
Reclaiming the Gorgon's Gaze: Gender Performativity, Agency, and Resistance in Natalie Haynes's *Stone Blind*

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Abstract

The article provides a thorough feminist examination of contemporary novel *Stone Blind* by writer Natalie Haynes, based on the theory formulated by Judith Butler, gender performativity. The analysis explores the ways in which Haynes's retelling of the Medusa myth challenges to the patriarchy, upsets traditional gender binaries and re-enacts female agency in an oppressive power structure. The research examines the characters' performances of gender, linguistic choices and narratives through close textual analysis and discourse analysis to reveal the underlying power and ideology in the scene. Analysis shows how *Stone Blind* challenges the essentialist ideas of gender, questions the power dynamics of heteronormativity, and offers other possible ideas of empowered womanhood via solidarity, resistance, and self-determination. The use of a multi-perspectival narrative structure is a way of problematizing the male tradition of myth and of highlighting the unheard voices of women. The research project is important to feminist literary criticism and gender studies because it shows that the contemporary mythological retellings can be used as places of cultural resistance and transformation. The results show that *Stone Blind* not only reclaims Medusa's story, but also offers a framework of how literature can be used to problematize and challenge patriarchal ideas and ideals, and how it can help to promote other narratives, such as those of social justice, gender equality, and narrative sovereignty.

Keywords: Gender Performativity, Feminist Literary Criticism, Agency, Mythological Retellings, Judith Butler, Patriarchal Power Structures

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

There has been a major shift in the way that narratives of power, gender and identity are constructed and disseminated in contemporary literature, which has seen a significant resurgence of feminist retellings of classical myths (Smith, 2025). In this rich literary environment, *Stone Blind* (2022) by Natalie Haynes is a radical new interpretation of the Medusa myth, one that calls into question the patriarchal interpretation that has taken over for millennia. This retelling follows in the legacy of feminist mythological revisionism, such as Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Madeline Miller's *Circe*, and Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, which all seek to grant voice and agency to female characters who have been silenced by male-dominated literary traditions (Smith, 2025). *Stone Blind* is not just a literary work; it is also a space where cultural critique is examined, revealing the ways in which gender norms are created, enforced, and challenged (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

The novel is an innovative contribution that explores the current feminist discourse's interaction with classical mythology to challenge the dominant power structures and reinvent the potential for female agency, identity,

and freedom (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). The novel, however, focuses on Medusa's point of view, a character who is often depicted as a monster and antagonist in the myth, which throws into question the moral structure surrounding this myth for centuries (Creed, 2021). Feminist literary criticism in *Stone Blind* analysis of the theory of Judith Butler on gender performativity provides insight into the narrative and the construction of identity and power (Salsabila, 2024). Butler's theory of gender as a performative act is created through repeated behaviour and the construction of discursive practices, offers a strong analytical language for the ways the characters in the novel create, perform and contest gender identity within oppressive social structures (Butler, 1990). This theoretical framework helps to interpret Haynes's interpretation of essentialist gender and sexuality concepts and to gain insight into other ways of constructing identity and resisting it (Musso, 2025).

1.2 Statement of Problem

In the feminist interpretation of Haynes's *Stone Blind*, a basic issue that is core to the current literary and cultural studies is the systematic and continuous marginalisation, objectification and silence of female voices in literature and culture (Zahro, 2023). The traditional myths of Greece have always been interpreted as victim women, monstrous women, women desired by men, which include reinforcement of gender stereotypes and perpetuating power relations (Desmawati, 2020). The Medusa myth, especially, has served as a warning of women's power and sexuality: Medusa was a monstrous creature whose annihilation is a prerequisite to the creation of a Patriarchal Order (Cixous, 1975). The issue is that these deeply rooted narratives need to be challenged and dismantled, as women must be given back their agency and subjectivity in the literary discourse (Collins, 2020). Feminist scholarship has advanced a great deal in examining the ways in which literature represents and reflects patriarchy, but there has been a lack of systematic engagement with the gender performativity theory in the analysis of current mythological retellings (Musso, 2025). This research gets to this lacuna by studying how *Stone Blind* challenges gender norms, hears unheard voices and provides alternative interpretations to patriarchy's readings of female characters. The study explores the ways in which the novel defies conventional gender dichotomies, offers critique of the power of heteronormative values, and provides models for resistance and empowerment that defy hegemonic values. (Shaw & Kamata, 2025)

1.3 Research Objectives

This study pursues the following research objectives:

- To examine the construction and representation of gender roles and identities within *Stone Blind*, analyzing how characters perform, negotiate, and resist gendered expectations imposed by patriarchal society.
- To investigate how performativity and agency are manifested in the female characters of *Stone Blind*, exploring the strategies through which they challenge, subvert, or conform to normative gender performances.
- To analyze the novel's critique of the sex/gender binary and heteronormative power structures through the lens of Judith Butler's theoretical framework.
- To explore the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of identity, including race, class, and sexuality, in the novel's representation of diverse female experiences.
- To examine the narrative strategies and linguistic choices through which Haynes constructs alternative models of female agency, solidarity, and resistance.

1.4 Research Questions

This research addresses the following questions:

1. How are gender roles and identities constructed and represented within *Stone Blind*?
2. How are performativity and agency demonstrated in the female characters of *Stone Blind*?

3. In what ways does the novel critique the sex/gender binary and heteronormative power structures through Butler's theoretical lens?
4. How does the narrative structure and multi-perspectival approach contribute to the feminist reimagining of the Medusa myth?
5. What strategies of resistance and empowerment do female characters employ in challenging patriarchal oppression?

