



**Review: Alice in Transmedia Wonderland: Curiouser and Curiouser New Forms of a Children's Classic. By Anna Kérchy. Jefferson: McFarland, 2016. 257 pp.**

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***Alice in Transmedia Wonderland: Curiouser and Curiouser New Forms of a Children's Classic.* By Anna Kérchy. Jefferson: McFarland, 2016. 257 pp.**

The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) has garnered much attention from fans, scholars, and academics alike, with an incredible number of newly illustrated editions, adaptations, and many scholarly (and not-so-scholarly) books on Lewis Carroll's *Alices* coming out around 2015.

Anna Kérchy's *Alice in Transmedia Wonderland* tackles the daunting task of examining the virtually countless postmillennial adaptations of the original *Alice* tales—and, as becomes more and more obvious, rewritings of the Lewis Carroll myth as well. Kérchy chooses not to limit herself to one form of adaptation (book-to-screen, book-to-digital media, book-to-stage, and so forth), as she wishes “to trace transmedia interconnections and metamedial self-reflexivity across a variety of representational methods” (2). The variety of media in her corpus reveals her broad understanding of what an *Alice* adaptation is. She includes films, pop-up books, digital picture books, computer games, young adult novels, musical, choreographic and other artistic homages, but also biofictions, a mock-cookbook, and chef Heston Blumenthal's “culinary art-project” (219). What seems to fascinate the Hungarian scholar is the multimedia dissemination of the *Alice*-inspired myth(s), as is made clear when she devotes several pages to Neil Gaiman's 2002 dark fantasy children's novella *Coraline*, Russell Craig's 2008 graphic novel adaptation, and Henry Selick's 2009 stop-motion adaptation of Gaiman's novella. This focus is likewise seen when she retraces the connections between Carroll's *Alice* books, Jan Švankmajer's 1988 *Alice*, Angela Carter's 1989 short-story “Alice in Prague or the Curious Room,” which the British author wrote with Švankmajer's movie in mind, and Rikki Ducornet's 1993 *The Jade Cabinet*. This passage from media to media is the main reason why Kérchy uses the term

“transmedia” in the title of her book. Though she quotes Henry Jenkins’s definition of the term, which emphasizes the fact that “integral elements of fiction get dispersed *systematically* across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a *unified and coordinated* entertainment experience [where] each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” (22, my italics), she implicitly broadens its scope and downplays the systematic and coordinated aspects of transmedia storytelling mentioned by Jenkins (22). According to Kérchy, every adaptation sheds new light on the previous one, thereby creating a web of new interpretations of the *Alice* tales and/or the Lewis Carroll myth.

The introduction posits that the amazing number and variety of adaptations result from the ambiguity of the original tales, which Kérchy infers from the *Alice* books’ “generic hybridity,” nonsense, and *in fine* the multifarious interpretations of the *Alice* books by scholars (4-5). She also suggests, like Zoe Jaques and Eugene Giddens in *Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass: A Publishing History* (2013), that it is very fitting that these books came to be adapted so frequently as their author kept revising them. Finally, she contends that all the *Alice* adaptations examined are, to some extent, metafictional—or involve “meta” aspects that are worth analyzing, Alice being “an agent of metafantasy and metamediality who offers a critical commentary on the dynamic interaction of artistic media and creative imagination” (18).

The first chapter deals with what an *Alice* adaptation looks like after “the pictorial or iconic turn” of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (27). Kérchy first shows the connections between Carroll’s elaborate exploitation of the text-image relationship in his *Alices*; the pop-up book adaptations by Benjamin Lacombe, Robert Sabuda, Zdenko Basic, and Harriet Castor; and the digital *Alices*. She then tries to rehabilitate Walt Disney’s 1951 and Tim Burton’s 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*

oft-reviled adaptations by showing how Disney's visual "nonsense" can be said to make up for Carroll's language games (60) and, less convincingly so, how Burton's "CGI animated live action hybrid characters . . . recall the Carrollian portmanteau" (70).

Chapter 2 comprehends the analyses of several *Alice*-inspired books, movies, computer games, and TV shows with dark undercurrents. Kérchy argues that Terry Gilliam's 2005 *Tideland* simultaneously demonstrates the power of the imagination as exemplified by the child-protagonist, who can turn trauma into fantasy, and the adult (spectator)'s discomfort toward the kind of "ethical nonsense" depicted in the movie (90). Kérchy then examines the choices made to turn *Coraline*, the novella, into a graphic novel and later into a movie. She finally discusses the case of the video game *American McGee's Alice*—which, for Kérchy, reveals the disquieting aspects of the original books as much as the violent power struggles "always involve[d]" when an original work of art is adapted—and of the television show *Once Upon A Time In Wonderland* and its dubious feminism (115).

In the third chapter, Kérchy gives pride of place to Karoline Leach's 1999 *In the Shadow of the Dreamchild*, which questions the validity of the traditional perception of Lewis Carroll as fixated on female child-friends. She then paradoxically centers on biofictions, artistic creations, and graphic novels that exploit the Lewis Carroll-Alice Liddell relationship and eroticize Alice, namely Stephanie Bolster's 1998 *White Stone*; Polixeni Papapetrou's 2002, 2003 and 2004 photo-series; and of course, Melinda Gebbie and Alan Moore's 2006 erotic comic book, *Lost Girls*.

In the fourth and last chapter, Kérchy focuses on works of art which aim to stimulate the viewers' senses—touch in Švankmajer's haptic *Alice* adaptation, sound in Tom Waits's 2002 *Alice* album—and rely on a return of "the formerly repressed . . . carnality" (167).

Kérchy includes illustrations, pictures of pop-up books and other artwork, and pieces of fan art to aptly illustrate some of her points. However, the book would have benefited from in-depth copy-editing to avoid run-on sentences, syntax problems, and typographical errors that somewhat impede the reading. A conclusion would have been welcome to attempt to tie the various venues of investigation together; its absence might testify to the difficulty Kérchy had in finding true cohesion in the heterogeneous *Alice*-inspired 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>- century material and their complex relationship with the original tales. The book does, however, comprise engaging insights into multimedia *Alice* adaptations that are sure to interest scholars and conversant fans alike.

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