

## Re-Alice: Reimagination of Carroll's Alice in Wonderland into Animation and Live Action

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### Abstract

Walt Disney Pictures has adapted several famous animated cartoons into live-action films in recent years, including Alice in Wonderland. The film is based on Lewis Carroll's classic novel, which tells the story of Alice's adventures in Wonderland. The adaptation process brought several changes in the form of the latest story. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to investigate and examine the reimagination markers and reimagination functions from the animated film Alice in Wonderland (1951) to the live-action version (2010). This study utilizes the reimagination theory of Purnomo et al., which categorizes markers into mutations and presences in textual, visual, and operative elements. These markers allow the work to fulfill various functions, including Stylistic, Ludic, Metathetic, Media, Branding, and Cultural Functions. This study found significant variations between the 1951 animated and 2010 live-action versions of Alice in Wonderland. The most common reimagination markers were in the visual elements. Meanwhile, the stylistic function is most frequently found in the function section. The findings of this study are likely to provide an additional and new understanding of cinematic adaptation and literary reimagination.

**Keywords:** *adaptation, Alice in Wonderland, film, reimagination*

### Abstrak

Walt Disney Pictures telah mengadaptasi beberapa kartun animasi terkenal ke dalam film live-action dalam beberapa tahun terakhir, termasuk Alice in Wonderland. Film ini diangkat dari novel klasik karya Lewis Carroll, yang mengisahkan petualangan Alice di Negeri Ajaib. Proses adaptasi tersebut membawa beberapa perubahan dalam bentuk cerita terbaru. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk menyelidiki dan mengkaji penanda reimaginasi dan fungsi reimaginasi dari film animasi Alice in Wonderland (1951) ke versi live-action (2010). Penelitian ini menggunakan teori reimaginasi dari Purnomo dkk., yang mengkategorikan penanda ke dalam mutasi dan kehadiran dalam elemen tekstual, visual, dan operatif. Penanda-penanda ini memungkinkan karya untuk memenuhi berbagai fungsi, termasuk Fungsi Stilistik, Ludic, Metatetik, Media, Branding, dan Kultural. Penelitian ini menemukan variasi yang signifikan antara versi animasi tahun 1951 dan versi live-action tahun 2010 dari Alice in Wonderland. Penanda reimaginasi yang paling umum terdapat pada elemen visual. Sementara itu, fungsi stilistik paling sering ditemukan pada bagian fungsi. Temuan dari penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan pemahaman tambahan dan baru mengenai adaptasi sinematik dan reimaginasi sastra.

**Kata kunci:** *adaptasi, Alice in Wonderland, film, reimaginasi*



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Walt Disney Pictures has reimagined classic animated films like *Aladdin*, *Mulan*, and *Cinderella* into live-action adaptations, utilizing advanced technologies such as CGI to create visually immersive experiences (Sun, 2023). This shift reflects Disney's effort to cater to evolving audience preferences by blending nostalgia with innovation (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). One example is *Alice in Wonderland*, which has been adapted multiple times—from the 1951 animated film to the 2010 live-action version directed by Tim Burton (Hasanoglu, 2023). While the original animation stayed true to Lewis Carroll's whimsical tone (Telotte, 2010), Burton's adaptation transformed the story into a darker, more dramatic narrative (Martinić, 2024). This shift highlights how reimagination changes visuals, tone, and storytelling, blending fantasy with mature themes to reflect contemporary tastes (Wells & Hardstaff, 2008). The use of CGI in the 2010 version brought Carroll's fantastical world to life in ways the original could not, making it more immersive for today's viewers. Disney's strategy illustrates how reimagination preserves core narratives while reshaping them for new generations (Rowe, 2022).

The animated and live-action adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland* illustrate how the same story can be reimagined in drastically different ways. This transformation lies in the concept of reimagination, which serves as a critical mechanism in reshaping narratives across mediums (Richardson, 2012). Reimagination is a subset of adaptation considered a genre in itself, where the resulting work has unique markers that distinguish it from other adaptations, including textual, visual, and operatic elements (Purnomo et al., 2023). Through transtylistation, these elements are adapted for the target audience, which can lead to significant changes to the original work. This study explores the markers and functions of reimagination in the animated film *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and the live-action film *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) to provide insight into the adaptation and reimagination.

