A CRITICAL COMPANION TO TIM BURTON

EDITED BY ADAM BARKMAN
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Adam: To Logan—just in case

Antonio: To my students, who have followed the progress of this volume with enthusiasm

Contents

Introduction

In the suburbs of a large city, a strange child is born. The child's parents do not accept his diversity, defining him explicitly as "a freak" and releasing their cold hands that momentarily held him, abandoning the child to the world. The child, therefore, grows up in a charity home, where the Head of the Police Department nicknames him "Stainboy" and charges him with the duty to fight other "deformed" adolescents. These scenes come from "The Origin of Stainboy," the sixth and final episode of an animated series written and directed by Tim Burton and broadcast in 2000 on www.shockwave.com. The series—which generated over a million hits within the first six days—is based on Burton's 1997 collection of twenty-three short stories written in verse, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy*. These are macabre and comic tales of adolescent outsiders. Alienation, misperception, "otherness," disfigurement, a wish for acceptance, flawed or surrogate parents, and teenagers who possess a clairvoyance that adults often do not have—all of these themes are repeated constantly throughout Burton's *oeuvre*.[1]

Tim Burton can certainly be considered one of the most popular and renowned artists of the present age. In his extremely heterogeneous career, he directed not only films, but also commercials (the 1998 "Hollywood Gum" and the Matrix-like 2000 advertisings for Timex I-Control watches) and two music videos (the 2006 "Bones" and the 2012 "Here with Me," both by the rock band The Killers). Burton is also the (co-)producer of films such as Henry Selick's *James and the Giant Peach* (1996), Shane Acker's *9* (2009) and Timur Bekmambetov's *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2012). His works were exhibited from November 22, 2009, to April 26, 2010, in a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and included about 700 of his drawings, photographs (in different formats), paintings, costumes, and puppets along with a program of his films. This multimedia exhibition,

presented also at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2011, clearly reflected the influence of Pop Surrealism, avant-garde performance art and "low" popular culture on Burton's work and his carnivalesque sensibility, according to the curators Ron Magliozzi and Jenny He.[2]

All of his achievements have offered (and still offer) an incredibly fertile ground for critical examination, analysis and discussion. The chapters included in this collection present a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary analysis of the works of one of the world's most renowned directors and artists. The essays are produced by scholars in diverse fields such as philosophy, literature, history, art, women's and gender studies, and film and media studies illuminate the entire artistic career of Burton up to the present day (2017), from his initial work for Disney and his first short films to both his major productions such as *Batman* (1989) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and his less profitable—but still highly recognizable—films such as *Ed Wood* (1994).

The volume in your hand—*A Critical Companion to Tim Burton*—illuminates the diverse facets of the director's work and, especially, his unique visual style, established firmly since *Beetlejuice* (1988) and consolidated throughout his entire career. Such a signature is easily identifiable in Burton's characteristic trademarks, from the frequent presence of dogs, the full moon, the towers on a hill and the use of black and white stripes to a series of Gothic paraphernalia such as pumpkins, scarecrows, skeletons, graveyards, windmills, and bare trees with fingered branches. His distinctive and personal touch—alternating very colorful setting and dark atmospheres as much as juxtaposing verbal jokes and visual gags with the macabre—justifies the affirmation that Burton is truly a visionary director.

Certainly, the defining characteristics of his *oeuvre* are also the fruit of his solid relationships and frequent collaborations with acting stars such as Johnny Depp (who appears in eight of Burton's films) and Helena Bonham Carter (partner of the director from 2001 to 2014, mother of his two children, and also actress in seven of his films). Separate mention is needed for Burton's most active collaborator, composer Danny Elfman, who wrote the music for all of the director's films, with the exceptions of *Ed Wood* and *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007). His soundtracks form a fundamental basis for the creation of the films' atmosphere, especially through his frequent use of atonality, his Puccini-like use of leitmotifs, his evanescent choral themes, and, as Janet K. Halfyard sums up, his emphasis on "minor keys, low-pitched melodies and textures, and frequent use of dissonance both at melodic and harmonic levels."[3]

In recent years, the scholarship on Burton has proliferated with volumes such as *The Philosophy of Tim Burton* (edited by Jennifer L. McMahon) and *Masters of the Grotesque: The Cinema of Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam, the Coen Brothers and David Lynch* (by Schuy R. Weisharr). Book-length publi-

cations that examine the American director's *oeuvre* in the media arts include Aurélien Ferenczi's *Masters of Cinema: Tim Burton* and Jim Smith and J. Clive Matthew's *Tim Burton*, both of which offer plot summaries, anecdotal references to the shorts and the films, and many insights on the biography of Burton. Edwin Page's *Gothic Fantasy: The Films of Tim Burton* considers the director's works as fairy tales and emphasizes their symbolic meaning as well as Burton's preference for the use of emotional imagery rather than plot. Similarly, Alison McMahan's monograph *The Films of Tim Burton: Animating Live Action in Contemporary Hollywood* interprets the director's works as "pataphysical films." Pataphysical films follow an alternative narrative logic that is based on intertextual, nondiegetic references rather than on "round" and emotional characters or complex plots. According to McMahan, Burton's works ironically comment upon and make fun of established systems of knowledge by satirizing the scientific academy as much as the classical Hollywood aesthetics through the use of unrealistic, "visible" special effects and make-up. Paul A. Woods' collection of essays and reviews *Tim Burton: A Child's Garden of Nightmares* instead explores the stylistic elements of the director's *oeuvre* up to *Planet of the Apes* (2001), emphasizing many details of the shorts' and films' production and reception.

