‘The Power of the Unconsciousness’ Depicted in Angela Carter’s ‘The Magic Toyshop’

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Abstract:

Once upon a time stirs memories……

Angela carter’s second novel “The Magic ToyShop” is a large spread of mythology, fairy tales, femininity, sexuality and reality. The protagonist of the novel Melanie, like every little girl dreams and fantasizes about herself. Her dreams twined with her fate, walks her through her destiny. The novel commences with Melanie’s desire to wear her mother’s wedding dress. Her desire and curiosity to feel like a woman, to feel like a naughty little princess, this episode ends up with her mistakenly destroying her mother precious wedding dress. The act of destroying the dress mysteriously steers the upcoming events in the novel.

Melanie becomes an orphan. Melanie along with her siblings without a choice is sent to London to live with her Uncle Philip. Her uncle Philip a toy maker is compared to Blue Beard. Through her terrifying experiences she learns to negotiate her awakening sexuality and face the frightening world of interpersonal relationships.

Melanie like all fifteen year old, dreamt that her life would blossom like a princess from one of her fairy tale stories, sadly forgetting that there are characters like blue beard who exist in reality. Her transformation and growth occur when her dreams burst like a bubble, with reality staring at her face. Carter blends the genre of mythology to structure the novel like a fairy tale. There is a reflection of Blue beard, Mr. Fox, the myth of Leda and the Swan and so on. Extracting Carl Jung’s theory of complex psychology and imprints of archetypal images to give a better understanding of Carter’s “The Magic Toyshop”.

This article focuses on how a dream can transform and shape a little girls life. Every culture’s myth is fabricated into its society creating and evolving its identity. Carter’s fantasy does not present a world of promises and hope but a world of threat and danger. It is for everyone to understand that all ‘Once upon a time..’ does not end with ‘Happily ever after’.

The novel ‘The Magic ToyShop’ is braided with myth, fairy tales, femininity, sexuality and reality. In this novel you will laugh on the first page, be disturbed at the end of the first chapter, and soon be immersed into its mystery and reality. It’s not always that fairy tales have a ‘Happily ever after’. Most of the time the reality is not told, it remains a silent spectator. Many a time’s reality comes upon us as a slap. In fact all our well known fairy tales are not as magical as they might seem. The original versions of the tales are different.

For instance in the first version of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ which is known as ‘Sun, moon and Talia’ by Giabattista Basile, the sleeping beauty is raped by a passing king and she even gives birth to a child while she is still asleep.

Carl Gustan Jung (1875 -1961) is a famous psychiatrist. In his book Psychology and Alchemy, he gives a detailed account on psychosynthesis or the unification and the differentiation of psych. Jung believed that the mind started out as a whole and would function in the same way. Jung divided the mind into three levels, the Conscious, the Personal unconscious and the Collective unconscious. In this novel through Melanie there is a clear understanding of the power of the unconsciousness.

In this novel ‘The Magic ToyShop’, our young protagonist Melanie a 15year old little girl dreams and fantasizes about the self. Her dreams twined with her fate, walk her through her destiny. The novel commences with Melanie’s desire to wear her mother’s wedding dress. Her desire and curiosity to feel like a woman, to feel like a naughty little princess provokes her to sneak into her parents’ room the day parents are out of the home. This emotion she goes through would be Carl Jung’s example of steering individualism.

Her parents are away on a business trip, inspite of knowing that it’s not right for her to sneak into her parents’ room, against her
consciousness she enters the room. Melanie fidgets with her mother’s things, finding her Mother’s wedding dress neatly packed; she quickly puts it on, and goes out for a stroll in the garden. By mistake Melanie gets locked outside the house, and tries to climb a tree to enter the house. Unfortunately the branch breaks, the dress is completely destroyed. On managing to climb in through the window, in her anger she breaks the mirror. Her act of destroying the dress and breaking the mirror mysteriously steers up the upcoming events in the novel. That very day her parents die in a plane crash.

