

The Enchanted Screen

The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films

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Alice and the Absurdity of Home and Utopia

In creating Dorothy and Oz, L. Frank Baum reported that he had read Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and was somewhat influenced by it. However, the influences were minimal, for the two fairy-tale novels have totally different plots and perspectives. For instance, there is not the slightest trace of utopianism in Carroll's work, nor does Alice want to return home. Instead, it is a grim tale about a ten-year-old girl who basically tries to make sense out of the absurdity of life, in particular, of life in the Victorian world, which resembles the Kafkaesque world of *The Trial*.

The bare plot of Carroll's novel is deceptively simple, and Will Brooker has aptly summarized how most films adapt it in his informative chapter on Alice adaptations in *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture*:

We are introduced to Alice in the real world, with either an older sister or other adult characters. She follows a White Rabbit into some form of tunnel or hole, and entering Wonderland finds a small door she wishes to get through. She drinks a magic potion that shrinks her, and then eats a magic cake. Animals swim in a pool of tears. The Rabbit mistakes her for his maid, Mary Ann, and sends her to his house, where she makes herself big again, then small again as the animals try to evict her from the house. She leaves the house and encounters a Caterpillar who asks "Who are you?" She joins a Mad Tea Party, and meets the Queen of Hearts with her court; they play croquet. There is a trial culminating from the dream.²¹⁴

As early as 1903, this basic structure was followed in Cecil Hepworth and Percy Stow's short silent film and in W. W. Young's exquisite feature film, *Alice in Wonderland*, in 1915. Young's adaptation shows the most innovation because the characters in Alice's dream are anticipated in her real experiences on an American farm, and the literal interpretation of the novel is enlivened by superb acting and unusual costumes and sets. The clear intention of this film and most of the adaptations that follow is to enliven and picture the novel through film as faithfully as one can. This is, indeed, a laudable goal, but the "literal" films tend to restrain experimentation and diminish the profound and complex themes of Carroll's novels that are closely connected to our so-called postmodern condition. Citing Gilles Deleuze on Carroll's works, Claudia Springer remarks:

The *Alice* texts represent for Deleuze freedom from static, rule-bound conventions that words and phrases have accrued over time. In *Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, language is free to make new associations, paradoxical ones, that bask in semiotic spontaneity. Alice is continually disoriented, unable to cling to a conventional understanding of temporal and spatial relations or logic. . . . It can thus be argued that the *Alice* texts are prophetic, foreshadowing the features of postmodernism that would become commonplace during the latter half of the next century. Alice is bombarded by rapid-fire constantly changing language that escapes meaning, the same sort of language that now dominates the discourses of advertising in our consumer society. She also experiences the confusion now frequently inspired by circuitous and labyrinthine postmodern architecture and by the MTV-style fast-paced manipulation of space, time, and logic.²¹⁵

If both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are particularly relevant to our liquid and globalized postmodern world, as Springer believes they are—and I agree with her—they are also deceptively “emancipatory” because they also contain misogynistic and oppressive elements. As Springer remarks,

Alice’s frustration [the real Alice Liddell, who was often mistaken for the fictional Alice while in New York] might well speak for any number of women thrust into the muse who have seen their public images transformed beyond their control by male artists. The Alice books simply heighten the typical erasure of female subjectivity by making Alice’s loss of identity explicit. Although the Alice books are usually read as charming children’s stories, it is possible to interpret them as exercises in terror for their young protagonist/victim.²¹⁶

In the filmic discourse about *Alice in Wonderland*, the tendency is to emphasize the charm rather than the terror. More important than charm or terror, I believe, is the manner in which Alice, similar to Dorothy, is used in filmic adaptations to confront the onrush of postmodern conditions. To explore the different approaches to the “perplexed” Alice, who is not a moral arbiter, I want to discuss Dallas Bower’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1949), the Disney *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), Jonathan Miller’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1966), Jan Svankmajer’s *Alice (Neco z Alenky)*, 1988), Nick Willing’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1999), and Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* (2010).

