

FROM MEDUSA TO MOTHER: MYTHS OF FEMININE MONSTROSITY IN THEODORA SARAH ABIGAIL’S MEDUSAE

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Abstract: The study examines how Theodora Sarah Abigail’s poetry collection *Medusae* (2021) reclaims mythological monsters like Medusa, Lilith, and Latroductus to challenge patriarchal narratives of motherhood. Implementing a close-reading methodology grounded in Creed’s monstrous-feminine theory and Kristeva and Rich’s institutional notion of motherhood, this study analyses seventeen poems that transform maternal “monstrosity” from a pathological notion into a form of resistance. The findings reveal three archetypal reconfigurations: (1) Medusa as the violated “mother” who weaponizes trauma, (2) Lilith as the autonomous mother who refuses subjugation, and (3) Latroductus as the consuming mother who loves through cannibalism. It then shows that Abigail’s mythological framework reveals the violence inherent in idealized motherhood while asserting that maternal rage, consumption, and refusal are mechanisms, not moral failures. By the end, the study contributes an original analysis of contemporary poetry through feminist monster theory, addressing gaps in maternal literature scholarship and showing how millennial voices rewrite classical mythology to articulate unspeakable maternal ambivalence.

Keywords: *Indonesian poetry, maternal ambivalence, monstrous-feminine, motherhood*

INTRODUCTION

The monstrous woman has long served as a cultural apparatus for policing femininity. From Medusa’s petrifying gaze to Lilith’s unapologetic exile, mythological

traditions worldwide have repeatedly cast women who resist domestication as threats to social order. Within the Indonesian literary landscape, this tension carries urgency, shaped by layered histories of colonial gender norms, Islamic patriarchal discourse, and Javanese cultural ideals of the *ibu* (mother) as the embodiment of silent sacrifice and unconditional devotion (Nurmi, 2009; Robinson, 2009). It is against this multivalent backdrop that Theodora Sarah Abigail's debut poetry collection, *Medusae* (2021), intervenes with startling force. Abigail does not merely invoke mythology as ornament; she mobilises the monstrous-feminine as a critical framework to dismantle the myth of idealised motherhood. Her poems articulate what remains most unspeakable in maternal experience: ambivalence, rage, hunger, and grief. Emotions that polite literary tradition has historically rendered silent or pathological.

The study of monstrous femininity has gained considerable traction since Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), which demonstrated how horror cinema codes female monstrosity as a response to cultural anxieties about reproduction, sexuality, and maternal power. Creed's theory, rooted in Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection (1982), describes the monstrous-feminine as that which must be repelled from the symbolic order to maintain the boundaries of the "proper" social body. Applied to poetry, this framework illuminates how Abigail's creatures: Medusa, Lilith, and Latrodectus, function not as cautionary figures but as sites of resistant subjectivity. Complementing this, Adrienne Rich's (1976) distinction between motherhood as an institution versus lived experience provides a critical lens to expose how patriarchal culture suppresses maternal ambivalence. Within the Indonesian context, the feminist poetics of Heraty (1972, 1995) established the right of the woman poet to a fully complex interiority, a legacy that Abigail radicalises toward explicitly monstrous registers.

Scholarship on Indonesian women's writing has produced several important strands of inquiry. Gynocritical studies have examined how female poets articulate resistance through bodily imagery, as seen in Armalina and Hayati's (2022) analysis of Rieke Saraswati's *Catatan-Catatan dari Bulan*, which shows how depictions of menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth voice protest against patriarchal suppression. Similarly, Hartanto and Roifah's (2020) study of Muna Masyari's short stories reveals how Madurese women writers use the female body and psyche to challenge binding

cultural norms. Specifically on motherhood, Mufidah and Hartanto (2021) apply O'Reilly's patriarchal motherhood theory to Dwi Ratih Ramadhany's *Silsilah Duka*, demonstrating how the novella critiques socially constructed maternal expectations in Madurese culture. Most significantly, Toeti Heraty's *Calon Arang* (2000) offers a direct precedent for Abigail's project: A book-length lyrical retelling of the legendary witch as "a woman sacrificed to patriarchy", reclaiming feminine monstrosity as a site of critique rather than horror (Foulcher, cited in Heraty, 2000; Bianpoen, 2022).

