Figure 166 - Tim Burton, *Curved Clown with Broom* (1984-1989)

Figure 167 - Tim Burton, *Clown with Poison Bottle* (1993)

Duality of life is another main feature of the Burtonesque, characterised by the co-presence of contrasting elements: the moving and the mischievous, the beautiful and the tragic, the funny and the heart-breaking. The co-presence of contrasting elements is what makes Burton's world grotesque. The definition of grotesque given by Kayser and Bakhtin and used in the second chapter perfectly fits the features of Burtonland. Burton shows us an estranged world, a world turned upside down. But at the same time he goes beyond our traditional view of the grotesque because he wants us to consider the world turned upside down as normal. As observed by Jenny He,

> There is often an environmental and atmospheric dichotomy. Two distinct worlds exist simultaneously —whether in the mind only or in an alternate reality such as the netherworld — and only a few selected characters traverse between the two. The "normal world is exposed as claustrophobic and suffocating while the "topsy-turvy" world is colourful, imaginative, and revelatory, and often turns out to be more logical.[436]

This is particularly evident in *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* (2005), a movie where there is a strong contrast between the dull and monotonous land of the living, and the funny underworld, populated by skeletons which recall the characters of the *danse macabre* and by a series of other grotesque figures. The contrast is realised also through the uses of colours: the living world is grey while the underworld is characterised by a strong presence of purples, greens and blues.

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[436] He, Jenny, "An Auteur for All Ages", in Magliozzi, Ron, He, Jenny, eds., *Tim Burton*, cit., pp. 16-23, pp. 18-19.
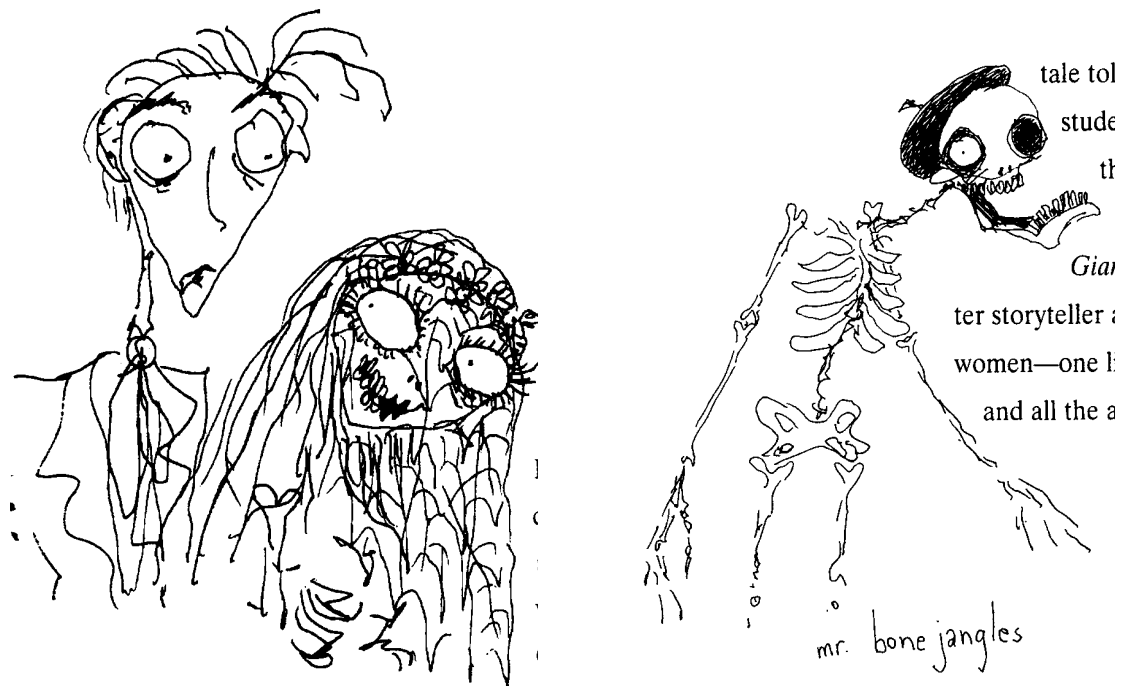
Figure 168 - Tim Burton, concept drawings for *Corpse Bride* (2005)
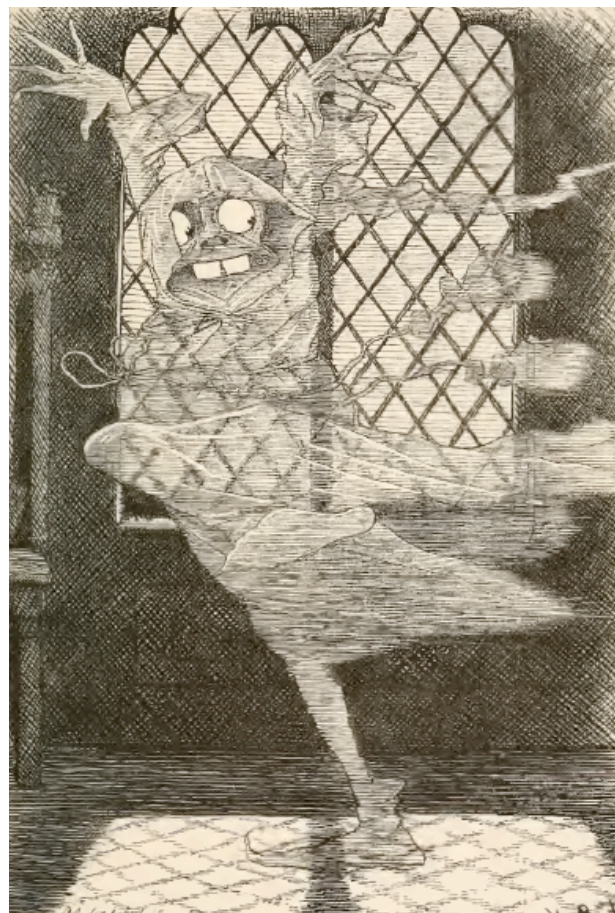