Born on August 25, 1958 in the Los Angeles working-class suburb of Burbank, Burton was an introvert and quiet child who took shelter in the local cinemas, in which he became an eager fan of 1950s science fiction, fantasy, and monster movies, such as Ishirō Honda's *Godzilla* (1954) and Don Chaffey's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). He later declared, "My fairytales were probably those monster movies."[4] Burton was also a fan of the horror films produced by the British Hammer Film Studios and of the cinematic adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe's stories, such *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964). His interest in the visual arts started with a childhood aptitude for drawing and with his amateur attempts at making fantasy films. In 1976 he won a scholarship to attend the CalArts (California Institute of the Arts), a training school founded by Walt Disney for prospective animators. He joined Disney in 1979, a formative though controversial experience for him: his sketches and ideas were at the time apparently out of place in the company, even after his being promoted to "conceptual artist" for Ted Berman and Richard Rich's film *The Black Cauldron* (1985), which used none of Burton's conceptual drawings.

During this period, he managed to be funded for the production of some short films. These included: *Vincent* (1982), a six-minute, black and white short narrated by Vincent Price that combines stop-motion and cartoon techniques and clearly alludes to German Expressionism in its designs; a forty-five-minute live-action retelling of the Grimm fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* (1983) that uses only Japanese non-professionals; and *Frankenweenie* (1984), a very intimate and moving twenty-eight-minute story about a child

who reanimates his dead dog by using electricity. After *Frankenweenie*, in 1985, Burton directed "Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp," an episode of the Showtime TV series *Fairie Tale Theatre*, and a remake of "The Jar" for NBC's 1985 resurrection of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. All of these shorts prefigure some of the director's central trademarks, such as the use of stop-motion sequences and a preference for the macabre.

His debut film, *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985), focuses on the character of Pee-wee Herman, created in the theater by actor Paul Reubens and made popular through *The Pee-wee Herman Show* in New York Carnegie Hall. The puerile cartoon-like adventures of the title character basically revolve around the quest for his stolen red bicycle. Such a quest leads the protagonist from his childish home filled with toys and inventions to the Alamo and, finally, to an almost Fellinesque pursuit through the Hollywood Studios. In spite of the many bad reviews that it received, the film demonstrates Burton's love of absurdity, especially in those sequences representing the main character's nocturnal wanderings and in his nightmare of a dinosaur that eats the bicycle. The will to parody many cinematic and TV genres such as the soap opera and the road movie is also remarkably evident. In 1986 the director contributed a number of designs to "Family Dog," an animated episode of Steven Spielberg's TV series *Amazing Stories*.

Confirmation of his talent and of his stylistic signature, however, really came with *Beetlejuice* (1988), partly thanks to the victory of an Academy Award for make-up. The film epitomizes many of Burton's fundamental characteristics, such as the use of models, the love of artifice (evident in the use of stop-motion effects and outré make-up), the use of bright colors and lights, and the reversal of usual Hollywood conventions both in terms of visual imagery and narrative (the two protagonists are killed off within the first eight minutes and the haunted house plot is completely transformed). Burton declared that the script "had no real story, it didn't make any sense, it was more like stream of consciousness."[5] Noteworthy is the depiction of the afterlife as a bureaucratic unwieldy purgatory, characterized by comically exaggerated animation and phosphorescent lights. As David Denby argues, "the whole movie is an aestheticised vision, a delirious potpourri of surrealism and expressionism turned to pop thrills."[6]

Reviews for *Beetlejuice* were rather mixed. Worldwide affirmation was instead granted by the two subsequent works of the director: his noir cinematic version of the DC Comics superhero *Batman* (1989) and his fairy tale *Edward Scissorhands* (1990). The former, inspired by Frank Miller's graphic novel *The Dark Knight* (1986) and Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* (1988), conquered the public at large and, apart from earning more than 406 million dollars in ticket sales and becoming the biggest film in Warner Bros' history, won an Oscar for design work and sold 750 million dollars in merchandise. *Batman*, distancing itself from the camp ABC series of the late 1960s (char-

acterized by psychedelic colors and dialogue balloons), recreated a dark, steamy, godless Gotham City filled with criminals. Elfman provided an operatic orchestral soundtrack, which is very dense and rich. Although the majestic performance of Jack Nicholson as the Joker overshadows Michael Keaton's role as the Caped Crusader, the character of Batman is most interestingly portrayed as a conflicted individual with a split personality. He is a tormented soul who is forced to remain in the shadow while dealing with the ghosts of his past and the traumatic experience of his parents' loss. Burton defined the film as "the duel of the freaks. It's a fight between two disfigured people,"[7] the hero and the villain being linked in a symbiotic relationship opposing order and the status quo against chaos and a demented reality.

Edward Scissorhands—actually inspired by the director's previous drawing of "a character who wants to touch but can't"[8]—is similarly focused on the figure of a misperceived and lonely protagonist, interpreted excellently by Johnny Depp. The plot, a reworking of the Frankenstein myth but also a version of Beauty and the Beast, examines the theme of image and perception by presenting the main character as an eternal outsider who is accepted only initially by the inhabitants of the pastel-colored suburban neighborhood. As it occurs in both the original Frankenstein narrative and in many subsequent productions by Burton, particular emphasis is placed on the behavior of an angry mob that irrationally causes havoc and seeks revenge. The Gothic-attired Edward (whose father/creator is played by Vincent Price) has often been interpreted as a representation of Burton himself, both being creative artists whose persona is not easily accepted by the surrounding establishment.

