

## *The Magic Toyshop*: Sexual Awareness in Carter's Girl

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Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* is considered one of the best of her works. The main character, Melanie has strong sexual interest men and herself, and the novel depicts her changes in sexuality. Angela Carter uses a lot of symbols in her work that help to illustrate the young heroines in puberty coming to terms with their own sexuality.

This paper explores the sexuality of the adolescent girl will be examined by focusing on the change from Melanie's sexual fantasy to her sexual reality. The first section considers Melanie's self-portrait as a mature woman, which contradicts her childishness, and her sexual fantasy. The second section examines the way the character Margaret is portray the reality in which women are placed. Finally, how Melanie comes to accept her sexuality as a reality.

Angela Carter talks about Melanie, She stupid child, too privileged. So you can't see the real reality. In a similar manner, Zubeni C. Ezung refers to the character of Melanie as follows, "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" (Ezung 34). Melanie holds a girlish ideal of love and marriage. From the very beginning of the novel, it is presented as her fantasy:

The summer she was fifteen, Melanie discovered she was made of flesh and blood [ . . . ]. For hours she stared at herself, naked, in the mirror of her wardrobe; she would follow with her finger the elegant structure of her rib-cage, where the heart fluttered under the flesh like a bird under a blanket, and she would draw down the long line from breast-bone to navel (which was a mysterious cavern or grotto), and she would rasp her palms against her bud-wing shoulderblades. And then she would writhe about, clasping herself, laughing, sometimes doing cartwheels and handstands out of sheer exhilaration at the supple surprise of herself now she was no longer a little girl. (1)

This part of the story shows what Melanie thinks of adult womanhood. She watches her body for hour after hour. Furthermore, Melanie thinks that she is still childish. Melanie is curious about physical womanhood, paying attention only to her physical image but is conscious of her frustration due to the lack of her sexual experiences. The following quote illustrates it. "Cupping her bare breasts, which were tipped as pinkly as the twitching noses of white rabbits, she thought: 'Physically, I have probably reached my peak and can do nothing but deteriorate from now on. Or, perhaps, mature.' But she did not want to think she might not be already perfect" (10). Melanie has anxiety that obesity may cause her to lose her sexual appeal, which is shown as, "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" (4). Melanie makes fun of Mrs. Rundle who is a fat single woman and the housekeeper in Melanie's house. Melanie thinks that Mrs. Rundle cannot get married because she is fat and therefore does not experience sexual intercourse so that she has a miserable life. Hence, we see that her image of becoming a happy adult consists of having a sexual experience. Therefore, this becomes a manifestation of the childishness of her puberty.

In the 1960s, the miniskirt was in fashion, and Twiggy, a very slender fashion model, was in the spotlight. In this era, women came to expose more of their skin. Melanie thinks that a slender woman is sexually more attractive and has more charm. However, Melanie does not wear miniskirt, as she is conservative in fashion and wears trousers. For this reason, we can see that she has no confidence in her figure. Moreover, the 60's were also a turning point when birth control pills became widely available lifted and people were more sexually active. At that time, advertisements for contraceptives appeared in newspapers and magazines, and even children could gain knowledge about them. As a result of this change, Melanie, who has never had a no sexual experience, has created biased images of women based solely on her limited knowledge from women's magazines.

Melanie is interested in her own sexuality. On the other hand, she feels a sense of guilt in exposing her sexual desires. Therefore, Melanie punishes herself by wearing her hair in stiff plaits, "She plaited her hair so tightly that it hurt her, straining hair and flesh until it felt as though the white seam down the back of her head might split and the brains gush out. It was penance" (31). Melanie believes that her parents' sudden death in a plane accident was

