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PR[äe]SENS

KINDGERECHTE „ARBEIT AM MYTHOS“ MODERNE REZEPTIONSSTRATEGIEN VON DER ADAPTATION BIS ZUR TRANSFORMATION

CHILD-FRIENDLY “EXPLORATIONS OF THE MYTH” – MODERN RECEPTION STRATEGIES FROM ADAPTATION TO TRANSFORMATION

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Blattlinie

libri liberorum wurde im Juli 2000 als Mitteilungsblatt der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Kinder- und Jugendliteraturforschung (ÖG-KJLF) gegründet und 2010 in eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift umgewandelt. Seit 2016 wird sie peer-reviewed, ab dem Heft 51 erscheint sie gleichzeitig open access. Ihr Ziel ist die Erforschung der historischen und aktuellen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur mit dem Schwerpunkt auf Österreich. Auch soll sie als Plattform der Kommunikation zwischen SammlerInnen und der scientific community im In- und Ausland dienen.

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Editorial

Liebe Leser*innen,

mit *lili* 54-55 (2020) halten Sie nun schon das zweite Doppelheft unserer Zeitschrift in Händen, das in den für viele beängstigenden, für manche nervenaufreibenden, für alle aber schwierigen und vor allem unwirklichen Monaten der COVID-19-Pandemie entstanden ist. Eine Evasion in das Reich der Mythen kann dabei helfen, wenigstens temporär die Anfordernisse des neuen Alltags in den Hintergrund treten zu lassen und neue Kraft zu schöpfen. Das Thema dieser druckfrischen *lili* erscheint hiefür nicht ungeeignet: Die einzelnen Beiträge zu *Kindgerechte „Arbeit am Mythos"* decken das weite Spektrum moderner Rezeptionsstrategien von der Adaptation bis zur Transformation ab. Mythische Elemente und Motive, mythologisches Kolorit sowie Figurenrepertoire aus Mythen sind in den Kinder- und Jugendliteraturen auf allen Kontinenten in vielfältiger Weise verankert und haben aufgrund der Akzeptanz bei den Leser*innen und dem damit verbundenen Identifikationspotential Eingang in den multimedialen Raum der Kinder- und Jugendkultur gefunden.

Der Aufforderung, zu dem schier unerschöpflichen Themenfeld aus unterschiedlichen Blickwinkeln aus dem Fundus der eigenen Forschung und der praktischen Umsetzung in der Arbeit mit Kindern und Jugendlichen etwas beizusteuern, sind zahlreiche Kolleg*innen aus verschiedenen Ländern nachgekommen. Coronabedingt konnten bedauerlicherweise nicht alle ihr ursprüngliches Vorhaben umsetzen; wir hoffen darauf, Ihnen diese Beiträge zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt in einem thematisch offenen *lili*-Heft (oder einem mythologischen Folgeband) präsentieren zu können. Was es in die vorliegende Doppelnummer geschafft hat, geht weit über Europa und den „klassisch" griechisch-römischen Mythenfundus hinaus, gibt aufschlussreiche Einblicke in die metaphysischen Weltsichten quer über den Globus und bezieht neben dem traditionell literarischen Zugang (incl. Sach- und Schulbuch) Filme, Spiele und künstlerische Aneignungen mit ein.

Ernst Seibert analysiert in „Mythisierung des Märchens als Propagandaliteratur in der NS-Zeit und ihre weitreichenden Folgen" die 1942 erschienene Märchen-Sammlung *Von Starken, Tapferen und Treuen* der steirischen Autorin Marie Moser, markiert die ideologische Verfremdung und Remythisierung im Bezug zu den Vorbildern Theodor Vernaleken und Friedrich Kuthmayer und beschäftigt sich mit der Nachwirkung bis Michael Köhlmeier.

Maria Jose Campos lässt uns in „Shinto for children in Hayao Miyazaki's *My Neighbour Totoro*" am Beispiel eines ikonisch gewordenen Animationsfilms aus dem Jahr 1988 eintauchen in die kindgerechte Präsentation der fernöstlichen Kultur, in Shinto-Mythologie und -Religion. Das gelingt über die Koexistenz von Natur und Gottheiten und vermittelt Einheit mit und Liebe zur Natur. Campos zeigt, wie Fantastisches in der kindlichen Wahrnehmung zur Realität wird und dass der Film eine Vision von Heiligkeit und Segen vermittelt, geprägt vom Wald, vom Landleben und dem Wert der Familie.

Sonja Schreiner untersucht in „Fantastische Tierwesen und wo und warum sie außerhalb der antiken Mythologie zu finden sind – eine Spurensuche im *Harry Potter*-Universum und darüber hinaus" Newt Scamanders Schulbuch literaturtheoretisch, künstlerisch und intermedial. Sie verbindet Quellenstudien und Antiketransfer und zeigt an der Artenvielfalt der Phantasiewesen und ihrer sensiblen Darstellung Joanne K. Rowlings Plädoyer für Artenschutz.

Karolina Kulpa, Agnieszka Maciejewska, Katarzyna Marciniak, Anna Mik, Elżbieta Olechowska und Dorota Rejter schreiben in „Metamorphoses of Medusa: The Reception of the Gorgon in 21st-century Culture for Children and Young Adults", einem umfangreichen Artikel, der sich aus mehreren biographischen und generischen Abschnitten zusammensetzt, eine neue ‚Biographie' eines der bekanntesten Ungeheuer der antiken Mythologie und zeigen im Durchlauf durch verschiedene Medien und unter Heranziehung theoretischer Literatur, dass das Monster keineswegs immer monströs sein muss. Dieser aus literarischen und audiovisuellen Elementen zusammengestellte Lebenslauf erlaubt einen neuen Blick auf die mythologische Figur und eröffnet Empathie: Elżbieta Olechowska widmet sich in „The Clashes with Medusa: An Introduction to the Gorgon's Reception in Contemporary Culture" den Filmen *Clash of the Titans* (1981 und 2010). Katarzyna Marciniak bespricht in „Medusa's Bad Hair Day, or The Taming of the Baby-Shrew" Medusa im liebevoll illustrierten Kinderbuch. Dorota Rejter beschäftigt sich in „Medusa's 'Snakeypoo Accident': A Lesson in Acceptance" mit besonders aussagekräftigen Szenen der Serie *The Goddess Girls*. Karolina Kulpa bespricht die Darstellung Medusas in den Serien *Legacies* und *Monster High.* Agnieszka Maciejewska stellt in „Medusa's Sacrifice: Love that Saves" die BBC-Serie *Atlantis* vor, in der Medusa vor ihrer Verwandlung in das Ungeheuer gezeigt wird. In Ana Miks „Aunty Em: Between Love and Hate" ist Medusa eine alte Frau geworden, während sie in „Medusa the Mother, or Cutting Hair Again" ganz in ihrer Mutterrolle aufgeht.

Suh Yoon Kim stellt in „Greek Mythology as Children's Literature: Humour and Fantasy in Retelling the Greek Literary Anthology to Primary School Students" entwickelte Mythenadaptation für Kinder in Lesebüchern für den Gebrauch in griechischen Volksschulen vor. Die Beschäftigung mit mythologischen Figuren, konkret deren Stärken-Schwächen-Analyse, soll Kinder psychologisch stärken, weswegen in so manch adaptierter Version Gottheiten als naiv und fehleranfällig gezeichnet sind; sind sie jedoch allmächtig, erhalten Kinder ‚Superkind-Phantasien'.

