

Mistressing Fear:
Gothic, Gender and Feminism in
Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*
and Margaret Mahy's
The Changeover

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1. Introduction

The pun in the title of this thesis indicates the central issue it is going to address: the dilemma of women's empowerment in the context of gothic fiction. While men in western culture are encouraged to claim power, women are expected to be passive and weak, and much more likely to become mistresses than masters. If a woman tries to gain power, she endangers her femininity. The gender double standard dictates that she hides her intention, otherwise she will face demonisation and harassment. Her feminine 'power' is supposed to be found in dreams, madness or suicide, not in rational thinking, education or political action. Gothic novels illustrate this problem very well. Orchestrated around their protagonists' confrontations with fear, these texts are full of shivering, crying, cringing virgins and sex-crazed, evil witch women who mistress their fears and are mastered by them. Or so the cliché says. Gothic fiction is easily satirised, yet difficult to define. Since its inception in the eighteenth century, it has undergone considerable changes. Helene Meyers describes the gothic in the broadest sense as "an encounter with otherness (both within and without), the transgression of boundaries (especially those of the body), and, perhaps most important, the fear that is born of such encounters and transgressions" (Meyers 20). Seen in this light, gothic fiction becomes literature, not just caricature, and appears worthy of scholarly analysis. Consequently, the female figures in gothic fiction can be multidimensional as well.

This thesis traces the development of the literary gothic from its beginnings to the present day, focusing on its correlation with feminism and postmodernism. It is structured around two novels from the second half of the twentieth century: Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover* (1984). Both texts follow and deconstruct the gothic tradition, yet they also draw on a variety of other sources, such as fairy tale and romance conventions and the discourse of witchcraft. They are driven by a strong interest in gender politics and the empowerment of women. I am not suggesting that these texts solve the dilemma I have outlined above; a dilemma is by definition unsolvable. However, they locate it in a specific historical moment and allow it to be illuminated from several perspectives. I will compare the gothic scenarios in the novels under discussion to 'classic' gothic plots, as well as to each other.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background to the subsequent discussion of the novels in chapter 3. In chapter 2.1, I will delineate the gothic genre as it was

consolidated in the eighteenth century, highlight the roles women have played in it and explain its relation to feminism. Chapter 2.2 depicts the evolution of the gothic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, elucidating its connection to postmodernism. In chapter 2.3, I ponder on the affinity between the gothic, the fairy tale and the romance novel. I also discuss the feminist potential of these forms. Chapter 2.4 takes a feminist look at the mother-daughter relationship and its manifestation in modern witchcraft.

In chapter 3, I apply the theoretical concepts derived from chapter 2. After Angela Carter and Margaret Mahy have been introduced, chapter 3.1 analyses *The Magic Toyshop's* and *The Changeover's* intertextuality and metatextuality, specifying which gothic plots, fairy tales, and romance conventions they comment on. Chapter 3.2 examines the portrayals of the different families in the novels as well as the gender roles propagated in those families. It highlights how Melanie and Laura, the novels' female protagonists, are moulded by their upbringings. In chapter 3.3, I will compare the romantic relationships which develop between the female protagonists and the male love interests, showing their gothic aspects. Lastly, chapter 3.4 delves into the metaphorical transformations the female protagonists experience and highlights how differently the two novels evaluate these processes. I will close by evaluating their respective conclusions and draw my own.

2. Theory

2.1 *Eighteenth-Century Gothic, Gender and Feminism*

In this chapter, I will sketch the emergence of the gothic novel in the eighteenth century and expound its use of 'the sublime', a concept which is central to the gothic aesthetics of the time. Subsequently, I will outline the importance of women to gothic fiction and introduce the term 'female gothic', a category created by feminist literary critics in order to identify gothic texts which privilege feminine subjectivity. After briefly summarising the basic insights of feminist literary theory, I will present the debate over a so-called 'gothic feminism' which began in the 1990s, and conclude the chapter with a vindication of feminism and the female gothic, albeit in modified form.

'Gothic' as a literary designation was first used in England in the mid-eighteenth century (cf. Heiland 2) to refer to a number of novelistic texts (cf. 4) dealing with mystery and melodrama, terror and horror. These novels frequently featured spooky

castles, craggy scenery, evil aristocrats, mad monks, wild flights and damsels in distress (cf. Botting 1-3). Well-known examples include Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) (cf. Spooner and McEvoy 1), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) (cf. Heiland 68) and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) (cf. Haggerty 10). Gothic fiction was excessively popular (cf. Heiland 2), yet it was also the subject of contempt and condemnation (cf. Botting 4). Too silly to be taken seriously, it was still feared as a corrupting influence (cf. 9). "Through its presentation of supernatural, sensational and terrifying incidents [...], Gothic [...] fed uncultivated appetites [...] instead of instructing readers with moral lessons" (4). The genre remained relatively recognisable until the 1820s. From then on, it started to diffuse (cf. Spooner and McEvoy 1). Its motifs changed with the anxieties of the time (cf. Botting 3). They trickled into other genres, such as the realist novels of the nineteenth century (cf. 11-12), as well as many forms of popular fiction in the twentieth century (cf. 13). The common denominator of gothic motifs lies in their power to scare (cf. Heiland 5). Gothic creates fear – this is part of its appeal (cf. Moers 90-91). Yet so is its capacity to ease the fear again (cf. Botting 8).

The means by which gothic novels arouse fear is 'the sublime', defined by Donna Heiland as an aesthetic concept describing "disruptive, irregular, transgressive energies" (Heiland 5). In Heiland's view, "sublime experience is at the heart of the gothic" (33), hence, the gothic and the sublime could well be used synonymously in the eighteenth century. As theorised by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, sublime energy is released during the encounter between (cf. 32-33) "a perceiving subject and an overwhelmingly powerful object" (33). In this encounter, the boundary between subject and object is violently broken down so they become one and the same (cf. 33). "The effacement of difference is [thus] the essence of the sublime experience" (Heiland 33). If sublimity denotes the loss of difference, it still remains to ask whose difference is lost. Does the subject subsume the object or vice versa? In Burke's view, the perceiving subject feels threatened by the powerful object and is consumed by it (cf. 33). This stress on feeling suggests that sublimity is subjective; what one person experiences as transgressive is quite normal to another (cf. 33). The fact that many gothic novels achieved widespread popularity in their day and age (cf. Armit 5) shows nonetheless that they touched upon collective concerns. The sublime cannot be completely personal; it always has a cultural bias. Sublimity evokes strong emotions (cf. Botting 4), one of which is fear (cf. Heiland 33). However, this fear is alleviated by the reader's necessary

distance from the narrative he or she is reading (cf. Moers 91). While readers witness the frightening breakdown of boundaries between the protagonists, they can feel safe in the certainty that they are not subjected to it. Their fear is tempered with pleasure. Fear and pleasure, then, blend in varying proportion in a sublime encounter (cf. Heiland 33-34). Heiland concludes:

Because [...] the sublime might also be described as self-loss, one must wonder whether it is a truly desirable experience. Much more appealing is to imagine the possibility of loss but at the same time draw back from it, and this is the experience that Burke really describes. [...] Sublime experience thus emerges as self-contradictory, a seeming loss of self that is in fact self-willed and reasonably well controlled. (34)

This interpretation of the sublime applies not only to the reader of gothic fiction, but also to the protagonist. If the perceiving subject was consumed by the powerful object, it would result in the loss of his or her perception as well as his or her narrative function, and, consequently, in a breakdown of the narrative. The sublime does not truly break down the boundary between subject and object; the subject only flirts with the idea of breakdown (cf. 34). However, even if we take Burke's sublime at face value (cf. 33), and assume that the sublime breaks down boundaries, it ultimately has the opposite effect (cf. 5). "The terrors and horrors of transgression in Gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society [...]: transgression, by crossing the social [...] limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits" (Botting 7).

One of the most interesting aspects of the sublime is that it frequently manifests in relation to women; that is, as violence against women (cf. Heiland 34). A short passage from Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* will serve to illustrate this:

And who am I to thank for this? What seduced me into crimes, whose bare remembrance makes me shudder? Fatal Witch! was it not thy beauty? Have you not plunged my soul into infamy? Have you not made me a perjured Hypocrite, a Ravisher, an Assassin! Nay, at this moment, does not that angel look bid me despair of God's forgiveness? [...] You will come with those tearful eyes, those cheeks pale and ghastly, those hands lifted in supplication, as when you sought from me that mercy which I gave not! Then will my perdition be certain! [...] 'Tis you, who will cause my eternal anguish! You, wretched Girl! You! You! As He thundered out these words, He violently grasped Antonia's arm, and spurned the earth with delirious fury. (Lewis 109)

The perceiving subject in this scene is Ambrosio, the monk of the novel's title, speaking to Antonia, the woman he has just raped (cf. 108). In his view, Antonia is a powerful object, an evil sorceress, the villainous seducer who drags down the good and pious monk. It is she who supposedly turns him into a villain, effacing the difference between them. Ambrosio is in a highly emotional state, and his language serves to evoke strong emotions in the reader, too. This is what makes the scene sublime. Yet the boundary between Ambrosio and Antonia is immediately redrawn. His violence, aggression and incessant talking contrast with her silence and passivity, highlighting Antonia's object status and exposing Ambrosio's talk as a prime example of a rapist's victim-blaming. 'Powerful object' (cf. Heiland 33) is a contradiction in terms. Deprived of subjectivity and agency, Antonia is shown to have no power in this situation. She is killed off shortly afterwards (cf. Lewis 111). The novel properly ends with the monk's punishment (cf. 127). Yet whereas Antonia welcomes death (cf. 111), Ambrosio struggles to the last (cf. 127). Lewis' novel presents itself as a warning and morality tale, while simultaneously allowing readers to reenact the man's crimes in their minds (cf. Botting 8-9). The woman emerges as pitiable and innocent, yet at the same time almost completely insignificant.

Contrary to this impression, women did play a major role in gothic fiction. "[F]rom its inception, the Gothic [...] has been preoccupied with women's economic, psychological, and physical vulnerability" (Meyers 18). Not only did they figure numerous in gothic plots, but they also had a prominent part in the production and consumption of gothic novels, as writers and readers (cf. Milbank 155-156). The association with the feminine (cf. Botting 4) is one reason why the gothic was dismissed as trivial for so long (cf. Meyers 25). It came under the focus of critical attention during the second wave of feminism (cf. Gamble ix) and with the rise of feminist criticism (cf. Milbank 155). 'Feminism' is a political theory and a movement (cf. Gamble vii) which began in Europe in the nineteenth century, peaked in the west in the 1970s (cf. ix) and has been contested since (cf. viii). Its premise is the belief that women are discriminated by society on the basis of their sex; its goal is social equality for women (cf. vii). "Exactly what 'equality' [...] entails, the means by which it is to be achieved, even the exact nature of the obstacles it faces, are all disputed issues" (viii).

US-American feminist critic Ellen Moers was the first to identify a female gothic tradition in 1976 (cf. Heiland 182-183).¹ Defined as “the work that women writers have done in the literary mode [...] called the Gothic” (Moers 90), a female gothic text typically tells the story of “a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine” (Moers 91). The woman is persecuted by a man, who is often conflated with the hero in the figure of the ‘villain-hero’ (cf. Meyers 18). However, Moers locates the woman at the centre of the gothic narrative, interpreting her as a heroine and emphasising both her victimisation and her bravery. Botting, too, reminds us that “Gothic [...] heroines [...] could encounter not only frightening violence but adventurous freedom” (Botting 7). By not adhering to the gender roles assigned to them, the women in female gothic fiction transgress the boundaries of their social situations. This causes fear, yet it can also lead to a critical engagement with and a possible subversion of those boundaries (cf. 58-61). “The Gothic heroine [...] became a proto-feminist in her resistance to patriarchal control” (Milbank 155).

Moers’ definition of the female gothic is problematically ahistorical and has been widely criticised for relying on the sex of the author (cf. Smith and Wallace 1, cf. Heiland 183). The plot pattern she describes does not at all apply to works like Clara Reeve’s *The Old English Baron* (1777) (cf. Heiland 15-16) or Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) (cf. Moers 92). It is still commonly found in gothic novels written by women (cf. Meyers 18), dating back to the works of Ann Radcliffe (cf. Moers 91), who was one of the most prolific and successful authors of gothic fiction (cf. Heiland 57).² “Writing in a tradition that was already fairly well established, she developed it so fully that her name became almost synonymous with the form” (57). In her readings of Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance*, *The Italian* (cf. 58), *The Romance of the Forest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (cf. 68), Heiland demonstrates how she “redefines sublimity as an aesthetic that multiplies differences, and that therefore empowers rather than effaces women” (58). Radcliffe does so by locating the sublime not in the heroine’s violent encounter with a man (cf. 34), but in her reunion with her long lost mother (cf.

¹ Other important feminist critics of the gothic include Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Elaine Showalter, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Juliann Fleenor (cf. Heiland 182-184).

² Other influential female authors of eighteenth-century gothic fiction are Sophia Lee (cf. Milbank 156) and Charlotte Dacre (cf. Heiland 5), as well as numerous anonymous ‘Ladies’ (cf. Milbank 156). Debatably, Mary Wollstonecraft also belongs on the list (cf. Heiland 6).

61-62). See first her rendition of the relationship between Emily St. Aubert and Montoni, Emily's uncle-in-law, from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:

'I will have no more argument,' said Montoni, with a look that made her tremble. 'What had I but trouble to expect, when I condescended to reason with a baby! But I will be trifled with no longer: let the recollection of your aunt's sufferings, in consequence of her folly and obstinacy, teach you a lesson.—Sign the papers.' Emily's resolution was for a moment awed:—she shrunk at the recollections he revived, and from the vengeance he threatened; but then [...] the strong feelings of indignation, with which she had always, from her infancy, regarded an act of injustice, inspired her with a noble, though imprudent, courage. 'Sign the papers,' said Montoni, more impatiently than before. 'Never, sir,' replied Emily [...]. Montoni turned pale with anger, while his quivering lip and lurking eye made her almost repent the boldness of her speech. 'Then all my vengeance falls upon you,' he exclaimed, with an horrible oath. (Radcliffe, *Udolpho* 279)

This passage differs strikingly from Lewis' portrayal of the 'interaction' between Ambrosio and Antonia. Emily is the perceiving subject here, and the text privileges her by granting the reader insight into her mind. This insight reveals that she is, indeed, "for a moment awed" (279) by Montoni, who thus occupies the position of powerful object. Yet the moment passes, sublimity is avoided, and both Emily and Montoni are perceiving and speaking subjects during the remainder of the scene. The boundary between them remains intact. Montoni's language is more formal and less violent than Ambrosio's, lacking emotional impact. Thus, his threats lose much of their potential power. Emily's fear, on the other hand, is acknowledged, yet it is presented as something she can overcome, making her not a victim, but a stubborn opponent. The man appears as a villain who is vincible, while the woman becomes heroic in her resistance. This interpretation is supported by the rest of the novel, which shows Montoni's lawful punishment (cf. 400-401) and Emily's accession to her rightful inheritance (cf. 472).

For a Radcliffean version of a sublime encounter, compare Julia's discovery of her mother in *A Sicilian Romance*:

[Julia] beheld in a small room [...] the pale and emaciated figure of a woman, seated, with half-closed eyes, in a kind of elbow-chair. On perceiving Julia, she started from her seat, and her countenance expressed a wild surprise. Her features, which were worn by sorrow, still retained the traces of beauty, and in her air was a mild dignity that excited in Julia an involuntary veneration. [...] A multitude of strange imperfect ideas rushed upon her mind, and she was lost in

perplexity; but as she examined the features of the stranger; [...] she thought she discovered the resemblance of [her sister] Emilia! [...] When the lady became more composed, 'Thank heaven!' said she, '[...] I am permitted to embrace one of my children before I die. [...] ['] [...] Julia threw herself at the feet of her mother, and embracing her knees in an energy of joy, answered only in sobs. (Radcliffe, *Sicilian Romance* 86-87)

This scene begins with Julia as a perceiving subject, and what she perceives bears some resemblance to the image of Antonia which is evoked by Ambrosio. Julia's mother, too, is a victimised woman, locked up in a cell by her husband (cf. Radcliffe, *Sicilian Romance* 87-88). She is characterised by beauty, sorrow and dignity: her beauty almost corroded by sorrow, she suffers with dignity. These attributes make her seem removed from ordinary human existence and give her an otherworldly hue. While the first sentence introduces her as an object of awe, this impression is quickly revised as she reacts to Julia. She, too, perceives her daughter and is shown to be nearly as upset by Julia's appearance as the former is by hers. Although the younger woman's subjective experience is foregrounded, her mother has her share in the "energy of joy" (Radcliffe, *Sicilian Romance* 87) created by their encounter. Radcliffe's use of the sublime reduces fear to a minimum, subverting Burke's original definition (cf. Heiland 61). Julia's relationship with her mother is not destructive, but productive. Instead of ending up imprisoned with her, Julia succeeds in freeing her (cf. Radcliffe, *Sicilian Romance* 98).

"[R]ecover of the mother [is] the necessary first step in the heroine's emergence as a distinct individual" (62). Although Radcliffe does utilise the sublime, she eventually allows her heroines to overcome sublimity and to realise their differences from their mothers (cf. 62) by taking action in the public sphere (cf. 60). Sublime sensation is presented as a necessary, but not a sufficient element of human existence (cf. 61). In Heiland's view, it is this eventual turn from the private to the public sphere as the site of social change (cf. 58) which gives Radcliffe's novels their feminist edge (cf. 60). Of course, the 'feminist' label must be strongly qualified here with regard to the historical context and the literary environment in which Radcliffe worked. Compared to Lewis' Antonia, her heroines certainly cross the boundary of accepted feminine behaviour (cf. 76).

The gender boundary serves to separate the masculine from the feminine, while gender-related boundaries divide public from private, parent from child and culture from nature (cf. Heiland 71, cf. Haggerty 11-12, cf. Botting 130). French theorist Hélène Cixous pointed out in 1975 that patriarchy creates meaning through such binary

pairs as culture/nature, head/heart, father/mother, activity/passivity. Ultimately, all of these binary pairs are based on the opposition between male and female (cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 104). The problem with this binary system is that the two sides of the dyad are mutually exclusive. “For one of the terms to acquire meaning [...], it must destroy the other. [...] In the end, victory is equated with activity and defeat with passivity; [...] the male is always the victor” (105). Defined in terms of lack, the female serves as a negative foil for the male (cf. LeBihan 135). The reason why the masculine side of the dyad is seen as superior lies in the fact that discourse has been produced primarily by masculine writers for centuries (cf. Cixous 878-879). “[W]riting has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy; [...] this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over [...]” (879). Cixous wants to move beyond binarisms; instead, she favours “multiple, heterogeneous difference” (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 105): a series of terms which gain meaning in relation, yet not in opposition, to one another (cf. 105).

According to Cixous, words such as ‘culture’, ‘head’ and even ‘father’ do not naturally refer to men, but have come to be associated with them by cultural habit (cf. LeBihan 134). In order to emphasise this artificiality of the link between one’s biological sex and one’s social position, English-speaking feminists adopted the term ‘gender’. As a term to describe human identities and roles, it originates in the 1950s from US-American psychiatrists working with transsexual patients. ‘Gender’ refers to the psychological and sociological categories of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, as opposed to biological ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ (cf. Moi 21-23). The ‘gendering’ of a person is an arbitrary process which transforms genital fact into cultural fiction (cf. Moi 21-24). US-American theorist Judith Butler developed this thought further by stressing the performativity of gender, as it is constantly created and maintained by persons (cf. Phoca 60). “[G]ender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be [...] reproduced as reality once again” (Butler 526). It is possible to deviate from the scripts and earlier performances. For instance, one can choose to perform a different gender (cf. 526-528), or one can even overlay it in the form of parody, thus drawing attention to its constructedness. A possible end could be the dissolving of

gender categories altogether (cf. Phoca 60-61).³ To summarise my readings of Cixous and Butler, both *what* is understood as a feminine or masculine trait and *who* is perceived as a masculine or feminine person is contingent. We can alter the former by altering discourse and change the latter by changing our performances.

