

Auteur reading

Tim Burton is an acclaimed film director who is well-known for a quirky, gothic style that is shown in practically all of the films he has taken part in. His artistic style is clearly shown through music, costume, colour and production design which gives off the dark, bizarre vibe. No other director has the same artistic vision and eye as Tim Burton, and if they did, it would be considered as copying and un-original, as Burton's vision is too distinct to be re-used by another director.

1 A common theme found in Tim Burton films is the idea of the outsider character. The outsider is typically the main character in the film and works on finding their identity and/or escaping out of a world of misunderstanding and isolation. It is known Burton was considered an outcast during his youth, so it is natural that he has made multiple films telling stories surrounding this idea. Through these films it is clear to see that Burton admires the outsider character, values and sympathises with them as he identifies and sees himself in these characters, a person who doesn't fit in with the so called norms of society. They are generally misunderstood and are lonely and have been rejected from society, or by a particular person. 1

Burton builds on the idea of identity and the outsider by playing on the idea of two worlds, generally one where the outsider character lives in, and then a fantasy-like world in which the outsider can escape to, and/or find themselves. This idea is suggested to be born from Tim Burton's distaste for the 'normal world', as he sees it as difficult and unpleasant. In Alice in Wonderland, Alice is faced with the problem of being unsure with her own identity, in both her home in England and in Underland. It appears as though she is trapped in a world of proper etiquette and her escape from this world is in her dreams and later Underland. In England, at the start of the movie, Alice attends what she thinks is a garden party, but then gets told that it is a surprise engagement party between Lord Hamish Ascot and herself. Hamish and Alice are polar opposites of each other and it is clear that neither of them love each other. Hamish is a character that is considered somewhat boring and normal, whilst Alice is more of a dreamer and rebellious character, which Hamish appears to be irritated by as it doesn't conform to society's idea of normal, where he wants Alice to be a respectable wife. Although Alice detests the idea of marrying Hamish, she is forced to consider it by those around her, as one, Hamish is in fact a Lord, meaning she will be considered high up in social rankings, two, being a female and not married in this Victorian era is seen as a life you would not want to live and three, no one else better would want to marry her in a few years as her "pretty face won't last", which appears to be the only value considered by men in marriage in this setting. Because of this, Alice is torn between the identity of falling into the stereotypical, traditional, Victorian wife or following her dreams and rebelling against the unpleasant society. Ultimately she chooses to chase a rabbit wearing a waist-coat down a rabbit hole to Underland, a place where she has been before when she was a child. 2

Visually Tim Burton is able to create a gothic, fairytale world through the creative, visual palette that has become his trademark. By doing this, he is able to connect the emotions of the characters through such things as costumes, symbolism and metaphors, so that the audience is able to understand characters in more depth. Burton uses costume and plays with scale in Alice in Wonderland on the character Alice to symbolise her confusion over her

ever changing identity. This is shown through her repetitively changing sizes, from being too small and then being too big and also through her multiple costume changes. In terms of her changing size, we are able to see her struggles, stress and discomfort of not knowing her who she is and where she 'fits', both metaphorically and physically. This can be seen just before she enters the door to Underland where she grows too big for the room and you can physically see her struggling to fit into the environment, symbolising her being the outsider in society, and not being able to fit in with the ideals of others surrounding her. However we see her at her 'normal' size when she is at the White Queen's castle, where you could say, she has found her identity, which is symbolised through her comfort in the environment at her normal size. Tim Burton is also able to show Alice's rebellion against the social ideals through her costume, and her dialogue about what she wears when she has a conversation with her mother: "Where is your corset? And no stockings!" – Alice's mother. "I'm against them" declares Alice. "But you are not properly dressed". "Who's to say what is proper? What if we agreed that proper meant wearing a codfish on your head. Would you wear it?" "Alice", "To me a corset is like a codfish". We can immediately tell through this conversation that Alice questions the expectations placed on women in this world, and therefore does not fit in with the society she lives with.

As we can see above, Burton's representation of the outsider is often portrayed by how others feel and behave towards the character – in other words Alice's feelings of being an outsider are built on by how others perceive her. Along with Alice being confused about her identity in England, others in Underland also appear to be confused to who she is and debate whether she is the "real Alice" or not, a statement that Alice doesn't understand until later on. She soon begins to realise her potential of being a strong female leader in Underland, compared to her small respectable wife role she can take in England, and says "I've been accused of being Alice and of not being Alice, but this is my dream. I'll decide where it goes from here". Ultimately you could say this is where Alice starts to shape her identity and realises who she wants to be, a strong willed, adventurous woman, who when she goes back to the "real world" takes what she's learnt in Underland and declines Hamish's proposal and decides to continue her late father's business in China. Burton presents an Alice who doesn't stop being an outsider but rather has accepted that she is one and embraces it, a step that an audience of today would expect and support.