

## DEMYTHOLOGIZING BUSINESS: ANGELA CARTER'S REPRESENTATION OF MOTHERHOOD

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### ABSTRACT

As a writer who deems herself involved in “demythologizing business”, Angela Carter fiercely deconstructs the debilitating myths of motherhood. For her, myths of motherhood turn women into mere agents of patriarchy who transmit conventional ideas about what it means to be a woman in patriarchal culture. Carter divorces herself from the patriarchal myths of motherhood and suggests that these myths are mere designs to produce generations of docile and subservient women. The aim of this article is to trace this theme of demythologizing motherhood in Carter’s fictional representations in line with her non-fictional writing. For this purpose, it will focus both on a selection of her most prominent fictional works and on her essays.

**Keywords:** Angela Carter, myths of motherhood, demythologizing, literature of matrilineage

## ANNELİK EFSANELERİNİ YIKMAK: ANGELA CARTER’İN ESERLERİNDE ANNELİĞİN TEMSİLİ

### ÖZET

1983 yılında kaleme aldığı denemesinde kendini “işçi efsaneleri yıkmak” olan bir eylemci olarak betimleyen İngiliz yazar Angela Carter, eserlerinde kadınları güçsüz kılan annelik efsanelerini adeta yerle bir eder. Ona göre bu efsaneler kadınları ataerkil toplumda bir kadın olmanın ne anlama geldiğine ilişkin geleneksel anlayışları bir sonraki kuşağa aktaran nesnelere dönüştürmekten başka bir işe yaramazlar. Bu efsanelerle bağını tamamen koparmak isteyen Carter, eserlerinde okura bu efsaneleri bir sonraki kuşağın kadınlarını itaatkar bireyler olarak kurgulamaya yarayan araçlar olarak sunar. Bu çalışma, Carter’ın annelik temsiline önüne çıktığı düzyazılarında ve kurmaca

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eserlerinde annelik efsanesinin neden ve nasıl yıkıldığı sorusuna cevap verecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Angela Carter, annelik efsaneleri, efsaneleri yıkmak, annelik geleneğini konu alan edebi eserler

### **Demythologizing Business: Angela Carter's Representation of Motherhood**

To cut the *umbilical cord*, kill the *Mother*: the crime that the modern poet has committed for all, in the name of all. *Octavio Paz*

Angela Carter's representation of motherhood in her fictional and non-fictional works marks an important feature of her feminism. While representation of mothers and mother goddesses is central to the feminist literature of matrilineage, in Angela Carter's writing, it is the absence of them that establishes her vision of femininity and feminist tradition. Investigating the absence mothers as a motif in her work, one can argue that it is one of the narrative strategies employed to challenge traditional notions of femininity. As a writer who deems herself involved in "demythologizing business"<sup>1</sup>, Carter fiercely deconstructs the debilitating myths of motherhood. For her, myths of motherhood turn women into active agents of patriarchy who transmit conventional ideas about what it means to be a woman in patriarchal culture. Thus, she often creates female figures who either have no mothers or stand in opposition to them. Through such representative means, Carter divorces herself from the patriarchal myths of motherhood and suggests that these myths are mere designs to produce generations of docile and subservient women. The aim of this article is to trace this theme of demythologizing motherhood in Carter's fictional representations in line with her non-fictional writing.

Revisiting one of her earliest autobiographical essays, "The Mother Lode" (1976), one can easily recognise this iconoclastic attitude towards the patriarchal gender roles and expectations imposed on Carter's mother by her family. In this essay, Carter portrays her grandmother as an authority exercising a strict control over her young daughter:

Her personality had an architectonic quality; I think of her when I see some of the great London railway termini, especially St. Pancras, with its soot and turrets, and she overshadowed her own daughters, whom she did not understand- my mother, who liked things to be nice; my dotty aunt. But my

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<sup>1</sup> In her (1983) "Notes from the Front Line", Carter famously states that "Because I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice, I'm in the demythologising business" (38).

mother had not the strength to put even much physical distance between them, let alone keep the *old monster* at an emotional arm's length. (my emphasis, 9)

