Through the Looking-Glass and What Fashion Found There

The Impact of Fiction on Fashion in the Case of Carroll's *Alice* Books

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It would be easy to assume that weighty, timeless Literature and flighty, fickle Fashion bear no relation to each other. Yet a range of scholars have shown that the two seemingly antithetical realms do in fact frequently collide. A steadily expanding body of scholarship over the last thirty years, and including the present volume, has revealed the variety of functions – thematic, symbolic and/or mimetic – served by dress and fashion in literature.[1] Overall, these studies make a persuasive case for the value of approaches foregrounding dress. As Kuhn and Carlson argue: 'attention to literary fashioning can contribute to a significantly deeper understanding of texts, their contexts, and their innovations – even challenging, in some cases, traditional readings'.[2] While most work has centered on fashion and dress *in* literature, there has been some recognition of the wider entanglement of garments real and imagined. In their introduction to an edited volume focusing on dress and transgression in eighteenth-century culture, for instance, Munns and Richards observe: 'literary works did not merely comment on fashion, they also created fashion. […] There is a circulation of energy between fictional and actual appearances.'[3] In an attempt to understand what it means for a character to be fashionable and to deepen understanding of the interrelationship between fashion and fiction, this chapter explores

1 Cp. Rose Fortassier: Les écrivains français et la mode: De Balzac à nos jours. Paris, 1988; E. J. Burns: Courtly Love Undressed: Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Culture. Philadelphia 2002; Lauren S. Cardon: Fashion and Fiction: Self Transformation in 20th Century American Fiction. Charlottesville, Virginia, 2016; Clair Hughes: Dressed in Fiction. Oxford, 2006; Madeleine C. Seys: Fashion and Narrative in Victorian Popular Literature: Double Threads. New York, 2018.

2 Cynthia Kuhn, Cindy Carlson (eds.): Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature. New York 2008, p. 3.

3 Jessica Munns, Penny Richards (eds.): The Clothes That Wear Us: Essays on Dressing and Transgressing in Eighteenth-Century Culture. New York, London 1999, p. 13.

the specific case of a pair of texts whose influence on dress is still tangible a century and a half after their first publication.

In an earlier project, I explored fashion and dress in relation to Lewis Carroll's two *Alice* books (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871)), focusing primarily on the nineteenth century.[4] Serving various symbolic functions and catalysing the action, dress is both narrated and drawn in these works – by Carroll himself and then Sir John Tenniel who was entrusted with the task of illustrating the published versions. Despite being regarded with some hostility by both author and illustrator, fashion nevertheless exerted an irresistible force upon the books, with Tenniel modifying Alice's appearance in *Looking-Glass* in order for her to continue to blend in and maintain the relationship established with the reader in the first book six years earlier.[5] Fashion and fiction were, then, already enmeshed in the creation of these works.

But the reason I embarked upon that project in the first place was contemporary fashion's preoccupation with Alice and the *Alice* books. With Annie Liebovitz's 2003 US *Vogue* photoshoot the catalyst and lodestar, *Fashioning Alice* was effectively laying the foundations for the discussion which follows here. Combatting the vagueness which characterises the small amount of writing on this subject to date, this chapter begins with an exploration of what precisely it means and entails for a literary character and the books in which she appears to be deemed fashionable or stylish. It also seeks to pinpoint when this embrace of Alice by the fashion world seems to have commenced. Using two key examples from British and American fashion magazines (*GQ* and *Vogue* respectively), it then explores the various reasons why fashion has had such repeated recourse to Alice and her books. These two shoots also offer opportunities to interrogate the standard opposition of fashion and fiction in terms of temporality; the assumed timelessness of (classic) literature versus the ephemerality, impermanence and constant transformations of fashion whose 'definite essence,' according to Yuniya Kawamura, is 'change'.[6]

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the fashionable in relation to 'persons' and (immaterial) 'things'. A literary character with a real-life avatar and dedicatee in the form of Alice Liddell, Alice hovers between these categories, but both she and the books correspond to the *OED* definitions in more or less obvious ways. Like the *OED*'s fashionable persons, Alice has always been 'observant of or following *the fashion*'. Relatively quickly, and well within Carroll and Tenniel's lifetimes, other artists started modifying and comprehensively reimagining Alice. Many of these new illustrators followed Tenniel's cue by modernising her appearance and thereby main-

4 Kiera Vaclavik: Fashioning Alice: The Career of Lewis Carroll's Icon, 1860–1901. London 2019.

5 Vaclavik: Fashioning, pp. 62–63, p. 65.

6 Yuniya Kawamura: Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies. 2nd ed. London, New York 2013, p. 5.

taining the sense of recognition that Victorian readers would have experienced on seeing his illustrations.[7] Thus we have a 1920s flapper Alice or a pared back 1990s minimalism Alice in illustrations by Willy Pogany and Helen Oxenbury respectively (see Fig. 1/2). Indeed, this has happened so frequently that illustrated editions of the *Alice* books effectively trace the history of female Western dress over the last century and a half.

