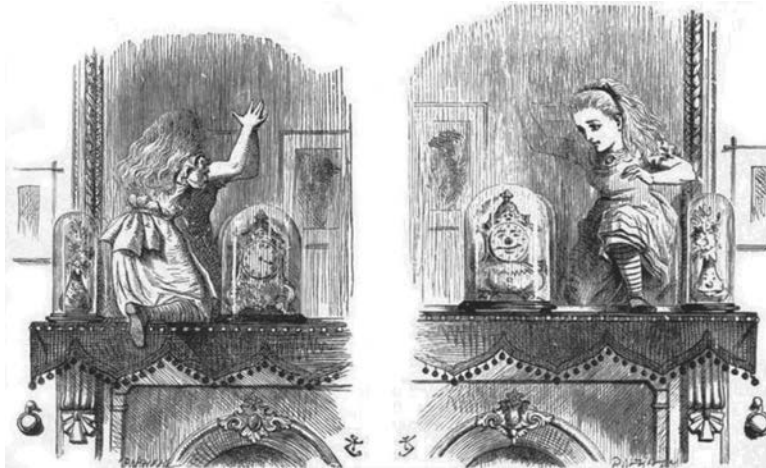


Reading the Parallel Stories

The left-hand pages in the red font describe events and images in the 19th century relating to Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*.

Alice



Alice discovering the parallel Looking-Glass World. John Tenniel (1870).

Most of the material on the left concerns fictional events within the books, but aspects relating to the life of Alice Liddell, the young girl for whom the original story was written, are also included in this track of the parallel treatment.

The parallel structure is designed to allow readers to make the comparisons for themselves, offering each section as a hypothesis for evaluation on its specific merits. The 'parallel' allusion may be seen to draw from Plutarch's seminal *Parallel Lives*, perhaps the first set for many of Shakespeare's plays, with which Lewis Carroll was extensively familiar.

It is also a side reference to the theoretical physics concept of 'parallel universes' that is clearly prefigured in the mirror-image world of *Through the Looking-Glass*, as discussed at length in Martin Gardner's annotations to the *Alice* texts (Gardner, 1960).

The book is organized into two main parallel strands, the fantasy of the 19th century *Alice* books and the milieu of the 12th century Alice that

Reading the Parallel Stories

The right-hand pages in the blue font describe events and images of the life, history and mythology of the royalty of 12th century England and France, as they relate to the *Alice* stories.

Eleanor



Eleanor of Aquitaine composite. Created by the author (2011).

The pivotal character in this account is another Alice, a Princess of France who spent much of her life in the courts of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, King and Queen of England and of a vast French territory. This Alice played a significant role as a pawn in their internecine struggles with King Louis VII of France for the control of Western Europe. Princess Alice must have felt as bewildered as the fictional Alice in her journey through the castles and engagements of the mid-12th century, before finally becoming an established Duchess in her own right.

In developing the connections between the *Alice* stories and the life and milieu of the mediaeval Alice, I have drawn together a number of threads that have lain unattended in the archives of history since her time. The main thread of this young woman, Princess Alice Capet of France, of the Vexin

forms much of the inspiration for its motifs. The concept of the side-by-side format is to encourage comparisons of the text and of the illustrations across the pages and across the centuries as to the specifics that may have inspired aspects of the stories.

However, the fantasy Alice strand is intertwined in turn with the reality of the living Alice to whom the story was told, with her “namesake” who inspired the original story, and with the 19th century backdrop of the Oxford milieu of the college and the river trips in which she grew up. And the Oxford milieu is itself intertwined with the royal family with which Alice had an active relationship through her father’s longstanding connections, coming full circle in harking back to the 12th century ancestors from which the royals were descended. Alice herself, as a member of the esteemed Liddell family, seemed to epitomize the family motto ‘Fama semper vivit’, that they would be forever illustrious. Thus, the reader is enjoined to treat each strand as a variegated braid, revealing different aspects as it weaves its way through the interconnected rambles, including the many other Alices whom Lewis Carroll knew and photographed.

The one strand that is completely absent from the books is the one that would have been most expected from a member of the Church of England at a religious college that housed Oxford Cathedral, and who published a number of sermons during his life, namely any hint of religiosity. Evidently, child-like pleasures were a parallel strand in Carroll’s mind that ran entirely independently of his religio-philosophical concerns.

Finally, as a historiographic note, references are cited for the obscurer sources of the textual development, while the uncited ones are to be found in common reference material such as Wikipedia.

and of Ponthieu, as it intertwines with the 12th century history of the life of Henry and Eleanor, relates especially to their time in the environs of Oxford where Lewis Carroll wrote the stories.

It should be recognized that the resulting sampler is heavily speculative and does not have the backing of extended scholarship that would characterize a true mediaeval history. On the other hand, a close reading of those histories reveals much that is similarly speculative, or sullied by strikingly contradictory accounts, so that there is room for a range of interpretations of many historical events this distant in the past (or indeed of current events in many cases!). The present account is therefore unapologetically personal to my reading of the available facts. Each aspect of the story may be taken as a plausible hypothesis as to what may actually have transpired, to form the basis for further investigation by interested parties.

Despite this caveat, it should also be recognized that the choice of the 12th century connections is far from arbitrary. Our knowledge of Lewis Carroll’s life makes it clear that he was intensely interested in several other large-scale epochs of history – the classical period, the Arthurian period, the Elizabethan period. Yet these periods are entirely absent from the *Alice* stories. Making this point throws the extensive mediaeval allusions highlighted in the present analysis into sharp relief.