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TRANSFORMING MEDUSA

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ABSTRACT

The mythic figure of Medusa is inherently linked with the idea of transformation; both her transformation from beautiful woman to monster as well as her ability to transform all who meet her gaze into statues have become fundamental elements of her story. While both these aspects of her character appear to be late additions to her myth, the idea of Medusa as a figure who both transforms and is transformed nevertheless became canonical and indeed she continues to transform throughout her subsequent history of reception. This paper will seek to understand the early mythic life of Medusa as a transformation before examining the disparate transformations she then endures, from the ancient period to the present day.

KEYWORDS

Transformation, Homer, Ovid, myth, castration, Freud, feminism, Mother Goddess, Nature Goddess, sexuality, power, rape, rage, Goethe.

TRANSFORMANDO A MEDUSA

RESUMEN

La figura mítica de Medusa está unida de modo inherente a la idea de transformación; tanto su transformación de mujer bella en monstruo como su capacidad de transformar a quienes captan su mirada en estatuas se han convertido en elementos fundamentales de su relato. Mientras que estos dos aspectos de su carácter resultan adiciones tardías al mito, la idea de Medusa como figura que transforma y es transformada es canónica y ha seguido en efecto transformándose a lo largo de la historia de su recepción posterior. Este artículo se propone comprender los inicios míticos de Medusa como transformación para examinar después las dispares transformaciones que padece desde entonces, desde la Antigüedad hasta hoy.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Transformación, Homero, Ovidio, mito, castración, Freud, feminismo, Diosa Madre, Diosa Naturaleza, sexualidad, poder, violación, ira, Goethe.

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Though the idea of transformation has become an integral part of the Medusa story and its reception, her metamorphosis from maiden to monster is in fact a late addition to the myth, either the innovation of an individual author—possibly Ovid—or simply an organic development. Yet while late it may be, the connection between Medusa and transformation has nevertheless become canonical, so much so that this element of her story has become one of the fundamental means of understanding the figure and her history. In examining her relationship with transformation, not only will we be charting the early life of Medusa *as* a transformation—which will later be expressed in her myth—but we shall also look at the subsequent transformations the figure undergoes throughout her reception. On the one hand, she becomes for her interpreters the helpless maiden, the threat of castration, and the dangerous seductress, while on the other she is the Great Mother, the rape victim, and the voice of feminist rage. What so many of these modern transformations have in common is that they purport to be, in a sense, un-transforming Medusa, taking her back to her original form. Yet, as will be shown, these interpreters are ultimately unsuccessful in their efforts, and through attempting to find the true meaning of Medusa, they have simply forced her to become a mere reflection of their own beliefs, fears, and aspirations.

Our first source to include a transformation episode in the story of Medusa is Ovid, and it is this account of the myth with which later writers and artists largely interact. However, the figure herself had been slowly transforming for centuries. For the figure that is, in our earliest visual representations, a grotesquely unfeminine beast, complete with bulging eyes, protruding tongue, and even the odd beard, had by c. 450 BCE already begun to be represented on vase paintings as a beautiful woman, a development that would lead to the canonization of the so-called "beautiful gorgoneion" type in the 4th century BCE. And in the literature of Medusa, while Homer knows the Gorgon as a hideous head alone, by Pindar she can be described as beautiful (Pyth.XII.15) and in the 3rd c BCE there may even have existed a tradition wherein she was killed for challenging Athene in beauty.[1] The insertion of the mythical episode wherein the beautiful Medusa is transformed into a monster as punishment for defiling the temple of Athene is therefore not without precedence in the life of the figure herself.[2] While a full survey of Medusa's development throughout the ancient period is beyond the scope of this work,[3] we can nevertheless examine how one particular aspect of the figure, namely the power of her sight, remained essential throughout her transformations before moving on to later treatments.

[1] Pseudo-Hyginus cites Euhemerus as the source of this tradition (*Astronomica* II. 12). See also Apollodorus, *Bibliotheka* II.38-46.

