PUPPET SHOW OR MASQUERADE?: BEYOND DESIRE IN ANGELA CARTER'S *THE MAGIC TOYSHOP*

KUKLA GÖSTERİSİ Mİ, MASKELİ BALO MU?: ANGELA CARTER'IN BÜYÜLÜ OYUNCAK DÜKKANI *ROMANINDA ARZUNUN ÖTESİNDE*

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Abstract

This study interrogates the construction of gender identity in Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop (1967) with a view to the young female protagonist's transforming idea of female subjectivity. Revolving principally around the experience of femininity of the fifteen-year-old protagonist, Melanie, the narrative depicts her transformation and ultimate emancipation from Uncle Philip's control. In the novel, Carter tries to challenge and undermine the assumptions and myths of patriarchy by bringing its power to an end with its self-annihilation. It is argued here that the novel goes beyond Lacanian understanding of subjectivity construction predicated on the interplay between desire and lack, and hence the puppet roles for women informed by this patriarchal domain, and depicts its protagonist's transformation as a strategy to transgress these roles. In this respect, the conception of femininity in the novel is represented as a masquerade characterized by a strategic performance, rather than just a puppet show controlled by someone. Carter's protagonist resists yielding to a female image enforced upon her by the forces of male gaze and desire by wearing a mask of femininity as a coping mechanism to protect her self. The mask serves the function of distancing her from an idea of woman, and emphasizes this fictive role as an act, rather than an essence. Looking at herself from outside in various instances and recognizing the constructedness of her femininity as a social product, Melanie assumes femininity as a masquerade with which she finds ways of coping with phallogocentric myths. It is observed in the end that these myths could be reconstructed as the female protagonist manages to free herself from the puppet show directed by the mainstream discourse and begins to employ performativity strategically, instead.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Angela Carter'ın Büyülü Oyuncak Dükkanı (1967) adlı romanında yer alan cinsiyet kimliği oluşumunu, genç kadın ana karakterin değişen dişil öznellik anlayışına odaklanarak ele almaktadır. Esas olarak on beş yaşındaki ana kahraman Melanie'nin dişilik deneyiminin ele alındığı anlatı, bu kahramanın dönüşümünü ve nihayetinde Philip Amca'nın kontrolünden kurtuluşunu tasvir etmektedir. Romanda, Carter ataerkil gücün kendi kendini yok ederek etkisini yitirdiği bir dünyayı betimlemeyerek bu dünyanın varsayımları ve mitlerine meydan okuyup onların temelini çürütmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışmada öne sürülen düşünce, romanın, arzu ve eksiklik hislerinin etkileşimine bağlı olan Lacancı özne olma anlayışının ve dolayısıyla da ataerkil söylem tarafından kadına biçilmiş kukla rollerin ötesine geçtiği ve bu rolleri aşmada kullandığı stratejinin bir sonucu olarak baş karakterin bir dönüşüm geçirdiğidir. Bu bağlamda, romandaki dişilik düşüncesi kontrolü başkasında olan bir kukla gösterisinden çok stratejik bir performans olma özelliği taşıyan bir maskeli balo olarak temsil edilmektedir. Carter'ın ana kahramanı kendi benliğini korumak amacıyla bir savunma mekanizması olarak taktığı dişilik maskesi ile eril bakış ve arzunun güçleri tarafından kendine diretilen bir dişilik imgesine teslim olmayı reddeder. Bu maske onu kadın fikrinden uzaklaştırma işlevinin yanı sıra bu kurgusal rolün bir öz olmaktansa bir eylem olduğunu vurgular. Birçok örnekte kendisine dışarıdan bakan ve dişiliğinin toplumsal olarak üretilmiş bir kurgusallık olduğunun farkına varan Melanie, fallusmerkezci mitlerin üstesinden gelmenin yollarını bulduğu maskeli baloyu benimsemektedir. Romanın sonunda kadın karakterin kendini ana söylemin yönettiği kukla gösterisinden özgürleştirmeyi başarması ve onun yerine maskeyi stratejik bir şekilde kullanmaya başlamasıyla birlikte bu mitlerin yeniden inşa edilebildiği gözlenmiştir.

Introduction

Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) mainly revolves around the 15-year-old protagonist Melanie's self-discovery of her female subjectivity in a world of patriarchal dominance. Impelled to leave her rural house with her two siblings upon learning her parents' unfortunate death in a plane crash, Melanie is fully situated in a phallocentric realm when she begins to live with Uncle Philip, his mute wife Margaret, their eldest son Finn and their other children in their working-class London neighborhood. Uncle Philip, a toymaker, organizes puppet shows and decides that Melanie can act out Leda in his version of "The Story of Leda and The Swan." Melanie refuses to conform to the role ascribed to her by Philip, which causes the disastrous ending of the show. The ending of the novel can be regarded as a rewriting of this patriarchal myth. Ultimately, the fire started by Uncle Philip on an impulse brings the novel to an end. As such, the novel is concerned with the quest for subjectivity, the role of male gaze and desire, the perpetual dominance and deconstruction of patriarchy as well as the female character's coping strategies to counteract prescribing forms of femininity.

