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The Carnivalesque Construction of a World: The Case of *Big Fish*, a Novel and a Film

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Abstract
This article introduces a new perspective on the concept of *carnival* as elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin. Through a comparative analysis of Daniel Wallace's work of fiction, *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* and Tim Burton's film based on it, an association between carnivalesque aesthetics and ideology is established and underscored. An attempt is made to recapitulate some of the major episodes of the fantastic journey of Edward Bloom, the hero in both texts, and his utopian path towards a society that accepts his own ideals. Thus, by means of a conscientious approach to both Wallace's novel and Burton's film, it is possible to confirm the validity and contemporaneity of carnivalesque ideology and how it continues to permeate various planes, not only of artistic production, but also of human experience and behavior. In sum, the analysis will focus on the processes and images that carnival provides for the construction of an ideologically-different world in Daniel Wallace's *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* and Tim Burton's film *Big Fish*.

Key words: carnival, literature and film, Mikhail Bakhtin, fantasy

Resumen
Este artículo introduce una nueva perspectiva sobre el concepto de *carnaval* elaborado por Mijaíl Bajtín. A través de un análisis comparativo de la obra de ficción de Daniel Wallace *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* y del filme de Tim Burton basado en esta obra, se establece y resalta una asociación entre la estética y la ideología carnavalescas. Así, se recapitulan algunos de los episodios más importantes del viaje fantástico de Edward Bloom, el héroe en ambos textos, y su ruta utópica hacia una sociedad más acorde con sus propios ideales. Se desprende entonces que por medio de un acercamiento concienzudo tanto a la novela de Wallace como a la película de Burton, es posible confirmar la validez y contemporaneidad de la ideología carnavalesca y cómo ésta continúa permeando diversos planos no solo de la producción artística sino también de la experiencia y comportamiento humanos. En resumen, el análisis estará enfocado en los procesos e imágenes que proporciona el carnaval para la

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construcción de un mundo ideológicamente diferente en *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* de Daniel Wallace y en *Big Fish* de Tim Burton.

Palabras claves: carnaval, literatura y cine, Mijaíl Bajtín, fantasía

The question of the Bakhtinian carnival never stops at the aesthetic possibilities that it presents, regardless of how varied and rich these may be. Today, as an eminently discursive practice, carnival has much more to offer to a world in which the artistic and philosophical mind is being more and more compelled to transcend its boundaries. Unlike any other time in history, now the individual—and especially the artist—is opening up to a universe of philosophical and ideological options that allow him/her to create and recreate his/her own environment almost at will. Carnival, in this respect, is one of such options, for it provides the ideological tools for the institution of a new social order. In this paper, therefore, the analysis will focus on the processes and images that carnival provides for the construction of an ideologically-different world in Daniel Wallace's *Big Fish: A Novel of Mythic Proportions* and Tim Burton's film *Big Fish*.

With regard to the effects of carnival on specific artistic practices like literature and film, first of all, it is important to draw attention to the fact that they go beyond the formal and structural onto the ideological and philosophical. Although the concrete and sensorial nature of its images is undeniable, long ago, carnival stopped being a mere aesthetic experience and was transposed onto the idealistic and subjective language of philosophy (Bakhtin, *La cultura* 40). Consequently, art and literature became the vessels not only of the aestheticism but also of the ideology of carnival. As a matter of fact, Bakhtin explains that carnival is a *festive* conception of the world, the world of ideals (14). Such conception, in addition, is anything but diffident or subtle. In fact, it is presented in literature and other artistic forms as a revolutionary movement that seeks to overthrow obsolete notions of the world and replace them with a renewed cosmovision. Bakhtin even states that the influence of the carnivalesque perception of the universe on human thought is rather *radical* (18). As a result, many of today's ideas about society and the individual are—although oftentimes unconsciously—determined by carnivalesque premises like deposition and renovation.

More specifically, Bakhtin intends to visualize the influence of carnival on human thought by exploring its effects on the literature of various historical periods, including his own. He thus determines that, more than others, some literary genres have experienced the process of carnivalization in a more thorough and dramatic way. One of such genres, which he especially refers to, is the menippea—named after Menippus, satirist of the third century BCE—, of which the *fantastic tale* is a modern form (*Problemas* 199). The menippea is

perhaps the best example of literary carnivalization in terms of ideological influence. Besides, it has reached contemporary literature more successfully than any other of the carnivalized genres studied by Bakhtin. As a matter of fact, the critic affirms that ". . . la menipea en las literaturas contemporáneas ha sido el transmisor por excelencia de las formas más concentradas y ostensibles de la carnavalización" (200). Accordingly, the role of carnival in the literature of today can be more easily and lucidly perceived in contemporary examples of mennipea, that is, in fantastic tales.

The menippea is framed by the effect of fantasy on the human perception of the world. Unlike more realistic, less carnivalized genres, the menippea finds in fantasy and adventure a thriving mechanism for the construction of new discursive possibilities. Besides, it intends to elucidate the relationship between the fantastic and the ideological in carnival. Furthermore, Bakhtin says about this genre:

> Su particularidad más importante consiste en que en ella la fantasía más audaz y la aventura se motivan, se justifican y se consagran interiormente por el propósito netamente filosófico de crear *situaciones excepcionales* para provocar y poner a prueba la idea filosófica, la palabra y la *verdad* plasmada en la imagen del sabio buscador de esta verdad. (*Problemas* 167).

As a consequence, it may be affirmed that the role of fantasy and adventure is to provide the chronotopic conditions for the development of a radical ideological proposal. Such proposal is mainly based on the questioning and testing of truths, on the confrontation of what Bakhtin calls *the ultimate questions*. According to Bakhtin, the fantasy and inventiveness of the menippea, along with the exceptional philosophical universalism of this genre and its deep contemplation of the cosmos, provide the arena for the world to be questioned (169). However, as with all other carnivalesque practices, no resolution is provided, for it is the ultimate *questions*, and not the ultimate *answers*, what characterizes the menippea as a genre and carnival as an ideological practice.

There is also an extremely relevant utopian component to the menippea, and therefore, to the role of fantasy as a source of ideological discussion in carnival. Since the realm of the ultimate questions does not allow room for any possibility of conclusiveness—as is the case with carnival in general—, the menippea deals with elements of *social utopia* (*Problemas* 172). Far from resolving or finalizing any significant ideological matter, utopian elements like dreams or fantastic travels provide carnivalesque options for the cyclical renovation of the universe and for the ambivalent creation of a new order of the world (216). Such possibilities, moreover, are in tune with the extraordinary situations that fantasy and adventure establish for the development of the philosophical undertones of carnival. In general, fantasy assists carnival in the implementation of its ideological agenda by questioning truths and then dreaming of changes.

