CHAPTER 2

SHADOW DANCE &

THE MAGIC TOYSHOP
CHAPTER 2

This chapter examines the two novels *Shadow Dance* and *The Magic Toyshop*; it focuses on the feminine elements in them and shows how these elements are worked out in the text of these novels. It also expresses the effect of lore and its ideas over writing these novels.

*Shadow Dance*

*Shadow Dance* is one of Carter's novels that lore has its fingerprints on it and is one of the feminine lore of Carter's rewritings. According to Linden Peach, "Carter's novels frequently, explicitly and implicitly, refer to mythology, the bible, European and English literary works, Renaissance drama, fairy stories, European art, film especially Goddard and Bunuel, opera, ballet, music, and psychoanalytic and linguistic theory.........in *Shadow Dance*, when Morris enters the cellar of the house where his friend is to kill their woman friend, he is compared to a character in a nursery tale and to a protagonist in a Greek tragedy (p.135)."¹ To answer a question by Ana Katsavos Carter says:

---

In a sort of conventional sense; that Roland Barthes use in Mythologies – ideas, images, stories that we tend to take on trust without thinking what they really mean, without trying to work out what, for example, the stories of the New Testament are really about.²

\textit{Shadow Dance} became one of the feminine lore rewritings. According to Peach, \textit{Shadow Dance}, \textit{is a complex, feminist and psychoanalytical exploration of post-1950s England}.³

\textit{Shadow Dance}, indeed explores themes, images, and ideas. In fact, there are no much critical studies available about this novel; it appears that literary critics have ignored it. "The first novel has been largely ignored by literary critics".⁴ This novel seems regular. Despite the bleakness of the novel's plot, however, the magic resides in what one reviewer called "a dark luxuriance of bizarre images."⁵ \textit{Shadow Dance} is evidence of Carter's characteristic concerns with the material world as she explains in her \textit{Notes from the Front Line},

\ldots...this world is all that there is, and in order to question the nature of reality one must move from a strongly grounded base in what constitutes material reality .... I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice.⁶

\textit{Shadow Dance} is a novel filled disorderly with the imagery of junk and rubbish as is the seedy antique shop that serves as the novel's main setting. The owners, Morris Gray and Honeybuzzard, spend their
time freeloading in abandoned and ruined houses for saleable leftovers. According to Mark O'Day⁷, "Morris and Honeybuzzard in Shadow Dance, interested in the mutability of categories and values surrounding the reuse of things. What is discarded junk or rubbish in one context can be shifted to a new one, done up or combined creatively with other 'second-hand' things, and achieve a new function or purpose: making money, for instance. Morris and Honey specialize in stealing Victoriana from derelict old houses, due for demolition, which they can then sell to American tourists in Morris's junk (sorry, antique) shop:

They were looking, primarily, for American-bait.... They looked for small, whimsical Victorian and Edwardian articles that could be polished or painted and sold as conversation pieces. Although there was always the chance of finding built-in furniture i.e. cupboards, corner cupboards, window-seats with backs, etc. that were the age of the house itself and, cunningly extracted from the house, cleaned and polished, could legitimately be termed Georgian or Regency, such finds were rare. (pp.87-8).

There's a moment here, at 'built-in furniture', when the thought that they might sell the whole house, were it possible, comes to mind; instead of London Bridge, shop a genuine Victorian terrace back to your private museum in the States (I'm sure it's been done). Honey is the one who's been reading the new Sunday colour supplements to find out what's supposed to be trendy with gullible Americans, and we see here, on a small and amateurish scale, the packaging of Britain's past which
was to mushroom into the full-scale tourist 'heritage industry' of the 1980s.

Morris is a failed painter who escapes from his dreary life with his wife Edna into fantasy or junk-sleep joy, "he loves to nose questingly among the abandoned detritus of other people’s lives for oddments, fragments, bits of this and that." (p.23-24). Honeybuzzard, gleams with sexual ambiguity and artificiality. He is a great performer, who slips in and out of various roles, from childlike innocent to sexual sadist. Playful and beautiful, Manipulation and power are his favorite games, and he plays them with a combination, as his name would suggest, of charm and voraciousness. Morris, from whose point of view the novel is narrated, comments that for Honeybuzzard "even sex was a joke, a savage one" (p.77). And Honeybuzzard treats as a joke even the most vile of his actions, knifing and brutally disfiguring the face of his former lover, Ghislaine, who, in a passion, an excitement and a rage of self-abasement, continues to pursue him. Released from the hospital, she hovers on the fringes of people’s sympathy and in Morris’s nightmares. Only Honeybuzzard seems careless about what he has done, although he is perversely amused by her letters of forgiveness, seeing in them an opportunity for further trouble and harm.

Ghislaine’s conversation with Morris begins the novel, but she is largely absent from the rest of it. The circumstances of her disfigurement remain a mystery, although Morris, who is certain that Honeybuzzard was the performer, nonetheless finds Ghislaine far more frightening. Morris is so terrified of contact with her that he flees from even her imagined presence and, in doing so, admits his complicity in
her attack. Blaming her for the failure of their one sexual liaison, he once handed her over to Honeybuzzard, saying, "Take her and teach her a lesson" (p.34, 37). The consequences of his "sort of joke" (p.37) multiply horribly, leading to suicide, despair, and finally Ghislaine's murder at Honeybuzzard's hands.

**Nature of the novel**

We notice the religious imagery in the novel. The novel paints men as angels or Christ figures, but women as suffering saints or objects to be consumed and used. It sounds that women are often associated with food: Emily is fruitcake, Ghislaine is sacramental wine, Edna and Emily cook, and the Struldrug serves food in the café. Sexuality becomes a parody of communion, as the vampire motif associated with both Honeybuzzard and Ghislaine implies. Honeybuzzard finds religious images powerful; they provoke his increasing wickedness because they seem to permit his treatment of women.

In "Notes from the Front Line," Carter writes that in the late 1960s she came to an awareness "of the nature of her reality as a woman";...... throughout her writing, therefore, she explores the imagery that creates the "social fictions" of women’s lives. Shadow Dance, seems to explore the social images that, most disturbingly, make women complicit in their own victimization. In later novels, Carter will portray women as strong enough to rise above oppression, but here she is documenting the various forms that oppression can take. Ghislaine's suffering concludes in her confession to Honeybuzzard: "I've learned my lesson, I can't live
without you, you are my master, do what you like with me” (p.169) Edna’s more domestic masochism is described as Victorian, when “girls were gentle and meek .... and laid their tender napes beneath a husband’s booted foot” (p.45). Only Emily resists the pattern, despite finding herself pregnant with Honeybuzzard’s child. Emily is strong, practical, and self-possessed, although the novel suggests that these qualities result from androgyny: “one might almost have taken her for a boy dressed up as a girl” (p.67). On the other hand, Honeybuzzard’s increasing madness corresponds to his increased and stereotypical feminization. From irritable temper peevishness to carrying lipstick, he is compared to mad Ophelia after he murders Ghislaine, and he cradles the plaster Christ in his arms as if it were a baby.

Truly friendly and unbreakable relationships seem only to happen between men. Women exist for sex, but not for friendship. When Honeybuzzard describes Morris as “David to my Jonathan” (p.58), he seems to be assuming a true bond of affection, although Honeybuzzard’s psychopathic behaviour is a puzzling basis for such closeness. The friendship between Morris and Honeybuzzard seems to take more than the model of man to man, but using it as a foundation for excluding women from any friendship.

