

Grotesque Performativity: Female Agency in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*

Katri Nyysönen
University of Tampere
Faculty of Communication Sciences
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Tutkielmani selvittää, miten Angela Carterin romaani *The Magic Toyshop* kuvaa naisen toimijuutta patriarkaalisessa yhteiskunnassa. Naisen toimijuus viittaa naisen mahdollisuuteen päättää omasta elämästään, ja toimia omien halujensa mukaisesti. Patriarkaaliset yhteiskunnat on usein nähty esteenä naisen toimijuudelle, koska naisen asema niissä on niin rajoitettu ja marginalisoitu. Tämä on kuitenkin suhteellisen kapea näkökulma; kuten Carterin romaani osoittaa, patriarkaalinen yhteiskunta ei automaattisesti sulje pois naisen toimijuutta.

Angela Carterin kiinnostus feministisiin näkökulmiin näkyy selvästi hänen teoksissaan. Hän käyttää romaanejaan kyseenalaistamaan naisen asemaa ja niitä rooleja, joihin naisia on luokiteltu. *The Magic Toyshop* julkaistiin 1960-luvulla, aikana, jolloin naisten oikeudet alkoivat näkyä selvemmin sekä poliittisessa että henkilökohtaisessa elämässä. Naiset alkoivat vaatia näkyvyyttä myös niillä elämän alueilla, jotka olivat heiltä suljettu pois, sekä vastustaa tiettyjä piirteitä, joiden oletettiin kuuluvan naiseuteen.

Nämä ajatukset ovat lähtökohta sukupuolen performatiivisuudelle, jota muun muassa Judith Butler on teoretisoinut. Hän väittää, että biologinen sukupuoli ei välttämättä vastaa sosiaalista sukupuolta, ja että maskuliinisuus ja feminiinisyys ovat sosiaalisesti konstruoituja. Butlerin mukaan näiden käsitysten taustalla on poliittisia tavoitteita ja normatiivisia ihanteita. Butler esittää, että sukupuoli on olemassa vain diskursiivisesti; sukupuoli määrittyy toistettujen tekojen kautta, ja toisto koostaa sarjan. Vaikka tämä tapahtuu säännöstellyn raamin puitteissa, meillä on mahdollisuus toimijuuteen tämän sarjan kautta.

Groteskin teoria tukee sukupuolen performatiivisuutta, koska se myös tutkii, kuinka normeja voidaan vastustaa. Varsinkin Mary Russon kehittämä teoria naisgroteskista sopii performatiivisuuden ideaan; Russo väittää, että tästä marginalisoidusta asemasta on mahdollista luoda uusia käsitteitä ja normeja. Tämä luo tilan toimijuudelle.

Tutkielmani tulee siihen tulokseen, että naisen toimijuus on mahdollista myös marginalisoidussa asemassa. Normeja voi parodioida niin, että samalla kuin niiden sosiaalinen rakenne paljastetaan, niiden merkitys uusiutuu.

Avainsanat: naisen toimijuus, groteski, sukupuolen performatiivisuus, patriarkaatti, Angela Carter

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will examine female agency in Angela Carter's novel *The Magic Toyshop* (1967).

Female agency refers to the ability of a woman to act for herself and make her own decisions.

Central to my exploration of this agency will be the role of the female both within a family and within society, and theories concerning gender performativity will ground this aspect. This exploration is based in the idea of female agency, and the choices that women have according to their gender and social roles. I will also approach female agency through the grotesque, which will show a different, yet complementary, view of how women are excluded from positions of power, and whether there is a way to utilize this exclusion advantageously.

The Magic Toyshop is the story of protagonist Melanie and her younger sister (Victoria) and brother (John), whose parents are killed in an airplane crash upon returning from their holiday. The orphaned children are sent to live with their maternal Uncle Phillip, his wife, Aunt Margaret, and her two brothers, Finn and Francie. Uncle Phillip, the feared and ruthless patriarch - now of two families - is also a toymaker, whose manic passion lies in the life-sized and life-like puppets that he makes. His stronghold over the entire household is evident, but particularly his wife, Aunt Margaret, suffers the brunt of his tyrannical reign. Melanie, just having entered adolescence, struggles to find her place within the household, but also within her role as a woman: the expectations of her childhood home and the expectations of her newly acquired home provide both similarities and contrasts in their perceptions of the ideal woman, and Melanie is somewhat at odds with both. The climax of the book is reached as Uncle Phillip's power begins to crumble. This is allegorized with the destruction of his swan puppet, which Melanie assumes in her forced role as Leda in Uncle Phillip's mad, private re-enactment of the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan. Boundaries are transcended, and roles are, if not reversed, at least destabilized and placed into a new context.

Angela Carter is accredited with an oeuvre that spans several decades, beginning with her first novel, *Shadow Dance* (1966), and terminating with *Wise Children* (1991). Her most critically acclaimed novels, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman* (1971), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), and *Nights at the Circus* (1984), were published during the second wave of feminism, and feminist themes have long been associated with the work of Carter. Carter herself identified as a feminist, although she objected to certain essentializing features of the (mainstream) feminism of the 70s, which was based on a more universal approach to gender (Trevenna 268). The feminist movement was also critical of Carter, objecting to her portrayal of pornography and masochism in her novel *The Sadeian Woman* (1979) as patriarchal and demeaning to women. Carter herself, as if predicting the criticism that this novel would provoke, defends pornography as potentially liberating already at the beginning of the novel: “Pornographers are the enemies of women only because our contemporary ideology of pornography does not encompass the possibility of change” (3). Whatever pornography may represent to feminism, feminist themes that take into account female agency and experience in relation to gender and sexuality dominate Carter’s fiction. Further, in Carter’s view, something generally accepted as oppressive may also have the potential to be converted into a source of power; this ability to find agency within oppression guides the analysis of Aunt Margaret which follows in chapter 5.

Female roles and agency relate to gender performativity. In the 1990s, when Judith Butler’s theories of gender performativity began to influence feminist thought, Carter’s work was taken up with critical fervor: newer ideas which highlighted the subjectivity of sex and gender lent themselves more favorably to Carter’s work. Butler’s concept of gender performativity deconstructs previously assumed inherencies and traits associated with gender, and shows them to be socially and historically shaped constructs. Therefore, her work will inform my research on gender and agency in Carter’s novel. In addition, I will illuminate the feminist thought around the time of the

novel's publication and also trace the development of feminist thought towards performativity; for these aspects I use the work of, for example, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and Gayle Rubin.

As noted earlier, the thesis also employs the concept of the grotesque in the analysis of female agency; I believe this concept lends itself well not only to the analysis of Angela Carter, but also to ideas of gender. The grotesque is concerned with the body and how "the old dying world gives birth to the new one" (Bakhtin 435). Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser can be regarded as two of the forefathers of the grotesque, although their approaches to what constitutes grotesqueness differ somewhat. Central to both of their definitions, however, is the idea of liminality, and the way that this marginality provides a space in which to transgress boundaries and redefine norms. As I will show in closer detail in chapter 2, it is this transformative aspect of the grotesque that aligns itself well with Butler's ideas of gender performativity.

Mary Russo relates performativity to the grotesque through her expansion of the theory to the sub-category of the female grotesque. This in will be very useful to my thesis, because of Russo's location of the female body within the discourse of the grotesque. The female body and how it has been policed throughout history has already been widely analyzed in feminist criticism in general, and also in discussions on female agency: from bodily functions and how they are sanitized, to the appearance of the body and how the form must be molded and contained, the body has been a highly debated topic. Discourse on the body also lies at the center of *The Magic Toyshop*; Aunt Margaret is a character that embodies the idea of body restriction in the extreme, but it also relates to other characters to a lesser extent.

The grotesque is a theory which holds a personal fascination for me, and while it is seen explicitly in other Carterian novels, its presence in *The Magic Toyshop* is negligible. However, part of the beauty of the grotesque is its wonderful malleability, and how it can be molded to enhance almost any discussion where marginality, transgression or the turning of social order is involved. Therefore, I do not consider it unworthwhile to use the grotesque to strengthen the

feminist issues; the latter are considerations which take precedence, but the grotesque forms a peripheral contribution which I believe to be more than justified.

Theories on gender performativity and the grotesque complement each other, as both explore social constructions, and therefore I believe that they will work well in my analysis of female roles and agency in *The Magic Toyshop*. *The Magic Toyshop*, hereafter referred to as MT, certainly questions essentialist notions, and I wish to examine the ways that norms are challenged, and the liberation that can be achieved in doing so. The challenge is a key element of the grotesque, and it serves to strengthen the connection between theories. In this sense, I believe that my thesis is relevant, as there are an increasing number of ways to modify traditional assumptions of society; parenting is no longer dependent on a male-female couple, or even a couple, family formations are multiple and diverse, gender is expressed in a multitude of ways, and even sex is increasingly viewed as a variable that is chosen rather than assigned. These issues constitute a significant area of what gender performativity and the role of women is concerned with.

I also believe that my thesis is a relevant contribution to the literary field because of the relative lack of attention that MT has received in comparison with Carter's other novels; it is certainly less critically acclaimed, gaining nowhere near the amount of academic scrutiny as some of her other works. I view this lack as a puzzling oddity, as the themes that her work is usually connected with in academic circles are also present in MT. For example, while the grotesque is explored overtly and in much more detail in some of Carter's other novels (*Nights at the Circus* is a prime example), there are certainly more than mere traces of grotesque elements to be seen in MT. Gender performativity too, especially in the vein of Butler's queer theory, is also blatantly seen in other novels. Precisely because so much academic musing already exists on Carter's other works, I feel that an analysis of *The Magic Toyshop* will lend a fresh perspective to an understanding of Carter's oeuvre.

Although MT has even been "sometimes strangely canonized as juvenile literature" (Kerchy 6), there is a certain depth to the novel that is not to be overlooked. Hence, some previous studies of it do exist (see, for example, Kunz) and some even connect the novel to the grotesque (or to characteristics that can be associated with the grotesque, such as appetite), and to gender performativity (or to characteristics that can be associated with gender performativity, such as speech/silence). As yet no study has explored the two concepts in tandem in relation to *The Magic Toyshop*, I am led to believe that the basis and goals of my thesis are valid and grounded in reason. I see the choice of the theory that will guide my analysis as a contemporarily valuable choice, as despite the seeming datedness of a concept such as traditional gender, we nevertheless remain surprisingly steadfastly in societies – even liberal, progressive ones – that are defined by gendered stereotypes. Carter seems to address this through the setting of MT: although *The Magic Toyshop* is not set in Victorian England, it has been referred to as Neo-Victorian because of its continuous and heavy references to the era – an era in which the role of the woman was policed with fervor. Sarah Gamble suggests that this is because through this technique, Carter shows the pervasiveness of antiquated ideas and ideals; the novel offers "a critique of the continued survival of the Victorian within contemporary culture" (255). Hence, although we may view Victorian standards as old-fashioned, their influence is inescapable. This is an especially pertinent note considering that the novel was published in the 1960s.

The bulk of the thesis is divided into an overview of the theoretical aspects, which forms chapter 2, and an analysis of the novel in relation to the theory, which makes up the rest of the thesis as far as the conclusion. It would be foolhardy to neglect the source and representative of patriarchy completely. Therefore, Uncle Phillip forms the basis of chapter 3. The three female characters – Aunt Margaret, Melanie, and Victoria – make up a generational triptych. This progression through time and age provides insight into how the role of the woman changes throughout her lifetime. Although it may seem logical to proceed through the characters according

to chronological age, this is not the method I will use. Rather, my approach examines agency through extremes, which happen to coincide with age. The last character to be analyzed is Melanie because I argue her as a character who is on the brink of decision; Victoria and Aunt Margaret offer differing perspectives of female agency in patriarchy, and now Melanie faces resolving her own sense of autonomy. Thus, first Victoria, then Aunt Margaret, and finally Melanie will be analyzed, in chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively. In my conclusion, I establish some key points about how female agency is viewed in relation to, and in contrast with patriarchy. I will attempt to locate the irony with which Carter views patriarchy, and how the seeming power of Uncle Phillip is overturned through the characters that make up the analysis of the previous section.

2. Theoretical Framework: Gender and the Grotesque

In this section I will explain the system of patriarchy, which is described as an establishment of norms and the power that upholds them. This will lead into an exploration of gender performativity, and what this means in terms of female agency. The conclusion of this section is a brief foray into the grotesque from a feminist perspective, which is related to the previously mentioned concepts. I will show that the two theoretical frameworks can work in tandem, and because of this, the grotesque will be able to add another dimension to an otherwise gender-centric analysis.

2.1. Patriarchy and Sex Differentiation

Patriarchy can be understood as a social and political system that serves to keep men in power at the expense of women. It enables unequal power relations between men and women through a series of culturally formed and culturally specific norms so that women are subjected to a role of the oppressed other and men are upheld as superior. This system sees men in power, maintaining roles of political leadership, social privilege, and moral authority. It also extends to matters of kinship, where the male role within a family solicits control over the female figures and over children.

Göran Therborn states that “In the beginning of our story all significant societies were clearly patriarchal. There was no single exception” (17). There are several issues with this statement; the defining of a society as significant seems to me a practice that could be read in the spirit of colonialist, patriarchal sympathy. Also, it is inaccurate; matriarchal societies have existed throughout history. Nevertheless, it is an undisputable fact that the majority of modern Western societies are patriarchal, and have been so for a significant amount of history. It should be understood that this form of patriarchy is the one to which I refer in this thesis; the patriarchy of Western nations, where white, Anglo-Saxon males are in positions of power and governance.

The beginnings of patriarchy precede even Christianity, although religion is one of patriarchy’s most fanatic supporters. Indeed, in the novel, the line “Jesus wants me for a sunbeam,

Uncle Phillip wants me for a flower” (MT 143) shows the similarity of the goals of both religion and men in controlling women, and in reducing women to the role of an objectified other. Even before the advent of Christ, Aristotle presented views which clearly presented women as inferior. In *Politics*, he states that “as regards the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject” (Smith 467). This proclamation was taken up with fervor amongst religious thinkers, and influenced both Christian and Islamic belief systems. This can account for the role that religion plays in women’s oppression; the story of Eve in the Garden of Eden shows the foundation of Christian ideology beginning with the exploitation of women; Eve is purported to be unable to contain her sexual libido, and thus dooms the entirety of mankind because of her lack of self-control and discipline.

Cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss takes Aristotle’s musings one step further when he proposes that women are not only the inferior sex; ultimately, they are devoid of sex altogether and serve only as a commodity that binds patriarchal ties between men. His analysis of marriage presents it largely as a form of establishing alliance; social solidarity is strengthened, as ties between otherwise unrelated lineages, clans or households are cemented. So too is exogamy promoted. This is a practice that occurs through the exchange of women between different patrilineal clans (52). Although Lévi-Strauss refers to tribal clans and societies, we can connect his insight to the patriarchy of the Western world, for the exchange of women is not so culturally removed from it as we might like to believe: Gayle Rubin urges us to recall the custom of the father ‘giving away’ his daughter, an act which presumes male ownership of a female (qtd. in Katz 136).

The institution of marriage in western patriarchy is an example of patriarchy in a private domain; although wedding ceremonies are embedded in public rituals and cemented through public institutions, they allow the patriarch to exercise authority over females in a private sector. However, the idea that marriage commodifies women also serves as an apt link to the way that patriarchy is not simply a private matter, but also a public one. Sylvia Walby makes the distinction:

Private patriarchy is based upon household production, with a patriarch controlling women individually and directly in the relatively private sphere of the home. Public patriarchy is based on structures other than household, although this may still be a significant patriarchal site. Rather, institutions conventionally regarded as a part of the public domain are central in the maintenance of patriarchy. (178)

The advent of industrialization between the 16th and 19th centuries saw a great deal of work that had previously been assigned to women triumphed by machines and factories. Although women were often employed in factories more than men, males supervised their work, and men controlled their finances. Moreover, women were excluded from an increasingly political world, in which predominantly male members spearheaded decisions affecting them; these decisions kept women in a position of inferiority.

We can return to marriage as something that bridges private patriarchy with a public one. In *The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex* (1975), Gayle Rubin outlines the concept of a sex/gender system, which she defines as "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (29). She emphasizes the way that these arrangements are hardly ever "natural", although they gain acceptance through their disguise under the pretext of "natural conditions". For example, hunger is a natural state, yet what food is considered acceptable is culturally and socially determined. Sexuality is an extension of the same concept, using the natural desire for sex to propagate the social interaction with the political economy (36).

