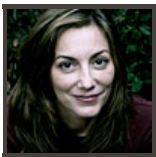


GINA PICCALO

How Helena Became a Freak

by Gina Piccalo



In the new movie *Alice in Wonderland*, Helena Bonham Carter plays the big-headed Red Queen—her latest over-the-top role. How the British goddess began playing weirdos.

Helena Bonham Carter is talking about her inner child, nestled as she is in yet another romantic and whimsical getup, this one reminiscent of Madonna circa *Like a Virgin*. She was "an obedient child" whose early film roles, *A Room With a View*, *Howard's End* and *The Wings of the Dove*, were rooted in the rigid mores of English society's Edwardian era.

She can't bear to watch those movies now. There's little trace in them of this vivacious being here, a woman whose cackling laugh surely echoes down the hall of her Hollywood hotel. Only the corsets of those roles foreshadowed the Gothic babe she would become, the tousled muse to the phantasmagoric Tim Burton.



Disney

Alice in Wonderland marks the sixth time that Bonham Carter has worked under Burton's direction, which isn't easy for either one of them.

Today, Bonham Carter is better known as the white-haired witch Bellatrix Lestrange of the *Harry Potter* series, the blood-thirsty baker Mrs. Lovett in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and the evil Red Queen with the oversize head in this month's *Alice in Wonderland*. "I didn't think, 'Oh my God! How do I break out of my corset?'" she says, tucked into the sofa of her hotel room, playing absent-mindedly with the copious ornaments around her neck.

Indeed, that urge was more of a subliminal whisper from her past. Bonham Carter's youth was overshadowed by her mother's nervous breakdown and her father's disabling stroke. She lived at home until age 30. She was 35 when she met Burton on the set of *Planet of the Apes*. And by then, she was ready to reclaim some of the playfulness she'd relinquished so young.

"I'm definitely always drawn to being a child again," says Bonham Carter, 43. "I think that's probably why me and Tim get on. He's a kid too. Johnny [Depp] is too. We're all self-affirming arrested development.... So maybe I'm having a second childhood. A real proper childhood."

She certainly looks like she's having fun. At Disney's *Alice* press conference last month, Bonham Carter was lively and candid, speaking in rapid-fire bursts that seemed aimless but somehow nailed a punchline.

One moment she was laughing hysterically into the microphone after an earnest Crispin Glover (who plays the Red Queen's paramour the Knave of Hearts) told a

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roomful of reporters that he hadn't read Lewis Carroll's book until recently. "What's so funny?" he asked his overcome cast mate. The next moment Bonham Carter was griping about how Burton's special effects made her less attractive. When someone asked her about her penchant for her macabre roles, she quipped, "As I get older, I only get villains at the moment."

Bonham Carter is clever with the press. As she has made the rounds promoting *Alice*, she's shared quite a bit about her eccentric relationship with Burton. There is, it turns out, a lot to talk about. She [told the Daily Mail](#) about their pet nicknames for each other (Big Chief Little Patience for him. Little Squaw Running Mouth for her) and The Guardian about what she sees as [Burton's autistic tendencies](#).

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March 2, 2010 | 10:45pm

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ortega

There aren't so much roles that you can play with that moustache.

3:25 am, Mar 3, 2010

(1)

terrycollmann

Right - and remind us just how perfect-looking you are?

4:23 pm, Mar 7, 2010

maxiepad

The author of this article read my mind. I had been thinking about how HBC used to be such a proper, prim, sweet girl (I'm thinking "A room with a view") and now she exclusively plays weirdos ("Planet of the apes", "Harry Potter", "Fight club", etc.)

It's unfortunate, because she obviously has a broad range. I blame Tim Burton and his penchant for the gothic.

7:29 am, Mar 3, 2010

(1)

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CoddledEgg

I was thinking the same thing two weeks ago when I saw the unappealing Alice trailer- Bonham Carter was so pretty in Room with a View and now she only takes roles where she is made to look grotesque. Only in Hollywood can that be counted as growth.

The author seems to skate around this very question- How Did Helena Become a Freak? Thats never answered.

One can understand taking some daring roles. Buts its been how long since a conventionally beautiful role? Maybe there were a couple since Frankenstein but thats it. She obviously gets offered her old Merchant Ivory roles so she is picking the grotesque. At this point I think its an outward manifestation of inner unhappiness.

12:38 am, Mar 4, 2010

(3) | | |

Kiyomi

I think it's true, as maxiepad said, that she obviously has broad range. And I too would like to see her do more films that aren't in the same style as Tim Burton's films. But I guess the part where I veer away is the part where you comment on her not taking any more roles that make her more "conventionally beautiful".

