Tampere University

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ALICE OBJECTIFIED?

21st-century Retellings of Alice in Wonderland

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences (ITC)
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyses two recent film adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* in order to determine why the protagonist has frequently been transformed into a young woman in visual media adaptations during the last two decades. In the original books, Alice was a seven-year old girl, but in all major retellings of the story published since 2000 the character has been aged to a woman in her twenties. The adaptations that were chosen for closer analysis were the film *Alice in Wonderland* from 2010 and a two-part miniseries called *Alice* from 2009. The hypothesis is, that the character of Alice has been made older in order to be more sexually attractive rather than to give her more agency.

The primary material was analysed using feminist and postfeminist theories, with an emphasis on the way women and especially the protagonist were represented visually, what their agency was like and what roles they were given. In addition to the analyses, the thesis discusses why the films' and series' approaches are problematic from a feminist point of view, as the covert messages in these productions reinforce harmful and limiting stereotypes for women while appearing feminist on the surface

The results were largely in line with the hypothesis and it could be argued that changes in societal norms in the twenty-first century put more and more pressure on girls and women to be sexually attractive objects, while at the same time expecting them to appear empowered and highly individual. Therefore, this thesis claims that these works fall into a postfeminist sensibility, with their emphasis on individual responsibility while complying with traditional feminine roles and a preoccupation with youth and appearances.

Keywords: Alice in Wonderland, adaptations, sexualisation, feminism, postfeminism, film

TIIVISTELMÄ

Annina Kortelainen: Alice Objectified? 21st-century Retellings of Alice in Wonderland
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Tässä kandidaatintutkielmassa tarkasteltiin kahta modernia versiota Lewis Carrollin *Liisa Ihmemaassa*-kirjoista ja analysoitiin muutoksia joita päähenkilön hahmolle on näissä tehty alkuperäiseen nähden. Carrollin luoma Liisa (Alice) on noin seitsemänvuotias lapsi, mutta 2000-luvulla hahmosta on johdonmukaisesti tehty noin kaksikymmentävuotias nainen. Koska hahmo vastaa länsimaista nuoren, heteroseksuaalisesti haluttavan naisen ihannetta, oli syytä pohtia missä määrin hahmon muutokset liittyivät sen seksualisoimiseen ja miten paljon muutokset johtuivat halusta tehdä hahmosta vahva, itsenäinen toimija, jollainen aikuisella on suuremmat edellytykset olla kuin lapsella.

Tutkielman kohteeksi valittiin kaksi versiota: elokuva *Alice in Wonderland* vuodelta 2010 ja *Alice*-minisarja vuodelta 2009. Teoreettisena taustana käytettiin feinististä ja postfeinististä teoriaa, joiden pohjalta tuotantojen naishahmojen, pääasiassa Liisan, toimijuutta, visuaalista ilmettä ja asemaa tulkittiin. Hypoteesina oli, että Liisan hahmon muuttaminen aikuiseksi liittyy enemmän tarpeeseen tehdä siitä seksuaalisesi haluttava objekti kuin aito pyrkimys miesten kanssa tasavertaiseen ja vahvaan naispäähenkilöön, ja tulokset vastasivat pääosin odotuksia.

Johtopäätös on, että tuotannot vahvistavat haitallisia stereotypioita naisista niiden sisältämän pinnallisen feinistisen diskurssin taustalla ja että ne täten asettuvat enemminkin postfeinistiseen tulkintaan maailmasta. Tätä tukevat useat piirteet molemmissa tuotannoissa, joista pääasiallisia ovat päähenkilön ulkonäön ja iän korostaminen sekä valinnanvapauden korostaminen sillä oletuksella, että naishahmon valinnat ovat patriarkaalisen yhteiskunnan silmissä soveliaita. Tutkielmassa esitetään myös, että tämä kehitys johtuu yhteiskunnallisella tasolla kasvaneesta tarpeesta korostaa seksuaalisuutta samaan aikaan, kun yleisö odottaa tuotannoilta jonkinasteista tiedostavuutta tasa-arvokysymyksissä.

