

# Through the “Magic Mirror”: Adapting Angela Carter’s Japanese Writings for the Silver Screen

CHARLOTTE CROFTS<sup>®</sup>

## Abstract

*This article outlines the development of a feature-length screenplay adaptation of Angela Carter’s short story “Flesh and the Mirror,” situating it within a critical discussion of her metaleptic narrative strategies and the challenges of translating them to the screen. The screenplay incorporates Carter’s Japanese short stories and journalism, which are said to be her most autobiographical writings. The article explores Carter’s attitude to life writing and highlights the dangers of a straightforward biographical adaptation, contextualizing her Japanese writings within her wider engagement with Japanese literature and the I-novel. It demonstrates how the screenplay aims to emulate Carter’s playful experimentation with narrative form, overlapping metaphors of magic mirrors, puppetry, theater, and film sets, attempting a delicate balancing act of transposing Carter’s “literary gymnastics” to the silver screen.*

This article critically reflects on the process of adapting Angela Carter’s “Flesh and the Mirror,” one of the short stories collected in *Fireworks* (1974), into a feature-length screenplay of the same name. The screenplay was developed in collaboration with screenwriter and producer Scott James Bassett and producer Douglas Cummins (Pinnacle Pictures), with the support of the British Film Institute (BFI) Development Fund. Using this central story as a portmanteau, the screenplay interweaves other short stories from the *Fireworks* collection and various articles Carter wrote about her experiences living in Japan in the late 1960s and early

1970s. Combining live action, puppetry, and animation, the screenplay creates a generic hybrid which formally engages with Carter's metaleptic techniques and draws upon the Japanese culture that Carter references, including *manga* comics, *irezumi* tattoos, and *bunraku* puppetry, in order to scrutinize—through practice—her representation of Japan and experiment with the aesthetics of narrative film itself.

The screenplay has had a long gestation, which began while writing my previously published chapter "'The Other of the Other,'" developing and extending my argument about Carter's engagement with Japanese culture through the lens of screen media practice. While I do not wish to re-rehearse the arguments of my previous writing here, to dissect the adaptation process it is first necessary to outline briefly the original short story, both in terms of plot and narrative style and to discuss its relationship to Carter's own biography and her attitude to life writing. "Flesh and the Mirror" follows the unnamed central female protagonist on a nocturnal odyssey through the streets of Tokyo's love quarter, searching for her Japanese lover, who has failed to meet her as promised at Yokohama Dock on her return from a visit to England. Instead of locating him, she finds herself in the arms of a one-night stand: "however hard I looked for the one I loved, she could not find him anywhere and the city delivered her into the hands of a perfect stranger" (*Burning Your Boats* 63). This mid-sentence shift in person from "I" to "she" is part of Carter's wider metaleptic narratorial strategies in a story which challenges the notion of stable subjectivity, bringing into play a split self which finds its expression in the figure of the puppet and the trope of the mirror. The protagonist experiences a sexual and cultural awakening as she watches herself making love to the stranger in the mirrored ceiling of an "unambiguous" love hotel: "The magic mirror presented me with hitherto unconsidered notion of myself as I" (64–5). This passage is discussed in further detail below in relation to the challenges of adapting it. The protagonist is filled with guilt for the pleasure she experienced in the arms of the stranger. When she is reunited with her lover the next morning, they repair to another love hotel "in every respect a parody of the previous night" (73), only to find their relationship is disintegrating.

Right from the start, I wanted to explore whether it is formally possible to translate Carter's narrative strategies to the screen, particularly her use of complex shifts in person and narrative register playing out in this "magic mirror" sequence. How might one go about replicating these exhilarating switches in narrative point of view on film? I was also intrigued by the way in which Carter's Japanese writings employ cinematic techniques and how one might translate these back into the visual image. In this article, I tease out the challenges of adapting Carter's well-known "literary gymnastics" (Sage, *Angela Carter* 27) for the screen. I do this by first contextualizing the original semi-autobiographical stories in relation to Carter's own attitude to life writing and her highly metaleptic narrative strategies, which complicate any reading of these writings as straightforwardly autobiographical. I then situate Carter's Japanese writings in relation to her wider engagement with Japanese literature and the I-novel. Finally, I delineate the ways in which Bassett and I have

<sup>1</sup> In this issue, Nozomi Uematsu and Aneesh Barai offer an in-depth discussion of the racial dynamics at work in Carter's Japanese writings.

attempted to capture not only the narrative content of the original stories but also Carter's formal narratorial strategies in the development of the screenplay.

In adapting Carter's Japanese writings, it is important to be alert to the danger of portraying Japan in a reductive way. Carter herself painstakingly attempted to avoid reducing Japan to a stereotypical description. "Flesh and the Mirror" delineates the protagonist's journey from an unexamined Orientalism (Said)—acting out her tragic love story with Tokyo as an exotic backdrop—to a "new-fangled sort" (Sage, *Angela Carter* 26), one which recognizes the power of Western othering.<sup>1</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, "Carter foregrounds the Eurocentric perspective of the narrator at the beginning of the story... but by the end of the story the narrator's experience of another culture has been transformed" (Crofts, "'The Other of the Other'" 103). In this article, I also explore the challenge of visually representing Carter's awakening as a Western woman who becomes aware of her own ethnicity in her encounter with another culture, without unintentionally reinscribing the very racist tropes Carter, and we, are attempting to explode.

