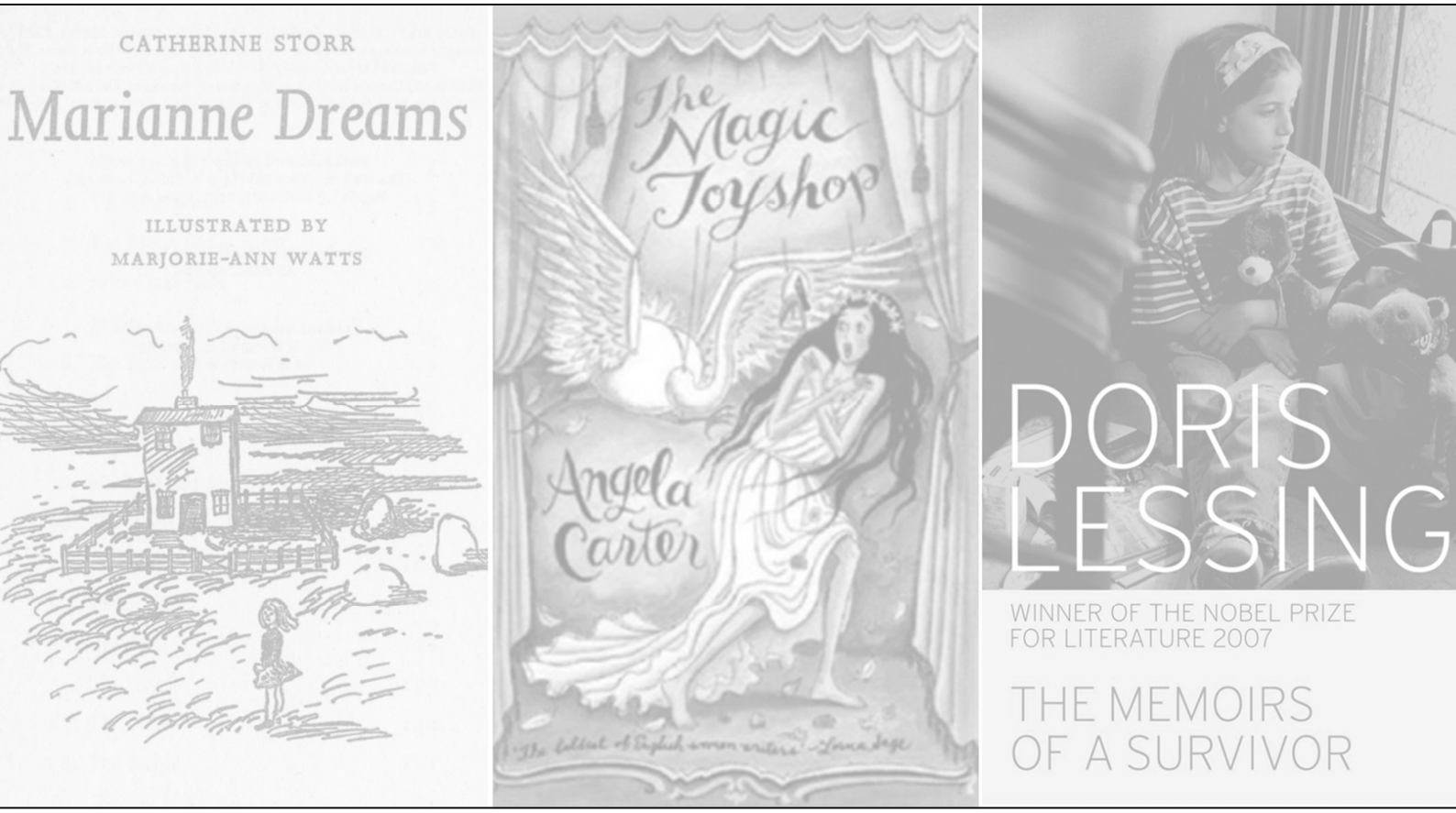
Liminal Girls in Liminal Lands:

Growing Up in British Fantasy Literature 1958-1974



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Contents

Introduction 3
Chapter 1: Liminal dreamscapes in Catherine Storr's *Marianne Dreams* (1958) 11
Chapter 2: Liminal houses and gardens in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) 27
Chapter 3: Liminal time, space and society in Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) 45
Conclusion 62
Works Cited 65

Introduction

Liminal female children live in liminal settings in liminal times. The liminal as a theme in British fantasy literature from 1958-1974 unveils contemporary ideologies around psychological development and the roles of children and women in society. This thesis will examine Catherine Storr's *Marianne Dreams* (1958), Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) and Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974). This thesis argues that the liminal appears in these texts between established categories, present in liminal physical spaces, liminal time, and in relation to the adolescent female characters themselves, poised on the boundary between childhood and adulthood. The liminal both contains and reveals tensions in dominant ideology.

The liminal is an increasingly popular metaphor in literary criticism, yet the nature of the concept is porous. Attempting to define the liminal is seemingly straightforward – that which lies in between the boundaries – and endlessly complicated. What happens when you slice the world into smaller and smaller measures, when the creation of more categories leaves little space for anything in-between? Dara Downey et al. assert that ""Liminality" has been utilised as something of a catch-all expression for an ambiguous, transitional, or interstitial spatio-temporal dimension" (3). Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts describe the liminal as a "borderline world – somewhere in between past and present, living and dying, waking and dreaming, reality and fantasy" (7). Furthermore, Downey argues that "a "both/and" state of affairs" typifies the liminal, mirroring Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which is a "simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" ("Spaces" 24). No study of the liminal would be complete without consideration of a pioneer in the liminal realm, upon whose definitions many contemporary scholars rely. In 1909, Arnold Van Gennep studied anthropological rites of passage "accompany[ing] a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" (10), such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. The liminal for Van Gennep was the middle, transitional stage

between a “preliminal” phase marking “separation” from the old, and a “postliminal” phase of “incorporation” (11) into the new. The rites surrounding the progression to a new stage of life often include crossing a physical space, such as “the entrance into a village or a house” (192), and thus the metaphor of the liminal as a journey was born. Van Gennep’s definition of the liminal as simultaneously depicting a “symbolic and spatial area of transition” (18) was hugely influential in the field.

Considering the origin of the liminal, Downey contends that the liminal is a natural human way to understand space: “As individual or collective subjects, we find ourselves always and already in the midst, located in a perpetual, though mobile, state of the in-between…we define our position in relation to others, establishing limits, boundaries, borders, or other such markers to help determine our sense of place” (ix). Boundaries and binaries help to make sense of the world and create the liminal. The argument that binary oppositions are essential to human experiences owes a debt to Claude Lévi-Strauss who saw binary oppositions as an “underlying paradigm” behind human myth making (Dundes 40). Cartesian mind-body dualism from the seventeenth century (Dennett 33) is also fundamental to this pattern of thought. Binary thinking leads to hierarchical thinking, Jacques Derrida arguing that binary oppositions are not in a neutral relation to one another, but rather in a “violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand” (41). The liminal is an inevitable consequence of a dominant ideology framed through such binaries.

The liminal exists due to dichotomies, because contemporary culture prizes certainty and thus eschews the grey area. The liminal is both all-encompassing and elusive. Language has insufficient descriptors for an in-between state. Ferdinand de Saussure would argue that this is a function of language itself, which creates meaning through “opposition or difference” (Gorman 975). Language both reflects our world and creates it, binary thinking baked in. We find it hard to understand that which is “most liminal, precisely because it is situated on the borders of our known experience”, propounds Katie Garner (401). We place utmost

importance on clarity, categories, certainty in definition. We resort to binaries. The liminal is synchronously a product of this desired certainty, and a challenge to it.

Literature and literary theory exploit the multiplicity of the liminal, often employing liminal motifs in physical spaces. Roger Luckhurst traces the history of liminal corridors, the architectural ideologies which underpin their creation forming an unconscious background for the building and how we understand the space. Architectural spaces are often used to demonstrate conscious principles, famously in Sigmund Freud's depiction of a house mirroring the structure of the psyche, and the concept of *das Unheimlich,* or the uncanny, ("Uncanny" 619) which disrupts the homely and "contradicts the traditional view of the house as a place of refuge", according to Andrew Hock Ng (2). Gothic fiction often features the liminal, as Anna Jackson asserts that the "Gothic chronotope is often a place, very often a house, haunted by a past that remains present" (4). These concepts have a special pertinence for literature featuring female children, as the home is the traditional purview of woman and child. Pauline Dewan declares that "for children, home is the preeminent place in their lives, a place charged with great emotional significance" (3), a home which the liminal often disrupts. Meaning imbues landscapes in children's literature, asserts Peter Hunt, but often a "familiar landscape [is] made strange, with its age-old values inverted" ("Landscapes" 13). Liminal landscapes in literature often lead to "psychogeographic journeys – quests" (7), according to Andrews and Roberts, the liminal space impacting an individual's development.

Individuals have strong reactions to the liminal. Van Gennep declares that a person during the liminal phase "finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation…he wavers between two worlds" (18). Victor Turner built upon Van Gennep's theories, describing "liminal personae ("threshold people") [as] necessarily ambiguous": "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). Liminality becomes a characteristic; a person may become liminal. Daina Miniotaitė argues that "in literature, liminal spaces traditionally give the person both power and torment" (51). Further, Foucault

characterises heterotopias as "disturbing" (*Order* 10). Garner asserts that: "From the nineteenth century onward, the human body has increasingly become a liminal site where normative boundaries are challenged" (401). Challenging, disturbing, tormenting, the liminal is a powerful experience.

This power of the liminal to both disturb and renew links to psychological theorists of the 1960s and 1970s such as R.D. Laing, who "embraced madness as a higher form of sanity" using a "voyage metaphor" (Chapman 1) to claim that the patient embarking on the journey of madness would return with valuable lessons. Madness is therefore a valuable liminal state. Laing formed part of the British anti-psychiatry movement in the period, although he himself disowned the label (Crossley 878). He represented "new, progressive trends in psychiatry at the time, which were challenging rigid distinctions between mental health and illness, arguing instead for a continuum" (Crossley 882), a breaking down of binary divisions. The strict duality which Laing and others opposed is evident in the theories of other contemporary psychologists who followed Freud's original conscious-unconscious dichotomy ("History" 412). Erik Erikson, for example, argued for infantile developmental steps based on binary oppositions, starting with trust-mistrust which stems from "the early process of differentiation between inside and outside" (248). Clearly, binary oppositions are essential to some thought processes, yet as Derrida asserts, the "hierarchy of dual oppositions" (42) is inevitable, and many psychologists incorporated hierarchical thinking into their practise. Hierarchical binary divisions are here the fundament of human health or pathology.

A fundamental binary which occupied many psychiatrists was the male-female divide, with the male often allied with health and the female "patholog[ized]" (Greer 55). Post-Freudian penis envy theory argued that women were subordinate to men, Erikson notably declaring that "the girl's clitoris cannot sustain dreams of sexual equality" (88). Although Donald Winnicott attempted to restore some balance – though the girl is "very liable" to envy the boy's genitalia, "when a girl knows that she has the capacity" to make babies, "she knows she has nothing to envy" (159) – he nonetheless essentialises women in their biological

function as mothers. Feminist opposition to these dominant views developed during the 1960s and 1970s, building on earlier writers such as Simone De Beauvoir. De Beauvoir argued that the assumptions underlying patriarchal ideology, of which Freudian doctrine is a part, relies on the assumption that man designates woman as "the Other" (16): "man represents both the positive and the neutral… whereas woman represents only the negative" (15). Feminist writers such as Hélène Cixous argued that "the Freudian male model of psychosexual development simply does not fit the female experience" (Evans 64). Second-wave feminist writers such as American Betty Friedan and the Australian Germaine Greer pointed out structural inequalities, rigid male and female roles, and highlighted the subsequent effects on women's psyches. De Beauvoir's famous assertion that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" (273) highlights the role of society in constructing male and female roles, attacking the biological essentialism underlying contemporary psychological views. In literature, women often appear in conjunction with the liminal, Kathryn James asserting that in many texts, "the feminine is unstable, liminal, and disturbing" (111). Women are on a liminal journey during these decades, their destination uncertain.

The role of women was uncertain, but what of the children? Kimberley Reynolds asserts that: "In the 1960s and 1970s, thinking about children and childhood was dominated by the disciplines and discourses of psychology and pedagogy" (451). Winnicott typifies the importance that society placed on childhood as he declares that "The basis of the whole of mental health is laid in early childhood and in infancy" (151). Winnicott describes "a vast change in society's attitude towards infant and child care" (185) towards a more "natural" (32) approach, contrasting with earlier "regulation[s]" put in place by "the medical and nursing professions" (32). He invokes the nature-culture binary, reifying nature in a reactive move against medicalised approaches. In the 1900s, G. Stanley Hall similarly linked childhood with "harmony and unity with nature" (71) but to a very different end. Hall was an earlier American psychologist, historically important nonetheless due to his seminal work *Adolescence* (1904), the first text to discuss this progression from childhood to adulthood.

Hall claimed that during adolescence, “powers and faculties, essentially non-existent before, are now born” (70), a view overturned by the theory of continual development from infant to adult (Freud, Erikson, Winnicott). Freud’s discovery of “infantile sexuality” (“History” 415) opposed Hall’s edict of childhood innocence. However, while psychology taught that childhood was no longer innocent, children’s literature and societal ideology lagged behind. Hunt declares that children’s literature is often a “conservative genre” (*Understanding* 135), although it can also be “subversive” (6). James asserts that many critics argue that death and sexuality are not “suitable topics” (2) for children. Tison Pugh argues that “innocence of sexuality in children's fiction” (1) dates from “the Romantic vision of children as idealized avatars of purity” (4), which mirrors Hall’s notion that “youth [is] the golden age of life” (55). Contemporary literature predominantly featured child characters innocent of adult matters such as sexuality. This split between childhood innocence and sexuality is indicative of a tension within the contemporary dominant ideology about the role of the child. Contemporary literature reflects that “our culture [is] changing [its] attitude toward the innocence of children” (7), according to Jackson. Children in literature demonstrate this ambiguity in contemporary attitudes towards childhood.

