

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Film is a type of visual art that integrates visuals, sound, and other aspects such as plot, characters, themes, setting, and style. In accordance with genres, films express particular themes and emotions among the audience. Genres in film include drama, science fiction, romance, comedy, and horror. Harsono and Sulistyani (2024) in their psychological study based on audience found out that interest in horror movies is because of a number of reasons, which include shared experience, cinematic aspects, relationship of emotions involving fear and pleasure, aesthetics, and association with characters based on mythology from the local culture. This cultural fascination provides a significant context for understanding the continued relevance of horror and Gothic cinema.

Smith (2013) defines 'Gothic' as a wide term with different meanings according to the context. At first, 'The Goths' referred to the Germanic tribe who settled in Europe from the third to the fifth centuries. However, Gothic later was reborn as a literary mode in the eighteenth century Gothic Revival with Horace Walpole's short novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) which is the first example of the genre of Gothic novel (Wright, 2007). The genre later evolved into Gothic literature (e.g. "*Frankenstein*", "*Dracula*", "*Wuthering Heights*").

Gothic as a genre in literature often blends horror and mystery. Botting in his work *Gothic* (1996) states that "Gothic atmospheres—gloomy and

mysterious—have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter’’. Gothic literature continues to be attracted to objects and traditions that are portrayed as transgressive, irrational, immoral, or fantastical (Botting, 1996) such as death, fear, horror, psychological terror, and a haunted atmosphere that can't be explained by a logical mind to explore the macabre. The core features include paranormal events or supernatural beings such as demons, corpses, skeletons, monks and nuns, evil aristocratic figures, fainting heroines, curses, monsters, and ghosts as the imagined and realistic threats (Botting, 1996), blurring the lines between the uncanny and reality.

As far as the genre of horror is concerned, the place of Gothic can be considered unique owing to its darker aesthetics, the supernatural presence, and eerie non-human creatures. Gothic features have been gaining significance as subjects of study in literary and film criticism. Previous studies related to Gothic literature have concentrated on the depiction of oppression and confinement of women along with their agency in literature. The research studies analyze the Gothic features of spatial confinement, supernatural imagery, and psychological tension as manifestations of male domination and gender discrimination (Puchol Vázquez, 2024; Ilie, 2022; Devi and Ghosh, 2024; Hu and Zhong, 2026; Yu, 2025; Bhave, 2025). It has been recognized that the female characters in Gothic narratives are presented as oppressed but still resisting.

However, most of these studies focus on literary works, with limited attention given to Gothic representations in film, particularly animated films. In addition, prior research tends to focus either on Gothic elements or feminist

perspectives separately, rather than integrating both approaches in a unified analysis. Consequently, this study aims to fill the gap by analyzing women's oppression in *Corpse Bride* (2005), combining Gothic theory and feminist perspectives to examine how visual and narrative elements assemble and represent women's oppression in the film.

The oppression of women still remains a major problem on a global scale notwithstanding the efforts made towards the promotion of gender equality. According to Sardinha et al. (2022), almost one third of all women in the world have been subjected to physical and/or sexual abuse at some point of their lives, which means that violence against women is one of the most widespread forms of human rights violations in the contemporary world. It is closely connected with patriarchal society where women are deemed inferior.

A research carried out in Nepal by Ghimire and Samuels (2023) found that patriarchal norms strengthen unequal gender relations by restricting women's autonomy, mobility, and participation in important decisions, while at the same time retaining male dominance over women's lives. This patriarchal dominance also manifests itself in the institution of marriage. A study on Chinese women by Zhong and Wilkinson (2025) revealed that although women have gained better legal rights and opportunities in education, many still experience parental interference, societal pressure, and gender stereotypes that prevent their freedom to choose a partner and decide the timing of marriage.

These conditions show that women's oppression continues to materialize through various forms of control over women's choices, agency, and autonomy,

which makes it an important issue to study both in social reality and in cultural depictions, such as films and literature. Nonetheless, studies examining how women's oppression is represented through Gothic elements in animated films, particularly in Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* (2005), remain limited. Therefore, further analysis is needed to comprehend how Gothic conventions operate as an instrument to represent patriarchal oppression and controlled female autonomy. Issues related to patriarchal control, women's autonomy, and gender-based oppression are frequently represented in literary and cinematic works. One of the cinematic works that portray these issues is an animated film titled *Corpse Bride* by Tim Burton, released in 2005. Through the experiences of Victoria Everglot and Emily, the film depicts how women are exposed to social expectations, controlled choices, and imbalanced power relations. Thus, *Corpse Bride* provides a valuable medium to examine and explore the representation of women's oppression through Gothic and feminist perspectives.

While the core elements of Gothic originated in literature, Gothic as a genre also influenced the film industry. Filmmakers were able to translate the elements of Gothic (the supernatural events, decaying and isolated landscape, atmosphere of suspension) into auditory and visual experiences as a way to intensify the psychological and emotional impact of Gothic storytelling through films, including animated ones. According to Rall and Jernigan (2015), the idea of the supernatural is prominently included in Gothic literature, and this genre has various narrative components that lend themselves effectively to visual representations through animation. Animated films would adopt these Gothic

conventions by using quirky stylized visuals and introducing fantastical universes, creating a quirky subgenre of Gothic animation.

One of the most famous directors working in the Gothic genre is Tim Burton. This is an American director whose style is distinctive because he combines the characteristics of the macabre and fantastic in his movies (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). This director is characterized by dark humor and odd settings and characters, which can be seen in his movies *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) and *Beetlejuice* (1988). The visual aspect of his movies is also visible in his stop-motion works like *Frankenweenie* (2012) and *Corpse Bride* (2005). His habit of exploring the duality of life and dark aspects of uniformity, along with his distinct visual style, has become so distinct that it is now referred to as Burtonesque (Middlemost, 2017).

