

Feminism in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Feminism in Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*” is a record of first hand research work done by me during the period of my study in the year 2016-2017 and that this dissertation has not formed the basis for the award of any other Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, Fellowship, or other similar title.

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I hereby certify that the dissertation entitled “Feminism in Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*” by C. Zubeni Ezung for the award of M.A. degree is a record of research work done by the candidate under my supervision during the period of her study (2016-2017) and that the dissertation has not formed the basis for the award of any other Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, Fellowship or other similar title and that this dissertation represents independent work on the part of the candidate.

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand the distorted patriarchal world and the consequent need for feminism as seen through the lenses of Angela Carter's novel, *The Magic Toyshop*. And thus obtain a holistic view of the early works of Carter with respect to the furtherance of the feminist movement during the 1960s. Blessed with a wonderful sense of imagination and creativity which can be attested through her quirky use of the Gothic and known myths, Carter is able to get her message across in a powerful and thought provoking manner. We have attempted to discuss the various elements of the patriarchal setup which, although they are particular to the present story, have a deep and abiding sense of familiarity as these are highly relatable. Elements of puppetry and the choking necklace representing unbridled control over woman is an example. Carter deliberately takes the established norms and traditions to bizarre levels to bring out their absurdity and to prove that they are unnatural and man-made. Through the lives of the women in the story particularly Melanie and Aunt Margaret, we have endeavoured to comprehend the limits set for a female and attempted to understand how these are nothing but historical constructs and as such are artificial and could easily be overturned.

Another focus of the present work is to understand the development of the psyche of femininity in woman over the course of her life from a child to an adult with its over-emphasis on chastity and the institution of marriage. Thus, her entire life starts to revolve around these issues and women are assigned fixed gender roles. Carter has also explored, although in not great detail, actions which are considered as taboo in our society such as incest. We have also attempted to comprehend the exploitation of female as a result of gender stereotyping simply based on sex.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Feminism, Femininity, Gothic, Gender roles.

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Introduction

“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.”

(King James Bible, Genesis 2:23)

Since time immemorial, women have been considered as the weaker counterpart of men which can be seen not only from the text given above but also everywhere one can see a deep-seated gender bias, and this bias has become part of the historical and textual tradition. Even though it is a woman who gives birth and brings forth new life, they are always considered as the second sex or the subordinate of men. In all the traditions, women have always been seen as the inferior sex, incapable of doing any serious thinking as their superior male counterparts. It has gone beyond religion, race, country, the period in which they live and has ultimately led to sex-stereotyping in all spheres that concerns women.

But gradually with the passage of time, numerous attempts have been made in order to give women a platform to raise their voice against such gender prejudice, especially through language and literature. In this dissertation entitled “Feminism in Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*”, different elements of Feminism are explored and discussed in order to understand how Carter uses the female characters in this novel to portray the age old plight of women under the monolith of patriarchal society. It also aims to examine Carter’s advocacy for feminism emphasising on the issues of gender- roles. In this light, this paper emphasises on the early part of twentieth century when women all over the world were living by traditional beliefs concerning their life issues like sexuality, economic decisions, and nature of profession which was completely governed by the patriarchal system. There will also be a detailed description of the numerous symbolism and allegories which Carter employs to describe the life and times of Melanie and her moral and sexual progression as a character.

In order to have an easy understanding on the topic that is to be discussed, it is important to have a clear cut idea about ‘Feminism’ or Feminist movement. Feminism is a socio-economic movement which started around the beginning of the twentieth century and which continues to this day and centres its demands round the improvement of the social, economic, and political improvement of women’s conditions and to bring them at par with

men in every aspect of life. Feminism has moved many activists, writers, artists, politicians and people from all walks of life to take up the cause of women in a serious concerted manner.

Subsequently, feminist theory or feminist criticism emerged as a result of this movement. This was a great leap in order to study and understand; re-read and to re-interpret the representations and a misconception of women's writing both as a writer and reader. Feminist theory is the process of codification of the various strands of feminism. It has been developed over the course of modern history with several waves providing a framework for various sub- types of feminism. It is generally divided into five waves of feminism: First-wave (19th and early 20th century); Second-wave (1960s to 1980s); Third-wave (1990s to 2008); Fourth-wave (2008 to present day); Fifth-wave (future concept). Carter comes under the second wave of feminist movement which was concerned with women's authorship and the representation of women's condition within literature including the depiction of fictional female characters, the final goal being the exposition of unfair treatment of women by the dominating male counterparts.

With regard to this field, and among the many renowned female writers, one can undoubtedly choose Angela Carter, a prolific critic and polymath, as the indispensable voice of women who in her various novels has raised some of the most pertinent issues about the position of women in the society. Most of her works deals with the themes of feminism, femininity, magic realism and has a gothic touch.

Angela Carter was a British novelist, essayist, journalist, dramatist and short story writer all in one. She was born as Angela Olive Stalker (her maiden name) in Eastbourne, England in 1940. Her father was a Scottish socialist and journalist. During her early years, she attended the local grammar school, Streatham and Clapham High school and she

described this period as being rather simple. Most of her proximate female relatives including her mother were said to be strong women of pragmatism. However, during her teenage years, she suffered from anorexia. Carter's literary career took off first during the 1960s as a journalist in a South London weekly called the Croydon advertised following her father's footsteps. Later she studied English literature at the University of Bristol, and then began to write cultural criticism for *New Society*, *The New Statesman* and other publications for which she received much praise. She was heavily influenced by all the classics of English literature as well as French literature and owing much to her father's socialist credentials, developed a deep sense of social justice.

She stayed in Japan for quite some time in order to get away from the cultural influence of England which she viewed as a 'demolition site'. She toured much of the Americas, Asia and Europe, gaining a cosmopolitan understanding of the world getting a first-hand experience of the skewed gender relations that more or less existed in all of these places. Carter spent most of her late twenties and thirties as resident writer in various universities such as the University of Adelaide, Brown University, University of East Anglia and University of Sheffield.

Carter has authored more than half a dozen novels and also did a polemical study of Marquis de Sade's *The Sadeian woman*. Her novels included *Shadow Dance* (1966) aka Honeybuzzard, *The Magic Toyshopp* (1967), *Several perceptions* (1968), *Heroes and villains* (1969), *Love* (1971), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) aka The War of Dreams, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), *Nights at the Circus* (1984), *Wise Children* (1991). Besides writing novels, Carter wrote several short fictions such as *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), *The Bridegroom* (1983), *Black Venus* (1985), *American Ghosts and Old World Wonders* (1993), and *Burning your Boats* (1995). She was awarded the John Llewellyn Prize for her second novel *The Magic Toyshopp* in the

year 1969 and *Several Perceptions* won the Somerset Maugham Prize in 1968. Achieving two weighty awards for such early works was a significant boost to her professional stature. Besides these, she is also the recipient of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction) in 1984, Kurt Mascher Award in 1982, and The Cheltenham Prize in 1979. In 2008, Carter was ranked tenth in the Times' list of "The 50 Greatest British writers since 1945." Two of her fictions were adapted into films and she has contributed in writing the screenplays for both the works.

Carter is considered to be a noteworthy writer, falling into a mix of genres. Following from a wide range of categories, her works fall under the genres of magic realism, fantasy, science fiction, Gothic and surrealism. Her works have been indicative of an extraordinary representation of femininity with regards to the feminist and postmodern approach that has been attached to her writing. She is a giant in her field for her critical depiction of gender, sexuality and identity, most notably with the focus on women. With her ability to dispassionately explain the socio-cultural construction into rigid compartments, Carter, in her writings employ strong elements of feminism, the role of being marginal and how women are always marginalized for their gender, and other Gothic elements which represents what is essentially a social issue, in a gory and rather macabre setting. This is what makes Carter's works an engaging and informative read.