After being granted larger autonomy with the script and a raise in his pay, Burton decided to direct the sequel *Batman Returns* (1992). Considered by many critics as darker than its predecessor, the multi-headed narrative nevertheless has a greater impact and is more fast-paced than *Batman*. It is a very vertical film, whose strength resides in the focus on the duality of the four main characters, each of them being accompanied on the screen by a specific nondiegetic musical leitmotif. On the one hand, Bruce Wayne (Michael Keaton) and Selina Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer)—and their separate alter egos Batman and Catwoman—are enveloped in a love-hate relationship alternatively guided by *eros* and *thanatos*. They both face the corrupt industrialist Max Shreck (Christopher Walken), the major villain of the story and the catalyst of the other characters' actions. On the other hand, the Penguin (an incredibly talented Danny DeVito, whose grotesque look was fashioned by Stan Winston), is "a creature of Dickensian rhetoric, proportions and comic depth,"[9] a character of tragic status whose disfigurement becomes central to the themes of abandonment and recognition of society's castoffs and whose destiny seems to be foretold since his birth. The tormented psyche of the villains is reflected in the Gothic impressionism of the setting, which is

conveyed also through the many establishing shots of the exaggeratedly high skyscrapers and the high-angle frames utilized to represent Batman on the top of them.

In the autumn of 1993, *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas* hit the theaters. It was inspired by an original poem written by Burton during the Disney years (partly based on Clement Clarke Moore's 1823 poem "'Twas the Night Before Christmas"), which was published in 1993 and was accompanied by his own artwork. Burton passed on the film's direction to fellow former Disney artist Henry Selick because of his involvement with *Batman Returns*.[10] What is today considered a cornerstone in Burton's *oeuvre*, the film follows the adventures of the King of Halloween Town, Jake Skellington (voiced by Danny Elfman), who, bored with cyclically repeating the same rituals of Halloween every year, abducts Santa Claus with the good intentions to distribute the Christmas presents himself. As was the case of Burton's first works, animation is realized through the use of twenty-centimeter high puppets, all "brought to life" by the extremely slow process of stop-motion, a technique that was used by Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen in films such as *The Lost World* (1925), *King Kong* (1933), *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) and *Clash of the Titans* (1981). Stop-motion is originally combined with moving shots in a film that best exemplifies the use of Gothic paraphernalia in the director's entire career, from menacing clowns (actually present in all of his films from 1985 to 1993) to all those frightening artifacts and nocturnal creatures associated with the horror genre.

Nineteen ninety-four was the year of *Ed Wood*, a biopic on Edward D. Wood Jr. (1924–1978), who, as the director of such films as *Plan 9 from Outer Space* and *Glen or Glenda*, is considered "the world's worst director." Wood was a famed heterosexual transvestite and alcoholic surrounded by a bizarre group of collaborators and admirers. The pseudo-documentary, shot in black and white, was Burton's first box-office failure, although it won two Oscars—for Best Make-up and for Best Supporting Actor (Martin Landau, in the role of Universal horror films star Bela Lugosi). The story depicts the close relationship between Lugosi and Wood (Johnny Depp), alluding to the friendship between Burton and Vincent Price, which ended with the death of the latter in 1993. It is also an ironic homage to a non-industrial and artisanal approach to making cinema, a metafilm. What is evidenced is Wood's enthusiasm, and not his failures, his naiveté against the Hollywood establishment and the audience's expectations. One of the most interesting aspects of this work is the re-creation of Wood's own films, which, as David LaRocca points out, should be interpreted as actual and faithful remakes of the originals.[11]

A better public and critical reaction (which was nevertheless partly hammered by the contemporary success of Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day*) was obtained by *Mars Attacks!* in 1996. This project is an adaptation of

the Topps Trading Cards first released in 1962 by Bubbles Inc., but it also quotes many sci-fi films of the 1950s, such as Byron Haskin's *The War of the Worlds* (1953) and Fred F. Sears's *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956), as well as disaster movies of the 1970s such as Ronald Neame's *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972). The very large and varied cast includes Burton's regulars Jack Nicholson and Danny DeVito, but also stars Glenn Close, Michael J. Fox and Natalie Portman. For the aliens—who all look the same and never blink—Burton abandoned stop-motion animation and made his first effective use of computer-generated imagery. The extraterrestrials' belligerence is treated with irony: the devastation brought on various international cities is actually a vehicle for satire on American culture. As Paul A. Cantor has recognized, in fact, by portraying American pop culture and outcast individuals as providing the only real defense against the invaders from outer space, the film criticizes the confidence in atomic energy and in the collaboration between the government and the military that constituted the thematic basis of science fiction films during the 1950s.[12]

The year 1997 was wasted on the screenplay of *Superman Lives*, a project that was put on hold after many months of development, whereas 1999 saw the production and filming of *Sleepy Hollow*. The film, clearly inspired by the Hammer horror films of the 1950s and 1960s (especially, Freddie Francis' 1968 *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave*) and alluding to Italian filmmaker Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* (1960), can be considered Burton's most atmospheric work. This is due to the massive investment in Gothic conventions and imagery, from the solitary burning windmill and the thick fog covering the monochromatic village (an effect obtained through a color filter) to the blood stains, the gory details, and the constant allusions to Christian symbols. The story, halfway between a historical romance and a police procedural, is a free adaptation of Washington Irving's 1819 novella "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow": the cinematic version alters the original text by realizing the supernatural aspects of the story rather than reproducing a rationalistic final revelation comparable to Gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe's technique of the "supernatural explained." The intricate plot alternates the deductive investigation conducted by Constable Ichabod (Johnny Depp) with the wavering of his scientific certainties against the effective existence of the supernatural. The hyper-rational protagonist devoted to science and the forensic methods he uses are juxtaposed both to the reality of witchcraft and the dark forces incarnated in the Headless Horseman (Christopher Walken) and to the value of the spiritual world represented by Katrina van Tassel (a very convincing Christina Ricci).[13] The juxtaposition is rendered all the more evident by means of the simultaneous focus on the fragile psyche of Ichabod. Indeed, a series of flashbacks retraces the protagonist's resurfacing of repressed memories through remembrance of the traumatic death of his mother.