Through combining a study of the liminal with contemporary ideologies and debates on psychosocial development and the roles of women and children, I intend to examine to what extent the liminal both challenges and contains these dominant ideologies. The substance of this ‘dominant ideology’ is, of course, difficult to define outside of binary oppositions; ‘dominant’ suggesting a ‘subversive’ opposite which fails to escape the original framework. Dominant hierarchical ideology creates weighted dichotomies such as male and female, old and young, powerful and powerless. Concentrating on young, female characters on the boundary between childhood and adulthood is a way to expose some of the constructions underlying the roles of girls and women, children and adults, in contemporary society. According to Pugh, children in fiction represent “values ascribed to childhood and children, often to advance particular cultural objectives”: children represent the “ideal vision”

(3) of society. Children are the future, but what kind of future does this period prescribe for girls?

The three following chapters will each discuss a British fantasy novel from the period 1958-1974. Storr's *Marianne Dreams* features a convalescing ten-year-old Marianne who explores an extensive world in her dreams. The text raises questions about the boundaries between dreams and reality, as well as exploring child and adult and male and female roles. Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* requires fifteen-year-old pampered Melanie to live in poverty in her uncle's toyshop, the magical realism of the text challenging categorisations of reality and fantasy, man and woman. Finally, in the post-apocalyptic society in Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor,* a middle-aged narrator watches thirteen-year-old Emily challenge and recreate binaries of an obsolete culture. All three texts feature liminal female characters on the boundary between childhood and adulthood, and furthermore, the liminal appears all around, in the houses, landscapes and settings of the novels. Liminal time, appropriate to texts featuring adolescents, abounds, and all the texts grapple with notions around divisions between male-female, reality-fantasy and past-present. All are revealing of contemporary societal ideology.

Adolescent characters in fiction often encounter liminal "rites of passage which involve adolescents learning their place in the power structure" (James 4). Thereby, the rites of passage which these characters undergo reveal the dominant contemporary power structure, making adolescent characters a profitable subject for study. Although not all the novels would classify themselves as magic realist texts, all require the reader to suspend disbelief in accepting elements of a fantasy world. As Lois Zamora and Wendy Faris affirm: "The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among those worlds" (6). Liminality is a frequent feature of magical realist texts, which by their nature challenge boundaries: "Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female: these are boundaries to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally

refashioned" (6). Magical realist texts "are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structures" (6). The liminal is a perfect motif to start to deconstruct dominant ideology, in the Derridean sense of exposing the contradictions inherent in the binary and therefore how it undermines its own authority (*Positions* 82). Yet the liminal is a slippery metaphor, containing both opposing poles as well as standing in between. The liminal is a part of the dualistic system and therefore repeats contradictions inherent in dominant ideology as much as challenging them. In the following chapters, I will examine the liminal motifs of each text against contemporary psychological, child development, feminist and literary theorists to discover what the liminal represents and to what extent the liminal disrupts dominant power structures. The liminal both contains and challenges the tensions underlying dominant ideology.

Chapter 1: Liminal dreamscapes in Catherine Storr's *Marianne Dreams* (1958)

Marianne's liminal dreams represent not only the character's psyche, but also the deep contradictions in contemporary ideology. Dreaming can be understood as a liminal condition, in which the states of consciousness and unconsciousness overlap and merge, recalling Andrews and Roberts' description of the liminal as "in between…waking and dreaming" (7). Marianne spends much of the novel asleep, her fantasy dream world dominating the narrative, where liminality fills the house and landscape. Marianne herself embodies the liminal in her prolonged convalescence, between sickness and health, and in the fact that at ten years old she hovers on the edge of adolescence, the transition between childhood and adulthood. Dewan points to "the possibilities inherent in liminal settings [for] children's writers" (269) due to the "natural affinity" of the liminal for "children and adolescents, whose lives border the shadowy zone between youth and adulthood" (269). The 'shadowy zone' of the liminal highlights the binary divisions which underpin contemporary thinking about childhood and femininity. *Marianne Dreams* features dichotomies such as emotional-rational, reality-fantasy, male-female, which help to construct contemporary dominant ideology. Furthermore, *Marianne Dreams* highlights an insidious contradiction in contemporary constructions of childhood. In order to progress to adulthood, a child must become aware of matters such as adult sexuality which, despite post-Freudian developmental theories, contemporary society deemed unsuitable for innocent children. Yet Pugh claims, conversely, that numerous children's texts prevent their protagonists from growing up; much like Peter Pan, they must inhabit an innocent childhood forever. This "inherent paradox" (1) in children's literature represents a "tension between innocence and sexuality" (1) which highlights the constructed nature of the figure of the child. Pugh's argument overtly conflicts with the quest narrative of *Marianne Dreams*, yet we will see how, insidiously, the text supports a truncated development for Marianne. Through an examination of the liminal motifs of convalescence, the dream house

and landscape, as well as the roles of fear and fantasy, this chapter will attempt to unravel the meanings behind the liminal. Marianne's liminal dreams reveal contemporary ideological tensions surrounding the role of children, adolescents, girls and women in society.

Marianne's dreams dominate the narrative, challenging the boundary between reality and fantasy. Yet the reality-fantasy dichotomy is also ambiguous in Marianne's waking life. Marianne ponders that "staying in bed for so long…seem[ed]…impossible and unreal" (15). Illness separates her from her ordinary life: "what she was missing…school…parties" (25). Marianne is apart from everyday life, and furthermore, the narrative questions the boundary between real life and dreams. Marianne ponders that her dream was "as real as anything she had ever known, and yet she knew also that there was another life, an ordinary life…she belonged to both lives and both belonged to her" (75). The novel prioritises neither "ordinary" life nor the dream world. Marianne can "live two lives at once" (163), supporting Downey's description of "a "both/and" state of affairs that is the essence of the liminal" (11). Poised between reality and fantasy, Marianne's dreams create a liminal world.

This liminal state disrupts contemporary assumptions which privilege rationality and reality over fantasy. Contemporary psychologists had many opinions about the contrast between reality and unreality. Erikson's theories present eight stages of infantile development. During the very first stage –trust vs. mistrust – the infant must undergo "the early process of differentiation between inside and outside" (248). Failure to master development in this stage leads to behaviour typical of "very sick individuals", who cannot desist from "testing of the borderlines between senses and physical reality" (248). For Erikson, the sign of a healthy psyche is that ability to distinguish an empirical, physical reality from the unreal. *Marianne Dreams* blurs this physical boundary as Mark's dream exercises improve his real health: he makes "a remarkably good recovery" (131). Actions in Marianne's dream world impact on real life in a positive manner, crossing the division between reality and fantasy. Taking a softer approach than Erikson, Winnicott permits the blending of reality and fantasy, but only for children. He allows that "we can use our imagination to make the world more exciting"

(69), but adults must be able to separate the two. Supporting this development, the child's "parent is all the time helping the child to distinguish between the actual happenings and what goes on in the imagination" (109). Notably, Marianne never tells her parents about her dreams. While Marianne tells "her mother the whole story" (49) of her anger over Miss Chesterfield's birthday flowers, she never mentions her dream world, thereby denying any possibility that the adult could impose a singular view of reality in the text. Shelley O'Hearn propounds that a "child-directed tone, typical of fifties children's realism" (38) dominates the waking sections of the text, which "offer the reassurance of the familiar adult voice" (37), yet in contrast, Marianne defies this adult reassurance to maintain a simultaneous duality of reality and fantasy which disturbs these familiar strictures.

The elision of boundaries between reality and fantasy raises thorny questions about personal responsibility. Having established that reality and fantasy are equivalent, the novel initiates a debate regarding Marianne's responsibility for her dream actions. The text describes that "Mark was in hospital, desperately ill, probably dying, and it might all be Marianne's fault" (67). Marianne questions "whether she was responsible for [Mark's] illness" (65) through her drawings, recalling William Butler Yeats' statement "In dreams begins responsibility" (81; "Responsibilities"). The text personifies Marianne's debate as a contrast between two voices, a "sensible, comforting voice" (104) representing a rational position that dreams "don't count for real life" (104), and a "niggling, tiresome" (103) voice that concludes that "'How you behave in a dream is just as real as how you behave when you are awake'" (104). The 'niggling' voice wins, suggestive of Marianne's conscience, and Marianne "miserably" (104) decides to help Mark. The text disrupts the common hierarchy of rational and irrational, suggesting that a logical, rational viewpoint elides important considerations and shirks responsibility which is in fact due. The text associates rational with male and intuitive with female, O'Hearn attesting to a "rational-intuitive opposition" (40) between Mark and Marianne. The text supports this division, Mark allying himself with the 'sensible' voice when he "accuse[s]" Marianne of "making herself too important" (64) in

taking responsibility for her dream world. In privileging the feminine, intuitive voice as moral and responsible, the text reverses the common dichotomy. Furthermore, as Storr is a female writer, the novel could represent questions about a female writer's responsibility for influencing the next generation of girls for whom she writes.

The novel highlights the influence of the liminal, suggesting that it has a transformative force. Marianne is in a liminal state for most of the novel, dreaming in bed. Her illness is a major narrative device, arguably necessitating vivid dreams to compensate for her daily lack of activity. The text presents Marianne's illness and convalescence as liminal states. A sickly Marianne occupies an in-between state: "engrossed in feeling quite extraordinarily tired and yet not sleepy" (4). Convalescence is similarly liminal: "It's neither one thing nor the other, not being well and not being ill, and I hate it" (141). The text characterises the liminal moment as uncomfortable and negative. Moreover, liminality lasts for most of the novel, with Marianne "feeling almost well again" by page 7, yet remaining in bed. *Marianne Dreams* foregrounds the transformative aspect of the liminal from the beginning: "Somehow the feeling really ill had made a gap between the person she had been then, and the person she felt herself to be now" (16). As Downey asserts, liminality commonly represents "change" (13). Furthermore, Freud viewed illness in his patient Dora as a transition: "She had in truth been a wild creature, but after the 'asthma' she became quiet and well-behaved. That illness formed the boundary between two phases of her sexual life, of which the first was masculine in character and the second feminine" (*Dora* 119). Illness, in these Freudian terms, is not merely a transition to regained health, but a boundary between two stages of life, leading to fundamental changes in character. In support, Marianne "wondered what she would be like at the end of such a long time as an invalid" (15); the novel foreshadowing character development for Marianne. We will return to this point throughout the chapter to examine how the liminal impacts on Marianne's evolution.

Marianne's illness takes place against a decade of polio epidemics that terrified parents and left polio survivors with a lengthy convalescence. Julie Silver and Daniel Wilson

assert that "Resuming one's life after polio was challenging" (8), with survivors having to navigate everyday life, often with additional disabilities. They underscore the transformative nature of recovering from polio: "Many had taken to heart the…work ethic reinforced during their polio rehabilitation: hard persistent effort pursued over a long time brought significant rewards" (8). While the text names Mark's illness as polio (120), Marianne suffers from a more amorphous disease which the text never names. While not as serious as polio, the novel suggests her convalescence is unpleasant: "things got unbearable" (25) and her illness dangerous, the doctor suggesting "you might make yourself ill in a way that would last the rest of your life" (10). Nonetheless, the text invites a comparison between Marianne's un-named illness and Mark's polio, with Marianne suggesting herself and Mark are "opposites…He's got to take exercise and doesn't want to, and I've got to stay in bed and I don't want to" (24). In binary thinking, comparison often implies a hierarchy, with Mark's deadly disease judged as more serious and therefore more important. Diminishing Marianne's illness, relatively speaking, could stem from contemporary prejudices. In the 1950s and 1960s, post-Freudian health professionals often dismissed feminine illness, Greer asserting that doctors assumed "hypochondriacal syndromes" or "hysteria" (55) when women were sick. Freud posits a gender difference in illness, stating that girls develop psychosomatic illness as an attention seeking device, competing for love with siblings: "A little girl in her greed for love…notices that the whole of [parental] affection is lavished on her once more whenever she arouses their anxiety by falling ill." (*Dora* 77). Offering some support for this interpretation, Marianne's brother barely appears in the novel, with one of his few appearances competing for Marianne's birthday meal, with her mother "try[ing] not to let Thomas eat all the best bits" (3). Because Marianne's illness is un-named, and contrasted with a more deadly one, the text invites comparison with contemporary opinions diminishing female illness. Furthermore, Marianne may not benefit from the 'significant rewards' of character development, in Silver and Wilson's terms, in recovering from her less-serious

illness. In fact, we see later in this chapter that Marianne becomes engaged in helping Mark to recuperate, subsuming her own development in favour of Mark's recovery.

During convalescence, Marianne's dreams centre around her drawing of a house. When Marianne enters the house, it defies definition as real or unreal. The dream house is characterised as having "no smell" (30), akin to "imitation houses" (30). However, Marianne finds it "comforting" (30), "without knowing why" (29), that the "house wasn't completely unreal" (30). The dream house hovers in the liminal area in between reality and unreality. Contemporary society linked domestic spaces with women, making Marianne's dream representative of her femininity. Erikson carried out experiments with children's drawings, which he claimed showed a tendency that "the girls tended to [build] the interior of a house" (102). For Erikson, this suggested "a male and a female experience of space" (108) with boys representing "strong motion" (106) and the girls, stasis. However, the liminal dream house inspires different feelings about stasis and movement, with Marianne feeling frightened and trying "to find [her] way in" (35) and Mark wanting to "get out" (37). However, later, Marianne feels that the house is "too cramped and small…a prison" (106) and it thus inspires the forward motion towards the outside. The novel treats the dichotomy between stasis and movement ambiguously, with both children wishing to stay and to go. Marianne proposes fleeing the house first (118) and overcomes Mark's resistance: "'I think we ought to go now,' Marianne insisted" (145). Marianne resists her assigned gender role by representing movement and Mark epitomising stasis. However, at the critical moment, Marianne switches roles, protesting that it is too "soon" (149) and requiring persuasion from Mark. Marianne's resistance of this aspect of gender roles is temporary.