2.2. Sex, Gender and Performativity

The way that patriarchy favors male over female, presupposes the idea of two biologically different sexes which can be differentiated from one another. That sex is binary has been a long contested assumption, with modern theorists claiming that an intersex theory is much more plausible - that is, sex is not binary, but rather, exists on a continuum. Traditionally, however, sex has been held as a biologically determined trait that distinguishes male from female. Gender, then, is what makes a male masculine and a female feminine. Moya Lloyd explains that “When feminists began to theorize the sex/gender relation, the underlying assumption was that sex was both logically and chronologically prior to gender” (32). That is, sex was considered preliminary to considerations of identity, with the culturally inscribed apparatus of gender then instilled upon the sexed body.

Gender is the permeation of a series of culturally and socially constructed ideals. These ideals perpetuate a set of norms that prescribe appearance, behavior and preference in accordance with sex. That societies differ in their interpretation of an ideally gendered sex is not problematic to the construction of gender, and it is important to acknowledge that the norms of gender are not universal. Despite possible differences in the cultural interpretation of sex, societies are alike in the way that gender is upheld as a norm if it is constituted correctly, and as something deviant if it is expressed unintelligibly. Gender constructions rely heavily on signs or signifiers which signify a belonging to, or identification with, one category over another. Opposite genders are constructed socially by “the suppression of natural similarities. Men must repress whatever is the local version of ‘feminine’ traits. Women must repress the local definition of ‘masculine’ traits” (Rubin qtd. in Katz 133). However, gendered selves that exist through notions of masculinity and femininity are problematic not only because of the way that these notions dictate appearance and mannerisms, but because they have implications for the realization of sexuality, which in turn dictates action based on biological considerations.

Although “It is a commonly held belief that gender is a natural attribute, an internal essence that manifests itself in characteristics such as (in the case of females) passivity, nurturance, maternal feelings and so on” (Sullivan 81), Lloyd points out Donna Haraway’s contention that the concept of gender was taken up by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s specifically to reject the assumption that a person’s sex determines their socially and psychologically functioning selves (28). While sex was seen as fixed and constant, gender was argued to be culturally conditioned and liable to change, not only across different societies and cultures, but also across the lifespan of any individual.

Until this point, sex and gender had largely been discussed as a binary system. In the 1990s, this was thrown into contestation and debate. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler is “motivated by a specific political aim: to contest the way in which particular idealizations of the sex/gender relation determine . . . who counts and who does not” (Lloyd 32). Butler invalidates not only the concept of a natural ‘gender’, but also of a natural sex, wondering whether it is “natural, anatomical, chromosomal or hormonal” (*Gender Trouble* 10). Sex is theorized to exist on a continuum, rather than as a binary. While this proposition theoretically opens up the domain of gender to a more inclusive one – if there is no duality, one sex cannot be favored over another – it nevertheless still uses this binary as the polarity between which the continuum lies.

Butler asserts that “If gender is the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way” (*Gender Trouble* 10). By this Butler means that masculinity and femininity do not necessarily correspond to male and female respectively, but are ideas that are free to be adopted or conformed to a body despite its sex. In other words, Butler sees gender as “a free floating artifice” (*Gender Trouble* 10), and the sexed body as its “arbitrary locus”. Butler negates the idea that sex predetermines gender; this is the premise of Butler’s “radical constructivist theory of gender” (Lloyd 42), which entails her infamous idea of performativity. This notion of performativity contends that gender is not something that is,

but instead, something that is done. Butler argues that gender is constituted through a series of performative acts and that through the “stylized repetition of acts” (*Gender Trouble* 140) something amounting to gender is formed.

Butler also goes on to claim that there is no essential subject behind these stylized repetitions; there is no actor that “might be said to pre-exist the deed” (*Gender Trouble* 33). Instead, she argues that it is the doing itself that forms the subject; the doing is everything. Butler maintains that “There is no ‘I’ outside language since identity is a signifying practice, and culturally intelligible subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings” (*Gender Trouble* 145). Performativity, in Butler’s view, is a pre-condition of the subject, a state that can only come into existence discursively. Therefore, the ‘I’ is not someone who performs their gender, as the ‘I’ only comes into existence through the performance.

The I, or self, is an important consideration in Butler’s work, and indeed, in most feminist discourses. This is elaborated in her idea of cultural intelligibility. “Cultural intelligibility, as Butler deploys it, refers to the production of a normative framework that conditions who can be recognized as a legitimate subject” (Lloyd 33). With respect to gender, Butler ponders how fixed gender norms constitute a subject either as viable or unrecognizable: if a subject is seen to deviate from normative values, they will hence be viewed as “impossible, illegible, unreal and illegitimate” (*Gender Trouble* viii). Butler argues that gender normativity is enshrined in the ‘heterosexual matrix’, from which follows that not only will males be masculine and females feminine, but also that these identities are confirmed through a joining and the resulting contrast with the opposite. “According to Butler, the matrix generates a series of ideal relations between sex, gender and desire such that gender is said to follow naturally from sex and where desire (or sexuality) is said to follow naturally from gender” (Lloyd 34). Therefore, an identity that follows this train of logic can be said to constitute a normative, intelligible and accepted subject. Deviation from it, on the other hand, results in an unintelligible identity, which is marginalized, and in effect, made invisible.

2.3. Performativity and Agency

Language had been theorized as phallogocentric – that is, that a center of meaning is established from a male-associated base, from which marginalized derivatives are formed; the case of male vs. female serves as an apt example. Jacques Derrida, amongst others, then identified phonocentrism – the privileging of speech over writing – as also integral to language, and further contributing to the privileging of male over female. Therefore that language was inherently concerned with sex was already known. In connection to agency, language is necessary for existence, as it is a structure in which an individual must engage. Structures are one of the “factors of influence . . . that determine or limit an agent and his or her decisions” (Barker 448).

Butler’s theory of performativity is similarly embedded in language. Although Butler is most often associated with performativity, the origins of the term ‘performativity’ can be traced to the work of language philosopher John Langshaw Austin, who theorized about performative utterances that are executed through language. Austin’s theorizes language theory as capable of performative acts, or a series of speech-acts, where action is determined through utterance. Austin’s classic example of the influence of speech is the marital rite of saying “I do”, upon which a couple is pronounced married (5). Before this performative utterance, the couple is in no way legally bound to each other; the act of speech has power in that rather than simply reporting or describing reality, it changes it. Speech acts therefore have the power to consummate actions.

It should be noted that Austin distinguishes between different types of speech acts; not all have the power to be performative. For example, a perlocutionary act for Austin is one in which a fact is simply reported: “it’s a sunny day” falls into this category. Saying “I do” at the altar, on the other hand, is a statement that performs an action, thus altering reality. Sara Salih elaborates this in connection with Butler using the example of the announcement in a delivery room, “It’s a girl/boy” (a performative act). We can compare this statement to “the baby is born” (a perlocutionary act), which merely relays an occurrence. With the performative statement, however, the doctors and

nurses are doing more than merely reporting the situation. This statement assigns a sex and gender onto the infant body, and only through this discourse does it come into being. “To claim, as Butler does, that sex is always . . . performative is to claim that bodies are never merely described, they are always constituted in the act of description” (61). Description, then, facilitates agency; there is reclamation of language in the way that words can be used with renewed meanings, creating new meanings also for the schemes that they signify. Hence, we see how liberating Butler’s performativity can be for oppressed women from the point of view of agency; although Butler acknowledges the socio-political circumstances that confine this repetition of gender to a “highly regulatory frame” (*Gender Trouble* 33), she believes that language has power. Language provides definitions and norms, but to engage with it is to have the possibility of redefinition; norms can be destabilized and subverted. The variation that occurs in this multitude of repetitive acts is where agency exists. Butler seems to suggest that we need only to recreate meanings and interpret performative acts individually in order to achieve emancipation.

This has been a source of contention for many theorists, who argue that if Butler has already removed the subject from existence and is now removing any semblance of fixed meanings, what does this mean for the possibility of agency? Rosalyn Diprose seems to have an issue with the obtuse quality of Butler’s argument, and suggests that true agency is only achieved if all actors are aware of the liberating effect of the act. The conceptualized subject receives its identity not only through the performative acts that it repeats, but also through the audience to which these acts are repeated. For gender to be imposed internally necessarily maintains that it is also received externally. Thus, it is a discursive process between society and the individual: “Subjectivity is necessarily non-unified and ambiguous because performance is never singular” (qtd. in Sullivan 93). To merely have ‘insider-knowledge’ of a method of subversion does not amount to anything more than a secretive gesture of private pleasure. Butler herself is rather vague about what deconstruction actually means for agency in real-life situations, merely suggesting that

deconstruction can happen through parodic representations. Sullivan elaborates with the insight, “These parodic styles and the gender codes associated with them are clearly drawn from hegemonic culture, but are denaturalized or queered in and through their parodic repetition” (86). Thus, Butler seems to be proposing that it is not so much gender itself which is being subverted, but rather its artificiality which is being highlighted; the parody is not of gender, but of the idea that there is an original gender to parody. It is an enticing idea, although one readily understands Diprose’s issue of insider knowledge.

Seyla Benhabib takes issue with the Nietzschean “death of the subject” that guides Butler’s theory, asking “If we are no more than the sum total of the gendered expressions we perform, is there ever any chance to stop the performance for a while, to pull the curtain down, and let it rise only if one can have a say in the production of the play itself?” (21). Benhabib seems reluctant to accept that the self cannot exist except through social constructions, and that this indeed seems to foreclose agency rather than enable it; if the social structures and paradigms that we exist within condition subversion and agency, can it really be called agency at all? Benhabib seems to think not. I agree that it seems rather pessimistic to reduce the self solely to a product of the discourse of others, and to see the self as coming into existence only through conscious engagement with this discourse. However, this is certainly not in line with Butler’s view, as she refutes this claim: “Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency” (147). She believes that to deconstruct, subvert and denaturalize identities through performative repetition is a process that is essential to the exposition of identity as a social construct. Salih clarifies Butler’s position: “construction and deconstruction (note that they are not antithetical) are the necessary - in fact the *only* - scenes of agency. Subversion must take place from within existing discourse, since that is all there is” (59).

However, for some, the process of construction and deconstruction making up Butler’s method leaves much to be desired. Martha Nussbaum criticizes Butler as indulging in a

lazy form of politics, arguing that actual agency has been achieved through proposals for social change, (attempts at) law reformations and campaigning for social and political justice. She overtly contrasts this with Butler's form of politics, which she condemns as merely "[using] words in a subversive way, in academic publications of lofty obscurity and disdainful abstractness. These symbolic gestures, it is believed, are themselves a form of political resistance; and so one need not engage with messy things such as legislatures and movements". While this is a valid point, it should be remembered that Nussbaum refers to agentic action that is possible for a very specific type of woman. It presumes a certain emancipatory level to exist already, invalidating the lives of other, more severely repressed women.

Saba Mahmood illuminates that emancipation may not be the only goal of female agency, and that female agency may be comprised of several other acts; agency can consist of acts that are not driven by emancipation (208-211). Feminist theorist Lois McNay defines agency as "the capacity for autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities" (10). If we use this definition as a base, we find that agency cannot be limited to any one form of action, political or otherwise. 'Capacity' suggests this difference; agency is a variable that depends on the woman and her situation. Jessica Aughter concurs that it is dangerous to view agency as a strictly agent/victim dichotomy; this narrow definition forecloses understandings of what agency might mean for individual women (122-125). Kelsey Burke agrees that there is a need to clarify the definition of agency, so that it does not repeat the blunders of feminism historically, when it was criticized for equating the concept of woman with a very specific type of woman (white, educated, middle-class). Instead, she draws on the work of Orit Avishai to suggest four different approaches to agency. She outlines these as 'resistant', where the status quo is challenged, and in which the idea of agency is perhaps seen most clearly; 'empowering', which is similar to resistance in the way that it accepts that some elements of structure are not conducive to women, but differs in the way that women find agency by changing their response to beliefs or

practices rather than challenging the system; ‘instrumental’ agency, in which women focus on external advantages that belief systems may offer them, such as material or relational benefits; and finally, ‘compliant’ agency, in which women are seen as possessing agency through the way that they choose to conform (124-128).

I think that Burke’s analysis is useful because it highlights the way that there is no one way to do agency, nor is agency necessarily dependent on achieving external changes. Nussbaum provokes Butler in suggesting that there is an inherent pessimistic defeat in the way that “We are all, more or less, prisoners of the structures of power that have defined our identity as women; we can never change those structures in a large-scale way, and we can never escape from them. All that we can hope to do is to find spaces within the structures of power in which to parody them, to poke fun at them, to transgress them in speech”. I instead embrace this as exactly what may sometimes be the case. This predicament, however, need not be an extinguishment of the possibility of agency, but rather the predictor of the sort of agency that is possible. Moreover, in *The Magic Toyshop* we see women from different social classes, standings and ages, and these differences result in their agency being enacted in differing ways. What is assumed is that the society of patriarchy marginalizes all women to some degree, and depending on this degree of subordination, different possibilities for autonomous action are available. This reiterates Butler’s idea of subversion as agency, which concerns “*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin 62). This idea of existing outside the normative framework, within the margins, is what we see in the grotesque.

2.4. The Grotesque

The beginnings of the concept of the grotesque can be traced through its etymology: the word ‘grotesque’ can be located in the Italian word *grotta*, which translates as ‘cave’. In fact, this cave appears in the novel, with our first view of the Flower household: “a dark cavern of a shop, so dimly lit one did not at first notice it. ...In the cave could be seen...stiff-limbed puppets, dressed in rich somber colors” (MT 39). The original *grotta* references Emperor Nero’s underground network of chambers and passages which was revealed to the world after the street above suddenly caved in. The artwork and ornaments of the underground palace was unlike anything ever seen before, mixing “purely nonfigurative ornamental patterns and lush swirls with recognizable elements that were representative of physical reality, combining the human, animal, vegetable and object kingdoms into a unique hybrid ensemble” (Perttula 20). Most characteristic about this new, strange art form was its deviation from classical art and its emphasis on harmony, symmetry and completion. Rather, the *grotto-esque* - ergo grotesque - was chiefly concerned with what was viewed as vulgarity and an inclination towards the unnatural. Already here we are reminded of Butler’s cultural intelligibility, which also deals with deviation from norms. The binary sex-gender system encompasses a symmetry that can be related to the harmony of classical art, whereas the more ambiguous continuum the Butler proposes is more in line with what is considered vulgar, unnatural, or unintelligible.

The grotesque body is what Mikhail Bakhtin calls “a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body” (335). It concerns a state of marginality in the way that it is “clearly differentiated from the world, but transferred, merged, and fused with it” (339). The association with performativity is clear; the act of continual becoming speaks directly to the repetitive acts of performative gender. In this Bakhtin quote there are also echoes of the marginalization of women, as they also exist within patriarchal society despite being excluded from it in matters of significance, such as decision-

making or law structuring. Bakhtin's vision of the grotesque is essentially a reaction against authority, and against all that is logical, official and formalistic. Bakhtin understands it as a rejection of anything that is complete and whole, especially that which is interpreted through narrowness and artificiality: "The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is spiritual, ideal, abstract: it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (20). Bakhtin makes it clear that by degradation he refers to the regenerative properties of the act as well as the destructive ones. This seems at first paradoxical, but is explained through the idea that degradation is an absolutely and strictly topographically defined concept: "downward" associates with the earth, whereas "upward" signals heaven. Therefore, degradation signals a return to the earth, an earth which simultaneously destroys as it gives birth, swallowing something to make way for something new. "The upper part is the face or the head and the lower part is the genital organs, the belly, and the buttocks" (21), and in this sense, degradation is also concerned with all activity of the lower stratum, chiefly copulation, conception, pregnancy and birth.

Now, not only can we connect the grotesque to ideas of gender performativity and the marginalization of woman, but also specifically to the female, and the ways that her body is discarded and made abject. Mary Russo is perhaps the most significant writer of the grotesque in connection to the themes presented in this thesis because of her relation of grotesque elements and the female body, as well as feminist themes. For example, Russo reflects on the origins of the etymology of the grotesque by connecting the cave-like reference to the "cavernous, anatomical female body" (1). Russo is alluding to the vagina as a metaphor for the cave, and this is not an illogical conclusion, for in examining the grotesque in relation to women, it is especially significant that there is "the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots" (Bakhtin 26). The vagina of woman, interchangeable in size, and able to expand to

grotesque proportions during childbirth, is then an epitomizing example of the body's ability to transgress its own limits, to be an "ever unfinished, ever creating body" (ibid.).