Woman can, in fact, be harmful to the union. Morris and Honeybuzzard’s dance in one of the abandoned houses ends, not because of Honeybuzzard’s “fierce embrace” (p.95), but because Morris, who has been calm into a dreamlike state, imagines that it is Ghislaine who sticks to him. In terror at this vision, he throws Honeybuzzard away, and they flee the house because they feel it has asserted an evil
will. It is Emily who calls the police, despite Morris’s attempts to stop her, after she and Morris discover Ghislaine’s body. Although Morris has abandoned his wife with ease and relief, he feels he cannot betray his friend, so he returns to the house and to Honeybuzzard.

Morris and Honeybuzzard have a more than economic interest in trash; indeed, they enjoy themselves in the leavings of other people’s lives. Moreover, there is an implied sinister indication to their hobby, because it generalizes to include their treatment of women, who are equally objects to be used and discarded. Morris “gives” Ghislaine to Honeybuzzard, attempts to lead Edna into bed with Oscar, and is lastly reassured that his neglect has allowed Henry Glass to “inherit” (p.160) her. The painting he creates of “a decaying female form, dead, in a brown desert” (p.124) makes the connection clear, echoing Morris’s association of Ghislaine with a Francis Bacon painting “of flesh as a disgusting symbol of the human condition” (p.20). The houses and Honeybuzzard pillage are symbolic equivalents to the women in their lives because both are treated as dirtiness and decay. Once the excitement of the new find has been exhausted, the houses, like the women, are deserted to destruction.

*Shadow Dance* begins with a meeting between Morris, the novel’s main character with his narrative voice, and Ghislaine, a beautiful girl, now badly disfigured by a scar which is ‘like a big, red crack across ice and might suddenly open up and swallow her into herself, screaming, herself into herself’ (p.10). The scar, a quite literal boundary-line which divides Ghislaine’s face into two halves'
The whole cheek was a mass of corrugated white flesh, like a bowl of blancmange a child has played with and not eaten. Through this devastation ran a deep central trough that went right down her throat under the collar of her coat .... But the other half of the face was fresh and warm as fruit in the sunlight (pp. 152-3).

Morris, shocked by his guilty feelings of complicity in Ghislaine's wounding, the scar comes to represent a conceptual break between the past and the present; what Ghislaine was and what she is: "a beautiful girl, a white and golden girl, like moon-light on daisies, a month ago. So he stared at her shattered beauty' (p.3). He finds this rift in normality horrific, terrified that her face "might suddenly – at too large a mouthful of drink or a smile too unwisely wide or a face-splitting request for “bread and cheeeeeeese” – leak gallons of blood and drown them all, and herself, too' (p.3).

As Morris's fixation on blood in the above quotation suggests, the disruption of his world is represented primarily through violence. In the bar which is a glorious testament to sixties tastelessness, 'a mock-up, a forgery, a fake; an ad-man's crazy dream' (p.1), Ghislaine's presence arouses an anticipatory tension among the crowd of regular drinkers. Like emotional vampires, they gather to witness 'an orgy of emotion, with blows and tears and violence’ (p.8). While a fight does not actually break out, Morris has a bottle thrown at him as he leaves the bar. Unable to believe that he is unhurt, his shock at the aggressive act throws him into

...a metaphysical hinterland between intention and execution ... there was a dimension, surely, in the outer
nebulae, maybe, where intentions were always executed, 
where even now he stumbled, bleeding, blinded ... (p.11).

In a sense, Morris's worst fears have indeed been realized. He 
has staggered into the crack that has opened up between past and 
present, reality and fantasy, and precipitated into a world composed of, 
in the words of Lorna Sage, 'leftovers, quotes, copies, in which 'the 
borders between art and trash, life and death, are busily dissolving'.

Honeybuzzard is a creature of the sixties cultural hinterland, and 
thus inherently problematic, he is an irreconcilable combination of the 
sweet and the predatory — 'beautiful', but also 'indefinably sinister' (p.56); 
a compulsive liar who, because he believes his own stories, is 
perversely sincere. His games and affectations are inventive and 
entertaining at the same time as being exploitative and, eventually, 
murderous.

He is also definitively camp, both in his mode of dress and his 
cultural attitudes. His 'flamboyant and ambiguous beauty' (p.55) is 
androgynous, thus posing an implicit challenge to dualistic categories of 
gender, and his love of flashy, outrageous costume renders notional 
any concept of a fixed and stable identify. Indeed, it is an idea which is 
totally alien to Honeybuzzard, whose wish is 'to have a cupboard 
bulging with all different bodies and faces and choose a fresh one every 
morning' (p.78). Elizabeth Wilson defines camp fashion as an 'aesthetic 
of the banal in which everything is surface': a neat description of 
Honeybuzzard, for he is so dedicated to making a spectacle of himself 
that it is impossible to ascertain the underlying motives behind his
increasingly irrational actions. He is the person responsible for the horrific scarring of Ghislaine.

Within his setting, however, Honeybuzzard is no irregularity, but an expression as well as an exploiter of the larger camp culture within which he moves.

Together with Morris he deals in junk, robed from the remains of the past in night-time tour to abandoned houses that are on the point of destruction. Here they find the personal fragments and wreckage of long-gone people’s lives, which they clean, polish and sell for a profit to American’s ‘as conversation pieces (p.90).

Honeybuzzard’s final theatrical presentation is the murder of Ghislaine in an abandoned house, laying her out on a trestle table in a makeshift chapel ‘illuminated by innumerable candles stuck with their own grease to every horizontal surface’ (p. 176). What he has set up is another over-the-top scene from a Hammer Horror film, or perhaps a piece of avant-garde performance art. The trouble is, however, that Ghislaine is really dead, and with this action, Honey has broken through the boundaries of camp. In abandoning the space between art and life, fantasy and reality, he has ‘fallen through a hole in time into a dimension of pure horror’ (p.178). His final appearance reinforces this impression, with all the layers of artifice and costume ‘pared away’. For the first time in the book he is not conscious of being watched, and so does not perform, appearing ‘naked and elementary and unknowable in the integrity of his own skeleton’ (p.179).
According to Gamble Carter said later that she had drawn the ending of this book directly from Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot*. Nevertheless, Honey ends the book still a figure defined by references to theatre as much as to literature, although tellingly he has passed into a different genre. Dancing a cakewalk in his ‘happy hat’ (p.89) for Morris, he is a character from burlesque or music hall. Jumping out at an unsuspecting old lady like ‘a spectre, a madman, a vampire’ (p.136), he participates in the Hammer Horror mode already evoked through Ghislaine. Underneath it all, however, as has actually been apparent to us from the beginning of the novel, is a far darker and more destructive personality which deals in true horror and real death. With the ‘angles and planes of the skull … showing through the flesh’ (p.179), Gamble says, ‘his role is now that of a murderer from a Jacobean tragedy, whose savage excesses put him beyond the reach of the redeeming, and comforting, exercise of irony.’

Essentially, therefore, where the camp parody of *Shadow Dance* falters badly is over its treatment of women, which could come as a nasty shock to any reader accustomed to thinking of Carter as a feminist writer. Although Carter appears to be trying to create a world in which you make your own rules unfettered by the traditions or moral assumptions of an outmoded past, it is a freedom that the text often seems only to extend to men. Furthermore, the treatment meted out to Ghislaine makes some kind of moral response to the text on the part of the reader unavoidable.

Lorna Sage argues, that Honeybuzzard is an early example of Carter’s ‘radical pornographer’, who ‘strips away the mystifications of
sex and sentiment to reveal the working of power underneath'. In this context, his violent treatment of Ghislaine and thus by implication the violent treatment distributed to many of Carter's female characters in her early fiction can be justified as a kind of anti-morality play which aims to undermine through exaggeration.

