Chapter 3

The Magic Toyshop (1967)

Angela Carter's second novel The Magic Toyshop was first published in 1967. It won the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1969 and brought her widely acclaimed readership as a major British author. The novel was made into a film in 1988 for which Carter herself wrote the screenplay. This book significantly anticipates the key features and aspects of her later ingenious works - allusions, myth, fairy tale, theatrical magic, suffering, revenge, incest and escape. Jeff VanderMeer in his essay on Angela Carter writes:

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 book revolves around the fifteen-year-old Melanie and her quest for love. It is a novel concerned with the theme of growing up - an adolescent girl’s dilemmas, her transformation into a woman, and the distress and elation she must endure in order to live and appreciate life. It surveys her past, present, and her ensuing future. Critics have referred to it variously as the novel about a young girl’s rite of passage, a patriarchal nuclear representation of the family set in a landscape of fairy tale and
myth, unquestionable filial obedience and societal gender stereotyping. We also witness the development of themes of sexual fantasy, absorption with fairy tales and the Freudian unconscious as well as the understanding of the nature and boundaries of patriarchy.

_The Magic Toyshop_ opens into the world of the fifteen year-old Melanie, who is on the verge of becoming a young woman, delighting in her own reality and beauty. She is overcome by “sheer exhilaration at the supple surprise of herself now she was no longer a little girl” (_Toyshop_ 1). Melanie gazed at herself in the mirror for hours; her thoughts were preoccupied with marriage, sexual fantasies, her prospective husband and children. She conjured her “phantom bridegroom” (3) so powerfully “to leap the spacetime barrier between them that she could almost feel his breath on her cheek and his voice husking ‘darling’” (2). Melanie along with her two siblings, twelve year-old brother Jonathon and five year old Victoria is left in the care of Mrs Rundle as her parents are away in America for her father’s lecture tour. They live a life of comfort in a large country house which “smelled of lavender furniture polish and money” (2).

One night while her parents were still away she wandered idly into their empty room, took out her mother’s “sliding satin” wedding dress from the trunk, dressed herself in it and went out into the garden. Once there, she is terrorised by the loneliness of the night and runs back to her house. On the way, branches tear her hair and thrash her face and the gravel path cut her feet. She reaches the door “bruised and bleeding” to
find it shut. Therefore, she climbs the apple tree and gets into the house through the open window of her room. By the time she reaches her haven, her mother’s wedding dress is reduced to tatters:

The skirt hung in three detached panels and the scored and tattered sleeves hung to the bodice by a few threads only. Besides the dress was filthy, streaked with green from the tree and her own red blood. She had bled far more than she realised. She fingered the dress, stiff with horror. (Toyshop 4)

The next morning she receives a telegram informing her of the unexpected death of her parents in a plane crash due to an unannounced storm and an engine fault. Melanie feels an obscure responsibility for her parent’s unfortunate demise and begins to blame herself for it:

‘It is my fault,’ she told the cat. Her voice wavered like waterweed. ‘It is my fault because I wore her dress. If I hadn’t spoiled her dress, everything would be all right. Oh, Mummy!’ (5)

This incident leaves her feeling like “an amputee” as if “a part of herself . . . was killed . . .” (6) Melanie along with her siblings moves to south London, to be in the care of her tyrannical Uncle Philip Flower (her mother’s estranged brother), an eccentric toymaker, a repressive and a perverted puppeteer. In the bizarre domain of the puppet maker’s house, she meets Uncle Phillip’s wife - Aunt Margaret who is dumb and her two brothers Francie - the violinist and the rakish Finn – “the puppeteer’s rebellious apprentice.” The brothers, alternatively fascinate and repulse Melanie. She begins to get sexually and romantically inclined towards
Finn. Once he takes her to a park (the remnant of the National Exhibition of 1852) for a walk and kisses her. Melanie is “convulsed with horror at this sensual and intimate connection, this rude encroachment on her physical privacy, this humiliation” (*Toyshop* 106).