Despite these contributions, a critical gap remains. While Heraty's *Calon Arang* engages with Javanese mythological figures, and while Saraswati and Masyari articulate resistance through bodily and cultural critique, no sustained analysis exists of how a millennial Indonesian poet appropriates Western mythological monsters: Medusa, Lilith, Latrodectus, as vehicles for articulating maternal ambivalence. Furthermore, existing studies have not systematically applied monstrous-feminine theory such as that of Creed (1993) and Kristeva (1982) to Indonesian poetry, nor have they examined how such theoretical frameworks require recalibration for the Indonesian *ibu* ideal, which emphasises absorption and silent devotion rather than expulsion. Against this backdrop, the study asks three interrelated questions. The first one concerns how Abigail reconfigures the mythological figures of Medusa, Lilith, and Latrodectus into archetypes of maternal resistance. The second one asks what these reconfigurations reveal about the violence inherent in idealised constructions of Indonesian motherhood. The third examines in what ways Abigail's poetics extend, challenge, or radicalise the feminist literary tradition exemplified by Toeti Heraty. These questions accommodate the analysis toward both the textual particularities of Abigail's poetry and the broader cultural pressures that shape maternal subjectivity in contemporary Indonesia.

This study's novelty is threefold. First, it is the first to apply Creed's monstrous-feminine theory to contemporary Indonesian poetry, testing the framework's cross-cultural applicability. Second, it situates Abigail's *Medusae* within a genealogy of Indonesian feminist mythological retellings, from Heraty's *Calon Arang* to the present, demonstrating both continuity and radicalisation. Third, it contributes to the transnational discourse on maternal ambivalence by showing how a millennial Indonesian poet transforms classical monsters from figures of horror into figures of

survival. By reading Abigail through Creed, Kristeva, Rich, and Toeti Heraty, this study offers a theoretically grounded, culturally specific analysis of one of contemporary Indonesian poetry's most provocative voices. In doing so, it argues that Abigail's mythological framework unveils the violence of idealised motherhood while asserting that maternal rage, consumption, and refusal are survival mechanisms, not pathologies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The maternal body in Abigail's poetry resists assimilation into any single theoretical tradition. Reading her Medusa, Lilith, and Latroductus through feminist monster theory, critical motherhood studies, and Indonesian feminist poetics produces productive failure rather than synthesis. Each framework reveals what another obscures, exposing the limits of the concepts themselves. Maternal monstrosity is not deviation but repressed truth, yet what repression means shifts with each lens.

Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), drawing on Kristeva's abjection, positions the maternal body as the original boundary-threat. Abigail's Medusa and Lilith carry this charge as repressed figures who destabilise domestic space. But abjection assumes a Western subjectivity constituted through expulsion. The Javanese *ibu* ideal operates through silent absorption, refusing the boundary abjection requires. Toeti Heraty's poetics of interiority offers a different grammar: compressing subjective life into spaces emptied by patriarchal expectation. Reading Abigail through Heraty exposes the cultural specificity of Creed's universal.

Adrienne Rich's distinction between motherhood as institution and experience provides a vocabulary for maternal ambivalence. But the postcolonial maternal subject troubles this binary. Collins (1994) and O'Reilly (2010) show that ideology always constitutes experience. For the Indonesian mother, Islamic piety, Javanese cosmology, and colonial gender norms inhabit the body simultaneously. Abigail's rage is thus strategic negotiation, not pre-political authenticity. Rich gives us refusal, but postcolonial critique reminds us that refusal itself is discursively produced.

Heraty's *Calon Arang* (2000) provides the clearest precedent for Abigail's project. Heraty reclaimed feminine monstrosity as critique, establishing the Indonesian woman poet's right to dark interiority without colonial mimicry (Bianpoen, 2022; Foulcher, 2000). But Heraty used Javanese figures while Abigail imports Medusa,

Lilith, and Latroductus. If decolonisation requires indigenous resources, Abigail's turn to Western monsters might seem like re-inscription. Yet her vernacularisation of these figures, estranged from their origins to the point of untranslatability, may constitute something else.