Gamble points out that, it was nevertheless an element in her writing for which Carter later apologized, claiming in 1992, for example, that 'It took me a long time to identify patriarchal bias in my discourse'. It is in Shadow Dance that this bias is most disturbingly obvious, for this is a text in which women are resolutely denied the privilege of a narrative voice. By excluding them from the formation of discourse, they are rendered figments of a fevered male imagination, and become the targets of a disturbing blend of violence and eroticism.

Ghislaine, of course, is the most extreme example of this process. When Morris meets her in the bar at the beginning of the book, his extreme reaction to her is partly disgusting at her ugliness, mixturing with guilt at 'the memory of her naked, threshing about beneath him' (p.5). He is also deliberately and clearly annoyed at her 'unfeminine' display of economic independence: 'Shall I buy a drink for you, Morris? Have you no money? Always penniless, poor Morris' (p.1). Yet he can transfer his guilt for both emotions onto Ghislaine herself by classifying her as the monstrous representative of a voracious, predatory, female sexuality. Infinitely malleable to any number of interpretations, Ghislaine's scar again becomes the focus of this symbolism, where it is transformed into a grotesque image of the female genitalia; open, grinning and never satisfied. Later on in the book, for example, Morris dreams of Ghislaine
...as a vampire woman, walking the streets on the continual qui vive, her enormous brown eyes alert and ever-watchful. and the moment she saw him she would snatch him up and absorb him, threshing, into the chasm in her face (p. 39).

This description of himself as 'threshing' chimes yet contrasts with his earlier use of the verb. Then, it was applied to Ghislaine, but now its transferal to himself signals her transformation from sexual prey to street-walking predator.

Although Honeybuzzard is the person who finally kills Ghislaine, Morris recognizes his own complicity in the crime, for all Honey has done is to dare to act out what Morris 'had always wanted but never defined. Choking out of Ghislaine her little-girl giggle ... (pp.178-9). As a statement of murderous misogyny, this could hardly be bettered, but the elaborate mythology, which is built up around Ghislaine, tends to obscure from becoming the repository of the guilty secret of Morris's own adultery. In later books, Carter will give her female characters the power to appropriate and subvert that process, but it is not a power shared by poor Ghislaine.

Morris's attitude towards women is also evident in his treatment of his wife, Edna. Mousey and meek, Edna bears very little relation to the glamorous and predatory Ghislaine, but she is no less a product of the male imagination. Whereas it is a process that renders Ghislaine monstrously larger-than-life, in Edna's case it works to reduce her, viewed as she is by Morris as 'a Victorian girl' who thinks 'marriage ... [is] for submission and procreation' (p.45). If he had not married her, he
thinks self-righteously at one point, 'she would have aged into a cat-spinster in a bed-sitter' (p 23). Honey's reaction to her is characteristic: he regards her as an example of the type of woman 'you can only vivisect .... the pink-eyed, laboratory-rat sort of woman' (p.62).

Incongruously, however, it is through Edna that the possibility of female empowerment can be glimpsed, however faintly, for at the end of the book she demonstrates a sexual independence that Morris, and hence the reader, has never suspected her of being capable. Presumably tired of bearing the weight of Morris's constant self-castigation, she finds happiness with another man. All unsuspecting, Morris comes upon them asleep in bed, like babes-in-the-wood, 'their two soft mouths curved flower-like in tranquility, their tender eyelids waxen petals of repose' (p.156). In freeing Morris from their sterile union, she also frees herself — a feat, which Ghislaine, abasing herself before Honeybuzzard's sadism, proves unable to achieve.

According to Gamble Edna is not the only female in *Shadow Dance*, either, who resists the male impulse to reduce, belittle or damage women, for this text also contains characters who can be seen as the forerunner of the kind of subversive female figures who will assume increasing importance in Carter's later fiction. Lorna Sage sees Honeybuzzard's girlfriend Emily and the enigmatic, ever-cheerful café waitress known only as the strulddrug as 'spelling hope in the midst of the underworld of gloom' which *Shadow Dance* otherwise evokes.

When she makes her first appearance in the narrative, complete with silver enamel fingernails, eclectic dress-sense and drugged white
cat, Emily appears to be wholly part of Honeybuzzard's world. She also shares Honey's attribute of gender ambiguity, for

With her height and her strong face and her heavy tread, one might almost have taken her for a boy dressed up as a girl in the Elizabethan theatre, when transvestism was an art form; what a foil she made for Honey's golden softness. (pp. 66-7).

However, while Honey might have chosen her for precisely that reason, there is far more to Emily than the role of supporting actor in his surreal personal drama. The epitome of solid, reasonable values as Sage observes, Emily is a matriarch-in-the-making-she sets about getting Honeybuzzard's life organized according to her own accurate standards of cleanliness and order. Although she is momentarily transfigured by her love for him, it does not affect her basic down-to-earth realism, for unlike Morris, who remains astonished by Honeybuzzard's powerful mixture of glamour and danger to the end, Emily does not hesitate to inform the police when they discover Ghislaine's body.

Emily's matriarchal evil tendencies are echoed in the text by the figure of the Struldrug; a name which evokes the immortal beings in 'Swift's Gulliver's Travels', who grow old, ugly and senile, but are denied the release of death but on a positive note, a term which signifies, perhaps, that one of the benefits of age is no longer being subject to the male habit of categorizing women according to their perceived desirability. For Morris, whose mother died in an air-raid during the War, the Struldrug signifies 'protective and benevolent' (p.38) motherhood,
and he is shocked when Honeybuzzard unkindly renders her prostrate with fear when they came across her squat in the basement of the ruined house which is to become the scene of Honeybuzzard's final descent into murderous insanity. The Struldrug, however, proves to be beyond his power, resurfacing alive and singing in the morning.

According to Peach, in *Shadow Dance*, Carter approaches Morris from different yet overlapping perspectives. Whilst one can be appropriately discussed in terms of the nineteenth-century metaphysical framework, which she undoubtedly found in Melville's work, the other is influenced by twentieth-century psychoanalysis and anticipates the work of French psychoanalysts such as Julia Kristeva. According to Kristeva, the melancholic is someone for whom despair and pain, as in Bartleby's case, provide the only meaning. The melancholic's identification with suffering and death, evidenced by Morris and Bartleby, is thus part of their failure to transform suffering in imaginative language. Kristeva argues that the melancholic's sadness is the most archaic expression of a non-symbolisable, un-nameable narcissistic wound that is so premature that no external agent subject or object can be referred to it. For this type of narcissistic depressive sadness is in reality the only object. More exactly, it is an ersatz of an object to which he attaches himself, and which he tames and cherishes, for want of something else.

For this perspective, the fact that Morris is a failed painter is an index of his melancholia, providing evidence of his failure to develop his imaginary and symbolic capacities. In fact, Morris tends to translate life into death. He imagines the old woman who works as a servant at the
café, for example, creeping nearer and nearer the grave and imagines the loneliness of her death. He thinks of her as the Struldbrug, the name given to the immortals in 'Swift's Gulliver's Travels' who only get older and uglier. Confessing to his friend, Oscar, that the café makes him sad, he sees his meringue as 'whited sepulcher with dead men's bones inside them' p. (32).

Although Morris is a failed painter, the fact that he struggles to paint distinguishes him in a vital respect from Emily and Honeybuzzard. For instance, he is at least able to appreciate the loss of life in the destruction of a bluebottle's eggs, unlike Emily who manifests her failure to develop the imaginary. Her only response to one of Morris's paintings, which she tried to read as a visually spoiled person feels Braille, is that it is 'quite big reely' (p. 104). Indeed, Melville's argument that an important aspect of the enquiring, symbolic imagination was the capacity to appreciate the inarticulate chaotic makes Emily's initial reaction to Moris' junk sop significant. When Morris pointedly tells her that 'the unseemly disorder around her was the standard', a sentence which has metaphysical results beyond the shop to which it refers, she seems calm, even spitting out a raisin kernel as if in disobedience.