At one of the puppet show organized by Uncle Philip for the family, Finn fails to manage his puppet dexterously. This fills Uncle Philip with rage; Finn is thrown on the floor and shoved “with the casual brutality of Nazi soldiers moving corpses in films of concentration camps” (132). Throughout the novel, Uncle Philip is shown to be hostile and antagonistic towards Finn. He is now convinced that Finn was inept at manoeuvring his puppets and he devises a new plan - of drafting Melanie – “the orphaned pubescent heroine” to perform with the puppets in a fusion of “puppets and people” (132). Aunt Margaret, Francie and Finn are all opposed to this new idea but nothing could alter Uncle Philip’s decision:

‘Why shouldn’t the girl do something for her keep? God knows she eats enough. She can act with my puppets up on my stage. She is not too big, she won’t be out of scale.’ He rubbed his hands with satisfaction. (133)

Uncle Philip assigns Finn to help Melanie hone her acting skills for the forthcoming show. Melanie notices a variation in Finn’s conduct; earlier he had been defiant and rebellious, but now he seemed bereft of all defiance; acquiescent to be controlled by Uncle Philip. However, Finn’s resistance returns when he declines the gratification of Melanie’s fantasy
of sex with him - an indulgence that would have been little more than a rape as desired and designed by Uncle Philip.

On the day of the puppet show, Melanie dressed in white arrives on stage. Uncle Philip, controlling the puppets and the voice-over, had arranged to recreate the rape of Leda (Melanie) by a swan, a clear reference to the classical mythology and Yeat's famous poem, "Leda and the Swan." The puppet show reaches its climax when the "obscene swan" (Toyshop 176) mounts Melanie (who screams and kicks her feet in revulsion) and "settled on her loins" with its "beak dug deeply into the soft flesh" of her neck. The curtain falls amid "a patter of applause" but Melanie in a state of shock, feels disconnected, "detached, apart" (168). Dissatisfied with Melanie's performance Uncle Philip slaps her.

After the show, while Uncle Philip takes Jonathan to a gathering of model boat enthusiasts on a man-made lake in the Home Counties, the rest of the family is left alone at the house to indulge in the festivity of their freedom. Uncle Philip's puppet swan is destroyed by Finn and buried in the park next to the fallen Queen Victoria (symbolic of old values). Returning home he crawls into bed with Melanie who while comforting him arrives at the understanding that "they [Finn and Melanie] would get married one day and live together all their lives and there would always be pervasive squalor and dirt and mess and shabbiness, always, forever and forever" (177). Thus, Melanie is seen to be slowly discarding her constant desire for sensual excitement and coming to terms with life. Finn, too, seems to have arrived at a realization, when he decides for a complete
change over by washing himself clean and making up his mind not to abide by and endure Uncle Philip's dominance anymore; Finn's coup d'état (rebellion) is represented by his occupying Uncle Philip's seat at the dinner table. Meanwhile, Melanie learns of the incestuous relationship between Margaret and Francie.

On returning home, Uncle Philip is infuriated to discover the incestuous relationship of his wife and the rebellion of his household. In great indignation and ire, he sets the house on fire. The catastrophe shocks Aunt Margaret into speech. She speaks and urges Finn and Melanie to escape. They are able to do so just in time, as the house collapses and burns “like a giant chrysanthemum, all golden” (Toyshop 199). Both realize that their old world was shattered and gone and all they had was each other. The shocking finale of the narrative leaves some questions unanswered, as well as gives rise to a few more, including musings on the therapeutic as well as destructive power of love and intimacy.

The magic realists incorporate both a conscientious observation of the real and the power of the imagination to construct a reality. Carter's fiction is suffused with her boundless imagination. Although never stepping away from stark realism, her writing has a dreamlike quality that gives the impression that the characters live in a magical world. The first chapter of the novel is a stunning evocation of adolescence, an incredible piece of writing and an amazing start to the book. Melanie's disordered and chaotic thinking, her feeling of uncertain anticipations as she decides
to try her mother's wedding dress as though she was trying on the idea of growing into a woman, is beautifully captured and rendered with panache. Carter's writing makes everything come alive and palpable. She does not describe what the stairs, or the lawn, or the housekeeper's cat looks like; she writes what they think. Even inanimate objects seem to have their own views, their own agendas. Animating everything lends magic to the air. Yet, the narrative develops within a framework of realism. It sets up oddly conventional expectations, fulfils them and then returns back to the absurd.

Uncle Phillip is a toymaker - a literal and metaphoric puppet master. His world should be vibrant, magical and innocent - surrounded by objects which fire the imagination but instead his is a dismal world ruled by brutality and violence where self expression is forbidden. Melanie is forced to play a human puppet in a puppet show. All the characters - Aunt Margaret, Francie and Finn, are dehumanized and reduced to being puppet like creatures manipulated by Philip. This amalgamation of the real (human) and the magical (puppet) by the novelist gives rise to Magic Realism. The fantastic atmosphere surrounding the frightening Uncle Philip, his surreal puppets and the darkness and sensuality of the text add to the magical experience.