[2] Indeed, it seems very likely that the introduction of this element was in fact an attempt to reconcile the coincidence of the two contrasting Medusa types.

[3] Though see for example Wilson 1920 and Belson 1980.

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In our earliest written references to the Gorgon Medusa, she is simply a terrifying head[4] and it is specifically her grim aspect (Il.XI.36-37), which is the source of the frightening power she possesses. In the Iliad we find her on both the aegis of Athene (Il.V.733-42) and the shield of Agamemnon (Il.XI.32-40), while in the Odyssey the mere threat of her head's arrival is enough to make Odysseus take flight (Od.XI.633-36). In the early iconography of Medusa, her gaze is again emphasised through the bulging eyes and frontality that remain canonical in representations of the monstrous type. That it was Medusa's sight which was viewed to be the specific source of her especial power is indeed confirmed by the fact that the decapitation episode itself can be dated back to the 7th century BCE,[5] with a Cycladic pithos from c. 660 BCE even portraying a Perseus who cautiously averts his gaze while beheading her.

What exact threat Medusa's eyes held at this point we do not know. Does she, already, turn her victims to stone? Apollodorus, who uses the Shield of Heracles and a lost ode from Pindar as his sources for the Medusa myth, claims that the power of petrification was given to all of the Gorgon sisters (Bibl.2.4.2), but our earliest extant mention is, again, in Ovid, so we cannot be certain that this exact manifestation of her power was already current so early in her history. As both of her appearances in the Iliad are on martial wear, it would be logical to deduce that the affect of her gaze is there either to rout the enemy through fear or, more likely, to make them incapable of flight through that same emotion. The iconographical tradition of Perseus chasing a fleeing Medusa, which took hold in pottery painting of the 6th century BCE, only confuses the issue of her powerful gaze. For while these images continue to emphasise both her hideousness and her frontality, they do not seem to fit into the logic of a Medusa who could either rout or petrify her enemies with her gaze; why would such a creature run?

The development which follows—and perhaps overlaps—this period of the running, monstrous Medusa in the iconography confuses the issue even more. For in Pindar's 12th *Pythian Ode*, c. 490 BCE, the Gorgon Medusa has become beautiful. Again, our author does not mention what sort of power she was felt to possess, so any conclusions would be as speculative as those above. Nevertheless, it is clear that this contradictory idea of a beautiful Medusa, whatever its implications, took hold in the imagination of Greek artists, for within half a century of Pindar's reference, the first non-monstrous Medusa appears in our iconography. Intriguingly, this new concept of the beautiful Medusa did not drive out her monstrous counterpart, who continues to appear in our written and visual sources. Neither, though, does the figure of Medusa simply split into two, for the beautiful Medusa

[4] Is the head already at this point decapitated or was the decapitation a later addition to explain the appearance of this disembodied head? See Vernant 1985, as well as Suhr 1965, for a discussion of the gorgoneion as a mask.

[5] Hesiod may be our first written source of the beheading, alluding as he does to the sad fate of the mortal Medusa (*Theog*.275-80).

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continues to play the same mythic role as does the monstrous one;[6] the beautiful Medusas which start to appear in the mid-fifth century are still being decapitated. These Medusas too must hold power in their eyes, and it is exceedingly likely that the power of both types is the same. This progression wherein what was once a hideous monster becomes a beautiful one makes clear that what was seen to be expressed in the figure was not simply the threat of the monstrous itself. What Medusa—in both of her forms—and her terrifying gaze represented to the ancient mind was instead something specifically female.[7]

The issues of monstrousness and beauty, as well as their role as two complementary faces of female power, are eventually brought together—though perhaps not for the first time—in Ovid, who presents the myth of Medusa as a story of two halves (*Met*.IV.1080-94). In the first we are presented with the beautiful priestess Medusa, the later of the two in the figure's history, who is flocked with suitors and attracts the attentions of the sea-god Neptune. In the second, Medusa is the familiar snaky-haired monster who petrifies all who meet her gaze. In between is her rape by Neptune in the temple of Minerva and her subsequent metamorphosis as punishment.