1.5 Significance of Study

This feminist reading of Haynes' *Stone Blind* is significant because it could be helpful in various academic fields (Bhandari, 2024). First, the study contributes to feminist literary criticism by offering a new perspective on the potential of contemporary literature to disrupt and defy the patriarchy, especially by reinterpreting classical myths, as described by Showalter (2020). In this research, Butler's theory was used in the analysis of the representations of identity, power, and resistance in the literature used, which was undertaken by retelling the myth in a modern context, thereby proving the usefulness of the theory of gender performativity in analyzing the representations of identity, power, and resistance in the literature used. Secondly, the results of the research can contribute to discussions of the relationship between narrative, gender, and power as a kind of model that can be used to understand how literary works can be a locus of cultural resistance and change (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). It shows how *Stone Blind* retrieves Medusa's story while simultaneously enabling a critique of the processes of gender norm construction, enforcement and, in some instances, challenge (Musso, 2025).

The study also has implications for the understanding of feminist retellings in the contemporary cultural context, especially in the context of countering historical narratives that have marginalized and silenced women's voices (Smith, 2025). The analysis explores how Haynes presents the story of Medusa, shedding light on the transformative power of feminist reinterpretations of myths, a topic that continues to be discussed in the field of literature, as discussed by Ghaffary & Bayat (2024). The intersectional exploration of gender with other forms of identity in the novel demonstrates the particular complexity of women's experiences and the need for feminist approaches that are inclusive, as they consider diverse voices and viewpoints (Crenshaw, 2023). This helps in the evolution of more refined feminist methods of literary analysis (Collins, 2020). Last but not least, the research has pedagogical implications; that is, it provides a model in teaching feminist literary criticism and gender theory, as an analysis of modern fiction (Bhandari, 2024). Overall, the study shows the ways in which theoretical approaches can be used to analyze literary texts and to shed light on their political and cultural meanings, thereby contributing to the understanding of the connection between literature, identity, and power (Showalter, 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Feminism and Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminism, as a movement advocating for women's equality and justice while combating exploitation and oppression, stems from the recognition of women's inherent rights and the systematic discrimination perpetuated by societal rules and cultural norms (Wilany, 2020). The feminist movement encompasses diverse perspectives and approaches, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, and intersectional feminism, each offering distinct analytical frameworks for understanding and challenging gender inequality (Bhandari, 2024; Desmawati, 2020). Feminist literary criticism, as a subfield of feminist scholarship, examines the representation of women in literature, the writing of women authors, and the ways in which literary texts reinforce or challenge patriarchal ideologies (Showalter, 2020). This critical approach seeks to uncover the underlying dynamics in literary works that speak to women's subordinate status in society, examining how gender, race, class, and sexuality intersect in literary representations (Zahro, 2023). Feminist literary critics argue that writing should not adhere to patriarchal

standards, which are dominated by men's perspectives and serve to further marginalize women socially, economically, and psychologically (Dalton, 2020). The evolution of feminist literary criticism reflects broader developments in feminist theory and activism (Showalter, 2020). Early feminist criticism focused on recovering women's literary traditions and analyzing representations of women in canonical texts (Bressler, 2020). Subsequent waves of feminist criticism incorporated poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches, questioning the category of "woman" itself and examining how gender identities are constructed through discourse and power relations (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 2023). Contemporary feminist literary criticism emphasizes intersectionality, recognizing that women's experiences are shaped by multiple, intersecting axes of identity including race, class, sexuality, and nationality (Collins, 2020; Mohanty, 2023).

2.2 Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity

Judith Butler's theory of performativity of gender, described in her earlier books like *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), has transformed feminist and queer theory by questioning basic concepts of gender, identity and power (Salsabila, 2024). In contrast, Butler suggests that gender is not predetermined or natural, but rather a performative process that is created through repeated actions, language and social interactions that are consistent with social norms. She asserts that gender is not "being", it is "doing" rather, "Gender is not who you are, it is what you do... an act... a 'doing' not a 'being'" (Butler, 1990, p. 25). One of the key points in Butler's theory is the rejection of the sex/gender binary, in which the biological category of sex is perceived as natural and static, and the social one of gender as fluid and dynamic (Butler, 1990). Butler challenges this binary, claiming that the concept of biological sex is a creation of cultural discourses and power structures. She claims, "*The difference between sex and gender proves to be a difference without a difference*" (Butler, 1990, p. 10). In this perspective, sex and gender are mutually fluid and contingent, as they are defined by norms, language, and power. In this perspective, both sex and gender are fluid and contingent, defined by norms, language, and power (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). Such a view challenges the essentialist ideas that correlate gender identity and behaviors with biology, and opens the door to a more inclusive view of identity (Musso, 2025).

Butler also challenges heteronormativity and her own term, the "*heterosexual matrix*," as a cultural arrangement that normalizes and regulates heterosexuality as the natural or default way of being (Butler, 1990). She talks about this matrix as maintaining and enforcing the creation of discrete, asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine' (Butler, 1990, p. 23). Besides marginalising non-conforming identities, heteronormativity also reinforces binary gender roles that continue to contribute to inequality (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). However, Butler's work unveils these as artificial and not natural, and requires deconstruction via performance practices that mimic gender norms and expose their imitative architecture (Salsabila, 2024). Butler takes her critique further to the physicality of the body, according to her, even the physical body is regulated by regulatory norms (Butler, 1993). Bodies only 'appear', only 'endure', only 'live' within the productive boundaries of certain 'highly gendered regulatory schemas' (Butler, 1993, p. 2). This concept highlights the importance of power beyond the cultural and social context, and how bodies are perceived, categorized and controlled (Musso, 2025).