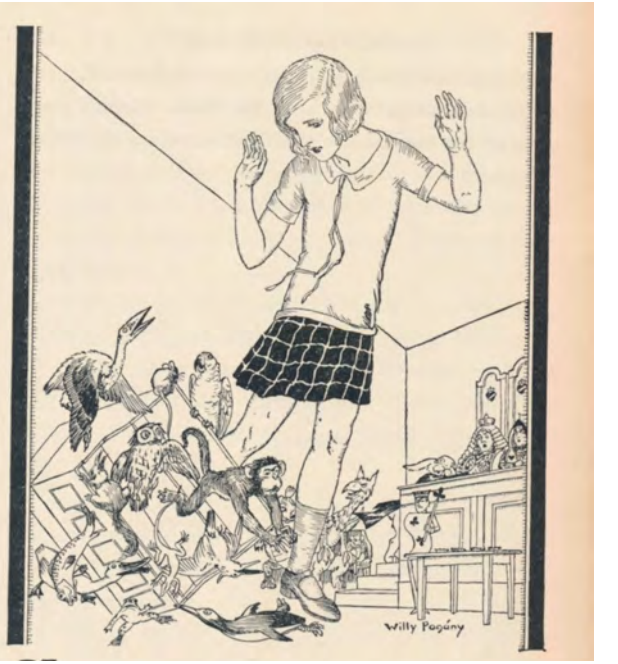

Fig. 1: Willy Pogany illustration from chapter 12 of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1929). Courtesy of the Richards Collection.

7 Although as Clare Rose points out, this establishes a form of anachronistic 'cognitive dissonance': 'If Alice is the modern Miss depicted by Willy Pogany in 1922 with bobbed hair and a drop-waisted sweater, why is she reciting 19th-century verses and playing croquet?' Clare Rose: How Alice's look has reflected 150 years of fashion. In: Financial Times (10 Apr 2015), https://www.ft.com/content/cb1c822a-ac92-11e4-9d32-00144feab7de (last accessed on March 2, 2024).

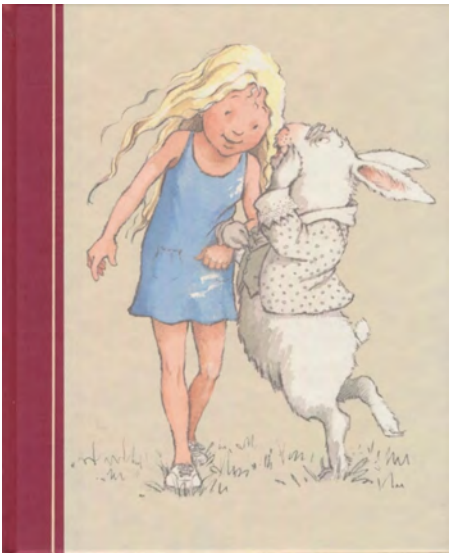

Fig. 2: Helen Oxenbury cover image for Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1999). With kind permission from Helen Oxenbury.

But Alice is also fashionable in the sense associated in the *OED* with (immaterial) things, i.e. she is 'in vogue among persons of the upper class'; 'approved by custom, generally accepted, current' (*OED*). This goes well beyond the confines of upper-class society to which the *OED* remains wedded in terms of tastemakers. Alice herself sets trends for others to imitate and possesses a look and/or qualities deemed desirable and attractive. There are countless examples of individuals of different ages dressing up as Alice or other Carrollian characters in numerous contexts including everyday wear, parties, weddings or fashion shoots.[8] National and international celebrities – who have in large part succeeded the upper class as the tastemakers of modern times – from Drew Barrymore (see below) to Beyonce have been dressed as Alice for fashion magazines and advertising campaigns.[9]

As such shoots already begin to indicate, the relationship between fashion and Alice goes well beyond particular individuals dressing like her or other characters

8 Alice is one of the main reference points in the Lolita style which originated in 1980s Japan but has since attained global reach. See Amanda Kennell: Alice in Japanese Wonderlands: Translation, Adaptation, Mediation. Honolulu 2023.