## Life Writing

I want to focus first on the relationship between biography and fiction and how Carter plays with the expectations each genre brings to the reader. Many critics, including myself, Lorna Sage, Sarah Gamble, Susan Fisher, Mayako Murai, Michelle Ryan-Sautour, Helen Snaith, Anna Pasolini, and Natsumi Ikoma have examined "Flesh and the Mirror" in terms of Carter's auto/biography and commented on the huge impact her experience in Japan had on her personal and creative development. Sage claims that many of the short stories in *Fireworks* "most uncharacteristically, are hardly fictionalized at all" (*Angela Carter* 26). Carter's personal journals, archived at The British Library, and Edmund Gordon's 2016 biography, which extensively references them and Carter's letters from Japan to Carole Roffe, further emphasize the importance of Carter's time in Japan and shine new light on the autobiographical context for this suite of writings as drawing on her real-life experiences in Japan. However, as Gordon points out, it is important to realize that she "wasn't always a reliable witness to her own life" (xvi). As Snaith suggests, "'Flesh and the Mirror' serves as a prime example of the blurred boundaries between biography and fiction," calling for a "cautionary approach" to straightforward autobiographical readings (41, 42).

Carter had a particular take on life writing, referring to her two biographical radio plays about Victorian painter Richard Dadd and Edwardian novelist Ronald Firbank as "artificial biographies" (*The Curious Room* 504) and eschewing the phallogocentric concept of a stable, coherent, fixed identity (see Crofts, "Anagrams of Desire," chapter 3). Carter's deployment of multiple narrators in both *Come unto These Yellow Sands* (1979) and *A Self-Made Man* (1984) (the scripts of which are collected in *The Curious Room*) can be read in the light of Liz Stanley's

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Gordon's biography, *The Invention of Angela Carter*, plays on this idea of Carter's self-invention and literary creativity.

theorization of an “auto/biographical” writing practice which “works to explicitly reinscribe the authorial voice in the biographical text as politically, historically and socially grounded” (Crofts, “*Anagrams of Desire*” 81). In *A Self-Made Man*, her radio play about Firbank, Carter uses a deconstructive technique to challenge the generic conventions of traditional biography, having Firbank himself arguing with his own biographers to create a polyvalent rather than singular fixed life. Carter notes how Firbank invents himself “as if from nothing, or from the shards of ideas, from brilliant fragments, of illusion” (*The Curious Room* 132).<sup>2</sup> Just as Carter compiles the artificial biography of Firbank from these “fragments,” so we mirror Carter’s method in “compiling” the screenplay in a patchwork from Carter’s different stories, writings, and cultural influences. These “fragments” can be related to Roland Barthes’s idea of “biographemes,” which Barthes imagines in terms of a silent movie: “a film, in the old style, in which there is no dialogue and the flow of images ... is intercut, like the relief of hiccoughs, by the barely written darkness of the intertitles, the casual eruption of *another* signifier” (*Sade, Fourier, Loyola* 9). As Sage argues, Carter believed in the Barthesian “proliferation of the author” (*Angela Carter* 54). This is also a useful way of thinking about the multiple authorship in the adaptation process and the collaborative relationships inherent in film production.

Carter employs similarly “artificial” techniques in her so-called autobiographical Japanese writings. As Sage points out, this is not your usual life writing: “we expect autobiographical writing to belong to the confiding realist mode, and this does not; it looks like an ‘exercise’ in literary gymnastics” (*Angela Carter* 27). Indeed, as Ryan-Sautour concurs, “Carter’s autobiographical writing ... demonstrates a high degree of subterfuge” (“Angela Carter as Fiction” 61). As Karima Thomas argues, in this issue, what Sage identifies as “literary gymnastics” can be discussed in narratological terms as “metalepsis”—that jumping between narrative registers which Gérard Genette defines as “[a]ny intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into the metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse..., [that] produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical ... or fantastic” (234–35). In “Flesh and the Mirror” there are numerous transgressions of the line between narrator and narratee. Thomas identifies a “metaleptic turn” in Carter’s post-Japan fiction, and Debra Malina notes the “violence” of Carter’s metaleptic transgressions (121); which poses the question of how one might translate these violent “metaleptic transgressions,” or Carter’s “literary gymnastics,” to the screen.

## Japanese I-Novel

Before addressing this, it is important to situate Carter’s semi-autobiographical Japanese writings in relation to the I-novel and her engagement with Japanese literature. As Yutaka Okuhata suggests in this issue, Carter was “deeply interested”

<sup>3</sup> The Japanese title is *Sasameyuki* (細雪). Sozo Araki translates this as “fragile snow” (Personal interview). Originally published between 1943 and 1948 as a serial, it is likely that Carter was reading the 1957 Seidensticker translation.

in both classic and twentieth-century Japanese authors, many of whom she read in English translation whilst living with her Japanese lover, Sozo Araki; indeed, their shared interest in Japanese literature was one of the things that drew them together. Sozo Araki recounts that Carter was reading the *Makioka Sisters* (1948) by Jun'ichiro Tanizaki when they first met (Personal interview).<sup>3</sup> Carter threw herself into learning about Japanese writers and engaged in critical discussion with Sozo Araki about them; her Japanese writings can be seen as an extension of that discussion. Several of the stories in the *Fireworks* collection could be said to emulate the confessional tone of the I-novel, which Murai describes as “a type of autobiographical narrative developed in early twentieth-century Japan under the influence of Naturalism in the West” (“Translation and Reception” 40). Usually written from a first-person perspective, the I-novel often deals with (male) sexual obsession, employing a “confessional writing style” to establish a Western sense of individuality (Ikoma, “Gender and Modernization” 13).

Ikoma outlines how the I-novel became “the mainstream of Japanese literature” during the Meiji era when there was a “desire to transform Japan into a Westernized modern nation” (4). Tomi Suzuki suggests that this literary and cultural dominance originates from “the special mystique of the notion of *watakushi*, the ‘I’ or ‘self,’ and ... the privileged status of the novel, both of which emerged under the cultural hegemony of Western modernity” (2). Suzuki argues that what she terms “I-novel discourse” became the dominant mode of critical analysis of modern Japanese writing, in turn underpinning narratives of Japanese modernity, which came to inform “not only the nature of literature but also views of Japanese selfhood, society, and tradition” (2). However, this selfhood is forged at the expense of both female subjectivity (women become the muse for male authors) and female sexuality (which is depicted as dirty and inferior), and this has had a wider impact on Japanese society. As Ikoma suggests, the I-novel tended to marginalize female experience, as well as female writers, and contributed to a specific, highly gendered notion of Japanese modernity (“Gender and Modernization” 16–9).

