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From Carroll's to HBO's Alice: gender, sexuality and non-conforming subjectivities

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“Thinking again?” the Duchess asked, with another dig of her sharp chin.

“I’ve a right to think”, said Alice sharply...

“Just about as much right”, said the Duchess, “as pigs have to fly.”

Carroll, *AAIW*

Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread.

Butler, *Undoing Gender*

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to discuss Lewis Carroll's famous character Alice in relation to her afterlives. The motivation for this study is the observation of recent characterizations of Alice, which have portrayed her very differently from the protagonist in Carroll's books, especially in her appearance, age and behavior. After the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872) there was considerable controversy about Alice and her transgressive personality, especially in relation to Victorian gender norms, as one can note in the several works of the time that attempted to "reform" the character. The analysis of the most recent afterlives of the *Alice* stories demonstrates that her adventures are being taken as a starting point for debating issues related to gender and sexuality. This thesis investigates how the portrayal of the character has changed through the decades and focuses especially on HBO Latin America's television series *Alice*, a Brazilian version of Carroll's writings.

Keywords: Alice, Adaptation, Gender, Subjectivity

Resumo

O objetivo desta dissertação é discutir a personagem Alice, de Lewis Carroll, em relação a suas “sobrevidas”. A motivação para este estudo é a observação de recentes caracterizações de Alice que a retrataram de modos muito diversos da protagonista dos livros de Carroll, especialmente no que concerne à sua aparência, idade e comportamento. Desde a publicação de *Alice no País das Maravilhas* (1865) e *Alice Através do Espelho* (1872), houve considerável controvérsia sobre sua personalidade transgressiva, especialmente no que tange às normas de gênero vitorianas, como se pode perceber nas diversas obras do período que buscam “reformular” a personagem. A análise das sobrevividas mais recentes de *Alice* demonstra que suas aventuras têm sido tomadas como ponto de partida para o debate de questões concernentes a gênero e sexualidade. Esta dissertação investiga como a caracterização desta personagem mudou ao longo das décadas e focaliza principalmente a série de televisão da HBO latino americana *Alice*, uma versão brasileira das obras de Carroll.

Palavras-Chave: Alice, Adaptação, Gênero, Subjetividade

Abbreviations

***AAIW:** Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

***TLG:** Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*

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1. Introduction:

The exciting adventures of little Alice constitute some of the most famous stories originally written in the English language. As the protagonist of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, by Lewis Carroll, Alice became known by an enormous number of people around the globe, since the books have been translated into many languages. Alice, the Victorian girl that constitutes a symbol of innocence from the so-called golden age of children's literature (Roth 23) has gone through several changes. Indeed, throughout her stories the reader enjoys seeing her "shrinking and growing", "shutting up like a telescope" (Carroll, *AAIW* 21) or "opening out as the largest telescope that ever was" (Carroll, *AAIW* 23). During her stories, her subjectivity is many times questioned and misrecognized by others, as she is called "Mary Ann" and "serpent," and even by herself, as she wonders whether she might be "Mabel." Similarly, by analyzing the several afterlives of Carroll's novels, it seems that, as she states in her dialogue with the Caterpillar, Alice has "been changed several times" (Carroll, *AAIW*48) since the publication of her stories.

Considering the enormous corpus constituted by Alice's afterlives in several media, the blond adventurous girl from Carroll's books would be much more puzzled about her *self* now: as this thesis argues, the character of Alice has been cast by many productions, but differently from the curious child, several images of Alice portray an adult and sexualized character, not always blond and not always traveling within a fantasy world. If Alice has changed so much, it is interesting to observe what remains: all the Alices find it very difficult to answer the Caterpillar's question "Who are you?". Actually, even though created about 150 years ago, Alice remains alive in the twenty-first century and, as Will Brooker and Carolyn Sigler have argued, Alice does not need her books to exist and now permeates

everyday life and populates our minds with stories that Carroll had never imagined, but that we create and cast her as protagonist.

The first chapter of this thesis, “Rereading *Alice*: Gender Transgression in Carroll’s *Alice Books*”, addresses the aspects that constitute Alice as a character in Lewis Carroll’s text, and how the books have been read since their publication, so as to understand why Alice has changed so much in several of her afterlives, and how she has acquired a new life – or rather several lives – “out of the page” (Pilinovsky 175). For that reason, Alice is analyzed both inside Wonderland, in her interactions with the creatures that inhabit the place, and also outside the fantasy world and thus, in relation to Victorian children’s literature. Concerning Wonderland, the discussion focuses on the several episodes in which Alice has her life and existence threatened and put at risk and also on how she resists. Moreover, I also discuss the Alice stories in relation to the Victorian context, so as to establish their place within Victorian children’s literature, and Alice’s place among other Victorian female protagonists. In order to understand Alice’s childish pranks and what her transgressive behavior represented within the Victorian context, the first chapter analyzes Alice in relation to the character of the Tomboy. It seems that Alice, similarly to the character of the Tomboy – who is generally an unhappy or rebellious girl who feels uncomfortable with the need to enter the realm of “appropriate” womanhood (Mei-Li Chew 394) – also gets at odds with the need to conform. That is why Alice has been read by several feminist critics, who have discussed her transgressive behavior both in Victorian and in contemporary times, as well as the “place” of the girl and the “place” of the woman. In many of the new versions of Alice, the girl has “grown up” and is cast as an adult woman who has to face issues such as marriage, sexuality, as well as economic dependency versus the hardships of the job market. Therefore, the impulses and questions involved in the re-creation of the *Alice* books in the 20th and 21st centuries on the one hand aim at pleasing the new audiences, as Will Brooker argues (29),

but, on the other hand also address issues associated with ideology, especially in relation to gender.

The investigation of the *Alice* books' afterlives and the character's process of growing up both within and along them is the focus of the second chapter of this thesis, "Alice's Adaptations: how the mythical character flourishes through time". I selected the most famous adaptation of each decade, from the release of the most acclaimed of all Alice's adaptations, Disney 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*, to 2010 Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. By means of these selected adaptations my aim is to investigate how Carroll's books have been read and adapted, as well as to observe whether Alice's transgressive features are still present in all the adaptations, or if they rather "reform" the girl. According to Pilinovsky when one observes "a chronological listing of the most popular images of Alice, it is undeniable that she has been maturing with the passage of the years" (176). This is the process that chapter two of this thesis discusses. Moreover, I also attempt to provide an answer for the reason why the approach to Alice has changed so considerably, and also to investigate whether these changes are implicit in Carroll's texts or became necessary for us as a contemporary audience.

Finally, in Chapter Three, "HBO's *Alice: A Brazilian Adaptation of Carroll's Alice Stories*", the discussion is around one of the most disruptive adaptations of the *Alice* stories, Brazilian HBO Latin America's *Alice*, a television series that was released in 2008. In this chapter, I aim to discuss and problematize the very concept of adaptation, as well as the difficulties and challenges faced when adapting Carroll's *Alice* books into the contemporary Brazilian context, relying on the concept of "cultural translation", proposed by Thaïs Flores Diniz. By analyzing Alice as a character, it is possible to observe not only how the experiences she lives and the difficulties she faces are all related to her being a woman, but also how reacts to them is analogous to the propositions of many feminists: Alice wants to have her own life, to decide whether to give birth to her baby or not, to be free to move

through space, rather than to be kept in the home-place, and, finally, to call home any place, at her will. As she attempts to create new possibilities for her *self*, and simultaneously, understand who she is, she portrays the need of being nomadic; indeed, this is the same need of all the inhabitants of Brazilian Wonderland, and I will discuss this need for mobility in relation to Rosi Braidotti's theory of the nomadic subject, since in HBO *Alice* "there is a real urgency to learn to think differently about the notion and practice of subjectivity... beyond the dualistic conceptual constraints and the perversely monological mental habits of phallogocentric thought" (22).

Therefore, this thesis aims at analyzing Alice and her process of growing up in relation to questions of gender, or, as Lizbeth Goodman puts it, reading Alice "with gender on the agenda" (17). Through the analyses of Alice's images from Victorian context to the early 2000s, the discussion will focus on her plight to understand her subjectivity and on the many obstacles that she encounters on her way, so as to understand her "transgressive" attitudes in both contexts as a statement about her need for fully existing.

2. Chapter I – Rereading *Alice*: Gender Transgression in Carroll’s *Alice* Books

2.1 Why reread *Alice*?

Written and published during the Victorian age, both *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* have been seen for more than one century as groundbreaking literary works, and have assured their place in Western canon. The books have been translated “hundreds of times” into several languages, such as “Japanese, Croatian, Turkish, Danish, Maori, Bengali, Chinese, Gaelic, Russian, and Swahili” (Sigler xii). Indeed, according to Carolyn Sigler, “[t]hey are the most widely quoted books after the Bible and Shakespeare’s plays” (xii). Furthermore, it is important to point out that the *Alice* stories were adapted to cinema, television and other media several times, and a list of those adaptations is easily found on Internet.¹ Given the absolute success of the *Alice* books, one of the most famous biographers of Lewis Carroll, Morton Cohen, interrogates: “What is the key to their enchantment, why are they so entertaining and yet so enigmatic? ... What charm enables them to transcend language as well as national and temporal differences and win their way into the hearts of young and old everywhere and always?” (qtd. in Sigler xiii). Indeed, as this chapter will discuss, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books have multiple reasons for its long life and afterlife. I believe those reasons are especially related to the shift Carroll’s books represented within Victorian literature, which fostered Western literature and arts to flourish.²

According to Carolyn Sigler, many literary adaptations of the *Alice* stories appeared still during Carroll’s lifetime and some of them even preceded the author’s second book, *Through the Looking Glass*, which was published in 1872. In her book *Alternative Alices*, Sigler compiles literary adaptations of Carroll’s books that were published between 1869 and 1928. The critic affirms that

¹ A list of television and film adaptations of Carroll’s *Alice* books, can be found on the link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Films_and_television_programmes_based_on_Alice_in_Wonderland

² To flourish, according to Linda Hutcheon’s concept, is related to the influence of Carroll’s text in inspiring both new adaptations and the next generations of writers, as I am going to discuss.

[i]n the decades immediately following the publication of Carroll's work, hundreds of literary parodies, sequels, spin-offs and imitations began to appear. Significantly, these *Alice*-inspired works reveal the kinds of cultural work the Alice books performed at specific times among different kinds of readers, as authors either paid tribute to, reacted against, or attempted to revise their perceptions of the Alice books and their effects on child readers (Sigler xvi).

Considering only cinema, according to Will Brooker, by 1933 there were already six film productions that cast Alice as a character, and interestingly, the first of these film adaptations, directed by Cecil Hepworth, was first exhibited only five years after Lewis Carroll's death (79). Considering film and television contemporary production³, one can notice that the Alice stories continue to inspire adaptations, so that the books, far from being confined to their time, prove that Morton Cohen's interrogation is still valid in the 21st century, for the Alice stories continue to charm contemporary audiences. Regarding the two thousands, Alice and Wonderland are the inspiration for American McGee's game *Alice*(2000), followed by the same producers' *Alice: Madness Returns* (2001). Cinema and television have also gained re-adaptations of *Alice*, as Canadian television series *Alice*, released in 2009; Tim Burton's acclaimed film *Alice in Wonderland*, released in 2010; HBO television series *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland*, released in 2013; and HBO Latin America television series *Alice*, released in 2008. This latter adaptation will be discussed at length in Chapter Three. Moreover, in 2013, Tim Burton's film adaptation of the *Alice* books was re-adapted into Disney's game *Alice in Wonderland*. Indeed, Alice has been read and

³ Here I am going to take Will Brooker's research as basis. His study covers adaptations produced within the years of 1990 and 2003. However, I also discuss two other adaptations that were produced after 2003: Tim Burton's film *Alice in Wonderland* and HBO television series *Alice*. While I just draw some comments about Tim Burton's film, HBO *Alice* became my object of study, which I discuss in Chapter Three of this thesis.

reread, adapted and readapted, and a first question to be asked is why reread Alice; or rather, even more provoking, why reread Alice today?

According to Helen Pilinovsky, Alice is now a free character in the sense that she does not belong to one creator alone, but can be (and has been) recreated, achieving her own existence “out of the page” (176). In the same vein, Michael Hancher affirms that Alice no longer “needs books [and their readers] to survive. She has escaped her narration and her narrator” (qtd. in Cristopher Hollingsworth xviii). As the critic proposes,

The dreamlike, episodic structure of both books, the heavily charged psychological subtext, and the explicit privileging of pictorial illustration, have from the start led her [Alice’s] audiences to register her story in terms of character, scene, myth, and image, rather than of plot, narrative voice, or (save for some memorable phrases) diction ... *Alice* is a happily overdetermined and polymorphous text. It thrives in an indefinite number of forms, which amalgamate differently in the experience of each viewer, hearer, and reader, old or young. The threatened disintegration of Alice’s personal identity in Wonderland prefigures her actual dispersal, and renewal, among her audiences (qtd. in Cristopher Hollingsworth xviii-xix).

In the same vein, Will Brooker argues that Alice has acquired the status of “myth,” in the sense that the character now appears in contemporary life as part of films, songs, decorative pieces, literary recreations, academic reviews, film and television adaptations, computer games, children’s costumes and in a varied range of forms as “a mess of souvenirs” (xvii). Moreover, the critic proposes that the lives both Carroll and Alice have acquired “out of the page” as a mythical existence are related to how criticism has read and approached the books over the years. Indeed, both Sigler and Brooker point to the different ways Carroll’s *Alice* books were treated since their publication. Sigler affirms that the *Alice*-inspired works that

were produced approximately in the fifty years after the publication of Carroll's books "comment specifically upon the original novels and upon popular critical responses to them, and form a coherent body of *Alice's* "imitations" (xvii). Those books generally tell the story of a protagonist, male or female, who experiences a trip from his/her everyday reality and gets into a fantasy world. He or she usually goes through change in appearance and size and encounters talking animals and characters extracted from popular nursery rhymes. The protagonist usually has to return to his/her everyday reality at the end of the story. Also, these narratives are usually filled with nonsense language, songs and verse-parodies, similarly to Carroll's *Alice* books (xvii). However, after the 1930s the production of Carroll's *Alice's* afterlives in popular literary adaptations that aimed at the delight of children decreased considerably.

As Sigler explains, after Edmund Wilson's declaration about their academic literary relevance, Carroll's books raised the attention of critics and scholars.⁴ This way the *Alice* books entered academia, and since the 1930s critics have applied different theories to discuss Carroll's works in terms of plot, character and context of production. Some of the pioneer studies on the *Alice* books read them through psychoanalytical theory, as "Freudian allegories of a desire to retreat back to the womb" (Sigler xvi) or as "a coded expression of [Carroll's] abnormal desires" (Brooker xvi). Because of those studies, accompanied by psychoanalytical biographies of the author, Carroll began to be viewed as a "repressed pervert". This view remained throughout the decades of 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, "and formed the basis for an understanding of Carroll that persists to the present day" (Brooker xvii): the image of the pedophile man who either abused or intended to abuse girl children. Moreover, other critic theories also read and interpreted the *Alice* stories in their terms,

⁴ In 1932, Edmund Wilson declares that "C. L. Dodgson was a most interesting man and deserves better of his admirers, who revel in his delightfulness and cuteness but do not give him any serious attention. ... In literature, Lewis Carroll went deeper than his contemporaries realized and than he usually gets credit for even today" (Phillips 243-245).

as reflections of the nineteenth-century ideology of imperialism, as archetypal journey myths, as metaphors for hallucinogenic drug experiences, as nostalgic visions of the comforting “secret garden” of childhood, as existential explorations of life and meaningless chaos, or conversely as meta-texts about the very “meaning of meaning”: “Is meaning necessarily contingent and relative? How do we mean what we mean? ... (Sigler xvi).

The interpretation of the *Alice* books as high-culture products both caused the reduction of their appropriation by popular authors and marked the beginning of a different way of adapting Carroll’s books. As Sigler explains, the adaptations of *Alice* that were produced after this shift in approaching Carroll’s books – from popular children’s fantasies to rich literary pieces worthy of academic interpretations – generally focus more on specific themes that can be apprehended within the *Alice* books than in reproducing their stories or recreating Alice’s adventures. Differently, “[t]hese recent works use the Alice books as starting points from which to comment on questions unrelated to the books themselves and to the issues they raise” (Sigler xvii). Moreover, the critic explains that this shift in adapting Carroll’s Alice books does not only reflect the academic status they received, but also socio-cultural changes that were happening at the time. Here, Sigler points especially to the growth of the women’s movement as a reason for the shift from faithfully retelling the Victorian narratives to the concentration on specific details in order to discuss social and cultural issues. On this point, I agree that adaptations of the Alice books have been changing: indeed, most recent adaptations take the Alice books as reference in order to discuss broader cultural and social issues. However, I do not believe that these issues are, in general, totally disconnected to the themes Carroll’s books address or to the issues they raise.

Indeed, the change in how Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books were interpreted strongly influenced how audiences have received his narratives through time. As Brooker suggests,

after the psychoanalytical interpretation of the Alice stories, neither “Alice” nor “Carroll” could be discussed without controversy. Brooker explains that two different discourses coexist around both Carroll and Alice: during Victorian Age, Carroll is viewed as a “sainted innocent, his books are joyous nonsense and Alice is his muse” (xv). After psychoanalytical interpretations of the books and of Carroll’s biography⁵, “Carroll is a pedophile, his books are dark allegories, and Alice is his obsession” (xv). Brooker explains that both “Carroll” and “Alice,” who were already myths given the success of the books, “are shadowed now by sinister twins, warped looking-glass reflections” (xvii), and he argues that is the reason why new illustrated versions of the Victorian nonsensical stories are still produced to children nowadays while they also inspire sinister and horror games for teenagers and sexualized film and television adaptations for adult audiences (xvii). Because of that, the mythical existences of both Carroll and Alice were deeply changed by the rumors of their relationship and of Carroll’s pedophilic impulses. That is what Brooker calls the “Carroll Myth”⁶ and argues it is still largely accepted as true for general audience, especially considering the several fan web pages that address the discussion.

One may wonder that, these two shifts – first, that of analyzing the *Alice* books in academy and this way, resulting in the production of adaptations that use the *Alice* stories as to discuss a theme; and second, the shift after psychoanalytical interpretation of Carroll’s biography and *Alice* books, that caused him to be viewed as a sexual pervert – resulted in the several adaptations, sequels and appropriations of the *Alice* stories that discuss sexuality and gender. Indeed, psychoanalytical readings have surely influenced the way Alice is portrayed

⁵ Indeed, the biography that was psychoanalyzed was that of the real man behind the penname Lewis Carroll, Charles Ludwig Dodgson. He was a Reverend in Oxford Christ Church, and his relation with religion fed the discussion about his restrained pedophilic desires.

⁶ It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss the veracity of the rumors about Reverend Charles Dodgson and Alice Liddell’s possible pedophilic relationship. However, the discussion on the issue is very broad, and can be found in Karolyne Leach’s *The Carroll Myth*, who proposed the term, and in Morton Cohen’s *Lewis Carroll: a biography*. This thesis limits its discussion to analyze how these rumors influenced the way both “Carroll” and “Alice” are viewed today and how adaptations were influenced by the possible relationship.

nowadays: as a “sexualized” adult character, sometimes starring horror-genre adaptations that generally rely on the “Carroll Myth” as a pedophile. Those adaptations generally recreate or discuss the sinister childhood the real girl who inspired the novels, Alice Liddell, might have experienced for “being abused” by Reverend Charles Dodgson. However, it was not psychoanalytical readings alone that transformed her into the protagonist of adventures related to experiencing sex and transgressing gender norms.

Besides the recurrent re-analyses and re-interpretations of Carroll’s books under psychoanalytical perspective, many different critical theories also interpreted the books in their terms. Among them, gender and feminist readings of the *Alice* stories certainly abound, and that is not by chance. As the *Alice* books began to be read and studied within academy, Gender and Feminist scholars started to debate how transgressive and non-conforming to Victorian context Carroll’s protagonist is. Also, especially in the last years there has been a large production of adaptations and appropriations that discuss gender and sexuality and indeed, re-write and adapt Alice’s adventures in order to debate those issues. As Judith Little has argued, “Alice’s two dream adventures are almost a comic compendium of feminist issues” (Little 74) and in order to debate those issues, the girl who is “[p]erpetually hovering between seven and seven-and-a-half” (Brooker 77) in Carroll’s stories is given an adult existence in many adaptations to different media. Feminist readings usually praise Alice’s assertiveness, activity, and curiosity as traits that surely did not conform to what Victorian society acknowledged as the “feminine ideal,” and I believe her subversiveness in relation to gender has been extended and emphasized in several adaptations.

Moreover, also as a response for her transgressive personality, Will Brooker dedicates a section of his book to discuss the several blogs and Web Pages that use the words “Wonderland”, “Alice” and other references to Carroll’s books that are used for non-literary or non-artistic purposes. As he mentions, “Lucy’s Little Wonderland” is the home page of a

transvestite, “Lucy Robinson” (50), who declares he discovered his taste for women’s clothes at the age of thirteen. Moreover, he mentions *Alcie’s Web Page*, the page of “the prettiest blonde bitch transvestite” (51), in which the illustration of a manga-style picture of a blonde girl in blue dress leaves no doubt about the reference to Carroll’s Alice. He also discusses an amateur erotic fiction “Daddy’s Little Girl,” that tells the story of Lewis Carroll as Alice’s father and narrates their incestuous relation. In my own research in the Internet, by searching for “Carroll” and “Wonderland” I could find a party that is dedicated to lesbian and gay audience and happens in Disneyland’s Theme park, in Florida. This event has been happening for 18th years⁷.

In fact, the character of Alice and her adventures in Wonderland have been re-signified over and over, and the imagery of transgression that surrounds them, especially in relation to gender, invites us to reread the books. In agreement with Judith Little, many critics have read the *Alice* books with gender on the agenda, and have discussed Alice’s transgressiveness, especially considering Victorian gender norms and the strict didacticism of children’s literature, which aimed to provide gender conforming role-models for both boys and girls. Thus, in the next sections I am going to discuss why the *Alice* books have been read as transgressive literary works, both in relation to the character of Alice and in relation to the fantastic non-didactic books Lewis Carroll has written.

2.2 Tomboyish Alice: Carroll’s character as nonconformist

According to Cynthia Mei-Li Chew, Victorian children’s literature differs considerably from that of the twentieth century. As the most noteworthy discrepancy she points the practice of classifying books: both fiction and conduct manuals were categorized as either “for girls” or “for boys”. As Mei-Li Chew argues, those books “instruct[ed] [their]

⁷ Available in: <http://www.girlsinwonderland.com/>

intended audience on good moral values as well as appropriate gendered behavior” (21). Concerning Victorian literature for girls, the author affirms that the *bildungsroman*, also known as the “novel of formation,” was a very popular genre, and often portrayed the process of maturation of the female character from girlhood to womanhood (22). Such books were intended to teach girls to embody appropriate femininity, and because of that, they very often included events related to marriage and motherhood as their “happy endings.” On this point, Foster and Simons argue that “conduct manuals and advice books of the time promoted the centrality of motherhood in the prevailing social order and the necessity for female self-sacrifice, service, and domestic responsibility, and these lessons were echoed in current literature for the young” (5-6). Thus, it is possible to affirm that Victorian literature had a moralizing purpose in relation to gender “appropriate” behavior, and that is strongly related to the way children and childhood began to be viewed from the end of the eighteenth century on.

From incapable miniatures of adults, as children were treated until the mid-eighteenth century, children began to be seen as totally innocent “heavenly” creatures (Mei-Li Chew 28). Because of their lack of knowledge they were treated as “blank pages”, into which adults would add information so as to build the children’s *selves*. Accordingly, the Victorian preoccupation with providing ideologically appropriate sources for those innocent beings aimed at avoiding the corruption of children, who would accept any information or example uncritically, without questions or resistance (Mei-Li Chew 28). This way, children’s literature constituted a didactic source in Victorian society, and the ideology it was in charge of conveying consisted of “a set of values and beliefs widely held in the society’s assumption about what the world *is*” (Mei-Li Chew 28). Specifically about “books for girls,” Edward Salmon argues that it was assumed that

Girls' literature ought to help build up women. If in choosing books that boys shall read it is necessary to remember that we are choosing mental food for the future chiefs of the race, it is equally important not to forget in choosing books for girls that we are choosing mental food for the future wives and mothers of that race (qtd. in Foster and Simons 1).

Through this quotation it is possible to affirm that girls, and by consequence women, had their place already established and fixed within Victorian society: that of marriage and motherhood. Interestingly, both "functions" women performed in Victorian society are related to reproduction, and thus, also related to gender difference. Women were confined within gender difference, and could only occupy their own "place" in society. Because that was the only possibility for women, no "mental food" was needed other than that that would help girls achieve proper womanhood.