Carter's death in February 1992 due to lung cancer is considered a great loss for the 20th century literature. She died at the age of 51. She is survived by her husband, Mark Pearce, and a son, Alexander. Ever since her death in 1992, Carter's writing became what Sarah Gamble suggests as an 'academic urban legend' in her study *Angela Carter* "Writing from the Frontline. Carter was an expert to invalidate the conventional things, by raising questions against them, especially with the issues faced by women.

She has been called as “the high sorceress” and the “benevolent witch-queen” of English literature by Salman Rushdie, who was a close friend, in the introduction to Carter’s 1993 book *Fairy Tales from around the World*. There is a beautiful combination of magic realism, fantasy, surrealism and Gothic tradition in her works.

Carter wrote the novel “*The Magic Toyshopp*” in 1967. The novel chronicles the lives of Melanie and her two younger siblings as they move into their maternal uncle’s house after their parents’ tragic accident which has killed them. Although, Carter does not provide a time period for the setting of the novel, it can be inferred when one of the characters Finn talks about the “National Expedition of 1852” mentioning its arson in 1914. This reference would suggest the novel to be set sometime between 1914 and its publication date of 1967.

After her parents’ death in an air crash, Melanie loses her identity. She suddenly realizes that from now on she is “a little mother” (Toyshop 31) to Jonathan and Victoria. This sudden change in her life makes her feel that she is “no longer a free agent” (Toyshop 31). Melanie, along with her siblings, goes to take up residence in Uncle Philip’s household where the law of the father holds supreme. But in that house she is forced to become a submissive puppet catering to every whims and fancies by the tyrannical figure, Uncle Philip, who is the representation of male domination. Melanie is just one of the toys in his collection. Besides Melanie, Aunt Margaret also represents women suffering under male tyranny. Philip is a puppeteer by profession who controls every aspect of his house in which women are merely dolls and puppets. The title *The Magic Toyshop* symbolically refers to female position and condition in the familial framework. The word ‘Magic’ refers to everlasting effect of patriarchal order which traps or subjugates women and ‘Toyshop’ refers to women’s marginal position in this world. They are treated as mere objects of pleasure and secondary sex. The world is not hiding its identity but still is mysteriously able to suppress women’s sensibilities.

Carter ends the novel with an ambiguous note, giving leeway to her readers to understand and analyse the predicaments of women in a patriarchal set up.

Research Gap: Enough and substantial work is done on Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* and many critics concentrated on the feminist angle too but they failed to cover or give a holistic exploration about the problems faced by women. The present dissertation concentrates on the boundaries set on female behaviour in terms of femininity, patriarchal boundary and its subsequent and often ignored result- Familial exploitation.

Research Objective: The basic objective of this dissertation is to explore and discuss the elements of feminism in the novel *The Magic Toyshop*. Furthermore, the main objectives will be to:

- explore the feminine conditioning and female body
- differentiate between female and male framework of social constructs
- understand patriarchal set- up and how females are sexually exploited
- forefront familial exploitation and female counter measures
- examine and investigate the novel *The Magic Toyshop* with an emphasis on the issues revolving around feminism
- examine Angela Carter's advocacy for feminism

Research Methodology:

Analytical methodology will be employed for this dissertation. A detailed analysis of the novel searching for themes related to feminism and a chronicling of women's circumstances under patriarchy will be done. Study of research articles related to the novel shall be done for the purpose of understanding the elements of feminism employed by Angela Carter in *The Magic Toyshop*. Regarding the format of the dissertation, MLA style (seventh edition) will be followed. Also, various libraries will be visited and internet journals and articles will be studied for the research purpose of this dissertation.

Literature Review:

According to Susannah Clapp, author of *A Card from Angela Carter*:

.... (Angela Carter's) creatures are dolls – it's hard not to think of *The Magic Toyshop*– whose bodies are too rigid to be saucy and too adult to be petted; they are showcases of femininity, made-up versions of the sex that makes itself up. (Page 11)

Angela Carter, in her novels in general and in *The Magic Toyshop* in particular, displays a penchant for using inanimate objects such as puppets and dolls to describe the caged human emotions and feelings. Thus, through an anthropocentric view, she is able to represent the actual state of things in a metaphysical way. Uncle Philip's Toyshop with its large plethora of dolls and puppets shows how patriarchy wants to impose its narrative on the world in which we live. Although dolls are in essence nothing but toys, yet the way they are crafted - rigid, carefully clothed, fixed smile on their faces, silent – subconsciously reveals what a social system based on male superiority and patriarchy wants, in fact, demands of its inferior sex.

According to Linden Peach, writer of *Modern Novelists: Angela Carter*:

...The novel is written from a 'rite of passage' narrative for Carter herself as well as for Melanie.....employs pre-novelistic strategies....narrative conventions borrowed from fairytales....also contains many allusions to theatre. (Page 72, 73)

The Magic Toyshop is a bildungsroman narrative of Melanie – her coming of age story. Although written in the third person, the lens of focus never really zooms out of Melanie. It is her journey from a simplistic young girl to adolescence to adulthood at least mentally and emotionally set against the backdrop of a quasi-Victorian society and economy that Carter has tried to capture. The novel assumes significance when it is considered that it is only her second novel and Carter, through the character of Melanie, gives vent at least to some extent of her own oppressive childhood and teenage years. Thus, it would not be wrong to hypothesize that *The Magic Toyshop* is a chronicle of Carter's 'coming of age' as well.

According to Rebecca Munford, author of *Revisiting Carter*:

From earliest to latest work, Carter plays with allusions from literature, art and film..... At the end of *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), with the Toyshop burning in an apocalyptic conflagration and losing her family for the second time, Melanie escapes on to the roof with Finn. An absolute break with the past is indicated: as Carter herself commented, the Toyshop burns and 'adult life begins' (Sage 190) – though, ironically, even this scene merely replays the past, for Melanie has 'already lost everything, once'the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden as a crucial inter-text here. (Page 10)

Angela Carter received her inspiration from a number of sources: English language classics, Greek literature, French writers and many more. Therefore, she alludes to the works of the great writers such as Shakespeare and Rousseau as well as poets such as John Donne. The tearing of her mother's wedding dress which she had put on is a clear reference to a loss of purity. Furthermore, at the end of the novel when Uncle Philip burns the house down, Finn

and Melanie are shown to be together with Melanie realizing that they would be married one day and that their lives would be far from ideal as neither of them has received any education. This departure from an idyllic scenario is an overt allusion to the fall of Eden with Adam and Eve thrown out of the Garden of Eden and forced to live a life of destitution with Eve receiving a second-class deal as she now has to go through the ordeal of childbirth.

According to Sonya Andermahr and Lawrence Philips, author of *Angela Carter: New Critical*

Readings:

Angela Carter's 1967 novel *The Magic Toyshop* is a representative example in its presentation of dislocation and reorientation. It employs the classic trope of the displaced orphans relocated to the city as fore-text but beneath this lays a subtext of cultural, social and sexual misplacement. It combines styles – fairy tale, social realist, pantomime and English Gothic – each sufficient to itself and yet also part of the whole. It is a novel about the search for an understanding of the world around us.
(Page 274)

Carter beautifully describes the socio-economic situation of the Flowers. They live in the South end of London which is generally inhabited by the poorer section of the city. The rich of the society live in the north which is described when a particular female customer of Uncle Philip was described as an “expensive woman” who came from the north of the river (Toyshop 95). Although it is Melanie's story, Carter takes time and effort to describe the situation of other characters. Even though Uncle Philip is described in a sinister light, Carter points out he was worldly wise as while having a discussion with Melanie about her parents, Philip says that her father could have left her and her siblings with at least some material possessions to live by (Toyshop 144).