2.3 Feminist Retellings of Classical Myths

Feminist reworkings of classical myths are an important trend in modern literature, which has been burdened by the stories of the patriarchy for thousands of years (Smith, 2025). Through these retellings, marginalized voices are recovered, traditional myths are shown to be gendered, and alternative readings of traditional stories are provided (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). This tradition has seen the likes of Margaret Atwood, Madeline Miller, Pat Barker and Natalie Haynes retell the stories of Medusa, Briseis, Circe and Penelope from a feminist lens (Smith, 2025). The Medusa myth, especially, has drawn the attention of feminists to reinterpret, since Medusa is the archetype of the monstrous feminine that must be destroyed in order for patriarchal order to

stand (Cixous, 1975, Creed, 2021). Feminist retellings overturn the romanticization of Medusa as a victim of sexual violence, questioning the gendered dynamics that allowed the events that lead to Medusa's fate to happen (Haynes, 2022). These reworkings encourage discussion on the issue of empowerment for women and challenge stereotypes and male domination of history (Zahro, 2023). Feminist retellings of myths are not only literary art, but they are also cultural resistance, a way to oppose the ideology of patriarchy in society (Smith, 2025). Through feminist reworkings of traditional mythological stories, new authors show how gender norms are a construct and how other ways of telling stories could feature women's experiences and agency (Mohanty, 2023). These retellings help fulfil the larger feminist efforts of reclaiming missing voices, fighting against dominant ideas, and envisioning different social structures (Collins, 2020).

2.4 Research Gap

The study of gender in literature and gender studies has covered the topic of gender in literature extensively, while the theory of gender performativity has been applied to literature only sporadically, and not to the contemporary retellings of the classical myths in particular, as in the case of *Stone Blind* by Natalie Haynes (Musso, 2025). While Butler's ideas have been adopted by literature scholars in many different ways, there is little research on the possible transformation of the ancient stories for reinterpretation in later periods that are saturated with gender norms and ideology. However, although Butler's concepts have been widely applied to the analysis of other types of literature, few studies have focused on the possible reinterpretation of ancient stories in later periods, when they are saturated with gender norms and ideology (Salsabila, 2024). Furthermore, *Stone Blind* is a feminist retelling of Medusa's myth which is an excellent material for examining how gender is constructed through narrative and linguistic means, but the material has yet to be fully discussed in the academic literature (Smith, 2025). There is limited or no in-depth research on *Stone Blind* from a Butlerian perspective with intersectionality with race, class and sexuality (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). Moreover, the classical retellings are often gender-blind when it comes to the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of identity (Crenshaw, 2023). Although there is a substantial literature on intersectionality in more recent contexts, the intersectionality of race, class, and sexuality has not yet been extensively explored in more ancient mythological contexts where race, class, and sexuality are often suggested but not explicitly mentioned in the text (Musso, 2025). This gap suggests that there is a need for research that will take Butler's theories and apply them to the gender dynamics in *Stone Blind* and also incorporate an intersectional analysis of how the various aspects of identity interact within the text (Shaw & Kamata, 2025).

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is the basic theory used in this research, where Butler defined gender as a social construction identity that is performed through repeated actions, language and discursive formations (Butler, 1990). Butler's framework is a powerful analytical tool to analyze the ways characters in *Stone Blind* negotiate and negotiate gender identity in the face of patriarchal society (Salsabila, 2024).

Table 1: Key Concepts in Judith Butler's Theory of Gender Performativity

Concept	Definition	Key Text
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Gender Performativity	Gender is not an inherent identity but a repeated set of behaviors that produce the illusion of a stable identity	Butler (1990)
Critique of Sex/Gender Binary	The distinction between biological sex and social gender is itself a cultural construction	Butler (1990)
Heteronormativity	Societal norms that enforce heterosexuality as the default and natural mode of existence	Butler (1990)
Heterosexual Matrix	The cultural framework that produces and maintains asymmetrical oppositions between feminine and masculine	Butler (1990)
Subversion of Gender Norms	Performances like drag parody gender norms, revealing their imitative and constructed nature	Butler (1990)
Materiality of the Body	Bodies are shaped by regulatory norms and discursive practices	Butler (1993)
Agency and Resistance	Individuals can resist and reinterpret norms through deliberate subversion	Butler (1990)
Intersectionality	Gender intersects with other aspects of identity including race, class, and sexuality	Crenshaw (2023)

Butler's theory is especially relevant to *Stone Blind*'s analysis as the novel explicitly deals with issues of gender construction, performativity and resistance (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). The use of multiple perspectives in the novel allows for a full study of gender performances, both expected and noticed, in various social roles (Smith, 2025). This interwoven narration upsets the traditional masculine-centered storytelling in *Medusa's History* in favor of another kind of analytical and complex narrative on gender activities and their strategic manifestations (Musso, 2025).

3.2 Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research method that relies on close textual analysis and discourse analysis to analyze the portrayal of gender, agency and power in *Stone Blind* (Redman & Mory, 1923). Given the research aims, qualitative research approach is appropriate, providing detailed, interpretive analysis of the language, story-telling and other thematic concerns used in the novel (Bhandari, 2024).