Michael Stierstorfer rückt in „Sophokles bildgewaltig aktualisiert? – Ödipus, Elektra und Antigone im Comic und Graphic Novel für Heranwachsende zur

Bestätigung eines selbstbestimmten Menschenbildes“ gleich drei Mythen in fünf aktuellen Adaptionen (von *Sokrates der Halbhund* bis *Entenhausen*) in den Fokus, denen jeweils eine Sophokles-Tragödie zugrunde liegt. In der (Post)moderne hat sich das von den Gött*innen determinierte Menschenbild der Antike in ein autarkes gewandelt; die Protagonist*innen der analysierten Comicbände interagieren so selbsttätig, dass sich Antigones Selbstbehauptung sogar im Licht der *Me-too*-Debatte umdeuten lässt.

Zur Rubrik *Berichte aus der Praxis* hat Marion Ziesmer mit „‚Entsunkenes Licht angeln‘ – eine Reise der Sinnsuche mit Gilgamesch, Neruda und jungen Lernenden aus Einwandererfamilien“ den ersten von zwei Beiträgen beigesteuert: Mit hoher Sensibilität hat sie mit Schüler*innen einer 4. Grundschulklasse in Nordneukölln Episoden aus dem Gilgamesch-Epos performativ nachgestellt und gedeutet, mit einem späten Gedicht Pablo Nerudas erweiternd vertieft und dadurch ein vielstimmiges *cluster of emotions* erzeugt. Der zweite Bericht aus der Praxis stammt von Karin Richter. Sie beleuchtet „Geschichten aus der griechischen Mythologie als Abenteuerwelt und als klassisches Bildungsgut. Wege zur Mythologie in der Grundschule und in der Sekundarstufe I auf dem Hintergrund einer multimedialen Kinderkultur“ und geht der Frage nach möglichen Zugängen zur griechischen Mythologie (mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Trojanischen Krieges) nach, wobei sie auf kindliche Medienerfahrungen ebenso fokussiert wie auf Mythenaneignung in der ostdeutschen Literaturszene. Dabei legt sie den Schwerpunkt auf Franz Fühmanns Auffassung von Mythen als Modellen von Menschheitserfahrungen.

Der Rezensionsteil (wenn auch – aus Gründen der Variation und Verfügbarkeit – weitgehend ohne mythologischen Hintergrund, aber durchaus mit vielfältigen theoretischen und inhaltlichen Verbindungsflächen zu den Beiträgen und Berichten) bietet Ihnen wie gewohnt Einblicke in empfehlenswerte Neuerscheinungen.

So bleibt uns nur noch, Ihnen viel Freude bei Ihren Ausflügen in die Welt(en) des Mythos zu wünschen (verbunden mit der Bitte, uns nach Ihrer gesunden ‚Rückkehr‘ – hoffentlich nur positives – Feedback zu geben)!

Sonja Schreiner
(für das Herausgeber*innenteam)

Metamorphoses of Medusa: The Reception of the Gorgon in 21st-century Culture for Children and Young Adults[1]

Karolina Anna Kulpa, Agnieszka Monika Maciejewska, Katarzyna Marciniak, Anna Mik, Elżbieta Olechowska, Dorota Rejter[2]

Medusa-Metamorphosen: Die Rezeption der Gorgo Medusa in der Kinder- und Jugendkultur des 21. Jh. in ausgewählten Beispielen

Medusa ist eine der bekanntesten Figuren der Mythologie, ein Monster *par excellence*. Die antike Literatur überliefert zwei Versionen ihrer Geschichte – ein Urzeitwesen aus vorolympischen Zeiten (Hesiod, *Theogonie* 270-285) und eine junge Frau, die in Athenes Tempel von Poseidon vergewaltigt und von der Göttin, die den Vorfall als unsagbares Sakrileg (miss)deutete, in ein schreckliches Ungeheuer verwandelt wurde (Ovid, *Metamorphosen* 4,753-803). Im Lauf der Jahrtausende klassischer Rezeption trat Medusa hauptsächlich als mörderisches Ungeheuer in Erscheinung, das ein Held auf seinem "Campbellischen" Weg zum Ruhm besiegen muss (Campbell 2004). Dann konzentrierte sich Hélène Cixous auf ihre Stimme als Opfer – mit einem speziellen Fokus auf ihrer Weiblichkeit – und machte Medusa zu einer Ikone für Generationen von Frauen, die unschuldig und aufgrund einer Reihe sozialer Faktoren Leid erfuhren (Cixous 1976).

Greift ein ähnlicher Perspektivenwechsel auch in der kulturellen Aneignung für ein junges Publikum? Erscheint Medusa vor diesem kulturellen Hintergrund einfach als Ungeheuer oder doch eher als Opfer? Oder spielt sie sogar noch mehr Rollen? Wir unternehmen den Versuch, Antworten auf diese Fragen zu finden, indem wir die Analyse von Medusas Rezeption in zwei Filmen – *Clash of the Titans* im Original (1981) und seinem Remake (2010) – als Ausgangspunkt nehmen. Diese Analyse enthüllt charakteristische Züge eines Bildes, das in den 1980er-Jahren geschaffen wurde, einer für die Entwicklung der Populärkultur besonders wichtigen Epoche, und vergleicht und kontrastiert sie mit der Repräsentation, die die Realität des 21. Jh. transformiert hat. Die Untersuchung des Medusa-Charakters in den beiden *Clashes*-Filmen ist durchzogen von einem Überblick über die wichtigsten antiken Quellen und das zeitgenössische Narrativ durch Wissenschaftler*innen und Autor*innen, deren Ziel die Popularisierung der klassischen Antike ist.

1 This text has been prepared within the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016-2021), led by Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", the University of Warsaw.

2 The *Our Mythical Childhood* team from the University of Warsaw.

Weiters stellen wir eine kurze Übersicht ausgewählter, zumeist weltweit zugänglicher Werke vor. Jedes einzelne ist einem bestimmten Abschnitt in Medusas Leben gewidmet. Als erstes treffen wir ein Kind, das seine ersten Schritte in die Welt macht (im Bilderbuch *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!* von Joan Holub und Leslie Patricelli). Dann stehen wir einer Teenagerin gegenüber, die die Bedeutung wahrer Akzeptanz entdeckt (*The Goddess Girls*-Serie von Joan Holub und Suzanne Williams). In einem dritten Teil folgen wir einem heranwachsenden Mädchen (und ebenso einem Burschen), die ihre Identität entwickeln (in den TV-Serien *Monster High* und *Legacies* – einem Spin-off von *The Vampire Diaries*). Später sehen wir eine erwachsene Frau, die für ihr Recht auf Glück kämpft (BBC TV-Serie *Atlantis*). Danach beobachten wir eine ältere Frau, zerrissen zwischen Liebe und Hass (Rick Riordans *Percy Jackson*). Und schließlich begegnen wir einer Mutter, die ihre Rolle in der Gesellschaft findet (im Bilderbuch *Mère Méduse* von Kitty Crowther).

Dieser aus literarischen und audiovisuellen Elementen zusammengestellte Lebenslauf der Medusa erlaubt uns einen neuen Blick auf die mythologische Figur. Versteinert sie immer noch mit ihrem Blick als Ungeheuer, ist sie ein Opfer, oder kann sie überhaupt eine Leitfigur für moderne Kinder und Jugendliche werden, um sich selbst besser kennenzulernen und gegenüber Anderen größere Empathie zu entwickeln?

