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Hugvísindadeild

Social Criticism Gets Animated

Satire and Humor in Corpse Bride (2005) by Timothy Burton

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Marina Druzhinina

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Summary

This essay explores social criticism and the way how, by means of satire and humor, it is introduced in the animated fantasy movie that was nominated for Best Animated Feature Film in the 78th Academy Awards, *Corpse Bride* (2005). The essay provides evidence that its chief director, Timothy Burton, explores the faults of society through all aspects of this highly entertaining stop-motion picture: setting, characterisation, structure, imagery, and language.

The essay discusses in details the issues about human society in general and Victorian culture in particular that are criticized in this movie. Some of these issues, like hierarchies and hierarchical thinking or monarchy surviving at the cost of arranged marriages with the representatives of the new class, are traditionally criticized matters. Consequently, a few of *Corpse Bride's* characters, like, for instance, the future oligarchs, the Van Dorts, and the bankrupt aristocrats, the Everglots, who have similar interests and likewise live completely on account of public servitude, are stock characters. Some of the criticized in the movie issues, however, like criticism of the marriage tradition and the frightening image of the afterlife, are very fresh and engaging topics.

I look at this film mainly from a Marxist viewpoint for thus I can easily relate the covert subject matter of Burton's work to central Marxist themes, like, for example, the conflicts of class interest between the rising and the falling classes during the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. I also use devices from narratology to demonstrate how Burton's *Corpse Bride* treats the salient structures that exist within all narratives and how he treats the elements of a fairy tale. As not much has been written on *Corpse Bride*, I rely on secondary sources about literary theory in general (such as *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* by Peter Barry), social and anthropological criticism (such as *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* by John Ferguson McLennan), and literature about fairy tales and fantasy.

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Introduction

The purpose of the following essay is to analyze the elements of storytelling that Timothy William Burton uses in his animated film *Corpse Bride* (2005) to criticize the faults of society and still to entertain all kinds of audiences in the best possible way. Burton represents Victorian society with expert characterization and a well-organized plot, which by and by reveals why and how the riches and nobles violate rights of the people around them including their own children, who are thus turned into obeying machines that serve the tyrants according to their weird plan.

The story of *Corpse Bride* elaborates a fairy tale about the incautious fiancé who accidentally marries a dead bride when he is rehearsing his wedding vows and places a wedding ring on what he thinks is a dead tree branch – but it is actually Emily's, the dead girl's, finger. As a result, he gets caught between the two worlds: the land of the living and the land of the dead. The realistic protagonist of Burton's story, Victor Van Dort, who is represented as a shy, clumsy and nervous victim of a formal and despotic real environment, is caught in the fictional one by his mistaken proposal to Emily the evening before his marriage with his beloved Victoria Everglot. In this fictional underworld, Victor meets the cold-blooded yet warm-hearted creatures, including Emily, Elder Gutknecht, and other dead fellows, who are able to empathise with and care about each other, unlike his living fellows. Here, he learns to respect himself, to make decisions, and to act accordingly, although his actions make him look rather finny than heroic. Finally, he is able to stand against the villain, Lord Barkis, who killed Emily and threatens the life of Victoria.

The essay shows that Burton treats the traditional elements of fairy-tales by changing the conventional images of a hero and his *damsel in distress* into modern versions and by offering a new sympathetic image for the inhabitants of the underworld. I am also going to observe how truly depressing the real world looks, especially as compared to the land of the dead. The real world is inhabited by the heartless merchants, the Van Dorts, the aristocratic Everglots and Lord Barkis, and their obedient subjects. The first two chapters of the essay represent, accordingly, the setting, characterisation, structure, imagery, and language that Burton uses for social criticism. The third chapter discusses Burton's treatment of fairy-tale elements and consists of criticism of the tradition to use the worn-

out yet strictly followed ritual of the marriage ceremony. The fourth and last chapter pays tribute to Burton's ability to represent the frightening underworld in a new light and thus to give the audience an opportunity to get rid of its fears of death, afterlife, and the supernatural creatures. Finally, the conclusion underlines that Burton uses the form of telling the story which is considered to be the most direct and popular form today and, thus, gives his criticism as well as his humour a better chance to find its audience.

I am going to look at this film mainly from a Marxist viewpoint because it enables me to relate the latent subject matter of Burton's work to basic Marxist themes, such as, for example, the conflicts of class interest between the rising and the falling classes during the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism that took place in Victorian England. I am also going to use the devices of narratology to show how Burton's story treats the recurrent structures which are found within all narratives. As not much has been written on *Corpse Bride*, I rely on secondary sources about literary theory in general (e.g. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* by Peter Barry), social and anthropological criticism (such as *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* by John Ferguson McLennan) and literature about fairy tales and fantasy.

Chapter I

Social Criticism through Setting, Characters, and Structure

The *Corpse Bride* (2005) is an animated fantasy movie nominated for Best Animated Feature Film in the 78th Academy Awards. The movie is directed by Timothy Burton and Mike Johnson. It features the voices of Burton's leading actors Johnny Depp as Victor Van Dort and Helena Bonham Carter as Emily and uses the soundtrack written by Burton's favorite composer Daniel Robert Elfman. The crew performs the story based on the *sjuzhet* found in a few Jewish folktales, such as "The Finger," "The Demon in the Tree," and "The Other Side," in which a young bachelor is trapped by the female resident of the underworld after he mistakenly places a wedding ring on her finger and, consequently, becomes engaged to the dead fiancée, demoness, or to the mysterious girl respectively (Schwartz 51, 98, 101). The film's action takes place in two distinct worlds: in the colourless, dull and rigid land of the living, which strongly resembles Victorian England, and in the colourful, exciting and organic land of the dead, which is Tim Burton's cheerful version of the place where people go after death. The comparison to the fictional, traditionally scary underworld helps Burton to explore the faults of the real society; he does it through all aspects of the film – setting, characterisation, structure, imagery, and language.

Even the first scenes of Burton's *Corpse Bride* reveal his dim view of the human society, at least of the nineteenth-century England's society. The camera slowly displays the dreary surfaces of the Victorian town with its ominous gothic lancet arches, ill-looking traceried windows, and clustered columns that are trailed over by the dead creepers. In the opening scene, a bright blue butterfly flies out of a small shady room and makes its way above the mechanically moving residents of the land of the living who do not even notice it. Their pale inexpressive faces, colourless clothes, and frozen poses altogether with the dark shabby surroundings create a depressing atmosphere of a deserted Necropolis filled with ghosts. The beautiful living creature that is depicted as an outsider in this motionless world hurries away from the town.