Russo believes that in contrasting with "the very constrained space of normalization" (11), something that is considered grotesque provides a space within which the possibility of reinterpretation is present. This is similar to the way Butler sees the ongoing act of gender performativity; within the moments between repetition exists the possibility for realizing individual agency. Russo bases her study of the grotesque on examples of female characters that are "one way or another, in error. They are marked by specificities of age, body shape, class, ethnicity or sexuality: each performs with irony and courage in the face of danger, ridicule, disbelief" (13). Instead of reading these flawed characters as powerless victims, Russo suggests that "the *assumption* of death, risk, and invisibility may be the price of moving beyond a narrow politics of identity and place" (48). Therefore, the abjection that error may entail can be a liberating force of agency and recognition on one's own terms. In fact, Russo believes that "the very structure for rethinking the grand abstraction of 'liberation' for women depends upon the flexibility and force of juxtaposition – the communal repetitions and differences much multiplied" (13).

3. Phillip

It seems counterintuitive to begin the analysis of a thesis concerned with female agency with the exploration of a male character. However, since the thesis is concerned with female agency within patriarchy, it seems warranted to first provide an analysis of the patriarch against whom the female characters are argued to rebel. Uncle Phillip is this patriarch; he is controlling, dominant and severe. However, Carter writes this novel at a time when the feminist movement was exposing the cracks in the stronghold of patriarchy, and the following analysis will also give a glimpse into the threat that the reigning system of male power undoubtedly felt from these pressures.

This section will show how Uncle Phillip's patriarchal control is exerted through his role as a toymaker. I will also show that dirt is one way of categorizing; I will examine dirt more generally, and what the duality between dirt and cleanliness represents to a patriarchal system.

3.1. Bluebeard's Crumbling Castle

Uncle Phillip is established as the patriarch especially through his occupation as a puppet-maker and as a toymaker. The idea of a puppet-master immediately brings to mind the idea of manipulation; Uncle Phillip is likened to the control and direction that puppeteers wield over their dolls. Heta Pyrhönen locates sadism in Uncle Phillip, and examines him in light of an erotic code that guides his action. We will put aside the erotic code, but what can be taken from Pyrhönen's article is the way that "In her 'Bluebeard' tales, Carter not only examines how the Sadeian erotic code affects Bluebeard's actions but also how it directs his art. Her Bluebeards are connoisseurs of art, collectors, toy makers, or rewriters of myth who apply this code to their aesthetic practice" (94). Pyrhönen is talking about Carter's Bluebeards collectively, but it is as though she were speaking specifically of Phillip: he is a toymaker dedicated to the quality of his craft. His toys are artisan products, admired even by those who despise and resent him: "He is a master' Finn said. 'There is no one like him, for art or craft. He's a genius in his own way and he knows it'" (MT 64). Uncle

Phillip is set apart from others in this passage; he is clearly exceptional. There is also a suggestion of Uncle Phillip's arrogance in this passage; 'he knows it' implies it. This might even be extended to the system of patriarchy in general; although it works on the basis of a flawed logic, it is a sort of logic nonetheless, and when executed by an undeniably strong representative, it can be a difficult system to subvert.

Pyrhönen's consideration of the Bluebeard motif in Carter's work is significant, for Uncle Phillip is also established as the patriarch through Melanie's repeated references to him as Bluebeard: "Bluebeard was here" (MT 118). What is even more interesting is how the Bluebeard trope coincides with the puppet-master motif: the original Bluebeard is perhaps most known for his imprisonment of women; he hides the mutilated bodies of his female victims in a locked room which his wife eventually enters against his wishes. In *The Magic Toyshop*, we see a mirroring of this scene as Melanie enters the private, underground grotto that is Uncle Phillip's workroom, and to her horror, discovers a room in which "The walls were hung . . . with partially assembled puppets, of all sizes, some almost as tall as Melanie herself; blind-eyed puppets, some armless, some legless, some naked, some clothed, all with a strange kind of liveliness as they dangled unfinished from their hooks." (MT 67). The connection is obvious, and what is more, the image is decidedly grotesque. This is a grotesqueness that is akin to the dark quality that Kayser relates to the field; dismembered figures are images that immediately evoke violence and horror, but also power, in the way that bodies are dissected and molded according to liking.

Upon her initial experience of Phillip's grotto, Melanie encounters a "puppet fully five feet high, a *sylphide* in a fountain of white tulle, fallen flat down as if someone had got tired of her in the middle of playing with her, dropped her, and wandered off. She had long, black hair down to the waist of her tight satin bodice. 'It is too much,' said Melanie, agitated" (MT 67). The puppet's resemblance to Melanie is uncanny. If we read the puppet as a symbol of Melanie, then there is a strong allusion here to the way that Phillip views women not merely as beings that can be

controlled, like puppets, but also as his playthings, frivolous distractions that are easily discarded once they become boring or mundane.

Since the first appearance of Bluebeard in Charles Perrault's fairytale in 1697, the story of Bluebeard has had an especially lively history, appearing in numerous literary accounts. "One reason for the attraction may be that it is hard to decide whether Bluebeard is about a woman or a man: each sex reads, and therefore retells, Bluebeard very differently" (Lovell-Smith 43). Also, Carter's use of the Bluebeard trope is also ambiguous. For although the patriarchal reign of Bluebeard is an obvious association with Uncle Phillip's character, there is also a suggestion of his usurped power through his wife's actions, "For women have no doubt that this story is about a woman" (Lovell-Smith 45). Denise Osborne supports the feminist claim to the Bluebeard story as one where the female triumphs in a masculine world, and a new social order is established. She examines this point of view through several critics, one of them Jack Zipes, and states that,

For [Zipes], Perrault took motifs from French folklore and created this story to debate masculine domination and the role of men and women during Louis XIV's reign. For Zipes, in order to understand Bluebeard, one has to understand the socio-historical context at the time. In the seventeenth-century, France had numerous writings by men about women's sexual and social roles and male fears of the growing power of women. Bluebeard reflects "a major crisis of phallotocracy. (134)

The threat to male power that Osborne identifies can be located in Uncle Phillip as well. For example, his puppet mastery alludes to manipulation and influenced actions, but it is significant that what he controls in this role are merely puppets and dolls; inanimate objects that have no will of their own. This lifelessness allows Uncle Phillip the illusion of control, and the privacy in which he exerts it can be read as a deep-rooted insecurity in the knowledge that this extent of domination

would not be possible in real-life encounters: although he does control Aunt Margaret and Melanie to some extent, it is significant that for a majority of the day, Uncle Phillip retreats to the privacy of his personal workroom. Here, he is truly a master, and he is able to exert complete control; his limited time amongst the Flower family can be read as Phillip's realization of the limits of his control. He enforces what power he can and then withdraws.

The privacy of Uncle Phillip's workroom, and indeed, the isolation of the entire Flower household, which is described as "a dark cavern of a shop, so dimly lit that one did not at first notice it" (MT 39), is significant, because it confirms that the outside world operates in a different manner. The stronghold of patriarchy began to give way around the time of the novel's appearance, due to the mounting pressures of the feminist movement. Uncle Phillip's intentional separation of his household from the outside world is his desperate attempt to keep his sense of patriarchal control intact. Thus, there is an exclusion of the outside, as we see in the passage, "The Flowers were quite private. Nobody visited them... No friends, no callers" (MT 90). Uncle Phillip's tight control of the finances makes it difficult for the other members of the house to interact with external forces, and therefore they are subjugated to a private, isolated existence. Certainly Melanie feels that the London in which the Flowers live is far from her, and that "she could see the lights of it from the upper windows, but never got any nearer" (MT 90). The segregation of the Flower household speaks of the way that "Bluebeard's solitary castle permits him to set up a new signification system" (Pyrhönen 94).

The system of which Pyrhönen speaks can be read in two ways. Firstly, it is new in the way that, at the time of the novel, to completely disconnect women from social life was quite extreme; Uncle Phillip makes an old tradition new again, by reverting to an older, stricter patriarchy. The newness might also refer to solitude that Pyrhönen mentions; in this sense, the solitary castle signifies Phillip's workroom. In this space, he is able to enforce a new signification system, because his puppets are completely lifeless; they are manipulated and controlled entirely by

Uncle Phillip. No patriarchy that is inflicted on living beings can account for every single nuance of their existence, but in this private world, Uncle Phillip has access to ways of being that are not otherwise possible.

The threat to power is the angle from which I will be arguing that Uncle Phillip is the embodiment of the Bluebeard trope, and similarly, the angle from which I see especially the older female characters, and even more especially Aunt Margaret, as operating. I will show that for every manner in which Uncle Phillip attempts to quell their potential, there is a triumph through a display of agency; for every attempt to assert his authority, there is retaliation, and thus, a regaining of control.

3.2. Dirt and Power

Dirt of all manner exists in the novel, and it does so prominently; to not notice the squalor is impossible. There is an echo of the division Bakhtin makes between the higher aspirations of the sublime and the lower strata of the grotesque. The earthly association of the grotesque is not merely symbolic; the earth is where dirt is found. The squalor of the Flower household stands in stark contrast to Uncle Phillip, who prides himself on being a model of presentability. Everything about his appearance exudes attention to appearance:

His hair . . . was silken and glossy . . . cared for with considerable vanity . . .
He wore an exceedingly white shirt with a butterfly collar, starched to a gloss like glass . . . He sat in shirt-sleeved patriarchal majesty and his spreading, black waistcoat (the shiny back of it cracked in long lines) was strung with an impressive gold watch-chain, of the style favored by Victorian pit owners.

(MT 73)

The sense of ownership that is inherent to patriarchy is seen in this passage as Uncle Phillip is likened to a pit owner. The other members of the Flower household are reduced to property. He is also set apart from the others through his cleanliness, which is in opposition to the dirtiness of especially Francie and Finn. Yet, the contrast between the younger men and Phillip is more complex than merely the consideration of dirt. We must examine what dirt is, and what it represents.

Uncle Phillip represents cleanliness and purity not because he himself is clean or pure, but because his character symbolizes (patriarchal) order. Mary Douglas, in her book *Purity and Danger*, suggests that the concept of dirt is abstract; that its existence relies on a set of categorization and system that determines the proper space and time for every substance. “Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (36). She uses the example of shoes to demonstrate this: shoes themselves are not inherently dirty if they remain in their allocated space, for example, on a shoe-rack, in the entryway, in a cupboard. However, shoes that transgress their sanctioned space to, for example, a table, an ornate rug or draped furniture, are engaged in a taboo act and are therefore dirty. This raises the question of whether offensiveness is determined by the substance or by the space: lipstick is decorative on lips, yet dirty when it marks other parts of the face; crumbs on a plate are permissible, but crumbs on the floor signal the need to clean, to eliminate, to arrange.

This need to control surroundings through categorization and compartmentalization can be applied to the novel, and specifically to Uncle Phillip. In the aforementioned description of him, what is relayed to the reader is not only the fastidious cleanliness of Uncle Phillip, but also the system that it represents. There are clues in this system, for it is not merely a random system for system’s sake, but rather specifically, the system of patriarchy and wealth. As Douglas points out, “pollution beliefs can be used in a dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status” (3). Sabine

Schulting traces this to the Victorian era, when the pollution of the Industrial Revolution aided the visible separation of people according to class; poorer people wore the dirt of their labor upon them, whereas the upper class, who were exempt from dirty physical labor were also then exempt from the marks that this labor left on the bodies of the lower class (3-8). Even today, a well-kept appearance is associated with higher social status.

Although Uncle Phillip is not himself particularly wealthy, he wishes to be, and resents Melanie and her siblings for their bourgeois background and upbringing: “I could never abide your father. He thought ‘isself too good for the Flowers by a long chalk, he did. A writer, he called ‘isself. Soft bastard, he never got his hands dirty” (MT 144). There is a strong inference in this passage to the way that dirt indicates class. Uncle Phillip’s statement implies that proper work is laborious work; it is the work that dirties the worker. That Melanie’s father never got his hands dirty distinguishes his social rank as higher than that of the Flowers. It is paradoxical that Uncle Phillip keeps himself fastidiously clean, despite being of a lower class. However, he is an artisan by trade, and this work is comparable with the literary pursuits of Melanie’s father. Despite this professional similarity, there is a marked difference in social standing and wealth, and this is what Uncle Phillip resents. He avenges this by forcing Melanie, Victoria and Jonathan to also resort to the dirtiness of the Flower household, whose squalor represents its relative lack of wealth. Uncle Phillip’s aspirations of wealth prevail; he separates himself from the other male members of the household by contrasting their dirtiness with his cleanliness. In this way, he establishes himself as the precedent, the standard from which deviation is measured.

Criticisms of the class system, such as Marxist ones, have often pointed out its self-perpetuating nature, and the way that it is built upon a set of prejudices and rules that prevent social mobility. By this I mean that the capitalist system is one that perpetuates social classes, and within this scheme, it is often considered difficult to transcend class; the poor stay poor and the rich get richer. If we consider the idea of dirt in this context, we notice a similarity in the possibility of

becoming clean. In it, bathing happens in “three inches of snot-green, thickish, brackish, warmish water, which took ten minutes to trickle from the geyser’s brutish snout into the tub” (MT 116-117), after which drying oneself is only possible on a towel that is “not quite clean and slimy and harsh to the touch at the same time” (MT 56). The association with dirt and poverty is emphasized: the tub recalls poor families bathing consecutively in the same bathwater; the last to bathe was often left with only the dregs of re-used bathwater, and only one towel was available for all. Incidentally, the expression “Don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater!” also references this; bathing order was determined by rank, with gender (male) and age (mature) presiding - a baby would be the last to bathe. The verb ‘trickle’ alludes to drudgery and dreariness that can be associated with poverty.

For the sake of comparison, there is first a description of the bathroom of Melanie’s bourgeois childhood: “Porcelain gleamed pink, and the soft, fluffy towels and the toilet paper were pink to match . . . the low lavatory tactfully flushed with no noise at all. It was a temple to cleanliness. Mother loved nice bathrooms. She thought bathrooms were terribly important” (MT 57). This is a bathroom that promotes cleanliness of not only patriarchy but also of the upper class. The importance of the ritual of cleaning is exemplified in Melanie’s mother’s attitude towards bathrooms, and also in the way that the bathroom operates; that the lavatory flushes is a tribute to the way that the necessary act of human excrement and passing of waste is sanitized, taking on the form of a hushed, hidden secret. Although we all must, and do, move our bowels, it is best if nobody knows about it. The toilet of the Flower household allows no such graces, because “when she tugged at the chain, there was a raucous, metallic clanking fit to wake the whole house, but not a trickle of water came down to flush the bowl” (MT 56).

Uncle Phillip experiences none of the hindrance of the Flower bathroom, as he “bathed in the tub as often as once or twice a week; he seemed to exercise some occult authority over the geyser, for it never erupted when he lit it” (MT 117). As the master of his system, he is able to navigate through its obstacles. Uncle Phillip’s devotion to cleanliness is not only a symptom

of his attempt to secure his reign, but it is also the means by which his reign is justified. For “he must be perfect as a man, if he is to be a priest” (Douglas 52). In this idea, Douglas encapsulates her argument that outlines the way that absolute cleanliness is akin to purity of a sort that is unattainable by mortals. Purity as a concept extends beyond the mere physical; it imparts cleanliness also in the form of ideas and values. Cleanliness permeates every level of society, from the physical to the abstract. The ultimate form of purity is an ethereal cleanliness, a purity equitable with godliness, or holiness: “Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused” (54). This highlights Uncle Phillip’s attempt to differentiate himself as the patriarch of the family. It is ironic in a sense, as we have so far examined differentiation as an aspect assigned to the marginalized other. What is shown through Uncle Phillip now is the constructed nature of patriarchy. In working so hard to define himself as the norm against which others must be measured, he exposes the unnaturalness of such a social system.

The matter of excrement itself is one that threatens a delicate sense of order, for as Douglas articulates, “We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind” (122). This marginality is due to the fact that urine and feces are substances that are the end product of a long system of ever-changing states; from solid food to broken down food combined with bile to feces, human waste is matter that is hard to define. This difficulty arises not only from a consideration of what it is, but also of where it belongs: “Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose a system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference ... that a semblance of order is created” (4). Feces clearly disrupts our sense of self; it does not belong in us, even if we are the machines that create it. Yet it seems that it does not, in finality, belong in the toilet either; we expect cisterns to

act only as the second part in a process of elimination – like the human body, the cisterns job too is to abject the feces, and dispose of it.