To describe the impact of her grandma's death on her mom, she says it was "a great blow since the umbilical cord had been ill-severed" (1976:13). This image of a severed cord solidifies Carter's idea of the need to liberate young women from "motherhood as [a patriarchal] institution"<sup>2</sup> which is designed to make them submissive. This visual image of the umbilical cord, the bond that nature gives and culture strengthens, serves as a marker of potentially restraining mother-daughter relation. Describing her grandmother in architectural terms, Carter does not just highlight the solidly fixed nature of the patriarchal role she plays but she also challenges the sentimental tendency to mystify the mother-daughter bond. To make her criticism of this sentimentalism even more visible, she describes her mother as "ever-infantilised" by the "old monster" and tells how her mother ended up being a passive, child-bride with ill-health. Knowing the cunning ways of her grandmother who "nagged her daughter's apparent weakness" (9), yet being distanced from her by one generation, she easily notices her tricks to oppress and wants to use her powers of observation to save her mother from the victim position: "With the insight of hindsight, I'd have liked to have been to protect my mother from the domineering old harridan, with her rough tongue and primitive sense of justice, but I did not see it like that, then. I did not see there was a *drama* between mother and daughter" (my emphasis, 9).

Ironically, the essay collection shows that as if it were something hereditary passed onto her via the "old monster's" umbilicus, a similar *drama* is later experienced between Carter and her mother. But, unlike her mother, Carter turns this tension into subversive fiction to liberate not only herself but also her reader. She manages this despite her mother's mistrust of fiction; possibly, as the victim of a mother with an "architectonic" personality, her mother assumes that fiction only offers "an unrealistic view of the world". Despite her "Never let me catch you doing that [reading a novel] again!", Carter perseveres; she does not just read but writes fiction to express herself. Much later, in an interview with Haffenden, Carter asserts that "A narrative is an argument stated in fictional terms (79). In all senses of the word, she manages to present her *argument* with her mother in the form of stimulating novels contemplating the nature of femininity. And she does that often through completely erasing mother figures or creating unpleasant ones.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, which puts a similar emphasis on the need to define women not as mothers or by their childlessness but as human beings, was published in the same year.

As such, her fiction presents motherhood as a problematic process functioning in the paradigm of patriarchy. Carter's works reveal that in such a paradigm where motherhood is defined in terms of discipline and power, all a family can offer to a girl is a series of conflicts with her mother. Both to illustrate this argument and suggest a paradigm shift, Carter eliminates the conventional mother figure from her texts. In a sense, she refuses to reproduce the old established myths of motherhood to be praised, celebrated and inevitably emulated. In her "Mother is a Figure of Speech", Nicole Ward Jouve interprets this passionate rejection of the maternal as a failure on the part of Carter and argues that: "Indeed, to refuse to explore [...] the mother-daughter relationship is to perpetuate an ancient repression, refuse one's own womanhood" (162-63). She contends that by her fervent refusal to portray pleasant mother figures, Carter produces another form of suppression. For Ward Jouve, the reason for this is that: "[Carter] had such accounts to settle with the mother" (163). Reading her fiction in line with the essays she wrote, one can argue that Carter rejects the mother figure because she had "accounts to settle" *not with* her mother but with the patriarchal discourse that reduces mothers to the role of patrons to preserve the cult of domesticity. In other words, Carter *does* explore the mother-daughter relationship; yet, she does so by suspending the figure of mother as a victim. She completely changes the gender dynamics erasing "the heroes and heroines" and replacing them with "the villains"<sup>3</sup>. It is this *epistemological matricide* that sets the subversive tone in Carter's writing.

In a challenging way, mothers in Carter's work are often represented as tools to transmit cultural codes that invalidate women. Carter seems to be stating that only by killing this mother and estranging oneself from her teachings can a woman liberate herself from the bounds of patriarchal system. In her essay "'Don't never forget the bridge that you crossed over on': The Literature of Matrilineage", N. B. Maglin lists six major themes that appear and reappear in "the literature of matrilineage"<sup>4</sup>: The two central themes she mentions are the recognition by the daughter that *her voice* is not entirely her own, and the amazement and humility about the *strength* of our mothers. I argue that a retrospection of Carter's writing offers a challenge to Maglin's categories because in Carter's fiction, outstanding themes are reversely the recognition by the daughter that *her mother's* voice is not entirely her own. The amazement and humility about the *weakness* of our mothers, and the need to empower the daughter not by means of reciting and reproducing, but by

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<sup>3</sup>Heroes and Villians` (1970) is another subversive Carter novel which challenges the patriarchal myths and cultural construct of femininity with its protagonist Marianne, a rebellious girl.

