

<b>Institution:</b> Queen Mary University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 26B Modern Languages and Linguistics		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Alice's Adventures in 21st-Century Creative Industries: Enrichment, Extension and Diversification of a Victorian Icon		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Kiera Vaclavik	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Children's Literature & Childhood Culture	<b>Period(s) employed:</b> Sept 2006-Present
<b>Period when the impact occurred:</b> 2015-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Professor Vaclavik's research on Lewis Carroll and the evolution of the character of Alice provided innovative new content for major organisations in the cultural and creative industries, enabling deep, enduring and creative engagement with a classic 19<sup>th</sup> century work, especially on the part of British children. Vaclavik's research initiated and was essential to a series of high-profile collaborative endeavours to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> in 2015: an exhibition at the V&amp;A Museum of Childhood, a concert suite for the London Symphony Orchestra, and a fabric collection for Liberty Art Fabrics. It continues to shape curatorial practice given her consultancy on the V&amp;A's landmark Alice exhibition.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Vaclavik, co-founder and director of Queen Mary University of London's Centre for Childhood Cultures (2016) has substantially revised and extended understanding of both Lewis Carroll and the reception and afterlife of the <i>Alice</i> books. Funded by a 24-month AHRC fellowship, Vaclavik's research draws attention to Carroll's life-long interests in dress and in sound, and their centrality in his best-known works, bringing focus to two previously neglected areas of scholarship.</p> <p>Vaclavik's extensive archival research in public and private collections has brought a substantial range of new materials to light, including North American illustrated editions, fancy dress and sources relating to amateur and professional performance. Particularly influential has been Vaclavik's examination of dress in the original <i>Alice</i> works and their subsequent adaptations across the world [3.1-3.4]. She underlines for the first time Carroll's deep involvement in styling his characters on the page and on stage to the extent of specifying a Liberty dress for the 1888 theatrical adaptation of the <i>Alice</i> books [3.4].</p> <p>Vaclavik's research reveals that the circulation of the <i>Alice</i> books in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was much more extensive than previously understood, with performances, parties, and other adoptions of Alice's persona occurring not just in Britain, but across the USA, Australia and Japan [3.3, 3.4]. This research has shown that the <i>Alice</i> books served as important catalysts for creativity amongst a much wider range of individuals than had hitherto been registered, especially women and children [3.4].</p> <p>In <i>Fashioning Alice</i> [3.4] in particular, Vaclavik challenges existing understanding of the heroine's gender identity by revealing that Carroll's original depiction comprises many gender-neutral components, which may have facilitated the widespread adoption of the character in performances by boys as well as girls. Her research shows that the revisioning of Alice's visual identity occurred from the very outset, decades earlier than the standard critical view [3.4]. It establishes new timelines, demonstrating the way in which Alice's image was shaped by contemporary fashion, and pinpointing for the first time when the 'Alice Look' (including the 'Alice band') became influential in its own right [3.3, 3.4]. All in all, as Jan Susina writes in a review of <i>Fashioning Alice</i>, Vaclavik's innovative project 'guides readers in addressing well-known texts with new eyes' [3.6].</p>		

Source materials consulted for the research on Alice's visual identity have also led Vaclavik to findings in a distinct but related area. Prompted by close analysis of illustrated music sheets and inspired by the collaboration with Rissmann (see Section 4 below), Vaclavik's work has helped restore the multifaceted sonic dimension of the *Alice* books, which was crucial to their Victorian reception but overlooked by critics to date. Her research – graded 'outstanding' by an anonymous journal reviewer – uncovers the full range of sonic phenomena within the works, from music to noise and silence. This means that it is now possible to understand the *Alice* books afresh, not just as illustrated books but as interactive audio-visual works combining word, image and sound [3.5].