Table 2: Research Methodology Components

Component	Description	Application
Research Design	Inductive research approach based on observation, findings, and conclusions	Analysis of textual evidence to identify patterns and themes
Research Method	Qualitative approach for descriptive and interpretive analysis	Close reading of novel passages to examine gender construction
Data Collection	Purposive sampling technique	Selection of relevant passages from <i>Stone Blind</i>
Analytical Framework	Judith Butler's gender performativity theory	Application of Butler's concepts to textual analysis
Data Analysis	Close textual analysis and discourse analysis	Examination of linguistic choices, narrative strategies, and character performances

The research design is inductive, starting with the observation of patterns in the text, then making generalizations about gender construction and resistance in the novel (Redman & Mory, 1923). The method is systematic observation, careful analysis and reasoned conclusions, which is part of the research of feminist

literary criticism and gender studies that is ongoing (Showalter, 2020).

The data was gathered using a purposive sampling method highlighting relevant passages from *Stone Blind* that contribute to the themes of gender performativity, agency and resistance (Wilany, 2020). The analysis is conducted on the characters' enactment of gender, language use, storytelling approaches and the power and ideology that emerges in a story from these components (Zahro, 2023). The researcher's interpretation is considered subjective because the researcher is handling the information in his/her own way, just as in qualitative research, where the researcher's positionality and subjectivity in interpreting the information are recognized (Bhandari, 2024). Such a method allows for the complexities and multiple layers of meaning to be recognized in literary texts, as well as for the novel's engagement with gender, identity and power to be understood (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Gender as Performativity

Gender is not a 'being' but a 'doing' as stated by Butler (1990, p. 25), this is the basic point of view for analyzing the construction of gender in the novel *Stone Blind* (Salsabila, 2024). Throughout the novel, the production of gender identities is repeatedly enacted and performed both linguistically and socially, and the reader is led to believe that they are natural and stable. The novel repeatedly shows the way in which gender identities are produced through repeated acts, linguistic performances and social interactions, creating the impression of stable and natural identities (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

Table 3: Analysis of Gender Performativity in *Stone Blind*

Character	Performance of Gender	Subversion/Resistance	Key Passage
Medusa	Victim, monster, survivor	Rejection of assigned identity, self-definition through narrative	"And the monster? Who is she? She is what happens when someone cannot be saved" (Haynes, 2022, p.1)
Metis	Shapeshifter resisting patriarchal control	Transformation as resistance to Zeus's domination	"Her muscles began to throb from the pressure and she had no choice but to make herself smaller and smaller still" (Haynes, 2022, p.3)
Athene	Warrior goddess performing masculinity	Subversion of feminine stereotypes through martial prowess	"This was the war she had been born to fight" (Haynes, 2022, p.40)
Hera	Wife performing jealousy and surveillance	Limited resistance within patriarchal constraints	"Hera and Zeus were ideally matched, at least in terms of their capacity to antagonize one another" (Haynes, 2022, p.12)
Danaë	Daughter, mother, survivor	Rejection of paternal authority, self-definition outside patriarchal bonds	"From the time she became his son's mother, she stopped being her father's child" (Haynes, 2022, p.29)

Despite her victimisation in the violence, Butler's notion of gender performativity is embodied in Medusa as she is compelled to perform the act of "monster" (Butler, 1990; Creed, 2021). The novel begins with an effective scene questioning the nature of hero and monster roles:

"The hero isn't the kind or brave or loyal one, I see them for an instant, them and then they're gone, but it's enough to know sometimes, not always, but sometimes, that the monster is the one. Who is she? This particular monster is attacked, abused and demonized - and, as always, it is the one that you should fear. She is the

monster.”(Haynes, 2022, p.1)

This passage is one example of Butler's idea that gender reality is performative, 'real only to the extent that it is performed' (Butler, 1990, p. 278). The novel opens a window into the cultural narratives that construct Medusa's transformation from victim to monster, and presents the fact that both roles are socially created as a result of repeated cultural messages (Smith, 2025). Society reinforces the concept of a male hero by displaying brave strength and the concept of a victim or horrifying attributes to women, as both identities are socially constructed and not natural (Zahro, 2023).

Another powerful example of gender performativity in the transformation of Metis is offered by the way in which their identities have changed. Another highly illustrative example of gender performativity in the transformation of Metis is in the change in their identities. In the transformation of the Metis from a woman to an eagle, snake, and panther, her body is a place of resistance against the control of the Patriarchy, in the form of Zeus.

"Her muscles began to throb from the pressure and she had no choice but to make herself smaller and smaller still: weasel, mouse, cicada. But still the pressure increased. She tried one last time: ant. And then she heard his hated voice, telling her she could not escape him. She already knew what she had to do to make the pain stop. Submit to another pain." (Haynes, 2022, p.3)

Butler's claim that there are no rigid sex/gender classifications (Butler, 1990) is exemplified by Metis's shape shifting. The changes she makes are an act of resistance to patriarchy but her final submission to Zeus is a sign of the regulatory power of gender norms (Salsabila, 2024). Butler's insight into the control of gender performance by dominant power systems is reflected in Metis's struggles; boundaries before and within gender performance defy her efforts to disrupt the social framework (Butler, 1993; Musso, 2025).

4.2 Heteronormativity and the Matrix of Power

Butler's critique of heteronormativity and the heterosexual matrix provides a framework for analyzing how *Stone Blind* exposes the mechanisms through which societal norms enforce heterosexuality as the default and maintain asymmetrical power relations between genders (Butler, 1990; Shaw & Kamata, 2025).