By imposing this dyadic structure on the myth, Ovid has brought out latent meanings within the two seemingly opposing representations of the figure. In this reworking of the Medusa myth, wherein the two different Medusas become two stages of one being, the figure is thus presented as posing a double threat—attraction and petrification—and subsequently receiving a double punishment—transformation and decapitation—all of which are clearly linked. While Medusa's former ability to incite men to action through her beauty is then countered by an ability to petrify them with her hideousness,[8] the loss of the first of these powers through her transformation is then echoed in the loss of the latter through her decapitation and death.[9] As becomes clear, Medusa's parallel powers of attraction and petrification are *both* threats to the male—represented in the narrative by first Neptune and then Perseus—and must thus both be overcome through assertions of male—or in the case of Minerva, masculine—dominance.

However, with this emphasis on the male in mind, perhaps we would be best to view not Medusa's transformation but the rape itself as the mirror of her decapitation. The *rape* of Medusa is something which we meet for the first time in Ovid, and which we do not meet again until the Medusa treatments of later feminist writers.[10] While Medusa's coupling with Poseidon can be linked back to Hesiod (*Theog*.279), there it takes place in "a

[6] Topper actually argues that the beautiful Medusa was found in dramatic performances of the myth, both tragic and comedic, but the reference from Pindar suggests that this was not the case (see Topper 2007).

[7] See Freccero 2003: 115.

[8] The beautiful Medusa is thus the object of sight, while the monstrous Medusa is the seer. See Goodman 2003:272.

[9] For henceforth that power reverts to first Perseus, then Athene.

[10] See Lefkowitz for a criticism of scholars' quickness to incorrectly identify sexual encounters with gods as rape (Lefkowitz 1993).

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soft meadow"[11] with no mention of defilement,[12] so we can positively assert that the rape in Athene's temple was a later addition to the myth and cautiously suggest that it was an invention of Ovid himself. Whatever its point of origin, in the structure of Ovid's account the rape becomes perhaps as essential as the beheading and indeed implicit in that final, violent act through the birth of Pegasus and Chrysaor.[13] Medusa's transformations from beautiful maiden to monster and from monster to emblem are thus both forced on her by males, each of whom is assisted by the masculine goddess whose temple Medusa defiles and on whose aegis she will be placed.[14]

Inherent in these transformation episodes, however, both in the figure's myth and in her history, is the message that a power as great as Medusa's cannot simply be eliminated; it must be transformed.[15] By Lucian, in the 2nd century CE, the subversion is complete, and we are finally introduced to Gorgons—plural—who near-petrify through their very beauty (*De Domo* 19.20). By this time, the beautiful Medusa had become the dominant type in visual representations, but Lucian's treatment still signifies a pivotal stage in the development of the myth. That poet enigmatically points out that Perseus looks at the reflection of Medusa only, for "he knows the price of a single glance at the reality"[16] (*De Domo* 25). Lucian does not elaborate as to what exactly the punishment would be,[17] but the *reality* of Medusa is something which the analysts of the second part of this paper will strive to (re)discover.

The later interpretations—or rather, transformative interpretations, for this is what they ultimately are—of Medusa can be roughly divided into misogynist and feminist accounts, with the former focused on de-emphasising the figure's power—either through demonising it or denying it entirely—and the latter on accentuating it.

We fittingly begin our survey of the misogynist transformative interpretations with an account wherein the enigmatic figure of Greek myth we have just encountered is stripped of all her powers. The 6th Byzantine scholar Ioannes Malalas includes the story of Perseus in his Chronographia, and the Medusa that appears therein has become simply a country virgin, only her wild hair and eyes enduring through this metamorphosis (II.14). Instead, Medusa—or rather her decapitated head, for that is what she swiftly becomes upon

[11] Translation from Hugh G. Evelyn-White 1914.