Recent scholarship on Indonesian women's writing has favoured the realist body. Armalina and Hayati (2022), Hartanto and Roifah (2020), and Mufidah and Hartanto (2021) read the maternal body through reproduction and materiality. These methods cannot see what Abigail is doing. Her Medusa does not menstruate, she petrifies. Her Lilith does not give birth, she refuses. Myth speaks what realism cannot, that motherlove and destruction are complements, that devotion and rage share a single tongue.

The mythological figures Abigail mobilises carry incompatible genealogies. Cixous (1975) reclaims Medusa as visible female power. Lilith scholarship (Patai, 1990; Scholem, 1974) frames her as female refusal. Latroductus theory (Ortner, 1974; Young, 1990) reads the black widow as cultural anxiety about maternal destruction. These figures do not harmonise. Abigail's poetry does not resolve this into coherent politics, it inhabits the contradiction. Her Medusa refuses to choose between visibility and refusal, between love and destruction, between Western theory and Indonesian specificity. The monstrous maternal is not a solution but a question that no single tradition can answer alone.

METHOD

This study employs close reading as its primary analytical method. Close reading, sustained attention to word choice, syntax, imagery, repetition, and structural organisation, enables the critic to attend to how meaning emerges through a text's specific linguistic choices (Federico, 2016; Phelan, 2021). The method is particularly suited to poetry, where language density and formal compression demand granular analysis.

The primary data source is Theodora Sarah Abigail's poetry collection *Medusae* (2021), published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. The collection contains approximately eighty poems across five thematic sections. It was selected because it is the first Indonesian poetry collection to systematically deploy Western

mythological figures, Medusa, Lilith, and Latroductus, as a framework for articulating maternal ambivalence, and because it has not yet received sustained scholarly attention.

Seventeen poems were selected for analysis based on three criteria: explicit naming or sustained metaphorical development of Medusa, Lilith, or Latroductus, thematic centrality of maternal subjectivity, and representativeness of the collection's formal range. The selected poems are "Birth of a New Star" (p. 13), "New Life" (p. 11), "After Forty Days, Comes Her First Goodbye" (p. 16), "Good Friends" (p. 30), "Seeds" (p. 40), "Sacrifice" (p. 97), "All Unknown Dimensions" (pp. 100-101), "Routine" (p. 123), "Again Tomorrow" (p. 125), "Initiation" (p. 127), "Déjà vu" (pp. 128-129), "Know Better Now" (p. 133), "Self-Acceptance, and Now" (p. 135), "Begin Again" (p. 149), "Movie Night" (p. 156), "Latroductus" (p. 158), and "Medusa, Queen of Hearts" (p. 159).

The analysis proceeded through three stages. First, both authors read each poem independently, noting recurring images, metaphors, and formal devices related to monstrosity and motherhood. We did this without consulting secondary literature, allowing textual patterns to emerge inductively. Second, we generated initial codes from the textual evidence, such as "forgiveness as extraction," "goodbye as refusal," and "consumption as love," and grouped these into broader patterns through iterative comparison across poems. This process produced three archetypal patterns: Medusa as violated mother, Lilith as autonomous mother, and Latroductus as consuming mother. Third, we mapped these patterns onto the theoretical frameworks of Creed's monstrous-feminine, Rich's institutional motherhood, and Toety Heraty's feminist poetics. Where tensions arose between textual evidence and theoretical expectations, we noted these and incorporated them into the interpretation. Disagreements in coding between authors were resolved through discussion. We used manual annotation throughout, following the traditional close-reading practice of marginal notation and analytic memo-writing (Guillory, 2025).

To ensure credibility, we debriefed the analysis with two independent researchers familiar with feminist literary theory but not involved in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We maintained an audit trail documenting all analytical decisions, including code definitions and revision histories. All claims are grounded in direct

textual evidence, with extended quotations provided in the Findings section to allow readers to assess interpretive validity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Close reading of the seventeen selected poems from *Medusae* (2021) reveals three coherent patterns of mythological reconfiguration, each producing a distinct figuration of maternal monstrosity as survival and resistance. These patterns are organised below according to the archetype that anchors them, with direct textual evidence for each.

