

# The Transition from Childhood to Adolescence in Contemporary Adaptations of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

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**UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA**  
**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

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**The Transition from Childhood to Adolescence in Contemporary Adaptations of Lewis  
Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland***

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Literature  
and Italian Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

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## Abstract

This thesis will provide an analysis of the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, the animated movie *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) by Walt Disney Productions and the movie *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) by Tim Burton. The analysis will center on Alice's transition from childhood to adolescence, focusing on the depiction of Wonderland as the symbol for the process of growth and maturation. The thesis will firstly offer a reading of the book through the method of close reading, with focus on the depiction of Wonderland. It will then proceed to compare the two movie adaptations explaining how they engage with the theme of growing up. The main issues that shall be discussed are the ways in which the book and the adaptations tackle the concept of identity and Alice's development over the course of her time spent in Wonderland.

**KEYWORDS:** Alice, Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, Disney, Tim Burton, childhood, identity, adulthood, adolescence

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## 1. Introduction

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, more often referred to simply as *Alice in Wonderland*, by the Victorian author Lewis Carroll is a children's book from 1865 that continues to fascinate. Its story centers around a young girl, of about 7 years of age, who enters a strange, dreamlike world. There, through the encounter with various supernatural creatures, Alice explores the nonsensical system of Wonderland and its residents. A state of lawlessness seems to reign in Wonderland, and Alice finds herself trying to adapt to the weird situation at hand, trying to make sense of it all. In the end, the whole ordeal is revealed to only have been a dream, with Alice waking up in the real world. However, despite it being a dream, Alice seems to have matured along the way, learning more about herself and the world around her.

Although the story lacks a straightforward narrative, it introduces a vast array of memorable characters and a memorable image of childhood and the process of growing up. As a result, many adaptations of the book have been made, ranging from novels to movies, comic books and games, such as Gilbert Adair's *Alice Through the Needle's Eye* (1984), A.G. Howard's *Splintered* (2013), ABC channel's *Once upon a Time in Wonderland* (2013), *American McGee's Alice* (2000), Quin Rose's *Heart no Kuni no Alice (Alice in the Country of Hearts)*, (2007), to name only a few.

This thesis will analyze Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its two adaptations, the 1951 animated feature film *Alice in Wonderland* directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, and the 2010 film *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by Tim Burton, both produced for Disney. The main premise in this thesis that Alice's stay in Wonderland is best understood as a psychological journey, through which Alice becomes acquainted with the ways of society, and her own identity, progressing towards adulthood. The thesis will thus, firstly, offer an interpretation of this idea through a close reading. Secondly, it will analyze the animated feature and how it relates to the transition from childhood to adulthood, and lastly it will offer an analysis of the same theme by examining the movie adaptation directed by Tim Burton.

The book and its adaptations both tackle Wonderland standing as a symbol for the process of growing up, albeit the animated feature handles the topic in a less serious way than Tim Burton's movie and Carroll's original story.

## **2. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll**

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), along with its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), is one of Carroll's most well-known works. Alongside this, the book is considered to be one of the first books written specifically for a younger audience, (Pullman, 2015, 3-4) and readings of the book should consider this fact when tackling its symbolism and imagery. Many critics (e.g. William Empson, Robert Phillips and Harold Bloom) have attempted to decipher Carroll's nonsense world and give it sensical meaning. These interpretations range from viewing Wonderland as a drug-induced fantasy (e.g. Parker, 2010) to it being an illustration of an eating disorder (e.g. Fairclough, 2011). This thesis will look at the book's storyline as a representation of the transition from childhood to adulthood. The thesis will analyse Wonderland and the nonsense which Alice encounters in it as symbols for the process of a child becoming an adult.

### **2.1 Alice at the start of her journey**

Before her great adventure, Alice is portrayed as a simple girl uninterested in the 'adult' book her older sister was reading. The book is described as having 'no pictures or conversations in it' (Carroll, 2002, 23) which makes Alice think 'what is the use of a book, (...) without pictures or conversations?' (Carroll, 2002, 23). Alice's character is immediately constructed as being preoccupied only with children's play and showing no interest for serious questions.

