

The Magic Toyshop

UK TV : 1986 : dir. David Wheatley : Granada : 107 min
 prod: Steve Morrison : scr: Angela Carter : dir.ph.: Ken Morgan
[Gareth Bushill](#); [Georgina Hulme](#)
 Tom Bell; Caroline Milmo; Kilian McKenna; Patricia Kerrigan; Lorcan Cranitch;
 Marlene Sidaway; Marguerite Porter; Lloyd Newson

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ☞ Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
2872a	2	4	1	-	- - - - -	No	Unseen



Tom Bell as Grimm toymaker Source: 30th London Film Festival programme

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Three children are left in the care of their uncle, a puppet-maker. Weird, sometimes grotesque, fantasy focussing on an adolescent girl's sexual awakening. * "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Like **"THE COMPANY OF WOLVES"**, an Angela Carter period piece. After the death of her parents, pubescent Melanie¹ (Milmo) is sent, along with younger brother and sister, to live with her tyrannical Uncle Philip (Bell), a toymaker who doesn't like children playing with his toys. The central relationship between the girl and her coeval Uncle Finn (McKenna)

¹ Pubescent? At 16??

is touching and funny, but juvenile fantasy is an excuse for numerous not so special effects: a block of wood sprouting into leaf, a stone statue springing tears. These seem incongruous, which is not the same as being surreal. In sad contrast to **"THE COMPANY OF WOLVES"**, the nastiness is tame, the pace too laid-back, the sex not laid-back enough, and a magical atmosphere singularly lacking."

Film Review 1988-89 review:

"This toyshop is definitely not one for the kiddies, with thinly-veiled sexual sadism, incest and magic going on in the back parlour. A strangely disturbing, haunting mixture of the factual and the faery, it is about three suddenly orphaned children - the eldest is a girl of sixteen who is very aware of her physical

sexuality - taken in by their Cockney uncle, a toyshop owner who makes bizarre life-sized puppets and rules with an iron hand.

British-made, near-surrealistic, poetically imaginative and altogether one of the most original films of the year, even if its appeal isn't likely to be wide. Caroline Milmoe gives a lovely performance as the girl and the support she gets is first class. Though made for TV, the film deservedly had its premiere release on the large screen. Bill Connor's music merits a special commendation. Scr: Angela Carter, based on her book of the same title. First shown: London (Gate Notting Hill and Camden Plaza) 31st July 1987. Cert "15". Video release: Palace/PVG - November '87."

30th London Film Festival - 1986 – programme review:

“ **"THE MAGIC TOYSHOP"** is a bold and imaginative cinematic excursion into the realms of Magic Realism, adapted by Angela Carter from her novel about a 15-year-old girl, Melanie (Caroline Milmoe), whose awakening sexuality is disturbed by the sudden death of her parents. Together with her younger brother and sister, she is packed off to live with Uncle Philip (Tom Bell), a sinister figure who rules like a dark god over an unhappy

household, lavishing his only affection on the making of toys and puppets.

His greatest pride is the "Marionette Microcosm", a private theatre for bizarre dramas of his own devising, and when he insists that Melanie takes the lead in his latest production, he unwittingly unleashes the latent powers of all his "play-things" - human and otherwise. Director David Wheatley translates the complex and disturbingly beautiful world of Angela Carter's writing into images of breathtaking richness and vitality, maintaining a delicately balanced credibility with the aid of perfectly-pitched performances. "Dreams aren't catching," one of the characters assures us; this one is."

- Clive Hodgson.

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. Milmoe's true age is not known, but if the first buds of sexuality are sprouting on the block of wood that is her "pubescent" body, it's safe to assume the actress was 17 at least, pigtails notwithstanding, and hence not a true adolescent by our definition. There is still a strand of myth in British culture which prefers to believe that sexuality only begins to "awaken" as a person enters their mid teens. If Milmoe were 12 or 13 these subtexts would have had more truth and resonance, but that would force the audience to equate sexual awakening with puberty, an equation we prefer to avoid.

"THE COMPANY OF WOLVES" was for my money greatly over-rated (**"PAPERHOUSE"** was rather better), and if this is an inferior blend of the same ingredients that doesn't bode very well. The title brings to mind an obscure British short of about the same vintage, the name of which I can't immediately place, in which an Edwardian boy and his father have a hallucinogenic experience in a similar olde worlde magic shop. The film had virtually no dialogue, and no point whatever, so we may be sure it was a BFI production. Nothing else is known of Gareth Bushill (though I suspect he was on television at the time) or Georgina Hulme.

See - putatively anyway - subject index under **ORPHANS / ADOPTION, SEX & SEXUALITY** and **TOYS / DOLLS / MODELS**.