Table 4: Analysis of Heteronormativity and Power Structures

Character/Dynamic	Heteronormative Structure	Power Relations	Subversion/Resistance
Zeus and Hera	Marriage as patriarchal institution	Male dominance, female subordination	Hera's acts of retaliation within patriarchal framework
Poseidon and Medusa	Male sexual entitlement	Violence, coercion, victimization	Medusa's transformation as unintended empowerment
Cassiope and Cepheus	Beauty and marriage as female value	Female power through male validation	Cassiope's awareness of beauty as social capital
Andromeda and Phineus	Arranged marriage as family interest	Female body as property	Andromeda's questioning of betrothal terms
Euryale and Medusa	Female solidarity as alternative	Collective resistance to male violence	Euryale's protective actions against Poseidon

Hera's relationship with Zeus is an example of Butler's 'heterosexual matrix' which highlights the idea of male power and female subordination in patriarchal power structures (Butler, 1990; Musso, 2025). The novel describes:

"Hera and Zeus were a perfect match when it comes to hating each other at least, on some days she thought he could not get out of bed without seducing or raping someone, and the time and effort it took her to pester

every goddess, woman or nymph he had seduced or raped.” (Haynes, 2022, p.12)

The passage indicates the construction of gender identity by power dynamics which establish male dominance and female submission (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). Zeus's seduction and his sexual aggression exemplify a man's dominant nature, which indicates control and conquest as central tenets of male strength (Creed, 2021). Asymmetry of traditional male/female power relations in the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) is evident in Hera's character as she reacts to Zeus's actions. The observation, surveillance and vengeance directed by Hera towards the victims of Zeus' actions illustrates how women are caught in the web of maintaining patriarchy: in her acts of vengeance she punishes other women, but not Zeus' power (Musso, 2025). Euryale's defense of Medusa is a strong counter-narrative to the dominant heteronormative power structures (Smith 2025). As a woman confronts the certainty of male violence, Euryale exhibits a kind of female agency which defies the control of the man.

The winds would not dare to speak, nor would the seabirds, and the sea itself was afraid, 'You will never touch her again, do you hear me?', she screamed, and with this, she lifted herself up into the air and smote her feet against the scarred rock, and there was a tremor, and the sea itself was afraid. (Haynes, 2022, p.26)

Butler's theory about contesting gender norms through performative acts that challenge settled gender categories, is illustrated by Euryale's defiance (1990; Salsabila, 2024). Her physical transformation of space, drawing in land to divide Medusa from the sea, is a reclamation of space from male power's (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).norms.

4.3 Critique of the Sex/Gender Binary

Stone Blind (Butler, 1990; Collins, 2020) centers on Butler's challenge to the binary distinction between sex (biological sex) and gender (gender identity and gender expression). Throughout the novel, it is clear that sex and gender are not organic or essential, but rather a creation of the power and cultural contexts (Salsabila, 2024).

Table 5: Critique of Sex/Gender Binary in *Stone Blind*

Character	Binary Challenged	Alternative Construction	Key Passage
Medusa	Beauty as objective standard	Subjectivity and resistance to imposed standards	"I don't agree with you" (Haynes, 2022, p.24)
Danaë	Daughterhood as patriarchal identity	Self-definition through motherhood and autonomy	"From the time she became his son's mother, she stopped being her father's child" (Haynes, 2022, p.29)
Athene	Feminine/masculine dichotomy	Performance of masculine attributes by female deity	"This was the war she had been born to fight" (Haynes, 2022, p.40)
Metis	Fixed gender identity	Fluid identity through shape-shifting	Her transformations from woman to eagle, snake, panther (Haynes, 2022, p.3)
Euryale	Passive femininity	Active, protective agency challenging male control	"You will never touch her again, do you hear me?" (Haynes, 2022, p.26)

Medusa's fight with Poseidon is a reflection of the novel's criticism of binary thinking (Zahro, 2023). When Poseidon sets out rules for beauty, Medusa challenges his rule:

“You can't prove what you believe,” she said, “you can only believe it.” “That is obviously not true,” he said, “you believe you can fly and I believe it too. We could prove it by going to the edge of the cliff and pushing you off.” “Flying isn't a matter of opinion,” she said, “nor is beauty.” “I don't agree with you,” he said

(Haynes, 2022, p.24). This exchange points to Butler's argument that sex and gender are not natural or objective but rather are culturally constructed and a function of power relations (1990; Salsabila, 2024). Poseidon embodies the hegemonic patriarchal discourse which supports a universal standard of fixed preferences and social acceptability that are grounded in bodily appearance and social acceptance (Creed, 2021). By saying “I don't agree with you,” Medusa challenges the dichotomy and proposes beauty that is more subjective than objective (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). With this, she questions the oppressive patriarchal systems of organizing female subjectivity (Musso, 2025). Danaë's change from daughter to mother also presses the boundaries of the binary of sex and gender, as it shows that identity is not solely a biological but social phenomenon (2020 Collins). The matriarchy assumes that women are defined by male relationships, and when Danaë says “*From the time she was his son's mother, she ceased to be her father's child*” (Haynes, 2022, p.29), she is rejecting the possibility of matriarchy. Her refusal of her father's authority, therefore, illustrates the point Butler makes in his argument about the social nature of gender as a constraint, rather than a natural quality, and how identity can be changed by resisting to these constraints (Butler, 1990; Musso, 2025).

