

## The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories

*The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy*: the name simply screams Tim Burton. How could a creative genius like Burton **not** be involved in a book about characters such as an oyster baby as well as a boy with nails for eyes? The book not only explores the unique characteristics and humanity of “Oyster Boy”, but also “The Girl Who Turned into a Bed”, “Stick Boy”, and other discarded characters searching for love in a world that rejects them because of their exceptional qualities.

When it comes to the movie screen, Burton has made his name through the creation of daring, dark creatures and stories. *Edward Scissorhands*, Burton’s most universally known character, epitomizes the tortured and emotional soul present in all his work. He created an emotionally complex character from a drawing he sketched as a teenager, and through that he displays his creative genius. Only Burton could possess the skill to form a moving and intricate tale from a fantastical sketch.

Edward lives in his own world, and when a kind neighborly Avon representative brings him down from his castle on the hill into the neighborhood that Edward has avoided his entire life, he doesn’t know the rules and expectations of this new society. He is termed a ‘freak’ by the inhabitants despite his thoroughly human emotions. Edward helps the girl he loves break into her boyfriend’s house on a mission to steal his parent’s expensive possessions. While the family and the police believe Edward simply does not understand the criminality of it all, when the girl asks him why he helped them break into the house if he knew it was wrong and he knew whose house it was, he responds with a simple: “because you asked me to.” Edward finds great joy in using his scissor-hands to

style hair, prune trees, and create all sorts of artistic masterpieces. He simply radiates sensitivity and compassion.

Though Edward epitomizes humanity with his emotional complexity, the neighbors still reject him and view him as a dangerous stranger. He longs for an unattainable woman and deals with relentless ridicule and bullying from the town. Obviously, Burton uses upsetting occurrences which most teenagers face, yet he hides them under a guise of dark, disquieting circumstances. He creates an outsider with strange features, such as hands made of scissors, but still manages to tug at the heart strings.

Again, in *The Nightmare before Christmas*, Burton creates another emotionally complex character with his “Pumpkin King” Jack Skellington. Burton generates an entire world where characters exist in their respected holidays. Jack Skellington, an actual skeletal character, lives in Halloween Town and finds himself longing for something different; something more. Every 365 days, holidays are celebrated in their respected towns. Halloween Town celebrates Halloween; Christmas Town celebrates Christmas; Thanksgiving Town celebrates Thanksgiving, and so on. Jack becomes bored with his repetitive and monotonous duties as “The Pumpkin King” and accidentally stumbles upon a portal to Christmas Town in the forest.

Falling through this tree-trunk entrance, Jack has entered the new and exciting Christmas Town. He faces things he’s never seen before, such as snow and happiness, and a spark ignites in his heart. In Halloween Town, Jack felt utterly alone and deserted and searched for happiness. Excited by his discovery, he poses the idea of Christmas to his Halloween cohorts and they begin to turn their Halloween into Christmas and take

over Santa's duties. Through a series of unsettling events, Jack realizes that he can't be someone other than himself, and returns to his Halloween holiday with new fervor.

Burton takes a universal feeling (isolation and wanting something more out of life) and turns it a theme surrounded by disconcerting, troublesome, and dark events. His ability to craft these extremely distinctive characters with completely human emotions despite their deplorable characteristics truly qualifies as genius. He blends the dark with the humorous in all his movies.

Similarly, as Burton moves from film into the print realm, he uses his book, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories* to create multiple outcast characters with bizarre and distinctive qualities, crying out for love and acceptance in a world that rejects them. "Oyster Boy" deals with his parents' disappointment and rejection, "Stick Boy" and "Match Girl" encounter fantastical issues within their short romance, and "Brie Boy" copes with exclusion from the other children. Burton possesses the truly ingenious capability to blend innocent, child-like characters with obscure and sensitive themes.

All of Burton's stories possess an unsophisticated, endearing value, but he writes them with a complexity that only an adult could understand. The underlying dark humor radiates from every character, and one simply finds amusement in the short poems such as *Jimmy, the Hideous Penguin Boy*: "My name is Jimmy, but my friends just call me 'the hideous penguin boy'" (*The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy*). The inexplicable brevity of this poem brings a smile to the reader's face, but the content requires the reader to sympathize and possess some empathy towards this poor character. His supposed friends ridicule him and he does not know any better. Burton draws in his audience by his

simplistic and lyrical writing, and despite the unique aspects of the characters, the reader commiserates and identifies with the misunderstood rejects.

The tone of Burton's poems displays a certain humorous element, though many convey a quite depressing concept. One can only expect Burton to blend the two. He has an amazing talent for injecting humor into the most depressing circumstances, such as he does with his character, James: "Unwisely, Santa offered a teddy bear to James, unaware that he had been mauled by a grizzly earlier that year" (*The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy*). Though one feels for James' unfortunate circumstances, the fact that Santa offers him a toy reminiscent of his attacker brings a causal and completely original sense of humor to the piece.

Despite its childish appearance (especially due to the original artwork from Burton), this book is not a child's book in the least. The themes are too complicated and disturbing for a child's mind. His short narrative poems prove what an unsettling and warped individual Burton is, but of course, anyone who knows his works probably already knew that. Those who enjoy Burton's creations and morbid humor would find great satisfaction with his book. Only he can possess the aptitude to make his audience squirm, wince, and cringe with laughter.

Burton uses the gruesome illustrations and melancholic storylines to appeal to that misunderstood, displaced person in all of us. His elementary yet twisted drawings both disturb and amuse. Without his illustrations, the stories would not possess the uniquely eerie and entertaining quality that they do. The visuals allow the reader to further identify with the character and see their freakish appearance. Despite the shortness of the book

(an adult could probably read it cover to cover in about 15 minutes, maybe less), it forces the audience to have compassion for Burton's macabre characters.

Yet again, Burton generates an eerily funny masterpiece as he moves mediums. Don't be fooled by the unsophisticated exterior; the book is full of deeper, darker, melancholic themes and illustrations not suitable for a young child. While it is unclear whether Burton wrote the book with a specific intention or whether he wanted to convey a certain point, the stories are very entertaining and emotional nonetheless. Burton forces the audience to feel massive amounts of compassion for the obscure, freakish rejects he creates. Any fan of Burton's movies will be completely satisfied with his new work.