

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Her books unshackle us, toppling the statues of the pompous,  
demolishing the temples and commissariats of righteousness. They  
draw their strength, their vitality, from all that is unrighteous,  
illegitimate, low. They are without equal, and without rival.

--Salman Rushdie, "Angela Carter, 1940-92: A  
Very Good Wizard, a Very Dear Friend"<sup>1</sup>

Angela Carter, whom Salman Rushdie praises as the "most brilliant writer in England," died young at the age of fifty-two (Rushdie 5). Carter at the age of twenty-two published her first novel and since then on she never stopped writing. A prolific writer in various forms, she wrote novels, plays, poetry, journalism, fairy tales, and one critical book on Marquis de Sade from the feminist point of view, editing two volumes of the anthology of the fairy tales of Charles Perrault. She was daring and bold to express what she believes in. As Alison Lee puts it, "she had a passionate belief in the power of language and literature to instruct as well as delight" (ix). Indeed, Carter was passionate about what she does, believing her efforts will make a

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<sup>1</sup> Salman Rushdie wrote a memorial of Angela Carter after her death on February 16 of cancer. This memorial gives a sketchy image of Carter about how he and Carter became friends and how she bravely fought against cancer. Rushdie remarks that Carter was "not place where she belonged—at the center of the literature of her time, at the heart," and sadly that a writer has to be dead before she got what she deserved (5).

difference in this world.

*The Magic Toyshop* (1967), the winner of John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize, is Carter's second novel, often seen as an example of the category of the fairy tale. Carter's writing is known for the abundant imagination and the elements of the fantastic, which results in the title of "magic realist" given by some critics, such as John Haffenden (Haffenden 76). David Punter compares Angela Carter with Russell Hoban, considering them to be in this particular category, which has the "tendency to depict 'magical,' boundary-breaking events as part of the texture of everyday experience" (Punter 142). Punter's definition is quite similar to Jeremy Hawthorn's. In *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, Jeremy Hawthorn thinks that magic realism is to "involve the sudden incursion of fantastic or 'magical' elements into an otherwise realistic PLOT and setting," and classifies Angela Carter into this category (128). At the same time, in another part of the glossary, Hawthorn regards Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* as the most influential book. In Todorov's definition, the reader's hesitation between a natural or supernatural explanation toward the events in the text is the most crucial component of the fantastic. However, what Hawthorn neglects to notice is that the significance of the start point of the journey of hesitation and the precondition of the fantastic is that it has to be built its base upon the scene of the real world so as to gain the belief of the reader. Only when the reader takes the text for serious can hesitation exist. The reader first has to get involved in the realistic scenery, and then the reader's perception of the real and unreal is confused by the mysterious events. Therefore, the fantastic is also to "involve the sudden incursion of fantastic or 'magical' elements

into an otherwise realistic PLOT and setting” (Hawthorn 128). What Hawthorn explains as the characteristic of magic realism<sup>2</sup> is actually fit for the operation of the fantastic.

My intention here is not to point out the ambiguity of Hawthorn’s definitions toward these two literary terms, but to emphasize what is often misunderstood and neglected in the fantastic: the social and political context. Rosemary Jackson remarks that the viewpoint of regarding the fantastic as a means of escapism is only a “nostalgic, humanistic vision” (2). The fantastic is a literary mode which is built upon and discussed within the context of the cultural context. It is not a production of pure imagination and not an isolated world from the world which the reader lives in. As Jackson points out, the fantastic can express and liberate what is muffled and repressed in the society, and it is greatly concerned with the unconscious which is produced from the social structure and regulations. As such, the fantastic can be subversive of norms and rules of society.

Indeed, Carter’s works never totally leave the realm of social and cultural contexts which are exactly what she protests and fights against. In “Notes from the Front Line,” Carter mentions that the Women’s Movement has always been of

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<sup>2</sup> In the introduction of *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris state that the writers of magic realism “treat texts from many countries and cultures,” and that “they create a complex of comparative connections, avoiding separatism while at the same time respecting cultural diversity” (4). The topic of magic realism always concerns some certain historical event or cultural phenomenon. The writers criticize and comment on the idea of a singular “culture,” supporting “cultural and political divergences” (4). Therefore, Neil Ten Kortenaar argues that magic realism is suitable for the “handling of materials from the Third World, where colonialism has resulted in the juxtaposition of cultural frameworks with different origins” (766). The Argentinian Luis Borges and the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez are two prominent authors in this field.