Orphaned Melanie and her siblings, Victoria and Jonathan are sent to live in London with their uncle Philip. None of them have ever met his uncle before. All that the children ever know about his uncle is that he has a toy shop and is a puppet maker. He once sent Melanie an ugly and scary jack-in-the-box that had frightened her. Ever since the accident the families have kept a distance.

As fate would have it all, Melanie begins the next facet of her life. Reality strikes her, when a five begins in London. She compares her uncle’s silent and scary house to that of Blue Beards castle. Uncle Philip, who seems to be a friendly puppet maker to everyone, is nothing but a tyrant within the house. He literally silences his wife Maggie ever since their wedding day. Finn and Francis, Maggie’s two brothers also stay with Uncle Philip.

Through all her struggles Melanie learns to negotiate her awakening sexuality and becomes aware of the frightening world she is living in. Each day kindles Melanie to realize who she is.

In this novel the unconsciousness thoughts that flow through the minds of the characters pave way for their destiny. As Carl Jung’s description of a total personality which is a combination of the individuals ego, personal unconsciousness, complexes and collective unconsciousness. The personal unconsciousness of the protagonist Melanie is embedded with reflections from the fairy tales of hope of her prince charming. In the beginning of the novel we find Melanie fantasizing over her naked body. This action is a proof of maturity, which according to Jung is mystical in nature. Admiring one’s own body is involuntary; it’s an instinct, the first step towards realization. Jung has given a clear description of the collective unconsciousness of an individual.

Angela Carter structures the novel like a fairy tale. To comprehend the worlds of myth and reality, let’s begin with a very basic question, ‘what is a fairy tale?’ The origin of the word fairy was coined by Thomas Keightley in his fairy mythology and it took many other forms branching out to form a new genre. On the other hand myths are traditional stories of events, deeds, history, lives of heroes etc. Myth has an authority over fairy tales. Every culture has its own set of myths, passed down orally through generations to hold on to religious beliefs, values and rituals. In this novel carter bends myth, fairy tales and reality.

In the opening chapter young Melanie fantasizes about her sexuality in front of the mirror, dreamingly she sneaks quietly into her parent’s room. In Russian mythology it is believed that when someone has left the house on a long journey, either their room or their things should not be touched. Destroying a wedding dress and breaking mirrors are considered to be bad omens, to bring bad luck for seven years to that person and family.

“She met herself in the mirror, white face, black hair. The girl who killed her mother. She picked up the hairbrush and flung it at her reflected face. The mirror shattered. Behind the mirror was nothing but the bare wood of the wardrobe. She was disappointed; she wanted to see her mirror, still, and the room reflected in the mirror, still, but herself gone, smashed” (24-25)

Uncle Philip the puppet maker not only enjoys making puppets and conducting shows but also likes to control his entire family like puppets horrifying them each day. Uncle Philip forces Melanie to join his puppet team. He compels Finn who is secretly in love with Melanie, to sexually abuse her in the act ‘Leda and Swan’. Melanie feels helpless like Leda in the poem.

“A sudden blow: the great wings beating still,
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed,
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He hold her helpless breasts upon his breast...

Carter chooses this Greek myth of Leda and swan and a poem by W.B.Yeats to bring out the plight of Melanie and the tyrant her uncle Philip is. Finn who is love with Melanie finds it terrible and insulting to act in his uncle puppet show. He ends up burning the Swan and destroying all the other puppets along with the shop and house.

At the end of the novel Melanie has lost everything once again. Her brother and sister and her aunt are missing, left to an unknown fate, her stuffed animals lie burning in the house along with
her clothes, all she has is Finn, standing beside her, watching the flames with her. The end is a metaphor for growing up into womanhood and leaving the life of her girlhood behind. All that Melanie has is the confidence to the next chapter of her life. She understands that life is uncertain and reality is bitter.

Finally to conclude, with the focuses on how a dream can transform and shape life. To put Carl Jung’s theory in a nut shell, every culture’s myth is fabricated into its society creating and evolving its identity. Carter’s fantasy does not present a world of promises and hope but a world of threat and danger. It is for everyone to understand the power of ‘The unconsciousness’.

WORK CITED


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