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## Alice in the Land of Movies

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The paper focuses on Tim Burton’s movie adaptation of the *Alice* books by Lewis Carroll. The distinction between the magical and the fantastic, and the miraculous and the wonderful that is resolved within the movie *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), carried within the infant nature present in Tim Burton’s grown-up Alice, redefines the standpoints of the fantastic, making child’s fantasy a literary-screen reality. In both cases, the frames of the fantastic, starting from a hint of the fictional and the wonderful, make a crossover towards the miraculous. According to Roger Caillois (1972), the fantastic expresses a scandal, a break, a strange, almost unbearable, penetration into the real world, and with its penetrations of the other side into the real world, it transforms itself into a poetics of the miraculous.

**Keywords:** *Alice in Wonderland*, Tim Burton, fantastic, miraculous, film adaptation, Lewis Carroll

*The grass was greener  
The light was brighter  
With friends surrounded  
The nights of wonder*  
Pink Floyd: “High Hopes”

No one knows better than Lewis Carroll’s Alice the greenness on the other side, the side that connects with her childhood – the period in which fantasy more than ever replaces reality. Enjoying the privileges of the childhood of this very sincere child, in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) Lewis Carroll creates a world in which Alice herself initiates her own crossover from childhood to youth.

This world has been reconstructed by Tim Burton in his movie *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), accordingly adapted to the conventions of another medium. This paper aims to analyse the fantasy world of the movie in comparison with that of Carroll's book, and to establish the similarities and differences between the two realisations of Wonderland. The issues involved in the construction of Alice's character in these narratives are also taken into account.

Built with mathematical precision, the time-space, or rather the chronotope, of *Wonderland* functions according to the logic of Einstein, proving the absurdity of one-dimensional reality, but at the same time confirming the magic of Carroll's maths in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In it, the child's consciousness directly uses its creative mechanisms to mark time and space.

It is the plan to play with time and space that complicates the relation between writing and memory (Kapuševska 1998: 153). Moreover, Alice's memory is confronted with her age and the pledge that she will write her own story when she grows up, adding immediately that she is grown up already (Carroll 2004: 30):

“And when I grow up, I will write it myself. There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one – but I'm grown up now,” she added in a sorrowful tone.

Having in mind that fantasy and memory, as founding anthropological categories, together with rhetoric, are a subject of interest for Renate Lachman, memorising and the attitude to time may be classified as remembering or losing the world, an issue considered in Lachman's *Phantasia/Memoria/Rhetorica* (2002). Insecure even in the memory of her own body, Alice is trying to restructure the lost world, this time through the construction of her identity, incorporating at the same time consciousness of herself. That Alice's adventure is a playful one and that she is aware of this are shown by her dialogue with the Caterpillar when the simple question “Who are you?” becomes an initiation question for her. From this point, she starts playing with her previous concepts of herself.

Tim Burton's movie *Alice in Wonderland* deals with the multiple concepts of one persona by creating, from an already grown-up Alice, a character conscious of herself and of the consequences of becoming mature. Burton's Alice functions in accordance with Lachman's ideas much more than with Carroll's poetics, proving that a dream is not a dream, but a memory of Wonderland. Renamed as Underworld this time, Wonderland emits endless lucidity, in which time is strange, and the Caterpillar, now named Absalom, helps in understanding the hypertrophy of memory. As the text of “*Alice in Wonderland* Production Information” by Disney Enterprises, Inc. (2010) says, losing this real world in contrast to gaining the other, fantastic one, for both Alices represents a game with memory and a subtle blend

of two worlds. It is no coincidence that Tim Burton's film was awarded Oscars for best Art Direction and Costume Design, and for the latter it also won the BAFTA award in 2011.

Similar to Dorothy's world in L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), here, too, one world blends with the other, harsh rules for food and liquid consumption do not apply to this world of wonders, lessons learned metamorphose as if they themselves had tried some magic cookie, Tweedledee and Tweedledum are Burton's sisters from the normal world, and the blue caterpillar on the Hatter's shoulder is the wise Absalom from the Underworld.

The distinction between the wonderful, i.e. the miraculous, and the fantastic, as defined by Todorov (1987), resolved within the title itself, is contained within the infant nature present in Burton's grown-up Alice. This redefines the standpoints of the fantastic, turning the child's fantasy from the literary-screen realm into reality. In both cases it is possible to discuss the frames of the fantastic, starting from a hint of the fictional and magical to make a crossover towards the miraculous. According to Roger Caillois, the fantastic expresses a scandal, a break, a strange, almost unbearable penetration into the real world (1972: 728), and with its penetrations of the other side into the real world it transforms itself into a poetics of the miraculous. Although Alice's penetration into Wonderland functions in the other direction as well, as an irruption of the real into the other side, she is, with her ample and suggestive imagination, an affirmation of fantasy as an ability to connect the first-hand experience, emotions and symbolical presentation of spiritual creations and constructive creativity, just as fantasy is defined in a glossary of literary terms (Živković 2001: 213).