Bower’s *Alice in Wonderland* has an interesting history to it. Produced by Lou Bunin (1905–1994), a superb puppeteer who also directed the animation, the film was more or less dismissed in the United States and the United Kingdom when it was released in France in 1949. Walt Disney, worried about how Bower’s and Bunin’s film might detract from his own forthcoming production in 1951, began a lawsuit that hindered its distribution in America, and in the UK it was censored because the film ridiculed the queen of England. Bunin might have expected such difficulties. Early in his career, he had worked in Mexico City with the great socialist painter Diego Rivera in 1926 and had created political puppets for theaters and various films including an anti-fascist cartoon, *Bury the Axis*, in 1943. While working for MGM during the 1940s, Bunin was fired because of his

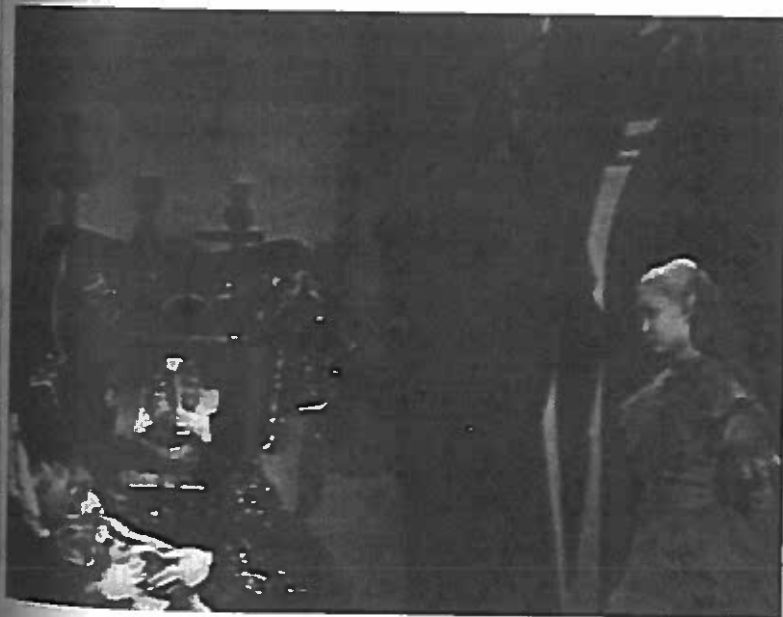


Figure 68
Dallas Bower,
Alice in Wonderland

left-wing politics and went to England, where he worked on *Alice in Wonderland*, only to see it denigrated and "blacklisted" by the American and British press in partial collusion with Disney. It is a shame because the film is clearly an interesting, political and artistic, collaborative effort that explores the relations of oppression in the *Alice* novel. Bunin worked with Bower and the writers Edward Eliscu, Albert Lewin, and Henry Myers to create the film, and though it is difficult to know how much of a role he played in adapting Carroll's novel, and how much credit he deserves, he produced a minor gem.

The frame of the film announces the politics of the film and is based partially on events in Carroll's life as the real mathematics professor Charles Dodgson at Oxford. Dallas begins the film with a pedantic professor scurrying like the White Rabbit to the Dean, Henry George Liddell of Christ Church College. He wants Dodgson dismissed and sent elsewhere because of the young professor's scandalous literary works. Meanwhile Dodgson is in the garden trying to photograph the three beautiful Liddell daughters dressed in Chinese costumes. Everything and everybody is in motion because Queen Victoria is about to visit Oxford and to be honored at a tea party. The queen, who arrives in a carriage, is depicted as arrogant and ignorant. The king is pictured as a demure tagalong, while Dodgson is a polite rebel against tradition. The three Liddell sisters are ordered to stay in their rooms because they might upset the decorum of the reception. Dodgson tries in vain to intervene on their behalf. The most he manages is to steal a cherry tart to bring to Alice as consolation. Later, he takes all three girls rowing on the nearby river and tells them a tale with Alice as the protagonist, while she falls asleep as he is talking. From this point on, she plunges as a live actress down a rabbit hole into the animated portion of the film and engages with the marvelous creatures of Wonderland.