Suffering comes with love and a capacity to believe in, that is the struggle to symbolize, some ideal. In his regret over what happens to Ghislaine and over the mistaken killing of the Stuldbrug, Morris demonstrates a capacity, although undeveloped, for love. His troubled conscience is symbolized by his constant aching teeth which when he tells Edna that Honey mutilated Ghislaine begin 'to ache, all together, in concert; all the canines and molars sang in chorus' (p.50).
Morris's troubled state of mind stands in contradistinction to Honeybuzzard's unconcern, when Morris tells Honeybuzzard that Ghislaine has been discharged from hospital, he notes how Honeybuzzard's face is 'a mask of nothing' (p. 59). Honeybuzzard does not feel any regret or sorrow over what he has done to Ghislaine or over his apparent killing of the old woman from the café. Indeed, the emphasis shifts from his cruelty, evidenced in the extent of Ghislaine's injuries, to his unconcern: "I don't care. Let her go, let her go!" He flung Ghislaine to the winds, with the gesture of the sower in the parable' (p.61)

The details of the episode in which Honeybuzzard learns of Ghislaine's release his face slipping for a moment into 'a mask of nothing' and the reference to the active fly in the silence are redolent of a scene at the end of Psycho

Honeybuzzard, as the duality of his name indicates, seems to embody the contradictory fears at the heart of the tradition: distrust of the ego like the protagonist in the European romance, he appears 'possessed by some personal devil' (p.136) and fear of the identification, the buried darkness from which it emerged and to which it must eventually return. The latter is signified most explicitly in the novel by the basement of the house in which Honeybuzzard murders Ghislaine: 'It smelt most terrible of damp, of rot, of excrement, of mice, of rats, of garbage, of age, of hopelessness, of uncleanness of human physical corruption' (p.133). Honeybuzzard, is half angel and half devil, but the disfigured Ghislaine: 'When she laughed, half her face was that of a happy baby and the other half, crinkled up, did not look like a face at all' (p. 153).
In *Shadow Dance*, the character most obviously regarded as a part-object by another character is Ghislaine. Before she is disfigured by Honeybuzzard, Morris sees Ghislaine as an idealised phantasy: ‘She used to look like the sort of young girl one cannot imagine sitting on the lavatory or shaving her armpits or picking her nose’ (p.2). After the disfigurement, he projects into her his guilt and horror at what Honeybuzzard has done. He sees her as ‘the bride of Frankestin’ while his dislike of the pretentiousness of her name becomes a focus for what he now sees a per phoniness (p.4). Morris’s wife, Edna, also, sees Morris as a part-object. We learn that according to whom she is talking, she would describe Morris as either an antique dealer or a painter. These little pretensions are projections of her anxieties into him as he projected his own, far more serious, anxieties into Ghislaine.

I lost my virginity when I was thirteen’, conversationally, as she lit a cigarette, or she would complain of the performance of her last partner, or she would ask you if your wife satisfied your sexually …. Or she would describe her menstrual pains; and he [Morris] remembered the graphic recital of a course of treatment for a vaginal discharge. (pp.9-10)

The text asks: Who is the Shadow? In the dream in which Morris cuts Ghislaine’s face with sharp glass their bloods significantly flow together. Tormented by guilt and troubled by what Honeybuzzard has done to Ghislaine, Morris stops to exist as an independent psychological identity: ‘he ran out of himself at every pore and the black sheep ran into him” (p. 18). It raises questions about Morris’s autonomy.
Where, the novel asks, are the boundaries to be drawn between Morris and Honeybuzzard? To what extent are individuals, both male and female, complicit in acts of intimidation, degradation and violence in which they are not directly involved?

Morris's instruction to Honeybuzzard to teach Ghislaine a lesson is the product, then, of particular social discourses which sanction male dominance over women and legitimate men's right to abuse women. Although Honeybuzzard mutilated Ghislaine by himself, Morris is present as well. It is a significant detail that Ghislaine was naked beneath a shiny black raincoat. But this piece of information is learned at one of the points of the novel where fact and Morris's phantasies become indistinguishable. Ghislaine is described as if she were an object of male, and in particular Morris's, fetishistic phantasy. Morris's sense of complicity with Honeybuzzard specifically and with society's way of seeing women generally is reinforced by the black cat which emerges from the bushes and spits at him. As a witch's familiar, the black cat reminds us of how the persecution of women as witches provided a means of controlling and punishing women's sexuality. Morris, like Desiderio, in the later novel, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, is forced to confront his complicity in the dehumanization of the objects of his desire.

The way in which Morris sees Ghislaine as a part-object is the product of both his individual psyche and the way in which society perceives women as part-objects. Although the notion of a 'negative ideal' may seem contradictory at first; the concept itself is interesting and relevant to Carter's work. For example, in *Shadow Dance*, Morris's
imagining of his sick wife as dead flesh reduces her to the ghost of the corpse on which medical discourse about the body is based. At one level, Emily is the ideal housewife. Virtually her first act on arriving at Morris’s shop is to wash all the sheets, linen and clothing she can find in strong soap. As such, however, she is reduced to the phantom of the automaton, the ‘negative ideal’ type on which the housewife in cultural discourse is based. She is actually said to behave like ‘a well-trained house-robot’ and to perform her services with ‘the competent impersonality of a cafeteria attendant’ (p.101).

The familiar virgin and whore ghost to which male representations reduce women are literally realised in Ghislaine’s disfigured face. Initially in Morris’s focalization, she has a personality of different emotions and motivations. However, he thinks of her increasingly in terms of a dualism: as a young picture book girl or as a shocking, rude woman. The one image, like the one side of her face is soft and obedient, while the other is disturbing and uncomfortable. Her Janus face forces Morris to confront a contradiction, which is within both himself and the masculinised realization of women as social objects.

If the novel presents us with any kind of realist narrative, it is one that is haunted like the main character by what is repressed. The aspect of Morris’s awareness, although socially determined, which makes him an assistant in Ghislaine’s disfigurement is revealed through his dreams and phantasies:
He dreamed he was cutting her face with a rough shard of broken glass. There was a gallery of people watching them, and applaud intermittently, like the audience at a cricket match; among them he made out Honeybuzzard and Edna, both smiling and nodding their heads. And then he and Ghislaine were in his own bed and her head rolled on the pillows .... and then it was Edna he saw that he was slicing open and there was blood everywhere. (p.18).

What are the butcherly delights of meat? These are not sensual but analytical. A clinical pleasure in the precision with which the process of reducing the living, moving, vivid object to the dead status of thing is accomplished. The pleasure of watching the spectacle of the slaughter that derives from the knowledge one is dissociated from the spectacle; the bloody excitation of the audience in the abattoir. (p.138).

The passage in Shadow Dance begins with Morris dissociated from Ghislaine as are those who watch and applaud. She is reduced by his shard of broken glass to a thing. If he takes any pleasure in what is happening, it is in the act of cutting. However, in the second half of the passage, he is no longer distanced from her. Meat has become human flesh. Ghislaine is changed from ‘the dead status of thing’ to a ‘living, moving, vivid object’. Morris is not dissociated from what Honeybuzzard has done and is implicated through male objectification of women in turning women into ‘the dead status of thing’.
She glanced at him over the rim of her glass, sharing sly secrets, and laughed her personalized, patented laugh she must be the only girl, anywhere, who could laugh like that. The shimmery, constricted yet irrepressible giggle of a naughty little girl, such a young, lovely and wicked giggle. (p.6).