The violated mother who weaponizes trauma (Medusa)

The first pattern rewrites Medusa as a maternal subject whose monstrosity results from violation rather than from innate wickedness. In “Birth of a New Star” (p. 13), Abigail structures maternal depletion through anaphoric repetition:

*you sucked the marrow from my bones,
and I forgave you. and you
snapped the coat of every hair on my head,
and I forgave you. and you
pressed all of the milk out of my breasts,
and I forgave you.*

The anaphoric repetition of “and I forgave you” across three parallel clauses builds a cumulative effect of violation: First, the extraction of marrow (life essence); then, the stripping of hair (beauty, identity, even protection); finally, the draining of breast milk (nurturance, the mother’s primary cultural function). Each clause escalates the intimacy and severity of the violation, moving from internal to external to reproductive. Repetition functions almost liturgically, like prayer or incantation, suggesting that forgiveness has become a compulsive ritual rather than a genuine emotional response. The mother does not choose to forgive, she performs forgiveness because the script of idealized motherhood demands it. The poem then pivots: “so now / forgive me. you are the love / my body knows but cannot / speak of” (p. 13). This inversion: mother requesting forgiveness from child disrupts the idealised script of maternal selflessness.

The inversion is jarring. The mother, having been systematically depleted, requests forgiveness from the child who consumed her. This reversal dismantles the idealized script of maternal selflessness by suggesting that the mother’s depletion is

itself a form of violence requiring absolution. The enjambment of “cannot / speak of” visually dramatizes the unspeakability of maternal ambivalence, the words fractured across lines as if the body itself resists articulation. The mother’s body knows love but cannot speak it, suggesting that maternal love exists in a register beyond language, or that language itself cannot contain the complexity of maternal experience. This passage weaponizes the liturgical form of forgiveness, transforming it from an act of grace into an accusation. The mother does not simply endure violation, she demands that the violation be acknowledged and that she be released from its burden.

“Know Better Now” (p. 133) invokes Medusa by name to reveal the systemic logic of patriarchal monster-making:

*to the warrior, every woman looks like a witch, and
all they need is the death of A Medusa.
Any Medusa.*

The capitalization of “A Medusa” followed by “Any Medusa” strips the figure of individuality, positioning any woman as an interchangeable target. The warrior does not need a specific Medusa. Any woman will do. The poem exposes the arbitrariness of patriarchal violence, suggesting that monstrosity is not an inherent quality but a projection of the warrior’s need for a victim. The lowercasing of “warrior” further diminishes the heroic narrative, stripping the figure of its cultural glamour. The warrior becomes a type rather than a hero, his violence exposed as routine and unthinking.

“Latrodectus” (p. 158) extends this bodily inscription: the mother wades “out of the amniotic sac / bleary and alone,” searching for “what she can affix to her body”, reversing the conventional birth narrative to suggest the mother is herself reborn as monstrous. This reverses the conventional birth narrative, where the infant emerges from the amniotic sac, not the mother. By positioning the mother as the one who emerges, Abigail suggests that motherhood itself is a kind of rebirth, but a lonely and disorienting one. The mother searches for something to “affix” to her body, suggesting that identity in motherhood is not given but must be constructed, pieced together from whatever is available. The word “affix” carries connotations of attachment but also of imposition, as if the mother must forcibly attach herself to something to become legible as a mother. A narrative of maternal improvisation replaces the conventional narrative of maternal instinct.