Winnicott would find the house a suitable motif for girlish dreams. He emphasises the importance of the house for women, and suggests that housewife is an aspirational role: "nowhere else but in her own home is a woman in such command. Only in her own home is she free" (120). Indeed, filling the empty house with "things that Mark wanted" (82) produces a proto-housewifely satisfaction for Marianne: Mark's bedroom with furniture and food

"looked very much better than it did before" (88). However, despite Marianne's efforts, the house resists. An aura of oddness remains in the newly furnished rooms: "it had a curious air of not quite being a complete room" (88). This disquieting atmosphere recalls Freud's concept of *das Unheimlich* ("Uncanny" 619). Ng claims that Freud's "uncanny, which describes how a familiar, intimate space becomes defamiliarized, thereafter precipitating horror" (13) is particularly appropriate to women in domestic spaces. The uncanny is present in Marianne's dream house from the beginning: it is "frightening" (29). At first the house appears to present the possibility of domestication. However, a threat materialises in the other upstairs room, "darker than the rest of the house" (134) and with the things Marianne draws in it "turn[ing] out wrong somehow" (138). Marianne does not have Winnicottian "command" over her house, it resists control, it represents the uncanny. However, the radio which 'turns out wrong' gives the children important information about the greater threat from the watching stones outside, and precipitates their flight. The uncanny is somehow on Marianne's side in this novel, despite being frightening. Disrupting Marianne's domestic expectations, the liminal house inspires un-feminine movement and activity.

The liminal moment between stasis and movement is uncomfortable, suggests the text. As Marianne and Mark wait for nightfall to leave the house, never "had any time of waiting seemed so endless…The atmosphere in the house grew tense" (147). The discomfort of the liminal inspires forward movement in the narrative, into the landscape outside. Marianne's dreamscape is liminal: apples on the tree are neither ripe nor unripe (34) and a "chill half-light" (116) fills the land. Marianne feels "uneasiness" (12) in this liminal landscape, which "drove her to start walking" (12). Firstly, her movement leads into the house and later, a journey to the lighthouse. Hunt claims that in children's literature, "The elements of quest…lead to new levels of physical and psychological development" ("Landscapes" 11). Yet Marianne's quest does not seem straightforward, as the text problematises motion. Movement in the "nothing" (11) landscape is a source of danger, at first "nothing moved" (11), then the "wind [blew] cold fear all around" (18) and "everything that had been so still

before came alive with movement" (11). Movement in this liminal landscape blurs the boundaries between human and inanimate. Marianne's forward motion is similarly equivocal. She is "frightened" (11) and feels that she has "got to get away" (11), yet spends most of her time sheltering in the house before re-starting her quest. Marianne's quest narrative contrasts with traditional notions of the quest as continuous motion, and thereby also questions her continuous development.

The Watchers, the stones in the liminal landscape, further elide boundaries between human and inanimate, between action and stasis, and fill the text with fear. The stones are described as "sort of…alive" (97), one moment "a hunk of stone, motionless and harmless" (99) but with frightening mobile eyes: "the pale eyelids lifted and seven great eyeballs swivelled in their stone sockets and fixed themselves on the house…Marianne screamed" (99). The stones are malicious, trying to "kill" (112) the children. They speak in a "chorus" (151), their unison suggesting that their collectivism is a threat to the individuality of the children. The liminality of the Watchers is a source of terror. The stones move and speak, but they are not alive. The stones overcome other non-human objects: "there was the sound of metal clashing on metal, and a snarl of disappointed rage" (160). Unlike the metal bikes which they break, the stones do not serve humanity but threaten it, representing a fear of technology, objects which turn against their creator. The Watchers are frightening because they blur the boundary between alive and inanimate, a fear which encourages the reader to question their world.

The Watchers appear most threatening at night, a liminal moment. Van Gennep characterises the night as a recurring liminal moment between one day and another: in "life itself…there are always new thresholds to cross" (189). Although this proliferates the liminal to an everyday occurrence, Ng agrees: "because of night's inducement of darkness, which cancels out our visual capacity to distinguish self from world, it can potentially instigate the mind to entertain the belief that the boundary separating our body and its beyond does not exist" (33). The darkness of night blurs the boundary between the individual and the world.

This liminal darkness provokes fear in the novel. Marianne feels "terror" (139) in the dark upstairs room, and outside in "nearly complete darkness" (159), the dark confuses and may conceal an enemy: "every shape that loomed at them from the side may be a harmless bush or might be one of THEM" (159). However, maintaining darkness protects the children in the house: "If we have a light on in here, THEY can see right in" (110) says Mark. Nonetheless, the protective cover of darkness is equivocal, with the children positioned as prey to Them in the darkness: "THEY are…seeing how to kill us or do something horrible to us" (112), imagery which seems more appropriate for the horror genre. Charles Sarland characterises children's horror literature as placing characters in "a position of increasing powerlessness, living in fear and thus denied agency" (51). *Marianne Dreams* characterises this feeling of powerlessness, with Marianne unable to erase the stones by scribbling: "she had an uncomfortable feeling that they would be there just the same" (100). The liminal darkness of night contains many terrors.

Fear plays a large part in the novel, something that is arguably uncharacteristic of children's literature of the period. Reynolds characterises "Storr's willingness to frighten and disturb her readers" (450) as attracting attention for being unusual at the time. Reynolds states that Storr, who had "ten years of experience working as a psychotherapist", tried in her writing to "help children acknowledge the dark and conflicted feelings we all harbour from infancy" (452-3). Storr herself argues that fear and evil are something necessary for children's development into adults: "the struggle to grow up…[children] ought to know that there are things to be frightened of, because I think an anxiety about the whole human condition is something we have all got to learn to live with and children have got to learn too" ("Fear" 31-2). Fear, therefore, is something which is central to being human, and children need to learn to cope with this as a passage to adulthood. Storytelling itself is a weapon, according to Storr: creating metaphors to "distanc[e] ourselves" ("Fairytales" 69) from distressing events is a powerful tool to enable children and adults to overcome fear. However, does *Marianne Dreams* equip children with the means to confront fear? Storr asserts that because Marianne

rescues Mark from the stones the novel provides “resolution” (“Fear” 40), which counteracts anxiety. However, resolution in the novel is equivocal. Although the children escape the Watchers: “who dared not come up into the light” (162), the stones remain in the landscape and inspire avoidance: “towards the side from which they had come neither of them ever looked” (164). Fear remains unresolved, and despite Marianne and Mark’s dangerous journey, they do not seem to have gained methods for managing anxiety apart from refusing to look at it. Additionally, while Mark flees in a helicopter, Marianne remains on the hill with Watchers all around, unable to leave without Mark’s assistance.

Marianne ends her quest trapped in the landscape which she created. Potentially, being female may impact on Marianne’s quest experience. Quests are important, according to Dewan: literary children "explore the wider world and, in doing so, are better prepared to make the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood” (13). Conversely, Marianne retreats inside from the dangerous outer world for much of the novel. O’Hearn posits that quests in children’s literature are substantially different for male and female protagonists. While “the (male) hero undergoes a difficult learning process…[and] expands his sphere of experience” (36), for “a female protagonist the quest takes on a different pattern, given the more restricted place allotted to her by society” (36). O’Hearn states that “the questing heroine takes 'the voyage in', remaining within the domestic circle” (36). The text supports this assertion as Marianne spends much of her time within her dream house, and similarly furnishes and equips the lighthouse once reached. The threshold of the lighthouse, the protective “heavy door” (162), represents safety, and Marianne is reluctant to leave: “‘Why should we get out? We’re all right here’” (166). O’Hearn declares that the novel represents a stifled female quest which “reduces rather than expands her horizons, and teaches her to restrain worldly curiosity in favour of nurturing” (36). Ultimately, “female agency is redirected into the primary demands of the male quest, and the consequent stifling of female selfhood” (40). This stifling of the female self is necessary to maintain contemporary societal roles. Inviting comparisons for O’Hearn with Mary helping Colin to walk again in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret*

Garden (1911), Marianne directs her efforts not to exploring her dream world, but instead to assisting Mark's recovery. The narrative redirects Marianne's quest, her personal maturation, towards helping a boy's development in her stead.

Furthermore, Marianne ultimately relinquishes her power over her dream world, represented by the magic pencil. Marianne wields power through her manipulation of the pencil, realising "I can make things happen" (59). Despite Mark's dismissal of her powers based on gender stereotypes: "You're showing off. Just like a girl" (58), he comes to believe Marianne. Marianne also saves Mark from the stones, physically stronger and supporting him "with an energy she had not known she possessed" (161). Thus far Marianne's actions challenge gender roles. However, Marianne gives away her magic pencil to Mark, relinquishing her power to control the dream world. A Freudian interpretation of Marianne's pencil suggests that it represents female inequality: the penis which Marianne lacks. Depicting contemporary views, Erikson describes inequity as a natural consequence of biology: girls "lack one item: the penis…While the boy has this visible, erectable and comprehensible organ to attach dreams of adult bigness to, the girl's clitoris cannot sustain dreams of sexual equality" (88). Girls cannot even dream of being equals in the period due to their biological differences. Critics of this opinion were vocal, Greer attacking the assumption of penis envy that saturates much of the contemporaneous psychological thinking: "What hooey", "the immature girl's penis envy. The horse between a girl's legs is supposed to be a gigantic penis" (93). Inviting a Freudian interpretation, Marianne starts the novel riding a horse and then takes up her pencil, symbolically compensating for her female lack. However, the text introduces ambiguity about a straightforward reading of the pencil as penis, as the pencil originated from Marianne's great-grandmother (7), hinting at a matriarchal line of power as Marianne's mother inherited the box. Whether Marianne's power is feminine or masculine in origin, she nonetheless gives the pencil away.

Marianne relinquishing her power is far from an individual action. De Beauvoir would see this surrender of power as representative for a girl on the border of adolescence. She

asserts that "in girls, the exuberance of life is restrained" (299); society seeks to curb the behaviour of girls becoming women. Furthermore, Greer declares that female adolescence is a painful time because of the social "conditioning that maims the female personality in creating the feminine" (102): "Women are contoured by their conditioning to abandon autonomy" (103). Girls must learn to curb their individuality in adolescence to become successful women. Supporting this view of overwhelming societal pressure, O'Hearn argues that "Marianne has no choice but to surrender her autonomy to Mark" (40). However, the text takes the reader on a journey through Marianne convincing herself she should not own the pencil. She makes the ultimate decision herself. Marianne progresses from "It's my pencil" (169), through "I had to be bossy…as he calls it" (170) to "Perhaps it is his turn to have it" (171) as she accepts "sadly" (171) that the pencil has "drawn itself, and so said good-bye" (171). Marianne has already internalised the rules of society and logically argues herself out of her powerful position. The text suggests that logical argumentations do not support female endeavour in this case, highlighting an inequality in the traditional hierarchy between rational and irrational. Marianne, while relinquishing her pencil, additionally inflates Mark's skills: "You're quite right Mark. I can't draw" (172). Marianne has a fixed mindset – she cannot draw and therefore cannot keep the pencil. A "growth mindset", according to the theories of Carol Dweck (10), would consider that Marianne could improve her skills at drawing, or indeed at leading. Marianne reflects societal views where gender roles are innate, and skills are inherent. While a girl, Marianne has equality with boys. But as she progresses to adolescence, the text suggests she must accept a more limited role.

The ending of a quest novel would traditionally provide Marianne with the tools to progress to the next stage of her life, especially in children's literature, which Hunt characterises as "favour[ing] a plot of resolution" (*Criticism* 118). Supporting the resolution narrative, John Collick argues that at the end of the book "both Marianne and Mark return to health and the normal world" (288). Yet as a girl, the novel suggests that Marianne's progress is more equivocal. Marianne is not uncomplicatedly in the 'normal world' by the end of the

text. Although Marianne in her "real life [is] free, and…going to the sea" (173), the text affirms that attention to both dream and reality is essential: "you've got to get back here so that you can get out…if you just stay away in what you call real life, you'll never know whether you're really not still here. Not free" (173). In order to gain liberty, Marianne must also escape in her dream world. But she does not; ending the novel "waiting" (179) on the cliffs for Mark to help her escape. She is not free. Laing would argue that a person can easily become trapped in a fantasy world: "the quality of reality experienced inside the nexus of phantasy is an enchanting spell. Outside, the world seems cold, empty, meaningless, unreal" (24). However, this carries strong risks: "if a person's whole way of life becomes characterized by elusion [*sic*], he becomes a prisoner in a limbo world, in which illusion ceases to be a dream that comes true, but comes to be the realm in which he dwells, and in which he has become trapped" (31). Laing underscores the importance of returning from the liminal journey of madness (Chapman 4). The traveller must return from the liminal realm to practise the new skills which they have learned. However, in Marianne's dreams she remains trapped in Laing's 'limbo world', remaining in the liminal.

Nonetheless, Marianne seems to be happy in her liminal dream world. She ends the novel lying on the grass, "resting, content, waiting" (179) for Mark to rescue her. The language uses common feminine descriptors: "gentle", "soft", "beauty" (179); a pleasant atmosphere. Marianne lies in a passive position, waiting for Mark to rescue her "as soon as [he] can" (178). The contrast with the "wildly exciting" (176) adventure book given by Miss Chesterfield, "all about horses and bushrangers and people shooting each other" (177), is striking. Marianne, a girl at the end of her own adventure narrative, waiting for a boy to rescue her, recalls de Beauvoir's description of how stories socialise girls into passivity. While in "song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously", in contrast, "woman is the Sleeping Beauty…she who receives and submits" (294). The young girl "learns that to be happy she must be loved; to be loved she must await love's coming." (294). Girls learn to be passive, and "the delights of passivity are made to seem delightful to the

young girl by parents and teachers, books and myths" (301). The ending of *Marianne Dreams* mimics this 'delightful' atmosphere, suggesting to the reader that Marianne is fulfilling her dreams in her prone and passive position. Nonetheless, the text introduces a hint of discomfort, a suggestion that Marianne's position is not completely alluring. There is a small jarring note as the "dark country beyond the hills" needs to be described as "not frightening" (179). The reader remembers that the Watchers remain in Marianne's dream land, fear may return, and Marianne no longer has power over her dreams. Furthermore, Marianne seems to need to convince herself that Mark will return, chanting, "He had not deserted her, he had waited for her, he had not wanted to go without her, he would come back and fetch her" (179). O'Hearn suggests that these "frantic repetitions…give an underlying chill to the apparent calm of the closing passage" (37). The novel truncates Marianne's dreams, she cannot dream of adventure and must passively wait for male action. While not directly criticising this process, the novel expresses discomfort.