The presentation of the spiritual creation of Lewis Carroll through little Alice, a character related to Alice Liddell, the little princess, the daughter of his dean, is neither more nor less than a jocular creation with children's rhymes, a play with William Wordsworth, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Isaac Watts, Robert Southey and Sir Walter Scott, a play with the social context to twist, re-code and present it again through a child's perspective, that is, through eyes that possess the child principle. It is that child's perspective that justifies both memory and the loss of the world, in order to create new ones; a new memory and a new world. Marija Todorova, in her book *Literature for Children and Cultural Diversity* (2010), clearly explains the psychological importance of the experience of another world for a child, where the child is free to express her or his imagination and freedom.

The chess table, similar to a labyrinth, one of the "wonders of culture" (Lachman 2002: 263), is found when Alice passes through the mirror. The image seen from the new Alice's perspective brings a new life, a new dimension and

some new content into Alice's world. This is the quality of a new land, a land of wonders. Functioning almost as her intimate, private world, the world of wonders affirms itself just because it carries the epithet of being wonderful. It is a world in which the watch of the polite and neat Rabbit redefines time. Only when the child's perspective of the world is lost is this world lost, too. Alexander Romanovich Luria, in his book *A Little Book About a Vast Memory* (as quoted in Lachman 2002: 263), alludes to this lost world using Alice as a guide through the mirror, a guide of the reader in a world of wonders where everything is known and close and yet strange and unusual. Just as strange as the reflections in the mirror is the dark matter of the imaginary beyond the obvious in physics, as the objects change their reflections in the spherical mirror. This is how a new world is brought before children, a new world which is provoked by the uncanny and by curiosity.

Participating in different chats with her newly discovered friends, Alice, among many voices, chooses to follow her own, creating from the narration a rather poetic but also deep paraphrase of her childhood in a context that Burton presents in an original, authentic way. Similar to Burton's Alice, Carroll's Alice makes a paraphrase of the world of wonderland of her childhood which is brought back into her memory after her adventures in Underworld. Wonderland, identified with Underworld, confirms the lucid and, at some moments, bizarre Burton poetics, and the choice of the term Underworld may be suggestively connected to the subconscious, the undiscovered, which can be sensed in dreams, imagination and fantasy.

Directly, almost mystically uncovering Alice's journey, Lewis Carroll, and later Tim Burton, discover the essence of children's consciousness, and the recognition that children's worlds resize and discover concepts of reality in a much more original way and more directly than adults, who forget their childlike nature. This is why the sensibility of Lewis Carroll is close to a child's sensibility. Burton transformed it into a young girl's sensibility whose principles are not those of good and bad, but those of either less or "more" bad. Thus, Burton's characters take their side in the battle, becoming the followers of the White Queen versus the Red Queen, placing the fight in the central position and accepting the sacrifice to be forgotten after the dream has finished. This is an inevitable destiny if one is part of the land of dreams. Underworld, dreams and land of wonders all coordinate the secret areas of consciousness in which Alice the child is indirectly living the concept of another, maybe more realistic, time-space, in which everything that is wonderful is also possible.

After reading the ciphered world of Lewis Carroll, ciphers are demystified by becoming imaginary images of what Jorge Luis Borges calls 'beyond-memory', a

new reality beyond remembering. It is the mnemonic capability that metamorphoses into children's rhymes; the caterpillar becomes a butterfly, and the wood where things have no names seems to be in a state of constant expectation to be named.

The text of words and the text of images, which are the book and the film, the literary and the visual, demonstrate that the text is not compromising memory, and that the semiotic layers that function through it confirm the memory of the dream as authentic, and make it a children's novel of a dream. Playing with the English language only enriches the book with layers, and witnesses a new kind of grammar, as if it were the grammar from the schools in Wonderland, tailored to fit Alice's measures. From them, she learns of herself, becoming a teacher, and finally becoming equal with all her companions, not only there, but also in the real world where her friend the professor and her sister respect her imagination and liberty. Crossing the limit of the usual, Alice renames it as a challenge to go further, but also to be back and pass on her experience about the wonderful and fantastic, so skilfully integrated in Carroll's poetic, and visually brought out by Walt Disney.

Child experience put in aesthetic frames makes fiction something that is easiest to connect with, through the naïve but sharp and honest eyes of children. Alice removes the limits to move along her the path in her chronotope with her multidimensional existence, the one at the same time here and now, but also then and there, deprived of the defining features of space and time. Discovered truths in the land of wonder correspond with the truths of time and space, of consciousness and personal experience as the most reliable. The imaginary and the real change their roles, being part of Alice's game itself, a game between the finite and the infinite, a game behind the mirror, in which Alice, instead of seeing her reflection, sees through her imagination, so she can finally see herself. Superior, yet fragile under the laws of nature, she gives life to the figures on the chess table, becoming a player herself in the game where rules change constantly, proving that life has no rules after all.

Faced with the realisation that the dream is a confirmation of the memory of both Alices, from the land of wonder they create a chronotope so much like Neverland and all wonderful lands from never ending stories that transcend reality into a new reality of fantasy. Peter Pan in Neverland and Alice in Wonderland, both child heroes, both in their respective passages to individuation, both in fantasy worlds; they present the dream of every child-reader.

