

MEDUSA: THE FACE OF AMBIGUITY AND RESILIENCE

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Medusa: The Face of Ambiguity and Resilience

In the modern day, many have heard of or seen Medusa through Hollywood movies such as, “Clash of the Titans,” (2010) “Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief,” (2010) “Medusa,” (2015) and many more. However, not many know the story behind the beautiful mortal who was a survivor of rape and punished for it. While the representation of the gorgon Medusa today has been posed widely as a monstrous mythological creature, the injustice and oppression she faced is often hidden by the mask with which she was wrongfully cursed. The eyes of Medusa are not on trial here, but the eyes of those who scrutinized her name out of self-interest and power are. Medusa is a complex character who was not born a demon, but was made to be viewed as one, by a misogynistic society. By further evaluating the ideological functions of Medusa, we will uncover who the gorgon was and how her identity has been masked by the scales of serpents. Her demon-like body is quite paradoxical as it has been used to define patriarchal power in ancient Greek time and serve as an empowering icon for many feminists in modern times. The literary works provided have explored how the serpents served more as punishment of being a woman rather than a punishment for those who gazed upon her. By understanding that the eyes which turned men into stone are not something to be wary of, it can be inferred that a misogynistic society imperiously mutilated Medusa's complexity by means of power and subjectivity.

Although many have seen the image or heard of the great gorgon Medusa, the story of her becoming often goes unheard. The Greeks have two stories of Medusa and I will be analyzing Ovid's story of the myth which pertains to the relationship of Medusa

and Athena, and women in a patriarchal society. Athena, the Olympian goddess of wisdom and military victory, was the daughter of Zeus and one of the three virgin goddesses. By revealing the relationship between Medusa and Athena, we discover that both men and women were at fault for the injustice and oppression that Medusa faced. Medusa served as a priestess for Athena, which required her to commit her life to celibacy and total devotion. Since Athena was known as a virgin goddess, it was required that all her priestesses be virgins as well in order to be truly devoted to her and abstain from putting anyone else above her. Athena also chose to remain a virgin goddess because the physical action of a man penetrating a woman and ejaculating inside of her meant that the woman's identity was lost and contaminated. Additionally, every word spoken were not words of her own, but words of the man she laid with. So, in order to keep her identity and individuality as a goddess, she abstained from having sexual intercourse with men, or as some Greek myths state, had intercourse with men but hid it from the public to keep her image.

It is important to clarify the meaning of the word 'virgin' as it had a different meaning in Ancient Greece than today's modern definition. According to the Neokoroi, also known as the Temple Keepers, to the Athenians "sexual abstinence was an after effect of virginity, not the literal definition of the word" (p.1). In the modern day, the hymen is one of the many ways we are able to tell whether or not a woman is still a virgin because it is most often torn during first sexual intercourse. However, the hymen had not yet been believed to exist during the time, and virgin births were considered a normal occurrence rather than a miracle. Sissa writes, "Penetration by a male organ deflowered a virgin, yet the event existed only if it was found out by family and society or revealed by

its consequences: the parthenic state depended on sexuality, hence on the body, yet was also a purely negative fact” (Sissa, Greek Virginity, 79-83). So, in this sense, a woman could still be considered a virgin while being sexually active, so long as it remained hidden from the public. Therefore “virgin births” became very common among the Athenians and Athena made it a requirement for those she called her priestess.

Among the Athenians, Medusa was once considered to be one of the most beautiful women in Athens before she was wrongfully cursed. In fact, her beauty was most often compared to Athena's and was so mesmerizing that she had men swooning at her feet for days on end. Although beauty is considered a blessing, it is the very thing that brought Medusa to her downfall and evidently became her curse. Unlike her other two gorgon sisters she was a mortal, unable to protect herself like they could. Due to the constant swooning of men, Medusa fled to the temple of Athena in search of guidance and protection from those wanting sexual pleasure. Athena listened to her cry for help and offered Medusa a chance to serve as one of her priestesses. Medusa accepted this offer and became known as one of the most beautiful priestesses to serve Athena in her temple.