[12] There is also a rather charming representation of the life of Medusa on a Boeotian Black Figure three-handled bowl from the late 5th c BCE. which shows a monstrous Medusa inviting the advances of Poseidon just as Athene invites the approach of Perseus with the Gorgon's head (Catalogue Number: Boston 01.8070).

[13] More explicit is Nonnus' treatment of the decapitation in the 5th c CE wherein he identifies the sickle of Perseus as playing the role of Eileithyia (*Dionysiaca* 24. 270 ff).

[14] The vase described in n. 10 seems to show this same dyadic**,** cause-effect structure, though without the element of rape.

[15] A message made explicit when Medusa's beautiful hair becomes hideous snakes as she is transformed into a partial reversal of her original form (*Met*.IV.1092).

[16] Translation from H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler 1905.

[17] His references to the tradition of petrifaction are all somewhat wary and non-committal.

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encountering the hero—relies on a male, Perseus, to imbue her with any sort of power, which he does by performing mysteries. Medusa's head is then similarly used by Perseus to conquer his enemies, only to have his rampage of killing and raping[18] end when he is foolishly killed by the head itself. The Suda reports a similar story, though emphasises that this human Medusa is "hideous and ugly,"[19] (μ.406.1) thus doubling her loss of power. These accounts seem like rather inglorious falls from greatness. However, in their presentations of a Medusa who is herself entirely powerless and completely dependent on a male, these sources are in fact emphasising that the fundamental element of Medusa's character is that she is not only a powerful icon but also a representation of a specifically female threat.

When we encounter Medusa roughly 1250 years later in Goethe's Faust, though she has retained a certain level of power, the Gorgon again looks very different to the figure we know from ancient myth. This is primarily because the Medusa of Faust has gained the ability to transform herself at will. She appears to the viewer neither as the hideous Medusa nor as the beautiful Medusa, but as his—and it will always be a "his"—beloved. Goethe's Medusa is then, fundamentally, a deception,[20] and like Malalas' Medusa, Goethe's Gorgon does not really possess any inherent power other than this power to transform—she must appropriate the image of another in order to ensnare her male victims. Even the thin red necklace which so fascinates Faust is itself merely an attractive trick, for in truth it is the cut from her decapitation.

Most damaging of the misogynistic transformative interpretations, however, and doubtless the one most responsible for the reactionary feminist treatments that were to follow, is the theory that the head of Medusa represents not female power but castration.[21] This theory, put forth first by Ferenczi but expanded by its more famous father, Freud, infamously identifies the Gorgon's hideous head as a representation of the female genitals, which are akin to the castrated male genitals. The act of decapitation too is read as a representation of male castration.[22] Conversely, Medusa's powerful gaze—and the petrification that it causes—represents the erect penis, not caused through attraction to the female, but rather simply reassuring the male that castration has not occurred. All of Medusa's power, then, is here related to the male. Even the snaky locks which had by this time become her defining feature become symbols of the penis. While the two accounts

[18] This Perseus is far more unsavoury than his original, not rescuing but raping Andromeda, and sacrificing a young girl to purify a city that he himself had conquered through war.

[19] Translation from Jennifer Benedict 2000.

[20] Her two-fold threats, however, are the same as those made explicit in Ovid, for while Mephistopheles warns that Medusa's "stare congeals blood and almost turns you to stone," Faust is nevertheless filled with desire and wishes to approach her—disguised as she is as his beloved young Margaret (*Faust* XXI.4192-3).

[21] DuBois suggests, however, that castration and penis envy are foreign ideas to Greek thought (DuBois 1988: 13). See however Freud 2001.

[22] This is one of the most striking examples of deflecting the figure's inherent power, for clearly if decapitation represents the subdual one gender's (sexual) prowess, it is that of the female.

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above robbed Medusa of her power, Ferenczi and Freud erased the importance of her femininity, and thus created a Medusa who was not only unrecognizable from her ancient counterpart, but also became a powerful tool against her fellow females.