According to Edmund Gordon, biographer of Angela Carter:

In Angela Carter's fiction – as in fairy tales – the heroine often makes a dramatic gesture, forsaking everything, giving up her oppressive past for an uncertain future. *The Magic Toyshop* – the novel that most powerfully evokes her childhood – ends with Melanie and Finn looking at each other 'in a wild surmise' as the family home is destroyed by fire. (Page 47)

The novel, *The Magic Toyshop* makes a full circle from the beginning to the end. In the beginning, the story is abruptly interrupted when it is learnt that Melanie's parents have died in a tragic plane accident in the United States. Thus, Melanie comes face to face with the cold hard truth that she now has to take stock of her own life and also the lives of her siblings. She embarks on an uncertain future when she goes to live in Uncle Philip's house in south end of London from her large rural estate. However, things go from bad to worse as Philip turned out to be a sadistic, dominating patriarch who wanted to control everything that went about in his house. This of course is not case and his family members, although behaving subserviently in front of him were all going against his orders behind his back. Finn developing feelings of affinity for Melanie as well as Aunt Margaret having an incestuous relationship with his brother Francie and so on and so forth. Towards the end of the novel, the whole façade collapses when Uncle Philip finds out about his wife and in his rage torches the house down. In the closing paragraphs, Melanie again finds herself in a similar situation as in the beginning, where she is faced with the prospect of an uncertain future.

Jeff Vander Meer, an American *New York Times* Best Selling writer, in his essay on Angela Carter writes that:

The Magic Toyshop deserves special mention among Carter's early works because many of her "signatures" are already in place, including the evil puppet maker, the

grotesquery of the puppets themselves, and her ability to create quick, charming brushstrokes of characterization...

The Magic Toyshop is a truly remarkable piece of writing not only because it showcases the writer's brilliant use of allegories and symbolisms but also because it presents a small glimpse into her future sense of writing and serves as a harbinger of the level of quality of writing which we can expect from her and which she goes on to finesse in the years to come. This is because the novel has almost all of her "signatures" already in place, including the Gothic setting of her novels, wonderful presentation of her female protagonist in terms of complexity and depth, brilliant juxtaposition of the fantastical story with the existing socio-economic reality which becomes her trademark as a magic realism writer, the evil puppet maker, the grotesquery of the puppets themselves, elements of incest, bestiality, and her ability to create quick, charming brushstrokes of characterization.

According to David Wiley, Adjunct Faculty at Brigham Young University writes:

(Although) this extravagant and beautiful novel doesn't match its mind-blowing opening..... (Even without the opening), this would still be a remarkable and highly original work. Prefiguring the outrageous and fully accomplished works that Carter would write for decades to come, *The Magic Toyshop* is a brilliant early step in the direction of genius.

The opening of the novel is truly mind-blowing and starts the story from a high pedestal in terms of quality. However as the story progresses, the rest of the novel does not seem to quite keep up with the tempo which had been set by the opening. Nevertheless it is an extravagant and beautiful piece of writing and to take the criticism mentioned above seriously or to take it as a dampener would be to miss the point altogether which is that the novel, even without the opening, is a work of art and should be considered as such because of its profusely high

content of originality. Serving as a precursor to her long and impressive list of works, *The Magic Toyshop* is indeed a brilliant and a magical first step in the direction of genius.

According to Kate Kellaway, a literary critic working for the *Observer*:

...Carter's imagination was theatrical in the red plush sense. She was a visionary props mistress: every toy in her *Magic Toyshop* was to marvel at, down to the flaring red of a rocking horse's nostril ...

Angela Carter had an eye for the theatrics and not of the garish kind but rather in the 'red plush sense' which is to say that her imagination of the settings in her novels would be so precise and detailed. She was wonderful with her props and can even be considered as a 'visionary props mistress'. In her novel, *The Magic Toyshop* she describes every character, setting, everyday object and landscape with such complexity, intensity, depth and richness that every toy in her Toyshop seems to come alive and makes her readers marvel at every one of them.

According to Gina Wisker, Director of Learning at Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge:

Angela Carter uses horror to explore and expose relationships particularly those of the family....exposing oppression and deception in ostensibly 'normal' families....One of Carter's favorite motif is to reduce people to puppets, dolls and automatons.... (Page 96)

Angela Carter is known for her brilliant characterization of her female protagonists and she does it with élan in *The Magic Toyshop*. Through the robust description of Melanie with all that is going on in her thoughts as well as around her and especially with regards to her disconcerted relationship with her Uncle Phillip, Carter is able to literally transform Melanie into the doll of Uncle Philip's imaginings. This she becomes during the play on 'Leda and the

Swan' in which a phallic puppet bird controlled by Uncle Phillip attempts to rape Leda, which is actually supposed to be played by a puppet doll but is instead played by Melanie.

Chapter 1

Patriarchal Setup and Feminine Boundaries for a Female in *The Magic Toyshop*

Patriarchy refers to a social system in which the male is the head of family and social setups support his supremacy. As the social apparatus gives authenticity and power to this system, it manifests itself virtually in every aspect of life. This means that it affects our social, economic, political and legal understanding and leads to a segregation of the society. It divides society into two distinct groups: man and woman. Feminist scholars, particularly, second wave feminists which includes Angela Carter have significantly altered the definition of patriarchy to make it more negative and sinister by contending that the oppression of woman is not due to the acts of a single man or a group of men but it is rather the patriarchal setup of the society which ensures the never ending oppression of woman (28). It is a mental construct which assumes that women are inherently weaker to men. It relegates domestic functions such as taking care of the home, raising the children, taking care of the husband and the likes to the woman. Thus, all the female characters in *The Magic Toyshop* do not have working jobs. This system can be found in most societies of the world which is not a mere coincidence because before the age of Enlightenment and the advent of science; the division of labour was based on the sole criterion of physical strength rather than mental strength. Therefore, it was only natural for men to become the breadwinners of the family and consequently, the financial head. This power gave him the right to dictate the activities of the household. This power developed over the years and more often than not, took extreme forms as can be seen by Uncle Philip's behaviour towards his family members. The women, on the other hand, all too aware of her own helplessness could do nothing but to simply accept her doomed fate of having being born in the wrong sex. However, this need not be the case in the

future. Gerda Lerner in her 1986 book *The Creation of Patriarchy* argues that male dominance over women is the product of historical development and is not "natural" or biological and hence unchangeable. Therefore patriarchy as a system of organizing society can be ended by historical process. As a postmodern feminist, Carter beautifully employs postmodern techniques of deconstructing universally accepted religious and cultural beliefs and ideologies subjecting them to merciless scrutiny.