Butler formulated her ideas in the 1990s. Meanwhile, feminism was increasingly vilified (cf. Moi, *F-Word* 1736-1737), resulting in a backlash which lasts to this day. “[F]eminism has been turned into the unspeakable F-word, not just among students but in the media, too” (1739). Along with feminism, the female gothic drew criticism. Diane Long Hoeveler argued in 1998 that gothic heroines “masquerade[d] as blameless victims of a corrupt and oppressive patriarchal society while utilising passive-aggressive and masochistic strategies to triumph over that system” (Smith and Wallace 2). ‘Gothic feminism’, as Long Hoeveler named it, was an ideology which structured reality as a gothic story and taught women to see themselves as victimised. More commonly, this mode of thought is called ‘victim feminism’ (cf. 2). Victims have no real agency either to help themselves or to harm others. Thus, they need not assume responsibility for their own lives and the parts they play in perpetuating oppression. The catchwords ‘gothic feminism’ and ‘victim feminism’ were taken up in popular discourse by a number of authors who either wanted to reform feminism or declared it obsolete.⁴ To speak in gothic terms, moderate feminists such as Naomi Wolf voiced concern that constant banging against prison walls will have a crippling effect, while anti-feminists such as Christina Hoff Sommers saw the dungeon as a delusion, where women are already free (cf. Meyers 4-7).

Addressing the criticisms levelled against both feminism and the female gothic, Meyers concedes that radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Mary Daly did indeed make heavy use of gothic rhetorics in order to celebrate ‘woman’ as the powerless but superior victim of ‘man’ (cf. 8-11). The feminist movement of the 1970s, comprised mostly of white middle-class women, saw gender as essential and neglected the impact of other social categories such as race and class. It is now generally acknowledged that feminists had their fair share in marginalising women of colour and working-class women (cf. LeBihan 136). By relying on a perceived female or feminine

³ This idea was taken up and is fleshed out by the postgenderism movement, for example (cf. Dvorsky and Hughes 2).

⁴ Other critics of feminism include Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfeld, Wendy Kaminer. Their respective positions differ, however (cf. Meyers 4-7).

essence, grounded in either biology or culture, and “by describing the world in the binary terms *male* and *female*, *masculine* and *feminine*, [they] were sleeping with the enemy [...] and were sure to replicate the oppressive structures of Western metaphysics” (Meyers 8). Nonetheless, it is a fact that women today are still disadvantaged in many sectors of society on the basis of their sex (cf. Bird 1, cf. Snowden 1), and violence against them is still widespread (cf. Women's Aid Federation of England 1). Meyers is concerned that

such glib and increasingly automatic phrases as *essentialist*, *victim feminist*, and *Gothic feminist* make it harder for women to refuse victimisation, in part because such terms seem to deny that gendered patterns of victimisation exist as anything other than a [...] fantasy. (Meyers 155)

Thus, she remains convinced of the need for feminism, as well as the usefulness of the female gothic. In order to counter victimisation, one must acknowledge its existence, and in order to make a point, it is necessary to make some generalisations. However, the social position of the person making the generalisations and the context in which someone is a victim or a perpetrator must be taken into account (cf. 13-14). Obviously, not all women are equally victimised in every situation, neither are all men always perpetrators. The denaturalisation and deconstruction of the categories ‘woman’, ‘female’, ‘feminine’, ‘femininity’ and ‘man’, ‘male’, ‘masculine’, ‘masculinity’ by Cixous, Butler and many others have made it possible for a female gothic plot to be written by a man (cf. Smith and Wallace 2).⁵ Likewise, this plot need not have a heroine, but can also feature a “male hysteric” (Spooner and McEvoy 1): a man who is ascribed ‘feminine’ attributes or who performs his gender in a way that causes others to label him ‘feminine’.

I am aware that this way of thinking leaves intact gendered categories, even as it disassociates them from sexed bodies. A world without genders is a utopian vision (cf. Moi 27) and “even those [...] who believe the [...] patriarchal law can be changed are in practice gloomy about how long it will take” (New 398). Hence, Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace conclude that “despite, or, indeed, because of, the rigorous debates which are ongoing around its usage, the term ‘Female Gothic’ is still a flexible and recognizable term for an area which is if anything gaining in vigour and complexity”

⁵ See, for example, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (1992) by Tamar Heller (cf. Heiland 183).

(cf. Smith and Wallace 6). Meyers goes even further. She is troubled that the opening up of feminist theory has again led to a neglect of female writers in literary studies today (cf. Meyers x). “[A]s we embrace canonical male figures and argue the feminist potential of their work, we hesitate to do the same for noncanonized women writers” (xi). This inequality she considers worth changing, and thus Meyers consciously takes the female gothic at face value in her selection of novels for study (cf. xi-xii). I follow her in choosing works by women as the subject of my thesis.

2.2 Gothic in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

This chapter gives a synopsis of the development of gothic fiction in the nineteenth century, describes its typical tropes and explains the concept of ‘the uncanny’, a modernised version of the sublime. Furthermore, it shows how, in the wake of postmodernism, the gothic has been gaining significance since the 1960s, both as a literary term and as a means of ‘reading’ culture. It ends with a short description of postmodern gothic fiction in comparison to the early modern, eighteenth-century gothic.

After having introduced the term ‘female gothic’ in 1976, Moers added: “But what I mean – or anyone else means – by ‘the Gothic’ is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear” (Moers 90). This uncertainty is understandable, as the modern and the postmodern gothic differ from the early modern gothic in several ways. To recapitulate, gothic ceased to be a genre in the 1820s and has become a set of changing motifs since (cf. Spooner and McEvoy 1), as well as a mode of writing and reading (cf. Botting 168-169, cf. Armitt 1-2). Here, I will give an overview of the motifs that characterised the gothic in the nineteenth century and still resonate in the twentieth century. The Victorian period was characterised by urbanisation, domestication and the consolidation of the bourgeoisie (cf. Botting 123), developments which continued well into the 1960s (cf. 157, cf. 169). Accordingly, the city, the home and the middle-class family constitute the Victorian gothic’s typical setting (cf. 123). “The modern city combined the natural and architectural components of Gothic grandeur and wildness, its dark, labyrinthine streets suggesting the violence and menace of [a] Gothic [...] forest” (2). Castles were no longer symbols of power, crumbling away as the old house took centre stage (cf. 3). The domestic focus is, of course, particularly strong in texts by female, white, middle-class authors (cf. Heiland 114-115), who led lives far more confined to the home than both their male contemporaries and their female predecessors

(cf. 3). 'Home' in modern gothic fiction is simultaneously a refuge and a prison (cf. Botting 128), while the family inside its walls is portrayed as a highly precarious construct under threat from without and within (cf. Heiland 116-117). Not only the violence of the streets (cf. Botting 123), but also domestic violence could shatter the ideal (cf. Meyers 19). As the nineteenth century progressed, increasing attention was paid to the family's least powerful members, the children (cf. Armitt 17). The child as victim and possible perpetrator of abuse finally becomes a common gothic motif from the Edwardian period onwards (cf. 15; cf. 25). Among the great number of works which could be used to illustrate this survey are Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) (cf. Heiland 6), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) (cf. Botting 128), Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853) (cf. 125) and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) (cf. Armitt 15-16). These are all predominantly realist texts strongly involved with the gothic. Examples from the first half of the twentieth century include Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1916) (cf. Botting 123) and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), which are less anchored in realism (cf. 160-161). The diversity of these works indicates the gothic's versatility and mutability.

Central to the understanding of modern gothic is the concept of 'the uncanny'. It is related to, yet also different from, the sublime, which it replaces as an analytical tool in the twentieth century (cf. Heiland 5-6). Roughly speaking, the sublime is about one thing turning into another, whereas the uncanny is about something not being what it seems. Sigmund Freud famously wrote about it in 1919 (in German: 'das Unheimliche'), highlighting its linguistic origin in the word 'heimlich' (cf. Punter 129-130). Thus, the uncanny is inherently linked to the 'Heim', or 'home'. It is also linked to the family, for the uncanny is the once familiar made strange and returning from repression. As such, it is really a part of the self, which can neither be integrated nor expelled (cf. Heiland 78). Heiland explains: "[T]he uncanny does not allow the breakdown of boundaries. Instead the person is literally or figuratively 'haunted' by this reminder of a past that she cannot identify and cannot escape" (6). Haunting, like the uncanny, is about a person's confrontation with a traumatic past event (cf. Smith 147-148). This past can be individual, yet is also associated with humanity's collective primitive past (cf. Heiland 78). In contrast to the sublime, which evokes fear and pleasure by (seemingly) breaking down and restoring boundaries (cf. 34), the uncanny induces fear without pleasure because it stays unresolved; boundaries are and remain blurry (cf. Heiland 78). The cause of fear is no longer believed to be an external object,

as it used to be in the eighteenth century, but is recognised as inside the human psyche (cf. Botting 9-11). “External forms [are] signs of psychological disturbance, of increasingly uncertain subjective states” (Botting 11). The subject projects his or her fears (cf. Smith 148) onto suitable objects, which thus become uncanny. David Punter, drawing on Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, lists some relevant examples of this process:

‘strange kinds of repetition’, a category which includes the double or *doppelgänger* and the experience of *déjà vu*; [...], animism and [...] anthropomorphism, which are, we might say, clearly related examples of uncanny shape-changing; [...] automatism – [...] another example of shape-changing insofar as it refers to the process whereby ‘what is human is perceived as merely mechanical’; [...] ‘a sense of radical uncertainty about sexual identity’ [...] and [...] death [...], a point of ending which is always in some sense simultaneously ‘survived’, as the record of a life [...] continues to ‘live on’.
(Punter 131)

By Punter’s definition, mirrors and dolls are potentially uncanny objects (cf. Punter 131). Feelings of loss, caused by death or absence, can take on the shapes of ghosts (cf. Smith 147). They unsettle the person’s sense of self by destabilising the divide between subject and object, self and other, human and thing, the real and the image, the living and the dead, the present and the absent. Yet in doing so, they effectively call into question all boundaries, as none can be taken for granted anymore (cf. Botting 11).

This uncanny state, once attributed to one disturbed person, eventually became a collective condition. “The internalisation of Gothic forms reflected wider anxieties, which, [though] centring on the individual, concerned the nature of reality and society” (11). In the course of two world wars (cf. Armit 2-3), the tenets of western culture were shaken, with the effect that many began to perceive this culture as unreal. Thus, culture was increasingly ‘read’ as a series of fabricated stories (cf. Botting 169). In 1979, Jean-François Lyotard contended that the ‘grand narratives’ or ‘metanarratives’ of modern culture, such as the Enlightenment, could no longer convince people (cf. Reese-Schäfer 410-411). “[This] breakdown of modernity’s metanarratives discloses a horror that identity, reality [...] and meaning are [...] subject to a dispersion and multiplication of meanings, realities and identities that obliterates the possibility of imagining any human order” (Botting 157). Botting describes what Lyotard named the ‘postmodern condition’, which can also be called a gothic condition (cf. Davison 307). The scope of the gothic, then, has broadened in postmodernity and transcended the field of literature

to encompass all of culture (cf. Meyers 24). As Lucie Armitt notes: the gothic “gains momentum in tandem with the burgeoning ‘new’ academic discipline of Cultural Studies” (Armitt 10). Still, it must be kept in mind that the story about the crisis of metanarratives and the textuality of cultures is itself a narrative, open to criticism (cf. Reese-Schäfer 411). Postmodern fiction, beginning around the 1960s, certainly fits into this narrative. By employing gothic tropes self-consciously, sometimes parodically (cf. Botting 168), and by freely mixing genres, it shows an awareness of the constructedness of culture and a disregard for its boundaries. The work of Angela Carter is a good example of this practice. Blending “fairytale, legend, science fiction and Gothic, [novels such as *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) (cf. Peach 72) and *Heroes and Villains* (1969) (cf. Botting 169)] show[...] the interplay of narratives shaping reality and identity, particularly in relation to the production of meanings for sexuality” (Botting 169). In effect, uncertainty and fear are induced not only on the plot level, but beyond (cf. 169): “The hybrid mixing of forms has uncanny effects [...] which make narrative play and ambivalence another figure of horror [...] to be expelled” (169). To a degree, this has always been true of gothic fiction (cf. 3); the postmodern gothic takes it to new extremes (cf. 157). To summarise the relationship between the early, ‘old’ gothic and the postmodern, ‘new’ gothic,

the [...] old Gothic and postmodern neo-Gothic [...] both engage in a textual negotiation with history. Both forms are also, generally, extremely self-conscious in their borrowing of literary conventions; and, finally, both are apocalyptic in their visions. [...] [T]he new Gothic, [however,] ‘strikes a darker and more disturbing note’ (5) than old Gothic, because [...] hell is now decidedly located in the mind. (Davison 307, quoting Sage and Smith 5)

Not all fiction from the 1960s onwards can be called postmodern, of course (cf. Nicol xvi). Coexisting with the postmodern gothic, generic and less ambitious forms such as romance, horror and science fiction incorporate traditional gothic elements rather seamlessly (cf. 156-157, cf. 161, cf. Radway, *Gothic Romances* 141-142) in the twentieth century.

2.3 From the Fairy Tale to the Romance Novel and the Female Gothic

In this chapter, I link the gothic to the fairy tale and the romance novel, highlighting their common origins and their shared focus on wish-fulfillment in the

form of 'magical transformations'. I discuss the ideological implications of this structure, stressing its feminist potential, yet also pointing out its limits. Moreover, I provide a disambiguation of the terms 'gothic', 'romance' and 'novel'. I close by narrowing down my definition of the 'female gothic novel', in order to distinguish it from the romance novel.

The fairy tale and the romance novel share a close affinity with the gothic. Given that all three are popular forms (cf. Botting 15, cf. Gamble, *Carter* 66, cf. Radway, *Gothic Romances* 142), denigrated as subliterate (cf. Botting 15, cf. Peach 73, cf. Regis xi) and associated with femininity (cf. Milbank 156, cf. Gamble, *Carter* 68, cf. Radway xi), it is reasonable to see the fairy tale as the female gothic's mother and the romance novel as its prettier sister. A fairy tale is a fantastic story about transformation and wish-fulfilment for those who adhere to social conventions (cf. Zipes xvii-xviii). Rooted in mediaeval oral tradition, the tales were eventually written down and rewritten from the fifteenth century onwards. That was the beginning of the literary fairy tale (cf. xvi). Both the oral and the literary fairy tale revolve around what Jack Zipes calls 'wonder', as well as the ensuing wondrous change in the hero's or heroine's situation (cf. xviii). "Wonder causes astonishment, and the marvellous object or phenomenon is often regarded as a supernatural occurrence [...]. It gives rise to admiration, fear, awe [...]" (xviii). The creation of awe is also an effect of the sublime in eighteenth-century gothic fiction. To recapitulate, the sublime is a powerful, elevating, potentially liberating, yet ultimately conservative experience (cf. Heiland 5). The wonder and the wondrous change in fairy tales are similarly liberating in that they elevate the protagonist, yet they are also conservative as they leave untouched the social system (cf. Zipes xvii). With the aid of a miracle, the protagonist is enabled to transgress the boundaries of his or her social situation. However, the implication that it takes a miracle to do so makes those boundaries look even more confining. Fairy tale protagonists are encouraged to be simple and naïve, then they are rewarded (cf. xviii). "In contrast [...], the villains are those who use their status, weapons and words intentionally to exploit, control, [...] and destroy for their benefit" (xviii-xix). As they actively transgress the 'natural' order, they scare (cf. xix). "Tales of monsters eating children [...] and witches putting [...] curses on beautiful maidens are only a few of the many fantastical examples of violence, cruelty and fear evident in [fairy] tales" (Boudinot 2). The villains consequently suffer gruesome punishments by greater forces (cf. Rowe 218).

Clearly, wonder is constituted of horror as well as joy. The horror is what gives the fairy tale its gothic aspect; a focus on horror makes a gothic fairy tale.

Wonder is employed to convey a message; it is an instrument of ideology (cf. Zipes xix). Most so-called 'classic' fairy tales we know today, such as "Cinderella", "Snow White" or "Sleeping Beauty", are associated with male authors and express patriarchal values (cf. xxvi). They have been heavily criticised by feminists (cf. Rowe 222-223). "These tales which glorify passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice as a heroine's cardinal virtues suggest that culture's very survival depends upon a woman's acceptance of roles which relegate her to motherhood and domesticity" (210). Efforts have been made to reclaim fairy tales and bring to life their subversive potential (cf. Jarvis 155-157), using wonder in service of women. Feminist critics and writers have shown particular interest in the figure of the witch, whom they reinterpret in a positive light (cf. 156, cf. Purkiss 7). By producing feminist and gender-skeptical reimaginings of 'classic' tales, as well as new tales, they have revolutionised the fairy tale genre (cf. Zipes xxxi). Angela Carter, with her 1979 collection *The Bloody Chamber*, was very influential here (cf. Peach 74). Attention has also been drawn to women's contribution to oral fairy tales (cf. Jarvis 155). As the designation 'old wives' tales' implies (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 68), story tellers were often female. Yet the first scribes who wrote down and rewrote the tales were usually men, since women were denied equal access to literacy. The women's 'voices' were buried under a male point of view (cf. Zipes xx). This criticism must, however, be balanced by keeping in mind that it is extremely difficult to uncover an oral tale's 'original' source and message (cf. xix). Much more evidence exists for women's predominant engagement with the written fairy tale. Its consolidation as a literary genre was accomplished by female writers in France at the end of the seventeenth century (cf. xxii), much the same way as the gothic's in England a hundred years later. Aristocratic salonnieres used fairy tales to "create an ideal world that could exist only within the imagination [...] and engage in the intellectual discourse of the day from which they were officially excluded" (Jarvis 156).⁶ Many other women writers followed their course. Benedikte Naubert (1789-1793), Fanny Lewald (1841) and Ricarda Huch (1896), only to name a few, anticipated issues which would continue to trouble feminists in the 1970s (cf. 156). "These issues include: voice and

⁶ These salonnieres, among them Madame d'Aulnoy and Madame d'Auneuil, also coined its name, 'fairy tale' (in French: 'conte de fées').

voicelessness; the commodification of women; [...] the importance of female education; [and] a questioning of the redemption motif of marriage as women's only salvation" (156). Female writers, then, had a hand in the development of the fairy tale at least as much as men did. Yet whereas everybody knows the Brothers Grimm, most of the women and their works are virtually forgotten today (cf. 155). Shawn Jarvis concludes:

The history of fairy tales is a case in point of how patriarchal practices have succeeded in diminishing the public perception of women's contribution [...]; it also demonstrates the importance of revisionist scholarship in documenting the continuity of feminist concerns in literary history in order to reconsider the history of women [...]. (156)

The bridge from the fairy tale to the romance novel is forged by the fact that modern romance novels still follow fairy tale patterns (cf. Rowe 209, cf. Raburn 28). Dating back to the mid-eighteenth century and Samuel Richardson's bestselling *Pamela* (1740) (cf. Regis xiii), romance novels have boomed on an even larger scale since the mid-twentieth century (cf. 108).⁷ In 1999, romantic fiction constituted 55.9 percent of all books sold in the USA. The vast majority of its writers, heroines and readers are female. So are its critics, who attack and defend it fiercely. Male critics, this implies, do not bother (cf. xi-xii). The above-mentioned facts and figures cause Pamela Regis to call romance "[t]he most popular, least respected literary genre" (xi). Defined by her as "a work of prose fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines" (Regis 19), a romance novel always ends 'happily', that is, with a wedding in view (cf. 9). According to Janice Radway, this outcome depends on a miraculous transformation of the romance hero (cf. Radway 134), which in turn makes possible a celebration of mutual love at the end (cf. 147). This miraculous transformation is very similar to the wondrous change in a fairy tale. At some point in the novel, the hero typically behaves in an alienating or downright abusive manner towards the heroine (cf. 129), which leads to their separation. What follows then is an act of kindness on the hero's part, prompting the heroine to finally accept him as her partner (cf. 134) and ushering in their happily-ever-after (cf. Regis 9). Radway sees this change of heart as miraculous because it is incongruent with the hero's and the heroine's afore-established

⁷ Influential romance novel authors of the second half of the twentieth century are Victoria Holt, Phyllis Whitney (cf. Radway, *Gothic Romances* 144), Kathleen Woodiwiss (cf. Radway 121), Rosemary Rogers (cf. Radway 165), Janet Dailey, Nora Roberts (cf. Regis 107).

characters (cf. Radway 148). A romance novel's 'ideal'⁸ heroine is beautiful, naïve, innocent, sensual, kind (cf. 124-127), yet she also has "unusual intelligence or [...] an extraordinarily fiery disposition" (123). Her stereotypically feminine character is 'spiced up' with one or two stereotypically masculine traits, and, consequently, she has "ambivalent feelings about female gender" (123) and women's roles at the story's outset (cf. 123). The 'ideal' hero, too, is "constructed androgynously" (xiii). Although he is muscular, stern, experienced, hard and unkind, this mixture is 'watered down' by a hint of femininity, such as occasional gentleness or compassion (cf. 128). The romance novel does indeed diffuse gender categories, yet only during a part of the narrative. The small features usually associated with another gender are hardly pronounced enough to undermine the heroine's 'true' femininity and the hero's 'true' masculinity (cf. 127, cf. 148). Still, the hint of femininity in the hero's portrayal is what presumably motivates his decisive act of kindness towards the heroine in the miraculous transformation (cf. 148).