The temple of Athena was a sacred place used by many individuals who would seek wisdom and protection, especially those who were considered priestess. Unfortunately, this happened to be the place where her innocence and purity were stripped away. It was not her own beauty that betrayed her or left her at a disadvantage, but the lusting gaze of a God who absent-mindedly chose to use her beauty to justify his evil doing. In order to dishonor Athena in the most vengeful way possible, Poseidon exploited Medusa by raping her inside the sacred temple of Athena, which automatically

broke her oath and released her from her position as priestess to Athena. In the book, *Metamorphoses*, Ovid states, "[Medousa (Medusa)] was violated in Minerva's [Athena's] shrine by the Lord of the Sea (*Rector Pelagi*) [Poseidon]. Jove's [Zeus'] daughter turned away and covered with her shield her virgin's eyes. And then for fitting punishment transformed the Gorgo's lovely hair to loathsome snakes" and vanished Medusa to a secluded island (*Metamorphoses* 4. 770 ff). The curse was made so that no man would ever dare look upon her again. Instead of pursuing her for her beauty they pursued Medusa for the sole purpose of killing her.

However, it is important to note that Athena's rage stemmed from more than Medusa breaking her vow, it was who aided in the breaking of her vow. She had previous conflicts with her uncle, Poseidon, as they competed against one another to win over the affection of the Greeks. Athena won the Greeks over with her gift of the olive tree and thus the Greeks named the city after her, causing tension between the two. So, it can be inferred that the curse of Medusa was not only caused by the immoral action of another taking away her virginity, but also caused by the rivalry between her oppressor and her goddess. Just as Medusa was powerless to fight against Poseidon raping her because of her mortality and his domineering powers, it can also be seen that she was powerless to the myth of her "demonic" character. It was later that Athena aided Perseus in the slaying of Medusa and in return used her head as part of her well-known shield to ward off her enemies. Because of the influence that the Greek Gods, and Hollywood producers have had, Medusa's appearance was and still is almost impossible to change in the eyes of many. With her "combination of human and animal features, and her ability to turn people to stone with a single glance," in almost every story, and movie made, it has

become a custom rather than a true representation of her significance (The Changing Faces of Medusa, p. 1). The significance of how she is represented compared to the many other representations of those who share similarities is quite paradoxical.

Female figures belonging to Indo-European cultures are very similar to Medusa but are also seen in a different light. Some of these figures in the Indo-European culture are the Indian Mother Goddess Kali who brought death to the ego and is known for her bloodlust; in England Sheela-Na-Gigs who had powers of creation and destruction; and the Indic Lajja who represented modesty and creativity. The Indian Mother Goddess Kali is powerfully terrifying, as she is most often pictured naked with four arms, blood dripping down her body, dancing on the body of her husband, wearing human body parts as jewelry (see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. A statue of the Indian Mother Goddess Kali. Kali: Black earth-mother goddess. http://library.artstor.org.libproxy.txstate.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001769635. Web. 26 Mar 2018.

She is described as, “having an awful appearance: she is gaunt, has fangs, laughs loudly, dances madly, wears a garland of corpses, sits on the back of a ghost, and lives in the cremation ground” (Kripal, p.24). She is both a wife and a mother, but she is also an “immodest, aggressive, and grotesque wife and a terrifying, violent and self-absorbed mother” (Dalmiya, p.126). Here we have a mother that is both abusive and terrifying and is viewed to be a mother that stands her ground and steers away from the traditional characterizations of motherhood and wife. As daunting as the Goddess Kali sounds, she was praised and worshipped within the Indian culture seen as a “beautiful ever-caring mother” to many. She was not a person to be afraid of but to be thankful for, whereas in ancient Greek culture, Medusa was feared and seen as a disfigured creature to be wary of. Moving onto another iconic figure is the Sheela-Na-Gig stone carvings that appear predominantly on religious sacred buildings and come in various styles. These carvings are of naked women that expose their genitals, which some may call overly exaggerated or even supernatural (see fig. 2)



Fig. 2. Rahara Sheela na gig from County Roscommon, Ireland. public domain. “Sacred Vulvas and Female History: Interview with Starr Goode.” *Margaret Merisante - MythWoman*, 27 Jan. 2017, www.mythwoman.com/sacred-vulvas-and-female-history-interview-with-starr-goode/.