Figure 169 - Arthur Burdett Frost, *Rhyme? and Reason?* (1883)

Most characters and themes in Burton's drawings and movies can be considered as archetypes that the artist has been developing over the years. One of the recurrent themes in his work is the relation between childhood and adulthood, and, most frequently, the difficult passage between these two stages in life. Maybe this is the reason why he often uses science-fiction, gothic horror, fairy tales and children's literature as genres through which this theme, at once personal and universal, can be explored. These genres exploit liminality and extensively evoke monstrous transformations – not less frightening than those occurring during adolescence. As pointed out by Roderick McGillis,

> Gothic fictions keep reminding us that we are haunted beings, [...]. Adolescents are, perhaps, as intensely haunted or even more haunted than the rest of us. Their bodies as well as their social milieu are in flux, changing as they – both body and social group – morph (or should I say grow?) into maturity. The pressures both within and without on the early adolescent bring trepidation and confusion. The body begins to manifest its thirst for satisfaction in ways that test social decorum, and the social group likewise begins to manifest its thirst for pleasure and control. Peer pressure and biological urgency haunt the growing person, even in the light of common day.[437]

Burton's exploitation and remediation of children's literature is evident in all his work. As far as his films are concerned, maybe the most representative of this drama are *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas* is a full-length animated film realised with the stop-motion technique. The movie was not directed by Burton because at the time he was busy with other projects, but the artist created the story going back to an unpublished children's book he had realised during his Disney years, based on Clement Clarke Moore's *The Night Before Christmas*. Like all Christmas stories, it contains horror, transformations, and

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[437] McGillis, Roderick, "The Night Side of Nature: Gothic Spaces, Fearful Times", in Jackson, Anna, Coats, Karen, McGillis Roderick, eds., *The Gothic in Children's Literature: Haunting the Borders*, cit., pp. 227-241, p. 231.