Alice's adventures in this Wonderland are played out like a Gilbert and Sullivan opera in stop-motion animation that is brilliantly conceived. Bunin's puppets, based on the original illustrations of John Tenniel, are not cute but peculiar and odd, and they fit into stark landscapes that have a surreal quality. When the creatures break out into song, the verses are taken from Carroll's book and add to Alice's confusion. Her pursuit of the White Rabbit is most important because it eventually turns into a pursuit of Alice herself in two ways: Alice loses her identity and must find it; the White Rabbit wants her head chopped off because she is insolent. The characterization of the White Rabbit is most unusual and transforms Carroll's novel into an investigation of political collusion in an arbitrary authoritarian regime. We learn early that the White Rabbit had come from the working classes and had learned to adapt to the queen's regime to become a "gentleman," that is, a toady. At one point, when he catches the Knave of Hearts eating one of the queen's tarts, he takes one himself and tells the knave not to worry because he will incriminate Alice. From that point on, he wants to hunt her. When they finally meet at the queen's croquet game, he seizes the opportunity to accuse Alice of stealing the tart. Alice denies this accusation and seems to be supported by the Knave of Hearts, who declares that Alice is telling the truth, but it is he who is really Alice, and Alice is the Knave of Hearts. Everything is turned upside down as it has been throughout Alice's adventures, and she is wakened by one of her sisters. Dodgson tells her that he has finished his story as they arrive at the shore, and that she was not listening just dreaming. However, Alice insists that her dream was real and pursues Dodgson and her sisters who move ahead of her as if they were entering some rabbit hole.

The politics of Alice's adventures mesh in Wonderland with the politics in Oxford. Each one of the animated creatures bears a resemblance to the characters in the frame story. For instance, the White Rabbit is the conformist, finicky professor, Queen Victoria, the queen of Wonderland, and so on. Alice herself is a mixture of Dodgson and Alice Liddell, or what Lewis Carroll would like Alice to become—feisty, inventive, assertive, and perceptive. While Alice is indeed confused at times, she enjoys all the oddities of Wonderland except for the queen and the White Rabbit. She has no

intention of leaving Wonderland, and the ending of the film is subtly ambivalent, for Alice appears to be pursuing her imagination.

Alice is played by the British actress Carol Marsh, and she is clearly in her twenties, but she manages to perform the role of a young girl without acting infantile. There is also a hint or two that Dodgson, about thirty, has more than a tutorial interest in her. But the manipulative courting of Dodgson does not lead to a romance. Instead, Alice has no interest in him or love. She is more intrigued by Wonderland, where she uncovers the machinations of the queen and exposes the obsequiousness and deviousness of many of her subjects. If Alice learns anything in this filmic adaptation, it is that her longing to meet Queen Victoria and her "incarceration" in her room while the Queen was in Oxford, were disappointments that enabled her to grasp the relations that produce oppression.

This is not the case in the Disney 1951 production of *Alice in Wonderland*, which had three directors who "obsequiously" followed the Disney formula of adapting a fairy-tale work and transforming it into an irrelevant Hollywood musical that has more fluff than substance. Moreover, the film is so stupidly pedantic that it takes the life out of all the comic antics and song and dance routines. At the beginning, Alice is pictured sitting in a tree with her cat Dinah and ignoring the history lesson that her prim and proper governess is reading to her. The governess is annoyed that Alice is not paying attention, and Alice responds by saying that a book without pictures is dull. The governess states that this is nonsense. Soon after, Alice breaks out into a song about a Wonderland: "If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense." And she gets her wish right after the song.