Sheela-Na-Gigs’, also referred as a “bald hag,” origin and meaning has been debated by many scholars. The word ‘gig’ in Scottish Dictionaries is defined as vulva, which then interprets to another name of hers, ‘Hag of the Vulva.’ However, some scholars would like to argue that ‘Sheela’ means femininity and others translate the word to ‘spiritual woman.’ It becomes quite questionable on why the carving of a naked women with an enlarged vulva would be displayed throughout Christian churches and used for battle, sexual pleasure, to name ships, dance tunes, and buildings. A Sheela-Na-Gig is described as, “the crow of the battlefield who ravages but also grants victory. A protectress of the land, she bestows both sovereignty and victory by mating with the male whom she energizes. By having intercourse with the hero, the goddess of war and sovereignty

transmits to him, in an active manner, her energies of kingship and war” (Goode, p.38). Similarly, to Medusa, Sheela-Na-Gigs’ are used for both battle and sexual pleasure, yet she is both praised and highly favored for it. There is a double standard when it comes to sexual desire in both stories. Unlike Medusa’s experience, sexual pleasure in this sense is praiseworthy even though it is out of want and desire rather than rape. In addition, Indic Lajja also known as the shameless goddess is naked in all her iconography with her vulva in clear sight and was considered to be a part of a cult rather than a deity. Her image is often shown with lotus flowers and is a symbol of wealth and abundance. The Indic Lajja is displayed in many temples most often in a squatting position but has also been seen standing up as well (see fig. 3).



Fig. 3. A stone carving of Lajja-gauri, from Alampur. Lajja-gauri, from Alampur. c. 700. Alampur, Site Museum. http://library.artstor.org.libproxy.txstate.edu/asset/ACSAA_MICHIGAN_1039429614. Web. 26 Mar 2018.

When the similarities of these goddesses are pointed out, it is undeniably clear how the story of Medusa took such a dramatic turn compared to their own. All these figures bring good fortune and protection to the temples that they are placed in, “but of all of these figures, only Medusa was viewed as a monster, and only Medusa needed to be decapitated and destroyed” (Dexter, p.26). If women analyze the story and “look at the Medusa straight on,” they will then discover that Medusa is not a deadly figure to be afraid of, but one of resilience and beauty to be admired. She faced personal trials, criticism, and punishment from the one being she revered most. Instead of Athena protecting her loyal priestess, she looked the other way and blamed the victim rather than the abuser. The monstrous image of Medusa exists only because it has been scrutinized by the lustful gaze of men and society’s failed attempt to understand her story.

Again, this loyal priestess was considered to be a beautiful goddess before her locks of serpents were bestowed upon her. So why has Medusa fallen from sublime all-powerful Goddess, wielder of the cosmic life cycle, to demonized symbol of irredeemable evil (Corbett, 1996, p. 203), as iconographic and mythological evidence would suggest? Most importantly, “why should reclaiming a lost history and meaning of the archaic archetypal figure of Medusa hold any relevancy for modern psychology. Rather, given that evidence points to a radical re-visioning of a psychically active core archetype, as well as the excising of a primordial form of human cognition, this inquiry becomes a critical component of understanding the totality of higher consciousness” (Root p.15). This does not mean that all architecture or mythological meanings of Medusa are wrong or do not hold some truth to them. For a living myth as Root says, “is not reductive, but rather as inclusive as a hologram wherein the whole is contained in the

parts” (Root p.15). Contemporary novelist Sue Monk Kidd (1996) reveals her discovery of Goddess within psyche:

To my surprise, I’d learned that in ancient times the snake was not maligned or seen as evil but rather symbolized female wisdom, power, and regeneration. It was associated with the ancient Goddess and was portrayed as her companion. The snake was perhaps the central symbol of sacred feminine energy. Frankly, at 207 the time, this made for uneasy reading. I glossed over those references. I think it was the word Goddess. It’s hard to describe the sort of anxiety the word created in me, as if the word itself were contraband. It seemed to violate a taboo, so deep and ingrained, I felt stabs of irrational fear just reading about it, as if any minute witch burners from the sixteenth century might appear and carry me off. (pp. 71- 72)