Marianne's dreams have changed throughout the novel from activity and creativity to a final passivity. Erikson suggests that "dreams of early childhood [should] be attached to the goals of an active adult life" (258), claiming that dreaming is a developmental tool leading to adulthood. Marianne's passive dreams seem representative of her imminent position as a woman in contemporary society. Furthermore, the text links the feminine with liminality as Marianne remains in her liminal dream world. In opposition to James's assertion that femininity is "liminal and disturbing" (7), Marianne's liminal state conversely seems to support contemporary dominant ideology. The text traps Marianne in a liminal state, and she is not able to progress to adulthood. Despite being seemingly outdated by this period, Hall would see Marianne's curtailed position at the end of the novel as entirely natural. Hall claims that "woman is far nearer childhood than man" (566), but he alleges this as a positive, idealising childhood as a time of innocence: "At dawning adolescence this old harmony and unity with nature is broken up; the child is driven from his paradise" (71). Hall describes women in terms of abbreviated development: "woman at her best never outgrows adolescence

as man does" (624); she remains in paradise. Pugh claims that coding children as innocent "often reveals cultural confusion or ambivalence" and "children are not as much inoculated from knowledge through this practice as adults are preserved from the challenge of resolving pertinent social conflicts" (4). The same argument can apply to an attempt to define women as innocent and thereby not equipped to tackle conflicts such as social inequality. Marianne's liminal, waiting state symbolises her accession into an adolescent stage, where according to Hall's theories she will remain for the rest of her life, never growing up. Despite societal progress, contemporary roles for women seem to contain more than a hint of the past. Marianne symbolises a liminal femininity which is characterised by never achieving full participation in contemporary society.

In conclusion, liminal motifs in *Marianne Dreams* reveal contemporary ideological tensions. Liminality in the text highlights a discomforting tension between reality and unreality, with the rational, sane approach eschewed by the text which problematises an easy binary between reality and fantasy. Marianne's liminal house represents a contemporary debate surrounding the role of woman at home, the text problematising binary divisions associating the feminine with stasis and the masculine with action. When the children finally leave the house for the liminal landscape outside, the reader would traditionally expect a developmental quest. However, Marianne's development is questionable, with her active role as saviour exchanged for a passive anticipation. Tension and fear grip the narrative, a progressive approach at the time but one that Storr stated would help children develop into adults. Furthermore, the text highlights the transformative, liminal aspect of illness, a prolonged convalescence changing Marianne, but with a passivity at odds with her earlier activity. The journey of illness transforms Marianne into a liminal figure, yet Marianne remains trapped in her liminal land, passively waiting for male rescue. Despite some textual misgivings, the novel suggests that this development is inevitable in contemporary society. *Marianne Dreams* allies the feminine with the liminal, suggesting there was never any real

way for Marianne to escape. Marianne remains trapped in her dreams, unable to escape the strictures placed upon women in contemporary society.

Chapter 2: Liminal houses and gardens in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967)

The liminal in *The Magic Toyshop* both contains patriarchal ideology and subverts it. However, it is questionable whether its young female protagonist can access the subversive qualities of the liminal. Melanie is an adolescent of fifteen when her parents die, and she is sent to live with her Uncle Philip in the titular toyshop. The liminal saturates the novel; Eliza Filimon declaring that "Carter's fiction constantly evokes boundaries and borderlines" (122). The text ruptures boundaries between reality and fantasy. Gina Wisker further allies the liminal and the Gothic: "Images of liminal spaces are common to the Gothic…These liminal spaces and the interruptions in calm, often threatened complacency, in authorized views or orthodoxies are figured as interstices" (411-2). Carter claims that her initial label as a Gothic writer was against her inclinations: "I could be conveniently categorized as "Gothic" and thus outside the mainstream" ("Notes" 132). She decided to use the label for an important purpose, asserting that Gothic fiction may challenge the "status quo" (133). Within the novel, Patricia Juliana Smith centralises the liminal in the character of Melanie: "she stands in the precarious liminal space between childish innocence and womanly experience" (347); however, I will argue that the liminal also pervades the physical spaces in the book, placing Melanie in a liminal world. Liminal places provide opportunities to undermine the binary hierarchies of contemporary society, Andrews and Roberts arguing that liminal spaces incite "the inversion or suspension of normative social or moral structures of everyday life" (6). *The Magic Toyshop* demonstrates the confronting nature of the liminal, but simultaneously how dominant patriarchal ideology assimilates the in-between spaces of the liminal to negate questioning, supporting Downey's assertion that the liminal presents "adverse or conflicting possibilities" (xii). The liminal drives change in the narrative, yet progress is dubious, and the plot left unresolved. Examining the liminal motifs in the houses and gardens, as well as Melanie herself, this chapter will attempt to determine the impact of the liminal. In between, neither

one extreme nor another, the liminal in *The Magic Toyshop* both contains the dichotomies of contemporary society, yet also challenges them.

The liminal in *The Magic Toyshop* is part of daily life, contesting the boundaries of everyday reality. In this vein, Zamora and Faris assert that in magical realism, magic is "an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence" (3). The text smudges the boundaries between reality and fantasy in mundane settings, a "fruitshop, with…groping, mottled hands of bananas; giant crinkly green roses which turned out to be savoy cabbages when you looked more closely" (42-3). Ordinary objects change unexpectedly, initial perception proven to be faulty. Dewan would term this "the proximity of the marvellous…the wondrous, and the enchanted are literally and metaphorically part of the everyday" (277). Yet in this novel the proximity of magic is less wondrous than comedic and a little threatening; grasping banana hands ready to grab an unwary purchaser. Zamora and Faris further argue that magical realism "assault[s]…basic structures of rationalism and realism" (6), suggesting that the closeness of magic to everyday reality in this text has subversive potential. The text suggests that one should not trust the evidence of the senses in ordinary life, let alone in the toyshop, where puppets have a "strange liveliness" (74) like people and even the "real [dog] or the painted one" (93) cannot be told apart. Furthermore, life in the toyshop bars the three children from participation in contemporary society. Smith states that the 1944 Education Act meant a new era of secondary education for everyone (335), giving rise to a new wave of educated minds in Britain. Yet when Melanie "faintly" (84) raises the subject of school the topic is dismissed: "too late in the term to start school, now" (84). Barred from education, the children inhabit a realm outside the reality of contemporary society. As Melanie says, "we might as well not be in London at all" (98). The text places the characters in an ambiguous liminal space between the boundaries of reality and fantasy.

The Magic Toyshop structures the narrative around major liminal events, located in liminal physical spaces. Three pivotal events have transformative effects upon the narrative: the terrifying night in Melanie's childhood garden; the trip to the abandoned pleasure garden

with Finn, and the performance of Leda and the swan. Elizabeth Gargano identifies a garden motif allying these incidents: “three crucial garden scenes, each of which serves as a focal point for the surrounding action” (63). Building upon Gargano’s observation, it is notable that all three scenes also heavily feature the liminal. All three scenes introduce the liminal visually; it is difficult to see. Melanie’s childhood garden has “Shadowed objects” (19) in the darkness which incite fear: “monsters…shifted in the nebulous space beyond the corners of her eyes” (21). Shadows introduce a disquieting ambiguity; can she trust her senses? The abandoned pleasure garden has a liminal status: Emma Fraser expressing the liminal nature of “abandoned locations” (146), which disrupt our “everyday world of assumed stability” (146). Mist shrouds the pleasure garden: “In grey billows, it rolled into nothing, into the mist” (112). The mist hides the boundaries of the park, but moreover it elides the boundaries of the real world, it is in proximity to nothingness. Gargano describes Uncle Philip’s stage as the third garden, stating that “the third is merely an imitation garden, a painted stage” (63). We first encounter the stage as “a hushed, expectant woodland, with cardboard rocks” (75), supporting Gargano’s assertion. The stage at the performance of Leda and the swan, brightly lit, does not at first seem to be a liminal site. But the lights disorient Melanie: “the stage was filled with a brownish gloaming. A spotlight transfixed her” (184). “She could see nothing…except the floury glare of the spotlight” (187). The contrast between the dimly lit stage and the bright light on Melanie prevents her from seeing, like the mist and shadows of the earlier gardens. Furthermore, “in this staged fantasy, anything was possible…the swan…might assume reality itself” (186). The scene elides the boundaries between reality and unreality, a model swan can cross the divide and become a real threat. In all three scenes, the liminal causes the reader to question sensory input, and defies the boundary of empirical reality.

The liminal both presages change and blocks progression. We move inside, where Melanie spends most of her time. Liminal settings in the houses of the novel are a major motif, with thresholds and doorways looming large. Van Gennep asserts that thresholds have a liminal character in a ritual sense: “the door is the boundary between the foreign and

domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling…Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world" (20). The door marks the boundary between inside and outside, between domestic space and the external world. Luckhurst affirms that "Often the doorway was the bearer of the heaviest symbolic load" (24), backed by the text as doorways feature in pivotal moments. Doorways function as a barrier. When Melanie is "locked out" (21) of her childhood home, the "white front-door step was sanctuary" (20) against the "terror" (20) she feels outside. Yet the door bars Melanie from the "cosy" (20) inside, and she must climb the tree to enter through her window. The threshold is impossible to cross, enforcing another path. When the children arrive at the toyshop for the first time, they "pushed at the door, which stuck momentarily…as if unwilling to let them in" (44). The toyshop puts up a barrier to entry, mimicking the unwelcoming feelings of Uncle Philip. Philip controls the house, and appears for the first time in a doorway: "Blocking the head of the stairway on the kitchen landing was the immense, overwhelming figure of a man" (77). Philip blocks the threshold, and controls the entry and exit points to the house, with the female inhabitants not often allowed out. Liminal thresholds are difficult to cross in this novel, blocking progression.

The liminal halts Melanie's progress, and furthermore seems to oppose her identity. Liminal moments frequently merge boundaries between reality and fantasy, causing Melanie to question her sense of self: even her body is strange to her. In her childhood garden, Melanie "was almost surprised to see the flesh of her fingers; her very hands might have been discarded like gloves" (24). She almost falls while climbing the tree: "she hung in agony by her hands, strung up between earth and heaven" (24). In this scene, though Melanie feels distant from her hands, they serve her in climbing the tree; although agonising, they assist her in the liminal moment. However, later, just before Melanie must perform with the swan, "Her hand seemed wonderful and surprising, an object which did not belong to her and of which she did not know the use" (181). Melanie's inability to use her hand suggests a severance from her own body, and an inability to act, to protect herself from the swan. Once again, the

liminal disturbs Erikson's classification of sanity as "differentiation between inside and outside" (248); liminal moments attack this basic sense of trust in Melanie's body. The liminal progressively disintegrates Melanie's sense of self; initially she can use her body to climb the tree, to free herself from the liminal moment. Later, however, Melanie becomes unable to escape, and the liminal period persists. On stage with the swan Melanie feels "herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality" (186) and sees herself from the outside as "the black-haired girl who was Melanie and who was not" (186). The liminal challenges a unified and consistent sense of self, which inhibits Melanie from action.

One liminal event demonstrates the process which undermines Melanie's consistent sense of self. The text ambiguously words the attack by the swan, in the liminal theatre setting: "The obscene swan had mounted her" (187). The reader is unsure exactly what has happened, although Melanie's "screaming" and the fact that the "passionate swan had dragged her dress half off" (187) suggest it raped her, in the context of the Leda myth. Afterwards, Melanie "felt detached, apart…She found herself wondering which was the real tea-table and which was the reflection" (188-9). Tamara Fischmann et al. state that "One of the effects of an acute, severe traumatization is that the affected person is abruptly seized from reality by the traumatic experience: within a dissociated condition he now experiences the reality surrounding him in a completely different way, unreal…separated" (2). The text may be ambiguous about the details of the attack but the traumatic effect on Melanie is clear. Gargano argues that although the swan is not real, it "still has the power to…traumatize" (75). Unreality has the power to alter Melanie's internal reality. Furthermore, Jean Wyatt propounds that "Carter uses rape as a metaphor for the psychic "dismemberment" of a young girl" (556): it reflects the "denial of…agency and self-determination" felt by rape survivors. In support, Carter, in *The Sadeian Woman*, asserts that a fear of rape marks "a fear of psychic disintegration, of an essential dismemberment, a fear of a loss or disruption of the self" (6). Wyatt further argues that this rape mimics the process of female socialisation "that strips a girl of her active impulses, her agency, and indeed her subjectivity" (556). She asserts that

Carter appropriates the Leda myth to highlight how Ovid's original narrative and Yeats' re-telling "celebrate rape as an act of power and beauty by eliding…the woman as subject" (558). The "patriarchal imaginary" (Wyatt 558) uses rape imagery to glorify male domination. Just as Philip uses the swan to overpower Melanie, patriarchy overpowers a young girl's sense of self.

Furthermore, a consistent sense of self is important to contemporary individualistic ideology; conversely, the lack thereof inspires anxiety. Miniotaitė declares that "Liminality in [Carter's fiction] can be interpreted as a (post) modern individual's split consciousness…insecurity and unease about the threats of destruction and terrors of uncertainty" (47-8). Destruction of the self reflects a contemporary societal anxiety about incertitude. Traditional psychoanalytical ideology suggests that the self should be certain and unambiguous, able to withstand challenges from fantasy. Erikson reflects this view, proposing that "the fear of loss of identity dominates much of our irrational motivation" (413). However, Laing, while agreeing that a mad person is "'out of contact with reality'" (*The Self and Others* 24), questioned the "distinction between madness and sanity" (Crossley 878), proposing instead a "continuum" (Crossley 882). Contemporary debates in psychiatry represented a schism in the ideology of a continuous self. The liminal in the novel similarly creates a fissure in Melanie's identity. Yet the text demonstrates that Melanie, in response, becomes apathetic. After her traumatic experience, Melanie "inhabit[s] a grey no-man's-land between sleeping and waking" (189), passively accepting ensuing events. Laing's model of liminal madness as a land of exploration does not seem accessible to her. Elaine Showalter argues that Laing's voyager is an "implicitly male pioneer of psychic exploration" (quoted Chapman 5), which suggests that Melanie's encounter with the liminal destabilisation of the binary poles of reality and fantasy is a female experience. The liminal defies boundaries, and Melanie becomes passive in response.