To understand the evolution of the patriarchal setup, it is important to note that primitive societies did not have a well-defined social system of patriarchy. Even though conflicting accounts are presented on the situation of women, it can be definitively concluded that there was not an institutionalized form of phallus-centric social order. As Simone de Beauvoir points out, in the early stages of mankind, it was possible that there was a rudimentary form of patriarchy which started to emerge because the man was not bound to one place and would constantly be on the move possibly to defend himself against animals or other hostile humans. However, the female also accompanied him and may have even engaged in fights as well. But the great and unfortunate truth was that she was handicapped by the fact that she had to give birth, which would severely compromise her capacity for manoeuvre and physical work. Thus in a world where only physical strength mattered, she was inherently put into a disadvantage. This was further aggravated by the fact that unlike other mammals, human females had closely spaced maternities. This meant that there would be gaps in the process of everyday labour. Therefore, it was up to the man to bring a balance between reproduction and production. Thus in primitive societies, on the one hand, the woman were resigned to her biological fate to take care of the children and on the other hand, the man had to be risk takers and warriors and conquerors of new ideas and land. Man's ability and capacity to take risk and live dangerously was viewed with the greatest respect and brought the biggest honour. This was because while reproduction was a routine activity

requiring nothing extraordinary, man's foray into the unknown brought with it a unique sense of adventure and so the perception that he was somehow superior to the woman started gaining currency. However, because there was no wholesale ratification of this inequality, womankind was not treated as badly as they would in the later centuries.

With the discovery of agriculture and domestication of animal, human beings gave up their nomadic lifestyle and started settling down in one place. This phase proved to be a bane for womankind as it is in this stage that man started codifying laws and institutionalizing the way of life as they had known. Thus several institutions started to come up: private property, inheritance, and jurisprudence, formal marriages inter alia. All of these discriminated against women. To take the case of private property, a need was felt for permanence of property: the land should be held by the same male owner in perpetuity. As this was not possible, the alternative of bearing male offspring and transferring property through the male lineage was adopted. This can be seen in the novel by the fact that Aunt Margaret is not given any money by her husband and even for grocery shopping; he makes her buy things on "credit" which he later clears (Toyshop 140). Thus, the subordination of woman was now complete as her economic rights of inheritance and private property were extinguished.

During the early centuries post the death of Christ, the unequal and unjust social systems as established during the agriculturists phase were further cemented. Practices such as polygamy started to thrive with no moral limitations on the man and the only limitation was economic. Thus, it is the development of such mindsets of sexual dominance over women from the early centuries onwards that leads to Uncle Philip having subconscious repressions to humiliate and control Melanie. This is implicitly expressed when, on having a conversation with Melanie regarding how much he hated her father, he says that now he would make her and her siblings "little Flowers" (Toyshop 144). On the other hand, marital infidelity and adultery were the worst sins which could be committed by the female. So,

when Philip discovers that his wife was unfaithful to him, his male ego could not take it anymore and his insanity toppled over to such an extent that he burned the entire house down.

The Magic Toyshop written in 1967, is arguably set in the nineteenth century in Victorian England because of the similar themes which can be found in other Victorian era novels such as an emphasis on the difficulty of life and importance of morality. However it does also have some modern elements as there are references to televisions and cars. Thus, together they have the consequent effect of bringing out the irony and contradictions of Victorian England as seen through the lenses of modernity. Therefore, it is obviously clear that the novel has been deliberately botched up chronologically. This is her way of implying that life in England in the 1960s wasn't very different from the 1860s (Victorian era). That the same mindset which existed a century ago still continued and women were still subservient to men and depended on him for her life.

The novel is rife with symbolisms which project the deep seated gender-based inequality and patriarchy in Angela Carter's imagination of England. Carter presents femininity with a distinct flair and élan. She has generally employed two representations of femininity to bring out the nature of patriarchy: a) by showing her female characters as subservient and passive and b) by showing her female characters as bold and outgoing. Through the first representation, she wants to convey the fact that women are subjugated and forced in a male dominated or phallic-centric society to act, talk, behave, and think in a particular way. And this leads to a situation where the characters are confused and depressed. Through the second representation, she tries to present her own version of how women should act and behave. Therefore, the second type of characters are dominating and resistant to the existing social order and have personalities which refuse to be bogged down by patriarchy and come out in rebellion against this social order which is rigged against women from their very birth. Thus, through the first set of characters, she shows how women are

existing as of now and through the second set of characters, she wants to convey or show a model of how women should actually live their lives having full control of their fate and destiny.

In the novel *The Magic Toyshop* Carter employs the first type of representation. Melanie and Aunt Margaret represent the first set of characters that are subservient to their male figureheads who is Uncle Philip in this case. The fact that Carter is a Gothic writer means that her symbolisms become all the more eerie and powerful. The eccentric setting, usage of the puppet metaphor, abandoned and dilapidated buildings, characters with their own personal quirks and idiosyncrasies all presented in an atmosphere of impending danger and precariousness have the awesome effect of leaving the readers with a sense of wonder as well as taking away the important point that there is still much to be done about the liberation and empowerment of women. Some of the elements employed by Carter have been described below.

At the very start of the novel, one of the most powerful and defining moments of the novel plays out. While her parents are abroad, Melanie secretly enters her parents' bedroom and steals her mother's wedding dress. At the age of fifteen, she is highly curious about her body and the sexuality surrounding it. Therefore, she puts the wedding dress on and ventures out into the night in the family's compound. Later on, when she decides to return, she finds that she has forgotten the house key and is therefore forced to climb up the apple tree. Here, the 'apple tree' is a biblical reference to the fruit which was forbidden to be eaten by God. And Melanie, like Eve, decides to trespass that commandment anyway. While climbing the tree, the cloth gets torn and she bruises herself suggesting a loss of innocence as it were.

In the novel, Uncle Philip who is the embodiment of male authority and patriarchy happens to be a puppeteer amongst his other 'talents'. This is no happy co-incidence but a

deliberately planned one to symbolize Melanie and Margaret's helplessness against the whims and fancies of Philip. Both Melanie and Margaret are completely dominated by him and his totalitarian regime and live in constant fear of his cruel actions unable to freely express their own views and ideas and thereby remain suppressed. It is important to note that the puppet is the embodiment of passivity as it does not have any power of its own and instead is completely propped up and controlled by another person, the puppeteer, who freely exerts his own or her own power over the puppet. Thus, all the characters in the novel have been depicted as puppets that are controlled and dominated by Uncle Philip. The puppet-show 'Leda and the Swan' is the most striking example of how Philip has turned Melanie into one of his puppets, especially because she actually takes the place of a puppet which would have otherwise played the role of the swan in Uncle Philip's play.

A visible representation of Margaret's domination by her husband is the choking necklace which he makes her wear every Sunday. The necklace is a sign of bondage which visualizes the 'choking' of both women. The fact that he makes her wear this on Sundays is a clear reference to religion as well as Sunday is considered holy in the Christian religion. Through this, Carter draws similarities between religion and patriarchy and implies that the two are not mutually exclusive of each other and definitely help and feed into each other. Moreover, this act of wearing an uncomfortable necklace is a way of showing the suppression of her thoughts and opinions. By leaving her voiceless, she is being deprived of a crucial aspect of her personality (her voice and thus her contribution) and which is what Carter is directly hinting at: that socially enforced arbitrary dictums of male supremacy have the effect of distorting and mutating women's personalities and results in a strange and unnatural person completely different from her own true personality. This is what Margaret seems to have become as a result of her husband's dominating nature.

The horrible incident of Philip exerting his power over Melanie is the rape scene during Philip's puppet performance on Christmas where Melanie is literally transformed into the Doll of Uncle Philip's imaginings. What is detestable is the fact that Philip disregards all boundaries and tries to dominate Melanie even sexually. In the play, Melanie has to play the female protagonist in Philip's puppet performance of the *Leda and the Swan* myth and is brought on stage acting as Leda along with a fake puppet swan which is controlled by her uncle Philip. By means of the swan, Philip is able to give vent to his sexual fantasies concerning Melanie and to rape her, even though the act of the rape is carried out indirectly through the swan. This is the most striking example of how Philip has turned them into his toys.