9 Beyonce was shot in the role of Alice by Annie Liebowitz for Disney's 'Year of a Million Dreams' campaign in 2005. Other celebrity Alices include Rosie Huntington Whiteley, Amanda Sedfried, Kendall Jenner and Amber Heard.

in the books. The women looking like Alice in the finished photographs are the end point of an inherently collaborative process involving multiple agents including stylists, photographers, editors, journalists, bloggers, (and sometimes) curators and designers. Nor is it just about specific garments or accessories which incorporate words and images from the books, plentiful though these are.[10] As Colleen Hill, drawing on Kawamura reminds us, fashion is about a good deal more than clothing alone, extending into the realm of symbolic production and the intangible.[11] Alice's fashionableness also manifests itself as inspiration, influence and organising principle in all forms of fashion activity and communication: in addition to photoshoots and features, Alice/the Wonderland aesthetic also appears in or entirely shapes runway shows, department store windows, advertising campaigns, museum exhibitions, articles and blogposts. A whole range of different processes and activities might be involved, from designing and producing individual garments, collections or sets and props to the selection of items for a fashion round up or a museum exhibition. At times the engagement can be less iconographic and more conceptual: in a caption for the 2003 *Vogue* editorial 'The Shape of Things,' for instance, a brief but perceptive connection is made between the ever-shifting shapes and scales of *Wonderland* and the unconventional proportions of the featured garments.[12] The nature, quality and scope of the engagement with Alice and the books by the fashion world varies enormously. Although in many instances the usage is superficial and hackneyed, elsewhere it can be more prolonged, profound and/or innovative, with marked interest running over the course of a career, as in the case of fashion photographer Tim Walker. Similarly, recourse to Alice spans the small scale and low cost to the major high-budget extravaganza. Alice and the Wonderland aesthetic has penetrated all levels of the fashion industry, from accessible high street to exclusive couture.

The ubiquity of the Alice fashion phenomenon means that there have been attempts both within academia and beyond to explore and outline its contours.[13] There is recognition that Alice's fashionableness is not new: Hill cites early fashion journalism while Jana's article – which sets out its temporal claim in its title which refers to Alice as 'One of Fashion's Most Enduring Muses' – makes fairly vague claims about the books having been 'a rich territory for many generations of designers'. Alice did

10 For instance, a 1992 Audrey Buckner waistcoat made of silk jacquard printed with Tenniel illustrations from *Wonderland* in the collection of the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York (object number: 93.62.1).

11 Cp. Colleen Hill: Fairy Tale Fashion. New Haven, London 2016, p. 19.

12 Cp. The Shape of Things 2003 pp. 116–137, p. 125.

13 See Hill: Fairy Tale; Rose: How Alice's look has reflected 150 years of fashion; and Rosalind Jana: Why Alice In Wonderland is One of Fashion's Most Enduring Muses. In Vogue (12 June 2021), https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/alice-curiouser-and-curiouser (last accessed on March 2, 2024).

emerge as a reference point in society events fairly early on.[14] At a time when the veneration of youth in Hollywood and beyond was becoming firmly embedded, she also shaped at least one fashion trend and a range of advertising campaigns from the 1930s onwards.[15] But it is certainly not the case that in the first three quarters of the twentieth century magazines were featuring Alice-themed shoots or that foremost designers like Coco Chanel or Christian Dior were turning to Carroll for inspiration. For much of this period, engagement is limited to accessories and to children's wear, which to this day usually falls well beyond the realm of high fashion.

Jacques Esterel's 1971 collection 'Alice 71 au pays des merveilles' marks a significant, if largely forgotten, shift (see Fig. 3). Esterel's Alice-inspired collection, which appeared in a film broadcast on French television, featured 25-year-old actress Brigitte Fossey as Alice and strictly no children in sight.[16] Incorporating identical garments for men and women, it gently probes gender boundaries and uses Alice as a poster girl for rethinking what masculinity looks like.[17] Fossey herself is attractive and has long blonde hair, but there is otherwise nothing inherently or recognisably Alice-esque about the collection. Rather, the books are used in the title and in the designer's commentary as a framing device and a way to evoke a certain mood, tone and universe: 'Je suis allé au pays d'irréel' [I have travelled to a fantastical world] asserts Esterel – effectively claiming the position of Alice ostensibly occupied by Fossey. Alice offers a way of promoting creativity, insouciance, légèrté and youth.

14 See Vaclavik, Fashioning, p. 182–83.

15 Cp. Vaclavik: Fashioning, p. 193. See also Kiera Vaclavik: Of Bands, Bows and Brows: Hair, the 'Alice' Books and the Emergence of a Style Icon. In: Colleen Hill: Fairy Tale Fashion. New Haven, London 2016, pp. 253–268. For the cult of youth in Hollywood and beyond see: Heather Addison: 'Must the Players Keep Young?': Early Hollywood's Cult of Youth. In: Cinema Journal 45/4 (2006), pp. 3–25; James F. Stark: The Cult of Youth: Anti-Ageing in Modern Britain. Cambridge 2020.

16 R Poitou: Mode Unisexe de Jacques Esterel' (1971) (last accessed on 27 March 2024), http://www.ina.fr/video/I10357955; Ilene Hacker: Alice '71 in Wonderland: Monosex Culture and Gender Fluidity in the 1970s. In: Vestoj (2016) https://vestoj.com/monosex-couture/#rf5-6731 (last accessed on March 5, 2024).

