



## Ramifications of Incest in Angela Carter's Novels

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### Abstract

Angela Carter is British novelist, short story writer, and journalist who left an indelible mark on the literary landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With her unique blend of magical realism, feminist critique, and postmodern playfulness, carter's works continue to captivate readers and inspire scholars. Incest means sexual intercourse between a male and a female who are closely linked by blood or affinity provided that such people are prohibited by law to marry or to conduct a sexual activity. Though the majority in the society treats this as an immoral act, the law does not have the strong stand over incest. The aim of this study was to identify family characteristics and dynamics relevant to the initiation and maintenance of interfamilial incest. An understanding of essential characteristics of the affected families could help to prevent such an act. The present study is an attempt to understand the infrastructure of incest and its dwelling in the society through the literature. The evidences of incest present in Angela Carter's novels make the study relevant even more. The study observes the causes and ramifications through the glass of literary pieces mentioned in the article. Incest is observed as a social taboo that affects the relationships within the family structure. The anatomy of incest is explained in the article through the characters involved in an incestual act in the works of Angela carter. The psychological explanation of the same elevates the relevance of incest to the modern world in this particular study.

**Key Words:** Incest, Interfamilial, Psychological, Dynamics, Literary.

### Introduction

Angela Carter fiction is renowned for its unflinching examination of the darker aspects of human nature, and among the most taboo and complex of these themes is incest. through her signature blend of myth, fairy tale, and psychological insight, Carter probes the intricate

of incestuous relationships, laying bare the power dynamics, emotional complexities, and societal implications that underpin this most forbidden of acts. This article will delve into Carter's portrayal of incest in works such as 'The Magic Toyshop' and 'Wise Children', examining the ways in which she uses this theme to subvert

patriarchal norms, challenge notions of family and identity, and expose the darker recesses of the human psyche.

Incest is considered a taboo sexual activity. Incest is derived from Latin word incestus which means unchaste. It is defined as “any sexual activity between close blood relatives who are forbidden by law to marry” (Kellogg 2005). The Cambridge English Dictionary also defines incest as “sexual activity involving people who are closely related and not legally allowed to marry” (Dictionary 2017). It is a worldwide neglected social issue both in developed and developing countries. As per a recent data from developing countries like India, nearly three out of ten registered cases of rape are due to incest, and it follows an increasing trend (Verma et al. 2017). Considering its rising trend, importance, and impact on the society, WHO classifies it as a silent health emergency (Organization 2004) and is underreported because of social taboo.

### **Incest: A Journey through History**

Incest is declared as “prohibited degree” of relationship from Biblical period. There is a bidirectional relationship between incest avoidance behavior and taboo. Incest is discouraged and forbidden; hence, people avoid incest, which may give rise to taboo related to incest. On the other hand, because there is taboo associated with incest, people avoid incest (Wolf 2015). Incest carries many social disadvantages (e.g., breach in social harmony, sexual abuse, role-relational confusion, and cultural violation); hence, taboos are created against incest (Wolf 2015). Freudian belief was centered around spontaneous inclination of human to indulge sexually within the family, though it was strongly criticized by many researchers (Wolf 2015). Incestuous characters also appear in mythology in all ancient cultures worldwide (Oosten 2015; Serrano and Gunzburger 1983). These mythological incestuous relationships are depicted in the context of disastrous outcomes, which might have propagated taboo with incest.

Westermarck’s hypothesis contradicted the concept given by Sigmund Freud. Westermarck postulated that children, who grow together in close association, often develop aversion to sexual contact among themselves as they become adult (Morehead 1999). It maintains the integrity of the family and act as a protective barrier against incestuous sexual contacts among siblings.

### **Angela Carter and her Novels Depicting Incest:**

Though Carter belonged to the second wave feminism, as readers one will definitely find it that her writing and the notions in her novels were much ahead of her time. Her novels are the narrations that find place in the present days of forth wave of feminism. Not only does she write about female and feminism her novels also shelter the psychological concepts too among which the social taboo ‘Incest’ is not exceptional.

Family dynamics seem to play particularly important role in the investigation of incest. Several critical constellations are discussed in the literature among which carter’s ‘*Wise Children*’ and ‘*The Magic Toyshop*’ are also included. ‘*Wise Children*’ found that stepfathers, uncles are more likely to sexually abuse than biological fathers. This was the last novel written by carter in the year 1991. The novel follows the fortune of twin chorus girls Dora and Nora Chance, and their bizarre theatrical family. It explores the subversive nature of fatherhood, the denying of which leads Nora and Dora to frivolous “illegitimate” lechery.

Most of the novel consists of Dora’s memories. The novel is an account of series of incestuous relationships which sparks the readers to think of reasons behind the same. Nora and Dora are identical twins whose natural father is Melchior hazard who denies his fatherhood however peregrine hazard who is Melchior’s fraternal twin brother is believed to be their legal father publicly. Melchior refuses to acknowledge his daughters and Dora is deeply

hurt by his rejection, contrasting the loving nature of peregrine, who become the twins' father figure.

Tristram Hazard is the half brother of Nora and Dora, who believes himself to be the nephew of the twins. Tiffany who is the goddaughter of the twins gets impregnated by her uncle Tristram. Melchoir is seen marrying and remarrying in the novel and ends up having three wives. Sasika and Imogen are his daughters born to his second wife, meanwhile melchoir has two more twins, Tristram and Gareth. Sasika, in an act of vengeance, enters into an incestual act with her half-brother Tristram. Dora is involved in an incestuous act with her paternal uncle Peregrine in a birthday party. The novel seems to be a complete mess to the readers. Illicit relationships and incest are the prime bricks that seem to build the novels plot.