Medusa-Clashes: Eine Einführung in die Rezeption der Gorgo in der zeitgenössischen Kultur
Schlagwörter: Gorgoneion, Medusa in Nacherzählungen griechischer Mythen des 20. und 21. Jh., Versteinerungsmotiv, Rezeption des Mythos von Perseus und Medusa in *Clash of the Titans* (1981 & 2010)

Medusas Bad Hair Day oder die Zähmung eines widerspenstigen Kleinkindes
Schlagwörter: Medusa, Haar, Agency, Kinder, Kinderliteratur, doppeltes Zielpublikum, klassische Rezeptionsstudien, Mythologie, Monster, Familie, Identität, Kontrolle, Sozialisation, Joan Holub, Leslie Patricelli, Suzanne Williams

Medusas Unfall mit "Snakeypoo": Eine Lehrstunde in Akzeptanz
Schlagwörter: Akzeptanz, Göttinnen und Götter, Freundschaft, Medusa, Monster, olympisches Pantheon, Vorpubertät, Transformation, Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams

Coming of Age in der Gorgonenfamilie
Schlagwörter: Gorgonenfamilie, männliche Medusa, coming of age, attraktive Ungeheuer, Teenager, Bedeutung von wahrer Liebe und echter Freundschaft, *Legacies*, *Monster High*

Medusas Opfer: Rettende Liebe
Schlagwörter: Atlantis, Fluch, Freundschaft, Herkules, Jason, Liebe, Medusa, Monster, Opfer, Prophetie, Pythagoras

Aunty Em: zwischen Liebe und Hass. Medusa als Mutter oder wieder einmal Haare schneiden
Schlagwörter: Alter, Märchen, *Mère Méduse*, Kitty Crowther, Monster, Mutterschaft, alte Menschen, Percy Jackson, Rick Riordan, Hexe

Medusa is one of the best known mythical creatures, a monster *par excellence*. Ancient literature transmits two versions of her story – a primordial being from pre-Olympian times (Hesiod, *Theogony* 270-285) and a young woman who was raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple and punished by being transformed into a hideous beast for what the goddess presumed was a dreadful sacrilege (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4,753-803). Down through the millennia of classical reception, Medusa appeared mainly as a killing monster to be defeated by the hero on his "Campbellian" journey to glory (Campbell 2004). Then Hélène Cixous listened to her voice as that of a victim – with a particular focus on her womanhood – and made Medusa an icon for generations of women who suffered innocently due to a range of societal factors (Cixous 1976).

Is a similar reversal of perspective also valid in the culture for a young audience? Does this culture feature Medusa simply as a monster, or rather as a victim? Or perhaps there are more roles for her still? We have attempted to answer these questions by taking as our starting point an analysis of Medusa's reception in two movies – namely, *Clash of the Titans*, the original from 1981 and the remake from 2010. This analysis reveals characteristic traits of her image as encoded in the 1980s, a period of particular importance for the development of popular culture, and compares them with the representation transformed into a believable 21st-century protagonist and following the demands of a 21st-century audience. The study of the Medusa characters in the two *Clashes* is interspersed with an overview of the most relevant ancient sources and the contemporary narrative both by scholars and popularizers of Classical Antiquity.

Then, we propose a short survey of selected, mostly globally accessible works. Each is dedicated to a specific stage of Medusa's life. First, we meet a child taking her first steps in the world (the picture book *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!* by Joan Holub and Leslie Patricelli). Second, we face a teen who discovers the meaning of true acceptance (*The Goddess Girls* series by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams). Third, we follow a maturing girl (and boy) building her (his) identity (the TV series *Monster High* and *Legacies* – a spin-off of *The Vampire Diaries*). Subsequently, we see a grown-up woman who fights for her right to happiness (BBC TV series *Atlantis*). Next, we observe an elderly lady torn between love and hate (*Percy Jackson* by Rick Riordan). And finally, we encounter a mother who learns her role in society (the picture book *Mère Méduse* by Kitty Crowther).

This composite, literary-audio-visual *curriculum vitae* of Medusa permits us to risk casting a new look at this mythical creature. Does she still petrify with the gaze of a monster, or is she a victim? Or, above all, is she able to become a guide for contemporary children and young adults to better awareness of themselves and greater empathy towards the Other?

The Clashes with Medusa: An Introduction to the Gorgon's Reception in Contemporary Culture
Keywords: gorgoneion, Medusa in 20th/21st-century retellings of Greek myths, motif of turning into stone, reception of the Perseus and Medusa myth in *Clash of the Titans* (1981 and 2010)

Medusa's Bad Hair Day, or The Taming of the Baby-Shrew
Keywords: Medusa, hair, agency, children, children's literature, dual audience, classical reception studies, mythology, monster, family, identity, control, socialization, Joan Holub, Leslie Patricelli, Suzanne Williams

Medusa's "Snakeypoo Accident": A Lesson in Acceptance
Keywords: acceptance, gods and goddesses, friendship, Medusa, monster, Olympian pantheon, preadolescence, transformation, Joan Holub, Suzanne Williams

The Coming of Age in the Gorgoneous Families
Keywords: Gorgoneous families, male Medusa, coming of age, attractive monsters, teenagers, meaning of true love and friendship, *Legacies*, *Monster High*

Medusa's Sacrifice: Love that Saves
Keywords: Atlantis, curse, friendship, Hercules, Jason, love, Medusa, monster, sacrifice, prophecy, Pythagoras

Aunty Em: Between Love and Hate. Medusa the Mother, or Cutting Hair Again
Keywords: age, fairy tale, *Mère Méduse*, Kitty Crowther, monster, motherhood, old adults, Percy Jackson, Rick Riordan, witch

The Clashes with Medusa: An Introduction to the Gorgon's Reception in Contemporary Culture

Elżbieta Olechowska

Both *Clashes of the Titans*, 1981 by Desmond Davis (director), Beverley Cross (screenwriter), and Ray Harryhausen (visual effects designer), and 2010 by Louis Leterrier (director),[3] present the myth of Perseus. While the second film is touted to be a remake of the first, it further adapts the tale playing fast and loose with ancient sources and with the 1981 version as well, keeping intact only the title. Any solid comparative analysis of the two movies requires a rigorous effort. First, to pay close attention to what is happening on the screen, as it is easy to lose track of the unexpected twists of the plot and their consequences, and second, to detangle and understand the logic underlying both types of change.

The venerated late American film critic Roger Ebert (1942-2013; *Chicago Sun-Times* 1967-2013), in his 1981 review, called the story "robust and straightforward" but was immediately punished for his hubris, as he got a significant fact wrong from the outset. He claimed, for instance, that the casket with the infant Perseus and Danae was "cast into the sea after she ha[d] angered the gods" (Ebert 1981). Ebert was not only unconcerned with grasping the intricacies of the plot correctly, but he also viewed the mythological material as charming nonsense. His primary focus was Harryhausen's stop-motion animation (Dynamation) mastery and Bubo, Athena's mechanical owl resembling R2-D2 from *Star Wars*.[4] Very sensibly, Ebert did not attempt to analyze the mythological side of the film.

Stephen R. Wilk, a non-classicist author of a book on Medusa, discussing the first *Clash*, said: "I suspect that most people today who are aware of the story of Perseus and Medusa owe their knowledge to the 1981 film *Clash of the Titans*"

3 Only in the first *Clash* all three collaborators (director, script writer, and special effect specialist) were almost equally important. The 2010 remake is known mainly as the work of Leterrier.

4 He was on the right track with the owl, see the recent article about intertextuality in the 1981 *Clash* (Clauss 2018).

(Wilk 2000, 209). He was mistaken in this, for if we read the two recent popular retellings of Greek myths, Stephen Fry's *Mythos* and Luc Ferry's *Mythologie et philosophie. Le sens des grands mythes grecs*, we *prima vista* detect no such influence.

Mythos[5] is a selection of ancient stories remembered from childhood. Fry briefly (Fry 2017, 52-53)[6] discusses Medusa as indistinguishable from the other Gorgons, granddaughters of Gaia and Pontus. In a sub-section called *Threesomes*, he comments on the ancient fascination with triplets and mentions five sets of such multiple births, all of them ghastly. The Gorgons are described as identical monsters, each with the power to petrify the unwary. Fry's assortment does not present the myth of Perseus, hence no Medusa's coupling with Poseidon followed by Athena's distaste and punishment and no Medusa's head as "a weapon of mass destruction".[7] Fry may have gently alluded to the *Clash of the Titans* by giving the same title to one of his initial chapters.