This represents an internal contradiction. If the hero has always been soft at heart, no transformation has ever taken place. It is only the heroine's perception of him that has changed (cf. 149). "What she is encouraged to do is to latch on to whatever expressions of thoughtfulness he might display [...] and to consider them, rather than his more obvious and frequent disinterest, as evidence of his true character" (148). Needless to say that in doing so, the heroine also leaves behind those 'masculine' traits she has displayed at the novel's beginning, such as high intelligence and strong temper, in order to become "a mature [...] and very married woman who has realized her full potential and identity as the partner of a man and as the implied mother of a child" (134). In the sublime moment of union between heroine and hero, the gender boundary is erased as they both indulge in their femininity. Of course, this moment cannot last, since the hero's "spectacular masculinity" (147) remains the guiding force of his character. "[T]he genre fails to show that if the emotional repression [...] that characterize[s] men [is] actually to be reversed, the entire notion of what it is to be male will have to be changed" (148). Instead, 'love' is presented as the remedy for the systematic devaluation of emotionality, femininity and women. If the romance novel is well-constructed, it can arouse profound joy in its readers. It "functions [...] as a

⁸ Radway's book is based on reader-response criticism; the definition of 'ideal' is derived from a group of romance readers she studied (cf. Radway 120).

utopian wish-fulfillment fantasy through which women try to imagine themselves [...] as happy and content” (151). In favour of utopian thought, Toril Moi comments that “the contradictions embodied by [...] utopias [are] a justification of their social critique [...], [their] gaps and inconsistencies indicate the pervasive nature of the authoritarian ideology the utopian thinker is trying to undermine” (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 122). Indeed, the romantic union becomes uncanny and terrifying in ‘failed’⁹ romances, such as Rosemary Rogers’ *The Insiders* (1979), in which “only four pages after the hero’s final anal rape of the heroine (to whom he is now married)[,] [the hero] suddenly realizes he loves her” (Radway 167). Farcical turns like this make the romance novel’s compulsive happy ending so questionable. The ‘failed’ romance is a gothic romance, a female gothic plot, where hero and villain are difficult to distinguish. It evokes fears in its readers which it cannot successfully contain again (cf. 133), and hence ultimately “fails to convince the reader that traditional sexual arrangements are benign” (133). This is where its feminist potential lies (cf. 218). By raising awareness of female victimisation, a gothic romance, even if inadvertently, can trigger critical thought processes and political action.

The terms ‘gothic’ and ‘romance’ have been closely connected since the gothic’s inception in the mid-eighteenth century. What we call ‘gothic novel’ today was referred to as ‘gothic romance’ back then because the designation ‘novel’ was reserved for prose narratives with a ‘realistic’ content, as opposed to the ‘fantastic’ romance (cf. Heiland 4). Romances were ancient and mediaeval texts depicting ideal fantasy worlds which could be written in verse as well as in prose (cf. Regis 19-20). The gothic was thus from the start aligned with the pre-modern and the irrational. While most gothic texts of the nineteenth century were ostensibly realist novels (cf. Botting 11-12), the gothic was again associated with the term romance in the mid-twentieth century, this time in the ‘gothic romance novel’. US-American publishers coined the term in 1960 to market the books of authors such as Victoria Holt and Phyllis Whitney (cf. Radway, *Gothic Romances* 143-145). Perhaps more accurately, Regis calls their subgenre ‘romantic suspense’ (cf. Regis 108). Combining a love story with a mystery, these novels draw on the female gothic tradition (cf. Radway, *Gothic Romances* 145). Yet, in Radway’s view, they “differ[...] substantially from the original gothic in that [their] explorations of evil and terror are more fully subordinated to the [...] primary romantic plot” (144). The

⁹ Again, Radway’s definition of ‘failed’ is derived from the group of romance readers she studied.

mystery plot usually revolves around a male villain and is investigated by the heroine, who puts herself in danger. For a part of the narrative, she suspects the villain of being the hero. However, at the story's resolution, when the villain is about to attack the heroine, the mystery is cleared up as the hero appears to save her and declare his love (cf. 158-159). "The 'sudden' revelation of the hero's ultimate benignity is made palatable [...] by the fact that his vindication occurs simultaneously with another's exposure" (159). The fears aroused by the mysterious threats to the heroine are blamed on an external agent who is not the hero, a scapegoat so to say, and thus those fears can be laid to rest (cf. 159). 'Ideal' romance novels arouse even less fear in their readers, still they typically function similarly to 'gothic' romance novels by allowing the hero to shine in comparison to a negative male foil (cf. Radway 133). Both also work with female foils, whose whorishness is used to highlight the heroines' purity (cf. Radway, *Gothic Romances* 149-150, cf. Radway 131).

The 'gothic' romance novels of the 1960s and 1970s are not entirely congruent with my definition of a gothic romance. It is only when a 'gothic' romance fails to deliver a convincing happy ending that it becomes a 'failed' romance and a gothic romance in my sense. Of course, whether a book fails is ultimately decided by the individual reader. "[T]he Gothic experience is not foundational but always a narrative in need of interpretation" (Meyers 20). I group the 'failed' or gothic romances together with female-centred love stories which also feature threats and violence against women, yet dispense with the happy ending (cf. 20-21). According to Regis, the latter ones are not romance novels, as the 'happy ending' is essential to the romance genre (cf. Regis 9, cf. 49). The two types of novels, 'failed' romance novels and novels about dangerous love from a female point of view, I call 'female gothic novels'.¹⁰ They tell uncanny stories about gender relations, some with, some without a formal happy ending. I argue that female gothic novels have a feminist potential because they make clear the problems inherent in and the constructedness of gender roles and the gender system. As Meyers phrases it: "[W]e should not underestimate the importance of debunking the

¹⁰ As I have already shown in chapter 2.1, a female gothic novel can also feature a male heroine, by which I mean a male protagonist who is ascribed feminine characteristics or performs a feminine gender. Furthermore, and this I have not made explicit so far, the villain-hero can also be female (cf. Spooner and McEvoy 1). It follows that the relationship between the two is not necessarily heterosexual, as the example of 'lesbian gothic' (cf. Smith and Wallace 3) demonstrates. My definition of female gothic is merely a working definition which I have tailored to fit the novels I am going to discuss.

myth that Mr. Right can save women from male violence and provide easy answers to the question of what it means to be a [...] female [...] human subject” (Meyers 154).

2.4 Feminism, the Mother-Daughter Relationship and Modern Witchcraft

Chapter 2.4 analyses the mother-daughter relationship from a feminist and psychoanalytic point of view, illustrating it with examples from female gothic fiction, fairy tale and romance novels. This is followed by a critique of the feminist construction of the witch and the discourse of modern witchcraft. Finally, I summarise the insights I have gained so far, pointing out how the dilemma of women’s (dis)empowerment emerges again and again.

Meyers stresses that the female gothic’s hub is not the villain-hero, “but rather [...] the heroine’s *relation* to him [...] as well as [...] her connection to another, victimized woman” (18). The latter part deserves elaboration. Striving for solidarity among women is, of course, a major principle of feminism (cf. Gamble viii). Accordingly, feminist critics have looked extensively at relationships between women in literature, particularly at relationships between daughters and mothers (cf. Heiland 57-58). “[M]other-daughter relationships [...] have long been recognized as central to the genre of female gothic” (Heiland 61), too, as the example of Ann Radcliffe’s novels has shown (cf. 61-63). Typically, these relationships are characterised by a longer lasting intensity than those between mothers and sons (cf. Radway 136). Since they are both of the same sex, the mother “tends to experience her daughter as an extension of herself” (136), which “continue[s] her dependency [and] ego-boundary confusion” (136) well into adult age. Luce Irigaray theorised the mother-daughter relationship from a psychoanalytic perspective in 1979, claiming that society’s pressure on women to be mothers and nothing else ultimately disables a fruitful mother-daughter interaction (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 87-88). She “argues [...] that because the woman has lost all conceptions of herself as a desiring female, she is unable to provide an adequate role model of womanhood” (88) and can only teach the daughter the role that patriarchy has assigned to her (cf. 88, cf. Rowe 214). This role, motherhood, is split into two binary opposites: the self-abnegating, over-nurturing ‘good’ mother and the selfish, under-nurturing, ‘bad’ mother (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 87). In fairy tales, the former is represented by the angelic, often deceased, ‘natural’ mother, the latter by the evil stepmother or the witch (cf. Rowe 212-213). Neither of these roles holds the promise of fulfilment; both are

utterly limiting. They are two sides of the same coin, for when the mother has been consumed, she in turn becomes all-consuming (cf. Jacobs 184). Hence the daughter's dilemma:

If she imitates domestic martyrdom, the daughter may experience a hostile dependency, forever blaming the mother for trapping her within a constricting role. If a daughter rebels, then she risks social denunciations of her femininity, nagging internal doubts about her gender identity, and rejection by a mother who covertly envying the daughter's courage must yet overtly defend her own choices. (Rowe 214)

The mother-daughter relationship is profoundly ambivalent, as the adolescent daughter struggles to become a subject independent of the mother, yet can never let go of her entirely (cf. 213). In its uncanny oscillation between sameness and difference, this relationship can indeed be called gothic (cf. Heiland 62). To achieve selfhood and maturity in patriarchal society, the daughter must turn from the mother to the father (cf. Irigaray 62). "Her first real attempt at individuation is thus often expressed as identification with and desire for the father and all that is male" (Radway 136).¹¹ At the same time, however, the daughter still needs the nurturance the mother used to give to her. The feminine self she develops is thus a 'self in relation' (cf. 136), unlike the masculine 'autonomous self' (cf. 148). Applying this theory to romance fiction, Radway claims that what the romance heroine wants from the hero is as much motherly nurturance as sexual partnership (cf. 151). "[T]he heroine's often expressed desire to be the hero's formally recognized wife in fact camouflages an equally insistent wish to be his child" (145). As this wish is not granted in the long term, women turn to mothering themselves, identifying with and defining themselves through their children (cf. 137-138). From the daughter's perspective, Irigaray writes: "You look at yourself in the mirror. And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother. Between the two, what are you?" (Irigaray 63). By becoming a mother, the woman hands her self over to her infant daughter, who is a passive receiver. The grown-up daughter longs to be on equal terms with her mother, to communicate with her woman to woman (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 88). However, when she gains autonomy from the mother by becoming a mother herself, she by definition gives up her self, too. She can now

¹¹ Radway draws not on Irigaray, but on Nancy Chodorow (cf. Radway 135), whose theory resembles Irigaray's.

communicate with her mother as a mother, yet since mother is defined as selfless, what is there to communicate? Irigaray closes with the daughter's utopian plea: "[W]hat I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive" (Irigaray 67).

The promises and problems of the mother-daughter relationship continue in the figures of the witch and the goddess (cf. Purkiss 32). Feminists have been avidly involved in witchcraft and goddess worship, based on "the myth of an originary matriarchy, through the themes of mother-daughter learning" (8). Reclaiming the witch from those who saw her as the anti-woman (cf. Carson 124-125), feminist discourse has instead tended to portray her as a simple, wise, diligent, peaceful, sexually liberated healer. She lives on her own in close touch with nature and follows ancient traditions, yet is eventually captured and burned by the misogynist Catholic church (cf. Purkiss 7). Diane Purkiss offers this construction of the witch only to deconstruct it. Depending on which part is emphasised, the witch's story is utopian or dystopian; in any case there is a binary opposition between victim and villain (cf. 8). Purkiss criticises this conception both from a historian's and a feminist's point of view (cf. 2). In doing so, she particularly rejects the writings of Daly (cf. 13) and Dworkin (cf. 15), who I have mentioned before in the context of 'gothic feminism' and who were also among the leading writers to interpret early modern witches as proto-feminists in the 1970s (cf. 8-9). "[O]ur foresisters were the Great Hags whom the institutionally powerful but privately impotent patriarchs found too threatening for coexistence" (Purkiss 13, quoting Daly 14-15). According to Daly, the key characteristic of a witch is her victimisation, which she evokes dramatically (cf. 13-15). Daly's and Dworkin's 'witch craze' is thus not limited to the early modern period, but has been ongoing through the ages and affects all women who attempt to resist patriarchy (cf. 13). "[T]he suffering female body can be used as a trope of timelessness which erases the specificity with which these experiences are mediated by social and discursive practices" (14). Purkiss sees this stance as reductive and presumptuous (cf. 17-18) because it ignores the complexities of historical witch-hunts (cf. 8) and equates the concerns of contemporary women with those of early modern women (cf. 12-13). More problematically, the same way as 'gothic feminism', Daly's and Dworkin's attitudes are defeatist (cf. 18). "Telling women that they must be Hags and also that Hags are doomed to suffer since the dawn of recorded history is not encouraging" (17).

Purkiss takes a more favourable view of modern witchcraft, or Wicca (cf. Waller 29), and goddess worship as represented by Starhawk (cf. Purkiss 18) and Zsuzsanna E. Budapest (cf. 30). Part of the pagan movement (cf. 31), contemporary witches are worshippers of a mother goddess figure (cf. 32). Some, though by no means all witches, also call themselves feminists (cf. 32). They generally claim to have recovered this cult from women of the past, or at least from other writers who have done so (cf. 33, cf. 40). Tracing the origins of the goddess figure from the texts of Jules Michelet and Charles Leland in the nineteenth (cf. 34, cf. 36) to C. G. Jung in the twentieth century (cf. 34), Purkiss shows that she is in fact neither ancient nor female-authored. Likewise, witchcraft as a religion was invented during the 1950s by Gerald Gardner (cf. 37-38). Many of these male writers believed in an original matriarchy, yet chose to see its downfall as a proof of women's incompetence (cf. 34). In the twentieth century, female writers did finally take part in inscribing the witch and the goddess, among them Margaret Murray (cf. 36-37) and Doreen Valiente (cf. 38). "The sorceresses and muses of male fantasy were reinterpreted and inhabited by women, who were able to inhabit such an inimical space by misreading it, sometimes willfully" (38). While creatively and imaginatively adding to these older fictions of the witch and the goddess (cf. 39), however, modern witches still profess to be telling a long forgotten truth (cf. 41). Nonetheless, Purkiss is more tolerant about Starhawk's or Budapest's lack of historical accuracy than she is about Daly's and Dworkin's (cf. 43). The origins they claim – Atlantis, King Arthur – are so obviously mythical that they can hardly be accused of fraud (cf. 42). Furthermore, most books on modern witchcraft are popular, not academic works and therefore less committed to the rules of evidence (cf. 52). Despite some reservations, Purkiss is excited by the possibilities (cf. 53) of this postmodernist approach (cf. Nicol 149, cf. Gamble, *Carter* 5) to history. "What if women writing history allowed their invention to play about freely in the fields of the past, searching for fantasies that might be at least temporarily enabling or interesting, rather than (or as well as) for new ways to do empirical history?" (Purkiss 53).

She remains critical of modern witchcraft's version of the goddess not "because it is a fantasy" (42), but because "it is problematic *as* a fantasy" (42). Unlike Daly's hags, modern witches do not identify primarily as persecuted victims, but cultivate a life-affirming attitude (cf. 32). "The rediscovery of the ancient matrifocal civilisations has given us a deep sense of pride in women's ability to create and sustain culture" (Purkiss 32, quoting Starhawk 91). As I have expounded before, they share in the myth

of women's lost freedom, yet instead of dwelling on the trauma, they focus on the positive period preceding it. Where Daly and Dworkin are dystopian, modern witchcraft has a utopian spirit (cf. 41). "Th[e] myth of [...] matriarchy offers a prelapsarian utopia of originary unity which replicates the blissful mother-child dyad even as it celebrates a society with no visible differences" (41). Witches see themselves as daughters who celebrate their mother and make her the divine ideal that women should strive for. Thus, they perpetuate the patriarchal belief that motherhood is the 'true' purpose of a woman's existence (cf. 33). However,

[j]ust what might seem to constitute 'strength' and 'authority' for an exhausted working mother? Might there be times when she wants to acknowledge aspects of herself which are *not* maternal? [...] The myth of the Goddess, with its insistence on an identity grounded in the maternal body, betrays its origins in male fantasy. (33)

Witches' self-fashioning centres on the past, the countryside and the home (cf. 20-21). Their magic is supposed to be 'white', hence protective, restorative, unaggressive (cf. 46-48). This is the reason why they are in danger of ending up as the passive and powerless 'good' women of patriarchy again (cf. 48).

Is there a way out for women? My readings of early gothic fiction, fairy tales, romance novels and modern witchcraft have shown the difficulties of overcoming patriarchal binary thought (cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 104-105) and performing one's gender differently (cf. Butler 520). Women in eighteenth-century gothic novels are frequently portrayed as objects to be killed off in a sublime encounter (cf. Heiland 34). In traditional fairy tales, there is wondrous change only for the meek (cf. Zipes xviii). If women are unruly, they suffer fantastic violence (cf. Rowe 218). Ideal romance fiction constructs a utopian setting in which femininity is rewarded and masculinity is miraculously transformed to suit women's needs (cf. Radway 148-149). Modern witchcraft, too, celebrates 'good' magic and motherhood, ignoring the negative sides (cf. Purkiss 46-47). "[W]omen are damned if they claim power and damned if they don't" (Heiland 36). Feminist theory is similarly conflicted. In the dystopian writings of Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin, women's 'greatness' depends on their victimisation (cf. Meyers 10-11, cf. Purkiss 15-16). Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, even as they profess that a simple reversal of hierarchies is not the goal, evoke imaginary realms of female self-indulgence as their implied solutions (cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 119-

120, cf. 144-145).¹² All of these texts at least engage with the ‘woman question’. In real life, female authors rarely enter the canon (cf. McCrum 1-8, cf. Modern Library 1-5) and are often forgotten.