The monotonous sound of the running clocks, which are seen through the windows of the town's buildings, sets the tone for the living. Thus, in unison with the constant ticktack, two men chop fish, a street-cleaner sweeps the avenue, and a cat wags its tail.

The ages have gone through the town, as it seems, and transformed its inhabitants into lifeless robots. The Victorian rationalists, besides, established a new era of machines with the highly praised calculated abilities that rule over their obedient servants. The setting has the symbolic meaning of the environment in which the common livings just work themselves out along their short journey to the land of those who already left.

Through the parallel between the town buildings, Burton suggests the similarity between their dwellers. At least, the clocks' tickers that are similarly flying in the houses of all the middle-class, the high-class, and the low class fellow beings carry on this impression. Besides, there is almost no difference of the interior design of the new riches' and the aristocrats' homes. For example, the room of the protagonist, born to the merchants Van Dorts, appears with ugly grey bare walls like the rooms of the house of the aristocrats, the Everglots, whose residence is also almost empty of furniture, with a piano and dark scary portraits on the walls as the only visible articles of luxury. Both the interiors and exteriors of the houses reflect on the dull and empty outer and inner world of their dwellers. Along with their locale and as a part of it, the Victorians look a lot like dead.

As it seems to the protagonist's father, on the other hand, the house of the aristocrats is smaller and shabbier than the house of the rich middle-class merchants. The slight contrast between the two homes implies a difference between the social and financial position of the grown poor hereditary landowners and the grown rich middle class business owners. While the former are "penniless" and "forced" into the selling of their daughter into the lower class family or, otherwise, "into the street," the latter are on their way up the social scale. The hierarchical structure, which forms the basis of the human society with the only choice for its members to climb up or to fall down, calls for Burton's primary disapproval; he emphasizes it through the comparison of Victorian strict and formal society to the comradeship of the land of the dead.

The fellowship of the dead inhabitants is distinct of the human society in terms of natural, cultural, and social environment. Although the underworld has no natural source of light, it is, unlike the world of the living, not gloomy and not dull. Burton colours the place, giving its characters a bright and merry appearance, and creating a leisure-like atmosphere supported by jazzy music. The underworld is pictured as not only more

brighter, more colourful and lively than the nineteenth-century England setting, its fictional society also does not look like a hierarchical construction. The dead have even forgotten, Burton maintains, about the place above where the creatures entertain themselves by climbing to “the rightful place,” and live gladly without any possessions or the exercising of power over their fellows. It does not surprise the audience, then, when Mayhew (voiced by Paul Whitehouse), the Van Dort’s former servant, feels “great” among the dead and when Victor agrees to swallow a poison and to stay under ground forever. As if following the idea of “defamiliarisation,” offered by Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky (Barry 161), Burton makes the well-known Victorian society, much praised for its progressiveness by the contemporaries but later much criticised for its cruelty and artificiality, look unfamiliarly dead and, on the contrary, the traditionally scary and hopeless underworld cheerful.

The Victorian town reads as a parody of aristocratic England in which the moral of the ruling classes is expressed by the stock characters, who are represented in parallels and contrasts. These are the newly rich merchants, the Van Dorts, and the bankrupt aristocrats Everglots. The former, typical for the middle class industrialists of this highly differentiated society, are obsessed with the idea to attain the status of the hereditary landowners through the arranged marriage of their son, Victor, to the Everglots’ daughter, Victoria. The aristocrats, agreeably, are eager to cement their powerful position in the society by means of their daughter’s marriage for money. The situation resembles the one that was pictured in the eighteenth century by a Londoner William Hogarth in his sets of the tale-told pictures, for instance in “Marriage a-la Mode” (1190-96).

Both the Van Dorts and the Everglots express their inclination to improve their social position by means of the arranged marriage in the dialogue-like song “According to Plan,” which they sing separately yet in harmony in the beginning of the film. The song reflects on the difference between the evaluation of the alliance by the middle and high classes’ members. While the Van Dorts express their happiness to climb up the social scale and therefore to be allowed into “the costume balls / In the hallowed halls / Rubbing elbows with the finest / Having crumpets with Her Highness...[just to be] there, [to] be seen / Having tea with the queen,” the Everglots consider the need to share their place in

the sun with “so common” and “so coarse” nouveau riches as a shameful act and a sign of their fall.

Tim Burton depicts the hierarchical difference between the middle and the upper classes not only through the comparison made by William Van Dort between his and the Everglots’ houses and through the sound arguments that are expressed in the song but also through kinesthetic images. For instance, the ambitious high-born bankrupts descend the stairway in their house to meet with the Van Dorts and then stand still on its last step; in this fashion, they literally place themselves above their relatives-to be. A moment later, the Everglots’ daughter, Victoria, makes the same way down the stairs to meet Victor playing the piano in the Everglots’ hall. When “the fishy fiancé” needs to explain his disappearance to Victoria, he must climb into her room on the second floor. The British stratifications seem to be the only subject of interest for the senior Victorians.

The Victorian England social setting offers basic information on Victor and his fiancée’s background in general and explains their miserable position inside the families in particular. The parents, who do “not approve of anything” that brings about passion instead of profit, dislike their children who are their complete opposites. For instance, Nell Van Dort (voiced by Tracey Ullman) expresses her displeasure of her son’s appearance: “Look at the way you're standing. You look like you got rickets or something.” She evaluates the fact that Victor has “never even spoken to” Victoria as an advantage because she believes her son to be graceless verbally as much as visually. In Mrs. Van Dort’s opinion, Victor is attractive to no one in general; if the marriage would not be arranged, nobody, not even a “corpse would marry...Victor.” The Everglots express an identical attitude in relation to their daughter whose face reminds them “of an otter in disgrace.” Her desire to be married to the one she is “deeply in love with” and her willingness to save her fiancé from the corpse bride make her parents think that she is insane. “Fetch her a straitjacket! She's completely mad!” replies Lady Everglot to Victoria’s cry “Victor is married to a dead woman.”

The place and time that seem to be so agreeable to the typical British snobs appear to be antagonistic to their imaginative children, especially to the girl. Victor’s drawings and his musical skills, moreover, indicate the real artist who is able to recognise, to save, and to transfer beauty. Victoria’s delight in Victor’s music and her youthful dream of love in

marriage indicates her creativity and impracticality. The audience learns that, if the middle class and his gender tolerate Victor to have some kind of freedom and choice, Victoria is less lucky. For the girl from the upper class, ironically, there is no opportunity to develop her personality or to nurture her romantic nature. To play the piano, for instance, is forbidden for Victoria because her mother understands it to be “too passionate” and thus “improper for a young lady.”