Holding that picture of Eve and the serpent that day, I realized how significant and sad it is that in the story Yahweh forever placed enmity between Eve and the snake. Taking symbolic history into account, we might say that Yahweh placed enmity between Eve and her deep Feminine Source, her wisdom and power. What did it mean spiritually and psychologically for a woman to be at odds with that source? Wasn’t this another way of portraying women’s severed connection with their feminine soul? I came to realize that Eden is a wounded geography within women’s lives, that part of my journey would be returning to this painful inner ground and redeeming the snake in my own psyche. (Kidd, 1996, p. 73)

Despite Medusa's story being misrepresented, the power of Medusa holds much more meaning than just turning men into stone. The snakes on her head were used as a weapon but in a way, one would not think. It can be inferred that the real reason behind the gazer's turning into stone was not because one gazed into the eyes of Medusa, but because they gazed at their own reflection and are struck by their own agonizing terror. This interpretation is insightful because rather than putting all the blame on Medusa, it puts the blame on the gazer. When her powers are viewed in this light it could be understood why she was given these powers in the first place. It was through Poseidon's impure actions and thoughts that Medusa was raped. Her powers served as a protest and her innocence is recognizable due to the tension of the effects of her powers correlating to the man's recognition of himself. Medusa is hidden behind a mask that captures the powerful gaze and "when you are bewitched by it, it is yourself, yourself in the world beyond, the head clothed in night, the masked face of the invisible that, in the eye of Gorgo, is revealed as the truth about your own face" (Vernant, p.136). The power of Medusa turning men into stone is only part of the equation. The full answer lies within the individual that accentuates that power to the point where they are subjected to it. Vernant emphasizes how "in Gorgo's face a kind of doubling process is at work. Through the effect of fascination, the onlooker is wrenched away from himself, robbed of his own gaze, invested as if invaded by that of the figure facing him, who seizes and possesses him through the terror its eye and its features inspire" (p.137). According to Rainer Mack, "the gaze of Medusa does not simply challenge your own status as subject to the gaze but robs you of it" (p.575). The fact that Medusa held such a dominant power in patriarchal

culture intimidated men and revealed the animosity and entitlement men felt towards women.

Although the image of Medusa has been misconstrued in a patriarchal society, it has been adopted by many women as a symbol of protection and “female rage,” because rather than a curse they thought her scaly locks to be a gift. For she was a beautiful woman who held a very positive role, but when she was faced with her horrible tragedy she was confronted with endless hardships brought upon by male actions. Serpent locks were what protected Medusa from the eyes of lustful men and saved her from any further incidents of rape. Medusa is highly revered by feminists today and demonstrates “how the same image that has been used to oppress women can also help to set women free” (Dexter, p.38), for she was a mortal who exemplified empowerment and freedom from oppression by punishing the men who devalued and objectified her body. Or as Patricia Monaghan states, “rather than being a bleeding image of female disempowerment, Medusa may be read as...one of the most ancient European symbols of women’s spiritual abilities... [and] an empowering image of feminine potential” (Monaghan p.244).

One example of this empowerment can even be a logo on the name brand items that women purchase today such as Versace (see fig.4).



Fig. 4. The Versace brand logo, from Versace, Gianni. "Versaces Medusa Myth - The Medusa Story | US Online Store." *Versace*, GIVI Holding S.p.A., www.versace.com/us/en-us/world-of-versace/brand/the-medusa-story/?selectedSubCategoryId=2351#2351.

Versace uses Medusa's head on his logo but by means of representing fashion, beauty, and seduction. David Leeming explains that the head of Medusa in Versace's products "does not frighten away enemies but is intended to immobilize her viewer for the seller's 'kill," and "to fascinate and lure his consumer 'victims.' Versace's Medusa is not the disfigured Gorgon; she is the beautiful Medusa that existed before being transformed into a monster" (p.82). This statement holds so much belief and power that the official Versace website has a section labeled 'The Story of Medusa' that includes chapter contents, which unmask Medusa and reveals why he chose her symbol. Here Medusa is redirected from her male made image and is used in a powerful way to eradicate the misconstrued view that has been passed down for centuries. Rather than fearing her power Leeming, Gianni Versace, and other woman have glorified it and understood how her power has been overshadowed by a patriarchal society.

