

## **The Medusa Complex: the head separated from the body in the psychopathology of negative affects**

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**Abstract:** This text deals with the issue and the image of Medusa as a polyvalent symbol. Its power has been analyzed from different sides, such as myth, symbol of dreams, attractive image and cultural ritual, symbol of possession of a complex for the psyche in the cleft between the head and the body. The relevant aspects of this reflection find their foundation in the psychological clinic, in the psychopathology of affections and emotions, petrified expression of anger that has not been processed, in defense mechanisms of isolation of affect.

**Keywords:** Medusa complex, female anger, psychopathology of affects.

### Introduction

Medusa was the eldest sister of the three Gorgons, the daughters of sea gods, the only one that is deadly. The Gorgons were described as monstrous creatures with the power to turn anyone into stone they met with their eyes. In some narratives, Medusa is described below comely changed in frightening Gorgon by Athena as a punishment for having dared to desecrate a place that is dedicated to her at the temple which suffered the abuses of Poseidon. The hero was destined to defeat Perseus, son of Zeus and Danae, he succeeded with the help of magic items such as the helmet of Hades that made him invisible, the winged sandals of Hermes that allowed him to be quick in movements, and the reflective shield of Athena which allowed him

to avoid eye petrifying her, through a direct view. From the decapitated head of Medusa were born the winged horse Pegasus and Chrysaor, children of Poseidon. However, even after the beheading, the head of Medusa retains its petrifying power and is used by Perseus as a weapon in his adventures, till the delivery to Athena. The figure of Medusa takes polyvalent meanings. It is a symbol of fascination and repulsion, death and life, threat and protection, signaling each time the coexistence of conflicting interpretative models and ambivalent. In art, it is represented as a snake-bird, demon from the severed head (Eastern tradition), the Gorgon (tr. Gorgos, terrible), but this comes in its duplicity as a healer and destroyer of a part made in the shade. It is the decapitated head which is the guardian of the dead, patron of forbidden places, the threshold.. It produces monsters and his blood is related to the gorgonian coral red of the Mediterranean. However, it does not attack, it defends itself, making it immobile. Only a man who makes an unusual approach, disguised, reverse, manages to kill her, the approach is not to understand but to destroy it (Rose, 1928; Culpepper, 2003).

#### Psychological elements of the myth

Its etymology regarding the act of governing (tr. Medo , Government) is closer to the tradition of the Greek mythological creature which subterranean monstrosities of Hades and his nature terrifying and frightening, the gorgon female (Kerényi, 1951; Dexter & Goode, 2002). The name itself, Medusa, the guardian, refers to protection. Both the bird and the snake are symbols that embody the representation of the birth as oviparous, they molt and lose skin, such as in regeneration. The snake is linked to the aspect of the chthonic goddess guardian, a symbol of opposite principles of male and female, the completeness. The monstrosity of this feminine nature has ancient roots, therefore, afraid for his shadow side, his anger, his complexity, his guilt for the ability to seduce, so his hair, a symbol of seduction, are punished brand of deformity with snakes. The unconscious seduction is punished by the element of rational Athena, a way in which rationality is defended by the power of irrational instinct (Belson, 1980; Gershonson, 1989).

It is scary from his head, his face, his gaze from which escapes, staring, petrifying (fr. Méduser, petrify) symbolically destroys the look that kills, can incarnational bearer of the evil eye in the Western tradition. It petrifies and makes a fossil state, thus ceasing the vital activity of a man (Arasse, 1997). However, it is also a beautiful young woman capable of attracting men in the Greek-Roman tradition. He the guardian is often associated and surrounded by snakes. His appearance that recalls the deadly regeneration is symbolically in his blood, fatal poison and salvation, whereas the female is a symbolic cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It marks the regime and the domination of women, its apotropaic function that protects from evil was brought to an end by the male Perseus in Libya with the cutting of the head (Ovidio, 1979).

This masculine principle kills her while she sleeps and thus avoids the magic and the power of his gaze through the protective instrument par excellence of the hero who is his shield. The patriarchal societies have shifted the divine feminine slavery; monstrous feminine figures represent bearers of death that generate fear. She is punished, raped and branded from the monstrous transformation in hair, despite being the victim of the violation of the lord of the sea in the temple of Minerva (Arasse, 1997; Garber & Vickers, 2003).