Avainsanat: Liisa Ihmemaassa, sovitukset, feminismi, postfeminismi, elokuvat, seksualisointi

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1. Introduction

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and its sequel *Alice: Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll have been remade numerous times since the publication of the novels in 1865 and 1871, in all kinds of media such as plays, films, novels, games and comic books/manga. Alice was about seven years of age in the novels, but the last time a child was seen portraying Alice in a film adaptation of the story was in the 1999 television film *Alice in Wonderland* (directed by Nick Willing), after which the character has consistently been remade into a young woman in her twenties. In *Alice* (miniseries, 2009), *Malice in Wonderland* (film, 2009), *Alice in Murderland* (film, 2010), *Alice in Wonderland* (film, 2010), *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland* (miniseries, 2013) and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (film sequel to the 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*, 2016), the protagonist's age ranges from 19 to 26. In all these versions, grown-up Alice is also conventionally beautiful, slim, white and able-bodied and presented as heterosexually attractive. Despite the obvious connotations to harmful stereotypes women face in media, these changes have never been studied from a feminist perspective. Kali Israel approaches the aging of Alice into a young adult from a point in which the alleged paedophilia of Lewis Carroll forces the modern Alice to be sexually attainable (272), while Catherine Siemann regards the twenty-first century as a darker time that requires Alice to be able to handle sexual threat and violence (175).

This thesis adopts a feminist and postfeminist point of view and examines the way the 2009 miniseries *Alice* and the 2010 film *Alice in Wonderland* represent Alice as a character. Specifically, it attempts to define whether the protagonist of the iconic children's story has been remade into an adult in order to empower her or to sexually objectify her, through analysing Alice's agency in the stories, the role of women in the new Wonderlands, and finally whether Alice's appearance is significant for the plots. While traditional feminism tends to regard female empowerment and sexual objectification of women as mutually exclusive, the postfeminist sentiment emphasises the responsibility of women to be their best selves (often through conforming to the patriarchal values

of the general western society). This thesis claims that, while seemingly attempting to be feminist works, both films analysed here ultimately represent postfeminist values in their storytelling and characterisation. The media have a strong ideological role in perpetuating notions of what is normal and acceptable "beyond the confines of the media, too" (Macdonald 3), which is why it is important to scrutinise the images they convey about acceptable and "proper" femininity (defined differently in feminism and postfeminism). Only by acknowledging harmful stereotypes and notions of what is normal can they be addressed and questioned and hopefully moved away from to a more realistic and inclusive portrayal of women in media, which should in turn affect the attitudes towards women in the real world too.

2. Background and theory

In order to analyse the changes that have been made to Alice's character in the two modern adaptations, I will first examine what these two productions have in common in their representation of the character of Alice and try to examine what is accomplished with these changes. After that, the findings will be analysed using feminist theory based on mainly Lois Tyson's but also on Myra Macdonald's writings on the subject, and Rosalind Gill's take on postfeminist theory (with supporting claims by other writers).

2.1. The two Alices

Alice is a two-part miniseries in which the protagonist is a modern-day judo teacher (hereafter referred to as Alice1) who sees her boyfriend Jack being abducted. She follows the abductors, one of whom is a human version of the White Rabbit, into an alley where a large mirror is poised against the wall. She falls through the mirror and ends up in a gritty version of Wonderland, where humans are brought to a place called the "Happy Hearts Casino" and drained of their emotions that are distilled into drugs for the denizens of Wonderland. In her search for Jack, she meets the Hatter

and learns that Wonderland is ruled by the evil Queen of Hearts, who controls her subjects by giving them “a quick fix” of human emotions. There is a resistance movement hidden in the Great Library, a remnant from the glory days of Wonderland before the Queen seized the throne from the wise Red King, and the Hatter works as a spy for them. After many plot twists, where Jack is revealed to be the Queen of Hearts’ son and, later, an agent of the resistance movement, the queen is overthrown, and Jack is crowned king. Alice returns to her own world, meets Hatter who followed her there and they kiss.

Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* follows Alice Kingsleigh (hereafter referred to as Alice2), who is a Victorian girl on her way to a party unaware that it is in fact an engagement party for her and Lord Hamish Ascott. In the middle of the proposal, Alice runs after a White Rabbit and falls down a large rabbit hole into a place called “Underland”. This is also a rather dark and gritty version of Wonderland, which is explained by a similar story as the one in *Alice.* Underland was a beautiful country under the rule of the White Queen, until the tyrannical Red Queen, the White Queen’s older sister, seized the throne with the help of a dragon-like monster called the Jabberwocky. Alice meets a resistance movement that tells her that she is the chosen one destined to save Underland, showing her a prophecy to prove it while arguing among themselves about whether she is the “right Alice” or not. Alice herself is rather certain that she is not “The Alice”, and she is unwilling to take on the responsibility that being the “right Alice” would demand. Alice travels through Underland, meets different people and creatures, and finally ends up wearing armour and acting out the prophecy. She uses the Vorpal Sword, a legendary weapon with a will of its own, to slay the Jabberwocky. The Red Queen loses all support when this takes place and is banished, the White Queen is reinstated as sole monarch and Alice returns to her own world. Once back, Alice decides not to marry; instead, she decides to follow in her late father’s footsteps and tries to open a trade route to China.