### 3. References to the research

- [3.1] Vaclavik, K. (2014). The dress of the book: Children's literature, fashion and fancy dress. In Carrington, B., & Harding, J. (Eds.) *Beyond the Book: Transforming Children's Literature*, digitised edition (pp. 62-76). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- [3.2] Vaclavik, K. (2015). Fashions of Alice. *Alice in a World of Wonderlands*, Volume 1 (pp. 723-725). Oak Knoll Press.
- [3.3] Vaclavik, K. (2016). Of bands, bows and brows: Hair, the Alice books and the emergence of a style icon. *Fairy Tale Fashion* (pp. 253-68). Yale University Press.
- [3.4] Vaclavik, K. (2019). *Fashioning Alice: The Career of Lewis Carroll's Icon, 1860-1901*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- [3.5] Vaclavik, K. (2021). Listening to the Alice books. *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 26(1), 1-20. [doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcaa022](https://doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcaa022)
- [3.6] Susina, J. (2020). Fashioning Alice: The Career of Lewis Carroll's Icon, 1860–1901 by Kiera Vaclavik. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 45(1), 84-87. <https://doi.org/10.1353/chq.2020.0007>

### Evidence of the quality of research

[EQR.3.1-6] Vaclavik, [PI]. (2013-2015). Addressing Alice: The Emergence of a Style Icon, 1865-1890 [AH/L003910/1]. AHRC. GBP192,488.

### 4. Details of the impact

2015 was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and Vaclavik's research reached international audiences through a series of high-profile collaborations with the V&A Museum of Childhood (MoC), Liberty department store, the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO), and the V&A South Kensington. The reach and significance of the research is demonstrated in the extensive media coverage received, especially in 2015, including local and national BBC television and radio, feature articles for *The Independent*, and interviews with over 20 other newspapers and magazines internationally such as *The Times*, *Harpers Bazaar*, *V* (USA), *Fucsia* (Colombia), *El Universal* (Mexico), *The Times of India*, *Glamour* (Italy) and *Grazia* (France) [5.2]. Public talks in venues across the world have succeeded in driving audiences (e.g. more than doubling the usual audience for a Lewis Carroll Society-organised event for Alice's Day in Oxford in 2019 [5.8]).

### Influenced curatorial practice and enhanced creative engagement with Carroll's work with the V&A

Working with the MoC, Vaclavik conceived and curated *The Alice Look* (May-November 2015), the first museum exhibition to consider Carroll's heroine in relation to fashion and dress [5.10]. The exhibition that ran for six months, brought together over 50 garments, photographs, rare editions and illustrations related to Alice. To which the creative & skills director of MoC states, 'the exhibition would not have occurred without [Vaclavik's] extensive research into Alice's visual manifestations across the world and over a century and a half' and further go on to say how it contributed to several of the MoC's key strategic aims [5.9]:

- ‘The exhibitions focus on the different ways in which Alice has been styled [...] helped articulate the Museums renewed focus on art and design.’
- ‘The exhibition allowed us to activate our collections in new ways and to connect items from the [MoC] holdings to those of the wider V&A.’
- ‘The nature of the subject matter [...] the exhibition helped the Museum expand its demographic profiles.’
- ‘The one-day conference accompanying the exhibition [...] contributed to the Museums aim to enhance its research dimension and intellectual profile.’

218,000 people viewed the exhibition, and audience evaluations indicate that the subject matter drew new audiences to the museum. 20% of the 99 survey respondents visited the museum solely to see the exhibition, and 64% of survey respondents had not visited the museum before. It ‘helped the Museum expand its demographic profile by attracting more young (single, child-free) adults than usual’ [5.9].

The exhibition featured an interactive postcard activity, selected by Vaclavik to promote inclusion and creativity, which enabled visitors to create their own look for Alice [5.1]. Thousands of postcards were completed, with young children completing approximately 75% of these. The completed cards demonstrated that visitors had both absorbed the exhibition’s key messages concerning Alice’s look and felt inspired to produce their own versions. The front of house team was ‘struck by the proportion and levels of engagement’ with this activity [5.9].

In audience evaluation, 94% of respondents said they learned something from the exhibition [5.3]. Almost one in five felt the exhibition would influence their professional practice and/or daily lives, and the same proportion said it prompted a return to the original texts. Respondents also spoke of their intention to undertake activities with children based on the exhibition, such as drawing or making costumes, and to introduce the books to young readers.