He admits to having read as a child Enid Blyton's 1930 *Tales of Ancient Greece*[8] which contained seventeen myths excluding the myth of Perseus and Medusa (and, naturally enough, Andromeda); that may have influenced his selection. He certainly did not read a one-time favourite collection of Polish children, published the same year, 1930, by Tadeusz Zieliński. Entitled *Starożytność bajeczna* [Fabulous Antiquity],[9] it was based on plays by the Greek tragic playwright trio as sources for the myths (the texts that survived and the lost ones he managed to reconstruct). In the chapter entitled *Głowa Meduzy* [The Head of the Medusa] (Zieliński 1930, 55-63), we see Perseus sent by Polydectes on the murderous quest – similar to a video game player equipped with a bunch of bonus weapons – succeed in decapitating the monster thanks to Athena's and Hermes' guidance. Athena praises his success afterwards revealing that Medusa was the most horrible threat to the gods because they were not immune to her petrifying gaze. This curious piece of news seems to exclude the likelihood of Medusa having been transformed into a Gorgon by Athena, as she and her fellow gods themselves would have fallen victim to the lethal gaze. The existing ancient sources do not confirm Zieliński's claim. In any case, fate had the last laugh here, as the Olympians survived to our times mostly as stone statues, often somewhat mutilated.

In 1942 Edith Hamilton published a mythology subtitled *Times and Tales of Gods and Heroes*, which became hugely popular in the English speaking world. It

5 See Edith Hall's sympathetic analysis in *The Guardian* (Hall, 2017).

6 The passage barely covers half a page.

7 The expression used by Katarzyna Marciniak in her 2018 *Mitologia grecka i rzymska* (Marciniak 2018, 480).

8 Fry mentions only the title, but the authorship of Enid Blyton (1930) is unquestionable.

9 It is a Polish translation of Zieliński's Russian original, issued in three parts in 1922-1923 in Petrograd by the Brothers Sabasznikow. Zieliński, a trilingual (German, Russian, Polish) classicist considered the greatest philologist of the first half of the 20th century, wrote also another mythology for children entitled *Irezjona. Klechdy attyckie* [Irezyona. Attic Tales], first published partially in Russian in six booklets (Petrograd: Brothers Sabasznikov, 1921-1922); all stories appeared in Polish in four volumes (Zieliński 1936); see also Michał Mizera's *Introduction* to Zieliński's *Queen of the Wind Maidens* (Mizera 2013, 5-12).

includes a full chapter (Hamilton 2017, 174-182) on Perseus and his adventures, but Medusa is again merely one of three monsters, outstanding only because of her head, which once it is cut off, becomes a weapon.

The same year as Stephen Fry's book, a French philosopher and former Minister for Culture, Luc Ferry, published his selection of myths centring on the philosophical meaning underlying Greek mythology, entitled *Mythologie et philosophie. Le sens des grands mythes grecs.* One of the chapters is called *Persée et la Gorgone Méduse* (Ferry 2017, 298-316).[10] In lively and fluid prose, Ferry follows Pherecydes of Syros, who was also the source for Apollodorus. While Ferry appears more disciplined and didactic than Fry, he slips in a curious piece of information, reporting the words of one of the nymphs who gave the promised magical objects to Perseus:

> […] the three Gorgons detest all humans since their misfortune. In the past, they used to be entrancing, but they dared to claim that their beauty was greater than that of Athena. To put them in their place, the goddess disfigured them. […] their gaze transforms into stone all living creatures […] as soon as they meet the Gorgons' eyes. (Ferry 2017, 308)

He reaffirms the same motive for punishment when relating a conversation between Perseus and Andromeda's father, Cepheus. According to Cepheus, Andromeda's mother Cassiopeia was guilty of a severe error of judgement: she defied the Nereids, whose beauty she unfavourably compared to her daughter's, like Medusa defied Athena (Ferry 2017, 312).[11] If this cryptic after-thought alludes to Ovid's story of the rape in the temple,[12] Ferry would be deplorably joining the patriarchal side of Medusa's critics.

To sum up, it appears that both Fry and Ferry have escaped the influence that the films could have had on the mythological knowledge of the contemporary public. Fry limits himself to a concise description of the Gorgons found

10 Ferry, an exceptionally prolific writer and master of multiple usage, also published a separate volume *Persée et la Gorgone Méduse* in 2016 and a comic book with the same title in 2017. His publisher on Amazon, like Stephen Wilk, associates the myth with the film, and has this to say about Perseus: "Célèbre pour avoir inspiré au cinéma *Le Choc des titans* de Desmond Davis (ainsi que le remake de Louis Leterrier de 2010), le mythe de Persée trouve enfin en BD l'adaptation fidèle qu'il mérite!" [Made famous by having inspired Desmond Davis' film *Clash of the Titans* (as well as its remake by Louis Leterrier in 2010), the Perseus' myth finally found the faithful adaptation it deserved in a comic book!] (accessed May 3, 2020, at https://www.amazon.ca/Pers%C3%A9e-Gorgone-M%C3%A9duse-Sagesse-mythes-ebook/dp/B0722H55J9/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Luc+Ferry%2C+Pers%C3%A9e&qid=1589625831&s=digital-text&sr=1-1).

11 In the 1981 *Clash*, Cassiopeia specifically targets Thetis, who immediately retaliates.

12 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4,791-803: "[…] one of the many princes asked why Medusa, alone among her sisters, had snakes twining in her hair. The guest replied 'Since what you ask is worth the telling, hear the answer to your question. She was once most beautiful, and the jealous aspiration of many suitors. Of all her beauties none was more admired than her hair: I came across a man who recalled having seen her. They say that Neptune, lord of the seas, violated her in the temple of Minerva. Jupiter's daughter turned away, and hid her chaste eyes behind her aegis. So that it might not go unpunished, she changed the Gorgon's hair to foul snakes. And now, to terrify her enemies, numbing them with fear, the goddess wears the snakes that she created as a breastplate'". Trans. Antony S. Kline (Ovid 2000, ad loc.).

in Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* 2,36-42,[13] nothing to do with Perseus, whose story is probably too complicated and too long for a single volume of myths, as he says explaining another omission. Ferry describes not only the Gorgons but the whole tale of Perseus and Medusa, quoting abundantly from sources, and even using the phrase: "[…] je laisse Apollodore vous raconter…".[14] Firmly within the tradition of popular culture, both these collections of myths were published without indexes that probably would have annoyed some readers. Instead they were intended for the enjoyment of young readers primarily fascinated with enchanting plots and fluent narration. They provide nothing that could be defined as evolution in the reception of Medusa, although to be fair, Ferry does introduce the intriguing concept of Medusa as a symbol of the inevitability of death, death which in the long run is worth looking at in the face (Ferry 2017, 298 and passim).

Coming back to the two films, first, we have to ask what the rationale for the title *Clash of the Titans* is? Stephen Wilk suggests a reasonable answer:

> Ketos was not a Titan, nor was Medusa (as Cross's[15] script later describes her); the Titans were the children of Uranus and Gaia (Mother Earth and Father Sky), who were also the parents of the Olympian gods. I suspect that Ketos/Kraken and Medusa were made Titans by courtesy so that the movie could be titled Clash of the Titans, which has more panache than Perseus and the Gorgon's Head. (Wilk 2000, 214)

Wilk is correct, neither Kraken nor Medusa was a Titan, even if the Graiae say otherwise in the movie. Still, it is also possible that the word *Titan* in the title was intended figuratively, meaning someone of enormous size and power, regardless of the actual mythological genealogy. The creators of the 2010 film on the other hand, intent on riding the crest of Harryhausen's fame, kept the title as a signal that the movie was a remake.