Another indication of complete domination is Margaret's self-imposed dumbness. This is expressed by Finn as "Not a word can she speak." (Toyshop 37). This self-inflicted condition apparently came to her on her wedding day like a curse. This is to signify that this condition started when she came to be associated with Philip. Her dumbness is her coping mechanism in the presence of Philip. She does not like it but prefers it to the alternative of Philip tormenting and torturing her if she says anything which is not palatable to him. Moreover, Uncle Philip is seen to like those who acquiesce with everything he says which is conveyed by the fact that he likes "silent woman" (Toyshop 63). This goes on to show that Margaret is keenly aware of her husband's arbitrary nature which is symbolic of patriarchy's arbitrary and discriminatory position with regards to women. Towards the end of the novel, when Uncle Philip burns the house down, for the first time Aunt Margaret yells out to Finn and Melanie urging them to escape.

The women in the house are completely dependent on the male authority for any sort of purchase. When Melanie asks Margaret for some money to buy some Christmas presents, she replies that Philip doesn't let her have any money. And after she says this, they exchange

an “ancient, female look” (Toyshop 140). They understood that they were mere poor women pensioners living at the mercy of the male authority. Also, Philip only lets Margaret buy groceries and that also in credit. Through this, he ensures that she is completely subjugated and prevented from taking a stand against him. Carter is hinting that financial independence is crucial for the liberation and empowerment. Because if Margaret was financially independent, she would have the courage to stand up to Philip’s whims and fancies and demand that she be treated better. But since she is not, she understands that there is no decent life for her outside of Philip’s home and thus for better or for worse, she gives an unwilling consent to him.

Although Uncle Philip takes great pride in the fact that he is the sole breadwinner of the family, through his own insecure and insane state of mind, Carter derides the capitalist mindset of the 1960s which continues to this day and which says that economic success can be equated with personal contentment. That in spite of being the financial head, he was nothing short of a deranged person as he never attempted to understand his family members rather choosing to spend his time in the basement with his puppets. Towards the end of the novel, his insanity comes to the fore when he decides to burn down the entire house and gleefully look on as a spectator.

The restriction which Philip imposes on Melanie and Margaret is another example of their personalities fading away. Margaret is made to wear a particular dress every Sunday by Philip. The dress itself is described as dull and lifeless being made of cheap material and of “deadly, flat shade of grey” colour (Toyshop 111). This is because Philip likes to see his wife in this dress, a dress which expresses her lack of joy and happiness, her unfulfilled desires and dreams and the negation of her very own personality. Every time Margaret puts on this dress, it sucks out more of her individuality. Uncle Philip also forces Melanie to adhere to certain dress codes and to change from trousers to “a schoolgirl skirt” (Toyshop 63).

Margaret is described as “painfully thin”, her face drained of all colour and blood. Melanie even wonders what is she made of and thinks of ‘bird bones, tissue paper...and straw” (Toyshop 138). This shows that the emotional trauma and pain troubling her on the inside has manifested in her outer appearance as well. The character of Finn is described as having a rather feminine nature and by extension having a gentle and kind personality. On the other hand, Uncle Philip is described as “immense” (Toyshop 69); roaring and unidentifiable in the darkness he creates. His physical stature is the personification of the male ego inculcated in a system based on patriarchy.

After the rape scene, Melanie is completely shocked:

She was hallucinated; she felt herself not herself, wrenched from her own personality, watching this whole fantasy from another place (Toyshop 166).

This sentence clearly points to her disempowerment which is ultimately the end result of patriarchy: A loss of identity.

The abandoned, overgrown park that Melanie and Finn visit together (and apart), with its fallen statue of Queen Victoria seems to symbolize the death of the British Empire, and perhaps even the death of traditional patriarchy. It's there that Finn first kisses Melanie, and after a theatrical fiasco in which Philip has Melanie playing Leda raped by the swan, Finn takes the swan-puppet to the park and buries it next to the fallen statue.

Melanie's mother, a model wife, builds her life around her husband. She is featured in a celebrity home edition magazine and goes with her husband on his trip. Aunt Margaret is a reclusive and obedient wife to her deranged husband. Melanie accepts her inferior status to man and resigns to her fate that she will end up leading a poor life with Finn will dominate and control her for the rest of her life.

Finn and Melanie are attracted to each other sexually despite being cousins. Aunt Margaret is in an incestuous relationship with her brother. These are symbolic of the fact that

because Uncle Philip controls everything, these relationships even though unnatural are outlets for the characters to feel loved and are silent attempts to express themselves sexually. Through her incestuous relationship, Aunt Margaret attempts to take control of her body from Uncle Phillip and thus, to have control in some way over her life.

Angela Carter is famously known for her ‘demythologization’ of patriarchy which means to deconstruct the myths and stories that show patriarchy in a positive light. These myths reinforcing patriarchy have been most of the times unscrupulously planted in our daily discourse by the social system that we live in right from our childhood. Therefore, the end result is that people are brainwashed into thinking that that is the right or proper state of things. Myths can be ideas, fairy tales, images, parable, legend or any form of tradition that have been told and retold for generations and which are not critically analysed and dissected but are accepted and adored as harmless beliefs and that they teach us some great moral lesson. It is not being argued that all myths have sinister motives; however it can also not be denied that a number of myths do indeed reveal the rigid boundaries that exist for a woman and what is expected of her and what happens to her if she ever attempts to breach those boundaries. Thus, these myths perpetuate the stereotypes about femininity and help create the internal validation for such a system to be in place. Carter stood vehemently opposed to such myths arguing that these myths are human constructed ideas with no rational or intelligent basis and therefore do not have any sanction in a modern society. In this vein, she is strikingly similar to Gerda Lerner:

The system of patriarchy is a historic construct; it has a beginning; it will have an end. Its time seems to have nearly run its course—it no longer serves the needs of men or women and in its inextricable linkage to militarism, hierarchy, and racism it threatens the very existence of life on earth. What will come after, what kind of structure will be the foundation for alternate forms of social organization we cannot yet know. We are

living in an age of unprecedented transformation. We are in the process of becoming.
(228-229)

Therefore, Angela Carter is engaged in a war of ideas with the existing system. She argues that everything that we know about society and gender roles - social life itself - is a deliberate creation of patriarchy which must be deconstructed, demythologized and critically analyzed in the light of gender equality and rationality in order to truly establish a just social order. Thus, Carter employs a gamut of myths in *The Magic Toyshop* – stories, poems, songs and myths – to which Carter constantly refers to in the course of her exposition, to prove the point that human beings are constructed from head to toe by the stories we tell ourselves.