In 2001 Burton directed *Planet of the Apes*, a mega-budget remake of the 1968 film directed by Franklin J. Schaffner, which, in turn, was adapted by Pierre Boulle's 1963 novel and spawned four sequels (1970–73) and two television series (1974–75). The original story's racial overtones, ecological concerns, and social commentary on the nuclear threat and the Cold War were immediately evident in the political climate and tumult of the civil rights era of the late 1960s. However, they are lost in Burton's work, which actually looks more like a remake of Ridley Scott's *The Gladiator* (2000) according to Andrew O'Hehir.[14] Although the film has been considered a "refinement of the first film's imagery,"[15] Burton decided not to set the dystopian narrative on Earth and emphasized the bestial nature of the apes, presenting them as instinctual, violent and easily "devolving" into an aggressive animal state whenever they lose their patience or their verbal arguments. *Planet of the Apes* has been considered an artistic flop,[16] especially for the asexual and bland performance of the heroic protagonist Leo Davidson (Mark Wahlberg) and the revised ambiguous and puzzling ending, which generated many polemic reactions. Nevertheless, in terms of box office receipts, it was the most successful work directed by Burton since *Batman*.

Big Fish (2003) can be interpreted as the most personal work by the director as well as the most sentimental and fantastic. The story, focusing on the confrontation/reconciliation between a rationalist son and his terminally ill imaginative father, has been read in light of Burton's recent loss of both of his parents (respectively, in 2000 and 2002). The difference between the hyperbolic storyteller Edward Bloom (Albert Finney) and his son Will (Billy Crudup) in the film's narrative is reflected on a visual level by the juxtaposition of a monochromatic present in which Will refuses to recognize his dying father's (narrative) identity and the colorful flashbacks reconstructing Edward Bloom's early life. *Big Fish*, therefore, is a film about the very process of narration and the joy of imagination. The flashbacks that retrace the fantastic past of young Bloom (Ewan McGregor) are visually rich and create a mythical and folkloric past for America populated by giants, werewolves and mermaids. Facts and fiction continually intertwine in a narrative that perfectly epitomizes Burton's intermingling of real life and fantasy. The film is also a testament of the immortality of an artist's work because, as Will's last words declare, "a man tells his stories so many times that he becomes the stories. They live on after him. And in that way, he becomes immortal."

During the following years, Burton was busy in the realization of two simultaneous projects: the remake *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) and the stop-motion animation *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* (2005). The original sources of the former—Roald Dahl's 1964 novel and Mel Stuart's charming cinematic adaptation (1971)—are quite faithfully reproduced in this new version of the tale of the poor but optimistic child Charlie Bucket (Freddie Highmore), who finds one of the golden tickets for a visit to Willy Wonka's

secretive and fabulous factory. Typically Burtonesque is the treatment of the traumatic relationship between the eccentric but anti-social Willy Wonka (Johnny Depp) and his severe dentist father (Christopher Lee), which is revealed through a series of flashbacks that escape the self-control, apparent serenity and politeness of the ever-adolescent Willy (whose resemblance with singer Michael Jackson is undeniable). Burton chose to construct mainly real sets rather than employ only the green/blue-screen technology and computer-generated imagery typical of contemporary films, such as the *Star Wars* I–III trilogy. This resulted in the visual richness of the factory's interiors, whose brightly colored extravagance and sugary creations are a fittingly delicious setting for the choreographed songs of the Oompa Loompas (the laborers/slaves who substitute the assembly line of other factories and who intervene to provide the moral points of the story). The film can be enjoyed with gusto, from the industrial town covered with snow at the beginning of the film to the depiction of the greedy, spoiled and ill-mannered children visiting the factory, who apparently represent capital vices such as gluttony, greed, wrath, and pride, and are punished almost sadistically according to their sins.

In *Corpse Bride* (co-directed with Mike Johnson) the juxtaposition between the Land of the Living and the Land of the Dead is characterized by an inversion of both values and visual colors. The nineteenth-century setting of the living is depicted through somber grays and shaded blues and is defined by rigid social rules and strict gender norms. Such a gloomy landscape is boring and reductive when compared to the joyful, playful and "alive" Land of the Dead, in which psychedelic colors and impressionistic settings prevail and where vibrant choreographed acts are enacted. In what could be considered as an updated version of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*'s Halloween Town, the highly stylized animated figures act in a warm operetta-like story (actually based on a Russian folk tale), which alludes also to Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty. *Corpse Bride* can be defined as a musical romantic comedy with attention to decay: the return of the dead to the Land of the Living is not portrayed as horrific; rather, it celebrates the joyful reunion of loved ones with their living family members, following precisely the widely diffused Victorian belief in the afterlife as a place where families could be reunited and love could be shared.[17] The bittersweet finale dispels any interpretations of necrophilia for the Gothic romance between the melancholic Victor (voice of Johnny Depp) and the determined corpse Emily (voice of Helena Bonham Carter).