4.4 Materiality of the Body

The concept that bodies are formed by regulatory norms and discursive practices is embodied in Butler's argument in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) which is well illustrated in *Stone Blind* (Salsabila, 2024). Throughout the novel, the interplay of culture and power dynamics are explored, showing how bodies are constructed, marked, and controlled (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

Table 6: Analysis of Bodily Materiality in *Stone Blind*

Character	Body as Discursive Construction	Regulatory Norms	Resistance/Subversion
Medusa	Body marked by divine punishment	Patriarchal control over female bodies	Transformation as unintended empowerment
Metis	Body as site of patriarchal control	Zeus's domination through physical confinement	Shape-shifting as resistance
Athene	Body as site of identity construction	Objectification and valuation through male gaze	Request for own symbol as assertion of autonomy
Danaë	Body as property to be controlled	Patrilineal control over reproduction	Rejection of paternal authority
Andromeda	Body as marital property	Heteronormative marriage as control	Questioning of arranged marriage

In the case of Athene's request for something of her own, Butler's argument regarding the construction of bodies and identities through material symbols and discursive practices (Butler 1993, Salsabila 2024) is demonstrated. Athene asks for a symbol of her identity, thus challenging the patriarchy notions of female power as being related to a male:
"I said it wasn't about anyone else! It's what I want!" (Haynes, 2022, p.32)
The frustration of Athene is that her identity is not based on her own symbol of power (her weapons, her spear, her arrows) but on the identity formed by her relationship to male figures (her father Zeus, her brothers Apollo and Ares) (Smith, 2025). Butler's argument that identity is manufactured through material objects and performances is illustrated in her request for the owl as a symbol of her identity. The material image of Athene is the owl which symbolizes wisdom, intelligence and power, going beyond the conventional role of women

(Zahro, 2023).
 Butler's theory of the regulation of bodies by the body (Butler, 1993; Creed, 2021) can be seen in Medusa's body. The novel describes:
She experienced a stabbing pain in her entire head as if someone had tied a cloth around her head and twisted and twisted it till it hurt. (Haynes, 2022, p.47)
 This transformation is a demonstration of Butler's idea of the materiality of the body as formed by discourse and power (Butler, 1993). Medusa's body is the place where God punish her, making her a monster and other (Creed, 2021). This metamorphosis results in her being stripped of her womanly appearance and endowed with a monstrous form, which embodies cultural fears of a female power (Cixous, 1975). The changes to the bodies reveal that physical bodies are targeted in cultural violence and ideology and become "unintelligible" and "unlivable" in the dominant cultural systems (Butler, 1993, p. xi; Musso, 2025).

4.5 Agency and Resistance

The feminist critique in *Stone Blind* emphasizes the ability to embrace and challenge norms through intentional subversion (Butler, 1990; Musso, 2025). The novel offers several forms of resistance that women employ to break the subservient rule of men and assert themselves (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

Table 7: Strategies of Agency and Resistance in *Stone Blind*

Character	Strategy of Resistance	Outcome	Significance
Medusa	Reclaiming narrative through voice	Restoring humanity and dignity	Challenging patriarchal narratives
Metis	Shape-shifting as escape	Attempted resistance to Zeus's control	Demonstrating fluidity of identity
Euryale	Physical protection of Medusa	Creating safe space through environmental transformation	Female solidarity as resistance
Danaë	Rejection of paternal authority	Self-definition through motherhood	Breaking patriarchal bonds
Athene	Demanding autonomous identity	Assertion through material symbol	Challenging definition through male figures
Andromeda	Questioning arranged marriage	Expressing personal agency	Resisting heteronormative expectations

The biggest thing that Medusa has done for herself is gain her own voice again (Smith 2025). Haynes takes a different view on Medusa by placing her at the centre, giving her humanity and questioning the idea of a narrative of her as a monster to be destroyed, which has been maintained by patriarchy (Cixous, 1975). Medusa's narrative is not just about her survival but also her resistance and her ability to redefine her identity outside of the confines of oppression (Zahro, 2023). This reclaiming of voice is a strong feminist maneuver, a statement that Butler put forth: *"The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating"* (Butler, 1990, p. 145; Salsabila, 2024). The bond between Medusa and her Gorgon sisters, Sthenno and Euryale, is a model of non-domination power, in contrast to the dominant one (Collins, 2020). The sisters' role is quite different from that of the Olympian gods who wield power through violence and control: It is one of caring, protecting and collective resistance (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). Their friendship raises the question whether women can really be seen as rivals in a struggle for survival in a patriarchal system, or whether solidarity can be defined as a power that is more effective than the one possessed by men (Musso, 2025). After Medusa's metamorphosis, their continued support of her exemplifies an alternate part of this relationship, one where gender solidarity is not as restrictive as the gender binary of society, where identity and power are only defined as male and female (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

Table 8: Comparison of Power Models in *Stone Blind*

Power Model	Characteristics	Examples	Feminist Significance
Patriarchal Power	Domination, violence, control	Zeus, Poseidon, Perseus	Represents hegemonic masculine authority
Divine Female Power	Authority through patriarchal alliance	Athene punishing Medusa	Shows complicity in patriarchal systems
Solidarity Power	Care, protection, collective resistance	Gorgon sisters supporting Medusa	Alternative model of female power
Narrative Power	Voice, self-definition, reclamation	Medusa telling her own story	Feminist resistance through storytelling

4.6 Multi-Perspectival Narrative and Feminist Critique

The multi-perspectival and fragmented narrative structure of *Stone Blind* advances its feminist critique by challenging traditional male-centered depictions and exposing the mechanisms through which gender norms are constructed and maintained (Smith, 2025). Through descriptions from gods, mortals, and monsters, Haynes attacks the traditional male-centered depictions found in Medusa's history (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