Before we can focus on Medusa's evolution between 1981 and 2010, the contradictions between various ancient sources and their reception in the films need to be addressed. Either the three Gorgons were born as hideous, primaeval monsters or, quite the opposite, they had a good reason for their alleged boasts of being more beautiful than Athena. Either, as Hesiod says, Medusa slept with Poseidon "in a soft meadow amid spring flowers",[16] implying a consensual act,

13 Apollodorus*, Bibliotheca* 2, 36-42: "The Gorgones' heads were entwined with the horny scales of serpents, and they had big tusks like hogs, bronze hands, and wings of gold on which they flew. All who looked at them were turned to stone". Trans. Keith Aldrich (Apollodorus 1975, ad loc.).

14 "I let Apollodorus tell you the story…" (Ferry 2017, 313, English translation E.O.).

15 The scriptwriter Alan Beverley Cross (1931-1998) was also the husband of Maggie Smith, cast as Thetis, a character given a crucial role to play in the story with full disregard to ancient sources.

16 Hesiod, *Theogony* 220-228: "[…] the Gorgons, who live beyond the famous Ocean at the edge of Night, / where are the Hesperidês, with their high-pitched voices, Sthenno / and Euryalê and Medusa, who came to a bad end. She was mortal, / but the others were deathless and ageless, the two of them. / The Blue-haired god slept with Medusa on the gentle meadow / amidst the spring flowers. And when Perseus cut off her head, / great Chrysaor leaped out, and the horse Pegasos, so called because / he was born near the springs [*pegai*] of Ocean. Chrysaor was called / that because he held a golden [*chryseion*] sword in his hands". Trans. Barry B. Powell (Hesiod 2017, 228, numbering of lines according to Powell).

or as Ovid says, Poseidon violated her in Athena's temple (*Metamorphoses* 4,791-803). Some other variations appear more as inconsistencies than contradictions. It is unclear whether all the Gorgons had snakes instead of hair and petrified the onlookers with their gaze. Was it only after Athena punished their alleged boasts? Information about the whereabouts of the Gorgons also varies (Ogden 2008, 47-50): Hesiod in *Theogony* (220-221) places them "beyond the famous Ocean at the edge of Night, where are the Hesperidês, with their high-pitched voices",[17] Herodotus[18] and Pausanias[19] report that the Gorgons lived in Libya. The Underworld, where Medusa has her lair/temple in the movies, is a less attested place. Daniel Ogden suggests that "the Gorgons' extreme western location near the realm of Night in the *Theogony* (274-275) evokes the location of Odysseus' necromancy-katabasis (Homer, *Odyssey* 11,12-23). […] the *Odyssey*'s reference to Persephone sending up the Gorgon-head" (Ogden 2008, 50) might provide evidence of such connection. In the 2010 film, Zeus gives Perseus a golden drachma to use for the ferry ride on the Styx, warning him: "It's expensive where you're going".

The 1981 Kraken is a traditional sea monster and as such obeys Poseidon's orders. The 2010 Kraken, created from Hades' flesh during Titanomachy, answers to Hades. Poseidon is not a villain anymore, Hades is. Why this change of villain? One of the logical reasons is the image of Hades in popular culture who, during the three decades between the two films, became the mythological troublemaker and evildoer number one.[20] He is bent on revenge on Zeus and on stealing his power. Poseidon did not undergo such a malignant transformation. He remained satisfied with his marine realm, as well as with his romances that occasionally turned ugly, as was the case with Medusa. The character of Io, an addition to the myth and, contrary to its traditional plot, Perseus' future wife in the 2010 universe, was punished with immortality by Poseidon, whose advances she rejected. The logic behind this side plot appears shaky. Still, Io provides here a way for Perseus to avoid marriage with Andromeda and, most of all, the resulting unwelcome "promotion" of a simple fisherman to a king. Poseidon's previous involvement with Medusa combined with his role of Zeus' main antagonist might have potentially diminished the clarity of the plot, except for the story of drawing lots with Zeus and Poseidon for power over three different realms after vanquishing Cronus. As for Hades, and the famous tale of his marriage to Persephone, the ancient sources transmitted few if any other myths about Hades. Contrary to the classical tradition of avoiding the "Unseen One" with superstitious dread, he exercises a powerful appeal for contemporary popular culture, especially in its audiovisual sector.

17 Ibidem (numbering of lines according to Powell in Hesiod 2017).

18 Herodotus 2,91,6: "[…] to bring the Gorgon's head from Libya". Trans. A. D. Godley (Herodotus 1920, ad loc.).

19 Pausanias 2,21,6: "[…] he guessed that a woman wandered from them, reached Lake Tritonis, and harried the neighbours until Perseus killed her; Athena was supposed to have helped him in this exploit, because the people who live around Lake Tritonis are sacred to her". Trans. W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod (Pausanias 1918, ad loc.).

20 Two obvious examples are the 1997 Disney *Hercules* and the 2011-2018 ABC television series *Once Upon a Time*.

Poseidon's brief romance/rape on the meadow or in Athena's temple was fruitful but the birth, inexplicably, occurred after the mother was decapitated, presumably ages after conception. A strange pair of twins were born, Pegasus and Chrysaor, the latter mainly known as the father of three-bodied Geryon, who was deprived of his famous Iberian cattle and his life by Herakles completing his tenth labour. Both *Clashes* resolved certain contradictions similarly: they show only one Gorgon – Medusa, who is not a mother, either before or after her demise. Pegasus is there from the outset but not as Medusa's son, but as Perseus' steed, one of Zeus' immortal horses. Indeed, the hero looks better riding a flying horse than he would be using Hermes' winged boots, very likely at risk of losing his balance.

Why did Perseus kill Medusa, a profoundly tragic, female monster, magically lethal, repulsive, and reclusive, intent on hiding from the world? The short answer is because he was a monster-slayer; he could, and that was what he did, to use the phrase from action movies. When contemporary heroes in action movies kill, they never do it indiscriminately (unless they are villains): killing causes remorse of conscience or post-traumatic stress disorder, occasionally requiring professional help. Mythological heroes kill monsters without remorse and even without a shade of compassion. Ovid, who wrote about Medusa's rape by Poseidon, does not commiserate with Medusa's fate at the hands of Poseidon and Athena but rather implies that she may have been too proud of her fabulous hair and her punishment reflected that. Perseus went to great lengths to find out how he could kill the Kraken, and when he learned that what he needed was Medusa's head, he had to get it. Killing two monsters for the price of one is most efficient, even if only one of them is an unredeemable destroyer whose strings are pulled by the master puppeteer, Hades.[21]

Greek mythology provides a different reason for the kill than what viewers of both *Clashes of the Titans* were told. Still, the goal remained the same: the appropriation of her magical power and its weaponization. The ancient reason for the kill was trivial and is wholly ignored in both movies, probably as not noble enough for the son of Zeus to undertake such risky labour. When Polydectes tells Perseus that he must bring a horse as a gift for the alleged royal bride, he asks, why not Medusa's head? Polydectes holds him to his word. When Perseus flies home from his quest with his sinister trophy, he happens to see Andromeda offered in sacrifice to a sea monster and he uses Medusa's head to petrify the beast and save Andromeda,[22] making this part of the story a sort of bonus feat. In

21 In the first *Clash*, Kraken is Poseidon's creature. As to the other puppets in Hades' living arsenal, they include Dioskilos, a two-headed modern version of Cerberus, who guards Medusa's lair in the 1981 *Clash* and the Harpies Hades sets on Perseus in the 2010 *Clash* to steal Medusa's head. The Harpies acquired some attractive redeeming features in Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials*, probably the only such twist of the reception of Greek mythology (Puetz 2020, 223-245). The only known two-headed dog in Greek mythology was Orthros, Cerberus's brother and guardian of Geryon's cattle, slain along with his three-bodied master, Medusa's grandson, by Herakles. See Apollodoros, *Bibliotheca* 2,5,10; Hesiod, *Theogony* 233-236, 248-249, numbering of lines according to Powell in Hesiod 2017.