After being awarded a Golden Lion for Lifetime achievement at the Venice Film Festival in 2007, Burton directed *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, "his darkest film yet and most authentic expression of despair."[18] The ghostly London filled with drunks and prostitutes is the (computer-generated) setting for a story of carefully planned revenge that leads to

a spiral of cruelty, tragically decimating the characters of the narrative. The story is indeed a literal recreation of both Charles Darwin's theory of the "survival of the fittest" and of Thomas Hobbes' phrase "*homo homini lupus,*" the brutish war "of every man against every man"—theories that are epitomized by the protagonist's recital of the verses "They all deserve to die" and "It's man devouring man, my dear." As there are no bright colors apart from the highly stylized blood continually flowing on the screen, so there is no pity and no redemption in this film.[19] In the part of the vengeful and misanthropic barber who returns to London after fifteen years of unjust imprisonment by lascivious Judge Turpin (Alan Rickman), the ivory-skinned Johnny Depp interprets one of his most spectral roles. As is the case of many protagonists of Burton's films, he is an outcast in the middle of a crowded urban milieu. Stephen Sondheim's songbook is abridged and re-shaped into the basis of an horrific musical, a Grand Guignol in which actors who are not (Broadway-)trained singers perform majestically their songs as much as their characters' obsessions. Noteworthy is the melancholy Mrs. Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter), the barber's Lady Macbeth–like accomplice, who serves corpses to unaware consumers of meat pies. The film's grim tone is epitomized by its tragic finale, in which, according to Jennifer J. Jenkins, the "refusal to allow beauty to reappear . . . offers a resolution that rests firmly on . . . the nihilistic, fearful, awe-filled sublime."[20]

Alice in Wonderland (2010) is Burton's most successful film to date, grossing over a billion dollars worldwide. The narrative, whose prologue and epilogue are set in a Victorian England (again characterized by rigid social and gender norms), is focused on the mission of Alice (Mia Wasikowska) in the fantasy world she reaches through the rabbit's hole. The story is an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). Through the rabbit's hole, viewers enter Underland, a wasteland devastated by the tyrannical Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter), a fascinating but treacherous fantasy world difficult to cope with (as was the case for Charlie inside Wonka's factory), which becomes Alice's nightmare rather than her dream. The characters encountered by the Pre-Raphaelite protagonist are argumentative, imperfect and judgmental, as annoying as the originals in Carroll's works. The nonsense language, illogical and whimsical characters and uncanny settings perfectly match Burton's fondness for absurdity and the bizarre. As is the case of many works by the director and in a clear nod to the World of Oz, the imaginary world (enhanced by the conversion to 3D effects) is more real and colorful than the world of "normality." The freethinking Alice must accept her role as a strong female lead before a final fight (in the style of *The Chronicles of Narnia*) takes place on an enormous chessboard. The director thus presents a tale of rebellion against obligations, in which an inversion of gender roles is enacted. On the other hand, and similar to The Penguin in

Batman Returns, the hydrocephalic Red Queen suffers for her own physical deformity although she mutates her pain into rage, cruelty, and castrating barbarism.

In 2010 Burton received the insignia of Chevalier of Arts and Letters by French Minister of Culture, Frédéric Mitterand, and was invited to be the president of the jury at the 63rd Cannes Film Festival. His two following productions were adaptations of previous works, respectively of a TV serial and Burton's own work. *Dark Shadows* (2012) is a faithful adaptation of the successful daytime TV soap opera created in 1966 by Dan Curtis and broadcast on ABC until 1971. The narrative is basically a family melodrama involving another outsider coping with a world (in this case, temporally) different from his own. Indeed, after being freed from his two-century-long imprisonment, the cursed and reluctant vampire Barnabas Collins (Johnny Depp) helps his dysfunctional descendants to solve their familial and financial problems. The film—one of the most ironic in Burton's career—immerses the spectator into a compelling recreation of the music and atmosphere of the 1970s and presents a superb female cast that includes Eva Green (performing a monomaniac witch), Michelle Pfeiffer (the austere matriarch), and Helena Bonham Carter (the disloyal and selfish psychiatrist). As is the case of many productions by Burton, the cameos from various artists (such as Alice Cooper, Christopher Lee and the very cast of the TV soap opera) enrich the film's value and create a network of references to other films and visual media. For this reason, the film could be considered a compendium rather than a mere adaptation, especially because of its intertextual references to films such as F. W. Murneau's *Nosferatu* (1922), Danny DeVito's *The War of the Roses* (1989), and Robert Zemeckis' *Death Becomes Her* (1992).[21]

Frankenweenie (2012) is a remake of the short Burton directed in 1984 for Disney: it is indeed an "autoremake," or reworking by a director of his/her own material.[22] In this black and white fairy-tale story of love for one's pet, Burton not only offers a repetition of cinematic techniques such as sequences, transitions and individual shots, but he also re-produces the precursor film's thematic concerns and syntactic elements such as plot structure and narrative units. Burton, therefore, reanimates his own product and presents it to the general public.[23] Reanimation has, in this case, a double meaning, particularly if we consider the film's use of stop-motion, a technique that allows inanimate objects to come to life and so is "very tied to *Frankenstein*," as Burton himself has declared.[24] Undoubtedly, this is one of the director's most personal works. Firstly, the story deals with themes which are certainly most dear to Burton: the exploration of life and death, the alienation of the central characters (especially, youthful characters), and the fragmentation of the body. Secondly, the film further demonstrates the fondness for dogs that Burton manifested extensively throughout his career. The animation and the fluid stop-motion effects are impeccable, and viewers

never lack the realism of CGI effects. The additions to the original narrative further endow the story with irony, especially in those sequences that involve the pets' resurrection by Victor's competitive and envious classmates.