Fantasy, as unique as a fingerprint, so distinct to everyone, confronts Carroll with Burton, proving that a motive or inspiration may emerge in an artist's imagination, just as faces reflect differently, depending on the type of mirror, similar to the different contexts in which artists create.

In the field that looks like a chess table, one Alice is trying to give a name to her world, thus making it real, while the other Alice is fighting for the Underworld, all for the purpose of making it real for herself. Playing with the very concept of memory, Lewis Carroll, in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), in the world beyond the mirror, explains the advantage of life backwards through the White Queen, when the memory functions both ways, so that Alice can verify the ‘real’ memory: “I’m sure my memory functions one way only. I can’t remember the things before they happen” (Carroll 2004: 75). With this, Alice, as an extraordinary child, walks many paths of the miraculous, retelling the story of one world here, and another there, a world caught by many images, word games and all that childish creative naivety that can be read between the lines as laughter caught in an onomatopoeic literary expression. If we analyse Alice through Lacan’s term of mirror stage (*cf.* Lacan 2006), we can say that her adventures are part of her initiation and shift to a new, higher identity. The sweet horror that exists in Burton is hypertrophied with the fact that in the course of her adventure Alice crosses over through an initiation from a girl into a woman, aware of her ambitions and a chance for the realisation of her ideas. All this happens through reminiscence about who her father is and, finally, who she is herself. As Burton says in an interview with Bruce Edwin, “In any fairy-tale land there is good and bad. What I liked about Underland is that everything is slightly off, even the good people. That, to me, is something different” (2010). In these few words, Burton’s poetics is sublimated. For him, the prospect of being able to put his own fresh spin on such a timeless classic as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was impossible to resist.<sup>1</sup> Burton’s films present an original approach to surrealism, characterised also by hyperbolic images and genre mixing. Surrealistic influence is reflected in the creation of new postmodern cinema worlds, which exist in the movie canvas and which may not be movies for children, but, by watching them, adults become like children. The fantastic provokes in the spectator the feeling that he or she is part of Burton’s created world, becoming “curiouser and curiouser” to know more about it and to participate in it even more.

The surrealistic pleasure that both Alices bring corresponds with their ‘otherness’ brought rather subtly into the real world. Recognised as otherness, it re-encodes the known world, proving that in this real, visible world there is a possibility for the existence of many other layers of the wonderful and the fantastic. Right there, in some of those worlds, both Alices shall meet, Lewis Carroll’s and Tim Burton’s, and thus enable the phenomenon of Alice, the phenomenon of the all-possible, to be re-inaugurated.

<sup>1</sup> It should also be noted that Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter, Burton’s wife, actually act in almost every movie Burton makes. Depp and Carter, as an actor – actress couple, are strongly connected with Burton’s movie poetics.

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## Alica u zemlji filmova

Analizira se uradak Tima Burtona, filmska adaptacija knjiga o Alici Lewisa Carrola. Razlikovanje čarobnoga i fantastičnoga, kao i čudotvornoga i čudesnoga koje se razrješuje u samome filmu *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), sadržano u dječjoj naravi odrasle Alice Tima Burtona, redefinira polazišta fantastičnoga, čineći dječju fantastiku književno-filmskom stvarnošću. I u književnoj i u filmskoj pripovijedi okviri fantastičnoga, polazeći od naznaka fikcionalnoga i čudesnoga, čine prijelaz prema čudotvornome. Prema Rogeru Cailloisu (1972), fantastično izražava skandal, raskid, čudno, gotovo nepodnošljivo prodiranje u stvarni svijet, a u tome prodiranju druge strane u stvarni svijet on se preobražava u poetiku čudotvornoga.

**Кljučне riječi:** *Alice in Wonderland*, Tim Burton, fantastično, čudotvorno, filmska adaptacija, Lewis Carroll

## Alice im Land der Filme

Im Beitrag wird Tim Bartons Verfilmung von Lewis Carrolls *Alice*-Büchern besprochen. Die im Film *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) aufgelöste und in der Kindernatur von Bartons erwachsenen Alice enthaltene Unterscheidung zwischen dem Magischen und dem Fantastischen, dem Wunderbarem und dem Wundersamen, bestimmt aufs Neue die Standpunkte des Fantastischen, weil im Film die Kinderfantasie in literarisch-filmische Wirklichkeit verwandelt wird. In beiden Medien bilden die Rahmen des Fantastischen den Übergang zum Wunderbaren, indem sie die Spuren des Fiktionalen und des Wundersamen verfolgen. Laut Roger Caillois (1972) drückt das Fantastische einen Skandal aus, einen Bruch, ein befremdendes, beinah nicht auszuhaltendes Vordringen in die wirkliche Welt, wobei dann durch das Vordringen der anderen Seite in die wirkliche Welt diese zur Poetik des Wunderbaren umgewandelt wird.

**Schlüsselwörter:** *Alice in Wonderland*, Tim Burton, Fantastisches, Wunderbares, Verfilmung, Lewis Carroll