



## **Bakalářská práce**

# **Tim Burton's Films as Frankenstein-adaptations for Children**

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# Tim Burton's Films as Frankenstein-adaptations for Children

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### Cíle:

Cílem práce je analyzovat tři vybrané adaptace *Frankenstein*a od Mary Shelley zpracované Timem Burtonem. Součástí analýzy je porovnání filmů s původním dílem a hledání prvků, které transformují tento hororový příběh v pohádku pro děti.

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1. Studium literatury týkající se daného tématu
2. Komparace filmové adaptace a původního díla
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# Filmy Tima Burtona jako adaptace Frankensteinova pro děti

## Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá proměnou hororového příběhu knihy Frankenstein od Mary Shelley ve filmovou pohádku Tima Burtona. Práce nejprve odкрývá základní techniky, které jsou používány ke zjemnění hororových prvků ve filmech a literatuře pro děti. Následně pak analyzuje použití těchto technik ve třech vybraných filmech Tima Burtona, a sice Edward Scissorhands (1990), Ukradené Vánoce (1993), a Frankenweenie (2012). Práce současně odhaluje některé výhody hororového žánru správně uzpůsobeného dětem. Cílem je dokázat, že Tim Burton adaptuje hororový příběh Frankensteinova tak, aby byl vhodný pro mladé publikum.

## Klíčová slova

Tim Burton, Frankenstein, horor, pohádka, monstrum, humor, šťastný konec

# Tim Burton's Films as Frankenstein-adaptations for Children

## Abstract

This bachelor thesis deals with the transformation of the horror story of the Frankenstein book by Mary Shelley into Tim Burton's film fairy tales. The thesis first uncovers the basic techniques that are used to soften horror elements in children's films and literature. Subsequently, the thesis analyses the use of these techniques in three selected Tim Burton films, namely *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), and *Frankenweenie* (2012). At the same time, it reveals some advantages of the horror genre adequately adapted for children. The aim is to prove that Tim Burton adapted Frankenstein's horror to be suitable for a young audience.

## Keywords

Tim Burton, Frankenstein, horror, fairy tale, monster, humour, happy ending

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# List of abbreviations

MPAA	the Motion Picture Association of America
G	all ages admitted
PG	parental guidance suggested
PG-13	some material may be inappropriate for children under thirteen

# 1 Introduction

Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) has become one of "the most enduring horror icons of horror fiction" (Buxton 2019, 1). Its cultural impact is mirrored in numerous screen and stage adaptations appearing soon after its first publication. Most people around the world have at least a vague awareness of Frankenstein's monster; nevertheless, in many cases, they do not know the details of Shelley's elaborate story, and under the name Frankenstein, they imagine a stitched green monster with screws sticking out of his neck instead of the creator, Victor Frankenstein. The reason probably is that the countless reimagining of the story has overshadowed the original novel.

One of the most famous and impactful adaptations of *Frankenstein* is commonly considered James Whale's black-and-white film *Frankenstein* (1931) and its sequel, *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935; see, for example, Buxton 2019 or D'Arcy 2018). Such liberal adaptations inspired countless other artists, including those who target their works toward children. This thesis focuses on the works of Tim Burton, a contemporary American filmmaker and artist, who, according to Noel Brown (2021), might be "the key influence on the development of the 'children's horror' style" (144). The elements of *Frankenstein* are notable in most of Burton's films. However, this thesis centres only on the three I consider the most Frankenstein-related and appropriate for the children's audience. The chosen films are *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), and *Frankenweenie* (2012).

This thesis aims to discover how Tim Burton transforms the horror of *Frankenstein* into a fairy tale for children. Additionally, it also reveals how the Gothic Horror genre and Tim Burton films benefit children's development. The first chapter focuses on finding the most common techniques used in Gothic Horror works for children so that they would become appropriate for the young audience. The findings are mainly based on the book *Reading in the Dark*

(2016), edited by Jessica McCort, and Catherine Lester's book "*Horror Films for Children: Fear and Pleasure in American Cinema.*" The second chapter tries to answer how and why *Frankenstein* turned into a children's story in Tim Burton's films, based predominantly on Burton's statements and the critical reception to the films. The third chapter formally analyses the three selected films, detecting McCort's and Lester's three main techniques in horror works for children. The analysis sheds light on the ways in which Tim Burton makes the story of *Frankenstein* accessible and favourable to young audiences.

## 1.1 Gothic and Horror Elements in Children's Literature and Films

Scary elements of the Gothic Horror genre were already tangible in fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As McCort (2016) asserts, the Brothers Grimm appropriated their collected folk tales to teach lessons specific to their culture, amplifying frightening aspects. Therefore, their works are filled with descriptions of murder, infanticide, mutilation, cannibalism, and incest. This regularly amped-up violence draws attention to the lessons children should learn from the story (18–19).

McCort (2016) states that the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales demonstrate that although no literature was marked as "horror stories for children" until the early 1990s, horror elements were already present and prevalent in works for young readers long before (6). One of the first works marketed for children and labelled as horror fiction was a book series that relied heavily on fright for fright's sake, such as the *Point Horror* series launched in 1991 (written by numerous authors, including Robert Stine, Richie Cusick or Carol Ellis) and Robert Stine's *Goosebumps* series published between 1992 and 1997. Both series were inspired by the popularity and profitability of horror films on the silver screen at that time (6).

According to Kristen Kowalewski (2016), Stine's *Goosebumps* books were so popular that they led not only to his additional series, such as the *Give Yourself Goosebumps* (1995–2000) adventure books, but also inspired other middle-grade series books that similarly identified themselves as horror fiction for children, such as Tom Stone's *Graveyard School* (1994–1998) book, and Christopher Pike's *Spooksville* (1995–1998). These books are described by Kowalewski as less realistic and more fantastic, with humour to ease the tension (225). Besides providing marketing success, these self-identified horror fiction series keep kids interested in reading. Kowalewski supports this claim with several surveys conducted by Stephen Krashen, a leading researcher in reading interest and motivation, which rate *Goosebumps* books as

children's first positive reading experiences and as a stimulus for their initial interest in reading (224–225). In addition, a study conducted by Ujiie and Krashen (2002) shows that even though no specific book claimed the majority of readers, the *Goosebumps* series, which was beyond its peak at that time of the survey, was the second most frequently named book after the Harry Potter books, which also bear dark undertones (2).

Similar to the literature, marking the beginnings of children's horror in films is also tricky. According to Lester (2022), in early Hollywood cinema, the identification of children's horror was complicated by the Motion Picture Production Code, which aimed to ensure that any film released in the United States, including horror films, would be suitable for children and maintain moral standards. In the Code era, the films had no age restrictions; therefore, children could attend the early examples of horror films, including James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931), which was hugely popular among young audiences at the time (23–24).

In the Code era, Disney was one of the most significant studios in Hollywood that addressed children or childlike audiences while adopting horror imagery and conventions. Some examples of their child-friendly horror are an early animated grotesque short, *The Skeleton Dance* (1929), or the isolated frightening moments in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Pinocchio* (1940). Apart from Disney, another studio that brought notable children-friendly horror films of the era was, for instance, Universal Pictures studio with Alaf Rafkin's *The Ghost and Mr. Chicken* (1966), which combined frightening moments with comedy (25).

Nevertheless, in 1968, the Code was replaced by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rating system that is still used today (Lester 2022, 30). Unlike the Code, the MPAA rating system brings age restrictions, which was a turning point in the Hollywood horror genre and children's cinema. Consequently, horror films targeting adults could be more gruesome, violent, and disgusting than ever before, starting a new era of American horror films (29).

Horror suitable for children was G- (all ages admitted) and PG-rated (parental guidance suggested as it may contain some material unsuitable for children) by the MPAA. In the aftermath of the removal of the Code, the industry took advantage of the new freedom, and the market shifted increasingly toward young adults and teens. The result was a lack of child-friendly content offered by Hollywood at the time and low levels of satisfaction with the bit of content available (29).

The rating system firmly anchored Disney's association with family entertainment. Nevertheless, in the 1970s and 1980s, the studio faced difficulties following the death of its founder, Walt Disney, and struggled to adapt to the changing industry. As a result of these difficulties, the studio attempted to make horror films for adults, *The Watcher in the Woods* (1980) and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1983). Both films, however, failed financially because the audience was unprepared for a horror film from a company known as a safe, family-friendly brand. After this experience, Disney was discouraged from producing further dark stories with sombre tones (30).