Without any transition, Alice sees the White Rabbit and pursues him down the rabbit hole. Her adventures in Wonderland, however, are quite different from those more meaningful ones in Bower's film and may be one of many reasons why Disney wanted Bower's film blocked in America. Though the animation is slick and appealing, and though the directors introduced other hilarious characters and scenes from Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, the narrative turns into a series of lessons for Alice, who suffers humiliation after humiliation and becomes utterly despondent in the Tulgey Wood, a dark and dreary forest, where she weeps and wishes to go home. The Cheshire Cat, a smiling sadist, opens a tree and points the way to the queen's castle, for it is only through the queen that she can learn how to get home. However, Alice is accused once again of upsetting the queen and placed on trial. She rebuts the queen and calls her a tyrant. The film ends with the queen and her followers chasing Alice, who is wakened by her governess and asked to recite her lessons. Alice can only recite some babble, but the governess forgives her and they march home to tea.

As Chaston has remarked in his essay on the "Ozification" of many Hollywood fantasy films,²¹⁷ the Disney production is a classic example of how numerous screenplays are geared to represent a young girl experiencing an unusual other world only to long for the conventional and regressive image of home. The Disney adaptation is truly infantile in almost every sense of the word: it has silly slapstick humor that bleaches the complex enigmas of Carroll's work; features a helpless blonde girl who does not learn to help herself; draws papier-mâché, cuddly one-dimensional creatures that are more decorative than intriguing and complex. There is little to redeem this interpretation of Carroll's works, even though the directors intended to give the film a modern look. Instead, they produced a repeat of the Snow White recipe without romantic love, which, in their hands, would have only added icing to a tasteless sponge cake.

There is no icing or "Ozification" in Jonathan Miller's stark black-and-white 1966 adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, which might aptly be titled "Alice in Wasteland," for Alice's adventures are set in moldy ornamented Victorian homes and churches, dry and dull forests, and on rocky beaches. Rather than taking part in all the incidents of her dream, Alice is a stoic observer. Detached and alienated from her surroundings and barely interacting with the characters she meets, Alice is more

like a sleepwalker, somewhat dazed but meditating on what it means to change in a repulsive world. As Miller himself has written,

I recognized that I could only succeed with *Alice* if the film realized the characteristically disjunctive grammar of dream. The strange juxtaposition of elements in a scene that never strike us as odd when we are dreaming, should occur as almost passing details in a film. When visualizing the law court in *Alice* we furnished it with lodges and stage boxes in which spectators could be seen hastily dressing, casually shaving or having Christmas dinner, as the trial proceeded. As Alice runs through the garden on her flight from the White Rabbit's house she was shown passing an enameled bath-tub in which a naked man is carefully washing himself. These items are normal in every respect except the context in which they appear before the eye. . . . Apart from the way that things are inappropriately juxtaposed in the same scene, dreams are characterized by the way one scene gives way to the next without any of the transitions that lend ordinary narrative text its coherence.²¹⁸

The abrupt dream sequences begin soon after Alice is groomed by a maid before a mirror in a tiny, well-ordered Victorian home. Her older sister watches and is obviously displeased that she must spend an afternoon with Alice. Nothing is said as they depart for a spot on a hill, where the sister sits down without a word and begins reading. Alice has brought nothing with her. So, she lies back and begins to dream, and during the dream, she narrates everything that happens to her and speaks at times to herself in an inner dialogue. Every now and then, she speaks to the caricatures of the typical Victorian people whom she meets. But for the most part, she remains the outsider, contemplating what is happening to her as she changes sizes and observes the absurd behavior of adults. (Kafka's *The Trial* resonates throughout the film.) Alice's face is expressionless for the most part. She does not show her emotions, nor does she participate much in the bizarre rituals that she witnesses. When called as a witness by the queen during the trial of the knave who stole the queen's tarts, she denounces the trial, which is held in an utterly chaotic and bizarre church, and wakes up as the queen screeches. Alice is not disturbed at all by her dream. She sits for a moment, contemplating the dream, and says to herself, "The things that I have seen, I can see no more."

