

Angela Carter

Cross Anne Rice with J.G. Ballard and Georges Bataille, and you've got a good idea what the work of feminist novelist and philosopher Angela Carter is like. In her best-known works, like *The Magic Toyshop* and the short-story-turned-screenplay, *The Company of Wolves*, she conjured and radically reconfigured Greek mythology, gothic legends, and fairy tales in ways that placed historically passive female characters at center stage. Whether tormenting unfaithful husbands, sucking the blood of poor Gypsy boys, or outsmarting werewolves, Carter's women are unapologetically sexual, and tap into the dark, even primal side of human sexuality. Alas—in true dark lady fashion—Carter died of cancer in 1992 at age 52. In her obituary, friend Salman Rushdie wrote, "She cut death down to size: no distinguished thing, but a grubby little murderous clown. After showing us how to write, after helping us to see how to live, she showed us how to die."

MARIA ELENA BUSZEK



Lizzie Borden

Madame Cheng

One of the only famous female pirates, Madame Cheng was known throughout Southeast Asia both for her cruelty and her efficacy. She escaped a life of prostitution in Canton by marrying the pirate Cheng I, and took over his fleet in 1804 when her husband was killed by a gale. Eventually, Madame Cheng ruled over 2,000 ships and had 70,000 pirates under her control whom she ruled with an iron fist. Raping female captives was a capital offense, consensual sex with a captive meant beheading for the pirate and a trip overboard for the woman, and any sailor absent without leave had an ear cut off. To strengthen her army, she forced them to drink cocktails of wine and gunpowder. Madame Cheng's adopted son, who at one point may have been her husband's lover, eventually became her lover and successor. Talk about pirate's booty! ELANA BERKOWITZ

Joan Crawford

You'd think a gal with the nickname "Cranberry"

would look more like a kewpie doll than a severely hungry cat. When it comes to the enigmatic Crawford, however, nothing surprises. If we didn't know she beat the hell out of her kids, we'd probably think she was smoking hot—plenty of people in the '20s, '30s, and '40s certainly did. And if you catch this devilishly fetching gal in *Mildred Pierce* or *The Women*, you'll know why she was a box office topper. Her tastes were extreme, her manner aloof, and her ego staggering. She ate up men and women alike. From her feverishly carnal exploits with he-man Clark Gable to equally



Death



Joan Crawford

impassioned dynamic female trysts, Crawford was a gluttonous, glamorous, gaggle of trouble who clawed her way to stardom from grossly impoverished beginnings. Perhaps that's what made her feel entitled to crap on everyone; and perhaps it's that nastiness that turns us on. STACY DAVIES

Death, from *The Sandman*

Death first appears in Neil Gaiman's *Preludes and Nocturnes*, the first sequence of comics in *The Sandman* series. Her brother Dream is sitting on a park bench feeling sorry for himself when she arrives, talking about Mary Poppins, and telling him, in the way that only a sibling can, to stop being so "bubble-headed." This is her role in

the comic, to be the ally. Death's job is also when your time is up. Dressed like Siou Xie, she's there to usher the living into the next life. Not in a depressing way, but with care. As one *Sandman* friend. Sometimes. N

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Elvira

Scream Queen Elvira Peterson, is the cur on the planet. Toui creepy, there's some woman who is a sell the Dark" with deep called Evil. Proving to turn on men are remains the top-se