Through the story of Victoria’s forced marriage, Burton shows the tradition for the Victorian women’s novels *happy ending*: To be married, for better or worse. Victor’s wife-to-be represents the Victorian feminine ideal, or “the angel in the house” that was described by Coventry Patmore in the eponymous poem (Patmore). The gentle, polite and sincere romantic heroine is brought up to act in the “appropriate” way, so she does not refuse her parents’ “plan” to get her to marry for money. Whatever she feels toward Victor, it does not make her rebellious. She behaves as she is told to and forfeits her happiness in order to save her parents “from the depth of deepest poverty.” Consequently, Victoria fits to Edgar Roberts’ description of a flat character “who is not individual but rather... static and unchanging” and who “associated with no more than a single dominating idea” (404, 68) that the Victorian female ideal is, in fact, a property in hands of her parents until she becomes a property of her husband.

Victor and Victoria’s naivety, sincerity, and romanticism make them into aliens and victims within their families in particular and of their society in general. Burton exercises situational irony while he shows what plants grew up out of Victorian seeds under the influence of the loveless environment. The pale faces and colourless wardrobe make Victor and Victoria appear very much like the other lifeless creatures. Their behaviour in accordance to the will of the parents, Barkis, and even the corpse bride resembles the activities of brainless marionettes. Finally, their names leave no doubts that they are the children of the Victorian Age. The young Victorians are portrayed as fragile reflections of romanticism that has faded away under the pressure of rationalists and pragmatics.

Both idealistic Victoria and her impractical indecisive fiancé are made-up losers; even when they are given a chance, they are unable to work it out and benefit from it. Burton starts the story on the day before the already arranged marriage, yet Victor blows it up by making a farce of the rehearsal and proposing to the dead bride. Later, when he receives a

chance to get back to the land of the living, he cowardly abandons Emily instead of telling her truth and, consequently, is taken to the underworld again. What his fiancée does to help him is to issue a cry for help of the people who would never help. Her visit to Pastor Galswells (voiced by Christopher Lee) and her attempts to explain the situation to her parents show her immaturity. As if she does not discover enough about these people around her, Victoria sacrifices her life for their comfort trusting herself into the hands of the murderer. Further, Victor who receives the news of Victoria's newly arranged wedding, literally gives up his life and attempts to take poison. Because Burton offers the most unbelievable way to save and reunite the young couple by supernatural means, he thus suggests that the shoots of the society that teaches its new generation to follow the "plan" and "never wonder," in Charles Dickens words, have no chance to survive even if they play by society's rules (Dickens 64).

Nevertheless, Burton obviously believes in Victor's ability as an artist to resist the evils of society and gives him an opportunity to develop both his creativity and self-respect. Unsurprisingly, the chance to do that comes with the change of a setting. By means of falling down into the land of the dead, Victor paradoxically receives the chance to get on his feet. In the underworld, he immediately learns about the other creatures who, like himself, are kind, friendly and not calculating, who use music as a language of communication, and who are able to live together in peace and harmony. As the result, Victor expresses his sympathy and pity to the corpse bride, who kidnapped him only a moment before, at once after the skeletons' "tragic tale of romance, passion, and murder most foul" (the "Remains of the Day" song). The friendly creatures, who respect his talents and respond to his wishes, initiate Victor to re-evaluate himself and develop self-confidence.

The end of suppression of Victor's spirit is shown at the moment of the discovery of true nature of his antagonist and the story's evil, Lord Barkis Bittern (voiced by Richard E. Grant). When Victor learns that Barkis is Emily's murderer and realises the fate that awaits Victoria in the hands of the villain, he is not a mamma's darling anymore. Although the protagonist fights with a fork against Lord Barkis's sword, it is a fight of a real hero, in which good stands against evil. The underworld, the story implies, works as a catalyst for the shy and immature character and causes his transformation into the

confident person, free of nervousness and indecisiveness, who stands to defend his love and the life of his lady.

The most prominent character of *Corpse Bride*, however, is Emily as the name of the movie suggests. The dead girl is portrayed quite realistically yet with love. The bride is deadly blue but her big blue eyes are comparable to those of a traditional princess and her blue hair is comparable to that of a fairy. Her body is half-decomposed and has its parts loosely fixed but she is well-built and nicely fragile. Her bride costume is worn-out and soiled, yet it still “fit[s] like a glove” making her as graceful as a beauty queen. Although she loses her leg when she dances, Emily reacts so naturally and womanly as if she was Cinderella who has just dropped her glass slipper.

This image of an odd beauty enables Burton to draw a comparison between Emily and the blue butterfly; the latter appears in the beginning and in the end of the work thus representing the significant element of the story: the framing device. For instance, the opening scene represents the protagonist who draws the butterfly from the captured live model and, afterwards, releases it. This scene foreshadows the ending where Emily, in the closing scene, expresses gratitude to Victor for he has “set [her] free” and then dissolves in mass of butterflies in the beam of moonlight. The blue butterfly also appears in the middle of the movie as if saluting Emily who comes for a short visit to the land of the living. The fragile creature dances in the moonlight a moment before Emily starts to waltz around Victor thus again providing similarity between these two dream-like images.

Unlike that of Victor, Emily’s spirit has always been free as this comparison to the blue butterfly suggests and as shown through her behavior. The story, which is told by the skeletons in the “Remains of the Day” song, depicts a beautiful and naïve girl who runs away with her beloved one because her father disapproves of her choice. Emily’s independent and strong-willed character, besides, enables her both to organise Victor’s visit to the land of the living and to stop it when it does not work the way she expected. Finally, her liberated (and generous) character is fully exposed when Emily spots Victoria behind the columns of the church and calls off her wedding ceremony with Victor. She sacrifices her happiness on the grounds that she knows how painful is to be left without “dreams” and hope for a happy end. Although Emily confirms her love to

Victor or, better to say, because the kind dead girl truly loves him, she wants him to live happily ever after in love and not to die for it.

Unlike the dead corpse from “The Finger” and the other Jewish tales alike, Emily is nothing like a monster. On the contrary, she is innocent, kind and capable of the emotion and actions that no one else among the story characters is capable of. For example, her reaction to the sad fact that she is “the other woman” and her marriage with Victor was accidental is a reaction of the heartbroken yet generous woman who begins to consider if Victor and Victoria are meant for each other, instead of making a scene, planning revenge, or turning mad. Unsurprisingly, she is the one in the story, who has friends, the maggot and the black widow spider, the “horrible” little creatures of the underworld who appear to be as sensitive as Emily herself; they pity her discovery of a rival in love, are happy to prepare her wedding ceremony and eager to avenge her murder. Emily’s manners make one agree with the opinion expressed by these fellows in the song “Tears to Shed” that Emily has “a wonderful personality.”