Viewing Melanie's maturation from her teenage years to womanhood, the novel can be categorized as a postmodernist bildungsroman or a formation novel, in which the female protagonist's transformation in terms of self-perception and gender formation is predominantly subversive. Therefore, the constructedness of gender categories in the novel can be explored with a view to Joan Riviere's conception of womanliness as a "masquerade," and the idea of gender as a performance. Lacanian concept of desire can define Melanie's initial positioning within the mainstream discourse of genderization, yet it does not suffice to explicate her gradual change towards the end of the novel. Rather, Melanie's sense of self can be gradually observed to be aligned with ideas of femininity as a masquerade and a performative act.

Melanie's introduction into the realm of female subjectivity is, at the outset, in line with Lacanian idea of desire. Jacques Lacan's concept of desire is basically connected to one's relationship with others. Lacan famously formulates desire in the statement that "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (1998, p. 235). What is implicit in this idea is that one needs recognition by the Other, which constitutes his desire. That means one identifies with, or seeks the object of the Other's desire. As Lacan (1998) puts it, "the point of the ego ideal is that from which the subject will see himself, as one says, as others see him" (p. 268). Self-identification in this

sense ensues throughout life "to seek and foster the imaginary wholeness of an 'ideal ego'" (Sarup, 1992, p. 65). As the ego is structured through a series of false connections, however, a unified image is unattainable by the subject. In this state, one views himself or herself from the other's standpoint, involving in a process of self-gaze. Then, desire always remains in the realm of the unconscious, the unconscious of the Other. This makes desire a metonymy (Lacan, 2006, p. 528), something which is never attainable, or tangible due to its state of constant deferral. Evans (1996) explains: "[O]ne signifier constantly refers to another in a perpetual deferral of meaning. Desire is also characterised by exactly the same never-ending process of continual deferral" (p. 114). This deferral is discernable in the subject's relationship with the lost object, an *object petit a*, or an object of *jouissance*. Lacan (1998) differentiates desire from demand, which is multiple and functional in the manifestation of insatiable desire:

> Desire is situated in dependence on demand – which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition both, absolute and unapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued, (*méconnu*), an element that is called desire (p. 154).

As Lacan puts it here, desire functions as a metonymy or a signifier, which can never be pinpointed, nor comprehended. Therefore, unlike demand, it is impossible to satisfy desire. In this sense, desire is at the root of both one's relationship with others and one's sense of self.

Like desire, Lacanian concept of lack is significant in making sense of subjectivity construction. In his *Seminar II*, Lacan (1991) defines the interplay between desire and lack, and its functionality in the identity making processes:

> Desire, a function central to all human experience, is the desire for nothing nameable. And at the same time this desire lies at the origin of every variety of animation. If being were only what it is, there wouldn't even be room to talk about it. Being comes into existence as an exact function of this lack. Being attains a sense of self in relation to being as a function of this lack, in the experience of desire (p. 224).

Demand is the articulation of need for Lacan, and thus different from desire, which is undoubtedly beyond need. As stated earlier, desire always remains insatiable, and is thus expressed in terms of a lack: “[D]esire is a relation of being to lack” (Lacan, 1991, p. 223). To put it in basic Lacanian terms, desire is lack.

Unlike Lacan, who describes subjectivity in terms of desire of the Other, Angela Carter is concerned with subjectivity in social terms. Carter defines female subjectivity as a social construct that is shaped, and hailed as genuine, by the patriarchal society: “[h]ow that social fiction of my "femininity" was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing” (Carter, 1998, p. 38). Focusing on the idea of femininity in both her fiction and her essays, Carter attempts to reveal “the social fictions that regulate our lives” (1998, p. 38) in these texts. In *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), her preoccupation with femininity as a social construct becomes more discernable when one looks at the experience of the female protagonist and her attempts to transcend a subjectivity predicated on desire and lack, and instead foreground it as a social construct through masquerade.

Carter’s protagonist resists yielding to a female image enforced upon her by the patriarchal forces of desire and gaze by wearing a mask of femininity as a strategy to protect herself. A mask serves the function of distancing her from an idea of woman, and emphasizes this fictive role as an act, rather than an essence. In “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” Joan Rivière, a French psychoanalyst, argues that womanliness “could be assumed and worn as a mask” (1986, p. 306). Central to her argument lies the impossibility to draw a distinct line between “genuine womanliness” and “masquerade,” for they are inseparable from each other in that it is in the borderline of this assumed mask that the idea of femininity is constructed, rather than being an “interiority.” Another function of the mask is that it can be employed as a strategy when “women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men” (Rivière, 1986, p. 303). This seems particularly necessary when women transgress their female roles by refusing them as givens of their identity as does Melanie as the novel progresses. By the same token, Butler puts forward, in *Gender Trouble*, that gender is “a performative act,” an idea equally revealing fictiveness of gender which has no “internal core” or “ontological status” (1990, p. 136). Throughout the novel, Melanie sees herself as acting or performing even when she is not in a puppet show. Looking at herself from outside in various instances, Melanie, consciously or unconsciously, draws attention to her gendered self as performativity.