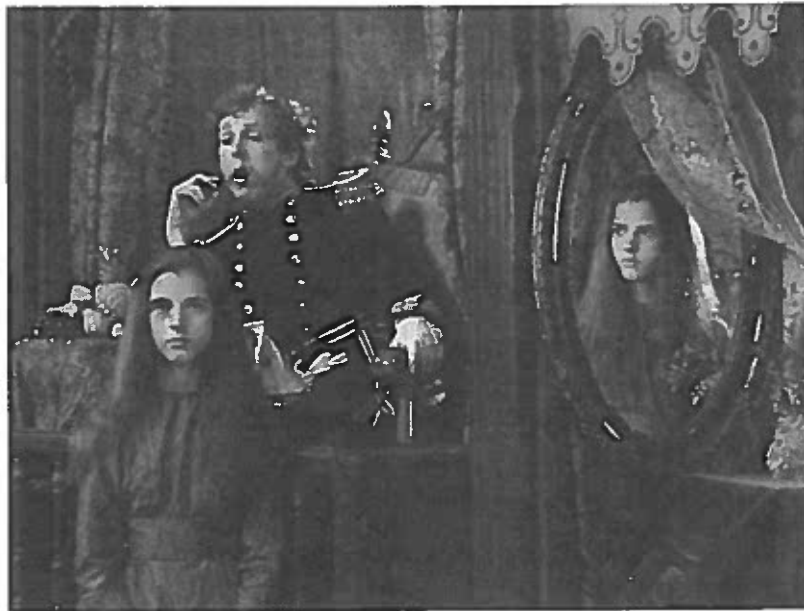


Figure 69
Jonathan Miller,
Alice in Wonderland

This ambivalent remark could mean that she has put her childhood behind her, or that she simply can no longer visualize what she has seen. When she arises and moves with her silent sister toward their home, we are left with a black-and-white exposure of a girl who does not reveal her feelings and is not upset by the absurd behavior of the adults whom she has encountered in her dream. Miller's interpretation of Carroll's fairy-tale novel is both a bleak critique of the Victorian and modern worlds at the same time. As Scott Thill has perceptively remarked about Miller's work,

In his assured hands, *Alice in Wonderland* is not merely a fantastical tale of caterpillars, mice, and bloodthirsty queens looking to cut off some heads, but rather a journey of self-realization and maturation for a young British girl locked in a Victorian nightmare filled with, to paraphrase de Saint-Exupery's similarly structured *The Little Prince*, adults executing matters of "consequence" that mean, like Footman says, nothing at all in the scheme of things. As Miller explains it, "Once you take the animal heads off, you begin to see what it's all about. A small child, surrounded by hurrying, worried people, thinking 'Is that what being grown up is like?'" The fact that they make no sense, are trapped—like the Mad Hatter, played with sparkling annoyance by Peter Cook—by time, dance about the meaningless caucuses until they're utterly spent, fuss over keeping their children prim and proper right before they go outdoors and play, and conduct ludicrous proceedings—such as in the King and Queen's court—when what they really want to do is to behead each other, doesn't jibe with the supposed air of solemnity, importance, and meaning that inflates everything they do.²¹⁹

It is really unclear whether Alice matures in Miller's account of Alice's adventures. I am inclined to believe that she has become more resistant to the forces that act upon her, more solemn. In this regard, she resembles many young girls in the 1960s, not just in the Victorian period, contemplating a web woven of inconsistencies and contradictions that constitute the environment in which they were compelled to grow up.