According to Lester (2022), another milestone came with Warner Bros.'s family-friendly horror film *Gremlins* (1984). In its initial marketing, *Gremlins* was intended for children, but adult audiences and critics found it too frightening. Consequently, a new rating category, PG-13, arose. This rating marks content that may be unsuitable for children but is not objectionable enough to restrict children's audience altogether. In the mid-late 1980s, the greater flexibility of the rating system led to a small number of horror films addressed primarily to children, with ratings PG and PG-13 (32). All three MPAA rating categories (G, PG, and PG-13) are considered child-friendly (173).

Some adults, especially parents, consider the Horror genre inappropriate for a young audience because of the negative emotions, such as fear and anxiety, that these works evoke (McCort 2016, 8). Nevertheless, the Gothic Horror genre for children differs considerably from

that for adults and can benefit their children's development by teaching them a moral lesson (8). In addition, according to McCort (2016, 13–14) and Lester (2022, 44), compared to works for adults, the Gothic Horror genre for children softens the terrifying elements through several techniques, including:

- 1 edification of the monster;
- 2 addition of humour to the story;
- 3 closure of the story with a happy ending.

The first technique to make the Gothic Horror genre suitable for children is the edification of the story's protagonists, especially the monsters. McCort (2016) states that a protagonist of a text targeted toward the young must evoke an empathetic response, depending on the emotional connection to the protagonist (11). Likewise, Catherine Lester (2016) marks the possibility of identifying children's films as having child protagonists and narratives that relate to children's concerns, fears, interests, and misapprehensions. She also points out that protagonists in children's films can be childlike adults or animals instead of children (33–34).

According to Victoria Nelson (2012), during the 1980s, it became fashionable to retell stories from the point of view of minor characters, including monsters, who become heroes, serving good and being good (222). Nelson calls this the "metamorphosis of the maleficent into the beneficent," a process in which antagonists-villains become protagonists-heroes struggling with their darkness, as the most striking characteristic of the new Gothic's spiritual framework (8).

Modifying the monster characters is a widespread technique to soften the dark tones of Gothic Horror (McCort 2016, 12). McCort (2016) explains that in scary stories, the monster character is used for a specific purpose, which differs in works for adults and children. In Horrors for Adults, the monster typically represents a danger or evil that needs to be defeated.

In works for children, especially those under ten, the monster's character, apart from becoming the protagonist, is made to be befriended (12–13). Therefore, the child appreciates the monster and identifies with it as these monsters represent their readers or viewers experiencing the same childhood or adolescent problems, such as resisting bedtime, figuring out a social identity or finding love. The projection of common problems helps children express deep-rooted feelings that are not always positive (11–13).

According to Peter Kunze (2016), to make the monster more child-friendly, their appearance is still monstrous, yet not discomforting or terrifying. For this purpose, illustrations and visualisations depict monsters in vivid colours, which hints at their benevolence and harmlessness. In addition, the monster's smile is painted grotesque or goofy, making the character less frightening and more friendly (157). According to Lester (2016), those monsters edified in such way are suitable for children since they are less realistic and do not inflict extreme violence (39). Additionally, she mentions that cartoonish animations, such as exaggerated body parts, head rotations of 360 degrees, or skin turning green, contribute to the feeling of comfort and ease for the audience (37).

The second way to soften Gothic Horror elements is the use of humour throughout the story, resulting in a rather grotesque than terrifying tale, which is more appropriate for the young audience. According to McCort (2016), for this purpose, the creators commonly use a faux horror narrative that turns what has traditionally been terrifying into something to be desired or befriended to domesticate the frightening and make it humorous. Many faux horror stories targeted toward the young are overtly or covertly funny, especially in the texts where the monsters are the protagonists (13).

Lester (2022) considers humour lessening fear, reality or violence as one of the most significant strategies to alleviate frightening moments (44). Accordingly, the monsters in works for children are commonly placed in humorous/slapstick situations, especially in fright and fear,



to balance negative feelings with positive ones of amusement and relief (44). Kunze (2016) adds that humour in children's films tends to be slapstick and scatological, as both forms lack intellectual rigour and are easily understood by a young audience (153). According to Stenius, Karlsson, and Sivenius (2022), humour may be necessary for children's physical and psychological health, as the amusement helps them to relax, reduce negative emotions and gain popularity among their peers (396–397).

The third common technique to soften the Gothic Horror elements in works for children is the way of ending the story. Nelson (2012) marks a happy ending with a lesson as folktales demand (99). McCort (2016) highlights that for children, it is necessary not to leave them with insecurity or dread by the end of the story so that they can return to the real world of stability and security without fear. Therefore, unless there is a planned sequel, the endings of these works are not open-ended, as is common in horrors for adults, and terminate with a happy ending. The happy ending helps readers or viewers maintain faith that any unpleasant or threatening situation will turn out well at the end of the story and in real life (11–12). Lester (2022) adds that stories targeted toward children if they do not have a happy ending, should at least end with resolution and a feeling of hope (39).

According to McCort (2016), the Gothic Horror genre customised for the young audience in such ways can significantly benefit children's development (12). In the pedagogy of fear, Horror elements in works for children are used to warn them away from bad behaviour, and the pedagogy of bravery and choice teaches children that fear is part of life that must be dealt with or handled with intelligence (17–18). Such lessons enable children to experience negative emotions, for example, dread, fear, shock, dismay, or visceral disgust, within the safe place of screens or pages, making it easier to face these emotions later in real life. In addition, it helps them to form their independence as they can then manage difficult situations without the help of adults (21–21).

## 1.2 Adaptation of *Frankenstein*: from Works for Children to Tim Burton films

Especially after James Whale's productions, the popularity of adaptations based on *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* is manifested not only in works for adults but also for children, primarily in comic books, television series and films, as well as in video games. This chapter outlines how the modified horror story of *Frankenstein* materialises in works for children and later in Tim Burton's movies.

One of the initial media for children where the characters of *Frankenstein* appeared was comic books. According to Robert Guffey (2014), the first serialised comic book version dates back to the 1940s, when Prize Comics published Dick Briefer's *Frankenstein stories* (32). At the time, the world of comics was ruled by superheroes wearing brightly coloured tights, and the monstrous character of Frankenstein's monster was an exception among them. Although he was not a classic superhero, he was dressed in the typical colours of these comic protagonists – yellow, blue and red. However, for the surroundings, Briefer predominantly used dark tones, which was a change from the sunny and colourful environment of other comic superheroes (32).

Another media of the second half of the twentieth century adapting *Frankenstein* was television series and films for children. Boris Karloff's iconic performance of Frankenstein's monster in James Whale adaptations inspired, for example, the character of Herman Munster from *The Munsters* (D'Arcy 2018, 1). *The Munsters* was a 1960s American television black-and-white comedy sitcom by Kayro-Vue Productions. Further, in 1971, a Canadian production company released the first episode of a children's television colour series, *The Hilarious House of Frankenstein*, with Vincent Price, the longtime horror-movie icon, starring the introductions of each segment (Kohanik 2005, 1). In 1981, Toei Animation studio released a Japanese anime *The Monster of Frankenstein* based, which was based on Mary

Shelley's novel and Marvel Comics' series (Buxton 2019, 2). Three years later, the film was dubbed into English and released in the United States under the titles *Frankenstein Legend of Terror* and *Monster of Frankenstein* (2).

Video games also adapted *Frankenstein* for children. In 1994, the movie *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, became the first movie released on the same day as its video game, increasing marketing demand for both products (Gelmis 1994, 1). After that, co-developing games and movies became a Hollywood trend and the same policy was adopted by other studios, e.g. Warner Bros.'s movie and game called *Batman Forever* (1995) or MGM's movie-video spinoff, *Tank Girl* (1995) (1–2).

Tim Burton's career started shaping in 1979 when he was picked to work for the Disney studio for his school project, a pencil-drawn short called *Stalk of the Celery Monster* (Burton 2006, 8). Helena Bassil-Morozow (2010) describes the works of Tim Burton as easily recognisable thanks to his unique style, which visually emphasises the duality of two different worlds, for instance, dark and bright colours, good and evil, humour and Horror. His films are full of these connected opposites that evoke deep emotions in the viewer and make them popular among young and adult audiences (1). In the same way, Burton connects the terrifying horror story of *Frankenstein* with the fairy-tale world of stop-motion and live-action films throughout his career.

In his youth, Tim Burton was strongly influenced by the monsters on the movie screens of his time. Burton (2006) admits that as a child, he often felt like an outsider, misunderstood by those around him, so he sympathised with the characters of the monsters that appeared on cinema screens. He was never scared of them. Conversely, Burton fell in love with them from the beginning. He perceived the monsters as misunderstood creatures whose souls were often more sensitive than those surrounding them (10). This emotional connection with the screen

monsters enabled him to capture the feelings and sorrows of these creatures in his works (Page 2006, 79).