It is argued here that Carter's protagonist seems to gradually distance herself from a domain of femininity dictated by male gaze and desire, whereby recognizing the constructedness of her femininity as a social product, and assuming, instead, a masquerade with which she finds ways of coping with patriarchal forces. As stated earlier, desire, together with lack, for Lacan, is constitutive of subjectivity, which is functional here in the earlier stages of the young female character's construction of self. However, as she matures as a woman, Melanie, moves away from the passive domain of identification with male gaze and desire into one which is more counteractive in terms of female performativity and subjectivity. Therefore, in reference to the construction of female subjectivity, its fictionalization and ultimate transformation, it can be argued that Carter's novel goes beyond Lacanian understanding of subjectivity construction predicated on the interplay between desire and lack, and hence the puppet roles of femininity shaped by this patriarchal domain, and depicts its protagonist's transformation in terms of a masquerade of femininity as a strategy to transgress these roles. In this respect, the conception of femininity in the novel is represented as a masquerade or performative act, rather than just a puppet show controlled by patriarchy.

From Essentialist to Discursive Conception of Female Subjectivity

The 15-year-old protagonist, Melanie, initially transgresses into the realm of contradictory roles of womanhood in which she has to confront with her sexuality and potential menace of patriarchy, and this can be explicated with recourse to Lacanian notion of desire. At the outset, Melanie is depicted as an adolescent who is introduced into the territory of sexuality within a state of self-examination:

> In readiness for him, she revealed a long, marble white leg to the thigh (forgetting the fantasy in sudden absorption in the mirrored play of muscle as she flexed her leg again and again); then, pulling the net tight, she examined the swathed shape of her small, hard breasts. Their size disappointed her but she supposed they would do (Carter, 1981, p. 2).

Melanie examines her body in the mirror and her fascination with her own body is in alignment with the idea of desire, which is informed by the Other's perception or gaze. To be more precise, it is the patriarchal ideology that shapes her sense of female beauty, and thus her introduction to the realm of womanhood. Sarah Gamble (1997) describes Melanie's condition as "narcissistic desire" stemming from female roles assigned to women by patriarchy since "Melanie's

passage into the patriarchal system is inevitable" (p. 69). In this respect, her sense of desire has a twofold dimension in Lacanian terms: "both the desire for the Other's desire and desire for the Other" (Sarup, 1992, p. 69). As Lacan puts it, one basically desires that which the Other desires. This reflects Melanie's entry into the patriarchal system since she imagines herself as the object of man's desire. In this sense, Melanie not only visualizes and desires an idealised image of a man, "a phantom bridegroom" (Carter, 1981, p. 2) for whom she gift-wraps herself, but also renders herself the object of desire for the other as she begins to view herself through the male gaze. Her phantom partner does not really exist, yet the image of it makes her see herself from his point of view. This amounts to what Carter describes as "a degree of colonialisation of the mind" (1998, p. 38). Carter also suffered, as she herself claimed, from this disposition as a young female journalist when she "quite unconsciously" used to "posit a male point of view as a general one" (Carter, 1998, p. 38). In this sense, her predicament can be likened to that of her female protagonist, who is also positioned within such a false identification. As Gamble puts it, "Melanie is already regarding herself from a male-identified perspective, envisaging her future adult female role as a man's bride or muse, which leads her to continually assess her body's worthiness as the object of male desire" (1997, p. 69). It can be argued, then, that she constructs her identity in line with the dictates of patriarchal discourse. This is evident in her aspirations to keep her body fit and desirable. For example, she refuses to eat the bread pudding as she considers "she would grow fat and nobody would ever love her and she would die virgin;" this image of herself as a drowned corpse on bread pudding recurs in her dreams, putting her into a state of terror (Carter, 1981, p. 3). Furthermore, in her mirror-image with moon-daisies in her hair, she mingles her present and imagined future, seeing herself in the mirror "as if she were a photograph in her own grown-up photograph album" full of "pictures of her children in Brownie uniforms" (Carter, 1981, p. 6). In many instances like this one, Melanie is in a constant state of mirror viewing. Her perception of herself fundamentally relies on this act of observing and imagining herself in the mirror. The significance of the mirror lies in its connection to the idea of desire. In this scene, mirror functions as a site for self-construction by reflecting not only Melanie's idea of self but also the image she desires to evade. It is also significant for its paradoxical function to distance her from a condition with which she is not ready to confront. In this distant mirror image, she prefers to see herself and her imaginary children in a photograph album, not in the real world. Evidently, this sphere of femininity is not without problems as she begins to

recognize. It is both attraction as well as dread that define her relation to her possible future as a woman. Her positioning within the feminine domain, therefore, has contradictory impacts on the female protagonist's ideas of self.