When we think of dirt, what comes to mind is the sort of dirt that covers bodies succinctly. There is a clear separation between dirt and body, and thus there is a clearly defined boundary between the dirt and the self. However, it is a different kind of dirt that is inherent to the character of Victoria. Victoria is covered in a form of dirt much more luxurious and voluptuous: Victoria is sticky. If there is not “cream and jam smeared on her cheek” (MT 41), then she has “hair [stuck] in spikes with jam” (MT 88) or “her dress smeared and sticky” (MT 88). The reason that stickiness is a more threatening form of defilement is twofold. Firstly, there is the nature of stickiness: it has a propensity to make whatever it comes into contact with sticky as well. It is not like a crumb or particle of dirt that can be brushed off, nor is it like a spill that can be wiped clean. It clings, coaxing its victim also into stickiness, and thus, into uncleanliness. The effort to remove stickiness is much more pronounced than the effort it takes to briskly renegotiate order in mess.

The second reason pertains to the transgressional nature of stickiness. Jean Paul Sartre, in his essay on stickiness, says that

Viscosity repels in its own right, as a primary experience. An infant, plunging its hands into a jar of honey, is instantly involved in contemplating the formal properties of solids and liquids and the essential relation between the subjective experiencing the self and the experienced world. ...It is like a cross-section in a process of change. ... It is soft, yielding, compressible. (qtd. in Douglas 39)

While Sartre perhaps accredits the infant with rather more capacity for rational or philosophical thought than they are due, he nevertheless makes an astute point on the nature of viscous substances, and the way that they are between states. The softness and willingness to yield of which

he speaks are also instrumental in analyzing viscosity as a symbol for transgression. Viscosity exists in the realm of marginality, neither a liquid nor a solid. It is this unconformity to either category which gives viscosity its power over system and order, for “All margins are dangerous. ... Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins” (Douglas 122).

Viscosity, therefore, is threatening to structure and arrangement. The inherent need to classify substances, things, beings as either this or that, is disrupted with viscosity; a liminal substance assaults the system and order that classification brings. Something that is unable to be classified poses a problem to its ability to be understood, to the ability to make sense of it, to give it meaning: “The status quo is transgressed, and the transgressive aspects . . . violate accepted, imposed or harmonious boundaries. In this, the grotesque can be transgressive by challenging the limits of conventional aesthetic, ethical or established forms of behavior” (Edwards and Graulund 65). Douglas affirms this when she states that, “Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable” (97). Transgression, then, occurs when a being exists in a marginal state.

Perhaps it then seems contradictory to find a passage in the novel where we are told that “However, Victoria’s weekly bath was a ritual” (MT 117). Thus, not only does the inadequate bathroom succumb to the purification acts of Uncle Phillip, but it also accommodates Victoria in an act that is “ceremonial, absorbing all of Aunt Margaret’s attention and taking up a great deal of time” (MT 118). The words ‘ritual’ and ‘ceremonial’ are significant; they promote Victoria, too, to a state akin to the holiness that Uncle Phillip designates to himself. However, Victoria’s holiness is of a different kind than that of Uncle Phillip. If attention is given to the idea of ritual, Douglas again offers insight into this distinction: “Our washing, scrubbing, isolating and disinfecting has only a superficial resemblance with ritual purifications. Our practices are solidly based on hygiene; there are symbolic: we kill germs, they ward off spirits” (33). This is telling. Victoria is also able to become clean, but it is Aunt Margaret who is cleaning her in a devoted act of purification. In fact, it

is the doing of Aunt Margaret that we should focus on: her actions “ward off spirits” that are induced by the reign and supremacy of Uncle Phillip. Victoria may reap the benefits of this will, but it is Aunt Margaret who initiates the proactivity. She relegates Victoria to the same metaphorical stratosphere in which Uncle Phillip exists, thereby confusing the boundaries he sets in place even further. Victoria’s cleanliness not only usurps the manner in which Uncle Phillip makes himself distinct from the other family members, but it also acts as a symbol which signifies her exemption from place within the hierarchy.

4. Victoria

The end of the previous chapter served as a link to the character of Victoria, who will be the focus of this chapter. I wish to examine the role of agency in childhood. I believe that Victoria occupies a paradoxical position with regard to agency; although she is denied it through her adult-dependent and adult-controlled existence, there is nevertheless a sense of agency seen in the way that she is exempt from certain social conditionings. I will also argue that she transgresses other socially sanctioned norms; her obesity regulates her clearly to the realm of the grotesque. Her acceptance into the social order despite exemption from its norms relegates her also the realm of the grotesque. However, I argue that this exemption is sanctioned, which ultimately denies her agency; her freedom is allowed, rather than gained.

4.1. Childhood and Agency

Victoria is the baby of the family, and is explicitly referred to as such. Yet, she is not a baby, not even within the range of toddlerhood: Victoria is all of “five years and four months” (MT 48). Being called a baby despite being one means that Victoria transgresses boundaries of age. There is another way, too, in which Victoria exists within the margins, and this way is her childhood. There is a similarity in gender politics, where women are argued to exist in the margins of a phallogentric world; children exist in the margins of an adult-centric world. Children exist amongst and alongside society’s adult participants, but are excluded from most of the matters that govern older members. The place of children in a world structured by and for adults emphasizes Victoria’s role as a marginal being. This echoes Douglas, when, referring to marginal persons, she states that “these are people who are somehow left out of in the patterning of society, who are placeless . . . Their status is indefinable” (96). Children do not make decisions for themselves, yet they are involuntarily subjected to the decisions of others; they are acquitted of a vast amount of responsibility and are indulged even if they flaunt conventions that older members abide by.

The child exists as a token of collective ownership; we see this in the novel through the way that not only does Aunt Margaret desire Victoria as her own child, but she is also adopted by Mrs. Rundle: “And a special kiss to Victoria, my little girl” (MT 94). The child as communal property is robbed of its agency. Ironically, the child is simultaneously used as a force to drive the political agenda of society. Lee Edelman suggests something similar to this when he theorizes about a “symbolic child” (19-21). Although Edelman’s concept refers to the way that children are enshrined as an epitome of futurity – that is, that heteronormative reproduction is mandated in political discourse using the child as a bargaining tool -, it can also be extended to the way that children are also used as a representation of innocence and naturalness. The problem with this is that this innocence and naturalness are often defined by adults; adults who are so deeply ingrained in the political and social structures from which they theorize that their arguments are often tainted with bias and projected expectation.

David Oswell notes that more recently, children have become accepted as “actors, authors, authorities and agents” (3), although he also admits that they “have a stake in the institutions and processes which govern their lives” (4). This implies that these institutions and processes are governed and shaped by adults who are acting on the behalf of children. This poses the problem of whether or not children can truly be said to have agency. For Jessica Auchter, agency “remains the attribute which marks entrance into the legitimate political community. Whether or not one is considered an agent has a real-life effect, specifically on women’s lives and their ability to participate in significant political action” (121). If we consider this definition in connection to children, it might then follow that neither Victoria, nor any child, regardless of gender, has access to agency; their age relegates them to a position of submission.

Andrew Casson, in his study on the grotesque in children’s literature, presents the view that “Childness, the changing construction of the image of childhood, has been based on the process of civilization that maintains power structures by inculcating revulsion at the body. At the

same time childhood is constructed by adults as an innocent place, safe from adult anxiety, both sexual and social” (i). Shame is a powerful tool by which society is regulated, and still Victoria feels none of its prohibitions. This is apparent in the passage, “Victoria, partially dressed, had clambered back into her cot and glowered through the bars . . . The pink female fold smiled longwise between her squatting, satiny thighs” (MT 182). What might be perceived as a vulgar display of genitalia is only perceived as vulgar because of the norms of society, which are represented by the cot, whose bars are reminiscent of a cage or prison. This causes a retaliative reaction in Victoria, which is seen through the use of ‘glowered’. On the other hand, the smiling quality of the exhibition speaks to the unabashed pride with which Victoria flaunts herself. I use the word flaunt as one that is less pertinent to Victoria’s action, but rather, revealing of Melanie’s reaction to it. The sexuality of the child is a contested subject; although children undoubtedly possess a sexual self, it is often denied by adults and relegated to the category of obscenity or unacceptability; thus Melanie admonishes Victoria by saying, “My, you are indecent, Victoria” (MT 182).

There is tension, therefore, between the agency of children, and the desire of adults to impose structure on this agency by molding it into a more socially acceptable form. The child’s agency is curbed and retrained. This is exemplified in a tense scene in which Victoria asserts her agency, threatening the presiding structure. The Flower family has been summoned to participate as the audience of Uncle Phillip’s private play. Uncle Phillip’s exacting expectations of their roles as audience members are clear for Aunt Margaret, who is fully conscious of her part in this carefully formulated script. Victoria, on the other hand, is unaware, and this ignorance results in her challenging Uncle Phillip’s domination; although silence is expected, “‘Funny lady,’ said Victoria audibly. Aunt Margaret hastily unwrapped a toffee and stopped Victoria’s mouth with it” (MT 127). Aunt Margaret quells the challenge to structure, sensing that it infringes too obviously on set

protocol. The adult reacts to the child's exhibition of agency by imposing structure on it; thus, the child becomes ever more ingrained into the dialogue of constructed normativeness.

As agency is enacted in the domain of structure, the recognition of such structure must be assumed as a prerequisite of agency. However, Victoria is seemingly oblivious to such structures or understandings of them, which is shown in the passage, "Victoria had no sense of guilt. She had no sense at all" (MT 5). This signals that Victoria, as a child, can indulge her primal instincts without condemnation. It also insinuates that knowledge itself is a socially constructed concept; a child's hedonistic and spontaneous pursuit of pleasure occurs in isolation from an understanding of social structures. This stands in contrast to moments later in the scene, where, despite Melanie's chastising, we see Victoria "pull[ing] off her nightdress defiantly" (177). The defiance of Victoria's action is two-fold; it confirms that Victoria is indeed aware of structure, and what is more, that she resists and defies it. This attests to the way that Victoria does have agency after all; she navigates her understanding of past situations and experience to determine future actions. This is akin to a Vygotskyvian understanding of a child's agency as a socialized being, which Matej Blazek outlines as one where "children actively appropriate the modes of behavior they witness, but also transform and rework them in ways that are different from the established societal patterns" (108).

4.2. A Grotesque Weight

If we take the theories of the grotesque literally, then almost anything that exists within the margins can be considered grotesque. As Victoria's childness relegates her to marginality, does it then automatically also follow that she is grotesque? Certainly, one might claim that there is something inherently grotesque about the way that children come into existence; their parasitic leeching of nourishment from the host body¹ to their birth combines several features of the grotesque, namely

¹ David Cronenburg's "body horror" has been identified as is one of the principle anxieties regarding the grotesque body. This involves the human body being "defamiliarized, rendered other

hybridity and inter-/intra- bodies existing in tandem. A faintly menacing quality is seen in Victoria: “She rolled in the sun and tore butterflies into little pieces when she could catch them” (MT 5). Cruelty is inherent to this passage; there is a marked disconnect between Victoria’s pleasure and the suffering of others. The violence of her action is contrasted by the warmth of the sun; there is an unnerving and unsettling effect that is achieved through this juxtaposition. Nonetheless, it cannot strictly be termed as proper sadism, as there is a carefree quality to her behavior that belies the deliberate infliction of pain. It is simply a by-product of her own enjoyment, a careless cruelty. It can be interpreted as an indication of her behavior, which is characterized by wanton destructiveness.

Placing Victoria most firmly in the realm of the grotesque is her weight. Russo states that “Freedom as a sense of boundless flight is still an almost irresistible image. In women’s writing . . . it appears again and again” (11). Russo provides more detail to illustrate what she means by this, and it is detail that is concerned with gender performativity as well. The idea of weightless delicacy is one that dominates contemporary ideals of Western femininity, as Russo points out through her example of the flying stunt-woman, Amelia Earhart: “the image of [her] – tall, slim and aerodynamic like the planes beside which she modeled – came to stand for all these liberatory aspirations for individual women. . . . The image has survived into the 1990s” (25). Thus, as slenderness is idealized, so too is it normalized; and slimness comes to represent an intelligible femininity. From this it follows that as one femininity is normalized, so too are other forms seen as abnormal, unacceptable and unintelligible.

Fatness, therefore, becomes shunned: “Fatness, for instance, functions as an extremely significant differential in separating off women. . . . placing them in different fields or markets of representation” (23). This differentiation can be extended to encompass a separation between girl children and adult women; children are sanctioned a certain amount of weight, as plumpness in

by a series of alterations, corruptions, erosions or de/evolutions from within, thus breaking down the borders” (Hurley, qtd. in Edwards and Grauland 57).

children has been regarded as indicative of health and wealth. This differentiation sees one female marked against using age and appearance as variables.

These differentiated bodies are the irregular bodies of which Russo speaks; the bodies that are not capable, or worthy, of liberation or transcension. There is grotesquity in these left-behind bodies, as they are rejected from the realm of cultural normativeness. The obesity that is described in the grotesque is also embodied in Victoria: “When she pinched Victoria’s cushiony thigh (Victoria writhing and screaming in pleasure), she scribbled on a pad for Melanie to read: ‘What a fine, plump little girl!’” (MT 48). This is hardly the only reference to Victoria’s size; her hearty appetite and fatness are repeatedly inferred to, for example as seen in the line “She had grown fatter than ever” (MT 88).

Largeness, like dirt, is a trait that unites Uncle Phillip and Victoria, for he too is described thus: “Blocking the head of the stairway on the kitchen landing was the immense, overwhelming figure of a man” (MT 69). In this quote the power of Uncle Phillip is exaggerated; it is a largeness that is within the confines of acceptability and even impressiveness. Edwards and Graulund point to the way that largeness is not the same as fatness, and that the latter is viewed differently to the former. They offer this insight into the matter: “height and strength are less likely to elicit derision, whereas fatness is often met with ridicule or disgust” (68), and elaborate on this with the input of Le Besco and Braziel who observe the way that overweight bodies are seen “as repulsive, funny, ugly, unclean, obscene”, and that the overweight body “equals reckless excess, prodigality, indulgement, lack of restraint, violation of order and space, transgression of boundary” (qtd. in Edwards and Graulund 68).

Despite these intuitions, Russo argues that fatness is not necessarily the product of reckless abandon. She contends that the fat body is an abjected body, and that “this abjection constitutes a hard and hidden work – a work that is easily misrecognized as the very overconsumption it is designed to hide” (24). Russo refers to the reclamation of marginalization and

the arduity of the process involved. There is a certain power that comes from taking pride in something that is regarded as abnormal, even vulgar. This self-spectacularization embodies a sense of extravagance, for “to be extravagant is to show off and to lack in moderation” (Edwards and Graulund 71). Edwards and Graulund go on to show that extravagance is embodied in the transgression of the grotesque, because “to be extravagant is, as its etymology implies, to stray from the beaten path, to wander (‘vagrant’) outside the limits of what is normal (‘extra’). It is to transgress the norm. Yet the extravagant can also be something delightful and enviable” (71).

These are valid assumptions about fatness as a general trait. However, are they evident in Victoria? Although there is no question of the indulgence that is seen in Victoria, she is received with neither ridicule nor disgust. I regard Victoria as a character who is likened to Uncle Phillip in order to show a similarity in their status; both are differentiated from the rest of the household as unique, special. Uncle Phillip’s difference is due to his position of power. This system of order translates ideas and values into practice, thus cementing codes of normalcy and acceptability. Victoria, on the other hand, elicits a form of power also, but it is a complex negotiation; her protection is ensured by others rather than through her own action. Although Victoria transgresses the confines of Uncle Phillip’s domination of control, her affront to it nevertheless confirms it: abnormality is defined in relation to normality. Nevertheless, an agency is seen in Victoria in the way that she adheres to instincts and primal urges.

This chapter has traced Victoria’s agency through her marginality and her alignment with the grotesque. Victoria’s obesity is characteristically grotesque. It is a way that normative body ideals are transgressed; an obese body is a marginalized body. However, this does not offer her agency, as her ability to act out of accord with societal norms is permitted to her because of her age. It is a societally imposed freedom, and therefore, one that lacks agency.

5. Margaret

The previous chapter explored female agency in the formative years, and I argued that although the child is exempt from some restrictions that are placed on the older female, the socially sanctioned way that children are able to do this is not indicative of an agency that is exercised voluntarily. This is most seen in the way that children are excluded from a political sphere and denied choice in a majority of their actions. Only their day-to-day existence is freed from some restraints; the agency of childhood is akin to the agency of humanity devoid of structures and theorized ideals.