By referring to her wonderful personality, the maggot and the spider mean not only Emily’s generosity but also her romantic nature. For instance, her girlish excitement about the visit to Victor’s parents, her readiness to arrange it, her naïve consent to wait for him in the forest during this visit, altogether with her lively response to the beauty of the world “Isn’t the view beautiful? Isn’t it romantic?” or “how beautiful the moonlight is” and her ability to express her feelings through music, make Victor think that “under different circumstances” he could fall in love with her.

Emily’s romantic personality is comparable to that of Victoria. Both girls have most likely been brought up on the same kind of fairy tales and romances with happy ending. Both are caring and understanding. However, Emily is different from the passive and easily manageable daughter of the cold-blooded aristocrats. Her lively, energetic nature and optimistic appearance suggest the dynamic and round, or “three-dimensional authentic, memorable, original, and true to life,” character different from the flat and static character of Victoria (Roberts 409).

It is no coincidence that both girls become preys of the same person; *Corpse Bride*’s structure reveals the idea that women always tend to be victims of the society which has the villain on the top. Lord Barkis carries out the image of the upper class’s snobs that

would rather live in poverty, while making up the plans how to let someone pay for their comfort, than work. It is noteworthy, however, that Lord Barkis, this genuine serial murder who has assassinated and robbed at least one girl and plans to kill another after he has married her and collected the dowry that traditionally goes with the bride, is represented in parallel to the Everglots.

The most dangerous mind is a common feature of a few characters of Burton's *Corpse Bride* who hold the highest position of the social scale. When Victor disappears "in the arms of a mystery woman," the Everglots express readiness to arrange not only a marriage but also a murder as long as it goes "according to plan." "If ever I see that Van Dort boy," Lord Everglot (voiced by Albert Finney) promises, "I'll strangle him with my bare hands." The phrase would be seen as a hyperbole, or overstatement, if his lady wife (voiced by Johanna Lumley) would not answer him agreeably: "Your hands are too fat and his neck is too thin. You'll have to use a rope." Burton shows here that the aristocrats actually do everything to get to "a rightful place." Evidently, Burton suggests, the highest power is supported by absolute violence.

If experience and Burton's story are any guides, the hierarchical society, and especially its successful climbers, are supported by the ideological structures such as the church and public media. Burton satirizes the so-called servants of God and shepherds of people who, similar to pastor Galswells, are furious about the pronouncing of the vows but blind to the nature of those who give them. Ironically, the pastor, who means to help fighting against devil and other supernatural creatures, seems not to believe in their existence. When the deceased, in fact, appear walking the streets of the Victorian town, he is the one who curses them as demons with the same eagerness he usually bids them the last farewell. In the movie, this supposed to-be guardian of human souls does not bother to save his sheep's bodies since he lets Victoria get married to the murderer and refuses to help Victor out of hell.

Just as the Everglots benefit, or they think they do, from the delay of the marriage between Victor and Victoria by virtue of their church minister, who also brings their "mad" daughter home after her fruitless plea to help Victor, Lord Barkis benefits from public media. In wholly inexplicable and always scandalous messages of the town crier, the villain sees the perfect source for the "bad news" about Victor that he uses to break

the arranged marriage and to get a chance to propose to Victoria. Although Mr. Van Dort sheepishly suggests that such information might be given by the people who just “need a little something to cry about,” the doubts about the arranged marriage fall on fertile field. Now, the Everglots are prepared to give their daughter’s hand to “a far better prospect,” and they do that immediately when Barkis proposes to Victoria.

Chapter II

Social Criticism through Imagery and Metaphors

Visual and auditory images of the Victorian English town and its inhabitants presented in Burton's *Corpse Bride* transmit the idea that the world of the living, as it was in England in Victorian Age, corresponds to the traditional view of the land of the dead, filled with lifeless, heartless, and dangerous creatures. In the movie, the monochromatic and depressing Victorian town with its motionless, lifeless, and murderous inhabitants really looks much more like the land of the dead, whereas the underworld created by Burton's crew is, ironically, the merry place with friendly and gay creatures that seem to have more potential for love and emotion than their fellow living things.

Interestingly enough, the word "thing" which is applied a few times in the film in relation to the living is never used for the dead. For instance, Nell Van Dort, at her first appearance in the story, sings: "We'll forget *everything* / That we've ever, ever been" ("According to Plan" song). If one doubts that Nell sees herself and her husband as *things* and not individuals until they are allowed to the high class by Victor's marriage to Victoria, there is the other evidence in the text. "Shouldn't Victoria Everglot be marrying a lord or *something*?" asks Victor thus applying that the title stands for its bearer.

For the reason that the last description is more appropriate to a painted doll with a clockwork device in place of heart, the image of many ticking clocks seen through the windows of the English town at the beginning of the story comes to mind again. The place appears as the one big mechanism with every living creature as a part of it, a little tiny *nothing*, insignificant by itself. The beating hearts of the Victorians, as the movie implies, seem to be just the blood-running engines which are set going until they are out of service. Through visual and auditory metaphors, in which mechanical dolls stand for people and clocks stand for their hearts, Burton claims that society is a device that manipulates living creatures as if they were the pieces of a machine.

The heart is of great significance in this work of art; it offers to reconsider the customary meaning of the metaphors that are built on this word or its image. For example, the metaphor of the heart as an object suggests a container which produces or get filled/emptied with emotion that understood to be the capacity of the living. *Corpse Bride* implies, however, that the hearts of the living are empty or realized as clock

mechanisms, while the heartless, that is, dead, creatures feel pity, sympathy, or anger and can fall in love. For instance, literally heartless, breathless, and lifeless Emily can feel and sense the beauty of the world; the nice view makes her cry happily. The fact that she is deprived of the opportunity to see the moonlight makes her pity her stay in the underworld: "I spent so long in the darkness. I'd almost forgotten how beautiful the moonlight is." She feels heartbroken when Victor calls her "the other woman" whom he would never marry if not by accident. Moreover, her sensitiveness surprises herself:

Yet the pain here that I feel
Try and tell me it's not real
And it seems that I still have
A tear to shed...