The predominance of vision through images paves the way for a blurred relationship between what is real and what is fantasy, between different selves construed by the dictates of desire. As in the case of mirror viewing, her visions of herself become dream-like, incongruous with reality. Melanie herself fails to set reality apart from illusion, and this culminates in a fragmented sense of self, in a situation in which she "suffers dissolution of the self" (Mahoney, 1997, p. 78). This is primarily caused by contradictory self-images she feels compelled to assume in a system controlled by patriarchy. Linden Peach (2009) avers that the novel is concerned with "ego disturbances within the psyche" (p. 70). Melanie's disturbed ego or disintegration can, then, be viewed as a result of her entrapment in a state of problematic relationship with reality. To exemplify, her obsession with her mother's wedding-dress draws Melanie into another fairy tale when she steals into her parents' bedroom at night in their absence, and becomes entangled by the veil blowing up around her. In fact, this can be regarded as a transgressive moment that reminds *jouissance*: "She shook with ecstasy" (Carter, 1981, p. 17). *Jouissance* is defined in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1950-1960* as a sense of enjoyment accompanied by pain, a feeling which is beyond the pleasure principle and can be attained when the subject transgresses certain restrictions (Lacan, 1992, p. 184). This moment marks Melanie's transformation, which is inaugurated when she feels this excessive sense of *jouissance*. In other words, Melanie's departure from an existence which is only reigned by reality can be viewed as liberating, reflecting Carter's own ideas about the power of such a departure: "[I]n order to question the nature of reality one must move from a strongly grounded base in what constitutes material reality" (Carter, 1998, p. 38). For Carter, reality itself is questionable, and one needs to step out of the territory of material reality to have a deeper insight into life and the self. This is what Melanie does when she experiences a transgression beyond reality, and the resulting feeling of *jouissance*.

This moment of *jouissance* represents a change in her attitude to view herself. Her new attitude is in line with Joan Rivière's conception of womanliness as a "masquerade." Wearing her mother's dress and her scent as a mask, she now becomes and feels like a woman: "Absently she dabbed stale Chanel behind her ears and at once smelled so like her mother that she glanced at herself in the

mirror to make sure she was still Melanie" (Carter, p. 14). At this earlier stage of self-discovery, she employs this mask as a protective shell unconsciously. The mask has two functions: it is both unifying and estranging. It is as if she was the one and the same with her mother, unified with her within semiotic ties. On the other hand, she is also estranged by her self-image as this vision does not belong to herself, but to another woman. Her reiterative act of mirror-gazing underlines her self-discernment in the light of others' gaze as well as her dissatisfaction with such an idea of self:

> She opened her mother's wardrobe and inspected herself in the long mirror. She was still a beautiful girl. She went back to her own room and looked at herself again in her own mirror to see if that said different but, again, she was beautiful. Moonlight, white satin, roses. A bride. Whose bride? (p. 16).

By looking at herself from outside through her reflection in the mirror, she adopts the other's gaze rather than relying on her own inner perception. She repetitively looks in the mirror in search of subjectivity, yet it merely yields an image of woman as the object of desire and gaze. Jean Wyatt (2000) holds that "[t]he gaze is all around us, a function of our existence in a visual field; being the object of the gaze is an inalienable dimension of human being" (pp. 70-71). She not only depends on mirror-vision, but she also asks the apple tree and the moon to look at her for a verification of her feminine identity: "'Look at *me*!' she cried passionately to the pumpkin moon, as it smiled, jovial and round faced as a child's idea of itself" (Carter, 1981, p. 16). She also seeks affirmation from the tree in the garden, which, as a metaphor of the master signifier and an epitome of patriarchy, tears the dress and Melanie's own youthful energy and sense of unity apart. Her mother's death at this night of transgression and Melanie's self-accusation inevitably alienate her from the mirror image, culminating in her destructive act of mirror breaking. Stricken with self-blame, she first vomits, and then, shatters her mirror in an attempt to free herself from this image:

> 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. […] She was disappointed; she wanted to see her mirror, still, and the room reflected in the mirror, still, but herself gone, smashed (pp. 24-25).

This scene of mirror-smashing is significant as, from this moment on, she gets more conscious in her attempt to distance herself from all the illusory visions reflected by the mirror. She is now capable of seeing the artificiality of the images in the mirror as they are constructed by the gaze / desire of the other. By this act of mirror-breaking, she also shatters images created when she looks at herself from an outsider's / male's viewpoint.

Not only mirrors but also actual men around her when she moves to Uncle Philip's house contribute to her self-perception through gaze. Unlike her well-decorated house with mirrors in every corner, there are no mirrors in her uncle's house. However, to a similar end, she can see herself through the male gaze surrounding her with the presence of her uncle and cousin Finn. Uncle Philip's "Medusa glances", or the phallic image created by the snakes around the mythical character's head, emphasizes his "patriarchal majesty" (Carter, 1981, pp. 72-73). As Day (1998) puts it, "Uncle Philip is almost a caricature of the patriarch" in a world in which "patriarchal power [...] turns people into puppets, deprives them of autonomous life" (pp. 23-24). His eyes seem to be "judging and assessing her all the time" (Carter, 1981, p. 92). Another form of gaze is Finn's slanting eye which ironically distorts her authenticity, refracting her image through the male viewpoint. Within the eye-mirror, "the image as expressed in the disguise of the eye reveals the power of the (male) gaze and the disempowerment of 'the other'" (Müller, 1997, p. 44). This male gaze is the sole thing that provides her a picture of herself, but only a distorted one within which she is reduced to a docile wife of a marriage without "any glamour or romance or charm" (Carter, 1981, p. 177). In this respect, she is no less suppressed than the women around her, like her mother and Margaret. As a result, Melanie seeks ways to distance herself from such a subjectivity enforced upon her by this dominantly male discourse.

