Alice in Wonderland. Dir. Tim Burton. Perf. Johnny Depp, Anne Hathaway, Mia Wasikowska. Walt Disney Pictures / Roth Films, 2010. Film.

Fifty-nine years after the release of their feature-length animated adaptation of Lewis Carroll''s *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* Disney has teamed up with director Tim Burton to take audiences down the rabbit hole once again. Unlike Burton's previous attempts to reinvigorate an existing film franchise, *Planet of the Apes* (2001), and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), *Alice in Wonderland* isn't so much a remake as a continuation of the original Disney film. Over a decade after her first trip to Wonderland, Alice (Mia Wasikowska) only remembers the events of the original film as a series of strange, reoccurring dreams. After escaping from an unwanted marriage proposal, Alice disappears down another giant hole to find herself in Wonderland, now inexplicably referred to as "Underland."

But all is not the same as it once was. The Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter) has since conquered Underland with the help of the legendary Jabberwocky. And, according to a prophecy, Alice is destined to slay the foul beast on the Frabjous Day, thereby making all well again in Underland.

The decision to make *Alice in Wonderland* a sequel was probably due to two factors, the first being that it afforded Burton a chance to create his own interpretation of Carroll's bizarre fantasy world. Burton essentially made his name in Hollywood directing extremely dark, grotesquely stylized fantasy films. His early films are remembered just as much for their outlandish visuals and art design as they are for their stories and characters. Usually his films would start in a sterile, uncomfortably sanitized world, such as the Maitland's picturesque New England home in *Beetlejuice* (1988), and the Boggs family's neighborhood, an angular, suburban nightmare of conformity and faded pastels, in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990). But with the sudden introduction of a deformed outsider, usually the film's namesake, characters from the first world are jarringly thrown into the second, a universe of contorted, non-Euclidian buildings, landscapes, and inhabitants which serves as a kind of farcical reflection of the first.

Burton's later films would abandon this distinction. Indeed, in *Big Fish* (2003) and *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), the line between the normal and abnormal, the ordinary and extraordinary

was deliberately blurred in order to make a statement about, respectively, the nature of stories and the corruption lurking beneath nineteenth 19thcentury London. But in *Alice in Wonderland*, Burton returns to his original form, creating creating two distinctive spaces for Alice to inhabit. The first, the world of England, is dominated by dull colors, robotic humans, and uncomfortable framings which seem to plunge it deep into the uncanny valley. Underland, on the other hand, is full of more fantastic designs. Burton deliberately mixed characters who were fully live action (Alice), fully CGI (the bandersnatch) and a hybrid of the two (the Red Queen, the Mad Hatter). Those who are offended by Burton's over-reliance on motion capture CGI should be reminded that much of the original Disney film was rotoscoped from live-action actors (Ed Wynn's original performance as the Mad Hatter during the rotoscoping sessions was so excellent that they didn't even bother re-dubbing his dialogue when the animation was completed).

But whereas Mary Blair's original art direction and color palette managed to capture the chaotic, nonsensical atmosphere of Wonderland without appearing cluttered or unpleasant, Burton's Underland is a wash of dark, muted colors, probably due in large part to the film's postproduction conversion to 3-D. Of course, Burton designed his Underland to look as if Blair's Wonderland had suffered through years of despotic rule and decay. The best example is the Tea Party set: the windmill is broken and covered in moss, the china is scattered and dirty, and the tea-cups are cracked and broken. Burton's sets serve a definite narrative purpose. And herein we discover the other probable reason why *Alice in Wonderland* was a continuation of the original instead of a remake: it allowed a more concentrated focus on linear, narrative storytelling.

It would be remiss to suggest that Alice didn't undergo a kind of character arc in the firstf film: she begins as a distracted day-dreamer and in a sense evolves into a more level-headed person when she finally rejects herself from Wonderland at the end. But her arc was largely obfuscated by an endless series of unrelated narrative *non sequiturs.* In Burton's *Alice in Wonderland,* Alice undergoes a heroine's journey acting out almost all of the steps of Joseph Campbell's monomyth. In addition, Burton takes a page out of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), and suggests that all of the strange characters inhabiting Underland are imaginary caricatures of people from Alice's "reality." These things all point to the biggest problem in Burton's *Alice in Wonderland;* it tries to make a deliberately illogical story logical.

When reduced to its bare essentials, *Alice in Wonderland* is a sub-par action-fantasy film that drapes itself with the tattered trappings of Carroll's novel and Disney's original classic. Burton makes Wonderland a supporting character in its own story.

Works Cited

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