Svankmajer's Alice is similar to Miller's in that she narrates her dream and really does not change much during her adventures. She, too, is much more the observer than a participant in a dream. If she learns anything, it is to resist the tyrannical rants and acts of the queen. But that is where the similarity between the two Alice films ends. Svankmajer's *Alice* is a narrated dream of a trip into Wonderland that resembles a horror house ride in a motley amusement park that is falling apart. His film is bleak, grotesque, and macabre without any kind of resolution. Alice, who is a bored ten-year-old, dreams a nightmare that ends as a surreal extension of the nightmare. The frame of the movie begins with a naturalistic picture of Alice and her sister leaving a dismal house in the country and walking to a nearby brook. The older sister sits down and reads and wants nothing to do with Alice by her side. Alice lays back and pictures herself in a room with toys and other strange objects. Before the title had been shown in the film, Alice's lips had informed us that "You must close your eyes, or else you won't see anything." Thus the dream of her adventures is illumination. And the dream as nightmare ends *not* with Alice returning to the side of her sister near the brook, but to the decrepit room of objects that have played a role in her dream. Alice says nothing. She gazes. The camera follows her gaze around the room, focusing on inanimate toys and objects that had been in the dream, and her surreal awakening is heightened by the broken glass case in which a large stuffed rabbit had been placed. He had initiated the sequence of events in Alice's nightmare by breaking out of the case and leading her to the queen. A revolting white rabbit with sharp buck teeth, he had spent a good deal of his time in the "adventures" replacing his stuffing of sawdust that kept falling out of his stomach and licking the sawdust off his pocket watch. He was not a friendly rabbit, and he turned out to be the queen's executioner, and when ordered by the queen, he used scissors to cut off the heads of animate and inanimate creatures. He is missing at the end of the film as Alice sits on the floor with cards spread on and around her lap and two dolls sitting by her side. It seems that

Alice returns from the nightmare of her dreams to the nightmare of her reality. As she gazes at the broken case, her lips declare, "He's late as usual. I think I'll cut off his head."

Michael O'Pray has remarked,

Svankmajer has consistently returned to the theme of childhood, especially in *Jabberwocky*, *Down to the Cellar*, and *Alice*. His obsession with marionettes, puppets and primitive folk tales also relates to childhood and its forms of representation—tales of the imagination while often use fear, horror and anxiety. He has remarked that "I have never viewed my childhood as something that I have left behind me." . . . For Svankmajer, his exploration of childhood is part of a type of paranoiac-critical method, whereby his own highly personal associations stemming from childhood and what he sees as its natural ally—dream life—actively construct the films in which such projections are given shape.²²⁰

Svankmajer's film technique is crucial for understanding his depiction of Alice as an artist/writer who gives shape to her dream and her real environment. Just as the filmmaker Svankmajer arranges objects, including puppets, dolls, apple cores, mousetraps, beetles, socks, skeletons, and animates them to become characters in his film about Alice's anxieties, Alice becomes his mouthpiece, literally and figuratively, as her lips are shown commenting on the episodes. She more or less takes charge of the filming of her dream, and in this respect, she is a very different Alice than all the other filmic Alices. Dirk de Bruyn has commented,

gone is Carroll's vision of Alice as a perfect English upperclass girl, who through her refinement and her bossy natural superiority protects herself from this topsy-turvy world. Svankmajer's world, here as in his other films, is more inherently fearful, where everyday objects, the tools of our comfort, are capable of turning on us. It is a world that an 'innocent' Alice negotiates, sifts through, inspects.²²¹

Alice has not made any kind of passage through childhood to adulthood. The various episodes from Carroll's fairy-tale novel that Svankmajer adapts with his puppets and extraordinarily animated found objects, refuse, bones, tools, and plants do not form a logical, goal-oriented plot. Instead, these encounters recall occurrences in real everyday life that a child, any child, experiences with a certain dread and wonder. Svankmajer's Alice narrates her way through these encounters to become the "executor" of her life. Perhaps, "executive" might be a better term, for she is not a killer, but she will give the orders that will determine the course of her life. Svankmajer tries to shed the pedophilic tendencies and the male gaze by having to contend with the camera's eye. The result is a most unusual exploration of drab conditions and a surrealist film that pays homage to the imagination of young girls.