22 Ovid in the 4th book of *Metamorphoses*, 706-734, describes the heroic fight between Perseus and the sea monster; Perseus relies on Hermes' flying sandals, his own skill, and his sword to kill the

the movies, there is no Polydectes; in the second *Clash*, Danae dies in the casket Acrisius put her in, reluctant to kill her outright; she is already dead when the fisherman from Seriphos recovers the chest and later adopts Perseus. The reason to seek out Medusa is not a careless boast but Perseus' desire to save Andromeda (he met her before) and by the same token the city of Argos. He goes on his quest to obtain the weapon able to kill the sea monster – he has nothing against Medusa, it could have been any other weapon.

Conveniently for Perseus, the odds are stacked against Medusa: in theory, she can be killed. For an undisclosed reason,[23] uniquely mortal among Gorgonic triplets born to the same parents as the other set of triplets, the Graiae, Medusa does not grow old (whatever Hesiod says),[24] and is almost impossible to kill unless it is with a deicide enabled weapon, reinforced with some Olympian assistance. Her mortality is not of a simple kind, as once the head is cut off, it lives on retaining the lethal force of her eyes – an ancient creature born a monster and entirely unredeemable. And yet, centuries after the old Homeric and Hesiodean versions, more horrifying than enchanting, gained a foothold in the cultural imagination, Ovid, the unsurpassed master of reception and adaptation, rewrote the horror into a sad story of a wretched victim of divine violence and injustice, possibly brought on by hubris. The stage was set for posterity to see Medusa evolving into a lovely maiden raped by one god and punished by another for having succumbed to an unwanted assault.

The legacy of Freud's *Das Medusenhaupt* (1922), while having been put to pasture by later criticism, occasionally lingers. Peter W. Rose discusses teaching Perseus' myth to students through watching *Clash of the Titans* (1981) and confronting them with ancient sources (provided by Crowell's *Handbook of Classical Mythology*)[25] and with Philip E. Slater's rather insensitive and dated psychoanalytical interpretation (Rose 2001, 302-311, particularly 305; Slater 1968/1992, 318-319).

More recently, Dan Curley analyzed the 1981 *Clash*, adding a review of the relevant aspects of the 2010 remake. He focussed on the first movie and Harryhausen's Dynamation technique as "a viable medium for myth-making" (Curley 2015, 208). Expressing his admiration for the Perseus-Medusa duel sequence, Curley leaves aside Medusa's character and its evolution. He is more concerned with the role of gods and their relationship with mortals. As the final point of his brief comparison, he says: "Whether the original film offered a pantheon of divine

monster without using the radical means of showing the monster Medusa's head. Hyginus in *Fab*. 64 says: "Cassiope filiae suae Andromedae formam Nereidibus anteposuit. Ob id Neptunus expostulavit, ut Andromeda Cephei filia ceto obiceretur. Quae cum esset obiecta, Perseus Mercurii talaribus volans eo dicitur venisse et eam liberasse a periculo". Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2,4,3, says that Perseus killed the monster and saved Andromeda but also does not suggest that Perseus used the Gorgon's head in the fight.

23 She of course may have been mortal for the very powerful reason of narrative necessity: Perseus' myth, regardless of its versions, would collapse without it.

24 In *Theogony* 222 quoted above (numbering of lines according to Powell in Hesiod 2017).

25 A Crowell's reference book written by Edward Tripp and published by T.Y. Crowell in 1970 in New York.

animators, the remake's pantheon has become divinely animated" (Curley 2015, 216). Three years later, the same scholar published another comparison of the two *Clashes* in a paper on "antiheroes" featured in several recent films dealing with Antiquity (Curley 2018, 173-190). The two-page analysis (Curley 2018, 181-183) concludes by classifying the 1981 Perseus as a classic mythological hero and the 2010 character as an antihero who refuses divine help, immortality, and a princess' hand in marriage combined with the throne, opting for a simple life of a fisherman instead. Curley mentions Medusa in Leterrier's remake only as one of the few "preserved fragments" from the original film, without considering the manner of this "preservation", which lies outside the scope of his analysis.

There is a three-decade-long interval between the two *Clashes of the Titans* retelling the myth of Perseus. Wilk discussed the first *Clash* and the critical importance of the dimensional animation in fantasy films in his book about Medusa (Wilk 2000). He also predicted that this technique would be replaced by computer animation.[26] He was proven right when the second *Clash* hit the screens a decade later and revealed the same, or similar, scenes fully redone in CGI. The new technique, while impressive, does not produce the same stunning effect as the Dynamation did thirty years earlier. By 2010, the viewers were already unimpressed, if not jaded by exposure to CGI.

An interesting point for the comparison of the two films was brought up by Stacie Raucci in her chapter "Of Marketing and Men" in *Classical Myth on Screen* (Cyrino & Safran 2015, 161-171). While Raucci's interest lies in the pre-screening buildup of the heroes on posters and trailers, designed to entice the public to see the movies, a comparison of Medusa's image on posters for *Clash* one and two[27] contributes to our understanding of the character's evolution. The poster for the 1981 *Clash* shows a fiery, snaky, howling head of Medusa, the primaeval monster, occupying the centre of the image; against this background, Andromeda and Perseus stand together in a ballet stance, next to a golden Pegasus ready to fly them away. The 2010 poster for *Clash* displays a relatively small, handheld, severed head with snakes flying ahead and away (trying to avoid further harm?) from Perseus, who looks like a force of nature and is howling with the lust of battle. Regardless of the obvious stylistic differences and esthetic conventions, Medusa on the 1981 poster is a looming monster that needs to be vanquished; on the 2010 poster, she is defeated, a shapeless bundle – the head and the face completely obscured by snakes, a weapon devoid of identity or personality, held up defiantly by the hero.

26 "It is, I suppose, only a matter of time before someone will make a movie in which the Gorgon is created via computer animation, but it won't have the soul of Harryhausen's Medusa" (Wilk 2000, 214).

27 There were a few other posters produced in 1981 and in 2010 which displayed a variety of characters including gods and monsters but without a pronounced bearing on the treatment of Medusa. The 2010 poster described in the paper was reissued as a cover for the DVD release by Warner Home Video on July 27, 2010. The somber colouring of the original was warmed up by golden hues of the sky in the background.