In contrast, most of the inhabitants of the Victorian England setting never resemble the cordial creatures that are able to love and pity. Their faces are emotionless. The movements are automatic. The language betrays coldness. Their actions are performed "according to plan" of the unnamed but remorseless designer. Their unions are based on the usefulness of one person to another. And, finally, they rule like dictators: manipulate by their children, command their servants, and desire to bring every creature who comes in their hands to its knees because they see the others as the unanimated objects and their own subjects that must obey and keep silent.

It is remarkable that most of the inhabitants of the land of living are continuously ordered to silence. Nell Van Dort, the Everglots, and Lord Barkis suppose the rest of the world must not only be speechless but also invisible. "Silence your blasted coughing," repeats Nell Van Dort to the Dorts' servant Mayhew. "Ignore him," she recommends a moment later to the Everglots in regard to her husband. "Quiet down now, everyone," orders Lord Barkis to the soundless and sleepy audience at his wedding celebration. Through this demand, the powerful exercise their "rights" to turn the others into the pieces of the ill-working mechanism called society.

Furthermore, Burton also reconsiders the meaning of the metaphors of the heart as a source of love and a source of life in relation to a wedding ritual and thus, by adding "the unconventional aspect" to the worn-out expressions, criticizes the society's practices (Kövecses 47). During the wedding, married couples traditionally promise to give their

heart to each other. The exchange would be possible if the hearts would not be the significant parts of living organisms. To illustrate, Elder Gutknecht explains to Emily that technically her marriage to Victor is not legal because the living cannot marry the dead on the condition of given vows; the vows bind the couple until death parts them and Emily is already dead. To get Victor and Emily officially married, he continues, Victor must drink a poison. "This would stop his heart forever. Only then would he be free to give it to you," concludes the old wise man. The idea that only the dead is free to give his heart ridicules the promise that is given during the wedding; a giver confesses the end of his life and the end of his love to his bride, actually, since he gives away his heart that is a source of life and love.

Chapter III

The Theme of the Wedding Ritual and Fairy-Tale Elements

The wedding ritual is depicted to be in agreement with the Victorians' common opinion that love has nothing "to do with marriage" because it is rather the orderly "partnership, a little tit for tat" according to Lady Everglot. This attitude helps to find an excuse for the arranged marriage, in which the bride and groom have not even met or spoken to each other before they make their promises to give each other their hearts and become a joy for each other until death hacks one of them off this union. The story makes this situation even more ridiculous when the bridegroom, Victor, learns his bride's name after the newlyweds find each other bound by his mistakenly given vows and the wedding ring.

Burton shows that when marriage has nothing to do with love, then it is not a union of the two beloved but a bargain between the merchants. To illustrate this idea, he makes Victoria marry Lord Barkis, who expects a dowry to be paid for the bride. The "angel in the house" who gives up her love for Victor in order to save her parents "from the poorhouse" (although, ironically, they are not to be saved through this badly calculated deal) becomes the next victim of the evil man. Likewise, Victor agrees to have a proper wedding with Emily to make her happy but thus literally sacrifices his life. The story therefore discusses marriage in terms of bargain and sacrifice.

The theme of marriage seems to be a topic of much interest for Burton since the story starts and ends at the very same moment, just before the wedding of Victor and Victoria. The four most notable characters, Victor, Victoria, Emily, and Lord Barkis, get involved in four short-lived unions revealed during the two days of the story's time-span. Burton makes these unions look deadly dangerous for their participants yet fit to the marriage ritual promise: until death parts them. For instance, the dead bride separates Victor and Victoria; the latter almost becomes the victim of Lord Barkis who already killed Emily; Victor is about to take poison during his marriage to Emily. Burton, besides, offers an ambiguous reading for Emily's hesitation to pronounce the last phrase during her wedding ceremony with Victor, "Your cup will never empty for I will be your wine," while she fills his cup with the poisoned drink. The bride realises that this vow has a terrible implication; it is actually the honest promise to poison her husband.

The opinion that “Marriage is like a coffin,” stated by Homer Simpson in *How I Spent My Strummer Vacation* episode (2002) of *The Simpsons* sitcom, would make a perfect epigraph for *Corpse Bride*. For real, the movie exposes how one brings this formula to life without even getting married. The promise to marry can do as well. That happen, for instance, to the girl who waits “late at night” in the middle of nowhere “by the old oak tree” for the “plenty-good looking / But down on his cash” “mysterious stranger” who offers her “to elope” from the watchful father with “the family jewels and a satchel of gold” (the “Remains of the Day” song). The wedding cliché *until death do us part* gives Lord Barkis the great opportunity to express his intentions, this time in reference to Victoria, openly: “You have only to suffer this union until death do us part. And that will come sooner than you think.” This traditional expression also sounds alarming.

Besides, Burton reminds us that a wedding is originally a result of the hunting game. He expresses this idea, for instance, identifying Victor as “quite a catch” for Victoria by Lord Barkis. The villain acts according to the hunting scheme by catching, robbing, and killing off the brides. The point of view of this seemingly exceptional evil, surprisingly, does not differ from the one expressed by the typical residents of Victorian England. For the Van Dorts, marriage of their son offers a chance to have their “family carried the way to be elevated to the heights of society” by means of catching the right fiancée and “reel[ing] her in.” Likewise, the Everglots see the marriage of their daughter as the opportunity to have their family carried “To the noble realm / Of [their] ancestry” though catching of the fishing merchants’ son at the live bait, Victoria. Overall, Burton presents marriage in terms of bargain, capture, and victimising.

It turns out to be not a coincidence that the wedding ceremonies take place in both worlds on the same evening and are shown in parallel. Burton obviously sees into the core meaning of this tradition, just like, for example, Scottish ethnologist John Ferguson McLennan did more than a century ago. When he investigated the “early social phenomena” of capture in marriage ceremonies, McLennan found the capture to be the most remarkable symbol “in the whole range of legal symbolism” and “the phase of society in which it originated existed, at some time or other, almost everywhere” (19).

The ethnologist suggests that the wedding ritual in the form of capture of the bride is based on the low social place, which women have held since the age of the first tribal

societies. The real meaning of capture really was similar to kidnapping with the further bargain for the stolen bride. McLennan reasons that “the symbol of capture occurs whenever, after a contract of marriage, it is necessary for the constitution of the relation of husband and wife that the bridegroom or his friends should go through the form of feigning to steal the bride. The marriage is agreed upon by bargain” (24). The researcher supports his theory with the documentary sources that provide the evidence of the first cases being observed in many differently located tribes, for example, among the Dorians, Spartans, the Kalmucks, the Hindus, etc., and always for the same reason.