Indeed, Elaine Showalter explains that literature for girls was "[e]ssentially moralistic", since it "was designed to bridge the gap between the schoolroom and the drawing room, to recommend docility, marriage and obedience rather than autonomy or adventure", elements that were viewed as inherently masculine ("Little Women" 50). Moreover, the novel also conveyed similar moralistic messages to adult women. According to Nancy Armstrong, the novel of the nineteenth century "problematized [the] individual and sought to contain, constrain, and normalize him or her in ways that at once created, reinforced, and updated a new and distinctively modern social classification system" (98). Since those classifications followed the rules of commonsense, the place of women was, therefore, that of domesticity, which can be illustrated by the famous expression "The Angel in the House."⁸ As Cora Kaplan and David Glover explain, during Victorian era it was believed that ideal femininity conformed to women's "natural and instinctive habits," which comprised "love, tenderness

⁸ The idea of the "Angel in the House" originated from a poem by Coventry Patmore, in which he holds his angel-wife up as a model for all women. The poem portrays the woman as submissive and subservient woman to men's needs and wants.

and affectionate solicitude for children, spouses and parents” (23). This way, the private sphere that constituted the woman’s place was formed by “maternity, marriage and domestic life” (23), and any practice that differed from that ideal would be treated as inappropriate.

Interestingly, the Victorian idealization of the domesticity of Woman as the “Angel in the House” was accompanied by the idealization of childhood. In this regard, children also had their “place” in society, and by “sanctifying” it, this place was both fixed and immutable, representing the “adult’s opposite or Other” (Roth 25). According to Christine Roth, “children themselves came to symbolize nostalgic spaces suspended between past and present” at that period, especially little girls, as the critic affirms that “in Victorian art and literature [they] exist within a sanctified space of childhood, not for their own pleasure or purposes, but as a service to nostalgic adults” (24-25). As “Others,” both women and children were conceived in opposition to adult males. As Roth argues, the worship of young girls can be justified by the relation between infancy and femininity. Indeed, adult men used to consider their own childhoods as feminine, and this way, the feminine young body has become a “site of nostalgia” for them (24). Quoting Robson, Roth affirms that, in the nineteenth century, the first six years of male life carried a “clear stamp of femininity, especially in retrospect” and this relation can be illustrated by many fantasy stories in which “men become masculine only after an initial feminine stage” (qtd. in Roth 24). Interestingly, as Roth highlights, the sanctifying of the girl child’s body as “site of nostalgia” can be interpreted as safe for adult masculinity, because of both the physical difference and the temporal past. This way, the “cult” of the child girl’s body as a nostalgic site does not threaten the male adult since it constitutes “a geographically distant present and a temporally distant past” (25).

Thus, in the Victorian age it is possible to recognize four fundamental aspects discussed so far. First, literature was intended to convey gender appropriate messages in

order to instruct both boys and girls, so as to teach women that their place is that of the domestic sphere. Second, that woman's place was home, and the space of domesticity itself was sanctified, as it is observable in the idea of "the Angel in the House". Third, that the female infant body was viewed as a site of nostalgia and thus, as a romanticized space for adult men's fantasy. Finally, it is arguable that the treatment given to the women who did not conform to the Victorian rules for femininity was fairly hostile, since they were generally ridiculed and viewed as "abject" beings.

Assuming this scenario, it is interesting to contrast the idea of the appropriate femininity Victorian literature aimed at conveying to girls to that of the woman traveler of the nineteenth century, for making a parallel between the Victorian ideal Woman and those women pioneers.⁹ These considerations are important because of the discussion this chapter will raise about the possibility of interpreting Carroll's Alice, and latter HBO's Alice, as mobile characters, who are unfixed both in relation to space and place, and who ultimately subvert those concepts. According to Casey Blanton in her book *Travel Writing*, not until the nineteenth century could females adventure to place with free will and begin to "travel alone to distant places far from the confines of home" (44). Differently, "even as late as the mid-nineteenth century" traveling by oneself was seen for a woman as "a dangerous and probably licentious endeavor (...) to undertake" (45).

Probably because of the inappropriateness of such outdoor practices, Victorian cartoonists depicted women travelers as "perched precariously on camel or canoe, sandwiched in between groups of natives, looking ridiculously out of place in their dresses and bonnets" (Blanton 46). Indeed, such pejorative and ironic portrayals of women travelers

⁹In *Travel Writing*, Casey Blanton dedicates several sections of her book to the writings of one of the most famous women traveler writers of the nineteenth century, Mary Kingsley. Indeed, it is important to highlight her role as a traveler in the nineteenth century because Tim Burton's Alice was pretty much inspired in Mary Kingsley and her lack of "place" as a woman in Victorian society, as I am going to discuss in Chapter Two. Moreover, it is interesting to mention the several others women travelers of the nineteenth century, such as Mary Ann Barker, Margaret Fountaine, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, May French-Sheldom, and Isabella Bird (Mills 2).

depreciated their accomplishments and were “largely responsible for them being seen as freaks” (Blanton 46). As the Blanton explains, the negative reaction against those women and their works was due to their mobility over space, which opposes the Victorian idea of home as the ideal woman’s place (46). Since their traveling questioned and destabilized the notion of the domestic sphere as the place for women, these women travelers were represented as “abject” in newspapers and magazine cartoons, so that the Victorian parameters for femininity would not be under threat.¹⁰

As a literary parallel of the abject travelers, the character of the tomboy appears in children’s literature as a stage to be outcome by female characters. As Mei-Li Chew explains, the Tomboy “is typically a prepubescent or teenaged girl who is frustrated by the expectations and limitations placed upon her because she is female. She is reluctant to conform to feminine standards of appearance and behaviour” (III). This way, the stories that contained the character of the Tomboy all intended to teach girls that childhood was a stage that they would have to overcome, and though tomboyishness “was depicted as normal,” it constituted a “temporary stage of girlhood, which was eventually grown out of” and which would give place to “Victorian appropriate femininity” (Mei-Li Chew 394).

It is interesting to observe Carroll’s Alice as a character and consider some similar aspects she shares with the Tomboy. While discussing *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Lizbeth Goodman affirms that “this is one of the few well-known English stories written in a previous generation in which the central female character is active, inquisitive, intelligent and engaged in her own right” (17). Indeed, differently from most protagonists of *bildungsromans*, Alice is not concerned about being beautiful in order to find a husband, nor is she interested in learning any activities considered as “suitable” for her gender. In this

¹⁰ According to Judith Butler, “bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas” which not only decide on what will be taken as “intelligible” but also define a domain of bodies that exceed the norm, which she calls “unintelligible”, “unlivable” and also “abject” (*Bodies that Matter* xi).

sense, it is possible to compare Alice to the Tomboy, who generally mourns the necessity of getting married and learning woman's chores, and prefers to do things that are considered inappropriate for her gender.¹¹ One may argue that she does not learn gendered chores because she is prevented from growing up in the fantastic and nonsensical story created by Carroll. However, if Alice is not forced into maturity, neither is she portrayed as static in relation to it. Indeed, in the first book, Alice is seven years old and in the second she is seven and a half. Moreover, several passages imply her process of "growing", such as her shifts of size in both books and her evolution from taking the role of the "White Queen's Pawn" (150) to being "crowned Queen" (231) in *Through the Looking-Glass*, for instance. Even though the character ages, her ageing does not relate to any moral or didactic purpose in Carroll's narrative.

Here, it is important to recall Mei-Li Chew's explanation that, if in *bildungsroman* the Tomboy was portrayed as getting into maturity and learning to enter appropriate womanhood, children's literature also contained the so-called "series books" in which the age of the Tomboy was fixed and therefore, "tomboy characters did not (and could not!) mature" (Mei-Li Chew 137). As the critic explains, the non-conforming female character became associated with "abnormal sexuality that was not the compulsory, accepted, assumed hegemonic heterosexuality" (137). Making an uncorrectable tomboy to grow up, or even hinting at the idea of her possible maturation, would entail serious problems concerning morality and gender roles in Victorian context. Therefore, it is really interesting to interrogate why Alice ages from one book to the other, but she never achieves womanhood, differing considerably from other protagonists of her time.

Alice's interest in learning and discovering new things, especially those of the outside world, constitutes another similarity to the Tomboy. Mei-Li Chew describes Ethel, from

¹¹ Jo March, the protagonist of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, fights against the need of getting married throughout the narrative. However, at the end of the novel, she marries a man and is portrayed as conforming to appropriate Victorian femininity.

Charlotte M. Yonge's novel *The Daisy Chain, or Aspirations* (originally published in 1856), as a tomboyish character – a predecessor of the Tomboy – because she is interested in studying and reading, instead of focusing on the activities that would be seen as “normal,” or rather “normalized” in patriarchal Victorian society. Moreover, while describing Jo March, the tomboy character of Louisa May-Alcott's novel *Little Women*, Mei-Li Chew mentions that the character has great ambitions in life, and that “found her greatest affliction in the fact that she couldn't read, run, and ride as much as she liked” (qtd. in Mei-Li Chew 35). Jo March “likes being outdoors, and going for walks, even in horrid weather, under the predicament she likes adventures” (qtd. in Mei-Li Chew 35). Therefore, it is arguable that Alice shares important characteristics with both Jo March and Ethel, which categorize them as Tomboys or tomboyish characters. Alice is interested in studying and learning things, and does not get satisfied by reading a book with her sister – which is probably one of Victorian novels “for women” – but shows great curiosity about the world outside home, even though she just experiences it as a dream. Her desire for adventure and for new challenging experiences aligns Alice with other tomboyish characters and, because of that, Alice can be read as a tomboyish character too.

However, despite the Tomboy's desire for adventure, it was “boys' stories” that “involved travel to far-flung places” and “courage” (Mei-Li Chew 24-25). Accordingly, both Jo March and Ethel are forced into regular Victorian femininity, and tomboyishness is depicted as a stage that needs to be overcome by these characters. Tomboys should abandon their nonconformist habits and enter the woman's place, so that at the end of the novel they are generally married and with children. However, Alice's relation to space differs from that of most Victorian tomboy characters, since she experiences the new world unrestrictedly, and is not led to the place of domesticity as she grows. In this regard, it is possible to view Alice

as a traveler within the new world of Wonderland, which has many differences between her own world and that which she tries to discover and understand throughout her journey.

According to Leed, it does not matter how different the circumstances or impulses for taking a journey, the departure always “separates the individual from a defining social and cultural matrix” (Leed 26). Moreover, the journey can be either heroic or antiheroic. The heroic journey is related to “extend[ing] an identity across through space and through time, to display power and status” (Leed 26), and so, it is a matter of recognition. On the other hand, the antiheroic journey is related to “necessity, chance, disaster, crime, or violation of the norm” (Leed 28), and entails transgression. Whatever the case, though, the departure and the journey usually make the traveler “feel the dividedness of self, the process of estrangement, and the ambiguity of identity as injury and suffering...” (Leed 46). In this sense, it is observable that Alice’s subjectivity and identity get disturbed after leaving the Victorian social-cultural context, in which her identity and selfhood are secured and fixed. Indeed, by the beginning of the books one can notice that Alice is part of the economic elite, and that she is educated to be a lady. However, Alice feels bored by sitting and reading with her sister, and her curiosity leads her to her journey in Wonderland. Her adventures in the outdoor space of Wonderland arguably make it possible to see Alice as tomboyish. Moreover, it is also interesting to reflect upon the fact that Alice, differently from most Tomboys of the nineteenth-century literature, is not pushed into maturity and regular femininity. This way, if she may be read as a tomboyish character, as I propose, she is not forced to outgrow it, and her tomboyishness remains.¹²

However, some critics do not agree with the transgressive aspects of Alice and affirm that “Carroll emphasizes the aging adult behind [Alice’s] seemingly whimsical and youthful behavior” (Roth 30). Thus, these critics would not see any similarity between Alice and the

¹² Actually, that may be one of the reasons for the various interpretations of Alice as a “feminist” heroine, as I will discuss further in this chapter.

Tomboy, as I propose. According to James Kincaid, Alice is a “false child” character, since she does not let herself go into the fantastic wonderland, but rather resists it (qtd. in Roth 28). As Roth argues, “Wonderland and Alice occasionally reveal the “grown up” desires driving the narrative and, as a result, undergo dramatic size changes” (Roth 28). She continues:

Alice constantly responds to the childish world of play and nonsense with logic and manners, she is generally willing to take on adult responsibility (the pig baby, for example), she resists intimidation, and she is eventually expelled from Wonderland amid accusations of breaking “Rule Forty-Two” by being too grown-up. In this final scene, after a story full of such adult behavior, her size actually shoots up out of control, eventually growing to her “full size” in the courtroom as she seems to lose her childlike sense of play once and for all and observes, “You’re nothing but a pack of cards” (Kincaid. *Child-loving* 129 qtd. in Roth 28).

In this sense, some critics have argued that both Wonderland and the Looking-Glass have a moralizing purpose upon Alice, and these spaces are constantly read as “liminal spaces” in which she “develops” from girlhood to womanhood. According to Jan Susina, “lessons and rules abound in Wonderland,” and have a clear purpose in educating Alice “in the rituals and beliefs of middle-class ideology” (3).

As Roth proposes, “children’s literature [is] an aggressive act of colonization in which the adult author manipulates the child into identifying with an image of childhood that satisfies the adult’s own needs and desires” (Roth 25). In the specific case of Victorian children’s literature, then, this “imperialist” force within children’s literature is arguably even more significant. Assuming that, then, why are the *Alice* books so different from the other books of their time, especially concerning the way they portray their main character and her process of growing up without achieving womanhood?

It is undeniable that the *Alice* books include the theme of maturation, but instead of moralizing, they open up the spaces of Wonderland and the Looking-Glass for Alice to construct and identify her *self*. The *Alice* books, far from aiming at didactic purposes, stated an opposite claim for children's literature, both through the construction of Alice as a character and through its lack of social moral values (or rather, its nonsensical morals). Indeed, Carroll even ridicules the Victorian excessive need of morals and morality in *Through the Looking Glass*. The character of the Duchess is portrayed as a mad character, with whom Alice can barely talk without being interrupted by her conclusions "And the moral of that is..." (Carroll *AAIW* 87-89). Interestingly, all the morals the Duchess finds in what Alice says are related to appropriate femininity, about being lovely, patient, and controlling impulses (Carroll *AAIW* 88-89). In spite of Alice's attempts to keep track of the conversation, the Duchess states: "Everything's got a moral if only you can find it" (Carroll *AAIW* 88). This way, Carroll bans any possibility for his books to convey serious "morals" at the end, and given the fact that the morals Victorian books usually conveyed to children were related to gender morality, it is possible to affirm that the *Alice* books transgress both the need for didacticism of the genre children's books and the inclusion of morality related to appropriate gender presentation.

2.3 No way out: either "leaving off at seven" or achieving proper womanhood

According to Carolyn Sigler, "[a]long with many other interpretations, the *Alice* books have consistently been read as portrayals of the experience of growing up and the construction of agency and identity" (xiv). Perhaps the clearest episode in which maturation and subjectivity are discussed in the *Alice* books is when she meets the Caterpillar, in chapter five of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. When the creature asks her the central question "Who are *you*?" Alice is not able to answer properly, as she explains

“I – I hardly know, Sir, just at present – at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then ... I can't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, sir,” said Alice, “because I'm not myself, you see—being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing” (Carroll *AAIW* 48-49).

Indeed, there are many episodes in both Carroll's books in which Alice's subjectivity is portrayed as problematic, and her confusion about her *self* is most of times related to growing up.

Sigler proposes that “Alice is herself a multifaceted and contradictory character whose identity ... the Wonderland and Looking-Glass creatures attempt, and fail, to grasp” (xiv).

The White Rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland* believes her to be his housemaid, Mary Ann. The Pigeon, in turn, declares Alice is “a serpent ... and there's no use denying it.” “Mind the Volcano!” cries the tiny White Queen to the King, after Alice picks her up and sets her on a table in the Looking-Glass parlor. The flowers in the Looking-Glass garden believe Alice to be another blossom, albeit with rather untidy petals. The Unicorn perceives her as a “fabulous monster” (solemnly assuring her, “if you believe in me, I'll believe in you” (Sigler xiv).

Actually, not even Alice herself is sure about her own identity, as she we can notice in the Caterpillar episode, as well as in several others. Thus, Alice's identity is not unproblematic – and neither is her maturation – but rather, the development of her complex subjectivity constitutes a central theme in Carroll's books. This way, Alice's process of maturation can be viewed as analogue to that of the Caterpillar itself, whose identity cannot be fixed in time or simplistically defined either: in not defining an ideal outcome from the process of maturation,

Alice is portrayed in both books as “mutable” and in a “constant process of becoming” (Sigler xiv).

Therefore, Alice is not forced to abandon her tomboyishness, and is not forced into appropriate womanhood as most Tomboys were. She escapes assuming a fixed and arbitrary place within Victorian society: that of domesticity, wifedom and womanhood. Differently, instead of the woman’s place, Alice lives outdoor adventures and goes through the destabilization of her own subjectivity and identity along her journey in Wonderland as a traveler. Standing by herself, Alice is able to think about her own subjectivity out of the Victorian patterns of gender behavior, and though sometimes she shows some values she has learned at home, she very seldom follows what is supposed to be appropriate. It seems that when she scolds herself, she is merely repeating what she has heard, but in disobeying those ideas, she transforms those social and moral values into words with no meaning, or rather, into nonsense. Nonetheless, Alice’s subjectivity is fragmented between what she has learnt at home and what she experiences in Wonderland, and that can be observed throughout Carroll’s narratives.

Because of the difficulty found by the Wonderland creatures in comprehending Alice’s subjectivity, it is interesting to discuss how Wonderland and Looking-Glass are built in Carroll’s novels. As Lizbeth Goodman argues, Alice is surrounded mostly by male characters (the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, the Mad Hatter, the Tweedles, etc.) who “serve a function to do with language and power in a male-dominated world” (17). In fact, there are many episodes in the books in which Alice must be silent, quiet, and stop questioning. According to Helen Pilinovsky, “critics ... note the tales’ [Carroll’s books’s] peculiarly antifemale views” (179). In the same vein, as U.C. Knoepflmacher’s observes, “for Carroll, power always involves the gender distinctions on which society insists” (qtd. in Pilinovsky 179). Nonetheless, Pilinovsky affirms that “this traditional hierarchy is somewhat skewed in

the world of Alice, where men are nonentities, and adult women are powerful, malevolent, and illogical – unlike Alice herself, who is exempt of these qualities by dint of her age” (179).

An observation has to be made in this regard: although Pilinovsky affirms it is also possible to interpret in Carroll’s *Alice* books a distaste for mature femininity, especially illustrated by his malevolent maternal figures (179-180). As the critic argues, it seems that Carroll himself aligned with other Victorian authors who “glorified the state of childhood in their tales of imaginary lands where their characters would avoid the pressures of adulthood” (180). Moreover, one may argue that, though portrayed as human and as powerful figures, the other female characters created by Carroll in both books – the Duchess, the Queen of Hearts, the Cook, the Red Queen and the White Queen – all seem to reinforce the dangers of unrestrained womanhood according to Victorian morals. In opposition to this idea, Judith Little, while commenting on the violence of the Duchess, argues that it may be a psychological result from her being forced to fill the role of “mother” (197). In this sense, the gender distinction in Carroll’s fantastic worlds is even further problematized, especially because the distinction itself exceeds the sphere of “gender” and is over-problematized in relation to “age” and “power”. In order to illustrate this debate, it is worth to quote a passage of *Through the Looking Glass*, which has been reviewed by many feminist theorists and critics.

Perhaps the most important of these episodes is the one in which Alice meets Humpty Dumpty, the egg-shaped character appropriated from a famous sixteenth-century English nursery rhyme, in *Through the Looking-Glass*. In this encounter, Humpty Dumpty completely ignores Alice's presence, not even directing his eyes to her. He says her name is stupid because it means nothing. He orders her to stop chattering to herself and to answer his questions. He takes all her questions as riddles, and tries to assure his superiority over her all

the time. Indeed, although he is also sitting on a wall in the nursery rhyme, here his position can be read as a semiotic reaffirmation of his privilege and empowerment over Alice (Goodman 18). When he asks Alice about her age and hears her answer “[s]even years and six months” (Carroll, *TLG* 194) he exclaims:

“Seven years and six months!” (...) “An uncomfortable sort of age. Now if you'd asked MY advice, I'd have said ‘Leave off at seven’—but it's too late now.”

“I never ask advice about growing,” Alice said indignantly.

“Too proud?” the other inquired.

Alice felt even more indignant at this suggestion. ‘I mean,’ she said, ‘that one can't help growing older.’

“ONE can't, perhaps,” said Humpty Dumpty, “but TWO can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven” (Carroll, *TLG* 194-195).

Humpty-Dumpty's comment can be read as an ultimatum for Alice. The character's proposition has been interpreted either as a “grim suggestion that Alice could have arranged her own execution,” or “literally and dearly, as offering a whole world of help to Alice in remaining a child” (Kincaid, *Child-loving* 278 qtd. in Pilinovsky 181), but I believe both interpretations can be assumed simultaneously. Indeed, it seems that Alice's very existence is being questioned by Humpty Dumpty, and the problem that matters is apparently her age. Perhaps in accordance to Kincaid's comments on Alice's unchildness, her age may represent a conflict in Carroll's narratives, since Alice does not fit either the sanctified and romanticized place of childhood, or the also sanctified and romanticized place of women within the domesticity of home. Alice is an incorrigible tomboy, who is not forced into appropriate womanhood, but neither is she fixed within the safe place of an ever-lasting

childhood. Alice does not have a place within Victorian models and although she is too big to enter the garden of idyllic infancy, she is not prevented from growing.

Following this argument, the *Alice* stories can be read as “stor[ies] of maturation that resent its necessity” (Pilinovsky 180). As Knoepfmacher points out, “Carroll knows that Alice must repudiate his desire to linger forever in a mid-summer dream world in which time can stand still. At the same time, however, by prolonging the attempt to detain his heroine ... he also rebels against that inevitability” (qtd. in Pilinovsky 180-181). This way, it is possible to argue that Carroll resists Alice’s process of maturation, and by doing so, his *Alice* books are positioned far from the didactic Victorian *bildungsroman* for child girls to learn how to achieve womanhood. On the other hand, it is arguable that despite Carroll’s attempt at keeping his heroine in childhood, he eventually empowers her, crowning her Queen and giving her the same status of his malevolent maternal figures in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Perhaps, despite his efforts, he echoes Alice’s affirmation, by acknowledging that “that one can’t help growing older” (Carroll *TLG* 194).

In this sense, Alice can be viewed as a nonconformist. She is too “grown up” for accepting nonsensical wonderland gladly and uncritically, since she has already learnt and embodied much of the expectation of the Victorian society upon her. Besides, because of Carroll’s double and paradoxical choice of both permitting her to grow from one story to the other, and not conducting her out of tomboyishness and childhood towards appropriate womanhood, Alice is kept inside a “space” that does not have its “place” within Victorian society. Alice is dislocated, displaced and non-conforming both in relation to Wonderland, and to the Victorian socio-cultural context, which will try to fix her identity as a woman. However, despite her dislocation due to Victorian gender norms, she exists – and is given full existence in Carroll’s tales.

According to Judith Butler, “the social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood” (*Undoing Gender* 2). In this sense, she explains that conforming to the norms is what makes individuals existence “viable” and that “the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms” (2). In relation to gender, Butler conceptualizes it as “an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing,” since “the terms that make up one’s gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author” (1). Assuming that gender is both constitutive and constituent of a subject, and that the forces of its constitution are bidirectional (from the individual towards society and from society towards individuals), Butler discusses the status of viable humanness, which, according to the author, dialogues with the Hegelian notion of recognition within society. In this sense, recognition itself “becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced” (2). Moreover, since sexuality – which for Butler, is “characterized by displacement” and can never be fully captured by any regulatory norm (*Undoing Gender* 15) – is related and intertwined in social norms, it also implicates the question of power and recognition, and consequently relates to the question Butler poses: “who qualifies as the recognizably human and who does not?” (2).

In this sense, according to Michel Foucault,

Nothing can exist as an element of knowledge if, on the one hand, it ...does not conform to a set of rules and constraints characteristic, for example, of a given type of scientific discourse in a period, and if, on the other hand, it does not possess the effects of coercion or simply the incentives peculiar to what is scientifically validated or rational or simply generally accepted, etc (“What is Critique?” qtd. in Butler *Undoing Gender* 27).

Therefore, the non-conforming character is unintelligible, since he/she does not fit the rules of society that would guarantee his/her own viability. Accordingly, Mei-Li Chew argues that “[c]hildren’s literature reflects society’s ideas and assumptions about normality and the world – how the world is and what are believed to be acceptable representations of the world” (10). Thus, it is possible to affirm that children’s literature works as “a socializing tool, as ideologically acceptable, as a reflection of how the world is and should be, and as a representation of how gendered subjects should be and become, presents a world of heteronormativity – one of hegemonic, normative heterosexuality” (Mei-Li Chew 11).

In this regard, it is arguable that during the Victorian age, the didactic purpose of children’s literature deliberately functioned as a technology of gender, in accordance to what Lauretis proposes. As the author explains, if gender is performative and thus, resultant of its own practices, and if it is represented and self-represented, both in fiction and within the “real” world, then by being inserted in literature (as well in other institutionalized discourses such as arts, epistemologies, and critical practices, etc), it gains the status of a “technology of gender” (Lauretis 1- 5). This way, every presentation of gender, whether didactic or not, is also productive and implies certain ways of presenting gender. In Victorian children’s literature, the distinctive element in relation to children’s literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the deliberate and political attitude towards teaching gender behavior appropriately for boys and for girls. The stability of the didactic role of Victorian children’s literature is threatened by the figure of the Tomboy or tomboyish character, and even more problematized in Alice, since as discussed before, she cannot be kept either in childhood and or in womanhood.