Ironically, according to Murai, the first of Carter's novels to be translated into Japanese, *Love* (published in 1971, but written before she went to Japan), was received in Japan as an I-novel. In his afterword, translator Kinji Itō compares Carter to Annabel, the novel's heroine (Murai, “Translation and Reception” 40–1). However, as Ryan-Sautour points out, Carter rejected “confessional modes of writing” (“Am I That Name?” 6). If Carter emulates the I-novel in her confessional, chatty style, she does so to deconstruct, even to explode, the modernist notion of identity. Carter is therefore both critiquing the Japanese I-novel to subvert its exclusionary treatment of women and parodying the feminine confessional mode often associated with Western women writers such as Edna O'Brien and Jean Rhys. This is not the I-novel of Tayama Katai's *Futon/The Quilt* (1907), “the first overtly autobiographical Japanese I-novel” (Suzuki 69), but more like the “anti-I-novels” of Tanizaki (Suzuki 11), such as *Naomi*, which Carter reviewed (*Shaking a Leg* 267–70). *Futon* was first translated into English in 1981 as *The Quilt*, the same year that Carter's short story “The Quilt

Maker” was published. It is highly likely that Carter is critiquing not only Katai’s novel in her title—as the preeminent I-novel in modern Japanese literature—but also the whole genre.

Suzuki suggests that the I-novel draws on Philippe Lejeune’s idea of the “autobiographical contract,” as “a textual affirmation of the identity of the author, the narrator, and the protagonist, an identity which ultimately refers to the name of the author on the cover of the book” (5). However, in “A Souvenir of Japan,” “The Smile of Winter,” and “Flesh and the Mirror,” the three most overtly autobiographical stories in *Fireworks*, Carter playfully breaks this “autobiographical contract.” As Ryan-Sautour suggests, “these three pieces clearly function in the autobiographical mode, setting up an intricate game with genre that leads the reader to reflect on the connection between the real Angela Carter and the anonymous autobiographical ‘I’ of the narrator in her interaction with her Japanese lover/ other in Japan” (“Autobiographical Estrangement” 57). Elsewhere, Ryan-Sautour emphasizes the playfulness of Carter’s strategy: “The word ‘play’ is key here, as Carter’s story does not pretend to be autobiography, yet exploits its modes to other ends” (“Am I That Name?” 6). It is just such an “intricate game with genre” that we are playing in the process of developing the screenplay.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of Carter’s playfulness see Gustar, Sivyer, and Gamble.

## Walking the Tightrope of Adaptation

For the rest of this article, I explore the delicate balancing act of translating Carter’s “literary gymnastics”—involving vertiginous shifts in person and highly layered metaphor—to the silver screen. Focusing on the challenges involved in adapting Carter’s self-reflexive narrative persona “I/she” into a cinematic protagonist, I examine the tensions between the “flesh” (the supposedly autobiographical story) and the “mirror” (Carter’s highly wrought literary technique).<sup>5</sup> One way in which we address Carter’s highly metaleptic mode of writing is to employ the Russian doll or patchwork approach of weaving stories within stories that director Neil Jordan and Carter utilized in their screen adaptation of *The Company of Wolves* (1984) to extend the short story and radio play by incorporating other wolf tales from *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Jordan describes this as a “Chinese box structure, using the dream of Rosaleen, and the thread of Granny’s storytelling as the connecting points, thereby enabling [them] to integrate other stories and themes of Angela’s own” (Carter, *The Curious Room* 507). In the screenplay we use a similar technique, interspersing several of the other stories in the *Fireworks* collection into the main spine story “Flesh and the Mirror”: “A Souvenir of Japan,” “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter,” “The Loves of Lady Purple,” “The Smile of Winter,” “Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest,” and “Reflections,” as well as referencing Carter’s later story “The Quilt Maker” (originally published post-Japan in 1981) (all collected in *Burning Your Boats*); and her journalistic writings written whilst in Japan, including “Tokyo Pastoral” (1970), “People as Pictures” (1970), “Once More into the Mangle”

<sup>5</sup> The title and introduction to Lorna Sage’s edited collection *Flesh and the Mirror* clearly reference this tension.



(1971), “Poor Butterfly” (1972), and “A Fertility Festival” (1974) (all collected in *Shaking a Leg*). The screenplay also incorporates some of Carter’s Japanese influences, including Tanizaki’s short story “Shisei”/“The Tattooer” (1910), which she references in “People as Pictures.”

The same considerations about the relationship between auto/biography and fiction that have underpinned much of the academic discourse around Carter’s Japanese writings have also informed the adaptation process. When Bassett and I first approached the Estate of Angela Carter for permission to adapt the above Carter texts for the *Flesh and the Mirror* screenplay in 2012, our request was initially rejected because of concerns about our treatment being too biographical. In the original outline, *Angela Carter’s Flesh and the Mirror*, not only was Carter’s name in the title of the project, but the central protagonist was called “Carter.”<sup>6</sup> Bassett and I discussed ways in which we could address the Estate’s concerns without sacrificing our overall approach. We both agreed that the solution lay in pitching the project more clearly as an “autobiography of ideas” as opposed to a straightforward autobiography.