Patriarchy benefits from the construction of a conflicted and passive female sense of self. Laing asserts that identity is a social construct: "It is clear that a person's 'own' identity

can never be completely abstracted from…the identity others ascribe to him" (75). Furthermore, "a person will have considerable difficulty in establishing a consistent definition of himself in his own eyes if the definitions of himself given by others are inconsistent or even simultaneously and mutually exclusive" (75). Inconsistent definitions of the self, given by others, can lead to psychological problems. However, this precisely represents the situation for women in contemporary society. De Beauvoir declares that "The psychoanalyst defines the female child [as]…torn between 'viriloid' and 'feminine' tendencies" (77): the very definition of female is that of a conflicted identity. Patriarchal psychology demands an inconsistent identity from women; insanity is not only inevitable but expected. Greer argues wryly that "As far as the woman is concerned, psychiatry is an extraordinary confidence trick: the unsuspecting creature seeks aid because she feels unhappy, anxious and confused, and psychology persuades her to seek the cause in herself. The person is easier to change than the status quo" (103). Patriarchy, which glosses rationality as masculine and the irrational as feminine, forces women into a subordinate position. Greer further asserts that "Women are contoured by their conditioning to abandon autonomy" (103). Melanie demonstrates this passivity. Unhappy with her oppressed situation in the toyshop, Melanie ponders options: "'I suppose I could run away, she thought. 'I could get a job and live by myself in a bed-sitting room'" (87). However, Melanie does not maintain her train of thought, drifting into apathy: "her arm went up and down…She watched it with mild curiosity; it seemed to have a life of its own" (87). Melanie is socialised into passivity, and cannot even sustain thoughts of independent action.

The liminal in the text demonstrates the construction of feminine passivity. Melanie begins the novel admiring herself in her mirror. She "discovered she was made of flesh and blood" (1) but quickly progresses to recreating famous paintings of women and fantasising about her future husband: "she gift-wrapped herself for a phantom bridegroom…She conjured him so intensely to leap the spacetime barrier between them" (2). Melanie makes herself into an object in the mirror. Her husband is a ghost, who in imagination can cross the boundary

between reality and fiction. Zamora and Faris declare that ghosts are liminal and "transgressive" (499), but here, the ghost seems to be wholly in service of patriarchal ideology. A mirror creates a false sense of self, argues Ng, using Henri Lefebvre's mirror theory, "because an image is fundamentally an inverted representation of the original and is fundamentally unreal…harmful" (31). Melanie creates an unreal self by making herself into an image of woman, to offer to a man. Shima Mirmusa declares that Melanie has an "excessive obsession with marriage" (143). However, another woman, Mrs Rundle, shares Melanie's marriage fixation: she fantasises about her invented husband, "until his very face formed wispily in the steam" (3). De Beauvoir, far from seeing Melanie's marriage fantasy as 'excessive', would view it as symptomatic of contemporary femininity. The young girl "soon learns that in order to be pleasing she must be 'pretty as a picture', she tries to make herself look like a picture…she studies herself in a mirror" (283): a literal account of Melanie's actions in the text. As Judith Butler argues, "gender is culturally constructed" (6); this novel emulates the socialisation process which insidiously acts upon young women to make them into passive creatures. De Beauvoir continues: "the supreme necessity for woman is to charm a masculine heart" (294) and to do so they must "consen[t] to become object in submission and adoration" (291). The novel suggests that Melanie's passivity is representative of the choices available for young women in contemporary society. The liminal serves patriarchal ideology by enabling Melanie to live in a culturally sanctioned fantasy world, blurring fantasy and reality.

Nonetheless, Melanie's liminal fantasies contain contradictions, highlighting their constructed nature. Melanie's husband fantasies are without consequences. As Smith asserts, Melanie "prays incongruously" (346) for either marriage or sex: "Please God, let me get married. Or, let me have sex" (9). The narrative links sexuality with the liminal: Melanie, on the floor with Finn, "waited tensely for it to happen…The moment was eternity…endlessly about to fall" (167). While both are liminal, Melanie's romantic fantasy precludes sexuality. Melanie's "phantom bridegroom" approaches so close "she could almost feel his breath on

her cheek" but merely voices "'darling'" (2), while in reaction to Finn's kiss she "choked and struggled…convulsed with horror at this…rude encroachment on her physical privacy" (118). Gargano declares that Melanie is "frightened and dismayed by the overt sexuality of the kiss" (72). We saw earlier that Melanie cannot trust her body; liminal sexuality further breaches the boundary of Melanie's 'physical privacy'. Faced with this contradiction, Melanie questions herself: "Is there something…wrong with me because I thought it was so horrible?" (120). Freud would certainly find the fault in Melanie. Discussing the case of Dora, who was kissed against her will at fourteen by an older man, Freud finds her "violent feeling of disgust" to be "hysterical. I should without question consider a person hysterical in whom an occasion for sexual excitement elicited feelings that were preponderantly or exclusively unpleasurable" (*Dora* 59). Freud should not be considered outdated by the 1960s, as Winnicott states Freudian theory "remains today a central fact…inescapable" (148), and psychiatrists diagnosed "hysterical frigidity" (Laing 73) in women who refused sex. Contemporary psychoanalysis expects sexuality from women. Butler argues that "The identification of women with "sex" …is a conflation of the category of women with the ostensibly sexualized features of their bodies, and hence, a refusal to grant freedom and autonomy to women as it is purportedly enjoyed by men" (19). Women, while associated with sex, may not make autonomous decisions about it. Similarly, Melanie is unable to escape the kiss: "Finn kept hold of her no matter how hard she struck at him…When she grew calmer, he slowly released her" (118-9). Liminal sexuality is inflicted on Melanie despite her protests. Sexuality opposes the romantic fantasies which society encourages for young girls, highlighting an opposition in contemporary ideology.

Sexuality has another outcome which horrifies Melanie, that of procreation. Winnicott states that "The roots of a little girl's sexuality" are maternally based: "there is a close association between…sex desire, and the wish to have a baby" (155). Melanie is pressed to be "a little mother" (32) to her siblings after her parents' death, but feels "misery" (35) at the prospect. Melanie feels that the role of 'little mother' harms her own identity: "Part of

herself…was killed…the daisy-crowned young girl who would stay behind to haunt the old house" (35). Comparing herself to a liminal ghostly figure, Melanie rejects her quasi-maternal role: she "gave up all rights in Victoria on the spot and felt a lessening of tension" (86). Melanie is not following the expected cultural script. Friedan asserts that motherhood is the only allotted role for women in contemporary society: "In the feminine mystique, there is no other way for a woman to dream of creation" (55). In contemporary ideology, for a woman to renounce motherhood is to reject the future. Melanie, by the end of the text is still "revolted" by the idea of "babies with red hair" (199) that are "waiting outside…on the landing" (205). Motherhood, presented as the outcome waiting on the other side of a liminal doorway, is repellent to Melanie, but she submits "With a depressed sense of the inevitability of it all" (199). The text presents Melanie's negative reactions, which oppose Winnicott's beliefs that even if a girl "resents" (19) the idea of pregnancy, her feelings inevitably "change" (19) to welcoming. By airing Melanie's opposition to her fate, the text criticises the dominant reification of motherhood as the only option for adult women, yet refuses to offer an alternative.

While the liminal, blurring the boundaries of fantasy and reality, promotes patriarchal ideology, it simultaneously presents a challenge. Liminal thresholds in the toyshop offer opportunities to disrupt binary oppositions. Foucault argues that "our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable…that we regard as simple givens: for example, between private space and public space" ("Spaces" 23). Liminal doorways challenge these boundaries between public and private. The public-facing toyshop itself is separate from the rest of the house, yet the "back door is never shut" (53) and the inhabitants are unconcerned about intrusions from "people, strangers, burglars" (53). The boundary between public and private space is ambivalent in the toyshop. Furthermore, within the house, as Ng expounds, "walls are unreliable as boundaries due to the family's predisposition towards spying" (35). Melanie finds a "spy-hole" (122) in her bedroom, concluding that she was "being watched when she thought she was by herself" (122). The hole breaches the expected

boundary between common and private areas of the house. Luckhurst uses the theories of John-Paul Sartre to suggest that a spyhole can make the subject viewed into an object: "look through the keyhole' where 'behind that door a spectacle is presented as "to be seen"'. This models the Other as an object reduced to the mastery of the unchallenged gaze" (48). Melanie "flushed with anger" (122) at Finn's "Peeping Tom" use of the spyhole in her bedroom, which makes her into a sexual object. Melanie covers the hole, but later "acknowledged the spyhole and peered through it, sometimes" (152), reversing the dichotomy of who is the subject and the Other. She also looks through the "keyhole" (56) of the kitchen door to see the Jowles family play music. Melanie feels the distance between her position as subject and the Jowles as Others, making them into inaccessible figures: Melanie "would never get closer to them than the keyhole in the door behind which they lived" (85). The family, seen through the keyhole, are Othered figures. Yet Melanie "envied them bitterly" and "yearned above all things to break into their home movie" (85). Melanie renounces her position as subject, wishing herself to be an object instead. The liminality of the house challenges boundaries between public and private, between subject and object, yet Melanie rejects its possibilities.

Outside in the gardens, the liminal offers further challenges to binary discourse. Gargano presents the "traditional analogy between the garden and the female body [which] grounds both in the realm of "nature"" (62). Melanie explores her body, encountering "mountain ranges" and "secret valleys" (1), finding in her body as Gargano states "elements of both a wilderness and a garden" (59). Butler argues that the "nature/culture discourse regularly figures nature as female" (37), which has an oppressive purpose: "The binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely "imposes" meaning on nature and, hence, renders it into an "Other" to be appropriated to its own limitless uses" (37). Women and nature are the Other to male culture.
However, the landscapes of this text are liminal. Foucault affirms that gardens are heterotopic, "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" ("Spaces" 25). By presenting Foucault's multiplicity of meanings, Andrews

and Roberts argue that liminal landscapes highlight "underlying tensions" (6) in society. The gardens of this text present a tension between the view of women and nature as tamed and able to be 'appropriated', and an underlying fear of anarchy. The abandoned pleasure garden demonstrates the wildness implicit in previously tamed nature: "The park lay in sodden neglect…Bushes and shrubs, uncared for, burst bonds like fat women who have left off their corsets, and…spilled out in mantraps of thorny undergrowth" (112). The text presents an underlying anxiety about excessive female bodies and dangerous sexuality. The "desolation" (113) of the garden mirrors Fraser's description of liminal abandoned places, which take us out of an "everyday world of assumed stability to step into a highly unusual universe where decay and disorder dominate" (146). The decay in the pleasure garden challenges, according to Fraser's theory of "modern ruins", because it suggests "an alternative to the regulated and mediated spaces of daily life" (146). The liminal garden blurs the boundaries between past and present, between controlled and regulated society and femininity, and anarchic wilderness.

Conversely, the liminal in the toyshop at first seems to be under the control of patriarchy. Usually, a house is just a house. But in this novel the house takes on a character and function of its own. Ng describes Gothic "narratives whereby the articulation of menace by the house is highly indirect and thus often easily dismissed, because of the architecture's seeming function as mere passive setting" (2). The toyshop reacts to events in an anthropomorphised manner: "a bell jangled angrily" (44). Ng states that the house almost acts as another character in supporting Uncle Philip's domineering agenda: "the house…supports its proprietor's, and hence patriarchy's, cruel and forbidding machinations" (26). Furthermore, the text "establishes domestic space as a patriarchal institution writ in miniature" (26). This "compromise[s] the traditional link between woman and the house by exposing the patriarchal structure embedded within the domicile" (4). Challenging the contemporary notion, espoused by Winnicott, that woman is "in command" "in her own home" (120), Philip controls the female inhabitants of the toyshop with old-fashioned rules

about clothing: “no trousers” (69), and behaviour: “Only speak when you’re spoken to” (70). Tellingly, the narrative introduces these strictures while Melanie is in the doorway: “She lingered with her hand on the door-knob” (70), and on passing the threshold to the kitchen again, she complies with the rules. The text turns a traditional female space into a male-dominated arena. However, by transforming the house into a threatening space, the text insidiously challenges the patriarchal ideology underpinning the traditional views allying women with the home.

The house later defies Philip, representing the patriarchy. Corridors are a liminal space which turn against patriarchal control. Corridors in the toyshop are intimidating: “threatening vistas of brown paint along which draughts roared” (105). Luckhurst states that corridors often challenge boundaries between past and present, with corridors “the genius loci for the sighting of ghosts” (34) and containing the “emotional tenor” of “dread” (260). The old fairy-tale of Bluebeard haunts the corridors of the toyshop. Melanie walked “along the long, brown passages, past secret doors, locked tight. Bluebeard’s castle. Melanie felt a shudder of dread as she went by every door” (92). On one level, the Bluebeard narrative represents Melanie’s actual life, her movements curtailed by a patriarchal overlord. Dutheil de la Rochère states that the Bluebeard tale is “commonly understood” as containing “misogynist representations of women”, such as “the classic caution against female curiosity found in Perrault’s first moral” (110). Yet the Bluebeard story itself is ambiguous, its second moral offering a different interpretation of gaining knowledge (Rochère 111). Bluebeard’s threatening presence fills Melanie with fear, at one point seeing “a freshly severed hand” (132) in the kitchen drawer. Melanie perceives the hand, but not Francie, Melanie concluding: “‘I am going out of my mind…Bluebeard was here’” (132). Bluebeard threatens Melanie’s sense of reality throughout the text. Her reaction is to limit her exploration: the “doors of Bluebeard’s castle” remain “closed” (164). However, by the end of the novel, “One of the sinister doors of Bluebeard’s castle sprang open…Francie came out, carrying an iron bar” (222). Francie and Margaret go to fight Philip while Melanie and Finn run for the roof. Ng states that the toyshop

plays an active part in Philip's downfall: "while it may appear to embody its proprietor's ideology…the house is, on another level, also working towards undermining" it (27). Thusly, Bluebeard's "secret doors" (92) eventually spring open to release a threat to Philip. Luckhurst states that the corridor was a potentially subversive space from its architectural inception: "The corridor differentiates, separates and divides the bourgeois house, but it also unnervingly makes linking things together much easier: genders and classes, family and strangers, mix" (40). The liminal corridors in *The Magic Toyshop* challenge boundaries and demonstrate a potential threat to patriarchy. However, Melanie does not defy authority herself and must wait for others to act.