Alice is thus, a nonconformist, and her viability is constantly under threat throughout both *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. She does not fit appropriate womanhood and neither is she fixed in time as a child. As she grows older

unrestrainedly, Alice has no place within Victorian society, and has her intelligibility questioned and her “reality” under risk. However, Butler concludes,

When the unreal lays claim to reality, or enters into its domain, something other than a simple assimilation into prevailing norms can and does take place. The norms themselves can become rattled, display their instability, and become open to resignification (*Undoing Gender* 27-8).

Therefore, Alice’s very existence within Wonderland and her constant interrogations to Humpty-Dumpty’s (and other characters’) attempt at asserting her unviability destabilize his norm and assure her intelligibility.

2.4 Fantasy against didacticism: Carroll’s *Alice* books in Victorian children’s literature

So far, I have discussed that Alice can be read as nonconformist in relation to the gender appropriate possibilities of existence within Victorian society. I argue that the very dislocation may be the basis for the discussion of power and existence, and because her nonconformity is itself in relation of gender norms and also intertwined with her own presentation of gender as a female that cannot be classified either as the innocent child or the domestic woman, feminist readings of Alice are justifiable. Moreover, I have argued that Alice, both as a tomboyish character and as one that has no aim at role-modeling for her female readers to learn how to achieve womanhood properly destabilize children’s literature as the didactic and functional Victorian socio-cultural apparatus for (hetero)normativity.

According to Sigler, “[t]hough debate has heated over whether Alice is or is not a feminist heroine” (xviii) and despite my attempt at showing how displaced she is both inside Carroll’s fantastic lands and within Victorian socio-cultural context, criticism has not reached an agreement in relation to Alice’s subjectivity and to what extent she is transgressive or conforming. However, the *Alice* books have undoubtedly played an important role in

destabilizing the Victorian traditional model of literature for children (and women), not only in the construction of Alice as a character, but also, and especially, in its form.

According to Lyn Pykett, “[t]he typical form of the nineteenth-century English novel was the ‘classic realistic text,’ a conservative literary form concerned to re-inscribe a commonsense view of things as they are”, and she points out that its “formal and ideological characteristics were adumbrated (and frequently castigated) by a host of critics bent on a radical critique of literature and its institutions” (192). In this regard, it is possible to affirm that the *Alice* stories, far from constituting a claim for realism, consist of works that can be included in the genre of the fantastic literature. Following Tsvetan Todorov’s categorizations, Alice can be read as a piece of the “uncanny-fantastic,” a sub-genre of the fantastic¹³, characterized by the presence of apparently supernatural events, which, at the end of the story, receive a rational explanation (51).

Todorov argues that the fantastic has a very risky existence, since it can vanish at any time in favor of rational solutions, showing its instability in constituting an autonomous genre by itself (48). This way, considering both *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, that hesitation, which for Todorov constitutes the effect of the fantastic, happens in two levels simultaneously. The reader both confronts his/her own interpretation of the events – because of their ambiguity and the neologisms that challenge comprehension even further – and whether those events have taken place or not, creating hesitation between the real and the imaginary. This double-bind is central in the *Alice* books, especially because of the real-imaginary status of her dream. Indeed, the reader is only aware of the dreaming nature of the events by the end of both books. In the beginning of her adventures, though, nothing is mentioned about Alice’s falling asleep, and the White Rabbit she sees appears to be in the same space and time of her everyday reality. This way, despite their

¹³ It is important to point out that Todorov classifies the fantastic as an autonomous genre, but not all theorists believe the same, as for instance, Rosemary Jackson. She believes that the “fantastic” constitutes a literary mode that can be found within several genres, not constituting a genre by itself.

“rational solution” Alice is dreaming— her adventures differ from those found in Victorian novels or in Victorian children’s literature; thus, they do not convey Victorian ideology – and if they do, it is surely not its deliberate purpose or main outcome.

As I have discussed before, one of the most remarkable differences between the *Alice* books and the greatest scope of Victorian children’s literature is the absence of moral values in Carroll’s books. Supporting that argument, Carolyn Sigler mentions the effort of some literary and critical revisions of Carroll’s books that “attempt to counter praise that focused on the novel’s lack of moralizing” (xix). Sigler cites a reviewer for *The Spectator* that declares: “Notwithstanding any remarks of the Dutchess, *Alice* has no moral” (Sigler xix). In the same vein, Jack Zipes remarks that Carroll’s writings pointed out a new horizon to Victorian fantasists, who were on a “quest for a new fairy-tale form [that] stemmed from psychological rejection and rebellion against the ‘norms’ of English society” (xx). The critic, then, affirms that “Carroll made one of the most radical statements on behalf of the fairy tale and the child’s perspective by conceiving of a fantastic plot with no ostensible moral purpose” (xxii).

I agree with Sigler when she argues that both the spaces of Wonderland and Looking-Glass have recurrently been read “as containing veiled political references and satire” (xx). I believe that both Carroll’s treatment of gender issues and his decision not to conform either to the traditional novel or to traditional children’s literature consisted of – or at least resulted in – a political attitude imprinted in his *Alice* books. Indeed, it is arguable that fantasy frees female characters from the constraints of the Victorian ideal femininity, if we consider that

(...) fantastic literature confront[s] taboo; [it is] associated with excess, with the irrational, non-rational or supernatural, and with carnival and misrule. Fantastic literature stages a confrontation between opposing models of reality (...). In its various guises the fantastic problematizes or interrogates

perception, language, time, space, and the conception of a unified character; it disrupts linear narrative (Pykett 194).

As Pykett argues, fantasy provides the individual with a possibility to escape from the restrictions and norms of his/her world to the world of the unlimited. Restrained by the rigorous rules and morals, people create a free unbound world of wonder through fantasy to activate their imagination. Interestingly, fantasy stories usually incorporate the motif of travel, in which unrealistic and abnormal adventures can be experienced. In this sense, some critics view fantasy “as challenging, interrogating, and disrupting the conventions of realism and the social conventions (presumed to be conservative) which realism supposedly reinscribes” (Pykett 194).

Considering the Victorian novel, Nancy Armstrong describes how the genre is consonant with the scientific discoveries of the time that intended to establish and improve the rules that governed both social life and biological reproduction. Those discoveries also established what texts and commodities were “appropriate” for the consumption of the respectable classes, in order to assure the “safety” of this consumption in relation to the social structure itself (97). In this process, “normalization” intended to secure the individual within his/her respective social “place.” Armstrong discusses masculinity as a value, and explains that the process of acquiring self-government and “acknowledging the law” were the basis for a man to leave his home and form a new family, so that he would be able to inherit the patriarchal power even before his father’s death.

That ideological ideal supported and encouraged men into marriage, and though Malthus represents the nation’s history as full of possibilities, he also exposes a serious and undesired outcome of the population increase. Malthus’s theorization about the reason between population and food stated that “[f]ood increases according to a simple linear calculus (...) while hungry mouths increase exponentially, each reproducing itself several

times over,” thus highlighting “the disparity between a growing population and a diminishing food supply” (Armstrong 98). The solution found by Malthus was calling “on domestic respectability to put a curb on sexual reproduction” (98).

By displacing the seemingly invincible problem from the realm of production of food to that of reproduction, women were the ones to be blamed and restrained. According to Malthus’ ideas, “if heterosexual desire caused overpopulation, which is in turn the source of war and misery (...) it was imperative to bring such desire under control” (Armstrong 99). This way, women’s sexual desire was seen as a threat to human existence rather than the insufficient economic system. Because of this context, and in the fiction of this period, “gender ceased to be the means of guaranteeing reproduction of the ruling class and provided instead the means of limiting sexual reproduction” (Armstrong 100). Concerning fictional representation, since all the maladies, economic inequality and poor fate were symbolized by the female body, than the solution for such problems was generally symbolically represented by bringing that body under control through the “reform” of that woman (Armstrong 100). Consequently, children’s literature also conveyed the same gendered and restrictive message for girls, so that they would also become regulated women.

Assuming this context, it is possible to affirm that Carroll’s choice of fantasy over “realism” allows Alice to escape the Victorian ideal and the supposedly necessary constraints for female bodies. If even contemporary critics assume the difficulty in defining the boundaries between the realistic and the fantastic, according to Pykett,

that is because the fantastic is itself a liminal and transgressive mode, concerned with a moving between borderlands and boundaries: the boundaries of the conscious and the unconscious; the rational and the irrational; the “civilized” and the “primitive”; the religious and the secular; the material and the numinous; the natural and the supernatural; the self and the not-self (194).

Because of its potential for destabilizing fixed and established binary categories and blurring their boundaries, Pykett argues that the fantastic also poses a question to “sexuality, gender, and social class” (194).

The claim for fantasy, which questions and destabilizes the Victorian traditional novel and also children’s literature, joins the nonsensical language in order to build an unimaginable adventure of a traveler girl outdoors. Thus, instead of playing with dolls and learning feminine roles, Alice wants to be intelligent and to discover the world that surrounds her. And she is neither pushed out of tomboyishness into womanhood, nor kept forever constrained within the Victorian idyllic garden of childhood, as discussed in the previous section. Although girls’ bodies constitute indeed a site of nostalgia for the Victorian adult man, who finds in the innocence of childhood a respite from their busy lives, Alice is already out of that idealized age... Perhaps “with proper assistance” she might “have left off” before, but as Humpty Dumpty asserts, she is already seven and a half: now “it is too late.” Her existence as an “intelligent and inquisitive” character has just gone out of its proper place in male dominated society, and now what place will she belong to? Indeed, Alice is a childless child, and her maturation causes others and herself to question who she is, since she cannot exist except as a domesticated and sexually restrained woman or as an innocent embodiment of childhood. However, her status of non-conformity cannot exist if not by the very negation of the norms, thus reasserting its unviability, its status of “unreal” or “un-human”.

Alice wakes up, and her sister, after being told about the Wonderland dream and “half-believing it,” laments the necessity for “opening her eyes” and for returning to “dull reality” (Carroll *AAIW* 119). In *reality*, though, Alice has not been less important. By choosing fantasy in spite of realism, and by poking fun at the compulsory need of “morals” in Victorian children’s literature through a character that reinforces the necessity of being “passive,” and “kind-hearted,” the *Alice* books do not convey any lessons to either boys or

girls. Or rather, the lessons Alice has already learnt and repeats to herself in Wonderland or on the opposite side of the Looking-Glass she often disobeys and transgresses. So, in reality, Alice is no role-model, and in terms of ideology, that is a great statement against Victorian didacticism. According to Jan Susina, Carroll's Alice books are often credited with changing the emphasis of children's literature "from instruction to delight" (Susina "Children's Literature"). As she argues, when compared with the majority of the children's books that were written before the *Alice* books, Carroll's works are remarkably free of religious or social lessons (Susina "Children's Literature").

Moreover, because of the great repercussion of the *Alice* books – especially concerning whether Alice is or is not used by Carroll to experience childhood again, or whether Alice is indeed free for experiencing her adventure or not, since everything she experiences takes place in a dream world, – they have been productive material for women authors to come to the fore (Sigler xviii). Sigler points that by writing reviews and literary revisionings of Carroll's works – in the attempt either to free Alice from Carroll's "conservative narratives" or to "restrain Alice" into her "proper place" – many women writers of the nineteenth century had the chance to be published (xix-xx). Moreover, the critic credits Carroll's *Alice* books for stabilizing fantasy rather than didacticism as a paradigm in children's literature and also for influencing adult literature. Sigler affirms that Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, among other authors, had read the Alice books in their late nineteenth-century childhood, and "went to transform literature through their modernist rendering of psychological experience" (xii), inserting fantasy and fantastic elements in adult literature.

Finally, by the problematization of Alice's process of growth and consequent getting into maturity together with her dislocation in relation to gender, which confers to her the status of nonconformist, multiple adaptations have discussed gender and sexuality in

contemporaneity. Taking the *Alice* books as basis to debate those issues, those adaptations usually claim for the freedom of the female body, and also of other non-viable bodies. They often constitute a struggle for the possibility of existence of “unviable beings,” and in this claim, *Alice*’s afterlives have been interrogating and destabilizing the power of normalization towards the culturally-and-socially-attested-humanity of the nonconformist.

3. Chapter II – Alice’s Adaptations: how the mythical character flourishes through time

3.1 *Alice’s Adaptations: a general panorama on the Victorian girl’s afterlives*

In the first chapter, the discussion was centered on the question “why reread Alice today?” I have argued that the presence of the mythical character of Alice has been massive in all spots of everyday life, and has especially being cast as to represent transgressiveness both in “real” life and in several contemporary afterlives of Carroll’s *Alice* books in such a way that a more careful reading of the books would be welcome. Indeed, I have proposed, in dialogue with many feminist readings, that both Alice as a character and the *Alice* books as literary texts can be viewed as subversive. This interpretation could be only one among many others¹⁴; though, for some reason it has been repeated and has constituted the central discussion of several recent adaptations of Carroll’s texts to different media. Thus, a second question to be made is: why adapt the Alice stories today? And also, why has the discussion around sexuality and gender been so recurrent in *Alice’s* recent afterlives?

Several adaptations of Carroll’s books have been produced, especially for television and film. Though most of them are adaptations of the first book, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, they also include some events and characters of *Through the Looking-Glass*. One can notice that while some adaptations, especially the latest ones, focus on the discussion of the full-existence and freedom of female subjects – and some even state the existence of trans-people, as for instance HBO Latin America’s television series *Alice*, which will be discussed next chapter – others end up sanitizing the tomboyish girl from Carroll’s novels and forcing her into conformity. As for discussing *Alice’s* adaptations I have selected Disney’s 1951 famous cartoon *Alice in Wonderland*, Jonathan Miller’s *Alice in Wonderland*,

¹⁴ As mentioned before, the *Alice* books have been analyzed in terms of multiple theories, such as the Victorian idealization of childhood, psychoanalytical theory, gender studies, studies related to the hero’s journey, psychedelic theory, among others. Interestingly, most of them do not seem to influence recent adaptations as those interpretations related to gender and feminist studies do.

released in 1966, *Alice in Wonderland: an X-Rated Porn Comedy*, released in 1976; the 1985 television film *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by Harry Harris; the 1999 television film *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by Nick Willing; American McGee's game *Alice*, released in 2000, and Tim Burton's 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*. However, concerning the 2000s other adaptations will also be mentioned because of the novel and disruptive ways they dialogue with Carroll's books. The criterion for selecting these *Alice* afterlives was to pick the most acclaimed adaptation from each decade – regardless the media through which it is conveyed – beginning with the most famous adaptation of the *Alice* stories of all: the Disney's 1951 cartoon *Alice in Wonderland*.

Moreover, I decided to include in this research only the works that are assumedly adaptations of the *Alice* stories and announce it in their titles; otherwise the range would be too large for there are numerous films and television series that cast some elements of the *Alice* books loosely, as for instance the Wachowski brothers' film *Matrix* (1999). Through this research I intend to analyze how each adaptation establishes a dialogue with the *Alice* books and whether and how they relate to issues of gender and sexuality. After looking at the adaptations selected, I will try to discuss the reason why *Alice* has been so recurrently adapted, addressing the question: Why adapt *Alice* today?

This chapter will be divided into two parts: in the first I will discuss the adaptations produced until the end of the 1990s, leaving the adaptations produced from the 2000s on to the next one. This choice was not only based on the year they were released, but also relates to similarities shared by the adaptations, as I believe that these two groups of adaptations relate to Carroll's *Alice* books differently. Concerning the adaptations produced until 1999, it is interesting to analyze what they have in common before establishing the differences among them – and the same will be done in relation to the adaptations released in the 2000s. One of the similarities shared by the 1990s adaptations concerns media: they were all turned into

film, either for the cinema or for television. Differently, the adaptations released from the 2000s on differ in relation to the media used, since one of the most acclaimed adaptations of the beginning of the decade is a videogame adaptation, American McGee's *Alice*, followed by its also acclaimed sequel. Concerning the adaptations released before the 2000s, despite their similarities, it is observable that they are really different from each other, both in terms of narrative and the characterization of the protagonist. The several Alices differ in age, appearance and personality, and the ways they interact with Wonderland also contrast considerably. Moreover, because of the selections made by each director/adaptor, the focus to some events in spite of others also change the way each film relates to Carroll's storyline. Concerning the adaptations released in the 2000s, they change the relation between books and adaptations to an even greater extent, for in some of them very little, if anything, of the stories written by Carroll remains, and the *Alice* books constitute a "starting point" for other discussions. Actually, they generally obliterate Carroll's narrative and refer to it vaguely in relation to specific events or characters; however, themes either raised by the books, such as Alice's transgressiveness, or related to the "Carroll Myth" receive attention in those adaptations, as we shall see.

Those various changes consequently interfere in how the adaptations relate to Carroll's books and the question of "fidelity" comes to the fore. As Will Brooker notes, despite the enormous corpus constituted by *Alice*-inspired works, very few articles compiled in acclaimed anthologies on Adaptation Studies dedicate their attention to the *Alice* adaptations. The critic affirms that is "odd," since adaptations of the *Alice* books abound. However, he affirms the lack of reference to these adaptations in those anthologies is not the only surprise. As he argues,

In some chapters an old fashioned hierarchy seemed to be at work, treating the film adaptations as inherently second-rate next to their literary originals, and

judging an adaptation as praiseworthy only inasmuch as it matched “faithfully” up to the ideal of the novel – or rather, up to the commentator’s individual notion of what the novel was about (Brooker 200).

In this regard, it is interesting to mention that the pursuit for fidelity guided Adaptation Studies for a long time, and one of the reasons is that cinema has adapted literary works since its beginning. Historically, the “need” for fidelity is related to the fact that for a long time cinema benefited from the prestige of the Great Books, and the choice to adapt canonical literature and to be faithful to them was intended at transferring the value of the books to their film adaptations (Naremore 6-8). The films needed to “respect” the authority of the “source” text, and to imply the director’s awareness that the film was an “imitation,” a poor copy of a masterpiece (Cartmell and Whelehan 29), or even a “digest” film adaptation, to use Andre Bazin’s terminology (19-20). Moreover, the pursuit of fidelity was also due to the fact that cinema was for long seen as an alternative way of studying the classic books in the literature departments (Naremore 7), so that students of literature would have a different way of accessing the “original” stories contained in the books, giving no attention to the film itself.

However, Brooker’s surprise concerning how fidelity has been preponderant in the study of the *Alice* adaptations is related to two reasons, in my view. First, critics have for some time now questioned the pursuit of “faithful adaptations”. As Linda Hutcheon argues, “concentrat[ing] on this particular aspect of the relationship between adapted text and adaptation means that there appears to be little need to engage directly in the constant debate over degrees of proximity to the original, that has generated those many typologies of adaptation processes ...” (7). Instead, the critic affirms that the “morally loaded discourse of fidelity” assumes that adapters’ ultimate objective is merely to copy a source. Although adaptation is repetition, it is “repetition without replication,” since there is not only one

simple intention as the basis for all adaptations, but there can be several different ones: “the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying” (7). Second, though several of the adaptations follow Carroll’s storyline, the *Alice* books have inspired several loose adaptations, as for instance the successful 1985 film *Dreamchild*, directed by Gavin Miller and the 1977 film *Jabberwocky*, directed by Terry Gilliam, so that the interest in re-creating the *Alice* stories is not something new. Thus, Brooker’s bewilderment is really attuned with the propositions this thesis aims to offer in relation to the *Alice* adaptations.

The *Alice* adaptations, whether containing the characters and following the events present in Carroll’s books or not, provide a rich and complex response to the Victorian texts, either paying homage or reacting to them, and that has been so since 1865, when *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was published. As Will Brooker suggests, “even if we don’t agree with the readings, they have kept [Alice] active, alive, relevant to the shifting concerns of the several decades,” making Alice more “fascinating and vibrant” (201). I agree with Brooker’s proposition, since I believe that far from representing the interpretation of a single adapter, these multiple *Alices* “seem to channel a broader way of seeing and responding to the books and its central character” (201-202). In this regard, the analysis this chapter aims to provide will identify some tendencies the adaptations of *Alice* have followed through time, and also discuss their responses to Carroll’s *Alice* books, especially because the adaptations selected do not only transfer the stories to another medium, but comment on the *Alice* stories through the very choices of setting, the actress who plays Alice, and the way both Wonderland and Alice’s home are portrayed. In this regard, Brooker argues,

What good would a slavishly faithful Alice be, anyway – one that gave us moving versions of the Tenniel illustrations, put every line of Carroll’s dialogue in the characters’ mouths and used his prose descriptions as stage

directions? Why should we look to a film for a precise acting out of the book, when we have the book for that? What I am interested in is what the production has included, what it dropped, what it has changed, and what effect this has in giving us a specific vision of Alice and her world (202).

Considering that, the following sections will discuss some adaptations focusing on the responses they give to Carroll's texts – which surely relate to the time of their productions – instead of discussing whether they accomplish a “faithful” transposition of the “core” of the books that inspired them.

3.2 *Alice's* adaptations from 1951 to 1999: tales about growing up

According to Helen Pilinovsky, the adaptations of the *Alice* books generally follow three main paths: there are adaptations that retell Alice's adventures in their Victorian context, those that update her childhood into more contemporary circumstances, and those that dismiss all circumstances that surround Alice and focus on her process of maturation (176). Indeed, the three types of adaptation Pilinovsky proposes can be found in the period between 1951 and 1999, and some of them will be analyzed in this section. Though these three forms of adapting the *Alice* stories may seem divergent at first, there are some traits they share that make them constitute a coherent adaptation corpus. Thus, before focusing on the peculiarities of each adaptation, these similarities will be addressed: the main similarity most adaptations produced between 1951 and 1999 share is that related to form. For that purpose, I will base my analysis on the categories Barthes establishes as constitutive of a narrative in his acclaimed essay “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”.

In his essay, Barthes divides narratives into two units: form and content. Content is further divided into distributional structures (the actions, causes and effects of the story itself) and integrational ones (which correspond to descriptions, physical and mental attributions of

characters, etc). Distributional structures can be once more divided into cardinal (nuclei) and catalysers. Cardinal functions include actions that are central to the development of the story; therefore, they cannot be omitted without changing of the narrative. Catalysers, differently, are the narrative events that are less remarkable, so they only accelerate or delay the story, but do not cause great changes in it (Barthes 95). This categorization, especially focusing on the difference between cardinal and catalyzer features, will be very useful for analyzing the narratives of the selected adaptations.

The similarity those adaptations share is mainly related to the structure of their narratives. Actually, Brooker himself uses the Barthesian categorization in order to establish an overall structure of the adaptations he analyzes. Though the adaptations the critic analyzes are not the same ones I am going to discuss, the “basic” structure shared by the adaptations does not differ considerably. Basically, Alice is first depicted in the real world, generally accompanied by her sister. Also, another recurrent scene is the one in which she sees the White Rabbit and follows him into a rabbit-hole-like tunnel or, as a reference to the second book, through a mirror or screen. Among all the selected adaptations, the only one that does not show Alice’s “shrinking and growing” after eating some cake or drinking some liquid is the 1976 adaptation *Alice in Wonderland: an X-Rated Porn Comedy*, and that is undoubtedly related to her already adult age, as I will discuss later. The scene in which Alice meets the Cat and asks him where to go and the scene in which she meets the Duchess are present in four of the selected adaptations. Moreover, two of the selected adaptations, namely Disney’s and Willing’s, portray Alice’s encounter with the Live Flowers from *Through the Looking Glass*. Still concerning the second book, the episode in which Alice meets the Tweedle brothers is also included in three of the five selected adaptations. Moreover, the scene in which she meets a Caterpillar who asks who she is, the scene of the Mad Tea Party with the Hatter and

Hare, and the scene of the trial with the Queen of Hearts are all present in the five adaptations in question.

This narrative outline constitutes a simplification of Carroll's *Alice* books and represents how those events have been considered essential to the girl's journey. However, considering Barthes' categories, cardinal features are those that constitute "direct consequence for the subsequent development of the story" (Barthes 94) and the number of occurrences in adaptations not necessarily prove that those events are cardinal in Carroll's narrative. To categorize the events as cardinal or catalyzers, considering the first scene, Alice has to be portrayed in a "real world" before going to Wonderland; otherwise, the viewer would not acknowledge the fantastic new world as oneiric or as different from her everyday reality. Thus, it constitutes a cardinal feature in *Alice's* stories. As to enter Wonderland, Alice necessarily falls into a rabbit hole, or enters some form of tunnel or hole in most adaptations, while in some of them she passes through a mirror. Her encounter with the Caterpillar also seems to be fundamental for the development of the story, since that is the moment when Alice solidifies her thoughts about her *self* and the changes that she is going through. That passage has generally been interpreted as related to Alice's process of growing up. In the same vein, Alice's "shrinking and growing" after drinking or eating something can arguably be considered a cardinal feature, but because of the adaptations that cast Alice as a grown-up, these elements have been omitted in some of them with no apparent loss of their effect in the narratives. Moreover, the scene that constitutes the end of Alice's journey in Wonderland, her trial with the Queen, is also cardinal in the Barthesian sense, since it establishes Alice's return to the real world.

Differently, though, as Brooker points out, scenes that recurrently appear in adaptations, such as the Mad Tea Party – which appears in all the selected adaptations – and the croquet game, to name a few, do not constitute cardinal features in any of the adaptations

since they serve no purpose in the narratives themselves but rather slow down her journey into Wonderland (204). However, in 1976 *Alice in Wonderland: An X-Rated Porn Comedy*, there is an exception. The Mad Tea Party constitutes the moment when Alice has her first sexual encounter with a man, the Mad Hatter, and in that adaptation, the scene provides something to Alice other than bewilderment and offense. The same can be said of her encounter with the Live Flowers and with the Tweedle brothers, though the former offers some discussion about “who she is”. Though Brooker does not discuss it, another scene that is arguably cardinal in the adaptations is when Alice meets the cat. Besides being present in all adaptations in discussion, the dialogue between Alice and the Cheshire Cat about what path she should take constitutes an important event both in Carroll’s books and in most adaptations.