Besides the monster character, Burton (2006) also sympathises with the creator's character as he admits, "I always felt like Frankenstein and my neighbours were all the angry villagers" (15). Consequently, the main characters of his works, similar to Victor Frankenstein, often face introversion, hatred and rejection by society, nonconformity, abandonment by father/God, or disability (Bassil-Morozow 2010, 51–55). The reason for this combination of elements of Burton's childhood, the characters of Frankenstein's monster and his creator, and the mixture of fairy-tale and Horror genres in his works can be explained by Tim Burton himself:

Because I never read, my fairy tales were probably those monster movies. To me they're fairly similar. I mean, fairy-tales are extremely violent and extremely symbolic and disturbing, probably even more so than Frankenstein and stuff like that, which are kind of mythic and perceived as fairy-tale like. (Burton 2006, 17)

According to Bassil-Morozow (2010), Burton follows the traditional *Frankenstein* patterns, emphasising the creator's unique abilities, overwhelming ambition, distinctness from the rest of the world, and a strong bond with the hideous freak he created, often using names from the original novel or imitations of them (2). Moreover, his male characters tend to express their creativity in Frankensteinian activities such as monster-making. The inventor in *Edward Scissorhands*, Dr Finkelstein in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and Victor Frankenstein from *Frankenweenie* all fabricate hideous creatures in crude, pseudoscientific ways (31).

According to Stephen Carver (2013), the basis of Burton's heroes is inspiration from nineteenth-century Gothic, especially in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the works of Edgar Allan Poe (125). Carver further states that Burton fully realised the theme of *Frankenstein* in his Batman movies (1989, 1992) and the films *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), as well as *Frankenweenie* (2012). Nevertheless, *Edward Scissorhands* and *Frankenweenie* concentrate more on potentially harmful suburbia and a misunderstood monster creature rather than on the dangers of science and playing God, as in Mary Shelley's novel. Furthermore, Burton treats this theme more allegorically in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and other films, such as *Corpse Bride* (2005) or *Sweeney Todd* (2007) (125).

Alison McMahan (2006) notes that elements of the novel *Frankenstein* were already evident in his early works, starting with the lost 1971 animated film *The Island of Doctor Agor* (1971), directed and written by him at the age of thirteen, and its almost two-minute sequel *Stalk of the Celery Monster* (1979). In these works, Burton presented the characters of a mad scientist and a monster, who also plays the assistant role (21). The sequel caught the attention of the Disney company, for which Burton subsequently created his award-winning short called *Vincent* (1982) – a black-and-white stop-motion film, again with the characters of a mad scientist and a monster (22). In addition, *Vincent* is narrated by Burton's childhood idol, Vincent Price, which begins their long-lasting friendship (Burton 2006, 24). The elements of the *Frankenstein* story are visible more or less throughout Tim Burton's filmography, including his latest work, the Netflix television series *Wednesday* (2022).

## 2 Analysis

This chapter aims to analyse the three selected Tim Burton films, *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), and *Frankenweenie* (2012), in terms of how they transform the story of *Frankenstein* to become suitable for a young audience, based on elements described in the previous chapter. Accordingly, in his films, the monster's appearance is edified to be more suitable for children; the Horror Gothic elements are softened by humour throughout the story; and none of the films has a tragic ending or ends openly, which helps children maintain faith that any unpleasant or threatening situation will turn out well at the end of the story and in real life.

The first analysed film, *Edward Scissorhands*, is a live-action fantasy romance with a PG-13 rating by the MPAA. The film is directed by Tim Burton and distributed by 20th Century Fox. Stephen Carver (2013) marks the film as “Burton’s fairytale *Frankenstein*” (129). Mark Walling (2014) denotes Edward’s innocence as an inversion of *Frankenstein*’s tale, which converted a frightening monster into a lonely, innocent child (75). Weinstock (2013) sees *Edward Scissorhands* as a remake of Burton’s short *Frankenweenie* (1984), with the difference that the neighbours in *Edward Scissorhands* do not reach the level of understanding of, and tolerance towards, the creature (51).

As Burton (2006) describes, due to the success of his previous film, *Batman* (1989), he was on an A-list of directors at the time, which gave him considerable freedom in his work (84). Impressed by Caroline Thompson’s short novel *First Born* (1983), Burton hired the author as a screenwriter. The novel is about an abortion that comes back to life, providing the same psychological and fantastical elements he wanted to present in his upcoming most personal film (85–87). Although the film had a modest budget of twenty million dollars, it was well-received by critics and viewers (Page 2006, 75). Furthermore, the film begins a long-term collaboration

between Tim Burton and Johnny Depp, who, through the role of Edward, successfully breaks his status as a teen idol (Burton 2006, 91–92).

*Edward Scissorhands* has a non-linear frame narrative. The story is framed by a prologue and epilogue of an elderly woman, Kim, indicating her as the narrator. The film's core is a story of her young age about an unfinished humanoid with scissors instead of hands, which she tells her granddaughter. Kim is an observer and omniscient narrator – she uses the first or third-person narration but has limited knowledge and perspective of an individual. The film has a few flashbacks on Edward's creation and life in a gothic castle before he comes to suburbia, which is beyond Kim's knowledge. In addition, she is not presented in most of the scenes. Therefore, the narration of the story cannot be purely from her own experience. This makes her an unreliable narrator. Moreover, the whole story may be a product of her imagination since she tells it to her granddaughter as a bedtime story.

The second analysed film, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, is a stop-motion animated musical fantasy film with a PG rating by the MPAA, directed by Henry Selic, co-written and produced by Tim Burton. Although Burton does not direct it as the two other analysed films, it bears recognisable features of his works (Weinstock 2013, 10). Burton (2016) notes that it took many artists to create the film, and each had contributed ideas that expanded his original story; still, he tried to maintain the initial feeling of his tale (120). Edwin Page (2006, 82) describes Burton's style in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* as different from the usual Disney fairytale tone by being darker and returning to the original fairytales. Jennifer McMahon (2014) states that the film is an “uncanny work of memento mori”, reminding the audience of the inevitability of death, which is seen especially in the character of Jack Skelington, the lord of the dead (226). Further, McMahon suggests that *The Nightmare Before Christmas* pays homage to the 1818 novel *Frankenstein* and its 1931 Whale's adaptation (227).

*The Nightmare Before Christmas* was the first feature-length animation of its kind to be produced by Disney (Page 2006, 92). The detailed, elaborate work to make the movie took almost three years. As Vincenzo Maselli (2018) observes, it gave a revolutionary cultural value to a stop-motion technique. It is considered the first important commercially produced film made entirely in stop-motion. Consequently, the film marks an end for stop-motion as a supportive technique for special effects and a new era for puppet animated films (58). Although the film was perceived as too scary for kids and its budget was under eighteen million dollars, after its release on Halloween 1993, it made fifty-one million dollars at the box office (Burton 2006, 125). Page (2006) attributes the film's continuous popularity, mainly among children audiences, to its "childlike energy and wonderment," most visible in Jack's song *What's This?* In addition, the popularity may be secured by revolving around two popular holidays, Halloween and Christmas (86).

As Burton (2006) describes, the film is based on his three-page poem of the same name written in 1982 while he was working for Walt Disney Productions, which therefore owned the film rights (116–117). The project frequently came to Burton's mind over the years, and in 1990, he agreed with Disney Studio to produce a full-length film with Henry Selick as director (118–119). The year the film was released, in 1993, a book of the same name was also published, written and illustrated by Tim Burton. Both the film and the book are based on Burton's original poem. Therefore, they have a rhyme narration that attracts children (Page 2006, 82). Burton (2006) marks his film tone as a combination of the darkness of German Expressionism and Dr Seuss's rhyming narration (115). Page (2006) specifies that Burton uses nursery rhymes, which convey a lesson or tell an amusing story and are aimed at children (82).

Page (2006) considers *The Nightmare Before Christmas* as an example of "the 'circular journey' narrative structure" that is characteristic of children's texts (91). Maria Nikolajeva (1995) states that "the circular journey code" originates in European Romantic philosophy and



has dominated children's literature since its beginnings. In the circular journey narrative, the plot starts at home, continues with home departure and adventure, and ends with a return home (46). Accordingly, Jack Skelington, a master of creating Halloween, embarks on a journey to become Santa Claus. On the way, he encounters difficulties and eventually returns to the original state of a Pumpkin King of Halloween Town, enriched by psychological maturity and a romantic relationship with Sally.

