

The Name 'Alice'

Lewis Carroll makes great play on the role of names in relation to personal identity and on the name 'Alice' in particular, which had become popular in the mid-Victorian era.

Alice



Alice Liddell as a beggar-maid (from the story of *Cophtua*). Lewis Carroll (1860).

“The Gnat amused itself meanwhile by humming round and round her head: at last it settled again and remarked, ‘I suppose you don’t want to lose your name?’

‘No, indeed,’ Alice said, a little anxiously.

‘And yet I don’t know’, the Gnat went on in a careless tone: ‘only think how convenient it would be if you could manage to go home without it!’

...

‘This must be the wood,’ she said thoughtfully to herself, ‘where things have no names. I wonder what’ll become of my name when I go in? I shouldn’t like to lose it at all – because they’d have to give me another, and it would be almost certain to be an ugly one. But the fun would

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‘Alice’ was a name with high royal aura in 12th century Europe, but only Alice Capet, daughter of Eleanor’s first husband, Louis VII of France, has given rise to a significant literary tradition.

Eleanor



Jane Merrow as Princess Alice (of the Vexin). *Lion in Winter* (1968).

The name Alice is an abbreviation of ‘Adelaide’ and means ‘of noble stock’ or ‘regal’. In the era of Eleanor of Aquitaine, many girls were called Alice (or the equivalent forms of Alix, Alys, Alais, Aelis, Aelith, Adáele, Adelaide) and form a context that runs through the story of her life. Of the many historical Alices of that era, however, only one has been a protagonist of a significant literary tradition, including a major motion picture (*The Lion in Winter*), and that one was Princess Alice Capet, daughter-in-law of Eleanor of Aquitaine, to become the centerpiece of the intersections with the Alice stories that are explored in this book.

A summary of the many mediaeval Alices of that time seems to begin with Alice of Tours, in the centre of France in the time of Charlemagne. They form an interconnected backdrop for the analysis of Alice parallels here, although the details may be skipped without loss.



Alicia Maria Carpenter,
Countess of Egremont.
Arthur Devis (1745).

be, trying to find the creature that had got my old name! That's just like the advertisements, you know, when people lose dogs – 'answers to the name of Dash: had on a brass collar' – just fancy calling everything you met 'Alice,' till one of them answered! Only they wouldn't answer at all, if they were wise.' ”

Alice Through the Looking-Glass, Chapter 3.

Lewis Carroll seemed to be surrounded by young girls with the name 'Alice' and once said "I'm very fond of Alices". Beyond Alice Liddell, for whom he wrote the first book, there was Alice Raikes, a distant cousin who inspired the second book; Princess Alice (Queen Victoria's daughter), to whom he used to tell stories; Alice Ellen Terry, the great actress whom he loved and photographed; Alice Price, daughter of the Master of neighbouring Pembroke College, whose portrait he drew; and photography models Alice Westmacott, daughter of a Victorian sculptor, and cousins Alice Jane and Alice Emily Donkin.

It was Lord Melbourne (William Lamb) who suggested the name 'Alice' to Queen Victoria for her second daughter. He was her first prime Minister and close confidante. This suggestion was presumably in honour of Alicia, Countess of Egremont, who was most likely Melbourne's grandmother, since he was rumoured to be the natural child of Alicia's son, Lord Egremont, and spent much of his childhood at the Egremont family home of Petworth, Hampshire. Alicia was Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte (wife of King George III).

Alice (Aelis) of Tours and Alsace (820 - 866), daughter Hugh de Bourges ('The Wicked'), Count of Alsace and Ava Eticondes, Countess of Tours, married Robert ('The Strong'), Count of Paris, who became Robert I, King of France

Alice (Liegarde, Hildebrante) of Neustria (887 - 931), daughter of Robert I of France and Beatrice of Vermandois

Alice (Adèle, Alix) of Vermandois, van Vloandern (910 - 960), daughter of Herbert II of Vermandois and Hildebrante (Alice) of Neustria

Alice (Adela) Capet (1009 - 1079), sister of Henri I, King of the Franks (ruled 1031 - 1060) and mother of Mathilda, wife of William the Conqueror

Alice (Adáele) of Normandy and Blois (1062 – 1135), Princess of England, daughter of William the Conqueror and mother of Stephen I of England

Alice (Adâelaëide) of Normandy (1057 - 1065), daughter of William II of England

Alice (Adèle, Adelaide), Countess of Vermandois et Valois (1065 - 1122), last of the Carolingian dynasty, who married Hugh Magnus, one of the leaders of the First Crusade

Alice (Adelaide) of Savoy (1092 - 1154), wife of Louis VI of France and mother of Louis VII of France