One of the distinctive features of a magic realist fiction is the use of dreams, myths and fairy tales. The Magic Toyshop is structured like a fairy tale (though devoid of any absolute fantastic elements) with an orphaned heroine embarking on a voyage of self discovery, facing hurdles,
and learning to steer through formerly unknown and unfamiliar situations. Melanie, thus finds herself thrown into a weird, alien world inhabited by grotesque characters. Sarah Gamble compares Melanie to Alice in Wonderland, as she moves "into a dimension where the real and the fantastic mix and mingle... However, this is no escapist fantasy, but one which like a fairy tale, is continually referring back to the social conditions out of which it is produced" (*Writing* 70). Carter has adopted an "anti-realist" style which aided by biblical allusion, fairy tales and myth lends a magical and fantastical feel to the novel. To put it in other words, she narrates a realistic tale but the style implemented has Gothic and mystical undertones. The techniques adopted by the novelist aid in "fictionality of realism" (*Gamble, Fiction* 23). Carter a true "demythologiser" makes these myths and fairy tales less mysterious and mythical. She gives a more human character to them thus permitting a more vivid perception and assessment. The beautiful and intricate weaving of these motifs, make readers better equipped to understand and interpret Melanie's hopes and fears and connect with them. Following is a section of an interview of the novelist by Anna Katsavos which will help in understanding the concept of "demythologising":

**ANNA KATSAVOS:** In "Notes From the Front Line" you say that you are not in the remythologising business but in the "demythologizing business." What exactly do you mean?

**ANGELA CARTER:** Well, I'm basically trying to find out what certain configurations of
imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semireligious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them.

AK: In what sense are you defining myth?

AC: In a sort of conventional sense; also in the sense that Roland Barthes uses it in Mythologies - ideas, images, stories that we tend to take on trust without thinking what they really mean, without trying to work out what, for example, the stories of the New Testament are really about.

AK: In modern poetry women openly use traditional figures of patriarchal mythology, figures like Circe, Leda, Helen, not only to reinvent them but to retell their stories, as you say in The Sadeian Woman, "in the service of women." To what extent do you rely on traditional mythical figures in your writing? Are you drawn more to a particular mythology than to another?

AC: I used to be more interested in it. I’m not generally interested in doing that. I mean I’m not terribly interested in these particular characters. The second novel that I wrote, a very long time ago, The Magic Toyshop, has a whole apparatus about Leda and the swan, and it turns out that the swan is just a puppet. I wrote that a very long time ago, when I really didn’t know what I was doing, and even so it turns out that the swan is an artificial construct, a puppet, and, somebody, a man, is putting strings on the puppet. That was ages ago, over ten years ago, when I wrote that. The idea was in my mind before I had sorted it out. But I just stopped using these configurations
because they just stopped being useful to me. (11-17)

Melanie is the Eve obsessed with her own beauty and transfixed by her image and reflection in the mirror. Her sexual and sensual impulse acts as temptation and prompts her to slide into her mother's wedding dress all “Moonlight, satin, roses” and venture out into the garden. The garden is filled with flowers of “un-guessable sweetness”, “dewy grass” murmuring and rippling, the fruit laden apple tree, trees “with a dreaming cargo of birds” (Toyshop 17). This lusciousness, luxuriance, fragrance and peace are symbolic of the Garden of Eden:

A fresh little grass-scented wind blew through the open window and stroked her neck, stirring her hair. Under the moon, the country spread out like a foreign and enchanted land, where the corn was orient and immortal wheat, neither sown nor reaped, terra incognita, untrodden by the foot of man, untouched by his hand. Virgin. (16)

According to some critics, Melanie's life lends itself beautifully to the biblical and religious allegory. Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden as a punishment for consuming the forbidden fruit is paralleled by Melanie's unwilling eviction from a life of luxury and comfort into a dismal world. At the core of this sentence is her intoxicating sexuality which forced her into her mother's wedding gown and led to her loss of innocence. By wearing the wedding dress, Melanie tastes the forbidden fruit (gains sexual awareness) too early. The last scene of the novel which depicts Melanie and Finn facing “each other in a wild surmise” (200) in the garden, can be
connected to the moment of creation, as Adam and Eve stand prepared to meet the new world in the garden.