It will not do to “decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions” (Woolf 86). Gender, Judith Butler maintains, is always oppressive (cf. New 397); the gender system as a whole must be subverted (cf. Meyers 11). A possible strategy of liberation is the “permanent deconstruction” (New 397) of the system, carried out in the guise of postmodern gothic writing (cf. Heiland 156-157) and using the uncanny as its tool (cf. 77-78). Since the gothic “is constantly being reinvented in ways that address the realities of our current historical moment” (156), the deconstruction it performs is bound to be situational and specific. Still, this can be considered an advantage, as it counters the reductive tendency of theory (cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 139). In the second part of my thesis, I will examine two postmodern novels which deconstruct gender in the gothic mode, Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop* and Margaret Mahy’s *The Changeover*. I will evaluate their success in the context of the other fictions I have discussed so far, as well as in relation to each other.

Having taken two steps forward, I take one step back. As insinuated in chapter 2.1, I will not take deconstruction to the outer limit, since it has no limit (cf. New 400-401). My position is feminist, which means that I see the advancement of women as politically desirable. Yet the prerequisite of feminism is a conception of ‘women’. In Bran Nicol’s words, feminist writers “use postmodern strategies in order to critique [...] the Enlightenment metanarrative, but also caution against chipping away at it until there is *nothing* left” (Nicol 142). Meyers, quoting Jacques Derrida, stresses the necessity of keeping in mind the violence of the hierarchy one is working to undo (cf. Meyers 12). In order to dismantle gender successfully,

[w]e must traverse a phase of *overturning* [...]. To deconstruct the opposition [between masculinity and femininity], first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment [...]. The necessity of this phase is structural; it is the necessity of an interminable analysis: the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself. (Meyers 12, quoting Derrida 41-42)

¹² I have chosen not to cover this aspect of Cixous’ and Irigaray’s theories, as it would go beyond the scope of my thesis.

The female authors I have chosen to support with my thesis are anglophone, white, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender women whose works strongly speak to me. This is certainly due to the fact that I share many of their characteristics. In that I am no different from other critics such as Judith Butler, who “is something of an ethical naturalist when she comes to speak about and for ‘her’ people” (New 400). I fully believe that many different women should be supported. However, the question of who is a woman (cf. Moi 7-9) and what constitutes her advancement is a matter which I am happy to ponder within the narrow framework of my thesis, but will not presume to answer in real life.

3. Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop* and Margaret Mahy’s *The Changeover*

This chapter opens with an introduction to Angela Carter and Margaret Mahy, clarifying why I have chosen to discuss these two authors together. It also provides a first overview of *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover*.

After her early death in 1992, Angela Carter turned into a celebrity (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 1) and is now canonised among the most important British writers of the post-war period (cf. Nicol 141). She never won a major literary award during her lifetime, however, as she was presumably considered “too quirky, too original, too avant-garde, too subversive” (Roberts 2). Carter did not regard herself as a mainstream writer, but as one writing from the margins, albeit still close enough to the centre for critical interaction (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 4-5). “[Her] fiction persistently concerns itself with the evocation of boundaries and borderlines, precariously suspending itself at the very point at which one state, condition, place or mode merges into another” (5). This play with boundaries is the main reason why Carter’s work is often called postmodern (cf. Nicol 143), her concomitant preoccupation with “all that is unrighteous, illegitimate, low” (VanderMeer 2, quoting Rushdie 2) also makes her a gothic writer (cf. Meyers 20, cf. Peach 7). Carter’s postmodern gothic manifests mostly in negotiations between femininity and masculinity (cf. Cornier Michael 499, cf. Gamble, *Carter* 6). She was a professed feminist; yet she frequently disagreed with other feminists of her time (cf. 4). As Rebecca Munford phrases it: “Carter’s [work] sits uneasily in relation to both Gothic and feminist discourses, especially as they converge through the category of the ‘female Gothic’” (Munford 61). Her heroines cover the whole range from objectified victims to oppressors of others (cf. 61, cf. Meyers 20; cf. Gamble, *Carter* 68).

Margaret Mahy, on the other hand, could be described as marginal to British culture by birth. A New Zealander of the same generation as Carter (cf. Duder 25, cf. VanderMeer 1), she passed away while I was writing this thesis (cf. Flood 1) and her work is still awaiting proper recognition (cf. Duder 15). For although Mahy did win important prizes (cf. Flood 1), she is marketed and identified primarily as a children's author (cf. Eccleshare 1). "That a writer working in such traditionally marginalised, or non-canonical, genres as children's and young adults' literature [...] should be one of the foremost writers of a country marginalised by its size, population and location, is pleasingly appropriate" (Hale 13-14), New Zealand critic Elizabeth Hale writes. Yet Mahy's books are popular not only in her native country, but also in the United Kingdom (cf. Duder 16) and the United States (cf. 111), while many of her works for young adults easily pass as adult novels (cf. 17). Among those are some of her best-known novels from the 1980s, *The Changeover* (1984), *The Catalogue of the Universe* (1985), *The Tricksters* (1986) and *Memory* (1987) (cf. 197). In Heather Scutter's view, "Margaret Mahy is one of very few children's writers to move toward a postmodern representation of subjectivity" (Scutter 1), showing the subject as fragmented and instable (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs, *Body* 1). Like Carter, Mahy interrogates boundaries (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs xiii-xiv). Unlike Carter, she has rarely been discussed in a gothic context so far.¹³ However, her fiction certainly causes fear, "tak[ing] readers (and the characters, of course) into danger and out again, scaring them but reassuring them of their ability to cope with it" (Hale 8). Moreover, though Mahy is not an outspoken feminist, critics have noted her strong female characters (cf. Duder 172). Refusing to portray women as innocent victims, "[s]he understands, and sympathises with, the desire not just to encounter danger, but to be dangerous" (Hale 9).

If one compares Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* to Mahy's *The Changeover*, it becomes obvious that they have much in common. *The Magic Toyshop*, published in 1967, was Carter's second novel (cf. VanderMeer 3). Aptly described as a "disturbing [...] Gothic psychodrama[...]" (3), it focuses on family dynamics and the 'romantic' relationship between a young man and the protagonist (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 72-73). Said

¹³ One example of a gothic perspective on Mahy's work is "On the Gothic Beach: Margaret Mahy's *The Tricksters* and Gavin Bishop's *The Horror of Hickory Bay*" by Rose Lovell-Smith, in: *Haunting the Borders: the Gothic in Children's Literature*, ed. Anna Jackson et al., New York: Routledge 2008.

protagonist is fifteen-year-old Melanie,¹⁴ who tries on her mother's old wedding dress and is orphaned subsequently. Along with her two siblings, she is sent to live with her uncle Philip Flower, a toymaker, his wife aunt Margaret and her brothers Finn and Francie Jowle. The novel depicts Philip's tyrannical rule, Melanie's increasing subordination and Finn's encroachment on her. It ends with Finn finally overthrowing Philip, liberating the family to do... what (cf. Peach 73-74, cf. Gamble, *Carter* 72-73)? "At night, in the garden, they faced each other in a wild surmise" (Carter 200).

The Changeover (1984), which is also Mahy's second novel, likewise concentrates on the female protagonist's ambiguous connection to a boy (cf. Duder 179). It resembles Carter's novel in devoting much space to the depiction of family relations (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs xiii). Both *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover* tell feminine coming-of-age stories (cf. VanderMeer 3, cf. Hale 15). Mahy's heroine Laura Chant is fourteen, the daughter of divorced parents, living with her single mother Kate and little brother Jacko. One day, Jacko is stamped by Carmody Braque, a demonic old man, who then begins to suck the life out of the boy. Laura turns to Sorensen 'Sorry' Carlisle, an older schoolmate, for help because she is convinced that he is a witch. Sorry and Laura form a relationship as he and his family of witches help Laura to become a witch herself. She succeeds in taking power over Braque, forcing him to release her brother (cf. Walls 114). The novel ends with the prospect of Laura's and Sorry's temporary separation (cf. Mahy 269).

The Magic Toyshop and *The Changeover* both employ the gothic, and they do so in two ways. Firstly, their plots feature modern gothic motifs, such as the family, the house and the city, as the sites of uncanny events (cf. Botting 3, cf. 11). Thus, they blur the (gendered) boundaries defining these sites (cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 104) and reveal them to be cultural constructions (cf. Heiland 117). Secondly, they are written in the postmodern gothic mode: they mix genres (cf. Botting 168-169) and allude to other texts as well as to their own textuality (cf. Peach 18-19, cf. Gavin 137). They are, in other words, intertextual and metatextual (cf. Wolf 453-454). Hence, they refuse narrative closure and imply that, off the page as well as on the page, the world is structured only by subjective distinctions which can collapse anytime. Furthermore, and more specifically, *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover* can be considered female

¹⁴ The reader never learns Melanie's surname. She is only referred to as a Flower, after her uncle's name (cf. Carter 116).

gothic novels. According to the working definition of the genre which I have developed in chapter 2.3, they focus on a troubled heroine and her connection to a villain-hero. Using the uncanny, they deal with the dangers of heterosexual relationships from a female point of view, without a full-blown happy ending. Hence, they blur the gender boundary as well as the related boundaries in line with it. This is what constitutes their feminist potential (cf. Meyers 19-20). In the following chapters, I will provide evidence for my claims about the novels under discussion by close readings of these texts.

3.1 Genre Boundaries, Text Limits

Both *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover* deconstruct, rewrite and fuse several literary genres, namely, the gothic novel (cf. Munford 61), the fairy tale (cf. Peach 73, cf. Waller 21) and the romance novel (cf. Lee 44, cf. Duder 187). Their character constellations and plot patterns clearly show their indebtedness to these forms. Like many a Radcliffean heroine, Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop* is of high birth (cf. Peach 73), orphaned and thrust into the power of a malevolent male relative (cf. Miles 80-83). Uncle Philip's abode may be no castle of Udolpho, but a terraced house with a shop in South London (cf. Carter 38), yet it is just as mysterious, terrible and confining. In this house, Melanie becomes the victim of mind games (cf. 83, cf. 118) and a staged rape (cf. 166), her self-confidence shaken. She allies with the other oppressed inmates (cf. 123), secretly transgressing Philip's rules (cf. 195). Still, it is Finn, not Melanie, who finally breaks the spell of the magic toyshop (cf. 171-172). The 'freedom' she gains in the end is eerily compromised, as Finn has begun to adopt aspects of uncle Philip's demeanour (cf. 183, cf. 185). Carter partly undermines this familiar plot by preceding it with a frank portrayal of Melanie's joy about her own awakening sexuality (cf. 1-2). Furthermore, while uncle Philip is a threatening figure (cf. 132), he is also subtly ridiculed by the narrative. "Lest the reader miss the point, Carter has him drink his morning tea from 'his own, special, pint-size mug which had the word "Father" executed upon it in rosebuds', p. 73 [...]" (Gamble, *Carter* 71). The gothic is, after all, artificial: "They built this vast Gothic castle, a sort of Highland fortress, only gargantuan [...]. It was made of papier mâché [...]" (Carter 99).

The Changeover's gothic owes more to Charlotte Brontë (cf. Gavin 133) than to Ann Radcliffe. Like *Jane Eyre* (1847), Laura is a lower class, or, rather, a declassed heroine (cf. Mahy 70, cf. Walls 115) who enters the house of a privileged male (cf.

Mahy 79). Janua Caeli, the stately home of Sorry's family (cf. 81), is a place where Laura is under sexual threat (cf. 132), yet it is also where she comes into power (cf. 202-203). Moreover, it is a place she can leave, as she has a refuge in her mother's house (cf. 15). 'True' evil in *The Changeover* resides not in the mansion, but in a shop (cf. 33), and its direct victim is not Laura, but Jacko, the child she is in charge of (cf. 36). This view is complicated by the fact that evil Braque lives in a house called Jolidays (cf. 210), which is "a vulgar imitation of Janua Caeli" (Walls 123). Sorry, for his part, shows an uncanny understanding of a gothic villain's psychology (cf. 215). When Laura reverses Braque's curse with a magic of her own, Sorry stands by her side (cf. 217). Still, in the end it is her alone who delivers the final blow (cf. 252-253).

The Magic Toyshop's and *The Changeover's* recourse to fairy tale is more explicit and more eclectic than their relationship to the gothic. They mention several well-known fairy tales (cf. Carter 33, cf. Mahy 19, cf. 98, cf. 192); "Sleeping Beauty" (cf. Carter 53, cf. Mahy 182) and "Bluebeard" (cf. Lee 49, cf. Mahy 129) especially are referenced by both novels. Their use is metaphorical with an ironic twist: "Bluebeard's castle. Melanie felt a shudder of dread as she went by every door, in case it opened and [...] some clockwork horror rolling hugely on small wheels [...] emerged to put her courage to the test" (Carter 82), and "[Laura] went, like beautiful Fatima, into Bluebeard's chamber. Of course, there were no previous wives hanging by their hair [...], only seventh-form homework spread across the floor and desk" (Mahy 129). Both novels also incorporate fairy tale motifs. In *The Magic Toyshop*, these include: the orphaned children (cf. Peach 73), the evil ogre, embodied by uncle Philip, the mute woman, aunt Margaret (cf. 74) and the simpleton (cf. Zipes xvii), Finn (cf. Carter 33), who is, in effect, not simple at all (cf. 54). *The Changeover*, according to Mahy, originally grew out of the Grimm tale "Brother and Sister", with Jacko as the bewitched brother and Laura as the good sister saving him (cf. Mahy 284, cf. Duder. 183). The witch motif is, obviously, also a main feature of the novel. Mahy's witches are not the evil witches of fairy tales; yet neither are they good (cf. Waller 21).

What makes *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover* particularly appealing to a critic is how they continuously problematise romance and romantic ideology (cf. Peach 73). At the beginning of *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie spends hours imagining her future bridegroom and dreaming about her wedding night (cf. Carter 2, cf. 13). Her childish fantasy dissolves when she meets Finn (cf. 45), who is nothing like the man of her dreams (cf. Lee 44), and whose sexual intrusiveness quenches her desire and fills

her with disgust (cf. 106, cf. 109). “She wished someone was watching them [...], Finn kissing this black-haired young girl, from a bush a hundred yards away. Then it would seem romantic” (106). Scenes such as this one alternate with scenes of mutual tenderness and affinity (cf. 68, cf. 123, cf. 170-72); still the novel makes it clear that the ‘love’ Melanie finally feels for Finn is at least partly due to her lack of options, loneliness and desperation (cf. 115, cf. 155, cf. 167). Finn never undergoes a miraculous transformation into a more romantic type, if anything, he becomes harder in the course of the novel (cf. 186). While *The Magic Toyshop* attributes Melanie’s romantic ideas to a variety of sources (cf. 2, cf. 10, cf. 13), *The Changeover* specifically tackles the romance novel. Subtitled *A Supernatural Romance*, the novel satirises itself by making Sorry, the villain-hero, an avid romance reader (cf. Mahy 129). Laura and her mother, in contrast, despise romances (cf. 85) and scorn those who read them (cf. 23). Laura’s notions of wedded bliss have been put into perspective by her parents’ recent divorce (cf. 39-40). She first feels sexually attracted to Sorry (cf. 23), before they also bond emotionally (cf. 145, cf. 160). It is Laura who is then magically transformed in the novel, even though Sorry is affected by her changeover as well (cf. 200). Toward the end of the novel, she can tell him: ““Well, I think I love you”” (269), still, she “[feels] the beginning of an unexpected relief” (269) when Sorry tells her that he will move away for his vocational training (cf. 267).

“*The Changeover* is [...] intertextually thick with allusions to myths, fairy tales, and other literature. Mahy both uses and subverts – without simplistically inverting – the texts to which she alludes [...]” (Gavin 137). Further texts the novel refers to include, among many others, *Macbeth* (cf. Mahy 94, 207), *Dracula* (cf. 208), *The Pickwick Papers* (cf. 208) and William Blake’s poem “The Tyger” (cf. 36, cf. 82, cf. 191-192, cf. Raburn 32), which is referenced by Carter’s novel as well (cf. Carter 122, cf. 172). *The Magic Toyshop* also mentions *Lorna Doone* (cf. 2, cf. 91), *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (cf. 2), *Winnie the Pooh* (cf. 91) and the poetry of John Donne (cf. 193). These are all ‘classic’ works of British literature,¹⁵ and their inclusion underlines that Carter and Mahy are firmly grounded in the tradition they criticise. Yet the hotchpotch style in which they use these works signals that “none offer a foundational structure for reading the[ir] novel[s] – they are [...] objects ‘found’ by chance as the author’s imagination takes the narrative along certain paths only to be discarded when

¹⁵ Except for *Winnie the Pooh*, perhaps, which is a classic of British children’s literature.

another, more appropriate one comes to mind” (Nicol 148). As Nicol stresses, the aim of postmodern intertextuality is the demystification of all narratives (cf. 148), including one’s own. *The Changeover* does this very overtly:

Even without witchcraft the world grew slightly unbelievable, as if part of her were a reading eye and most of her was a character moving through a story – a character, moreover, who had begun to suspect that she might not be entirely real, might be nothing but a puppet, or words on a printed page. (Mahy 119)

The manner in which the novel references itself does, in effect, destabilise both its own world and the world ‘outside the text’.¹⁶ Yet paradoxically, the statement that it takes no witchcraft to induce wonder re-mystifies those worlds again. For if we readers are puppets, too, who is mastering us?

3.2 Family Relations and Gender Roles

This chapter looks at the portrayal of the protagonists’ families in the novels under discussion, and at how the familial structures they grow up in shape their gender.

Melanie’s family in *The Magic Toyshop*, the one she is born into, is a traditional nuclear family composed of father, mother and children. It is also an upper middle-class family (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 69-71), which means that her parents can afford to leave their children in the care of a housekeeper while the father is on a business trip and the mother is accompanying him (cf. *Carter* 3). Their temporary absence hints at a distance that is generally present in Melanie’s relationship with her parents. “[W]hen [...] her mother cuddled her, the embraces were always thickly muffled in cloth” (10) and “Daddy was [...] tweed and tobacco” (10). Melanie cannot even imagine what her parents look like naked (cf. 10); she lives in a sexually repressed atmosphere, typically associated with the 1950s (cf. Peach 76, cf. 12-13). Still, distance also gives her privacy (cf. Lee 46), allowing her to spend a whole summer admiring her own body (cf. *Carter* 1-2). “She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself, clambering her own mountain ranges, penetrating the moist richness of her secret valleys” (1). This, in Sarah Gamble’s words, “wonderfully self-absorbed auto-eroticism” (Gamble, *Carter* 69), comes to an abrupt end when Melanie enters the house of her uncle.

¹⁶ Furthermore, through the puppet metaphor (cf. Lee 48-49), it recalls *The Magic Toyshop* as well.