17 As I've shown, this has roots in the source text itself. See Kiera Vaclavik: Revisioning Lewis Carroll's Alice and their Afterlives through Male Performance. In Anna Cermakova, Michaela Mahlberg (eds.): Children's Literature and Childhood Discourses: Exploring Identity through Fiction. London, New York 2024, pp. 111–137.

Fig. 3: Still from film promoting Jacques Esterel's collection featuring Brigitte Fossey as Alice.

Esterel's collection was part of a broader current of Alice-inspired challenges to the status quo which spanned music, theatre, art and literature in this period. Carroll and the *Alice* books became an important reference point in the various forms of the counterculture movement of the 1960s onwards.[18] If the Surrealists, plumbing the depths of dream and the subconscious, had established the books as intelligent and interesting, the countercultural appropriation of Alice added a further layer of more streetwise credentials and political relevance. A notable instance was Yayoi Kusama's 1968 happening combining liberation and protest which took place at and upon the Alice in Wonderland statue which had been erected in New York's Central Park nine years earlier. Declaring herself the 'modern Alice in Wonderland' 39-year-old Kusama wore a short white minidress covered in multicoloured polka dots surrounded by mostly masked participants whose bodies were entirely on view.

In the same year, the Central Park statue also served as the setting for one of the cover images of Jimi Hendrix's studio album *Electric Ladyland*. Photographed by Linda McCartney, the image features Hendrix and his band members sitting relaxed and smiling with three small children on the statue. Hendrix was by no means the

18 See Kate Bailey and Simon Sladen (eds.): Alice: Curiouser & Curiouser. London 2020.

only musician to turn to the *Alice* books at the time, and subsequently. From the Beatles and Jefferson Airplane to Gwen Stefani via Tom Petty, David Bowie, Siousie Sioux and others, musicians have both incorporated Alice references into their lyrics and used the books to shape accompanying multimedia productions in the form of photographs, TV programmes and music videos. Adjacent to, overlapping with and having a profound influence upon fashion, the music industry's extended and various usages of the *Alice* books has played a major part in making them edgy and cool.

Fittingly, *Rolling Stone* magazine was the place in which the first celebrity Alice photoshoot appeared. For the 15 June 1995 issue of the magazine, former child-star Drew Barrymore was shot for a feature story by Mark Seliger in a variety of guises including a scout and an acrobat. As Alice she wears ultra-high heeled black platforms and white tights with a short electric blue, cap-sleeved dress and white apron. Head resting on hand, she gazes out moodily at the viewer or, in another shot, is focused in on the act of producing smoke rings from her casually held cigarette. Both images convey innocence-exploding nonchalance and world weariness. Something entirely different – more in line with the Esterel collection – was evoked by Gianni Versace in a short piece for *Marie Claire* magazine three years earlier, which also includes a sketch of his design for an outfit for Alice. The Italian designer both asserts that the 'freshness and wonder' he associates with Carroll's heroine is 'the quality every woman should have a little of' and aligns himself with the character: 'I think I am like Alice. I dream a lot.'[19]

It was from this point in the 1990s, and accelerating in the early 2000s, that the full range of activities outlined above began. As in the past, where stage productions heavily influenced what was worn beyond the theatre, a major new film production catalysed many of these ventures so as to tie-in with and capitalise upon broader interest and attention.[20] Thus, Tim Burton's live action *Alice in Wonderland* film (2010) triggered not only in-house Disney clothing, accessory and cosmetics ranges (with elaborate promotion including a launch event during which it was proclaimed that

19 Meredith Etherington-Smith: Versace's Heroines. In: Marie Claire 43 (March 1992), pp. 98–102, p. 102.

20 In the eighteenth century, 'if actors on stage represented the manners and appearances of the elite, the elite in turn dressed their hair à la Santlow and carried with them fans and snuff boxes decorated with images from plays.' Munns and Richards: The Clothes That Wear Us, p. 13. Of the multiple earlier examples of *Alice* stage productions generating fashionable content, see: Fashions Today. In: The King and his Army and Navy (9 January 1904) p. xiv. – in response to the 1903 London stage production starring Maidie Andrews (accessible via https ://lewiscarrollresources.net/stage/playssearch.html).

'ALICE is the new black'), but also store windows in both Paris and New York.[21] But by the time the 2010 Disney film was released, Alice's fashionableness was in fact already firmly established. There had already been two separate features in *Vogue* as well as *GQ* and others. By 2010, some of the various agents in the process outlined above had become Alice regulars: Seliger followed his *Rolling Stone* Barrymore image with a full Alice-themed feature for Italian *Vogue* in 2006 featuring Amanda Seyfried, while Elizabeth Jagger embodied Alice both as a 16-year-old for *GQ* (examined below) and then in a shoot by Lorenzo Agius for German *Glamour* magazine. The big budget, critically unsuccessful Burton film further extended a process clearly already well underway.