A very renowned myth which finds place in this novel is of Leda and the Swan. Uncle Philip through his puppet show recreates the magic of the myth where Zeus in the guise of a swan seduces Leda. Melanie playing Leda, “attempts to flee her heavenly visitant but his beauty and majesty bear her to ground” (Toyshop 166). Zeus – the swan is a puppet created by Uncle Philip. The juxtaposition of opposite polarities of a human being and puppet - the real and the unreal aided by Carter’s perfect portrayal and delineation of the scene appear as real and life like. The use of this motif also stresses Uncle Philip’s inner urge to reduce men and women of flesh and blood to puppets whose strings are controlled by his hands. Carter brilliantly reveals the thoughts going through Melanie’s disturbed mind as she played Leda:

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

Carter employs a variety of classic fairy tales to depict the predicament of Melanie and her siblings. Fairy tales were initially used to
instruct children, especially girls on the verge of adolescence about morals and their expected societal roles and behaviours. The trials, the girls in the fairy tales “undergo describe a symbolic as well as a literal process of transformation: from childhood to maturity, from victim to heroine, from incompleteness to wholeness” (Lowry). Carter has made a reference to a variety of fairy tales but these allusions are paradoxical as Melanie’s life becomes a harsh fairy tale at an age when children of the bygone eras would have been hearing them:

Fairy-tales can smuggle a disturbing theme across the borders of consciousness without pushing the receivers' faces in it. They've been told to children and youths for centuries for this reason: they're stories about family strife and sexual danger, about intellectual curiosity and impatience with social hierarchy, but they remain in disguise, in the land of far away and long ago and once upon a time. (Lucky)

This novel carries various allusions to the fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* which has numerous interpretations. The most significant and convincing being the “puberty ritual” of red Riding Hood - a little girl being transformed into an adult woman; her sexual awakening and rebirth into a new person. This tale is appropriately used to portray the regeneration of Melanie who passes through similar stages and finally evolves into a new person. Uncle Philip, when he orders Finn to “rehearse a rape” with Melanie, is behaving in a manner comparable to Red Riding Hood’s mother. They both are conscious of the dangers involved but still encourage the act. Finn portrayed as a wolf here, (but unlike the fairy tale)
comprehends that his position is being abused and restrains himself both mentally and physically. On the way to her uncle's house, Melanie notices the shops being "brightly lighted" (Toyshop 38) and delightfully coloured. This parallels the distractions Red Riding Hood encounters on her way to grandma's house. Before they enter their Uncle's "dimly lit" house (39), "Finn pushed at the door, which stuck momentarily on a thick doormat as if unwilling to let them in" (39). This not only contrasts the ease with which the wolf enters the grandmother's house but also demonstrates the magnitude of the task - both emotional and physical that Melanie faces to settle herself in a new gloomy and dismal world.

There is also an allusion to Madame de Beaumont's version of Beauty and the Beast. Melanie had always dreamed of a handsome, well-groomed and rich bridegroom who could easily materialise her fantasies of a honeymoon in Cannes, Venice and Miami Beach. In reality, Finn has none of these attributes but still she accepts him because the mature Melanie realises that it is the beauty within which is of greater significance. Carter also uses Snow White, not only because the plot reflects a girl's development into a young woman but also fits in with Carter's theory of patriarchal society. In the English translation of Schneewittchen (meaning Snow White in German) by D.L. Ashliman, the dwarfs in the forest took pity on Snow White and said:

"If you will keep house for us, and cook, make beds, wash, sew, and knit, and keep everything clean and orderly, then you can stay with us,
and you shall have everything that you want." (Grimm)

Uncle Philip too controls and domesticates Melanie in a similar manner - "Why shouldn't the girl do something for her keep?" (Toyshop 133). The use of mirrors is another point of reference that links the novel with the fairy tale. Melanie shatters the mirror after she learns about the death of her parents because in it she sees the reflection of the girl who killed her parents while in Snow White the mirror symbolised evil.

The novel also has undertones of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Melanie's actions and disregard for her mother's wedding dress is similar to Goldilocks' using and damaging items belonging to others and finally being frightened by the bears and running away. Melanie is also aware of misdemeanour and believes it to be the cause of her parent's death and her forced banishment from home. Carter refers to the fairy tale while describing Aunt Margaret eating "Baby Bear portion" (73) of the porridge, to highlight her fear arising from Uncle Philip's presence.