Burton's next work is the biographical drama *Big Eyes* (2014), a film that can be hardly inscribed into the director's typical style, apart from the use of pastel colors and from the scene in which the female protagonist hallucinates that everyone in a grocery store has her trademark big eyes. This film thus lacks the expressionist use of distortion and exaggeration that characterizes many of the director's films. Furthermore, the narrative is linear, conventional and has a satisfying logical finale that generates an Aristotelian catharsis for the viewer. Contrary to films such as *Beetlejuice* and *Alice in Wonderland*, visual aesthetics do not have priority over the story in *Big Eyes*, which follows the chronological development of real facts. Burton, therefore, efficaciously represents the fictional re-enactment of historical events. The narrative, set in a 1950s and early-1960s San Francisco, is focused on Margaret Ulbrich (Amy Adams), later known as Keane, a shy woman and talented artist who creates beautiful (and weird) paintings of waifs with big and sad eyes—paintings that actually match Burton's macabre iconography. Her exuberant and manipulative second husband, Walter Keane (Christoph Waltz), initially helps her to sell the pictures and to establish a lucrative brand, although he takes the credit for the paintings and becomes increasingly abusive until Margaret decides to tell the world the truth. It is a narrative about a period in which woman's art was not as accepted as man's, but it is also a moving story about the price of a lie that humiliates the individual and gradually consumes his/her dignity (which is particularly evidenced by the use of many low-camera angles). On the backdrop of the narrative on intellectual property theft and the celebration of pre–Andy Warhol kitsch and pop culture, *Big Eyes* can be praised for its accurate recreation of the period's costumes, locations and artifacts.

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children (2016) is Burton's latest work. Central to the narrative are the trope of the outcast and society's conflictual relationship with "the Other," the grotesque, the theme of loneliness, the use of traumatized characters, the figure of the mad scientist, and the fight of good against evil. The story, which is based on Ransom Riggs' 2011 homonymous novel, focuses on Jake (Asa Butterfield), a boy from Florida who witnesses his grandfather's murder by a malevolent creature and is encouraged to search for an orphanage on an island off the coast of Wales where children with peculiar (dis)abilities reside. Thanks to a powerful spell cast by the eponymous shapeshifting manager of the place (Eva Green), the mansion's young residents revive perennially a single day in 1943, when the building was bombed by a Nazi aerial patrol. The school is under attack by an outcast group of peculiar individuals who have transformed into monstrous beings that need to feed on the eyes of the special children. The

kidnapping of Miss Peregrine thus forces the talented children to embark on a dangerous mission leading to a climatic final battle. Although some critics have pointed out that Burton relies more on ornamental special effects and focuses more on the childrens' special talents rather than on their backstories (Cruz and Duralde),[25] the film—which could be defined as an X-Men story infused with elements of the Burtonesque—is an entertaining narrative containing elements from the fairy tale, the thriller, and the superhero film. It is replete with references to the Holocaust and is characterized by absurd humor. Evident are the similarities between this film and Burton's work at large, especially his illustrations for *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy* and his animated series *Stainboy*.

Throughout his career Tim Burton has created a distinctive style now referred to as "Burtonesque," an identifiable brand.[26] He has been rightfully included in the Olympus of consecrated directors. Many of his recurrent themes are analyzed in this collection, which explores his unique visual aesthetics, narrative techniques and thematic concerns. Our investigation of Burton's *oeuvre*, therefore, takes us into several distinct areas and addresses the different approaches and a range of topics invited by the multidimensionality of the subject itself: the philosophical, the artistic, the socio-cultural and the personal. The book is organized into three sections that center on specific subjects, so that chapters with a similar focus or approach are grouped together and thematic groupings lend internal coherence to the wide spectrum of films constituting Burton's *oeuvre*.

The first part of the collection, "Constructing Worlds," sets the scene for the understanding of the broadest issues that are manifest in Burton's works, such as the director's fabrication of new worlds that subvert reality and its rules. Such worlds are created through the *mise-en-scène*, the music, and the use of thematics such as the uncanny and the carnivalesque. This part, therefore, considers the aesthetic representation of Burton's visual landscapes as well as the relationship between worlds. In the first chapter, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock discusses Burton's construction of physical space through camera shots and effects and the way these feed into the construction of differentiated "ontological spaces," such as the afterlife, underworld, and other heterotopic fantasy spaces. The chapter focuses particularly on the vertical axis used in Burton's works, which has interconnected physical and metaphysical components. Settings and locations are fundamental also in Fran Pheasant-Kelly's argument, which focuses on the spatial representation of life after death in *Beetlejuice*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, and *Corpse Bride*. Engaging theoretically with the work of Julia Kristeva, Sigmund Freud and Mikhail Bakhtin, her chapter explores the ways in which realms beyond death are depicted, connecting these, where appropriate, to their German Expressionist influences and Hammer horror forebears. In the third chapter, Orsolya Karacsony reflects upon the director's use

of dichotomous colors (either dark and mournful or light and vibrant) and theorizes that they reflect the characters' personalities and create a tale-like atmosphere in which most of the stories are set. Outsider characters, such as Edward Scissorhands and Batman, are evaluated by Karacsony against the environments surrounding them. In the following chapter, Sabine Planka traces the influence of surrealism on Burton's representation of otherworldly settings. Planka establishes many parallels between the director's works that challenge the border between reality and dream, and surreal paintings and sculptures by artists such as Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Hans Bellmer or René Magritte. The fifth chapter by Elsa Colombani contends that creativity and art are associated to positive forms of creation, but also to destruction such as in films like *Ed Wood*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,* and *Frankenweenie*. The latter aspect, according to Colombani, is also evident in characters such as Vincent (in the homonymous short), the Joker, the Headless Horseman, and Sweeney Todd. The first part concludes with Andrew S. Powell's chapter on Danny Elfman's work. Powell's analyses of musical transcriptions display how rhythm, melody, and harmony are closely entwined with the story unfolding on the screen, an important quality first propositioned (but seldom explored) in cursory studies.