2.2. Feminist and postfeminist theories

Lois Tyson defines patriarchal ideology and the way it affects society and the way we regard gender in the following way: among other things, patriarchal ideology divides women into those who conform to the traditional gender roles (stereotyped as virginal angels or selfless caregivers) and those who do not conform to these roles (stereotyped as nags, seductresses and 'bitches') (140). Telling women that their inherent value lies in their physical beauty and their sexual appeal to men is another characteristic of this ideology (146). Tyson also states that we have become so accustomed to patriarchal values that they have become almost invisible and that this invisibility makes the ideology more dangerous, since it makes it far more difficult to address (139). This invisibility is what Myra Macdonald would term hegemony, which she defines as "a consensual system of viewing and thinking about the world, arrived at not through coercion but by winning voluntary agreement that this is a sensible or even natural way of perceiving reality" (224). She also states that "In hegemony, ideologies are naturalized to appear as 'common sense'" (224). In her book, Macdonald focuses on the way women are represented in media, stating among other things that a woman's appearance is usually deemed more important than what she has to say in media (49).

Rosalind Gill writes about postfeminist media culture in an article published in 2007, where she suggests that postfeminism is "best thought of as a sensibility that characterizes increasing numbers of films, television shows, advertisements and other media products" (148). Gill lists features that are relatively stable in their connection to the postfeminist discourse, such as an emphasis on femininity as a bodily property and on self-surveillance and discipline, a shift from objectification to subjectification, a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment, a marked sexualisation of culture and an emphasis on consumerism (149). She also states that while these features are not necessarily problematic on their own, they tend to be combined with "stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to 'race' and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and

disability as well as gender" (Gill 149).

Gill points out that the features making contemporary media culture postfeminist rather than pre-feminist or anti-feminist, is a distinct mixture of feminist and postfeminist ideas expressed in products belonging to that category (161). Postfeminist heroines value their freedom to make individual choices and also their bodily integrity, but they often use that empowered position of postfeminist autonomy to make choices that are usually well within the boundaries of the same normative notions of femininity that many feminists regard as problematic (Gill 162). According to Gill, feminist discourse has been internalised by the media and feminist ideas are no longer seen as external to the political atmosphere, but rather as the normative way to approach issues in everyday life to a certain extent (161). Postfeminism takes these internalised feminist ideas and merges them with the neoliberal agenda of self-control and individual responsibility, adding in some consumerism-boosting fixation on feminine beauty and youth (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 722; Brown 169; Evans and Riley 270; Gill 163-64). Jeffrey Brown also states in his book *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture* that "The extreme, self-oriented individualism at the heart of neoliberalism is anathema to the collective call to action against systemic social injustices that characterized much of second-wave feminist politics. Who cares about others when we are each responsible only for governing ourselves?" (169), which further serves to distinguish postfeminist agenda from the ideology held by second- and third-wave feminists. In fact, as Gill puts it, postfeminism both incorporates, revises, depoliticises and attacks feminist ideas (161). Postfeminism encourages heteronormative feminine ideals and working extensively towards those ideals by self-transformation and self-regulation, while presenting this work as freely chosen for one's own pleasure (Gill 164). According to Gill, patriarchal power in the postfeminist age operates by the internalised male gaze in women, under which women are "endowed with agency on condition that it is used to construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy found in pornography" (Gill 151-52; also Evans and Riley

270). Ultimately, this is the view that characterises both Alices under scrutiny here, as will be shown in the sections below.

3. What does it mean to be empowered in Wonderland?

The postfeminist sensibility is apparent in both adaptations, though it is more obvious in the overall theme of the story in Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. The film's central theme is freedom of choice, as long as those choices conform to male expectations. While in "Underland", Alice constantly emphasises her right to choose over the wishes and expectations of the other, almost entirely male, characters, only to be fulfilling those expectations in the end exactly as they were expressed but maintaining that this was her choice all along. By the end of the film, the one person who supports Alice2's new plans that involve trading in colonised countries – a traditionally male endeavour – is Lord Ascott, who was her father's business partner and who states that he regards Alice2 as her father's daughter (as opposed to a person in her own right).

