

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

She was the first great writer I ever met, and she was one of the best, most loyal, most truth-telling, most inspiring friends anyone could ever have.

--Salman Rushdie, "Angela Carter, 1940-92: A Very Good Wizard, a Very Dear Friend"

Angela Carter speaks out of the innermost in an audacious manner. Against those authoritative discourses, *The Magic Toyshop* exposes the social limitations and restraints which are often neglected. Through the form of the fairy tale, *The Magic Toyshop* expresses a picture of dystopia which is so scary and unsettling that the reader is forced to face what has always been repressed by the operation of the social system. In order to break through the solid boundary of the established ideology, the fantastic has to disturb the reader's perception by the mystery events which cannot be definitely explained and pinned down. Laughter and carnival are another means to blatantly challenge and subvert the system. The unconstrained laughter and the outspoken spirit of carnival are the progressive ways to contest the serious and rigid grand-narratives of patriarchy.

In *The Magic Toyshop*, what is challenged is the phallus, the transcendental signifier, which overtly controls the mind. It has been operating so smoothly and naturally that one can seldom notice its wily devices. The system has been

internalized, taking the predominant position. Although the language system generates this condition, paradoxically it can only be changed through the system. Carter says that “[...] it is all applied linguistics. But language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation” (“Notes from the Front Line” 77). Believing the power of literature, she boldly displays the working process and recalls the reader’s memory of the experience of primal stage, hoping for making a difference.

Melanie’s bildungsroman presents a girl’s growing process in the system of social order. Being an object of the male gaze, Melanie has to adjust herself to the “proper” image of how the female looks like. When entering Uncle Philip’s realm, Melanie is forced to further reduce her subjectivity and sexuality, turning into a great resemblance to the lifelike dolls made by Philip. All the characters in the novel, including Melanie, Jonathon, Margaret, Finn, Victoria, and even Francie, become the subordinates to Philip’s manipulation. Philip is the phallus, the predominant power. Everyone in its realm cannot help but comply with its rules. He makes the real person metamorphose to the unreal puppets which can only act according to his will, and he himself metamorphoses into the ruler in mythology, Zeus, who always pillages secular women at his wish. His authority is never questioned and challenged. The new-coming members will be admonished for the misbehavior. Finn tells Melanie not to wear trousers and makeup at the first morning she arrives.

*The Magic Toyshop* exposes the disturbing reality for the unsettling effect, but not for the despair or the abandonment. The purpose is to subvert the reader’s view toward the condition of the society and especially the issue of sexuality which has

always been Carter's primary concern. Not only does Carter's strategy contain the protest by the revelation but also the aggressive measure. When there is abundant love, the characters are no longer stiff and passive puppets. Finn stands up to destroy the swan beloved by Philip. Although the act of destroying the swan is executed by a male, its significant meaning has not diminished because Finn determines to be a New Man and no longer succumbs to the law of patriarchy. Finn does not only liberate the family members but also liberates himself. The broken swan symbolizes the subversion of the patriarchal power, which cannot threaten them anymore. The family members create their own realm of carnival. The regulation and the censorship are suspended. Free from the manacles, they can have their strength back to fight and to strive.

The novel subverts in the progression of plots and at the same time in the devices of the narrative structure. It is a parody of the the fairy tale, mythology, and the Bible. The classical play of "Leda and the Swan" in mythology is parodied as the weird scenery of a paper-cut swan manipulated by the perverted uncle to rape a young and helpless girl. The cruelty of the act of rape is clearly presented in this scene. Moreover, the gloomy toyshop resembles to the Garden of Eden, where human being has to obey the will of God. Uncle Philip regards himself as a god on the theatre stage and in the house. His violent and furious temper and his rules and domination do not bring bliss and happiness to those governed by him. Furthermore, the ending of the novel subverts Propp's deductive conclusion of the typical ending of the fairy tale: the novel ends not with a promising future with fortune but with confusion and uncertainty.

Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* is created within the realm of the fairy tale

together with the fantastic, which transgresses and subverts the convention of the society. The novel presents a lot of depictions of the social condition, which aims to disturb the reader and open a possibility for improvement. It is a rebellious parody of the main discourses.