The symbol of patriarchy throughout the novel is the character named Philip Flower, who is Melanie's uncle and the husband of Aunt Margaret. As Melanie is the protagonist, throughout the novel, he is referred to as Uncle Philip. Uncle Philip is described as this god-like human being who is in total control of the people around him and what makes the matter worse is that he is acutely aware of that fact. His physique has been as described as tall, broad and imposing. As physical prowess is essentially the basis for the validation of patriarchy, Uncle Philip is automatically regarded as the sovereign and ruler of the household. He terrorizes his family with no remorse and treats everyone with contempt. His profession is toy making and he is also a puppeteer. However he doesn't sell his puppets with which he spends time with as a "hobby" (Toyshop 64). His Toyshop is a metaphor for our world of patriarchy in which everything is controlled as just as the Toyshop had "partially assembled puppets in all sizes, some almost as tall as Melanie herself; blind eyed puppets, some armless, some legless, some naked, some clothed, all with a strange liveliness as they dangled unfinished from their hooks" (Toyshop 67). Just as patriarchy, with its rules and regulations, with its do's and don'ts and its myriad list of laws has the effect of constricting women's lives, so also Uncle Philip with his overbearing ego and medieval concepts of woman as the weaker sex,

overly controls everyone particularly Aunt Margaret and Melanie. The profession of a puppeteer has been deliberately assigned to him to signify that he controls and manipulates everyone in the family. Thus, Uncle Philip and patriarchy are one and the same. Just as Philip literally controls the puppets, patriarchy metaphorically controls and dictates the lives of women.

The obsessive need to control Melanie was best exemplified during the play of 'Leda and the Swan.' It is the climax of the horrors of patriarchy. Through the puppet swan, Uncle Philip gives vent to his pent-up desires to physically dominate Melanie. As the Greek mythology goes, the swan which is the manifestation of Jove (Zeus) rapes the human female Leda. And so, as the puppet swan approaches Melanie, she couldn't help but laugh at the forced nature of the act. Moreover, the swan was not majestic as Melanie had expected but had a rather comical appearance. This act of hers was deliberately inserted by Carter to show the fallacy and artificiality of patriarchy. That even though on the outside man tries to dominate her and act as the superior sex; on the inside he is just as vulnerable and insecure as woman. And that his act of supposed manliness is nothing but a façade to cover for his weaknesses and an attempt to overlook his own deficiencies. Thus, by presenting the swan in a less holier-than-thou fashion, Carter tries to undermine the supremacy of a phallus-centric social system and its claim to power. This seemed to irk Uncle Philip who makes the swan violently abuse Melanie. She is traumatized by this sudden approach and yells out in protest only for the curtains to be rolled down. Uncle Philip is visibly irritated by this reaction of hers. And utters that she "overacted and was melodramatic.....puppets don't overact" (Toyshop 167).

Another myth that she applies continuously in *The Magic Toyshop* is 'Bluebeard's castle', a French folktale written by Charles Perrault. In the story, the eponymous Bluebeard is a cruel and wicked man who has a penchant for marrying young beautiful women and

murdering them after a while. He keeps the dead bodies of his former wives in a chamber in the basement. Thus, just like Bluebeard, Uncle Philip is the embodiment of evil in the house who has repressed obsessions of dominating Melanie and Aunt Margaret completely.

She (Melanie) felt lonely and chilled, walking along the long, brown passages, past secret doors, shut tight. Bluebeard's castle. Melanie felt a shudder of dread as she went by every door, in case it opened and something, some clockwork horror rolling hugely on small wheels, some terrifying joke or hideous novelty emerge to put her courage to the test. (Toyshop 82)

Chapter 2

Categorising Female into Feminine Self and Familial Exploitation in *The Magic Toyshop*

“The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood... She embarked on a traced voyage, exploring the whole of herself.”

(Toyshop 1)

Carter depicts the biological change in a female body through Melanie’s transformation from a little girl to a recently blossomed woman, so young and fresh. We can see how Melanie embraces her physical change with great admiration. She is discovering her body like a “new found land” (Toyshop 1), utterly amazed and thrilled by the thoughts of being a full grown woman like her mother. One major instance that encapsulates this exploration is shown where Melanie sneaks into her parents’ room one night while they are away on a book tour to America. Out of sheer curiosity, Melanie wears her mother’s wedding dress and starts fantasizing about the bliss of womanhood and is overwhelmed by the strong desire of being dressed in ‘white’- “symbolic and virtuous white. White satin shows every mark... Virtue is fragile” (Toyshop 13). But all her excitement turns to fear when she sets out of the house that night. Suddenly “she was lost in this alien loneliness and terror crashed into the garden, and she was defenceless against it” (Toyshop 18). This represents the other side of man- made female boundary where women are not treated as equals. As soon as a woman sets out of her confinement in order to explore her potentials and live her out her dreams, societal norms and conditions straps her back within her four walls. Traditions, social customs, cultural norms, these are all pinned down on women and very few on men. This is one big obstacle on the

way of a female's growth, be it in her sexual explorations or worldly adventures. She is a woman and that is the ultimate reason for her to be meek, submissive, and reserved.

Melanie's fear of the cold, dark night is shown as being connected to gender stereotyping, that is, female are weak not only physically but both emotionally and mentally as well. The scene where Melanie wounds herself and bleeds while climbing up to her room is one major instance in the novel which is quite symbolical. Carter has carefully used this as a way of foreshadowing what awaits Melanie in the near future. Staining her mother's 'virtuous' wedding dress is symbolical of Melanie's fate, that is, how she will soon be robbed off of her naivety and virtue after being exposed to the real world outside her comfortable and cozy home.

Furthermore, Melanie's realization that "she was no longer a little girl" (Toyshop 1) shows that she was gracefully accepting her physical change and that has made her all the more enthusiastic about her life as a grown up. Just as Eve, (God's first female creation) she became aware about the knowledge of good and bad. The kind of character that Carter portrays through Melanie is that of a young, dreamy girl who is unfamiliar with the ways of the world, cocooned in her own cozy home where she is secure and safe from the harsh reality of life. From an early age, Melanie is seen day dreaming about her wedding. In one instance when Mrs. Rundle talks about death, Melanie gets horrified by the thought that she may not be able to get married before she dies. She earnestly hopes that she gets married and that she was "forty and it was all over" (Toyshop 6). Melanie is a girl full of dreams and fantasies. She secretly prays to God either to let her get married or to let her have sex. Here, Carter is showing the discreet side of every woman who, like Melanie, at some point or the other, is worried about their sexual desires to never be fulfilled. The age old belief that a female is by default the weaker sex and that "the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities... on account of its weakness it quickly approaches its maturity and old age since

inferior things all reach their end more quickly” (*Generation of Animals* trans. Peck) shows how men treats women in the society. They are treated as an item or commodity which can be easily possessed and disposed off. For a woman, patriarchal set-up is like a cage where men subjugate them and where societies assign them certain roles. Women are generally viewed as prisoners of her body and her house.

For a woman, marriage is a big deal. It not only provides them love but also a constant source of protection, security, and a good social status. Carter has described the importance of this issue through the female characters in the novel, especially through the character of Mrs. Rundle, Melanie’s housekeeper. She is “fat, old and ugly” (Toyshop 3) and actually unmarried. “She adopted the married form by deed poll on her fiftieth birthday as her present to herself” (Toyshop 3). Mrs. Rundle gave herself the title of a married woman (‘Mrs.’) because she thought it gave a woman “a touch of personal dignity as she grew older” (Toyshop 3). This proves the importance that marriage had and the legitimacy that it provided.

Besides that, it is every woman’s dream to be married and live a blissful life. Even young Melanie is hopeful and earnestly wishes to get married after she grows up, thus reflecting the impact of man- made social conventions which governs the female psyche to a large extent. Through this, Carter surfaces one important issue faced by women in all society, that is, the obligation of marriage and the shame attached to the prospect of remaining a spinster or unmarried. Even during the twentieth century in England, Victorian conventions were greatly upheld. For a woman to remain unmarried was quite a matter of disgrace and instability, especially in terms of monetary issue. The shift in Melanie’s life takes place when she, along with her siblings, enters Uncle Philip’s house after the tragic demise of their parents. From being a newly blossomed young girl, she suddenly has to take the role of “a little mother” (Toyshop 29) for her siblings. They are compelled to move out of their house

because of financial crunch. Every item in their house was to be sold off. Consequently, Mrs. Rundle sends them to their maternal uncle's house in south London.