Alice (Alix) of Champagne (1100 - 1145), daughter of Stephen II of Blois and Alice of Normandy, married Renaud III, Count of Joigny at Chartres in at age 15

Alice (Petronilla, Aelith) of Aquitaine. Petronilla of Aquitaine (c. 1125 – 1193), daughter of William X of Aquitaine and Aenor of Châtellerauld and the sister of Eleanor of Aquitaine

Alice de Vexin (c. 1031 - c. 1141), wife of Theobald III of Blois

Alice (Alix, or Adèle) of Champagne (1140 - 1206), daughter of Thibault IV, Count of Blois, became third wife of Louis VII of France

Alice (Alix) Capet, Princess of France, Countess of Blois (1151 - 1198), second daughter of Louis VII of France and Eleanor of Aquitaine, named after her aunt Alice (Petronilla), married Theobald V, Count of Blois at about age 13

Alice (Alys, Alais) Capet, Princess of France, Countess of the Vexin, Countess of Ponthieu (1160 – c. 1220) was the second daughter of Louis VII of France and Constance of Castile. Married William

Princess Alice, who knew Lewis Carroll from visits to Oxford and was reprimanded at age 5 for commenting on his stammer, nursed her father, Albert, through his fatal struggle with typhoid fever; she was unhappily married to Prince Louis of Hesse and was inspired by Florence Nightingale to devote much of her life to the management of military hospitals.

Another cryptic Alice who inspired Lewis Carroll was the child actress (Alice) Ellen Terry, whom he saw in her first role as Prince Mamilus in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* at the age of 9 and described in his diary as "a beautiful little creature, who played with remarkable spirit and ease", shortly followed by Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Prince Arthur in *King John*. He was believed by his sister to have, in fact, been in love with Ellen Terry when she was seventeen, just after her unhappy marriage to the pre-Raphaelite artist George Frederick Watts (Hudson, 1976). Miss Terry, notable for her head of long strawberry-blonde hair matching the original illustrations for Alice, went on to become the doyenne of the British and American theatre for the next 50 years.

Princess Alice's daughter, Alice (or Alix), married Tsar Nicholas II of Russia, and was renamed Tsarina Alexandra Feodorova; Alix passed her mother's gene for haemophilia on to her son, crown prince Tsarevich Alexei. Alix, her husband, and her children were shot and killed by the Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Princess Alice's brother Leopold married Princess Helene Friederike, who soon gave birth to a daughter, Princess Alice of Albany, the last surviving grandchild of Queen Victoria, who became Princess Alice of Athlone.

In a contemporary note, Princess Alice's granddaughter, Alice Battenburg, married Prince Andrew of Greece and became the mother of Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth II.



Choosing (Alice Ellen Terry at age 17)
by George Frederick Watts (1864).

III Talvas, Count of Ponthieu, on 20 August 1195, and had three daughters: Jean (stillborn), Marie, Countess of Ponthieu, and Isabelle

Alice of Courtenay, Countess of Angoulême (1160 – 1218), niece-in-law of King Louis VII of France through her marriage to his youngest son, Peter I of Courtnay; mother of Isabella of Angoulême, who became Queen consort of England as the wife of King John, fourth son of Eleanor of Aquitaine

Alice (Alix) of Blois (c. 1164 - ?), daughter of Alice, Countess of Blois, became Abbess of Fountevault

Alice of Thouars (1201 - 1221), daughter of Guy of Thouars and Duchess Constance of Brittany, became Duchess of Brittany at age 2 and married Peter of Dreux at age 12

Thus, Princess Alice Capet's half-sister, sister-in-law, step sister-in-law, aunt, grandmother, mother-in-law, grandmother-in-law, aunt-in-law, great-aunt, great great-aunt, niece, niece-in-law and grand-niece were all named Alice!

...

One final Alice played a role in England's first revolution – Alice Tyler, daughter of Wat (Walter) Tyler – a young girl described as "pretty, joyous, innocent, and modest." As a blacksmith, Wat Tyler found it hard to pay the poll tax instituted in 1377 by the Government under the young king, Richard II, to cover the costs of the French War. Wat Tyler refused the tax collector's demand for a head tax of three groats for Alice, on the grounds that she was under 15. When the tax collector "insulted her virgin modesty" by implying otherwise, Wat Tyler felled him to the ground with a sledgehammer, generating such a popular feeling against the tax collector that it instigated the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 (in which, however, Wat Tyler was killed in a struggle with the Lord Mayor of London).

The Reader's Handbook, by Brewer, 1889, p. 1046.



Adela of Normandy, Alice of Champagne, Alice Capet.