The second part of the collection, "Fairy Worlds and Nightmares," explores the supernatural, fantastical and heroic in Burton's works. This part begins with Antonio Sanna's chapter on heroism and the fights against oppression, tyranny, and injustice in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Planet of the Apes*. Sanna analyzes both films as representations of the Darwinian concept of the struggle for existence through their focus on the adversarial interactions between the protagonists and the creatures that they encounter. *Alice in Wonderland* evidences the frightening aspects of Lewis Carroll's Victorian tales, whereas *Planet of the Apes* reverses the Darwinian theory of evolution and portrays nature as careless and uninterested in human beings and their survival. In the following chapter, Chris Cuthill suggests that *The Nightmare Before Christmas* raises questions about ultimate meaning, which theology can engage in open dialogue. Cuthill weighs the relative merits and deficits of an internal and external hermeneutic approach in unpacking the theological content of the protagonist's dilemma. He argues that while both positions allow us to place Burton's work on the theological horizon, the first attempts to reverse the hermeneutic flow by allowing the film to speak to theology, while the second directs theological criticism to challenging the thematic propositions of the narrative. The third chapter, by Alissa Burger, evaluates the importance of the structure of the fairy tale in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*. Burger argues that Burton actively deconstructs the fairy tale form, subverting the expected conventions in both cases to create something exceptional. In these deconstructions, Burton interrogates the dissatisfaction that draws the hero on his journey in the first place, his

exploration of that other world, and the identity he eventually embraces by choice rather than expectation. Nicole Pramik argues that despite the film's appearance and genre, *Mars Attacks!* is a fractured fairy tale demonstrating the three key principles of Recovery, Escape, and Consolation as outlined by J. R. R. Tolkien in his essay "On Fairy-Stories." The 1996 dark comedy is examined in light of how its characters and the audience can see various matters, in Tolkien's words, "as we are meant to see them," as the story causes its characters and, by proxy, viewers, to rid themselves of trite ideas regarding aliens, alienation, and the concept of the "Other." In the fifth chapter, Carl Sobocinski initially reconstructs the cinematic history of the biopic, tracing its focus on great and heroic characters and its disregard of historical accuracy. Sobocinski then demonstrates that Burton's biopic on the underfunded director Ed Wood reproduces a mythological structure that invests the film's protagonist with the qualities of a hero facing multiple difficulties, recruiting allies, and drawing inspiration from his god. In the sixth chapter Maria Dicieanu interrogates the theme of the unfit hero in Burton's works. By drawing a parallel with the mythological figure of Prometheus, she analyses the paranormal characters represented in under-researched works such as *The Melancholic Death of Oyster Boy*, the series *Stainboy* and The Killers' "Here with Me" music video. All of these stories, Dicieanu demonstrates, contain characters who desire to be normal but whose heroic conditions remain tragic at the end of the narrative. Trip McCrossin provides the final chapter in the section, writing about "the problem of evil." By confronting Burton's film with Ransom Riggs' original novel and by using Susan Neiman's theory that evil is also a secular problem as a frame, McCrossin examines the relationship between *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* and the historical context of World War II, focusing specifically on the persecution of the Jewish people.

The third part of the collection, "Identity and the World," begins with Florent Christol's chapter, which addresses the uncharted and problematic socio-political issues and dynamics at stake in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* through a study of the (partly-) repressed cultural links between racist, imperialistic ideology, and circus culture. Christol contends that the centrality of the circus/freak show imagery in the film should be questioned and investigated along the lines of gender/class/race issues. In the second chapter, Radosław Osiński utilizes the category of dandyism as the conceptual key to describe the characteristics of Burton's Willy Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Osiński argues that compared to the Wonka of 1971 film, Burton's Wonka both gives more weight to the aesthetic than to moral judgment and transforms the space of the factory into a stage for performance in which he operates as an eccentric master of ceremony and provoker. Wonka appears to fit the image of the contemporary dandy (as described in Susan Sontag's seminal essay "Notes on 'Camp'") and evokes the spirit of carnival

and counter-culture. The third chapter by Kyle Alkema and Adam Barkman questions the real identity of the character of Batman in Burton's 1989 and 1992 films by confronting it with the Kane-developed Batmans and explaining his persona through his relationships with some of his villains. Alkema and Barkman argue that while Burton hits-and-misses with the physical appearance of his Batman/Bruce Wayne, he is right to stress psychological complexity or, more fundamentally, the personality of Batman/Bruce Wayne. Burton thus really adds to the identity of the Kane-developed Batman by dramatically suggesting that Bruce Wayne is the mask that Batman wears. In the fourth chapter, Siobhan Lyons analyzes the trope of the outcast, which informs debates on the relationship between society, conformity, and individualism. Turning to two of the director's most popular creations, Lyons demonstrates how, by depicting society as ill-equipped in embracing the nuanced and unique figure of the outcast, *Edward Scissorhands* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* epitomize the classic Nietzschean philosophy of the Übermensch ("Over-man"). According to Lyons, the "normal" societies represent Martin Heidegger's notion of *das Man* ("they" or "people"), who epitomize conformist attitudes and behavior. Renee Middlemost reflects with detail upon Burton's portrayal of alienated characters existing on the periphery, whose overarching motivation is a "longing to belong." The fifth chapter by Middlemost explores how the nostalgia of the "sympathetic monsters" in *Beetlejuice* and *Edward Scissorhands* creates an impression of longing spawning an emotional appeal that can partially explain the ongoing endearment of these films to contemporary audiences, whereas in the following chapter Brent Peters and Adam Barkman explore the possible deterministic undertones of Burton's films. Peters and Barkman analyze the director's portrayal of extreme characters in *Ed Wood*, *Sweeney Todd: the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, *Dark Shadows*, *Frankenweenie*, and *Big Eyes* and debate whether Burton's characters—who cannot conform to society at large, but almost always find a place to turn to for help—are capable of changing or doing things they do not want to do. The chapter demonstrates that such bizarre characters remain consistent in their lack of deliberation and awareness of consequences, and, therefore, in their lack of genuine freedom. The third section of the collection concludes with Donna Mitchell's chapter, which explores the ambiguous nature of female identity in the stop-motion animation pictures *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*. Mitchell uses a Gothic doll motif to analyze these figures through the relevant theories of feminism, doubleness, and gender performativity in relation to the social demand on women to become "live doll[s]" that renounce their autonomy.