There, she shares a room with her little sister (cf. Carter 44), is told to wear skirts and stay silent (cf. 62-63), kept out of school (cf. 75), spied upon (cf. 109) and symbolically raped (cf. Peach 72). The toyshop-household is “a grotesquely exaggerated form of the patriarchal structure” (Gamble, *Carter* 71), yet at the same time, it is uncannily familiar, clearly based on a British lower middle-class family in the mid-twentieth century (cf. Carter 55-56, cf. 61, cf. 77). Philip Flower’s extended family comprises himself, his wife Margaret, her two brothers, his two nieces and his nephew (cf. 35). Just like Melanie, Margaret and her brothers are orphans, yet unlike Melanie and her siblings, they are very close (cf. 37-38). Melanie and her siblings, by contrast, are shown to be distanced from each other in their ‘old home’ already (cf. 29), and grow even further apart in Philip’s house. Victoria, the little sister, is immediately taken under Margaret’s wing, while the brother, Jonathon, becomes Philip’s apprentice (cf. Lee 49). Carter’s depiction of Melanie’s siblings is decidedly not endearing, and indeed rather disturbing, mocking the conventional, typically Victorian view of children as innocent and sweet (cf. Armitt 17). Five-year old (cf. Carter 48) Victoria is mindlessly cruel and not particularly pretty (cf. 5). She represents the ‘id’, who “rolled in the sun and tore butterflies into little pieces when she could catch them” (5). Twelve-year old Jonathon is almost completely absorbed in thought devoted to the building of model boats (cf. 4, cf. 82), an early intimation of a technocratic geek, who harbours a streak of sadism when he sees his rules transgressed. “The vicar had betrayed him. Gag him with marline spike. [...] Give him a taste of the cat” (8). Between these two different siblings, one aligned with the body, the other with the mind, Melanie is suspended, “treading the dangerous route between them, connected to neither” (82).

Compared to Melanie at the outset of *The Magic Toyshop*, Laura Chant in *The Changeover* lives in a much less traditional nuclear family. Her father has left her mother a few years before the story’s beginning, and in doing so, “seems to have left [his children] as well” (Walls 115), condemning them to a life of relative poverty (cf. Mahy 70). Laura’s mother had to become the breadwinner, taking on a badly paid job in a bookshop (cf. 39-40). While Kate fulfils the paternal role to the best of her ability, she shares the maternal role with her daughter. Laura often takes care of her three-year old brother Jacko after school (cf. 27) and partly regards him as her own child (cf. 29). Mahy portrays Jacko in angelic terms without irony. “His hair was as curly as hers but softer and fairer, and light seemed to shine out of it as if he were a lamp, each pale, curling hair a little filament glowing in the sunlight” (30). Throughout the novel, this

non-normative, lower middle-class family is characterised by affection and warmth (cf. 24, cf. 135). “[Kate] looked at a drawing of Jacko’s – a happy, family drawing, for that was all he could draw. There they were – Laura, Jacko and Kate, [...] with smiles so wide that they extended beyond their faces” (15). The blurring of the boundaries between father and mother, mother and child has created an almost equal partnership between the mother and the daughter. “Kate did her [bookseller’s] course on one side of the table while Laura frowned over her homework on the other. [...] It was cheerful to have someone to work with, and to have time alone with Kate when Jacko was [...] tucked up in bed” (40). Kate’s and Laura’s relationship reads like a realisation of Irigaray’s mother-daughter utopia (cf. Jacobs 178-179, cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 90-91). As such, it clarifies the gaps and lapses underlying the idea, as well as the impossibility of keeping masculinity at bay.

Family life in *The Changeover* is not as sugar-coated as it may seem, but “a complicated private game where the rules [are] barely understood” (Mahy 60). Laura, who admires her mother enormously, sometimes to the point of idealisation (cf. 16, cf. 228), is also jealously possessive of her (cf. 64, cf. 133). The intimacy between daughter and mother compensates for the traumatic loss of father and husband respectively (cf. 50, cf. 134). Yet it is necessarily a non-erotic intimacy (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 88) that detains them from the fulfillment of their erotic desires. Laura is inclined to deny this, believing in the illusion of a partner-like relationship between herself and her mother (cf. Mahy 163), yet “Kate is constantly juggling her need to be mother against her desire to be a desirable woman” (Wilkie-Stibbs 107). To solve her dilemma, she begins an affair with a man (cf. 64-65). In doing so, she reasserts her parental authority and puts her daughter back in her place: “Laura, you’re not to speak to me like that” (64). “[Y]ou are a consolation to me, but you can never be an escape, because I feel responsible for you” (163). However, it is now Laura’s turn to long for an escape, as she fears to be left behind by her mother and required to take care of her brother alone (cf. Walls 115). “Kate was not to know how Laura had looked forward to [...] giving part of the responsibility for Jacko over to someone else, and how dismayed she was to find Kate’s concentration focused elsewhere” (Mahy 60). In the words of Irigaray, “the one doesn’t stir without the other. But [they] do not move together” (Irigaray 67).

The housekeeper in *The Magic Toyshop* also advises Melanie to “be a little mother to” (cf. Carter 28) her younger siblings after their parents’ death. “Yet Jonathon and Victoria hardly seemed to feel the lack of a mother. They had their own private

worlds” (29). Raised to be a ‘self in relation’ (cf. Radway 136) and deeply traumatised by the sudden disintegration of her family (cf. Peach 81), Melanie is desperate for somebody to connect to. Predictably, she turns to aunt Margaret and the Jowle brothers, who form a non-normative family within the normative family structure uncle Philip has constructed around them (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 72). “Together, they are the ‘red people’ (p. 52), whose love of music, dancing and, indeed, of each other, cannot be stamped out through the imposition of patriarchal tyranny” (72).¹⁷ While Philip tries to infantilise his wife and her grown-up brothers (cf. Carter 38, cf. 71), Melanie comes to see Margaret and Francie as surrogate parents (cf. 122). “He and his sister stood on either side of the bed, bending over her as if to protect her from the perils of the night with their own flesh and bone” (122). Since Melanie views them as father and mother, it is only appropriate that the love between Francie and Margaret is erotic, expressed in sexual encounters behind Philip’s back (cf. 194). About the incest taboo, George Haggerty writes: “It is the nature of patriarchy to make incest [...] its most basic prohibition, for unless the terms of familial desire are carefully controlled, according to the logic of patriarchy, the fabric of society will break down” (Haggerty 12).

Yet curiously, except for their kinship, Margaret’s and Francie’s relationship fits unproblematically into the patriarchal pattern. Francie is described in rather traditional terms as a man “turned to stone, [...] with a craggy, impassive face” (cf. Carter 33), and he is the only one in the household who has a degree of financial independence from Philip (cf. Lee 43). Margaret, on the other hand, seems to “live for her brothers” (Carter 123) and mends their clothes as well as her husband’s (cf. 91). Feminist critics have thus argued that “the only taboo surrounding incest [is] a prohibition against speaking about it” (Fischer 96), and that it is not at all a breach of patriarchal law, but very much in line with it (cf. 96). Incest is indeed a common phenomenon in the toyshop-household. Uncle Philip lusts for Melanie, his niece (cf. Carter 143-144), and Finn is also an uncle-in-law to Melanie (cf. 35). “Families in which incest occurs have pronounced gender roles where the father has absolute authority and a profound sense of entitlement, expecting to have his demands obeyed and his needs served by his wife and (female) children” (96). What is endangered by Francie’s sexual relations with

¹⁷ Margaret, Francie and Finn Jowle are Irish (cf. Carter 35). The racial aspect of *The Magic Toyshop* is, however, hardly explored by the critics I have consulted. It would be interesting to investigate to what extent this otherwise very critical novel adopts stereotypical depictions of Irishness. Yet such a discussion would probably be too lengthy for this thesis.

Philip's wife is his position as pater familias, but not the patriarchal system (cf. 198). For Melanie, this means that her adoption by Margaret and Francie is hardly helpful. Her surrogate parents provide her with the affection she craves, while keeping her firmly within the structure that subordinates her. Similar to Melanie's late father, Francie is "essentially benevolent [...], but he's a patriarch nonetheless" (Gamble, *Carter* 69). Although he gives her a pound note when she is in difficulties, he would probably not help her find a job outside the home (cf. Peach 92). Margaret, too, "may offer Melanie a toffee to console her, but [...] is unable to rescue them from the oppression of [her] uncle" (Peach 93).

In *The Changeover*, the Chant women also "struggle for female liberation from the all-consuming tyranny of male power" (Wilkie-Stibbs 107). The appearance of the villainous Carmody Braque coincides with the budding relationship between Kate and her new lover Chris, as well as between Laura and Sorry. Furthermore, Jacko's illness causes his mother to call her ex-husband, Laura's father. It is important to note, however, that none of these male figures simply intrude on Laura and Kate; all of them are, in fact, asked in or sought out (cf. Mahy 36, cf. 48, cf. 109, cf. 134). Laura and Jacko meet Carmody Braque in his little curiosity shop (cf. 32-33), which bears a remarkable resemblance to uncle Philip's toyshop (cf. Carter 66). To Laura, their encounter is foreshadowed from the first pages of the novel (cf. Mahy 12-13, cf. 24), and she later describes Braque as "a sort of vampire, [...] an incubus, a demon" (Mahy 99-100). Armitt has argued convincingly that "[i]n an age [...] in which we no longer believe in ghosts, demons, or vampires, paedophiles have become their 'natural' descendants" (Armitt 18). Interpreting Braque as a paedophile stands to reason. He fits the cliché of the jovial but sinister stranger who lures in innocent children with sweets or toys (cf. Mahy 34-36). "[...] I'll make it up to the little brother, poor, wee lambie. Do I see a stamp on the right paw? How about another on the left? Hold it out, you little tiger, tiger burning bright, and you shall enter the forests of the night" (36).

However, this explanation seems too simple, as it conveniently positions the abusive adult somewhere 'out there'. Yet Braque is certainly within the family as much as he is without. Josephine Raburn reads him as a mythological father figure (cf. Raburn 29), Jacko's and Laura's absent father returned and reversed. As a matter of fact, Laura is still haunted by the memory of her father, as much as she tries to suppress it (cf. Mahy 134), because losing him made her feel like "a sacrificed Aztec, whose living heart was being held up for all to see" (41). Where Laura's and Jacko's father did not

want his children anymore (cf. 134-135), Braque wants Jacko all too much, and while the natural father is passive about paying regular maintenance (cf. 70), Braque actively drains him of his life substance (cf. 213). Presented in terms quite different from Laura's "dark, powerful father" (173), Braque recalls the fairy tale witch more than he does the stern sorcerer (cf. 86). He "look[s] like a grinning puppet" (33-34), wearing a "pale pink shirt and a very smart plum-coloured suit" (35), and is feminised by his appearance as well as by his childish demeanour (cf. Duder 183, cf. Mahy 214). Seen from this angle, however, the person he comes to resemble is Laura, who, at this point in the novel, is half child, half witch herself (cf. Gavin 137). To Armitt, "childhood innocence is a collective myth to which we cling" (cf. Armitt 25), and Mahy seems to subscribe to this critical view.

A friend of Kate's had recently had a new baby and had given her older child a [...] doll with instructions that, if he ever felt jealous of the new baby, he was to punish the doll which could not feel. On a recent visit Laura had watched with consternation as the child punished the doll. [...] "I'm allowed to do this," he said, hitting it less, Laura felt, out of jealousy for the new baby, than because he had been given a chance to be [...] cruel. (Mahy 245)

'Experienced' children who commit crimes against other children are no longer a rarity in twentieth-century gothic (cf. Armitt 23-25), and Laura, too, has it in her to become abusive of her little brother (cf. Walls 125). Indeed, on one occasion, when she is overburdened, she actually gives him "a small, sharp slap" (Mahy 58). According to Kathryn Walls, Braque is an outward projection of Laura's own repressed resentment against her family, and her little brother in particular (cf. Walls 115). "In a sense, then, it is Laura who threatens Jacko – which is why she must transform herself if he is to survive" (115). This implies that the power Laura has to confront is not specifically a male power, but her own 'masculine' aggression. It is noteworthy that she, when she first perceives Braque, and before he has even approached Jacko, sees him as a threat to her integrity. "Now... now... she would begin to come apart. Now the first crack would begin between her eyes though no one would know it was there but Laura herself" (33). These three readings of the demon Braque – as a metaphor for the paedophile, the dark double of Laura's and Jacko's father, and the embodiment of Laura's anger – are, of course, not mutually exclusive, and give rise to many more. They aptly illustrate how *The Changeover* creates unease and fear by showing the constant permeability of social boundaries.

Uncle Philip in *The Magic Toyshop*, seen through Melanie's eyes, is categorised as "a monster" (Carter 77) early on. "[H]is presence, brooding and oppressive, filled the house. [...] She sensed his irrational violence" (92). The reality of uncle Philip's violence becomes most clear in relation to Finn, whom he beats regularly (cf. 92) and nearly kills in one scene (cf. 132). "'God rot you to hell,' said Finn and vomited. His vomit was streaked with blood. He looked down at it with a horrified surprise" (132). A reminder of Finn's corporeality, the sudden emergence of blood locates Philip's violence in material reality. By contrast, the violence he exerts against Melanie is mostly mental (cf. 166); yet that does not make it less real or less terrifying. "His silence had bulk, a height and a weight. [...] She ate at the same table as this elemental silence which could crush you to nothing" (168). Jeff VanderMeer criticises uncle Philip's lack of psychological plausibility, viewing him as "a character so one-dimensional that his very presence undermines the integrity of the novel" (VanderMeer 4). What he fails to notice is the possibility that this is precisely the point. As a postmodern author, Carter is happy to undermine herself (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 5), and in the case of *The Magic Toyshop*, the disintegration of the novel entails the disintegration of the all-powerful patriarchal structure it depicts. If uncle Philip is recognisably fictitious, then patriarchy can also be recognised as the social fiction it is (cf. Nicol 142).

Indeed, uncle Philip is first presented to Melanie in pictures (cf. Carter 11-12), artifacts (cf. 42, cf. 56, cf. 66) and stories (cf. 62-63) before he enters the scene himself relatively late in the novel. "Blocking the head of the stairway on the kitchen landing was the immense, overwhelming figure of a man. The light was behind him and Melanie could not see his face" (69). In other situations, his eyes are described as colourless (cf. 73, cf. 92) and "[h]is expression [is] quite blank; too blank, even, to seem bored" (12). The very undefinedness of uncle Philip makes it easy for Melanie to project her fears onto him (cf. Peach 81). However, the 'scary' attributes he is given are often theatrical or slightly ridiculous. For instance, he "dart[s] Finn Medusa glances from beneath his bushy brows" (72), which look "like those on [a] Mephistopheles mask" (73), and "[h]is shaggy, walrus moustache [...] [is] brown and sodden where it dipped into his [...] mug" (73). Medusa is a woman, the Mephistopheles mask can be put on by anyone, and a dirty, dripping moustache does not exactly exude authority. As Botting notes, the gothic "can produce laughter as abundantly as emotions of terror and horror" (Botting 168). Describing her life in theatrical terms is a coping mechanism for

Melanie. “[S]he found it made things easier if she dramatised them. Or melodramatised them. It was easier, for example, to face the fact of uncle Philip if she saw him as a character in a film, possibly played by Orson Welles” (Carter 76). This strategy enables her to keep a distance from her surroundings and to retain a sense of herself as a separate subject (cf. 76). Unfortunately, uncle Philip is a more experienced fantasiser than his niece. He styles himself as a puppet master with such skill (cf. 67) and conviction that he succeeds in convincing his family that they are puppets (cf. Lee 48-49). “And herein perhaps lies Carter’s clue to the deconstruction of patriarchy – its greatest horror and its greatest weakness is that it is sustained by the force of its subjects’ belief” (Gamble, *Carter* 72).

Feeling like a puppet at first (cf. Mahy 119), Laura learns in *The Changeover* that she, too, can become a puppet mistress and direct reality (cf. 139, cf. 178, cf. 242). She is taught by the Carlises, a family even less traditional than her own. Although Laura meets them through Sorry, her male love interest (cf. 83), they are a predominantly female family, comprising old Winter, her daughter Miryam and her son (cf. 22). Winter’s husband is dead (cf. 126), and Sorry’s father is unknown even to his mother (cf. 153). Furthermore, Sorry himself has joined his birth family only recently, having grown up in a very normative foster family (cf. 125-126). Living together (cf. 123), Winter and Miryam seem like a more extreme version of Kate and Laura. While “Winter counts as a father” (117), she does not need to win their bread, since the Carlises are a landowning upper middle-class family who can live on their inheritance (cf. 84, cf. 122-123).¹⁸ And whereas Kate and Laura are a little eccentric (cf. 14-15, cf. 22-23), “[o]ld Winter gets madder day by day and Miryam floats around staring into space as if she saw only tomorrow” (22). Even more than Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop*, Sorry is distanced from his ‘birth parents’ (cf. 264-265). “We are a fond family rather than a loving one” (136), Winter says.

Raburn sees the Carlisle women as Laura’s mythical mothers, “who represent the moon goddesses” (cf. Raburn 29). This is certainly valid (cf. Mahy 121); still, both are

¹⁸ *The Changeover* does not address colonialism or race issues. Its only reference to the Maori is found in the first description of Laura, who has “woolly, brown hair, dark eyes, and olive skin, marked off from her blonde mother and brother because her genes were paying a random tribute to the Polynesian warrior among her eight great-great-grandfathers” (Mahy 13). However, Mahy paid some attention to Maori culture and politics in later novels, such as *Memory* (1987) (cf. Walls 131) and *Kaitangata Twitch* (2005) (cf. Walls 134-136).

also masculinised by the narrative. Winter is a grave presence (cf. 94, cf. 203), who, according to Sorry, “always thinks of her own advantage first” (142), and indeed, skillfully tries to manipulate Laura (cf. 137, cf. 171). Miryam’s face is “very cool and calm and always about to change to another less ordered expression, but never quite doing so” (83). Her interest in “art and learning” (126) aligns her with culture and the mind. She may be associated with a goddess (cf. Waller 28), yet Miryam is “not a motherly woman” (Mahy 125), who has given away her son when he was not what she expected (cf. 125). Nonetheless, both Miryam and Winter have been regretting their neglect of Sorry since they learned about the violence he suffered from his foster father (cf. 126, cf. 154). By helping Laura to become a witch, they want to strengthen the bond between her and Sorry, hoping that she will be an emotionalising influence on him (cf. 128, cf. 196, cf. 203). Unlike Margaret and Francie in *The Magic Toyshop*, Winter and Miryam are barely affectionate as surrogate parents (cf. 185). Instead of love, the Carlisle witches give Laura knowledge (cf. Smith 45, cf. 47).

The families featured in *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover* are diverse, showing that the traditional, normative middle-class family is indeed only one construction among many. However, both novels also make it clear that alternative family structures are neither ideal nor free of domination. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie’s birth family is contrasted with her foster home in uncle Philip’s house, which is again set apart from the family of aunt Margaret and her brothers. Melanie’s birth family is characterised by mutual aloofness as well as privacy, and while it certainly operates according to the rules of patriarchy, these rules are hardly enforced (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 69, cf. Peach 81). In uncle Philip’s house, this aloofness is intensified – uncle Philip usually does not even talk to Melanie (cf. Carter 124) – yet privacy is lost to her all the same (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 73). The family formed by aunt Margaret and her brothers, finally, is very close and affectionate. To Melanie, they are “a [...] three-headed animal talking comfortably to itself” (76). Still, the boundary between uncle Philip’s regime and aunt Margaret’s family is blurred by several factors. One is the traditional distribution of roles in Margaret’s and Francie’s relationship. Another is the prevalence of incest within Uncle Philip’s family. A third factor is the difficult position of Finn. The novel insinuates that he, too, has an incestuous desire for Margaret (cf. 197), yet being the younger brother, he is subordinate to Francie (cf. 194). Still, at nineteen years, he is too old to play the part of their child (cf. 33). On the other hand, Finn works closely with uncle Philip (cf. 64), and his feelings for Philip are not entirely

clear either. Their enmity holds a strange intimacy: “I thought it would be me he would kill. [...] And so did he, we always thought that of each other” (196). While he hates uncle Philip (cf. 152-153), he also endorses his politics at times (cf. 62). For instance, it is Finn who tells Melanie that Philip would not want her to wear trousers (cf. 62), and he even peeps on her of his own accord, depriving her of the privacy that her uncle has left her (cf. 109). The ‘normative’ Flower family and the ‘non-normative’ Jowle family require and define each other.

