

Gender Reading

Gender is important in films as it defines the storyline and the attributes of the main characters. There are plenty of films where women are presented in stereotypical roles, which we would define as stereotypes that perpetuate gender roles within a male-dominated system. But in *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by Tim Burton, he reinvents the stereotype through the female protagonist of Alice. ①

In Hollywood, males are typically shown as being strong, handsome and heroic, with the women being the damsel in distress- prize for the hero, typically shown in many fairy tales. Due to his feminist views, Tim Burton does not do this, instead he tries to avoid Hollywood's unoriginality when it comes to how heroes are shown as being traditionally male. He does this frequently in his films- *Edward*, *Beetlejuice* etc. where he flaunts the male/outcast but in doing so represents males at the same time as being weak and inferior to women.

Alice is the female protagonist in *Alice in Wonderland*, she is absent minded, v adventurous and lets her imagination run away with her. Tim Burton gives her the stereotypical role of the male hero/knight in shining armour. For example; Alice slays the Jabberwocky in order to save her friends, whereas in Hollywood and other fairy tales, the hero slays the monster or dragon to gain personal victory, glory and status, plus in most cases to win over or save the female. When Alice first goes to wonderland she is not ready to be the 'saviour'. This is shown through characters such as the door mouse telling her "we've got the wrong Alice", but throughout her journey and adventures in wonderland she realises what she has to do and so she finds herself and regains her bravery to become the hero she needed to be, beheading the jabberwocky in Underland and in the real world turning down Hamish. ② ⑦

Males are shown in this film as being weak and less dominant than Alice. Hamish is a snobby 'insider' who does everything his mother says, he has no individuality, personality or power. You can see this when Hamish is proposing to Alice, you can tell through the way Hamish acts that he doesn't like or appreciate Alice's wild imagination and creativity. We can tell that he is only proposing to her as this is what his mum blatantly wants and has arranged, so Hamish is trying to keep his mum happy by doing this. The Hatter is truly mad, which is shown through his split personalities and the dark knight is weak and under the control of the red queen- who is another female character that has more dominance and power than the male characters. ④ ④

Red queen is another dominant female character. Firstly she is a queen, when in usual fairy tale stories, it is a king who rules the land but in *Alice in Wonderland*, there is only a queen. She is powerful, dominant and rules the kingdom. Even though she may not rule justly, she still has power and portrays immense dominance over all the males in this film, for example the dark knight who grovels at her every command, and her followers who live in fear of her turning against them if they do something wrong. Burton uses this contrast to enforce that the role of a female can also be a role including dominance and power, particularly over males. She is the strongest character in the beginning of the film, as is shown as undefeated. This further signifies Burton's purpose for drawing away from typical stereotypes in order to create an original plot that is intriguing for his audience as it is unexpected. ③

Burton glorifies the female character in order to be original and to get a refreshing change to an unoriginal society that praises male dominance in films. Other films in media have been highly influenced by the concept that Burton has used, for example: modern films such as the Hunger Games and Divergent, where the main characters are female, living in a society oppressed by a dominant male figure. These films, as well as Alice in Wonderland serve greater purpose for society as Tim Burton tells girls through his films that creativity and individuality is a gift that should be recognised and flaunted. Girls are influenced by these films and shown that they can be strong and males don't always have to be the heroes.

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