The most obvious concession was to rename the central character the “Protagonist” and to add the “Narrator” as a separate character. This enabled us to position the story being narrated as a work of fiction, while at the same time emulating the way in which Carter herself plays with levels of narration in her work. The screenplay opens on a black screen and the “metallic twang of a shamisen” (Bassett and Crofts 1), as we cut to the Garboesque face of the Narrator, who, speaking directly to camera, utters the opening sentence of “Flesh and the Mirror”: “It was midnight—I chose my times and set my scenes with the precision of the born artiste” (*Burning Your Boats* 68). The Narrator is played by the same actor as the Protagonist, but differentiated by an austere scraped back hairstyle, à la Clarence Sinclair Bull’s iconic publicity stills of Greta Garbo for *Mata Hari* (1931), in which her face appears luminous from the shadows, that “snowy solitary face” Barthes identifies in “The Face of Garbo” (*Mythologies* 56). The camera dollies back to reveal the Narrator kneeling formally at the edge of a traditional proscenium arch, the red curtains of which part to reveal a “photorealistic Japanese cityscape” (Bassett and Crofts 2). Disgruntled, the Narrator “screws her face up with displeasure” and sets about rearranging the scene, demanding “[m]ore romance please. More drama,” transforming the boring cityscape “into a picture book version of the romanticised East. A Westerner’s dream of Japan, throbbingly seductive, alien ... the perfect stage on which to play out one’s exotic fantasies” (2).

Right from the beginning of the screenplay, there is a blurring between the narrative world “in which one tells” and “the world of which one tells” (Genette 236; my emphasis), and this is sustained throughout the screenplay as the Narrator impinges on the narrative at various points, breaking the fourth wall, revealing her vertiginous, virtuosic technique, commenting on the construction of the story, drawing attention to the artifice and knowingly toying with our generic expectations and narrative desires. In an interview about the cinema release of *The Company*

<sup>6</sup> In *A Self-Made Man*, Firbank objects to the academic convention of being hailed by his last name: “I wish you wouldn’t call me Firbank; it gives me a sense of galoshes” (*The Curious Room* 139).

of *Wolves*, Carter posits that what drew Jordan to the collaboration was the opportunity to experiment with narrative film form:

rather than the emotional satisfaction of making a movie about story-telling, he would have been attracted by the idea of being able to use so many different modes of narration within the one narrative, so that as well as telling a great many stories, you could also do a compendium of ways of telling them .... The way the film is being narrated is perpetually in flux. (“Angela Carter and Neil Jordan Discuss *The Company of Wolves*”)<sup>7</sup>

It is just such a “compendium of ways of telling” that Bassett and I have employed in our adaptation, so that the way the screenplay is being narrated is “perpetually in flux.”

Various mechanisms are utilized in the screenplay to interweave these other writings into the main narrative, such as the use of analepsis and *mise-en-abyme*. For example, when the Protagonist sails on the ship back to Japan, we flash back to the firework festival in “A Souvenir of Japan,” which functions both to give some back story to the central love story and to set up the expectation that the Protagonist will be met by her lover when she arrives at Yokohama. As the Protagonist gazes down at the water from the prow of the ship, “reflections of the harbour lights multiply and dance across its surface,” which dissolve into “FIREWORKS, blazing in the night sky. Bursting open like a succession of variegated parasols,” causing the Protagonist to remember the fireworks festival three months before, where her lover had promised to meet her on her return from England (Bassett and Crofts 3).

In the screenplay, different characters tell stories within stories, and each story has a different emphasis depending on who is narrating, using a similar structure to that deployed in Neil Jordan’s film adaptation of *The Company of Wolves* (1984). For example, at the fireworks festival the lovers explore a trinket stall where the Protagonist chances upon a gruesome pop-up book of “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter,” “she opens up the pages to reveal an elaborate snowy landscape .... As she pulls a little tab, the mighty axe falls and the head of a young man rolls, spurting strips of crimson paper” (Bassett and Crofts 5). As the Lover narrates the story of the Executioner committing incest with his daughter, the book springs to elaborate life, mixing live action with 3D animation, as he “ruts away at her beneath a paper moon” (6). Repulsed, the Protagonist snaps the book shut. The Lover shows her another pop-up book that she might like better, the traditional Japanese story of Momotaro, “about a little boy born inside a peach” (6).<sup>8</sup> The Protagonist is so taken with the story she christens her lover Taro, after the peach boy. This is a direct reference to “A Souvenir of Japan,” in which the protagonist claims to have “learned that his name was Taro” when she encounters the pop-up book in a toy store, “he too had the inhuman sweetness of a child born from something other than a mother” (*Burning Your Boats* 30).

Building on the peach theme, as they later lie in a postcoital embrace during a flashback to another anonymous love hotel, the Protagonist tells Taro about how

<sup>7</sup> In the same interview, Carter also references the Polish film *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965), which uses a similar *mise-en-abyme* technique.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of Momotaro, see Uematsu and Barai, in this issue.



<sup>9</sup> This was incorporated during the BFI script development process to strengthen the central love story between The Protagonist and Taro. "The Quilt Maker" is yet to receive detailed analysis in relation to Carter and Japan, but there is not enough room to address this here.

she left her husband at a Greyhound station in Houston over a quarrel about a peach (Bassett and Crofts 34), drawing on Carter's later short story "The Quilt Maker."<sup>9</sup> In the original short story, when her husband challenges her about choosing the "smaller peach" from a vending machine, the first-person narrator realizes "if the man who was then my husband hadn't told me I was a fool to take the little peach, then I would never have left him because, in truth, he was, in a manner of speaking, always the little peach to me" (*Burning Your Boats* 445). In the screenplay, as the Protagonist narrates this anecdote the scene is dramatized in a brief flashback. Responding to her story, Taro coquettishly asks, "What kind of peach am I?" (Bassett and Crofts 34).