Another very important trait linked to Alice is the concept of curiosity. At the moment the white rabbit appeared before her, Alice 'burning with curiosity, (...) ran across the field after it' (Carroll, 1865). Furthermore, it is later stated that: 'In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.' (Carroll, 2002, 23-24). With this, and the way Alice eats and drinks things without thinking of the consequences, a childlike naivety emerges. It could also be argued that with this trait Alice is not simply just a child, but an archetype for children. By doing this, Carroll's Alice and her journey stop being the story of a particular child and instead becomes representative of every child's journey to adulthood, as Liza Vos states: 'From the perspective of Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, Lewis Carroll's Alice is one of many incarnations of the same recurring character conjured up by humanity's collective unconscious: the archetypal child.' (2016, 2)

## 2.2 Wonderland: the symbol of one's journey to adulthood

Lewis Carroll's Wonderland can best be seen as a symbolic journey to adulthood in the way he uses 'nonsense': the silliness of Wonderland and its inhabitants can be linked to a child's view of adults and the adult world. To children, many things that adults hold dear seem ludicrous and hold little sense. Children are known for being very direct and open about the world around them and are often prone to point out peculiarities and question them, such as things that adults often avoid doing to be polite or simply maintain a tradition. Another similar example of this can be seen in another famous story from the same period aimed at the young written by Hans Christian Anderson, 'The Emperor's New Clothes' (1837). In this story it is the child alone who does not fear being seen as stupid and pointing out the obvious, that the Emperor is indeed naked. This same level of directness is visible in Carroll's Alice. She is quick to judge and pinpoint the contradictions which Wonderland's residents often display. An example of this can be the Duchess, who is obsessed with finding morals in everything around her. "You're thinking about something, my dear, and that makes you forget to talk. I can't tell you just now what the moral of that is, but I shall remember it in a bit." "Perhaps it hasn't one," Alice ventured to remark.' (Carroll, 2002, 97) In this passage it can be seen how outspoken Alice is and how quick she is to find a flaw in the Duchesses' logic. Children, due to their simple way of viewing the world around, often confront adults in a straightforward manner about things which happen to them, without searching for deeper meaning in occurrences. In this scene, and many others (e.g. the scene where Alice meets the Footman who questions whether she can or cannot enter through the door, see pages 70-72) Alice's remarks and innocent straightforwardness could also be seen as a means through which Carroll directly criticizes the 'nonsense' found in the 'real world'.

In his life, and according to Jenny Woolf (2010), Lewis Carroll, the pen name of Charles Dodgson, had a very tight relation with his childhood. This theme is taken up by Bryan Talbot in his graphic novel *Alice in Sunderland*, where Talbot suggests that Carroll/Dodgson's family posthumously tried to maintain his image of a reclusive and innocent man who never really grew up (Talbot, 2007, 117). This is confirmed by his obituary in 'the London Daily Graphic ...[which] noted that "like many bachelors, he was very popular with children and very fond of them."' (Woolf, 2010, n.p.) Before the year was out, Dodgson's nephew Stuart Collingwood

published a biography that devoted two effusive chapters to Dodgson's many "child friends," including references to his hugging and kissing girls, and largely omitted references to his many friendships with women.' (Wood 2010, n.p.). So, if the family's depiction of Carroll held at least a small amount of truth, one could connect Carroll's depictions of the adult world as nonsensical due to his negative experiences with other adults: questioning their traditions and ideals and contrasting them with the innocence of a child. And, according to Carolyn Sigler, Carroll depicts adults and society as 'an autocracy of fools, in which meaningless didacticism is wielded as a weapon, rules of behaviour and decorum are hypocritical and contradictory, and the threat of punishment always looms' (1996, 58).

Another possible reading that could further emphasize this point is looking at the visit to Wonderland as standing in for a child's game of make believe. In this case, Alice would be the one imitating the adults around her and creating her own world through which she could openly engage with the 'adult world'. Laura Berk states in her book *Child Development* (2008) how through playing pretend children achieve emotional integration and develop their social and language skills (359-445). Furthermore, Albert Bandura, an American-Canadian psychologist explains how humans learn behaviour and social norms through imitation and by observing their surroundings. (1971, 3) Seen in this way, Wonderland could be viewed as Alice's exploration of society and forming of her identity through child's play. An example of this in the book can be found at the very beginning of the narrative when Carroll describes how: 'She generally gave herself very good advice (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes.' (Carroll, 2002, 28). It is also stated how she would not rarely assume the role of a second person and pretend to be two people at the same time (Carroll, 2002, 28-29). Throughout the book, Alice could often be seen talking to herself and reprimanding herself, as if she had two roles to play, that of an adult and of a child. But, as the narrative unfolds, Alice starts lecturing not only herself, but also other characters. A good example of this is when Alice finds herself at the Mad Hatter's party, and becomes infuriated with the nonsense the March Hare, the Hatter and the Dormouse are perpetuating. Instead of staying quiet, Alice began scolding the trio because of their rudeness (Carroll, 2002, 79-87).