The authors of the chapters return over and over to some of the key figures and themes of Burton's *oeuvre*. This series of key moments revisited in the chapters evoke the appeal of Burton for viewers, fans, and scholars

alike. Yet the diversity and range of the chapters compiled in this collection reflect the editors' belief that a study of the full complexity of Burton's works, as well as the reassessment of the critical interpretations of them, require both an interdisciplinary perspective and the drawing together of different intellectual approaches. The chapters, which together address in one way or another the entirety of Burton's creative corpus, demonstrate a collective awareness of Tim Burton as a fundamental figure in contemporary cinema.

NOTES

1. This book is not endorsed by or affiliated with any of the performers, directors, producers or screenwriters who created the cited films or the studios that produced them.
2. Paul A. Cantor, "*Mars Attacks!* Burton, Toqueville, and the Self-Organizing Power of the American People," in *The Philosophy of Tim Burton*, ed. Jennifer L. McMahon, 85–109 (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 85–106.
3. Quoted in Alison McMahan, *The Films of Tim Burton: Animating Live Action in Contemporary Hollywood* (London: Continuum, 2005), 193.
4. Quoted in Aurélien Ferenczi, *Masters of Cinema: Tim Burton* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2011), 8.
5. Quoted in Tim Burton, *Burton on Burton*, ed. Mark Salisbury (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 55.
6. David Denby, "Babes in Cinema Land," in *Tim Burton: A Child's Garden of Nightmares*, ed. Paul A. Woods, 37–39 (London: Plexus, 2002), 39.
7. Quoted in Burton, *Burton on Burton*, 80.
8. Ibid. 87.
9. Richard Corliss, "Battier and Battier," in *Tim Burton: A Child's Garden of Nightmares*, ed. Paul A. Woods, 77–80 (London: Plexus, 2002), 78.
10. Selick directed many other films, such as *James and the Giant Peach* in 1995 (co-produced by Tim Burton), the short *Moongirl* (2005) and *Coraline* (2009). He is well known for his commercials for MTV.
11. David LaRocca, "Affect without Illusion: The Films of Edward D. Wood Jr. after *Ed Wood*," in *The Philosophy of Tim Burton*, ed. Jennifer L. McMahon, 243–65 (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 253.
12. Cantor, "*Mars Attacks!* Burton, Toqueville, and the Self-Organizing Power of the American People," 85–106.
13. The Horseman has also been interpreted as "an all-purpose return of the patriarchal repressed—a mutilated, yet potent, remnant of the American Revolution." J. Hoberman, "Heads or Tails," in *Tim Burton: A Child's Garden of Nightmares*, ed. Paul A. Woods, 160–61 (London: Plexus, 2002), 161.
14. Quoted in Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 94.
15. Jonathan Romney, "Don't Monkey with a Great Ape," in *Tim Burton: A Child's Garden of Nightmares*, ed. Paul A. Woods, 169–70 (London: Plexus, 2002), 169.
16. Ferenczi, *Masters of Cinema*, 80.
17. Pat Jalland, "Victorian Death and Its Decline: 1850–1918," in *Death in England: An Illustrated History*, ed. Peter C. Jupp and Clare Gittings, 230–55 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 236.
18. Ferenczi, *Masters of Cinema*, 86.
19. *Sweeney Todd* reverses many of the themes of Burton's previous works. Indeed, contrary to *Edward Scissorhands*, Sweeney feels incomplete without his razors and names

them "my friends;" contrary to *Batman*, there is no justice in this sordid tale; and contrary to *Big Fish*, there is no escape to a fantasy world opposed to grim reality.

20. Jennifer J. Jenkins, "A Symphony of Horror: The Sublime Synesthesia of *Sweeney Todd*," in *The Philosophy of Tim Burton*, ed. Jennifer L. McMahon, 171–92 (Lexington, KT: The University of Kentucky Press, 2014), 189.

21. Antonio Sanna, "From *Dark Shadows* to a Triumph of Colours: Tim Burton's Intertextual Homage to the TV Serial," in *Interactions* 24, no. 1–2 (2015): 183.

22. Jennifer Forrester and Leonard R. Koos, "Reviewing Remakes: An Introduction," in *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*, ed. Jennifer Forrester and Leonard R. Koos, 1–36 (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21.

23. Antonio Sanna, "'You're Alive!' Reanimation and Remake in Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie,*" *The Quint: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly from the North* 7, no. 2 (2015): 199.

24. Burton, *Burton on Burton*, 252.

25. See Lenika Cruz, "*Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* Is All Spectacle and No Heart," www.theatlantic.com (accessed December 30, 2016); and Alonso Duralde, "*Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* Review: Tim Burton Gums up the Works," www.thewrap.com (accessed December 30, 2016).

26. Ron Magliozzi and Jenny He, *Tim Burton* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 17.

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