Assuming all the scenes that do not constitute “cardinal features” in the *Alice* stories, why do they appear so often in adaptations? Brooker affirms that “the only reasonable explanation is that these episodes are regarded as *iconic* elements, without which the story would seem lacking, so that each director sees them as necessary to and expected of *Alice in Wonderland*” (205) despite other modifications in the plot, the omission of characters or the addition of elements. Indeed, I believe Brooker’s explanation is true, though not enough. The passages concerning Alice’s trip to Wonderland and return to the real world constitute the very condition of the *Alice* stories, both in the books themselves and in the several adaptations, and can be considered cardinal features. However, I do not believe that events such as the encounter with the Caterpillar, the liquid from a bottle that makes her shrink, the cake that makes her grow, among others, constitute the only cardinal ones throughout Carroll’s books. If these scenes can be considered “cardinal” for Carroll’s narratives, so can others that are generally omitted in adaptations, such as her encounters with the Duchess and with Humpty-Dumpty.

Moreover, I doubt whether these episodes actually establish the necessary relation of cause and effect for being considered cardinal features within the Victorian nonsense books. The narratives of the books do not consist of linear beginning-middle-end narratives that establish along themselves relations of causality. Differently, the focus of the *Alice* stories is not on the cardinal features but on Alice's lingering through the several catalyzer events that take her "nowhere" and have no specific purpose, in consonance with Hancher's idea that "scene, myth, and image, rather than of plot, narrative voice, or ... diction" (qtd. in Cristopher Hollingsworth xix) are the most important features of *Alice*. Concerning the adaptations, I believe that there may be already a traditional way of adapting the *Alice* books – considering the first adaptation was produced in 1903 – which was established by the very practice of adapting and re-adapting them, helping shape the nowadays famous journey and conferring on some events and situations the status of iconic. Therefore, considering Alice as a myth, these events have also achieved their importance out of Carroll's books, though that does not mean they are more relevant within the books. Furthermore, as Alice herself, the new "existences" of those events are filled with new conditions, contexts and significations, as the discussion of the adaptations will try to show.

Considering these iconic episodes, they constitute the central axis around which all the selected adaptations revolve. In contrast, the adaptations from the 2000s on relate to those passages differently. My purpose here is to debate how the character of Alice is portrayed both in her real world and in Wonderland, so as to find out the transformations the character has suffered in the selected adaptations. Furthermore, the adaptations will be analyzed taking into consideration the "tomboyishness" visible in Carroll's heroine, so as to analyze whether Alice has been reformed or whether her transgressiveness remains. Another aspect that will be debated is how Alice interacts with Wonderland and how the social relations in Wonderland are constituted, focusing on the role she plays in each context. Furthermore, the

following subsections aim to demonstrate how critical readings of the *Alice* stories have influenced the adaptations in question.

3.2.1 Disney's 1951 *Alice in Wonderland*: "I give myself very good advice, but I very seldom follow it"

In the most famous production that retells the *Alice* stories, Alice follows pretty much the storyline of the adventures created by Carroll in his first book, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, though some characters from *Through the Looking Glass* also appear in Disney's *Wonderland*, as for instance the Tweedle brothers. Despite Walt Disney's love for Carroll's *Alice* stories, the reception of the cartoon at the time it was released includes bad reviews for having "cheaply pretty songs", by *The Times*. *The Illustrated London News* "blocked its ears" at the "indescribable hullabaloo" and "sheer din" (Brooker 206). Moreover, Donald Thomas deeply dismisses Disney's *Alice*, since, according to him, it owes "more to the culture of popcorn and bubble-gum than to the genius of either Dodgson or Tenniel. For the first time, the self-confidence of Alice was touched by the vulgar assertiveness of Lolita" (qtd. in Brooker 206). According to Brooker, Thomas's disdain for the adaptation is a mixture of distaste for American commercial films with the sexualization of the Victorian girl (Brooker 206).

Surprised by Thomas's comment, Brooker affirms that "Disney is commonly thought of as a sanitizing influence, reducing classic tales to tweeness" (206), and that Disney's *Alice* is a sanitized version of the Victorian books – an opinion that I tend to endorse. However, since my objective is to discuss those adaptations also in terms of gender, Thomas's comment could not be ignored. Though I see no sexualized trait in Disney's *Alice*, Donald Thomas writes at the time the cartoon was released, when the audiences – perhaps, especially in relation to other adaptations of the *Alice* books or maybe in comparison to other cartoons'

protagonists – may have find sexualized aspects in Alice. In any case, that is not my impression on the production and its protagonist.

In the first scene of Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice is portrayed lying on a branch of a tree while her sister reads an excerpt of "William the Conqueror" aloud. Her sister is portrayed as much older than Alice and she is wearing an eighteenth-century-style dress. Actually, she does not seem to be Alice's sister, but rather the governess of Alice's house, since her characterization suggests respectability and order. Comparing the portrayals of the two sisters, Will Brooker draws attention to the difference in how they speak: "[i]f Alice's voice ... is cut-glass haughty, [her sister's voice] is even further up the scale of reserved refinement" (206). Moreover, Alice is bored because the book her sister reads does not have "any pictures or conversations", and starts to talk to Dinah about how her world "would be a wonderland" if she could recreate it. Thus, it is possible to argue that the great difference between Alice and her sister is the element that recalls Carroll's Alice non-conformity: while her sister embodies the appropriate womanhood, Alice is not satisfied with the world as it is and feels the need to invent a new one.

The three aspects of the protagonist that the viewer can apprehend by this first scene – her lack of interest in the book, the way she speaks with no refinement in comparison to her sister, and the fact that she is positioned on the tree – can be read as her tomboyishness. However, in my view, Alice is much more conforming, passive and well-behaved in Disney's cartoon than in Carroll's books. To begin with, though she sometimes loses her temper, Alice keeps her politeness much more than Carroll's Alice, in different scenes and in relation to several characters. Indeed, the characters with which Alice really argues in the books – as for instance the Tweedles, the White Queen, the Red Queen, the Duchess, among others – are omitted in this adaptation or have their participations really minimized. Especially regarding the scene when Disney's Alice meets the Tweedles, though she does not want to hear their

poems, she passively waits until they finish reciting and only flees when they seize to address her.

Besides, the songs Alice sings “offer a commentary that seems coyly sentimental when compared to the wry, sometimes grim twists in Carroll’s ‘How Doth the Little Crocodile’ and ‘You Are Old, Father William’” (Brooker 206). This excessive sentimentality can be best noted in the scene that portrays Alice lost in the Wonderland forest. In that scene the girl begins to cry and is watched by the Wonderland creatures, to which she tells her wish to go back home. Singing “Very Good Advice,” Alice affirms that she must have followed all the good advice she gives herself, and that now she is paying the price for disobeying: she will never be able to get home again. It is interesting to point out that both in the books and in Disney’s version, Alice’s advices to herself mock the tone and the content of adults’ advices¹⁵; and that can arguably be a reflex of her everyday reality and how adults address her at home. However, whereas in Carroll’s books Alice “very seldom follows” her own advices, she does not regret being disobedient as she does in Disney’s version. In this sense, if Carroll’s *Alice* books present no moral lessons, Disney’s *Alice* conveys a very assertive moral: children should be obedient; otherwise they can get into trouble. Indeed, Carroll’s Alice wants to discover Wonderland and does not fear going deeper into it, differently from Disney’s Alice, who cries for fear of never returning home. Thus, if Carroll’s Alice can be read as a traveler in relation to the “new land” she discovers, Disney’s Alice is her opposite, since the “somewhere” she wants to get to, as she tells the cat, is back home.

Another aspect to be discussed is the difference between Carroll’s and Disney’s Wonderland. In this regard, Brooker argues that Carroll’s Wonderland, especially concerning Tenniel’s pictures, is filled with “morbid and violent elements” (207). He affirms that

¹⁵ An example of that is the passage when she drinks from the bottle and shrinks for the first time: “‘Come, there’s no use in crying like that!’ said Alice to herself, rather sharply; ‘I advise you to leave off this minute!’ She generally gave herself very good advice, (though she very seldom followed it), and sometimes she scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes; and once she remembered trying to box her own ears for having cheated herself in a game of croquet she was playing against herself. ...” (Carroll, *AAIW* 21).

“Tenniel’s images are almost eerie in their depiction of grotesques on the same level of realism as Alice” (207). Differently, Disney’s Wonderland clearly deals with fantasy: the creatures are all drawn in a stylized manner that lacks the realist grotesque appearance of Tenniel’s drawings. As Brooker explains, the way the characters that inhabit Wonderland are drawn is strongly related to surrealism; interestingly, the cartoon was produced after Salvador Dali’s residence at the Disney studios, so that his influence is visible (207). The only scene that carries the violence of Tenniel’s Wonderland is the scene of the trial, in which all creatures chase Alice following the Queen’s order, resulting in the end of her dream, as she wakes. Thus, in terms of images, it is possible to affirm that Disney’s Wonderland is much less scary than Carroll’s/Tenniel’s: the fantastic land was created to entertain children; consequently, much of the “knowing, intelligent appeal to adults” (207) was removed from the adaptation.

However, Brooker affirms the “innocence of Disney’s Wonderland is complicated by the potential for drug reading” (207). In fact, the Alice books have been read by psychedelic theories that support the apology to drug use in several events of the stories. The mushroom on which the Caterpillar lies, the hookah he smokes, the bottle from which Alice drinks that causes her to shrink, the cake she eats that makes her grow – all these elements have been read as hallucinatory elements that take Alice to a mental “wonderland”. In Disney version, those elements not only appear but also their reading as hallucinatory is arguably increased. As Brooker observes, “[t]he Caterpillar’s appearance is accompanied by languid, exotic music and his voice is lazily drifting, with smoke shapes accompanying and illustrating his dialogue” (208). Brooker discusses Alice’s final escape from Wonderland and argues that the trip has numerous “surreal distortions, culminating in a slow-motion, nightmare struggle towards the little door and a vision of herself under the tree” (208). Although reading those elements as related to drug use could be arbitrary, as Brooker points out, he argues that the

association of Disney's version of *Alice* with drugs was acknowledged briefly after its release, and even used for marketing purposes, because of its enormous success among hippy college audiences, as for instance in the slogan: "Should you see it? Go ask Alice" and "Nine out of ten Dormice recommend Disney's Alice in Wonderland for visual euphoria and good, clean nonsense" (Brooker 208).

Thus, it is possible to conclude that Disney's *Alice*, though sanitized in the sense of the moral it conveys, and also in relation to the less violent Wonderland it portrays, is not completely free of controversy. Despite its status of "appropriate" entertainment for children, it also contains the unofficial drug reading that is going to please knowing adults. However, I believe that the psychedelic elements that appear on screen, though interesting for debate, do not put Disney's Alice in the same place as Carroll's Alice in terms of subversion and innovation. Indeed, the protagonist is much less interesting than that of Carroll's stories, and her desire to get back home threatens the relevance of her adventures and makes the story less nonsensical, and consequently less interesting.

3.2.2 Miller's *Alice in Wonderland* (1966): "The things that I have seen I now can see no more"

In the first adaptation that will be analyzed, Jonathan Miller's *Alice in Wonderland*, released in 1966, the influence of a critical trend upon the film is quite visible. Clear references to psychoanalytical readings of Carroll's books are present in the adaptation and the changes in plot, characters and dialogues in relation to Carroll's books support that reading. When asked about his film and its central discussion, Miller explains,

"[i]t was all about dreaming. Dreaming is an internal world which bears a reference to a world that you live in and replays in all sorts of disheveled versions... That was my concern with the incidents that occur in dreams,

which pass unnoticed at the time and only in retrospect seem odd. They seem odd because after the dream you are like the spectator on the other side of the aquarium glass, able to look at the contents of the aquarium and see it as exotic... (Roiman 32).

The director's preoccupation about the aspects of dreams, and how illogic they seem to the dreamer when he/she awakes, influences the way he builds Wonderland. A good example of that is the moment when Alice is running through the forest and, as she runs, she passes by a man bathing in a huge bathtub without noticing him. Although the image of someone bathing is something familiar, in that context it functions as an uncanny element that helps build up the simultaneous strangeness and familiarity of Miller's Wonderland, in psychoanalytical terms.

Miller's concern about the aspects and nature of dreams influenced not only the uncanny elements that appear in Wonderland, but also the way he builds the characters that inhabit it. As the director himself affirms, he interprets the *Alice* stories as a "*roman à clef*, [in which] Dodgson was actually talking about people that the little girl, Liddell, would have known... [I]t was about the childhood of an Oxford girl who had grown up in the gardens and cloisters of Christ Church, Oxford" (Roiman 33). In this sense, the director blurs the limits between fantasy and reality, since he portrays the characters of Wonderland unmasked: the Mouse, the Rabbit, the Caterpillar and all the other animals that inhabit Wonderland are acted by people in "civilian clothes" (Roiman 33). Their characterization as the Wonderland's creatures is made through their gestures and ways of speaking, in order to establish a closer connection between Alice's everyday reality and Wonderland, again relating to the fact that dreams are populated by elements of our "real" world. Interestingly, through this quotation it is possible to see that Miller's understanding of the *Alice* books includes the relationship between Charles Dodgson and Alice in Oxford, interpreting the books both considering the

Victorian context and reading Alice as not only the fictional character or the “paper-being”(Brandão 14), but as Carroll’s child friend, Alice Liddell.

Miller’s psychoanalytical approach to the *Alice* stories, instead of following what Brooker calls “the Carroll Myth” and implying a pedophilic relationship between Carroll and Alice, focuses on the nineteenth-century idealization of childhood and the nostalgia implied in growing up, as discussed in Chapter One. In this regard, Miller confesses, “I knew it wasn’t simply a story for a child – it was also, we can see at this distance, a story about childhood, about growing up” (Roiman 33). Thus, Miller reads and adapts the Alice stories as a fable about growing up, and that can be attested by the way he portrays his heroine as a prepubescent girl, around thirteen or fourteen years old. Moreover, her connection to Alice Liddell, or rather to Carroll’s idealization of the girl, is supported by her appearance, which, according to Brooker, “recalls the manuscript and illustrations of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*” (209), which was illustrated by Carroll and given to Alice Liddell as a present. According to Pilinovsky, “[t]he story of Alice can be read as a story of maturation that resents its necessity” (180) and that is what Miller’s adaptation discusses. In the scene of the Caucus race, for instance, instead of rebelling against a pointless race in which no animal would be able to get dry, as narrated in Carroll’s books, Alice watches an adult social meeting, and sees it as pointless and illogic. The fact that the adults are animalized and that the scene is clearly being shown through Alice’s point of view imply that she is not part of that world and fears the need to grow up. Moreover, by the end of Miller’s adaptation, the tone leads the viewer to interpret the story as a melancholic abandonment of childhood, especially because of her feeling that “freshness and glory of vision is something she has left behind in childhood” (Brooker 209).

Therefore, Miller’s Alice is a tormented girl that resents – and is terrified by – the need of growing up, and because of that, Wonderland is portrayed as threatening and scary,

since it represents the social interactions and challenges she will encounter in the next stage of her life. Here, it is not possible to discuss transgressiveness in the same way I have discussed so far: Miller's Alice's only transgression, over which she has no control, is her fear to grow out of childhood. In this regard, her conflict is much more mental than physical, and her journey into Wonderland is much more an allegory of her helplessness in relation to her own life than an adventure she takes because of her curiosity to discover the world. Similarly to Carroll's Alice, Miller's protagonist also questions her subjectivity and identity, but she knows who she is and wishes she can be the same despite the pressures of social life that order her to grow up. Therefore, although she fears to conform to social expectations and grow up, by the end of the film it is suggested that she will mature and fit adulthood.

3.2.3 Townsend's *Alice in Wonderland: an X-Rated Porn Comedy* (1976): "It feels so good to be growing up"

Bud Townsend's 1976 retelling of *Alice in Wonderland*, produced by Bill Osco, has been X-rated in its very title because of the sexual content of the film. It appears both as *Alice in Wonderland: an X-Rated Porn Comedy* or *Alice in Wonderland: an X-Rated Porn Musical*, though the music is not the most peculiar feature in its narrative and thus, the title "comedy" seems more appropriate. In this adaptation, Alice is taken out both of childhood and of the Victorian context. The setting of the film seems to be contemporary to its production and reminds us of the libertarian tone of the great musical festivals from the end of the 60s. Despite its prohibition for young audiences and also despite its sexual appeal, Townsend's adaptation contains most of the "iconic" events narrated in Carroll's books and repeated in many adaptations for children. Moreover, it also approaches the Alice stories as a fable about growing up. However, differently from Miller's adaptation, here Alice has chosen to "grow up" and now resents all the fun she has not experienced. Even though the

protagonist is already a young woman who has a job and responsibilities, the plot of the adaptation suggests she has not accomplished maturity yet because she has never had any sexual experience; or rather, that she has experienced only the “serious” part of adulthood but missed the pleasures that come with it.

In the first scene, Alice is presented to the viewer in her work place: she is a librarian who seems to have spent her whole life “too busy growing up” instead of pleasing herself, as she sings. Before acknowledging that, though, Alice has an argument with William, a man who harasses the young woman by insistently asking her out. William has a very important role in this first scene because he is the one who makes Alice rethink her life and notice that pleasure has never been part of her it. The virginal librarian, who wears clothes that seem too childish for her age, unties her hair, takes a copy of Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* from a shelf and imagines the pleasures Alice experienced in Wonderland instead of growing up. At this moment, a White Rabbit appears at her side and taps her shoulder. She follows him through the mirror, which functions as a clear allusion to Carroll’s second book. In Wonderland, Alice experiences many different sexual pleasures, discovers how to please herself and has sexual intercourse with the Mad Hatter in the scene of the Tea Party. Another example is that, during the trial scene, Alice confronts the Queen of Hearts. The trial consists of a lesbian sexual relation, which Alice wins since she makes the Queen have an orgasm. As the Queen takes some time to recover, Alice is able to escape Wonderland and return to her world.

Townsend’s film is surely also characterized by a psychoanalytical approach. Alice is a repressed adult who has always followed the rules and, because of that, has never experienced sexuality. The desires and pleasures are hidden in her mind, and it is only through her dream that she learns that “if something feels good, it is good; so there is nothing wrong with it.” Because she has always been too obedient and conforming to the rules, Alice

can only experience sexuality in her dream; when she returns to her real world, she is awakened to her sexuality and decides to give William a chance. She loses her virginity, but in order to be able to get any pleasure from sex, Alice has to access the secret desires of her unconscious, which constitute her excessive and deviant Wonderland.

As a last comment to be made, even though this retelling of *Alice* promotes the liberation of sex from the restraints of “appropriateness” and discusses desire and the awakening of sexuality, the “possible” sexual intercourses it displays are either heterosexual or fetishist lesbian. Male gay sex is not portrayed, and since the film discusses unrestrained desire it seems puzzling why this sexual possibility was excluded. I believe that although the film aims at a libertarian purpose, it is entrapped by keeping the male spectator as the target audience, so that male gay sexual intercourse would not please male viewers. Moreover, one may argue that Alice ends up as a non-conforming adult in relation to gender and sexuality; however, that is not what happens. Alice’s journey in Wonderland enables her to experience sex, as a “mental healing”. Indeed, as Alice awakens to her sexual life, she conforms to what it was expected of her, so that sexuality in Townsend’s film does not constitute transgression and a reading of Alice as a non-conformist would be impossible.

3.2.4 Harris’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1985): “When will I be a grown-up?”

If Miller’s Alice does not want to get to adulthood because she sees it as illogic and threatening, growing up is Harry Harris’s Alice’s strongest wish. In the first scene Alice is helping her mother in the dining room. They are arranging the table for tea, which Alice cannot participate in because “tea is for grown-ups,” as her mother explains. This way, Harris also adapts the *Alice* books in relation to the process of growing up, but instead of rebelling against social expectations, Harris’s Alice wants to conform to them. In relation to gender, the first scene of the adaptation shows how dedicatedly Alice helps her mom to arrange the

table, and it becomes clear both that she is educated as a lady and that she “can’t wait” to be an adult. When Alice goes outside to call her sister for tea, the viewer is introduced to a refined young lady who is reading a novel in the garden and embodies everything Alice wants to be one day. Indeed, Harris’s adaptation abandons the tomboyishness of Carroll’s Alice and recreates the girl into a conforming ideal in relation to gender.

Moreover, the way Alice interacts with Wonderland also reinforces the director’s move into reforming Carroll’s tomboyish protagonist. The director includes a scene in which Alice is wandering in the forest and finds a baby goat. She notices the goat is trapped under a log and hurries to free it saying “Bye, little goat... Go back to your mother. I’m sure she misses you... I’m sure mine does too”. Similarly, when she finds a young chimp, she also sends it home, back to its mother. The urge to go back home is one of the most relevant aspects that distinguishes Harris’s television film from all the adaptations discussed so far.¹⁶ Differently from Carroll’s Alice – whose curiosity about the White Rabbit and uncontrolled wish to enter the beautiful garden constitute her motivation for her adventures in Wonderland – Harris’s Alice regrets having fallen into the rabbit hole and wants to go home. Even more striking is the way she scolds herself for being curious: she affirms that the impossibility of ever returning home is the punishment she gets – and deserves – for her thoughtless attitude. Therefore, again differently from Carroll’s *Alice* books, in Harris’s adaptation morals abound, especially in relation to gender.

The impulse to force Alice into conformity is not the only aspect that makes Harris’s adaptation a “sanitized” version of Carroll’s novels. The television film casts many celebrities as Wonderland creatures, and seems to have a merchandizing appeal for humanitarian purposes. That may be supported by the scene of the Beatle Ringo Starr as the Mock Turtle, and the subsequent song Alice sings: “Why do people act as if they’re crazy? /

¹⁶ To a certain extent, Harris’s *Alice* is comparable to Disney’s, since both adaptations can be viewed as “sanitizing” Carroll’s books. However, if in Disney’s adaptation no clear message about growing up and achieving proper womanhood is conveyed, in Harris’s these morals are considerably present.

Why do people live the way they do? / Don't they understand that the things I've planned are dreams that I demand come true?" Together with Alice's constant "I love you" for different creatures in Wonderland, it seems that Harris' adaptation aims at conveying a good example for both kids and adults and to provide families a healthy entertainment. This response to the *Alice* stories, though valid, surely distorts both transgressive essence of Alice and the novelty of the books as non-didactic children's literature.

3.2.5 Willing's *Alice in Wonderland* (1999): "I don't want to disappoint you and daddy, mom."

Willing's adaptation of the *Alice* stories, similarly to all the previous adaptations, also gives Alice a new motivation for entering Wonderland. The director also reads the *Alice* stories as a parable for maturation and builds the whole narrative around this assumption. In the first scene, Alice is in her bedroom, having her hair brushed by a maid, as she is getting ready to sing a song in her parents' garden party. However, Alice is afraid of singing in front of the audience, and her trip to Wonderland seems to function as a way to escape the scary situation she is about to live. Similarly to Miller's Alice, Willing's is also a prepubescent girl who fears adulthood. Differently, though, the tone of the adaptation is not melancholic in relation to the need to grow up, but rather presents it as necessary and healthy.

Similarly to Miller's adaptation again, Wonderland is filled with elements and people from Alice's everyday life. The characters who constitute the audience that will watch her recital appear as the White Rabbit, the Gryphon, the Caterpillar, the Mouse, the Cook, and other creatures in Wonderland. This replication of characters totally modifies the way Willing's Alice interacts with the inhabitants of Wonderland when compared to Carroll's Alice. Moreover, the meaning of Wonderland also changes in relation to Carroll's books. If in Carroll's texts the creatures in Wonderland puzzle, question and confront Alice, in

Willing's version the creatures encourage Alice to abandon shyness. The best example of that is the Mock Turtle, who persuades Alice to sing to the creatures in Wonderland. The moment seems to constitute a "healing ritual" and, in this sense, Wonderland can be read as a liminal space where Alice is prepared to enter adulthood. Moreover, the relation to psychoanalysis is also visible. Another scene that supports that is the moment when, at the end of her trial with the Queen, Alice feels prepared to confront her. When Alice states that she feels confident enough, the Rabbit replies: "Then you don't need us anymore", and the dream land begins to vanish. Alice goes back to the garden party, and is applauded after singing, representing Alice's success in both overcoming her shyness and managing to be part of the adults' social context.

Thus, as Jack Zipes points out, Willing "violates Alice by making her into an obedient and innocent girl, who thrives on pep talks from silly creatures" (301). Indeed, similarly to the adaptations discussed so far, once more Alice's transgressive features are simplified by a difficulty to conform – here, represented by her shyness – that is easily overcome. Her difficulty to conform differs a lot from the tomboyishness of Carroll's Alice, which is not present in this version. Moreover, the threatening features of Wonderland give way to a friendly and comforting setting that serves a clear purpose in Alice's process of getting to maturity, so that nonsense disappears.