The dialectic between representative codes and codes of fantasy is evident here in the language where ‘naughty’ and ‘wicked’ have different meanings when applied to a real girl from its application by men to women who are perceived as ‘girls’.
The Magic Toyshop

In *The Magic Toyshop*, lore has its role in rewriting it as a feminine lore novel. It possesses fairy tales qualities. Carter uses an eclectic assortment of material from myth, fairy tale and legend to tell a tale of patriarchal tyranny, narrated in the third person from the perspective of 15-year-old adolescent girl Melanie. When her wealthy parents are killed in a plane crash while traveling in America, her comfortable world comes to an end. Melanie and her younger brother and sister, Jonathon and Victoria, are sent from their country home to live with their Uncle Philip in South London. Philip is a clever toy maker with a passion for life-size puppets. He is also a miserly and tyrannical patriarch who controls every aspect of his household. Philip appears seldom in the novel and speaks only to utter criticism, issue orders, or narrate his puppet shows; however, his presence fills the house, and his dependents learn to control themselves in response to his absolute rules. Philip’s Irish wife, Margaret, is a dry woman who was struck dumb on her wedding day and communicates by means of chalkboards and writing notebooks. Like Melanie, Margaret is an orphan, her marriage to Philip is a means to provide a home for her brothers, Francie and Finn Jowles. Gentle Francie is the least affected by Philip’s tyranny because he has some small means of economic independence in playing his cheating. Finn is the toy maker’s trainee and a talented painter, but he

judges Philip's irrational violence with his disrespect and is beaten because of it. When Finn tears the controls from one of Philip's dolls during a performance, Philip throws Finn from the flies and he crashes onto the stage. This is the beginning of war between the two, and it precipitate Philip's plan to have Melanie act with one of the dolls in a performance of "Leda and the Swan". Although he hardly acknowledges the children's presence in his house, forcing Melanie into the role of Leda is Philip's revenge on their dead father. He instructs Finn to train Melanie for the role, hoping, as Finn sees it, that her symbolic rape will be preceded by a real one. Melanie's father was a writer and represents, for Philip, the enemy "who use[s] toilet paper and fish knives." (p.152)

According to Peach, "The Magic Toyshop", reclaims a number of elements from the genre. The world 'reclaim' is used deliberately here, for the fairy tale has been marginalized as a literary form, In The Magic Toyshop; Carter rediscover its imaginative potential, especially for the feminist writer. The storyline of the novel itself is reminiscent of a fairy story. Its heroine, Melanie, her brother Jonathan and sister Victoria are orphaned; the death of their parents in a plane crash is linked in Melanie's mind to an act of transgression. Melanie secretly trying on her mother's wedding dress one night and the children are forced to live with a relative they hardly know who turns out to be an ogre. The stock fairy tale motifs adapted by Carter include: the arduous journey the children travel from their comfortable home in the country to their uncle's toyshop in south London; the dumb mute their aunt in London has been stuck dumb on her wedding day; metamorphoses. Uncle Philip's evil is revealed gradually in the course of the narrative; and
even the winged creature in the form of the swan puppet, which Philip makes for the show in which Melanie takes part.

Traditional fairy tales, rewritten by male writers, became vehicles for the socialization of young women producing a subgenre of 'warning tales'. As Jack Zipes points out: 'Almost all critics who have studied the emergence of the literary fairy tale in Europe agree that educated writers purposely appropriated the oral folk tale and converted it into a literary discourse about mores, values and manners so that children would become civilized according to the social code of that time.'

The stories acquired a moral that often arose out of a young girl being punished or brought to 'wisdom' through realizing the foolishness of transgression. In a discussion of Perrault, those tales Carter translated, Zipes points out that such stories do not warn 'against the dangers of predators in forests', but warns girls 'against their own natural desires which they must tame'. In other words, Carter, like many feminist critics, recognizes fairy tales as a reactionary form that inscribed a misogynistic ideology. However, critics have not always questioned, as Makinen has pointed out, whether women readers would necessarily identify with the female figures.

The novel incorporates the reactionary element of the fairy story in the consequences that befall Melanie borrowing her mother's wedding dress. However, it also undermines this inscribed ideology by emphasizing what the misogynistic fairy stories suppressed, an adolescent girl's excitement about her body and the discovery of her emerging sexuality.
......she would follow with her finger the elegant structure of her rib-cage, where the heart fluttered under the flesh like a bird under a blanket, and she would draw down the long line from breast-bone to navel (which was a mysterious cavern or grotto), and she would rasp her palms against her bud-wing shoulder-blades (p.1).

Peach\textsuperscript{24} also says, that the novels' concerns here with the female body and sexuality are typical of Anglo-American feminist art and literature of the late 1960s and early 1970s and it is important to place the zeal of such work, which from a later feminist perspective may appear intellectually a little crude, in the context of the times. Feminist artists and writers of the day were mounting a challenge to the way in which women's bodies were rendered invisible in art and culture other than as idealized objects in works produced by men within the tradition of the classic female nude. The focus of their challenge was this Western tradition's denial of women's experiences of their own bodies. In other words, they attacked the mythical sense of the integrity of the body and its boundaries in the representation of the female nude and drew attention to the internal bodily changes or bodily fluids, which regularly crossed those boundaries and subverted the body's sense of closure.

Although this may seem like straining for effect to contemporary readers, Carter is following the feminist concerns of her day to challenge, and work against, traditions which reified the cosmetically finished surface of the female body and denied the abject matter of its
interior. Ironically in London, Uncle Philip tries to turn Melanie into a fetishised object as spectacle, a wooden marionette.

The way in which the wedding dress incident is structured appears to suggest a young girl's first experience of sex and the anxieties around it. The purring cat at the center of the tree she is about to climb gives Melanie the confidence to step out of the wedding dress and become naked. In her nakedness, she feels vulnerable, pulling her hair around her for protection. The cat unexpectedly hurts her, the dress that she had parcelled up and placed in the tree is symbolically ripped and there is now blood on the hem. Melanie now feels 'a new and final kind of nakedness, as if she had taken even her own skin off' (p.21). Moreover, the season is the end of the summer, the end of childhood and 'innocence' and the moon, the female symbol to which menstruation is linked, is 'beginning to slide down the sky. Here, the lore plays its role in rewriting this novel as a feminine lore novel. According to Peach,25 'Carter rewrites the myth of the Garden of Eden of which we are reminded by the tree itself, clearly the Tree of Knowledge, by the reference to the shower of apples, and by an allusion to Eve's realization of her nakedness after eating the forbidden fruit – Melanie is 'horribly conscious of her own exposed nakedness'. However, if the biblical imagery reminds us of Genesis, there are counter elements drawn from witchcraft, paganism (idols worship) and superstition – the cat is a well known witch's familiar, Melanie crosses her fingers, and there are references to blackness, the night, blood and nakedness. They remind us of elements absent from the biblical version of the Adam and Eve story and the novel seems to be challenging a myth which endorses the inferiority of women to men.'
According to Peach\textsuperscript{26}, an important aspect of the novel’s revision of the Adam and Eve story is the female point of view, which stresses not only a developing sexuality, but the excitement, fears and phantasies to which sexuality gives rise and through which it not only finds expression but is explored and developed. Melanie’s experience of nude tree climbing leads to injury and, quite literally, torment. Here the novel may be predicting more than what is in store for Melanie as a consequence of her parents’ death and her enforced move to London. It may also be giving expression to centuries old fear of women: that their husband’s may turn out to be monsters and wedded bliss proves a nightmare. Ironically, while much of the passage suggests the permanent loss of childhood Melanie has started her periods, decided to grow her hair long and has stopped wearing shorts, Melanie emotionally go back to childhood: ‘Please, God, let me get safe back to my own bed again.’ Particularly important to the novel’s concern at this point with Melanie explicitly and all women implicitly is the tension between desire and restraint which causes a scream to swell up in Melanie’s throat. The unexpressed scream, of course, becomes a symbol of the condition in which Melanie, and perhaps many women, will come to live:

Once a branch broke with a groan under the trusting sole of her foot and she hung in agony by her hands, strung up between earth and heaven, kicking blindly for a safe, solid thing in a world all shifting leaves and shadows. (p.21).