The night of transformation that is a turning point in Melanie's life is imbued with symbolic images that reflect her subsequent change with a ritual passage into the feminine territory driven by patriarchal forces. The scene depicting that night is full of images of the moon and the moonlight, which emphasizes her association with womanhood and female sexuality. Everything happens with the moon as her only witness; her face is all 'mooney' (Carter, 1981, p. 14), and even "familiar things seemed exotic and curious in the light of the moon" (p. 10). In fact, the moon reflects the shadowy and unknowable part of her self as she begins to discover her sexuality. Together with the moon, the apple tree also accompanies her

transformative experience. The tree, a phallic symbol in Freudian psychology, is an object of desire and a destructive force. While climbing in a state of nakedness, she feels her vulnerability more intensely: “She felt a new and final kind of nakedness, as if she had taken even her own skin off and now stood clothed in nothing, nude in the ultimate nudity of the skeleton” (p. 21). The moment she longs for unity, she gets disintegrated by her interplay with the tree, a destruction, in fact, brought about by the patriarchy itself. The tree, her childhood playmate, is no longer a safe ground to hold on to because it leaves her “hung in agony by her hands, strung up between earth and heaven, kicking blindly for a safe, solid thing in a world all shifting leaves and shadows” (p. 21). The apple tree also entails biblical connotations, symbolizing the fall of the man, which in turn stands for Melanie’s fall from the heavenly surrounding of her own house and the safe ground of her innocent childhood by stepping into the unknown isolating territory of Uncle Philip’s house.

Her new life in Uncle Philip’s house begins following the train journey to London, a symbolic passage to a new stage of femininity. This stage involves an irretrievable transformation of Melanie’s self-construction since she becomes more mature, and assumes a more austere cultural position with new responsibilities. This moment also represents her psychic disintegration, a state of reformation of her sense of self, in which she is both literally separated from her parents and psychologically steps into a realm where she feels an utter sense of insufficiency and ambiguity. Constant juxtaposition of fantasy with what is manifest is displayed within Melanie’s view of other people. “Melanie’s way of reading others is also through image and construction” (Mahoney, 1997, p. 78). She sees Uncle Philip as Beast of Apocalypse, Bluebeard, and Saturn, all of which go along with the idea of violence as his presence is “brooding and oppressive” (Carter, 1981, p. 92). Similarly, her view of Aunt Margaret is also based on imagery; her exposed subsistence and tender movements are bird-like; Melanie visualizes her birdy head and bird-claw, and she is actually no different from the bird imprisoned in the clock house. Melanie once wonders: “What is Aunt Margaret made of?” as if she was a toy rather than a woman (p. 138). In this new phase of her self construction, she becomes more conscious of gender as a fabrication as she observes women like Margaret. Regretting this vision of woman, she later develops strategies to avoid such an ending for herself. As part of her strategy, her dream-like perception is based on mental pictures that she herself creates in order to separate her idea of being a woman from one dictated by the mainstream discourse of patriarchy and to

deal with a sense of lack.

The most intense form of lack within Melanie bears upon the past life of her comfortable country house that she retrospectively idealizes and her childhood from which she is unable to detach herself. This idea of homesickness is also in accordance with the concept of lack since Carter's characters, Linden Peach (2009) claims, "are motivated by a desire to realize the ideal of home [as their] early home life is severely disrupted by trauma" (p. 69). Therefore, as a traumatized subject, Melanie is attached to a number of belongings that unleash her desire. An *objet-petit-a*, or an object of desire, which bridges the gap between her and her lost childhood is the blue sweater Mrs. Randle has sent her as a Christmas gift. She keeps it on during all her subversive actions, such as when the whole household challenges Uncle's Philip's authority in his absence in the aftermath of the swan-show. Melanie is now more fragmented as a subject due to her sense of lack, yet she is stronger in her reactions to patriarchal figures like Philip.

Melanie reacts against not only Uncle Philip but also Finn with the employment of masquerade though in a different way. Melanie interacts with Finn in a way described by Rivière in relation to one of her patients who, "by wearing towards him the mask of womanly subservience, and under that screen, performing many of his masculine functions herself – 'for him'" (1986, p. 311). In this sense, Melanie replaces Finn in his site of masculinity as he himself is castrated not only by patriarchy but also by Melanie. Therefore, Melanie's relationship with Finn is dubious, giving her "a half-frightened, half-pleasurable sensation," (Carter, 1981, p. 61) in which she acts in a double-layered way like the woman in Rivière's analysis. On the apparent level, she wears a mask of womanliness, and thus seems intimidated by Finn. Yet, on a deeper level, performing his masculinity, she is more powerful and active than him. In fact, Finn is a subjugated subject in many respects, and often remains passive in reaction to the father-figure, Philip. Just like Melanie, Finn also suffers from a profound sense of lack, which is exacerbated by his mother's death. Thus, he is in a desperate need for love and sympathy that can be fulfilled by his interaction with Melanie. Although Finn is horrid and even disgusting for Melanie, he is still an object of desire for her as his affection for and attraction to her is not only sexual but also emphatic and motherly. Denying his sexual role, Finn in fact accepts his own castration as an act of overthrowing the phallic function and subverting patriarchal power. Commenting on Finn's castration, Wyatt (2000) argues:

> It is from his own body that the false 'phallus' pokes out, so in chopping it off Finn refuses the masquerade of masculinity: he acknowledges his own castration. In the family structure, Finn is in the position of son to Philip, 'apprenticed' to him ostensibly to learn the art of toymaking, but implicitly to learn the art of male dominance. [...] Finn is meant to identify with the father figure, become 'master' in relation to woman. [...] Severing and throwing away the paternal symbol is equivalent to refusing the phallic function. In Lacan's terms, Finn acknowledges the lack that is everyone's inevitable lot. [...] Finn subverts the power relations of patriarchy (p. 73).