### **2.3 Alice and the everchanging concept of identity**

A prominent question that is often brought up by Alice and Wonderland's residents is the question of Alice's identity. While growing up, one's identity is one of the key issues that children and teenagers must determine to fully mature and in the case of the book, the question of identity is the one that gets asked the most. According to Pratima Mistry: 'Alice's adventures in Wonderland reflect the child-adult conflict of Alice on her inner quest for identity. The first step into adulthood includes not only psychological growth as in maturity but also physical growth; to grow is to grow up.' (2015, 147-148). Although this interpretation mainly focuses on Alice's psychological growth, the fact that she does grow physically from eating and drinking cannot be overlooked, as will be explained later in the thesis.

In the second chapter, when Alice finds herself in the predicament with the long hallway and the locked door, she starts questioning her own identity because environment around her shifts and becomes strange. In this ordeal Alice states: 'Dear dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the new question is "Who in the world am I!?" Ah that's a great puzzle!' (Carroll, 2002, 31) Right after encountering her first challenge, Alice begins questioning herself. Alice is in a situation she had never been before, where she has only herself to rely on, and is thus forced to be the 'adult' in the situation. Naturally, this raises to Alice the question of her identity.

There is yet another symbol that keeps reoccurring throughout the book: Alice changing sizes by eating and drinking things, which could bear the meaning of Alice adjusting herself and her identity to her surroundings but could also be an allusion to Alice's physical growth. Another possible interpretation is that it represents an exploration of identity on Alice's behalf, where she starts becoming more familiar with herself. 'I'd nearly forgotten that I've got to grow up again! Let me see – how is it to be managed? I suppose I ought to eat or drink something or other; but the great question is "what?"' (Carroll, 2002, 55). Alice is able to shift back and forth between the roles of a 'child' and an 'adult'. However, after a certain point in the book, Alice just keeps on growing without the aid of food, and thus has no more control over her

growth, and the role she plays. This can be seen in the jury scene, where Alice keeps growing uncontrollably, outgrowing the jury-box (Carroll, 2002, 115-129).

Another theme that crops up in the book, linked to the question of identity, is how grownups often enforce their opinions and thoughts on children, putting labels on them and trying to make the children assume that they are indeed what the adult is trying to make them to be. This is addressed in the episode where Alice grows to the size of a tree, encountering a pigeon's nest. There the pigeon starts panicking and calling Alice a serpent which came to steal her eggs. "Well what are you?" said the pigeon. "I can see you are trying to invent something!" "I – I'm a little girl," said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through, that day... "No, no! you are a serpent; and there's no use denying it." (Carroll, 2002, 66). At the start of their argument, Alice is fairly sure she was a little girl, but by the end she begins to doubt this truth, remembering all the changes she had been through. The pigeon's remarks are of no help to Alice, encouraging her to further question herself. This also ties to the process of growing up, since children do have to come to a point where they question themselves. This is so that children could arrive at an answer in regard to their identity establishing it by the means of this process.

## **2.4 The Caterpillar**

When it comes to the recurring question of identity in the novel, one of the most important scenes is the one in which Alice encounters the Caterpillar. Upon their meeting, Alice and the Caterpillar immediately engage in a dialogue: "Who are you?" said the Caterpillar (...) "I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then." (Carroll, 2002, 56). The whole dialogue between the two consists of Alice giving the Caterpillar an explanation of how she is unsure of her identity because she had changed multiple times through the course of the day, and the Caterpillar provoking Alice. At one point, the Caterpillar asks Alice to recite a nursery rhyme; however, Alice is unable to do so. Alice is no longer the same person she was at the beginning of her journey and is slowly forgetting parts of her Child-self. Jenny Karlsson explains how

According to the psychiatrist Erik Erikson's model of a child's socio-emotional development, (Alice's) thoughts of identity belong to the fifth stage of psychosocial crisis, ranging from early adolescence from about 13 or 14 years-old to about 20. In this stage the

youth learns to identify himself or herself and answer the question of “Who am I?” “satisfactorily and happily” (Child Development Institute). (2009, 8).