Peach\textsuperscript{27} says that Zipes drawing on Freud’s theory of the strange suggests that fairy stories have remained popular because they are concerned with the quest for an idealized notion of home which has
been suppressed in the adult consciousness. In discussing the liberating power of feminist fairy tales, Zipes suggests that they present us with a means by which the idealized home may be reclaimed. These include the ways in which the opposed protagonists learn to free themselves from 'parasitical creatures'. For Zipes, the latter are allegorical representations of the sociopsychological conflicts that have prevented the opposed protagonists from having a psychic realization of home. They are also the conflicts that, in Zipes's psychoanalytic approach to fairy stories, the reader, in a similar position to the opposed protagonist, needs to revisit.

In *The Magic Toyshop* is in the third person, but the focalisation is Melanie's. The contrast between the new home and the one she has left opens up a new space in which Melanie imagines, locates and develops an ideal: She is cast as an opposed protagonist. Even though Aunt Margaret, Francie and Finn love each other, making Melanie feel 'bitterly lonely and unloved', the flowers family becomes the parasitical creatures of fairy stories. Finn, for example, is described as 'a tawny lion poised for the kill'. Melanie does consciously what Zipes argues all readers of fairy stories do unwittingly. She translates the parasitical creatures of fairy stories into the socio-psychological conflicts, which separate her, and will continue to separate her, from the psychic ideal of the home. Finn comes to represent an 'insolent, off-hand, terrifying maleness' and the threat that he poses is suggested when, in order to comb out her hair, he 'ground out his cigarette on the window-ledge and laughed' (p.45). For all the differences between Finn and his uncle, the laugh and grounding gesture at this point blur the boundary between
them. From the outset, *The Magic Toyshop* is concerned not only with the importance of phantasy but of ego disturbances within the psyche.

In the novel, the psyche is perceived as constructed within a wide system of relationships including familial, social, cultural and political forces. Some of these such as nature and sex; we tend to ‘mythologise’ and regard as if they are ‘outside’ of history and a particular social milieu. Desire and phantasy, especially, we tend to regard as ‘universal’ or ‘archetypal’, ignoring the way in which these, too, are socially constructed. Many teenagers, for example, may identify with the lyrics of chart-topping pop songs because they appear to reflect their emotions, anxieties and frustrations, without realizing that these songs as part of popular culture contribute to the social construction of emotional identity, of gendered behaviour within relationships, and of desire itself. In her exploration of the different social roles and subjectivities available to women, Melanie not only challenges the notion of a singular female identity, but also demonstrates how women have to negotiate countless of received assumptions and social conventions.

According to Peach, At the end of the novel, Melanie and Finn escape from the toyshop, like Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, returning the reader to the biblical myth which is employed in the earlier description of Melanie’s sexual awakening. In fact, Carter herself has said that she saw the novel in terms of the ‘Fortunate Fall’ ‘I took the Fortunate Fall as meaning that it was a good thing to get out of that place. The intention was that the toyshop itself should be a secularized Eden.’ The ‘Fortunate Fall’ is not only from the toyshop but the cultural
myths which have contributed to women's intellectual, emotional and sexual oppression.

The theme of a new Eden and the human race reduced to an elemental pair was common in science fiction of the 1950s and 1960s. Carter's adaptation of it is ambiguous and possibly influenced by the art of the time, especially collage work that suggested that desire, as Thomas Crow maintains, is 'held hostage' by the Adam and Eve myth. At the end of *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter appears to imply, as she said, that the Fall was fortunate, but also that Melanie and Finn are trapped by the Genesis myth. It is ironic that in the fire 'everything is gone' but that the myth remains: 'At night, in the garden, they faced each other in a wild surmise' (p.200).

The agency which Melanie needs to acquire in her own life is evident in the early part of *The Magic Toyshop* in acts of transgression, Melanie trying on her mother's wedding dress and stealing her brother's books in order to raise the money to buy false eyelashes. Ironically, whilst, at one level, her desire for false eyelashes is a sign of her independence, at another, it is a symbol of the way in which her identity as a young woman is defined by discourses outside herself. Inevitably, Melanie is beginning to feel a failure because she has not yet married or had sex.

According to Alison Lee that Paulina palmer writes, 'Carter uses the image of the puppet to "represent women's role in society" and to suggest the manner in which "human beings are reduced by a process of psychic repression."' Alison continues saying that Because
Melanie's discovery of sexual autonomy is, in her eyes, the cause of expulsion from her Edenic past, it is not surprising that part of what she sees as her punishments should be the loss of that autonomy. The puppet master's world is a world in limbo, but Melanie is in a similar, in-between state. Too young and too small for some things, she is too big and too old for others. Finn makes much of Melanie's being too young for a sexual relationship (p.151, 153), as she was too young and too small for the wedding dress and all that is represented. In Philip's house, everyone is diminished by his enormous bulk, and Melanie wonders whether she will wither as Margaret has. Not having a mirror, Melanie sees herself reflected “in little” (p. 105) in Finn's eyes, and in approaching her performance as Leda, she feels powerless in a world carrying her, “infinitely small, furious, reluctant, with it” (p.162). Although Philip wishes to make his nephew and nieces into “little Flowers” (p.144), Melanie is not small enough for his ideal Leda: “I wanted my Leda to be a little girl. Your tits are too big” (p.143).32

The effectiveness of feminine lore appears here; Lee says, Melanie is no longer in control of the sight of her own body; the world she has entered watches her, judges her, and determines how she sees herself. Although this is implied in the terms of a fairy-tale fantasy, complete with motifs such as the wicked uncle, orphaned children, mute woman, and isolation, as well as a disturbing mixture of the real and the unreal, what happens to Melanie is hardly restricted to fairy tales. Although her uncle's toyshop seems alien and sinister, it provides an education in female behaviour and sexuality that is, unfortunately, quite ordinary.
The culmination of Philip's control comes when he forces Melanie to play the role of Leda to his huge puppet swan. Philip seems to have a peculiar clairvoyance when it comes to Melanie's inner life. According to Alisson Lee This fairy-tale element creates an atmosphere of dread, especially when Melanie begins to notice images from the wedding-dress night appearing in Philip's house. A music box in the shape of a white rose, whose petals open to reveal a tiny, dancing shepherdess, and a black-haired puppet dressed in white tulle remind Melanie of her adventure in the moonlight. The costume for her portrayal of Leda is diaphanous white chiffon of the kind Melanie once used to put on in front of her mirror. "Melanie would be a nymph crowned with daisies once again; he saw her as once she had seen herself. In spite of everything, she was flattered" (p.141).³³

Melanie learns lessons about what life as a woman has to offer. The course of the novel is a slow erosion of Melanie's delight as she becomes dependent, manipulate, and victimized. Unlike her predecessor Ghislaine, or the other women in the Bristol Trilogy, however, Melanie does not choose masochism as a response. She seeks friendship from Margaret and community from Finn and Francie, and although she does not take an active role in protesting her position, she does not, at least, surrender to conscience.