In the specific case of Wallace's and Burton's *Big Fish*, both the questioning of truths and the utopian proposal of a new order of society are organized

mainly around the chronotope of fantastic travels. Although the chronology of the novel differs from that of the film, both texts follow a logical pattern in which the hero starts at a profound dissatisfaction with the world that surrounds him, sets out on a symbolic/ideological journey towards other possibilities of truth, and ends with a utopian proposal of change and renewal. In all of the stages, fantasy, dreams, and visions are the detonators of a carnivalesque search for what Bakhtin calls *a second world* (*La cultura* 11). Moreover, the ideological quest of the hero/heroine involves not only a movement from the real world to a world in reverse, but also from the individual to the social body. The hero/heroine becomes a true ideologue, and as such, the utopian message that he/she conveys by means of fantasy finally transcends him/her and materializes in the outside world. Thus, by means of carnival, his/her society, as well as the society of the reader/spectator, is ideologically questioned and transformed.

At the beginning of his novel, Wallace depicts a fantastic universe of decay, barrenness, and stagnancy, which will be recurrent in numerous passages along the protagonist's journey. "The sun baked the fine red Alabama clay to a grainy dust," the narrator describes, "and there was no water for miles" (Wallace 5). In the midst of this unproductiveness, the common individual becomes useless and unbalanced, like the man who ". . . went crazy, ate rocks, died. Took ten men to carry him to his grave, he was so heavy. Ten more to dig it, it was so dry" (5). Accordingly, both the individual and his/her world are miserably empty —or else full of unfruitfulness— and in desperate need of change, which in this case is purposefully represented by the image of water. Then along comes Edward Bloom, and his birth brings with it the "first cloud in weeks," and wind and thunder, and finally the longed-for rain (6-7). "The day he was born," William says about his father, "things changed" (7). It is noteworthy that Wallace should present one character as the ultimate agent of change in favor of a whole community. In this respect, he seems to be asserting, from the beginning, the immense potential for social change that a single individual possesses, and such presupposition shall accompany the hero all throughout his carnivalesque journey.

Early in his novel, Wallace establishes a contrast between his hero and the rest of the characters, who, unlike him, do comply with the standards that their world has imposed on them and are framed by its logic and nature. Edward is unlike every other Ashland resident in this respect, and Wallace uses the element of fantasy to show it. The year it snowed in Alabama, for instance, Edward built a snowman that surpassed all logical dimensions: it was "a full sixteen feet tall" (9), its eyes were made out of "old wagon wheels," its nose out of "the top of a grain silo," and its smiling mouth was "the bark cut from the side of an oak tree" (10). From young Edward's point of view, building an ordinary-size snowman would not have sufficed, for his idea of success implies a more ambitious perception of what the individual is capable of doing. In another passage, Edward did not freeze like the man he once saw "in a block of ice" on his way to school (11). In fact, the extreme cold did not affect him nearly as much, for he actually arrived earlier than expected. Like in the previous example, here Wallace depicts a universe of unbearable —sometimes even physical— restrictions that

are supernaturally overcome by the hero. In spite of all the logical obstacles that afflict Edward's world, he manages to prevail as no other character seems to be able to. Thanks to his bodily and cerebral strength, the hero becomes the exception to the norm, and as a consequence, his actions and reactions with regard to the conformity and triteness that surround him allow him to test the truths of his reality.

Although Burton does not portray the same kind of inhospitable environment that surrounds Edward in the novel, he does create a fantastic contrast between the hero and his fellow townspeople. Edward is able to surpass expectations and overcome limitations like no other character in the film. Even his birth "set the pace for his unlikely life," says Will in his narration, since it was marked by that fantastic element that will later establish the hero as an individual beyond his own world. Furthermore, Burton builds up Edward's higher character by making a clear-cut contrast between him and the character of Don Price, who stands for the norm and average of Edward's social environment. In several occasions along the film, Don is presented as a physically large and strong individual lacking in the personal and social skills that Edward superabounds in. Especially as a child, Edward surpasses Don morally, intellectually, and even supernaturally, for he is able to comfortably see in the eye of the witch what the other simply could not stand. Don's life and early death, furthermore, will reaffirm his inferiority with regard to Edward's high standards. By means of this contrast, Burton emphasizes not only the extraordinariness of Edward's character but also—and more importantly—the beginning of an undying struggle between the hero as an exceptional individual and the mediocrity and ordinariness of his world.

As he grows older, the protagonist of Wallace's and Burton's texts becomes bigger than himself, and consequently, bigger than his own world. More specifically, Wallace depicts a self-made carnivalesque hero coming from an underworld of worthlessness and social and spiritual drought up to a fantastic realm of endless possibilities of growth. The narrator describes, "They say he grew so tall so quickly that for a time . . . he was confined to his bed because the calcification of his bones could not keep up with his height's ambition, so that when he tried to stand he was like a dangling vine and would fall to the floor in a heap" (Wallace 12). Unlike the average Ashland resident, young Edward does not comply with the expectations that have been imposed on him by society and nature itself. Not even as a convalescent youngster does he follow the norm, for he rather decides to "use his time wisely, reading" (12). He read every single book in Ashland until he became even more knowledgeable than Mr. Pinkwater, the librarian (12). Edward's supernatural growth thus proves to be the perfect site for Wallace's carnivalesque ideology to start unraveling. As the individual grows wiser and more productive, his/her social environment does not always develop along with him/her at the same pace but rather falls behind him/her and ends up hampering his/her intellectual and spiritual potential.

Burton shares this idea and clearly supports it in his film through the correlative image of Edward's fantastic growth. In a tiny chapel, the whole

community of Ashland sings "Amazing Grace." The camera travels from the front along the chanting congregation until it stops at young Edward, whose voice cracks and drops a half-octave. Next, the boy notices that there is something wrong with his feet, which, as a couple of close-ups reveal, are inexplicably growing bigger and bigger by the second. Another close shot presents Edward's shirt buttons popping right out onto the head of the lady sitting in front of him since his chest and torso are likewise supernaturally enlarging. In the next sequence, young Edward dangles from some pulleys and levers right above his bed while adult Edward's voiceover explains, "My muscles and bones couldn't keep up with my body's ambition." Yet Edward's growth is not only physical but also intellectual. In spite of his unnatural situation, he reads and learns, and this is how he comes across an encyclopedia entry about the common gold fish. As a result, he discovers the reason for his condition: he reads out loud, "Kept in a small bowl, the goldfish will remain small. With more space, the fish can grow double, triple, or quadruple its size." The boy thinks this through, and adult Edward narrates, "It occurred to me then, that perhaps the reason for my growth was that I was intended for larger things. After all, a giant man can't have an ordinary-sized life." Even more explicitly than Wallace, here Burton introduces the spectator to his ideological stance. Through the use of fantasy, he conveys a basic necessity of the individual to grow out and free of social constrictions that hinder his/her ambition.

Like in the case of the menippea, *Big Fish* the novel and *Big Fish* the film make continuous use of fantasy and dreams to develop the character of their respective heroes, as well as the carnivalesque themes of change and renewal. According to Bakhtin, the fantastic logic of dreams particularly allows for the presence of carnivalesque ambivalence within the text (*Problemas* 248), which in turn offers a large gamut of ideological prospects for transformation and change. Dreams grant resurrection, renovation, and regeneration to the hero and enable him to see, with his own eyes, the possibility of a very different life (217, 224). Through dreams, the carnivalized genres of today create a second world in which the individual finds options instead of solutions.