But as controversial and memorable as Freud and Ferenczi's Medusa has been, she is not the most influential. For the overriding popular image of Medusa in contemporary culture is indeed that of a dangerous seductress, her hissing hair vampish, her gaze both alluring and unsettling. Though this image has only really begun to dominate in the last few decades,[23] already in the 16th century, Natale Conti portrayed Medusa as a hyper-sexed and dangerous female. He attributes her transformation to her wilful violation of Minerva's temple with Neptune, and identifies her as a didactic embodiment of "lust, boldness, and arrogance" (Mythologies X.1077).

Five hundred years later, an even more damaging transformation of Medusa can be found in the paintings of Nancy Farmer, more damaging because, unlike Conti, Farmer clearly believes that her own hyper-sexed Medusa has actually become empowered in her hands. The Somerset-based artist, whose other favourite subjects include devils and fairies—all of them highly sexualized—has a series of paintings dealing with Medusa. Farmer's Medusa is decidedly beautiful, the only signs of her traditional monstrosity being her glamorously snaky hair, occasionally green skin, and the strategically placed locks that cover her eyes. Yet while Medusa's status as a monster is always merely hinted at,[24] the sexuality of the figure is consistently emphasised through the red lips, glasses of wine, and provocative poses that dominate Farmer's Medusa iconography.

Farmer's most telling painting of Medusa—and indeed the image that chimes best with the rest of her work—is entitled "Medusa's Gimps," and portrays the Gorgon as a dominatrix. In this painting Medusa is again presented as highly sexual but more importantly, she is imagined as fully exerting her dominance over males,[25] who are here protected from her deadly gaze by the very masks that identify their sexual subjugation. Though claiming to have discovered a "latent domineering streak" (Farmer 2008) of Medusa's, Farmer has of course simply created her own Medusa, and as flattering as her portrayals of Medusa the seductress are, they are nevertheless negative portrayals. For all that Medusa has maintained through this transformation—other than the obligatory snakes and power of petrification—is her status as a sexual being, which is rooted in the accounts of her wilful defilement of Athene's temple as well as the tradition of her rape by Poseidon. Whether she is presented as dominating men or as merely sexually appealing, Medusa has become—both in Farmer's work and in popular representations in general—a simplification. The history and vivacity of the figure is forgotten, and the Medusa whose

[23] While the Medusa of 1981's *Clash of the Titans* was a horrifying monster, by the 2010 remake she has been transformed into an attractive woman.

[24] Even if only indirectly, as through the statues of her guests visible in the background of many pieces.

[25] In the majority of Farmer's works, it is implied that males normally reject Medusa.

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powerful gaze had the power to petrify all whom she saw becomes herself an object to be viewed.

The profundity of these misogynist transformative interpretations is countered by the *feminist* transformative interpretations which we will turn to next. Indeed, many of these treatments are direct cries to change Medusa *back* into the figure she presumably was before male-centred scholarship imbued her with false meanings.

It was in 1975 that the French Feminist Hélène Cixous announced that we were all looking at Medusa in the wrong way (Cixous 1975). If we were simply to look at the Gorgon straight on, she told us, we would find that she is not castrated, or deadly, but beautiful and laughing.[26] Yet even before Cixous' call to look again, we find interpretations that seek to bring out the positive elements of what had become a largely negative symbol. For example, Christine de Pisan, a Venetian poetess of the 15th century, includes a Medusa figure in *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*. Her Medusa is, just like Malalas', a mortal, but here Medusa is not only still beautiful but she also retains her powerful sight, which can, in de Pisan's work, near petrify all mortal creatures. De Pisan simply (un)transforms Medusa's snakes into curly blonde locks, removes the aggressor Perseus, and her Medusa becomes yet another admirable inhabitant in her ideal city of women.