<sup>4</sup>Other themes that Maglin lists are the importance of trying to really see one's mother in spite of or beyond the blindness and skewed vision that growing up together causes; the need to recite one's matrilineage, to find a ritual to both get back there and reserve it; the anger and despair about the pain and the silence borne and handed on from mother to daughter (Maglin, 280-300).

subverting this model are also among the significant themes of this literature of matrilineage. Then, Carter's literature of matrilineage reveals that when they simply follow the dictum of patriarchy, mothers often function as servants of patriarchy.

To support this argument, one should trace the fictional representation of mother-daughter bond in one of her earliest novels *The Magic Toyshop* (1967). To expose the *bildung* of an adolescent girl in a typical patriarchal family, the novel starts with the image of this girl, Melanie, stealing and wearing her mother's wedding dress when her parents are away. This opening scene depicting her rite-of-passage is immediately followed by the news of their death in a plane crash. The novel neither elaborates on a productive mother-daughter bond nor does it portray the young girl brooding over her mother's loss. In a way, Carter offers Melanie as a case to investigate the potential this loss might bear. At the very beginning of the novel, in her mother's absence, she enjoys the idea of marriage and being a bride. Later, when she is forced to play the role of Leda in the puppet-show-- staging the myth of Leda and the Swan, Carter features Melanie in a white dress. Reminiscent of the initial image, Melanie in her mother's wedding dress, this scene in which she is seduced by Zeus becomes a caricature version of patriarchy put on stage. The silent puppet show not giving voice to the victimised Leda implies that marriage reduces a woman to a sex object.<sup>5</sup> Finally, to free herself from those crippling patriarchal conventions, Melanie escapes her uncle's home, and the puppet-show, with a very unconventional male figure, Finn. This sense of freedom is accompanied by a final scene of purifying fire. As it does in Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, and also in Carter's *Nights at the Circus* and *Wise Children*, fire brings the *ancien régime* to a halt and starts a new life.

In this totally new realm, Carter chooses to leave Melanie motherless; in the absence of a biological mother, she is represented as a lonely figure struggling and trying to survive in a male-dominated system on her own. This way, Carter offers a model of independence from a maternal or familial bond that would potentially tie her down to the law of the father. There is a surrogate mother, Margaret, but, in this case she is not a figure to empower Melanie. Instead, in her failure to challenge her husband, she is just a subordinate figure Melanie avoids. As Linden Peach notes: "Margaret may offer Melanie a toffee to console her, but she is unable to rescue [her] them from the oppression of

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<sup>5</sup>Carter admires the Japanese distance in familial relations and prefers it to the restrictive love in her own Western tradition: "When I lived in Japan, I learned to admire their total acceptance of the involuntary nature of family life. Love in the sense of passionate attachment has nothing to do with it; the Japanese even have a different verb to define the arbitrary affection that grows among these chance juxtapositions of intimate strangers" (*The Mother Lode*, 9).

their uncle” (93). This surrogate mother figure reveals the married woman’s failure to act outside the bounds of male rule. She cannot offer any solid let-out from it.

In her seminal work *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich describes patriarchy as “The Kingdom of the Fathers” and discusses the role of mothers in it:

Patriarchy depends upon the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private; [...] certainly it has created images of the archetypal Mother which reinforce the conservatism of motherhood and convert it to energy for the renewal of male power (“The Kingdom of the Fathers”, 61).