“immense importance” to her, and that she is a “feminist in everything else and one can’t compartmentalise these things in one’s life” (69). Carter constantly focuses on the issue of sexuality and sexual injustice in the social condition, and her enthusiasm of writing about this particular topic never fades away. She is clearly aware of the constructed discourses which contribute to the formation and operation of the social structure, because she was “[...], as a girl, suffering a degree of colonisation of the mind” (“Notes from the Front Line” 71).

The protagonist, Melanie, in *The Magic Toyshop* is also a girl who suffers greatly from the colonization of the constructed social discourses. At the beginning of the novel, Melanie, a fifteen-year-old girl, is obsessed with various female images in the paintings of the male artists in the Renaissance period and in D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. The sexy images of women in the male artists’ eyes imprint upon Melanie’s mind, and the women magazines are her resources of feminine sexual role. Naturally, Melanie grows a “romantic” view toward her future, in which marriage (or at least having sex) and a charming husband play the most important part. Melanie’s father is a successful writer whose novel is adapted for a movie, and because of his success, he has to travel around and give speeches. Melanie’s mother often accompanies her husband. As a result, their three children are left at home and taken care by Mrs. Rundle, a fat housekeeper who is always making bread puddings. They live in comfort and ease: Melanie has her own stereo and silver comb, Jonathon makes model boats all day long, and Victoria only cares about eating and play.

One night, Melanie tries on her mother’s wedding dress and goes out to the garden, imagining that she is already a beautiful and mature woman, but accidentally

locks herself outside. She climbs the apple tree, which is a hint of the symbol of knowledge in the Bible, in order to get back to her room. The wedding dress is destroyed, and soon after, Melanie's calm and carefree life is broken and destroyed by the plane crash which takes away the lives of Melanie's parents. Melanie is pushed into the cruel life of reality, taking the responsibility of caring for her brother and sister. In order to keep the three of them together, these three orphans are sent to London to their Uncle Philip, a cruel and violent person, who takes control of his wife Margaret, and Margaret's two brothers, Francie and Finn.

Uncle Philip, an ingenious toy-maker, enjoys creating all sorts of toys; but among them he especially loves dolls of human size. The puppet theatre is what he values, and in Philip's eyes, those puppets are more important than his families. He treats his wife as one of his properties, designing a silver collar in order to make her uncomfortable, and even orders his niece to play the role of Leda in his theatre with his dolls. Philip is never satisfied with his families, because he cannot manipulate them as easily as he manipulates his dolls. Whoever under the roof of Philip Flower has to obey his rules and commands, except for Francie who plays violin on parties and earns his living.

The pressure of Philip's patriarchal domination seems to be so excessive and prevailing in the first half of *The Magic Toyshop* that Elaine Jordon comments that Carter's strategy may cause the problem: "[...] to query the political value of speaking as a victim can be only a hairsbreadth away from blaming the victim" (120). At the beginning of the novel, Melanie is totally unaware of being internalized by the ideology in patriarchal creations of painting and writing. Melanie even does not

realize that she is already a victim. Yet, it is exactly such prevailing and overwhelming depiction of cruel manipulation of patriarchy which can disturb the reader's perception and achieve the effect of blurring the boundaries. Melanie's subordination to the male gaze indicates the psychoanalytical process of a girl who has to inevitably go through the oedipal phase. The recollection of the oedipal stage awakes what is repressed in the reader's growing process, and thus unveils what is hidden beneath. As Jackson points out, only when the reader is "*disturbed*" can the structure of the social restraint be shaken, and thus the so-called truth is no longer a singular noun (23). Melanie's sexual abandon is not a negation of female sexuality but a protest against the patriarchal manipulation.