Carter presents the tyrannical side of male hegemony through the portrayal of Uncle Philip as a stern, overbearing, domineering, and a callous man. He is a man who likes to control everything that he owns. This makes him a perfect representation of a typical male psyche which is governed with the notion that females are just sub-ordinates and inferior to man. Our female characters in the novel are trapped inside a completely male-dominated society. Being a puppeteer, he creates and controls everything that stays inside his house. Even his family members are treated like puppets rather than as humans. He shows no love and affection to anyone. The only thing he holds dear is his puppet theatre, and is rather obsessed with his hobby.

It is said that Melanie faces patriarchal pressures only after she goes to Uncle Philip's house but fact of the matter is, Carter shows it even prior to this new venture in Melanie's life. The very fact that Melanie dreams and wishes to grow up and enjoy the bliss of a wedded life somewhat shows how the institution of marriage, which is again man-made, has shaped her mind in making this as her main purpose in life. She takes solace in imagining wonderful things about adulthood and enjoys day dreaming about her life after marriage. But after her parents' death, Melanie realizes that she was "no longer a free agent" (Toyshop 31). She is now obliged or forced to accept the harsh reality of life which begins under the custody of Uncle Philip.

Being born a female is not a choice. Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) argues that although 'sex' is a biological fact and 'gender' is a subjective truth through the cultivation of certain stereotypes, the idea of gender and gender differentiation is passed down "from one generation to the next" (29). The book looks at the acts of sex as defined by

patriarchy through the lens of emotion. In this novel we are introduced to such issues which particularly restraints or subdues women's voice because of their gender. One such character is Aunt Margaret, Philip's wife. Carter depicts her as "a wind-up putting-away doll, clicking through its programmed movements" (Toyshop 76). Her submissiveness is not something natural. It is as if she is a breathing puppet "without volition of her own" (Toyshop 76). According to Melanie, she is made of "bird bones and tissue paper, spun glass and straw" (Toyshop 138). Even her physical traits are exposed in the most vulnerable way. A woman's destiny is so closely tied to her gender. Moreover, due to the gender-roles assigned by society, it has conditioned the human mind to expect every woman to fulfil certain responsibilities at every stage of their lives.

Melanie, Margaret and Mrs. Rundle are victims of such social constructs. Each of them represent the various conditions of women- one who is too young to voice out, one who is too submissive and dependent, and one who lives according to the social dictums. Right from early childhood, a female child is shelled and protected under her father's rule. Then comes the time after she is married, she is again under male dominance through her husband. Even after she is widowed, she stays under the dominance of her son and father-in-law. This is a continuous cycle of endless subjugation. Throughout their lives, women are constantly under the reign of patriarchy because they are considered to be weak in every sphere, and always in need of a man's support. People are least bothered about their individuality, their identity as a woman which is equally important as a man in the role of creating a new life. Woman is the life force without which humanity will cease to flourish. And this is what Carter tries to exemplify in this novel. Through the ill treatment of the female characters such as Aunt Margaret and Melanie, she is showing how women are marginalized in terms of their sex and gender.

All the woman characters in the novel did not have a working job and are depicted as housewives or caretakers. Also, the continuation of old and medieval concepts of female purity and the great emphasis on maintaining the sanctity of the institutions of marriage and male line inheritance to name a few are examples of the existing status quo. Therefore, it was extremely important for a woman to maintain their femininity, to look presentable at all times. For instance, Melanie, although a girl in her adolescence, is consumed by the thought of marriage and understands that she has to not grow fat as then nobody would marry her. When Mrs. Rundle served her a bowl of bread pudding, she refused to eat because:

She was afraid that if she ate too much of it she would grow fat and nobody would ever love her and she would die virgin (Toyshop 3).

By doing so, Carter is trying to show how women are bound to think about their body as the most important asset because the society has conditioned our minds to think that physical beauty is what defines a woman's aura. It is not self-imposed but rather drawn on the lines of social expectations. Melanie is aware of her maturing body parts and thus admires it with great awe and pride. She was "beautiful and had never been out with a boy" (Toyshop 9). At the onset of the twentieth century less than one third of women had premarital sex and it was not until the 1980s that couples started living together regardless they were married or not. As Carter's novel falls between these times, this reflects how the female characters were living by traditional beliefs and rules regarding marriage and sexuality- a time when women were still, to a large extent, oppressed by patriarchy. The novel may be set during a time when all aspects of women's lives were observed and controlled but Angela Carters *The Magic Toyshop* can be recognised as attempting to represent sexuality as not only a domain of restriction, repression and danger but also as a domain of agency.

A woman's virginity is always expected to be intact until she is married whereas the same does not apply to men. There is no stigma attached to a non- virgin man but contradictorily, though both male and female are sexual beings, a woman who does not maintain her chastity before marriage is considered as defiled and unholy, making them unsuitable for marriage. This social stigma is indoctrinated in all societies throughout the ages.

Women are never off the radar from public speculations. Vis-a-vis the way they talk to the way they dress, eat, walk, they are always under the impression that somebody is watching them. This, to a large extent, makes them conscious about the way they carry themselves, thus giving them less space to be who they really are or want to be. One such instance in this novel is when Melanie wears a pair of trousers at Uncle Philip's house; Finn violently warns her saying that she can't wear them because Uncle Philip:

Can't abide a woman in trousers. He won't have a woman in the shop if she's got trousers on and he sees her. He shouts her into the street for a harlot (Toyshop 62).

Even Aunt Margaret wasn't exempted from this. Philip controlled all his women strictly. The frowsy grey dress which Philip makes her wear during Sundays was "old- fashioned and made of cheap, unyielding woollen material" (Toyshop 111). The colour grey signifies an extermination "of any possibility of prettiness" (Toyshop 111). It was a dress which expresses her lack of joy, her unfulfilled desires and dreams, and the negation of her own personality. Along with that, she is also made to wear a necklace which is clasped around her throat, giving it an "almost sinisterly exotic and bizarre" look (Toyshop 112). To gift his wife such a restricting ornament and a dull, unattractive dress, and to dictate the type of clothes that a girl is supposed to wear just goes on to show how Uncle Philip, the representation of male dominance, is brooding all over the domestic as well as personal spheres of both the women's

lives. They are not given any leeway to dress according to their wish which to a large extent is robbing them off of their feminine desire, that is, to look beautiful and presentable.

There is an underlying theme of familial exploitation in this novel which Carter incorporates through the use of the Greek mythology 'Leda and the Swan'. The horrible act of Philip exerting his power over Melanie is the rape scene during his puppet performance on Christmas where Melanie is literally transformed into the doll of Uncle Philip's imaginings. What is detestable is the fact that Philip disregards all familial boundaries and tries to dominate Melanie even sexually. Aunt Margaret's assurance to Melanie saying Philip will not harm her because she is "his sister's child" (Toyshop 138) is but just in vain because after the play, Melanie is totally horrified and perturbed. Philip deliberately chooses her to play the role of Leda because he sees her as "white chiffon... a very young girl" (Toyshop 141). Her purity was what invoked Philip's incestuous desire. The puppet swan is a manifestation of Philip himself, and it was controlled by him. Through the swan, he is able to vent his sexual fantasies concerning Melanie and to force himself upon her, even though the act is carried out indirectly through the play. There are many cases like this in reality as well. Such heinous exploitations take place in and within the circle of family also. Women are always a soft target and therefore objectified, be it anywhere around the world. Carter is condemning the perversion of thought which defines a female's body as mere sex object by ignoring all familial boundaries and values.