The character of Edward Bloom in both the novel and the film is constructed around these parameters. He is a man of change, and on such account, also a man of dreams. "Dreams are what keep a man going," says Buddy Barron, one of Wallace's narrators, and Edward Bloom "was a dreaming empire" (Wallace 51). Metaphorically speaking, the need of a bigger pond where to swim drives the hero into a constant state of dreaming, for the possibilities of a second life lie precisely in his dreams and visions. In fact, in Wallace's text, Edward always had some sort of prophetic power that usually manifested itself in the shape of dreams about other people's deaths (115). Although Wallace attaches some carnivalesque hilarity to this fantastic skill, the truth is that Edward's visions grant him access to a whole new range of possibilities, one of which is the power of foreseeing the future and thus acting accordingly. On one specific occasion, William narrates a farsighted dream that his father had about his own death and the effect that it would have on people when it finally occurred (33-39). The fantasy

of the narrated events is used to explain how Edward is able to transform the perception that his world has about death and replace it with an alternative vision of joy and laughter. Ultimately, the faculty of dreaming enables Edward to effect changes on his own world.

Conversely, Burton does not give Edward any similar psychic capacity to foresee, through dreams, his own death—or else the death of others, for that matter. However, the director does attach a significant amount of importance to the fantastic visions through which the hero and other characters can envisage their future, and more specifically, their own deaths. Although in the film the future-telling power does not come from his dreams but from the witch's foggy eye, Edward is still able to see, with his own eyes, the revelation of a different life, one in which the fear of death has been eradicated. As he walks the old witch back to her door, the young hero declares that seeing the moment of his death in her eye might actually "help" him since, as he affirms, "Everything else you'd know you can survive." In the case of Don and Zacky Price, Burton shows the spectator blurry but appalling inside-the-eye shots of their corresponding deaths. However, the director purposefully omits all images of Edward's vision of *his* death. Instead, he presents the young boy's sweet face graciously smiling at his fortune. With this, Burton communicates that, as opposed to his peers, Edward has gained from this fantastic experience more than just a scare but the invaluable capacity to lead a different life and thus become a greater man than Don and Zacky can ever hope to be. On account of his vision, the hero has now acquired the possibility of constructing his own future upon the basis of self-confidence and assertiveness.

As the novel and the film progress, Edward grows closer and closer to that *world in reverse* which Bakhtin describes as the product of a carnivalesque experience of change and renewal (*La cultura* 16). The hero then starts to move away from a mere discontentment with the barrenness and stagnancy of his environment and instead directs his efforts to the exploration of a new world that is not ruled by the same norms and parameters. His dreams and visions, as a result, begin to come true for him and his social universe. This is where Edward sets out on a fantastic ideological journey towards that utopian realm that he will later preach to the rest of his world.

Like his dreams and visions, Edward's fantastic adventures provide the reader and the spectator with a clear carnivalesque depiction of a new cosmos of possibilities for human thought and behavior. For example, early in the novel, Wallace describes an extraordinary event in which the hero comes across a beautiful naked girl while she bathes in the river. He then sees a snake approaching her. "Cottonmouth, had to be," the narrator points out (Wallace 25). As the brave gentleman that he is, Edward swims towards the menacing animal. "She screamed, of course," William narrates, ". . . and he rose out of the water with that snake writhing in his hands, mouth searching for something to lay into, and she screamed again. Finally he was able to wrap the snake up in his shirt" (25). Nevertheless, a few lines later, the narrator affirms, ". . . in his shirt no snake at all, but a stick. A small brown stick" (27). "It looked like a snake," he

continues, ". . . especially when he [Edward] threw it in the river and watched it swim away" (27). The fantastic tone of the passage helps characterize Edward even further as a true hero. Moreover, it also provides an ideological possibility according to which the individual may perceive his/her reality and his/her world in a way such as to allow him/her to act heroically and thus transcendentally. In other words, it is from the individual's own perception of his/her universe that social change can truly be originated.

In his filmic version of this scene, Burton uses a dreamy bluish lighting design and a slow-paced background tune to enhance its fantastic aura. The tension then rises, however, with the appearance of the snake as it swims towards the girl in the river. Burton accelerates the pace of the music and alternates shots of Edward's uneasy expression —and then hurried breaststrokes— with the image of the snake's determined race towards its victim as a way to develop the action and heighten its suspense. The anxiety raised by the sequence reaches its peak when Edward finally grabs the snake and declares triumphantly, "I got him!" Immediately after, the girl plunges mysteriously into the water, and the hero is left confused and abashed in the middle of the river, only to discover that what he firmly holds in his hand is nothing but a wooden stick. A few shots later, young Jennie explains to Edward that what he just saw was not a woman but a fish. "Fish looks different to different people," she declares. In comparison with Wallace's passage, Burton underscores not only the hero's perception of the snake but also of the girl. On such account, it is possible to assert even further the ideological undertones of this fantastic event. To the eyes of the hero, the fish is a woman, and the stick is a serpent, and this provokes in him a reaction that compels him to risk his own life to save someone else's. From an ideological standpoint, Burton, like Wallace, seems to imply that there is something in the individual's perception of his/her world—and not in such world *per se*—that urges him/her to act in transcendental ways to change it.

The image of the extraordinary Asian woman/women that Edward encounters in one of his adventures likewise contributes to describe his unique perception of the world. In an attempt to provide alternative options to reality, both Wallace and Burton make use of fantasy to highlight cultural variety as a source of growth and moral and intellectual upgrading for their hero. On the one hand, Wallace's Edward claims that he once saw a beautiful two-headed geisha performing the tea ceremony, yet the grotesque quality of her appearance did not prevent him from admiring the gracefulness and nobility of her demeanor (Wallace 16). By means of this passage, Wallace establishes and praises the hero's high morality and respectability, as well as his remarkable cosmopolitanism, on account of which he is a more knowledgeable and honorable character. As an ideologue, Edward preaches not only the significant implications of intercultural tolerance but also a current social and individual necessity to broaden the scope of moral and intellectual comprehensions of the outside world.

On the other hand, Burton emphasizes the humor and the parody in the corresponding fantastic vision of the Chinese Siamese twins. The flirtation of their song and the familiar exoticism of their performance are cross-cultural allusions

and carnivalesque descriptions of the ambivalent alienation and intermingling of social groups that characterize contemporary —especially American— society, and the dual nature of their physique seems to mirror such conception. Burton does not undermine the alleged superiority of his hero's morality and cleverness with regard to cultural interaction; however, in this specific case, he does not necessarily make use of the fantastic to instruct the spectator on the relevance of cultural tolerance but rather to show the transcendental role of intercultural communication in the creation and development of a global community. Later in the film, the hero resorts to the affability of his relationship with these Chinese singers —now successful businesswomen— to fulfill one of his self-imposed tasks: buying a whole town. In any event, both Wallace and Burton portray a hero who, in his fantastic travels, has started to explore new and exotic possibilities to renovate his environment, and on such account, has become an ideological emissary of change.