3.3 Contemporary adaptations: Alice's non-reformed transgressiveness

Certainly, this recurrent reading of the *Alice* books as related to the protagonist's process of maturation – instead of reading it as a political critique or as a drug hallucination, for instance – has influenced the more complex readings that emerge in the early 2000s. In the most recent *Alice* adaptations, the protagonist's new adventures do not follow Carroll's storyline and nor do their narratives share many similarities with Carroll's. Although some

iconic episodes from the books may appear, they are all re-signified and sometimes, as I will discuss in relation to HBO *Alice* in Chapter Three, these elements are so intertwined in the new narrative that they are barely recognizable.

In the studied adaptations from 1951 to 1999, Alice's process of maturation implies entering adulthood and, in order to do so, the protagonist must overcome her difficulties and conform to something that is socially established. The same does not happen in more recent adaptations. Actually, nowadays Alice's new journeys are related to her need to discover herself, and although the adaptations also discuss the protagonist's maturation, they discuss it rather in relation to her subjectivity than in relation to something she needs to conform to. In both Tim Burton's and McGee's inspired works, Alice goes to Wonderland because of her conflicting personality in relation to her "real" worlds and her struggle is related to freeing her *self* from norms and truths that regulate her life. Thus, if several adaptations have reformed Alice's non-conforming personality, recent adaptations reinforce her transgressiveness as central to her subjectivity and this way, establish a dialogue with Carroll's Alice, as I will try to show.

Interestingly, in both adaptations Alice's journey is actually a return to the dreamland, though the motivation for the second journey is not the same, so that Burton's and McGee's stories constitute sequels rather than modified versions of Carroll's narratives. Moreover, the sanitization many adaptations of the 1900s have offered to the Alice stories has disappeared in the 2000s adaptations: insanity, either as mental disease or as a social label in relation to her nonconformist behavior, informs the narratives of these recent *Alice* afterlives. In the same vein, Wonderland is portrayed as a violent setting. Both in Burton's and in McGee's dreamlands there are multiple challenges Alice has to face and many situations where her life is at risk. Several creatures are violent and have grotesque appearances, similarly to the creatures drawn by John Tenniel in the pictures of Carroll's Victorian books. Moreover, in

both adaptations Alice must travel to Wonderland in order to save it from evil regimes, which pretty much mirrors the horror present in each Alice's everyday worlds. Concerning their differences, as I am going to discuss, though both adaptations reflect the several interpretations of the Alice books in terms of theories, they are influenced by different trends and respond differently to each critical reading.

3.3.1 McGee's 2000 *Alice*: "Is there no joy here?"

Besides being innovative because of the medium chosen for the adaptation, American McGee's *Alice* videogame is most praised by the inventiveness of its plot by both literary critics and gamers. McGee's *Alice* narrates Alice's life after her adventures in Wonderland and in the Looking-Glass land, constituting a sequel to Carroll's books. This third adventure also takes place in the Victorian context, and begins to be narrated by the medical diary that accompanies the game, which, together with the scenes that precede and introduce the game itself, contextualizes Alice and her new adventures in Wonderland. Alice has been in a mental hospital for ten years now since the accident that happened to her parents: one night Dinah upset a gas lamp, causing the fire that killed both Alice's mother and father. In spite of Alice's vain attempt at helping her parents, the flames had already taken the whole room and she throws herself outside through the window as they shout "Save yourself, Alice!". After this traumatic experience, Alice is blamed, both by others and by herself, for the fire that killed her parents and is taken to a mental hospital.

This first scene conveys a sense of a forced abandonment of childhood and innocence. The camera focuses on Alice's eyes just after she has thrown herself outside into the snow, when she was about nine years old, and "we move in on her face and pull swiftly back to her green eyes to discover the older Alice rigid and unmoving in the asylum bed" (Brooker236). The player acknowledges ten years have passed, and here is when the game action begins to

happen. As a nurse takes Alice's old toy rabbit to her room, trying to cheer her up and take her out from inertia, Alice sees the stuffed rabbit turn its head. The toy echoes her dead parents' supplication "Save us, Alice!". Similarly to Carroll's first novel, and here assumedly for the second time, Alice is invited into Wonderland by the rabbit, but here the dreaming adventure constitutes a "symbolic battle against her own demons of grief, rage, and guilt" (229). Alice needs to revisit her dreamland in order to free herself from the guilt she feels, since she also believes she was responsible for her parents' death. Moreover, she wants to revenge on those who brought her to the mental hospital. Thus, the pleasure Alice might have experienced in her previous journeys into magic lands, though already full of scary and challenging situations, have turned into a mental horror-adventure: the game is loosely built in relation to Carroll's stories and its atmosphere is darker, more adult, and filled with the sense of revenge.

Concerning Alice as a character, she is portrayed in Wonderland wearing a blue dress similar to the one in Disney's version and black boots full of buckles. Despite her clear connection with Carroll's Alice, McGee's is a brunette, similarly to Mr. Dodgson's child friend Alice Liddell. As Brooker observes, the connection between McGee's Alice, Dodgson's friend Alice Liddell, and Carroll's fictional Alice is even more complicated while the player finds out that this Alice was reading a sequel to the *Alice* books, given to her as a present, and discovers that the handwritten letters that are on her writing desk contain phrases such as "Dear Mr. Dodgson"(235). Those elements insert the idea of the "Carroll Myth" into McGee's game, though this reference is not further explored. Moreover, McGee's Alice's behavior while interacting with Wonderland, despite her revenge motivation, is very similar to Carroll's literary Alice. According to Brooker, both Alices are "polite yet not passive, affectionate to those she trusts, generally unfazed by new challenges, anxious to keep pressing ahead towards a goal" (239). Another similarity they share is the fact that both

characters break into tears once or twice through their adventures, but are able to support over-challenging situations and do not give up because of fear.

Differently from Carroll's Alice, who is driven by curiosity, McGee's Alice enters Wonderland as an attempt to free herself from guilt. Her need to save Wonderland from the Queen's evil regime, which has enslaved part of Wonderland and almost destroyed it, stands for her dry reality; as Alice herself states, "Reminds me of the asylum. Is there no joy here?". Indeed, McGee's Alice's journey constitutes an inner journey to overcome guilt and to allow her to be happy again. Constituting Alice's greatest obstacle, madness is at times addressed as a form of escapism that can and must be abandoned, as the Cat says to Alice "As knowing where you're going is preferable to being lost". In order to escape madness, then, Alice overcomes her inner barriers and hunts the White Rabbit and all the demons that represent her guilt: she must kill them all in order to achieve mental freedom. Therefore, Carroll's Alice's subversiveness in confronting the creatures in Wonderland and stating her existence is taken to an extreme point in McGee's inner journey, since here Alice needs to slay them, so as to recover her *self*. Moreover, madness itself is re-signified: whereas the cat says to Carroll's Alice "we're all mad here" (Carroll *AAIW* 65), thus considering Alice mad too, McGee's Alice pursues her healing.

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that besides reading the *Alice* books as a fable about reaching maturity, McGee's *Alice* story responds to the books not in the sense of reforming Alice or simply re-interpreting and re-contextualizing her transgressiveness; differently, this adaptation takes the Alice stories as they are and seemingly ask: What happens after that? Attuned with Carroll's threatening wonder-lands and with Alice's subversive features, this adaptation creates a new story that simultaneously acknowledges previous adaptations¹⁷ and vaguely casts Carroll's characters and landscapes in order to tell story of a young woman that

¹⁷As Brooker argues, the game suggests elements from previous film adaptations of the *Alice* stories, namely Miller's (1966) and Willing's (1999) films (Brooker 234).

has changed a lot: she has experienced changes in her size in Carroll's novels, changed her actual size and shape due to growing up, and now her psychological features have also changed after the accident.

It is clear now that this adaptation engages in dialogue with psychoanalytical readings of Carroll's novels, especially the theme of madness and the mental journey for cure. As Brooker highlights, in spite of the half gothic, half fetishistic style of her books (231), which are black and full of buckles, Alice has not a sensual appeal: her thin and small-breasted body is all covered by her dress, so that she differs considerably from general videogame heroines. However, Brooker enumerates several websites that contain prequel and sequel fan-fictions that sexualize McGee's Alice, some of them based on the "Carroll Myth", and dozens of illustrations that portray her in more sensual clothes. Acknowledging these responses is interesting for my next discussion about why to re-adapt Alice today.

3.3.2 Tim Burton's 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*: "I was just picturing all the women wearing trousers and all the men wearing dresses."

Tim Burton's film adaptation of the *Alice's* stories enters into dialogue with the adapted Victorian books similarly to McGee's game: both not only add elements and re-create Alice's motivation for journeying into Wonderland, but also take Carroll's narratives as Alice's past experiences. Burton presents Wonderland and her experiences there as a recurrent nightmare that is the same she has had every night since she was seven years old. In the first scene she is in her nightgown, calling her father because she is scared by the insistent dream. Her father, named Charles Kingsley¹⁸, leaves the business meeting with some friends,

¹⁸ It is interesting to point out that Charles Kingsley was a university professor, historian and novelist who lived in England during the Victorian Age. He was Mary Kingsley's uncle, woman traveler who inspired Tim Burton's characterization of Alice. Moreover, it is also worth to mention that Charles Kingsley's ideas were also ahead of his time: he was radically critical of Roman Catholicism and sympathetic to Darwin's theories on evolution. Thus, somehow, he was also a "non-conforming" man, and maybe that is the reason why Burton chose his name for Alice's father.

who call him “mad” for his daring spirit in investing in a completely new trade, and takes Alice back to bed. He tells Alice that, because of the recurrent nightmare, she is definitely mad, “but all the best people are,” as her father asserts. Here, a love bond between father and daughter is shown, and is disrupted by the discomfort of the next scene.

The following scene shows Alice and her mother in a carriage, going to some party Alice does not have the least interest to participate in. The viewer gets aware of the death of her father, and it becomes apparent that Alice is not as close to her mother as she used to be to her late father. The party they are attending is supposed to be Alice’s engagement party, which everybody knows except Alice herself. Both within their conversation and in the party, many issues related to “proper” Victorian femininity and womanhood are raised. First, Alice’s mother scolds her for not being “properly dressed”, as Alice is not wearing either stockings or a corset. When her mother asks her about the corset, she replies, “I’m against it”; at this point, a direct connection with the feminist struggle emerges, which, interestingly began already during the Victorian age through the suffrage movement. As the young man Hamish is going to propose to Alice, her older sister, who is already married and assumedly happy, tells Alice that she should marry him and be happy ever-after. As Alice reacts by saying she does not know whether she wants to marry Hamish, her sister replies she would never find a better husband, since Hamish is a lord. Furthermore, her sister affirms that Alice’s beauty will not last forever, and if she does not marry soon she will have a tragic end and become a burden to her mother.

Hamish proposes to Alice under a gazebo, and the young woman, who is being anxiously watched by the guests who expect her to say “yes,” runs away asking for some time to think. Before she runs, though, she sees the White Rabbit showing her his watch, as if indicating that time is passing and it is getting too late. Indeed, in Wonderland, Alice turns into the heroine who saves the place from the evil regime of the Red Queen, similarly to

McGee's adaptation. Alice is the only champion able to slay the Jabberwocky, the monstrous creature that the Red Queen uses to impose her power upon Wonderland. Besides that, and more importantly, is her achievement in relation her consciousness and the certainty about what she should do. Again similarly to McGee's adaptation, the Jabberwocky represents Alice's inner dragons: she does not know how to deal with the expectations of her family and her real desires. As she slays the Jabberwocky, it becomes clear for her that she is brave enough to find an alternative path for her life differently from marriage.

Through the theme of Alice's marriage, Burton poses several issues concerning the socially acceptable pattern for a woman in the Victorian Age, and also shows its connection to economy, as a woman should get married because she was economically dependent on a provider: while single, her father is her provider; and after marriage, her husband. That is also related to the Victorian idea that work was a shameful practice inherent to the lower classes, and thus, a female member of the aristocracy like Alice would never be expected or allowed to work and become her own provider. The film leads the audience to think of social and political elements related to women's position and development in society through Alice's journey as a heroine, thus entering into dialogue with the several Gender and Feminist readings of Carroll's *Alice* books.

Concerning Alice as a character, discovering *who she is* is the young woman's greatest objective. As the Hatter tells her, the first time she visited "Underland", she had much more "muchness" than now, and "muchness" can be read as independence, courage, and self-assurance. Now, Alice is there again, in her childhood dream, and has the opportunity and the duty to re-discover *herself* and her desires for life, in spite of social expectations. The metaphor of the caterpillar turning into a butterfly is the element that shapes the whole film and symbolizes Alice's process of building and discovering her subjectivity. In fact, the blue caterpillar is first seen on Hamish's shoulder, at the moment he was proposing to her. The

second moment it appears is during the journey, when Alice is asked the most important question she has to answer both in the book and in the film: “Who are you?”. The Caterpillar, named Absolem in Burton’s film, affirms Alice was “not hardly” the real Alice, the one who had been there years before. The question appears again the night before the Frabjous day, when Alice has to slay the Jabberwocky. At this moment, the Caterpillar is turning into a chrysalis (as it happens in Carroll’s book), and says Alice is not the real one – which sounds offensive to the girl her and functions as an impulse that makes her say exactly who she is, and what her objectives are. After slaying the dragon and achieving a position in her father’s company, at the exact moment she is heading for China on a ship, the blue butterfly from Underland lands on her shoulder and then flies away, as she greets him. Thus, similarly to the caterpillar who turns into a butterfly, the spectator sees Alice's transformation from girl to a non-conforming woman, as a result of her successful journey as a heroine in her inner world, Underland. From now on she will be able to call it “Wonderland” again as she used to do when she was a child, since she succeeds not only in bringing her childhood potentialities up to womanhood¹⁹, but also in slaying her inner dragons.

It is interesting to comment that, not by chance, Alice is referred as “he”, or as “that little boy,” by the Hatter. It is possible to interpret that as a metaphor for the duality in being a tomboy. Moreover, as she assumes the task of slaying the Jabberwocky, she turns into the male champion who faces the monster in Carroll’s famous nonsense poem. If in Wonderland, Alice takes a role assumedly “male”, the battlefield, when she returns to real life and has the chance to work for the company of her late father, which Hamish’s father has bought, Alice is again occupying a “male” position, considered “inappropriate” for a woman. Here, it becomes clear that it is not by chance that Alice’s last name is Kingsley: Burton’s adaptation recalls the pioneer Mary Kingsley, who travelled to Africa and published a book over 700

¹⁹This discussion is the center of my monograph paper, in which I discuss Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* in relation to Joseph Campbell’s theory about the hero’s journey.

pages long about her anthropological experience. Therefore, Carroll's Alice's transgressiveness is present as the figure of the traveller in Burton's adaptation, which was seen as "abject" in relation to Victorian norms. Moreover, Alice manages to discover "who she is", and proves that her theory about "imagining six impossible things after breakfast" may be at times right, as she imagines a new path for her life and accomplishes it, despite its "unthinkability."

3.4 Why do Alice's recent adaptations discuss gender?

From the analysis of the selected adaptations from the 2000s, it is possible to observe how differently – in relation to the adaptations produced within 1951 and 1999 discussed earlier – they relate to Carroll's books. Assuming the books as Alice's past, these two afterlives of the Victorian novels aim at creating what comes after them. Therefore, the process of reforming Alice or modifying the narrative in Carroll's books does not happen. Concerning Alice as a character, both adaptations take into consideration the transgressive aspect of Carroll's protagonist and keep it in their sequel narratives, problematizing her process of growing up even further. Moreover, not only the motivation for Alice to enter Wonderland is complicated, but the whole narrative of the adaptations problematize that dialogue with critical readings of the Alice books and raise new discussions.

Concerning Burton's film, it is striking how gender becomes a central concern that structures the whole narrative. Actually, I believe that has been a tendency in most recent adaptations, and though relying only on Burton's film might seem too vague or arbitrary to support my hypothesis, there are several adaptations that, similarly to Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, have their whole plots designed around gender issues. One of these adaptations is HBO *Alice*. The adaptation also discusses the process of a getting to maturity, but that is not all: similarly to Burton's Alice, what seems appropriate to her does not conform to social

expectations and she leaves the “appropriate” place and becomes part of the group that exceeds the norm in relation to gender, sexuality and subjectivity. Thus, if in Burton’s Alice refuses to get married and becomes a Victorian traveler, in the HBO television series she also decides not to marry and to lead an alternative life, having several sexual partners and assuring her mobility through the city of São Paulo, as I am going to discuss in Chapter Three. In HBO Alice’s Wonderland the “creatures” she interacts with are lesbians, gays, transsexuals, prostitutes and a vast range of non-conforming people.

Other adaptations are also very striking in relation to gender issues. One example is Moore and Gebbie’s graphic novel *Lost Girls*. The book constitutes a pornographic response to Carroll’s *Alice* and other stories from children’s literature, as it casts Alice, Wendy (from *Peter Pan*) and Dorothy (from *The Wizard of Oz*) and builds up new narratives to those, now adult women characters. Concerning Alice – called Lady Fairchild, a clear reference to Carroll’s affection for her – the woman “engages in nonconsensual sex with a variety of partners, all female, while under the influence of narcotics, blaming them for the loosening of her moral boundaries” (Pilinovsky 189). Another example is the appropriation of Alice’s process of “growing up” and in this process, getting to know one’s subjectivity: *Alice in Genderland: a Crossdresser Comes of Age* is the first ever memoir by a cross dresser to be published. Richard Novic narrates his life and his process of discovering himself and his sexual preferences, and openly describes his dissatisfaction within his ordinary life as a Harvard-educated psychiatrist, husband and father. As he confesses, once a week he goes out at night and his male self is left at home: that night he is Alice, a woman who enjoys going shopping, dancing, and dating a man – practices he has kept in the last ten years.

Moreover, the very responses of fans that have sexualized McGee’s Alice and also Disney’s Alice all converge to the same discussion. Indeed, Alice, the mythical image of the character that now permeates our world with her own life out of the page, has grown up along

the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and is now being discussed in relation to gender and feminist issues. But why? A first reason is that Carroll's novels themselves raise the issue of getting to maturity, which the author seemingly resents. Though Alice remains between seven and seven-and-a-half, there are multiple passages in which she has to find out who she is despite her frequently "shrinking and growing". A second reason is that several adaptations have read the books concerning Alice's maturation, generally creating new circumstances that further problematize her process of growing up.

These adaptations together have created a coherent corpus of "maturing Alices" that have been incorporated in a kind of adaptation tradition of the *Alice* stories, reinforcing her coming of age as an inherent trait of the mythical character in the contemporary viewers' minds. Furthermore, the psychoanalytical reading of Carroll's books and of Dodgson's biography has created the myth of the pedophilic relationship between Carroll and Alice, which consequently leads to the sexualization of the Victorian girl. Finally, the academic readings of the Alice books in the departments of Gender Studies and Women's Studies abound: as discussed before, Alice's transgressiveness radically questioned Victorian gender norms because of her tomboyishness, which she has never abandoned into proper womanhood as all other Victorian female characters were forced to do.

Assuming all that, I will try to answer why Alice's recent adaptations discuss gender. Carolyn Sigler has suggested that the "*Alice* books' enduring power and appeal may very well lie in the fact that, like dreams, they *can* mean whatever we *need* them to mean" (xiv). It is arguable then that a considerable portion of Carroll's direct and indirect readers need Alice to grow up, and it is also apparent that nowadays there is a need for discussing gender and sexuality within *Alice* afterlives. Even though Alice has appeared in culture as an adult and sexualized woman, and also despite the several readings of Carroll's novels based on gender and feminist theories, such approaches to Carroll's books could not be productive nowadays.

In fact, Alice has been read in terms of several theories since the publication of her books, and some of these approaches – for instance the one that romanticized childhood – remain at the time of their analyses and do not inspire Alice’s most recent afterlives. Differently, the discussion of gender and sexuality seems to constitute a tendency in recent adaptations. Then, why do recent afterlives of the *Alice* stories include debates about gender and sexuality? Is it just because of Alice’s transgressive features in Carroll’s novels?

In her essay “Body as Wonderland” Pilinovsky poses the question “What do these changes say about the character, and what do they say about *us*?” (175). In the same vein, I believe that, since Alice has accomplished a whole life out of the page, and since the reading of her stories as a fable of the process of growing up has been solidified through the several adaptations, it is not surprising that the story be used for discussing themes that permeate the twentieth and twenty-first centuries “real” world. Both centuries have experienced great changes in relation to gender: women have got the rights for voting, have populated the work market, have achieved the possibility of contraception, have been acknowledged as free subjects, etc. – all that has happened in the Western world. Nowadays, gay and lesbian marriage has been debated in many countries while some countries in Africa, for instance, still criminalize homosexuality. In Brazilian context, we have just watched the controversial first gay kiss on Brazilian television. Whereas some viewers affirm that scene constitutes a step towards the end of prejudice against non-conforming bodies, most viewers have seen it as a risk for its potential “production” of homosexual people. It is noteworthy that gay and lesbian marriage was only fully legalized in Brazil in May 14th, 2013.

Specifically about media, several feminist critics have for some time now struggled against the over-control of representation within patriarchal terms, interrogating and destabilizing the heterosexual couple as the idealized and unique form of “happy ending”. As Teresa de Lauretis argues in *Technologies of Gender*, representation creates paradigms of

gender behavior. As she conceptualizes gender, she defines it as “both a representation and a self-representation” (2), and thus, as the result of “various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (2). Therefore, if the Victorian books, categorized as for “boys” or for “girls”, functioned as technologies of gender, reinforcing certain behaviors, in contemporary media it is not that different: through the massive celebration of the heterosexual couple, other gender representations are omitted and kept obscured, out of representation, and un-legitimized. When Burton’s Alice refuses to get married in order to occupy a position considered inappropriate to her gender, Victorian gender ideology is being questioned. Similarly, when in HBO *Alice*’s transgender characters are given subjectivities, out of the stereotyped “comic” place they so often occupy, a radical statement in relation to gender is being made. Indeed, several attempts at inserting non-conforming gender practices into discourse and, thus, into legitimized existence have appeared nowadays; however, the controversy around it remains: homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, and all forms of gender representations that exceed the heterosexual couple are still stigmatized.

The stigma remains because the norms that control what can be intelligible, what can be “normal”, are under patriarchal rules. As Butler argues, “the norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 42). In agreement with that, Rosi Braidotti criticizes that the world in which we live is not the one that is portrayed in media; consequently only a part of the population is represented and legitimized by the media: those who conform. As Braidotti puts it,

there is a noticeable gap between how we live – in emancipated or postfeminist, multiethnic globalized societies, with advanced technologies

and high-speed telecommunication, allegedly free borders, and increased border controls and security measures – and how we represent to ourselves this lived existence in theoretical terms and discourses” (4).

For that purpose, when HBO’s *Alice*, *Alice in Genderland*, *Lost Girls*, and Tim Burton’s *Alice* present different gender representations and sexual practices as non-stigmatized and intelligible, it seems that Carroll’s Alice’s transgressiveness is being recreated, and her plight for existence despite exceeding patriarchal norms of intelligibility is renewed and given new life.

4. Chapter III – HBO's *Alice*: A Brazilian Adaptation of Carroll's Alice Stories

In his book *Alice's Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture* (2004), in which he discusses Carroll's *Alice* books as well as several of their afterlives, Will Brooker proposes that

Explicitly sexual images of Alice in Wonderland do exist, but they remain across a cultural boundary, in the category of pornography: the 1976 erotic musical version of Alice, for instance, directed by Bud Townsend, and the numerous online archives that depict Disney's Alice naked and engaged in sex acts with the film's other characters. Townsend's film may now seem fairly dated, almost quaint, but the Web sites that strip and sexualize the Disney girl are apparently getting a kick out of the process of violation; the corruption of an icon of innocence. However, the cultural status of this kind of image is leagues away from Miller, from Svankmajer, ..., even from American McGee's "dark" PC game with its teenage Alice and its fast-and-loose play with the mythos: it only exists on an unofficial level, underground (227).

By the time Brooker was working in his book, sexualized readings of the *Alice* books seemed to remain across the cultural boundary he discusses. However, ten years have passed since the publication of his critical volume and it seems now that this boundary that separated "officially accepted" and other adaptations has begun to blur.

As mentioned before, the books *Lost Girls* and *Alice in Genderland* address the theme of Alice's sexualization and discuss it in relation to practices of gender that exceed compulsory heteronormativity. On TV, though, the first work inspired on the *Alice* books that sexualize Alice and re-shapes her stories, so as to discuss gender and sexuality is HBO *Alice*, released in 2008. In fact, this adaptation not only includes in its discourse "other" practices of gender, but also debates their existence within society and in relation to subjectivity. That

was the reason why I selected this adaptation to be the object of study in this third chapter. In this series, multiple presentations of gender coexist in the city of São Paulo and no prejudice or moral judgment against lesbians, gays and trans-people are portrayed. Actually, HBO's *Alice* proposes a world in which people that do not conform to the norms can have a full existence as subjects. This response to Carroll's books seems to both acknowledge the contemporary world's need to discuss the existence of different gender practices and to reread Carroll's Alice non-conformity as a metaphor for their existence: if Carroll's Alice manages to destabilize Victorian norms of appropriate womanhood, so do those that are not seen as "normal", but as exceeding the norm, unthinkable, un-human and unreal.