The autonomous mother who refuses subjugation (Lilith)

The second pattern presents a mother who refuses to perform maternity on patriarchal terms. “Begin Again” (p. 149) explicitly names Lilith within repurposed Garden imagery:

*in no other garden is Lilith more
welcomed than the first. you are
as familiar to me as sudden precipitation—as
welcome as the flood after the drought, equally asphyxiating.*

The phrase “equally asphyxiating” refuses resolution, holding welcome and suffocation simultaneously. Lilith is welcomed, but her welcome is suffocating. The comparison to precipitation is ambivalent: Rain is necessary for life, but floods destroy it. This grammatical suspension mirrors the psychological suspension of maternal ambivalence. The mother does not resolve her feelings into either love or resentment, she holds both. The enjambment across “sudden precipitation, as / welcome” creates a visual break that mimics the interruption of easy resolution.

“New Life” (p. 11), the collection’s opening epigraph, states refusal most starkly:

*A girl is born every hour.
Goodbye, says the mother.
Who are you? asks the father.
Every hour, a new curse is unleashed upon the world.*

The mother’s “Goodbye” at the moment of birth constitutes a radical refusal of the script of maternal anchoring. Where the institution of motherhood demands that the mother greet the newborn with unconditional acceptance, Abigail’s mother speaks about departure. The father’s question, “Who are you?” marks his exclusion from maternal subjectivity. He does not recognize the mother’s goodbye as a meaningful utterance because he operates within a framework where the mother’s presence is assumed rather than chosen. The final line, “Every hour, a new curse is unleashed upon the world,” frames birth itself as a curse, a formulation that inverts the conventional celebration of new life. The repetition of “every hour” links birth to mechanical reproduction, stripping it off its sacred aura and exposing it as a repetitive, exhausting cycle.

*I wrapped my babe in a red
swath of my girlhood fury
it protects her from the sun
it protects her from the wind*

Fury here becomes swaddling cloth. The word “swath” carries connotations of cutting and harvesting, suggesting that the fury is not an excess but a measured, purposeful substance, something gathered and applied. The red color evokes both blood and danger, the very things the mother is supposedly protecting the child from. Yet the poem suggests that fury itself is protection. The repetition of “it protects her from” frames fury as a barrier, a layer of defense against the elements. This reverses the conventional logic that positions maternal rage as a threat to the child. Instead, rage is refigured as the mother’s most reliable resource, the only thing she has that is genuinely hers to give. The mother does not protect her child despite her fury, she protects her child through it. The conventional binary between care and anger collapses: Care’s most honest form is not its opposite but its manifestation.

The consuming mother who loves through cannibalism (Latrodectus)

The third pattern centres on Latrodectus, the black widow, and the logic of consuming love. The titular poem “Latrodectus” (p. 158) performs identity dissolution through tripartite self-definition:

*What I am
is a spine ready to be cracked apart with a knife,
full of sweet marrow that stains the lips.
What I am
is a line in the long great endless page of a book.
What I am
is a stitch in my mother’s palm, a needle pressed
tight and firm into the sole of her left foot.*

Each definition is relational, positional, and embedded in another body. The spine is “ready to be cracked apart,” suggesting that the mother’s identity is not autonomous but awaits consumption. The marrow is “sweet” and “stains the lips,” framing consumption as intimate, pleasurable, and marking. The second definition shifts to textuality: The mother is “a line in the long great endless page of a book.” This figuration positions her as part of a larger narrative, but one that is endless and therefore without resolution. She is not the author but a line, a component, subject to the reader’s interpretation. The third definition intensifies embeddedness: The mother is a “stitch in my mother’s palm,” a “needle pressed / tight and firm into the sole of her left foot.” The stitch suggests mending, but also piercing, binding, and pain. The needle pressed into the sole evokes the fairy-tale wound, the point of entry that transforms the body into a site of both

suffering and connection. The repetition of “What I am” at the start of each stanza performs a ritual of self-annunciation, but each annunciation dissolves the self into relation. The mother does not know herself except through the bodies she is stitched into.