The third analysed film, *Frankenweenie*, is a stop-motion animated black-and-white horror comedy with a PG rating by the MPAA, directed by Tim Burton and produced by Walt Disney Pictures. Brown (2021) describes *Frankenweenie*'s filmic strategy as "grotesque imagery with sufficient wit to appeal to leftfield sensibilities while still delivering the pleasing emotive content associated with mainstream family entertainment" (145). Bassil-Morozow (2010) marks the film as almost a direct translation of Whale's vision into a children's story, in which a little monster dog replaces Boris Karloff's terrifying monster (13). Burton (2006) admits that the original twenty-five-minute live-action *Frankenweenie* (1984) was a remake of James Whale's 1931 adaptations of *Frankenstein* (31). However, Burton claims that he never intends to directly link particular scenes in his movies and focuses more on their emotional context in how he remembers them from watching them as a child (34).

As Lester (2016) points out, the feature-length *Frankenweenie* is a remake of Burton's 1984 short film of the same name and pays homage to the 1931 film *Frankenstein* and its 1935 sequel while being both horrific and child-friendly (54). According to Jeffrey Weinstock (2013), *Frankenweenie* itself functions as a kind of Frankenstein's monster, as it is a "cinematic pastiche" made of pieces from Mary Shelley's novel, classical horror films, and Burton's earlier work (1–2). Further, Weinstock suggests that Burton's moving from the margins to the Hollywood mainstream is visible on the way from the original *Frankenweenie* and its 2012 remake while maintaining his outsider status (2). Disney financed the original shelved

*Frankenweeney* with nearly one million dollars, while the remake cost Disney approximately thirty-nine million dollars and grossed over eighty-four million dollars worldwide (1).

Although the original *Frankenweenie* was intended to be shown on the 1984 re-release of *Pinocchio*, after the short received a PG rating from the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), Disney decided to shelve it (Burton 2006, 38). Nevertheless, almost thirty years later, the studio asked Burton to direct the feature-length remake of *Frankenweenie*, to which he agreed (Weinstock 2013, 1). The equally dark remake of *Frankenweenie*, released under the same name and company, again with a linear narration, became the first black-and-white feature-length film and the first stop-motion film shown in IMAX 3D (ANIMATIONXPRESSCOM 2012, 1).

Burton's work, including his last creation, the *Wednesday* series (2022), is criticised for being racially insensitive for pervasive whiteness and scarcely presenting black characters appearing only as villains (Hill-Paul 2022, 1–2). On the other side, Burton appeals mainly to introverted audiences, with whom he shares the feeling of otherness of an individual in his social milieu (Burton 2006, 227). The principal message that can be taken from his works is to celebrate our differences and accept those of others (Baltzer-Jaray 2014, 166), which can also be applied to cultural, racial, sexual orientation and other differences within a society, despite that they are not much visible in his films. Furthermore, his principal and supporting characters of stop-motion with stories placed in a fictional world often have unnatural skin colours, such as grey, blue, or green, which could be considered a symbolic representation of cultural diversity.

## 2.1 Edification of the Monster

The first aspect that makes Burton's works accessible to children is the edification of the monster. Accordingly, his monsters evoke an empathetic response by sharing children's concerns, fears, interests, and misapprehensions. Therefore, they are made to be befriended and even become protagonist heroes. Their appearance is still monstrous, yet not discomforting or terrifying, which is mainly achieved by a cartoonish appearance with a grotesque or goofy smile.

Lester (2016) describes monsters suitable for children as unrealistic and states that the fear they may evoke comes from the supernatural origin and or possible fusion of categorical distinction, such as living/dead or human/inhuman (46–47). Bassil-Morrozow (2010) describes the Frankensteinian aspects of the monster figure as introversion, nonconformity, disability, rejection by society, abandonment and son/father relationship in the characters of the creator and his creation (37). Tim Burton's selected films follow these statements, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter.

As Weinstock (2013) observes, Tim Burton's Frankenstein films predominantly feature male and female monster hero characters who are more silly than scary and often become protagonists of the story (27). The creation of his characters begins with his grotesque drawings on paper, which are the essential parts of his projects (The Museum of Modern Art 2009, 0:01:37). Page (2006) cites Helena Bohman Carther's affirmation that a notepad plays a considerable part in the conception of films such as *Edward Scissorhands* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (69). Communicating is difficult for Burton, and those drawings help him explain his visions to his co-workers (The Museum of Modern Art 2009, 0:01:47). In addition, the drawings are then transferred to his stop-motion or live-action films. Therefore, the appearance of his characters indicates their personalities at first sight.

The first analysed film, *Edward Scissorhands*, presents the monster as an unfinished humanoid named Edward. He is created by an older man, the nameless creator, who lives alone in his gothic castle up the hill. Therefore, the monster here becomes a protagonist of supernatural origin. The creation starts with a heart-shaped cookie, indicating Edwards's naturally sweet character and the creator's desire for a friend. The creator teaches Edward the basics of decent behaviour, and the entertainment of poetry and encourages him to smile. Nonetheless, he dies before he can finish him, and Edward stays alone with scissors instead of hands. Burton (2006) explains that the idea of a boy with scissor hands came from his teenage drawing (Image 1), which expresses the feeling of wanting to touch but being unable to, to be both creative and destructive, and the inability to communicate (87).

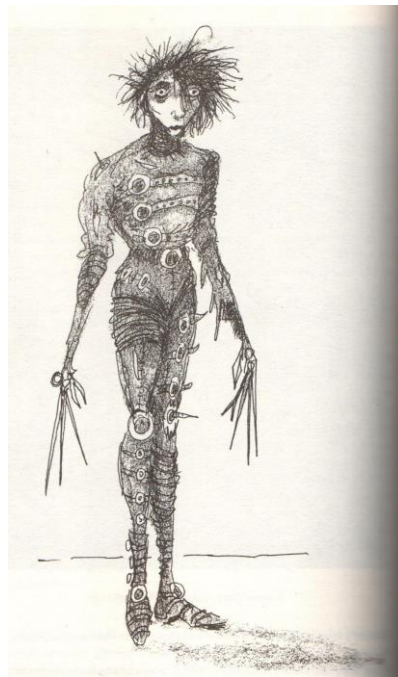


Figure 1. Burton's teenage drawing of a boy with scissors for hands

Burton, Tim. *Edward Scissorhands*. In Tim Burton, *Burton on Burton*, 86. United Kingdom: Faber and Faber, 2006.

Edward has slow, robotic-like movements at the film's beginning, but his motion becomes more fluid as he evolves throughout the story. However, in tense situations, he is still clumsy and accidentally causes cuts to others or himself with his scissors hands. He is naturally

good and does not want to hurt anybody, yet he is perceived as a monster through those several misinterpreted accidents. Youngsters commonly experience these feelings of misunderstanding and can identify through them with Edward. Moreover, Burton juxtaposes the characters of a creative introvert (Edward) with a sporty extrovert – Kim’s boyfriend, Jim – who bullies the introvert and abuses his talents (McMahan 2006, 64–65). The introverted spectator can, therefore, through these common problems, sympathise with Edward even more.

At first glance, Edward’s appearance is monstrous. He has a pale face covered with scars, wide dark eyes that never blink, purple heart-shaped lips, and black tousled hair. He has no eyebrows, but the makeup underlining his eyes makes it look like he has one, shaped in a typical Burtonesque style, making him look constantly sorrowful and worried. He is dressed in black leather clothing from neck to toe, which seems to be part of his body as a skin. The sizeable sharp scissor blades stick out of his arms, representing his inability to touch others without hurting them.

However, one look into his eyes shows a frightened boy with a pure soul longing for friendship. This can be seen when Peg sees him for the first time. Initially, she is frightened of him, but after he says, “don’t go” with desperation in his eyes, she realises that he is harmless (Burton 1990, 00:14:00). In addition, when brought to a suburban neighbourhood, he is given clothes that fit better into the environment and make his appearance less frightening. Later, Peg even tries several times to cover his facial scars to make him look more normal, helping him to be accepted by society. Nevertheless, by the end of the film, when Edward runs away from the family house (Burton 1990, 01:19:00), he cuts those clothes off, which signals his frustration and rejection of the harmful environment of suburbia (Spooner 2013, 53–54).