The December 2000 issue of British men's magazine *GQ* included an 11-page feature entirely based on the *Alice* books photographed by Dan Macmillan (formally Viscount Macmillan of Ovenden) on location in Chelsea, London (see Fig. 4). It brought together a range of individuals from, or born into, the worlds of music, fashion and entertainment, as well as 'society' people – not least the photographer himself – cast for the most part in roles from the books. Despite its claim to be more than 'another generic fashion shoot', it does nevertheless feature and promote particular garments by the likes of D&G, Paul Smith, and Comme des Garçons.[22] The relationship with the *Alice* books is liberal in both senses of the term – both dipping into them freely but also in a thoroughgoing manner. Alice serves as far more than an organising principle or swift allusion in a caption. The slightly modified title, 'Malice in Wonderland', establishes the relationship immediately, a cast list is provided, and sometimes slightly modified quotations from the text also feature prominently (for instance: 'I'm Kate [Moss], I'm late for a very important date'). As here, textual and visual references are an amalgamation of Carroll and Disney – although cast as the White Rabbit, Moss actually wears a pink striped vest top heavily reminiscent of Disney's Cheshire Cat. Other elements of visual iconography drawn from the Wonderland aesthetic include a hair band (known in Britain and other parts of the English-speaking world as the *Alice* band), rabbit ears and a watch, a hookah and a toadstool. In this combination of posed shots and more naturalistic, action snaps, there is no attempt to reproduce scenes from the illustrations or to retell the full story. The focus instead is on the tea party – that moment of sociality which has proven so popular in adaptations, and which here turns into a Moët-fuelled food fight.[23]

21 The display in the department store Printemps involved – not for the first time as we'll see– the commissioning of several high-profile designers (including Alexander McQueen, Maison Martin Margiela, Chloé and Manish Arora) to design an outfit and a window. There was also a fair amount of interest and ranges, including a Marc Jacobs collaboration with Disney, linking in to the 2015 sesquicentenary celebrations of the first publication of the book.

22 Cp. Murphy Williams: Malice in Wonderland. In: GQ (December 2000), pp. 252–263, p. 256.

23 See Vaclavik: Fashioning, p. 151.

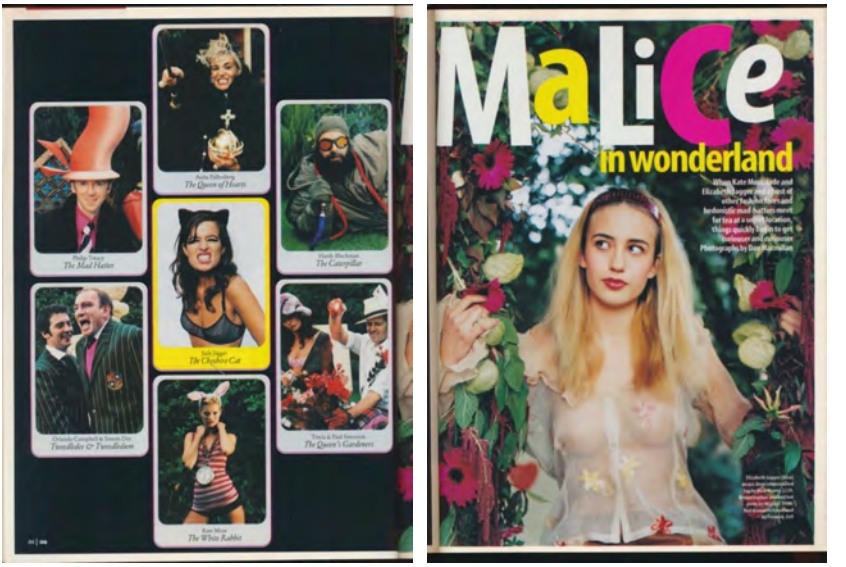

Fig. 4: Malice in Wonderland shoot by Dan Macmillan for GQ (December 2000). Courtesy of the Richards Collection.

The behaviour is childish but, with the prominent cigarettes, undress, and extensive references to drinking, these figures are also meant to be emphatically adult. Played by Elizabeth Jagger, Alice herself is pictured leaning forward, jeering, a cigarette stamped between her teeth in a manner reminiscent of the Seliger shot of Drew Barrymore six years earlier. Except for her long blond hair and hairband, the styling moves deliberately away from the established Alice look. The traditional demure dress and pinafore is replaced by a transparent top (sans bra), and leather designer hot pants. The(n) 16-year-old Jagger as Alice is an *enfant femme*, retaining her youth but leaning determinedly into experience. Knowing and uproarious, we see her with mouth open wide as she rubs cake into the caterpillar's face. Cool, attractive, and invariably laughing, she is clearly having a much better time than the Alice of the books.

