Adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Catherine March, Oxford Brookes University

Summary: An exploration of how different mediums adapt the classic children's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, what this does to the original text, and how this reinterpretation ensures its accessibility and thus its continuation.

Adaption Considerations

Fidelity - How to stay "true" to the original.

Who would want to read or watch it then and now?

The director or writer's task is to introduce the Knowing and Unknowing audiences to their world, characters, or plot, whilst also entertaining both.

'Every text ... is an intertext that incorporates, refracts, refutes and alludes to many other texts.'

'Words such as *infidelity* and *betrayal* ... translate our feeling when we have loved a book, that an adaptation has not been worthy of that love.'

'Any modern adaptation failing to recognize this deeper, darker nature has actually missed the point. This is quite a shift from the apparently unanimous nineteenth-century opinion that the Alice books were a healthy dose of fun and nonsense.'

Playfulness

Playfulness is a key element of the story and can easily be translated across mediums, thus is present in all the works.

Lexical playfulness is a well known part of Carroll's writing style, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* it includes insider jokes for the Liddell girls. Multimodality creates playfulness and ensures understanding.

Burton's dialogue is a direct translation of Carroll in places, the paralleling of playfulness foregrounds it, facial expressions further emphasise it.

Wheeldon's balletic parody shows medium specific considerations, a combination of props and exaggerated acting convey playfulness.

The authorial voice of Noon mimics Carroll's, he also breaks expectations and literary conventions showing playfulness with language.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Growing up

The Adult vs Child tension present in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* underpins the story, how adaptors understand the tension can greatly affect their remaking of the story.

Carroll's Alice is a child, the ending of the story shows inevitability of maturation, but there is clear authorial bias against growing up. Additionally the creation of childhood or the cult of the child had begun to exist at time of writing.

The dynamic between Alice and her doll Celia in Noon's adaption gives a new twist on the tension of growing up. His circular plot is also in-keeping with children's literature.

Burton uses a teen character. Big life choices mean the return to childhood is not possible. Using a modern feminist plot supports Alice's growth towards adulthood.

Wheeldon's teenage Alice experiences her first love which enable us to track her growing up process.

Madness

Madness can either be more playful and therefore child friendly, or more serious and therefore more adult. How this theme is read can vary and therefore create such wide variations between each adaptations.

Carroll's critique of the adult world reveals his desire for eternal childhood, our modern perceptions often changes our experience of the book.

Wheeldon follows Carroll's interpretation of madness closely as his is the first full balletic interpretation. Due to nature of ballet too many change could make it hard to understand.

Burton uses madness to justify his feminist plot and her inherited traits otherwise her path becomes unrealistic for her time and place.

Noon uses multiple cyberpunk conventions that can all be tied together with madness. The Alice and Celia dynamic suggests a Freudian reading.

References:
'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', chor. Christopher Wheeldon, dir. Jonathan Haswell, BBC4, 29 December 2012, 19:00, <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/01C05934?bcast=93017078> [accessed 17 March 2018]
Noon, Jeff, *Automated Alice*, (Reading: Corgi Books, 1996)
Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (London: Puffin Books, 1865)
Moi, Toril, ed. *The Kristeva Reader*, (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986)
Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013)
Sanders, Julie, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 2nd edn, (Abingdon: Routledge 2016)
Stam, Robert, 'Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation', in *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* by Timothy Corrigan, 2nd edn., (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 74-88.
Stam, Robert, *Literature through Film*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2005)
Alice in Wonderland, dir. Tim Burton, BBC2 England, 30 December 2017, 18:20 < https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/02E58787?bcast=125816733> [accessed 17 March 2018]
Will Brooker, *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture*, (New York & London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 71-72.