Despite Edward’s terrifying appearance, he is an innocent, sensitive, gentle and caring character. Page (2006) describes that Edward, like Frankenstein’s monster, does not know how to handle his feelings, cannot cope with everyday life and survive in the “real” world without

the guidance of others (91). At first, he is shy, confused, and ashamed of his scissor hands. Later, he becomes more confident and optimistic as he fulfils his need for self-expression and acceptance by creating glorious sculptures out of hedges and ice, grooming dogs, or cutting women's hair. His friendliness is shown when he appears on a local TV show. A woman in the audience asks him, "What's been the best part of your new life here in town?" and Edward responds, "The friends I've made" (Burton 1990, 00:54:00). In addition, the film is loosely based around the love between Edward and Kim, whom he likes since he first sees her in a photograph. Although Kim initially fears Edward, she gradually reveals his pure intentions and falls in love with him. His heroism is shown, for instance, when he saves Kim's younger brother, Kevin, from getting hit by a car (Burton 1990, 01:28:07). Unfortunately, Edward brings him down onto the lawn when trying to get him out of the road and accidentally scratches his face. Onlookers misinterpret this event as a monster attacking a small boy.

Edward does not speak much, and his stiff, scarred face does not allow him to show many facial expressions, so the emotions are primarily mirrored in his eyes and smile. He tries to grin throughout the film, but it looks rather grotesque as the makeup creates a constantly sorrowful and worried expression. His first attempt at a smile is shown in a flashback when he still lives with his creator and does not have a scarred face yet (Burton 1990, 00:39:36). Initially, he only smiles slightly and then overdoes it, showing his flawless white and straight teeth. It looks unnatural, as the smile is rather uncomfortable than friendly or joyful. For the rest of the film, Edward mostly smiles slightly, except when the family's son, Kevin, brings him to the primary school for the show-and-tell practice. The kids adore and applaud him, which makes Edward smile widely with exposed teeth again (Burton 1990, 00:45:34). The smile looks more natural this time but is shown from a more considerable distance, from the opposite part of the room, unlike the other of his smiles that are only light and mostly captured in close-ups. In another scene, Peg puts a healing mask on Edwards' face, which covers his monstrous scars and makes his smile grotesque (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Edwards's grotesque smile with a face mask

*Edward Scissorhands*, directed by Tim Burton (Twentieth Century Fox, 2015), 00:52:00, Screenshot.

The monster in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is embodied in a young-looking, dead girl named Sally, created by a duck-like creature, Dr Finkelstein. According to Carver (2013), Sally originates as a Voodoo Girl, a stitched doll character from the 1997 poetry book *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*, written and illustrated by Tim Burton (126). Sally is an honest, kind, loyal, and intelligent character. She serves his creator as a maid and is repeatedly locked inside his castle because he thinks she is unprepared for the world outside while she longs to escape. Children can empathise with Sally through this parent-like overprotection and isolation.

However, not only does the outside world attract her, but she also desires a mate and wishes for a relationship with Jack Skleington, the Pumpkin King of Halloween Town. Initially, she is too shy to show her feelings for him, and he is so occupied with his obsession with Christmas that he overlooks the sweet favours she is doing for him. Younger and teenage children experiencing first love can identify with this romantic feeling and desire for a mate.

Although Sally presents as Jack Skellington's naive admirer, she appears as an ideal female heroine by being brave, intelligent, self-reliant, resourceful, and sympathetic. Sally openly expresses her frustrations about being closed in Dr Finkelsetein's castle, and neither is afraid to tell Oogie Boogie, the sole harmful and dangerous character of Halloween Town, what she thinks about him. The only thing Sally struggles to express and is afraid of are her feelings toward Jack. However, although she admires him, she is the only one to see that his plan to take over Christmas is a foolish idea and does not hesitate to express her worries and try to stop him.

Sally has no friends and no emotional support from her creator. Therefore, when things go wrong, she never asks for help and takes the initiative to resolve the situation. An example is when she tries to rescue Santa Claus. In this scene, Sally shows her creativity, intelligence, venturesomeness and heroic nature. She removes her leg that shows behind the door and seduces the captor, Oogie Boogie (Selick 1993, 00:58:00). At the same time, the rest of her body attempts to get Santa Clause out of Oogie Boogie's lair.

Sally's monstrosity represents the fact that she is dead, which projects in her body that literally falls apart. She has faded-blue skin, and her body comprises parts sewn together, which she can remove and then sew them back. According to Burton (2006), the stitched parts of Sally's body represent a psychological feeling of being pieced together, "the feeling of not being together and of being loosely stitched together and constantly trying to pull yourself together" (123). Her circular face indicates her soft and harmless character. Her bulging eyes are framed with long, straight eyelashes, which make the eyes even more prominent. Similarly to Edward, she has no eyebrows, but the brow ridge frequently renders the sorrowful and worried facial expression. The corners of her lips continue into the stitched scars on her face. The red-painted lips and long, straight red hair underline her femininity. She wears a dress of patterned fabrics sewn together with visible seams, the same as her body parts. Although her description sounds terrifying, her kind smile, graceful movements, and sweet nature, evident



from her first appearance in the film, make her another friendly monster character of Burton's films.

Even though Sally is often sorrowful and worried, almost always when she sees, hears or thinks about Jack, she smiles with love (Figure 3). The only time Jack does not make her smile is when she is worried about him. Apart from her in-love smile, Sally shows mischievous happiness when she is about to or already does fool someone with her intelligence, for example, when she manages to poison Dr Finklestein so that she can escape after Jack (Selick 1993, 00:18:25). The mouth scars make it look like a smile from ear to ear. Sometimes, she even shows her teeth when smiling, but they are straight and white, so the smile does not look monstrous but human-like and friendly.



Figure 3. Sally and Jack smiling at each other

*The Nightmare Before Christmas*, directed by Henry Selick (Walt Disney Pictures, 2013), 01:08:30, Screenshot.

In *Frankenweenie*, the monster is represented by Sparky, a Bull Terrier dog whose owner is a little boy named Victor Frankenstein. At the film's beginning, Sparky is hit by a car when chasing a ball. Nevertheless, Victor successfully finds a way to bring him back to life with the help of electricity and the love he feels for him, making him a living-dead protagonist of

a supernatural origin. As a non-speaking dog character, Sparky does not face many problems through which children could identify with him except for being unaccepted by society. However, Sparky does not seem to be bothered by this problem. Children can instead relate to the feelings of Victor through his grief over losing his beloved pet and his desire to bring him back to life. Some children can also relate to the preference of being alone and creative instead of playing with other children outside, while parents wish otherwise.

Sparky has the qualities of a typical dog – he is playful, curious and a faithful companion. He is brave and protects his owner and others at the risk of his own life, which makes him a hero and proves that he is naturally good. This is shown when Victor, his classmate Elsa, and her dog Persephone, are captured in a burning wooden mill up the hill while attacked by a revived Vampire Cat. Without hesitation, Sparky rushes in to save them (Burton 2012, 01:14:12), giving up his life. The heroic act convinces the inhabitants of the town, who had previously chased him with burning torches, that he is no monster. All together, they bring him back to life for the second time. After the reviving, the first thing Sparky does is that he hugs Victor, showing his friendly and loving nature. In addition, like the two previous analysed films, Sparky brings a little bit of a love story through his mutual interest with Persephone, who has a conical hairdo with a white wavy stripe on each side, representing a dog version of the female Frankenstein's monster from *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

Like a typical Burton's character, Sparky has large eyes with little black pupils and highlighted by dark circles. Since the first revival, Sparky's body is covered with visible seams holding him in unity, together with a fabric-dotted patch on his back. Sometimes, his ear or tail falls off, and Victor has to sew them back on his body. In addition, Sparky has two bolts sticking out of his neck, which are attached to starter cables when he is being recharged or revived. Nevertheless, his cheerful behaviour and puppy movements make this monstrous appearance less frightening. When sad or discharged, he pulls his ears, eyelids, eyebrows, muzzle and tail

down; when he is happy, he wags, woofs, and jumps with joy. Unlike Edward and Sally, Sparky does have eyebrows and its thinness and friendly arched shape make him look amiable.

Sparky's friendly and goofy smile is another lightening aspect of his monstrous appearance that balances between life and death. He predominantly smiles throughout the film, especially when he looks at Victor. He repeatedly licks his hand or face as dogs do to their owners to shove their love and joy. Sometimes, Sparky sticks his tongue out of his mouth when smiling, which makes him look even goofier (Burton 2012, 00:27:24). Although his figure is equipped with teeth, they are not as sharp as is usual for dogs but rather blunt, which softens his monstrous appearance. In addition, the teeth are easily overlooked, so he looks friendly even when he smiles with an open mouth (Figure 4).