Table 9: Narrative Strategies and Feminist Critique

Narrative Strategy	Feminist Function	Effect on Gender Construction
Multiple narrators	Diversifies perspectives, challenges single-authority narratives	Reveals constructedness of gender categories
Medusa's voice	Restores agency to silenced female figure	Challenges patriarchal narrative control
Divine perspectives	Humor and irony expose patriarchal power as absurd	Undermines legitimacy of patriarchal structures
Fragmented narration	Reflects traumatic, fragmented nature of gendered experience	Challenges linear, coherent patriarchal narratives
Mythological self-awareness	Interrogates construction of myths and gender roles	Demonstrates mutability of gender categories

Incorporating Medusa's own voice is an important narrative device that takes the decision out of her hands and disrupts patriarchy's narrative control (Zahro, 2023). The myths that have been used traditionally to retell the story of Medusa render her voiceless, as if she were a monster to be fought or overcome, not a person with feelings, fears, and desires (Cixous, 1975). *Stone Blind* is a story of empowerment, giving her the opportunity to voice her emotions, concerns, and desires, and exposing how women have been muted throughout history to perpetuate gender oppression (Smith, 2025). Utilizing the views of the divine, the novel uses humor and irony to show the absurdity of the patriarchy's power (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). The divine triad of Zeus, Poseidon, and Athene are shown as self-important, petty, and absurd, calling into question their divine authority (Creed, 2021). Poseidon's assault on Medusa is mundane, rather than divine; it is caused by a strong man who is entitled to make hasty decisions (Musso, 2025). Athene's revenge against Medusa is due to her wish to maintain social order and because of her insecurity and fear of Medusa (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). Haynes exposes God's duplicity ironically which makes him unworthy of being obeyed and calls for a feminist attitude toward beliefs (Salsabila, 2024).

5. Discussion

5.1 The Construction of Gender through Narrative

The analysis of *Stone Blind* uses Butler's theory to determine the construction, performance and contestation

of gender in the narrative. From the theoretical aspects of Butler, the analysis of *Stone Blind* is used to determine gender as a construction, performance and contestation in the narrative. The novel shows the performativity of gender as it is produced through repeated actions, language and social interaction (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). This understanding deconstructs and subverts essentialist conceptions of gender identity, and provides avenues for new ways of conceptualizing identity and power and resistance (Musso, 2025). The novel's multi-perspectival approach to the narration is a means to reveal the constructedness of gender categories (Smith, 2025). Haynes also provides a range of views, some contradictory, of gender identity and performance, indicating that gender does not form a coherent, cohesive category, but is also a space of contestation and negotiation (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). This narration approach is in line with Butler's argument that there is an inherent instability of identity categories, which can be redefined through performative acts (Butler, 1990; Salsabila, 2024). Additionally, the employment of humor and irony in divine perspectives further weakens the validity of the power structure of patriarchy (Creed, 2021). Haynes shows the absurdity of the natural authority of the patriarch, by making the gods appear frivolous, childish and laughable (Musso, 2025). The critique is also being applied to the larger narratives that remain embedded in the culture and support a patriarchy system as the socio-cultural structures linked to it are historically and socially produced (Collins, 2020; Mohanty, 2023).

5.2 Agency, Resistance, and Narrative Sovereignty

The analysis shows some of the strategies of agency and resistance that female characters employ in the contestation of the control of the patriarch (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). Medusa's reclamation of narrative voice is the strongest act of resistance, one that does not take the identity imposed upon her by the patriarchal mythology (Smith, 2025). Her narrative is a tale of survival, resilience, and empowerment against oppressive systems (Zahro, 2023). Medusa's connection to her Gorgon sisters is a model of a different power, one that resists, cares, and is solidary to others (Collins, 2020). This model rejects the patriarchal notion of power as domination and control, and shows how power can be expressed in terms of connection and mutual support (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). The sisters' relationship is a model of women's community that is stronger than patriarchy, and is a basis for resistance (Musso, 2025). The novel's critique of the power of patriarchy isn't limited to acts of resistance but also includes more structural changes (Mohanty, 2023). Haynes' rewriting of Medusa's tale restores her agency and also serves to question the ideological underpinnings of patriarchy ideology (Cixous, 1975). As Smith (2025) shows, the novel proves that myths are not unchangeable, immovable stories, but are contestable sites that can be re-interpreted for feminist ends.

5.3 Intersectionality and Universalism

The novel's depiction of a variety of female experiences breaks the monolithic nature that has been employed in feminist discourse at times (Crenshaw, 2023). Haynes introduces different female characters, each with unique experiences, perspectives, and means of resisting the patriarchy, revealing that "woman" is not a homogeneous category, but one that is difference and contestation (Collins, 2020). This corresponds with Butler's remarks on universalism in feminism, and her ideas for more expansive and intersectional conceptions (Musso, 2025; Butler, 1990). When analyzed intersectionally with other aspects of identity in the novel, women's experience becomes more complex and important to recognize a variety of voices and perspectives (Crenshaw, 2023). The novel deals with the gender, class, mortality and difference between the divine and the human, as identities are formed from numerous and intersecting axes of power and privilege (Shaw & Kamata, 2025).

5.4 Implications for Feminist Literary Criticism

This research has implications for feminist literary criticism, in the analysis of contemporary retellings of myths (Showalter, 2020). The study shows the possibility of applying Butler's theoretical framework to literary works that can be used to uncover the political and cultural content of literary works, as an example

of how literature can subvert and challenge patriarchy ideology (Salsabila, 2024). The study of *Stone Blind* brings together the themes of narrative, identity and power and demonstrates how literature can be used as a space of cultural opposition and change (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024). The exploration of Haynes's reinterpretation of the Medusa myth adds to the broader discussions about representation, empowerment, and social justice in literature (Smith, 2025). Also pedagogically, the study has implications, as it provides a model for the teaching of feminist literary criticism and gender theory based on the analysis of the contemporary fiction (Bhandari, 2024). The study illustrates the use of theoretical approaches in literary analysis to uncover their political and cultural messages, enriching the study of the link between literature, identity and power (Showalter, 2020).