She also serves as a feminist icon in 20th century poetry. Carol Ann Duffy is quite famous for her work in feminist poetry, specifically for her poem *Medusa* which explores the theme of jealousy and anger. The anger that Medusa feels for Poseidon is emphasized through the harsh wording used; ‘shattered,’ ‘filthy,’ ‘stank.’ The rhetorical question ‘Are you terrified?’ is very effective and powerful within the poem because it shows Medusa becoming more powerful than man. Without hesitation or waiting for an answer, the next line states ‘Be terrified’ showing that Medusa knows of her strength and instead of being commanded by man it is her that commands and overpowers the man in this poem. The poet describes the transformation of Medusa as she becomes more comfortable with her power and uses this new found power to become stronger, and in other ways is now able to dominate any man that has caused her to feel such hatred. Duffy ends the poem with ‘Look at me now’ which is both short and powerful. In the end Medusa is no longer a victim but a survivor who is claiming her superiority by daring the man to face her straight on, commanding him to his death. Medusa is used as a metaphor and is linked to the theme of feminism as she in the end becomes the one who overpowers the man that oppressed her. Another example of how she is used in poetry can be viewed in May Sarton’s poet, *The Muse as Medusa*, where she describes the woman who has been deeply misunderstood and speaks volumes to women as they find themselves relating to Medusa.

*Forget the image: your silence is my ocean,
And even now, it teems with life. You chose
To abdicate by total lack of motion,
But did it work, for nothing really froze?*

*It is all fluid still, that world of feeling
Where thoughts, those, silent, feed and rove;*

*And, fluid, it is also full of healing,
For love is healing, even rootless love.*

*I turn your face around! It is my face.
That frozen rage is what I must explore—
Oh secret, self-enclosed and ravaged place!
This is the gift I thank Medusa for.
(May Sarton, 1971)*

The classical myth of Medusa gives us perceptions of female power, rage, and sexism from antiquity to today. In Mary Beard's book, *Women & Power: A Manifesto* the misogynistic society of Medusa mentioned earlier are the roots from which misogyny can be traced back to. The book goes over how women from Medusa to Elizabeth Warren have been subjugated, marginalized, and silenced. Relating instances within Greek mythology to some of the problems many women face today. For example, she brings light to the first instance in which a woman is being told to be quiet by a man, which occurs in Homer's *The Odyssey*. Penelope is told to shut up and go back to work by her own son, Telemachus. Beard writes in her London Review of Books Winter Lecture in 2014: "There is something faintly ridiculous about this wet-behind-the-ears lad shutting up the savvy, middle-aged Penelope. But it's a nice demonstration that right where written evidence for Western culture starts, women's voices are not being heard in the public sphere; more than that, as Homer has it, an integral part of growing up, as a man, is learning to take control of public utterance and to silence the female of the species." In this instance Telemachus was demonstrating his domineering powers by further enforcing the belief that women had no business speaking out, unless of course it was just to chatter or gossip with other women.

Just as societies today hold men in a much higher state, so did the ancient Greeks, leading to an “overpowering fear of female sexuality” and power (Dexter, p.31). The face of Medusa has evolved through a patriarchal culture that disallowed women to be nothing more than a visual pleasure to their eyes. Men were so eager to see the body and face of Medusa that they lead themselves to their own deaths. As Robins Dexter says, “an abundance of female nakedness can overcome even the mightiest warrior” (p.33). Female exploitation is further seen through the story of Medusa because "men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession" (Bowers, p.217). Although Medusa had the power to turn men into stone her power was not hers to possess, but to be controlled. Bowers emphasizes that:

Medusa kept her goddess qualities although these qualities became superimposed with male projection and objectification. Without a head, the woman... can threaten neither the man with her nor the male spectator with her own subjectivity. Her mutilated body is a symbol of how men have been able to deal with women by relegating them to visual objectivity. Thus, Poseidon's rape can be recognized as distortion and violation of Medusa's erotic power. When Athena, guardian of rationality, punishes the victim of the rape by changing her into a gorgon, she further objectifies that distortion (Bowers, p.218).

