

*IN THE NAME OF GOD*



Shiraz University

**Faculty of Literature and Humanities**

**M. A. Thesis In English Language and Literature**

**SUBVERSIVE TRANSITION: A PSYCHOANALYTIC  
READING OF ANGELA CARTER'S *THE MAGIC TOYSHOP***

**By**

**SEPIDEH SAMI**

**Supervised by**

**Farideh Pourgiv, Ph.D.**

**January 2012**

**In the Name of God**

**Declaration**

**I, Sepideh Sami (880254), student of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Literature and Humanities, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research, and that I have provided exact references wherever I have quoted someone. I also declare that the topic of my research is an original one and has not been worked upon before. I hereby promise not to publish the findings of this research and not to make it accessible to others without the permission of Shiraz University. Shiraz University holds the copyright on this research.**

**Name and Surname: Sepideh Sami**

**Date and Signature: 12/11/1390**



IN THE NAME OF GOD

SUBVERSIVE TRANSITION: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF ANGELA  
CARTER'S *THE MAGIC TOYSHOP*

BY

SEPIDEH SAMI

THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (M. A.)

IN


ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE


SHIRAZ UNIVERSITY

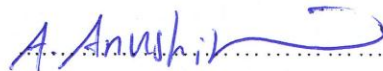
SHIRAZ

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

EVALUATED AND APPROVED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE AS: EXCELLENT

..... F. POURGIV, Ph. D., PROF. OF ENGLISH  
LITERATURE (CHAIRPERSON)

..... ..... P. GHASEMI, Ph. D., PROF. OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

..... A. ANUSHIRAVANI, Ph. D., ASSOCIATE  
PROF OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

JANUARY 2012

**Dedicated to:**

**To My Kind and Supportive Family**

## **Acknowledgment**

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr Pourgiv, who was there for me all the time, who was more a friend to me than a professor through these years. I also deeply thank her for inspiring this thesis to me. I thank Dr Ghasemi whose ever-lasting kindness was as precious as her comments to me. I also thank Dr Anushirvani whose comments were food for thought all along. My sincere thankfulness also goes to Dr Abjadian whose memories are embedded in all students of English Literature for good. Last but not least, my appreciation goes to my family for their dearly welcoming of all my troubles throughout these years, for their unfailing faith in my ability to succeed and excel, and also for giving me an education far more significant than any institution ever could.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **SUBVERSIVE TRANSITION: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF ANGELA CARTER'S *THE MAGIC TOYSHOP***

**BY**

**SEPIDEH SAMI**

Angela Carter (1940 –1992), one of the prominent contemporary English writers, shows her interest within fairy tales and, more broadly, folklore. Attempts to pin her oeuvre to a particular style or genre have been hampered by her versatile writing addressing as many issues as gothic literature, mythology, magic realism, feminism, postmodernism, and psychoanalysis. Being in “the demythologizing business,” Angela Carter brings into question almost all the long-established conventions and traditions and treats them in an innovative, subversive, postmodern way.

This study aims to take the Lacanian psychoanalytic reading as its major concern in one of Carter's novel, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). It traces the transition of the 15-year-old Melanie from the Imaginary to the Symbolic orders. Towards the end, though, as Carterian subversion turns up, she leads the whole household back to their idyllic life, the Imaginary Order. The writer scrutinizes how the text, through the course of the story, lends itself to a Lacanian reading. It is only toward the end of the book that Carterian subversion comes to the fore.

The first chapter deal with introduction, literature review, the object and significance of the study and the organization of the study; the second chapter will focus on the theoretical framework of the study which will be psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan; the third chapter applies the previously defined theories to the text; the fourth chapter goes through the Carterian subversive reading and her negation of psychoanalytic reading. The fifth and the last chapter will be a concluding part of the study. It summarizes all the previous chapters.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENT	PAGE
<b>Chapter I</b>	
Introduction .....	2
<b>Chapter II</b>	
Back Ground and Theoretical Framework.....	12
<b>Chapter III</b>	
Psychoanalytic Reading of Carter's <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> .....	27
<b>Chapter IV</b>	
Subversive Reading of Carter's <i>The Magic Toyshop</i> .....	53
<b>Chapter V</b>	
Conclusion.....	66
<b>Works Cited</b>	



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

*MT = The Magic Toyshop*

*Food = Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's  
Fiction*

*The Infernal Appetite = The Infernal Appetite of Angela Carter*

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1: Introduction

Writing of traditional tales with feministic tendencies was becoming a fashionable endeavor during the 80s and 90s. In this regard, Angela Carter, an English novelist, could be taken as a precursor of this new trend whose work is distinctly postmodern in its reexamination of fairy tales. Carter herself describes that how she has committed to demythologizing the folklores; “I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (Carter, *Shaking a Leg* 26).