In *The Changeover*, Laura’s present, women-dominated family is frequently compared to her past, patriarchal family (cf. Mahy 18, cf. 40-41, cf. 134, cf. 145, cf. 173). The father is an absent presence in Laura’s life, overshadowing much of the story (cf. 235-236) and undermining the family peace. He is embodied by her biological father, who has hurt and betrayed her, as well as by Chris, the stepfather to be, who she fears will take her mother away. Finally, he assumes the shape of Carmody Braque, the demon who threatens Laura’s psychological and moral integrity (cf. 159, cf. 243). The ‘happy family life’ that Laura told herself she was living is revealed to be half illusionary: “This house which had been a happy house now felt threatening, for its present desperation flowed back into the past and ruined [...] the memory of all that had gone before it” (108). The Chant’s closeness is not a matter of choice, as lack of money and of another caretaker force them to stick together (cf. 223) and suppress their differences (cf. 166, cf. 244). Compared to them, the Carlisle women’s wealth gives them the freedom to decide whether they want to raise a child themselves. Miryam can have the cake and eat it by paying another family to take care of Sorry whilst obliging them to inform her about his progress (cf. 125). Surprisingly, for all their education and independence, Miryam and Winter seem to believe in patriarchy, falling for the myth of

a story-book home... a wonderful, motherly mother, all the cake tins filled with home baking, kind father, such a dependable man, and four brothers... the sort of family that goes to church on Sunday morning, and then off for a picnic in the family car on Sunday afternoon. (125)

The sort of family where Sorry receives “the m-most terrific hiding he’d ever g-given me” (154). Kate, Miryam and Winter are emancipated women in varying degrees, yet their acquired agency brings with it the danger of making mistakes and victimising others, most obviously their children. This is implicated in Kate’s demands on her daughter (cf. 14, cf. 27) and even more apparent in Miryam’s treatment of Sorry. Still, it

must be stressed that neither Kate nor Miryam are solely responsible here. Laura's father's default in paying alimony exacerbates her problems, and while Miryam puts Sorry in the power of his foster father, she is not the one beating him. The matriarchal families depicted in *The Changeover* operate within patriarchal structures, from which they cannot be excised. Again, 'non-normativity' and 'normativity' are interrelated and interdependent.

3.3 Romantic Relationships

In this chapter, I will examine the relationships between the female protagonists and the male love interests in *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover*, in order to find out to what extent the female gothic concepts of the 'persecuted heroine' and the 'villain-hero' apply to them. Furthermore, I will discuss the imagery used by both texts, showing how it centres on uncanny objects.

Melanie is far from persecuted at the beginning of *The Magic Toyshop*, living comfortably and securely in her father's country house (cf. Carter 7). "Born in Salford, it pleased him to play gently at squire now he need never think of Salford again" (7). When her father's sudden death puts an end to his playing, Melanie's life as a country lady also comes to seem like a children's game (cf. 6-7, cf. 56-57). Her sense of security is revealed to have been unfounded, as she descends the social scale (cf. 77) and regresses into childhood (cf. 84, cf. Peach 82-83). Melanie fulfills many of the criteria for a typical ('gothic') romance heroine (cf. Radway, *Gothic Romances* 151, cf. Radway 126-127). She is innocent and naïve, yet also highly sensual (cf. Carter 1-2). Like an 'ideal' romance heroine, she is anticipating the man who'll activate her sexuality (cf. Radway 126). Still, filled with "sheer exhilaration at the supple surprise of herself now she [is] no longer a little girl" (Carter 1), Melanie is happy to exercise it a little during the long wait (cf. 1). Rather than her "phantom bridegroom" (2), "the real object of her desire is, in fact, herself" (Gamble, *Carter* 69). She is punished, or, more precisely, punishes herself for this audacity in due course (cf. Carter 23-24).

By comparison, Laura in *The Changeover* is both more restrained and more knowing about sexuality. "She was not altogether easy with the new and in some ways blatantly female body that had recently opened out of her earlier childish one" (Mahy 81). Unlike Melanie's unbridled joy, "a tentative optimism" (10) is the ultimate feeling her bodily changes engender in her. Laura is sexually educated, able to discuss sex with

her mother (cf. 163) and aware of her parents' sexuality (cf. 104). Yet she also knows that intercourse does not equal love (cf. 136). "Sexuality is always about power and [...] power, perhaps more important, is always about sexuality" (Haggerty 13). Characteristic of the female gothic, Laura fears and desires this power (cf. 14-15, cf. Mahy 11). Living in a disreputable suburb has made her aware of her vulnerability as a woman (cf. Mahy 21): "[A [...] girl from the seventh form, Jacynth Close, had been beaten and raped in the trees that bordered the Gardendale reserve. [...] It made Laura realise that she herself could be chosen" (80). Still, from the relative security of her mother's house, "she frequently enjoy[s] th[e] razor-edge of risk waiting outside their comfortable, family door" (21).

The Magic Toyshop and *The Changeover* use similar images to depict their heroines' subjective states. Both novels frequently employ the mirror metaphor. Melanie re-enacts erotic scenes before her bedroom mirror (cf. Carter 1-2), which seems to show her a reliable and unmediated reflection of herself. When her parents die, however, she blames the sexual young woman in the mirror, smashing it to pieces. In doing so, Melanie symbolically obliterates herself (cf. 24-25), and indeed, sees no more mirrors in uncle Philip's toyshop (cf. 44, cf. 56, cf. 125). "There are no mirrors in the house because the toys come to represent the occupants. Looking at one's own face in a mirror is a manner of self-recognition, and Philip wants his family to be mirrored only in his perceptions of them" (Lee 49). What Melanie does not realise is that her mirror image has been edited even before she arrived in the toyshop. The poses she copies in her bedroom are all taken from the canon of western art: "Pre-Raphaelite, she combed out her long, black hair to stream straight down from a centre parting [...]. A la Toulouse Lautrec, she dragged her hair sluttishly across her face [...]" (Carter 1). While she is playing light-heartedly, the weight of a male-dominated cultural history is on her, and the feminine roles at her disposal are inevitably shaped by that history (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 69). The uncanny quality of her mirror image escapes her notice. In contrast to Melanie's sessions of self-reflection, Laura usually does not like to see herself in the mirror, preferring a blurry reflection or a short glance (cf. Mahy 10). When she does take a good look at her mirror image, she is upset and unsettled (cf. 13). During an uncanny moment, she feels estranged from herself: "If Laura had been asked how she knew this reflection was not hers she could not have pointed out any alien feature. [...] However, for all that, the face was not her face for it knew something she did not" (12-13). Laura's mirrored face is the face of the witch she is about to become, warning her

against domestic tragedy (cf. 12). “It’s yourself reversed [...] made sinister” (202). Only when Laura has adjusted to this image does she feel comfortable again (cf. 273).

The theme of the distorting mirror is developed further in the portrayals of the male love interests. Both Finn in *The Magic Toyshop* and Sorry in *The Changeover* have mirror eyes. Melanie sees herself reflected in Finn’s eyes (cf. Carter 105, cf. 193), yet he seems to her “untrustworthy” (cf. 54) and indeed, the image of herself is “in little” (105, cf. Lee 50). “His eyes were so shifting, so leering and slippery; the slight cast made one unsure of the direction of his gaze” (Carter 54). Sorry “had grey eyes with the curious trick of turning silver if you looked at them from the side. [...] They were [...] looking-glass eyes with quicksilver surfaces, and [...] mirror mazes hidden behind them, none of them leading anywhere that was recognisable” (Mahy 24). The idea of a space behind the mirror points to Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) (cf. 53, cf. 198, cf. 152), and Christine Wilkie-Stibbs reads Laura’s changeover as a journey through the looking-glass (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 107).¹⁹ The realm behind the looking-glass symbolises the Irigarayan ‘feminine imaginary’ (cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 141-143) where the plurality of the self can be explored (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 108).

Viewing the self as multiple is also helpful in approaching the figures of Finn and Sorry, whose ambiguity is evident throughout the texts. In Gamble’s words, the former is “a disquieting mass of contradictions” (Gamble, *Carter* 72), while the latter has “[t]wo distinct and contrary faces [...] tangled into one” (Mahy 188). When Finn first appears in *The Magic Toyshop*, he is described as follows:

[J]ust a few inches taller than Melanie, with longish, bright red hair hanging over the collar of a dark blue, rather military looking jacket [...]. [...] He breathed through his slack-lipped mouth, which was a flower for rosiness. He grinned at nothing or a secret joke. He moved with a supple, extraordinary grace, raising his cup to his mouth with a flashing, poetic gesture. (Carter 33)

His low height, his uncut hair, still more his rosy mouth and graceful movements clearly associate Finn with femininity. A “boy” (34) rather than a man, his body is as “supple” (1) as Melanie’s. This body is an obtrusive feature in the novel, for Finn keeps it utterly smelly and dirty (cf. 36, cf. 54, cf. 63), opposing Melanie’s clean soap-scentedness (cf. 36). Furthermore, he is habitually described in animal terms: as “a tawny lion” (45),

¹⁹ Similarly, Gamble compares Melanie’s ‘descent’ into the toyshop to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 70).

with a “vulpine grin” (35), or, generally, “a wild beast’s mouth” (105). Although these animals are ferocious and dangerous, they are also stereotypically feminine, as is the body. Finn’s lack of bodily hygiene intensifies this impression: “While men lay claim to the supposedly ‘superior’ category of mind, the biological processes – menstruation, gestation – are writ large upon the surface of the female body, and thus become the means by which ‘woman’ is defined” (Carson 117). Finn sheds blood, too, though it is not menstrual, but due to the domestic violence uncle Philip acts out on him (cf. Carter 132-133). Victimised, he finally strives to become a martyr: “‘I wish you’d kill[...] me,’ he said hoarsely to Uncle Philip. ‘If you’d killed me you’d be damned.’” (132). Ironically, it is this disregard for his own life that empowers Finn to ‘kill’ Philip (cf. 172, cf. Lee 51).

The focus on Finn’s body does not take into account the performativity of gender (cf. Carson 126-127). Like his masculine military style jacket, he can also put on “the quality of maleness like a flamboyant cloak” (Carter 45), strewing cigarette ash on the floor of Melanie’s bedroom and giving her confident orders (cf. 45-46). Similarly, he dons a Mephistopheles mask before Melanie, assuring her that he is trying to amuse her (cf. 67-68). Finn’s credibility, however, is difficult to establish, as his statements sometimes carry a sinister double meaning. “‘I learn the craft. I’m your uncle’s apprentice’” (64), for instance, may refer to the craft of toymaking as well as to the art of tyranny. When he tells Melanie: “‘[H]e’ll turn you out if you can’t work for him. [...] We could do nothing for you. You would starve’” (148), it is unclear whether Finn believes his own words or is trying to manipulate her. *The Magic Toyshop* is full of different masks, of “lions, bears, devils, witches” (80), and anyone can wear them. A little boy who has tried on a tiger mask “feint[s] across the counter at Melanie; she bit[es] off an exclamation” (80). As for Finn, “the smell of paint fought with his body smell and won” (46). By the novel’s end, he is more masculine than feminine, more artist than animal.

Sorry is feminised even more overtly than Finn, with *The Changeover* based on the premise that “the school’s model boy – clean, quiet, hardworking, going around with an expensive camera photographing birds –” (Mahy 19) is secretly a witch (cf. 21). His mother Miryam describes witchcraft as “very much a feminine magic – or so we think” (97), which makes Sorry “not completely a man or a witch but some hybrid, and he struggles too hard to be entirely one thing or the other” (97). Laura suspects Sorry of

witchcraft from the beginning, having mysteriously recognised him (cf. 22-23). When she visits him at his home for the first time, she is proven right:

[T]his was a different version of Sorry Carlisle from the one she had seen at school. His black dressing-gown, or caftan, was part of the change; his hands, redefining the [black] cat by stroking it, were another. For they were covered in rings, [...] gifts perhaps from his grandmother, who also wore many rings. [...] [H]e was somehow expanded, less simple, less mild, less *good* – overflowing with blackness. (86)

Sorry, who is also about the same height as Laura (cf. 131), wears a gown and jewellery, presumably obtained through female lineage. Moreover, he is stroking a black cat, another common example of feminine animality and a stereotypical symbol of witchcraft (cf. Peach 77). Interestingly, Laura immediately suspects him of evil. This might be due to the traditional (self)-condemnation of the witch (cf. Carson 124-125). However, the combination of biological maleness with the cultural markers of witchcraft also gives Sorry a queer aspect, making him particularly ‘bad’ (cf. Haggerty 2). In a similar way as Finn, Sorry is positioned close to beasts of prey, mostly tigers (cf. Mahy 82, cf. 87, cf. 191-192, cf. 195, cf. 212, cf. 264, cf. 266). Indeed, his mother is said to be “looking [at him] as if she had a dangerous pet on the end of a piece of rotten string” (265). Yet like *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Changeover* also refers to the power of costume play. On the wall of Sorry’s room, Laura spots “a painted mask, funny – and frightening because it *was* funny even though it was so still” (85), and later on, she wonders about “a[...] tiger which might have a human face behind its mask” (191).

The Changeover lays less emphasis on the body than *The Magic Toyshop* does (cf. 264, cf. 268). Still, Sorry, too, is corporeally victimised by a patriarch (cf. 154-156). Whereas Melanie and the rest of the family are almost immediate witnesses to uncle Philip’s violence against Finn (cf. Carter 131-133), the violence that Sorry experiences is situated in the past and conveyed through his narration (cf. Mahy 152). This does not mean that he has managed to distance himself from his trauma emotionally, to the contrary; the memory is so powerful that it manifests viscerally and visibly (cf. 155). Here is a prime example of the uncanny return of the repressed: “He smiled at Laura light-heartedly but as he did so the stigmata of an old punishment discoloured his face, even displacing his summer tan so that his cheeks swelled and his eyes blackened” (155). Sorry is presented and perceived as a threat to Laura because of his lack of emotions (cf. 113, cf. 151) and his manipulative sexuality, as well as his magical

powers (cf. 128, cf. 266, cf. 275), the metaphorical significance of which I will discuss later. On the other hand, he can aid Laura in gaining access to witchcraft herself (cf. 137). Hence, she has highly ambivalent feelings for him: “[S]he could not tell, when he looked up, if he were hero or villain, for he was both threatening and savage, and yet consoling [...], as if he were offering to save her and ruin her simultaneously” (188). Sorry is an obvious villain-hero, as he self-consciously remarks (cf. 144, cf. 268). Although Adrienne Gavin boldly states: “The difference in supernatural quality between Braque and Sorry is that Sorry is a human witch who, because of his difficult childhood, has repressed his own feelings, whereas Braque is a non-human, evil spirit who steals other people’s feelings” (Gavin 140), Sorry’s similarity to Braque is explicitly addressed (cf. 127, cf. 214, cf. 223). He believes that “[Braque] began somewhere [...]. Somewhere along the line he made a wrong decision – I just know it” (Mahy 223-224). Yet Sorry is a doppelgänger not only to Braque, but also to Jacko (cf. 190-191, cf. 202-203), Laura’s little brother (who, in turn, is another double to Braque, indicative of the very blurry boundaries between all the male figures in the novel (cf. 74, cf. 105, cf. 208)). “[Sorry’s kiss] reminded Laura of the soft but heavy kisses Jacko used to give when he was just learning to kiss, and found it very disturbing [...].” (204). Hence, with the power of make-believe, he may turn out ‘good’ in the end: “Well, I’m not a hero [...] [B]ut I can *pretend* to be one” (160).

Melanie in *The Magic Toyshop* is similarly, if not more conflicted about Finn than Laura is about Sorry. “[T]his insolent, off-hand, terrifying maleness [...]. She hated it. But she could not take her eyes off him” (Carter 45). Thinking about him gives her “a half-frightened, half-pleasurable sensation” (61); yet when Finn tries to kiss her for real in the pleasure garden, a ruined Victorian amusement park (cf. 99-101), her fright becomes predominant. Still, Melanie is determined to tolerate his action because she believes this to be her duty as a woman (cf. 105). The kiss is worse than she expected, revolting and humiliating (cf. 106). Furious, Melanie decides to cut Finn (cf. 110), but finds that she feels too lonely to do so (cf. 115). She represses the unpleasant memory instead, gradually convincing herself that the incident never happened (cf. 115, cf. 136) and inclined to interpret him as favourably as possible: “He could have been her phantom bridegroom sleeping” (123). Later in the novel, uncle Philip sends Finn to rehearse a staged rape with Melanie (cf. 145). When sexual tension creeps in and he grabs her breast (cf. 149), she eagerly takes on the victim role (cf. 149). “This [...] [was] the real beginning of a deep mystery between them. What would he do to her,

would he be kind? She looked down with a fear that was also pleasure at his stained, scarred hand. His workman's hand, which was strong and cunning" (149). In this scene, Melanie invests Finn with sublimity, reading him as a powerful object (cf. Heiland 33-34). Her self, by contrast, becomes insignificant: "She was utterly subdued. She was changing, growing. All that was substantial to her was the boy whom she touched all down the length of her but did not touch" (Carter 149). In a stance that borders on masochism, Melanie romanticises the idea of rape. It is Finn who refuses to be cast as a rapist and runs away from her (cf. 151). He does not want them to become uncle Philip's pawns (cf. 152): "'You see,' he said, '[Philip] wanted me to fuck you.' She had never connected the word with herself; her phantom bridegroom would never have fucked her" (151-152).

In *The Changeover*, Laura also partly misconceives an erotically charged moment with Sorry. "Something is going to happen, [she] thought. She was going to be kissed. [...] However, Sorry did not kiss her, but put his left hand on her breast [...]. Laura felt her own expression become incredulous" (Mahy 132). Her belief in romantic ideology is stronger than she lets on (cf. 136). Still, Sorry, too, is not entirely certain about what he is doing: "[H]is face softened somehow, became a little unfocused, as if he were more disturbed by it than she was" (132). The scene is interrupted by a phone call from Laura's mother (cf. 132-133). Yet the next day, her mother's affair with Chris puts Laura in distress (cf. 149), causing her to offer herself to Sorry angrily. "[S]he yelled at him. [...] 'You want to make out? All right then. It doesn't take long does it? And then you can just shut up about it. It'll be over and done with'" (160). In true hero fashion, Sorry rejects this offer (cf. 160).

The physical intrusions Melanie and Laura experience are complemented by intrusions on a psychological or symbolic level (cf. Peach 83). In *The Magic Toyshop*, the main plot is foreshadowed by a scary toy that uncle Philip sent Melanie when she was a child (cf. Carter 12). It is a jack-in-the-box which wears "a grotesque caricature of her own face" (12). This scene encapsulates how uncle Philip will soon distort Melanie's self-perception, and, more generally, how culture bombards women with unrealistic images of femininity that they are supposed to conform to (cf. Lee 45). In *The Changeover*, the second chapter is titled "The Jack-in-the-Box Man" (cf. Mahy 26), referring to Carmody Braque who suddenly jumps up from under his shop counter (cf. 33). Interestingly, he later comes to wear Laura's face (cf. 217). In distinction from *The Magic Toyshop*, Laura designs the face herself (cf. 203) and imprints it on somebody

else (cf. 212), while Melanie's face is painted and 'imprinted' on her by uncle Philip (cf. Carter 12, cf. 141). In this sense, Laura is clearly more empowered than Melanie. However, when Laura looks at her stamp image for the first time, she is unsure what it shows (cf. 203). Her stamping of Braque can be read as an act of possession as well as an act of identification (cf. 214).