Karlsson’s explanation is applicable to the Caterpillar’s question to Alice’s state. Although at the start of the novel Alice is indeed much younger than the age defined by Erik Erikson, towards the end of the novel she seems to portray the characteristics of a child at this later stage of development. In this way, even the progression of Alice’s growth seems to be accelerated, with her remaining the same age but maturing in a psychological manner. This sort of occurrence is not rare with children who are put in scenarios which require them to mature more quickly, beyond the confines of their age.

## **2.5 Alice’s encounter with the door leading to Wonderland**

One of the key moments in Alice’s adventure is when Alice has to enter the little garden of Wonderland, as a result of her falling through the rabbit hole. This scene later serves as a parallel to another, to showcase Alice’s growth. In the first scene, after discerning that the door was indeed too small to fit her, Alice decided to drink from a little bottle, becoming smaller. However, before shrinking to the size suitable to fit through the exit, she forgot to take the key to the door, leaving it on the table. Unable to reach it, Alice began crying, like any child would finding themselves in an uncertain situation. She was able to solve the predicament with the help of the lucky circumstances by eating the cakes she found, growing rapidly. Afterwards, Alice was able to shrink again thanks to the white rabbit who came to her and dropped his fan and white gloves in front of Alice because of fear, which Alice took and fanned herself to a small stature. (Carroll, 2002, 30-31).

This scene is important because later in her journey, before entering the Queen’s garden, Alice ‘found herself in the long hall, and close to the little glass table.’ (Carroll, 2002, 86). However, unlike the first time, Alice has gained experience and now shows no problem in solving the difficulty at hand. The first time Alice was in the hall, it took her a chapter and a half to get past the door. But this time around, Alice opened the door in no more than one sentence. This can be seen as the moment in the book that most highlights the growth that Alice experiences. It even states so explicitly with Alice’s words: ‘Now, I’ll manage better this time’ (Carroll,

2002, 86). This sentence marks the point of Alice's transformation in the book. From here on Alice assumes a more mature stance when dealing with the world around her.

## **2.6 Alice at the end of the book**

By the end of her journey, Alice has evolved into a more mature version of herself, as she herself states: 'But it's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then.' (Carroll, 2002, 111). Her change can be seen in how she did not indulge in eating the Queen's tarts, despite being hungry. It can also be seen in the following line, where Alice shows she learned not to blurt out all of her thoughts: "I once tasted ----" but checked herself hastily, and said 'No, never' " (Carroll, 2002, 105). Another aspect in which Alice changed is how she is now resolutely addressing the illogical reasoning Wonderland's residents displayed, without fearing their reactions. This can be seen in the trial scene, where Alice declares that her statement is unimportant and cannot be deemed as evidence, countering the King of Hearts. And not only that, but Alice begins thinking more about those around her, as Pratima Mistry states:

As she proceeds on her journey, she gradually learns to control and regulate her emotional outbursts. The fact that Alice is small with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle shows that she has undergone a psychological development in terms of maturity. She pities the Mock Turtle for his heartbreaking sorrow. She is more sensitive now to the emotional needs of others. (2015, 147-148).

In the final part of the book, Alice's older sister observes her and thinks:

she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood: ... and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days. (Carroll, 2002, 131).

This reinforces the theme of growing up and shows how Alice was now no longer the same child she was before, although her child years would forever remain in her memory as she progresses through life.

### **3. *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske (Walt Disney Productions)**

Walt Disney's famous animated feature film, directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske, is one of *Alice's Adventurous in Wonderland's* most well-known adaptations. Many have been introduced to the story of Alice and Wonderland characters through Disney's animated film, so much so that many people think in terms of the 1951 images when the story is brought up. Disney's image of Alice became deeply embedded in popular culture, and so many subsequent adaptations adapted not only the design choices, but also the narrative points directly from the 1951's cartoon, and not from the book (e.g. many Japanese comics, like *Ouran Highschool Host Club* (Bisco Hatori, 2002), *Shugo Chara* (Peach-Pit, 2005), *Cardcaptor Sakura* (Clamp, 1996) had Alice in Wonderland chapters where the main cast assumed Wonderland roles and followed a plot similar to the Disney animated feature). However, what is important to note is that the Disney animation does not adapt only the first, eponymous book, but instead it also introduces the characters from its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), and changes some plot elements. This, in itself, does not present a problem in itself, however what becomes a problem is that the fact that the animated feature film is often taken as the embodiment of the first book because of its title, especially by those who have only seen the animation and have not read the books.