A follow-up survey two years later confirmed the long-term effects of the exhibition. It showed that it had indeed sent visitors back to the original books (a third of respondents reported they had done so) and shaped professional practice: one respondent had been prompted to include a section on fashion in her regular teaching of the books [5.4]. The survey shows that the widespread global take-up of the Alice look and processes of adaption more generally had particularly stayed with visitors, with one respondent remarking,

‘I think about how different societies have taken the idea and changed it to reflect their culture. It has made me think about how we do that more broadly with a lot of things.’ [5.4]

The success of The Alice Look helped establish ‘the viability and wide-ranging appeal of children’s literature-based exhibitions’ at the V&A [5.6]. Vaclavik subsequently became a key member of the advisory group for the major V&A exhibition Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser, now rescheduled to March-December 2021 due to COVID-19, with anticipated visitor figures of more than 200,00. Her research shaped curatorial decision-making in relation to dress, as well as wider gender issues. For example, Vaclavik’s research on boy Alices led to the scheduling of a weekend event in conjunction with the V&A’s LGBTQ+ working group (now rescheduled to November 2021) focusing on mental health, wellbeing and creativity, comprising a public talk by Vaclavik alongside workshops and drag queen storytelling (250 participants anticipated with online materials substantially increasing that reach [5.6]).

### **Enhanced the design practice at Liberty Art Fabrics**

Vaclavik’s research findings on Carroll’s earmarking of a Liberty dress for an Alice costume initiated a collaboration with Liberty’s Art Fabrics department, resulting in an Alice-themed collection of over 70 fabrics released for retail sale in 2015. This was the only externally influenced brief that Head of Design, Emma Mawston used in her 35 collections for Liberty [5.7]. Vaclavik presented her research to the department’s design team and had a series of briefing meetings with Mawston, to which she attests:

'Vaclavik's familiarity with Carroll's work [...] shaped our approach to the project in important ways: for instance, her research focus on dress led us to think about which Liberty print Alice might be wearing today and we then used this to involve a series of external figures (including actors, designers), asking them to select fabrics from the archive which were then brought up to date and included in the final collection.

The fabrics were sold not only to individuals but also global brands including Vans and Gola for their 2015 collections.

### **Enhanced LSO programming and influenced young audiences**

Vaclavik's examination of illustrated music sheets led to a collaboration with composer Paul Rissmann resulting in a concert-suite for families and school children. Commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO), *The Wonderland Suite* (2015) extended a limited existing repertoire for young audiences. LSO Discover Community Project Manager states that the concert suite widened 'the range and style of themed concerts we are able to offer for this age group and expand[ed] the musical learning of the audience', and served as a prompt for the LSO 'to create a truly cross-curricular project using music, literature and history to support the primary school national curriculum' [5.5]. Audience interaction was enhanced through a Key Stage 2 teacher-training event delivered by Rissmann and Vaclavik in September 2015 introducing the score and outlining ways of working with pupils attending the performances [5.5].

The composition premiered at the Barbican in November 2015, with three sell-out performances (total audience 6,500) by the LSO alongside the LSO Discovery Choir, made up of local young people aged 8-18 [5.5]. Beyond the UK, the Australian premiere was performed by the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra to 750 children in June 2017 (followed by a further two performances, with total audiences reaching 2,250) [5.5].

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- [5.1] [Portfolio] 'The Alice Look' postcards
- [5.2] [Media] Dossier of media outlets referencing the research
- [5.3] [Report] 'The Alice Look' exhibition evaluation 2015
- [5.4] [Report] 'The Alice Look' exhibition follow-up evaluation 2017
- [5.5] [Testimonial] LSO and Rissmann [Corroborator 1]
- [5.6] [Testimonial] Senior Curator and Producer, V&A [Corroborator 2]
- [5.7] [Testimonial] Liberty
- [5.8] [Testimonial] Lewis Carroll Society chair [Corroborator 3]
- [5.9] [Testimonial] V&A Creative & Skills Director, Museum of Childhood [Corroborator 4]
- [5.10] [Visual] 'Alice Look' exhibition [Corroborator 5]