“Good Friends” (p. 30) explicitly theorizes love as consumption through a prose poem maxim: “The only way to really love a person, she said, was to consume them whole.” The prose poem form, with its lack of line breaks, mimics the maxim’s uninterrupted flow, presenting consumption not as metaphor but as proposition. The word “whole” is crucial: Consumption is not partial or selective. It is total. To love someone, in this logic, is to absorb them completely, leaving no remainder. This proposition inverts the conventional understanding of love as respect for the other’s autonomy. Here, autonomy is the obstacle to love. Only by annihilating the other’s separateness can love be fully realized. The maxim is attributed to “she,” a reported speech that distances the speaker from the proposition while simultaneously endorsing it. The reader is left uncertain whether the speaker agrees or merely reports. This uncertainty mirrors the ambivalence of maternal love itself: The mother does not know whether her desire to consume her child is love or destruction.

*“The only way to care for them properly,” we say together,
is to devour them whole.”
Consumption—the only method of consummation.*

The wordplay between consumption and consummation argues that total merging is the logical conclusion of the cultural demand for total maternal love.

“Medusa, Queen of Hearts” (p. 159) brings Medusa and Latrodectus together around the menstrual cycle:

*And when I bleed that’s how I know I live
The same way all those mothers did long ago.
The spider spins a story from her long, long silk,
Concealing the hourglass on her underbelly*

The first two lines link menstruation to maternal genealogy. Bleeding is not pathology but evidence of life, a continuity with “all those mothers did long ago.” The repetition of “long” in “long, long silk” suggests an ancient, uninterrupted practice. The spider spins a story, not a web, positioning maternal labor as narrative production. The hourglass on the underbelly, concealed, is the black widow’s identifying mark, the sign of her danger and her reproductive capacity. Concealment suggests that the danger is

not overt but hidden, that the mother's consuming capacity is not immediately visible. The final lines recast maternal biology as an unending act of self-sacrifice.

Discussion

The three patterns identified in the Findings expose maternal monstrosity as a site where patriarchal ideology is simultaneously enforced and resisted. Abigail's Medusa, Lilith, and Latrodectus do not resolve into a coherent politics of motherhood. Instead, they inhabit contradictions that existing scholarship on Indonesian women's writing has not fully addressed.

Creed's monstrous-feminine and Kristeva's abjection position the maternal body as that which must be expelled to secure patriarchal subjectivity. In Abigail's poems, this expulsion is reversed. The mother in "Birth of a New Star" is systematically depleted, yet her demand for forgiveness weaponizes her own abjection as a claim for recognition. The Latrodectus figure, defining herself as "a stitch in my mother's palm," insists on embeddedness rather than expulsion. This complicates Creed's framework in a specifically Indonesian context. Where the Javanese *ibu* ideal demands the mother's constant presence and availability, Abigail's monsters are hyper-visible and hyper-present. Their monstrosity derives not from absence but from a refusal to perform that presence as selflessness.

Rich's institution-experience binary proves equally insufficient. "New Life" presents the mother's "Goodbye" as a refusal of the institutional script, yet this refusal is parasitic on the very structure it rejects. The mother can only say goodbye because the institution demands hello. In "After Forty Days," the mother wraps her child in "girlhood fury," revealing that rage is not pre-institutional authenticity but the institution's own repressed content. For Indonesian mothers, this is especially acute because the *ibu* is not merely a social role but a spiritual ideal woven into Javanese cosmology and Islamic discourse of *bakti*. Refusing the institution means speaking a language the institution itself provides.

These readings place Abigail in direct conversation with recent scholarship, while also exposing what that scholarship cannot see. Armalina and Hayati (2022) read Rieke Saraswati's *Catatan-Catatan dari Bulan* through bodily realism, identifying menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth as sites of protest. Hartanto and Roifah (2020) examine how Madurese women writers deploy the female body and psyche to challenge

binding cultural norms. Mufidah and Hartanto (2021) apply O'Reilly's patriarchal motherhood theory to demonstrate how *Silsilah Duka* critiques socially constructed maternal expectations in Madurese culture. These studies share a methodological commitment to realism and cultural specificity. Abigail diverges from them precisely here. Her Medusa does not menstruate, she petrifies. Her Lilith does not give birth, she refuses. By shifting from bodily realism to mythological allegory, Abigail accesses registers of ambivalence that realism cannot speak. The unspeakable in her work is not conveyed through material facts of reproduction but through figures whose transhistorical weight allows the poet to say what direct confession cannot: That motherlove and destruction are complements, not opposites.