Any attempt to pin her oeuvre into a specific genre will be in vain. She is a postmodern feminist who is interested in fairy tales, gothic literature, mythology, and magic realism. Her novel has been assigned to fantasy, “a hybrid genre itself at the border of science fiction, utopia, and metropolitan novel” (Curti 49). Besides, by employing intertextuality, she tries to link the tale to the zeitgeist of its moment and call attention to fairy tales as product, not of a collective unconscious. She also tries to make the tales as a site through which she can explore how gender roles are not universal rather culturally determined, like other forms of social interaction. Breaking rules and transgressing boundary, thus, which ends up in deconstruction and retelling of the “master narratives” of the western culture is inevitable part her business (Easton 8).

Carter published her first novel, *Shadow Dance*, in 1966 and she began to win the literary prize for the second one, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). Almost all of her early works deals with women facing manipulation by controlling system of patriarchy. *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), however, marks a turning point characterized by females' awareness of their right and their endeavor to overcome and over-throw their oppressors, a collection of subversively rewritten fairy tales which initiated some of the first critical examination of her work by feminist critics. Her later novels, the last two ones, *Night at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991) depict women of greater awareness who have got power over their destinies.

Carter's second novel, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), that is the focus of this study, chronicles 16-year-old Melanie's coming to know her femininity under the tyrannical thumb of Uncle Philip who runs a decidedly disturbing toyshop. Melanie and her siblings live in a luxurious house in the countryside until their parents are killed in a plane crash, and the children must move to the less elegant digs of London's south end. There, Melanie is required to submit to some transmitted law with forbearance. She follows the situation but she ends up with stirring up the household and repudiation of Philip's supremacy.

Through the intervention of the Name-of –the-Father, Philip, the unified world of Melanie breaks down and she enters into a cruel realm of self-awareness and maturity. The so called father is only a signifier rather than an actual father. Philip as the voice of the authority intervenes and inhibits Melanie's desire from remaining in her idyllic situation. Melanie is involved in a process of substitution of desire-for-the-mother

with the Name-of –the-Father. Melanie’s entrance into the Symbolic Order accompanies her self-awareness which is defined and given to her by Philip. She, who has no alternative, follows his transmitted laws and rules.

Women in patriarchal society are subordinated to men’s power and they are usually mistreated by their fathers, husbands or brothers. Philip is the father agent that misbehaves Aunt Margaret and Melanie. Aunt Margaret’s voice has diminished from the first day of their marriage, the symbolic exaggerated oppression of patriarchy and Melanie is not heard even seen by Philip.

Finn and Francie are not those ruthless brothers and followers of Philip. They are more treated callously than treating callously. Not only they are the voice of authority but also they are subject to ruthless behavior of Phillip as the female agents of the house are. All these imply their being castrated in one way or another. They are castrated from their male potentiality by the law of the father, so Philip can be sure there will be no threat and challenge to his power and he can claim to be the head master.

Despite all Philip’s attempts, one day in Philip’s temporary absence, in a rebellious act of opposition, Melanie with the help of Finn, stimulates the entire house’s rejection of Philip. In Philip’s temporary absence, the entire household fills with joy and happiness and the secret of Aunt Margaret and Francie, their incestuous relationship, comes to the surface. The state of bliss in which they live is likened to the Imaginary Order, a complete union. It is the Law-of-the-Father, Philip, that marks the “origin of civilization, religion, moral and art,” it is associated with the

prohibition and repression of the incestuous desire for the mother that brings about civilization and culture (Homer 57). As a result, the disclosure of incestuous affair is due to the lack of any imposed law.

The wholesome change signifies the house return to the blissful unity in which there is no law and the Name-of-the-Father. The very same transition mirrors that the household no longer validates Philip's majesty as the head master. It opens up the alternative of rejecting patriarchy; a long established which used to treat as normal and natural. The denunciation will be more meaningful in the light of a female agent, Melanie, as the trigger of the whole uprising, and also Carterian subversion of conventional laws and tradition the very same aim that Carter is almost all the time after it.

Carter tries to challenge the system of Patriarchy and give some natural universal male-dominated texts a new trend in which she deflates notions of patriarchal hierarchy and proves that patriarchal system is no longer monolithic in power and their status is extremely unstable which is fulfilled by the end of the text.

## **1.2: The Significance of the Study**

Angela Carter, as one of the prominent English novelist, though addresses many issues that her oeuvre simply escapes categorizing to any specific genre, has dealt with Western culture in almost all of her works. Being in a demythologizing career, she problematizes the patriarchal myths and subverts the olds traditional folklores and tales of the past. So,

this study is a new attempt to show how Carter's story lends itself to the Lacanian psychoanalytic reading, which is crowded with a masculine themes, and it is toward the end of the novel that the Carter's subversion comes to the fore and the Lacanian reading of the text receives a great challenge.

### **1.3: The Objective of the Study**

This essay attempts to go through the way that patriarchy defines established roles for everyone and the way that they are after total compliance in *The Magic Toyshop*. Uncle Phillip, representative of patriarchy, does his best to establish himself as the sole voice of the power in the house and it is only at the end of the novel that Phillip faces the illusion of control and domination due to female-character's awareness. She, no longer submissive and tame, rebels against masculine established laws.

