

The Age of Chivalry

Alice has an encounter with battling knights in *Through The Looking-Glass* that resonates with episodes relating to the incessant territorial battles of the Plantagenets.

Alice



Alice with the fighting knights. John Tenniel (1870).

Alice plays the role of the onlooker when she encounters the futile battling of the knights of the Looking-Glass World:

“ ‘You will observe the Rules of Battle, of course?’ the White Knight remarked, putting on his helmet too.

‘I always do,’ said the Red Knight, and they began banging away at each other with such fury that Alice got behind a tree to be out of the way of the blows.

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The Plantagenets were primarily responsible for launching the Arthurian knightly tradition in Europe and played a central role in the promotion of jousting during the Age of Chivalry.

Eleanor



Arthur and his knights ride back to Camelot (14th century).

“We know that the Plantagenets definitively launched the Arthurian tradition in Europe. . . . It cannot be denied that Eleanor influenced Henry and Richard, and consequently she shared responsibility for the spread of the myth of Arthur, . . . [in their] pursuit of an imperial politics covering England and the Continent. . . . When Eleanor temporarily vanished from the political stage in 1173, literary production slowed to a trickle instantly, proof that the queen played an important role in its occurrence.

At her court of Poitiers, it was to the caste of knights that Eleanor turned While she was queen of the troubadours, she was also

'I wonder, now, what the Rules of Battle are,' she said to herself, as she watched the fight, timidly peeping out from her hiding-place: 'one Rule seems to be, that if one Knight hits the other, he knocks him off his horse, and if he misses, he tumbles off himself — and another Rule seems to be that they hold their clubs with their arms, as if they were Punch and Judy — What a noise they make when they tumble! Just like a whole set of fire-irons falling into the fender! And how quiet the horses are! They let them get on and off them just as if they were tables!'

Another Rule of Battle, that Alice had not noticed, seemed to be that they always fell on their heads, and the battle ended with their both falling off in this way, side by side: when they got up again, they shook hands, and then the Red Knight mounted and galloped off.

...

'It was a glorious victory, wasn't it?' said the White Knight, as he came up panting.

'I don't know,' Alice said doubtfully. 'I don't want to be anybody's prisoner. I want to be a Queen.'

'So you will, when you've crossed the next brook,' said the White Knight. 'I'll see you safe to the end of the wood — and then I must go back, you know. That's the end of my move.'

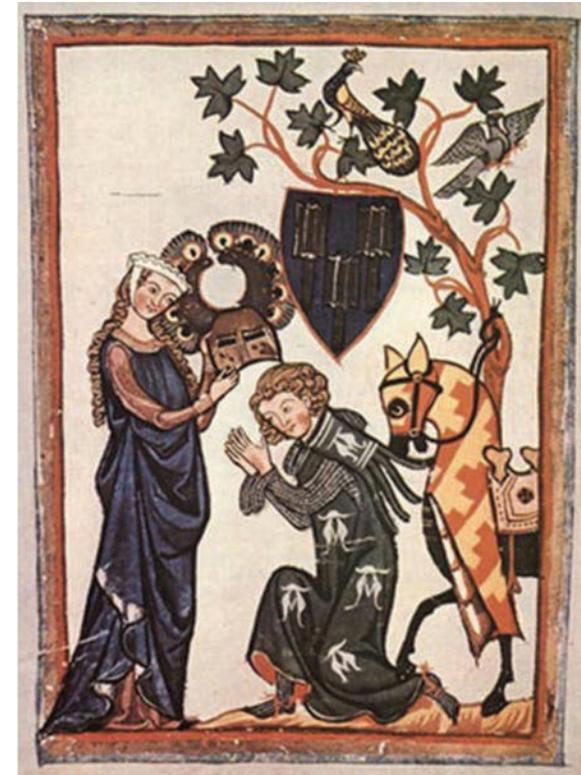
'Thank you very much,' said Alice. 'May I help you off with your helmet?' It was evidently more than he could manage by himself; however, she managed to shake him out of it at last.

'Now one can breathe more easily,' said the Knight, putting back his shaggy hair with both hands, and turning his gentle face and large mild eyes to Alice. She thought she had never seen such a strange-looking soldier in all her life."

Alice Through the Looking-Glass, Chapter 8.

queen of the knights. In addition, because of the interactions in this complex twelfth century society, numerous troubadours were also knights. . . . It was necessary for every lord to hire the services of loyal knights, and the lords therefore not only tolerated but even encouraged the institution of '*fine amour*'. . . . The higher the place occupied in the hierarchy by the chosen lady, the higher their rank would become. We know that many knights owned only their horse and equipment, when they were not obliged to use them as collateral. Material interests thus commanded the service of love. . . . The troubadours were the first to compose poems to the glory of a fictional or real lady, extolling her beauty and merits."

Eleanor of Aquitaine, by Jean Markale (1979, p. 146-9 and 134-143).



Victorious knight being awarded with his lady's favour (14th century).