Corpse Bride (2005) is an animation movie that belongs to the genre of Gothic dark fantasy. The directors of the film are Tim Burton and Mike Johnson.

The movie *Corpse Bride* was drawing inspiration from the Jewish folktale "The Finger". This movie reflects the distinctive style of Tim Burton, which is characterized by unique and fantastic visual effects. The movie is set in the Victorian era and follows the story of a young man named Victor Van Dort who accidentally makes a proposal and gets engaged to a dead woman, Emily. The movie is full of Gothic elements like creepy places, the supernatural, and the tension between life and death. Emily, the dead bride, is a brilliant example of Gothic characters in animated movies.

The title of the film "*Corpse Bride*" reveals the Gothic essence of the movie. "Corpse" refers to death and supernatural forces, while "bride" refers to marital status, femininity, and domestic expectations. Thus, the juxtaposition of these two elements forms a main paradox of the Gothic, wherein love, death, and marriage are connected. As Botting (1996) suggests, the Gothic tradition employs such elements as death, supernatural, and transgressions to reveal the cultural and social fears and anxieties. Consequently, not only does the title of the film expose the presence of supernatural atmosphere in the film but also the oppression of Emily, who remains a bride beyond life.

Despite the fact that *Corpse Bride* is a film from 2005 that depicts a Victorian-like society, the problems that were illustrated in the film are still relevant to our contemporary world. Gender inequalities and patriarchy still restrict women in making decisions, having full autonomy and mobility, and feeling safe within societies. As it has been reported by UN Women (2025), women continue to experience less equal rights in accessing various opportunities and spaces. Therefore, the depiction of women's oppression in *Corpse Bride* (2005) is not only a problem of the past; it is also a contemporary issue.

This study applies Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women as "the Other" to examine the positioning of female characters within patriarchal structures. This framework is useful to analyze how female characters are denied autonomy and agency as their roles are restricted by male domination, control, and also social expectations. In addition, Sylvia Walby's definition of patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices that exploit women acts as a supporting framework

to understand marriage as an institutional site of women's oppression. While Beauvoir helps to explain women's position as the "Other", Walby helps to clarify how marriage materially and socially reproduces this kind of subordination. Fred Botting's conception of Gothic conventions help to complement these feminist views to contextualize the film within Gothic traditions. And lastly, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory helps to examine how visual aspects work in the film as signs that reveal women's oppression within

1.2 Research Question:

- How do these Gothic elements represent women's oppression in the film?
- What Gothic elements are represented in *Corpse Bride* (2005)?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the Gothic elements represented in *Corpse Bride* (2005) and to examine how those Gothic elements represent women's oppression. The analysis primarily utilizes Simone de Beauvoir's "the Other" theory using Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women as "the Other" to explore the positioning of female characters within the film *Corpse Bride* (2005). Additionally, Sylvia Walby's definition of patriarchy and Fred Botting's definition of Gothic are used as supporting frameworks to contextualize the film within the Gothic conventions.

1.4 Limitation of the Study

The current study limits itself to an analysis of the Gothic aspects of Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* (2005) and doesn't include his other movies. Furthermore, although the present study includes an analysis of a movie, the production process and reception are not taken into account. Lastly, the approach to the analysis is based on Western Gothic and feminism perspectives, which may or may not appeal to other cultures.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it contributes to English literature and film studies by analyzing how Gothic literary conventions are adapted into animated film, demonstrating the exchange between cinema and literature. It offers a deeper understanding of Tim Burton's unique Gothic style, particularly regarding his portrayal of female characters, oppressive societal norms, and the intersections of gender and power within *Corpse Bride* (2005). By analyzing the representation of women's oppression through characters, settings, and themes of marriage and death, this study helps to shed light on how animated films can reflect and become a tool to critique rigid societal structures. Finally, it also provides a foundation for future research on Gothic elements within media adaptation of Gothic conventions with the attention to gender dynamics.

1.6 State of the Art

Prior studies have widely covered the correlation between Gothic features and the life of women in patriarchal societies. According to the research carried

out by Vázquez (2024), Ilie (2022), Diana Devi and Ghosh (2024), Hu and Zhong (2026), Yu (2025), and Bhave (2025), Gothic stories tend to depict women as oppressed, confined, restricted, and under patriarchal rule. Gothic features like supernatural imagery, haunted spaces, imprisonments, uncanny situations, and darkness operate not only aesthetically but also symbolically, as symbols of women's mental problems and power imbalance.

Moreover, these studies show that female characters in Gothic stories are placed into patriarchal settings but try to resist and strive for freedom at the same time. In this way, Gothic literature can become an effective means of representing and questioning gender inequality, women's agency, and patriarchy. From the results, one can assume that Female Gothic narratives always examine themes of confinement, identity, oppression, and resistance from the viewpoint of women.

Nevertheless, most of such research centers on Gothic novels and literature that includes books written by Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, Daphne du Maurier, Ann Radcliffe, Angela Carter, and Barbara Comyns. There is still not enough academic research related to animated Gothic stories. Additionally, previous research focuses mainly on individual female characters, while the oppression of several women depicted in an animated Gothic movie has been hardly discussed in the literature. Thus, this research will add to the field of Gothic studies and feminist theories, analyzing the oppression of Emily and Victoria depicted in Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* from the perspective of Gothic and patriarchy.