In these semi-autobiographical stories, the lover is based on Sozo Araki. While he is given a name, Taro, in "A Souvenir of Japan," in "Flesh and the Mirror" he remains nameless throughout, and in "The Quilt Maker" he has become the "Big Peach," who the narrator fantasizes about meeting again: "your hypothetical arrival is a catastrophe too terrifying to contemplate, even in the most plangent state of regret for one's youth" (*Burning Your Boats* 454). However, it would be wrong to read this as straightforwardly autobiographical. In "A Souvenir of Japan," Carter breaks the "autobiographical contract" and further undermines the veracity of her narration: "[h]is name was not Taro. I only called him Taro so that I could use the conceit of the peach boy, because it seemed appropriate" (*Burning Your Boats* 32). In the screenplay, the Narrator likewise throws doubt on her reliability in a flashback which references the cinematic *mise-en-scene* of "The Smile of Winter". The voiceover slightly amends the line from the original: "[o]f course his name was not Taro, I only called him Taro because it seemed like an appropriate conceit. The big peach" (Bassett and Crofts 35), adding the "big peach" reference to "The Quilt Maker." Later, the Protagonist questions the very existence of their relationship: "[y]ou will have to take my word for it that we existed," drawing directly on "A Souvenir of Japan" (*Burning Your Boats* 32). These words are now in the mouth of the Protagonist, rather than the Narrator, as we begin to erode the division between Protagonist and Narrator towards the end of the screenplay.

## Extreme Puppetry

To discuss how the screenplay translates Carter's heady shifting perspectives, I need to further unpack the use of narrative point of view in the original story. Throughout "Flesh and the Mirror," Carter plays with narrative person, drawing attention to the "distance between the moment of narration and the narrated" (Crofts, "The Other of the Other" 100). At the start of the story, the first-person narrator describes herself "walking through the city in the third person singular" (68). As Scott Dimovitz asserts, "[t]he narrator reveals her romantic, textual self-delusions through ironic deflations from some later time, although this later perspective's trustworthiness remains uncertain" (6). As I have argued previously, "The narrator

extends this tendency to think of herself in the “third person singular” to the metaphor of the puppet theater, casting herself as both puppet and puppet master, with Tokyo acting as an exotic setting for her own self-dramatisation” (Crofts, “The Other of the Other” 100). In the short story “Flesh and the Mirror,” the narrator utilizes the metaphor of the puppet theatre:

There I was, walking up and down, eating meals, having conversations, in love, indifferent, and so on. But all the time I was pulling the strings of my own puppet; it was this puppet who was moving about on the other side of the glass. ... So I attempted to rebuild the city according to the blueprint in my imagination as a backdrop to the plays in my puppet theatre, but it sternly refused to be so rebuilt; I was only imagining it had been so rebuilt. (*Burning Your Boats* 69)

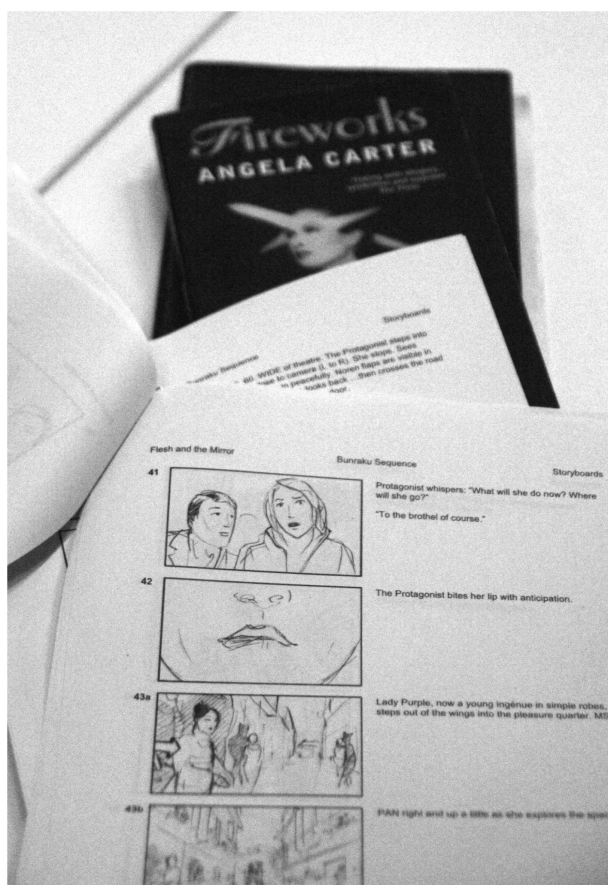
The use of the puppet analogy sets up a series of interconnected metaphors for artifice and performance, centering around puppetry, theater and film sets, and mirrors, which Carter uses to deconstruct the protagonist’s highly constructed image of Tokyo (and herself) at the beginning of the story. In the screenplay we make this marionette metaphor concrete, taking it literally so that the Protagonist suddenly stops “as if hooked like a fish,” attached to the strings of a marionette which manipulate her into a “woe is me” gesture. As we track up the strings, we see the Narrator “towering above her and the constructed city streets like a blonde-haired Godzilla” (48). In the following scene, we pull back to reveal the Narrator and Protagonist/Puppet on a theatrical stage, whilst we also hear the Narrator (voice off): “[w]hilst I looked on, with the bored eye of an agent watching yet another audition, asking –.” We then cut to *another* Narrator, who is sitting watching from one of the aisles, dressed in Dietrich style top hat and tails, chewing on a fat cigar. This second Narrator turns to camera and finishes the hanging sentence: “– what *else* can you do?” (48), tapping out the ash from her cigar as she blows an enormous ring of smoke that fills the screen.

In the original short story, Carter not only uses *bunraku* as a metaphor, but “her writing method itself mimics its formal properties, revealing the mechanics of storytelling” (Crofts, “The Other of the Other” 103). In this special issue, Thomas notes a link between “the theatrical aesthetics of *bunraku* and the narrative aesthetics of metalepsis.” This multiplication of the Protagonist/Narrator echoes the “three separate writings”—the puppet, the puppeteer, and the narrator—that Barthes identifies in his analysis of *bunraku* (*Empire of Signs* 49), which he wrote after visiting Japan in 1967, shortly before Carter. According to Ryan-Sautour, Carter read Barthes’ *Empire of Signs* while she was in Japan (“Autobiographical Estrangement” 12), so it could be suggested that she is doing this consciously. As Thomas argues in this issue, the narrator, “by presenting herself as simultaneously puppet, puppet master, and vociferant, jeopardizes her organic totality as a subject.” In the screenplay, by dramatizing this moment, we bring Barthes’ “three sites of the spectacle” to the fore (*Empire of Signs* 49), making it explicit and exploding the notion of coherent identity.