Both Alices under scrutiny here convey what Brown refers to as an "anachronistic message of postfeminist empowerment through sexiness and romance" (Brown 170-71). While both Alices display the romance aspect to some extent, Alice1 is the one who fulfils what Brown calls the "traditional beliefs that female happiness can only be found by being beautiful and sexy . . . and by catching the hunky guy." Alice2, as stated earlier, does indeed not "catch the hunky guy", although it is made clear that she could do so if she wanted to. Her female empowerment shuns romance in an obvious attempt to seem more feminist while disregarding the opposite messages it conveys in ways discussed here.

3.1. Female agency vs. male agency

In *Alice,* the protagonist is first introduced to the viewer through showing the end of one of the martial arts lessons she teaches. She stays behind to give one of her students "private lessons", throws him down on the floor and sits on top of him, revealing he is her boyfriend Jack. This opening scene establishes Alice1 both as someone who can defend herself and who is physically superior (technique-wise) to her taller boyfriend. In the following scenes, Alice1's character subverts even more traditional feminine tropes, as she first refuses to marry (thinking Jack is proposing to her) and then attempts to save her abducted boyfriend from the White Rabbit organisation. As the story advances, however, Alice1 who was established as a capable female hero, is pushed more and more aside as the male characters take central stage and eventually accomplish most of the plot action. Alice1 is saved numerous times by Hatter and to a lesser extent by the White Knight, both from the various kinds of enemies and a few times even from her own fear of heights. Alice1 does sometimes take matters into her own hands in Wonderland too, but they appear more like token moments of female empowerment with landing a few punches here and there in a fight while the men take the worst beatings, thus giving Alice1 time to escape.

In addition to the physical domination the men in the story display, they also handle most of the political plotting, whether it be the White Knight creating an army out of skeletons, or Jack being the court insider who really works for the resistance movement. By the end of the second part, Alice1 is at least given her chance at a rallying speech for the trapped humans at the Casino. She also has the idea of "stirring up some emotions" to disrupt the inner workings of the Casino, which eventually makes the whole structure come down. In this way, she is doing something heroic by herself, while her counterpart in the film *Alice in Wonderland* does even less for her title of saviour of Wonderland.

Alice2 is established at the beginning of the film to be very independent in terms of thinking, refusing such normative feminine ideas as proper underwear (corset and stockings) and

marriage out of social reasons, as well as making remarks that are deemed socially unacceptable. When she finally ends up in Wonderland, however, she is forced into a role she does not want and pressured into doing what is expected of her. At the beginning of her journey, Alice2 states that "From the moment I fell down the rabbit hole, I've been told what I must do and who I must be," and continues with stating that everything is just a dream and that she decides where her dream goes. However, since the film's story line requires Alice2 to be the heroine everyone expects her to be, this emphasis on choice is ostensibly circumvented with a superfluous champion selection ritual, where the White Queen asks the crowd who will be her champion and where many characters step forwards to volunteer, only to be immediately brushed aside with a reminder that "if it ain't Alice, it ain't dead" (referring to the Jabberwocky). Even then, with everyone turned towards Alice2, expecting her to step forward as a champion, the White Queen tells her that "Alice, you cannot live your life to please others. The choice must be yours", which attempts to give the viewer a ham-fisted impression of free will while everything else in the scene emphasises the fact that there are no other options than to comply with the expectations.

In action, Alice2's warrior woman status proves to be even more superficial, as most of the fights are performed by the male characters, most notably the Hatter, who is given a chance to save Alice2 from the Knave of Hearts by using a hat pin, perfume and some furniture as weapons, all the while being shackled to a chair/table. Meanwhile, Alice2 stands in the corner holding her weapon, the Vorpal Sword, doing nothing. In fact, Alice2 is never in any real danger, because there is always someone else to save her: the Hatter, the Dormouse, even the Bandersnatch at one point. Even in the end, when she is told that she must face the Jabberwocky alone, the Hatter saves her by stabbing the Jabberwocky in the foot so that Alice2 can escape. In this story, Alice2's fighting tactic is mostly running and hiding, and it is only half by chance that she ends up beheading the Jabberwocky. As with Alice1, this Alice does not see much political action because the men accomplish that

elsewhere. Even the token rallying speech is given to the Hatter, while Alice2 sits in safety at the White Queen's castle.[1]