As Edward advances in his fantastic journey towards a new order of the world, he encounters more and more possibilities for carnivalesque growth and renewal. One such possibility appears —both in Wallace and in Burton— when the hero meets Karl the Giant. The transcendence of this event is specially stated by Wallace's narrator. "But perhaps [Edward's] most formidable task," says he, "was facing Karl, the Giant, for in doing so he was risking his very life" (Wallace 29). The irony of the situation, however, lies in the fact that Edward soon proves to be figuratively larger than Karl, for he comes to take control not only over his own but also over the giant's future and survival. To Karl's dilemma of not having enough to eat, Edward has a solution: "Cook —Grow food. Tend animals," he says (33). As a result, "Karl became the biggest farmer in Ashland, but [Edward]'s legend became even bigger" (33). A parodic renovation takes place in this passage since the hero is truly starting to reverse his own world and his position in it —now *he* is the giant, the authority—, and to renew it upon the basis of fresher views and ideas. Besides, Edward's capacity to change other people's lives reflects his profound commitment with the reality that surrounds him. His largeness of spirit and mind transcends that of any other character —including the dreadful giant's—, for he, unlike anyone else in his world, can make real changes occur. As Wallace sees it, a truly *large* individual is capable of reversing his/her environment and thus changing its rules for the betterment of the whole. What is more, he/she must be strong and industrious enough to subvert the rigid hegemonic structure of his/her society and establish new parameters for social organization.

Likewise, in his film, Burton establishes a parodic contrast between Karl the Giant's enormous dimensions and Edward's unmatched disposition before the world. Similarly, Burton's protagonist faces the giant not without fear or bewilderment yet with the kind of unforeseen success that only a carnivalesque reversal of the natural order may allow for. As he chats with the giant, who has just sat with a crash on a colossal log, Edward appears physically insignificant and vulnerable. However, his sensible and intellectual superiority is evident. To Karl's confession of his unbearable condition, Edward replies, "Did you ever

think that maybe you're not too big, but maybe this town is just too small?" As it follows, the hero tries to convince Karl that the best solution for him is to leave town and look for a bigger place. He also has to clarify that his words are not merely rhetorical but that he himself wishes to leave Ashton and go to the big city. "You think this town is too small for you?" he tells the giant, "Well, it's too small for a man of my ambition." With a shake of hands, both characters set out on a journey towards bigger and better opportunities. Edward, however, is the leader, and this is even acknowledged, with much applause, by the whole town and its mayor, who gives the hero a key to the city upon his departure. Burton makes use of these fantastic events not only to depict a parodic reversal of the world but also to highlight the hero's necessity to grow out of the confinement of his environment and into a whole new realm of material and ideological prosperity. Like Wallace, Burton announces that a change of mentality in the individual will lead him/her and his/her society from the imprisonment of normality and routine to the openness of future economical, social and spiritual possibilities.

In the specific case of Wallace's novel, this movement from social and intellectual enclosure to the liberation of the individual soul and mind is most clearly stated by the chronotopicity of Edward's travels to various extraordinary places. The first one of them is "that small corner" of his native Ashland that remained underwater after the whole town was flooded (Wallace 36). Like in a fuzzy dream, the inhabitants of the area appear half-alive and *fishy* as they work and talk beneath the water, and "little bubbles leave their lips and rise to the surface" (36). Edward himself admits to the implausibility of this scene when he decides not to tell anyone about it. In any event, "[h]e couldn't," says William, "[b]ecause who'd believe him?" (36). To justify the consequences of his journey —namely the loss of his pole and boat—, the hero even has to lie and say that he was "dreaming" while his possessions were "drifted away" (36). Precisely, this dreamy, fantastic quality of the incident accounts for its ideological charge. The place and the characters in it are described as sluggish and slow-motioned, which contrasts with Edward's hasty journey underneath and back above the water. Wallace, therefore, seems to refer to the social lethargy and apathy by which his hero is surrounded in spite of his opposition to them. For the author, the natural freedom of the individual mind is necessarily hostile to —yet still constrained by— the drowsy effects of social stagnancy. Accordingly, Wallace —like Burton— establishes the character of Edward Bloom as an agent of change. He enters the *watery* world of conformity and proposes a more solid society ruled by the individual pursuit of economic and moral growth.

The image in Wallace of "the place that has no name" is another example of this carnivalesque struggle between the individual and his/her social surroundings (38). In this case, the effects of the environment on human behavior seem to be even more threatening, for they also involve moral corruption and decay. When Edward finally leaves Ashland, he arrives in a place that, as unidentifiable as it is, may allegorically be mirroring any social milieu. There, the hero meets a "strange lot" who welcome him fine and entreat him to stay with them (38). However, every fellow in town shows some kind of grotesque physical deformity.

Among others, there is a man with a shrunken arm: "[h]is right hand hung from his elbow, and the arm above his elbow was withered" (38), a woman whose face is half-frozen: "her lips sloped downward in the exaggerated form of a frown, the flesh around her eye sagging" (39), and a hydrocephalic boy who works as a sweeper and whose mother is the whore of the town (39). The misshapenness of these characters, however, transcends the merely grotesque and fantastic and thus comes to stand for the social vices that threaten to infect young Edward's innocence as, for the first time, he gets acquainted with the world beyond the limits of his native Ashland. As a result, the hero realizes that he simply cannot remain for too long in a place that does not offer him any possibilities for growth but is rather determined to corrupt him and deprive him of his natural intensity and force.

The strong power of persuasion and control that this world of social and moral corruption may exert over its visitors is best revealed in the character of Dog —also suggestively lacking proper identification—, who bites off the fingers of anyone who attempts to leave the place that has no name. Incidentally, this purposeful omission of naming with regard to the town and its guardian certainly stresses a lack of ideological identity that is categorically opposed by Edward's heroic activism. Nevertheless, the hero's fortitude and charisma are to be tested by the authority of the town's Cerberus. "He's like a gatekeeper" (43), says Willie, one of the locals, as he explains to Edward the role of the animal in town. Nevertheless, when Edward approaches and sticks out his hand to Dog, the creature, instead of biting it, starts licking it and wagging his tail. "Does this mean I can go?" (44) Edward asks. Much in spite of themselves, the townspeople will later have to admit that the answer to this question is a stout "yes." Although they do everything to delay and even thwart Edward's departure, when the time comes, Dog himself convoys the hero out of town (48). As a result, the forces of social corruption that the animal firstly embodies finally give way to the hero's superior morality. Next, he leaves unstained, ready to move on to a new ideological setting where he can truly construct a paradisiacal future, away from the vice and spitefulness that contemporary social patterning oftentimes imposes.