Carter’s 1984 novel *Nights at the Circus* illustrates this idea, by a complete obliteration of the maternal body; here, she radically eradicates the traditional mother figure and features her main character Fevvers as a bird woman with no belly button, who becomes a symbol of the Victorian “New Woman”. As Fevvers answers the questions of the American journalist, Walser, the reader learns that she was hatched from an egg and found as an infant with the broken pieces of an egg-shell around her:

Hatched; by whom, I do not know. Who *laid* me is as much a mystery to me, sir, as the nature of my conception, my father and my mother both utterly unknown to me, and, some would say, unknown to nature, what’s more. But hatch out I did, and put in that basket of broken shells and straw in Whitechapel at the door of a certain *house*, know what I mean? (21)

By wiping out the biological mother from the text, and offering disreputable surrogate mothers, Carter evokes an *epistemological rupture* that challenges the accepted notions about the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge in phallogocentric culture.<sup>6</sup> Fevvers was raised by two radical figures standing in sharp opposition to conventional views of femininity, by Ma Nelson, the mama of the brothel, and the socialist Lizzie, who worked at the brothel some time ago. Gaston Bachelard who first used the term epistemological rupture in the early 1930s meant to challenge the obstacles in the realm of the sciences, such as principles of division (e.g. mind/body). Carter similarly breaks away both from the limiting binaries and from the conservative mother figure that would potentially transmit the rules, i.e. the *epistemological obstacles* for the daughter. Carter extends the argument by

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<sup>6</sup> The history of science, Bachelard asserts, consisted in the formation and establishment of these epistemological obstacles, and then the subsequent tearing down of the obstacles. This latter stage is an epistemological rupture—where an unconscious obstacle to scientific thought is thoroughly ruptured or broken away from.

making Fevvers proudly note the positive aspects of her alternative sources of love and care that stand against a potentially restrictive mother figure:

[I was born and bred] in a brothel, sir, and proud of it, if it comes to the point, for never a bad word nor an unkindness did I have from my mothers but I was given the best of everything and always tucked up in my little bed in the attic by eight o'clock of the evening before the big spenders who broke the glasses arrived (22).

This sharp departure from the norm changes the whole paradigm of the maternal body as fundamental to the social order. Fevvers becomes a New Woman to contest the traditional female body which could only survive as an uncomplaining wife or as an all-sacrificing, long-suffering mother. Since she has no mother to turn her into a woman on the market, Fevvers can enjoy a different experience. She literally grows wings and learns how to use them: She flies. Like Melanie's, her rite of passage marks a progress toward a very unconventional place:

'I spread,' said Fevvers. And all unwilling by me, uncalled for, involuntarily, suddenly they broke forth my peculiar inheritance- these wings of mine! Still adolescent, as yet, not half their adult size, and moist, sticky, like freshly unfurled foliage on an April tree. But, all the same, wings." (24)

As she explores in her essays, Carter's own rite of passage, her "entry into the world" was also a problematic one. In her review of Mara Selvini Palazzoli's *Self-Starvation*, Carter describes her experience of anorexia immediately following her first menstruation and agrees with Palazzoli in seeing this as a bodily response to having no personal autonomy. Carter considers anorexia as the sign of a mindset failing to come to terms with the ambiguous cultural role of modern woman. As a young woman with this mindset, she interpreted her mother's attempts to help her follow a normal diet as "malicious" ("Fat is Ugly", 58). What this figuratively means is that unlike her heroine Fevvers, she could not grow wings to fly; but, to assume control over her body, she stopped eating normally: "I reduced myself to a physical condition-that of Walking-Corpse that only a chronic necrophilia could have fancied" (58).

This refusal of traditional wifedom and motherhood is similar to the suggestion she makes in the postscript to *The Sadeian Women* (1979), which is from the anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman<sup>7</sup>. Goldman contends that in order to have a complete and true emancipation, one has to do away with "the ridiculous notion that to be loved, to be sweetheart and mother", [which is]

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<sup>7</sup>"The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation" (1910)

synonymous with being slave or subordinate” (151). Years before quoting Goldman, Carter knew that her anorexia was a war on the male order ready to reduce her into a subordinate girlfriend, a wife and then a mother.

