



Reclamation and Restoration of the Mother Archetype: Maternal Subversion in the Select Works of Kavita Kane and Madeline Miller

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Abstract

Archetypes are considered representations of the human experience; they are a part of cultural memory. The archetype of the mother is one of the most layered and conceptually complex archetypes. The idealised maternal figure has always been described as selfless and pure. A mother who falls short of social ideals of motherhood expectations is 'mom-shamed'. The idealised maternal discourse in canonical texts has ignored issues of maternal burnout and maternal dissatisfaction. Cultural narratives and archetypes have functioned as a disciplinary device that constructs motherhood as an institution. Discussing paradoxical ideologies about motherhood is often considered objectionable and unacceptable. This paper hopes to explore the deconstruction of the mother as an archetype in the select novels of Kavita Kane and Madeline Miller, who have extended the archetype beyond the patriarchal ideology. Contemporary literature has embraced ambivalence, rage and regret as dimensions of the motherhood experience. The democratisation of traditional canonical discourses is facilitated through modern retellings of myths, which embrace the fluidity of the motherhood experience. This paper analyses how the select writings of the authors Kavita Kane and Madeline Miller subvert the cultural mythology and portray motherhood as a paradoxical position that is both fulfilling and limiting. To give credence to the interpretation, the paper borrows insights from Erich Neumann, Adrienne Rich, Susan J. Douglas, Meredith Michaels, Orna Donath, and various other theorists to identify how society disapproves of anything that cannot be labelled as 'intensive mothering' and expose the ideological operation behind the archetypes. The paper employs a multidimensional approach by examining various facets of motherhood, including Maternal Ambivalence, Maternal Rage, and Maternal Regret.

Keywords: Archetypes, Mom Shaming, Patriarchal Ideologies, Maternal Dissatisfaction, Intensive Mothering.