Much in contrast with Willie's expectations, the hero is actually *different* from the lot; he is anything but "normal people" (42). This is what ultimately reverses Edward's world and grants him newer possibilities for development as an individual and as a social agent. About his own town, Willie initially says, "This rain, this dampness is a kind of residue. The residue of a dream. Of a lot of dreams, actually. Mine . . . and yours," to which Edward hurriedly responds, "Not mine" (42). The world that Willie describes is one of hopelessness and social stagnancy, and he attempts to make Edward a part of it by equating him to the average visitor. However, the hero deviates from all traditional standards and is certain of what he truly wants, so he refuses to settle down to conformism and normality. As a result, he rebels and thus declares, "There has been a misunderstanding. I'm not here to stay" (47). In the end, Edward comes unaffected by Willie's —and the whole town's— cynically homogenizing perception of the universe. As a result, true to his character, the hero achieves the moral and

individual strength that will later help him help others overcome stagnancy and pursue a carnivalesque renewal of their world. Against all odds, Edward defeats Dog without even having to face him violently, and thereupon, still counting on all of his fingers, he starts effecting changes on the people around him.

Burton combines some of the characteristics of Wallace's underwater town and "the place that has no name" in the image of Spectre —especially in Edward's first visit to it—, in order to reinforce the common ideological struggle between society and the individual who, on account of his/her dynamism and progressiveness, usually opposes it. Although he does not approach social corruption with the same candor that the novelist does, Burton reveals in his film a profound preoccupation with the alienating, normalizing effects of society on the individual mind. The stillness and the quieting tone of the first image of the town as the hero crosses its threshold alludes to a world of stagnancy and numbness. No wind shakes the shoes that bafflingly dangle from a power line at the entrance of the village, and no human presence is perceptible, except for a statue-like, banjo-playing old man. In his description of "the place that has no name," Wallace describes a similar image of a ghastly man who stands among a crowd of villagers. "He was like petrified life," the narrator states, "His skin had dried and grown tight around his bones, and his veins were blue and as cold-looking as a frozen river" (46-47). Although Burton's version of this character is far less horrid, it is still highly suggestive of the social motionlessness that surrounds the hero. Only a few seconds of shooting show the old man softly rocking on a bench, yet his phantasmagoric presence, along with the mystifying background music and Edward's befuddled expression, undoubtedly adds to the ideological theme of the scene.

The fantasy of this stage in Edward's journey is further reinforced by the nature of Spectre and its people, who awkwardly welcome the young hero as if they had been expecting him all along. The villagers' offbeat warmness and the enticing spirit of their manners portray a fantastic vision of a universe of idyllic comfortableness which no *normal* person would even wish of leaving. Edward learns this soon enough, yet his idea of a truly valuable life is far from what Spectre can offer him. When entreated to stay in town, he excuses himself: "I have to meet somebody," he claims, "and I'm already running late." Nonetheless, the townsfolk will not hear of it, and the hero reluctantly follows them into the village to meet Norther Winslow, the poet who also came from Ashton some time ago but never left Spectre. Already indoors, Burton shows Beamen —the town's pseudo-mayor— in front and Winslow on the left contentedly rocking in their chairs as they wait for dessert. Edward is on the right still finishing his lunch, yet a subsequent close-up of his countenance soon reveals his unease and puzzlement at his companions. A couple of takes later, an under-the-table shot makes a contrast between Beamen's and Winslow's bare feet and Edward's shoes: the hero seems out of place. Not long after, the poet starts to describe Spectre: "Everything tastes better here," he affirms, "Even the water is sweet. Never gets too hot, too cold, too humid. At night, the wind goes through the trees, and you'd swear there was a whole symphony out there playing just for

you." As their inhabitants see it, Spectre is a small haven, but obviously not Edward's.

Like in the case of Dog in Wallace's text, the character of little Jenny is Burton's representation of the powerful obstacles that social conformity sets against a more enriching individual experience of the world. The girl steals Edward's boots right off his feet beneath the table and rushes out towards the power line from which the footwear of all other visitors is dangling. In spite of Edward's beseeching, Jenny tosses his shoes up in the air and successfully hangs them around the line. "Hey!" the young hero exclaims, "I need those," yet it is too late. Immediately afterwards, the other characters appear beside him and warmly usher him back into town. Burton depicts Edward's uneasiness at this point by using an enclosing shot of his fearful gestures as a group of uncomfortably friendly arms drag him towards them. "I agreed to spend the afternoon," Edward narrates in voiceover, "if only to understand why a place could feel so strange and yet so familiar." Although just temporarily, Jenny has accomplished her task of preventing Edward from leaving, which to the eyes of the audience reflects the enticing effect of society on the mind and character of the individual to force him/her to remain in a comfortable but detrimental state of security and contentment. Little Jenny, on account of her tender yet eerily roguish attitude, appears as a rather uncanny spreader of that infectious conformity and familiarity against which Edward will later have to fight. She is the youngest resident of —and thus the only hope for— the town of Spectre, and as such, she stands for the threateningly abiding force of social inaction. In the end, saying goodbye to *her* will probably be the most difficult trial for Edward to face upon his departure.

Nevertheless, the last scene of this Spectre sequence reveals the true nature of Edward as a fantastically strong-minded hero and as an agent of change and of carnivalesque ideologies of reversal and renewal. In the midst of the town's revelry and boisterousness, Edward feels uneasy and anxious. Burton shows this mainly by making use of three important devices: recurrent close-ups of Edward's twisted expressions and nervous smiles, spinning shots of the partying crowd all around him, and the increasing beat and urging tone of the dance music. However, all of this stops abruptly when Edward announces, "I have to leave…tonight." When asked why, he explains, "the truth is: I'm just not ready to end up anywhere." To this, Beamen replies astounded, "But no one's ever left!" However, the hero simply lifts his eyebrows and shrugs in response. "How are you gonna make it without your shoes?" Jenny asks, but Edward is determined to move on, though he affirms that he does not expect to find any *better* place. As a matter of fact, the only other option available for the protagonist at this point is a threatening dark forest, yet he prefers it to the strange familiarity and conventionality that the town offers. Besides, as a hero, his thirst for adventure impels him to move on in spite of the obstacles and search for alternative ways to advance and transform the world around him.

Edward Bloom is unlike any other character in Spectre —Burton emphasizes this fact ever since the beginning of the sequence, even by contrasting the

color of the hero's clothes with that of the villagers'—, and he greatly differs from the underwater people and the grotesque residents of "the place that has no name" —Wallace, on the other hand, makes this distinction not only physical but also moral. The hero's willpower and ambition are matchless and strong enough to overcome any attempt of alienation and homogenization against him, for he ultimately defeats both Dog and Jenny. The path for the hero to follow then deviates completely from whatever route society has designed for him, and on such account, both in the novel and in the film, Edward Bloom becomes an ideologue of change and renovation. The world that Edward wishes to find is far from being that which everybody else considers desirable and worth fighting for and keeping. Accordingly, Burton and Wallace portray the individual as a traveler in search of new options to create his/her own universe and attain happiness and success in terms of his/her own standards, based on struggle and ambition and away from social stagnancy and corruption.