Moreover, *Corpse Bride* ridicules the wedding ritual that resembles the ancient tradition to give “panem et circenses,” or “bread and circuses,” as the ancient poet Juvenal has it about the practice of free wheat given by the Roman politicians in combination with costly circuses to gain popularity and, then, power (Braund 38). Burton pictures the dwellers of the land of the dead who joyfully call the ceremony “a party” in “The Wedding Song.” The party programme, that the film develops, consists of two parts. Firstly, it is the sentimental custom of saying beautiful but meaningless vows in a church before the audience which has a chance to have “something to cry” about. Secondly, it is the wedding feast.

In the film, the preparation to the party is limited to the dress and cake matters. For instance, the Everglots order Victoria to be dressed properly: “Get those corsets laced properly.” The spider is excited about Victor’s suit: “You can’t get married looking like that you need a suit. When everybody sees you they will all be quite impressed.” What else is important for the wedding? “A wedding cake is no mistake!” The *Corpse Bride* story, therefore, mocks the wedding as the result of successful hunting for social and other benefits and as the traditional symbol of capture, bargain, and sacrifice celebrated in the form of the strictly preserved ritual decorated by the weird vows.

Burton shows that the well-preserved traditions keep sending the same archaic messages that originate in the uncivilised past of humanity: the messages that justify the bond on material grounds and the low position of women in society, especially noticeable during the Victorian Age. The great hunters, who had guts to fight a beast with a knife in hand or needed to shoot a prey to feed a family, or kill an enemy to save someone’s life, lived and died in wilderness. Their weapons, traditions, ideals, and morals that made

them survive must be buried along with their corpses. Although there are not always evidential hunters among those who read their vows before the ministers of church, there are enough victims of this bond and examples of the promised violence.

The same traditions, moreover, preserve the ancient fears of the unknown and of other beings as if ignoring the fact that our contemporaries have lesser reasons to fight back even before we are given the sufficient evidence of somebody's hostile intentions. It is amazing how many people nowadays are still afraid of those who yesterday were their dear ones, especially when no one has any proof of such phenomenon as the walking dead, ghosts, and demons. *Corpse Bride*, for instance, mocks the popular scene, thoughtlessly repeated in all horror movies, in which the dead force the scared livings away. He offers to look attentively to what one considers be dangerous. Maybe, those who look or sound scary mean no harm. The evil, on the contrary, walk among the living, and do it, moreover, in high places where no human judge can reach them.

The film, in fact, does not present any judge who passes on a death sentence for Lord Barkis. It is rather the defect of the character that leads the villain to his end. According to Aristotle *Poetics*, a "fault" or *hamartia* of a tragic character is one of the key elements of the plot which causes his *peripeteia* or a "reversal" of his fortune (Barry 224). When Emily, with the removed sword in hand lets Barkis leave the church safely, he stops to drink a toast to Emily to humiliate her. The static character of Barkis, thus, remains evil to the end. A self-reliant snob, as he is, cannot show himself as a loser and live happily ever after. This "elegant, cultured, radiant and more" aristocrat stays to disgrace the enemies whom he could not overtake. His "rightful place," the society teaches him, is above others. He is the one who is supposed to celebrate the victory. This attitude costs him life, as the movie indicates. Interestingly enough, Barkis's *peripeteia* manifests as a downfall (into the land of the dead) just like it does in classical tragedy.

Additionally to the marriage ritual, Burton criticises what we call "the norms of society" through the changes made to the structure of a traditional fairy-tale. For instance, he offers a different view on the basic fairy-tales binary opposites: good versus evil. Lord Barkis is certainly evil; however, he is also a high-born gentleman, "plenty good-looking," tall, well built-up and blonde. This is, in fact, the established portrait of a prince. In contrast, Victor, who plays the role of a hero, is portrayed as the nervous, shy,

clumsy and obeying son of the merchants. There is nothing heroic about his pale and weak features and passive agreeable character. He looks and behaves rather as a melancholic clown. In this manner, Burton rearranges the fairy tale the way that the evil stock character looks like the traditional hero and the pathetic commoner gets a chance to play one.

Burton suggests that it would be quite unreasonable, still, to expect that the tactful aesthete and, at the same time, the passive and obeying fruit of Victorian England, would jump at his enemy with the sword in his hands and thirst for blood in his eyes. To make the protagonist look like a hero and yet still be realistic, Burton equips his protagonist with the only weapon any commoner is actually used to, a fork. Barkis, who is armed with a sword, would kill Victor and he almost does, but Emily helps her beloved. In keeping with the traditions of the genre, Burton does not let Victor die and Barkis to celebrate the victory. In keeping with the best traditions of realism, however, Victor also cannot win, especially because he fights not against the single person named Lord Barkis but against evil in general. By making *good* incapable to withstand *evil*, Burton mocks the great expectations for the real person to overcome the devil of the society which shaped them both and to which they both belong. Although in the end of the story, Victor appears matured and capable to make decisions on his own and to act against villainy, he has defeated only one enemy so far, a slave inside him.

Also according to fairy-tale conventions, Burton let the protagonist fight against the antagonist for the traditional *damsel in distress*, his fair lady Victoria. Many tales regularly introduce damsels in distress. Nasty witches shut Rapunzel in a tower, for example, and curse the princess to fall into eternal magical sleep in “Sleeping Beauty” and “Snow White.” In all of these fairy tales, a courageous prince comes to save a maiden and marries her. In Burton’s story, there are two maidens, Victoria and Emily, who require to be rescued from the villain but no hero is able to do that. On the contrary, the damsels save their pitiable hero. For instance, Victoria appears in the church right in time to prevent Victor’s marriage to the dead and, consequently, his death. Emily twice prevents Victor’s death; firstly, when she takes the glass of poison off his hands and, secondly, when she stops Barkis’ sword with her chest. By placing the male in the situation when he is rescued by the maiden, Burton reverses the traditional fairy-tale

model. His film rather reflects on contemporary myths which send the opposite to the traditional tales message: the damsels are strong-willed women, capable to undertake quite important and dangerous tasks including rescue of their weak and passive *males in distress*.

Although Burton makes sad but realistic changes to the traditional fairy-tale image of a hero, he safely transmits the message of the tales that he was inspired by. Like the original Jewish tales, Burton's story makes a point that a pledge has its meaning although some rituals represent it too formally. For instance, "The Finger" is about a bridegroom who, like Victor, places the wedding ring on the finger of a supernatural creature and, in the fashion, fulfills the wedding ritual which underlines an oath to take care of the bride. The accidental promise challenges Victor who is not ready to perform the task. By the end, however, his character shows significant change. "I made a promise," Victor says to the dead bride, now offering her his hand not because he lost his chance of the future with Victoria, but because he does care about Emily.