In *The Magic Toyshop*, as mentioned before, Finn invades Melanie's privacy by spying on her through a hole in the wall, which she discovers right after he has kissed her (cf. Carter 109). He has also secretly created a half-naked painting of her. "She looked like a virgin who cleaned her teeth after every meal and delighted to take great bites from rosy apples. [...] The picture was flat and uncommunicative [...] and seemed to be an asexual kind of pin-up" (154). Along with Finn's repeated allegations that Melanie is too young for a sexual relationship (cf. 151, cf. 193), this painting shows that it is her very 'innocence' which makes her the object of his desire. "Although the portrait is perhaps a more faithful rendition of Melanie than some of the poses she has chosen for herself, it [...] misses the struggle she is having with herself as a sexual being" (Lee 48). Instead, it simply assigns to Melanie the role of 'virgin'. This implies that a divergence from Finn's ideal would immediately make her a 'whore', cementing the dichotomic view of women. Still, to Melanie, "he did not see her precisely as she saw herself, but it could have been very much worse" (Carter 154). In *The Changeover*, Sorry does not paint Laura, but takes a secret photograph of her, which he pins to an erotic poster (cf. Mahy 130-131). "Laura, looking from her own picture to that of the naked goddess extending herself languorously [...], sighed and shook her head" (130). Sorry's creation serves to sexualise Laura, yet again this version of feminine (a)sexuality is a young man's construction, and, additionally, a half-commercial product, since Sorry has bought the poster. Laura quietly takes note of it (cf. 131). Towards the novel's end, she has finally found the confidence to tell Sorry to take it down (cf. 224). "Her magical strength makes her realize that she will not be objectified and made unindividual, and that Sorry must seek individual knowledge of her" (Gavin 140).

Not only does Sorry photograph Laura, but, similar to Finn, he magically intrudes into her room through a bolted door when she is a guest at Janua Caeli (cf. 142-143). "'What do you want?'" she cried, really frightened now, first by the darkness and the unfamiliar room that lurked beyond it, and then by Sorry's voice somewhere close to her face" (142). He states to have come to warn her against his grandmother's

cunning (cf. 141). When Laura accuses him of sexual harassment, Sorry laconically remarks that she must “have been reading *Woman’s Weekly*. [...] “Never mind – as harassment goes I expect it’s the best sort there is”” (143). Finn, on the other hand, complains that Melanie is “talking like a woman’s magazine” (155) when she says ““I think I want to be in love with you but I don’t know how”” (Carter 155). Remarkably, Sorry makes fun of Laura for presenting herself as a victim, while Finn ridicules Melanie’s attempt to gain emotional agency. These two scenes may contrast a 1960s aversion against the notion of a desiring woman with a growing distaste for women as victims in the 1980s – or they simply show that ‘women never do it right’. Furthermore, they illustrate how difficult it is for both Laura and Melanie to talk about their feminine identities without resorting to the language of the popular media.

In *The Magic Toyshop*, “the world is presented as a confusing and dangerous place for women. Villains and protectors are often at least temporarily indistinguishable from one another, and thus these narratives explore the fear that men represent a threat and women victims-to-be” (Meyers 18). From her arrival in the toyshop, Melanie feels and is indeed very much like a traditional gothic heroine, persecuted and frightened. Accordingly, Finn is and remains an uncanny, latently threatening villain-hero throughout the novel. Shortly before the end, “[t]hey look[...] at each other. Was he trying to mesmerise her? As in the pleasure gardens, she saw herself in the black pupils of his squint” (193). This dark vision is shaken by Carter’s emphasis on theatrical equipment and use of distancing strategies. Hero, villain, heroine and victim are all culturally constructed roles and self-definitions which can be adopted and rejected. For instance, when Melanie glorifies the idea of Finn raping her (cf. 149-150), it is made clear to a reader that she actively plays the passive victim, though she seems hardly aware of it herself (cf. 150). She does what Long Hoeveler has accused ‘gothic feminists’ of doing: taking a hyper-feminine, ‘professional victim’ stance in order to gain power (cf. Smith and Wallace 2). Melanie’s unacknowledged eagerness to have sex with him causes Finn to hide in the cupboard (cf. Carter 150-151), yet is this the kind of power she desires?

While *The Magic Toyshop* as a whole is riddled with ambiguity, *The Changeover* seems comparatively straightforward because it makes explicit many of the former’s implicit conflicts. Laura and Sorry toy with notions of the ‘romantic heroine’ (cf. Mahy 199) and the ‘villain-hero’ (cf. 144) only to distance themselves from them. However, the fact that the protagonists need to bring up these concepts at all is telling. Their irony

is half-hearted. As Milbank notes with regard to Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817): "The potency of [the 'persecuted maiden'] is such that not even her most satirical presentation is safe from Gothic incursion" (Milbank 155). Laura appears like a much tougher heroine than Melanie, actively seeking out danger. Sorry, for his part, never seems less like a villain than when he muses about the possibility that he might become one (cf. 223-224). Still, the novel is full of subdued violence, which is mostly located in the past and not completely revealed (cf. 40-41, cf. 153). Sorry laughs about his childhood trauma, "amused and not in the least angry, but [...] it chill[s] Laura to the bone" (153), whereas Laura suffers "from a secret illness no one [has] ever completely recognised or been able to cure" (236), which she can only acknowledge after she has defeated the demon.

For both Finn and Sorry, their positioning as 'villain-hero' is tied to femininity, animality and victimisation. These shared attributes make it easy for Melanie and Laura to bond with them, as much as they necessitate their differentiation from them. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie expresses disgust at Finn's filthiness, while she herself is struggling to keep her body as clean and neat as she used to (cf. Lee 46). She fears his sexual desire most when her own desire has been suppressed by trauma (cf. Carter 106). In *The Changeover*, Laura sneers at Sorry for his love of romance novels (cf. Mahy 85-86), yet she imagines him as a romantic hero (cf. 23). He gives her the gentle creeps; "[at] the same time he stared at her incredulously as if she had a precisely similar effect on him" (86). The gothic heroine needs the villain-hero to be feminine so she can be masculine, animal so she can be human, victimised so she can feel like a saviour – and vice versa.

3.4 Magical Transformations

At *The Magic Toyshop*'s end, Melanie is comparatively worse off than Laura is by the end of *The Changeover*. In my reading, the former gradually loses her mind (cf. Carter 162), whereas the latter gains in subjectivity (cf. Mahy 206). Each of these reverse developments is symbolised by a 'wondrous change' which the heroine experiences: Melanie becomes a puppet (cf. Carter 67); Laura turns into a witch (cf. Mahy 200). In this, the novels differ from conventional romances, where it is not the heroine, but the hero who is miraculously transformed (cf. Radway 147-148). By focusing on the protagonists' metamorphoses, *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover*

follow the fairy tale tradition (cf. Zipes xvii-xviii). However, unlike 'classic' fairy tales, both novels stress their heroines' participation in the 'wondrous change' they undergo. Metamorphosis does not simply happen to them; both Melanie and Laura actively bring it about.

Melanie's transformation begins at her old home. One night, she cannot sleep and sneaks into her absent parents' bedroom. Wondering about her parents' sexuality, she opens the trunk where her mother keeps her old wedding dress (cf. Carter 9-14). The dress is described in ghostly terms as Melanie tries it on: "She unfolded acres of tulle [...]. Melanie was trapped, a mackerel in a net; the veil blew up around her, blinding her eyes and filling her nostrils. [...] The dress was very heavy. [...] It slithered over her, cold as a slow hosing with ice-water" (15). Even though the wedding dress is too big for her, Melanie is fascinated with it (cf. 16). Wearing it, she feels like an enchanted bride, who is "sufficient for herself in her own glory and [does] not need a groom" (16). She decides to show herself to the world and walks into the moonlit garden, where the sublimity of the night instills her with awe (cf. 16-17). "Exhibiting herself, even if only to the sky, is as transgressive an act as usurping her mother's place. But the power she feels in unleashing her desires is extraordinary, delightful and terrifying" (Lee 47). Melanie finds that it overwhelms her, as she is suddenly seized with panic and longing for domestic security (cf. Carter 18). Yet she has locked herself out and is forced to climb the apple tree in order to get back in through the window (cf. 19). Having put on the ghostly wedding dress without permission, Melanie becomes a desperate ghost herself (cf. 77), forever haunting the sleeping inhabitants of her childhood home (cf. 31). In this, she comes to resemble other gothic heroines such as Catherine Earnshaw of *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the child ghost who knocks on the window pane, begging to be let in (cf. Gavin 136, cf. Brontë 15). More generally, this scene shows how a woman "must die in order to find her self as a woman" (Gavin 136), as death is the ultimate way out of the prison of body and culture (cf. Heiland 158).

Melanie does not die completely; it is her brave tomboy self which is left for dead (cf. Carter 20). As Peach notes, "[t]he way in which the wedding dress episode is structured appears to suggest a young girl's first experience of sex and the anxieties around it" (Peach 77). To be able to climb the tree, Melanie has to undress; "she [is] horribly conscious of her own exposed nakedness" (Carter 21). The housekeeper's black cat rips the wedding dress (cf. 20-21) and the tree tears her body (cf. 22). "She was bruised and filthy and she bled from a hundred little cuts" (22). Still, she believes to

have found safety; only the next day does she learn that her parents' have died (cf. 24). The tree-climbing scene is reminiscent of the Genesis myth, in which Eve tastes the apple from the tree of knowledge and is subsequently expelled from the garden of Eden (cf. Peach 77). "However, [...] there are counter elements drawn from witchcraft, paganism and superstition" (77). The black cat can be read as Melanie's animal side, or as the witch aspect of her personality, which comes into conflict with the virginal, homely pretensions of the wedding dress. Her struggle with the tree (cf. Carter 22) signifies the (corpo)reality of sexual intercourse (cf. Peach 77-78) as distinct from her erotic fantasies (cf. Carter 2). In its entirety, the journey from the house into the garden and back into the house symbolises Melanie's initiation into femininity. Setting out for adventure, she comes full circle: "Ironically, while much of the passage suggests the irretrievable loss of childhood [...],] Melanie emotionally regresses to childhood" (Peach), which is only appropriate in a culture that regards women as essentially immature creatures (cf. LeBihan 129-130, cf. Radway 135).

Laura's metamorphosis takes place towards the end of the book. After the Carlisle women have told her that it is the only way to save her brother (cf. Mahy 137), she agrees to undergo *The Changeover* (cf. 171). In this ritual, Laura, who is already "a sensitive" (138) to magic, is supposed to change herself into a fully-fledged witch (cf. 138). However, the process is risky, and, as Sorry warns, "[i]t c-could kill her" (137). From the bath tub at Janua Caeli, Laura embarks onto a surreal journey inward and outward (cf. 184). As Miryam prepares her, the room is stocked with vaguely occult objects (cf. Smith 49), such as candles, incense, a brazier shaped like a black cat, and a mirror. Laura is dressed in silver chains and a white gown, and is made to drink hot wine from a black stone cup, mixed with a drop of her own blood. There are references to water and the moon (cf. Mahy 179-183), stereotypically female symbols (cf. Raburn 31-32, cf. Cixous 889, cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 128). This part of the changeover reads very much like a black mass (cf. Mahy 172), and, indeed, earlier in the novel, Miryam and Sorry have "looked at [Laura] with their matching eyes [...] as if they were ancient priests assessing the quality of a sacrifice" (89). Still, in Raburn's view, it "is a sacrifice only in an ironic sense, since it is a carefully planned ploy to outwit her adversary" (Raburn 31). When Laura leaves the bathroom, she finds herself in total darkness (cf. Mahy 184-185). "Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all, don't go into the forest" (Cixous 878). Unable to see, she begins to attend to her other senses: smell, hearing,

taste and touch (cf. Mahy 186). The traditional supremacy of sight in western culture (cf. Carson 121, Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 132) is temporarily suspended.

Eventually, a door opens and Laura finds herself in a dream version of her daily life. “She was in Kingsford Drive once more, walking towards the Gardendale Secondary School” (187). Sorry is standing by the school gates in his role as prefect, yet he is a mythical gatekeeper as well. Laura must pay him with stone coins in order to receive a sword, and he also tries to trick her into giving him a kiss (cf. 187-189). “‘I’ll kiss you because I want to,’ said Laura, ‘not because you do’” (190). They kiss passionately; then he advises her to “[c]ut down whatever crosses [her] path” (190), as she enters the forest. “She was in a forest that was all forests, the forest at the heart of fairy tales, the looking-glass forest where names disappeared, the forest of the night” (190-191). However, the forest is simultaneously a city, having merged with Laura’s familiar environment (cf. 286). “Between the straight trunks of the birches, [...] a distant supermarket lot show[s] like a little desert of cars” (191). Mahy’s approach, like Carter’s, is surrealist, using ‘alienating techniques’ to present ordinary things in a new and strange light (cf. Peach 6-7, cf. Hale 8). “Non-realistic fiction distances [...] us so that we are disturbed, puzzled, confused and possibly very critical of what we are reading” (Peach 6). By blending forest and city, *The Changeover* challenges the belief that only one side of the dyad can be the site of danger. To similar effect, the novel blurs the boundaries between city and garden, garden and house, respectively. As Laura enters the park of Janua Caeli for the first time, she is convinced

that she might have to run for her life at any moment. Still, she did not mind this feeling, for it had an edge of poetry to it that had not been part of the chilly anxiety of the street outside the gate. Better to be eaten by a tiger with golden eyes than beaten and raped by the savages of the Gardendale subdivision. Yet after all, the world was ferocious one way or another, Laura thought, and could be just as savage behind the curtained windows of a family home. (Mahy 82)

She romanticises the tiger, just as she euphemistically translates a violent sexual assault into ‘being eaten’. Compared to a neighbourhood rapist, the wild and beautiful animal seems grand; still, Laura is aware that the distinction between them is only in her mind. In reality, rape is always horrifying. Radway suggests that feminine rape fantasies often serve the purpose of containing a threat that seems too prevalent to be ignored. By mentally downplaying sexual violence, woman can gain the illusion of control (cf.

Radway 141-142). Laura knows that the garden and the house are artificial enclosures; violence can lurk anywhere. The notion of home as a safe haven is deceptive.

Melanie realises this as well after her terrifying experience in the garden. She returns to the house, but it has changed; her new home is her old home with the varnish come off (cf. Carter 116, cf. Gamble, *Carter* 71). When Finn takes her on a tour of uncle Philip's workshop, they come across "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 [...]. She had long, black hair down to the waist of her tight satin bodice" (Carter 67). Upon seeing this toy, Melanie is shocked and scared. Feeling reminded of her adventure in the garden, she identifies with the doll: "She was in the night again, and the doll was herself" (68). Later, she imagines the "red people[, Francie, Finn and Margaret, to be] lighting a bonfire for her, to brighten away the wolves and tigers of this dreadful forest in which she lived" (122). The dark garden becomes a forest, and the forest is simultaneously a house. Hence, Melanie, too, can be a woman and a puppet at the same time. Her transformation is acted out and made apparent (cf. Lee 50) when uncle Philip orders her to take part in one of his puppet performances, the mythological Rape of Leda (cf. Carter 132-133, cf. 141). His aggressive, insulting way of speaking to her (cf. 143-144) contrasts with the superficial prettiness of the costume he has chosen. "Melanie would be a nymph crowned with daisies again; he saw her as once she had seen herself. In spite of everything, she was flattered" (141). Almost taken in, she still cannot help finding the idea of the puppet show ridiculous while rehearsing with Finn (cf. 148), and continues to feel the urge to laugh up until the moment before uncle Philip's puppet swan descends on her (cf. 165). "[T]he [phallic] swan acts as the displaced representative of Uncle Philip's incestuous desires, enacting a virtual rape on Melanie" (Gamble, *Carter* 72). When the distance between them breaks down, her self-alienation is complete:

All her laughter was snuffed out. She was hallucinated; she felt herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality, watching this whole fantasy from another place; and, in this staged fantasy, anything was possible. Even that the swan, the mocked up swan, might assume reality itself and rape this girl in a blizzard of white feathers. The swan towered over the black-haired girl who was Melanie and who was not. (Carter 166)

Consequently, she faints (cf. 167). The puppet swan has become a sublime object in Melanie's mind, capable of extinguishing her subjectivity. The difference between them is violently erased, as she comes to perceive herself as nothing but an object, a doll.

In Laura's changeover, she also encounters an animal companion. However, the tiger does not harm her; he merely growls at her to move on (cf. Mahy 191-192). I read the tiger as Laura's animal side, or her sexual desire (cf. Raburn 32),²⁰ yet he is connected to Sorry, who has "the shadow of tiger stripes [...] across his face" (cf. Mahy 195), and on whom she has projected her desire. "With the coming of the tiger, the forest [...] becom[es] older and darker" (192), and Laura begins to see a train of fairy tale figures moving in the opposite direction from her. "She saw dwarfs, lost princes, beautiful girls who had committed themselves to silence in order to save brothers turned into swans or ravens [...]" (192). This does not mean that fairy tale and romance are leaving Laura's life as she grows up (cf. Smith 47, cf. Waller 33), but it represents "a symbolic exile of phallogocentric closure to these tales (where the princess marries her rescuer and the witch is destroyed), and a movement towards new ways of narrating based on Laura's expressly female development" (Waller 33). Waller's interpretation is in line with Mahy's and Carter's general deconstruction of patriarchal narratives. Like *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Changeover* also comments on the biblical Genesis story. Soon after the fairy tale parade has disappeared, Laura passes "a tree of snakes, a tree whose rosy apples, once clearly seen, were the hearts of Aztec sacrifices" (Mahy 193). Equating the apple of knowledge with a human heart, and a Christian symbol with a stereotypically heathen artifact is an interesting metaphor. Moreover, the "sacrificed Aztec" (41) refers to Laura's earlier depiction of herself after her father left (cf. 41). As a whole, the image suggests the 'savagery' inherent in Christian mythology, and the necessity of (self)-cannibalism in order to gain knowledge. This might mean that Laura has to put her heart, which her parents have torn out (cf. 200), back into her body, even by eating it – or by eating somebody else's. Mahy, in her own words, "originally saw [*The Changeover*] as a [...] story about the impossibility of retreating to a state of innocence once innocence has been exchanged for knowledge. You can't forget what you know – or if you do you are subjecting yourself to a sort of violence" (Duder 182). For Laura as well as for Eve, suppressing her desire for the apple-heart might be just as

²⁰ Raburn goes in a similar direction, yet she relies on Jungian archetypes (cf. Volkmann 24-26), which I find only partly helpful in my feminist-postmodernist approach.

cruel as giving in to it. Hence, Mahy seems to be at least partly sympathetic towards the belief in a 'Fortunate Fall', which views Eve's and Adam's expulsion from Eden as a deliverance from patriarchal tyranny, and which has been offered by Carter as an apt interpretation of *The Magic Toyshop* (cf. Peach 84).