The Chinese romantic fable Willow Pattern too has been referred by the novelist, when she describes Melanie's feeling on Monday mornings:

\[\ldots\text{ she would look at the little bridge on her willow pattern plate and she could run across it away from her Uncle Philip's house to where flowering trees were.} (74)\]

This tale is about a wealthy Mandarin's beautiful daughter who falls in love with her father's accounting assistant - a commoner. The father does
not approve of their relationship and arranges his daughter's marriage to a powerful Duke on the day when blossoms fall from the willow tree but the lovers manage to escape (crossing a bridge) on the day of the wedding. However, one day the Duke learns of their refuge and sends his soldiers to capture them and puts the lovers to death. The gods, moved by their plight, transform the lovers into a pair of doves. Melanie and Finn, Aunt Margaret and Francie symbolise the lovers of the fairy tale while Uncle Philip represents the pitiless father.

The novel like magical realist stories has a dream-like landscape and takes the help of folk-lore and myth to question the true nature of reality. Carter by blending biblical allusions, myths and fairy tales with Melanie’s life – her hopes and fears, performs dual functions. She successfully demythologizes the myths and fairy tales by dissecting them, furthermore, she enables the readers to connect and relate to them. Carter was interested in the manner people perceived their experience(s) and mythology. In an interview with Rosemary Carroll, Carter asserts that by “taking apart mythologies”, she is able to “find out what basic, human stuff they are made of.” Secondly by merging these myths and fairy tales within her realist setting, themes and descriptions she was able to make her narratives appear magical and fictional.

Apparently, The Magic Toyshop does not appear to be Gothic. It is set in the recent past probably in the 1950s. Hundred years have passed since the National Exposition of 1852 is the obvious reference made by Finn as he walked with Melanie towards the “pleasure ground.” Nor do
the characters of the novel dwell in castles. However, the Gothic undertones make themselves felt in the distinct Gothic setting of the novel. Uncle Phillip’s “chilly, high, inconvenient house with its threatening vistas of brown paint” (Toyshop 94) is located in a run-down and neglected south London suburb. The walls of the kitchen were grease streaked and those of the dining room were damp stained. The lavatory was devoid of hot water, soap, toilet paper and proper flushing system. The house was decaying and falling apart where its denizens “lived like pigs” (77). Finn takes Melanie for a walk one day and shows her a once stately middle-class neighbourhood but now a sad and depressed place “crumbling in decay,” (98). The park - a vestige of the “vast Gothic castle, a sort of Highland fortress, only gargantuan, . . . made of papier-mâché specially treated to withstand the weather” (99). The castle with all its “goods and chattels and art and inventions” burnt down with flames in 1914 and all that remained was “the graveyard of a pleasure ground” which lay in “sodden neglect” and “pervasive despair” (100-101). Even the “Queen of the Wasteland” (103) - Queen Victoria’s statue was “slime and fungus streaked” (104). It is in these decaying yet mystifying ruins of the pleasure garden that Finn kisses Melanie, paving way for “a real beginning of a deep mystery between them” (149).

The first indication of decay in Melanie’s life appears with her mother’s torn wedding dress, followed by the death of her parents - that is decay in its most prominent form. Melanie’s psychological breakdown and her social decline from a middle class background to working class life at
Uncle Phillip's is also a form of decay. She finds herself in close proximity to “dirty and common” working class men for the first time in life:

Melanie began to smell the men. She was puzzled for some moments as to the source of the smell, so little did she expect her brothers would be so dirty... their smell filled her nostrils until she almost choked with it. And also with horror, for she had never sat close to men who smelt before. A ferocious, unwashed, animal reek came from them both. *(Toyshop 83)*

Decay in the personalities of the inhabitants of the house is also explicit. Aunt Margret’s dumbness - “a terrible affliction” is also a form of decay as she is not able to express her thoughts and desires to anyone. Another example of the diminishing and decay of Melanie’s and Aunt Margret’s personalities is their external appearance and way of dressing. The “painfully thin” Aunt Margaret with “no blood at all showing in cheeks or narrow lips” *(40)* dressed plainly and unflatteringly is an embodiment of a personality slowly fading away. Elements of decay are also visible in Finn’s untidiness, his lack of hygiene, his discoloured teeth and decaying molar.