As it has been made evident by now, Edward's fantastic experience of the world is also a realization of his social surroundings and the obstinate restrictions that they impose on his individual genius. The result of such discovery, however, is a resolute search for change, a strong-minded attempt to take control over his own life and make a difference in the lives of others. Edward's unbelievable journey, particularly in the novel, is a clear chronotopical manifestation of this process of change. Once he has witnessed corruption and overcome temptation in "the place that has no name," the hero is ready to move on and begin shaping a whole new utopian world one family at a time. Wallace describes such endeavor as rather adverse and unfavorable at first. At this point, William steps out from the narration to let Jasper "Buddy" Barron, vice president of Bloom Inc. and Edward's business successor, tell the story of his father's "first day in the world he would come to live in" (50). On the night of such day, Buddy recalls, Edward was beaten "within an inch of his life" (51) by two thugs. Injured and bleeding, the hero kept walking, "no longer caring or knowing where he was going, but just walking, forward, onward, ready for whatever Life and Fate chose to hurl at him next" (52). Accordingly, Edward's attitude in the face of hardship clearly preaches uprightness and fortitude as ethical and ideological principles for Western society. Furthermore, the hero's commendable endurance sets the tone for his subsequent actions.

Edward's supernatural capacity to tolerate physical pain and subjugate it to higher aims accounts for the fantastic in this passage. When he finally arrives at the Jimsons' country store, he finds help: the whole family is "determined" to save his life (52). "But of course," Buddy tells William, "he wouldn't let them. He could not let them save his life. No man of your father's integrity —and they are few . . .— would accept such charity, even when it was a matter of life and death" (52). Edward is a self-made man, and as such, his undying quest is to transcend his own boundaries —even the physical ones— but also to affect the lives of others in the process. As the exceptional character that he is, he ignores the poorness of his present physical condition and starts helping the Jimsons revive their business. "So," Buddy narrates, "still bleeding, and with one of his legs broken in

two places, Edward found a broom and swept the store clean" (52-53). He then went on to mopping his own bloodstains off the wooden floor until he dropped almost dead. The Jimsons were "awestruck" (53): what Edward was trying to do was "impossible —yet he tried" (53). Even as he expires —or at least as he seems to—, the hero grants his hosts a last favor. "*Advertise*" (53), he says, and thus his endeavor grows from the merely material to the ideological.

In this extraordinary passage, Wallace underscores three quintessential ideological coordinates for Western society: humanism, individualism and capitalism. In the image of the carnivalesque quest for renewal and rebirth that Edward has embarked on, Wallace recreates a material society in which these philosophical and political trends, among others, have become the guiding lights for the American ideal to transform and reconstruct realities around the globe. The Americanizing discourse in Wallace is evident —not only here but all throughout the novel—, and this underpins the currency of carnivalesque ideology, which in this case serves a very specific topical agenda. In other words, through the use of fantasy and dream, carnival here *reinforces* —and does not dethrone— some of the most relevant premises of American philosophy, which in turn are characterized by an undying search for change and revival. The Jimsons' humanitarian reaction, Edward's stubborn determination to be "his own man" (52), and the hero's solution for the family's financial problems —all within the context of his fantastic journey— act as ideological frameworks for Wallace to bring carnival to the present. Consequently, the ultimate questions brought under the spotlight by Wallace's supernatural world start taking shape and thus articulating the social utopia that characterizes this carnivalized novel in particular.

In the case of Burton's *Big Fish*, these same philosophical stands are present as discursive components of the carnivalesque nature of the text. However, besides the individualistic tone that evidently pervades both characterization and plot, the filmmaker most readily emphasizes the capitalistic ideals that govern both the hero's fantastic world and its intertext of twenty-first-century American society. Burton best achieves this ideological accent by way of the character of Norther Winslow, whom Wallace only mentions as one of the wretched residents of "the place that has no name," but Burton develops further in his version of the text. Once the "poet laureate" of Spectre, Winslow appears later in the film completely changed as a man. Edward runs into him at a small bank office in Texas during one of his business trips, and from their catching-up chat, he learns that, thanks to his influential actions, this old acquaintance of his has finally left Spectre and has been traveling around the world ever since. Furthermore, Winslow's priorities and aspirations in life have also changed. In the past, his only preoccupation was to finish an absurdly childish poem, whereas now, his true ambition is monetary. "I'm robbing this place," he confesses to Edward and, before the hero knows it, he has become this lawbreaker's partner in crime, his sidekick.

Nevertheless, Winslow's materialistic ambition and criminal behavior is in a way denounced by the moral codes of Burton's film. The director soon draws

onto the elements of parody and laughter as carnivalesque mechanisms to reverse the social and ethical order of his world but only temporarily, and in such manner, he renovates it. However, the capitalistic undertones of the text as an ideological production do not disappear with or are lessened by this image of corruption. Edward himself becomes a sort of financial guru who explains to the unknowledgeable robber, upon his discovery of the bank's insolvency, "the vagaries of Texas oil money and its effect on real estate prices, and how the lax enforcement of the fiduciary process had made savings and loans particularly vulnerable." In this passage, the hero reveals his mastery in economics but also his demystified vision of the world in which he lives. On such account, the fantasy of Edward's adventure appears as an ambivalent ground for the testing and analysis of capitalism as a contemporary social and philosophical practice.

As a result of Edward's career advice, Winslow arrives at a simplistic yet logical conclusion. He bends over to face camera across the car window and resolutely tells Edward, "I should go to Wall Street: that's where all the money is." A couple of shots later, Burton presents a nostalgic image of a dreamy landscape at dusk. The silhouettes of a horseman and an oil drill against the beautiful sunset seem to make reference to the agrarian and industrial forces which were the drives of American economy during the last century. In this same take, in contrast, Winslow appears standing and pleasantly smiling on the side of the road as he watches Edward leave in his car. He holds a "handi-matic" —one of the multifunctional devices that the hero sells from state to state— close to his chest, which incidentally shows that Edward has also taken commercial advantage of his conversation with Winslow while they were driving across Texas. In this shot, Burton establishes a visual contrast between America's agricultural and industrial past and a present and future of economic and commercial liberalism based on technological development. In addition, this image also foreshadows Winslow's extraordinary success as a modern businessman since, thanks to Edward's advice, he is destined to become a successful stockbroker. The hero, on his part, thus advances in his carnivalesque attempt to establish a new social order in which capitalism plays a transcendental role. Following Burton's portrayal of Edward's fantastic world, a new society is constructed also at such earthly levels as the financial and commercial, which in the end are but a material reflection of a more transcendental worldview.

Edward's idea of a utopian society, naturally, does not rely solely on the financial prosperity that may be achieved as a magic result of commercialism and capitalism. For him, the basis for social change lies in individual hard work, and not only to make money and buy a nice white-picket-fence house but also to gain control over his own life and over his unfavorable surroundings. In the chapter of the novel entitled "His Three Labors," Wallace underscores this view of the reality. Now a married man, Edward has to undergo a series of fantastic trials until he finally reaches his right place in the world and becomes the successful man that he has always intended to be. First, he worked as a veterinarian's assistant, and "his most important responsibility was to clean out the dog kennels and cat cages" (Wallace 91). However, his labor was frustratingly useless since

as soon as the animals were restored to their enclosures, they would "shit" in them again (92). Second, he worked as a salesclerk in a department store, where he had to sell a girdle to the most enormous, unfriendly woman, Mrs. Muriel Rainwater. Nevertheless, this time his labor turns out to be more productive and rewarding, aside from the fact that he also gets a first glimpse of what his true professional vocation will be in life: selling. "You'll go far here, young man," the woman presaged after the hero accomplished the impossible task of finding the perfect girdle for her (95).

