

## Drawing from the Carrollian Well in the 21st Century: Neo-Victorian Adaptations of Alice

Perhaps no figure in children's literature is as recognizable as Lewis Carroll's Alice, the heroine of his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. In the 150 years since the first novel's initial publication, Alice has become well established as not only the protagonist of Carroll's novels but also the center of myriad adaptations and retellings, as well as the inspiration for many tales about falling down metaphorical rabbit holes. While Carroll's novels have been inspiring adaptations since the nineteenth century—more than 200 were published by 1930, according to Carolyn Sigler—the most recent attempts to reimagine Alice and Wonderland engage with the Victorian era, its literature, and culture in distinctly fraught ways. As a result, Alice serves as a particularly useful lens for investigating the ways in which contemporary works for children and young adults have adapted, retold, and revised Victorian literature and, with it, understandings of Victorian culture.

In this paper, we consider Lewis Carroll's Alice, protagonist of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, as a case study for the larger phenomenon of twenty-first century neo-Victorian children's and young adult literature. We argue that the contemporary spate of Alice retellings, particularly those for audiences of children and adolescents, reveal larger cultural anxieties about youth that hinge on questions of identity, agency, and sexuality. Works such as A.G. Howard's *Splintered*, Frank Beddor's *The Looking Glass Wars*, and Tim Burton's two film adaptations place Alice at the center of life-or-death conflicts, not only positioning her as a potentially empowered heroine but also highlighting the higher cultural, political, and environmental stakes confronting young people in the twenty-first century. In particular, as post-9/11 texts written in an environment of massive and fast-moving change, these adaptations of Alice reflect the dual pressures of increased agency and accountability that complicate contemporary children's and adolescents' lives. Overall, we contend that contemporary adaptations of Alice reveal how we struggle now, as the Victorians did then, to assert a cohesive understanding of youth and thus young readers, and that this lack of cohesion is a result of or a parallel to the disruptions taking place on a larger (even global) scale.