As in many Gothic novels, the protagonist in *The Magic Toyshop* is also a lonesome and vulnerable female who is faced with the uncertainties of interpersonal relationships, gender politics and people who want to exploit and control her. Melanie, her parents having died in a plane crash, is left at the mercy and shelter of Uncle Philip - a patriarch and “a monster
with a voice so loud she was afraid it would bring the roof down and bury them all . . .” (Toyshop 77). The man she finally wants “to be in love with” is no handsome, valiant and perfect prince but the dishevelled beatnik Finn. He explains to Melanie that she is attracted to him due to the “proximity” they share and because he is the only eligible man around. Melanie is the virgin curious of her own sexuality, eagerly waiting “in an agony of apprehension” (105) to experience the pleasures of her erotic awakening and to “get it over with.” She is the re-embodiment of the Gothic heroine in distress and loneliness. On the verge of adulthood, she needed the help and guidance of a mother figure but there was no one around to explain to her the truths of life, to soothe and smooth away her fears and “nervous, unlocalised excitement” (149). “She felt lonely and chilled, walking along the long, brown passages, past secret doors, shut tight. Bluebeard’s castle” (82). The moment Melanie is forced to play Leda, we as readers begin to fear the ulterior drive and violent schema of Philip Flower. Despite depicting Melanie’s dilemmas and fears concerning adulthood, Carter never portrays female sexuality (Melanie’s) as dangerous or threatening instead she describes it with vigour and vitality.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Honeybuzzard – the “fledgling figure” of Carter’s first novel Shadow Dance matures and evolves into the puppet master - Uncle Philip - “hewn and cut out of thunder itself” (92). He is the powerful, impulsive and tyrannical Gothic male of the novel. His character is a Gothic motif employed by Carter to depict yet another Gothic theme of sexual and patriarchal oppression. He
was a man of “immense, overwhelming figure” (69) who “ponderously seated himself, presiding majestically” (Toyshop 71) at the head of the table on a large chair. His “patriarchal majesty” and “authority was stifling.” He could not bear a woman in trousers and to him such a woman was synonymous to a harlot. His liking for “silent women” is apparent in the dumbness of his own wife - “struck dumb on her wedding day, she found her old voice again the day she was freed” (197). Aunt Margaret – an image of “passivity and dependence” (Wright, 141) trembled at his “leonine voice” (Toyshop 78), shuddered and was cowed by his presence. His presence was mostly accompanied by an “oppressive silence” (74). If anyone could speak, it was him alone. He comes across as a misogynist who “never talked to his wife except to bark brusque commands” (124). He kept her “bird-like” (42), imprisoned in a cage choked with a silver necklace. The tyrannical presence of this “beast of the Apocalypse” (77) snuffed out the freedom of the inhabitants of the house and “chilled the air through which he moved” (124).

His Victorian authoritarian impulse is palpable in his brutality, his viciousness and his queer puppet show. His ultimate aim is to turn his extended family into mere puppets. His mental illness is evident in his attempt to control Melanie’s sexuality by directing Finn to rehearse Leda and the Swan - a rape, with her and when he represents her as a puppet while staging the same. Melanie “is literally transformed into the doll of Uncle Phillip’s imaginings” (Wisker 122). Through the puppet show Uncle Phillip gives vent to his sexual fantasies of raping Melanie. His perversion
is highlighted when he examines Melanie before the performance and expresses his dissatisfaction by stating: “I wanted my Leda to be a little girl. Your tits are too big” (Toyshop 143).

When Melanie demands an explanation for Uncle Philips malevolence, Finn rightly points out “you’re so fresh and innocent, all of you, so you’re something to change and destroy” (152). He also signifies the patriarchal Augustan who has control over the long oppressed Irish race. Aunt Margaret with her red hair and fair skin and her two brothers Francie and Finn are Irish - the old Celtic lost race. The last pages of the book come alive with Uncle Philip's roaring voice and shouts of insane glee. We witness the extremity of his brute savagery when he finally sets the house on fire.