According to Iwona Maria Kubaki, in her/his thesis, In fairy tale fashion, the punishment for Melanie's breaking of taboo comes immediately. The day after the wedding dress incident, she learns that her parents have been killed in an airplane crash. Even before she reads the telegram she knows what has happened, and is convinced
that it is her fault: “It is my fault because I wore her dress. If I hadn’t spoiled her dress, everything would be all right. Oh Mummy!” (p.24). Picking up her hairbrush, she flings it at her reflection in the mirror. The mirror shatters, destroying both Melanie the criminal “The girl who killed her mother” (p.24), but also Melanie the narcissistic child.\textsuperscript{34}

Kubaki\textsuperscript{35} adds saying, Carter includes elements from both in her feminist Gothic bildungsroman. Briefly, the typical Female Gothic plot – as exemplified, for instance, by Mrs. Radcliffe’s \textit{The Mysteries of Udolpho} – centers on a virtuous heroine, usually an orphan, who is imprisoned in a castle or other sinister structure and persecuted by a villainous male. While in flight, she is also on a quest to discover family secrets. Claire Kahane summarizes this type of Gothic in the following manner:

Within an imprisoning structure, a protagonist, typically a young woman whose mother has died, is compelled to seek out the center of a mystery, while vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness. Following clues that pull her onward and inward – bloodstains, mysterious sounds – she penetrates the obscure recesses of a vast labyrinthine space and discovers a secret room sealed off by its association with death. In this dark, secret center of the Gothic structure, the boundaries of life and death themselves are confused. Who died? Has there been a murder? Or merely a disappearance? \textsuperscript{36}

Like the classic or Radcliffian Female Gothic, The Magic Toyshop “expresses conflicts within the female regarding her own
sexuality and identity” it “specifically deals with female anxieties and conflicts from a female perspective.”37 It is narrated through the focalizer of the fleeing, questing heroine, and focuses on her examination of family romances and secrets within an oppressive domestic space that is both monstrously other and oddly familiar.

The female Gothic “creates a Looking-Glass world” which exposes “the perils lurking in the father’s corridors of power”.38 Tania Modleski argues that the Female Gothic became popular at a time (the late eighteenth century) when the nuclear family was being consolidated because “it portrayed in an extremely exaggerated form a family dynamic which would increasingly become the norm” ........ “It spoke powerfully to the young girl struggling to achieve psychological autonomy in a home where the remote, but all powerful father ruled over an utterly dependent wife”.39

The “harsh, unloving truth” Melanie – and every Female Gothic heroine – must face is the place assigned to women within the patriarchal family: the negative, silent place of the mother. Feminist critics agree that the Female Gothic dramatizes women’ ambivalent feelings about their relation to their mothers. “What I see repeatedly locked into the forbidden center of the Gothic which draws me inward,” Unlike the traditional Female Gothic, The Magic Toyshop does not take the form of a quest for signs to the death or disappearance of a mother or mother figure. The mystery of Melanie’s relation to her mother is, however, central to Carter’s novel. It is after all, Melanie’s trying on of her mother’s clothes, and her confusion about who she is – herself or her mother – that wrenches the novel out of realism and shifts it into the
Gothic. Later in the novel, waking up in bed with Finn Jowle she imagines herself in the mother’s place:

Melanie had a prophetic vision as Finn sat beside her ... She knew they would get married one day and live together all their lives and there would always be pervasive squalor and dirt and mess and shabbiness, always, forever and forever. And babies crying and washing to be done and toast burning all the rest of her life. And never any glamour or romance or charm. Nothing fancy. Only mess and babies with red hair. She revolted. (p.177).

Kubaki adds,\textsuperscript{40} In the classic Female Gothic, fear of sexuality and of the consequences of sex (becoming a non-person like the mother) are expressed indirectly, either through reports of a “bad” woman paying dearly for her sin of lust, or in the image of a secret room associated with madness and/or death. Following the Male Gothic tradition, Carter brings sex out into the open, staging an excessive, transgressive scene of sadistic voyeurism and humiliation..............

Not content with deconstructing the bildungsroman through the discourse of the Gothic, Carter rewrites the Gothic, too. Like a traditional Female Gothic novel, \textit{The Magic Toyshop} begins with an idyllic picture of childhood in a perfect family. That idealised image is quickly shattered, and the dark underbelly of family life is revealed in the funhouse mirror of a demonic world upside down. The dangerous (sexual, violent) impulses that his bourgeois family normally represses are expressed in Uncle Philip’s demonic family. The traditional Female
Gothic, however, turns the familiar world upside down and inside out
only to right it. In *The Magic Toyshop* Carter turns the familiar world
upside down, and then destroys it, leaving it in pieces. There is no
nostalgia for ancient paternal domains. It is not enough that Uncle
Philip’s family is a grim parody of a normal bourgeois family – even that
family must be destroyed.

Family is, in Carter’s novel, Melanie’s Oedipal fantasy brings the
first, calm family crashing down and bursts the bounds of realism.
Significantly, the final turn of Carter’s Gothic screw is brother-sister
incest rather than incest with the Oedipal triangle. Uncle Philip
discovers Aunt Margaret making love with her brother Francie, and
burns the house down in rage. Brother and sister unite against Uncle
Philip, and defy his prohibition of incest, the Law on which the cultural
order is founded, according to anthropology and psychoanalysis.

Lore here appears through Carter’s words in an interview with
John Haffenden, Carter explains that she had conceived *The Magic
Toyshop* as a retelling of the myth of the Fortunate Fall, with the
toyshop itself as a “secularized Eden”.41 The novel ends with Melanie
and Finn (another incestuous, or at least quasi-incestuous, couple) in
the garden at night, watching the paternal house burn and facing each
other “in a wild surmise” (200), like the explorers catching their first view
of the Pacific in Keats’ “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer.”
“They’re escaping like Adam and Even at the end of *Paradise Lost* ...
two people alone, about to depart from a garden,” Carter explains.42
While reading the novel a reader finds that Melanie explores her body as an unknown land. Even though she spends hours in self-fascinated speculation, there is nevertheless something nicely unselfconscious about her great delight in the “supple surprise of herself now she was no longer a little girl” (p.1). She tries out her new body in various poses drawn from paintings, she creates fantasies of a phantom bridegroom that are so powerful and passionate that she can “almost feel his breath on her cheek” (p.2) Sitting in church, she prays that she will be married, or at least have sex, and she worries that she has already passed her prime. Melanie has company for her fantasizing. Even the housekeeper, the dull Mrs. Rundle, remembers a husband she never had, and Jonathon, who is only hardly conscious of the world around him.

Melanie transgresses the boundaries of her innocent idyll; however, on the night she enters her absent parents’ bedroom. As an almost fairy-tale forewarning of what is to come, Melanie sees Uncle Philip in her parent’s wedding photo and is reminded of the jack-in-the-box he once sent her from which a “grotesque parody of her own face” (p.12) jumped out. This foretells Melanie’s future, in which she will lose her own-mirrored face to various parodies of it constructed by her uncle. Philip’s treatment, however, are different only in grade from the ones to which Melanie has already subjected herself. The wedding photo leads Melanie to speculate about her mother’s sexuality, the symbolism of the white dress, and the letter Melanie has read in women’s magazines about relations before marriage. Implied in Melanie’s speculations is a sense that there are rules for women’s sexual manner that have little to do with the kind of playfulness she has displayed in front of the mirror.
Melanie's descent from grace begins when she tries on her mother's wedding dress, in which she is "sufficient for herself in her own glory and does not need a groom" (p.16). She wanders out into the night, but the enormous loneliness of the sky fills her with fear, and nature seems to turn against her. Finding herself approached of the house, she takes off the dress, already blemished with blood from her cut feet, and climbs the apple tree to her own room. In the apple tree, she suddenly becomes aware of her nudity, and because the imagery is clearly that of Genesis, her disobedience is placed on a splendid level. Having blemished the wedding dress and ripped it to pieces, she has symbolically lost the innocence that led her to think she was independent. Symbolically, in trying on the wedding dress, she has tried on her mother's sexuality, and neither of them fits her. Melanie has tried on "too much, too soon" (p.18). In metaphoric terms, wearing the dress seizes her mother's position as the sexual woman in the family. This moving contravention, however, makes Melanie think that she has accurately killed her mother by symbolically replacing her, and when the telegram comes the next day, Melanie doesn't have to read it to know what it says. She is persuaded that by wearing the dress, she has caused her parents' deaths. The wedding dress is a symbol of virginity and of beginning into sexuality. Discovering herself as a sexual being, however, is also a discovery of shame, and for this Melanie feels that she is punished by losing her parents. In her sorrow, she smashes her mirror and then destroys her parents' bedroom.