Finn's first refusal of masquerade of masculinity takes place when he rejects the masculine role Uncle Philip imposes upon him, asking him to rehearse the scene of Leda's rape with Melanie in private. He holds back touching Melanie upon discovering Philip's genuine intention of abusing her sexually: "He's pulled our strings as if we were his puppets, and there I was, all ready to touch you up just as he wanted" (Carter, 1981, p. 152). He also shows willingness to step out of patriarchy's puppet show, where he himself feels suppressed. Likewise, he subversively and pleasurably destroys the swan that Uncle Philip has made as an embodiment of his own masculine aggression, chopping it up into pieces as a symbolical act of castration. Then, he seeks relief in Melanie's bedside, and assumes a powerless and susceptible position in comparison to that of Melanie. Remembering her own sense of insecurity in the isolated forest of the wedding-dress night, Melanie understands his "great ordeal," which indicates a reversal of roles between them. Melanie is in the more powerful side now, manifesting a shift of traditional gender roles, in which women are considered more submissive contrary to how Melanie is represented here.

Melanie is no longer passive in her reaction to, and acceptance of, gender as an essence. Although she initially gets self-satisfaction from her vision and role as a woman, she is now more aware of the state of women within patriarchy. For example, she can view the image of Queen Victoria, which epitomizes the female degradation by phallocentric order, and which is in fact "the embodiment of the woman broken by patriarchy" (Gamble, 2005, p. 41). Thus, Melanie resents the predicament of this statue by "narcissistically gazing at itself," (Carter, 1981, p. 104) and seeks ways to distance herself from this image that reminds her of her own fall. As a result, she is absorbed in an act of destroying her self-image

predicated on a narcissistic self-gaze, just like that of the statue of Queen Victoria. Another self-image she longs to set herself apart from is the one reflected by one of Uncle Philip's puppets. Just as her mirror image within her mother's dress, the view of the puppet with a white tulle dress in Philip's basement room is unbearable for her because while looking at the doll she sees herself in her mother's dress at the terrifying night; both images reflect her own subjectivity within a system she wishes to elude.

Melanie gets more and more conscious of her femininity as a performance in line with Joan Rivière's definition of womanliness as a "masquerade", which functions as a strategy. This strategy of evasion involves detachment of her self from her body, where the body just performs independently from her self. When Finn kisses her in the park, she dramatizes the event as a film scene, "a shot from a new-wave British film", viewing herself from outside: "She wished someone was watching them, to appreciate them, or that she herself was watching them, Finn kissing this black-haired young girl, from a bush a hundred yards away. Then it would be romantic" (p. 106). The separation of her mind from her body can be regarded as a coping strategy to moderate her distress. Melanie "experiences her own life from the secure position of an anonymous observer [which] lent her the power of the gaze" (Müller, 1997, p. 140). Her adoption of this masquerade of femininity dissociates her from an idea of woman. In other words, the mask that she wears indicates the distinction between the girl who acts as a woman and the one who has another self which is different. In the same vein, corporeal aspects of gender identity render it, according to Butler, liable for reconfiguration since gender is a category (feminine/masculine), differentiated from the biological category of sex (female/male), which lacks "an interior essence" or "a psychological "core"" (Butler 136). The idea of gendered body with its "performative acts" characterizes, in this sense, Melanie's idea of her gender as a construct. Another example is also that she attempts at self-detachment with "a sudden desire to giggle" while acting out her role of Leda, the young girl whom Uncle Philip's puppet swan ("a grotesque parody of […] phallic bird of her imaginings") is planning to rape (Carter, 1981, pp. 164-165). Yet, the scene paralyzes her. This state of paralysis is significant because she gives up participating in the puppet show, and subsequently positions herself outside of it.

Despite Uncle Philip's attempts, she refuses to succumb to the status of a puppet through detachment from her role. To this effect, she tries to disassociate herself from this doll-like existence by looking at it from outside and laughing inwardly. This act, or rather refusal to act, functions as a clear revolt against Philip. In fact, the woman who is described to masquerade by Rivière, just like Melanie, "had quite conscious feelings of rivalry and claims to superiority over many of the 'father–figures'" (1986, p. 305). In this way, she attempts at self-relief towards her virtual rape by Uncle Philip in the guise of the swan, and culminates in an intermingle of reality and fantasy where she is distanced from her self and her body:

> 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, that 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 (p. 166).

From this outer point of view, she finds it difficult to identify with herself, unable to figure out whether the black-haired girl is herself or someone else. As in the idea of masquerade, her interior self is distinct from her apparent status on stage. Stage also emphasizes performativity.

