The Medusa Gaze in Contemporary Women's Fiction: Petrifying, Maternal and Redemptive. Gillian M. E. Alban. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017.

Much has been written about the Medusa myth recounting Medusa's rape by Poseidon and her subsequent outrageous imprisonment and transformation by Athena. She became a symbol of discrimination, objectification, victimization, alienation, fury and finally power. In short, she has represented the position of women in a patriarchal environment within numerous significations.

In her book, *The Medusa Gaze in Contemporary Women's Fiction: Petrifying, Maternal and Redemptive*, Gillian Alban uses the Medusa myth primarily less to present the patriarchal objectification of women by the male gaze, but more to demonstrate that instead of being pacified or defused by the male gaze, woman rather gains an objectifying power by wielding her own gaze. To prove her thesis, Alban makes a thorough use of the theory of the Gaze, both of Lacan's and Sartre's, in order to conclude that Medusa is not only castrated by the gaze of others, but also castrates others with her own gaze. While describing this dual function of the gaze, she also takes it beyond male-female relationships to include the mother-daughter relationship, since maternal force can be simultaneously castrating and castrated. The Medusa Gaze Schema she provides after the Introduction clarifies this interplay of power and nurture as an effective response to destruction and powerlessness through succinct quotation from writers like Cixous and Ettinger as well as Lacan and Freud.

While castration seems to be a key aspect of Alban's argument, she consciously and skillfully refrains herself from complying with the Freudian theory of the castration complex, since the novels she deals with are not limited to the putative "lack" of women that threatens men, despite the level of cultural castration women suffer. For Alban, "Discussion of women bound together even as they are generationally severed starts from Sigmund Freud's view of the mother as a terrifying Medusa" (116). She underlines the implied meaning that Freud's view of the Medusa "expresses his fear of the female, while connecting the mother's genitals to the Medusa head [… since] he sees the mother archetype as petrifying, while at the same time offering the male a reassuring stiffening or erection" (116).

The first part of the book evaluates the dual function of the gaze as the Self in the petrifying gaze of the Other, and the deadly gaze of the Self toward the Other. The first function serves as a medium to form identity through various interactions with others as "they see themselves mirrored in those around them": Esther in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Pecola in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Leonie and Thérèse in Michèle Roberts' *Daughters of the House*, Julia and Cassandra in A.S Byatt's *The Game*, Elaine and Cordelia in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. Some remain trapped within doppelgänger interrelations, while others evade objectification, even "under a panoptic gaze, [managing to] wield the power of the gaze themselves" (111). The deadly gaze of powerful women may be destructive rather than constructive, petrifying her objects, as seen in Marianne in Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains*, Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*, and Honor in Iris Murdoch's *A Severed Head*. In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, she elaborates how Sethe's "outrageous fury, her tigress-like, savage protection of her young children", looking her oppressors "dead in the eye", forces them to give up on their attempt to reclaim their "property" (55-56) .

In the second half of the book, Alban moves beyond the gaze of Medusa to examine further Medusa functions such as the position of women in society in relation to Freud's androcentric perspective of the mother as a terrifying Medusa, to which Alban clearly objects in suggesting that "it is frequently mothers' onerous duties and life's harsh circumstances that turn them into fierce maternal tigers" (120). As examples, she scrutinizes Annette Cosway Mason of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Mother in *The Passion of New Eve* and Mrs. Winterson of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*.

Readers, especially those interested in the presentation of social restrictions on women and its metaphorical demonstration through mythic women's presentation in literature, will enjoy reading Alban's book. Appreciating the nine contemporary writers and numerous cross references she discusses in her book helps readers to wholeheartedly ratify the journey of women from petrification to redemption.

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