Finally, "[t]he third and last labor of Edward Bloom had to do with a wild dog," which he ended up killing in a fantastic feat of wit and physical strength. As "the fiercest, most terrible dog of all" jumps over the standing hero (97), determined to attack a little girl, "Edward Bloom was able to thrust his hand through the dog's hair and skin and into the body proper, clutching and finally ripping out his massive beating heart" (99). The result of such an incredible exploit was that the whole neighborhood finally accepted the hero and his wife as part of their community. In all of the aforementioned episodes —the last one included—, Wallace makes use of fantasy to reveal the true essence of social and individual growth. As Edward grows from failure to success, from the ordinary to the extraordinary, and from anonymity to social recognition, his idea of building a better world finally starts to materialize.

This cause-effect relationship between hard work and accomplishment is not new to American literature. As early as in 1784, Benjamin Franklin highlighted industry and resolution as two of the quintessential attitudes that every Puritan man was supposed to adopt and foster in order to achieve moral perfection and individual success. Like in Wallace's novel, such values also seem to play a very significant role in Burton's text, and they even appear a little earlier in the case of the filmic narration. When Edward leaves Spectre and sets out to find his own path, he and Karl arrive at Amos Calloway's circus, where the hero has his first supernatural encounter with the beautiful Sandra Templeton —his true love—, and the giant discovers his future as a show business star. For Edward, however, the distance between falling in love at first sight and actually *attaining* the love of his life is quite long, and the only way to shorten it is through labor. When Amos hears about the young man's intention to find the pretty blonde girl in the blue dress, "the woman [he is] going to marry," he discourages him on account of his lack of status, experience, and income. He even tells him with disdain, "You don't have a plan. You don't have a job. You don't have anything except the clothes on your back . . . You were a big fish in a small pond, but this here is the ocean, and you're drowning."

Nevertheless, Edward's determination is overwhelming, and he finally convinces the ringmaster to help him find the girl of his dreams. "Every month you work for me," Amos concludes, "I'll tell you one thing about her. That's my final offer." This is how the hero gets initiated into the "real world," by working hard in order to reach his goal. Burton makes use of various shots to show Edward's labors. Among other things, the hero has to entertain the audience by risking his life in more than one way, he has to bathe a massive man as if he were an

elephant, and he even has to shovel off real elephant excrement, until he finally performs the ultimate task: liberating Amos himself from his unnatural response to frustration and despair. Turned into a wolf, the circus owner attacks the hero, but the latter manages to subdue him by showing him some sympathy and granting him the kind of attention and "social niceties" that he lacks. As a result, Edward obtains the necessary information and then leaves in search of his love. Like the novel, the film emphasizes hard work as a source of not only financial but also emotional success. In terms of American standards, both the novelist and the filmmaker appear to be establishing a connection between the carnivalesque search for renovation and progress and a Yankee ideological tradition of struggle followed by material and spiritual reward.

In both Wallace's and Burton's texts, the hero attains status as a liberated individual and social being. Due to his exceptional willpower, perseverance, and hard work, he is able to transcend the limitations of his own environment and even reverse its traditional order once in a while to become the kind of character who can achieve whatever prize he endeavors to obtain. In such manner, Edward is a sort of American Adam, "the mythic New World hero" (Guerin et al. 187). His radical, charismatic personality, his historical and ideological emancipation, and his "self-reliant and self-propelling" disposition turn him into the kind of hero that has the potential to actually change the universe and acquire the "Edenic possibilities" that the American Dream offers (186-187). Furthermore, Edward is also capable of changing other people's mind by preaching his own unique vision of the world as a place of struggle but also of endless potential. His final goal is to create a "second paradise," a society of "boundless opportunity," and thus accomplish—like Wallace and Burton themselves —the great American Dream of success (186, 188). Edward Bloom, however, maintains a very particular notion of life and individual achievement, and on such account, many traditional truths are put to the test throughout his journey. Consequently, his heroic nature is both a mythical and a carnivalesque explanation of the universe.

One of such truths is the ultimate question of warfare, especially in the context of the ideological struggle between American nationalism and individualism. Interestingly enough, in the specific case of the novel, Wallace lays a bigger emphasis on the image of Edward as a visionary man than on his role as a passionate American soldier, for "he wasn't the cynic, he wasn't the lover," the narrator states, "and he wasn't the radio operator. He was, of course, a sailor" (Wallace 101). As opposed to "a general, or a captain, or an officer of [some] kind" (101), Edward was simply a sailor, which did not give him much of a chance to stand out as a military hero but ultimately allowed him to explore the immensity of the world —honestly his only conceivable reason for going off to war—, hence the relevance of the chronotope of the ocean in the middle of conflict. William explains that, "[b]eing surrounded by water, by horizons everywhere he looked, made [Edward] consider the greater world lying beyond, and the possibility that the world held out to him" (102). Later, when the ship he was on sinks, Edward's only concern was to swim farther and farther after the magical girl who waved for him to follow her. This is how he saved his own life and the lives of a group

of fellow sailors, but at such point he decided that "he wasn't going back. He was going home" (105). Wallace's depiction of warfare is therefore far from proclaiming any kind of American nationalistic discourse. In this passage, war is perceived merely as a trial in the hero's quest, a personal opportunity to grow and learn about the world, but never is it described as a field for the hero to display his political or military affiliations.

Likewise, Burton does not promote the idea of war as an estimable ideological pursuit but rather parodies it and questions its contribution to the construction of a true social and ideological renovation. However, like in the novel, war in the film plays a transcendental role in the shaping of the hero as an agent of carnivalesque change and renewal. Although the parodic tone of the scene is primarily aimed at other non-American ideologies like communism, its individualistic discourse is strong enough to also blur any attempt to truly promote Occidental nationalism or militarism. Instead, the emphasis is laid on the hero's individual actions to complete his task and go back to his beloved Sandra as soon as possible. By showing them a portrait of his fiancée, Edward convinces the Chinese Siamese twins to help him out of their country and join him in his trip back to America, the land of opportunities —once again, the myth of success is present.

In this whole war-related sequence, the hero's physical strength is certainly stressed, but it is his unrivaled power of persuasion what in the end grants him success. On the side, Edward also takes advantage of his rhetorical skills to instill in his accomplices the same sense of individualistic struggle for achievement and prosperity to which he lives up. Like Wallace, Burton ignores any American nationalistic or militaristic propaganda and replaces it with clear references to individual capitalism, which accounts for the social change that the carnivalesque ideology of the text as a whole endorses. Consequently, the chronotope of international warfare represents no more than a stage for the hero to display his material and ideological superiority and thus achieve more effectiveness in his discourse, as well as a renovated thrust in his undying quest for change.