Unfortunately, despite all its glitz and cameo appearances of famous movie stars such as Martin Short, Peter Ustinov, Miranda Richardson, Ben Kingsley, Whoopie Goldberg, and Gene Wilder, Nick Willing's 1999 adaptation, influenced by both Miller's and Svankmajer's films, is a travesty of the imagination and the childhood of young girls. It is a spectacle for the sake of spectacle based on a stupid plot-line: the film begins with an anxious Alice being groomed for a song recital that she is expected to deliver at her parents' garden party—a scene that recalls Miller's opening frame—and as her hair is being combed, the camera moves outside the large Victorian mansion to introduce us to the very odd guests, who will soon populate Alice's dream. And, indeed, Alice will have a dream once she is taken into the garden and runs away into a nearby forest because she dreads performing before the lavishly dressed and peculiar people, who act with extravagant manners.

The film is really all about extravagance. Willing is infatuated with showing off his imagination rather than with exploring Carroll's novel or recreating an unusual interpretation, for all he wants to depict in each episode is Alice learning to conquer her anxiety so that she will sing for her supper.

This is a very pathetic message in a film inflated by ridiculous performers making themselves look ridiculous. Whoopie Goldberg plays a Cheshire Cat with a smiling-ass grin; Ben Kingsley, a weird caterpillar, puffs a hookah pompously on top of a mushroom; Miranda Richardson is irritating as a shrill, wooden queen; Robbie Coltrane and George Wendt look like fat balloons and act like infants as Tweedledee and Tweedledum; Gene Wilder, as Mock Turtle, is an endearing and cuddly performer; and Christopher Lloyd is a bumbling White Knight. Many of the characters are taken from *Through the Looking Glass*, only so that they can play a role in building Alice's confidence and can add a bit of flavor to the didactic plot. In the end, Alice awakes beneath an apple tree—the ripeness of the apples is supposed to suggest something—and she bravely returns to the party and sings a song of her own choice instead of "Cherry Ripe." Viewers are expected to feel that Alice has finally matured and feels confident in life. But film adaptations that simplify very complex and profound novels with a banal message can never convince audiences to respond happily to the filmmaker's directions, even if the actors have done so. In this case, Willing has violated a novel that he claims to love, and he paradoxically violates Alice as well by making her into an obedient and innocent young girl, who thrives on pep talks from silly creatures.

In Tim Burton's delightfully bizarre *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), his Alice does not need pep talks. Rather she runs away from pep talks by people who want to encourage her to marry a dim-witted, pretentious aristocrat. Burton's Alice is nineteen years old and fortunately has a mind of her own as well as a great imagination, which she has clearly inherited from her father. The film begins with a six-year-old Alice talking to her merchant father, who has wild dreams of opening trade routes to the Pacific. She clearly admires him and needs his love and affection before going to bed because she has been troubled by nightmares about a weird kingdom. Her father tucks her in bed and jokingly tells her that she's bonkers and all the best people are bonkers.

Unfortunately, Alice's father dies before she reaches puberty, and it is because her mother has fallen on hard times that she has arranged a marriage for Alice against the girl's will. She is obviously more interested in money than Alice's welfare. But since Alice is indeed a bit bonkers in the positive sense of the word, she runs off into the nearby forest just as her unctuous suitor is officially proposing to her at a lavish garden party. As usual, she falls down a rabbit hole, but this time she arrives in "queerland," not wonderland. Indeed, Burton queers the narrative of *Alice in Wonderland* by crossing genders, mixing sexual identity, and creating all sorts of bizarre animated characters who remind us that there is no such thing as normal, whether in reality or in our imaginations. Burton introduces characters from both *Alice in the Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* to spice up the plot, and many of the characters resemble those she had met at the garden party. Whereas most *Alice* films are coming-of-age narratives, Burton's film differs in that his Alice is on a quest to determine whether she should marry the prig who has proposed to her. She must also prove that she is the Alice who had one time visited "queerland," for the queers need her to fight against the tyrannical Red Queen, who is destroying their lives. And of course Alice eventually becomes the champion of the queers, defeats the Red Queen, who is a malicious dragon, and returns to the garden party to reject her flabbergasted suitor.