Previous studies on reimagination explore various cultural and narrative shifts in adaptations. Hoogstraten (2017) critiques Disney's 1951 animated and 2010 live-action films for failing to retain Carroll's subversive portrayal of the Victorian girl-child, instead conforming to conventional ideals of girlhood. Todorova (2018) investigates the reimagination of cultural meanings in *Hedgehog's Home* through visual and performative

elements across different mediums. Dillon, (2019) explores Alice's transformation across film and television adaptations, emphasizing intertextual and meta-adaptive changes that reflect shifting cultural expectations of female figures. Scott (2022) examines darker reimaginings of Carroll's Wonderland in works like *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Stranger Things*, showcasing how horror-themed narratives subvert cultural hierarchies. The last, Agbese (2024) analyzes reimagination through gendered lenses in *Black Panther*, highlighting the portrayal of empowered African women in contrast to real-world inequalities. However, while these studies contribute to understanding reimagination across modalities, they lack an explicit focus on identifying textual, visual, and narrative markers of reimagination. This gap leaves room to explore Alice in Wonderland adaptations more systematically, particularly regarding what markers of reimagination and what functions of reimagination are found in Disney's 1951 animation and Burton's 2010 live-action film.

According to Purnomo et al. (2023), adaptation reimagination is marked by two key concepts: mutation and presence. Mutation refers to significant alterations in textual, visual, and operative elements that transform the narrative, while presence involves adjusting these elements to align with the current cultural and temporal context. In *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), the mutation appears minimally as the film largely preserves Lewis Carroll's whimsical narrative, formal dialogue, and lighthearted tone. The visual elements, such as Alice's consistent blue dress and colorful animated settings, emphasize the innocence and wonder of the story.

In contrast, the 2010 live-action version directed by Tim Burton showcases extensive mutations: the textual elements feature darker dialogue and a more complex plot, where Alice transforms into a warrior battling societal expectations and literal monsters like the Jabberwocky. The visual elements evolve dramatically through advanced CGI, creating a grimmer, more gothic Wonderland, while operative elements include dynamic camera angles and immersive action sequences. These changes reflect presence, as the 2010 adaptation adjusts the narrative to contemporary tastes, exploring themes of identity and rebellion relevant to a modern audience. By analyzing these markers of mutation and presence, this study reveals how reimagination functions stylistically and culturally to transform the same source material into distinct cinematic experiences.

The descriptive qualitative method is used in writing and information gathering (Creswell, 2009). This research uses this method to explore and analyze the reimagination markers between Disney's animated *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and its live-action adaptation (2010). The method focuses on a content analysis approach, specifically examining textual, visual, and operative element changes. These changes include shifts in dialogue, character designs, settings, and the application of visual technology. The analysis begins by identifying transformed elements—called mutation—and those retained or adapted to fit a contemporary context, known as presence. Textual data encompass dialogues and narrative shifts. Visual data focuses on imagery and CGI advancements, while operative data considers cinematic techniques such as camera angles and scene composition. Data were collected through systematic observation of both films, focusing specifically on scenes that highlight their stylistic and thematic differences.

Previous studies on this research have primarily examined cultural adaptations, gender perspectives, and thematic reinterpretations of literary works. However, no one has identified textual, visual, and narrative markers or functions of reimagination. This study bridges this gap by focusing on the markers of reimagination—mutation and presence—across textual, visual, and operative elements, using Purnomo et al.'s theoretical framework. By analyzing Disney's 1951 animated and Burton's 2010 live-action versions of *Alice in Wonderland*, this research aims to uncover how these markers manifest and function to transform the original material. The study aims to identify the stylistic, ludic, and cultural functions of reimagination in these films, offering novel insights into the adaptation and narrative identity in cinematic reimagination.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Reimagination Markers**

#### ***Mutation of the Textual Elements of Reimagined Works***

The reimagination in the 1951 and 2010 adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland* can be seen through textual elements that have undergone significant changes. In the 1951 version, this adaptation is more faithful to the original text by Lewis Carroll. For example, the conversation between Alice and the Cheshire Cat in this version is almost unchanged from the original text:



*Alice: "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"*

*Cheshire Cat: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to".*

*Alice: "I don't much care where—"*

*Cheshire Cat: "Then it doesn't matter which way you go".*

This shows that the 1951 film stays true to the original, reflecting a classical adaptation style that aims to preserve the original text and attempts to reproduce it accurately in a new medium. In contrast, the 2010 version, directed by Tim Burton, provides a different dialogue than the 1951 version, showcasing a more modern and dark style, which is evident in the same conversation between Alice and the Cheshire Cat:

*Alice: "Would you tell me which way I ought to go from here?"*

*Cheshire Cat: "That depends on where you want to get to".*

*Alice: "It really doesn't matter, as long as I..."*

*Cheshire Cat: "Oh, it matters. We all have our paths to take. Some go this way, some go that way. But as for you, my dear, you're on the wrong one".*

The 2010 version reimagines the dialogue to be more relatable to today's audience, using modern language and narrative elements that enhance the characters and story. These differences stand out when compared to the 1951 version. It shows that reimagining is a creative process that changes parts of a story to create new meanings and experiences while keeping the original essence.

### ***Mutation of the Visual Elements of Reimagined Works***

In the 1951 animated film *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice wears a knee-length blue dress with a white pinafore. This iconic outfit includes puffed sleeves and a bow in her hair, inspired by Victorian-era fashion. Alice remains in this dress throughout the film, emphasizing her innocence and youth. The movie's setting is bright and colorful, complementing Alice's outfit and making it stand out in the surreal surroundings. The anthropomorphic animals and flowers align with the film's mid-20th-century animation style, enhancing its charm and visual appeal.

Figure 1: Alice dress in *Alice in Wonderland* (1951)

In the opening scene, Alice is seen wearing a light blue Victorian-era dress with puffed sleeves and lace detailing. The dress is more elegant and mature, fitting the social event she attends at the film's start.

Figure 2: Alice dress in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)Figure 3: Alice's dress when she entered Wonderland in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)

Alice falls down the rabbit hole and enters Wonderland. Her dress in this scene is unique and whimsical, reflecting the magical world around her. It is a light blue, off-shoulder gown with layers and ruffles. The dress looks slightly tattered and crumpled, giving it a dreamy, otherworldly vibe. The blue color is consistent with Alice's iconic dress in many story versions. The dark and mysterious background contrasts with her dress's light color, enhancing Wonderland's strange and surreal feeling.

Figure 4: Alice dons armor to fight the Jabberwocky in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)

The armor is shiny and likely made of steel, offering maximum protection in battle. It has artistic carvings and curves, especially on the chest and shoulders, combining beauty with practicality. The chest plate and shoulder guards are sturdy, protecting Alice's vital body parts. Alice also carries a large shield with matching designs for extra defense. Her weapon is a sharp, large sword, ready to fight the Jabberwocky. Alice's overall appearance shows strength and elegance, emphasizing her readiness for great challenges.

Visual mutations include characters, settings, and locations changing to represent time and space (Purnomo et al., 2023). In the live-action version, Alice wears various gowns that show her growth and bravery in Wonderland. Meanwhile, her dress stays the same in the animation, representing her innocence. The evolving outfits in the live-action reflect a reimagination, while the animated version's unchanged dress highlights consistency.



Figure 5: Comparison setting of *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)

The live-action *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) presents a darker, more elaborate setting than the bright, whimsical world of the 1951 animated film. This shift significantly impacts the visual design, including Alice's costume and color palette. In the animated version, characters like Tweedledee, Tweedledum, and the Flowers are depicted with bold, cheerful colors and simple, cartoonish designs, reflecting the lighthearted fantasy of mid-20th-century Disney aimed at children. Alice's vivid blue dress symbolizes her innocence and curiosity, enhancing Wonderland's magical and joyful atmosphere.

In contrast, the 2010 live-action adaptation uses darker tones and more intricate details to create a mysterious and mature Wonderland. The same characters appear whimsical yet slightly eerie, with muted colors and detailed textures that reflect a deeper and more complex narrative. Alice's darker blue dress highlights her growth and challenging journey, while the desaturated color palette illustrates the evolution of visual

storytelling and CGI technology. These changes demonstrate how adaptations reflect shifting audience preferences and technological advancements, maintaining the story's essence while evolving to suit contemporary tastes.

### ***Mutation of the Operative Elements of Reimagined Works***

According to Purnomo et al. (2023) Mutation in the operative elements of reimagined works refers to changes and adjustments made to the interactive aspects of the work. In the film adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, there are visible differences in shooting between the animated film (1951) and the live-action version (2010). These differences directly affect the way certain elements are displayed.