Edward's ultimate attempt to change his world, however, is his unlikely decision to buy a whole town "for the love of it" (Wallace 149), and in this case, his actions become more transcendental than ever. In this stage of his fantastic journey through life, Wallace's Edward comes across a small utopian paradise called Specter. William describes it as "a beautiful little town full of small white houses, porches and swings, beneath the trees as big as all time to give them shade" (144). The dreamy quality of this place attracts the hero powerfully, so he decides to purchase it, lot by lot, house by house, and store by store. He considers it a "sad [but beautiful] place" (146), so he turns it into his own private world, and he comes and goes as he pleases. Nothing changes in Specter, "nothing but the sudden and suddenly routine appearance in town of . . . Edward Bloom" (147). However, Edward's universe is not complete until he has made it fully his, so he does have to make one little change, his own individual contribution. He then tracks down every single property in Specter until he finds Jenny Hill's swamp and convinces her to sell it to him and move into a pretty cottage downtown. But

the hero's transformation of Specter goes beyond mere material or geographical changes. With the amazing story of his life, William declares, "Edward Bloom reinvented [the townspeople], so they reinvented him" (160). In the end, this is how he renovates his world and constructs his utopian society: by telling stories and making them significant to others.

Burton has already described this paradisiacal setting in Edward's first visit to Spectre. However, it is in his *second* visit —now that he is grown man— that the hero is truly able to transform its order and renovate it, thus behaving like the actual agent of social change that he was destined to become. Upon his second arrival in town, Edward discovers a completely different place. It now looks like a ghost village, and Burton's particular use of music and color helps enhance this aura. As a result, old Jenny narrates, "Edward Bloom decided to buy the town." The following shots reveal the hero as he persuades his old friends —now successful businesspeople— to finance his dream. "In that way," Jenny explains, "he made sure the town would never die." Additionally, Burton describes Edward as an ideologue who pursues his project of building a new society in spite of all the obstacles. Even obstinate young Jenny finally surrenders and yields to the hero's overpowering determination. In fact, her old shack becomes the ultimate image of the social progress that Edward Bloom has come to establish. Unlike Wallace, Burton does portray the change in Spectre as a physical transformation. The final image of the town corresponds to a colorful place illuminated by elegant street lamps and countless little light bulbs which have replaced the ominous shoes that used to hang above the street. However, once again, Edward's influence upon others is much more perennial than home improvement: it has to do with ideology. The legend of his life has survived, and along with it, all of his ideas about a new order of the world.

In the end, Edward's true success still corresponds to his capacity to persuade others to think and act like him. His own son William falls prey to his charm and finally succumbs to the power of his magic. Fantasy is then transposed onto the realm of logic, and as a result, a real change occurs in a real world. In the novel, William even admits that he and Edward "have switched places" (Wallace 68), but not only because the former is now taking care of the latter but especially because the son —through his narration of the fantastic events of his father's life— has turned into an ideologue himself. Accordingly, Edward's ideology of life and society and his utopian venture of creating a whole new world in reverse are transferred over to his son, who, much in spite of himself at the beginning, finally embraces the task in his storytelling, even though, as he admits it, "No one believes a word" (180).

This ideological transfer from father to son is made even more evident in Burton's film, for it is possible to almost tangibly perceive it in William's expression as he tells the fantastic story of his father's death. His nervous chuckling, his gleaming eyes, and the increasingly passionate tone of his voice reveal that he truly accepts his own tale as true, even though he absent-mindedly declares, "It's…It's unbelievable." Besides, one of the very last scenes of the film presents William's son in the pool narrating to his peers one of his grandfather's fantastic

tales. As a result of his friends' skepticism, the little boy opts for his father's reassurance. "Dad!" he calls, "That's right, isn't it?" Off the shot, William responds, "Pretty much." The spectator is then left with the belief that Edward's transformation of the world has actually taken place, and that the utopian paradise that he once pursued lies indeed in the myth of his life and in the stories that both his son and his grandson will tell to from generation to generation.

William's final assimilation of his father's perception of the world into his own reality necessarily entails a carnivalesque fusion of fantasy and logic. Both Wallace and Burton have been accomplishing this by way of their alternating narratives of Edward's extraordinary tales and his actual medical condition. However, there is one episode in both texts that most particularly and suitably depicts this coexistence of the fantastic and the real. "One day," says Wallace's William, "when I went out to check on him [in the pool], I could have sworn I saw a fish —a small-mouth bass, I thought— break the surface for a fly. I was sure of it" (Wallace 168). Burton's William, in turn, witnessed a similar miracle when he was cleaning up the pool. Among the leaves and the slick of algae that cover the surface, and from underneath the green murky water, the flip of a catfish momentarily ripples against the exterior, at whose visage William jumps in disbelief, alarmingly dropping the skimmer pole from his hands. This blending between the logic and the fantastic realms helps explain the carnivelesque function of the latter as a space for the testing of truths and for the deconstruction and renovation of conventional perceptions of the universe. In fact, this is precisely what William experiences in this passage. In sum, both Wallace and Burton see in the use of fantasy and imaginary travels a successful mechanism for the establishment of a new order of the world.

Likewise, the reader and the spectator are also influenced in their reception experience by Wallace's and Burton's depictions of fantasy and reality. As Edward becomes a big fish at the end of both the novel and the film, the texts' addressees accept the hero's carnivalesque creation of a utopian world in which the natural laws of social and individual behavior have been utterly transgressed and reversed by way of fantasy. Through his final metamorphosis, the hero ultimately transcends all natural boundaries and thus teaches society his last lesson. The utopian second world that he has constructed in his tales is not in this life but in a *bigger* place. With his death and transformation, Edward escapes all social and ideological constraints and finally reaches freedom in the immensity of the water. In this manner, Wallace and Burton seem to be telling their audiences that the individual must part from the confinements of his/her environment and abandon all conventionalities in order to accomplish complete renewal and full spiritual development, that is, in order to inhabit that utopian society that carnival proposes.

The purpose of Edward's fantastic journey has been to completely renovate his perception of the world and thus discover new possibilities for social and individual development. Such process has been marked by the unbelievable and the extraordinary, that is, by the carnivalesque, and this has provided him with much more opportunities for growth and renovation than any conventional setting

could have ever granted him. He started out as a young boy who did not fit into his own body and ended up becoming a legend, a *very big fish*. As an ideologue, Edward has rejected social stagnancy and conformism and instead has advocated for individual action and progress, which has always led him to experience the most unlikely situations. He has built his own personality upon the basis of optimism, ambition, ingenuity, integrity, determination, and hard work. He has made a change in other people's lives and minds only on account of his persuasiveness and awe-inspiring attitude towards the world. Thus, he has spread the word of a utopian vision of society that relies mainly on the scope of an individual's dreams and aspirations. Moreover, he has sympathized with current philosophical trends like individualism, humanism, capitalism and economic liberalism and has adopted them as the bases for his actions, which speaks of the contemporaneity of his carnivalesque ideology. Yet he has tested such ideologies and has reconstructed them and renovated them in his stories as many times as fantasy has allowed him to. All told, Edward Bloom, has transformed himself and the world around him, and in the process, he has also transformed literary and cinematic audiences all around the globe.

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