Carter’s review, “Edward Shorter’s *A History of Women’s Bodies*” also disputes the definition of female body in terms of motherhood. She critiques the mystification of the maternal body and labour, by revealing how little we know of women’s bodies since it was always men who had the right to write about it. She also ridicules the legendary “joy in the newborn wip[ing] out the memory of the pangs of childbirth (71). To subvert the myth of normal delivery, Carter bitterly notes that her mother died early from a heart condition aggravated by a protracted labour. Problems of motherhood demythologizing the patriarchal ideals are also articulated in her review “Eric Rhode: *On Birth and Madness*”. Carter concludes this review by citing a mother suffering from *post-partum* depression to show how medical history fails to see the thin line between madness and motherhood: “When I am washing [my babies] clothes and squeezing them out, I think I’m wringing her neck” (78). To make her argument more convincing, she cites a recurring dream of another suffering mother who says: “I could see a knife sticking into a baby. I could see someone swinging the baby in our hall at home, swinging the baby round and round in the hall” (78). Carter concludes that such anecdotes of numerous mothers in pain bluntly explain what it is to be a depressed mother, and strongly pronounces: “Mystification of this pain is a lie” (78).

Similar arguments demystifying motherhood are also available in her essay “Notes from a Maternity Ward” which describes her own motherhood experience in a ward, a room more like a Dostoyevskian underworld. In this essay, Carter critiques the medicalisation of motherhood and the control doctors and nurses exert on the maternal body. She becomes the target of these authority figures because she is a middle-aged and unmarried, thus unconventional mother. Put simply, nurses turn the maternity ward into a bastion of patriarchal values, a hell where she is dictated even how she should relate to her son:

The midwife shows me how to put the baby to the nipple. ‘Look deep into his eyes,’ she says. ‘It helps with the bonding.’ Good grief! Aren’t we allowed any choice in the matter, he and I? Can’t I learn to love him for himself, and vice versa, rather than trust to Mother Nature’s psycho physiological double bind? And what of his father, who has no breasts? (30)

Infuriated, Carter refuses both to be told how to become a mother by the agents of the culture and to play an essentialist role of the nurturer; she wants to construct her own notion of the loving bond- which should replace the umbilical cord. We hear the same recalcitrant voice in her comments on the way labour is mythologized:



Somebody gave us an American publication called *Giving Birth*. A collection of photographs of mothers and fathers sharing the experience. (Where's the lesbian couple? Discrimination!) The parents look ecstatic; radiant; touchingly, comically startled and so on ("Notes from a Maternity Ward", 31).

She notes that these images are all in black and white, which romanticise and distort the real, painful, bloody experience that is far from the romantic. Then, she scoffs at the quotes from the book: "I felt I had to be very focused. It was almost like meditation" (31). These photos/ accounts depict the process of giving birth as if it were something sacred, or a mental journey that brings a blessing in the form of "immunity to pain" (31). Carter juxtaposes the voice of the woman next door giving birth with these fancy images, and wittily notes that it was by no means an indicator of a peaceful meditation of any focused body. By this remark, she once again denigrates the patriarchal myths of motherhood that do not stand to reason and suggests that they are fabricated only to empower men.

Carter is armed against these myths that put women on pedestals and expands her earlier mission statement, "I am in the demythologizing business", in the polemical *The Sadeian Woman*. In this "exercise in cultural study", as a stern demythologizer, she lifts the veil over the *femme fatale* showcasing strong women as monsters. She argues that this myth of *femme fatale* is created as a strategy to free men from the burden of controlling their desire: "All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsenses; and consolatory nonsense seems to be a fair definition of myth anyway" (5). She puts the *femme fatale* against the meek and mild mother figure which is another "consolatory nonsense". It is significant to note that her 1987 adaptation of Frank Wedekind's play *Lulu*, featuring a *femme fatale*, is based on the cult films such as "Blue Angel" and "A Letter from an Unknown Woman" which feature mothers who leave their children behind for their desire, for fame, lovers and money. By doing so, Carter wants us to see that such female figures who assert the power to exercise their will are often demonized and stigmatized as infernal.