By using Medusa’s character as a false pretense, Perseus demonized her wisdom, resilience, and powers into a dark crone aspect that further stripped away any resemblance of mortality and innocence left. In the Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, classical and religious scholar Jane Harrison (1903) expresses the view that “in her essence Medusa is a head and nothing more; her potency only begins when her head is severed, and that potency resides in the head; she is in a word a mask with a body later appended (p. 187). Not only was severing her head a literal death, but also physically

eradicating her wisdom and sexuality. For she was known for her wisdom and with the blade of a sword that wisdom was stripped away from her, leaving the body barren without a head to resemble her significance. Notice that the person who cursed Medusa was the very person that helped Perseus slay her, which shows that there was no silver lining to Medusa's worth. The result was that Medusa would continue to serve Athena even after her death and her story would continue to be buried under all that deception. Athena used the head of Medusa as a shield "to strike her foes with dread, upon her breastplate wears the snakes she made" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4. 770 ff). The decapitation of Medusa was used in iconography benefitting the Greeks, as a means of protection and domineering power.

The power of Medusa was also used for greater divine origins. Her head was one of the powers that was held captive by Athena, but another power was the blood of Medusa itself. Athena gives the blood of Medusa to Apollo's son Asklepios, who was a surgeon, and used her blood as one of the primary sources of his divine power. In Apollodorus, it states that "he (Asklepios) used the blood that flowed from the veins on the left side for the bane of mankind, he used the blood that flowed from the right side for salvation, and by that means he raised the dead" (1921, p. 17 [III.x.3]). Another example of the blood of Medusa used for greater divine origins is by the Erinyes; the three goddesses of vengeance and retribution. However, there is a difference in the way her blood was used by these goddesses and it correlates back to Medusa's story. These goddesses used her blood to punish men for crimes, "particularly concerned with homicide, unfilial conduct, offenses against the gods, and perjury" and were described as "ugly, winged women with hair, arms and waists entwined with poisonous serpents. The

sisters wielded whips and were clothed either in the long black robes of mourners, or the short-length skirts and boots of huntress- maidens” (Atsma p.1).

The power that Medusa possessed would be believed to have kept her image secret since those who laid eyes upon her immediately turned into stone, yet male artists have been able to create a fearful image of their own that further established her misrepresentation. The transformation of being a “gazed-weapon to a reflection-shield is the crux of the myth” (Foster p.189). A conflict that many tend to overlook is that many of the claims regarding her appearance went against the very thing that was disallowed: looking at her. A question that arises is: does Medusa in fact have the ability to turn people into stone or does her fearful imagery come merely from “our perception of her, a perception that has manifested itself from male warnings?” (Vanderbilt University, para. 2)

As time progressed the image of Medusa became more horrific than what was originally described in Greek myths. For example, Dexter notes that “Medusa’s iconography grew with time. She grew wings (this rather early), a lolling tongue, and the tusks of a wild boar” (p. 26). This can also be seen in Hollywood media and video games like “Dungeon's and Dragons” and “Clash of the Titans”. In the popular video game version of “Dungeon's and Dragons”, Medusa was first animated into a four-legged monster that was both human and serpent, who served to turn men into stone. The animation of Medusa here is so farfetched, yet it is not a problem that gets addressed or recognized. She was one of the very first monsters introduced in the earliest edition of D&D. Staring in 1977, numerous D&D Monster Manuals, also known as “A Guide to the Medusa” were created and can be found online for gamers looking to slay the ‘horrid

evil' that dwells in dark caves. The game goes as far as creating peculiar versions of Medusa such as Greater Medusas that use bows and poisoned arrows, Hatchlings which are baby girls that do not start developing powers until the age of two, and Maedars/Male Medusaes which are male versions of Medusa. In each edition, Medusa's backstory becomes more hidden as her character is revealed to be anything less than human; a lawful evil. Within this one game, they have been able to create an image of Medusa that does not even closely correlate to her original being. Not only is her image scrutinized even farther, but creatures said to be related to her or have the ability to mate go far beyond the original story. Here Medusa is no longer a figure in Greek mythology but a completely different creature created by the minds of humans in each edition released (see fig. 5).

