# Tim Burton’s Gothic Style

## **Sum**mary

Tim Burton has received acclaim throughout the film industry for his adaptation of a diverse number of works into his unique Gothic style. In this paper, there is a discussion of two of his works: Edward Scissorhands, and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. The main characters in both films are lonely individuals who are isolated from the rest of their communities. Edward Scissorhands is an artificial creation of an inventor who has scissors for hands, becoming a tragic character when his creator dies just before he fits him with human hands. Edward is brought into the suburban neighbourhood by Peg, a salesperson, and while he is well received at first, he ends up being rejected. Willy Wonka, on the other hand, is also an individual that lives in isolation following his bitter experiences as a child as well as his feelings of betrayal from some of his employees. He is surrounded with perfection, yet he is an individual that has a void inside, perhaps even living a nightmare. These two films have similar themes that are embodied by the characters and their surroundings. Among these is the idea of perfection, on one hand, and monstrosity on the other. In the case of Edward, there is a failure by the community to look beyond his appearance to the innocent and perfect individual inside. Willy, on the other hand, despite his physical perfection, is an individual who has made the decision to stay apart from the world. These contrasting figures are actually quite similar when it comes to their relationship with their own societies to such an extent that they essentially live in isolation.

## Edward Scissorhands

Edward Scissorhands is a 1990 film that was directed by Tim Burton, and was able to gain a considerable following because of the audiences’ attachment to the title character. Edward is a creation of an elderly inventor who creates him with scissors in place of hands. However, just when the inventor is about to replace the scissors with actual hands, he ends up having a fatal heart attack, leaving Edward as he is. Edward lives in isolation until he is discovered and introduced to the rest of the community by Peg Boggs, a door-to-door sales woman. Despite the positive reception that Edwards receives from Peg’s family, and the community, with the latter being only attracted to him because he is an anomaly, he ends up being increasingly isolated. This isolation comes about because of various misunderstandings where other people come to represent him as either being dangerous or untrustworthy. In addition, Edward, because of the scissors he has for hands, ends up unintentionally hurting people, resulting in the community completely rejecting him. He develops a close relationship with Kim, Peg’s daughter, but this positive relationship in Edward’s life is disrupted because of her boyfriend, Jim’s, jealousy (Dubowsky, 2016). Events escalate to a point where Edward makes the decision to return to the mansion where he was created. Jim and the altercation that follows leads to Jim’s death pursue him, and Kim, who witnessed it, declares that both Edward and Jim died. However, Edward is actually alive and Kim was only protecting him by stating that he had died; allowing him to live in isolation at the mansion of his creator.

One of the most important impressions that is attained when watching Edward Scissorhands is that it seeks to decipher what makes individuals human. This is an essential aspect of the film because it allows the audience to make the decision for themselves. In this film, Edward seems to be more human than the people he encounters because he seeks to fulfil the needs that can be associated with humanity (Goodlad, 2007). One of the most important of these needs is that he wants companionship because it is the best means through which to end the loneliness he has experienced since the death of his creator. In addition, the treatment that he receives from the people that he encounters is condescending and without an understanding of what Edward has gone through his entire life. They are attracted to him because he is different, with the difference making the community shun him eventually. Moreover, Edward is a victim of circumstances beyond his control, as seen where Joyce attempts to seduce him and when he rejects her advances, she turns the tables on him, declaring he attempted to seduce her. Furthermore, the most destructive character in the film is Jim, who, because of his jealousy seeks to destroy Edward. Jim can be considered the direct opposite of Edward because while Edward, a non-human, shows very human characteristics, Jim, a human, displays the characteristics of a monster (Potter, 1992). In this film, Burton is able to show the conflicts that take place in society while at the same time promoting the belief that not all people are as they seem.

