been put forward as potential identities for Jack the Ripper. There is even presently a group of dedicated souls working feverishly to 'prove' that the obviously and ludicrously faked Ripper Diary is genuine and that poor poisoned James Maybrick was indeed the Ripper.

In the literature of the Whitechapel Murders, we find the same handful of circumstantial evidence used as 'proof' against upwards of 60 different 'suspects', all but four or five of whom must be regarded as exceedingly unlikely, if not entirely crazy, candidates. From Mme. Blavatsky to Leopold II of Belgium. From Neil Cream to Algernon Swinburne. From James Maybrick to Carroll, they all have their advocates, who have all based their belief on the impossibility of proving a negative. Happily unhindered by reason, these theorists take labyrinthine tours through winding avenues of 'what-ifs', and 'maybes'.

'What if the King of Belgium had visited the Congo?

And what if, while there, he witnessed atrocities that made him develop a taste for sadism?

And what if, his London house had been the one that Robert Lees' daughter *said* her father's suspect lived in?

And what if he had made unrecorded visits to that house at the time of the murders?

Well then - he would probably have been the Ripper wouldn't he?

Likewise - what if Neill Cream had a double?

And what if one of them was serving time while the other was running round Whitechapel being our Jack?

What if the Royal family were involved?

Or the Masons?

Or *both*!?

What if Maybrick had multiple personality disorder, which is why the writing in the 'diary' is nothing like his usual hand?

And what if he'd had an office in Whitechapel?

And what if the ink in his 'diary' isn't modern at all?

Then - golly - we have our guy.

And of course - what if Carroll had been a homosexual sadist, with a mother-fixation, who composed all his work to be read as bad anagrams of a life of crime?

Well, why not? In fact, why not all of them together - in a cabal to dwarf the Knight conspiracy theory? After all if Carroll, Maybrick, Cream, Queen Victoria, Mme Blavatsky, Prince Eddy, Dr. Gull, the Masons and Leopold King of the Belgians were all involved in a huge plot then with that kind of world-wide influence in high places, it would naturally be totally covered up, leaving no evidence at all. And there *is* no evidence at all! So what more do you need than that?

The will to believe distorts our perceptions of anything - turns black into white, reality into fantasy, and it is always defended by the same mantra - 'you can't prove it didn't happen'. Which of course is often true, because - as has been remarked many times - it is very very difficult to prove a negative. But of course the logical result of such a position is that everything, however improbable, must be believed, until someone manages to conclusively disprove it. If Carroll or Maybrick, or Eddy can all just 'be' the Ripper until proved otherwise, then so can Mark Twain, Ellen Terry, Scott Joplin, Richard Branson with a time-machine, or the entire chorus of the D'Oyly Carte Opera company. The bits of the moon no one has yet visited are indeed made of cheese. Glenn Miller didn't die - he went to Mexico, had extensive cosmetic surgery and returned as Marilyn Monroe. The earth is just a tiny lollipop in a huge pan-dimensional sweet shop run by beings from Vega who look like carrots.

It's been said that you could probably make some sort of a law that reads; 'the human capacity to believe in any given concept, will automatically increase in inverse proportion to the amount of data available to support it' Believing, defined as pretending things are the way they almost certainly aren't is a completely human activity. Dogs don't do it. Elephants don't do it. Even our closest relatives chimps don't seem to do it. It's a quality all our own. The essence of what it is to be human. It seems we evolved the need to deceive ourselves as a kind of adjunct to our ability to reason, and before very long we had populated the world with ourselves and our forests of false perceptions, myths, legends, faiths and bigotries. Nothing happened but that we must speedily re-invent it as something else.

But we have to wonder why? Why have we been implanted with this discontent with the real? Why this perpetual itch to re-build reality slightly to the left and much much bigger? Why have we developed the ability to reason, only to have it overthrown by our even greater ability to tell ourselves huge absurd and throbbing lies? It's hard to see any potential evolutionary advantage. What would be the net gain for early hominids in being able to convince themselves that lions weren't really dangerous - or that flowers talked to them, or the sun was a giant artichoke or

whatever? It's hard to imagine how we ever survived to populate the earth and decimate it with our own unique brand of arrogance and gullibility.

Of course, it isn't only the wacky or the marginal that is infected this way. As Lewis Carroll scholarship so well illustrates, unsubstantiated belief, and pure faith-driven madness can proliferate anywhere. There are scientists using the same fragments of data to simultaneously and conclusively 'prove' the existence and non-existence of God. There are economists who argue that we just have to destroy the earth we inhabit and slowly poison ourselves to death - because 'the market' tells us to. You could argue that the only difference between Wallace and a political economist is that the political economist has managed to convince more people that his fantasy is real. But that wouldn't be a very comfortable thought. So let's not think it.

And lastly - with a curious perversity, through all his forest of speculation and extraordinary inferencing, Wallace neglects to mention the only direct reference there is in Dodgson's own diary to the Whitechapel murderer. On 26 August 1891, Dodgson records talking to "Dr. Dabbs", (an acquaintance on the Isle of Wight) on the subject of "his very ingenious theory about 'Jack the Ripper'". He did not mention what that 'very ingenious' theory was. Or if it had anything at all to do with anagrams.

But hey - why was this Doctor Dabbs so interested in the murders anyway? Was it - *personal experience*?

What if he had a house in London? And an appetite for sadism learned in the Congo? - And a very big knife?

Can anyone prove it didn't happen?