In the screenplay we extend the metaphor of the puppet/puppet master further by introducing traditional *bunraku* puppeteers into the diegesis. We first encounter a black-robed figure watching the Protagonist unnoticed from the shadows as she searches for her lover in Tokyo's love quarter (23). Later, when the Protagonist is pursued by a horde of schoolboys shouting "*Gaijin! Gaijin!* (Foreigner! Foreigner!)," two hooded figures help her to escape by revealing a hidden doorway. This is in homage to the Japanese film *Shinjû: Ten No Amijima/Double Suicide* (1969), in which the actors are manipulated by *bunraku* puppeteers. A third way in which the screenplay engages with the metaphor of the puppet is by dramatizing "The Loves of Lady Purple" as a *bunraku* puppet performance. Wandering the streets searching for her lover, the Protagonist gets swept into the *bunraku* theater by the gentle flow of the crowd. Seeking anonymity, she takes a seat right in the center of the auditorium but towers a "full (and defiantly blonde) head and shoulders above the rest of the crowd" (68). Just as the chanter begins to sing his introduction, the Stranger slips into the seat beside her whispering the translation into her ear. As the performance unfolds, the Protagonist (and the screenplay's implied spectators) begin to understand that the mysterious black-robed figures we encountered in the diegesis earlier are *bunraku* puppeteers. At first, we view the performance from the perspective of the theater audience in a wide shot of the whole stage, intercut with the Protagonist's reactions; but gradually we are drawn into the world of the play, like the staging of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's film *The Red Shoes* (1948), when the proscenium arch disappears and we are suddenly inserted into the world of the dance.<sup>10</sup> Initially, Lady Purple is portrayed by a traditional *bunraku* puppet, manipulated by three black-robed puppeteers, but gradually the audience and the auditorium disappear, the puppeteers dissolve into nothingness, the puppets become more human and begin to move unaided. This will be achieved by using a mixture of clever intercutting between live action and puppets, a similar technique to that used by director David Wheatley in his adaptation of *The Magic Toyshop* (1987), and cutting-edge computer-generated imagery (CGI) visual effects (as outlined in a personal interview).

As part of the script development process, we workshopped "The Loves of Lady Purple" sequence from the *Flesh and the Mirror* screenplay with Mark Down, master puppeteer and artistic director of Blind Summit Puppet Theatre, and a crew of puppeteers using puppets from the theater's existing collection. Blind Summit is a London-based puppet theater company, who have explored *bunraku* techniques in a number of acclaimed productions: devising the puppetry for the Olivier Award-winning English National Opera production of *Madama Butterfly* (2005), directed by Anthony Minghella; and *Shun-kin* (2008), an adaptation of Jun'ichiro Tanizaki's *A Portrait of Shun-kin* (1933), a coproduction between Complicité and Setagaya Public Theatre, directed by Simon McBurney, which was performed in Japanese with a full Japanese cast. Drawing on our storyboard (Fig. 1), we physically blocked scenes that enabled us not only to explore their visual aesthetics but also to gain a better understanding of puppet design, costume, and set design, which then fed into our development process.

<sup>10</sup> Powell and Pressburger's film is an adaption of Hans Christian Andersen's eponymous fairy tale, which Carter critiques in her 1976 article "The Better to Eat You With" (*Shaking A Leg* 451).



**Figure 1**

Storyboard for *Flesh and the Mirror* used at Blind Summit workshop, 28 June 2018. © Charlotte Crofts.

In attempting to represent Lady Purple's depraved antics on screen, there could be a potential danger in succumbing to "puppet porn," but the remarkable skill of the puppeteers in bringing these inanimate objects to uncanny life, while balancing raunchiness and pathos, is a testimony to their immense skill—what Down speaks of as the craft of "extreme puppetry."

Transposing "The Loves of Lady Purple" into the *bunraku* theater enables us to explore and extend the metaphor of the puppet master and draw connections between the two stories: "Flesh and the Mirror," where the puppet metaphor is implied; and "The Loves of Lady Purple," which is about a puppet that comes to life. As Thomas notes in this issue, although the two stories are "marked respectively by an autobiographical and a fantastic dimension, they both draw on *bunraku* to craft a system of representation cognizant of itself as an aesthetic

construction, and of its subjects as discursive productions of subjectivity.” The screenplay of *Flesh and the Mirror* explores this system of representation both through the reification of the puppet metaphor that Carter utilizes and through dramatizing “The Loves of Lady Purple” as a *bunraku* puppet play. However, it is important to stress here that although many critics (myself included) have read “The Loves of Lady Purple” through the lens of *bunraku*, in the short story she is in fact a stringed marionette, not a traditional *bunraku* puppet. As Maggie Tonkin suggests, “the Professor practises a composite form that combines aspects of *bunraku* with ... the Western literary tradition of the animate puppet” (255). Our dual approach—using both the European tradition of marionettes and the Japanese *bunraku* puppets—enables us to render explicit the connections between the two stories and the two cultures.