#### The isolation of affect: Psychopathological notes

The deprivation of his head from the body is dangerous, monstrous, pay for his powers posters, frightening his female great. The head severed from the body separates into two directions the spirit (wisdom, consciousness) and the corporeal (ego, sexuality) and its link with the horse that generates (winged horse) in her role as mother, the alloy with the semblance of equine the centaur as used in some iconographic representations. The decapitated head leads us to the fear of castration of a devouring female. Freud S. (1922) in his essay aluminum alloy emasculation of the genitals, the terrible mother. It petrified men on the other hand making his face a mask of death,

it cannot in itself constitutes a grave, symbolically incubator uterine life that binds the two worlds. The fear of female sexuality triggers fear in humans. The face that laughs seals the grimace reminiscent of the anger withered and frozen, power of aggression and anger which is not canalized properly.

What is the fate of a man that turns into a stone by the aggressive look of the feminine; he is frozen, dried up, and silenced.

Thus the "Great Goddess", the "Mother awful" comes to life between readings of the feminine archetypes (Jung, 1972). In an ancient mythology we find focus on the head of Medusa isolated and loses the fullness of its original power, death of goddess of the life cycle and a rebirth of a lifeless head.

The archetype of the mother is at the base of the mother complex and undoubtedly the presence of a real mother, good or bad which greatly affects the formation and evolution of the human being. This does not feel to be understood, or rather heard, here the mother is experienced by the child as dead and then show up in the personality dotted with these negative experiences, the archetype of a negative mother, the demonic symbol of the Terrible Mother. In its negative sense the mother archetype may mean something secret, inner darkness, the abyss, the world of death, which devours, seduces, poisons (Jung & Hinkle, 1912; Jung 1963).

The witch is a symbol of Mother Nature who gives birth to her children, in the dark, in the chaos, in symbiosis where there is no individuality, but where everything is mixed indiscriminately. The witch, even in the world of fairy tales, lives in the dark forest of the unconscious, has attributes of death, skulls, human bones etc. and wild energies and powers, it communicates with the two worlds which can be blind or have a view over the human, but lives in an inner world within which it is trapped. Archetypal symbols are also observable in the graphical representations of the self (Settineri S. et al., 2015).

Often in fairy tales, the starting point towards finding is the hero who is abandoned by the mother, a succession of misfortunes, such as the arrival

of a stepmother who does not give love. From here, from this suffering, begins the long journey of the hero or heroine in search of its shade to be able to integrate into consciousness (Jung, von Franz, Henderson, Jacobi & Jaffe, 1964, Von Franz, 1972).

The isolation of affect, as a defence mechanism, it is also observable in relation to traumatic aspects of patient's life, as has been observed in a single case study Rorschach protocol of a deaf patient, in which the jellyfish response at the X table was related to the aspects that collide the interpersonal sensitivity (Mento C., et al., 2016).

Jung considers the witches as one of the projections of the Anima, that is, the unconscious man wrapped in feminine, thus emphasizing the importance to unveil these dark forces of the unconscious, making them rise to the clarity of consciousness, feelings, actions, bringing to light or killing them, so that the witch does not continue to live within us through her thousand disguises and many seductions in darkness and secrecy (Jung, 2009).

The witch embodies the desires and greed and removes the unconscious because they are incompatible with the ego and are the antithesis of the image of the idealized woman. It is the embodiment of a hindered evolution, where creative energies are not yet covered instinctual and domesticated: the witch you can win just by using these forces under the rule of conscience in performing an action of integration and exclusion by itself. This is the meaning of the struggle with the witch and the challenges to overcome that can symbolize the evolutionary dynamics of the individual and the self realization.

Medusa needs to be looked into the mirror which is so terrible to enter the circle of her own destructive magic. The eyes may also allude to a greater attention to work less, in the depths of the unconscious, in bringing to light. The witch, in the case of the Medusa's mother is fruitful, it is not atrophic but a living force, this means that the witch has hidden deeply within herself the positive aspects, the treasures to be conquered once and freed from its magical influence. For this is seductive and destructive, but when the hero

kills the witch split elements one feels released and purified through the trials and the witch asks for the death penalty and this means that this return is a regression to the mother complex. In clinical phenomenology it is possible to find a woman with anger on her face turned to stone. However, the principle of the petrification of emotions also occurs in the body and is the basis of the phenomena of somatization. This cycle is aggressive and is typical of its repetition (repetition compulsion), which is the basis of symptoms and a far cry from his resolution.

This transformation allows for reflection on how this complex mechanism of isolation affects.

The nature of Medusa is Earth which is linked to the depths of the earth; she defends a territory and tries to find her contact with the shadow, the unconscious. The lesson of the myth reveals how it is possible and important to bury this head and bury the magic of the feminine through the integration of monstrous evil and beneficial characteristics. It provides a better and more therapeutic split oppression of either principle. In this sense it is possible to read the disease as the result of a disruption of the balance between body and spirit.