Liminal sexuality ultimately threatens patriarchal ideology. The revelation of "incest" (217) appears in a liminal scene: "a lover's embrace, annihilating the world, as if taking place at midnight on the crest of a hill" (216). Mirmusa views the incestuous relationship between Margaret and Francie as a representation of "Bakhtin's carnival in which "all hierarchies are cancelled"": "all the characters, which were initially subordinate to Uncle Philip, take dominant positions and freely do whatever they desire" (144). Forbidden sexuality provides a carnivalesque defiance to dominant, patriarchal ideology. The text likens the atmosphere in the toyshop, with Philip gone and the swan destroyed, to a "carnival" (206), and "laughter" rules: "Melanie had never seen the brothers laugh so much" (207). Mikhail Bakhtin affirms that "carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter" (8). The laughter of carnival is described by Bakhtin in an ambiguous, liminal way: "laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival" (11-12). Carnival is a liminal moment, laughter a challenge but at the same time a celebration. Carnival revels in societal taboos, such as "universal incest taboos" (62) noted by Erikson. Incest is at the heart of Oedipal development, a necessary rejection of an incestuous relationship leading to normative sexuality. Incest in the novel leads to Philip's angry destruction of the toyshop and himself, representing an attack on patriarchal ideology.

The liminal in the novel presages change, the text suggesting that liminal episodes are a "portent or an omen" (200) for a transformative shift in events. However, according to Van Gennep, for transformation to take place, a traveller must continue beyond the liminal to the "new world" (20) on the other side. The textual challenge to dominant ideology is ambivalent, as the liminal continues at the end of the narrative. At first the text marks each liminal moment with an ending, suggesting forward movement in the narrative. At major liminal moments in the text, we see that each has an outcome, a closure of the liminal, marking a boundary and progression to the next stage. Melanie's liminal interlude in her childhood garden ends abruptly: "Life went on" (25) and leads, in Melanie's interpretation, to the death of her parents. Further, following Finn's kiss, Melanie "found that she had torn most of the mourning band away from her sleeve and there was nothing for it but to pull it off entirely" (120). Melanie, entering (if unwillingly) into a more adult sexuality, progresses past the young girl who was mourning for her parents. However, the final liminal moment in the text does not have an ending point. Carnival reigns in the kitchen, but carnival is usually a brief disruption, as Bakhtin affirms: "carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the…established order" (10). The liminal, incestuous, carnivalesque moment does not conclude, but continues into the fiery destruction of "Everything" (224). Melanie and Finn face "each other in a wild surmise" (224), with their future uncertain. Critics were similarly uncertain about the ending. Wyatt suggests that the novel proposes "alternative forms" (565) of femininity and masculinity, lending a positive air to the conclusion. Conversely, Gargano argues that "the novel eschews both narrative closure and thematic resolution" (76), which is symptomatic of Carter's refusal to "resolv[e] feminist debates" (76). Furthermore, Smith states that Carter challenges contemporary ideology without seeking a resolution: "collapsing the dichotomies on which it was theoretically constructed without necessarily destroying it" (360). Disrupting contemporary binaries may mean the destruction of the liminal, without two extremes to separate, or it may suggest the supremacy of the liminal grey area. The ending of

the novel ambiguously refuses to give clear answers to these ideological propositions, leaving the characters in a liminal moment.

The novel suggests that Melanie may remain in the liminal due to her fear of the future. Melanie describes her fears of a "limbo" life which she would follow passively "without volition of her own" (84): "a bleak nightmare, for the rest of her life" (115): "a mean monotone, sunless, rainless, a cool nothing" (84). The prospect of life with Finn does not entice Melanie to leave her detested limbo: "they would get married one day…and there would always be pervasive squalor and dirt and mess and shabbiness, always, forever and forever" (198), the dirt and mess taking on a liminal quality themselves, continuing without end. Her future with Finn, as presented at the end of the narrative, hardly seems appealing to this reader. However, the reader, and Melanie, cannot contemplate another option, and the liminal state ends the novel. Turner describes that liminal acolytes "have no status", are "passive" and "obey their instructors implicitly" (95). Melanie, a liminal adolescent female, similarly has no status and obeys Philip's instructions, even when "quaking" (183) with fear. Yet Turner's acolytes are on a liminal journey, "they are being reduced…to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life" (95). Melanie does not emerge from the liminal, nor does she gain additional powers. The text highlights the creation of passive Melanie, who lacks the imagination or force to change her situation. The options for a penniless girl are few. Carter concedes in *The Sadeian Woman* that the pathetic Judith "is not in control of her life; her poverty and her femininity conspire to rob her of autonomy" (51), inviting comparison with Melanie and implicitly criticising the society that restricted her autonomy.

Nonetheless, the novel implies that Melanie is also to blame for her passive state. Melanie fearfully dresses and prepares herself to meet the swan on performance day. She "wistfully" hears Victoria call her pretty, "as if being pretty was a kind of protection" (182). Of course, the text demonstrates that being pretty does not protect Melanie from the swan. Society tells pretty, good girls that good things will happen, but this is a myth. Carter is

scathing about the "passive virtue of a good woman" (*Sadeian* 46), innocence which only invites abuse and misfortune. Victim blaming aside, Carter argues that "her innocence invalidates experience and turns it into events, things that happen to her but do not change her" (*Sadeian* 51). Carter suggests that maintaining innocence despite negative consequences is an active and foolish choice. In comparison, Melanie experiences many transformative liminal events, yet they do not help her to develop. Her only development is regressive, Melanie becomes more passive and more separated from reality by the liminal. She does not learn; she passively accepts but does not engage with the liminal and therefore cannot change.

In conclusion, the liminal in *The Magic Toyshop* challenges the reader's sense of reality and unreality from the beginning. Placing Melanie, an adolescent, liminal figure, into a series of liminal houses, exterior spaces and events, the text destabilises accepted boundaries between reality and fiction, inside and outside, male and female. The liminal is often a dual motif, both signalling development and blocking progression; both creating and destroying a sense of self. The liminal touches both sides of the duality which created it, and at times has the power to enable a switching of categories, from object to subject. However, we see that Melanie, although a liminal figure, does not make use of the powers of the liminal state and often retreats into passivity. We see an explanation in the text's depiction of the liminal's use by dominant ideology to form a fantasy world for girls which makes them into a passive and malleable object. Melanie remains in a liminal, adolescent state, meaning that she would not progress on to the sanctioned options for her future of accepting sexuality and motherhood. However, her disgust towards these options enables questioning of the strictures placed upon women in contemporary society. The liminal challenges patriarchal ideology through demonstrating alternative views on female sexuality, with the liminal gardens and houses proving excessive and surpassing their boundaries. Patriarchy, in the form of Uncle Philip, eventually destroys itself, but Melanie remains in a liminal state with dubious options available for her future. She does not develop, and the novel is ambiguous about whether Melanie is unable or unwilling to engage with the liminal and access its transformative nature.

The text refuses to provide answers or resolution, leaving the reader to question contemporary binary structures and dichotomies. The liminal ambiguously contains the binaries that it criticises, and at the same time challenges their existence. The liminal continues at the end of the novel, prolonging a questioning, challenging state which is anathema to the contemporary drive for certainty.

Chapter 3: Liminal time, space and society in Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974)

Memoirs of a Survivor uses the liminal as a motif throughout, yet simultaneously challenges the concept of the liminal. *Memoirs of a Survivor* is also a liminal text in Lessing's oeuvre, marking a shift in Lessing's writing from realism to later science fiction. Betsy Draine sees the novel as part of a steady movement from a "strictly realistic mode" to experimentation with "non-realistic modes" (51). Derek Wright argues more strongly that "*Memoirs of a Survivor* is…a transitional or threshold work and was the last milestone along Lessing's fictional journey into the "inner space" of the psyche prior to the launching of her work into "outer space" in the science fiction that followed" (86). Furthermore, the novel contains and questions the concept of the liminal throughout. The un-named female narrator describes a liminal time of change between the destruction of an old society – the context of events never fully explained – and the birth of a new civilisation. Her flat is a boundary between the outer world of the streets and an inner world accessed through the wall, the narrator describing herself standing "on the margin between two worlds" (15). In addition, the narrator lives with Emily, a liminal character who in her adolescence straddles the boundary between child and adult. The novel questions the binaries supporting contemporary society, such as rational–irrational, male–female, individual–collective, testing the boundaries of these categories. The text furthermore questions the boundaries of the liminal itself. I will structure this chapter around Van Gennep's categorisation of the liminal as the middle, transitional point between a "preliminal" phase marking "separation" from the old, and a "postliminal" phase of "incorporation" (11) into the new, whether this be a "passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" (10). While the novel continually merges the boundaries of time and space, this structure helps to centre the liminal and investigate its effects. With the liminal permeating the whole text, I will first examine liminal time, then liminal physical spaces, liminal characters and liminal society. *Memoirs of a*

Survivor disrupts the boundaries of the liminal and suggests a destruction of the liminal altogether.

We start in the past. While the novel does not give historical details about the overwhelming change in society, the narrator offers clues about the preceding structure through people who cling to the past. The narrator typifies this as something happening to everyone: “While everything, all forms of social organisation, broke up, we lived on, adjusting our lives, as if nothing fundamental was happening” (19). She variously describes this attitude as “comic, of course. Unless it was sad. Unless…it was admirable” (21). The reader can at first form their own opinion about the attitudes of the parts of society which are unable or unwilling to move on. Some people manage to cling on to old manners and customs for much longer than others, such as the rich White family near the end who have still “retained old ways” (163) and say “goodbye, quite in the old style” (164). The narrator is now scathing: “It was comic. We always had been ridiculous, little, self-important animals, acting our roles” (164). The old roles are not suitable for the new structure of society which emerges gradually throughout the novel. The idea of acting a role foregrounds the constructed nature of society and roles within it. Pierre Bourdieu characterises this role playing as the “performative utterances” (10) of a dominant institution, which both assert the power of the institution, and perpetuate it. The narrator asserts explicitly that certain sectors of society benefit from maintaining the old structure: “bureaucracy…the section of a society which gets the most out of it maintains in itself, and for as long as it can in others, an illusion of security, permanence, order” (91). She thus highlights the inequality in the past system, which prevailing powers systematically maintained. The text activates the reader to criticise their own current society by comparison.

However, the reader may also question the narrator’s over-reaction to a simple goodbye. The narrator’s credibility is questionable. Sheila Conboy affirms that “the narrator's own "survival" is ambiguous…for her "memoirs" are written retrospectively to address readers who recognize and still inhabit "this collapsed little world”” (75). The narrator writes

in the past tense from an uncertain future, making her existence uncertain. She is a liminal, ghostly figure, but one that blurs the boundaries of the future rather than the past. The narrator is an ambiguous figure in the text, unnamed and with no history. Gillian Dooley asserts: "about [her] occupation and family circumstances we learn nothing: she exists in a pure narratorial present with the most generic of childhood memories" (158). The non-specificity of the narrator makes her generalisable. The narrator herself asserts that "my own personal experience was common" (8). However, the narrator gives clues that her narrative is unreliable. She draws attention to the fact that she "wonder[s] what to say, how to present myself" (17): her words are carefully chosen, and her narrative constructed. Veracity is questionable: "This is a history, after all, and I hope a truthful one" (94). The narrator includes her speculations about Emily as fact, and we learn about Emily through her assertions. Jenni Diski, who came to live with Lessing as an adolescent, claims to see herself in Emily, yet the picture is partisan: "Emily only got to express herself through the narrator's insights into her psyche. It was as if Doris didn't want to know, or it wasn't useful to her story to give Emily a voice or fears of her own". Similarly, the narrator speaks for Emily, but simultaneously hints that her version may be flawed: "that is probably how Emily's version of that time would sound" (131). The reader deduces that the narrator's version may be unreliable, and therefore her conclusions about society in general may also be flawed. The unreliable narrator activates the reader to critically consider the narrative and draw their own conclusions.

Despite the narrator's unreliability, she remains the only insight into the development of a new phase of society, contrasted against the old. The narrative shows that the official version of events no longer matches reality: "officially children even went to school regularly. But nothing like this was the practise" (82). Although "all this new life…was illegal…None of it, officially, existed" (155), the powers of the dominant society to subdue it are ineffectual. The narrative creates a binary between official and actual events, and describes the evolution of the liminal time in between. The narrator characterises liminal time as: "Temporary ways of life…all of our ways of living…transitory" (107). During the temporary moment of the

liminal, Downey asserts that multiple possibilities arise, liminal times being "potentially as alienating and disorienting as they are liberating and euphoric" (11). In contrast, *Memoirs* suggests that the liminal in this changing society represents mainly uncomfortable disorientation rather than a joyful liberation. Members of the society "contriving and patching and making do" (46) are surviving, but the text suggests not thriving: "everything is in change, movement, destruction…a feeling of helplessness as if one were being whirled about in a dust-devil" (71). Powerlessness against events unfolding suggests a grim determinism underlying the narrative. However, the narrator does concede that these changing times may also include "reconstruction, but that is not always evident at the time" (71), leaving some possibilities open. While times are unstable, the narrator also develops: "Because of this feeling, born of the experiences…I was changing" (88). Individuals and society change during the liminal moment, but the narrator leaves a feeling of ambiguity about the effectiveness of this change as she declares "our little adaptations – transitory, all of them, none of them could last" (107). The narrative calls into question the concept that meaningful lessons learnt during the liminal period will accompany the individual into their future.