### **1.4: Methodology**

This is a library research .The study is to follow the psychoanalytic reading of the novel to which Jacques Lacan's theories and concepts best corresponds. Lacanian reading of the novel goes in line exactly with the entire event during the course of the novel. Besides, some part of the thesis is devoted to how Carter who is in a demythologizing business,

questions the established laws and traditions and tries to give the text of past a new postmodern reading.

Thus the organization of the study would be as follows: Chapter I will deal with introduction, literature review, the object and significance of the study and the organization of the study. Chapter II will focus on the theoretical framework of the study which will be psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. In the discussion of the patriarchal society and the way female character respond to that, there will be some theories and concepts in realm of psychoanalytic criticism that make the reading easier and more meaningful. Chapter III will apply the previously defined theories to the text to provide a discussion of the text based on psychoanalytic theories and criticism. Chapter IV will go through Carter's negation of psychoanalytic reading. Chapter V will be a concluding part of the study. It will summarize all the previous chapters—the way that the text, only up to a specific point, lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading, and how Carter's subversion and negation of patriarchal systems then comes to impede a through Lacanian reading.

## **1.5: The Review of Literature**

Dani Cavallaro (2011) in *The World of Angela Carter: A Critical Investigation* explores a selection of Carter's novels and short stories, supplemented with her outlook on politics, society and aesthetics, and her attempts to redefine popular genres such as the fairy tale. In the second chapter of her book "Dark Play," Cavallaro examines *The Magic*



*Toyshop* thoroughly and thematically. She discusses almost all the imagery of the text, including mirror, marionette, cave, and garden imagery and their significant in reinforcing the meaning of the text.

Dimovitz (2010) on his study goes through the Lacanian psychoanalytic theories and its application to some of Carter's short stories. His discussion neither approves the psychoanalytic reading of the texts nor rejects it completely.

Martin (2009) questions a society in which female sexuality, articulation and appetite are controlled, and there would be no options for female expression. The way female articulation is defined by male dominated- society is treated by her. Using the linguistic theories of Kristeva and Irigaray, Martin discusses the themes of language and silence in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *The Magic Toyshop*. She believes that Aunt Margaret's silence could be read as an exaggerated form of patriarchal domination and suppression of female or as a refusal to speak the language of patriarchy.

Sean Homer (2005) in his work *Jacques Lacan* goes through almost all Lacanian concepts and definitions. The Imaginary and the Symbolic, the Oedipus complex and the meaning of the phallus, the subject and the unconscious, the real, sexual difference are among those concepts that are explained by him. Defining the Imaginary Order, The issues of self-awareness start to shape from the first time that child look at the mirror. Little by little after being aware of his own existence, the child should be able to differentiate himself from his environment.

Robert Eaglestone (2003) in his article scrutinizes Carter's way of retelling the old stories and texts. Eaglestone states that Carter gives old

stories, in which female desires were defined within a phallogocentric system, quite a new narrative. He believes that it is not mere retell; since it sheds light on all the parts which was being ignored for such a long time, in a way Carter deconstruct the old folk lore and fairy tales.

Cross (2001) talks about the mirror as a reflecting agent made by patriarchy; “the silver of the mirror” is made by patriarchy which reflects female as “not male” (10). Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage is considered both as a component and as a product of this system in which the male subject being after a whole unity, looks into a mirror, tries to find something that completes him and at the same time by not being equal to him, reinforces his power and its own lack. On the other hand, she goes through the concept of the body and the way that it is the mirror of the soul and the way that females are supposed to see themselves as body, reflecting the soul; that is male. In a way she tries to discuss the issue that if the mirror could be changed to a window, female would no longer defined by patriarchy as “not male” but they would be defined as female.

Castration images in Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop* are treated by Jean Wyatt (2000) in her article. She deals with the concept of castration as defined by Lacan, the way that Lacan defines it as the signifier of lack, castrated female, signifies the value of what man has and the way that “castrated, silent object” reflects the mastery of patriarchy (60).

The situation of Melanie and how she suddenly leaves the safe phase of childhood and steps into the cruel world of adolescence is discussed by Pearson (1999) in her article. She believes the novel invokes a number of female doubles for Melanie: Duchess of Malfie, Lorna Doone, the lady of shallot, Jane Eyre and Leda who were all under the oppression of

patriarchal society who react somehow to such dominion. Albeit all these dualities, Melanie is demythologized, for she is neither Duchess of Malfi nor Lorna Doone, she is given a powerfully evocative position.

*Shaking the Leg* (1997) is the collected journalism which brings together many of her small piece of writing including book reviews and short articles. They provide a broad view of Carter's interests and abilities.

Gamble (1997) in her book called *Writing from the Front Line* has done an in-depth study of almost all of Carter's novels and short stories. Respectively, she has devoted some part of her book to *The Magic Toyshop*. Gamble talks about the refusal of female characters in submitting themselves to the patriarchal structures.

*The infernal desires of Angela Carter: fiction, femininity, feminism* (1997) is a collection of essay almost on all of Carter's work from different critical approaches centering around feminism and gender studies.

Bordo (1989) in her article discusses the role of body as a cultural site for is open to various interpretations including gender studies. He pinpoints the essential role of female body as a cultural site on which patriarchal role is written.

# **CHAPTER II**