It's possible that she feels beautiful in her every-day life and doesn't need public adoration for her looks to make her feel "ok". That she understands that this movie is a job. And the idea that a woman should consider whether or not, during the performance of her job duties, she's allowed to look beautiful while performing those tasks, before deciding whether or not to take the job offer seems like a skewed sense of priorities ("Don't do too many things that don't allow you to look beautiful while doing them"). Or maybe after doing all of those Merchant Ivory type roles, she's found that she personally finds these fantasy-world, over-the-top types of films/roles to just be more fun for her to participate in.

I guess what's bothersome particularly is that it hints of the old attitude that what women have to offer is their physical beauty, and to have it and yet not use it is somehow offensive to the public. Apparently to the point where you would assert that there must be some sort of emotional disturbance ("I think its an outward manifestation of inner unhappiness").

It's as though you're saying, "the fact that you don't care whether or not you appear to the public (and make your money by being) as beautiful to our standards of convention must mean that there's something wrong with you. It can't be alright that you don't seek out that approval, or adhere to our rules, or have other things that you find far more important. The idea that you would actually choose to do something that, while it may be fun for you, will compromise how aesthetically pleasing you are while doing it, is a sign of some sort of emotional/mental issue."

I don't know, maybe it's just me. But I feel like that attitude is a bit questionable.

4:11 am, Mar 4, 2010

|

CoddledEgg

"It's possible that she feels beautiful in her every-day life and doesn't need public adoration for her looks to make her feel "ok"."

Perhaps she does. But when she select 12 roles that portray her as a freak I think there is a pattern there.

Compare her to Merle Streep- who isnt a great natural beauty, like I feel HBC was. Streep has a variety of roles some of which play up conventional beauty like Mama Mia and Devil Wears Prada. Charlize Theron did Monster and Aeon Flux. Even Christiana Ricci does glamorous roles.

I wouldnt be surprise if we didnt find something weird was going on with HBC mentally 20 years from now.

From a film goers stand point, I thought Terminator Salvation was a worthwhile movie, but she served no purpose in it. If she would take over Kate Hudson's or Cameron Diaz's career,movie going would be greatly improved.

1:43 pm, Mar 4, 2010

terrycollmann

And you received your degree in psychiatry from where?

4:24 pm, Mar 7, 2010

akcita

Interesting double standard. Johnny Depp plays the freakiest roles on the planet and he is a genius, but poor Helen is a freak?

What drivel.

8:23 am, Mar 3, 2010

(1) | |

easton

absolutely right, couldn't have said it better myself. She is starring in an adaptation of a Children's classic book, and working with a great cast and director. She sounds like she is having a wonderful life.

1:59 pm, Mar 3, 2010

clearthinker

Johnny Depp can play a freak and then come back and play a more conservative character. Carter has become typecast as a freak and that is all she can do. It is sad because she has become predictable. Even a freak can be boring.

11:55 am, Mar 3, 2010

comink

It seems impossible for HBC not to be influenced by Burton in her film choices. Physically, she isn't a classic film beauty. She's beautiful, but in a weird way. That also lends itself to the quirky roles. (in Room With A View she was wonderful, but her odd hunched posture was distracting and weird)

1:15 pm, Mar 3, 2010

AstroBoy

So she lives in a world of her own just by living with Burton, choosing whaever roles she wishes for herself with the freedom to have fun, what esle would you want out of life? Living fantasy and reality all the way, i'm jealous. And even in her older roles she has a twisted quality that few can muster. Can't wait to see Alice...

2:31 pm, Mar 3, 2010

Cinghiale

She's best cast as an over-the-top character, since those roles are the only ones that can accomadate her awful overacting. She's like a car that can only go at one speed. She's terrible.

3:53 pm, Mar 3, 2010

magicmary

I would gladly trade my normal boring job to be exactly the same kind of freak. Way to go Helena - what a fun life! And what a brilliant weirdo!

4:49 pm, Mar 3, 2010

AgathaX

I loved "A Room with a View." Perhaps by the time she's in her 50s or 60s she'll appreciate a bit more subtlety.

8:45 pm, Mar 3, 2010

TK798999

"akcita

Interesting double standard. Johnny Depp plays the freakiest roles on the planet and he is a genius, but poor Helen is a freak?

What drivel."

I agree with the above post.

Sexist double standards rule, unfortunately even from female writers.

10:16 pm, Mar 3, 2010

Siouxie921

What about "Fight Club?" She was fantastic in that, and I believe that role redefined her as an actress.

2:00 pm, Mar 4, 2010

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