Medusa remains a minor character in the second film, a means to an end, an instrument of mass destruction. The main driver this time is the conflict between gods and humans. Perseus, here, is much prouder to be human. He despises gods; he does not want to become an Olympian; he accepts his father's help only when facing certain death. Medusa in *Clash* 2 is different from the terrifying portrait in the first movie. She now shows a beautiful face in a halo of vicious serpents, and her lower body gracefully moves its powerful coils of a glistening giant snake. The Harryhausen's Medusa is terrifying in face and body – in direct opposition to the lovely Nadia Vodianova, who plays the Gorgon in 2010 – she propels herself like a giant, repulsive worm, some of her moves are jerky. Still, her gaze remains deadly. Both films make Medusa even more dangerous than she was in the ancient sources by providing her with a bow and advanced archery skills. When her attackers manage to avoid looking at her, she may still kill them with her arrows. The fight to the death with Leterrier's Medusa features not only Perseus and his companions but also Sheikh Suleiman, chief of the magical Jinn, impervious to Medusa's stare, who activates the blue explosive device in his chest sacrificing himself to wound Medusa almost fatally. He makes it possible for Perseus to sever her head. The non-human Jinn help the hero achieve his goal because they are also against oppressive divine domination (Tomasso 2018).[28]

Perseus is victorious against not only Medusa but also Kraken (who in 1981 looks closely related to Godzilla, and in 2010 turns into a sleek, many-tentacled giant CGI octopus). In 2010, Perseus set Andromeda on the throne but had different matrimonial plans than in 1981. Before Perseus and his companions enter Medusa's lair, the lovely Io (a 2010 addition and Perseus' future wife), probably having read Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and some of the more sympathetic interpretations, explains that Medusa was once a beautiful woman desired by Poseidon. She fled before him to Athena's temple, praying in vain for the goddess' protection. Athena felt affronted and transformed the rape victim into a hideous and lethal monster whose gaze turned living things to stone. Io also mentions that there is a curse forbidding women entrance to Medusa's lair. Could it be poetic justice protecting potential victims and reserving petrification for men?

According to the myth, Medusa is decapitated, dies and her head becomes a desired weapon, but not accessible because Perseus either throws it into the sea or gives it to Athena, who fixes it on her shield. The head as a symbol and no longer a weapon of mass destruction but transformed into a deterrent – to remain in the arms race terminology – becomes a gorgoneion mask with apotropaic powers. Quite popular as protection against danger, it may be often found guarding doors, or other vulnerable places, and features on necklaces as an anti-evil eye amulet, worn even by gods. Wilk, and Ogden after him, emphasize the resemblance of the mask to the deformed face of a rotting corpse, complete with hair standing up from the scalp, bulging eyes, and a repulsive rictus: protruding tongue and drawn back lips (Wilk 2000, 183-191; Ogden 2008, footnote 22 and

28 Tomasso (2018) says that "*Clash* advocates for alliance rather than the binary 'clash of civilizations'" – a very contemporary position.

the related passage). A symbol of death that protects from death, possibly as a reminder that death brings ultimate decay of life and the living must be prepared. It says: be extremely careful because you may end up like this, and sooner than you think – a *sui generis* mythological *memento mori*.

Petrification, as a motif of ancient origin, underwent a curious change after Antiquity, where it was hard and cruel and always followed by death. Later it becomes less definitive and occurs in fairy tales. People turned to stone do not crumble but may be revived magically. Literary examples abound. In Bolesław Leśmian's 1913 *Klechdy sezamowe* [Sesame Tales] inspired by the *Arabian Nights*, brave adventurers turned to stone are resurrected by drops of a magical resin (Leśmian 2017, 280-285). C.S. Lewis' talking animals of Narnia turned into stone by the White Witch are revived by Aslan's breath (Lewis 2017). Hogwarts students, the Gryffindor House ghost, and the school caretaker's cat are petrified by an ancient monstrous serpent, the Basilisk (a potential relative of Medusa's, on the snaky side), and brought back to life with Mandrake juice (Rowling 2013, 329).[29]

The second decade of the 21st century brings little in the sense of Medusa scholarship. A 2011 book *Classics on Screen. Ancient Greece and Rome on Film* (Blanchard & Shahabudin 2013) mentions Davis' and Leterrier's films four times, but in relation to brief summaries of the plots, special effects, similarity to video games, and the relationships between gods and mortals; the character of Medusa simply does not come up in any of the ten chapters of the book. David Leeming, in his 2013 "biography" of Medusa, gives a general overview of what cultural posterity did with the myth, acknowledging *The Medusa Reader*, edited by Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers in 2003, as one of his main sources of information, which labels his book as a less scholarly publication (Leeming 2013, 122). It is indeed more of a listing of various Medusa related cultural texts and art than an original take on the abundantly available material. The two *Clashes* receive only a brief factual mention accompanied by a quote from Wilk about the first movie's popularity (Leeming 2013, 80). Among even "lighter" fare, there is a 2017 feminist anthology – one would almost say a samizdat – of over sixty personal and subjective essays entitled *Re-visioning Medusa: From Monster to Divine Wisdom*. Only one of the authors, Teri Uktena, was impressed enough with the first *Clash* to give it a thought: "*Clash of the Titans* with Harry Hamlin is a cult classic" (Hendren et al. 2017, Kindle location 1051). The appearance of such publications indicates how pronounced the current interest of the general public is in the character of Medusa and new interpretations of the myth of Medusa. The legacy of the two *Clashes,* displaying the highly traditional images of a mythical monster, seems largely forgotten and well removed from the concurrent tendency to shine a beacon of light on the tragic, human, and mortal aspects of the character, initiated by Hélène Cixous speaking to adults, and followed by others who retell the story to children and youth.

29 The victims of the Basilisk's yellow eyes only saw the monster in a reflection on spilled water, or in a mirror; this indirect eye contact was clearly reversible.

Medusa's Bad Hair Day, or The Taming of the Baby-Shrew

Katarzyna Marciniak

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when Perseus tells of "his long journeys, of dangers that were not imaginary ones, what seas and lands he had seen below from his high flight, and what stars he had brushed against with beating wings", and finally of his terrible fight with Medusa, the audience wishes to know one thing only: "Why Medusa, alone among her sisters, had snakes in her hair?" (4,753-803)[30]. Indeed, it was the hair – the girl's greatest "beauty", transformed by Athena into a hideous attribute of the punished Medusa-monster – that aroused the strongest emotions both in Perseus' listeners at the court of his father-in-law and across generations of artists working on the reception of this myth. Among them were Caravaggio and Rubens, who carefully studied and even brought into their homes specimens of reptilian fauna in order to give to their Gorgons the perfect serpentine locks.

Hair has a long tradition as a symbol of womanhood and freedom. A cultural history of these two concepts and their intrinsic relationship could be written only by following the "hair styling" practices, including the given society's rules for covering or trimming one's coiffure.[31] In our times, starting from the second half of the 20th century, the notion of freedom probably takes a slight lead in this context, as the social transformations have also included men within the scope of "hair studies", to mention only the hippie counterculture as captured in the musical *Hair* by Galt MacDermot (1967), with its famous film adaptation by Miloš Forman (1979).

The reception of the myth of Medusa in works for young people is interesting from this perspective, as the snakes are given their own agency, as it were. They are not a repulsive stigma of dire punishment; rather, they seem to be Medusa's friendly helpers, they enact her true thoughts and desires and seem to be the manifestation of her Freudian *id*, which the Gorgon needs to learn to accept and integrate within her consciousness in order to achieve maturity and fulfilment. In reference to the coming-of-age process, this motif is an important narrative tool for making the audience aware of the complexity of identity building.

The protagonist of the picture book by Joan Holub (text) and Leslie Patricelli (illustrations), *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!* (2015), is still a long way from being able to grasp this complexity, as she is a toddler taking her first steps in the world. However, she is already experiencing the pains of fighting for agency. For now, with an ambiguous end – happy or not quite, but for sure with a guiding ray of hope.

30 Trans. Antony S. Kline (Ovid 2000, ad loc.).

31 For the first works in this area see, e.g., Hiltebeitel/Miller 1998; Sherrow 2005; Ofek 2009.

The picture book draws on the popularity of Holub and Suzanne Williams's series for 8- to 12-year-olds, *The Goddess Girls*, initiated in 2010 (see the next section of this paper). Preceded by the two volumes – *Be Patient, Pandora!* and *Play Nice, Hercules!* – *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!* is part of a new series, *Mini Myths*, for the youngest audience: preschool children from 1 to 3 years old. Each book, with colourful illustrations and a simple story – a "mythology-inspired modern-day parable for the young and young at heart", as the cover blurb informs us – offers an easy and funny lesson to help kids socialize and learn the basic rules of behaviour in the adult world. The narration is interspersed with loose references to a chosen Greek myth, that is summarized in the last section of the picture book. Such a method has a two-fold positive effect: on the one hand, the mythological elements provide these little readers who already know the myths with a background that makes the story familiar; on the other, those readers who are yet to discover the realm of mythology gain an educational opportunity by entering this realm easily through a modern-day setting – and thereafter, they deepen their knowledge in the summary section at the end.