Burton is able to make the contrast between the treatment that Edward receives from his creator and the community in which he lives through his memories. Edward’s memories are extremely essential in the development of the character because they ensure that his humanity is revealed (Hammond, 2015). His creator is shown to have been a surrogate father for Edward to such an extent that he provided love and lavished care on him. The special relationship between the inventor and Edward can be seen through the way that the former home-schools Edward. It shows that he had a high regard for Edward and his potential of eventually fitting into the rest of society as seen where he ends up dying before he can fit hands on Edward to replace the scissors. Edward’s memories are extremely important because they promote a positive image of his being created and the good relationship that he had with his creator. It is also a means through which to see Edward’s humanity in such a way that promotes the advancement of the feelings of loneliness that he experiences following being shunned by the rest of society. In addition, Edward’s memories and his talents with using his scissor hands is essential in showing the close relationship that he shared with his inventor. The creativeness that the inventor put into practice when creating Edward is the same one that prompts Edward to come up with very good works of art, as seen when he trims the hedges and also sculpts ice during winter. Therefore, Edward can be said to have attained his creativeness from his creator and the memories that he has are quite human; allowing for the advancement of the idea that he is perhaps more human than the members of the isolated community who end up rejecting him because he reminds them of the human characteristics they are supposed to have.

The concept of the duality of existence is an important aspect of the Gothic imagination (Bye, 2015). Burton makes use of its extensively in Edward Scissorhands in such a way that allows the audience to witness character development as well as showing that nothing is at it seems at first. This is especially the case when Peg makes the journey between the town and the castle that is Edward’s home. The town is shown to be a place where there is extensive socialization, where individuals live in a community. The castle, on the other hand, is quite isolated, with Edward living alone in a world where he has no communication with anyone else. However, when these places are considered sometime into the film, one of the most important discoveries that the audience makes is that the town itself, despite being a place of community, is actually quite a lonely place. The sense of community in this town is actually quite artificial with individuals not caring about one another at all. Edward, after being introduced to communal life, is depicted as being lonely because the members of the community end up shunning him because of who he is as well as what he represents; a being that they cannot understand. The castle, on the other hand, turns out to be a place of refuge because after all the rejection that he undergoes, Edward returns to it to seek refuge and as Kim tells her granddaughter, she believes that he still lives there, making ice sculpture as evidenced by the ice shavings that scatter all over the neighbourhood. Moreover, the relationship between Edward and Kim is one that is unlikely to be a happy one as evidenced by the considerable differences between them. Edward is an artificial being with scissors for hands meaning that there is a high potential of him hurting Kim accidentally. In addition, their relationship, despite being a loving one, has the potential of leading to chaos as seen in the way that Jim’s violent reaction that leads to his own death.

Another essential Gothic aspect that is shown in the film is the mob, which represents some very pertinent themes. The mob is a powerful force in the discussion of cultural memory because it represents the short memories that human beings have when it really matters (Church, 2006). Edward is, at first, very well received by the community into Peg brings him. He is able to move freely within the community and is appreciated because of his unique talents with his scissor hands, which he makes use of constructively. However, when his reputation is damaged because of false rumours about him, Edward ends up in an awkward situation because the entire community, whose individuals tend to live very secluded lives, come together to challenge his presence in their community. The mob can itself be considered a monster because it shows the negative part of human nature. The actions of those involved in it is not based on common sense but is instead led by irrational emotions that are bent on destruction.

In conclusion, Edward Scissorhands shows that the communities, within which individuals live, which create the monsters that haunt them. Edward is from the beginning shown to be a likeable fellow who does everything he can to fit into the community. However, the community turns against him because he is different, leading to accidental situations that prove to be harmful, and fatal in one case. Edward is an instrument of reminding the community of how it perceives the world, and its perception of difference. The hostile way in which the community reacts to Edward without any evidence to back up their assumptions concerning him is relevant because it shows how the society as a whole reacts to such issues as race, sexuality, and gender. It shows that the community in which he lives is one that is intolerant and unable to accept those individuals that are perceived to be different; essentially behaving like the monster that they claim Edward is.

## Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

 Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a film whose plot revolves around the relationship between Willy Wonka, and Charlie Bucket. Charlie is a boy that lives in a loving and close-knit family, and despite being poor, the whole family is happy. Charlie’s family included both sets of grandparents, his parents, and himself, with all of them depending on Charlie’s father income. A local chocolate factory owner, Willy Wonka, makes the decision to create a competition for people all over the world so that those who qualify can visit the factory. This is after having gone into seclusion for sometime because of an incident of suspected industrial espionage. Five golden tickets are placed in five Wonka bars with the lucky people having an opportunity to visit the secluded factory. Charlie is among those who are determined to get the tickets although his expectations are quite low because of the poverty in his family. However, he eventually wins a ticket, which gains him entry into the chocolate factory. While there, all the other contestants are eliminated after several trials, with only Charlie remaining. Wonka surprises him by declaring him his heir, which is the grand prize for his being the winner of the competition. The prize comes with a condition; that Charlie has to leave his family behind. Charlie refuses to leave his family and rejects the prize, making the decision to remain with his family. Charlie later learns about the troubled childhood that Wonka experienced, especially with his relationship with his father. The two later reconcile and Wonka makes the decision to have the Buckets move into the factory along with Charlie.

 In this film, the factory is one of the most prominent features around the entire town. Its looming features can be compared to a sinister version of a Gothic cathedral, especially considering that the smoke stacks have replaced the spires that are normally found in these cathedrals. The looming aspect of the factory is designed in such a way that it promotes an image of dominance (Brammer, 2016). The factory shows the power that it has over the town and it looks like the entire town is dependent on it for its survival. It is like a giant among lesser beings; a sign of the power that Willy holds over the entire town. It seems that the factory was the employer of a considerable number of people in the town and that many of the people who were reliant on it for their livelihoods, such as Grandpa Joe, ended up losing their jobs following the industrial espionage claims. Therefore, the looming presence of the factory, in addition to showing its power over the town, is also symbolic of the substantial liking that people all over the world have for Wonka’s chocolate; explaining the enthusiasm by some individuals to take part in the competition.

 The factory is comparable to Edward Scissorhands’ castle because they are book massive structures that despite their size are isolated from the communities that surround them (Scherman, 2015). These structures act as refuges for both Willy and Edward because they are individuals who have not had good experiences in the world around them. The isolation that these structures have is symbolic of the isolation that their owners face and this is to such an extent that they have gone for years without leaving them. In the case of Willy Wonka, the factory is a sign of his outside posture as an unassailable individual who is not only perfect, but also makes products that people all over the world love. However, it only serves to hide his inner vulnerability because of the abusive childhood that he had at the hands of his father. The projection of strength represented by the factory is important in the film because it acts as a foreshadowing for the audience because it relates to its owner, who is actually a quite emotional individuals whose real emotions remain hidden away at all times. Therefore, Burton makes use of these massive and looming structures to show the audience the world within which Willy and Edward hide and feel safe after facing disappointments from the communities around them.

 The Bucket family home in the film is made to appear in such a way that promotes the image of poverty (Schober, 2009). This is a family that relies solely on one income; that of Charlie’s father. A consequence is that there is hardly enough to go around, as seen where Charlie is tempted to sell the golden Wonka ticket that he wins in order to help his family. The residence of the Buckets, when compared to the massive size of the factory, is the highlight of poverty. The situation can be compared to a gothic castle that loomed over the houses of peasants in medieval Europe. These differences seem to be an attempt by Burton to promote an image of the reality in the lives of the characters. Charlie has a very happy life with his family despite being poor; having close family around him all the time to provide him with moral support. Willy, on the other hand, despite seemingly having everything, from good looks to wealth, is an individual that in the end is found to be devoid of happiness. The imposing factory, which also serves as his residence, serves to hide the reality of his life because despite the show of grandeur, it actually houses an empty shell of a man.