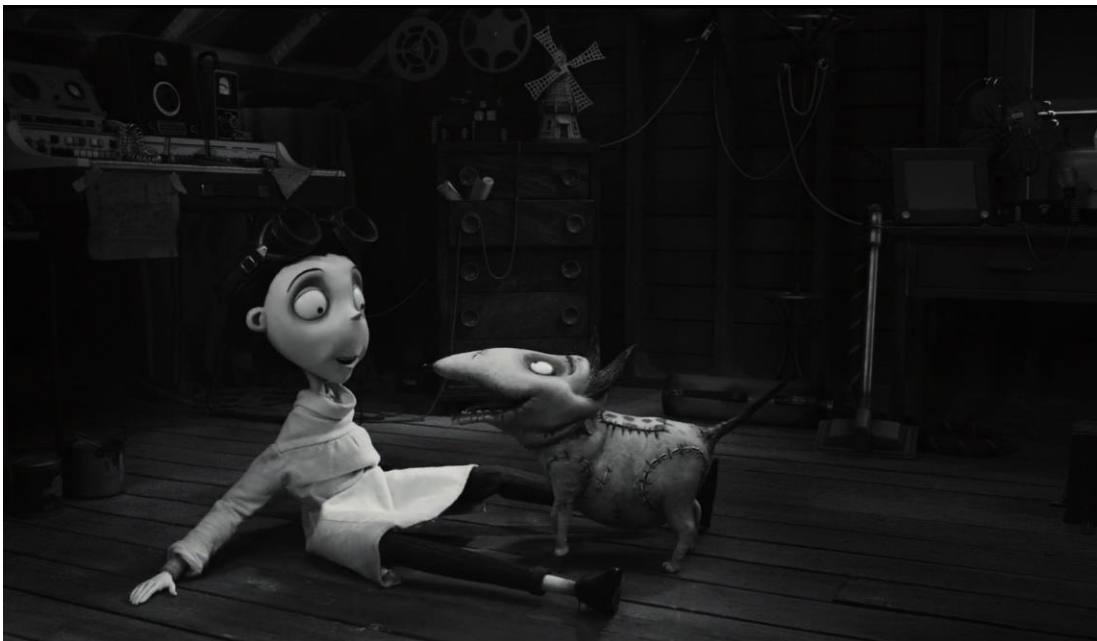


Figure 4. Sparky smiling at Victor

*Frankenweenie*, directed by Tim Burton (Walt Disney Pictures, 2013), 00:27:17, Screenshot.

## 2.2 The Use of Humour

The second aspect that makes Burton's works accessible to children is his softening of the Gothic Horror elements with a predominant childish sense of humour. This claim is supported by Page (2006), who describes Burton's films as darkly humorous storytelling that is enjoyable for children (83). The chapter proves that the analysed films use humour appropriate for children of different age, which makes them well-tailored for children and probably accounts for their popularity among audiences.

Stenius, Karlsson, and Sivenius (2022) note that children's humour is at its best between the ages of three and five when their imagination is at its peak. This mirrors in children's books and television programs where things are turned upside-down and inconsistencies incorporated playfully. Their research also indicates that later, at school age, children are amused by toilet humour, clowning, exaggeration, and slapstick humour (398). Similarly, Nandi Lessing-Venter (2019) explores types of humour used in literature for children. Based on the theories of several researchers, she categorises children's humour as exaggeration, incongruity, surprise, the absurd, human predicaments, ridicule, defiance, violence, verbal humour and scatological humour (342). Further, she synthesises those categories into five – comic character, humorous discourse, physical humour, slapstick, and poking fun at authority (344). Part of her research is based on works by Victoria Kappas (1967) and Kerry Mallan (1993), who describe different humour preferences during child development as follows.

According to Kappas (1967), younger children around the age of five delight in low comedy. They enjoy slapstick humour and are amused by elements of surprise, incongruity and exaggeration. Later, around the age of nine, their sense of humour becomes finer in form and content. They enjoy situations disapproved by adults, the misfortune of others and deviations from the usual and conventional (71–72). Mallan (1993) adds that young children enjoy nursery rhymes like those of Dr Seuss and misnaming objects or inventive naming (2–4). In addition,

preschool children's humour matches their attempts to succeed in a task or solve problems, such as learning to put the right clothes on the appropriate part of the body (3). Mallan (1993) suggests that children begin to enjoy punning riddles from age eight as they understand that a word can have two meanings or that an image can have two different interpretations. Later, in upper primary years, children appreciate sick jokes, which make fun of inappropriate things like death or severe illness, and jokes on a specific topic, such as the current political situation, pop stars or movie characters (Mallan 1993, 6–7).

Kappas (1967) asserts that in older children, from the age of fourteen, the sense of humour begins to individualise, approaching the humour of adults (73). For the first time, verbal wit begins to dominate over visual humour and the humour dealing with forbidden ideas and subjects is not indulged as much as earlier (73–75). According to one study of children and humour literature, kids prefer absurdity and slapstick humour, but as they mature, satire and whimsy become more appealing (73–74). Mallan (1993) agrees with Kappas that older children, around the high school age, enjoy the more sophisticated and subtle form of humour that provides them with intellectual challenges (13–14). Accordingly, they appreciate parodies and allusions as long as they correspond to the realm of their experience, for example, a pastiche of well-known fairy tales or works studied at school, such as *Frankenstein* (7).

In *Edward Scissorhands*, Burton uses low humour for younger children throughout the film, especially in Edward's misfortune scenes, which lightens his dark appearance. An example is an exaggeration when Edward touches a microphone, resulting in electric sparks and his falling off a chair (Burton 1990, 00:56:00). The slapstick humour is also present, such as when Edward bumps his head into a car window when he wants to get a closer view of kids playing in a yard (Burton 1990, 00:16:00) or when Edward accidentally pinches the water bed and the water starts squirting into his face (Burton 1990, 00:20:00). This scene follows another comic one in which Edward tries to put on trousers without using his hands and then

accidentally cuts his suspenders when trying to put on a shirt (Burton 1990, 00:21:00). Further sample of a humorous scene is when Bill, the father in the family, takes Edward for a “lemonade” which is actually an alcoholic drink. Edward drinks it with a strong sound of sipping with a straw into the bottom of the glass. Then follows a scene in which Peg, the family’s mother, brings their daughter, Kim, to introduce her to Edward. However, as he is drunk, he only makes a strange noise and falls down the bar chair (Burton 1990, 00:42:00). A scene follows up this situation with verbal and other slapstick humour, as the neighbour, Joyce, asks him, “Wouldn’t you like a lemonade?”, which makes Edward throw up (Burton 1990, 00:44:00).

Besides the low comedy humour, *Edward Scissorhands* contains amusing elements targeted toward older children and adults. The whole film is a satire of American postwar suburbia. Burton pokes fun at middle-class values, small-town hypocrisy, gossiping, backbiting, and the fear of anything strange that does not fit in. Since his arrival to the pastel suburbia, Edward, with his peculiarities, is the centre of attention. Information about him spreads rapidly throughout the neighbourhood, especially among the women. The neighbours are kind and friendly towards him at first, but then, they quickly dismiss him as a dangerous monster, even though Edward has one of the purest souls and never intends anything evil. Another example of parody is the lady’s exaggerated haircuts created by Edward. He cuts the hair into eccentric, unnatural shapes, making them look comical. This possibly pokes fun at the impracticality and senselessness of some modern trends that fashion brings.

Overall, Burton uses low humour that younger children easily understand throughout the film. At the same time, several humorous elements are based on previous scenes, which may be harder to follow for the youngest audience. In addition, some of the humour is based on scenes that are more suitable for teenagers and adults, for example, when Joyce seduces Edward with her sexy underwear. They both fall off the cosmetic chair (Burton 1990, 00:59:55).

Furthermore, the film uses satire that may be overlooked by younger viewers but enjoyed by older ones. Generally, the comical elements are presented mainly at the beginning and middle of the film. From the second half, the humour slowly decedes, as does Edward's popularity among the residents of suburbia outside the family. The scenes are then rather serious, and the film focuses more on the themes of rejection, misunderstanding, and isolation.