Laura's progress is indeed marked by increasing self-mutilation. "[P]ushing against an intangible resistance, [...] something like the past or reality" (Mahy 192), she is forced to use her sword to cut through branches which scream with her own voice, and whose pain she can feel. She grows so tired that she finally does what she was told not to do and, in a classical move (cf. Scally 134), looks back over her shoulder. "Behind her the road branched infinitely. [...] She [...] saw all the possibilities, her own and other people's, that had brought her to this point" (Mahy 194). In this moment of crisis, her surroundings begin to flicker and disappear (cf. 194). She has been admonished by Sorry that the changeover country could not stand doubt, and that its dissolution would result in her death (cf. 190). Indeed, like Melanie in her transformation, Laura has a near-death experience. "[She] ducked down under the water. At first [...] [s]he breathed easily. "I'm drowning, I'm drowning," she told herself, and suddenly her lungs were filled with chilly water" (195). Fighting for breath, she eventually manages to return to the surface (cf. 195) and, surprisingly, "[brings] triumph out of disaster" (195). Sorry gives her a wand in exchange for the sword; then Laura finds herself in a bare hill country which Winter calls "the beginning land" (197). A brook is trickling from the top of a mountain and collects in a stone pool, watering the green forest she has traversed. "Another dry channel led away from the pond to a forest lying beside the first, but apparently dead" (196). Laura must open a shutter to let the water flow to the second forest as well, and in doing so, 'unlocks' her witchcraft. Winter demands that she pay her with a stone coin (cf. 197), before she can return home by following the brook to its source. Laura is so exhausted and bruised she is no longer able to walk; she crawls on bleeding knees (cf. 198). She uses the wand to charm away the rock until her spiral-shaped path becomes so narrow she can hardly move through anymore (cf. 198-199). This is when

[i]t suddenly occurred to her that she was being born again and, as this thought formed, the helix took her as if it had come alive. She was held and expelled, moved in a great vice, believing her intransigent head with its burdens of thoughts, dreams and memory must split open, and she came out somewhere into darkness. Reviving water continued to fall on her face. At last she opened her

eyes [...]. She was in the bathroom at Janua Caeli [...]. She lay, like a romantic heroine in the arms of the succouring hero, her head on Sorry Carlisle's shoulder. (199)

When he has overcome his "wonder and dread" (199), Sorry reminds Laura that "[t]he Sleeping Beauty always loves the prince who wakes her" (199), at which she retorts: "'I woke myself'" (200).

In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie also wakes with "Finn [...] kneeling beside her, pulling her skirt decently down for her" (Carter 167). Yet she does not immediately recognise him, too detached from herself and her environment (cf. 167). She remains disassociated, in shock, unable to tell fiction from reality (cf. 168-169), until Finn knocks at her door at night (cf. 169). He tells her that he has chopped up and buried uncle Philip's puppet swan in the pleasure garden (cf. 171-173), the same place where he has kissed Melanie earlier in the novel (cf. 104-105). Now, he is feeling "sick and sorry" (170), asking her to take care of him. "It was an honest and simple request. So she held him until his teeth stopped chattering" (170). On one hand, this scene is characterised by "straightforward tenderness" (178). On the other hand, despite the destruction of the swan, it is a direct continuation of the puppet performance. As they lie in bed together, Finn talks about his adventure, and Melanie marvels at his courage (cf. 172). She is reduced to a supporting role, while he and uncle Philip are the main actors, staging their power play. Indeed, as Finn admits, "it was a pleasure to destroy the swan" (173), and he "did it [only] partly for [Melanie's] sake" (174). This may be justified, granting that he has suffered a lot from uncle Philip as well, still, a statement such as "It came to me, I'll kill his swan for him" (172) is much more dubious. It almost seems as if Finn has been acting in league with uncle Philip, doing him a favour by burying his favourite toy. When one additionally considers that Finn, although he claims to have "dismembered [the swan]" (171), has in fact been unable to chop its head off (cf. 173), with the result that "the swan's neck stuck out" (173) of his coat "as if [he] was indecently exposing [him]self" (173), the burial looks less like a funeral and more like a cover-up – given that the dead are rarely really dead in gothic fiction (cf. Smith 148-149). Finn has stolen uncle Philip's 'phallus' and put it on himself, relieving the older man of the burden of power and self-control, freeing him to show his "insane glee" (198). Melanie is aware that Finn is styling himself as a hero: "'He'll murder you,' she said [...] and thought: 'Of course, he wants me to say that.'" (172). By contrast, Melanie, rather than a heroine, becomes an old wife and a mother. "They were peaceful in bed as

two married people who had laid in bed easily together all their lives” (174); “[t]hey might have been married for years and Victoria their baby” (177). Melanie tends to Finn like a mother as well (cf. 170, cf. 174), while the sexual tension seems to have almost evaporated from their relationship (cf. 179). “He must have been through a great ordeal. It must have been like the wedding-dress night. In the pleasure garden, Finn had walked in the forests of the night where nothing was safe. ‘I have been in that place, too,’ she thought” (172). However, while she sympathises with him, Finn is unaware of and largely uninterested in Melanie’s ordeal (cf. 116, cf. 136). “[W]hen she closed her eyes again, [she] was inside the white igloo of the swan’s wings” (174). No wonder that she dreams about being Jonathon and escaping on a sailing ship (cf. 175-176): “Daylight filled the work-room from the open curtain of the stage and Finn’s painted seashore sparkled and all the little waves had white caps. [...] [Jonathon] came upon a small rowing boat [...]. With a gentle plashing, he made for the ship” (176). The dream signifies Melanie’s frustration with the future in store for her (cf. 177), and her persistent desire for a more masculine identity. At the same time, the fact that she imagines herself as her brother shows that she cannot separate freedom and agency from the idea of a male body. Ironically, her dream illustrates how the very attributes she is longing for are lost to her. “The course of the novel is a slow erosion of Melanie’s delight as she becomes dependent, manipulated and victimized” (Lee 51).

In *The Changeover*, Laura’s successful transformation (cf. Mahy 200) is seen as empowering. “Her [...] eyes, in spite of her weariness, were round and shining, and something in their expression made her blush all over with [...] fright” (cf. 202). Like Winter, Miryam and Sorry, she now identifies as a witch (cf. 203). Alison Waller has examined Mahy’s eclectic construction of the witch figure, showing how she “incorporat[es] aspects of the fairy-tale witch, the enchantress from Greek mythology and contemporary Wiccan movements, but exclude[es] more negative images of victimised old women or malevolent witches” (Waller 22). The symbolism of Laura’s changeover does indeed draw strongly on modern witchcraft. For instance, the cup, the coin, the sword and the wand are popular Wiccan motifs, used to represent the four elements (cf. TvTropes 1). Winter, Miryam and Sorry take on the roles of crone, mother and maiden, the three aspects of the goddess (cf. Waller 28, cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 110). Furthermore, as is typical of modern witchcraft (cf. Purkiss 35-36), becoming a witch is an emphatically corporeal change. When Laura comes to, Sorry tells her that he “felt the bones of [her] head move” (Mahy 199), and her white dress is soaked in blood from a

nosebleed (cf. 200). Since blood and the body are associated with women (cf. Carson 117), critics have rightfully read *The Changeover* as a metaphor for Laura's "achieved womanhood" (Gavin 140, cf. Walls 115). However, as the term 'achieved' implies, this does not simply refer to passively experienced biological change. If it did, all the women in the novel would be witches, and all the witches would be women, which is not the case. Instead, Miryam describes "women [as] imaginary creatures [...]. [O]ur power flows out of the imagination and that's the faculty that makes magicians of all of us. Witches just act upon it with such conviction that their dreams turn into reality" (Mahy 178). Through a "[p]erformance of the metaphor" (Smith 49), Laura phrases her own "words of empowerment" (49). Lisa Scally thus interprets witchcraft as the power of authorship (cf. Scally 132): "[I]n the process of her changeover, Laura re-authors (recreates) herself, and later claims authorship over Carmody Braque through a ritual of inscription in which she stamps an image of her face onto Braque's hand" (Scally 132). By contrast, her mother Kate is only "a keen and clever reader" (Mahy 42). Authorship, in Mahy's view, is fuelled by desire (cf. Scally 134), which is both psychical and physical (cf. Cixous 876-877, cf. Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 114), and certainly not the province of only one gender.²¹

The fact that Sorry is a witch, too, has been missed by his mother and grandmother before (cf. Mahy 124-125). Likewise, Wilkie-Stibbs conveniently leaves him out of her list of *The Changeover*'s witches (cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 109-110). They lapse into biological essentialism when they see Sorry as "a necessary stranger" (Mahy 125) in their coven simply because he is male. In his male-dominated foster family, on the other hand, Sorry is estranged for different reasons: "I could go through the looking-glass and the others couldn't. [...] [A]nd I could read any book. Actually, that wasn't witchcraft but it might just as well have been" (152). His otherness on several levels – as a witch among non-witches, as an upper middle class child in a lower middle class family – causes Sorry's foster father to choose him as a scapegoat (cf. 152-153). Both Sorry and Laura "have experienced deprived childhoods" (Smith 47) and victimisation at an early age (cf. Mahy 154-155, cf. 41). Hence, Mahy's version of witchcraft can be read as a means of overcoming that victimisation and of expressing thwarted desire. Yet Sorry has apparently been born a witch (cf. 126-127), while Laura has to go through the

²¹ The notion of a „feminine magic“ (Mahy 97) as a form of authorship (cf. Scally 132) recalls Hélène Cixous' concept of 'feminine writing'. For a detailed discussion see Cixous 878-879 and Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 108-110.

changeover to become one. For a male, expressing and acting out desire is much more acceptable than for a female, who is ideally defined as having no desires of her own (cf. Cixous 876, cf. LeBihan 129-130). Thus Laura must work hard to even access her desire and find an imaginative outlet for it, whereas Sorry has fewer cultural inhibitions to overcome (cf. Mahy 88-89). Despite, or perhaps because of the fact that witchcraft comes to him easily, Sorry is critical of its value: ““Chant –” he exclaimed suddenly. “Cut and run! [...] [G]row old and die like a real human being, not an imaginary one”” (178). However, “Miryam[...] questions such a stark division between the ‘imaginary’ and the ‘real’, and redefines the imagination as that which *produces* reality” (Scally 132).

In *The Magic Toyshop*, the energy set free by Finn’s act of imaginary transgression, namely, the appropriation of Philip’s position, has real consequences which go beyond his own control. The morning after the puppet performance, uncle Philip has miraculously taken a day’s leave and gone on an outing with Jonathon (cf. 183), giving Finn the chance to sit in his chair (cf. 183), wear one of his shirts and take a bath (cf. 186). “When he was clean, he dazzled Melanie; he looked made of ivory and red gold, a small, precious statuette, a chessman” (186). This depiction of Finn is strikingly different from his first appearance in the novel (cf. 33), yet again it is highly ambiguous. While words such as ‘clean’, ‘gold’ and ‘precious’ have positive connotations and purvey an impression of power, ‘small’, ‘statuette’ and ‘chessman’ point to objectification and loss of power. Indeed, whereas aunt Margaret and Francie are overjoyed that Finn has buried the swan (cf. 192), he himself is “straining to be happy” (191), making plans to knock out uncle Philip for real with Francie’s help (cf. 192). However, things do not go as planned. Uncle Philip returns early and finds Margaret and Francie making love on the kitchen floor (cf. 193-194). This discovery prompts him to set the house on fire, “an action which also signals the collapse of the text under the strain of its self-generated and elaborately upheld contradictions. [...] [B]oth reality and fantasy unravel, with the result that all endings are rendered [...] uncertain” (Gamble, *Carter* 73). Finn and Melanie are ushered out through the skylight like children (cf. 197), while Francie and Margaret stay behind to “finish [their] business with Philip” (197). On the last few pages of *The Magic Toyshop*, Margaret, too, rejects her victimhood and is magically transformed: “Catastrophe had freed her tongue. Her voice was thin but true. [...] [Melanie’s] aunt was a goddess of fire; her

eyes burned and her hair flickered about her” (197). Melanie and Finn escape the flames, clueless about their future (cf. 200).

Laura’s new-found power also comes close to spiralling out of control, yet is ultimately contained by a more traditional ending. After the changeover, she and Sorry confront Carmody Braque at his fashionable house in a wealthy suburb of the city (cf. Mahy 206). Trimming his rose garden, he “look[s] like an improbable cross between Dracula and Mr Pickwick” (208), however, when Laura meets his eyes, “she [...] saw [...] something so insatiable that her recognition of it caused the sunlight to falter” (212). The world becomes unreal, “the roses, the neat lawn and the expensive house [...] nothing more than a painted screen behind which a dreadful machinery was at work” (212). Braque’s desire is so intense that it threatens to annihilate reality. Advised by Sorry to act like a helpless victim (cf. 208) in order to trick Braque into putting out his hand, Laura finds that she is truly terrified (cf. 214). Still, she takes her chance when it comes, taking possession of the villain (cf. 217). “Like a model man he was under her remote control [...]. It was so easy it was hard to believe such an ability had not always been natural to her. All the same, her skin crawled and her stomach twisted with horror. She had no mercy to offer” (217-218). Laura reverses the flow of life substance from Braque to Jacko (cf. 229-230), and reconnects with her mother as a woman (cf. 228-230, cf. Wilkie-Stibbs 111-112). Afterwards, she is reluctant to kill the demon. She herself becomes a black cat, “playing with [her] mouse a bit” (243), revelling in secret revenge fantasies: “With her commands exploding in his mind, he would howl like a dog, [...] bite pieces out of his own arm or tear off his clothes and dance naked outside the school gate” (242). It is, again, Sorry who reminds her of the danger of losing her humanity (cf. 244). Eventually, Laura avoids further temptation (cf. 249-250) and finishes Braque on her own at the Gardendale Reserve (cf. 250). By telling him that he is just a figment of the imagination, she forces him to “un-write[...] himself” (Scally 137), until he is “nothing but dead leaves” (Mahy 253). Scally stresses the centrality of Laura’s conflict with her own power to the story of *The Changeover* (cf. Scally 137). The novel makes clear the gothic heroine’s ability to achieve sublimity, and her potential to become a villainess. “Yet the witchcraft never tips over into real fear, and Mahy’s text[...] refuses to take its implications too seriously” (Waller 39). Consequently, *The Changeover* ends on a domestic note: “Kate and Chris danced, the potatoes over-cooked gently, Sorry carefully hung his pictures out to dry while his cat

watched him [...], Laura dreamed of many things, and Jacko [...] fell asleep on her knee [...]" (Mahy 281).

What is most noteworthy about Melanie's and Laura's metamorphoses is their similarity. Both are symbolic wedding ceremonies, with Melanie "marr[ying] the shadows" (Carter 77) and Laura being "marr[ied] to some sleeping aspect of [her]self" (Mahy 184). Darkness, the moon, blood and the body play a significant role in the process, and transformation is marked by mutilation, death and rebirth. Both take place in a hybrid space, which is simultaneously a garden and a house, a forest and a city. Lastly, Melanie's and Laura's metamorphoses are imaginary *and* real. Where *The Magic Toyshop* and *The Changeover* differ is in their evaluation of these developments. Melanie is "rendered passive, controlled and silenced" (Peach 98); Laura changes into a "more confident, more vocal and more sensual sel[f]" (Waller 25). These divergent interpretations can be grounded in the facts that Melanie walks into the nightly garden rather unsuspectingly (cf. Carter 16) and is commanded to act in the puppet show (cf. 132, cf. 141), whereas Laura knows that the changeover is perilous (cf. Mahy 185) and decides to undergo it (cf. 171-172). When she climbs the apple tree, Melanie accidentally cuts and scratches herself (cf. Carter 21-22), yet Laura, by comparison, practices deliberate self-harm when she chops through branches screaming with her own voice (cf. Mahy 193). Uncle Philip in *The Magic Toyshop* is clearly an ordinary human being, who is invested with supernatural powers through Melanie's magical thinking (cf. Carter 168); Carmody Braque in *The Changeover* is a supernatural creature whose magic is supposed to be taken at face value (cf. Mahy 99-100). However, if the demon is read as a part of Laura (cf. Walls 115) and a product of her imagination (cf. Scally 137), her mental torture and subsequent killing of him also become self-torture and suicide. To summarise, Melanie is largely crushed and changed by others; Laura mostly does it to herself. Is self-inflicted pain less painful? Mahy's comment on the issue is worth quoting:

It is part of the perceived reality of children's books to end with hope, but that doesn't mean such endings are impossible. Self-sacrifice or, if you like, the suppression of one's own ego is not particularly fashionable at present, partly because it was so damagingly insisted on in the past, particularly in the lives of women and the poor. Now it sometimes seems like a false myth or sometimes like a myth insisted upon by one part of society in order to command another. Nevertheless it is part of my direct experience and therefore I suggest on its

possibility... It is adult reality, built on guilt as well as experience that suggests such endings are necessarily cop outs... (Duder 196)

Beside pointing out the connection between self-sacrifice and ideal femininity, Mahy mentions the class aspect which my thesis has only rudimentarily covered. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Melanie's metamorphosis is framed by a mean shopkeeper, who is "patriarchy incarnate" (Gamble, *Carter* 71), and entails downward social mobility, while Laura's transformation in *The Changeover* is helped by "two nice, middle-class women with money and private school accents" (Mahy 99), resulting in a higher social status for her (cf. 84). As a rich rentier, Miryam is portrayed in a more positive light (cf. Mahy 122-125) than business-savvy Philip Flower (cf. *Carter* 86-87, cf. 137), still, to Walls, she "most vividly [...] exemplifies the capitalist mentality" (Walls 120). Walls interprets *The Changeover* from a socialist perspective (cf. 112-113), which stands to reason, given that its villain is both a shopkeeper and a bourgeois (cf. 121-123). The ghostliness of capitalism (cf. Smith 149-50) and the shop as a gothic site belong to the literary tradition of the nineteenth century, and have been explored, for instance, in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853). Women's oppression and objectification is clearly linked to capitalist practice (cf. Carson 121), which becomes most obvious in second-wave feminism's critique of pornography (cf. Gamble, *Carter* 4, cf. Peach 98). *The Magic Toyshop's* and *The Changeover's* depiction of class lends itself to fruitful discussion in a future work, as does their engagement with race (cf. *Carter* 192, cf. Mahy 13), or, more precisely, their near-complete lack of engagement with race.

4. Conclusion

I have shown the complexity of the female gothic in its different manifestations, from its consolidation as a genre in late-eighteenth century England to its deconstruction in the late twentieth century. Developed by Ann Radcliffe in reaction to male gothic fiction in the vein of Matthew Lewis, and significantly revised by Victorian authors such as Charlotte and Emily Brontë, the female gothic formula of the persecuted heroine and the villain-hero has been used ever more self-consciously by postmodern writers. Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) lays bare some of the cultural mechanisms which produce the gothic heroine, while Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover* (1984) stresses her rejection of victimhood and thus comes close to subverting her. Both

works must be read in relation to the political climate in which they were written. Carter's novel is strongly influenced by the discourse of second-wave feminism, sharing its concern with the material and cultural factors of women's subjugation. Mahy's novel, by contrast, anticipates the backlash against second-wave feminism, which questions the validity and utility of seeing women as victims, and opposes notions of their inherent moral superiority. This backlash eventually developed into feminism's ongoing third wave (cf. Gamble ix). In spite of all attempts to dispense with the persecuted heroine, she is alive and suffering, as the phenomenal success of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008) shows. At the present moment, in the early twenty-first century, gothic is "probably more popular than [...] ever" (Heiland 156), and the female gothic mode is still recognisable, expressing, evoking and easing women's fears about sexual relationships which are likely to persist as long as the concept of romantic love has cultural relevance.

My thesis has also traced the connections between the female gothic, the fairy tale and the romance novel. The literary fairy tale, which originated in late seventeenth-century France, can be seen as the precursor of the female gothic novel as it developed in the late eighteenth century. Both genres in turn preceded the modern romance novel. The three forms share many similarities in content and reception. Centring on ideas of 'wondrous change', 'sublime experience' or 'miraculous transformation', they are highly popular among women, which correlates with their disparagement in dominant discourse. Hence, they have been of particular interest to feminist critics, who have debated their feminist potential and their political functions. Fairy tales, female gothic fiction and romance novels have been used to give expression to women's fears and desires, yet their reliance on magical or quasi-magical solutions is seen as detrimental. Still, they provide useful illustrations of the difficulties of feminine self-definition, which always takes place between two diametrically opposed extremes.

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