The death of the parents, a beginning for the orphan protagonist to start a journey, the torture and manipulation of the wicked villain, and the stable characters of the evil or good in *The Magic Toyshop* manifest the structure and characteristics of the fairy tale. Mathews explains that

Although it is difficult to define literary fantasy precisely, most critics agree it is a type of fiction that evokes wonder, mystery, or magic—a sense of possibility beyond the ordinary, material, rationally predictable world in which we live. [...] *modern fantasy is clearly related to the magical stories of myth, legend, fairy tale, and folklore from all over the world.* (1) (emphases added)

Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* is precisely a modern fairy tale of the fantastic which is related to the stories of myth, fairy tale, and folklore. Kinley Roby terms the novel as "fairy-tale fantasy" but at the same time points out that what happens to Melanie can

not be seen as unrealistic and simplified tale (50). Linden Peach indicates that Carter borrows the narrative conventions from the fairy tale. Flora Alexander remarks that Carter uses the techniques of the “rewriting of fairy-tale” to distinguish the expectations in romantic novel and the real condition of human existence (71). Moreover, Michael Wood argues that Carter’s love is not typical of magic realism but of fairy-tale stories and that her novels have “a tale at their hearts” (130). Carter’s interest in the fairy tale lasts throughout her literary career. The structure and motifs of the fairy tale is utilized to manifest the core of the fantastic, desire and lack which result from the social and political discourses.

Although there are critics trying to differentiate between fantasy and fairy tale, fairy tale and myth, fairy tale and folklore, it is my argument that the fantastic is a broader mode, and that the modern fairy tale of which *The Magic Toyshop* is an example, utilizes the mode of the fantastic. It is the position of this paper that the mode of the fantastic is the most important element in the fairy tale structure of Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop*. It endeavors to reveal the imperfectness of reality, to disturb the reader’s perception, to subvert the rules of rationality, and to open a chance for improvement and change.

The contemporary writers no longer use the rosy and idealistic point of view to describe the world of the fairy tale, but choose the depiction of the gloomy and deserted dystopia, so that the reader will not mistake the beautiful scenery for the condition of the present society but will acknowledge the imperfect society which he lives in and the fear which has always existed in his unconsciousness. For Zipes, the reading of the fairy tale has the effect of the uncanny, which can arouse the reader’s

psychoanalytical experiences of the earlier stage of his life. By the recalling of the reader's memory, what is repressed in the unconsciousness and thus unfamiliar to the reader becomes familiar again. Zipes argues

[...] *the very act of reading a fairy tale is an uncanny experience in that it separates the reader from the restrictions of reality from the onset and makes the repressed unfamiliar familiar once again. (Fairy Tales 174)*

Only when the repressed floats on the surface can the reader realize the alienation which has always existed between people. The disappointing picture of reality in the fairy tale forces the reader to see social injustice, and thus opens the possibility of rethinking and adjusting.

Themes of the fantastic are about making the invisible seen and disturbing the main-stream discourses by upsetting the reader and violating the reader's sense of reality. According to Jackson, the fantastic has the ability to open a possibility for subverting the laws of reality and transgressing the singular point of view. In *The Magic Toyshop*, the boundary between the real and unreal becomes more and more blurry through the progress of the tale, which is what Todorov emphasizes as the significant characteristic of the fantastic: hesitation of the reader. In the toyshop, the lifelike puppets and specimens are so vivid that Melanie is often scared by them. Melanie can not distinguish the dog in the painting from the real white hound dog, and she suspects that those two can change identities from time to time. Living among those lifelike puppets, Melanie's sense of reality is no longer definite. One night, she even sees a girl's hand in the dresser drawer, which can not be explained as simply as



Melanie's hallucination because she can give a detailed description of the girl's hand. Moreover, the eerie and strange atmosphere of the house increases the possibility of the authenticity of what Melanie witnesses.

In the novel, those victims of Philip's cruel domination support each other by their family love. From time to time, when Philip is not in the house, they can have relaxation and amusement from the carnivalesque music and dancing. As Jackson points out, the root of the fantastic is the Menippean satire, which violates and fights against the established rules in the society. The characteristics of the menippea "form a breach in the stable, normal ("seemly") course of human affairs and events, they free human behavior from the norms and motivations that predetermine it" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 117). The spirit of the menippea comes down from medieval to modern as to the contemporary literary art, which has now turned into the spirit of the fantastic. Jackson also indicates that for Mikhail Bakhtin the menippea is closely associated with the concept of carnival. Carnival is a medieval festival which is opposed to the monopoly of the authority. In the state of the carnival, the law is suspended and invalidated, and the institution and government lose their power over the people. The common people join in this public-space festival and speak out the vernacular which is opposed to the high language used by those elites and government.