Aunt Margaret, on the other hand, is an interesting character to analyze through the lens of agency, for she is at the other end of the spectrum to Victoria. She is older and married, and especially her union to Uncle Phillip forms a contract that infringes on many of her freedoms. Marriage can exist as a social bond that promotes the power of the male – in this case, Uncle Phillip – at the expense of the female, Aunt Margaret. This chapter will explore the negotiation of power within such an institution, and will especially focus on the agency that is available to Aunt Margaret despite her seemingly suppressed potential. In what follows, I will examine Aunt Margaret's female agency through firstly dress, then appetite and finally speech, which will be argued as controlling forces in the lives of women subjugated by patriarchy. As each method is examined, I will simultaneously discern how each method can be subverted from within, and agency demonstrated through the process.

5.1. Dressed to Impress

I will begin this analysis with the theme of appearance. We are offered the following description: “She was painfully thin. The high, family cheek-bones stuck up gaunt and stark and her narrow shoulders jutted through the fabric of her sweater like bony wings” (MT 40). Within this account is a suggestion of freedom. The wings that her shoulder blades resemble are also reminiscent of the potential for flight that birds are imbued with, and this reference is later reinforced: “Aunt Margaret

was bird-like herself, in her hither-and-thither movements and a certain gesture she had of nodding her head like a sparrow picking up crumbs” (MT 42). This bird reference is a recurring motif throughout the novel: with Aunt Margaret it is picked up again through a Christmas-dinner goose, which will be examined momentarily. It also appears, interestingly, in connection with Uncle Phillip, who assumes the role of his alter ego through a swan puppet. This will be analyzed in the following section in connection with Melanie. For now, the focus is on the parallel between women and birds. Russo problematizes the equating of flight with freedom, seeing it instead as a “fantasy of female liberation which defies the limits of the body, especially the female body” (44). It is possible to associate Aunt Margaret more with a caged bird than one that soars the skies of freedom. However, I will argue that Aunt Margaret is not only capable of liberation, but also achieves it. What follows is a look at several factors, which show not only Aunt Margaret’s subjugation, but also her subversion and reworking of these factors; and thus, her emancipation.

The first element of Aunt Margaret’s oppression and liberation is her clothing. Margaret Miles states that in patriarchal cultures, “a central component of maintaining and reproducing social order is the management of women. The primary strategy for the control of women is their public representation” (111-112). In keeping with the idea of Uncle Phillip as a controlling force, the everyday attire of Aunt Margaret is unobtrusive to the point of oblivion: “Like Mrs. Rundle, she wore black – a shapeless sweater and draggled skirt, black stockings (one with a big potato in the heel), trodden down black shoes that slapped the floor sharply as she moved” (MT40). This description exudes a form of dress that is designed to render its wearer invisible, covering any trace of individuality, and indeed femininity. ‘Shapeless’ clothing disguises shape, and specifically the female form is distinguishable because of its curves and shapely lines. The nondescript nature of Aunt Margaret’s clothing is emphasized, and so too is the nondescript appearance of Aunt Margaret. The formlessness of her attire also conceals her by literally denying

her body a view, and from view. If we return to Miles, what is clear is the way that women are marginalized in society; public representation amounts to invisibility.

Melanie wonders “how old [Aunt Margaret] was but there was no way of telling; she could have been any age between twenty-five and forty” (MT 41). Age is but one more way of discriminating especially against women. Women are seen to have a peak period of sexuality and beauty. Biology drives the notion of sexuality in the way that women past a certain age are no longer fertile or as able to produce offspring; the ‘forty’ end of Aunt Margaret’s ambiguous age spectrum alludes to this. ‘Twenty-five’, on the other hand, speaks of a time that is associated with a ripe sexuality and prime stage of womanhood; it is an age of assuredness beyond the self-conscious glow of adolescence, yet nowhere near the declining womanhood of forty years. If the range of age between twenty-five and forty designates the ages during which women ideally produce children, then they are also the ages that are associated with femininity and sexuality. This harks to Butler’s heterosexual matrix as well as Edelman’s reproductive futurity, as enforced heterosexuality ensures species survival. In Aunt Margaret, essentially her entire spectrum of sexual potential is reduced to indifference. That it is Melanie who wonders is telling of the influence of patriarchy on Melanie’s outlook of the world; this scene occurs immediately upon her arrival to the Flower household. Melanie is at this point still relatively accustomed to a previous way of life, where cultural references are acquired through male-dominated institutions and powers. This will be examined further in the next chapter.

While sexuality can be enough on its own – this speaks of an attention to appearance that brings self-satisfaction, a pride in appearance that enhances a feeling of self-confidence – often sexuality is performed with another in the role of the spectator, as the receiver of the performance. Although we have no knowledge of Aunt Margaret prior to her marriage to Uncle Phillip, it is noteworthy that the censorship of Aunt Margaret’s womanhood is so pronounced now that she is married; it enhances Uncle Phillip’s ownership of her – as his wife, her attractiveness to others (or

even herself) must be concealed as she already 'belongs' to someone. This promotes female beauty as existing solely for a male viewer, as the object of a male-gaze. It seems paradoxical then that Uncle Phillip makes invisible his wife's appearance, and by extension, her sexuality. This conundrum is clarified when we recall the objectified beauty that Uncle Phillip imposes on his puppets; their hair flows freely, their dresses are delicate and light. He objectifies objects because of their corporeal inability and impossibility; their inanimateness is what Uncle Phillip admires. A real subject, like Aunt Margaret, threatens him with the propensity of thought and action, and this is what Uncle Phillip attempts to subdue.

Evelyn Rosenthal claims that even "Feminist critiques of sex role stereotypes and challenges to sexist claims about women's nature have not generally extended to old women; with few exceptions, feminists have failed to confront their own ageist constructions of the nature of women beyond midlife" (2). Through the eyes of a young Melanie, we too are afforded a view of women that denies them sexuality beyond midlife. While Aunt Margaret's sexually potential age is faded into a shapeless grey oblivion, the possibility beyond this is even bleaker. Women in old age are relegated to the realm of the grotesque, a character to which Bakhtin refers to as the senile hag. This is because idealized beauty is shaped by socially constructed ideals, and in adherence to these ideals results in expulsion, or abjection: "Mrs. Rundle was fat, old and ugly and had never, in fact, been married. She adopted the married form by deed poll on her fiftieth birthday as a present to herself. She thought 'Mrs.' gave a woman a touch of personal dignity as she grew older" (MT 3). Here the stigmatization of spinsterhood is seen, and we can recall both Butler's heteronormative matrix as well as Edelman's idea of reproductive futurity, which, especially when combined, demonstrate the normative format of heterosexual coupling for the purpose of reproduction. Mrs. Rundle is presented as subjugated entirely to this paradigm; hence her adoption of the married title, which allows her a sense of dignity. Especially women are subjected to intense scrutiny of their marital status as an indication of their worth. The implication is that a single woman is a young

woman; and an older, still single woman has failed as a woman. Even currently, ‘Dr.’ is the only title that defines a woman by her achievements, rather than by her marital status.

But let us return to Aunt Margaret and her clothing. The everyday dress of Aunt Margaret is permitted an exception with the adoption of a special Sunday dress. That this change of dress occurs every Sunday is significant; Sunday is regarded in Judeo-Christianity as a holy day. Thus we are offered an ironic likening of Uncle Phillip to a god. This furthers the idea that was touched upon in the previous chapter, where Uncle Phillip’s cleanliness was shown to be his means of separating himself from the others and establishing a position of authority. The extent of religious control is likened to Uncle Phillip’s reign, and a sense of ceremony is alluded to through the holy attire that Margaret dons on Sundays. This attire consists of a dress that, despite its poor fit and unbecoming appearance, is “nevertheless her Sunday best, and as such, had a certain innate dignity in spite of its nastiness” (MT 112).

The crowning glory of the ensemble is the necklace that Uncle Phillip has made especially for her, “which snapped into place around her lean neck and rose up almost to her chin so that she could hardly move her head. It was heavy, crippling . . . Topping off that scrawny grey dress, the collar looked almost sinisterly exotic and bizarre” (MT 112). The forced erectness of Margaret’s posture is a cruel result of the necklace; as Margaret is otherwise described as meek and cowering in the presence of Phillip, this necklace can be seen as a sadistic means of forcing her to bear with the extent of his tyranny. That the necklace is abnormally tight alludes to the way that his power literally chokes her. This metaphor relays the status of women within patriarchy. The way that her head can hardly move is telling of the extent to which women’s agency is compromised in a patriarchal regime; they are literally robbed of movement, which is a metaphor for the lack of movement experienced on every level, from philosophical to physical.

What is equally telling in the previous quote is the description of Margaret’s collar as “sinisterly exotic and bizarre”. There is an inference, however slight, of something intriguing, and

this fascination is confirmed in the quote “she acquired a startling, hare-like, fleeting beauty, pared to the bone; a weird beauty that lasted until bedtime” (MT 113). To see the torturous necklace as an object of beauty would be to participate in Uncle Phillip’s sadistic pleasure, and yet, it is not entirely recounted as an object that inspires only terror or imprisonment. There is a duality here that is afforded through the extradiegetic narration - a garment that should repel is instead attractive.

Finn offers Melanie a further observation about Sundays in the Flower household: ““You see, they make love on Sunday nights, he and Margaret”” (MT 114). Because of the way that Phillip is so clearly distasteful to Margaret, it must be assumed that the activity is one that is forced upon her against her will. There is perhaps a comment on the nature of religious worship as well; the phrase ‘God-fearing’ is brought to mind, as a parallel between a vengeful god and Phillip is more than apt. In the following chapter, more attention will be given to the way that Carter questions the ideals of Christianity, and specifically the role in which woman is placed. Biblical references lend considerable weight to the upholding of patriarchal values; the subservience of women can be traced to numerous passages in the Bible. However, religious promises of an afterlife that is either heavenly or hellish depending on adherence to normative behavior accounts for a strong alignment with such behavior and practices by some women, even if the unfairness and equality inherent to these practices is perceived. In condemning the values associated with staunch Christian ideals of womanhood, Carter alludes to the fearful nature with which much devotion is carried out. It is devoid of will or want, existing instead as a series of rote actions performed through a sense of duty, rather than desire.

There is another point to be made about the regulated nature of Aunt Margaret and Uncle Phillip’s sexual activity. Roy Baumeister and Jean Twenge study the cultural suppression of female sexuality from a variety of viewpoints, tracing, amongst others, one in which female sexual appetite is argued to be greater than that of the male. This increased desire is perceived as a threat to the male libido, and is thus regulated to keep it more in line with the male sex drive. Dubbing this

the ‘male control theory’, they draw on the work of Gerda Lerner to allege that sexually regulating women is an integral part of patriarchal power (169). Therefore, it could be argued that Uncle Phillip suppresses Aunt Margaret’s sexuality by regulating her appearance as well as her sexual drive. One might speculate that in doing so, Uncle Phillip regulates his own sexuality as well. However, this is in accordance with the ‘male control theory’, which also speculates that men possess a lesser libido than women and therefore desire sex less frequently. Sex is regulated for the woman, but tailored to the man. The threat that Baumeister and Twenge refer to is also in accordance with what drives Uncle Phillip’s action, which I will elaborate upon shortly.

Thus far, what has been established is a reading of Uncle Phillip as a Bluebeard figure, a patriarchal figure; in this frame, Bluebeard is “more a cautionary tale about marriage than a celebration of marital bliss” (Tatar 145). What has also been seen is the instability of Uncle Phillip’s reign and the fragility of his power. However, what was promised earlier was also a more feminist reading of the Bluebeard motif, one which reveals the power and agency available to women despite the entrapment of marriage. Thus, I now elaborate on the way that Aunt Margaret is able to subvert Uncle Phillip’s control, by affronting the normative codes assigned to her.

There is another instance in which Aunt Margaret’s dress differs from her everyday dress. It is a vastly different dress in all aspects, different from both the formless everyday dress and the constricting Sunday frock. The dress that Aunt Margaret wears when Uncle Phillip is away is not initially her own, but a gift received at Melanie’s insistence. It is glaringly different to the maudlin dullness of her normal clothing, and contrasts the drab greyness of her common dress with its vivid and deep shade of green. The shock of color is accentuated through Margaret’s “pyrotechnic hair” (MT 189), which is set free like a “shower of sparks” (ibid.). The usual darkness that is associated with Aunt Margaret is reversed, and the presence of color is accentuated. The colors themselves are symbolic as well; the green of the dress signifies not only Aunt Margaret’s Irishness, but also specifically the desire for freedom and independence that can be equated with

Ireland. The redness of her hair and its imitation of fire is descriptive of the personality that has been hidden away under Uncle Phillip's command.

Judith Halberstam argues that heteromascularity, especially one associated with exaggeration of either color or form, is often understood as a sign of the feminine, queer and even monstrous (121). This is an arguable proof in some respects, as Halberstam here refers to men in colorful clothing rather than people in general. While I do not argue that the minimalism associated with Aunt Margaret represents heteromascularity as such, there are grounds to concede that the somber attire is a means of Uncle Phillip suppressing the potential of her femininity. Here, Halberstam's inference to the exaggeration of color serving as a sign of the feminine is apt. Similarly, the heightened display of color serves simultaneously as a sign of the monstrous, for such an independent Aunt Margaret would certainly be a monstrous force for Uncle Phillip. The notion of monstrosity also connects to the feminine grotesque; womanhood as unbridled freedom and unconstrained existence elicits fear. This is due to the way that it refuses to conform to a sanctioned and idealized femininity, to the mold of masculine demand.

There is another important observation to take away from one of the few instances in which Aunt Margaret's chromatic dress appears. Specifically, I refer to the climactic ending of the novel. Firstly, I offer the insight that Osborne makes about the original Perrault fairy-tale: "In Bluebeard, the wife is saved by other men (her brothers)" (134). This is significant, because Aunt Margaret's incestuous relationship with her brother Francie has just been exposed, first to Melanie, and then to Uncle Phillip, provoking incredulous wonder in the former and incensed rage in the latter. This deserves some attention, especially in the light of Osborne's observation that the original Bluebeard heroine was saved by her *brothers*. It could be argued that the idea that the heroine is ultimately saved by another male figure relegates the idea of power and liberty to a masculine sphere. However, I insist that in *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter plays on this idea of brotherly exemption. Equality is enhanced through the idea that Aunt Margaret and Francie are

siblings; there is an inherent equality here that is missing from the relationship between Uncle Phillip and Margaret. When women's subjugation is theorized about, a 'head of household' is usually accounted for. This figure is most often a father, or a father figure, in the life of a younger woman, until she is old enough to be married off – again, we recall the commodification of women through customs which see her traded from the power of one man to the power of another. The idea of siblingness inspires a similarity in status; while male children may elicit more favor than female children in the system of patriarchy, they are nevertheless subject to a degree of submission as well with respect to the head of the household. This is witnessed in the novel; Uncle Phillip is the head of the household, and he commands not only Aunt Margaret, but also her brothers, Francie and Finn, with equal derision. Therefore, when we are made aware of the union between Aunt Margaret and Francie, we also observe an inherent equality in their status.

Incest in itself is a transgression of patriarchal order. In the theory section, I offered the view of Lévi-Strauss that marriage is a form of alliance establishment between patrilineal clans. However, this is a practice that inherently also encourages exogamy and sets the precedent for incest as a taboo. In the collected work on taboo and transgression, Stella Butter and Matthias Eitelmann consider this very scene in *The Magic Toyshop*. They quote Monson-Rosen as saying

The incest model then serves to inscribe a heterosexual love that is outside the realm of the interwoven structures of societal patriarchy, heterosexual hegemony, and conventional romance. Carter offers a model for a relationship conceived outside of naturalizing patriarchal law, and in violating that most primal of laws, she shakes the myth of patriarchy at its very core. (152)

Not only then is the patriarchal order challenged, but the outcome is idealized, as the relationship between Aunt Margaret and Francie is described as utopian: “It was a lover’s embrace, annihilating

the world . . . The brother and sister kneeled. The room was full of peace” (MT 193-194). There is a symmetry in the action of the characters, which echoes the symmetry that essentialist notions of sex and gender have used to confirm the superiority of heterosexuality, where man is seen as the binary complement of woman, and their fusion as a balanced completion. The peace is striking; there is no sense of the active force of subversion, or indeed, of anything forbidden. In fact, this peaceful union is heterosexual, so in this sense normative conformations are not transgressed. However, I argue that this aspect is what can place the incest between Aunt Margaret and Francie into the realm of performativity and the grotesque; as incest is conventionally taboo, the relationship is in the marginalized domain of what is grotesque. However, the simultaneous heterosexuality keeps it still in the domain of normative sexuality, so from this angle, there is a recodification of prescriptive coupling. It is an extraordinary relationship, ““Like the Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt”” (MT 194). The heavy capitalization enforces the specialness of the relationship, and the reference to regal powers maintains the nobility admiration with which the relationship can be seen.