Moreover, HBO's *Alice*, similarly to Carroll's books, tells the story of a female character that travels to another place and lives several adventures there, meets different creatures, faces hardship and is frequently puzzled by the question "Who are you?". Establishing an interesting connection with Carroll's protagonist, in the HBO's version Alice is strong, inquisitive and intelligent. However, differently from Carroll's *Alice* stories, the setting is the late 2000s Brazil. Indeed, instead of a Victorian girl from the elite, HBO *Alice* narrates the life of a Brazilian lower middle-class woman. The series tells the story of Alice, a 25-year-old woman who lives with her grandmother and her brother in Palmas, the peripheral capital city of Tocantins, in the North of Brazil. At first sight it seems that the only relation between Carroll's Alice and HBO's protagonist is the name, which is surely insufficient for affirming that the television series constitutes an adaptation of the Victorian books. A closer analysis, though, shows the complex dialogue between them, as I am going to discuss later in this chapter.

In the series, Alice is portrayed as leading a traditional life: she is generally portrayed at home with her grandmother and brother, at work or with her fiancé Henrique – the first episode briefly shows their engagement party. Alice's mother died when she was fifteen

years old and her father lives in São Paulo with his new wife and daughter. Alice and her family are portrayed as deeply rooted in Palmas. Her grandmother Glícia always walks on a road from which she watches the Tocantins River, a famous landmark that is homonymous to the state where they live. Alice works as a tour guide for a municipal agency, and in the first scene of the first episode she is taking some tourists to see the city. She shows them the main monuments of the city, which tell the history of the foundation of Palmas. Alice is going to get married within one month, and makes plans about having children and living a happy life in the city. One day she receives the news of her father's death and needs to go to São Paulo for his funeral. She has a lot to do there in relation to the inheritance of her late father and spends more time in the metropolis than she has planned. She loses her job in Palmas, gets many different jobs in São Paulo, stops missing her family, and never goes back home.

As it is observable through this overview, the plot of HBO's *Alice* differs a lot from Carroll's *Alice* books, and one may ask why it is an adaptation of the Victorian novels. Moreover, the motif of a girl who leaves home and lives adventures in a new place is not new, so that HBO *Alice* could be simply another way of presenting it in a new story. Thus, the first question to be asked is why can HBO *Alice* be considered an adaptation of Carroll's books since very few (if anything) of the story is kept? How can that character be connected to Lewis Carroll's Victorian girl? How can the story of a Brazilian young woman relate to *Alice's*? Furthermore, HBO's *Alice* does not enter any fantastic or magical world, but has to face the difficulties and dullness of São Paulo, the hugest metropolis of South America: can São Paulo be considered her "Wonderland"? What is the dialogue, then, between adaptation and adapted text, if not only the name of the protagonist? These questions I am going to address in the two next sections.

4.1 HBO's *Alice*: adaptation as cultural translation

HBO's *Alice* constitutes a free adaptation of Carroll's books, recreating scenes and characters and adding new elements to build up a new narrative. Actually, most characters portrayed in the television series are not the same present in Carroll's books. The animals and creatures are substituted by Brazilian ordinary people, and the difficulties Alice faces are related to the difficulties São Paulo imposes on her. Since the relation between Carroll's books and HBO's *Alice* is not clear at first sight, in order to help us discuss *Alice* as an adaptation of Carroll's books, it is interesting to observe how Thaïs Flores N. Diniz analyzes four film adaptations of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Her corpus includes the adaptation by the Russian director Grigori Kozintev, *Korol Lear*, produced in 1970; the adaptation directed by the English director Peter Brook, produced between 1969 and 1970; the Japanese version directed by Akira Kurosawa, *Ran*, released in 1985, and Jean-Luc Godard's film version, homonymous to Shakespeare's play, produced in 1987 in France. For the discussion I want to propose, I am going to focus on Diniz's analysis of Kurosawa's and Brook's films, since the others, according to the author, "represent evident transpositions of Shakespeare's text, although each director rewrites it differently" (16).

Kurosawa's film script was entirely written by the director himself, and although it keeps some themes of Shakespeare's play, especially those of "power relationships and patriarchal domination" (16), he recreates the story in 16th century Japan. His film narrates the story of Idetora, a samurai warrior who is betrayed by his two older sons, but saved by the youngest son, who ends up being murdered. The three daughters of King Lear in Shakespeare's play become the three sons of the samurai: because of the strictly patriarchal traditions in Japan, inheritance could not be disputed by daughters. According to Diniz, the influence of Noh theater is noticeable already in the first scene (54), and the Japanese visual and theatrical traditions can be observed in the whole narrative. As to Peter Brook's film,

instead of the Renaissance context of cruelty, “embodied in personal and national disputes for power” (17), it transposes that sense of cruelty to the 1960s, including in the plot the Vietnam War, the racial problems, the struggles for human rights, the contestation of authority (17), among other facts and situations, to create an equivalent to that atmosphere of instability and cruelty of the Renaissance in a contemporary adaptation.

Indeed, neither of the adaptations briefly summarized above represent, or aim at being, a faithful transposition of Shakespeare’s play. Both films not only changed the time and the place of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, but also presented different cultural, moral, and philosophical aspects. Brook’s film production is almost contemporary to the time he portrays on screen; he produces the film at the turn of the decade, as if pointing at the many atrocities the world had just suffered. His film seems to ignore the cathartical element in Shakespeare’s plays and to speak as a “messenger of hopelessness” (17), conveying a political message about the violence and the never-ending conflicts that reflect human cruelty. Kurosawa, differently, uses another strategy for his adaptation: his cultural tradition is that from the Orient, and what he does is to adapt the moral existent in *King Lear*, which is specifically the one of medieval Europe, into a moral attached to the Japanese historical moment and social peculiarities (18).

According to Diniz, Kurosawa “naturalizes” the narrative instead of simply transposing it to the screen (54). And the choice of naturalizing a canonical work of the Western tradition constitutes a political act. As the author explains, Kurosawa promotes the dialogue between Eastern and Western cultures, but instead of passively accepting the Western cultural model present in Shakespeare’s text, he critically absorbs it and transforms it into something else: he does not simply assimilate the foreign influence, but recreates it in relation to his oriental background (55). To conceptualize this kind of adaptation, Diniz uses

the term “cultural translation,” which seems to be extremely adequate to define the type of transformations that happen in *Alice*.

Actually, what the Brazilian directors Karim Ainouz and Sérgio Machado do in relation to Carroll’s books is similar to what Kurosawa does to Shakespeare’s play. Lewis Carroll’s work occupies a central position in the Western canon, written in the English language, which nowadays “colonizes” billions of people because of its global power and its linguistic capital. Instead of accepting the foreign model, the directors of *Alice* appropriate the story and naturalize it, adding elements of Brazilian cultural and social background. In this sense, *Alice* can be read as a mutation of Carroll’s work, and this process of “reproduction without replication” (Hutcheon 195) is certainly a political one. As Appadurai argues, “[t]he central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual efforts of sameness and difference to cannibalize one another, and thus to proclaim their successful hijacking of the twin enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular” (Appadurai 42-43).

Accordingly, what happens in *Alice* is the cannibalization of the “source” in favor of a Brazilian television/cinema piece of work. Undoubtedly, the very selection of the setting of the television series, which comprises Palmas, in Tocantins – a city in the North of Brazil which is away from the economic center – and São Paulo – the largest metropolis in Latin America –, is already very telling both for the portrayal of Brazil and for the political agenda of the adaptation, which fosters the discussion of cannibalization/naturalization of the foreign as well as the discussion of social and identity problems within the Brazilian territory. Moreover, by representing Palmas as Alice’s homeplace, and the metropolis as where she lives her adventures, the television series is simultaneously relocating Carroll’s *Alice* stories and hinting at an issue several feminists have debated: how the metropolis “frees” women’s and other bodies because of the difficulty of regulating them in the crowd.

Linda Hutcheon argues that

[s]tories also evolve by adaptation and are not immutable over time. Sometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favorable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media. In short, stories adapt just as they are adapted. (31)

Therefore, the *Alice* stories have flourished in Brazilian context: HBO's *Alice* at once pays homage to the Victorian books, and transgressively destroys its plot, transforming it into a new narrative about a similarly subversive female character.

4.2 Flourishing in Brazil: a Brazilian recreation of the *Alice* stories

If one has a quick look at the titles of the episodes of *Alice*, one would immediately see the relation between them and some titles of Carroll's chapters. The first episode, called "PelaToca do Coelho" ("Down into the Rabbit Hole"), receives the same title of the first chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and contains the greatest number of references to the book. However, references to *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* are also present. Some other episodes also refer to titles of Carroll's chapters, as for instance the title of the fourth episode of the television series: "No jardim das flores perdidas" (In the Garden of the Lost Flowers), which makes a clear reference to the second chapter of *Through the Looking Glass*, called "The Garden of the Live Flowers." Because of the tone of the episode and especially because of the issues related to gender and sexuality it raises, a change was made, but the link with Carroll's work is kept. Moreover, the episodes "O lado escuro do espelho" ("The Dark side of the Mirror") and "Wonderland" establish connections to the titles of Carroll's books themselves and the episode "Em queda livre" ("In Freefall") arguably reminds the several risks Carroll's Alice faces, especially the moment she falls into the rabbit-hole. It is interesting to notice that some of the episodes that have become iconic,

in Brooker's terms (205), for being recurrently present in *Alice's* adaptations, are present in the titles of the episodes. However, very few of these episodes have scenes that can be read as a kind of loose recreation of the events Carroll's *Alice* lives in Wonderland.

Concerning the connections between adaptation and adapted text, the titles of the episodes would arguably not suffice to support that HBO's *Alice* is an adaptation of Carroll's *Alice* stories. Indeed, the most important similarity between the Victorian books and HBO's television series consists of Alice's journey to the new land: both texts emphasize Alice's non-conformity and discuss how her subjectivity and *self* change, while she pursues the answer for "who she is". Instead of a "faithful" adaptation, then, *Alice* constitutes a free recreation of the *Alice* books. Whereas the setting of Carroll's books is Victorian England (before the protagonist's trip to Wonderland), HBO's *Alice* takes place in the 2000s in Brazil. While Wonderland is characterized by fantasy and nonsense, HBO's *Alice* finds herself in the metropolis of São Paulo. Those changes of space and time are important in the process of re-signification of many events from the books, as well as to link HBO's *Alice* to Carroll's protagonist. Indeed, time and place constitute two important features of the narrative, serving not only to establish the physical setting but also to imply a set of values, customs, and habits that are important for our discussion of gender. Along Alice's journey in São Paulo, some other references to Carroll's books arise. In São Paulo, Alice has the chance of meeting again her aunt Luli, in whose house she stays. She also meets her father's second wife, Irislene, and her half-sister Regina Célia. She intends to arrange all the documents related to what she and her brother would inherit from their late father, but Irislene makes things difficult for her and during an argument, she blames Alice for not being present in her father's life. This fact destabilizes Alice emotionally and makes her decide to stay longer in São Paulo, so that she would be able to see a lawyer and also get to know a bit more about her father. Because of the problems with the inheritance, Alice creates a strong bond with her sister Regina Célia,

who is twelve years old and lives with her mother Irislene. In the second episode, mother and daughter have an argument and Iris slaps Célia on the face. As Célia decides to run away from home and to go to her aunt Luli's house by herself, she gets lost, and just after a few hours Alice is able to find her. Before Iris arrives there to take Célia and Alice home, an interesting reference to Carroll's books appears: Célia gets a mustard tube and writes their names on a bar counter, explaining that their father has scrambled Alice's name to make hers, and consequently that made her Alice "through the looking-glass." Célia's first name, Regina, also alludes to Carroll's second *Alice* book: in *Through the Looking-Glass* Alice is crowned queen, i.e., Regina in Latin. Although the two characters do not have opposite or mirrored attitudes, that fact is important to Alice since it allows her to understand that her father did think of her, despite the distance. Moreover, Célia says their father used to read her *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and say he was the literary Alice's father. The girl tells her sister that she did not believe that before, but now that she knows her sister, she does.

Other characters from Carroll's books do not have a full existence in the television series and neither do they appear as secondary figures. However, besides the moments a character echoes or performs the same role as that of one of the book characters, they are mentioned sometimes in conversations. An example of that is when Alice meets the successful millionaire businessman Lourenço Marques, with whom she has a love affair; when she introduces herself as "Alice" he says he is the "Mad Hatter." During their conversation, Alice sees an elegant woman with a blue scarf and jokes about her resemblance to the Blue Caterpillar. Another instance is when Aunt Luli tells Regina Célia that she has to visit her, so she can play with "Dinah". Nothing is explained about who Dinah is, and neither is there a character or animal named Dinah throughout the series; however, a clear reference to Carroll's *Alice* books is present since Alice's cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has that name. All these references together contribute to link the television adaptation to the

adapted texts, reassuring its state as an “adaptation,” being intermittently “haunted” by their adapted texts (Hutcheon 6).

Despite the fact that the iconic events from Carroll’s books are only present in the titles of the episodes of HBO’s *Alice*, there are two scenes that loosely recall iconic passages from Carroll’s books. These two scenes are extremely important in the plot of HBO’s *Alice* and represent the two inner conflicts of Alice as a character: “Who am I?” and “Where to go?”. Here, though the characters from Carroll’s books do not appear, different characters “play” the roles of the Caterpillar and the Cat. The first of them happens right after Alice’s father’s funeral. During the important conversation Alice has with her aunt Luli, she lights a marijuana cigarette as she hears Alice talk about going back to Palmas because of her wedding. Blowing smoke, her aunt asks her if it is love what she feels for her fiancé, and warns her not to get married if she is not sure about her feelings. Both visually and in terms of the effect in the protagonist’s subjectivity, this scene can be interpreted as a reference to the passage in which Alice meets the Caterpillar, in chapter five of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The Caterpillar, smoking a hookah, asks Alice who she is. She is not able to answer that, except by repeating her name, and giving excuses (Carroll, *AAIW* 48-50). In the television adaptation Alice is asked whether what she feels for her future husband is real love. She answers her aunt with a not very confident “yes” and the close-up shot on her face is effective in implying her doubt. Despite her confusion, she decides to go home, but a traffic jam causes her to miss her flight to Palmas, and she has to stay in São Paulo longer. Gradually Alice, who was born in São Paulo but has never lived in the city, begins to call the metropolis “home” or, many times, “Wonderland.”

The second iconic event also appears in the first episode. After missing her flight, Alice is not able to contact her aunt Luli and calls an old friend she met back in Tocantins, who lives in São Paulo, to help her. The girl, Daniela, takes her to a party, and there Alice

gets drunk and falls asleep. Dani cannot find Alice and leaves her there, thinking she might have gone home already. When Alice wakes up the party has ended and only the staff is in that place. She runs down the stairs and sees the DJ of the party being driven somewhere. Since she does not know what to do or where to go, she asks him for a ride. The DJ asks Alice where she needs to go, and she answers she does not know. He opens the car door and she enters. Her expressionless face implies she does not care about where he is going to take her, and that trip ends up in a hotel room, where Alice and the DJ have sexual intercourse. At this moment, the DJ (who cannot understand Portuguese and communicates with Alice through her poor English) embodies one of the most remarkable of Carroll's characters in a famous passage of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This sequence of scenes recalls the episode in which the Cheshire cat asks Alice where she wants to go.

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

“I don't much care where —” said Alice.

“Then it doesn't matter which way you go,” said the Cat (Carroll 64).

The adaptation of this passage from the books to the series is remarkable because it represents a very relevant and conflicting interaction throughout the episodes: the relation between Alice and the city. Because of the new environment and the new possibilities the city offers to her (as well as to all individuals), Alice has her subjectivity reshaped, deconstructed and reconstructed. While Alice is on the plane to São Paulo, she looks at the straight streets of Palmas, the last planned capital city of the 20th century in Brazil, and feels fear. That functions as a foreshadowing to the changes she will go through in the story, especially because of the strict bond between her *self* and her homeland portrayed in the first episodes.

The two passages I have described as related to Carroll's books are arguably the two most important impulses for Alice to live her adventures in São Paulo. When Luli asks her

about her feelings, Alice questions herself about her wishes, dreams and desires. In addition, the ride Alice takes with the DJ can be interpreted as a metaphor for Alice's greatest doubt: she does not know where she wants to go, or rather, what she wants to accomplish in life, so that it seems that the path she has taken so far – her decision about marrying, having a family, etc. – rather than a wish, constitute an automatic decision in relation to what is seen as “normal”. The second scene also implies that, by losing her old self in São Paulo, Alice's new subjectivity will emerge. Indeed, together, the interconnections of subjectivity and sense of space build a new Alice, who she does not know whether “better or worse” from the previous Alice, but who is indeed very different.

4.3 *Alice* in relation to traditional cinema: a radical statement for women subjects

I have asserted that HBO's *Alice* is part of a recent tendency toward responding to Carroll's books in relation to gender issues. Moreover, I have already mentioned the presence of lesbian, gay and trans-people, and have affirmed that the discussion of different practices of gender have seemingly constituted a political agenda within recent adaptations of *Alice*. A question to be posed now is: how does gender constitute a central preoccupation in *Alice*? In the first part of my discussion, I will compare the construction of female subjectivity in HBO's *Alice* and in traditional cinema, also including the so-called Woman's films, the Hollywood productions addressed specially to women's audience in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Then, I am going to analyze *Alice* in terms of a recent research that discusses women characters in cinema and television productions from 1990 to 2006.

As Judith Mayne argues, the representation of women in both cinema and television has always been problematic and insufficient. Productions were all addressed to male audiences, and women constituted “adornments” for the male eyes. Furthermore, the subjectivity of the women characters was usually undeveloped. After the rise of Woman's

films, though, productions started to address women's audiences and to focus their narratives on women protagonists. Indeed, as Judith Mayne affirms when discussing Mary Ann Doane's analysis of "Woman's film",

if the Woman's film is indeed an exemplary form insofar as female subjectivity and female spectatorship are concerned, it is because the woman's film demonstrates, again and again, the impossible position of female desire vis-à-vis the cinema – impossible, that is, in the terms of voyeurism and fetishism, so central to cinematic pleasure in the first place (3).

As Doane argues Woman's films obsessively attempt to portray Woman's subjectivity and desire, and simultaneously insert them in traditional and conventional forms of narration, which "cannot sustain such an exploration [since] certain contradictions within patriarchal ideology become apparent" (Doane 13). Such contradictions destabilize the whole narrative and are insufficient to portray women and their subjectivities and desires as such. As a result, women are misrepresented once again, and only the ideal Woman, who conforms to patriarchal society's expectations, is portrayed on screen.

Accordingly, in her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that "mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order" (835). She affirms that though cinematic representation constitutes an illusion, "[i]n *reality* the fantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it" (837). According to Mulvey, this operation of the law is visible on screen through the very ideology and aim of such productions, so that the "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (837). In cinema, thus, the gaze is male, while women are displayed as "sexual objects" and their appearance on cinema usually caused some erotic impact for the "erotic spectacle": "from pin-ups to striptease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (838).

After this brief panorama of the construction of woman's subjectivity in cinema, it is possible to observe how *Alice* breaks with stereotyped portrayals and, as I believe, destabilizes the idea of the gaze as male. The first scenes of the television series *Alice* provide the viewer with a short description of Alice's personal life, and the lives of the people who are close to her in Palmas. In the first scene, the tour guide Alice takes some tourists to visit the city as well as its monuments and landmarks, and presents some information on the history of the capital city. She mentions the laying of the cornerstone on May 20th, 1989, marking the creation of the last planned city of the 20th century. This scene is followed by Alice's inner thoughts about her life, presented in voice-over. She says that she can "hardly believe that within one month [she is] going to become a married woman and leave home – which her teenage brother Duda will love, as he could have the whole bedroom for himself. At this point, Alice starts to remember her family, whom she thinks she will miss, especially her grandmother Glícia, the person Alice "loves the most in world". About her fiancé, who soon will become her husband, she says he is an amazing guy. Until this moment it seems that Alice represents the traditional woman that wants to get married and is part of a traditional family, as it seems that everything in her life is conforming and according to social expectations. However, the picture Alice gives the viewer of her family is not the picture of "appropriateness" most television productions traditionally portray²⁰, especially concerning gender issues and sexuality, and that difference is very telling in relation to what the television series *Alice* does regarding gender ideology.

Alice says the main reasons why her brother will enjoy having her room all to himself is that this way he can "fuck" his girlfriend Janice in the room the siblings used to share. When she states her feelings for her grandmother, who is presumably running on the road as

²⁰ Brazilian soap operas have only recently started to portray dysfunctional families, who face problems especially related to drugs and violence, as well as new forms of family organizations. However, in relation to gender, most shows still reproduce the hegemonic discourse, portraying marriages and babies as their "happy endings".

her doctor advised her to do, Glícia is shown standing still, leaning over the rail, watching the Tocantins River and smoking a cigarette. The scene that follows shows Alice's fiancé Henrique. After Alice states how nice he is, she affirms he is "hot" and the scene portrays Alice and Henrique having sex in an outdoor public space. These descriptions and scenes show the main characters transgressing institutionalized discourses (medical, legal and gender norms), thus questioning their power in regulating lives. Moreover, in dialogue with Carroll's books, its inspirational nonsense "sources," which do not aim at conveying either morals or moral values – as discussed in chapter one – *Alice* constitutes a radical statement against the flat and uncritical reproduction of moral values, here specifically of values related to gender, especially compulsory heteronormativity, which remains as the hegemonic possibility of gender practice in most mainstream cinema and television productions.

To start with, one can notice that *Alice* contains a larger percentage of women characters than television series and films generally do. In fact, though recently there are some productions in which women outnumber men – such as *Desperate Housewives* and *Sex in the City* – these are still exceptions in relation to the massive television and cinema production, which keep the imbalance. Stacey L. Smith and Crystal Allene Cook, in their essay "Gender Stereotypes: an Analysis of Popular Films and TV," argue that though "[f]emales take up half the space in society, especially in films aimed at children they appear much less frequently than do males" (12). It is interesting to point out that the corpus of Smith and Cook's research comprised film and television productions from 1990 to 2006, so that the numbers they present are totally up-to-date and serve as a basis for analyzing a 2008 television production. Moreover, although their main focus is cinema and television productions for children, they affirm that this disproportion is not visible only in children's entertainment, but also in films aimed at different audiences, as one of their studies proves

about G, PG, PG-13, and R²¹ rated films released between 1990 and 2006. According to the researchers, these films generally portray only one speaking woman character in opposition to the male rest. The increasing number of women screenwriters, producers and directors has not significantly altered the imbalance. In their words, “[w]hile a few executive women can be commended for breaking through the glass ceiling in the entertainment industry, their influence has had limited results with respect to gender parity and portrayal” (12).

Another interesting point the researchers make is that the portrayal of women characters is not only scarce but also undermined by their being “‘hyper-attractive’ or ‘hypersexual’ and/or passive” (12). Again, if the two famous television series mentioned above contain characters that do not fit the stereotypes, there are also several productions such as *The Big Bang Theory* and *Two and a Half Men*, which portray women as less intelligent and/or the object of men’s desire, and as the researches point out, the latter kind of production outnumbers the former. As the authors discuss, the problem is not related to casting beautiful women, but rather that the construction of their characters is usually related to their physical appearance and/or foreclosed in it. Differently, the authors claim for new and balanced representations portraying developed women characters, instead of “creating females as adornment, enticement, or with inclination to romance as the main or exclusive personality trait or motivator” (12). In this sense, they affirm that the development of the women character could offer an “antidote” to the frequently undermined representation that relies on physical aspects instead of complex and multiple subjects who choose their own paths (12).

²¹ The Motion Picture Association of America has set standards for films in order to help parents determine if the content is acceptable for their children or not: G-rated films: these movies are adequate for “general audience”. PG-rated films: the films may contain some material unsuitable for younger children, so that “parental guidance” is suggested and parents should decide whether or not the film can be watched by their children. PG-13-rated films: this category means “Parents Strongly Cautioned,” because the movies go beyond the PG rating in theme, violence, nudity, sensuality, language, adult activities or other elements. R-rated films: Restricted, so that children under 17 require accompanying parent or adult guardian because these films include adult themes, adult activity, hard language, intense or persistent violence, sexually-oriented nudity, drug abuse or other elements.

Definitely, *Alice* is a typical example of Smith and Cook's proposition in portraying women characters: they are not only larger in number in relation to the men characters (eleven relevant women characters in relation to seven men), but are also active and powerful in relation to their own lives and destinies. An example of that is Renata, the owner of the "Tribeca Event Planning" in which Alice works for some time. Renata constitutes the most powerful character in the television series, and despite her beauty, the aspects that build her as a character are all related to her sense of leadership and hard work. Besides, all the eleven women characters are well developed and their subjectivities are complex in their formations, in opposition to the only five well-developed male characters.

In relation to beauty and "hypersexualization" (14) – which, according to the researchers, constitute the central aspects of the mainstream representation of women on screen in spite of their personalities – *Alice* also makes a radical statement against the foreclosure and simplification of women characters based on such traits. Not even Alice's friend Marcela, the character that represents the apex of the economic pyramid and who works as a fashion model, an occupation related to beauty, has her subjectivity defined by her physical appearance. Differently, Marcela's life story is portrayed in detail: her distant relationship with her parents, who live abroad, the way she refuses to participate in her parents' lives and their constant trips because of her father's occupation (he is the Brazilian ambassador in Syria), her desire of making money out of the graffiti she makes.