Burton's film is lavish—the images of the castles and the forests are gorgeous and stunning. The plants and characters are unique and exotic, and all the characters act with exaggerated mannerist gestures and hyperbole. Interestingly, Alice is never overwhelmed by anyone or anything because she has been there before, and she believes that she is in a dream that she needs to control. Throughout the dream sequences, Alice keeps saying that this is my dream, and I can decide who appears and what happens. But she cannot always do that. Either her unconscious imagination or psyche gets the better of her, or Burton imposes arbitrary obstacles so that Alice cannot live the dream that she wants to dream. In other words, there is a battle over the narrative—and Burton asks: Can we control our dreams? Can a young woman write her own narrative? Can we humans

who have become caricatures of humans in today's society of the spectacle in which commercials, advertisements, and other media influences invade our lives, determine the plot and narrative of our lives?

Unfortunately, Burton was financed by the Disney Corporation, and his film does not explore the profound questions that it raises. The film is a mish-mash of Burton and Disney. It has a dark, macabre side, but it eventually dissipates into a Hollywood sentimental film with a traditional battle scene at the end that one finds in *Peter Pan*, *Narnia*, or *Harry Potter* films, not to mention *The Lord of the Rings*—glorious battle for the sake of spectacular battle. Despite the extravagant color and characters, Burton's film is too black and white. In other words, the dichotomy between evil and good is so apparent that it becomes artificial if not superficial.

What saves the film is Burton's depiction of a strong-willed young woman. Even here, however, there are massive contradictions. From the beginning, Burton's Alice has an inquisitive and critical mind. Her trip down the rabbit hole only reinforces her independent spirit. This girl is not the typical Disney heroine. She is not overwhelmingly beautiful or cute, more Tomboy than petite comatose princess. She is not looking for a mate but for herself. She is valiant in battle when need be. She has a sense of humor. But there is the contradiction in the end when she decides to stay well within the safety of her upper-class society by making a deal with the man who took over her father's business. Her "vision" is to colonize China through trade! In other words, she will probably become a rich business woman and live off the Chinese in the late nineteenth century. Of course, children (and adult) viewers will not think about the consequences of her decision. They will see an empowered young lady determined to follow in her father's footsteps. All power to patriarchy in the end! Will Brooker makes a very significant comment about the absence of sexual elements in the filmic adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland*:

This absence even from the adaptations that explore *Alice* as a sometimes brutal, sometimes frightening expression of the unconscious is surprising when we remember the extent to which the idea of Carroll as some form of paedophile—repressed obsessive, shy lover of Liddell girls, troubled deviant—recurred in newspaper stories, biographies, and novels like *Still She Haunts Me* and *Automated Alice*. Given that this image of Carroll is so pervasive, we might have expected an "adult" adaptation of the book that Alice Liddell inspired to have incorporated some hint of the Wonderland denizens seducing, falling in love with, or preying sexually on the heroine.²²²

Alice appears to be an icon of innocent childhood, and there appears to be a taboo about "molesting" innocent icons such as Dorothy, Alice, Pinocchio, and Peter Pan. Yet, one must wonder why writers and artists are infatuated by these young characters and use them implicitly and explicitly to represent their own sexual desires, maturation, and development of social cognition. It is as if they want to put childhood behind them, when childhood persists throughout their lives. The Alice filmic adaptations provide substantial evidence that we will always cope with childhood even as we grow older, but that there are aspects of childhood that we repress as we represent them in images.