Wiem Krifa has also studied patriarchy within the novel, and discloses that the novel ends with Uncle Phillip “being mocked and cuckolded by his dumb wife” (350). This echoes Finn in the novel: ““He’s a cuckold . . . by his own brother-in-law, whom he never would have suspected”” (MT 195). ‘Cuckolded’ is a significant verb, because it implies a sense of derision towards Uncle Phillip and speaks of a shortcoming on his part. While the obvious connection is the failing of his patriarchal reign and the emasculation that it experiences as a result of Margaret’s adultery, it also refers to a more ontological shortcoming; a symbolic castration. Aunt Margaret, despite her longing to have children, has thus far been denied of any. Although there is no definitive proof that the fault lies with Phillip, there are subtle implications, like the aforementioned one, that point to the deficit lying with him rather than her.

5.2. Appetite, Eating, Food and Feeding

Motherhood is a contested subject in the realm of female agency. After all, mothers are often viewed as socially and domestically disempowered, due to the restrictions in this role. Childbirth has been relayed as a physically draining ordeal that serves to prevent women from any means of self-realization, trapping them within their bodies (de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 19-29). Betty Friedan explains this idea in her text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), where she argued that women were subjected to a restricted role of mother-wife through a culturally and politically defined set of false values and assumptions; this urges women to define their identity and self through their husbands and children, denying them the possibility of creative self-fulfillment.

It is in this vein that the earlier work of second wave feminists like de Beauvoir and Friedan has been criticized as being misogynistic; several women desire children, and receive pleasure and satisfaction from their roles as mothers. Nevertheless, the oppression of motherhood is certainly felt by Melanie, who initially wonders about her younger sister Victoria, ““Will I have to stay at home and help Mummy look after her and never have a life of my own?”” (MT 7). The implication for Melanie is clear: motherhood is a detriment to one’s own potential and desire. Melanie’s character offers the perspective that motherhood is not synonymous with individuality; the roles are separate, and cannot exist in harmony – to take on the role of mother is to give up the role of self. Later on, this is solidified in the lines, “Aunt Margaret wanted babies so much, she wanted Victoria for her very own. Then she could have Victoria. Melanie gave up all rights in Victoria on he spot and felt a lessening of tension. A burden had been taken off her” (MT 78). Indeed, Victoria’s weight is emphasized in scenes where Melanie is in charge of her care: during their journey to the Flower household, she is described as “a heavy lump of a child and Melanie’s arms cracked under the weight of her” (MT 32-33). The burden of childcare is made evident, as is the idea that this is a woman’s burden: despite asking Jonathan for help, Melanie must manage alone, as Jonathan replies, ““I would rather carry the model I am working on, in case it gets

injured” (MT 32). The implication is that men prioritize their own fulfillments and commit to their individual pursuits, whereas women must abandon these in order to cater to the child’s needs.

We return to the problematic character of Aunt Margaret, whom I attempt to read as a potentially emancipated woman, even if she passionately desires to be a mother. Kerchy offers us the beginnings of an answer to this dilemma when she claims that “The Carterian narrative, as a notorious demythologizer of ‘motherhood as an essentialist token of womanliness and a social institution,’ contradicts the Kristevian insistence on the maternal space as an immediate source of textual/corporeal revolution” (31). Kristeva, then, would appear to believe that the maternal role is an empowering one after all. Aunt Margaret justifies an empowered reading of motherhood, because it is something she chooses. Despite not being able to have children, she desires them. She realizes this desire by adopting the role of a mother to the orphaned children, and in doing so, she initiates agency.

Sarah Sceats extends: “The transposing of the nurturing, feeding aspects of motherhood onto substitute figures is a way of avoiding a biologically determined essentialism. . . . Natural mothers . . . hardly feature in Carter’s work but non-biological mothers are allowed to behave – and be constricted – maternally” (15). She goes on to note that the combining of food and love is contingent with maternal behavior, and explains how nourishment is “implicit in scenes of positive maternal nurturing” (20). Aunt Margaret’s agency is discernable through her actions. In accordance with Butler’s performativity, her sex is confirmed through her gender; the actions she performs are a tribute to motherhood, which removes anatomical sex from the equation. Her anatomical sex and self-identification, however, are in accordance with the genderization of motherhood as female. Therefore, her lack of biological children works to initiate a discord between her biological sex and her biological functionality: this discord defines Aunt Margaret also as grotesque – she is marginalized even in the margins.

If nourishment is the measurement of nurturing capabilities, then Aunt Margaret excels exceedingly: “The food was abundant and delicious . . . Aunt Margaret presided over the table with placid contentment, urging them to eat with eloquent movements of the eyes and hands” (MT 47). This is an instance where Aunt Margaret’s lack of spoken language is not a deterrent to communication: the language of food is a universal one, and a preverbal one too. Aunt Margaret is able to implore everyone to eat heartily without anything more than bodily movements and physical signs. This movement differs from her usual nervousness; within the realm of heartfelt expression, Aunt Margaret becomes “eloquent”. The warmth and comfort that connects mothers to food and nourishment is an equation that is understood on both sides of the interaction: “she must, thought Melanie, be nice if she cooks so well” (MT 47).

Food is a female-centered and female driven domain, and is a realm of life in which women can exert a form of freedom. Sceats observes that “Angela Carter places . . . Aunt Margaret in a maternal role precisely to emphasize her disempowerment. But the situation is neither straightforward nor static, and relative status can shift about considerably. The nurturing aspects of mothering and the pleasures to be gained from feeding people are apparent . . . Such satisfactions are empowering” (20). Even Uncle Phillip’s tightly controlled household allows Aunt Margaret a wider berth when matters of food are involved: we can contrast the usual state of affairs, ““But he doesn’t let me have any money, myself” (MT 140), with the procedure when food is involved, ““There is credit at the shops”” (MT 140). The realm of nourishment, and if the earlier analysis is correct, then also the realm of love, is one in where Aunt Margaret is allowed unprecedented freedom and agency; not only is she free to cook whatever she wants, she can also cook as much of it as she wants. There is a poignant scene in the novel concerning the power that is associated with food: “To her surprise, there was a special dinner, a roast goose . . . Aunt Margaret must have ordered it secretly by herself, as a surprise. Old Scrooge Uncle Phillip frowned when he saw it and plunged the carving knife into its belly so fiercely . . . He attacked the defenseless goose so

savagely he seemed to want to kill it all over again” (MT 160). This is a very phallic act that incorporates sexual brutality; we can liken the carving knife to Uncle Phillip’s penis, and the bird to Aunt Margaret, who is violated repeatedly. What becomes clear in this is the threat that Aunt Margaret’s power provokes in Uncle Phillip, which causes him to violently retaliate and reassert his dominance over Aunt Margaret.

The fact that Aunt Margaret is repeatedly described as bird-like is especially significant in relation to this scene: the goose can be read as an allegory for Aunt Margaret. It is Aunt Margaret whom Uncle Phillip so savagely attacks, or rather, the presumptuous degree of emancipation that she displayed in offering such a lavish meal. The power he exudes over her is not enough, the freedoms that have been denied her are insufficient, and thus, he wants to kill her “all over again”. The plunging of the carving knife alludes to the brutality of his actions, and the extent of his need to be solely in control: ‘plunge’ is forceful and direct – there is no hesitation in his force. This analysis has not escaped Martin either, who agrees that “food is one of Margaret’s limited means of self-expression, and as such it is resented and attacked” (12).

The Christmas dinner is but one of several meals that are pictured in the novel, the taking of meals being a central theme. This dinner is an especially prominent one because it is so telling of the dynamic between not only Uncle Phillip and Aunt Margaret but also of Uncle Phillip in relation to other characters. There is another meal, however, that expresses a different power dynamic. It is a meal that occurs in Uncle Phillip’s absence, and both of these opposite forms can be considered through a specific element of the carnivalesque grotesque: the feast.

Bakhtin distinguishes between two different feasts: official feasts that were sanctioned by the state or political forces; and the feasts of the carnival. These two types of feasts differ from each other completely, from their purpose to their atmosphere. There is a parallel with both sorts of feasts in MT, and the difference in the novel is distinguished through the absence or presence of

Uncle Phillip, who can be read as the officiating state of government. Bakhtin describes this first solemn feast in the following passage:

The official feasts ... did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it. ... Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. ... This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it. (9)

This echoes the somber quality of meals that are taken with Uncle Phillip, and the official, joyless atmosphere that they exude. Indeed, the Christmas feast is described as “a gloomy table, and they did not linger over it” (MT 160). We can contrast this to meals taken without Uncle Phillip: “there was such festivity in the kitchen” (MT 183). If there is any doubt about the way that this meal breaks from the usual traditions and norms, the line “He sat at the head of the table like the Lord of Misrule” (MT 183) confirms that it is so; Finn replaces Uncle Phillip as the presiding source of power, and the contrast between their reigns is pronounced. That Finn offers an alternative to patriarchy is a strong theme in the novel; it will be discussed further in connection with Melanie.

5.3. The Power of Silence

There is one last issue through which Aunt Margaret must be examined, and that is speech and communication. She paradoxically displays this power by choosing muteness: “It is a terrible affliction; it came to her on her wedding day, like a curse” (MT 37). Margaret’s silence upon marriage strongly infers that marriage silences women. If Aunt Margaret’s silence is viewed

through the lens of performativity, it can certainly be read as a parodic reaction; if patriarchy means to silence women figuratively, then the absurdity of this action shall be highlighted, for Aunt Margaret takes it to a literal extreme. This demonstrates agency in Aunt Margaret, which is confirmed by the fact that Aunt Margaret is not mute by birth. Rather, it is a choice she has made, not only as a symbolic highlight of the patriarchal oppression of Uncle Phillip's reign, but moreover as an assertion of her own power. Martin concurs with this view, noting, "Aunt Margaret's silence can be read as a refusal to speak the language of patriarchal power, and her near-starvation as a rejection of Uncle Phillip's crushing authority at the dinner table" (12).

There is another way that Aunt Margaret uses language to her advantage, for Aunt Margaret does not shun discourse altogether. There is a view that speech is associated with phallogentrism; in this already male-privileged domain, women are silenced even further by the limitation of their speech, its volume, and its subject matter. Martin justifies this idea when she remarks "women's bodies, speech and sexuality are tied to notions of excess and punishment, suggesting that they are sinful and ultimately threatening. Therefore in the history of Western patriarchal culture, women have been denied the same means of expression as men and their voices have been suppressed by a cultural tradition that denies their significance" (5). In resorting to writing on a chalkboard as a means of communication, the sentence "Melanie noticed the woman's index finger was stiffly grained with chalk dust. She would have been a talkative woman if she could" (MT 41) is misleading in the way that the conditional 'could' implies a lack of choice on Aunt Margaret's part. The stiffness of the ingrained chalk dust speaks of a willful determination, and hence we should interpret the conditional state as one that indicates Aunt Margaret's agency: she 'could' have been talkative if she had chosen to be so.

In adopting writing over speech, Aunt Margaret initiates a multi-faceted dialogue, with alternative means of expression. The interactivism of reading and writing inspires dialogue instead of monologism. In the transferal of ideas from thought to written form and then to read form, there

is an opportunity for reflection. The pauses that are integral to Aunt Margaret's method of communication are suggestive of the gaps between Butler's repetitive actions, where agency lies. Aunt Margaret's chalkboard lengthens the gaps between these repetitions; in them lies the opportunity for consideration and construction. This is in accordance with Bauer, who notes that "coming to know and re-evaluate the other is at the heart of the feminist act of reading ... just as it is at the heart of the female grotesque characters coming to know themselves as other in a world where patriarchal language and hegemonic order aspires to monologism" (677). There is a definite power in Aunt Margaret's actions: the interaction of communication is dictated by Aunt Margaret, and so is the timing of the dialogue, with the receiver forced to comply with the speed of Aunt Margaret's writing. The power of communication has thus been trumped by Aunt Margaret.

Full emancipation or freedom, at best abstract terms clouded by differences of culture, class and religion, is not necessarily a choice that is readily available even to the most Westernized woman. In an interview given to, a Jewish centered news source, Butler elaborates on this: "It seemed that if you were subjugated, there were also forms of agency that were available to you, and you were not just a victim, or you were not only oppressed, but oppression could become the condition of your agency" ("As a Jew"). I view the character of Aunt Margaret as having the most agency of the three females that I analyze; Aunt Margaret utilizes the power that is available to her. Her character is an embodiment of contradictions; she exists as an enigma who occupies gendered essentialism, yet teases its signifiers into unique contortions in order to construct new meanings. Aunt Margaret is a character who answers Russo affirmatively when she asks whether there exist "possibilities of re-inhabiting the old in a way that will alter it" (30).

6. Melanie

In the previous chapter, Aunt Margaret was shown as a character that possessed a great deal of agency, despite being arguably the most embedded within Uncle Phillip's patriarchy. Her independence and navigation of power from such a marginalized position is what makes her grotesque; she establishes a new meaning within the old system of signification. Melanie, on the other hand, poses somewhat of a dilemma in this analysis. She is impassionate and resigned, and this makes it difficult to connect her explicitly to either agency or the grotesque. However, it is precisely this ambiguity that I believe to encompass Carter's attitude towards female agency; it is a process of delicate negotiation, where meaning must be created carefully and hesitantly.

This chapter focuses on Melanie, the adolescent whose age is symbolic of her position on a threshold; the liminality of this age alludes to the marginality of the grotesque. She has neither the unaware blitheness of Victoria, nor the hardened and determined reserve of Aunt Margaret. Melanie exists on a boundary, and from this, she must decide to which side she will step. I will show that in *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter uses nature to symbolize female sexuality, and revises the story of the Garden of Eden. Secondly, I claim that Melanie is a character through whom Carter comments on the nature of the institution of marriage; there are two scenes that pertain to this, and I will explore both. Thirdly, I will endeavor to show the development of Melanie's agency as she transitions from the role of the objectified Other to the gazing, subjectified Self.

6.1. A Grotesque Garden of Earthly Delights

Already in the opening passage of the novel, Melanie's body is connected with a garden, or nature. She views her own body as a landscape, and "embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her own mountain ranges, penetrating the moist richness of her secret valleys" (MT 1). This opening passage is rife with sexual imagery, and Melanie is not only

embarking on an exploration of physical appearance, but also of her sexuality. The relation of women to nature is an old idea. Simone de Beauvoir speaks of it when she notes that,

Woman is related to nature, she incarnates it . . . she represents to man the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world . . . She can be mediatrix between this world and the beyond . . . [opening] the door to the supernatural, the surreal. She is doomed to immanence . . . but if she declines this role, she is seen forthwith as a praying mantis, an ogress. In any case she appears as the privileged Other, through whom the subject fulfills himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness. (“Myths” 681)

For now I will only use the first few sentences of the above passage; the rest of it will provide fodder for the interaction between self and other that occurs between Melanie and Finn and will thus be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

In *The Magic Toyshop*, both Melanie and the garden are depicted in the same way; when Melanie steps into the garden, it is described as an unknown territory, a land to be conquered: “Under the moon, the country spread out like a foreign and enchanted land . . . neither sown, nor reaped, terra incognita, untrodden by the foot of man, untouched by his hand. Virgin” (MT 16). There is ambiguity to this passage; it is unclear whether the man represents the generic man of humans or the specified gendered man. Because of the reference to virginity, however, we can presume that it alludes to either a specific male or to men in general. The garden, then, is representative of both female sexuality in general and Melanie’s sexuality specifically.

There is a grotesque quality in the garden as well, which is fitting if we are to read it as a symbol for female – or Melanie’s – sexuality; as Russo has already made clear, that which is

not normative or that which is forbidden, marginalized or shunned, can be considered grotesque. The garden is not forbidden as such, but there is a sense of trespass that is offered as Melanie ventures into it, as we see in the description of her journey to it: “Quietly, gently, or down would come Mrs. Rundle” (MT 17).