Figure 6: The difference in shooting a scene between the animated film (1951) and the live-action version (2010)

In the animated film *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), the door shown in the scene is a living creature. Therefore, the shots were taken from a close distance to show its characteristics. The closer shot aims to show the details and expressions of the living door; therefore, the audience can feel the magic and uniqueness created by the Alice in Wonderland animation film.

Meanwhile, in the live-action *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), the door in the film is an ordinary small door that does not have the characteristics of a living creature. Therefore, shots are often taken from a long distance, focusing more on Alice's character than the small door so that the door does not have a particular emphasis. This difference shows how each medium utilizes operative elements because it has differences based on shooting, from *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) animation film and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) live-action film.

## A Function of Reimagination

### *Stylistic Functions of Reimagination*

Stylistic functions include text, visual, and operational styles. Text style refers to changes in the narrative, visual style to reimagined imagery, and operational style to storytelling mechanics (Purnomo et al., 2023). In the 1951 animated *Alice in Wonderland*, the text closely follows Lewis Carroll's original story. The dialogue comes directly from the book, emphasizing absurd and imaginative elements. The colorful visuals use traditional animation techniques to create a lively, fantastical world. The operational style is simple, with Alice exploring Wonderland in a linear and episodic manner



Figure 7: The difference Alice's style in the *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)

In contrast, the 2010 live-action version by Tim Burton changes all three styles significantly. The text is darker and more mature, with dramatic dialogue and complex characters. The visuals rely on advanced CGI to depict a gloomy and gothic Wonderland, reflecting Burton's unique style. Operationally, the story focuses on Alice's emotional journey and growth. For example, in the 2010 version, Alice says, "This is my dream. I'll decide where it goes from here," showing greater control and self-awareness than her reactions in the 1951 version. This difference shows how reimagination through the function of style can provide new perspectives and experiences on the same story.

### *Ludic Functions of Reimagination*

The concept of ludic functions revolves around inspiring playfulness. When works are reimagined within this ludic context, the aim is to be playful and evoke laughter (Purnomo et al., 2023). The ludic function can be applied in the adaptation of the animated film *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and the live-action film *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) through several elements that bring playfulness and humor into the narrative. In

the 1951 animated film, one example is the characters Tweedledee and Tweedledum, designed with round bodies and silly movements. Their rhythmic dialogue and dance scenes invite laughter and create a light and humorous atmosphere. These visual elements effectively modify the original story to entertain audiences, especially children, with a more comedic approach.



Figure 8: The difference ludic concept in the *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)

On the other hand, the 2010 live-action film adaptation directed by Tim Burton also employs the ludic function, albeit in a darker and more complex style. A clear example can be seen in the character of the Mad Hatter, played by Johnny Depp. The Mad Hatter's dialogue is often filled with puns and absurdity, creating humorous moments amidst the more serious narrative. In addition, using CGI visual effects that show the world of Wonderland in imaginative and unusual ways, such as when Alice becomes smaller or larger, adds an attractive and playful visual element. These two adaptations show how ludic elements can be integrated into narrative and visuals to create a fun and entertaining experience for the audience.

### ***Methectic Functions of Reimagination***

In *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), the Mad Hatter is portrayed as an eccentric and whimsical figure, staying true to Lewis Carroll's original depiction. The character's playful design, voice, and behavior aim to captivate mid-20th-century audiences through a lighthearted and spectacular adventure. His antics and humor are designed to entertain, reflecting Carroll's cheerful and escapist tone and creating a fun experience for viewers.



Figure 9: The Mad Hatter's different look in 1951 and 2010

In contrast, the Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) is a deeper and more significant character. Tim Burton's darker and gothic reimagining, played by Johnny Depp, appeals to modern audiences seeking complex narratives. Depp portrays the Hatter with moments of despair and anger, highlighting a divided personality shaped by his tragic past, including the loss of his family and homeland. These elements add emotional depth and make the character more intriguing and engaging.

The term "methectic" originates from Plato's concept of audience participation and relates to fan engagement. The adaptation introduces emotional and narrative complexity by reimagining the Mad Hatter in 2010. This modern approach aligns with contemporary expectations, offering fans a deeper and more complex character experience.

### ***Medial Functions of Reimagination***

In the 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*, the Queen of Hearts is depicted with a black-and-white costume with the iconic heart symbol. The design is more cartoonish. All the interactions and movements of the Queen of Hearts were made with 2D animation techniques of that era. Her actions in the 2D animation technique make her look cute, even though the antagonist role also carries a scary vibe.