Carter also shows the unfortunate side of an unhappy marriage through the plight of Aunt Margaret. By doing so, she is showing how women like Margaret suffer under the hands of their tyrannical partner, chaining them to their cruel and unhappy relationship rendering them helpless and not dependent. Ever since the day of her marriage, Philip snatches away her right to speak. "It was a terrible affliction... like a curse. Her silence..." (Toyshop 37).

Carter is not only presenting the problem but she is also hinting the fact that such weakness of women should be discarded because it simply is not sensible to totally compromise their identity and become completely subservient, even up to the extent of losing one's voice. This is not an act of devotion. It is only an act of fear and dominance, the notion that man is God and his word is world, vice-versa. This type of puppet- women, as discussed in the earlier chapter, fears to voice out because they are made to think that being meek and obedient is what's expected of them as a woman or wife. It is a natural duty and that it should not be questioned.

There comes a striking revelation in chapter nine of the novel where Melanie comes to know about the incestuous relationship that Aunt Margaret shares with Francie, her brother: "Francie and Aunt Margaret embraced. It was a lover's embrace, annihilating the world" (Toyshop 194). Melanie's young adolescent mind could not take it all at once. Bewildered, she looks at Finn for answer, to which he says that "they are lovers. They have always been lovers... they are everything to each other" (Toyshop 194). Carter leaves this issue with an open- end without centralising it because she wants to make the point that when women find themselves in a loveless situation they tend to find love even in the unlikeliest of relationship. Although incest can be considered normal in what is largely a gothic inspired novel, there is definitely a human aspect to it as well, as can be understood from Finn's answer to Melanie.

Through the lives of Melanie and Margaret, we see the plight of women that were not only persisting in the past but are deeply rooted and continue to be the main reason for their lack in progress. For instance, in India, the power of forty-nine is largely ignored. Women make more than forty- nine percent of the population in India. But they are still treated as the unwanted or unimportant population because of various social constructs which has deeply taken its roots in every society. Such things leads to rape, sexual exploitations, familial

exploitations, so on and so forth. We must understand that a female boundary is not physical, rather it is culturally made. If we compare any western countries with a country like India, diverse in culture and ethnicity, we find countless differences with regards to women empowerment and female boundaries. What is considered fashionable there is considered vulgar here. Even the way they live, women get full liberty to live freely. The point is, female boundaries are set by patriarchal dictums and cultural obligations. Throughout their lives, women live under the hands of their male counterparts just because society has conditioned us to accept and think that it is right to do so.

Conclusion

Published at a time in history when significant change, not only for women, but the entire western world was about to take place, *The Magic Toyshop* illuminates the metamorphosing

social dynamics in the way women writers sought to tackle the problems faced by women in the society. Angela carter sensed this moment. With a postmodern approach intertwined with magic realism and gothic fiction, Carter developed herself into an influential feminist writer trying to contend with some of the most pertinent questions on gender and femininity in the 1960s. While her later works have more finesse in terms of consistency and quality, it is the edginess and raw originality of her early works that included *The Magic Toyshop* which heralded her as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. *The Magic Toyshop* has been critically praised by a number of high profile critics and writers and has received numerous recognitions.

In the dissertation, we have attempted to dissect the novel and understand the symbolisms of patriarchy and the gender roles which are expected of a woman. Carter has provided a wonderful and intriguing background for the novel filled with numerous imageries, references to mythology and old classics. A careful perusal of the novel makes it abundantly clear that life for a female in the Victorian and post-Victorian era was very difficult and substantially the same, if not worse, as it had been since the institutionalization of agriculture and private property. Inordinate amount of emphasis on virginity, marriage, outer appearance, materialism among others were the cold hard reality for women of this era. Through the use of myths such as Leda and the Swan and Bluebeard's castle, Carter points out how we, as a society, have been taught to think and act in a particular way. She argues that it is all mental conditioning through language, stories and clichéd metaphors. Through this deconstruction of generally unquestioned and accepted truths, she confirms and validates her credentials as a post-modern and post-structural feminist. Her use of the gothic technique, with representations of eerie background, a continuous theme of puppetry, discovery of a severed hand, the idea of a Toyshop itself, enactment of the Leda and the swan play and many such themes, makes her narrative all the more compelling and forces us to delve deeper into

the issues at hand. Written as a fictitious account of a girl reeling under the tyranny of her uncle, the political and social undertones in the book are but obvious. It is highly thought provoking and leaves it to the readers to draw their own individual conclusions about what happens to the characters of the story.

Although written in a manner reminiscent of Dickensian stories with clichéd tropes such as orphaned children, evil relative, backdrop of a working class struggling society inter alia; the story doesn't end on a happy note which is quite unlike Dickens' works. The ending is highly curious as it is rather cautious of the future. This marks a departure from the consistent theme that she had used in the novel which was mythology. Now, it is clear that all myths end on a happy note: whether it be Cinderella who is rescued from her deplorable condition, or Snow white who finds her prince and so on and so forth. However, in the case of *The Magic Toyshop* our protagonist Melanie does not have the luxury of a fairy-tale ending. In the end of the novel, she finds herself in a precarious situation where she has to contend with the fact that her life will never be easy and that she will end up being known as so-and-so's wife with no identity of her own. Even her white knight, Finn, is nothing like the heroes in the myths in that he is described as dirty, smelly and slightly effeminate. Thus, Carter is highly pragmatic and painfully aware of the dichotomy between myths and reality. Through the rather anticlimactic ending from the point of view of Melanie, Carter is also giving vent to her apprehensions about the progress of feminist movements if there is no change in the social order as we know today. But it is not all gloomy as there is a tinge of hope as well as can be understood by the short yet easy conversation between Finn and Melanie at the end of the novel. Finn is nothing like Uncle Philip and is more prone to reason and love. Thus, like all great novels, it ends on an ambiguous note.

In the second chapter the topic of "Female, Feminine and Familial Exploitations" is discussed thoroughly. Here Carter's attempt to represent women as sexual agency can be seen

within both the characters of Aunt Margaret and Melanie; however, both suffering under the tyrannical hands of Philip, Margaret and Melanie seek freedom in the form of another male, Francie for Margaret, and Finn for Melanie. Margaret finally regains her voice during Philip's attack on her and her brother towards the end of the book which culminates in the burning of the entire house. She informs Finn and Melanie to escape while there is still time. "Catastrophe had freed her tongue" (Toyshop 197). Margaret finds freedom only through her incestuous sexual relationship with her brother. In this regard, Paulina Palmer's quote stating that women in a patriarchal society are "pressured to seek refuge from one man in the arms of another" (Paulina Palmer. 1987) is quite relevant to both the female characters, as although she does not share the same relationship with Philip as Margaret does, Melanie is still subdued to his control, including sexual control through the symbolic rape and also by the threat of homelessness if she does not acquiesce with his rules and demands.

The novel ends as it had started. Just as Melanie found herself at a crossroads in the beginning of the novel, she is met with a difficult reality at the end as well. It marks a full circle thereby, in some sense, symbolizing the cycle of life. However, Carter is anything but passive and fatalistic. She clearly points out and argues that the distorted gender relations as exists today are human constructs. And as such, through the employment of counter narratives about gender equality and gender sensitivity, it can be undone as well to reflect the truth. Thus by doing this, we can hope to create a gender neutral society.

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