Toety Heraty's *Calon Arang* (2000) offers the closest genealogical precedent. Heraty reclaimed feminine monstrosity as critique, establishing the Indonesian woman poet's right to dark interiority without colonial mimicry. But Heraty worked within Javanese cosmological figures, while Abigail imports Western monsters and vernacularises them with Indonesian domestic details. This raises a necessary question: Is Abigail's turn to Western mythology a decolonising expansion or a reinscription of Western feminism? The answer lies in the poems themselves. Abigail's Latroductus wading "out of the amniotic sac" is not Ovid's spider but an Indonesian mother navigating the *ibu* ideal's specific demands. Her Medusa is not merely Cixous' figure of visible female power but a mother whose violation is specifically reproductive. Her Lilith is not just female refusal but maternal refusal at the moment of birth. These figures are estranged from their Western origins to the point of untranslatability. Abigail thus extends Heraty's legacy into registers that Heraty's era arguably did not permit explicit violence, cannibalistic love, and the refusal of spiritual resolution.

Read dialectically against one another, the three figures expose the impossibility of a single theory of maternal ambivalence. Cixous's Medusa demands to be seen, Lilith demands to leave, Latroductus devours what she loves. Abigail's poetry does not choose between them. The closing assertion that "a curse and a promise are two sides of the same coin" encapsulates this refusal of resolution. Abigail's mother occupies structural positions analogous to the *janda* (widow or divorcee), a figure associated with dangerous independence in post-Reformasi Indonesia. Where the *janda* is punished for perceived sexual autonomy, Abigail's Medusa is punished for maternal failure. Both are

figures of patriarchal anxiety about women who cannot be contained. In a cultural context where women are expected to resolve suffering into *ikhlas*, or sincere surrender, this formal refusal is a political act of survival.

This analysis has three implications. Theoretically, the study demonstrates that Creed's monstrous-feminine requires recalibration when applied to maternal ideals that demand absorption rather than expulsion. Methodologically, it establishes mythological allegory as a necessary complement to the bodily realism that dominates scholarship on Indonesian women's writing. Culturally, it reveals how millennial Indonesian poets are rewriting classical monsters to articulate maternal ambivalence in a post-Reformasi context where conservative Islamic discourse increasingly polices gender roles. Abigail's *Medusae* thus constitutes not a departure from but a radicalisation of the Indonesian feminist poetic tradition, one that refuses the redemptive narratives patriarchal culture demands of maternal suffering.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Theodora Sarah Abigail's *Medusae* (2021) reclaims mythological features: Medusae, Lilith and Latrodectus to articulate maternal ambivalence and challenge the idealised *ibu* figure that Indonesian patriarchal culture enshrines. In doing so, it argues that maternal rage, refusal, and consuming love are survival strategies rather than pathologies.

This study makes three contributions. First, it extends Creed's monstrous-feminine theory to Indonesian poetry, showing that abjection works differently when the maternal ideal demands absorption rather than expulsion. Second, it complicates Rich's institution-experience binary by revealing how Abigail's maternal rage is not pre-institutional authenticity but the institution's own repressed content, a reading with direct resonance in post-Reformasi Indonesia. Third, it positions Abigail within the feminist poetic lineage inaugurated by Toeti Heraty, arguing that Abigail radicalises Heraty's mythological interiority into registers of explicit violence and cannibalistic love that Heraty's era arguably did not permit.

Suggestions

Three directions stand out for future work. A comparative study of Abigail and Dorothea Rosa Herliany would show how two generations of Indonesian women poets handle bodily violence and religious imagery differently. An extended analysis of *Medusae*'s remaining poems would test whether the same patterns hold across the full collection. A reception study with Indonesian mother-readers could investigate whether the monstrous-feminine registers as a survival strategy or an alienating provocation, a question that textual analysis alone cannot settle. Finally, comparison with Filipino or Thai feminist poets who engage related figures such as the *manananggal* or *krasue* would situate Abigail's work within a broader Southeast Asian feminist poetics of monstrosity.

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