In *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, the low humour strongly prevails from the film's beginning; for example, when a cat sits on a trash can, a man inside flips open the lid, which throws the cat away (Selick 1993, 00:02:37). The exaggeration and incongruity are evident, especially in Jack's obsession with Christmas, as he does everything he can to become a Santa Claus. However, Jack is a master of scare, and his actions result in the misfortune of others, which amuse younger children. The elements of humorous surprise are, for instance, when a man reveals a little man under a hat who also has another man under his hat (Selick 1993, 00:22:00) or when Jack sends three kids of Halloween Town to a Christmas Town for Santa Clause, and they bring a pink easter bunny in a black garbage bag instead (Selick 1993, 00:40:00). The absurdity accompanies the entire film. An example is a walking bath with legs (Selick 1993, 00:37) or when Dr Finklestein creates his clone and gives him half of his brain to have "a worth having conversation" with it (Selick 1993, 00:37:00). This scene is connected with one of the last ones when it is revealed that Dr Finklestein's recently created clone is his woman double (Selick 1993, 01:10:00). Slapstick defiance and violence are visible in Sally's escape from her creator, getting rid of her arm, which stays in Dr Finkelstein's hand and repeatedly bumps him in the head (Selick 1993, 00:37:00). In addition, the film is inspired by the 19th-century children book written by Clement Clarke Moore, *The Night Before Christmas*, which shows a wordplay in the title of the film (Burton 2006, 115). Similarly, Dr Finkelstein's name is a wordplay referring to Victor Frankenstein or James Whale's Henry Frankenstein.

Apart from the low comedy for the targeted young audience, the film contains humour more suitable for older children and adults, such as a reference to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, when Jack Skelington takes off his head skull and holds it in his hands while singing "And since I am dead, I can take off my head to recite Shakespearian quotations" (Selick 1993, 00:06:00). In addition, the film contains several satirical elements, such as the character of a mayor, whose head is formed by two faces – one smiling which he uses for the public, and another horror-stricken one that represents his incompetence for the function, shown when he asks Jack for help. The incompetence is supported by verbal humour as he says: "Jack! Please! I'm only an elected official here! I can't make decisions!" (Selick 1993, 00:12:00).

Generally, the low comedy accompanies the film from the beginning till the end. The humour goes from the character's exaggerated appearance with funny voices and rhythmic intonation through the misfortune accidents to occasional puns and satire suitable for older children and adults. In addition, children may be amused by the musical aspect of the story with its rhymes and cheering melody.

In *Frankenweenie*, the exaggeration of the low-humour comedy is visible throughout the film in the grotesque appearance of the characters, especially in negative ones. For example, Victor's classmate that blackmails him, Edgar, has thin legs and arms, only three protruding teeth, and a big hump on his back, which may remind older audiences of Quasimodo from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831), written by Victor Hugo. Mr Burgemeister, Victor's neighbour and authoritarian mayor of New Holland, is a chunky, bald and sullen man. The arrogant gym teacher's facial expression tends to be a scow, and she always wears a tracksuit, which tightly hugs her figure, highlighting her large breasts and backside. These exaggerated stereotyped characters may appeal to both younger and older audiences.

Furthermore, the film contains scatological humour, as the poops of a cat called Mr Whisker predict to whom something big will happen, depending on its shape forming



an initial letter of someone's name (Burton 2012, 00:09:00). An example of slapstick humour that softens a horror scene in the film is a dancing robot and reindeer from Christmas decorations while Victor is reviewing Sparky (Burton 2012, 00:25:00), or when Sparky follows Mr Whisker and a window slaps his buttocks, and he falls from a great height onto the lawn. The cat and the dog then run around the neighbourhood, making a mess everywhere and scaring an obese woman who starts screaming in a high tone (Burton 2012, 00:29:00), which also amuses children. Another example of slapstick humour is when Sparky tries to drink water, and it gushes out of his seams. He jumps and catches it in his mouth (Burton 2012, 00:29:00). The human predicament is apparent when Victor's classmate, Bob, considered more as a negative character, is bitten by an invisible fish, which is accompanied by an exaggerated sound of biting (Burton 2012, 00:37:00).

The destruction of antagonist-revived pets of Edward's classmates can be considered funny by younger and older audiences. While younger may laugh at the pets' absurd appearance and exaggerated way of death, the older may be amused by the allusions to the monster creatures of horror cinema of the Twentieth century. Weinstock (2013) explains that Toshiaki's turtle monster named Shelley aurally and visually references the Toho Godzilla films of the 1950s and 1960s (24). Shelly is fried by an electric current, leaving only the carapace of its original size. Another destroyed, revived pet is Colossus, Nassor's dead hamster with the mausoleum at the pet cemetery. The word colossus has a Latin origin, marking a sizeable artistic object, and is usually used to refer to a person or thing of significant size or power. Colossus is ironically a tiny mummy. It is connected with verbal humour suitable for younger children when Colossus' owner obeys him to kill the Godzilla-like turtle monster. Nassar screams, "Go Colossus! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!" and Colossus goes heroically into the fight but is immediately trampled by his opponent (Burton 2012, 01:20:00). In addition, Colossus reminds Mothra of Ishirō Honda's *Mothra Vs. Godzilla* (1964) in its caterpillar stage and its destruction by being trampled by a giant foot alludes to Merv Newland's cartoon short, *Bambi*

*Meets Godzilla* (1969) (Weinstock 2013, 24). Further, Bob's destructive sea creatures that pop out after eating salted popcorn because they are freshwater creatures are, according to Weinstock (2013), a clear nod to Joe Dante's *Gremlins* (1984) (24).

Besides irony and allusions, the film uses satire as a form of humour for older audiences. Again, as in *Edward Scissorhands*, Burton presents suburban dysfunction in the conventional suburban setting. As before, the community's outwardly 'normal' residents pose the greatest threat, while the outcasted ones have good intentions (Brown 2021, 156). For example, Mr Rzykruski, the science teacher with an Eastern European accent, may seem sinister at first sight, but he cares about his students and wants to teach them to be curious and to think openly. In addition, the character of Mr Rzykruski brings a satire to anti-intellectualism. In the parent-teacher meeting, led by Mr Burgemeister, his teaching is accused of endangering the students, because they are beginning to be curious and asking their parents difficult questions. The next day, he leaves the school, and his classes are substituted by an incompetent gym teacher, who believes that "sometimes knowing too much is the problem" (Burton 2012, 00:47:05).

Similarly to *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, the low comedy accompanies the entire film, supported by the comical appearance of the characters. However, the low humour is often combined with humour appropriate for older audiences, which makes both groups amused simultaneously, but for different reasons. To amuse older children and adults, Burton occasionally uses irony, allusions, and satire. In the end, after the comical destruction of the antagonist's revived pets, the humour fades, and the film concentrates more on the happy ending.

## 2.3 Closure of the Story with a Happy Ending

The third aspect that makes Burton's films accessible for children is an appropriate closer to the story. As described in the previous chapter, it is necessary not to leave children with insecurity or dread by the end of the story, which may be achieved by a happy ending or at least by the work ending with a feeling of hope.

Katherine Fowkes (2013) asserts that despite Tim Burton's films adhering to Hollywood's penchant for happy endings, he questions the norms and traditions of a feel-good ending reflected in many mainstream family films (233–234). Page (2006, 85) describes Burton's film endings as bittersweet as they underline the message that some things work out and some do not. This chapter demonstrates that Burton, in the analysed films, presents his version of a happy ending and does not leave the young audience with insecurity or dread by the end of his fairy tales, which is an essential part of works for children.

*Edward Scissorhands* ends with Edward returning to the isolation of a gothic castle. Soon after, he is visited by Kim, who wants to reassure herself that he is still alive. Immediately after this, Jim arrives, shouting at Edward with a gun in his hand. Kim quickly rips the gun from him, but Jim continues his attack. Initially, Edward does not defend himself. Kim slams Jim across the back with a beam to stop him again. Nevertheless, when Jim slaps Kim and kicks her to the ground, Edward gets mad and stabs him with the blade of his scissor hand to protect her (Burton 1990, 01:34:01). Page (2006) justifies this violent killing, which the audience may not expect from Edward, by his strong feelings toward Kim, and the fact that he was put into the corner by Jim's unacceptable behaviour (91). Afterwards, Edward says his last goodbye to Kim, knowing they will never see each other again. She kisses him and confesses her love to Edward with the words "I love you" (Burton 1990, 01:35:00). Kim then tells the residents who are waiting in front of the mansion that both Edward and Jim are dead by killing each other. Everyone goes home, and Edward stays in solitude at the Gothic castle.

Although it could be seen as a sad ending to the story, Edward and Kim seem pretty happy and satisfied, considering past events. When the elderly Kim tells the story to her granddaughter, she believes that Edward is still alive because his ice sculptures brought snow to the suburbia, and without him, it would not be snowing. She does not want to visit him, as he is probably still a young boy, and she wishes him to remember her as a beautiful young girl. In addition, Kim came to terms with the reality that the suburbians would never accept Edward. Furthermore, Kim's relationship with her granddaughter marks her content with the family she has, although it is evident that she still has Edward in her heart. The final shots of the film show Edward continuing to create enchanting sculptures out of hedges and ice, reconciled and content with his life, far away from the people who caused him so much pain.