Melanie's ability to enjoy in her body is partly a result of her class. In her parents' house, she has the free time and the means to be comfortable with her self-regard. Once she moves to her uncle's home,
however, her body is a record of comparative poverty. She cannot keep it clean or warm, and she feels she has lost control of it. Putting away the cutlery one day, she feels she is a “wind-up putting-away doll, clicking through its programmed movements” (p.76). Not only is she watched by Finn through a peephole between their bedrooms, but she feels as though her uncle’s “colourless eyes were judging and assessing her all the time” (p.92). Philip also dictates her manner of dress. He thinks that a woman wearing trousers is a “harlot” (p. 62), and he forbids makeup.

Philip’s miserness and misogyny (women hate) similarly control Margaret’s clothing. Her skirts and sweaters are in scraps, and her stockings are damaged. Only on Sundays she wears her best clothes, and even they are old-fashioned and dreary. The ultimate glory of her Sunday costume is a silver collar that rises almost to her chin and forces her to keep her head abnormally erect. Her wedding gift from Philip, who made it himself, the collar in uncomfortable and prevents her from eating, while her husband gets a “certain pleasure from her discomfort” (p.113). Bodily discomfort and humiliation is the price Melanie and Margaret pay for having a cover over their heads. They are “poor women pensioners, planets round a male sun” (p.140).

On the wedding-dress night, Melanie performs her desires, and the results are tragic. Displaying herself, even if only to the sky, is as breaking an act as seizing her mother’s place. But the power she feels in releasing her desires is amazing, wonderful, and terrifying. From the moment she enters her uncle’s house, however, she passively accepts the restrictions he imposes, including not going to school. Despite not wanting to play Leda in her uncle’s puppet show. Only when she is
faced with the possibility of a real sexual relationship with Finn she
revolts Finn's kiss in the ruined pleasure garden is humiliating, "a rude
encroachment on her physical privacy" (p.106). Once again, she wishes for
a fantasy to fight her lack of desire: "She wished someone was watching
them, to appreciate them, or that she herself was watching them, Finn kissing
this black-haired young girl, from a bush a hundred yards away. Then it would
seem romantic" (p.106).

From the first morning in her uncle's house, Melanie feels
"insecure in her own personality" (p.58). Her grief at losing her parents and
her home certainly contribute to this insecurity, but does a radical
change in the fantasies available to her. She does not recognize herself
in her new home; first, because it shows the trappings of a different
class, and second, because the images she is given there are those of
a clear secondary to which she is not familiarized. Finn's portrait of her,
though presents her as a freshly cleaned virgin. Though the portrait is
maybe a more truthful rendition of Melanie than some of the poses she
has chosen for herself, it is still "an asexual kind of pin-up" (p.154), and
misses the struggle she is having with herself as a sexual being. On the
entrance of sexuality, Melanie finds few ways of express it, although the
images offered to her in her uncle's house strangely mirror the ones she
once tried out for herself in her bedroom. No longer Cranach or
Toulouse-Lautrec, her choices are now Leda or asexual self. The
source of the images has changed, but their message has not.

As Melanie has discovered, confusing reality and fantasy can be
a dangerous pursuit. In her new home, she is forced into a similar
confusion, although not one of her own making. Not only are the toys
and puppets strangely real, but also everything in and around Philip’s house seems to have a life of its own. The wallpaper seems to grow thorns, the hot water geyser is maniacal, and Philip’s chair is gloomy. Melanie feels she has entered Bluebeard’s castle, and that having “married the shadows” (p.77) on the wedding-dress night, she is, like Bluebeard’s wives, faced with a house full of sinister rooms. So real does this image become to her that she hallucinates a young girl’s severed hand in a cutlery drawer. Francie, who finds Melanie after she faints at the glory sight, suggests that the distress of her loss might make her imagine such things. Not only has she lost her parents and her home, but also her brother Jonathon is lost to Philip, as is her sister Victoria to Margaret. Left only with responsibility for herself, even Melanie’s body seems to corrode and fall apart; certainly as a doll without volition (p.76) the detached hand line up her with what she sees in Philip’s workshop.

The puppet shows are some of the weirder events in the novel. Here, as everywhere else, Philip’s authority is maintained, if not lauded, by his family, although there is something pathetic about the formality of the show and the family’s forced appreciation. Philip puts on his puppet shows as though to a large crowd, although the family in his only audience. Unwritten rules dictate that they applaud wildly and throw paper roses. If Melanie has not already been schooled in the contradiction between her imagined romantic fantasies and the reality of her subordination, the performance in which she plays Leda makes it explicit. The structure of the show imitates that of the wedding-dress night. Melanie is once again clothed in a costume whose purpose is to draw attention to sexuality. The shells on the stage cut her feet, and she
is overwhelmed by the horror of her position: "she felt herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality" (p.166). She feels she must perform well or be savaged by "an armed host of pigmy Uncle Philips" (p.166) that might rush from the belly of the swan. At first the swan seems "dumpy and homely" (p.165), but as it covers her, its obscenity becomes overwhelming, and Melanie loses consciousness. Philip's savagery in mounting and spoiling the poetry. Having forced her to act like a puppet, he is offended that she is not one'.

Even though Finn is barely Melanie's model dreamy hero, and she is shocked of the kind of life he seems to offer her "babies crying and washing to be done and toast burning all the rest of her life" (p.177) he runs to save her by cutting up and burying the swan. Killing the swan stands for killing Philip, and the situation in the house the next day is one of festivity and emancipation from his dictatorship. The feminine lore is available here through Álison's words, 'In the Greek myth, Leda is raped by Zeus, but produces two sets of offspring. Leda's husband, Tyndareus. This coupling is not only a rape; it leads, through the progeny who result from it, to terrible tragedy: Helen's adultery causes the Trojan War, and Clytemnestra's adultery leads to the death of her husband, Agamemnon, upon his return from the Trojan War. The performance of "Leda and the Swan" also produces tragedy, if on a more domestic scale: Philip discovers the incestuous love between Margaret and Francie; the house is burned down, and all but Finn and Melanie seem to be burned with it'.

In an interview with Anna Katsavos, Carter says "The Magic Toyshop has a whole apparatus about Leda and the Swan, and it turns
out that the swan is just a puppet. I wrote that a very long time ago, when I really didn't know what I was doing and even so it turns out that the swan is an artificial construct, a puppet and somebody, a man is putting strings on the puppet. That was ages ago, over ten years ago, when I wrote that. The idea was in my mind before I had stored it out. But I stopped using these configurations because they just stopped being useful to me.
REFERENCES


11. Ibid.


24. Ibid., p. 76.
25. Ibid., p.77.

26. Ibid., p.78.


28. Peach. Linden, Angela Carter (Modern Novelists), p 84.


33. Ibid., pp. 50, 51.


35. Ibid., P.66.


42. Ibid. p.80.