Furthermore, like *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer, *Corpse Bride* sends a message that "avarice is the root of evil" (Chaucer 246). The poisoned wine that causes the death of the greedy murderers in Chaucer's tale reminds of Elder Gutknecht's "wine of ages" that ends the life of Lord Barkis who murders his brides for money. Through this parallel, thus, Burton manages to renew the messages that point out the problems of humanity. The master is certain that, altogether with the traditions that originated at the time when the people could easily catch, steal, kill, and bargain their fellow beings and that have survived even in the institutions of God which teach to do otherwise, the history of humanity also records the suggestions how to pull out these devilish roots.

Unlike the traditional fairy tales, Burton's tale, as stated above, happens in a real place and time and to the real-like hero with intent to criticise the real problems of the society. The world of the heartless snobs who sell their souls and children for money and the opportunity to be seen "having tea with the queen" as well as in the company of the highborn or high placed criminals is not a fruit of someone's sick imagination and still calls for our attention. The dragon which has ruled for centuries and over the millions, the film maintains, had not been overcome yet and cannot be done in a single combat by a

superhero. By switching the tale into the real world, Burton turns the attention of the audience off the fictional and onto the real danger which one has to be aware of and ready to fight with the society that creates the monsters and the monsters that support this society.

Chapter IV

Party Time, or Humour and Music in *Corpse Bride*

To make the story entertaining and not moralising or frightening, Burton fills his movie with humour. As if following to the recipe that is given by the magician in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Burton makes at least the dead creatures appear “riddikulus” and, therefore, not scary (Rowling 134). The skeletons are singing and dancing in the land of the dead. The off head gallantly and with a French accent introduces itself as a headwaiter. A gentleman with his body cut in two halves manages to have an advantage of his new form. The officer, Napoleon’s fellow, makes good use of the sword stuck in the chest of the famous “dwarf” just as the cook does of the knife stuck in her husband’s head. The maggot, multicoloured and witty, appears to be not a parasite but a friend who gives Emily recommendations and pities her misfortune. Another bug and Emily’s friend, the black widow, dangerous and frightening in the traditional view, looks and sounds very womanly and caring in the movie with her long lashes and tender voice. She cheers Emily up, repairs Victor’s suit and seems to be a very intelligent and peaceful creature. Finally, Victor’s dead dog Scraps behaves as a regular loving pet, full of energy and playful. In such a manner, the dead come into being as charming rather than creepy creatures.

Although all of these characters seem harmless, not all of them look ridiculous; still, they all provoke sympathy if not laughs. Emily, for instance, realistically appears as the half-composed corpse with her facial expression changing from smiling to melancholic and even angry. Burton does not let the audience forget that, in fact, his heroine is dead. She is not a “breezier” like Victor: the view “takes my breath away. Well, it would if I had any.” She has not “rosy cheeks and beating heart” like Victoria. Still, even when she constantly loses her body parts and drags the chatty maggot out of her ear, she laughs so confusedly and gently that the audience cannot be scared. Emily, with her blue eyes, fragile figure, light dancing step, and “wonderful personality” provokes sympathy and not fear.

By making his heroine appear as attractive as possible, Burton encourages his audience to see one’s true nature that shines through a sometimes ugly exterior. The eyes and the smile of the dead bride, for instance, reveal her lively and enigmatic personality.

The facial expressions of the traditionally fearful spider and its flesh-eating fellow maggot reflect the kind, peaceful and witty characters. On the contrary, the evil grin of the “plenty good-looking” aristocrat betrays his cold-blooded nature. The grimace that Finis Everglot creates in response to his wife’s advice “Smile, darling, smile,” shows his coldness and rigidity. The idea that personality is more valuable than the facade has been the subject of philosophical and cultural debates among the humanists centuries ago as it happened to all “infinite, without the comprehension of time, place, and person” metaphysical matters (Wilson 23). In fact, it still has more opponents than supporters if we judge by the continuously increasing number of cosmetic products and plastic operations.

Renaissance literature, for instance, has preserved the early disputes about the inner and external beauty. Thus, the Italian courtier and writer Balthasar Castiglione in his *The Book of the Courtier* features a group of the aristocrats who spend the night in a philosophical discussion “upon a waightie matter” of love and beauty (Castiglione 52). Starting his monologue with a definition of love as “a certain coveting to enjoy beawtie” in the beginning of the fourth book, the main speaker and a fictional first-person narrator M. Peter Bembo discusses points to the different kinds of beauty, physical and spiritual. Bembo suggests that physical beauty is acknowledged through the sense that may offer “the false judgement that made [one] beleave the yll to be good” (Castiglione 53). Castiglione, in this fashion, expresses the general idea of humanism, which Burton obviously supports, that physical beauty is often misleading and a subject to change while spiritual beauty is true and everlasting.

To make the daunting story light and delightful, Burton also makes fun of literary tropes. Interestingly, the puns emerge more often in the environment that is not supposed to be funny: in the land of the dead. Because the jokes are satire-free there, they produce spontaneous laughter, full of sympathy for the creepy-looking inhabitants of the underworld. For example, when the maggot says “If you ask me, your boyfriend is kind of jumpy - I'll keep an eye out for him,” honestly offering his help to search for Victor out of Emily’s eye socket where he sits, he revives the audience after the terrifying images of the real world. “Married, huh? I'm a widow,” gently says the spider that is well-known for her capacity to eat the mate occasionally after reproduction (Hannum and

Miller 1). Although Burton once more expresses his pessimistic view on marriage here, the remark from the funny frank lady bug sounds comical.

The figures of speech used in the land of the dead are often ambiguous and thus entertaining. For instance, the spider's comment "Why so blue?" which is addressed to the blue-colored corpse has not the single meaning of the dead body as the visual image of the corpse bride suggests; the spider wants to know a reason for Emily's melancholy look. Another episode, when the dead grandfather of Lord Everglot cries to his grandson: "Finis. Where do you keep the spirits?" also has a complex meaning because the dead Lord does not mean only alcohol beverages but also his relatives' souls. The examples show that Burton uses both possible implications of the same ambiguous phrase and, in such a manner, develops them to the point when spontaneity frees the audience to laugh, and, hence, fulfils "the task of the comic writer" (Roberts 167).