Gothic literature is concerned with boundaries and transgression of boundaries. The beginning of the novel portrays Melanie confronting the boundary between a young girl and a woman. Her foray into the garden dressed in her mother’s wedding dress is an attempt to explore and cross this boundary. Her parent's untimely death forces Melanie and her siblings to give up the rich, luxurious middle-class life of rural comfort for a life of “down-on-its-luck South London” (39). The conflict between the upper middle class and the poor working class corresponds to the traditional Gothic opposition of the civilized with the barbaric. The boundary is perceptible and distinct in the standard of living of both the classes - their mode of dressing, their speech, accent and their leisure activities.
Yet another boundary which Carter highlights (though not explicitly) is that between the English and the Irish (foreigner). The untutored, untamed and uncivilized Maggie, Francie, and Finn (who represent the savage Irish race) were artists. Finn painted and danced, Maggie was a great cook, and all three played music. Melanie, who possessed none of these skills realizes how “they were red and had substance and she, Melanie, was forever grey, a shadow” (Toyshop 77). She also becomes conscious of the fact that among the Jowle siblings “love was almost palpable... warm as the fire, strong and smoothing as sweet tea” (43). This stands in opposition to the relationship between Melanie and her brother Jonathon which lacked the warmth and sweetness of love.

The theme of imprisonment is represented in The Magic Toyshop through the dictatorial and patriarchal Uncle Phillip. Melanie becomes aware of her captivity when she is informed by Finn regarding (what Uncle Phillip considered) the appropriate dress code for women. Finn explains to Melanie:

“He 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 out into the street for a harlot.” (Toyshop 62)

As mentioned earlier, Melanie is made to work in the toyshop to earn her maintenance and is even forced to play the part of Leda in one of Uncle Phillip’s private puppet shows. Uncle Phillip’s preference for “silent women” without a voice or opinion of their own is evident in the dumbness of his wife which “came to her on her wedding day, like a curse”
Aunt Maggie’s silence signifies her imprisonment through marriage to Uncle Phillip. The most palpable symbol of the caging and possession of his wife is the choker (silver necklace) – the only piece of jewellery he ever gifted her. Even Finn and Francie live a caged existence. Uncle Phillip, who had taken them in when they were orphaned, made them earn their keep in his house. Finn being Uncle Phillip’s apprentice, is the primary object of his violence and brutality and often came out of the workroom with swollen eyes and bruises. Melanie’s two siblings are also imprisoned by the toy-maker. Victoria is included into the family as “Aunt Maggie’s baby” and Jonathon with his extreme obsession for building ship models, willingly contributes for his maintenance by building ships that were sold in the shop.

“Vulnerable characters who find themselves in the clutches of MONSTERS or menaced by psychopaths retreat to the bestial logic of the haunted and instinctively search out safe haven” (Snodgrass 122). This gives rise to the flight motif in traditional Gothic. The idea of running away from Uncle Phillip’s house occurs to Melanie following her first breakfast in her new home. The filthiness and squalor of the non-functional bathroom in contrast to her old bathroom - “a temple to cleanliness” (Toyshop 57) and the tyrannizing and terrifying presence of Uncle Phillip force her to think thus. She yearns for independence and imagines herself taking up a job and living by herself in a bed-sitting room: “Brewing Nescafe on her own gas-ring... and painting one wall geranium red and another cornflower blue and the others white”
The thought of flight also occurs to her on Monday mornings when:

. . . she would look at the little bridge on her willow pattern plate and wish she could run across it away from her Uncle Phillip's house to where the flowering trees were. (74)

In spite of these thoughts she lacks the courage and the determination to escape. The first rebellion against the despotic Uncle Phillip comes from Finn. He chops Uncle Philip's Swan puppet (symbolizing him and his intentions) and occupies his place at the dinner table. When Uncle Phillip leaves for a day, the household resounds with gaiety and merriment till the time of his return. Uncle Phillip in a fit of anger sets the house on fire, when he discovers the covert incestuous love between Aunt Margaret and Francie. This incident liberates Aunt Maggie who "found her old voice again" (197) together with her strength and courage. In this closing section of the book Melanie's desire of flight is fulfilled when she and Finn break out of the burning house at Aunt Margaret's insistence.

The theme of incest introduced at the end of the novel is yet another essential Gothic motif. In spite of the social and moral embargo against it, incest has been a common theme to be incorporated in the early British and American Gothic novels. The main objective in the use of this striking motif was to highlight the instability of the social hierarchy. It was a symbolic petition to elders to understand and maintain their roles as compassionate guardians to their inferiors. Many writers and critics
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Incestuous relationships are a dominant feature of the Cartarian novels. The intimate scene between Aunt Margaret and Francie "locked together in the most primeval of passions" (Toyshop 195) leaves Melanie, who had never encountered it "wide-eyed and grave" with shock:

The fiddle and flute were cast down on the floor. Francie and Aunt Margaret embraced. It was a lover's embrace, annihilating the world, as if taking place at midnight on the crest of a hill, with a tearing wind beating the branches
above them. The brother and sister kneeled.