When the Protagonist is reunited with Taro in the seedy love hotel, the black-robed figures “manipulate the hands and limbs of the lovers” into a wooden performance of lovemaking. We hear the “clack, clack, clack of wood against wood” and afterwards “the black-gloved hands of the puppeteers lay the heads of the lovers down” on the pillow (71). As the hotel room disintegrates, three black-robed puppeteers usher the Protagonist out of the door into the “vast, empty landscape” that has materialized outside. One puppeteer opens the door, another “takes hold of her heels, sliding her feet forwards” (81). Suddenly, the Protagonist impulsively snatches the hood off a third figure to reveal “her own face ... her hair exactly like the Narrator’s” (81), violently disrupting the division between narrative levels. Carter extends the metaphor of the puppet theater to the film set:

I no longer understood the logic of my own performance. My script had been scrambled behind my back. The cameraman was drunk. The director had had a *crise de nerfs* and been taken away to a sanatorium. And my co-star had picked himself up off the operating table and painfully cobbled himself together again according to his own design! (*Burning Your Boats* 73)

In the screenplay we take this literally. Tokyo collapses like flats on a film set and the camera falls over 90-degrees. This mixing of metaphors of puppet theaters and film sets allows Carter (and us) to riff on themes of theatricality, performativity, and appearances. In developing the screenplay, Bassett and I have explored the importance of fantasy and artifice to emphasize the construction of Japan in the Western imagination, and then to explode it. Our intention is to utilize theatrical staging, old-fashioned camera tricks, and traditional stop-motion animation, while also embracing CGI and digital workflow to enhance the dreamlike world. Much like Carter’s original text, then, the screenplay reveals the artifice of its own construction, mixing live action with puppetry and animation, so that you keep having to ask yourself if what you see is real—a tattoo suddenly springs to life; puppets and automata have a life of their own—à la David Wheatley’s 1987 adaptation of Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*.

These metacinematic techniques mirror Carter's use of metalepsis. Much has been written about both Carter's intertextuality (see Munford) and her intermediality (see Ryan-Sautour, "Intermedial Synergy"). Ryan-Sautour argues convincingly that "other media and forms of intermediality act as an underlying force to Carter's writing" (19). Our screen adaptation is also intermedial, steeped in allusion to other films and images, many of which are also intertexts for Carter. It is crucial to understand how much Carter valued the cinematic image and how much it informs her writing practice, as well as her own adaptations—which I explore extensively in my book, *Anagrams of Desire* (see chapters 4–6). Indeed, Carter's interest in Japanese cinema predates and stimulates her visit to Japan. Marina Warner points out that Carter chose to visit Japan "because she liked Japanese cinema. She liked the films of Akira Kurosawa, which were a blend of realism and fantasy and fairytale—so that was a strong pull on her ... That's what drew her there" (np). According to Snaith, "she was watching Japanese films—specifically the work of Kurosawa—from as early as 1963" (48). She continued this passion for Japanese cinema whilst she was living in Japan. Sozo Araki states that they "frequently went to the cinema together" (*Seduced by Japan* 68). She taught him about European existentialist films, and they watched many Japanese B-movies at cheap cinemas; not art-house films that penetrated to Western audiences, but "tawdry ones featuring mafia, detectives, or love stories" (68–9). She loved *yakuza* gangster films, holding her breath when she saw the tattooed back of a male *yakuza* gang member, and enjoyed "sword swingers" featuring Tatsuya Nakadai (69). Sozo Araki explains, "When I thought certain lines needed to be translated for Angela in order for her to follow the storyline, I whispered the translation to Angela" (69).

Furthermore, Carter employs specifically Japanese cinematic techniques in her writing. As Snaith has argued, Carter "adopts, negotiates, and translates the kind of cinematic techniques used in Japanese films, and subsequently applies [them] to her fiction" (48–49). For example, Snaith points out the "cinematic quality" of Carter's short story "The Smile of Winter," whereby the "compositional elements ... adhere to an 'aesthetically patterned narrative' ... often found in Japanese film" (201). Snaith cites Donald Richie here, who is writing specifically about Japanese cinema, but this "aesthetically patterned narrative" (Richie 8) is also highly reminiscent of the "patchwork" patterns Carter utilizes in "The Quilt Maker."

It would be misleading to assume that this is straightforward appropriation of Japanese culture on Carter's part, as modern Japan is steeped in the global flow of ideas—what Snaith terms "cultural osmosis"—enabling "cinematic techniques to be adapted, borrowed and evolved from other countries" and indeed across media (49). Our screenplay is an extension of this "cross-cultural, intertextual exchange of ideas and images that shift from screen to page (and from page to screen)" that Snaith identifies in her comparative reading of Carter's unrealized screenplay "John Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore" (49). Carter is indebted to Kurosawa, who was influenced by one of Carter's key intertexts, Shakespeare, who in turn influenced Italian film director Sergio Leone, another of Carter's favorite filmmakers. This demonstrates



the cross-fertilization between European, Japanese, and American cinemas and, as Snaith argues, this “borrowing, entangling and meshing of ideas ensures that cinematic techniques and themes are reused, transformed and preserved both on and off the screen” (212). As Snaith suggests, “Carter’s literary oeuvre functions as a vehicle for a cinematic bricolage” (211). Rather fittingly, then, the screenplay ends in the auditorium of the Ritzy Cinema, with a third, white-haired “version” of Carter herself, the novelist as memorialized by Salman Rushdie’s obituary as English literature’s “high sorceress, its benevolent witch-queen.” She is surrounded by a bricolage of intertextual references in an homage to The Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club* album cover, from Marilyn Monroe to Toshiro Mifune and the MGM lion, who makes a cameo in “The Merchant of Shadows,” Freud, Barthes, Baudelaire, and a pack of wolves from “The Company of Wolves.”

### The Intersection Between Cinematic Projection and Mirrors

The title “Flesh and the Mirror” implies a distance between reality and its (visual) representation. If Japanese cinema (representation) draws Carter to Japan, as Warner suggests, then (visual) representation can mean a lot more than has previously been considered, particularly in relation to the metaphor of the mirror. Mirrors—loaded with Lacanian meaning and intertextual reference to Lewis Carroll’s *Alice through the Looking Glass*—form an important visual strategy both in Carter’s writing and, significantly, in her two feature film adaptations, *The Company of Wolves* and *The Magic Toyshop*. As Murai points out, in both “A Souvenir of Japan” and “Flesh and the Mirror,” the mirror operates both “thematically and as an organising principle,” with Carter using a “self-reflexive and fractured narrative structure [which] is correlated with the themes of reflection, looking and reversal” (“Passion” 5).