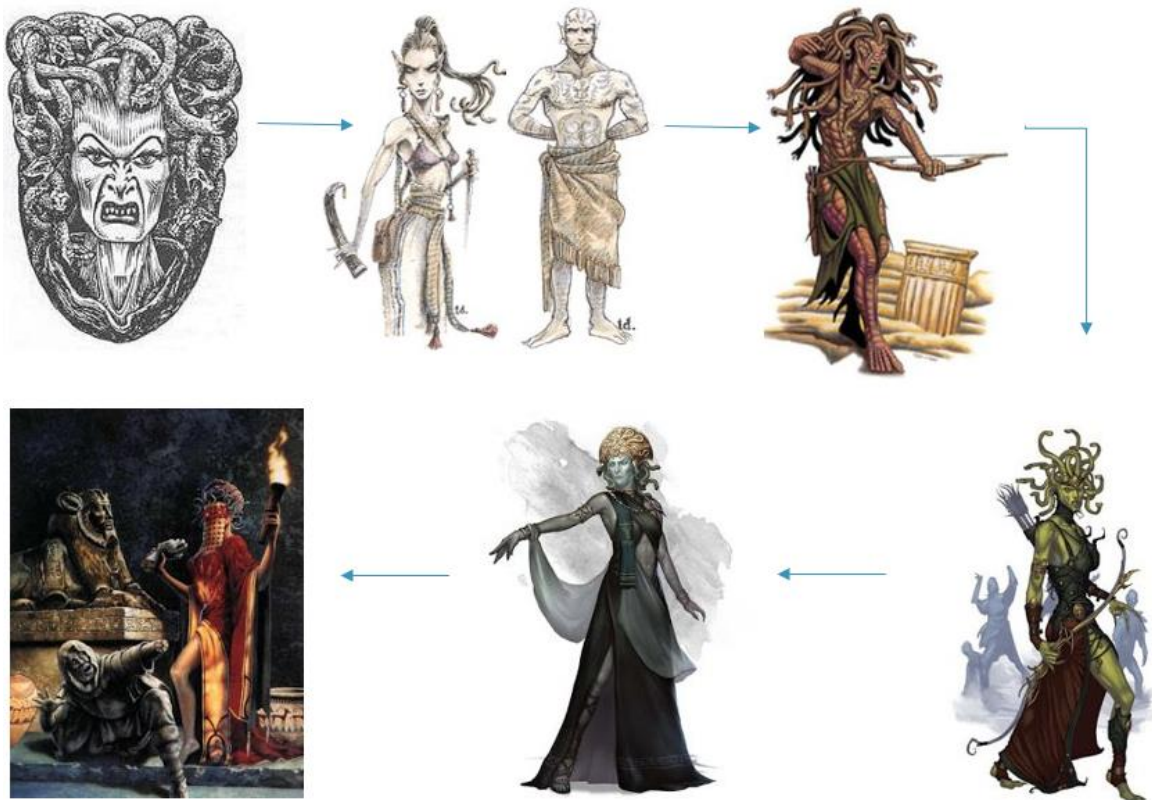


Fig. 5. Graph indicating how Medusa has changed through each D&D video game release, from Sean. "Dungeons & Dragons - A Guide to the Medusa." *Power Score*, 1 Jan. 1970,

thecampaign20xx.blogspot.com/2017/11/dungeons-dragons-guide-to-medusa.html.

In the movie film, '*Clash of the Titans*', Medusa was also animated to be both human and serpent: the upper half of her body was human other than her locks and instead of having human legs she had a serpent's tale. In Greek myths, the only disfigurement that Medusa suffered was that of her locks turned into serpents, yet her image has suffered beyond that. If her image can be easily manipulated even further, then her image becomes very distorted to the ones who know nothing of her. The perspective of her character is then seen as none other than the "representation created by the male artist, and neither provides space for a glimpse of Medusa before her gaze turns both deadly and monstrous" (Schlutz, p.336).