With its slightly blurry images contributing to the sense of chaos and instability, the overall tone of the feature is one of hedonism and irreverence. Although not markedly dark or violent in the way some *Alice* adaptations have been, this is nevertheless edgier and grittier (not to mention more overtly sexual) than the floaty fantasy of Esterel in the 1970s. Where Esterel's models move gracefully around holding hands in a park, Bianca Jagger as the Cheshire Cat gazes provocatively at the viewer

in ankle boots and underwear while Jasmine Guinness 'flits around near nude'.[24] As opposed to Kusama's 1968 happening, no discernible political point is being made via undress here.

Coinciding with and encapsulating the final flourish of the Cool Britannia movement which emerged in the UK in the mid-late 1990s, this shoot is now almost entirely forgotten. 'Malice in Wonderland' is wholly representative of fashion as ephemeral and transient, leaving behind little trace or imprint. Even *GQ* seem to forget its existence, as a 2016 art exhibition review indicates. The unnamed journalist, who wearily outlines the frequency of creative engagements with the *Alice* books ('We've seen it all before' they sigh), seems entirely unaware that *GQ* had itself gone to the books to mine something new in precisely this way.[25] Another shoot has, however, had a much more lasting impact.

The December 2003 American *Vogue* photo essay 'Alice in Wonderland', devised by Grace Coddington and shot by Annie Liebowitz, has been widely circulated and has even elicited a retrospective behind the scenes podcast and accompanying article (see Fig. 5). *Vogue* hails its own creation as 'the greatest fashion shoot of all time'. Social media responses to repostings of the shoot suggest widespread popular admiration and affection for it.[26] A regular fashion feature in its promotion of particular garments and cosmetics (e.g. L'Oréal lipstick 'for sweet-little-girl lips'), it is also considerably more than this.[27] An established tradition for the December issue of the magazine was for it to 'celebrate fantasy and whimsy', with readers expecting 'magic and romance'.[28] Despite not being editor Anna Wintour's first choice (*Mary Poppins* was), Alice provides an ideal vehicle for such an endeavour and *Vogue*'s powerful delivery of it is both innovative and creative. Rather than styling individuals as Alice or using the books as an organising principle to bring together a set of disparate clothes, here new garments and looks are created bespoke. The clout (and budget) of the magazine was such that it was able to commission 'the world's most influential designers' to each design a gown for Alice, the only stipulation being that it had to

24 Williams: Malice, p. 258.

25 Cp. Anon: Elmo Hood: The art world's king of hearts. In: GQ (November 2016) https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/elmo-hood-down-the-rabbit-hole (last accessed on March 2, 2024).

26 For instance a 28 February 2024 social media post marking model Natalia Vodianova's birthday referred to the shoot as 'one of *Vogue*'s best known and loved portfolios'. Hamish Bowles: Natalia Vodianova's Turn as Alice in Wonderland Is the Gift That Keeps on Giving. Unwrap It Again on Her Birthday. In: Vogue (February 28 2024) https://www.vogue.com/article/natalia-vodianovas-turn-as-alice-in-wonderland-is-the-gift-that-keeps-on-giving-unwrap-it-again-on-her-birthday (last accessed on March 2, 2024). It was liked over 200,000 times on Instagram and elicited hundreds of appreciative comments.

27 Hamish Bowles: Alice in Wonderland. In *Vogue* USA (December 2003), pp. 225–249; p. 233.

28 Hamish Bowles (presenter): Annie Leibovitz and Grace Coddington: Down the Rabbit Hole of The Greatest Fashion Shoot of All Time. In: In Vogue: the 2000s Podcast Episode 6 (2021).

be blue.[29] Akin to the generations of illustrators who have delivered their own take on Alice's look, these designers had the opportunity to put their own stamp on the character, to dress her according to their image – in a manner anticipated by the Versace sketch of the *Marie Claire* article. The final feature comprises a series of opulent images which in most cases reproduce scenes from the books. Alice is embodied throughout by the(n) up and coming 21-year-old Russian model Natalia Vodianova and the designers responsible for the particular gown being worn typically appear within the image as a particular character (e.g. John Galliano as a hi-camp Queen of Hearts, Tom Ford as the ultra-dapper White Rabbit).