Another interesting aspect the researchers highlight as defining most female characters' subjectivities is the pursuit of love, specifically heterosexual normalized, restrained and legitimated form of love. In *Alice*, such stereotyping does not happen: none of the women characters gives up her dreams and objectives because of relationships. The best example is Alice, who abandons her fiancé because she decides to live in São Paulo, and nothing makes her change her mind. Another example is the decision Dani makes to move to

Barcelona. Her boyfriend Teo cannot go with her and, despite her feelings for him, she prefers to leave him to pursue her own happiness, which she believes to be impossible in São Paulo. If *Alice* confronts the ideal romantic love as the only desire of a Woman (with capital initial, since the representation that is being criticized is the one that essentializes women and represents them indifferently as Woman), the television series also contributes to the political confrontation against compulsory heterosexuality, as I am going to discuss.

4.4 HBO *Alice*'s trip to Wonderland: from Palmas to São Paulo, a new subject is formed

After briefly discussing how HBO's *Alice* diverges from traditional television and cinema productions in relation to stereotypical portrayals of women, I will analyze how *Alice*'s journey happens in the television series and discuss what these changes represent in terms of gender performativity in the protagonist's life. As I have argued before, the two iconic scenes that were loosely reproduced in the first episode of *Alice* present her two biggest inner conflicts: Who am I? and Where to go? Whereas Carroll's *Alice* got confused about who she was after the changes in her size, HBO's *Alice* asks the same question as she notices she has made no decision in her life: she was just conforming to the norms and to other people's expectations. Interestingly, the norms she was uncritically following are strongly related to how to live gender, as she was going to get married and form a family. Comparatively, whereas Carroll's *Alice* wanted to get "somewhere", as she tells the Cheshire Cat, HBO's *Alice* wants to decide where to go and when to go by herself: she discovers she may not want to follow the "natural" path and decides to remain single, to have boyfriends, and experience what the city of São Paulo can offer her.

If São Paulo is her Wonderland, Palmas constitutes her "immediate reality" before her journey; in this section, I am going to debate how this movement over space is related to

gender and culminates in the transformation – or rather, discovery – of her subjectivity. Therefore, in HBO's *Alice*, “Who am I?” and “Where to go?” are turned into important questions about Alice's life as a woman and a subject.

4.4.1 Palmas as home: problematizing identities

In the first episode, Alice tells the viewer through voice-over narration that she is full of certainties about her life and introduces the viewer to the decisions she has made for her future. While she narrates, she is shown on the screen silent, aboard a small ship in which she is taking some tourists to visit the Tocantins River. As I mentioned before, Alice shows them the monuments of the city and talks about the foundation of Palmas. In this scene, it becomes clear that Alice likes the place where she lives and interestingly, she is a tour guide in Palmas Tour, so that her occupation can be read as a metaphor for her connection to her hometown. According to Rosi Braidotti in her book *Nomadic Subjects*, “tourism itself constitutes a form of enclosure”, since the place is viewed as “a limited closed entity” (168). In the same vein, as a tour guide Alice seems at first sight to be fixed and enclosed in Palmas. Even Alice's wishes are related to the few possibilities Palmas offers her. Alice feels satisfied only by following the “natural path” of getting married and having children. Her family is also portrayed as deeply rooted in Palmas and as satisfied with what the city provides them: her grandmother walks along the banks of the Tocantins River, and her brother usually skates around the squares. However, their identities do not “belong” to Palmas as unproblematically as it seems, though in this thesis I am going to discuss only Alice's subjectivity and identity.

When Alice goes to São Paulo, she lives diverse experiences, makes new friends and faces new challenges; she states in the seventh episode: “I am broken. What I want the most is to join all the little pieces and build a new Alice ...” Actually, her *self* never glues back together the same way, if it ever does. What happens to Alice is the fragmentation of her

subjectivity and also of her beliefs and references about herself: her subjectivity, her identity and her relation to space begin to collapse. At first, Alice is afraid of leaving Palmas, but she is also afraid when she arrives in São Paulo. Even more representative than those feelings is the fact that she transforms her identity after moving to São Paulo, in a process of agency and also of redefinition of her own subjectivity. This process of redefining her *self* includes becoming aware of her own dreams and, in order to achieve them, she transgresses many moral values of Western patriarchal society, posing the question whether following those “recipes” functions as a guarantee of happiness. Interestingly, as I am going to discuss in the next section, her transgressions are intertwined with other characters’ transgressive attitudes, so that the patriarchal State is questioned in favor of a heterogeneous and unbiased society.

Before her arrival in São Paulo, though, it is interesting to analyze how Alice is portrayed in her “real world”: whereas Carroll’s Alice is portrayed in a Victorian aristocratic home, HBO’s Alice is portrayed in an ordinary and small house in the city of Palmas. Moreover, whereas Carroll’s Alice is immediately depicted as non-conforming to her Victorian context, the Brazilian Alice seems to belong to Palmas, and at first no conflict is apparent. However, as she goes to São Paulo the plot suggests that Alice “belonged” to Palmas just because, as she says, she “had never stepped out” of it.

At this point it is interesting to discuss Palmas in relation to Doreen Massey’s propositions concerning place, for it constitutes a “locality” in Brazil. Massey problematizes the idea of geographical localization as equal to community. According to the critic, a place may be inhabited by several people that, despite their common geographical localization, do not share similar interests, traditions, culture, etc. Contrarily, a community can exist despite distance, or despite not being in the same geographical place (153), for a community does not evolve from an arbitrary identity label based on locality: identity has to be constructed by means of true identification. Therefore, though Alice and her family seem to be rooted in

Palmas and to belong to a community, her belonging disappears as she goes to São Paulo and identifies herself with the city and people there. As Z. Bauman points out, no identity remains stable forever. The critic explains that the problem concerning identity nowadays results from the difficulty to keep the same identity for long, and also to find a way to express a life-long identity that is fully recognized. Thus, one should not get too attached to any identity so that one may get rid of it at one's convenience (143).

Concerning gender, it is possible to observe how Alice's plans for her life are related to the restricted possibilities the city of Palmas offers her and also how she is uncritical in relation to her own life before going to São Paulo. In Palmas, Alice has never questioned herself about what she really wanted for her life. Though she had plans of marrying Henrique and having children, it seems that her decision was not because she wanted to accomplish that, but rather that she could see no other possibility. Actually, as she goes to São Paulo and discovers new ways of experiencing sexuality and gender, Alice discovers that she did not want to marry, but was just following the "normal" path. Therefore, in agreement to Massey's theory, the relation between gender and space defines Alice's life in Palmas, and redefines it in São Paulo.

Since the contrast that is made in *Alice* is between the "local" Palmas and the "global" São Paulo, it is interesting to observe how the directors of the television series problematize the fixity of those concepts. As Massey argues, "place is interpreted as important in the search for identity in this supposedly troubled era of time-space compression" (10). In asserting that, Massey proposes that countries and their inhabitants fear "losing" their "identities", especially in a globalized era and, in order to establish their "identities" they end up labeling themselves – or accepting labels – according to stereotypes, which function as identity boundaries. By selecting Palmas as Alice's home, the directors already problematize the idea of the "fixed locality": since Palmas was founded only in 1989, though Alice's

family seems to have deep roots in Palmas, actually they do not. Her family is constituted of mobile people; actually of migrants, as her grandmother Glícia states she moved to Palmas because she believed the city would prosper, and the family would have better life conditions. Moreover, despite the effort to “construct” a tradition for Palmas and the state of Tocantins in the early 1990s, the place’s identity did not become “marked” by a stereotype, nor does it have a tradition yet, due to its late creation.

Therefore, the city of Palmas does not have its identity fixed, and neither does Alice’s family or Alice herself. By this choice it seems that the directors state that no identity, be it of place or of a person – is immutable and fixed. Moreover, as both Palmas and São Paulo are built by people from different origins and seem to be always in movement, apparently *Alice* suggests that the “local” and the “global” are not dissimilar separate entities, but rather, in agreement to Massey’s ideas, “if each [space and place] is part of the construction of the other, it becomes more difficult to maintain such simple contrasts” (9). As she goes to São Paulo, Alice discovers her subjectivity, desires and dreams away from the norms and finds herself re-territorialized in the city of São Paulo, through a process of identification and agency, instead of mere geographical position.

4.4.2 Alice’s deterritorialization-reterritorialization: re-building identity and subjectivity

Recalling some concepts by Deleuze and Guatarri, Haesbaert explains that territory constitutes a product of agency, i.e., territory is any space created from the connection of two parts – mechanical, biological, social, imaginary etc. (Haesbaert 2004:116-117). However, Haesbaert argues that there is no deterritorialization without reterritorialization, and that Deleuze and Guattari already discussed that, although the latter concept was ignored by most critics. Reterritorialization would mean, thus, the process of re-defining or re-establishing

bonds of agency and identification. Moreover, Haesbaert affirms that though territoriality is much more a symbolic than a concrete idea, it always implies material space (Haesbaert 356). In the same sense, the geographical materiality of the city constitutes a necessary element for Alice's new process of agency and of redefinition of her subjectivity and identity.

When Néstor García Canclini discusses deterritorialization, he distinguishes two processes: 1) the separation between culture and territory, either social or geographic, and the dissolution of the "naturalness" of this bond; 2) some territorial "relocations," that take place by means of the "old" and "new" symbolic productions (309). Canclini considers the transnationalization of the symbolic markets and migration as the two exponential factors of the phenomena of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Thus, it is possible to interpret the urban space, especially that of the metropolises, as the privileged space for these phenomena to happen. Canclini argues that the very constitution of the space – the mobility of people, capital and information; and the non-localization of industrial, economic, technological, and cultural headquarters in favor of transnationalization – cannot be grasped or understood by means of the traditional binary organization of power. Moreover, he views migration as the element that problematizes the discussion of the "national" and the "foreign", since they are multi-directional and multi-cultural, thus destabilizing the abstract cohesion of Nation-states (Canclini 309-14), in accordance with Massey's argument about the impossibility of having "spaces" and "places" with unproblematic, separate and homogeneous identities.

In *Alice*, the cosmopolitan and multiple space of São Paulo makes it possible for Alice to experience the simultaneous process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, which is of paramount importance to the constitution of the character's subjectivity. In order to convey the bond between Alice and the city of Palmas, the director uses dialogues to indicate the process Alice goes through towards destabilizing her *self*. When Alice gets lost in São Paulo

after missing her flight and calls her friend Dani to rescue her, the viewer notes that Dani does not remember her until she says her nickname, “Jalapão”, a touristic landmark in the state of Tocantins. Alice is recognized by means of the place where she used to live, and so is her subjectivity localized. Then Alice meets other friends, among which is Téo, Dani’s boyfriend. The first time he greets Alice he uses the right nickname, but in another episode he begins to mess up the geographic reference and to call her “Cuiabá,” the capital of another state in Brazil. He keeps using the wrong reference, despite Alice’s attempts at correcting him. After being corrected, Téo says they are all the same, and makes two completely different regions seem undistinguishable.

As her friends mistake her nickname and recurrently call her “Cuiabá,” the mis-reference functions as a metaphor for her process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and leads to the redefinition of her identity and *self*. In consonance to the changes in the way people address her, Alice herself also feels her close ties with her city gradually become loose. In the first episodes she wants to return home. Then, this wish is substituted by a feeling of homesickness and, at the end, Alice forgets even to call her grandmother back in Palmas on her birthday. If deterritorialization is part of Alice’s development as a character, so is reterritorialization, illustrated by her decision to confront São Paulo and the difficulties the city imposes, ending up in a process of agency that results in calling São Paulo her *home*. Interestingly, Alice was born in São Paulo and only moved to Palmas due to her parents’ divorce. Throughout the episodes, Alice repeats she wants to conquer São Paulo back, but this process is painful for her since she was completely territorialized in Palmas.

Similar to Alice’s simultaneous process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in building her subjectivity, some other characters – in fact, all those whose background is available to the viewer – go through the same process. Among them, Nickolas is the one who

goes through the most visible process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization by moving from Goiânia to São Paulo. In one of the episodes, he tells Alice how hard it was for him to leave his homeland, especially because of his father's disapproval. During his narrative, he quotes one of his father's sayings, and through it, Alice and the viewer discover that Nickolas' birth name is José Nicolau. Nickolas is never called by his real name, not even by his boss, and it is possible to interpret that he was renamed after getting to São Paulo, assuming a new persona and having his subjectivity altered by the new city, which he eventually calls *home*.

Alice's friend Dani also goes through the deterritorialization/ reterritorialization process, but if Nickolas and Alice are able to feel home in São Paulo, that is not what Dani feels in the city. She feels uncomfortable at home. Because of that, she begins to question whether it is possible to be happy in São Paulo. She believes it is not, and decides to move to Spain by herself, since her boyfriend has to support his old mother and cannot go with her. When asked why she has decided to move to Barcelona, she answers that "It's closer than China and farther than Argentina," demonstrating how arbitrary and purely geographic her choice was: she is not able to feel at home in São Paulo, so she moves away.

Based on these several and continuous movements in the representation of São Paulo one can argue that Doreen Massey's proposition that "all spaces are meeting spaces" (171) is realized on the television series, problematizing the identities of space, place and individuals. In this sense, home and roots are replaced by mobility – echoing to Gertrude Stein's idea that "[i]t is great to have roots, as long as you can take them with you" (qtd in *Nomadic Subjects* 1). In the television series, home is not essentialized as static, timeless, and fixed – attributes traditionally conferred to it, as Massey argues (160-163), but is as mobile as the subject. This way, both the individual's and the place's identity are changeable and changed, and those changes imply the non-existence of *a* home, but of homes, in plural forms.

If Palmas is portrayed according to Massey's propositions of place as a non-stable and fixed entity, it is possible to argue that the portrayal of São Paulo enters into dialogue with her conceptualization of space too. At first the metropolis is clearly presented in opposition to Palmas: "the straight streets" of the latter contrast with the chaos of the former. In fact, São Paulo is the largest metropolis of Latin America, and the number one economy in Brazil. Although both cities seem to be opposite to one another, the way they are represented in the television series is quite similar, for their representation questions the binary oppositions of "local" versus "global." In her words,

Each geographical 'place' in the world is being realigned in relation to the new global realities, their roles within the wider whole are being reassigned, their boundaries dissolve as they are increasingly crossed by everything from investment flows, to cultural influences, to satellite TV networks. Even the different geographical scales become less easy to separate rather they constitute each other: the global the local, and vice versa (161).

This way, both Palmas and São Paulo are portrayed as constituted by multiple social relations: the mobility of the characters and their different social and cultural backgrounds rule out any possibility of fixing the cities' identities and also their inhabitants'.

The space of São Paulo is represented as the encounter of a multiplicity of spaces and places, due to its transnational and cosmopolitan relations with both Brazilian places and the rest of the globe. The considerably greater flows of people, cultures, information, and capital turn São Paulo into the Brazilian Wonderland. Carroll's fantasy and nonsense world in which Alice can live any adventure she dreams about, because of the inexistence of the "impossible" and because of its own organization as questioning the ordinary logic, is translated as the space of the metropolis: the space in which many spaces coexist and thus, the space that threatens the very organization of space adopted so far.

4.4.3 São Paulo as Wonderland: Alice's gender performativity questions patriarchal norms

In Alice's process of reterritorialization in the Wonderland metropolis, her way of presenting gender changes from the center of regulatory norm to its excess. Her very subjectivity changes as she moves and has new experiences. As Elizabeth Wilson argues, the metropolis constitutes itself as a possibility for women to pursue sexual pleasure (90), not only because it is impossible to regulate each individual, but also because of the phenomenon of anonymity that results from living in heavily populated areas. In this regard, the author points to the potential the city has to create and open up new "possibilities" for living that do not conform to the established ones, which follow the dominant masculine (*versus* feminine subjected) form of organization. As she observes, the city, a place of threat and paranoia to men, might be a place of liberation to women. The city offers freedom. After all, the city normalises the carnivalesque aspects of life. (...) [D]espite its bureaucratic conformity, at every turn the city dweller is also offered the opposite: pleasure, deviation, disruption (7). Indeed, that is what São Paulo offers Alice: different possibilities of breaking away from the normalized path she had drawn for herself, so that she is able to recreate her journey, and, in the process, to recreate herself.

As argued in last section, in Palmas the path Alice traces for her life coincides with the heterosexual normalized and singular possibility of having a "viable" life. She wants to get married and have children, and that is arguably because of the lack of possibilities for performing gender differently: several conforming practices showed no way out and established the gender norm in Palmas. The fear she feels as her plane to São Paulo takes off is the fear of the unfamiliar; of the unpredictable: she is afraid of finding "streets" that are not so "straight" and "planned" as those of Palmas, and this way, of discovering a path to her life that differs from the only she considers safe and intelligibly possible.

By relinquishing her future marriage and embracing other forms of living, Alice ceases to be regulated by “possible” gender forms and finds it possible to live sexuality out of marital bo(u)nds, both deviating her *self* from marriage and disruptively questioning it in favor of her own pleasure. As Judith Butler proposes in *Undoing Gender*, sexuality “outside the field of monogamy” can provide and allow a “different sense of community,” and this way, open up the idea of kinship beyond the familiar sphere and reconfigure agency bonds.

(26) The author argues that

(...) those [people] who live outside the conjugal frame or maintain modes of social organization for sexuality that are neither monogamous nor quasi-marital are more and more considered unreal, and their loves and losses less than “true” loves and “true” losses. The derealization of this domain of human intimacy and sociality works by denying reality and truth to the relations at issue (Butler 26-7).

According to Judith Butler, thus, Alice, who has just decided to “live outside” heterosexual marriage, has her existence threatened by the risk of “unreality”. As Butler explains, those who exceed the norms are considered “unviable” beings, less than human, and their subjectivities do not matter. On this point too, several “unreal beings” are also portrayed in *Wonderland São Paulo*: prostitutes, transvestites, lesbians, gays, bisexuals. All these people who, according to Judith Butler, constitute “bodies that do not matter” for exceeding the norm, exist and are given full subjectivities in HBO’s *Alice*.

In São Paulo, Alice has sex with several partners even before the end of her engagement with Henrique. She also gets involved with a married man, Lourenço Marques, who is a famous and successful businessman. Using the alibi that Lourenço is going through problems with his wife, at first Alice justifies her affair with the businessman. However, Alice neither relies on this excuse, nor omits her affair with the married man from her friends

or from her aunt Luli. Surprisingly, nobody judges her for the affair, since the other characters themselves also perform gender in non-conforming ways.

Hence, it is possible to argue that, by abandoning the norms that regulate gender, Alice enters the realm of the “unviable” subjects, and joins the other characters’ realm, assuming that none of them (except Lourenço, who is unfaithful to his wife) lives within the bounds of marriage. To illustrate that, Alice’s aunt Luli is single in spite of being fifty-seven years old; Dora is divorced, and so is her daughter Joana; Dani and Teo do not get married; Alice’s young friends Marcela, Monique, Marcílio, and Nickolas also remain single. Renata, Alice’s boss at the event planning agency has a boyfriend whom she betrays with her driver. Therefore, heterosexual marriage is portrayed as fallible, problematic and unromantic and its inherent roles of heterosexual marriage are contested. Moreover, the role heterosexual marriage plays in regulating individual sexuality and normalizing it, and also its role in representing a micro-sphere of the Nation – which Spivak argues to be based upon the heterosexual family (42-43), so that problems related to identity, agency, and recognition are “solved” by fixing kinship within the symbolic family (Butler *Undoing Gender* 26) – are destabilized in *Alice*.

4.5 Transgression in Wonderland: possibilities for non-conforming subjectivities

Elizabeth Wilson’s argument about the creation of “possibilities for ‘alternative’ living arrangements in cities” (90), especially in what regards gender performativity, is taken to its extreme in *Alice* and in its way of representing the social relations that constitute São Paulo. As the failure of monogamous marital bond is portrayed, several different forms of presenting gender out of the normalized pattern emerge, and that is the theme of this section. As a first example of non-conforming gender practice is the relationship among Marcela, Dani and Teo. Marcela and Dani are best friends and share the apartment, while Teo, Dani’s

boyfriend, usually visits the girls and sleeps with his girlfriend. One day, while entering their house without announcing himself, he overhears Marcela naked in the bathroom, and feels attracted to her. Some episodes later, while Dani is asleep, Teo enters the bathroom and kisses Marcela. Confused by the affection she feels for her friend Dani and the lust she feels for him, Marcela briefly struggles against Teo, but then kisses him back and they have sexual intercourse in the bathroom. Here, a conflict takes place, since Dani gets aware of the betrayal of her boyfriend with her best friend, and mourns the event for some time. By the end, though, Dani is able to forgive both her boyfriend and her friend in a scene that shows the three of them in a *ménage à trois*. The television series implies that this kind of sexual intercourse becomes a practice for Teo, Dani and Marcela and, due to the strong feelings they feel for each other, one can define their relationship as polyamory²². That relationship lasts for some time until the moment Dani decides to move to Barcelona; after her departure, Marcela and Teo continue to make casual sex.

The representation of the relationship among the three of them not only problematizes the “unproblematic” heterosexual relationship, but also represents a kind of sexual behavior that is considered “ab-normal,” “ob-scene” and unregulated in relation to the “possible” sexual behaviors established by patriarchal norms. Furthermore, this relationship contributes to raise another interesting issue: that of the innate sexual desire as pertaining to male individuals, and not to females (who constitute the object of the desire). Regarding Dani’s process of forgiving, it arguably inverts the logic of the discourses naturalized as “masculine” and “feminine.” Actually, both Teo and Marcela were driven by inconsequential and

²² According to the Pride Center of Oregon State University website, Polyamory constitutes “the non-possessive, honest, responsible and ethical philosophy and practice of loving multiple people simultaneously. Polyamory emphasizes consciously choosing how many partners one wishes to be involved with rather than accepting social norms which dictate loving only one person at a time. Polyamory embraces sexual equality and all sexual orientations towards an expanded circle of spousal intimacy and love. Polyamory is from the root words Poly meaning many and Amour meaning love hence “many loves” or “Polyamory” (Available at <http://oregonstate.edu/pridecenter/terms-and-definitions>).

uncontrolled desire towards each other, and their intentions were not to hurt Dani's feelings, but to fulfill their sexual desire. However, Dani is able to forgive her friend Marcela's desire for Teo more easily than her boyfriend's: Dani is able to comprehend Marcela's uncontrolled desire, but not Teo's; thus, her "process of forgiveness" contradicts the "naturalized" idea that men are the ones to possess the unconstrainable sexual desire, while women constitute their passive "desired" beings. As Adrienne Rich explains, "women have been educated – no less than by romantic literature or by pornography – to perceive ourselves as sexual prey" (107). The view of "passivity" in terms of lack of sexual desire as part of both the "natural" sexuality of Woman, and of the "idealized" and "normalized" practice of gender is thoroughly contested.

Through this first example it is arguable that gender norms are strongly questioned and destabilized in *Alice*. Echoing Butler's affirmation that "sexuality fails to conform to the social norms by which it is regulated" (14) and that "it emerges precisely as an improvisational possibility within a field of constraints" (15), other forms of living sexuality emerge. Actually, that is what the television series shows, criticizing the limits imposed at subjects by patriarchal norms, which restrict sexuality to the heterosexual possibility. According to Rich, heterosexuality has for long been seen as a "preference" for women, but there are "covert socializations and ... overt forces that have channeled women into marriage and heterosexual romance pressures ranging from the selling of daughters to postindustrial economics to the silences of literature to the images of the television screen" (102). And if heterosexuality is frequently pointed as "preference" for women, so it has been for men. In this sense, the character of Luana Byton, though participating in only three episodes, corresponds to a maximal interrogation of such generalizations.

Luana Byton, a transgendered character that works in a low class coffee shop, and her friend, the prostitute Marília, appear in the second episode. They play an important role in

helping Regina Célia when she gets lost in São Paulo after running away from home: they take care of her, feed her and allow Célia to call Alice, so that her sister could take her home. The character of Luana Byton is acknowledged as transgender both by Alice and Célia, and so is Marília's occupation as a prostitute. However, neither Alice nor Célia make any comment in this regard: they just talk with the two "saviors" of Célia, take some pictures, and eat together. Only in episode number eight, Célia's mother's attitudes towards Marília and Luana are filled with some "estrangement" or even "prejudice." However, since most characters accept Luana and Marília in social practices and even become their friends, prejudice is portrayed as an exception instead of a normal reaction.

Hence, though in *Alice* the prejudice against transgenders as well as against prostitution is subtly present, the statement in favor of their acceptance within social relations without any prejudicial labels of "different" or "less-than-human" is much clearer. Actually, *Alice* politically provides them the possibility of having fully intelligible existences. The insertion of non-conforming individuals contests the heterosexual marital bounds as the only possible "norm". In this regard, homosexuality *per se* serves manifold political functions in the context of representation: it reinserts those "unreal," "unviable" individuals into the realm of the possible, and thus, questions the exclusive norms that regulate "normality." By destabilizing the hegemony of heterosexuality, *Alice* legitimates the "real" practices of non-conforming gender performativity by means of picturing other possibilities in discourse and representation. As a non-heterogeneous, non-strict "technology of gender", the television series reforms the realm of "possibilities" and opens up its boundaries, arguing in favor of the existence of the non-conforming people. Another point to be made is about the construction of the characters of the prostitutes. In terms of social class, Marília, the suburban prostitute who exposes her body on the sidewalk in order to attract her clients, is opposed to the VIP and expensive prostitutes Stephany and Guiga. As Adrienne Rich explains,

prostitution constitutes one of the many ways male sexuality finds to force itself upon women. Moreover, prostitution is viewed by most feminist critics as a way to “use [women] as objects in male transactions,” in Rich’s terms, so that women are valued or devalued, depending on masculinist patterns, and also subjected by these patterns (107-108). Many feminists have defined prostitution as males’ violence against women, as it is used to reinforce the dominance of heterosexuality as well as male power, representing “the absolute embodiment of patriarchal male privilege” (Kesler19).