Page (2006) describes the film ending as fairytale-like and traditional, in a way similar to the Brothers Grimm's works, by being less pleasurable and containing a vital message (77). Further, Page cites Burton's view on his film: "It's not a happy ending, it's not a sad ending. To me, it's more of a symbolic ending. Some things work out, and some things don't" (78). Accordingly, the film's ending teaches children that reality is not always pleasurable and that not everything will end up as they wish, although the intentions may be pure and good. In addition, the film highlights that there is nothing wrong with being different and that those individual differences can be beneficial. Nevertheless, Burton also indicates that some people, especially the creative and innocent ones, are better when alone. They do not fit into an ordinary world but are naturally good people, preferring a solitary life where other people cannot hurt them.

*The Nightmare Before Christmas* ends with Jack's failure to become Santa Claus. After he reveals that he is not suited for the role of a cheerful Christmas man giving gifts to children in the real world, Jack realises that he should stick to what he can do best – creating Halloween. The realisation and pure intentions are seen in his words by the end of the film, "What have I

done? But I never intended all this madness” (Burton 1990, 01:07:00). After that, Jack admits his mistake and apologises to Santa for kidnapping him with words “Forgive me. I’m afraid I’ve made a horrible mess of your holiday” (Burton 1990, 01:09:00). Santa is then set free and cleans up the mess Jack has made in the real world – gives the children appropriate Christmas toys instead of the ghoulish scary ones delivered by Jack. Sally is also freed as her creator, Dr Finkelstein, has a new caregiver, his female clone. Additionally, Jack finally realises that Sally is a fantastic girl who is always here for him, and they end up together as a loving couple. The final scene presents them kissing and singing a love song atop a curly mountain under a full yellow moon. All of Jack’s lament and sadness disappear and Halloween City returns to its original state of a scary and crazy town. Halloween Town is then covered with snow as a gift from Santa, indicating his forgiveness.

The film shows Jack’s dedication to his idea as he tries repeatedly and experiments despite continuing to fail. Nevertheless, when Jack finally sees that what he does is only a disaster, he understands that it is better to give up and return to be the Pumpkin King. He also shows the appropriateness of saying sorry after making a wrong decision. Jack’s apology is accepted and rewarded, which teaches children the proper behaviour. In addition, his attempt to become someone else shows that it is better to respect and admire heroes and idols than to attempt to be them. Nevertheless, according to Baltzer-Jarary (2014), children naturally pretend to be their heroes, which helps them discover themselves in a fun way. She also adds that, as in *Edward Scissorhands*, the film celebrates individual otherness and diversity and teaches children to be their authentic selves and that life does not always bring what is desired (166).

Kimberly Baltzer-Jarary (2014) points out that the audience may desire Jack to succeed in his attempt to become a Santa Claus and get to know the true spirit of Christmas (153). Nevertheless, the film presents an unexpectedly happy ending, implying that life does not always bring what is desired, although the intentions might be good. In addition, Baltzer-Jarary

(2014) marks that the end brings a lesson that the viewer should be his true self and let others be themselves (166). Moreover, the film's final scenes show a joyful singing of inhabitants of Halloween Town, including Jack and Sally in love, which indicates their happiness.

*Frankenweenie* ends with Sparky's heroic act of sacrificing his life for others, which shows the villagers of New Holland that despite his terrifying appearance and corpse origin, he is no monster but a heroic and harmless pet of a young boy. Although the people previously chased him with torches up the hill to the burning mill, they eventually decided to bring Sparky back to life again. They revive Sparky for the second time using jumper cables and car batteries. At first, this attempt appears to have failed. Viktor hugs Sparky's corpse and the townspeople share Viktor's grief. Suddenly, Sparky wakes up again, runs to hug Victor, and the residents cheer and clap with joy. Persephone also jumps for joy, and the film ends with an electric nose kiss between the two dogs, bringing an electric 'THE END' sign on a black background.

Although it could be expected from Burton that he ends the film in a more gloomy symbolic way as in the previous films and lets Sparky die as a hero while Edward is finally reconciled to his death, he decided to bring a happy ending where the monster is accepted and lives a happily ever after life with his loyal owner and beloved Persephone.

According to Lester (2016), the film's ending emphasises the importance of acceptance, friendship, love, and the ethical use of science. Further, Lester observes the moral of the ethical use of science in the destruction of other revived pets of Edward's classmates. As their revival was done due to a desire to win a school competition and not from love and affection for their pets, their reviving went wrong. Those pets turned into terrifying rampaging monsters attacking the residents of New Holland. Therefore, it was necessary to dispose of them. In this way, the film remains recognisably 'horrific' while being 'suitable' for a young audience (56).

According to Brown (2021), when Victor's father admits that "Sometimes adults don't know what they're talking about" (Burton 2012, 01:17:27), it could be interpreted as

a revelation that authoritarian hierarchies between children and adults should be less rigid (157). Moreover, the ending emphasises the saying “do not judge a book by its cover” by teaching children that they should not judge someone or something based on what they perceive without knowing the entire situation, unlike the townspeople who immediately condemned Sparky for his deadly appearance and supernatural origin. It is possible to use the same logic not to judge differences in ethnicity, raciality, or religion.

### 3 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to discover how Tim Burton transforms the *Frankenstein* horror story into fairy tales for children. Based on the findings described in the first chapter, the analysis has demonstrated that Burton uses techniques that make the horror story appropriate for the young audience in the three selected films: *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), and *Frankenweenie* (2012). The connections between Burton's films and the story of *Frankenstein* have been proved by citations from several authors investigating his filmography. Additionally, the thesis indicates that the Gothic Horror genre and Tim Burton's films adequately used for children can benefit their development.

The first chapter presents three principal techniques generally used to transform Gothic Horror stories into fairy tales for children: the edification of the monster, the addition of humour to the story, and the closure of the story with a happy ending. The analysis shows that Burton uses these techniques to make his films suitable for children while maintaining the Gothic Horror atmosphere.

Accordingly, his films transform the protagonists of *Frankenstein*, the creator and his creature, into children-friendly characters. In *Edward Scissorhands*, the creator is a nameless old man who created a young boy. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* puts into these roles a duck-like creator and a young girl. *Frankenweenie* presents the creator as a young boy reviving his dog. In addition, children can sympathise with the protagonists through common problems, the monster protagonists are naturally pure and heroic, and their appearance is rather grotesque than terrifying.

Further, Burton uses different types of low humour suitable for younger children to lighten the Gothic Horror atmosphere. Nevertheless, the films also contain more sophisticated forms of humour, such as satire and allusions, that are suitable for older children and adults whom they provide with intellectual challenges.



Moreover, Burton's films never leave children with feelings of dread or fear. Although he usually does not end his films with a truly and fully happy ending that the audience of Hollywood cinema might expect, he maintains a more traditional way of closure to the story, as in the Brother Grimm's fairy tales. Therefore, his somewhat bittersweet, and highly symbolic, endings bring a moral lesson and help children better deal with unpleasant real-life situations.

Apart from the three analysed techniques of softening the Gothic Horror genre in works for children, I noticed that Burton also uses other techniques which could be further studied, possibly in the form of a Master's Thesis. The techniques include using music that strongly appeals to children's emotions, for which Burton usually collaborates with American music composer Danny Elfman. Another examination-worthy technique would be the use of language, which is understandable and appropriate for the young audiences by using simple words and shorter sentences, and avoiding vulgarisms. Moreover, the theme of the creator-creature relationship, as well as addressing otherness and diversity, also had to be left mostly unexplored due to the recommended scope of the thesis.

Working on this thesis took me back to childhood and helped me understand why I liked Tim Burton's films. When watching the movies again, as an older spectator, I initially could not understand why they were my favourite. However, by the end of writing this thesis came a relived experience of how they appealed to me as a little girl. These stories made my younger self realise that being internally different from others, in terms of preferring solitude and creative activities over social interactions, is not a bad trait that should be changed. Burton (2006) claims that Dr. Seuss' work "probably saved a bunch of kids" (19), and I would say the same about Tim Burton's productions.

To sum up, this thesis sheds light on how Tim Burton transforms the story of *Frankenstein* into fairy-tale-like horror films, which are accessible and favourable to young audiences.

The MPAA's film rating indicates that Burton's selected films are accessible to children, but with certain restrictions. Although his films may not be favoured by all and may not appear suitable for every member of the young audience, they can have an essential significance for children facing the same issues as Tim Burton faced when he was a kid and teenager.

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## Figures

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