

Society restricts us, that is the message of Gore Verbinski's 2003 film *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*. The restrictions on freedom, actions, and most importantly romance, are portrayed through the relationship of the leads, Will Turner, and Elizabeth Swann. Verbinski illustrates the social laws placed on both the wealthier and lower classes, causing discontent for both. From details in the costume design, the dialogue, as well as the cinematography, Verbinski highlights the desire between the leads, as well as the social institutions driving them apart.

Verbinski's theme of restriction is introduced early on in the first act, when the blacksmith's apprentice, Will Turner, reunites with his childhood friend, the wealthy Elizabeth Swann. Immediately, Will's thematic struggle is introduced through his environment. Will is a fish out of water in the English manor, where Verbinski introduces him to the viewer, with long hair, and cheap brown clothes. Will is involved in a professional yet patronizing barter with, Elizabeth's father, as Will delivers him a pristinely crafted sword. The two are soon interrupted by the sound of movement at the top of the stairs above them. A beautiful English woman is carefully trotting down the stairs, this is Elizabeth. In contrast to Will, Elizabeth is in an elegant dress, only noticing the men, when her father calls her name. Verbinski provides the audience with a close-up shot of Will's face, looking taken stunned. Despite her regal appearance, the air of formality is dropped immediately as soon as she sees Will, excitedly calling his name while running down the stairs. Elizabeth maintains her friendly demeanor, enthusiastically telling Will about her dream last night about when they first met. This level of rapport seems to visibly agitate Elizabeth's father. In contrast to Elizabeth's warm hello, Will maintains a level of formality, addressing her as Ms. Swann despite her requests for him to not. This lack of reciprocation seems to upset Elizabeth, saying farewell to Will, as Mr. Turner, before being

escorted out of the mansion by her father. It is only when Will is alone, watching Elizabeth board a waiting chariot, does he finally utter “Elizabeth.”

The reuniting scene establishes the shared mutual affection, between the two leads. The affinity between these two characters is made apparent through their actions and dialogue, especially on Elizabeth’s side. Immediately, when Elizabeth interacts with Will, Verbinski makes clear her feelings for him. The choice to have Elizabeth only announce Will’s name when she notices the pair of men, despite it not being him that addressed her, illustrates to the audience her unusual level of excitement to see him. Coupled with her rushing down the stairs to talk to the man, is a very strong indication of affection. This continues in Elizabeth’s written dialogue. Despite her formal appearance, she speaks casually to Will, telling her about her dream last night which involved him, something commonly understood as a personal conversation. Even more direct than that, Elizabeth specifically asks Will, to address her by her first name. This act as a signal to the audience that Elizabeth is written like Will. Even if more subtle, the use of Will also works to show mutual attraction. The deliberate choice to show Elizabeth’s entrance, from a low angle looking up, links the viewer to what Will below her would be seeing. Then, by cutting immediately to a close-up of Will’s face, an understanding is created that Will’s expression of awe and shock is due to seeing Elizabeth. In this context, Verbinski visually shows how the character Will views Elizabeth, and the audience also understands Will’s admiration for her beauty. This admiration is later explicitly shown. When Will is alone for the first time, he utters the word “Elizabeth” as a sign to the audience of his true feelings for her. Verbinski chose to have Will break the formal behavior he’s been exhibiting, to show the viewers he was only pretending to not want to be close to Elizabeth.

The reason for the disingenuous formal behavior is also established in this introduction. Purely from a visual standpoint, it is clear that Will and Elizabeth are vastly different. Will is dressed in heavy brown clothing, with dark unkempt hair, compare this to his surroundings. Pure white, with even the servants dressed in white, white wigs as well, this continues onto both Swanns. The choice to have such a visual contrast shows one thing about the situation. Will is socially below Elizabeth. This builds the audience's understanding of Will's lesser status. The decision to have Will only address Elizabeth by her last name, when given express permission to do the opposite, demonstrates how restricted he is supposed to be. Verbinski confirms this through the use of Elizabeth's father. Portrayed with darting uncomfortable eyes, and even attempts to stop Elizabeth's informal conversation with Will, Verbinski uses his elitist behavior to represent the culture keeping Will, from actively pursuing his feelings, which in turn curtails Elizabeth's feelings.

Despite the fantastical premise of *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the core relationship between Will and Elizabeth captures the sad reality of the era, and that is still alive today. Even with Elizabeth's more lavish living conditions, she too suffers from this perception of whom she can love, while Will believes he has no choice but to hide his feelings. This dynamic shows the lack of freedom that perforates romance, by those who tell us whom we can desire. However, the feelings do not stop. Will still uttered the word "Elizabeth" and the feelings between them still exist. *Pirates of the Caribbean* poses the choice of whom to listen to in love, yourself or the world.

#### Work cited

Verbinski, Gore. 2003. *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.