Alice in Wonderland is putting its protagonist in armour and giving her a sword, trying to fit Alice2 into a traditional heroic role usually reserved for males in fairy tales. At the same time, it takes care to preserve her passivity and innocence by making the vorpal sword be the actual slayer, as demonstrated in lines such as "Remember, the vorpal sword knows what it wants. All you have to do is hold onto it" (Absolem) and "Not you, insignificant bearer, my ancient enemy, the Vorpal One" (Jabberwocky). Alice2's heroism in the film comes mostly down to being present while others accomplish feats.

3.2. The role of women in Wonderland

All throughout the *Alice* miniseries, there are only three female characters who are given a name in an otherwise all male cast. Besides Alice1, the Queen of Hearts and the Duchess, there is one older woman with the resistance (revealed in the credits to be "the Owl") who says a few lines. In addition to these, there are some silent members of the court in flimsy dresses that can only be spotted in the background of the throne room, and then there are the dancers and card dealers at the Happy Hearts Casino. The humans, called "oysters" by the people of Wonderland, are filled with positive emotions by letting them win (both genders) or by being sexually aroused by the dancers in the casino (men only). Alice1, being specified in the story as a twenty-year old, is feminine, in a short dress and high heels, but she is also innocent in a world where everyone else seems "corrupted" in some way (the Hatter is a spy, the White Knight is a coward, Jack is a traitor, etc.) The Queen of Hearts is an older woman, who is depicted as a cruel tyrant who shows no love for either her husband or her son, and who orders people beheaded when things do not go the way she

[1] This decision was probably not essentially anti-feminist, but rather an attempt to give Johnny Depp more screen time as the Hatter. Depp was the star of the franchise in many ways, with even the advertisements putting Alice in the background or to the side with Depp's Hatter in the centre of many posters and DVD/Bluray-covers.

wants. While the Queen of Hearts is a relatively asexual character in the way she behaves and is dressed, the Duchess, who is Jack's fiancée in Wonderland, could be regarded as a stereotypical seductress (see Tyson 150), dressed in a revealing and tightfitting golden dress and with exaggeratedly feminine movements and way of talking. She is shown early on to be a rival to Alice1, making remarks about Alice1's appearance and using sex to pry information from Jack. She is shallow, beautiful and blatantly sexual, and the series makes it clear that she is the opposite of Alice1 in every way. There is even a scene where the Duchess is attempting to seduce information out of Jack, and in asking him about Alice1, Jack says: "Alice is innocent", to which the Duchess replies, "Of course she is." This exchange contrasts the openly sexual Duchess with Alice1, who is sexually attractive (as proven by the interest of both Jack and the Hatter, as well as the lewd remark the King of Hearts makes at one point about searching her body more thoroughly) but innocent: Alice1 is not using her body to get what she wants. Brown distinguishes between the "noble flirting of the heroines and the degenerate attempted seduction of heroes by villainesses" (61), a contrast clearly illustrated by Alice1 and the Duchess.

In *Alice in Wonderland,* too, the protagonist is a female character who is shown to be innocent and pure, almost a child with her ankle-length dress and asexual behaviour. In the frame story, she is contrasted with the lustful woman her brother-in-law is cheating on her sister with, as well as the gossiping sisters who represent Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee in the "real world". In addition to these relatively young women in the frame story, there are older women who either attempt to control Alice2 (her mother and Lady Ascott) or, in the case of Aunt Imogene, are the warning example that Alice2 should not want to end up like: unmarried, lonely and with delusions of a prince who will never come. Once Alice2 falls down the rabbit hole, the female cast consists of her, the White Queen, the Red Queen and possibly the Dormouse (who is voiced by a female actor). There are some females in the Red Queen's court, but they have one line in total together and are mostly used as background to illustrate the Red Queen's oppression. The Red Queen is violent and

loud, and she has a large, malformed head which is throughout the film treated as an embodiment of everything that is bad with her (even the slogan of the resistance is “Down with the Bloody Big Head”). Her younger sister, the White Queen, from whom the Red Queen stole the throne, is by contrast beautiful, gentle and excessively feminine in her movements. She also makes the point that it is against her vows to harm any living creature, confirming her acceptance of the traditional gender role of nurturing women. The protagonists in both stories are also enforcing the notion of the traditionally feminine trait of nurturing to signify good. Alice2 gets the vorpal sword, which is crucial for the resolution of the main conflict, by offering the Bandersnatch its eye back in a nurturing, friendly gesture, while Alice1 finds her resolution to end the drug-induced tyranny of Wonderland when she sees two children brought through the Looking Glass to be drained (this far, only adults had been used).