Many of Carter's novels contain the spirit of the carnival which is used as a means to create a space for the illegal and outlawed. In *The Magic Toyshop*, Finn always has his carnivalesque laughter in front of Philip's authority. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin remarks that laughter is one of the most important concepts of

carnival. The laughter has the effect of anti-authority. Through the laughter, Finn diminishes and resists Philip's authority. The most drastic subversion section is at the end of the novel when Finn determines to destroy the model of swan which Philip makes for the play, "Leda and the Swan." Philip, the maker of the swan, is symbolically Zeus who metamorphoses into the swan. The swan is the symbol of the power of patriarchy, the phallus. Finn subverts Philip's domination by destroying the swan. After the swan is buried, the whole family members can finally laugh without worry. They are all free from the restrictions set by Philip. Margaret and Francie show their love as lovers. Their desires are not repressed anymore.

My study argues that Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* is concerned deeply with what is repressed and alienated under the social and patriarchal restraints. The fantastic, which builds on the reality of alienation and disturbs the reader's perception so that what is repressed under the reader's unconsciousness is exposed, is particularly suited to deal with the logical predicament. The convention of the fairy tale also sheds light specifically on the realm of the oedipal phase and the imperfectness of the social system, which arouses the reader's feeling of unease. The ultimate efforts of the fantastic and fairy tale are made for the quest for a real home, an improvement for a better society.

This paper starts with the theory of the fairy tale. First, the structural research of Propp provides a fundamental formula of the fairy tale, which calls attention to what is underneath the structure, lack. Oedipal phase is therefore the most significant emphasis in the fairy tale, in which a person (character) develops personality and starts his journey. Modern fairy tales no longer serve as the vehicle of the institution,

but have the power to reveal what is repressed through the growing process. The reader is unsettled through the reading process of the uncanny because he recognizes what has been repressed in his unconsciousness, which is thus exposed. The reader comes to realize the alienated condition produced from the oppression; only when the reader is disillusioned and realizes the alienated state of the society can there be a chance for improvement. Secondly, Jackson's study builds upon Todorov's work on fantasy but also importantly locates the fantastic as a mode and elaborates on study of what is repressed and hidden under the social order, desire and lack. The fantastic questions the boundary of the social order and disturbs the reader's perception, and thus opens a loophole for what is repressed and a possibility for subversion. The origin of the fantastic, the *menippea*, can also enhance the subversive power of the fantastic, because it challenges the boundary and limitation of every rule and undermines the authority. Moreover, carnival is another important concept which opens a gap and departs from the grand-narratives.

In chapter two, the first part analyzes the fairy-tale components and structure in *The Magic Toyshop*. The structural frame of the fairy tale is applied to the text to show the convention of the fairy tale, which prepares for the uncanny reading experience of the reader. The second part is the psychoanalytic analysis of Melanie's rite of passage through the oedipal stage. Carter uses the technique of defamiliarization to unsettle the reader by bringing what is in the unconsciousness to the surface. The depiction of an unhappy family upsets the reader's perception and recalls the reader's memory of his primal stage. The image of dystopia in the novel is a protest of the social and sexual injustice.

Chapter three is an analysis of the subversive function of the fantastic. The first part focuses on the blurry boundary of the real and unreal in the novel. With the progress of the story, the fantastic element grows stronger and stronger so as to confuse the reader. The second part argues that love and carnival have the power of breaking through the system of patriarchy. The family members support each other and Finn's laughter is a notable defense against Philip's overwhelming dominance. In the final part of the novel, the carnival spirit gives insight into the fantastic transgression and subversion. The third part argues that Carter's strategy of subversion is not just limited to the plots of the novel, but her strategy is also the techniques of the metafictional writing which fundamentally utilizes and subverts the conventions of various literary forms, such as mythology, the fairy tale, the Bible, and romance. Carter's parodic rewriting is an anti-authoritative discourse which is best demonstrated within *The Magic Toyshop*.