The overriding feeling in the novel is that of waiting for an unknown future. The narrator asserts that there is "a consciousness of something ending" (130) but without knowledge of what follows. Waiting for this unknown is painful: "the protracted period of unease and tension before the end" (7). Liminal time is uncomfortable and apprehensive, it goes on "interminably" (84), the end unknown but feared. The liminal period is uncomfortable to live through partly because the boundaries of the liminal period are unclear. Firstly, the narrator asserts that the old and current societies both exist during the transitional moment: "how very odd it was that all over our cities, side by side with citizens who still used electric light…were these houses which were as if the technological revolution had never occurred at all" (90). This mirrors Turner's description of the "semantic bipolarity" (69) of the liminal, simultaneously containing both binary opposites. There is a gradual shift during the narrative in favour of the new way of life. The narrator further describes a process of "a

gradual opening into comprehension" (10), a realisation that things had changed. "'Yes, of course!'" she states. "'I've known that for some time. It's just that…I hadn't grasped it'" (8). She describes that "every one of us became aware at some point" (8); a societal process of realisation. The text interrupts the idea of clear boundaries around this liminal time period, suggesting that the beginning and the end moments of change are impossible to define. Furthermore, the narrator suggests that one can only define change afterwards: "everyone – will look back over a period in life, over a sequence of events, and find much more there than they did at the time" (7). The text suggests that the boundaries of the liminal can only be defined retrospectively. This is at odds with Van Gennep's view of the liminal as a progression from "from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (3). By removing clarity about the boundaries of the liminal, the text increases the discomfort in the transition without a destination and enlarges the liminal moment.

Liminal time in the text is an important motif which further develops in the liminal physical spaces in the narrative. This is most evident in the narrator's flat, where although "the walls were thick" (9), one is an "ambiguous wall, which could so easily dissolve" (67) and provides an entry point to another world. The narrator describes that "two lives, two worlds, lay side by side" (25). The wall acts as the boundary in between two worlds, but as Downey argues, "a boundary or border might become a threshold, but only when it is transgressed" (xi). The narrator transgresses the boundary, making the wall into a threshold, and can encounter the world beyond her wall. The narrator states that the two worlds are "closely connected" (25): "A wind blew from one place to the other" (137). Wright argues that the two worlds connect the two stories, but "that the relationship of the two through-the wall worlds in the novel is left deliberately problematic" (87), with the stories sometimes "equatively connected, in others merely juxtaposed": "At times one seems to act as a touchstone for the other, as when the present reality confirms what is learned from the wall-memories" (88). The liminal wall is permeable, creating insights into Emily's current psyche, as the narrator hears the "hard accusing voice" (62) of Emily's mother: "In my ordinary life I

would hear the sound of a voice, a bitter and low complaint just the other side of sense…behind the wall" (63). The narrator grows to understand Emily by observing the scenes of her past through the wall. Conversely, Draine argues that the connection between these two worlds is a fault in the narrative, as "the narrator negotiates frequent shifts between these two radically incompatible universes…the frame-shifting mechanism falters" (52-3). This is due to the incomplete division between the two worlds: "if a novelist wants the reader to accept shifts between worlds with a sense of comfort, one of his crucial tasks is to mark clearly the boundaries between worlds" (53). While Draine argues this is a weakness, the ambiguity about the connection between the worlds purposefully highlights an equivocation about the boundaries of the liminal. The reader may be less comfortable than Draine would like, but this discomfort is necessary: in distancing from the narrative the reader may critically consider the links between the stories.

The narrator leaves the reality of the events behind the wall equivocal: "When I was actually through that wall, nothing else seemed real" (25) and on returning the narrator has to remind herself that "what I was looking at was reality, was real life" (137). The narrative thereby questions the reality-unreality binary, with both worlds variously claiming the status of reality. Marilyn Charles asserts that the other world is the narrator's "world of dreams, the landscape of the unconscious" (6). However, if the experiences behind the wall are understood as dreams, then the narrative also questions the relationship between dreams and reality as one world impacts on the other and they ultimately merge. Wright contends that reader concerns about what is real "are effectively declared irrelevant…the divisions between observed and imagined realities, past and possible worlds, the factual and the fantastic, are themselves invalid" (88). Reality, according to Wright, is an ineffectual category in this text. The text underscores the liminal nature of the physical spaces in the other world, with "ghosts of walls, like the flats in a theatre" (86), a ghost being a figure which disrupts the boundary between past and present. Moreover, the text highlights the performative nature of reality, with "tall quiet white walls, as impermanent as theatre sets" (37) standing in the other world.

The performative theme continues with the narrator's return to the real world, "I was standing foursquare in what everybody would concur was normality" (137), introducing a hint of ambiguity as reality becomes an agreement, rather than an incontestable truth. The narrator represents society as assenting to live in illusion: "there were moments where the game we were all agreeing to play simply could not stand up to events" (20). The performative nature of what is agreed to be normal shifts by the day: "we came to understand that it was our periods…of normality…which were going to be unusual now" (13). The text questions the boundary between real and unreal, suggesting reality is a performative construct rather than an unassailable, empirical truth.

While physical spaces contest the category of reality, in the other world behind the wall, architectural structures also suggest a binary between possibility and determinism. Charles argues that the "rooms…seem to have meanings within the novel" (2) with a dual significance of having control or being subject to control. The narrator encounters two binary categories of "scenes" (38) behind the wall, the 'personal' and the 'impersonal'. When the narrator first enters the other world, she has the impression of light and space, with "many windows and doors" (15). Multiple openings suggest a liminal space where thresholds are easily crossed. The space seems limitless, the narrator "turning the corners of long passages to find another room" (25). For Luckhurst, in the post-war period corridors represented a "spirit of utopian modernity" (90), the corridor representing the possibilities of "communal spaces" (88) for bringing people together. Although the narrator does not see anyone in the corridors of the 'impersonal' world, "the feeling of someone's presence was so strong" (24), and the feeling of opportunity is evident. The narrator explicitly links "the space and the knowledge of the possibility of alternative action" (39), in contrast to the 'personal' scenes: "to enter the 'personal' was to enter a prison, where nothing could happen but what one saw happening" (39). This echoes in the interior space, where the thresholds to the rooms are blocked: "tall but heavy windows, with dark red velvet curtains" (39). The liminal is not present in the 'personal' scenes. The text links the liminal with the possibility to move forward, past the

threshold, while the lack of the liminal leaves one passively trapped in the 'personal' realm. Liminal space here seems to represent a more utopian image than the endlessness of liminal time we saw previously. However, as the 'personal' and 'impersonal' scenes merge as the novel progresses, the liminal corridors turn against the narrator, who "ran and ran along passages, along corridors" (128) in a fruitless search for a crying baby Emily. Luckhurst argues that in "the late 1960s and '70s" (91), the utopian meaning of the corridor transformed: "Where the corridor was once a device for the possibility of social and personal transformation, it has now become an anxious and dystopian site, principally through the rejection of the collectivist politics" (102). The utopian, liminal corridors of the 'impersonal' world slowly change their meaning in the text and become dystopian sites of confusion and difficulty.

A liminal female character accompanies the liminal time and spaces in the text. The narrator meets Emily when she is "in that half-way place where soon she would be a girl" (22); Emily is liminal in her adolescence. She soon enters a "chrysalis" (53) phase where she is "eating, dreaming, indolent" (51) and then "full of energy", creating "self-portraits" (51) with different clothes. This binary between indolence and energy is reminiscent of Hall's characterisation of adolescence: "spells of overactivity, alternating with those of sluggishness and inactivity" (76). However, Hall also suggests that "The dawn of adolescence is marked by…a special kind of sex shame hitherto unknown…[which] supplies one of the powerful motives for dress" (97). Emily, in contrast, seems to have no thoughts of shame, and is dressing for her own objectives, as she "did not go out of the flat" (53). The narrator suggests that Emily is engaged in "a new invention of herself" (53). Emily also seems to contradict de Beauvoir's assertion that young girls dressing up are embodying the destruction of female "autonomy" (285): "she soon learns that in order to be pleasing she must be 'pretty as a picture', she tries to make herself look like a picture…she studies herself in a mirror" (283). While Emily and her neighbour Janet do "arrang[e] their images this way and that before the long mirror" (51), she does not represent the submissiveness that de Beauvoir decries. The

society in the novel is not influencing Emily to behave in a passive and subservient way. The new society values "practicality" (55) in dress and behaviour, and clothes take on a liminal nature in themselves, being free of time constraints: "decades of different fashions on display…obliterating that sequence of memory" (84). Emily seems to find freedom in her liminal experimentation. Clothing also marks her progression out of the liminal phase: "now she looked like the other girls and must behave and think like them" (55). Emily leaves the liberty of the adolescent phase as she becomes a "young woman" (89) in society. However, the society that Emily joins is a liminal, "migrating" (55) one, and also seems to be full of possibilities.

Despite the narrator's misgivings, she sees the positivity in the new society which springs up in the liminal period. She characterises the new society as "reverting to the primitive" (90) as opposed to earlier civilisation. The text evokes the civilised-primitive hierarchy, but conversely values the primitive: the people are "savages from whose every finger sprouted new skills and talents" (91). At a new market for bartering goods, the crowd is "lively" but "an orderly crowd, and one able in the new manner to settle between themselves disputes and differences quickly and without bad feeling" (101). Many people mix together in a "polyglot crowd" (101). This utopian vision is akin to Turner's theory of "communitas" which "emerges recognizably in the liminal period… society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured…community…of equal individuals" (96). Contemporary readers would recognise this, as Turner asserts that "In modern Western society, the values of communitas are strikingly present in the literature and behavior of…the "hippies"…who "opt out" of the status-bound social order" (112). The breakdown of civilisation in the novel has also demolished hierarchies and boundaries between people. The narrator finds the migrant lifestyle "attractive": "What a relief it would be to throw off…all the old ways, all the old problems…an earlier life of mankind would rule: disciplined but democratic" (140-1). The liminal society contains utopian possibilities.

However, the utopian society in *Memoirs* does not last. Even as the narrator fantasises about joining one of the tribes, she considers that "Responsibilities and duties there would have to be, and they would harden and stultify, probably very soon" (141). More ominously, "There was silence from out there, the places so many people had set out to reach" (177). No news returns from the tribes who left and as the city empties, the question of "where would we be going?" (177) keeps the narrator static. Utopia as an outcome to the liminal period is doubted, and finally dismissed, leaving the narrator trapped in the liminal, "waiting" for "an attack" (180). The novel rejects the possibilities of the liminal state and the danger inherent in the liminal persists. Utopianism is, furthermore, shown to be flawed from the outset. While Draine argues that "Emily and Gerald become leaders in the post-Catastrophe society because they are able to shuck off old assumptions, decadent habits of behaviour and outmoded social relationships and assist a new social system to develop" (55), the text conversely shows that old habits are continued into the new. Emily struggles to maintain equality, crying "'It is impossible not to have a pecking order. No matter how you try not to'" (112). The narrator explains this as "the old patterns kept repeating themselves, re-forming themselves even when events seemed to license any experiment…so did the old thoughts, which matched the patterns" (115-6). Even though Emily may strive for "democracy" (113), the narrator suggests that people's past patterns ensnare them, and they cannot completely change. "It's a trap", the narrator argues, "all that has happened is what always happens" (113). Stephen Greenblatt declares that "Worries about merely being possessed by the past came to seem central to late-twentieth-century English fiction" (1841). The novel typifies this attitude, with the past represented as inescapable. The text once again asserts that determinism predominates and suggests that the possibilities of the liminal are an illusion.

The patterns of the past have especially negative effects on the female characters in the novel. Lessing herself did not see the novel as representing a particularly female point of view: "A middleaged person—the sex does not matter—observes a young self grow up." (quoted Dooley 162). However, as Dooley argues, "Specifically female aspects are

fundamental" (162). Emily, although not socialised into a Beauvoir-esque passivity, is restricted as she is "in love…this longing for him, for his attention and his notice…this need drained her of the initiative she would need to be a leader" (94). Gerald "did care, but not at all in the same way" (127): he is able to lead a tribe and have relationships with other women. Emily accepts this: "things are quite different, aren't they…he just has to – make the rounds, I suppose. Like a cat marking his territory" (122). The narrator presents differences between the sexes as unalterable biological determinants in allying human behaviour with animals. Despite women's "fight for equality, the decades-long and very painful questioning of their roles, their functions" (94), Emily's actions reverse these: "how many centuries had we overturned, how many long slow steps of man's upclimbing did Emily undo when she crossed from my flat to the life on the pavement" (127). The narrator places the blame with the individual for destroying centuries of gradual female liberation. This suggests an anxiety within feminist discourse that individual relationships with men could not be free from patriarchal strictures. Men and women are binary categories which the novel does not question; the liminal setting of a dissolved society paradoxically reducing characters to biological essentialism, trapped in their separate roles.

The text suggests that this deterministic process is of female origin: the mother in the 'personal' scenes behind the liminal wall. The narrator argues that the mother's actions create the child. The mother has "never been taught tenderness" (128) and "the pressure of criticism on [Emily], her existence" (61) makes Emily "isolated, alone", with a "bright hard smile" (63) symbolising her defensiveness. This mirrors Winnicott's assertion that "The basis of the whole of mental health is laid in early childhood and in infancy" (151). Winnicott, lauding the "natural" (32) mother, concedes that "self-sacrifice" is "certainly" (109) required, yet there will be "enjoyment, which comes naturally in the ordinary way" (27). Much of Winnicott's argument depends on this connection between women and nature. Winnicott suggests that women are natural mothers, and that they should naturally enjoy this process. Although Winnicott lauds the 'good-enough mother', who is an "ordinary devoted mother…most of the

time" (16), he creates a dichotomy segregating motherhood from intelligence: "the beauty of it is that you do not have to be clever. Or you may be really clever. But all this does not matter, and hasn't anything to do with whether you are a good mother or not" (16). Intelligence is superfluous to the maternal role. Similarly, the novel suggests that maternity depletes intellect, which Emily's mother resents: "when you think that at one time I was quite known for my intelligence, well that is just a joke, I'm afraid" (61). She is "exhausted" (62) by motherhood, which attacks her sense of identity: "I never imagined I could become the sort of woman who would never have time to open a book" (62). Emily's mother provides an example of an anti-Winnicottian woman, a mother who resents the "natural" role of motherhood, despite the fact that "marriage and children were what she had personally wanted and had aimed for – what society had chosen for her" (62). The mother's refusal to accept her maternal role has strong negative effects on Emily. The narrator further asserts that "Emily's mother [is]…her tormenter, the world's image" (128), generalising Emily's mother's actions to all mothers in society.