Yet it would not be until the 20th century that a Medusa-figure to truly challenge the misogynist strain of interpretation would appear: Medusa the Nature Goddess. Erich Neumann's treatment of Medusa in his 1949 *The Origins and History of Consciousness* is one of the pivotal works of this movement,[27] and its thesis is a remarkable one. For him, what the ancient Medusa represented was "The Great Mother" herself, her Gorgon sisters "The Infernal Feminine" from which Perseus can never escape.[28] Far from being castrated, Neumann's Medusa castrates, and the overpowering threat she represents to Perseus qua male can only be eliminated with the assistance of the male-friendly aspect of the female.[29]

For Bowers, writing in 1990, Medusa is again "a perversion of a matrifocal culture's goddess," (Bowers 1990: 217) which she sometimes identifies specifically as the Mistress of Animals or the Snake-Goddess of Mycenae.[30] Yet Bowers is not satisfied in merely showing that this "perversion" occurred; she insists that the figure which was formerly such a powerful representation of the female has also come to suppress her fellow women (Bowers 1990: 217). Indeed, though throughout her work she insists on this identification of Medusa as a debased Nature Goddess, Bower's own discussion of the figure makes clear that it was not any one representation of the female, but the threat of female power in

[26] Lucan's Medusa is also laughing, but the effect is very different (*Phars.*IX.747).

[27] See also Frothingham 1911; Frothingham 1915; Hopkins 1934; and Dexter 2010.

[28] As represented in the plethora of images of the *fleeing* rather than conquering Perseus on pottery (Neumann 1995: 214-215).

[29] For Athene's relationship to Perseus and Medusa, see Neumann 1995: 217.

[30] This latter identification could be brought under scrutiny using Wilson's assertion that Medusa's snaky-hair was a late development (Wilson 1920).

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general, which Medusa represented to her audiences. That, for men of both the ancient and the modern age, Medusa was used to represent what they "most feared: sensual and powerful women," who subsequently had to be conquered (Bowers 1990: 224) is doubtlessly true, yet it is unnecessary to link this powerful image to one single Nature Goddess or Great Mother figure. Indeed, in the introduction to her essay, Bowers asserts that, "Rediscovering and remembering the vitality and dark power of that Medusa can help women to remember themselves" (Bowers 1990: 217) and this betrays her motivation. Having identified Medusa as a figure who has traditionally been used to suppress women, Bowers wants to transform her into one who can empower them.

When we turn to Ann Stanford's striking reworking of the Medusa myth, we see a very different example of how these transformative interpretations can entirely alter its focus. In Stanford's first-person account of the myth, entitled 'Medusa,' which appears in her 1977 *In Mediterranean Air*, Medusa is a beautiful girl, then a dangerous monster, but most importantly she is, in between these two states, a victim of rape. As was discussed above, we have no treatments of Medusa's mating with Poseidon as rape from the ancient world other than that of Ovid. Yet after its introduction, the rape becomes a part of her story, and for Stanford, it is the essential event. Essential because here, in this poem, it is the rape itself which transforms Medusa. Without Athene, with the aid of her own rage alone, Medusa's hair curls to serpents, and her eyes see "the world in stone" (14) What was in Ovid a complicated sequence of events—why would Athene punish a rape victim?—is in Stanford both logical and deeply moving.

Her Medusa's drive for revenge after Poseidon's attack fuels her but in the end it also isolates her. This Medusa wishes to transform back to the beautiful girl whose "grace" inspired the rape itself (6), but is incapable of doing so, not because the metamorphosis is irreversible, but because her own rage will not let her. She thinks "of the god and his misdeed always" (35) and is thus stuck in her monstrous form. How different Stanford's Medusa is from the wanton seductress of Conti, even from the powerful Mother Goddess of Neumann. Yet she is, of course, also very different to the Medusa of the ancient world; the Medusa whose rape and rage we experience through Stanford's narrative is a thoroughly modern woman.[31]

If Stanford has made Medusa just like us, then the two authors in this concluding section have done the reverse and have themselves become Medusa. May Sarton and Emily Erwin Culpepper, writing in 1978 and 1986 respectively, both emphasise, as indeed

[31] Rape is not just a contemporary concern, and it is interesting—though very tendentious—to consider the inclusion of the Gorgon in Euripides' *Ion* (984-1027) with Medusa's rape in mind**.** While we cannot confirm that the tradition of her rape was current in the 5th c BCE, when Creusa, herself a rape victim, plots to use some of the Gorgon's blood to kill Ion, she could be interpreted as using Medusa's rage for herself, as later feminists would do centuries later.