Contrarily, in her influential book on prostitution *Female Sexual Slavery*, Kathleen Barry affirms that both marriage and prostitution share the same foundational element of women’s oppression, which she names “sexual slavery.” Indeed, the prostitute embodies both the search for sexual pleasure out of marriage – which Elizabeth Wilson explains as more or less forbidden, by giving the example of Germany in World War II (132) – and the possibility of women’s sexuality as uncontrolled and unrestrained. And since prostitution is a mixture of economic trade and sexual act, the boundaries between private and public sphere become blurred, so that they embody both the “object of desire” and the “threat” to patriarchal society.

As Zatz suggests, though gender and sexuality are at the basis of the practice of prostitution, it cannot be simplified or reduced to these aspects (279). Thus, when feminist theories explain the existence of prostitution based on the essentialized dominance of men upon women, they are actually deploying the prostitute of any identity or subjectivity, and disregarding other constituents of the formation of the subject, such as class, race, and ethnicity, among others. In this sense, the portrayals of the prostitutes Marília, Stephany and Guiga question the essentialization of prostitution and minimize its view as simplistically violence against women. Marília is kind to Regina Célia and the one who finds the lost girl and takes her to the coffee shop where Luana Byton works. She talks about her economic

situation in a lighthearted tone, telling Regina Célia she cannot lend her cell phone to the girl because she has no credit to make calls. Her friendship with Luana is depicted as strong and long-lasting, and the way one cares for the other, as well as the way both of them take care of Regina Célia, is given much more attention than Marília's occupation. Indeed, the viewer realizes Marília is a prostitute at the end of the episode, which shows her on a street corner at night, together with other prostitutes, so that other aspects of her subjectivity are portrayed before.

Regarding Stephany and Guiga, the scenario is quite different. The two girls are strippers in a very expensive nightclub, and in the episode they are attending Italian customers, and the scene implies they receive a lot more money for the night than Marília. However, Alice's attitude in relation to the girls is not different: she shows no prejudice against them. Alice accompanies the girls as they leave the nightclub, and takes the girls to her house by the end of the night, since they could not find two taxis. In Alice's house, the portrayal of Stephany is deepened in her dialogue with Alice, in which she tells her real name, Marina, and confesses she has escaped her city, Londrina, to live a new life in São Paulo. In this scene, Alice and Stephany are equated by the condition of being mobile subjects, so that being a prostitute does not make her inferior to Alice. Differently from that, both girls are portrayed as outcasts. In telling her story to Alice, and especially because of the connection Alice feels to her – Alice's dead mother's name was Marina too – the girls dance while a lullaby song is played, so as Stephany/ Marina has her subjectivity re-signified and builds an important bond with Alice. The comparison between the prostitute and Alice's mother highlights that Stephany, though a prostitute, is a woman among other women and is not defined only by her occupation.

Another aspect to be discussed is the emotional and mature relationship between Alice's aunt Luli and her friend Dora. The two women live a love story full of difficulties

because of being lesbians. Luli and Dora's love is mutual, though Dora's daughter Joana does not approve their affair and creates obstacles for them to stay together. Interestingly, Joana uses many of the artifices that have been used by men since the Victorian society in order to keep her mother away from Luli. Joana argues she has just divorced, and thus, needs her mother to help her with her son, even though he has a nanny. Moreover, when Dora tells her she loves Luli, Joana says "that is craziness" and tries to convince her mother that she has a lot of work at home, not permitting her to go out. Joana has a very important role in *Alice*: she represents the law (both the Lacanian symbolic law and the social norms), and in consonance with that, Joana works as a lawyer. She does not feel comfortable seeing Luli and Dora together, and laments her mother's divorce from her father. Joana wanted Dora to occupy her position within the symbolic family, and cannot accept her mother's non-conformity to that. However, by the end, Joana surrenders as she sees the only way for her mother to be happy is by being free to make her own choices. Interestingly, Joana's first reaction against their love affair, especially considering that she is the character who represents the law, coincides with an earlier period in History, when homosexuality was seen as both "pathology" and crime by the powerful discourses of medicine and the law, which governed – and still govern – lives.²³

In consonance with Adrienne Rich's political agenda, *Alice* does not condemn lesbianism to "invisibility." According to the critic, lesbianism is negated both in fiction and in theory, so that lesbians are neither represented/inserted in discourse (for being unintelligible, non-conforming), nor discussed within academic debates (and here she criticizes feminist theories who are blind to lesbians). As she argues,

One of many means of enforcement [of heterosexuality for women] is, of course the rendering invisible of the lesbian possibility, an engulfed continent

²³ About these institutionalized discourses, Butler affirms that they have for long kept non-conforming practices of gender as "ab-normalities."

that rises frequently to view from time to time only to become submerged again. Feminist research and theory that contributes to lesbian invisibility or marginality is actually working against the liberation and empowerment of women as a group (104).

This way, the very representation of Luli and Dora as mature and assertive lesbian women makes a political statement against lesbian invisibility. Moreover, the television series does not fetishize it either. As Adrienne Rich argues about films and pornographic videos that include lesbian sexual intercourse, popularly called lesbian pornography, they are indeed “created for the male voyeuristic eye [and are] devoid of emotional context or individual personality” (106). Contrarily, the television series interrogates not only the “essentialization” of lesbians as if their subjectivities could be summarized by lesbianism, but also the idealization of heterosexual love by representing a deep and true lesbian love. Actually the only wedding portrayed in the series is that of Luli and Dora, in the last episode of the first season. Interestingly, by the time the television series was released, gay/lesbian marriage was not yet institutionalized as a “possibility” by Brazilian Constitution. However, the directors do not even consider the non-institutionalization of homosexual marriage, and this way, their attitude of ignoring the rules of the State and inserting this possibility may be read as a political attitude. Thus, I strongly believe that *Alice* opens up the possibility for lesbians to “exist,” as well as politically interrogate and destabilize the regulations of the institutionalized discourses (especially that of the cinema/ television representation and that of the State) upon gender and sexuality. In this sense, as to exemplify the machinery through which the television series does that in a subtly political way, it is relevant to analyze the scene in which Luli cries because she misses Dora. Luli is in a party in Alice’s house, in which she is drinking alcohol excessively and talking to Monique, who says she thought Luli was interested in a friend of theirs, but Luli says: “No, there’s no way to deny it. Dora is the

woman of my life.” Monique just nods showing sympathy for Luli’s sadness, and demonstrates no surprise or estrangement. Whereas traditional cinema and television make compulsory heterosexual relations “go without saying” and thus assert them as “natural” upon the viewers’ lives as the intelligible form of performing gender, *Alice* constitutes an attempt at opening up possibilities by means of “naturalizing” homosexuality (as well as of other forms of performing gender) and assuring lesbian, gay and transgender individuals’ existence and intelligibility without the mark of difference as pejorative (Lauretis 10).

Therefore, *Alice* establishes a dialogue with several of the feminist struggles. As I have argued so far, the performativity of gender and its multiple possibilities question patriarchal society and destabilize the norms that regulate individuals. Moreover, the creation of those norms, though it happens socially, still echo the patterns and prejudices of the immutable symbolic “Law”, and thus, has a clear connection with instances of regulation (heterosexual relationship, marriage, the formation of a functional family) and the formation of the State. It was also discussed that, during Victorian age, gender and sexuality became “a State concern” (Lauretis 12); consequently, heterosexual normativity was implemented in the English Constitution, while homosexuality was criminalized by the same document. In contemporaneity the relation between State and heterosexual normativity, though less strict especially because of feminism (Spivak 42-44), is still present, and remains dominant in common sense and in institutionalized discourses and means of representation (Lauretis 12). Far from reinforcing the power of the symbolic “Law” of patriarchy or of the connection between regulated gender practices and the State, *Alice* claims for new possibilities as the series includes “other” subjects. Therefore, *Alice* can be read as a political fictional work that opens up possibilities for both performing gender and experiencing sexuality without the risk of un-humanness or unviability.

In *Alice*, gender norms are questioned, destabilizing the regulation of the State over sexuality and gender performativity, and so are the Brazilian laws as a whole. The characters are constantly portrayed breaching the law and escaping unpunished. For instance, Alice and her friends use drugs in several scenes. In the parties they go, they use cocaine, ecstasy, and LSD. Since Monique works in a hospital, she has easy access to several pills and capsules that cannot be consumed without a prescription. However, she steals medicines from the hospital and shares them with her friends, asserting that “These pills together with Vodka make you forget all your problems.” It is interesting to highlight that the use of drugs here also somehow connects the television series with the psychedelic readings of Carroll’s books, as well as of some previous adaptations of the *Alice* stories.

The consumption of drugs takes place even at home, in the parties they throw in Dani and Marcela’s apartment or even with no party or event taking place. When Alice arrives at her aunt Luli’s house after her father’s funeral, they share a marijuana cigarette while they are talking. After Alice’s birthday, when Luli prepares a room for her so that she can stop sleeping on the sofa, aunt and niece “baptize” it. In addition to that, Alice’s aunt Luli, Marcela and Dani drive after consuming alcohol. Interestingly, none of them is ever questioned or punished because of any of their transgressive attitudes. Actually, the frequency with which they transgress and infringe the law questions the efficacy and effectiveness of the application of those laws upon social individuals and destabilizes the State as a whole.

4.6 Nomadic *Alice*: a political fiction representing the un-representable

A last transgressive attitude that needs to be mentioned, which is very significant for the re-construction of Alice’s subjectivity, is the abortion Alice plans to have after being aware of her pregnancy. After dating Lourenço Marques several times, Alice gets pregnant.

In despair, Alice calls Lourenço and asks for help. She does not know what to do, and is unsure whether she should give birth to the baby or have an abortion. When she meets Lourenço he asserts he does not want any more children, and offers Alice a great amount of money to travel to the United States and abort the child. Because of Lourenço's proposition, Alice gets really angry and leaves the restaurant crying.

Interestingly, Alice does not get angry with the possibility of the abortion because she has already considered it by herself before the conversation with Lourenço. Actually, when talking to Luli, Alice confesses that she is unwilling to give birth to the child, and is neither judged nor reprehended by her aunt. This way, the conflict established is not based on a moral discourse against abortion, and neither is it due to the illegality of the practice in Brazil, but related to the fact that Lourenço suppresses Alice's choice: he gives her no other option but the abortion. Deprived of the possibility to choose, Alice decides to interrupt her pregnancy, though other events take place and result in Alice's having a miscarriage.

Alice's attitude in relation to her pregnancy is indeed very disruptive. Alice's unwillingness to give birth to the child is related to her wish to remain in São Paulo. Her greatest fear, as she confesses to her aunt, is to have no other option than returning to Palmas. Her ex-fiancé Henrique visits her in São Paulo and, after receiving the news about her pregnancy, affirms he would take the baby as his son, and offers Alice protection and care if she forms a family with him. Although in trouble, Alice does not accept Henrique's offer. She prefers to have an abortion than to build a family, and that is related to her urge of remaining mobile and unfixed. All Alice wants is to be able to choose: she wants to choose whether to have the baby or not and whether to stay in São Paulo or move to anywhere else. Moreover, Alice's attitude serves to destabilize the patriarchal idea of motherhood as "natural" and "inherent" to women, in accordance to Adrienne Rich's critique.

Alice declares the city is “the love of her life,” and indeed her relation with the multiplicity of possibilities São Paulo offers her causes great changes in her subjectivity. Alice not only assumes another “possibility” for her own life concerning gender performativity, but also changes her way of seeing the world, people and also herself. This way, whereas in the beginning of the television series, Alice is presented as satisfied and filled with certainties, by the end she does not know what she wants for her life. In this respect, it is interesting to consider the several jobs she has. Back in Palmas, Alice was a tour guide and worked for the city government. Differently, in São Paulo, she does not attach herself to any job, but changes occupations as she transforms her own subjectivity. At first, Alice takes small jobs to make money and simultaneously works as a salesperson in her aunt’s store. Later, she has an opportunity to work as an assistant producer in Tribeca. Then, after solving the problems she had in relation to her inheritance, she inherits an old hangar and transforms it into a space for events, which she calls “Wonderland”. Until the last episode of the first season she keeps throwing parties in “Wonderland” to make money, but in the first episode of the continuation, she has already sold the hangar and becomes a theater director.

São Paulo can be seen as Alice’s “lover”, but it also constitutes an “enemy,” against which she has to struggle in order to gain her own space. The city and its multiplicity of possibilities both help the young woman and pose difficult obstacles in her way. Though Alice likes the city, she has to work very hard to achieve some success, and because of the many hours of dedication to her work, she forgets to call her family and friends, who get really disappointed with her. Moreover, the pollution of the city also causes Alice a serious lung disease, and despite the medical prescription, Alice cannot rest properly and her medical condition worsens. Another point to be made is that Alice’s conflict with Lourenço resulted from his assertive position that did not allow Alice to choose whether or not she would give

birth to the baby. In this sense, the city also deprives her of the chance to choose, since its violence causes her miscarriage.

Despite her conflicting relation with the city, Alice is able to feel “at home” in São Paulo. After realizing that within São Paulo she could escape the regulatory power of gender norms, Alice rebuilds her identity. When asked by her grandmother if she intended to return to Palmas, she affirms she cannot do so anymore. She tells her grandmother about her dreams and plans, and the viewer understands that Alice does not belong to Palmas as she used to. When in the last episode she visits Palmas, she can barely recognize her room. She sees everything as very unfamiliar and distant. She states everything there seems too small for her, and makes an allusion to an important passage of Carroll’s books as she asks: as she asks “Was it me that grew up, or all this that shrunk?” she recalls Carroll’s Alice’s constant shrinking and growing. Moreover, when returning to São Paulo she talks with a man who was flying to the metropolis for the first time. He asks her if she is from São Paulo, and her answer is positive, thus erasing her past identification with Palmas.

It is possible to argue that Alice moves towards assuming a globalized, unfixed and unfinished sense of selfhood. She does not want to define herself, and is portrayed as a subject that is always changing and in-process. The episode “The First Day of the Rest of my Life” portrays her relationship with Nickolas, and their search for an apartment, since they intended to live together. However, in the following episode, “The Last Night”, it becomes clear that Nickolas does not want to move in with Alice and, when she realizes that, she breaks up with him. Alice’s process of re-constructing herself begins again, and simultaneously, all the other characters are also going through experiences that break with the cycles they were in. In *Alice*, subjects are never portrayed as complete and defined, and their incompleteness is coincidental with the adaptation’s lack of a definitive end.

This way, it is possible to affirm that a nomadic consciousness permeates both Alice as a character and the television series. Alice changes her perspective and way of living after moving to São Paulo. Because of the manifold possibilities, Alice is able to abandon old behavior patterns and experience life, and that experience results in her finding her *self*. She discovers she does not want to marry Henrique or to have children. She finds out she does not want to remain fixed, but to be multiple and mobile. When she says in episode seven that she is broken and wants to glue all the pieces to build a new Alice, it seems that she acknowledges that this process can be repeated as many times as she wants, and that she chooses to do so. Because of the different social relations that constitute São Paulo, Alice goes through different processes of agency, and finds out that she wants to construct her identity based on identification rather than arbitrary relations related to geography, as it was in Palmas. Moreover, by choosing a non-conformist path to her life in relation to gender norms, Alice embraces all the “other” forms of living, performing gender and experiencing sexuality regardless of prejudicial labels and definition.

Therefore, *Alice* can be read in relation to the figuration of the Nomadic Subject. By this figuration Braidotti affirms she aims at the destabilization of “dogmatic, hegemonic, exclusionary power at the very heart of identity structures of the dominant subject through nomadic interventions” (9). This way, the nomadic subject Braidotti proposes is more a state of consciousness than a “real” travelling subject; the nomadism she theorizes is that of consciousness, as she affirms that trips can also be made without geographical moving. As she puts it,

[t]he nomadic subject is a myth, or a political fiction, that allows me to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges. Implicit in my choice of this figuration is the belief in the potency and relevance of imagination, of myth

making, as a way to step out the political and intellectual stasis of our times. Political fictions may be more effective, here and now, than theoretical systems. The nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior. ... Consciousness-raising and the subversion of the set of conventions define the nomadic state ... (26).

In this sense, “Alice” as a mythical character merges into the myth of the nomadic subject: if Alice (both Carroll’s and the mythical existence she has acquired) embodies the claim for new possibilities, the television series *Alice* largely contributes to question the patterns of representation and plays a role in both legitimizing and producing “new” ways of gender performativity (Rich 102). Thus, “what accounts for the content of gender difference is gender-differentiated meanings and the positions differently made available to men and women in discourse” (Hollwayqtd. in Lauretis15). The television series does not present simply a nomadic subjectivity (Alice’s subjectivity) that confronts the traditional essentialization of Woman, in spite of women, but a space full of social relations that destabilize patriarchal order and question its regulatory norms upon individualities. As a social myth, the figuration of the nomadic subject is arguably a fantasy, in relation to Butler’s ideas, for it takes us out of the real-here-and-now space, and moves us to spaces *beyond*: which “means spatial distance, marks progress, promises the future” (Bhabha 4). Though according to Bhabha “the act of going *beyond*” constitutes a journey in direction of displacement and of the “un-representable,” the attempts at going beyond and representing it – as the television series *Alice* does by inserting the “unrepresented” and “un-representable” in representation – make of that displaced space a radical “intervention in the here and now” (4-7).

If Alice can be seen as a political fictional character that abandons the rules and her own “viability” in order to live, so do most characters of the television series, turning the television production into a radical statement against patriarchal norms and asserting the viability of those who constitute its excess. Moreover, by pointing to the fallibility of the Brazilian laws, the legitimacy and the power of the State in regulating lives is also deeply criticized. In this regard, *Alice* gives personality to commodified bodies, permits the existence of transgender subjects and celebrates lesbian marriage, realities which Brazilian State not only has treated as “excesses” of the norm and ignored until very recently. As Teresa de Lauretis argues, “discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking, unless we speak in its terms” (Lauretis 18). Assuming that, *Alice* constitutes an attempt at representing and voicing those who do not live within heterosexual norm, and by doing so, politically enlarges the realm of possibilities for living subjects.

Therefore, turning back to the discussion HBO *Alice* as adaptation of Carroll’s books, it is arguable that the transgressive traits of Carroll’s Alice’s subjectivity are strongly present in HBO *Alice*. If Carroll’s Alice had no place either in Victorian childhood or in Victorian womanhood because of her subversive subjectivity, HBO’s Alice also does not have place, except the margin of the norm. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll’s Alice is told by the Tweedle brothers that her existence is under the conditions of the White King’s dream, and since it is his dream, if he stops to dreaming of her, she will not exist anymore. However, Alice’s existence, as well as her statement “It is my dream” (Carroll, *TLG* 173-174), questions his power over her existence. Similarly, HBO’s Alice cannot “be herself” under patriarchal conditions of existence as a conformist: if she does so, she is not being herself. However, her subversive existence as a non-conforming subject makes a radical statement about her viability even though out of patriarchal norms and constraints.

Moreover, the “unreal” creatures of Carroll’s Wonderland, those who are “all mad” and insane, are transposed in HBO’s *Alice* into “unreal” human beings, whose reality and humanness have been for long dismissed for their non-conformity to gender norms. Thus, since the mythical existence of Alice has been cast for discussing gender and sexuality, especially because she has accomplished to have a life out of the page and several afterlives – both in relation to Benjamin’s term and in relation to her survival in culture, despite her non-conformity – in HBO free recreation of her stories the main claim is that the non-conforming subject, too, be able to accomplish a fully “viable” and “intelligible” existence in the world.

5. Conclusion:

Considering the prolific afterlife of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, their protagonist has acquired the status of myth in Western culture and now permeates everyday life in contexts and narratives that hardly relate to her Victorian stories. Alice's several appearances as a mature young woman – not always blond and not always within the Victorian setting – who generally transgresses social norms related to gender and sexuality invites us to read Carroll's books with gender on the agenda. Whereas Alice was viewed as a symbol of innocence during the Victorian Age, one may wonder why she has so frequently been characterized as either a non-conformist woman, or as a sexualized nubile.

In both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice is characterized as an intelligent and inquisitive girl, who wants to discover the world, to learn new things and to penetrate the fantasy lands she visits – differently from most Victorian children's girl protagonists. As the First Chapter of this thesis discusses, Alice can be read as a tomboyish character that does not follow the necessary path for every Tomboy, since she is not forced to achieve appropriate Victorian womanhood. Alice constitutes a non-conformist character that strongly interrogates and destabilizes Victorian gender norms. The chapter also argues that fantasy, the genre Lewis Carroll chose to narrate Alice's adventures, provides a strategy to escape the realism of the Victorian novel, and thus, to make the girl's subversive features possible. Moreover, fantasy also allows the books to dismiss the didactic purposes of Victorian children's literature, so that the *Alice* books convey no moral at their ends and no messages in relation to gender practices for either boys or girls.

The several psychoanalytical readings of the *Alice* stories and also of Carroll's biography have considerably contributed to the characterization of Alice as a woman, as I have argued. Moreover, the fact that, along decades, many adaptations have read the *Alice* stories as fables about growing out of childhood caused the image of an adult Alice to be

endorsed and accepted nowadays. As an adult, thus, Alice begins to be read *as* a woman, and issues related to gender and sexuality are raised, especially due to the multiple feminist readings of both the *Alice* books and their afterlives.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, it becomes apparent that the sexualization of Alice within “official” adaptations, in Brooker’s term, constitutes a recent phenomenon. Until 2004, when Will Brooker’s influential *Alice’s Adventures: Lewis Carroll in Popular Culture* was published, sexualized readings of the *Alice* stories were restricted to fan fictions and illustrations that could be found on webpages. However, one year later, the publication of *Alice in Genderland* by Richard Novic, marked the change of this reality: nowadays, adaptations of the *Alice* stories focusing on gender and sexuality abound. This phenomenon is certainly related to the need to debate those issues, as the whole world has experienced significant changes in relation to gender practices and norms.

The phenomenon of the sexualization of Alice takes the debate about sex and gender out of the “underground” and brings it to the fore, especially because Alice’s sexualization *per se* is not the ultimate objective, but the interrogation and destabilization of both the male gaze and the binary patriarchal logic. In Tim Burton’s film, Alice chooses to be a traveler rather than to embody the “Angel in the House”; in *Alice in Genderland*, a father, husband and professional man narrates his adventures as a crossdresser; in *Lost Girls*, Alice is a lesbian who has lived multiple sexual experiences and narrates them to her friends Wendy and Dorothy. In all these adaptations, subjects are given the chance of leading lives out of the patriarchal gender norms.

Among the adaptations that portray non-conformist Alices as full subjects, the one that most openly problematizes gender and sexuality is HBO’s television series *Alice*. In this free recreation of Carroll’s *Alice* stories, Alice goes through the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as she moves to the Brazilian Wonderland, São

Paulo. There, Alice's subjectivity is rebuilt, since she goes through a process of agency as she identifies with the social relations that constitute the space of the metropolis. Interestingly, these social relations are all deviant concerning gender norms: Alice interacts with transsexuals, gays, lesbians, and other characters that present gender away from the compulsory heteronormative pattern. As she acknowledges the existence of practices that exceed the normalized and naturalized path of the heterosexual marital bond, Alice discovers that the plans she had made for her life had nothing to do with what she really desires.

As a result of her identification with Wonderland, she is only able to access her *self* and understand what she really wants for her life after she moves to São Paulo; thus, the plot suggests that the lack of possibilities to live gender in Palmas caused Alice's uncritical plans of marrying and following the gender norms. As her mind changes, Alice transforms herself in a nomadic subject, and the narrative both permits and claims for a nomadic consciousness, in Braidotti's terms. Thus, differently from most portrayals of non-conformist characters in relation to gender and sexuality, the characters in *Alice* are presented as full subjects, so that this series makes a radical statement against the representation of non-conformist characters by means of stereotypes. As Alice acknowledges the different possibilities of gender performativity, so does the viewer, who is provoked to deconstruct his/her own stereotyping in relation to "other" gender practices. In this regard, whereas hegemonic representations naturalize the heterosexual couple as the norm, *Alice* can be viewed as naturalizing other – lesbian/gay/trans/poly- – forms of love, gender practices and sexuality. Therefore, *Alice* legitimizes the existence – the human, viable and intelligible existence – of those who do not conform. Thus, the series inverts the logic of the technology of gender: by inserting and representing non-conforming subjects in discourse it destabilizes hegemonic patriarchal gender ideology.

Despite displaced and non-conforming, Carroll's Alice manages to exist and, in doing so, she interrogates the morals and gender morality conveyed in Victorian children's books. As she becomes a cultural myth and manages to have an afterlife – both in relation to Benjamin's term and concerning the way she survives in culture – it seems that Alice becomes the inspiration for those non-conforming beings, who also exceed gender norms and have never had a place for existing as subjects. Finally, as adaptations of *Alice*, such as HBO's, discuss gender and state the intelligibility of non-conforming beings, they are at once claiming for new possibilities for subjects and politically enabling non-conforming subjects to exist.

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