Figure 10: Queen of Hearts in 1951 and Red Queen in 2010

In *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), the Queen of Hearts changed her name to Red Queen, played by Helena Bonham Carter. Red Queen has newer characteristics without leaving the black and red colors, especially in her hairstyle. In live-action Red Queen, her head is more considerable and heart-shaped, her hair is curly with a fiery red color, and her makeup is eccentric with white foundation, blue eyelids, thin eyebrows, and not to forget the shape of heart lips with red dye. Her costume is detailed, and CGI enhances her appearance, making her movements smoother and more realistic. This creates a more frightening character that blends seamlessly with the setting.

The transition from the animated Queen of Hearts to the live-action Red Queen shows how technology transforms visuals and storytelling. Advances in CGI add detail, realism, and complexity to characters. These changes also enhance the Red Queen's backstory, making her a more memorable figure.

### ***Branding Functions of Reimagination***

The branding function is related to the narrative identity the developer, publisher, or company wants to build and signify. This branding may also influence Reconceptualization, especially when a company buys another company (Purnomo et al., 2023). There are differences in branding function between the *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) animation film and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) live-action film.



Figure 11: Tweedledum and Tweedledee in 1951 and 2010

This difference is striking because in *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) animation film, the branding created by Disney is to show Disney's image as a producer of cheerful and fun animated film characters. Making children the main target of this film. This is shown through the characters Tweedledum and Tweedledee, where these characters are seen singing a cheerful song while dancing and holding Alice's hand. The scene is their meeting accompanied by singing and dancing, showing Disney's trademark full of joy and warmth.

Meanwhile, in the *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) live-action film, the characters Tweedledum and Tweedledee are still presented as in the animated film. Still, the branding appears to look more serious and realistic. In Alice's meeting with Tweedledum and Tweedledee, there is no singing and dancing like in the animated film. In addition, the depiction of Tweedledum and Tweedledee has a larger and more intimidating physique than Alice, giving a more serious and dramatic impression. Based on these differences, it shows that the branding strategies used by both films are used to suit different target audiences.

### ***Cultural Functions of Reimagination***

Cultural function relates to how a product aligns with cultural, normative, and legal elements. When a product is reimagined for a new target audience, it adapts to their cultural needs. This leads to changes as the source culture meets the target culture (Purnomo et al., 2023). The animated *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and the live-action *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) show these cultural shifts.



Figure 12: The difference in cultural concept in *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)

The 1951 animated film reflects the post-World War II values of order and routine. After the war, people sought to return to everyday life, escaping the trauma of conflict. Alice represents this desire to escape into a fantastical world, as seen in her dialogue:

*Alice: "If I had my own world, everything would be nonsense."*

*Alice: "Nothing would be what it isn't. And otherwise, what it is, it wouldn't be."*

This reflects the post-war era when people longed for a break from stressful daily life and needed entertainment to transport them to a fantasy world full of freedom.

In contrast, the 2010 live-action film is set in a modern context. Alice is portrayed as a rebellious figure, challenging the unjust authority of the Red Queen. The film focuses on



themes of rebellion, justice, and the search for individual freedom relevant to the social and cultural issues of the 21st century. Alice faces pressure to conform but chooses her path, emphasizing personal freedom and identity. These differences highlight how cultural shifts shape the reimagination of a story. The 1951 animated version provided an escape for those recovering from the war, while the 2010 version explores contemporary issues like rebellion and justice.

## CONCLUSION

The reimagination of *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and (2010) illustrates how adaptation reshapes a narrative to align with the cultural, technological, and stylistic demands of different eras. The 1951 animated film retains the whimsical essence of Lewis Carroll's original work, emphasizing innocence and playful fantasy through vibrant visuals and straightforward storytelling. In contrast, the 2010 live-action adaptation redefines the narrative as a tale of identity, rebellion, and self-discovery through darker themes and complex character arcs. These transformations show how adaptations creatively reshape stories to connect with diverse audiences across generations.

This study highlights the importance of reimagination markers—textual, visual, and operative mutations—and their functions in shaping the adaptations. By analyzing these elements, we observe how reimagination preserves and evolves narratives to reflect societal concerns and audience preferences. These findings encourage further research into the role of reimagination in various literary adaptations. Examining how reimagination reshapes narratives across different mediums and cultural contexts helps us understand its role in connecting stories to the evolving interests of audiences over time.

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