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Stanford does, the rage of the Medusa figure in their works,[32] and it is this perceived element of the figure with which they are able to connect.[33]

In May Sarton's poem, 'The Muse as Medusa' from *Invocations and Mythologies*, the poet's encounter with the Gorgon is a personal one: she sees her alone in an empty room. When she looks at the Gorgon "straight in the cold eye"[34] in the first stanza, Sarton is simply surprised to find that she is has not been petrified by Medusa's gaze, but by the seventh, she discovers that the face of Medusa is, in fact, her own face, "That frozen rage is what I must explore."

Years later, Emily Erwin Culpepper too explores the "frozen rage" of Medusa in 'Ancient Gorgons: A Face for Contemporary Women's Rage.' As with Sarton, Culpepper's encounter with Medusa is again an intimate one. In this work Culpepper describes how, through practicing martial arts, she was able to get in touch with her inner Gorgon, but more importantly it includes an account of how the author was able to ward off a rape attempt through actually becoming the Gorgon herself. Culpepper explains that, after the attack, she revisited the rage she had experienced and says that, "As I felt my face twist again into the fighting frenzy, I turned to the mirror and looked. What I saw in the mirror is a Gorgon, a Medusa, if *ever* there was one" (Culpepper 2003: 244). The implication here is that Medusa is something into which *all* women can transform simply by connecting with their own female rage.

What Sarton, but more urgently, Culpepper identifies as essential about Medusa is her transcendental nature. Implicit in the latter author's description of events is the idea that the vicious, contorted face which so frightened her attacker was the same (female) face with which the (male) founders of the very myth of the figure found themselves confronted—a face which they expressed through the monstrous visage of the Gorgon. While Culpepper asserts that "[i]dentifying with Gorgons is not an unreal, escapist romanticizing of female ferocity" (Culpepper 2003: 242) as Garber and Vickers note, "Culpepper not so much recuperates Medusa as she relies upon her as a means of transformation, self-empowerment, and thus survival" (Garber and Vickers 2003: 238). Culpepper's Medusa is thus not so much what she wants the Gorgon to be—which has indeed been the driving motivation behind the majority of these transformative interpretations—as she is what Culpepper *needs* Medusa to be. Her investment in the figure, and indeed the investment of feminists in general, is far more urgent than Malalas' or Freud's, for she is not looking at an image of Medusa and seeing herself; she is looking at herself and seeing Medusa.

[32] There is some precedence for this in the ancient world, for while the source of the Homeric Gorgon's fearfulness is not made explicit, the pursuit Medusa's Gorgon sisters make of Perseus in Pseudo-Hesiod's treatment is frightening because of their very anger, an emotion which extends to, and is perhaps personified by, the snakes they use as belts (*Sc.*229-237).

[33] Culpepper notes that it was indeed this element of Medusa that led to her being adopted by feminists so quickly (Culpepper 2003: 239).

[34] Following Cixous' advice, perhaps?

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The ancient Gorgon Medusa was not all of the things that she has here been presented as being, but through the various processes of recreating Medusa through interpretation, individuals allow her to yet be all of these things at once. The monster who became the beautiful maiden—who then, through her myth, became the monster again—finds herself repeatedly transformed throughout her history, and with each new incarnation meanings are both lost and gained. Thus looking at her, as Cixous calls for, straight on is now an impossibility, for Medusa has simply become a mirror for subsequent interpreters, and we have become either her slayer or the dread Gorgon herself.

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