*(Toyshop 193-194)*

Carter, by using this motif seems to emphasize that the seclusion and loneliness in which the characters lived was possibly responsible for this obnoxious perversion. The patriarchal rule of Uncle Phillip is transgressed by the incestuous relationship of his wife. The house (nurturing incestuous relationship) meets a destiny similar to that in conventional Gothic, when it is burnt down by Uncle Phillip along with the persons involved in the act.

*The Magic Toyshop* is supported by a fairy tale with strong Gothic features - the story of Bluebeard's castle. Uncle Phillip, similar to Bluebeard is the sovereign of his house – a tyrant who imprisons his wife within the house. Like Bluebeard's castle, Uncle Phillip's house also hides secrets behind closed doors - secret of music and joy of the Jowle siblings and the secret of incestuous love of Maggie (his wife) and Francie (Maggie's brother). Carter employs Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard*, as a parallel to show Melanie overcome the revulsion of Finn's "extraordinary, extravagant, almost passionate dirtiness" (96). This also reflects the wife's reaction to Bluebeard's repulsive defect. In Perrault's version, the wife drops the key to the locked room in a pool of blood and stains it. The stain signifies double misdemeanour, moral as well as sexual. This is paralleled by Melanie's original temptation of trying on her mother's wedding dress and the development of the awareness of her own sexuality.
Bluebeard - the Gothic villain, in the fairy story owned a typical Gothic castle where he organised bountiful and generous parties. The guests were allowed access to all rooms but one which was kept locked. Similarly, in The Magic Toyshop no one is allowed to enter Uncle Philip’s workshop in his absence. In the fairy tale, the wife exposes Bluebeard’s horrid secret which led her brothers to kill him and burn down the castle. This is replicated in the novel through Uncle Philip’s discovery of his wife Margaret and her brother Francie’s incestuous relationship and the burning down of the house. As Francie appears to confront Uncle Philip he is described by Carter as emerging from: “one of the sinister doors of Bluebeard’s castle” (Toyshop 198). The house is also referred to as “Bluebeard’s castle” when Finn leads Melanie to his room to “rehearse”:

They climbed the stairs together past all the closed doors of Bluebeard’s castle. (145)

In Joseph Jacob’s translation of Bluebeard into English as Mr. Fox in 1890, Bluebeard’s fiancée manages to escape his clutches, with a detached hand. Melanie sees in the kitchen drawer “a hand, cut off”-“freshly severed hand, all bloody at the roots” (118). Francie tries to brush away this thought from Melanie’s mind by stating that “the distress of your loss might make you see things. It is only natural” (121). The author names Melanie’s teddy bear as Edward. This name too is borrowed from Bluebeard’s Egg (1983), Margaret Atwood’s version of Bluebeard, in which she mentions “Edward Bear” as moniker for her husband.
The grotesque and terrifying toys hanging in the backdrop, are also a Gothic motif employed by the author. The sense of apprehension and anxiety which pervades the narrative and overwhelms the senses of the reader along with Carter's use of language adds to the Gothic atmosphere of gory details.

*The Magic Toyshop* written in the third person narrative, is an incredibly well-written, frightfully compelling and at the same time disturbing novel. Carter's language is audacious, celebratory and full of life even when it is at its darkest. The strange rhythm and imagery are spellbinding. As a writer, she has a remarkable skill of exquisitely detailed writing which generates a mental picture rich in texture, colour and volume. Unvarying reference to facial features, fabrics, costumes and factual descriptions conjure up an almost theatrical dramatic picture, which draw the readers towards its dark, surreal and dreamlike world. “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... (Kellaway).

Endowed with a brilliant imagination and élan of style Carter comes across as a writer of intense and extraordinary tales for adults. Albeit *The Magic Toyshop* is structured like a fairy tale, it is not a traditional fantastic tale that aims to surprise. Carter packs her writing with rich tapestry of literary references and “revisionary inquiries into folklore, legend and fairy-tale” thereby adding a magical and fantastical quality to it. She exploits the pattern of the tales and “demythologises”
them so as to allow the book to be read as a social and cultural critique. Her fantasy is deeply rooted in realism and aims at subverting traditional patterns of patriarchy, femininity and sexuality.