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

This study has comprehensively examined the concept of gender performativity, agency and resistance in *Stone Blind*, however, some limitations are worth noting (Musso, 2025). Firstly, the study is almost entirely a textual analysis and does not observe reader responses or the wider cultural reception of the novel. Future research may examine how readers of various types read *Stone Blind*, as well as the ways the novel has affected readers' ideas of gender roles and mythological stories (Smith, 2025). Second, the research is mainly on gender analysis and not one that fully addresses other aspects of identity in the novel that converge with genderism, including race, class, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 2023). More explicit intersectional frameworks could be used to further investigate how these multiple dimensions of identity interact in the text (Shaw & Kamata, 2025). Third, the study does not extensively analyze *Stone Blind* in comparison with other feminist retellings of myths (Smith, 2025). Comparing the author's work with other feminist revisionists like Madeline Miller's *Circe*, Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* can shed light on the patterns and differences in feminist mythological revision (Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

Table 10: Future Research Directions

Research Direction	Focus	Potential Contributions
Comparative Analysis	Comparison with other feminist mythological retellings	Identification of broader patterns and variations in feminist revisionism
Reader Response	Examination of how different audiences interpret <i>Stone Blind</i>	Understanding of the novel's cultural impact and reception
Intersectional Analysis	Exploration of race, class, and sexuality in the novel	Nuanced understanding of diverse female experiences
Digital Humanities	Analysis of the novel's reception in digital spaces	Examination of contemporary feminist discourse online
Pop Culture Reception	Study of Medusa's image in contemporary media	Understanding of how feminist retellings influence modern representations

6. Conclusion

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is used to analyze this comprehensive feminist account of *Stone Blind* by Natalie Haynes, which questions the male-dominant narrative, challenges the gender binary, and offers a rethinking of women's agency in a patriarchal power structure (Butler, 1990; Salsabila, 2024). Through the research, it has been showcased how *Stone Blind* not only rescues Medusa's story but also embodies the potential of literature to question and disrupt patriarchy, thus also becoming part of the broader conversation on social justice, gender equality, and the power of narrative sovereignty (Smith, 2025; Musso, 2025). The analysis shows that there are several important findings. To begin with, the novel supports Butler's thesis that gender cannot be taken as a given and natural, but is rather a performance in which a series of actions, linguistic selections, and social gestures create gender (Butler, 1990; Ghaffary & Bayat, 2024).

Haynes uses characters like Medusa, Metis, Athene, and Hera to show how gender identities are created, enacted and challenged in oppressive social systems (Zahro, 2023).

Second, the novel challenges the heteronormative and the heterosexual matrix, revealing how male domination and female subordination are maintained by the operation of the power structures of patriarchy. (Butler, 1990; Shaw & Kamata, 2025) Zeus and Hera, Poseidon and Medusa, Cassiope and Cepheus are examples of relationships that are both formed and enforced by power dynamics in which males dominate and females are subjugated (Creed, 2021). Third, the novel questions the sex/gender binary, arguing that both sex and gender are socio-cultural and not natural or predetermined (Butler, 1990; Collins, 2020). The characters of Medusa, Danaë and Athene reject essentialist accounts of gender identity, and illustrate the potential for other formations of identity, power and resistance (Salsabila, 2024). Fourth, the novel offers a range of strategies of agency and resistance that contest the patriarchal control (Musso, 2025). Butler's (1990) point of view is supported by the reappropriation of voice in Medusa, the sense of togetherness among the Gorgon sisters, and Athene's insistence on her own identity. The reclamation of voice in Medusa, the collectivity of the Gorgon sisters, and Athene's assertion of independence illustrate Butler's (1990) notion of deliberate subversion as a means of resisting and reinterpreting norms.

Fifth, Stone Blind's multiple-storyline narrative approach delivers a feminist critique that counters the depiction of traditional men and reveals the process by which gender norms are formed and sustained (Smith, 2025). Haynes challenges the traditional male-centred representations in Medusa's history through descriptions from gods, mortals and monsters, presenting a textured analysis of the activities of genders and their strategic manifestations (Shaw & Kamata, 2025).

The implications of this research go beyond literary analysis to broader issues of narrative, identity and power (Mohanty 2023). The study shows that modern retellings of myth can serve as spaces of cultural resistance and change, rethinking the patriarchal ideologies and envisioning alternative social arrangements (Collins, 2020). The research will explore the ways in which Haynes reworks the narrative of Medusa and reveal some of the potentialities of feminist reimagining in the rewriting of myths as part of the continued debate about representation, empowerment and social justice in literature (Cixous, 1975; Smith, 2025). To sum up, *Stone Blind* is an important work in feminist literature and the overall effort of rejecting patriarchal narratives (Zahro, 2023). In this complex examination of gender performativeness, agencivity and resistance, the novel reveals the ongoing significance of feminist thought to the understanding of the present day literary discourses on identity, power and liberation (Salsabila, 2024). Butler (1990) and Musso (2025) have shown us in Medusa's story that we have the power to challenge, subvert and imagine alternative narratives that limit us, thereby creating space for more just and equitable futures.

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