

The comparative analysis of two or more adaptations of the same source text.

In this essay I will be comparing Disney's animated *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and Tim Burton's Live-action *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) as adaptations of Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

The story of *Alice in Wonderland* is worldwide famous, known through all generations for a long time and has been adapted into films many times. The two films that have been the most famous are the two Disney adaptations. There are films that did not do so well or are more cult or niche such as *Alice* (1988) by Czech director Jan Svankmajer and the PC and console game adaptations of *American McGee's Alice* (EA Games 2000), which could perhaps be called much better than those by Disney.

Written by Lewis Carol in 1865, *Alice in Wonderland* is at it's basics, a story about a young girl trying to make sense of a world that she doesn't understand, by falling asleep and coming across many characters and situations which are all relatable when looking at the text in more depth as to their meaning. Marketed and aimed at children, on the surface is a wonderful children's story on nonsense but any adult reading the book would realise there is much more too it, if they were looking for it. Alice is a representation of our-selves and many other things, and even as an adult, the book can be an amazing escape for people to identify with and perhaps share in the understanding that many things in life don't make sense, that events and day to day life can't be fully understood or expect to happen in a linear, normal manner.

In both the Disney films they have chosen to alter the stories for their adaptations greatly, the 1950's film not as much as the 2010's version. The first film did this in order to turn the story into a more linear film, they had to leave out parts of the story and compress other parts in order to fit it into a film. Looking first at Walt Disney's animated telling of *Alice in Wonderland* (1950), it is interesting to note from that start that Walt did not like the film and was never keen on making it.

Disney had started with telling the stories from the book in a 57 short cartoons with a live action actress of Alice called *Alice Comedies* (1923-1927) and then applied to make the full feature length film. At the same time as making the feature film, he had large amounts of his team working on Cinderella and Bambi, which truly are beautiful made animations and Alice is not on the same level.

There are many differences between the book and the film, the overall mission of Alice trying to get to the beautiful gardens she has caught glimpses of is not her mission in the film, but of chasing a white rabbit. Very soon into the film after she falls down the rabbit hole and is greeted by a talking doorknob and enters the door, in the book she does not get let through the door but starts to cry and the whole room fills with water, she then finds herself with lots of other displaced characters who are all unsure about what to do. Then there are Tweedledee and Tweedledum who took a much larger role in the film. But with all the differences there wasn't any real reason apart from making the story more linear, as much as it could be. The deeper meaning to the story as written by Lewis Carol was looked over, and 'Disneyfied'. The definition of Disneyfication, 'the transformation (as of something real or unsettling) into carefully controlled and safe entertainment or an environment with similar qualities' (Merriam Webster 2019). This is what Disney did and they did it so often and repeatedly with many children's stories and fairy tales that their own actions became a term.

Many parts of the film where there were gaps in the story where a poem or verse could be inserted, Disney inserted songs throughout which is one of the film staples that Disney had become known for, though the songs in this particular film did not do as well as other films had done.

Overall the film did not do incredibly well with audience and it was only in the 60's over 10 years later that the film found an audience that loved it, which was the hippies and their use of hallucinogens saw it as a kaleidoscopic experience along with other Disney films such as *Fantasia* (1940). There is no record of Lewis Carol having taken any drugs or even drinking, but at the time the book was written in Victorian England, Laudanum was readily available for people of all ages and

Opium Den's were frequent. The character of the blue caterpillar is smoking something in his pipe which would seem to be an opium pipe, which cannot be an accident. This is an example of the more adult underlining themes in his book and amazingly got through the Disneyfication process, but this blue character was so iconic that they probably couldn't have left him out.

Looking next at the 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*, also a Disney production but this time live action and directed by Tim Burton, the two films could not be further apart in their approach of adapting the story. 60 years later, people were excited to see how dark and wonderful a land Burton could create, with his gothic flair and previous fantastic films it could have been a fantastic film, but alas it was sadly lacking in many areas.

As with the first film, this took the story and changed it heavily, but unlike the first Disney adaptation, this film bore no resemblance to the book, and played out more like a sequel, which it was not as that was also written by Lewis Carol in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). Tim Burton went on to make a sequel to his own film also called *Alice Through The Looking Glass* (2016), which makes it all a bit confusing and they are so vastly different to the books.

The main thing in common from the book to the film is there are the same characters. Alice in this film has gone back to Wonderland as a girl of 19 who is about to get married but does not want to. As with the book this is similar theme of growing up, where in the book it was puberty, Alice here is looking at much more grown up life events through a series of strange events. Though in this adaptation compared the first, the story leads an incredibly linear set of events and has implemented the 12 steps heroes' journey, where the hero goes on an adventure to save herself before having to make a big choice and then reaching atonement in the end and all is well.

The main issue of this film is the overall message to the film contradicts itself, which the book does not. She has gone to wonderland to find herself and find the right thing to do for herself, and is it what her family and society wants her to do. The journey follows her meeting the characters that Lewis wrote and is set on a prophecy mission to slay the Jabberwock beast, at parts along the story

she does want to stray and do what she wants for herself, that it isn't up to her to fight other people's wars, but that is what she must do and by the end of her time in Wonderland, she has won the war for these people which was not her own. The story to this point leads it up to the conclusion that she must do as she is told and that is how things are, she must follow the rules. But this is not the ending to the film that we get, instead decides not to marry the man and also takes her Father's ship to run her own business, which was not acceptable at the time in which the film is set. Therefore, the depth that they have tried to create in this film is hollow due to this conflicting ending.

As poor a story as this adaptation was, it cannot be ignored what a beautiful film it was. It received awards for the artistry in it. Everything from the outfits, the hair, the scenes, the sets and the props were wonderful and it really does take you to a far-off fantasy land. In terms of how the film was made, it was mostly made with CGI which was an incredible feat and made it all the more awkward to film. Tim Burton's attention to detail in the directing of this film makes it seamless between reality and fantasy, what sets were real and how much is not as it seems.

Burton often uses the same actors and this film is no different with Johnny Depp playing Mad Hatter and Helen Bonham Carter as The Red Queen. These two are excellent actors and make the character that they play very enjoyable as over the top characters. Unlike the story, Mad Hatter takes on a much bigger role and is in fact a secondary main character, but this worked well for the film due to people choosing to watch the film purely for his name, as well as Bonham Carter and Burton's names.

In conclusion in terms of fidelity to the original story, I believe that the 1950's film was a much better adaptation. As much as an adaptation can and should take the original text anyway it likes, leaving only the characters names and a hint of the original characters as Burton did, is throwing away too much of what made the story so famous worldwide. In an interview with Francois Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock (1985) 'I read a story only once, and if I like the basic idea, I just forget about the

book and start to create cinema.' I think this is what Burton did with Alice in Wonderland which works a lot of the time with a lot of stories but didn't on this occasion in comparison.

Word Count 1698

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