#### **3.1 The atmosphere of the animated film and its character design**

One of the changes that the animated feature introduced is that the story was even more targeted at children than it the book, thanks to its design and a 1950s moral targeted at kids. Wonderland became a much more nonsensical world than it already was: bright and saturated colours dominate the landscapes and the characters were given an even sillier dimension, making them often engage in slapstick comedy.

In her paper about character design Hanna Ekström explains the importance that shape language has with regard to character. She states:

The visual language can vary between cultures, especially the meaning of colour (Sable, Akcay 2010). However, shape has a way of communicating universally, because the concept of circular versus triangular shapes originate very much from nature. Rounded shapes tend to be safe, while angular shapes make us cautious. (Ekström, 2013, 6).

In character design there are three main shapes that are used to construct a character, with each conveying a specific thing. The first one is the circle, which conveys goodness and friendliness, then there is the square, which shows someone who is strong and often secure, and in the end, there is the triangle, which symbolizes danger and is mostly used when designing villains. Confirming this logic, the characters from *Alice in Wonderland* are all mostly drawn using circles, perhaps in order to show to the children that Wonderland is not a malicious world, despite Alice going from one bad situation to another. Even the cartoon's 'villains' have rounded shapes in their design. For example, the Walrus and the Queen of cards are both mostly constructed of rounded shapes, and even the cards, who have one big square shape, still possess circle elements to them (their heads, hands and feet). The cards only gain a more triangle shaped head in the scene where they chase Alice, assuming a more dramatic role in the story. The only characters who are designed with more triangle shapes are the ones who are clearly innocuous (e.g. the birds which Alice encounters in the forest).

This overall shift to child-friendlier character designs is important because this is one of the indicators of the story assuming a more subdued tone.

### **3.2 Alice at the start of the film**

Like in the book, the animated movie opens with a child-like Alice, uninterested in her sister's book, and more precisely the history lesson on William the Conqueror (an homage to the book, when the Mouse is talking to the animals and Alice in the Caucus-race of the many things he knows, one of them being William the Conqueror). Instead of listening to her sister, Alice prefers daydreaming, thinking of a world where everything would be different, as can be seen in the following quote: 'Alice: That's it, Dinah! If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrariwise, what it is, it wouldn't be, and what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?' (00:03:15-00:03:29). Wonderland, while still being a dream from which Alice eventually wakes, is also presented as a place within Alice's imagination, where she flees from her responsibilities. This dialogue of the film makes it so that Wonderland appears to be a haven Alice constructs for herself, which, however, turns out not to be so perfect as Alice, (and implicitly the children watching the film) would imagine it to be.

### **3.3 Moral lesson in the movie**

The cartoon version makes Alice's growth closely linked to her curiosity and dislike of responsibilities. The first scene that gives Alice a warning in regard to her curiosity is when she meets Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, two characters originally found in the sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). When the viewers are first introduced to them, they appear to be just two silly characters exhibiting their dance, who, like most of Wonderland's inhabitants, are just talking nonsense. However, when Alice wishes to leave and says she's curious to find the White rabbit's business, the tone of the scene abruptly shifts from cheery to being one of the eeriest scenes in the film. The two characters now stop being funny and assume a certain seriousness, and even creepiness when they exchange a glance after realising that they have caught Alice's attention and sparked her curiosity. This is where Alice receives the first moral, inside the twins' story of the curious oysters. In their story, the little oyster, drawn to look like young children, end up eaten by the Walrus, for not listening to their mother and for letting their curiosity lead them astray. However, Alice does not yet understand that the story's moral is directed at her, and thus remarks: 'Oh yes a very good moral, if you happen to be an oyster.' (00:20:38). Therefore, she leaves the two brothers who resume dancing and singing in their silly manner. This scene makes it clear that the objective of this Alice during her visit to Wonderland is to learn that curiosity can lead you into trouble, and that one has to think of the consequences before one acts. Thus, the main point the animated film highlights is that blind curiosity, and not listening to adults (Alice to her sister, and the oysters to their mother) can bring grave consequences.