caused because she stained her mother's wedding dress, accidentally tearing it in her curious attempt to wear it in her mother's absence. It is caused by Melanie's interest in mature female sexuality. Hair is a female sexual symbol. To tie up her hair means suppression of her female sexual expressions. Also, the white wedding dress symbolizes virginity and innocence. Melanie soils this dress with her blood. This performance implies a loss of virginity. Melanie thinks that she is the cause of the spoiled dress, and subsequently of her parents' death. Melanie connects her sexual liberation with the death of her parents, so the action of tying her hair up is self-torturing punishment out of disgust and guilt. Also, this act of identifying her body can be regarded as a manifestation of her desire for sexual liberation. She undoes her braid although she does not respond to Finn when he asks Melanie why she tied her hair up. This reaction can be interpreted as Melanie's way of dispelling her resistance to the male initiative to the release of her sexuality. Therefore, Finn is strongly influencing Melanie's sexual cooperation.

Finn is a brother of Melanie's uncle's wife and a young man about nineteen year-old. Even more, he is quietly complying with the uncle's patriarchal authority with an attitude different from Melanie who shows resistance toward her uncle. However, Melanie is apparently attracted by Finn. When He moved with a supple and extraordinary grace, raising his cup to his mouth with a flashing, poetic gesture" (37). Melanie pays attention to Finn's motion for the first time. Yuko Hosokawa notes that Carter is a writer who speaks effectively of the visual impressions and tactile sensations of skin (Hosokawa 152). Carter characterizes Finn for his unclean appearance, making Melanie concerned about Finn's appearance. Thus, Melanie initially has disgust for Finn's dirty body. At the same time, she is attracted by his behavior. Finn is an unlikely choice of a man for Melanie, who is immature and has never been in a relationship with a man, and although he is far from Melanie's ideal partner, she is strongly attracted to him in term of her sexual interest. The description of Finn in the previous quote, that is, "extraordinary grace" and "poetic" sound unlike that of a dirty-looking man. This is a sign of Melanie's fantasy which romanticizes her ideals toward men. The following quotation describes the wild masculinity of Finn when he wipes his mouth with his hand against the previously mentioned graceful movement and the wave-like gaze that fascinates Melanie.

When the younger one finished his tea, he tossed the cup over the hoarding with a lyrical, curving, discus-thrower swing and wiped his mouth with back of his hand. He seemed to be inspecting the train, raking the length of it with a slow, sweeping, lop-sided gaze. His eyes were a curious grey green. His Atlantic-coloured regard went over Melanie like a wave; she submerged in it. She would have been soaked if it had been water. (38)

The contrast in descriptions of his behavior underscores the difference between the feminine and masculine elements of his actions. His gaze is thought to be the manifestation of Finn's sexual interest in Melanie in a way in which his eyes go all over her. At this point, Melanie is uncomfortable with the fact that Finn is filthy, but she does not reject it and sees it as a positive thing, as it does not seem that she accepts Finn as a reality. "I think I want to be in love with you [Finn] but I don't know how." "There you go again, talking like a woman's magazine," said Finn. "What you feel is because of proximity, because I am here. Anyway, you are too young, we have been into that" (173). Melanie says that she wants to be in love with Finn without thinking too much about it. Finn indicates that Melanie is like romanticizing the situation that of and too young. Yaeko Sumi refers to it, for fifteen-year-old Melanie, sexual relations between men and women are still an event in her fantasy, shrouded in a "pure white" veil (Sumi 171). Melanie's perceptions are not clear enough to escape from fantasy. However, Melanie's sexual fantasy becomes reality by gaining experiences with Finn.

Next, Margaret represents the reality of women who are subjugated by men. Margaret is Phillip's wife and Finn and Francie's sister. Since she got married to Phillip, she became unable to speak. Margaret makes Melanie feel the reality of the dominant relationship between men and women. "Carter portrays a woman who suffers from a controlling husband in her marital relationship with Phillip", Ezung points out (Ezung 40). Margaret is suppressed by Phillip and does not defy her husband. Margaret reads Phillip's facial expressions and under the patriarchal control of her husband, her feelings and thoughts are repressed.