These two stories treat the stereotypical feminine trait of “being emotional” rather differently. Linda Woolverton, the film’s screenwriter, stated in an interview that the Pool of Tears of the original tale was left out because she “couldn’t have her [Alice] break down like that” and because she felt that “it’s really important to depict strong-willed, empowered women” (Rohter). This is mirrored by the caterpillar Absolem in the film, who tells Alice2 near the end that “Nothing was ever accomplished with tears.” Alice2, who is throughout the film rather detached and emotionless, quickly dries these tears in her only moment of what the film would probably deem “weakness” that should not be present in an empowered woman. By contrast, Alice1 is literally saving Wonderland first by regressing back to a child who cries and begs for her father’s recognition, which triggers her father’s initial weak memories of having a daughter, and later on, by stirring emotions in the “oysters”, which destroys the casino completely, freeing everyone and ending the Queen’s reign.

Both Alice1 and Alice2 are ultimately defined by their lost fathers, presented as loving, older men who have a special connection with their daughters. Alice1 is shown two minutes into the

series to be looking for her father actively despite it being ten years since he disappeared. He is also the reason she has commitment issues (affecting the romantic subplot) and the reason she can save Wonderland (the main plot): Jack sought her out because she is the daughter of Carpenter, who has the real power to save them all. By the end of the series, Alice1 finally knows what happened to her father and is ready to move on with her life and find a relationship (with Hatter). Alice2 also lost her father early on, but the very first scene in the film shows us that her relationship with her father was very close. Throughout the film, Alice2 is shown to bear a great resemblance to her father as well as quoting him on several occasions, even explaining who she is in terms of being "Charles Kingsleigh's daughter". Her father follows Alice2 through the entire film in hints, shaping her personality and ultimately directing her decision on what to do with her life: the ending scene is Alice2 fulfilling her father's dream of expanding trade to the Far East.

3.3. Beauty equals goodness

Both the film and the miniseries display a blatantly postfeminist assumption that only a pretty, thin and young woman can be the protagonist in a story that attempts to be a female empowerment fantasy (Gill 149; Brown 172; Siemann 183). The focus on appearance and youth, two of the defining traits in the postfeminist sensibility as defined by both Gill (149) and Brown (170-71), is clearly present in both adaptations. In *Alice in Wonderland,* the protagonist's sister actually tells her that "You'll soon be twenty, Alice. That pretty face won't last forever. You don't want to end up like Aunt Imogene". Here, the sister is trying to convince Alice2 that she needs to marry as soon as possible, because no one would like to end up like the old and sad spinster that Imogene is. While Alice2 is opposing the restrictive idea of a corset, she does not actually need one to look properly slim-waisted and hence, her statement against the corset could be interpreted as yet another jab made by the film against older women who do not conform to the female beauty ideal without

external aid such as the corset. Alice1 is living in modern-day America and has no social pressure to wear a corset *per se*, but she conforms to the modern pressures on women having to be slim and athletic instead.

Both Alices are subject to the trope of untarnished beauty: even if Alice2 falls rather violently and dramatically down the rabbit hole, is chased around Wonderland by various beasts, and goes to war, all she suffers appearance-wise is that her updo opens and her hair lies in neat curls for the rest of the film, and there are some scratches on her arm. Alice1 gets wet a few times and has a tattoo-like sign branded on her arm by a magical light but is otherwise perfectly unblemished, while her companion the Hatter is tortured and beaten and gets a purple eye and blood everywhere. There is a spoken focus on the appearance of women in both stories too. When Alice2 initially ends up in Wonderland and shrinks due to drinking a potion, her original, rather modest dress does not shrink with her. However, the more revealing makeshift dress grows and shrinks along with her, variously leaving her back and shoulders bare or rising to a minidress that reveals her legs halfway up to the thigh. The modern Alice1 is wearing a minidress from the beginning, so she does not need this kind of change of clothes. The many times her clothes become wet are treated in a very sexualised way though, with the Hatter initially announcing his willingness to help her because he does not see a reason not to help "a pretty girl in a very wet dress" while looking at her body. Alice2 is told several times by various people that she is too tall when she has eaten the cake that makes a person larger, and this is usually said in a negative way. This underlines even more the notion that traditionally attractive women are petite. The one exception to this is the Knave of Hearts, whose fetish for largeness is the instigation needed to include a scene in which the protagonist is sexually harassed.