In this film, Alice's growth carries the purpose of instructing the children viewing the movie of this moral, and thus lessons learned in the book are not emphasized, and important details are changed or left out. In this manner, the 1951 adaptation does not concentrate on the process of growing up and finding one's identity, but chooses to mainly focus on only one aspect of growing up, learning not to act on a whim and controlling one's curiosity. Thus, the Caterpillar episode is changed into the Caterpillar becoming a butterfly by the end of their conversation. Another modification is the scene with the long hallway and the door, which is completely changed into the key appearing on the table only after Alice shrunk, leaving Alice with no lesson to learn. Consequently, the second scene with the long hallway is left out, and is instead replaced with another important scene, which symbolizes the shift in Alice, and that is the scene where Alice gets lost in the woods.

### 3.4 Alice in the woods

After leaving the Mad Hatter's tea party, Alice ventures into the woods, angrily saying: 'Well, I've had enough nonsense. I'm going home. Straight home. That rabbit. Who cares where he's going anyway.' (00:50:24-00:50:31). She tries to concentrate and find the right way out, becoming serious and moving aside one of the woods' creatures saying: 'Uh, no no, please. No more nonsense. Now, if I came this way, I should go back this way' (00:50:57-00:51:00). Alice is about to learn the two most important lessons of her journey through this symbolic scene, which are not taking her home and reality for granted and not letting curiosity be her guide.

Faced with desperation and the realisation that she may never get home again, Alice sings her song "Very good advice". In it she says that her not listening to reason and letting herself be guided by curiosity led her to this situation. The last line, 'Will I ever learn to do the things I should?' marks a shift in Alice, as she now wishes to change her ways and start following rules. In that moment the Cheshire Cat appears asking Alice if she was expecting the White Rabbit to which Alice replies: 'Oh, no no no no. I- I- I'm through with rabbits. I want to go home!' (00:56:40). With the White Rabbit being the symbol of her curiosity, her saying this signifies that she is willing to embrace the change she sang about before. And with this, the Cheshire Cat opens a door for her.

### 3.5 Alice by the end of the film

After Alice's transformation in the previous scene, the only thing left is for her to find a way back home. Because of this, the scene at the Queen's court is changed to make for a more dramatic ending. Alice is the one being tried for a deed she was not guilty of. In the animated film the Queen's sentences seem final, despite them being void and just for show in the book. Another point which is changed is that during the trial Alice does grow bigger, but by eating one part of the magic mushroom and not because she stops having control over it. However, later she shrinks again by eating the other part of the mushroom. All of these changes by the end serve only to make for a more theatrical ending, emphasizing the point that the 'real world' is better than Alice's make-believe one. In the very end, although learning the lesson about curiosity, Alice still remains a child, as she recites "How doth the little crocodile", a variation of the poem 'how doth the little busy bee', taught to her by the Caterpillar in Wonderland. Zosia



Swidlicka, in her discussion of the film, states that: ‘The Alice of the 1951 Walt Disney animation is the happy, friendly dream daughter of post-war America. With a new focus on the family unit during the boom years, innocence, affection and playfulness were promoted as essential qualities to foster in a child.’(n.d., n.p.). Placing the film within the context of the era in which it was produced explains why Disney’s 1951 feature film decides to focus more on preserving Alice’s playfulness and wishing for the story to serve as a lesson to the children watching the film. In this manner Alice’s growth is reduced to only her learning a lesson, in stead of her progressing more rapidly towards adulthood.

#### **4. *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) directed by Tim Burton (Walt Disney Pictures production)**

Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* can be considered an adaptation of both the book and Disney animation from 1951, because it is inspired by its predecessors character design and uses the same mix of characters from the two books that the animation uses. The movie brings a dark, gothic-like spin to the story, in true Burtonesque fashion, making Alice a nineteen-year-old woman on a journey of self-discovery. When talking about the book and his own movie Burton stated in an interview: 'Well, there's been so many versions and for me, I'd never seen a version that I really liked so I didn't feel like there was a definitive version to me that we were fighting against.' (2010, n.p.). Burton also stated, in another interview that: 'I never felt any emotional connection, so it was an attempt to give it some framework and emotional grounding that I felt never seen in any version before.' (2009,n.p.). From these two statements it can be seen that through his movie Burton wanted to take a story in which he saw potential and transfigure it into something he would have found enjoyable. In both interviews the director explains how his connection to the characters and story has not come through the book itself, but through music featuring elements and imagery of the book (Burton, 2010, n.p.). Kamilla Elliott describes in her review of the movie how the film itself disappointed many critics as Burton's adaption seems to be more a sequel to his other works than to the story of the book (2010, 4-8). However, Burton did clearly state in the interviews how he was more influenced by music and the book's motifs to construct his Wonderland. He seems to have taken the gist of the book, explaining how he has always seen the book as 'an internal journey'(2009,n.p.), and then integrating this into his unique narrative. His understanding of the source material is clearly incorporated into his vision of the movie, as Alice Kingsleigh's adventure is tied to her figuring out her identity.