Yet the text also introduces an element of understanding of Emily's mother's position: she feels "trapped, but did not know why…she was isolated in her distress…sometimes even believing that she might perhaps be ill" (62). Friedan typifies this attitude as common to mothers of the 1960s and 1970s, calling it the "problem that has no name" (16). Women across society suffer from "a strange feeling of desperation" (16). Friedan asserts this is a fault of "the feminine mystique [which] says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity…accepting their own nature, which can find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" (37). Society identifies women with motherhood, asserting that this is their natural role, reflected in Winnicott's views. The novel suggests that the restricted maternal role demanded of Emily's mother creates her negative emotions, which have such a deleterious impact on Emily. Yet the text suggests that this cycle will continue inevitably as part of "the unalterability of the laws of this world" (118). The narrative represents contemporary debates about the role of women

and mothers, stressing the importance of the maternal role yet recognising the burden on women. The narrator offers no answers, declaring "I fell into despair at the precariousness of every human attempt and effort" (127). The narrator cannot solve the debate and tries to leave through the liminal wall, but cannot access liminality: "The wall…was uniform, dull, blank…I knew there could be nothing in a deliberate attempt of the will" (127-8). The liminal is unexpected, not controllable by individual effort. The absence of the liminal from the 'personal' scenes sheds light on the nature of the liminal as full of possibility. In this debate about the role of women, the possibilities of the liminal are absent, and thereby binary ideology governs. Determinism in female roles triumphs over freedom.

The text allies the liminal with possibility, but also with fear. Fear predominates whenever the narrator considers the future, the end of the liminal period. Contemporary anxieties about childhood and upbringing ultimately provide the largest challenge to the liminal society. The "new gang of 'kids'" (147) are dangerous, unpredictable and destructive. Unlike other "children without parents [who] attached themselves willingly to families or to other clans and tribes" (147), the new kids "seemed never to have had parents, never to have known the softening of the family" (147). They are outside "society…the terms of what was known and understood" (147). The new kids inaugurate a new paradigm. They appear in opposition to the notion of childhood innocence; they are "just children…but they are wicked" (149). The fear generated by these children highlights the role that belief in the innocence of childhood still plays in contemporary society, despite the prevalence of post-Freudian theorists who posit a continuum of development from infancy, which calls into question the Romantic ideology of childhood innocence. In this post-apocalyptic society, the narrator asserts "that I, that everybody, had come to see all children as, simply, terrifying" (162). Children represent the future of society; this liminal realm fears the future, and children represent that terror. Furthermore, the children destroy liminal thresholds, "flinging open doors and slamming them, putting their fists through the precious polythene in the windows" (150). They are an antithesis to Van Gennep's exploration of the liminal to learn valuable

lessons; they destroy boundaries instead. Downey argues that "Liminality…represents the freedom from traditional constrictions, but also implies an unsettledness in which nothing at all really matters" (13). Traditional boundaries do not matter to the children; neither does any kind of society. Furthermore, "because of a whim, a fancy, an impulse", the children would "kill" (175). The narrator names the overriding fear: "Inconsequence" (175). The children lack consequences, and thereby lack a future; they are dangerous. They are the children of the dark side of the liminal. The narrator argues that "these children were ourselves. We knew it" (153); this anxiety about inconsequentiality underlies contemporary society, the narrator asserting "Inconsequence…had always been there, it had been well channelled, disciplined, socialised" (175). The fear of anarchy leads contemporary society to attempt to impose control, to prefer binary categorisation to the ambiguity of the liminal in between.

The journey of the text finishes with the future, when "It all came to an end" (181), suggesting a closing of the liminal period which has dominated the narrative. Throughout the narrative, the 'personal' and 'impersonal' worlds merge and "disorder" (134) reigns in the other world. Wright argues that this degradation mimics the "irreparable public collapse" (87) and dissolution of society outside. The utopian possibilities of the new, liminal society disintegrate, and the dystopian danger of the new kids dominates. Behind the wall, the narrator describes that "the feeling of surprise, of expectancy, had gone…these sets and suites of rooms, until so recently full of alternatives and possibilities, had absorbed into them something of the claustrophobic air of the 'personal' with its rigid necessities" (134). Access to the liminal declines throughout the narrative, with the narrator not able to find the liminal "rooms which opened and opened out from each other" (159) and unable to sustain "a clear memory of what [she] had experienced there" (159). As the narrative progresses, it destroys the possibilities and the openness of the liminal. Nonetheless, the ending requires the liminal to recommence. The world behind the wall opens, and "We were in that place which might present us with anything" (181). All possibilities resume, contradicting the dystopian determinism that predominated. Emily and her companions cross a "threshold" which is "the

way out of this collapsed little world into another order of world all together" (182). The world they are leaving "folded itself up" (182), making it clear that survival lies on the other side of the threshold only. The status of the liminal at the end of the text is ambiguous. The finality of this threshold suggests an end to the liminality of the current world, yet the fact that the text re-invigorates the liminal with possibility suggests a strengthening of the liminal.

Furthermore, the text destabilises the notion of the liminal itself. The narrator calls into question the concept of development within Emily's life: "an apex of achievement…[this] is how we see things, it is a biological summit we see: growth, the achievement on the top of the curve of her existence as an animal, then a falling away towards death. Nonsense, of course, absurd" (81). The narrator finds fault in the concept of progression from one stage to another, thereby calling into question the liminal period separating each stage. She declares "what I was really waiting for…was the moment she would step off this merry-go-round, this escalator carrying her from the dark into the dark. Step off entirely…And then?" (82). The narrator provides no clarity at the end of the text as to what comes next. Wright states that the text makes an "escape… into private mysticism in the ending" (88), the ambiguity of the ending symbolising a personal journey. Wright further indicates the "Laingian dimensions of Lessing's thought" (87). R.D. Laing "embraced madness as a higher form of sanity" (Chapman 1), using a "voyage metaphor" (3) to signify how the patient can journey into madness, finding valuable lessons which he then can apply to his life when he comes "back again" (4). The journey metaphor is a liminal one, the journey between madness and sanity difficult but ultimately rewarding. However, the text disputes this transcendental interpretation. Conboy argues that "despite the seemingly triumphant transcendental journey at the novel's end, Lessing still implies that the Laingian visionary has severe limitations. For if what is discovered on the "voyage" is not applied in the world…then no learning is possible" (76). If the voyager does not come back, then the lessons learnt on the quest are useless. And in *Memoirs* any return is highly questionable as the current world

collapses as the group leaves. The text questions the concept of progression through a liminal stage to the other side, and thereby challenges the existence of the liminal.

The novel suggests a dismantling of the duality which makes the liminal possible. There is a clue in the narrator's wish to see Emily "step off this merry-go-round…entirely" (82). Throughout the novel the inner and outer worlds of the narrator merge and finally become one at the end. Conboy argues that "the novel insists on the need to fuse "internal" and "external" experiences" (70), eliding the boundaries between reality and imagination. The narrator further omits boundaries between herself and others, arguing that her experiences are universal, her story is "true for everybody" (8). Draine contends that in breaking these boundaries, "the novel…attempts to 'teach' a shift in perspective from a more logical, linear mode of thought process, which we of the Western world have been taught to hold in the highest esteem, to a more intuitive perception" (60). However, this criticism maintains a duality of thought between rational-intuitive, which is in opposition to the destruction of binary thinking which the text espouses. While Draine was critical about Lessing's efficacy in achieving her mission: "There is nothing in the text that would convince the reader" (60), Wright affirms that "The fault lies with the limited apparatus of perception available to the Western mind and brought by the reader to the novel—a way of thinking that habitually divides, distinguishes, and disconnects instead of looking for unity and connectedness" (88-9). Duality, which is inherent not just in Western thinking, but worldwide, imposes an ideological structure which is very difficult to break. The destruction of the old world at the end evokes a breaking of the barriers of time: "rooms…spanning the tastes and customs of millennia" (181). Further, the "walls [are] broken, falling, growing again" (181): the boundaries of the physical space disintegrate but then renew. The text suggests a model of circular time and space in opposition to the contemporary ideology of continual development.

In conclusion, *Memoirs of a Survivor* contains the liminal throughout, in time, spaces, women and society. We see that the text introduces the liminal as a time of change, yet the past overlaps with the liminal and defies the concept of clear boundaries of the liminal.

Reality and fantasy are also unclear, with other worlds and an unreliable narrator activating the reader to critically consider the multiplicity of options the novel presents. Liminal space gives access to another world, seeming to offer endless possibilities, representing the utopian side of the liminal. However, the text dismantles utopian spaces and societies, replacing them with a dystopian determinism. While the narrator seeks to extend her experiences to the whole of humanity, the novel in contrast represents a particularly female perspective. Male-female is one of the few dichotomies left intact by the text, with the narrator asserting a biological essentialism that is at odds with the dissolution of society. The novel links women, and especially mothers, with a lack of the liminal. In this text, women lack the possibilities inherent in the liminal, although it is hard to decipher whether this merely reflects or actively condemns contemporary reality. The novel ultimately leaves the status of the liminal unclear, with the characters progressing beyond the liminal world but their destination uncertain. The liminal society of the novel fears the future, the end point of the liminal. The ending of the text questions the concept of progression and thereby the idea of the liminal as a middle phase between different developmental stages. However, the concept of the liminal in the text is contradictory, as the text shows that the past is inescapable and continues into the liminal present, whereas individual lessons learnt during the liminal cannot incorporate into the future. The text suggests that rigid dualism, underpinning contemporary ideology, stems from a fear of anarchy, and furthermore, of insignificance. The novel destabilises binary ideology, arguing for a merging of boundaries, leading to a fresh paradigm. The ending posits a model of circular time, of the rise and fall and rise again of walls, boundaries and societies, which is in opposition to linear thinking. However, if boundaries fall and overcome the liminal, this argument suggests that these same boundaries and binary thinking will arise again. The liminal, containing the duality of possibility and determinism, will return.

Conclusion

Can we form clear conclusions about the significance of the liminal in these novels? As befits its nature, the liminal has many conflicting meanings in *Marianne Dreams*, *The Magic Toyshop* and *Memoirs of a Survivor*, containing and revealing tensions in dominant ideology. This thesis sought to interpret what the liminal represents, and to what extent it interrupts dominant power structures, examining the liminal motifs of each text against contemporary psychological, child development, feminist and literary theorists. A brief comparison of the liminal in these three novels as represented in physical space, characters, time, and the reality-unreality dichotomy, will serve to examine if we can glean an over-riding signification of the liminal.

The liminal permeates physical spaces in these novels. Notably, houses in these texts do not provide protection for their female inhabitants, disrupting the traditional view of home as a female purview. Threat comes from within, following Freud's theory of *das Unheimlich*, making these houses decidedly uncomfortable homes. Marianne's dream house contains an unknown threat in the other room which warps her dream creations. Uncle Philip's puppets endanger Melanie and spyholes prevent privacy in the toyshop. The narrator and Emily wait in their flat for the new kids, inhabiting the top part of the building, to attack. However, in all three narratives, the liminal provides a challenge to the threat. The uncanny radio warns Marianne of the stones' deadly intentions, and precipitates movement in her flight into the landscape outside. Philip's house turns against its creator, and the characters' rebellion leads to his probable demise. Furthermore, *Memoirs'* liminal other world offers its characters an escape, potentially into another plane of existence. In all three cases the liminal inspires movement and change in the narrative. However, the texts complicate the alliance of the liminal with possibility and development.

Landscapes are also equivocal. Like the home, gardens are often a metaphor for femininity, but liminal landscapes in these texts suggest danger. Liminal landscapes in these

texts represent binaries such as human-inanimate, past-present and reality-unreality. Traditionally, a quest through dangerous liminal landscapes should inspire development, yet *Marianne Dreams* raises the paradoxical possibility that quests for liminal girls may lead backwards, advancement from girl to woman representing the restrictions that women in the period must learn to accept.

The liminal in these texts frequently challenges the reality-fantasy binary. Storr's novel accepts Marianne's dreams as equivalent to reality, raising uncomfortable questions about individual responsibility. Responsibility is also a theme in *Memoirs*, for if the reader accepts the deterministic position of the narrator, the individual holds no responsibility for the future. Furthermore, the texts question the nature of reality in contemporary society. *Memoirs* questions the performative nature of a societally agreed reality and *Toyshop* highlights the creation of a fantasy generation of girls, whose imaginary lives and the lack of a consistent sense of self help them to accept the restrictions of contemporary femininity. The texts activate the reader to critically consider the fantasy worlds presented, as well as the societal assumptions insidiously re-created.

Liminal time expands and is uncomfortable to experience, with the liminal often a fearful, threatening space. *Memoirs* removes the boundaries of the liminal, positing a model of circular time in contrast to linear progression. Yet the liminal is contradictory, as the past determines the present, yet present lessons do not accompany the individual into the future, representing an ambiguity about the effectiveness of change. The texts suggest a fear of the future may block progression past the liminal. Marianne rests in stasis at the end of the novel, liminal illness changing her from an active girl into a passive adolescent. Thresholds block Melanie's progress in the toyshop and the other world in *Memoirs* hovers between possibility and determinism. While the liminal may create progression in the narrative, the female characters seemingly do not benefit from this development.

The female characters in these novels prove inconsistent. These adolescent female characters hover between childhood and adulthood, between past and future, and thereby shed

light on these categories. Mirrors help to create an inconsistent sense of self in Melanie, which the text suggests is representative of contemporary femininity. Emily sees greater possibilities in her mirror, yet the narrator overwhelmingly asserts that biological determinism limits female potential. However, with the narrator herself a ghostly figure from the future, the reader must critically consider the assumptions behind her words. *Toyshop* criticises roles for women such as mandated sexuality and both *Toyshop* and *Memoirs* criticise motherhood, without suggesting any alternatives. *Marianne* provides a contrast here, the earlier novel lauding an overtly passive femininity. Examining the texts in chronological order suggests development from acceptance to questioning of allotted female roles, followed by a return to biological determinism. These three texts provide a snapshot which suggests that the trajectory of women's liberation did not progress smoothly during this period, and contained many contradictions. The liminal, by revealing the dichotomies in society, gives potential opportunities which none of these female characters enjoy. Whether nature or nurture, these girls are at a disadvantage; whether the texts provoke a challenge or merely represent contemporary reality is up to the reader to decide. There is no resolution to these thorny issues within the works explored here, and certainly not consensus between authors. All the texts end in a liminal state, yet as befits the nature of the liminal it eschews clear conclusions. The liminal, sitting between established binaries, represents contemporary anxieties about challenging the status quo, about anarchy and a fear of the insignificance of human endeavour.

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