To write about yet another novel of carter '*The Magic Toyshop*', though it does not seem ambiguous, it gives a clear glimpse of incest. Things fall apart for the protagonist of the novel Melanie who is orphaned along with her siblings, is compelled to shift to London to stay with her maternal uncle Philip Flower who owns a toyshop and is fond of puppet show. Melanie is astonished to find out that her aunt (Philip's wife) has dumbbed herself deliberately though she had the ability to speak. Melanie encounters Margaret's siblings Finn and Francie between whom she feels more attracted towards Finn and readers can find some intima episodes between them.

Melanie is mature enough to find out the distorted relationship between her uncle and aunt where Philip treats her wife disrespectfully and is cold at heart and has frozen feelings towards the whole family. During the saga when her uncle isn't home she discovers that her aunt Margaret and her brother Francie are in love with each other and they make love with each other every now and then. Though she tries to argue with Finn who priorly knew about this

that it is an incest they are committing, she however gets consoled by Finn. To their shock, Uncle Philip witnesses the move and gets to know about his wife's incest. he grows furious and gets mad with anger and rage, he starts breaking he furniture and gathers the wood. Meanwhile we discover that Margaret could speak and eventually the readers find that she deliberately had dumbbed herself because she did not want to speak to a man like her husband who was heartless. The readers find that the catastrophe had freed Margaret's tongue and her voice was thin but true. She urges everyone to get out of the house as Philip sets the house on fire. The novel ends when Melanie and Finn are found safe and hoping the safety of rest of the family members.

There can be two potential explanations for this case in the novel. in this case of sibling incest, both the absence of the father and the mother are considered risk factors. Physical or psychological abuse by the caretakers or removal of children from the family, as well as domestic violence are significantly correlated with incest with siblings. Lack of communication skills and poor problem solving strategies may be frequent in incestuous family structures. Negative, belligerent family ambience, parental rejection of children, orphan feeling, marital problems and lack of satisfaction with family relationships promote the occurrence of interfamilial incest. Marital dissatisfaction and violence between spouses can be identified as one of the causes of incest here, as abuse may serve the purpose of satisfying the perpetrator's emotional needs for closeness and security, which are expressed through sexual acts.

As responsible individuals of the society it is our onus to think about the repercussions of the incest encountered in the mentioned literary pieces as there is a notion that literature mirrors the society. Following might be the outcomes in realty if the characters in the novel were for real.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS:

1. Power dynamics: Incestuous relationships can involve significant power imbalances, particularly when they occur within families. This power imbalance can lead to coercion, manipulation, and abuse.
2. Incest taboos: Many societies have developed incest taboos as a way to maintain social order and family cohesion. Incest can disrupt family dynamics and lead to jealousy, rivalry, and division within families.
3. Emotional and psychological harm: Incestuous relationships can result in emotional and psychological harm to the individuals involved. They may experience guilt, shame, and emotional trauma, which can have long-lasting effects.

MEDICAL REASONS:

1. Increased risk of genetic disorders: Offspring resulting from incestuous relationships have a higher risk of inheriting genetic disorders. This is because they are more likely to share a higher percentage of their DNA, increasing the chances of passing on recessive genetic mutations. This can lead to serious health issues in the offspring.
2. Reduced genetic diversity: Over time, widespread incestuous relationships can lead to a reduction in genetic diversity within a population, making it more vulnerable to diseases and environmental changes.
3. Increased risk of birth defects: Incestuous relationships can lead to an increased risk of birth defects and congenital disorders in offspring due to the sharing of genetic material between closely related individuals.

4. Increased risk of mental health issues: The secrecy and social stigma surrounding incestuous relationships can contribute to mental health issues for those involved, as well as for family members who may be aware of the relationship.

**Impact of Incest:**

Women who had history of incest are more likely to develop poor self-esteem and often have difficulty in close relationships (Herman 1981). Incestual practice between an adult and their child is usually considered a form of child sexual abuse and may lead to development of sexual dysfunction, depression, anxiety disorder, substance abuse, borderline personality disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in later part of life. Incestuous relationship results in inbreeding, which has various health hazards because the expression of otherwise recessive alleles, due to homozygous states, might cause development of complex diseases and reduction in longevity (Rudan et al. 2003). Evidences support increased mortality of children born from consanguineous marriages (Rudan et al. 2003). Consanguineous marriage also increases the risk of recurrent pregnancy loss, stillbirths, early death of child, X-linked disorders, autosomal dominant Incest 3 disorders, mental retardation, as well as limb abnormalities (Shawky et al. 2013). The children born from incest are often at risk of developing rare recessive disorders like homocystinuria, congenital ichthyosis, deaf-mutism, retinitis pigmentosa, glycogen storage disease, cystic fibrosis, and progressive cerebellar degeneration. They are also at high risk of developing congenital organ malformations (Super 1981). Incestuous relationship during childhood is often a traumatic experience that adversely affects the mental well-being. The cognitive behavioral and other psychotherapeutic interventions for the victims of incestuous abuse focus on understanding the traumatic stress, psychodynamics, concept of

self, as well as the relational aspects with the perpetrator (Courtois 1997)

### Conclusion

Though incest is considered a social taboo, it still persists in the society and has become part and parcel of the social lives of many. Many of the incestual cases go unnoticed and are being ignored due to many unexplained reasons. It is a burning issue in today's developing world where it is believed to be common and is covered in the name of modernization where culture and traditions are ignored and are mutated. Carter has attempted to juxtapose the same through her novels and has rendered success in justifying her notions. She is believed to be much ahead of her times because she has written about the concepts that are much relevant in today's world. Her writings are bold enough to be discussed as topics of today's modern world. Incest is something which needs to be in limelight and which needs to be discussed more and more due to its recurrence in the modern world. Incest kills the essence of relationships directly or indirectly and needs an amendment in the society.

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