##### **4.1 Alice at the start of the movie**

In this incarnation of the story, Alice is a 19-year-old girl living in Victorian Britain. She is first portrayed as a little girl who just woke up after having a bad dream, and who gets consoled by her father. In this scene the close relationship between Alice and her father is established, and the viewers can see how her father was a role model for Alice, as he tells her that all the best people are mad, a quote that she will repeat to the Hatter later in the film. The

narrative then shifts to the now grown Alice attending a party with her mother. Much like Burton's other character, Alice is an outsider and is portrayed as a person ahead of her time, similar to how her father was. She questions the society and does not wish to simply conform to the norm and marry Hamish, the person who was chosen for her by her mother. However, at the beginning of the movie she does not yet have the confidence to freely express her ideas and go against those around her, therefore she engages in silent acts of rebellion. Alice refuses to wear stockings and a corset, and when her mother reprimands her for this she counters her by saying: 'Who's to say what is proper? What if it was agreed that "proper" was wearing a codfish on your head? Would you wear it? ... To me a corset is like a codfish.' (00:03:28-00:03:39; this symbol will also be discussed later). Another instance important for Alice is when she is confronted with Hamish's marriage proposal. Alice is unable to make her choice, scared of having to disappoint all the people around her who she knows expect her to say yes, but knowing that she would never be happy with Hamish. Another reason Alice is uncertain on giving an answer is due to her fear of having to end up and old spinster like her aunt. And so, without giving an answer Alice flees and chases the White Rabbit into Wonderland. There she will be confronted with these same fears and will be forced to overcome them.

#### **4.2 Finding one's identity as way of growing up**

One of the most important lessons Alice will learn in Wonderland is to remember who she was before society tried to shape her, since in this version she had visited Wonderland before when she was a little girl. Looking at Wonderland as a symbol of growing up it could be said that in this movie the way to grow is to rediscover one's true self which one had in his or her childhood. This is seen in the way Alice had to regain her memories of the adventurous and courageous little girl who once roamed Wonderland so that she could fully become the heroine she was destined to be.

The question of identity, prominent in the book, is even more emphasized in the movie, with Wonderland's residents searching for the 'true Alice' to save them from the terror of the Red Queen and her Jabberwocky. The scene with the glass table and the door is now used as a test for Alice by the Wonderland characters, to see if she were the real Alice. After passing the test, Alice learns that she is prophesized to be the saviour of Wonderland, but she refuses to

accept that she is the person in question. She tells the Wonderland crew that they must have the wrong Alice. This is because she is still unaware of who she really is, and still doubts her abilities.

Absolem, here the name for the Caterpillar, is a character who constantly challenges Alice in regard to her identity, similar to how he did in the book. On their first encounter Absolem asks her his famous question: ‘who are you?’ (00:20:26) and the dialogue proceeds in this manner: ‘ALICE: Alice.

THE CATERPILLAR: We shall see.

ALICE: What do you mean by that? I ought to know who I am!

THE CATERPILLAR: Yes, you OUGHT. Stupid girl.’ (00:20:30).

Absolem is aware that Alice does not yet know who she is, thus he reprimands her with these words. The other characters take this as a clue that Alice is not the one they were looking for, and are therefore disappointed with her.

Later, Alice meets the Hatter, the only character that absolutely believes in Alice and has no doubt that she is the real Alice. However, later, before being taken by the Queen’s soldiers, he remarks how she has changed and lost her ‘munchness’ (00:38:00). This affects her tremendously, to that point that after, when meeting the Bloodhound, Alice states: ‘ALICE: I have had quite enough! Since the moment I fell down that rabbit hole, I’ve been told what I must do and who I must be. I’ve been shrunk, stretched, scratched and stuffed into a teapot. I’ve been accused of being Alice and of not being Alice.

ALICE: But this is my dream! I’ll decide how it goes from here.

THE BLOODHOUND: If you diverge from the path (...)

ALICE: I make the path!’ (00:43:35-00:43:52).

This scene is important to Alice’s development because it’s the first where she decides to take matters into her own hands. Alice is finally rebelling and taking a stand for what she believes to be right, expressing her true thoughts.

