

In your opinion are women seen as autonomous beings or as appendages to men in the narrative texts you have read this year? Putting it another way, is the idea of woman as “other” demonstrated in your understanding of one of the texts?

Otherness and the role of women are central topics in Angela Carter's *Magic Toyshop*. Otherness is created by the categorical thinking of uncle Philip but also by the behaviour of the “other” throughout the novel. The role of women, which is defined through the male characters, overshadows Melanie's continuing quest for self and degrades her to a passive appendage of men. This role of passive appendage even transforms to a complete loss of personality as in Margaret's case. However, a steady challenge of the “other” to Philip's patriarchal puppet household exists and finds its final expression in a fire of destruction with a sense of rebirth and repetition in the end.

Uncle Philip represents the personification of a feminist concept of patriarch. He sees all the “other” within stereotypical schemes and categorises them. He perceives Margaret as his wife and not an individual person. Finn is only a “useless Irish bastard” and Melanie, denied of her own sexuality, is “a little girl” whose “tits are too big”. He does not want to distinguish between his family and his puppets, rather he wants his family to become his puppets so that he can totally control them. He doesn't like when humans “overact” like Melanie does as Leda because “puppets don't overact” they are silent and look like he wants them to look.

Philip's superficial categorization is in addition strengthened through various meaningful symbols, which show the oppression of the “others” significantly. Margaret lost her subjectivity and her autonomy the day she entered life with Philip and becomes dumb. She loses the ability to speak and can't make herself hear, which is an elementary understanding of self and also Virginia Woolf's understanding of feminism. Philip wants Margaret to lose herself in his stereotypical view of a silent wife. He takes away her personality, which she is obliged to hide when he is present. Margaret, in accepting her role, becomes his wife-puppet. She wears his chosen Sunday costume and the necklace, which disables her with a sense of pride after all its “her Sunday best”.

Melanie's role is to be passive and to reflect the “other” of the male characters. Her quest for self is strictly limited by Philip and also Finn's chosen role for her. In lack

of a mirror she sees her reflection only in Fin's eyes in the Pleasure Garden or at the picture he has made through the spy-hole. But even before her parents died she saw herself only through male eyes when she posed in front of her mirror. In presenting her identity from a male perspective she places herself continually as a female object of a male subject and thus personifies the idea of otherness. So Melanie is not only physically trapped but also spiritually trapped into conventional female roles as Margaret and also Mrs. Rundle, who even adapted her Mrs. title to feel complete.

Finn, the oppressed male character, represents together with Francie and Margaret the secret opponents of Philip. The "red people" find hours of happiness and this itself is challenging enough for Philip. In retaining their own autonomy and creativity they represent a serious threat to his vision of puppets. Furthermore the incestuous relationship between Margaret and Francis is the ultimate menace to Philip's authority and finally destroys him and the whole stage. Melanie and Finn are the only survivors of this destruction and stand in the end at their beginning; but Finn still wears Philip's white shirt and Melanie's frightening vision of doing the washing and looking after their children overshadows the entry into her new life.

Margaret has finally got her voice back and would maybe find the courage to live herself but is denied of this fortune and dies with the patriarch. Her character is defined through the patriarch and can't exist without him. Melanie has not developed into an autonomous being but has rather passively accepted her female role as a wife and lays her accepted otherness into another patriarchal, hopefully not so terrifying, home.

Thus it is unavoidable for the female characters in Magic Toyshop to live as an appendage to men and the breeze of self-acceptance and acceptance of femininity can only lose itself in the otherness of death.

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