Aunt Margaret had one single piece of jewellery, besides her fat gold wedding ring. This was a curious necklace which she wore on Sunday

afternoons after lunch, when she changed from her drab, black, weekday clothes into her best dress. The week's work was done and she waited for another hard week to start in this ugly, holiday dress [ . . . ] Somehow, too, because it did not quite fit her and hung gauchely in parallels and was kept with such care, spots of dirt sponged out and the dress frequently brushed and pressed, it made her seem, touchingly, much younger. (124-25)

Every Sunday is decided by Phillip to be a day of having sex with him. The oversize ugly dress and choking necklace are the uniforms for the day and the ornament is suffocating as if it worked as a collar. Apart from that, she wears simple clothes, but is forced to wear them depending on her husband's choice of outfit every Sunday. Margaret is forced to be in a state where she cannot even eat satisfactorily. It expresses unmistakably the situation of the wife as a sex slave of the husband. She keeps a holiday dress to torment herself with the greatest circumspection, like her attitude towards Phillip. Marelly Coody said a woman repressed by patriarchy is "powerless and submissive", like Margaret. The jewelry equates to decoration of a puppets that Phillip handles in puppet performance. Naoko Choja sees: "As is reflected in the puppet that parodies Margaret, Uncle Philip fetishises Margaret by means of a silver choker he makes for her" (Choja 8). In the following quotation Phillip satisfies his sadistic sexual desires, looking at the pain she feels in the clothes. "[...] apparently deriving a certain pleasure from her discomfort, or even finding that the sight of it improved his appetite" (127). Phillip does not money on deposit to his wife. He has made it impossible for Margaret, who cannot speak, to escape outside the home. This treatment ignores the dignity of the individual and he considers his wife to be his property. Thus, Margaret is forced to get dressed to confirm that she is Phillip's property. She may well be an entity that visualizes Phillip's male domination. Melanie's performance in the puppet show gives her a clear understanding of her position in the household. Uncle Phillip is a threat and evil which causes anger and hatred to Melanie. Melanie's sense of victimization and a rebellious spirit increase, because of she has been forced to perform in the play, she can understand Margaret's reality. Melanie feels pitiful for Margaret who wears an obligatory gift from her uncle. She would give her fine clothes. Sumi discusses that the "ratty dress", along with the heavy "silver choker", is a symbol of the sexual

activity (domestic violence) that her uncle regularly and forcibly demands from her aunt on weekends. Therefore, Melanie has a strong, almost superstitious, fear of this garment (Sumi 174). By giving Margaret a dress of a different color, Melanie could realistically understand herself as the object of her uncle Phillip's sexual interest and the threat of the sexual master-slave relationship Margaret was in.

Melanie is immaturely romanticized with her sexual fantasy and observes the reality of a women being dominated by men. She goes through the process of awareness from her sexual fantasy to sexual reality. This is first realized by Finn kissing her.

'Oh, get it over with, get it over with,' she urged furiously under her breath [ . . . ].

It might have been anybody, kissing her, besides, she did not know him well, if at all. She wondered why he was doing this, putting his mouth on her own understanding one, softly moving his body against her. What was the need? She felt a long way away from him, and superior, also [ . . . ]. Finn inserted his tongue between her lips, searching tentatively for her own tongue inside her mouth. The moment consumed her. She choked and struggled, beating her fists against him, convulsed with horror at this sensual and intimate connection, this rude encroachment on her physical privacy, this humiliation. (118)

This quote describes Melanie's feelings against Finn's intrusive action without any romantic atmosphere. Melanie's feelings of excitement disappears when she is kissed by Finn. However, she feels superior because her long-cherished desire has been fulfilled. Over again, she has a strong disgust and fear his tongue which is inserted into her mouth. Moreover, she feels a distance from him because of the discrepancy between her fantasy and Finn's aggressive masculinity in reality. This is the moment when Melanie's sexual fantasy shocked her more than she could have imagined, and she feels a big difference in reality by the first sexual contact. The total disappointment in her first sexual encounter with a man makes her doubt about her sexual eligibility self-questioning; "Is there something wrong with me that I felt such a blankness? And after that it seemed so horrible, is there something even more wrong with me because I thought it was so horrible?" (120).