### **4.3 Costume symbolism and a changed Alice**

As a mirror to Alice’s growth, the clothes she wears change as the movie progresses also change. She is first seen wearing various dresses, albeit without a corset. Antonija Primorac states in her book *Neo-Victorianism on Screen* how corsets relating to the Victorian age are

often presented in movies as cages constricting women literally and metaphorically, symbolising the social restrictions of the time (2018, 98-111). This symbol is also used by Burton, by showing how Alice is unwilling to let society define her identity. At the beginning of the movie, Alice muses to Hamish how interesting it would be if women wore trousers and men wore dresses, which he promptly dismisses. However, later, when Alice arrives at the White Queen's castle, she is given her first costume which is not a dress, but still has a dress-like cape. At this point, Alice has almost found her true self, but was not quite there yet.

The White Queen's words: 'Alice, you cannot live your life to please others. The choice must be yours because when you step out to face that creature, you will step out alone.' (01:19:47) confront Alice with herself, making her aware that she has to make a choice for herself. This challenges Alice not only with the situation at hand, but also with the one with Hamish, and the marriage which is another 'monster' Alice would have to face alone. The Queen's words overwhelm Alice but also make her come to terms with her real self and accept the reality of Wonderland, stepping out of denial. Alice finally remembers that she visited 'Wonderland' once before, and thus remembers who she really was. After this realisation, Alice is transformed and decides to face the monster Jabberwocky on her own, which her armour reflects (whose silhouette does not reflect a dress at the slightest). Alice's battle with the Jabberwocky can be interpreted as her winning over all of her inner insecurities and demons. As Karina Pawlow states:

This gain of self-confidence in the fight with the Jabberwocky gets very significant when she finally returns to maybe not "the real", but "the other" world where she originally came from. Very doubtful and "distracted" before she went to the Wonderland, she now seems to clearly know who she is and what she wants in her life (2015, 4).

Through her experience in Wonderland, Alice was able to grow and face Hamish and the people around her back in England. And not only that, but Alice was able to inherit her father's company, surpassing his dream and expanding the company's potential. But the most prominent change of all was that of Alice finally finding her true identity, as is symbolized by the clothing she wears in the ending scene. This change enabled Alice to achieve all of the things mentioned above because it gave her confidence in herself and in the potential she has.

## 5. Conclusion

Alice's journey through Wonderland can be seen as signifying a journey of self-discovery and thus, of transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Carroll illustrates this in the book by making Alice as curious as any child, not thinking much of the consequences of her actions. Through her journey marked by the frequent questioning of Alice's identity, Alice is able to establish and assert her personality and individuality in society. The Alice by the end of the book is changed, she has learned from her past mistakes (as can be seen with the long hallway scene). She is now able to think more about the consequences of her actions, choosing to refrain from saying certain things because she has learned that those words could be the catalysts for unwanted interactions and hurt feelings. Also, the final statement of her sister is another clear indicator of this journey as one of self-discovery.

On the other hand, the animated feature chose to focus only on one aspect of Alice's journey: on her realizing that she should not let curiosity determine her actions. The movie emphasizes this point with various interactions, as is evident in the episode where she meets Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum and hears their fable of the curious oysters. Furthermore, the climax of the movie depicts Alice realizing how she made a mistake chasing the White Rabbit and deciding to make going home her new mission. Despite this being a duller and more moralistic version of the Victorian text, it still showcases Alice's growth as a character and her abandoning a characteristic tied to childish behaviour, that of acting only on the basis of one's curiosity without considering all the repercussions such actions could bring.

Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, presents an adolescent Alice who, unlike the other two Alices, is at the end of her journey to adulthood. Identity is the central issue of this movie, the answer to which is the key to Alice becoming the heroine of Wonderland and of her own life. Right from the beginning of the film, Alice is constantly asked if she is the true Alice or not. The most important moment in this movie is when Alice decides to take the initiative and start making decisions, starting to express her own opinions. This ultimately leads to her winning her battle with the Jabberwocky and to her expressing her mind when she returns to the real world.

All three of these stories, despite being distinct, still carry the same meaning of Alice's journey in Wonderland being one of her discovering new aspects of herself, and growing as a person. In both the book and the two adaptations Alice is challenged and is forced to come to conclusions that help her assume a more mature outlook on the world around her, helping her gain more confidence and come to a better understanding of her own character.

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