Some of the artwork created of Medusa are those only of her head and not her full body, thus manipulating her complexity in regard to power and demoralizing her body even further. Both contemporary and ancient artwork revealing Medusa fail to create her in her entirety and instead present only her severed head or decapitated body along with it. The image of her head is most often used on architectural surfaces such as shields, ships, seals upon passageways, as well as sculptures. These images were used to challenge those who dared look upon the infamous gaze of Medusa. One very well-known 17th century art piece, the Head of Medusa by Caravaggio, influences an overwhelming sense of sorrow and terror (see fig.6)



Fig. 6. The severed head of Medusa, created by Da Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi. *The Head of Medusa*. 1598, Uffizi, Florence.

This art piece projects the scene after Perseus severed her head, and plastered it onto a circular shield, most often used in literal texts to present her. The image is only of her head with blood spewing from her neck, with terrified eyes gazing down, and a mouth that is left wide open with nothing but a silent scream coming out. Her silent scream should be the very thing that makes the viewer uncomfortable because it resembles the rage and silence that Medusa has had to endure. Another work of art that demoralizes the body of Medusa can be seen in the sculpture created by Antonio Canova, which reveals Perseus naked with a sword in one hand and holding Medusa's severed head in the other (see fig. 7).



Fig.7. A sculpture of Perseus holding the severed head of Medusa, created by Canova, Antonio. *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*. 1804, Italy, Rome.

Perseus holds the head of Medusa not by the base of her neck but by the snakes she had for locks, demonstrating the lack of respect that Perseus had for Medusa, and treating her as an object rather than a person. A few other artists also included the body of Medusa near the feet of Perseus. One sculpture had Perseus standing on top of her slain body as he held her head in the air in victory. In this instance, not only is Medusa disgraced with a naked body at the feet of Perseus, but also devalued as a woman. Perseus victoriously stands on top of her body further exemplifying his male dominance and power. Medusa is both literally and figuratively dismembered in the consciousness of many. As Cathy Diorio states, "being dismembered allows Medusa to be re-membered and re-storied,"

and since that has become the basis of which her story has been presented, she will almost always be a monster in disguise (p. iv). Root emphasizes that journal articles, volumes, and forums “have been written in the past few decades on the rape of the feminine principle as embodied in woman as archetype, as a psychological entity, as a cultural motif, and as nature herself. Yet despite the topic’s seeming overkill, the danger is in disregarding the deep truth by allowing it to become cliché. A great schism in consciousness did occur, and the resulting ramifications have created a raging psychosis in our collective psyche” (Root p. 208).

The story of Medusa deserves more recognition than that of a severed head. A patriarchal culture has deviated from her true existence and shifted the views of many. Today, Medusa is strictly viewed as a monster that turns men into stone, rather than a victim of rape that just tried to defy the odds. The complexity of her character is revered by women but hid by a mask through a misogynistic society who silences the female rage. It should be recognized that the eyes of Medusa are indeed meant to be understood and not wary of. She has been subjugated by male deities and domineering power which mirrors the devaluation of women, particularly in Greek society, but continuing today as stated by other feminist writers. Despite Medusa's character being used as a means to an end, her image may very well go unchanged due to the iconography used in many artworks, media, and stories today. If the scream of Medusa could be heard and her story understood, then it would be possible to change the terrifying image of her to an image that signifies ambiguity and resilience. Medusa's story exemplifies how society has been able to demonize figures for the purpose of terrifying others and use them as a source of control and power. Instead of protecting her innocence and female rage, the stories that

have emerged from a misogynistic society have put her on trial and have unjustly found her guilty of a crime she had no control over. Again, Medusa was not born a demon but made into one through the eyes of men that objectified her as a means of protection and domineering power. If the misconstrued image of Medusa seems too complex to change or give voice to, then what does that say about society now when there are women today that face the same challenges as Medusa did?

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