final reconciliation. The protagonist of the movie is Jack Skellington, the Pumpkin King of Halloweenland, a place populated by a series of grotesque figures such as monsters, ghouls, goblins, vampires and witches. After years spent in organising Halloween celebrations, Jack starts to get tired of the same routine. Fascinated by the world of Christmastown, which he discovers by chance, he tries to bring Christmas under his control. His faithful dog Zero, who mirrors his owner in every feature, helps him in this adventure. Once again, through the figure of Jack Skellington Burton makes references to the *danse macabre*. In addition to this, most of the grotesque figures who inhabit Halloweenland are realised by melting together two kinds of animals. For *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Burton uses some of the concept drawings he had realised in 1980 for Tricks or Treat, a project which, eventually, was not realised. One of these concept drawings shows an animal compound very similar to a Totem with all its magic power. The proliferation of forms, unnaturally compounded, as in the Chimera, characterises the universe of *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas*. These images belong to an ancient tradition which Burton appropriates and remediates into the peculiar montage of stop-motion, which allows the features of a monster to take up their own life, visibly.

Figure 170 - Tim Burton, concept drawing for ***Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas*** (1993)

Figure 171 - Tim Burton, concept drawing for *Tricks or Treat* (1980)

In spite of his title, *Alice in Wonderland* is not the faithful adaptation of Carroll's Alice books, but a perfect example of their remediation realised by Burton. Released in 2010, the movie is a sort of sequel in which the original stories and characters exist as a subtext. Burton's Alice, in fact, is nineteen years old and the only memory she has of Wonderland is a recurrent dream about a strange land with bizarre characters and speaking animals. At the beginning of the movie she is attending a summer garden party with her mother and sister. During the party, Hamish, the son of Lord and Lady Ascot, proposes to Alice who, in that precise moment, spots a white rabbit, wearing a waistcoat and carrying a pocket watch, racing across the lawn. She runs off to follow it, falls down the rabbit hole and finds herself in Wonderland again. As explained before, since the very beginning of his career, Burton has always been fascinated by outsiders, "characters who don't belong or don't feel as if they belong in the world they live in."[438] For this reason he liked very

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[438] Salisbury, Mark, *Alice in Wonderland: A Visual Companion*, New York, Disney Editions, 2010, p. 26.

much the script provided by Linda Woolverton; in an interview about *Alice in Wonderland* Burton says: "What I liked about Linda Woolverton's take on the story when I read her script was that Alice was an outsider, a girl who doesn't quite fit into her society, her culture, and is trying to find her way in the world."[439] Actually, the theme of identity is essential also in Carroll's books. At the beginning of Chapter Two — The Pool of Tears — Alice asks herself "Who in the world am I? Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!"[440] As observed by Hugh Haughton "one of the great appeals of the Alice books is that [...] they dramatize the puzzling nature of identity in a world dominated by rules and rulers that remain obstinately unpredictable and indecipherable."[441] Burton dwells upon and emphasises the importance of the theme of identity, of the search for an identity, but, at the same time, he adapts this topic to his style, as he gives his own interpretation and brings it to a further development. Burton not only adapts the story and the themes in Carroll's books, but also the traditional imagery connected to Wonderland and its characters. Before beginning the design process, he gathered artwork from all the various artists who had illustrated Carroll's books over the years. That material was his starting-point, a sort of visual roadmap from which he took inspiration to create a Wonderland which was classic and new at the same time.

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[439] Salisbury, Mark, *Alice in Wonderland: A Visual Companion*, cit., p. 3.
[440] Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There - Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Hugh Haughton*, cit., p. 18.
[441] Haughton, Hugh, "Introduction", in Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There - Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Hugh Haughton*, cit., p. xli.

Figure 172 - Tim Burton, concept drawing for *Alice in Wonderland* (2010)

Figure 173 - John Tenniel, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)