Melanie is terrified with the lack of sexual happiness and pleasure she has expected, even though she experiences the kiss she has longed for. The reason for this is due to a vague misperception of her idea of an adult woman, a woman with sexually experiences. For these reasons Melanie is shocked as she is unprepared for the actual experience. The way she accepts the experience can be seen in the following quotation: "No more false starts, as in the pleasure gardens, but the real beginning of a deep mystery between them [Melanie and Finn]" (167). At the age of fifteen, Melanie is sexually inexperienced and idealizes kissing and skin contact with a man. She once rejects the encounter, disgusted by the difference between her fantasy and reality. However, she comes to terms with reality and tries to learn how she breaks out of her female fantasy along with experience with Finn. Furthermore, Melanie's acceptance sexual reality is brought by the puppet show in which she performed. "She [Melanie] was alive again" (188). This quotation after Melanie is attacked by the swan in the play and loses consciousness states that Melanie has come back to her senses as if she were reborn, trying to reconfirm her own situation by looking at herself objectively throughout the entire play. In response to this, Choja says: "She seems unable to distinguish herself in the real world from the copy of herself in a constructed world" (Choja 7). On the contrary, this scene allows her to reaffirms the reality of Melanie's situation. She may have come to recognize the reality by placing herself in a position to objectively look at the facts.

Uncle Phillip also participates in the change of Melanie's perceptions. He is interested in Melanie, seeing a woman's body in Melanie who wears the play's costume. Her breasts are unsatisfactory to her uncle because it does not match his image of a virgin. But Phillip shows satisfaction with Melanie's hair and legs. It appears in the following quote: "And you've [Melanie] got quite nice hair. And pretty legs" (161). The hair and legs that Uncle Phillip admires are the same parts that Finn admires about her, but Melanie is uncomfortable with his gaze. She senses that she is being relegated to the same position as her aunt. Melanie realizes again by becoming an object of male sexual gaze apart from Finn in the real world.

The next quote suggests that Melanie is on the way to the acceptance of sexual reality mingled with some romantic elements: "He [Finn] could have been her phantom bridegroom sleeping and, overwhelmed [...]" (138). Melanie reflects on her fantasy that Finn might have been a sleeping groom,

a male version of *Sleeping Beauty*. She translates her sexual fantasy to reality through the contact with Finn. None the less her romanticism remains in her idea of marriage as a social institution. Melanie's view of marriage is based on both her idea of parents and that of the oppressive uncle and his wife. In the following quote, however, Melanie does not fit either of these images of marriage and instead imagines Finn and her own unique, dirty, shabby, unattractive, and unromantic marriage style, which she considers nothing fanciful.

She [Melanie] knew they 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 [. . .]. And never any glamour or romance or charm. Nothing fancy [. . .]. She revolted [. . .]. With a depressed sense of the inevitability of it all, she slumped against his shoulder [...]. (198-99)

This shows Melanie's old-fashioned view of love of marriage as it shifts its focus from sexuality to marriage. Also, Finn shares her fantasy of marriage seen from the way how he already talks about the name of their child. Melanie who once manages to break away from her sexual fantasy of love now goes back to embracing the fantasy of marriage. As a result, Melanie's knowledge of reality does not totally change.

In conclusion, Melanie succeeds gets rid of her sexual fantasy by witnessing the oppressed women by the patriarchal system and the conservative reality of between men and women. However, Melanie is innocent and naive for better or worse. She is able to break free from her sexual fantasy and accept some of the sexual reality, but she is still caught up with another fantasy about marriage as a social settlement. The reality of Melanie who has not yet reached adulthood is shifting with the womanly growth of a typical fifteen-year-old girl in puberty.

#### Work Cited

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