In her "The Kingdom of the Fathers", Rich contends that "the idea of power has, for most women, been inextricably linked with maleness, or the use of force; most often with both" (79). Thus, power relations between mother and child are often simply a reflection of power-relations in patriarchal society. In this study of motherhood as experience and institution, Rich also argues that "Powerless women have always used mothering as a channel-narrow but deep-for their own will to power, their need to return upon the world what it has visited on them." (38) For her, this is a sort of martyrdom which causes us to carry negative echoes of our mothers' experience "into the mere notion of

“mothering” (253), which is practically “matrophobia”<sup>8</sup>. In the final analysis, it is the fear not of one’s mother or of motherhood, but of becoming (like) one’s mother:

Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were performed transmitted. Easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her. But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely (235).

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the *potential* victim in us, the unfree woman, the martyr. So we perform “radical surgery” to see where mother ends and daughter begins (236). Following Rich’s argument, one can see that Carter’s *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann* (1972) elaborates on the concept of power in these lines. *Desire Machines* also shows what happens when this radical surgery is not performed, i.e. when mothers simply follow male order and daughters obey all:<sup>9</sup> One of the central female characters in the novel, a powerful mother figure, Mama, of the River People, offers her young daughter Aoi to Desiderio, the protagonist, is again represented as a docile agent of patriarchy. Although Aoi is too young to be married, Mama has already taught her how to be dexterous in sex. In fact, she is still a child cradling in her arms a doll dressed like river babies, but she knows how to perform sexually to make a man happy:

Aoi was rather more solemn than usual but still she seemed to have studied every word and movement from a book of manners. Mama must have taught her everything. When I climbed into the bed beside her, she snuggled very prettily in my arms, reached down for my penis in a very businesslike way and began to stroke it very considerable dexterity[...] she procured me an orgasm I was quite unable to forestall even though, as I sobbed it out, I wondered anxiously that it might be out of order and the whole exercise had been designed to test my stoicism [...] Aoi seemed quite content and curled up to sleep until Mama brought us our breakfast in bed next morning, with many expressions of approval and kisses for both of us. (83)

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<sup>8</sup> In “Motherhood and Daughterhood” chapter of her *Of Woman Born*, Rich uses this term that the poet Lynn Sukenick uses.

<sup>9</sup> The text shows the rule of fathers, namely of Dr. Hoffman, the Mayor, the Count, and Albertina is called “her father’s daughter” (13).

The sexual mores of the *matriarchal* river people in Carter's house of fiction are by no means different from our patriarchal ones. Carter employs a younger character to show how mothers act almost like merchants trained to sell their goods in the market.

Mama of *Desire Machines* functions the same way as the symbolic "Mother" in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) which also deconstructs notions of gender and sexual identity that determine women's experience of motherhood. Mother figure here as the head of the matriarchal city is an embodiment of the womb, a woman whose function is reduced to reproduction. She turns herself in to a Greek goddess of fertility, "the many-breasted Artemis", and rapes Evelyn, to castrate, then turns her into a womb which they call "the fructifying female space" (77). She manages to impregnate him with his own sperm. Mother reconstructs Evelyn "as a woman in the same manner as she constructed herself, that is, effectively as a reflection of masculine images of the female" (Aidan Day 116). Obviously, the novel presents matriarchy as a parody of victimised women who could empower themselves only by holding the space to keep the sperm. Carter suggests that his all-female rule that boasts of its capacity to give birth is as crippling as patriarchy and a feminism that is a raw and angry reaction to male order is just another myth to be deconstructed.

It is clear that by delineating such mother figures, Carter implies that if women model themselves on Artemis and rely solely on their reproductive skills, they will simply perpetuate essentialist, debilitating myths of the male order. Therefore, being the fictional products of this frame of mind, mothers in Carter's fiction are either erased from the text or reduced to agents of patriarchy reproducing the male order. Carter's *ars poetica*, evident in her essays as well as in her interview with Haffenden, is "to reduce everything to its material base" (92). By stating that "Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father goddesses" (*The Sadeian Women*, 5-6), she gives the material base of her fiction and suggests that when women writers reproduce and fortify myths of motherhood, they lose their contact with themselves and merely perform estranging feminisms. Then, Carter proposes that what remains to be done for a viable feminism is an act of severing the umbilical cord which binds women to those estranging myths. For Carter, this is the very step a female writer should take to liberate not just herself but also her reader and to create alternative models of existence.

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