I want to unpack the transformative moment in the “magic mirror”—perhaps the very moment she “learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalized,” as she later characterized her time in Japan (*Nothing Sacred* 28). The moment of witnessing herself making love to the stranger is enacted formally by a doubling of narrative point of view, simultaneously utilizing both the first-person and third-person pronoun separated by a slash “I/she”, and then flipping it “she/I” in mid-sentence: “Women and mirrors are in complicity with one another to evade the action I/she performs that she/I cannot watch, the action with which I break out of the mirror, with which I assume my appearance. But this mirror refused to conspire with me; it was like the first mirror I’d ever seen” (*Burning Your Boats* 70). The most violent rift between “I/she” happens in the mirror, when “I beset me” (70). As Ryan-Sautour points out, these “[c]onstant shifts in pronouns, in combination with a contrasting and blurring game with generic modes, invite the reader to continually readjust his/her reading contract” (“Autobiographical Estrangement” 6). In the short story, the moment in the mirror signals a shift where the narrative is violently ruptured in an

attempt to disrupt the hegemonic patriarchal structures of traditional narrative. As Michiko Takahashi argues, “[t]his experience of seeing herself as a desiring self and an objectified (desired) self at the same time shakes her self-integrity” (11).

This is the most pivotal scene in the screenplay because it represents the moment when Carter found her voice as a writer. She states elsewhere that, until that time, she had been writing as a “male impersonator” (*Shaking a Leg* 38). The challenge of capturing that transformative moment, that shift in narrative voice, visually fascinates us. What kinds of structures of looking, camera points of view, and editing techniques might capture this Brechtian moment when the narrator shifts point of view and draws attention to the act of narrating? It recalls the moment when Tilda Swinton directly addresses the audience/mirror in Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1992); when he becomes she. One of the ways we have approached this in the screenplay is to double the Protagonist and the Narrator (voice off screen), so that they are speaking in unison but respectively uttering different pronouns: “the mirror ... it refuses to conspire with me/her” (Bassett and Crofts 61). There is a separation between the Protagonist and her reflection: “rather than collude with the eroticism of her *performance*, the *reflected her* in the mirror remains perfectly, unnaturally still” (62).

There are clearly parallels between the silver screen and the Lacanian mirror that have been explored extensively in psychoanalytical film theory. As Christian Metz suggests, “film is like the mirror,” but there is an important distinction between film and the mirror: the fact that the spectator’s body is never reflected back in film (45). This lack of reflection of the spectator’s body is echoed in the screenplay: “[i]n the blink of an eye the reflection judders and disappears completely. Nothing remains. Around the edges of the gilt frame the black glass undulates” (62). However, as Ikoma points out “Carter does not just utilize Lacanian theory here; again, she seems to criticize it” (“Encounter” 83). Likewise, Dimovitz argues that in contrast to Lacan’s “vision of the mirror-as-illusion, Carter’s world of the mirror has the capacity to make one see the self as other, thereby offering a new realm of possibility and change beyond mere cultural inscription” (8). Carter is clearly in dialogue with Lacan, then, but we could equally talk about how the cinema, as silver screen, acts as a mirror in its projection on/representation of other cultures.

Many critics have explored Carter’s use of mirrors, particularly in relation to Japan.<sup>11</sup> Murai argues that Carter represents Japan as “the exact mirror image of the West” (“Passion” 9), and Takahashi similarly argues, “For Carter, Japan was almost like a looking-glass, or to be more exact, an incessantly changing image that appears on the surface of a mirror” (2). Yet, as Pasolini suggests, “it is through the reflection/projection of the Japanese culture into the Western one and through the mirroring of the female subject in the other’s eyes, that female subjectivity is endowed with a new subversive potential” (133). Although there could be a danger of the mirror becoming a racist trope, Carter manages to avoid this. Pasolini argues convincingly that, whilst Carter does use “the mirroring with the Oriental other as a strategy to construct and elaborate her notion of—Western and female—identity,” this is not to reinforce the

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Crofts, Takahashi, Ikoma, Pasolini, Dimovitz, Murai.

“self-other opposition,” but rather to achieve “a deeper understanding of the self—but in part also of the other” (137–8). This shift informs a “far reaching political agenda” which informs Carter’s post-Japan writings (138). As Pasolini argues, “otherness has become a looking glass projecting a *mediated* reflection, adding to the simple reflection of physical appearances the impressions conveyed by having been in a relationship of reciprocity with the other” (146). Carter, therefore, moves beyond the “through the looking-glass” trope to a more complex understanding of intercultural exchange in which the mirror reflects her own otherness.

Our screenplay attempts to emulate Carter’s metaleptic tactics through the following key strategies: via the framing device of the Narrator as a separate character; using analepsis and *mise-en-abyme*; through the mechanism of the puppet show and film set; and through the representation of the uncooperative mirror. By making the narrative clear as a fiction/abstraction in this way, the Protagonist and Narrator split offers versions of Carter which become extensions of the real Carter but not limited to the real Carter. Without honoring Carter’s formal experimentation and narratorial strategies, there is a danger of losing the “magic” of the mirror and reducing it to a straightforward biopic, therefore once again taming Carter’s power as a feminist writer. Ryan-Sautour identifies the “in-between status” of the screenplay as a form (“Intermedial Synergy” 30); that is where I find myself with this project, with the latent potential of the screenplay—a “centre of potentialities” (Ryan-Sautour, “Intermedial synergy” 31)—before it is realized. Only time will tell whether the screenplay, when produced, will do justice to Angela Carter’s “literary gymnastics.”

University of the West of England, UK  
Charlotte.Crofts@uwe.ac.uk

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