It is certainly a magical garden, and almost foreboding: “The dewy grass licked her feet like the tongues of small, friendly beasts; the grass seemed longer and more clinging than during the day” (MT 17). This allusion to non-human entities is decidedly grotesque; beasts and hybrid beings characterize it. A pronounced difference between night and day is also created: “Melanie let herself into the night and it snuffed out her daytime self at once” (MT 17). The harsh light of day exposes everything in stark view; there are no illusions. The night, on the other hand, offers a refuge for secrets and provides a sanctuary for enacting upon urges or desires that might not be acceptable were they to be seen. The night is where ambiguity reigns, as is confirmed in the passage, “the creature, whatever it was, had no more corporeal substance than wind-blown leaves” (MT 17). Bodily borders are less visible; there is more possibility to disappear, to transform from one form to another. This is indicative of the marginality of the body, and from that we see the grotesque. It is full of “whatever monsters. Whatever huge, still waiting things with soft, gaping mouths, whose flesh was the same substance as the night” (MT 19).

Furthermore, these hybridized beings of a nightly world are also distinctly sexual. They are threatening because of their unfamiliarity, but otherwise, their mouths are soft and friendly. This is only one of the ways that the garden is a potent symbol for sexuality; there are numerous references of this: “A fresh little grass-scented wind blew through the open window and stroked her neck, stirring her hair... The flowers cupped in the garden with a midnight, unguessable sweetness” (MT 16-17). Not only are the descriptions loaded with sexual imagery, it is sexuality of a distinctly feminine nature. The overall impression of sexuality that we gain from the garden is one of opulence and temptation. The caressing wind conjures images of sensual comfort; “the cupped

flowers” are strongly suggestive of the vagina, and the “unguessable sweetness” indicates the sexual fluids within. ‘Unguessable’ also suggests a sense of wonder, implying that within Melanie’s sexuality there are elements that are as yet unknown. Elizabeth Gargano states that in “adopting the time-honored convention of metaphorizing female sexuality as a garden of earthly delights, Carter appears to embrace a tradition that is linked with the objectification of an essentialized female body” (60). This is rather a strong claim, and I am not prepared to fully agree with Gargano. For example, I take issue with the idea of objectification. Although Melanie’s sense of sexuality has thus far been molded in accordance with images of objectification (the references to art, her parents), I distinguish this scene as Melanie’s discovery of the constructedness of social ideals and the exposure of their shortcomings. Melanie feels estranged from the sexuality that she is supposed to conform to. The most potent sense of it occurs in isolation, in an idealized fantasy. It takes place in her bedroom, with her mind projecting romance in an imaginary world. In the real world, in this garden, there is an only a sense of disappointed jadedness tinged with a degree of fear: “She was too young for it. The loneliness seized her by the throat” (MT 18). Therefore, I detect this as the beginning of Melanie’s own attempt to define her femininity; she must navigate the myriad of feminine representations that she has encountered and process them alone.

There is another way that the scene is grotesque, and by this I refer to the marginality that is inherent to it. For example, we see that “It was late in the summer and the red, swollen moon winked in the apple tree and kept her wide awake. . . . Her skin prickled with wakefulness and her nerves were as raw as if a hundred knives were squeaking across a hundred plates in concert” (MT 9). The moon has long been associated with femininity, and more specifically, with menstruation. That the moon in MT is “red” and “swollen” alludes to this; the redness signifies blood, and the swelling is indicative of the increasing saturation and bloating that occurs prior to menstruation. Kathleen Rowe connects menstruation to the grotesque by stating that “The grotesque body is above all the female body . . . which, through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation,

participates uniquely in the carnivalesque drama of becoming . . . of inside-out and outside-in, death-in-life and life-in-death” (33-34).

In this sense, Melanie is a grotesque character: her adolescence and menarche place her prominently in a position of marginality. “Since she was thirteen, when her periods began, she had felt she was pregnant with herself, bearing the slowly ripening embryo of Melanie-grown-up inside herself for a gestation time the length of which she was not precisely aware” (MT 20). Most telling is the idea that Melanie is pregnant ‘with herself’. This image grotesque because of its bizarreness; the familiar embryo-within-an-adult is reversed to give an image of an infant body housing an adult. It is also grotesque because of its implication of marginality; the idea that the real and essential Melanie has yet to be born is prominent. This suggests that the Melanie who is acting presently has no agency of her own; she is merely performing mechanized rote motions as she waits for her adult self to emerge. There is a sense of duality: it is as if another, or rather, the other, is an integral part of the self and warring with it. The idea of a body at odds with itself is the terrain of the grotesque. It might seem absurd to claim that all teenagers are grotesque, but this is not quite the claim that I am making. I suggest instead that menarche places females temporarily in a position of marginality; they literally exist on the margin between childhood and womanhood. Menstruation itself is also a marginal act, as layers of the self are shed and regenerate thus permanently placing bodily borders in an ever-evolving state. I argue that Melanie’s femaleness and her menarche combine to stress her marginality, because she is in a process of change that alludes to self-discovery.

The onset of menstruation coincides with an uncertainty of the self; a self that was previously complete suddenly divides into a self that is continually and repeatedly shedding itself. Indeed, there is the implication that some part of the self is trapped and longs for liberation. The self that exists beneath the discarded layer is also not complete; it is a projection of a future self, of a “Melanie-grown-up” that will exist properly only once its final corporeal borders are realized. The

shreds of self that are expelled may be abject, but the implication is that neither is the remainder accepted as whole. I argued in the previous chapter that age is used as a means of objectifying women's sexuality. Menstruation can be seen to coincide with this discrimination somewhat, as the period of life in which a woman menstruates correlates with the reduction to biological functionality. However, if menstruation is associated with female validation, and this entire period is consumed with the expelling and abjecting of oneself, then women only exist in completion either prepubescently, or in extreme maturity.

Menstruation pertains to the female grotesque in the way that menstrual blood is specifically female; while all manner of bodily fluids are grotesque because of their mutable nature, female blood is even more so because it is related only to females. For example, concerning an Irish protest against English rule, Leila Neti noted that "It was acceptable to discuss feces . . . but menstrual blood did not receive much public attention . . . Smearing feces on the wall was something that both male and female prisoners took part in. Yet the social taboo of discussing women's bodily functions seems to play a role in silencing the women's struggle" (81). There is an abject quality to it because of the way that it is produced from within; whereas feces and urine require external input to be produced – food and drink are transformed within, but they come from the outside, and are expelled – menstrual blood is inherent to the female corpus. It provides a continual state of transition within the female body, and also a continual rebirthing of itself. Catherine Martin explains: "As a body that 'does not respect borders, positions, rules' but represents 'the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite', the body of the adolescent fulfills Julia Kristeva's definition of the abject (*Powers of Horror* 1982:4), and as such becomes a target for social control" (6). We have already seen the link between the abject and the grotesque in the way that what is left behind, what is beyond the margins, holds the possibility of transformation. Menstruation encapsulates this proposition: the flowing blood is a testament to an aspect of womanhood that is neither sanitized nor contained within definitive borders; it is expelled

involuntarily, leaving behind a fragment of femininity that is at one taboo and totemic. Furthermore, menstrual blood is a highly sexual fluid and thus, pertains to the sexuality of women; the taboo of the blood can be extended to the taboo of women's sexuality.

As has already been shown through the Bluebeard figure, *The Magic Toyshop* is rich in intertextuality; however, this is by no means the only revision of a well-known motif. According to Martin, "Carter acknowledges that *The Magic Toyshop* is also an attempt to revise the story of the Fall, and hence the founding myth of Judeo-Christian culture (Haffenden 1985:80) . . . Carter implies that the gothic conditions suffered by the women . . . are an exaggerated version of the conditions imposed by Christian morality" (11).

The allusion to the Garden of Eden is marked. We initially see Melanie as Eve: "She was alone . . . the only woman" (MT 17). The apple tree of Eden is also present, "her own tree, her friend, whose knobble old branches were thick with fruit" (MT 19). Pictured too is the snake of Eden masquerading as a cat, yet whose evil is plain: "Its paw was tipped with curved, cunning meat hooks. It had a cruel stroke" (MT 21). Gargano notes that "the garden introduces temptations, pleasures and dangers that must be averted or resolved" (62-63). These pleasures and temptations have already been seen in the imagery of the garden, but it is the resolving and aversion of them that I will focus on next. For this is the crux of the garden scene, as Melanie ventures into the garden despite her fear and trepidation: like Eve, who ventures against the conditions of utopia, Melanie too is overcome by a curiosity about the wonders of the nighttime garden, despite her apprehension.

In accordance with the story of The Fall, Melanie too ventures beyond the limits of what she knows and discovers that she "never thought the night would be like this" (MT 17). The novelty of the garden initially fills her with wonder and intrigue, so much so that, "She shook with ecstasy. Why? How? Beyond herself, she did not care" (MT 17). 'Beyond herself' is a telling phrase. It can be interpreted as 'apart', separate from Melanie. In this sense, it denotes the excitement that cannot be contained within her corporeal body and visibly struggles being withheld

in her frame, but it also speaks of the way that the knowledge she has gathered in the garden is beyond the knowledge that she has had ingrained into her automatically. She is beyond herself in the way that she has evolved from one state of knowing to another.

The knowledge was hitherto outside the scope of her understanding, and Melanie is overwhelmed by it. There is a marked contrast between her life up to this point, and life after it: “She was too young for it . . . suddenly she could not bear it. She panicked” (MT 18). Melanie realizes that she has trespassed into a territory that was, if not entirely forbidden, at least forbidden still presently. There is the suggestion that there is something within the garden that makes up a part of Melanie’s fate, but that she does yet feel ready for it; it is “Too much, too soon” (MT 18). As the garden has been established as a metaphor for sexuality - a potentially liberating force - we can assume that the fate which terrifies Melanie is the culmination of sexuality, which in Melanie’s case is the resulting heterosexual coupling. Until this point, a potential partner has only existed on Melanie’s terms; now the reality of such a fate becomes apparent, and it alarms her.

What is clear, though, is that there is a symbolic fall from grace, as Melanie attempts to climb the tree which “had turned against her and there was no comfort in it” (MT 20), and apples “tumbled continually as she moved” (MT 21). “The image [of the female body as unruly and grotesque] is grounded in Biblical authority” (Martin 5). With Melanie’s foray into the garden, she loses innocence, but gains knowledge.

6.2. Of Brides and Swans

The first few pages of *The Magic Toyshop* establish heterosexual coupling as the prevailing norm, at least through the eyes of Melanie, who also spends time fashioning “nightgowns suitable for her wedding night which she designed upon herself. She gift-wrapped herself for a phantom bridegroom” (MT 2). Recalling the theory section which presented the idea of women being exchanged between men as a commodity: this idea can be explicitly illuminated through the likening of Melanie to a parcel. The passage further suggests the prizing of virginity; it is not only

the woman who is gifted but also her virginity. A significant amount of attention is given to the idea of marriage, and especially to the wedding ceremony, which is a symbolic culmination of all the bonds that such a contract enshrines. This will be explored next through two scenes: Melanie's nocturnal venture into the garden, and her enactment of Leda in Uncle Phillips interpretation of the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan.

If the garden as Eden represents sexuality, the unknown, the forbidden, then the house, the solid foundation which has shaped Melanie up to this point, contrasts it. In fact, we see that "she kept as close to the house as possible . . . the house was some protection" (MT 19). The house is a symbol for the institution of patriarchy in which Melanie has developed. It is a world in which the roles of men and women are clear; the male is the breadwinner, and the female provides nurture and company. This is a house that provides Melanie with an image of coupling that proceeds thus; "Mummy was keeping Daddy company. Daddy was on a lecture tour" (MT 3). This is a domesticated ideal, and it has shrouded Melanie in a bubble of domestic innocence.

Central to this ideal is heteronormativity, and this is seen in Melanie donning her mother's wedding dress before she enters the garden. That the house and Melanie's upbringing represent the ideals of white, Anglo-Saxon, upper class men is made clear in other ways, too: the house is described as "red-brick, with Edwardian gables, standing by itself in an acre or to of its own grounds; it smelled of lavender polish and money" (MT 7), and as for the value system, "Their father liked them all to go to church on Sundays. He read the lesson, sometimes, when he was at home. Born in Salford, it pleased him to gently play at squire now he need never think of Salford again" (MT 7). However, I think the wedding dress is the most powerful element here. It is made of "acres of tulle, enough for an entire Gothic Parnassus of Cranach Venuses to wind round their heads" (MT 15). Again, the references to women are explicit, encapsulated in perhaps one of the most metaphorically loaded images that women are offered: the image of the bride. Also Melanie buys into this image, albeit questioningly and with some hesitation: "Moonlight, white satin, roses.

A bride. Whose bride? But she was, tonight, sufficient for herself in her own glory and did not need a groom” (MT 16).

Leena-Maija Rossi has explored the way that reiterative and repetitive visual performances make heterosexuality (and by extension, heteronormativity) a norm, and she uses the wedding dress as a token of “decorative, highly stylized female femininity” (12). She proposes that the entire spectacle of the wedding ceremony is an act that is enshrined in not only visual, but harking back to Austin, also in verbal codification that performs the narrative of happy, successful heteronormativity. Genders are binarized and contrasted, in the way that “the wedding dress and the groom’s suit of course form a syntagmatic combination, which re-produces the assumed definitive difference and oppositionality between the genders” (12).

An important point that Rossi makes is that especially the bride’s ensemble has become increasingly opulent and extravagant, whereas the groom’s suit has “started to resemble more and more his attendants’ suits. Thus the body of the bride has been foregrounded while the groom is faded ‘into the background’ (Freeman 2002, 32)” (13). This poses the question of whether the idea of Melanie being sufficient for herself, without a groom, is reflective of female agency and autonomy. In fact, I argue that it is not necessarily so; I see this instance rather as a tribute to how pervasively institutions are marketed – a spectacularized image of beauty is enough to shadow the reality of what lies ahead. The bridal motif is literally a dressing up of a convention, designed to disguise the fine print embedded within the contract. The wedding is for the bride; the marriage is for the groom.

Regardless of which of these readings is correct, what can be taken away from this is that such performances of gender showcase the female in the role of spectacularized beauty. This is the domain of objectification, in which women are allocated roles that reduce them to a visually attractive exterior, to be enjoyed and appreciated by an audience on the basis of exteriority alone, while the interior is ignored. Despite the admiration that onlookers offer a spectacularized body,

Russo points out the danger that is inherent to such situations: females in fantastic forms have often been subjected to atrocities. She includes the possibility of danger by pointing out that during the festivities of the carnival, women have either been raped or reduced to an element of stylized performance, thus becoming estranged from the liberation that would otherwise be possible. Because in such spaces women's bodies characteristically take on mere signs, they are denied transgression and simply perpetuate misogynistic representations instead (59). This pertains exactly to the wedding motif; the wedding is a stylized performance, and the bride a stylized element of it. Her objectification is made extreme, perpetuating misogynistic representations of chastity, pureness, innocence (denoted by the white of the wedding dress), which are commodified and traded from one male to another.

There is another scene in which the self-fashioned bride Melanie is reproduced, this time fashioned by Uncle Phillip. He forces Melanie into the role of Leda in his private re-enactment of Leda and the Swan. Again, this displays of Carter's penchant for intertextuality, and it is especially significant that this time the intertextuality deals with a myth. Whereas the reworking of biblical theme of the garden can be seen as an undoing of the 'master-narratives' by which patriarchy works, the deconstruction of a myth serves another purpose. Carter herself remarks that "[myths are] ideas, images, stories that we tend to take on trust without thinking what they really mean. ... I'm in the demythologizing business" (qtd. in Day 3-4). The Leda myth is one that Carter returns to repeatedly; it also appears in her novel *Nights at the Circus*.

The myth of Leda and the Swan is the Greek story of the god Zeus who, in the disguised form of a swan, seduces Leda and copulates with her. This is the scene that plays out in Uncle Phillip's private theatre grotto: Melanie is forced to take part in Phillip's recreation of the myth, in the role of Leda. In this scene, Phillip himself is reduced to a puppet, for the swan represents his alter ego; Phillip is disguised as Jove, who is disguised as the swan. As the swan enters the stage, Uncle Phillip narrates, "Almighty Jove in the form of a swan wreaks his will" (MT

166). There is a multilayered façade at work. This bizarre role reversal, the ambiguity of human versus marionette, relegates this scene also to the domain of the grotesque. Kayser notes that “The mechanical object is alienated by being brought to life, the human being by being deprived of it. Among the most persistent motifs of the grotesque we find human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks” (183).