Tim Burton revives the dead metaphors and, thus, makes them appear deliciously fresh. For instance, "If I hadn't just been sitting in it, I would say that you had lost your mind!" says the maggot to Emily. The metaphor of a mind as a brittle object, which can be lost or found, stands for the physical object, the human brain in particular, where the maggot lives and which he feeds on. The dead Mayhew uses the related metaphor of a life as a brittle object when he advises Victor to start a new life in the underworld: "Time to pick up the pieces and, you know, and move on, I suppose." The fallen to pieces skeleton responds to this philosophical remark literally: "Speaking of picking up the pieces?" In other words, he asks the guys to help collecting his body. The other example is of the deceased cook who reacts to Emily's complains about her husband's callousness; Victor "walked off without saying a word." While comforting the bride with the phrase "They get something stuck in their heads," the cook releases a knife out of her dead husband's head. Burton, thus, makes use of a well-known ontological metaphor: ideas are objects, which is normally used in relation to someone with a rigid mind or an obsessive idea. The visual images translate the metaphors from their figurative to literal meaning and, therefore, make familiar expressions appear in a new and funny light.

The movie's humor develops as much out of incongruous situations as out of the verbal and visual language which represents them. For example, the meeting of the living with the dead who "walk the earth" is pictured rather humorously than horror-like. The

terrible scene where one of the dead, illuminated by devilish green flashes and to the strains of ominous music, makes the appearance from behind Lord Everglot and drops his eye in the bowl with soup, is totally turned into comic by Finis's observation made with the snobbish look and accent "it is an eye in me soup." The next scene, when the commoners are pictured scared of the dead who invade the town, is turned into a comic by means of the old woman Gertrude's attack on her long dead husband. One more humorous scene represents Pastor Galswells who struggles to drive the dead away from the church with the traditional howling formula "Be gone, ye demons from hell! You shall not enter here" but receives the quiet answer: "Keep it down, we're in a church." The wicked servant of God then appears as a traditional comic figure with both his powerful jaw and the rod, the symbol of his power, dropped down. Humor in the scenes made in the Victorian setting enables the audience to enjoy the criticism suggested by almost every one of them.

Sympathy towards the inhabitants of the land of the dead challenges the long-established fear of the afterlife. The audience can see this fear in the horror-pierced eyes of the living when they meet the dead on the streets of their town. Ironically, the commoners turn out to be able to face, to fight, and to recognise their friends among the "demons from hell" while their firm shepherd can only curse and damn the dead. Burton thus suggests that there is at least one institution, the church, which has promoted and supported the fears of the afterlife to control its sheep and to benefit from this control. The long history of humanity contains many examples how fears of post mortal punishment, in fact, gives the church an opportunity to rob and exploit the poor and pure while it grants absolution to the rich and evil. Unlike God's servants, Burton offers a much more cheering message about afterlife. "We all pass away / But don't wear a frown / Because it's really okay," sing the inhabitants of the underworld.

At least three characters evaluate the land of the dead positively: one of them is the living, another is the newly dead, and third on is the long-standing inhabitant of the underworld. The first one, Victor, seems to realize immediately after his fall into the underworld that its inhabitants feel all right there. "What a fantastic idea!" Emily gets excited about the visiting of Victor's parents, "Where are they buried? Oh, they're still alive." "I'm afraid so," replies Victor. The second, a "new arrival," Mayhew, expresses

satisfaction with his new environment: “Actually, though, I feel great.” And, finally, the third one is Elder Gutknecht; his bare bones allude to his long stay in the land of the dead. He is surprised to hear a wish to return to the land of the living: “Now, why go up there, when people are dying to get down here?” In such a manner, using as many arguments as possible, Burton convinces the audience that its deep fear of death has no real foundation.

To make the story that is focused on social criticism merry, convincing, and memorable, Burton actively uses music, or what is now known as “non-diegetic sound,” which forms a traditional background for the story and accompanies the action melodically (Negus 90). In *Corpse Bride*, background music is used to set the right atmosphere, for example the gothic air in the scene when Emily makes her first appearance before terrified Victor. It is also used to represent characters and to support the connection between the characters as, for example, between the flight of the butterfly and the dance of Emily in the forest. It also enables the crew to build up towards key-moments in the film and the finale.

Burton also uses “diegetic sound” in his movie and exercises poetical language in spoken dialogues. These dialogues, interestingly, never occur between the main characters. The first song, “According to Plan,” for instance, is the dialogue between the Van Dorts and the Everglots preparing to the wedding of their children. The second song, “Remains of the Day,” is the tale which is sung by the skeleton and includes his dead audience’s remarks. The third, “Tears to Shed,” is the dialogue between Emily and her friends, the maggot and the spider. And “The Wedding Song,” at last, reflects on the wedding feast preparations and is sung in a form of dialogue between the characters of the land of the dead. To talk with his two brides, Victor does not need words. Instead, he uses the nonverbal language of music. By playing the piano and improvising the same musical theme, he expresses his feelings before meeting Victoria for the first time and later together for Emily. Burton thus poetically and musically point to the similarity, empathy, and mutual understanding that exist between these three key characters.

Conclusion

As shown above, Burton uses not only the setting, characterisation, structure, imagery, and verbal language to criticise society and its ways to control and manipulate its people, but also nonverbal forms of language that make, in the opinion of British visual semiotician Daniel Chandler, a film into “audio-visual media.” Burton’s story is not told, it is performed. As it was centuries ago, the storyteller again expresses himself by vocal and bodily gestures and uses drawings and music to illustrate his message. Today, when critics see a movie director as “a central storyteller for contemporary culture” (Ward 1) with “animation [as] one of the most direct forms of cinematic storytelling that exists (Mackendrick 87), Burton must be considered among the best who are able to transmit a serious theme, such as social criticism, within this extremely entertaining comedy.

In its seventy-seven minutes running time, the movie manages to reveal traditionally criticized issues about society, like hierarchies and hierarchical thinking, monarchism surviving at the cost of arranged marriages with the representatives of the new class, the future oligarchs, who continue their tyrannical policy to exist completely on account of public servitude, gender inequality, and the role of God’s servants in our lives. Besides, the animated film makes visible the impact of social despotism, which is supported by strict archaic traditions and beliefs, on the family life of all society’s members, making calculated monsters from some of them, mindless machines from others, and senseless and heartless mechanism from everyone. Through the colorless images of the Victorian England’s inhabitants, their mechanical movements and absent-minded facial expressions, and especially through contrast between them and the colourful and cheering inhabitants of the fictional underworld, Burton’s message cannot fail and simply must reach its audience. His non-aggressive strategy of presenting social criticism in the form of witty songs, puns, and through fairy-tale elements, helps a lot to digest and memorise his point, and directs us to search for treatment of society’s defects.

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