Through her coping strategies, Melanie, unlike other women in the novel, manages to step out of a context that silences and subjugates women. Despite Melanie's superior social position, other women in the novel are predominantly submissive. For example, her mother is assigned to the role of an obedient wife keeping company to her husband in his business trips. Her father is a powerful patriarchal figure upon whom the whole family relies on. Mrs. Randle adopts the title Mrs. as her fiftieth birthday "present" primarily because it is this title that assumedly gives women respectability in the society, "a touch of personal dignity" (p. 3). Aunt Margaret, who is muted symbolically on the same day she marries Philip, hence opts to be his possession and submits to his love for silence. She is a victim of male dominance and aggression. Alongside her, the whole household is like his puppets as each of them is easily manipulated under his absolute authority. This corresponds to patriarchy's authority: "Uncle Philip is patriarchy incarnate, less a character than barely embodied principle" (Gamble, 1997, p. 71). Carter thus "makes the puppet-master as symbolic of the control exerted by a patriarchal culture on women and the roles available to them" (Palmer, 1987, p.

183). Furthermore, the necklace Philip has made for Margaret turns out to be exactly the same as the one around his female puppet, Queen of Scots' neck. With the necklace on, she can hardly move and eat without pain. Her painful stance is a source of pleasure for her husband: "while gazing at her with expressionless satisfaction, apparently deriving a certain pleasure from her discomfort, or even finding that the sight of it improved his appetite" (Carter, 1981, p. 113). His overgrown appetite is contrasted with the unwillingness to eat he has evoked in the others. Sarah Sceats (1997) analyses this in terms of psychoanalysis, regarding Philip's appetite as "patriarchal licence and capitalist greed":

> In psychoanalytical terms, Uncle Philip […] could be said to be stuck in the oral or oral-cannibalistic stage of development, longing for the sense of wholeness which is associated with the blissful sensations of the tiny infant at the breast, as yet unaware of itself as being distinct from the rest of world (p. 108).

Margaret functions as one of Philip's puppets upon which he exerts his absolute control. Melanie is different from both her mother and Aunt Margaret in that she refuses to internalize femininity defined by men unlike the other two women, and rather, views it as performativity.

In line with the idea of reconstruction of femininity, the ending of the novel can be viewed as a rewriting of patriarchal myths, and even grand narratives such as the biblical references like Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden. Aunt Margaret, Francie, Finn and Melanie all participate in an act of rebellion against their patriarchal oppressor, Philip. For the first time, Margaret is ripped off her immobilizing cage-like necklace and dull grey dress by replacing them with Melanie's youthful green dress and ornaments. She also defies her domineering husband within an incestuous union with Francie. Finn rebelliously destroys Uncle Philip's swan, sits on his place and drinks from his cup that clearly asserts that it belongs to the "father." Melanie wears her trousers, an action normally forbidden by her uncle. In all these subversive acts, it becomes manifest that patriarchal order in the house is about to be destroyed by its own weapon, by male aggression in the fire set by Philip. The fire is characterized as "the fire of patriarchy's self-inflicted destruction" resulting in "the deconstruction of patriarchy" (Gamble, 1997, pp. 72-73).

Melanie and Finn's escape from the toyshop entails some biblical references in that their isolation may allude to Adam and Eve's fall from the Garden of Eden. Angela Carter herself asserts in an interview that her own characters' fall is the "Fortunate Fall" because it is an escape "not only from the toyshop but the cultural myths which have contributed to women's intellectual, emotional and sexual oppression" (ed. Gamble, 2001, p. 45). In their flight, Melanie and Finn's relationship is "beyond the dichotomous logic of patriarchy" because it means "transformation through transgression (of the model offered by the patriarchal discourse)" (Birlik, 2021, p. 15). Likewise, contrary to the conventions of fairy tales, the ending remains irresolute or equivocal, hence liable to interpretation. Even though they are now free from the restrictive force of Philip, their future is declared unknown by the narrative itself, being left outside the central discourse of patriarchy. The two characters are now confronted with the possibility of stepping outside the borderline of patriarchy in their final departure. As a postmodern text, Carter's novel refuses to delineate the borders of the narrative where the interpretation of the reader gains significance as s/he needs to (re)write an ending of her/his own.

Conclusion

Consequently, it can be argued that subjectivity construction in the novel seems to go beyond the limitations of desire and lack in Lacanian terms, and thus the gender roles prescribed in patriarchy's puppet shows. Instead, femininity is described as a masquerade or a performative act functioning as a strategy to emphasize the fictiveness of gender. In this sense, it is clear that Rivière's concept of masquerade and performativity are intermingled with Carter's feminist agenda of manifesting the notion of female subjectivity as a construct. Both of these approaches to female subjectivity are diverse from women's (in this novel Melanie's) presence and passivity in a puppet show where puppets are directed by a powerful controller without whom they cannot move on their own right. Unlike such a restricted form of action, women's actions in the ideas of masquerade and performativity are self-oriented and in fact subversive. Masks of femininity in these theories are regarded as strategies for distancing women from an idea of women rather than essentializing it. This form of viewing female subjectivity is different from Lacanian formula of desire as the desire of the other and a sense of self based on male gaze. As a result, embarking on a process of subjectivity construction in her teenage years, Melanie later redefines her way of looking at her gendered self and gives up

her internalization of male gaze. To put it differently, she looks at herself from outside several times, in which she no longer adopts a male's viewpoint, rather gains consciousness into the constructedness of her gender identity. Throughout the novel, Carter's protagonist is observed to reconstruct her femininity by transcending predefined models and distancing herself from gender myths. Her strategies, then, can be claimed to be in line with Carter's own conception of femininity as a social construct.

