

Lewis Carroll: A Poet First

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The NYIT logo consists of the letters "NYIT" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, centered within a solid orange square.

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A Poet First

Carroll is a poet first and
there is pure genius in his poetry,

1. *“Jabberwocky”*
2. *The Hunting of the Snark*
3. *“The Mad Gardener’s Song”*
4. And *“A-sitting On a Gate,”*
which we generally call *“The
White-Knight’s Song”* or *“The
White-Knight’s Ballad”*

A Poet First

Carroll's first and last published works were both collections of his poems. Poetry was his life-long anchor and friend.

A Poet First

Useful and Instructive Poetry (1845)

Written when Carroll was 13



A Poet First

What is remarkable about his juvenilia is how skilled he is at crafting poems and how consistently Carrollian his work remained throughout his life. What he wrote at age thirteen has it all.

A Poet First

Useful and Instructive Poetry (1845)

A Poet First

Brother and Sister

“SISTER, sister, go to bed,
Go and rest your weary head,”
Thus the prudent brother said.

“Do you want a battered hide
Or scratches to your face applied?”
Thus the sister calm replied.

A Poet First

“Sister! do not rouse my wrath
I’d make you into mutton broth
And easily as kill a moth.”

The sister raised her beaming eye,
And looked on him indignantly,
And sternly answered “Only try!”

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Off to cook he quickly ran,
“Dear cook, pray lend a frying pan
To me, as quickly as you can.”

“And wherefore should I give it to you?”
“The reason, cook, is plain to view,
I wish to make an Irish stew.”

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“What meat is in that stew to go?”

My sister’ll be the contents.” “Oh!”

“Will you lend the pan, Cook?” “NO!”

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Moral: “Never stew your sister.”

A Poet First

A Poet First

...his greatest poems are all comic or humorous, and
as one of the greatest comic poets in history
he has not been sufficiently proclaimed a great poet.

“Jabberwocky”



https://youtu.be/LbGbU65_Rbg

STANZA OF ANGLO-SAXON POETRY

ƆWƆS ƆRYLLYƆ, AND Y^E SLYTȚY ƆOVES
DID GYRE AND GYHBLE IN Y^E WƆƆE :
ALL HIMSƆ WERE Y^E ƆORƆGƆVES ;
AND Y^E HƆME RƆTHS ƆUTGƆRƆƆE ♦

“Jabberwocky,” the world’s most famous nonsense poem,
isn’t a pure expression of nonsense.
There is underlying sense to it.”

A Poet First

The Hunting of the Snark

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...tension between the comic tone and the underlying anxieties is one of the poem's most distinguishing and fascinating characteristics

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His anapestic verse with more accents in lines 1 and 3 than in 2 and 4 is complex and illustrates the perfection of his versification.

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Humor was a means for him to order his experience.

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“The Gardener’s Song”
is more stupid than “Jabberwocky”
and *The Hunting of the Snark* combined

*“He thought he saw an Elephant,
That practiced on a fife:
He looked again, and found it was
A letter from his wife.
‘At length I realise,’ he said,
‘The bitterness of Life!’”*

A Poet First

*‘He thought he was an Argument
That proved he was the Pope:
He looked again, and found it was
A Bar of Mottled Soap.
‘A fact so dread,’ he faintly said,
‘Extinguishes all hope!’”*

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“The Gardener’s Song” is more freely associative with its startling leaps of thoughts and references and is the purer nonsense poem of the two.

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Of all of Carroll's poems, this one with its ludicrous associations, its nonsense, is not about meaning but is pure entertainment and comic relief.

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“The White Knight’s Song”

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Again, verse of the young poet becoming
the kernel of the masterpiece of the mature artist.

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A Poet First

*“I’ll tell thee everything I can;
There’s little to relate.
I saw an aged aged man,
A-sitting on a gate.
‘Who are you, aged man?’ I said.
‘And how is it you live?’
And his answer trickled through my head
Like water through a sieve.*

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*He said 'I look for butterflies
That sleep among the wheat:
I make them into mutton-pies,
And sell them in the street.
I sell them unto men,' he said,
'Who sail on stormy seas;
And that's the way I get my bread—
A trifle, if you please.'*

A Poet First

*And now, if e'er by chance I put
My fingers into glue,
Or madly squeeze a right-hand foot
Into a left-hand shoe,
Or if I drop upon my toe
A very heavy weight,*

*I weep, for it reminds me so
Of that old man I used to know—
Whose look was mild, whose speech was slow,
Whose hair was whiter than the snow,
Whose face was very like a crow,
With eyes, like cinders, all aglow,
Who seemed distracted with his woe,
Who rocked his body to and fro,
And muttered mumblingly and low,*

A Poet First

*As if his mouth were full of dough,
Who snorted like a buffalo——
That summer evening, long ago,
A-sitting on a gate.”*

A Poet First

Carroll is the aged, aged man...

Thus, the poem may be taken as Carroll's symbolic farewell to the real Alice of his dreams as she goes on in maturity.



A Poet First

“It is very sweet to me, to be loved by her as children love: though the experience of many years have now taught me that there are a few things in the world so evanescent as a child’s love. Nine-tenths of the children, whose love once seemed as warm as hers, are now merely on the terms of everyday acquaintance.”

A Poet First

Thank you