 Burton explores the concept of surface perfection against internal decay in the development of his characters (Bassil-Morozow, 2011). In the case of Willy, there is an attempt to show him as a physically perfect individual with no flaws on his body. Moreover, his residence, the factory, is also portrayed as housing considerable perfection, in the form of candy, which is every child’s dream. However, there is a dark side to this perfection as seen through they way that Willy is in reality an emotional wreck. Willy was abused by his father as a child, being forced to wear braces because of his dentist father’s obsession with perfect teeth. In addition, Willy’s father denied him candy because of its potential of spoiling his teeth, and to a child, this must have been torture. A consequence was that Willy made the decision to become a confectioner because of his love for candy. While he was able to make his dream come true, Willy was not able to fill the void that was created by his lack of parental love. The seemingly perfect appearance of the chocolate factory actually houses some of the dark secrets of the traumatic events that Willy underwent as a child (Schober, 2012). At the end of the film, when Willy and his father meet after a long time, the latter notes Willy’s perfect teeth.

The perfection of the teeth was achieved through Wilbur Wonka’s forcing a torturous and disfiguring brace on his son (Leaman, 2014). It shows a parent that was unable to provide his son with the love that he needed and instead, it promotes an image of an individual that was obsessed with his profession. Willy also follows this attribute because he is also obsessed with his chocolate factory to such an extent that he loses trust in his employees following suspicion that someone had been conducting industrial espionage against him. Willy is also an individual obsessed with perfection to such an extent that he creates a perfect environment around him. This environment is most likely aimed at compensating for the lack of happiness that he experiences in his own life because of the traumatic events surrounding his childhood. Wilbur Wonka’s obsession with perfect teeth can also be considered a means through which he sought to compensate for the lack of affection towards his son that was his own fault. He seems to have lacked the time to spend with his son to such an extent that whenever they were together, his professional life came to interfere with his relationship with Willy. Thus, both Willy and his father are portrayed as imperfect individuals who are obsessed with perfection in order to fill the void in their lives.

In conclusion, Willy Wonka is portrayed as an individual with a damaged personality that is surrounded with perfection. The perfection essentially helps to hide the void that was left because of the lack of affection from his father. Charlie, on the other hand, is shown to have happiness despite the poor circumstances in which he and his family live. Charlie ends up being a redeeming factor in Willy’s life because he not only makes Willy understand that he cannot live in isolation forever, but also assists him to find his father so that they can make peace. In the end, Willy is able to find peace and seek to make sure that he is able to concentrate on his business while actually being surrounded by the perfection of the Bucket family’s happiness.

References

Bassil-Morozow, H. 2011. Individual and society in the films of Tim Burton. Jung and Film II: The Return: Further Post-Jungian Takes on the Moving Image**,** 206-224.

Brammer, R. 2016. Tim Burton. Screen Education**,** 78.

Bye, S. 2015. The imaginative world of Tim Burton. Storyline**,** 6.

Church, D. 2006. Fantastic Films, Fantastic Bodies: Speculations on the Fantastic and Disability Representation. Oﬁscreen, October.

Dubowsky, J. C. 2016. Queer Monster Good: Frankenstein and Edward Scissorhands. Intersecting Film, Music, and Queerness. Springer.

Goodlad, L. M. 2007. Looking for something forever gone: gothic masculinity, androgyny, and ethics at the turn of the millennium. Cultural Critique, 66**,** 104-126.

Hammond, C. 2015. Monstrosity and the Not-Yet: Edward Scissorhands via Ernst Bloch and Georg Simmel. Film-Philosophy, 19**,** 221-248.

Leaman, T. M. B. 2014. Changing Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

Potter, R. A. 1992. Edward Schizohands: The Postmodern Gothic Body. Postmodern Culture, 2.

Scherman, E. L. 2015. Mixed Assortment. Tim Burton: Essays on the Films**,** 36.

Schober, A. 2009. Roald Dahl's Reception in America: The Tall Tale, Humour and the Gothic Connection. Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature, 19**,** 30.

Schober, A. 2012. Wonka, Freud, and the Child Within. Lost and Othered Children in Contemporary Cinema**,** 67.