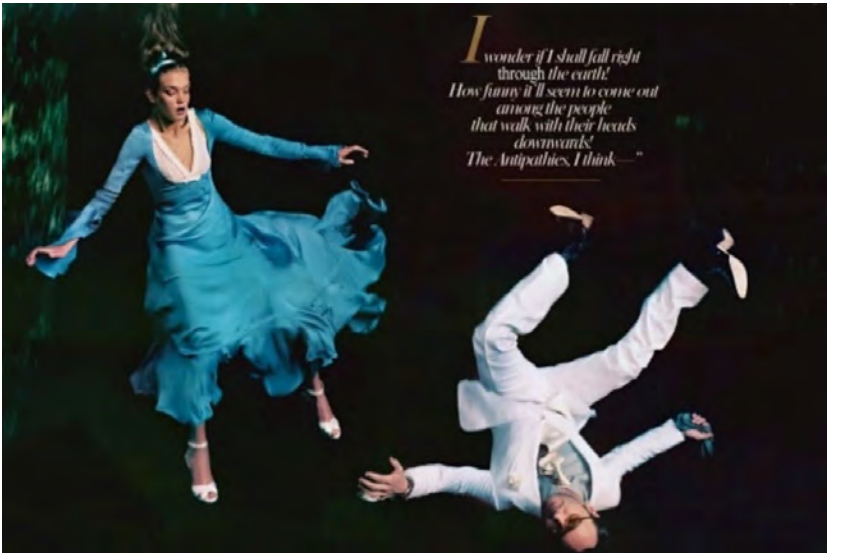

Fig. 5: Natalia Vodianova as Alice and Tom Ford as the White Rabbit in American Vogue's 2003 photo essay by Annie Liebowitz and devised by Grace Coddington.

Manifest in both text and image, the relationship with the *Alice* books is unmistakeable even for a reader idly flicking through the magazine. This is a serious-minded, thoroughgoing exploration not just of the texts but of the overall Alice phenomenon of which it becomes a part, spanning origins and afterlife. The opening essay by fashion journalist Hamish Bowles provides background and context alongside glimpses into the shoot and the ongoing appeal of the books for some of those involved. The biographical circumstances of the works and the relationship between

29 Bowles: Alice in Wonderland, p. 225.

Carroll and Alice Liddell is foregrounded in the opening double page spread – kept apart and temporally distanced from the other images through the use of black and white. Those other colour images are for the most part directly based on specific images by John Tenniel. Through the reproduction of poses and expressions they are effectively a series of that Victorian favourite: the *tableaux vivant*.[30] Alice is, for instance squeezed into a room in the White Rabbit's house or positioned precariously on the mantlepiece about to pass through the looking glass. Across the images, Vodianova conveys the misery and frustration endured by Alice and captured by Tenniel – a far cry from the uproarious Alice of *GQ*. With painstaking attention to detail, various aspects of the illustrations are fleshed out and made real – dressed in Chanel alongside Lagerfeld in role but no costume as the Duchess, Alice/Vodianova thus holds a (real) baby piglet.[31] But this is by no means slavish reproduction of the Tenniel images. Taking freely from both works, they do not follow their overall sequence (ending for instance with the opening of the second book). Nor are Coddington/Liebowitz afraid of leaving the source text behind entirely. Thus, there is no Tenniel precedent for the stunning image in which Alice hurtles down the rabbit hole/well, showcasing the billowing sheen of the bright blue fabric of Ford's gown in motion.

This shoot is very much about (cosmopolitan, Western) fashion, beauty and glamour.[32] Across these meticulously staged, densely colour saturated images, everything and everyone is superlatively stylish and beautiful, from the garments and those wearing them to the sunlight dappled foliage of the outside spaces. Alice herself is presented as the epitome of femininity: sullen but beautiful, and incredibly svelte. Bringing designers centre stage and onto the page, it proclaims its relationship with Fashion and foregrounds the couturier as celebrity actor and *auteur*. Despite Vodianova's assertion in the 2003 feature essay and then reiterated in the podcast that this involved the erasure of egos, it seems that the reverse was the case. Lagerfeld was clearly difficult, an 'indomitable' diva who refused to fully cooperate but whose position at the very pinnacle of the industry meant he was worked around and accommodated.[33] For newer kid on the fashion block, Nicolas Ghesquière, the situation was very different. His recollections indicate that for him

30 On the cultural history of the *tableaux vivant*, see also the article by Oxane Leingang in this volume.

31 When it was discovered that the room built for the outsized Alice wearing a Helmut Lang gown was the wrong way round, it was entirely rebuilt, shipped to New York and photographed three months later. (Bowles (presenter): Annie Leibovitz and Grace Coddington.)

32 Shot on location at the Chateau de Corbeil Cerf just outside Paris, for an American magazine (with a number of Americanisms (e.g. 'how have I gotten here?' p. 235)), featuring a Russian Alice and French, Italian, British and Dutch designers.

33 Cp. Bowles (presenter): Annie Leibovitz and Grace Coddington.

the stakes were high and that making it into the feature was of the utmost importance. Overall, the fantasy and nonsense of Wonderland provides a highly fitting analogy for the often impenetrable, cryptic, and unpredictable world of fashion – an 'acid commentary' on its irrationality according to Clare Rose.[34] Alice is often thought of as a model child, but, consistently unsmiling in Tenniel's illustrations, she also bears distinct affinities with the *fashion* model. In the *Vogue* shoot, she is dressed according to the whims, the sometimes outlandish, borderline insane vision of the various predominantly male and exclusively white designers who surround her.