Because the puppets are manipulated and controlled by Uncle Phillip, his power is highlighted in the scene. However, there is also a sense of the control being just outside his grasp; there is a furtiveness to his action that speaks of a power lost, and the attempt to regain it. This is evident in the line, “she could see Uncle Phillip directing its movements. His mouth gaped open with concentration” (MT 166). Here, we are offered a view of the absorption that control demands from Uncle Phillip; the hold on power does not come to him naturally, and it requires effort. In fact, although this scene metaphorically describes the rape of Melanie, what is striking about it is the power and assuredness which is connected to Melanie. Her body may be violated, but her mental capacity retains an air of detachment; she experiences “a gap of consciousness” (MT 167) once the rape has ensued, which can be read as a defense system employed by the body as a means of self-protection in the face of adversity. Furthermore, there is a recognition of the ultimate sham of Uncle Phillip’s power, as evidenced in Melanie’s reaction to the swan: “It was a grotesque parody of a swan... It was nothing like the wild, phallic bird of her imaginings. It was dumpy and homely and eccentric. She nearly laughed again to see its lumbering progress” (MT 165).

The above scene houses another example of Melanie appearing in virginal white, associated with innocence and purity. The repetition of this image cannot be coincidental: Carter clearly wants us to think about what this means in relation to Melanie. The second image of Melanie was less pronounced; it was merely the puppet hidden in Uncle Phillip’s workshop that resembled Melanie. Although the actual Melanie now appears in “just the chiffon tunic with the white satin ribbons crisscrossed between her breasts”, there is a symbolic contrast between the

metaphorical Melanie who is a puppet, and the actual Melanie who takes part in the enactment.

While both of these Melanie's are connected to external control and seem to be denied autonomy of action or agency, Uncle Phillip reacts to the two Melanies in different ways: "he was resenting her because she was not a puppet" (MT 144). The contrast between dolls and women is confirmed when, after the play, Finn says to Melanie, "'You were melodramatic. Puppets don't overact. You spoiled the poetry'" (MT 167).

Ultimately, what is seen in this passage is the way that patriarchy does not operate in accordance with any natural instincts. The rules of representation are ambiguous and socially constructed. Even more telling in this passage is the suggestion that they work when they are applied to inanimate representations of people. The ideals of patriarchy are suited to the lifeless forms of dolls and puppets, but real beings demonstrate the difficulty of applying these ideals; their animated existence prevents the application of such norms in a way that is harmonious to all involved. The pretense of the rules of patriarchy is what Melanie feels, as we see in the line, "She was in show-business now" (MT 163). This line shows the performativity of gender by likening it to an actual performance. When Uncle Phillip says to Melanie, "I wanted my Leda to be a little girl. Your tits are too big" (MT 143), he emphasizes the disconnect between society's portrayal of women, and their corporeality. There is again the idea that women's bodies are shaped and molded to subscribe to a certain norm; existence beyond this is chastised, scrutinized, and rejected.

Ultimately, however, what is portrayed in this scene is not the construction of woman, but rather, the construction of patriarchy. The ultimate rejection comes not from Uncle Phillip, but from Melanie, who witnesses the sheer exertion and exhaustion with which Uncle Phillip attempts to promote his phallic power. In the end, however, defeated and dejected, "It hung on its strings, pathetic now its motive power was gone" (MT 167).

6.3. Gazing Upon One's Self

The first image we have of Melanie in the novel is one of her in the privacy of her bedroom, fashioning herself into differing models: “Pre-Raphaelite, she combed out her long black hair to stream straight down from a center parting... A la Toulouse Lautrec, she dragged her hair sluttishly across her face... She was too thin for a Titian or a Renoir but she contrived a pale, smug Cranach Venus with a bit of net curtain wound round her head” (MT 1-2). This is a significant passage, because it provides insight into both Melanie and ideal femininity. Of femininity, what becomes clear is the performative element of it, and that it is a socially constructed ideal, rather than an essence. It is shaped, largely by men, but it is also malleable, and changes with time. Aesthetic appearance is but one more way to translate political ideals and prevailing ideas; it is shaped by reflections of what is at that time considered healthy, beautiful, desirable; and these standards are often related to political agendas, like, for example, the previously mentioned idea that dirt was associated with poverty as a visible marker of class.

What can be gleaned of Melanie, on the other hand, is the pervasiveness of such ideals, and how the construction of the self is indeed a performative process. This is a potentially liberating position, yet one which recalls the vexation seen in Butler: can a self exist prior to the influence of social constructs? Socio-political shapings are so obtrusive that we unwittingly draw on them in our attempt to present ourselves authentically. Gargano notes that “as Melanie embraces her sexuality in the private world behind her bedroom door, her understanding of her body takes shape only when she costumes herself in images drawn from history, art, and literature. Her secret garden is the well-travelled territory of western culture...[constituting] aspects of a self still under construction” (62). Martin agrees, pointing out that “Melanie’s conception of her body and her desire is *“constructed entirely through and by masculine representations of sexualized women”* (Mahoney 1997:78), and so the possessive male gaze lurks behind Melanie’s self-discovery” (11).

It is interesting that Melanie's self-discovery in front of the mirror is done in isolation. Thus, Melanie is simultaneously both an object and a subject; she gazes upon herself. This begs the question of whether Melanie's self-fashioning really is for herself, or whether it is for an imaginary partner. For although Melanie "performs" her femininity in front of the mirror, there is evidence to suggest that the latter option is the case. This partner has yet to exist, but his eventual existence is an assured fact in Melanie's mind, as "she conjured him so intensely to leap the spacetime barrier between them that she could almost feel his breath on her cheek and his voice husking 'darling'" (MT 2). Merely the image is enough to guide her process of discovery, and she exists perpetually "in readiness for him" (MT 2). As Martin suggests, "Melanie unquestioningly hopes to reproduce the heteronormative family structure with which she has grown up" (11).

However, there is a potent scene in which Melanie finds that a peephole has been drilled into the wall of her bedroom. I argued earlier on that the garden represents the beginning of Melanie's journey to find her place within social and political structures that dictate women. This journey began in a heteronormative world, where woman is the objectified inferior of man. The peephole occurs shortly after her arrival in the Flower household, after she has been confronted with the uber-patriarch Uncle Phillip, and also by the very different male roles that are occupied by Francie and Finn. The peephole is found on the wall that separates her and Finn's rooms. "The spyhole was neat, round and premeditated. Someone had made the spy-hole. Why? Presumably to watch her . . . when she was taking her clothes off and putting them on and so on" (MT 109). There is voyeurism of female sexuality here, which speaks of repressed desires and urges on the part of the viewer. Such furtive glances remove the sexual act from that of direct experience to a more passive one. Not only is the peephole a strong identifier of the objectified female, but Donna Mitchell's article on *The Magic Toyshop* also prompts the idea that "These subverted purposes remind the reader of how the female subject's identity is constantly monitored" (9).

Melanie's initial reaction is one of incredulous indignation: "She flushed with anger. 'The dirty little beast,' she said to herself. 'Oh, what a little animal!'" (MT 109). However, more telling is how she next reacts, "which can be read as an active rejection of her submissive position as recipient of the gaze" (Mitchell 9). For Melanie looks through the peephole herself, immediately reversing the situation between herself and Finn in order to occupy the role of the viewer. In doing so, Mitchell suggests that "she takes on the traditionally male role of the spectator, which suggests her possession of an empowered female agency that challenges the fixed gender roles" (9). Finn himself becomes the object of observation, and in doing so, he is assigned the position of a spectacularized body. This may sound far-fetched, but in fact, the image of Finn that Melanie has through the peephole is an image of Finn immersed in an absurd act: "Finn himself crossed her vision. His hair brushed the splintery floorboards. He was walking on his hands. She could not be surprised anymore" (MT 109). Melanie occupies a position of normalcy, while Finn exhibits difference; if patriarchy rests on the assumption that the female is the differentiation of the male, then this scene shows us a reversal of this. Paulina Palmer confirms this when she claims that "She represents the norm, while he, in his odd position, represents the freak and the spectacle . . . [suggesting that] the roles adopted by men and women . . . are open to change" (qtd. in Day 30-31).

Eventually, then, Melanie takes control and demonstrates agency. If her self-reflection was initially shaped by images of female beauty and constructed through systems of male dominance, there is presently an equality to the relationship between the gazed and the gazed upon. As I noted earlier, we first see Melanie modeling herself upon male-produced representations. However, this self-perception evolves, as is confirmed in the scene where Melanie discovers a spyhole in her bedroom. It is important to remember that possessing agency need not be a complete rejection of the ideal. In fact, as Butler has suggested, we operate in a "highly regulatory frame", and must subvert power from within it. If it were not so, Melanie would complicate the reading of agency, for once she appears as Leda, her appearance is strikingly similar to the one of herself that

she fashioned in the her bedroom. The white chiffon is present, as are the flowers in her hair. However, I propose that by this stage, Melanie has realized the sham of patriarchy, and this discovery makes all the difference: “Melanie would be a nymph crowned with daisies once again; he saw her as once she had seen herself. In spite of herself, she was flattered” (MT 141). Melanie faces the task of reinventing herself, and reinterpreting the codes and significations that were instilled in her. There is a slight sense of shame in this passage; the phrase ‘in spite of herself’ alludes to the idea that Melanie does not feel that such an image of the feminine is in accordance with agency. However, precisely that she is flattered nevertheless confirms that this image is one that corresponds to her sense of self, and thus, to autonomy and independence. Through this scene, we see a change in the nature of relationship between the gazer and the gazed upon.

7. Conclusion

Women's agency within patriarchy is still a relevant notion; despite being written over fifty years ago, the themes in *The Magic Toyshop* are current even today. Modern debates argue that patriarchy is an outdated concept: the term 'hegemonic masculinity' is increasingly in favor because of the way that patriarchy is increasingly regarded as a system that does not simply oppress women, but also men, who are also subjected to unrealistic roles and expectations. Uncle Phillip exemplifies this; although I read him as the patriarch of the Flower household, I hope that I have also offered some proof of the inherent threat to such a figure. His frequent retreats to a solitary dungeon can be read as an escape from a world that cannot completely comply with the absolute authority of any figure. Furthermore, it offers refuge; Phillip's dungeon acts as a private fantasy world where the constructedness of patriarchy can exist freely. The nature of patriarchy is not natural; to impose it on natural beings is problematic.

The focus of this thesis, however, has concerned female agency; although men also suffer gendered stereotypes in a patriarchal system, women face the majority of oppression, and are more restricted. Nevertheless, agency is available to women even in situations of oppression, although it differs somewhat according to, for example, age, wealth and social class. Aunt Margaret, Melanie and Victoria form an inter-generational triptych which provided an ideal way of depicting differences in agency that are determined by age.

Females in childhood have the least amount of agency, which is not necessarily due to sex alone; I argue that all children are denied agency in a full capacity. Although their autonomous action at times even trumps social conventions, I attest that it is precisely their marginality that allows them this freedom; being excluded from all manner of decisions and policy making locates them on the periphery of society. Their action, at first spontaneous and instinctual, are monitored and regulated because children are seen as beings that are still in a process of normative socialization. As they have yet to comprehend social laws, they are exempt from social sanctions.

Children are regarded as symbols that represent what is considered sacred and worthy. When there is a sense of danger, the child provides a reason to persist. The child's appeal as something to be protected is seen in the climactic ending: "I'll keep the baby safe. Whatever happens, she'll be safe" (Margaret in MT 197). Paradoxically, the sacred status of children prevents them from realizing agency; although norms may be constructed to protect the sanctity of childhood, the concept of sanctity itself is a construct. Thus, children represent an ideal that is not based on natural laws, but on social ones. Reduced to serve as a symbolic accumulation of virtuous ideals, they exist as superstitions: "Aunt Margaret, bereft of beauty, clutched Victoria to her breast as if she were a shield or talisman" (MT 184). Children provide the impetus for protection, but adults reap the benefits as well, as the sacred space that is created around children also shields adults who cater to them. It is also clear that children resent this infringement of autonomy: "Victoria squirmed and wriggled" (MT 184). This line highlights the construction of social norms and shows that there is nevertheless potential for resisting: they are unnatural.

Aunt Margaret exists in opposition to Victoria; she is at the other end of the age spectrum. Through the juxtaposition of Aunt Margaret with Uncle Phillip, the contrast between power and victim is highlighted; she appears to cower in his reign and is seemingly ingrained in the system of patriarchy. However, I claim that Aunt Margaret exhibits a dramatically keen agency. She is the strongest link between the grotesque and gender performativity because of the way that she inhabits the old and makes it new. If Butler's theories have been criticized as vague in connection with real-life, then Aunt Margaret shows us the possibility for realizing such a method of subversion. Her refusal to participate in oral discourse altogether shows a way of parodying patriarchy so power is shifted; even Uncle Phillip must succumb to her form of communication if they are to be in dialogue.

Aunt Margaret is simultaneously in accordance with social norms and in opposition to them. Her interpretation of compulsory heterosexuality is one that adopts heterosexuality at the

expense of taboo; the normative manner of coupling is perverted, and what is shown is an alternative of equality and compassionate understanding. Her adherence to social structures does not make her grotesque, or indicate agency. It is her decisive action within a marginalized position that does this; she subverts the system from within, armed with knowledge and intention.

Aunt Margaret's agency and embodiment of the grotesque differ to those of Victoria. They are both ambiguous characters in the way that they exist on peripheries; in certain respects they are instituted into socially defined roles, yet in other ways they resist them. This sees both characters as indicative agency and the grotesque to some extent; in any case, the ending of the novel sees Finn remark, "I think Francie and Maggie and the baby are safe" (MT 200).

If "Maggie and the baby are safe", then only Melanie is left. Melanie also finds a new way to inhabit and interpret the old. She finds this in Finn, whose character represents an alternative to Uncle Phillip, and an alternative to the male figure that patriarchy constructs. Finn embodies aspirations that coincide with Melanie's, and thus, she is encouraged by his prompts. This is demonstrated through Melanie's hair, which is a metaphor for her personal journey from submission to emancipation. Initially, Finn commands Melanie to free her hair: "'Come here,' he said again, softly" (MT 46). The binding of hair can be read as a metaphor of the rigid binding of women to social constructions and patriarchal rule. Melanie, however, does not succumb to his command: despite the gentleness of the request, Melanie resists it and by the next day she has reworked her hair into "tortured plaits" (MT 45).

The novel ends with "[him pulling] Melanie's hair, which tumbled loose because it was a holiday" (MT 191). This is an allusion to Melanie's acceptance of heterosexual coupling with Finn. It is demonstrative not only of their equality, but also of Melanie's agency; her hair now falls freely because she lets it. Melanie's agency evolves throughout the novel. She begins as a character who unquestioningly succumbs to the images of culturally shaped images of femininity that

inundate her world. However, their constructed nature is gradually exposed to her, and she reinterprets a way to navigate them on her own terms.

Uncle Phillip's power is ultimately usurped in the novel. Donna Mitchell argues that "female autonomy and patriarchy cannot coexist peacefully" (11), though I find this rather radical a claim. My thesis has sought specifically to show the opposite; even within situations of oppression, agency is available. This is in accordance with Butler when she says that parody is a form of agency. When parodied, the absurdity of norms and the constructedness of their nature are exposed. This is also in agreement with Russo's female grotesque, which asserts that power is available even in marginalized positions; marginalization itself can be used as a form of parody, and therefore, agency. I hope that this thesis has conveyed every one of the female characters as somehow contradictory; not one of them challenges the status quo overtly, yet neither are they prepared to fully submit to it. This is the strength of agency as seen through both the grotesque and through gender performativity; power exists even in oppressed conditions, and emancipation from this situation need not be the only definition of agency.

I think that this thesis offered several possibilities for more in-depth analyses. The themes that were touched upon are mere starting points; several of them can be extended into lengthier considerations. Intertextuality, for example, is employed to such an extent that this subject alone would provide adequate material for another thesis. Emasculation and castration, merely touched upon in my analysis, could also be expanded significantly. In this sense, this was a fruitful endeavor. Although this Carterian novel is not as pronouncedly grotesque as some of her other works, elements of this theory are present in the novel nevertheless. Considered in isolation, there is not enough to support the length of an entire thesis. However, the grotesque works seamlessly with gender performativity and female agency; therefore, the combination was able to offer a fresh perspective to a thesis that would have otherwise approached agency only through gender theories.

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