It can also be concluded that Carter's own development as writer is analogous to her protagonist's transformation in *The Magic Toyshop*. As a young female writer/journalist, Carter recognizes that she suffered from what she calls "the colonialisation of the mind" (Carter, 1998, p. 38), an unconscious process of accepting a male perspective as general. Her young female protagonist, likewise, begins with a male point of view, or male gaze, in her construction of her femininity, but gradually becomes more aware of patriarchy's colonizing effect on women and accordingly reconstructs her strategies of self-view.

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Summary

Angela Carter's novel *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) deals with the conception of female subjectivity and its representation as a construct. This study suggests that young female protagonist of the novel reconstructs her idea of femininity by freeing it from male desire and gaze in favour of a strategic employment of masquerade and performativity. Revolving around the experience of femininity of the fifteen-year old protagonist, Melanie, the narrative depicts her transformation and ultimate emancipation from Uncle Philip's control. In the novel, Carter tries to challenge and undermine the assumptions and myths of patriarchy by initially depicting the protagonist's positioning within this mainstream discourse, and then her gradual recognition and awareness of her gender identity as a social product. In the beginning, her subjectivity construction is in line with Lacanian notion of desire, which can be defined as the desire of the other. In this earlier stage, she adopts and internalizes the other's view of her as a woman, and hence the male gaze. However, this does not long last as she begins to develop strategies to deal with this situation as she matures. As a strategy she wears a mask of womanliness, or a masquerade, as defined by Joan Rivière. In this sense, the reading of the novel with recourse to Rivière's conceptions is more effective than those of Lacan. It is argued here, then, that the novel's approach to female subjectivity is represented by the idea of masquerade rather than a puppet show as the former implies performativity on the part of women while the latter corresponds to a state of their passivity. In fact, the mask serves the function of distancing her from an idea of woman, and emphasizes this fictive role as an act, rather than an essence.

The female protagonist's transformation in terms of self-perception and gender formation is predominantly subversive. Melanie's introduction into the realm of female subjectivity is, at the outset, in line with Lacanian idea of desire. Jacques Lacan's concept of desire is basicly connected to one's relationship with others. In this state, one views himself or herself from the other's standpoint, involving in a process of self-gaze. This is clearly seen in the mirror-viewing scenes where Melanie looks at herself but with others' gaze. However, breaking the mirror marks at an irreversible change in her idea of self. Shattering her own image in the mirror means a moment of transgression as well as the beginning of a new stage in her experience of femininity.

Unlike Lacan, who describes subjectivity in terms of desire of the Other, Angela Carter is concerned with subjectivity in social terms. Carter defines female subjectivity as a social construct that is shaped, and hailed as genuine, by the patriarchal society. Carter's preoccupation with femininity as a social construct becomes more discernable when one looks at the experience of the female protagonist and her attempts to transcend a subjectivity predicated on desire and lack, and instead foreground it as a social construct through masquerade. In 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', Joan Rivière, a French psychoanalyst, argues that womanliness "could be assumed and worn as a mask" (1986, p. 306). An important function of the mask is that it can be employed as a strategy when "women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (Rivière 303). This seems particularly necessary when women transgress their female roles by refusing them as givens of their identity as does Melanie towards the end of the novel.

Her new life in Uncle Philip's house begins following the train journey to London, a symbolic passage to a new stage of femininity. Melanie gets more and more conscious of her femininity as a performance in line with Joan Rivière's definition of womanliness as a "masquerade", which functions as a strategy. This strategy of evasion involves detachment of her self from her body, where the body just performs independently from her self. When Finn kisses her in the park, she dramatizes the event as a film scene. Her adoption of this masquerade of femininity dissociates her from an idea of woman. In other words, the mask that she wears indicates the distinction between the girl who acts as a woman and the one who has another self which is different. Despite Uncle Philip's attempts, she refuses to succumb to the status of a puppet through detachment from her role. To this effect, she tries to disassociate herself from this doll-like existence by looking at it from outside and laughing inwardly. This act, or rather refusal to act, functions as a clear revolt against

Philip.

Consequently, it can be argued that subjectivity construction in the novel seems to go beyond the limitations of desire and lack in Lacanian terms, and thus the gender roles prescribed in patriarchy's puppet shows. Instead, femininity is described as a masquerade or a performative act functioning as a strategy to emphasize the fictiveness of gender. It can also be concluded that Carter's own development as writer is analogous to her protagonist's transformation in *The Magic Toyshop*. As a young female writer / journalist, Carter recognizes that she suffered from what she calls "the colonialisation of the mind" (Carter, 1998, p. 38), an unconscious process of accepting a male perspective as general. Her young female protagonist, likewise, begins with a male point of view, or male gaze, in her construction of her femininity, but gradually becomes more aware of patriarchy's colonizing effect on women and accordingly reconstructs her strategies of self-view.