In this sense, the 2003 *Vogue* shoot – like the 2000 *GQ* 'Malice in Wonderland' – is very much of its time. Although of course women are the creative force behind it, other than Vodianova, the only visible woman is Donatella Versace, reflecting the male domination of the fashion industry then, and still to a great extent, now.[35] Similarly, whether in front of or behind the camera, people of colour are entirely absent – the severely limited contours of the industry unwittingly displayed. Despite or perhaps because of this, the *Vogue* shoot has proven enduring and highly influential, inspiring other shoots (notably an all-black cast shoot by Walker/Enninful for Pirelli in 2018), featuring in exhibitions, and returned to in *Vogue*-initiated coverage and autonomous events (e.g. an Grace Coddington interview for Sotheby's in conjunction with the V&A exhibition). In the 2021 podcast, *Vogue*'s Mark Holgate argues that unlike much fashion imagery which 'just captures a moment, an instant moment, and is kind of gone,' the Liebowitz photographs 'have a permanence about them', are 'profoundly lasting' and 'really stand up to the test of time.'[36] Although Holgate does not elaborate, it is possible to pinpoint reasons for this timeless quality. As opposed to the *GQ* shoot, the *Vogue* images are harder to date and less dated thanks to unobtrusive make-up and hair styling in conjunction with a natural or period backdrop and, especially, to the neo-Victorian inspiration for many of the gowns. The *Vogue* shoot achieves timelessness through its recourse to a text itself widely hailed as a timeless classic. Although it can be forgotten à la *GQ*, Fashion as well as Fiction can clearly endure.

In the course of the foregoing discussion, the nature of the appeal of the *Alice* books to the fashion industry has begun to emerge. Alice is available to the fashion world because she is instantly and very widely recognisable. Her image, and the iconography of the books more broadly, has crystallised so that an 'immediately

34 Cp. Rose: How Alice's look has reflected 150 years of fashion.

35 Cp. Ellie Violet Bramley: Male, pale and out of step: why fashion houses have such a problem with diversity. In: The Guardian (3 Dec 2023). https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2023/dec/03/male-pale-and-out-of-step-why-fashion-houses-have-such-a-problem-with-diversity (last accessed on March 2, 2024).

36 Bowles (presenter): Annie Leibovitz and Grace Coddington.

identifiable'[37] 'Alice Look' and Wonderland aesthetic is in place. A blue dress and white pinafore *mean* Alice in the same way that a white gown and veil means a bride, and has the same connotations of femininity. Equally, visual cues (a playing card, teapot or rabbit) suffice to make the connection. This iconographic consensus means that Alice and the books can be used and reworked freely in the predominantly visual forms of fashion and fashion photography. Like the countless book illustrators and costume designers who have reinterpreted Carroll's heroine, designers and stylists too can (and have) put their own stamp on Alice's look. What they have chosen to do with Alice and the books varies enormously: Alice and the Wonderland aesthetic more broadly can be by turns sweet and cloying or dark and edgy. Often perceived as being quintessentially English, this is itself open to a range of inflections spanning a conservative ideal drawn to a lost world of rose gardens, tea parties, cottages and cucumber frames through to a deliberately subversive celebration of non-conformity and rebellion.

The qualities of whimsy, fantasy, and eccentricity encapsulated within the books all align readily with the creative practices of fashion. Crucially, furthermore, the books appeal in their showcasing and celebration of youth – so central to entertainment and to a range of other industries from the 1920s onwards as film and medical historians have shown.[38] Seven-year-old Alice has had to grow up in order to become fashionable – but not too much. Most of the many fashionable celebrity Alices are twenty something *enfants femmes* provocatively poised between sophistication and innocence, guile and naivety. Fashion's embrace of Alice underlines Western society's longstanding and complex attraction towards, and worship of, youth.

Referring to Alice – or indeed any literary character – as a style icon runs the risk of sounding glib and imprecise. But in the case of Carroll's young heroine, the comprehensiveness and duration of fashion's recourse to her, fully warrants such an appellation. While it is possible to trace sporadic gestures to Alice and the books in this domain all the way back to the nineteenth century, it was really in the 1990s that the usage gathered momentum, becoming sustained, repeated, and widespread. These works, which were themselves shaped by the forces of fashion, have in turn generated sartorial styles, inspiring and informing the visions of creative practitioners across the fashion industry. That works about the fantastical dreams of a little girl could achieve such status and have such an impact on fashion seems improbable in some ways but also makes total sense. The relationship between fashion (which can, as we have seen, endure) and fiction can clearly work both ways: there is much fertile ground for literary scholars with an interest in embodied reception still to tread.

37 Jana: Why Alice In Wonderland is One of Fashion's Most Enduring Muses.

38 Addison: 'Must the Players Keep Young?'; Stark, The Cult of Youth.

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