The jellyfish is also a symbol. Dreaming of a jellyfish swimming with her characteristic button movement also leads us to reflect on the aspects of stinging that hurt and block the will. It is disturbing and fascinating at the same time, whose gelatinous and transparent structure is combined with an ethereal beauty along with the sinuous movement. Other animals with tentacles, like the octopus and the squid, although more consistent and less attractive in appearance, express the same symbolism being grabbed and "trapped" close in a deadly embrace, but also a sensitive chance to be "burned", "bumped" near misses, "paralysed". It has to do with issues that block personal will, which, although detrimental fascinate, which belong to the dreamer's personality and behave like "jellyfish inner" which is forcing and irritating.

Just as in the myth, Medusa represents the darkest impulses of the psyche, the monstrous sinful, deformed that are kept secret, but whose power, once revealed, is able to "paralyse" able to annihilate the will, and destroy every desire for change. So often in dreams, it becomes a symbol of a previous fault fixing and focuses attention without allowing evolution, healing or acquittal.

The dreamer becomes so judgmental in its function that he makes Medusa a symbol of diversity and uniqueness (Jung 1984).

In this sense, the cut of the head means to break down this fascination and react to paralysis of the soul and the feeling of anger that makes it firm and anchored the slaves of the past.

The aspects described are related to the development and self realization and when a good mother "dies" turning into abandoning one bad mother then begins a long process that anticipates the birth of the hero. The real external attack by the collective is implemented towards those who try to proceed independently. This form of collective persecution and its laws are often linked to the hero and the strenuous tests that he must pass which worth the success and life.

The protagonists of fairy tales deal with the witch or the monster which means facing their own shadow, overcoming the limitations of the ego and consciousness expanding the more hidden depths that lie great treasures, which relate to the intense force, numinous, punctuated by archetype of the Great Mother. Face it and win it means tapping into a vital and fecund female benign albeit from roots and powers of hell unknown, put people in contact with the possibility of integrating the wound, the mark of having known the divine secrets and wisdom to integrate unconscious contents "divine" in consciousness. From the cut off head the children that were born returned to the homeland. This sacrificial element of the split between head and body carries within itself the germ of individuation of the Self. Pegasus the son of Medusa was killed by Chimera with the help of Bellerophon, which is the principle of overcoming the complex.

## Discussion

Medusa involves the destruction of the self. The suffering is due to the consolidation of the ego and the very possibility of extending the boundaries of consciousness.

The figure of the witch is not only linked to the soul but also contains aspects of animus. But when the whole Animus takes possession the risk of a split between the conscious and unconscious ego functions is not able to withstand, a state of absolute unconsciousness with respect to the living reality of the complex in place. Here the appearance of the witch animus coincides with a diabolical figure, which contains in itself the fall of the head of Medusa, the forces of disintegration of personality and a total slavery which is a stubborn unconscious. Such behavior studied the more destructive side of the complex, a form of the hopeless Mother-Death that does not contain the possibility of rebirth as it coincides with the absolute end.

To enter into the circle of the complex runs the risk of being in the dark of the unconscious forces, the ability to use destructive man so sadistic at the cost of destroying it and not for a burst of evolution within. The negative animus may coincide with perhaps demonic which does consider being unconscious and not allow a person to live creatively with a possibility of integration. The possibility of this reflection is not in consideration of the mythology which on literalization can create metaphors for understanding psychological phenomena.

Psychologically, this means being invaded by the contents of the unconscious, enter the psychosis, pure invasion of a Logos divorced from the reality of the body and its emotions and feelings, such as the insulated head of Medusa.



The continuity between the two different, almost opposite interpretations of the character (head terrifying / seductive woman) is marked by a common theme: the night. The archaic Gorgon that petrifies is a nightmare, a ghost of darkness. Even in this case, however, the night seems to be the only time one can see the Gorgon, the only one which kills her. His expression embodies the feminine anger that every culture seeks to suppress, making the victim.

Anger has always been considered an expression that spoils the beauty of women. Tend to curb it, avoid it and do not know how to handle it. The usual representation of the feminine soul is associated with all aspects of opposites, such as availability and calmness, subjection. The lesson of the myth can lead to consider the possibility of accepting shadow aspects of ourselves, such as aggressiveness and anger. The break with the unconscious generates suffering, separates the head from the body, and generates incurable diseases, such as the fate of Medusa.

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