While the Red Queen is continuously criticised for her appearance by various characters in *Alice in Wonderland*, with the unfortunate implication that this lack of beauty is the reason she is bad, the Queen of Hearts in *Alice* needs to wait till the end before her appearance is brought forth as

a reason not to obey her. There is a scene just after the Happy Hearts Casino has fallen, where Alice1 tells the Queen's former subjects to "really look at her". They do as they are told, look at the older woman, and turn against her, choosing the handsome, young Jack to be king.

3.4. Postfeminism in Alice

The superficial feminist statement Alice2 makes in the beginning about corsets and the ending, where she embarks on a typically male endeavour of trade and sailing, form an interesting juxtaposition with the actual treatment of female characters in the film. The roles and fates of the secondary female characters in the story imply a message that women are good as long as they comply with the traditional feminine roles patriarchy has assigned them and that women who do not conform to these roles are bad and deserve complete exclusion from all society. These conflicting views on femininity and feminist ideas are well in line with the postfeminist sensibility described in 2.2: the emphasis on individual choice and empowerment combined with an exclusion of women who do not conform to the patriarchal ideal of young, beautiful and innocent. Both Alices also display the self-oriented individualism that rejects what Brown called "a collective call to action against systematic social injustices" that characterised much of second-wave feminism (169): Alice1 does not care for the oysters kept imprisoned in the Casino, her goal is first to find Jack, and later on, her father, and the revolution happens in tandem with these endeavours. Alice2 is even less interested in participating in the grand political upheaval her allies are planning, renouncing the hero-role she is presented with and proclaiming that she makes her own choices. In the end, both Alices are manipulated into participating in the rebellion, one by the use of her father and the other by peer pressure, while the latter is still made to believe that it is of her own choice. This is well in accord with the postfeminist ideal of being an individual whose choices just happen to correspond with the demands of the society (Evans and Riley 270; Gill 162). Brown also differentiates between feminism and postfeminism in writing that certain kinds of (postfeminist) stories "allow young

female audience members to experience heroic female empowerment without aligning with feminism . . . and to witness the efficacy of personal choices as heroic and rewarding actions“ (173), which as a statement suggests that feminism is something young women want to avoid being associated with.

The major emphasis on attractiveness and youth displayed in both *Alice* and in *Alice in Wonderland* is also in accordance to the postfeminist sensibility, whether it is explained by attempts to promote consumerism or, as Laramie D. Taylor and Tiffany Setters note in a survey among undergraduate viewers, by the belief that “[a]ttractiveness played a key role in predicting whether a protagonist was considered an appropriate role model for women“ (43). Both reasons stem from a desire to create a seemingly empowered protagonist for viewers to emulate, while ensuring that the same viewers stay well within the norms of patriarchal society.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the primary material shows that, despite trying to appear as stories about female empowerment, the modern Alice stories eventually fail to recognise the gender inequality and objectification of women they perpetuate and naturalise. Both the film and the miniseries place their female characters in very limited roles, basing their personalities on patriarchal stereotypes of sexually attractive but virtuous women while trying to appear progressive and feminist. The Alices are presented as strong and independent warriors, but the stories themselves never let them live up to these expectations. As soon as Alice (1 and 2), empowered in her own world, ends up in Wonderland, she immediately becomes a character that the people in Wonderland need to take care of, guide and save from various dangers, while telling her that she is a special person that will save them all (as a catalyst, not important in herself). In addition to this, neither Alice1 nor Alice2 expresses any wish to participate in the heroic deeds expected of them: this has the double function

of expressing the protagonists' passive femininity (in the social sphere such as politics) and their postfeminist emphasis on individual choices and goals as opposed to collective action.

As individual films, these messages would not necessarily be noteworthy or have much impact, but as parts of a large, clearly rather homogenous industry of entertainment mostly aimed at young women, the underlying values of these productions perpetuate harmful ideals about what a woman should be like and what her goals in life should be. Combined with the cursory endorsement of feminist ideas and female empowerment, these ideas are easily conveyed to an audience who perhaps likes to see itself as progressive and egalitarian while consuming media that surreptitiously reinforces patriarchal values.

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