The mythological setting in *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!* is built around the action's knot, that is the "hair rebellion" of a baby girl named after the famous Greek monster. Medusa refuses to brush her hair and is adamant in her resolution, despite the pleas from her Father. Not even the perspective of the Grandma coming for a visit changes the toddler's behaviour that elicits – and here we have an allusion to the myth clear for the adults reading the book to their children (the "dual audience" phenomenon, e.g., Wall 1991; Nodelman 2008) – *frozen* looks of shock from her family members. Other references are more easily grasped by the inexperienced readers: on the first page we see the protagonist standing proudly on an Ionic column; next, there is a toy snake draped from Medusa's bedpost; and her doll is a mermaid (she even offers to brush the doll's hair instead of her own, but the Father does not accept this compromise). Furthermore, in one of the illustrations, the girl herself seems monstrous – when the Grandma arrives, she sees not a human toddler, but a frightening bunch of Medusa's entangled locks, the rest of her little body disappearing somewhere outside of the book. The Grandma takes the girl to a hairdresser, who has Hermes' wings on his hat, as we can see in the salon mirror (an equivalent for Perseus' polished shield). He keeps a blade in his hand and cuts Medusa's locks, which then fall to the floor and lay there like coiled snakes. Finally, we are provided with the Greek myth's summary, focused precisely on the topic of hair: "Medusa was a sea monster with hair made of snakes. Anyone who dared to look at her was turned to stone!", it starts. Next, we learn that "King Polydectes sent a man named Perseus to stop Medusa from scaring everyone". In this version *ad usum* (*parvuli*) *Delphini* there is no place for death (the Gorgon simply spooks people) or for an evil king trying to possess Perseus' mother. Hence also the mild coda: instead of a scene of slaying the monster, again the focus is on her hair, which is deprived of its uncontrollable force: "Perseus was able to defeat Medusa and tame her snaky hair" (Holub/Patricelli 2015b, [n.p.]).

This type of modification of myths is, of course, perfectly in line with reception practice – we should remember that the picture book targets the group of 1-

to 3-year-olds. The only possible trauma in such a context can be Medusa's short haircut, but also here the potentially difficult experience is softened, as everything happens with the girl's consent and in the end she is given a candy for her compliance. In sum, "All are pleased with this drastic yet adorable solution" (the publisher's note). But indeed all? No. While *Be Patient, Pandora!* and *Play Nice, Hercules!* contain positive lessons in good manners, ones widely appreciated by parents, in the case of *Brush Your Hair, Medusa!*, there are some reservations popping up here and there on the Internet (see, e.g., Amazon reviews). Namely, the preoccupied (or frustrated) progenitors observe that the protagonist's initial lack of obedience leads to (1) a reward in the form of a lollipop (which is also not quite healthy *per se*), (2) the commissioning to deal with the problem to another person (the hairdresser), and (3) the unpedagogical elimination of the problem for the future (the short haircut requires no further efforts from Medusa). However, these objections seem rather more humorous than truly critical. They are also a testimony to an interesting phenomenon in the field of children's literature. That it is read by adults too, is obvious, but we can see that the mature readers become deeply engaged in the stories and they expect not only educational values for their wards, but also some support for themselves in their daily (Herculean) parental tasks.

In the context of the serious agenda of this picture book, I wish rather to focus on a different aspect, one that opens the field for discussing the issue of socializing children – a process that is natural on their way to maturation, although it is also artificial, as the youngest children may be deprived of, or at least they have to learn to control and suppress part of, their innate *esprit*. Let us observe that Medusa, as the protagonist of this light story, is poised on the border between Nature (associated with childhood) and Culture (understood as the adult realm). The background built by the Greek myth of one of the most famous monsters only strengthens this dualism. The "mini monster-girl" is untamed, stubborn, self-governing, and sovereign, which is symbolically expressed by her tangled hair and bare feet, and her position on the Ionic column – a clear demonstration of her triumph, yet from before the visit to the hairdresser's. This visit is something she accepts, but in fact, she is tricked into it. She believes that the Grandma was going to take her out for some candy, and even if that does happen (she gets her lollipop at the hair salon), it is hard to resist the impression that the feisty character of Medusa loses in the unequal battle with the adults' methods of steering her agency. She goes to the hairdresser in shoes brought by her Father, who stands for the acculturation process, and her short haircut resembles the coiffure of the Grandma, with the only difference in colour (blond instead of grey). While the bribery with candy is a rather sad conclusion to the story (but also a real experience, as many parents might confess), the whole issue is complex, for Medusa does make a concession at the cost of her agency; however, at the same time, she gains not only candy but also access to the social life of her family members whereby she becomes similar to them, which is symbolically shown through their physical resemblance. She has resigned from a part of herself, but now she truly belongs. To have captured the essence of the tensions of

young people's identity-building in such a light picture book for toddlers – this is the authors' undeniable achievement.

Moreover, the authors play with us cleverly all the way to the last page. There we see Medusa still with her lollipop and the mermaid doll. Her Father appears again and asks the girl to brush her… teeth (quite a good idea after the sweet treat). How will this quest end? Well, we are left to use our imagination, but we should remember that the mythological Gorgon has impressive fangs and it is impossible to remove them. So there is hope in this open ending (maybe even a happy ending after all), much in Shakespeare's ironic style, where in the grand finale we are invited to question the apparently successful harnessing of the strong-willed protagonist. Perhaps you are not able to tame the shrew, be it a mature woman or a baby monster on her way to becoming one. And perhaps deep down you do not want to tame them, as the world is richer and more amusing when each of us can keep our own agency.

Medusa's "Snakeypoo Accident": A Lesson in Acceptance

Dorota Rejter

Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams devote three volumes of the series *The Goddess Girls* to Medusa, this time as a "teenage monster". In the collection, the authors have decided to re-create the ancient myths by "pushing them into a different setting" (Williams 2020) and by adapting them to the age of their readers (age 8-12). In *The Goddess Girls*, Holub and Williams present the members of the Greek pantheon as students of the Mount Olympus Academy (MOA). We get to know Medusa for the first time as one of the MOA's pupils in the book *Athena the Brain* (2010), where she is presented mainly as the antagonist. Then, she becomes the main character of two volumes: *Medusa the Mean* (2012)[32] and *Medusa the Rich* (2015). Her monstrous transformation can teach the young readers about self-acceptance.

As we learn from the books, Medusa is the daughter of Ceto and Phorcys, and the sister of Stheno and Euryale. She is the only mortal of her siblings, so her parents often underestimate her and focus mainly on her sisters. Also at school Medusa feels isolated and lonely, as there are not many other mortal students at the Mount Olympus Academy. At the beginning, she does not have any friends and she feels socially excluded. Kids at school bully her because of her appearance and because she is not a real goddess. From the beginning Medusa looks like a Gorgon – she has a light green coloured skin that "didn't shimmer" (Holub/Wil-

32 For an analysis of Medusa's reception in this volume see Hodkinson 2020, 197-222.

liams 2010, 19) – compared to the skin of her sisters – and long dark green hair. Children keep calling her "Gorgonzola" because of her surname "Gorgon", and saying that she stinks like blue cheese. Medusa, often intimidated and reserved, becomes mean and spiteful. She is also jealous of the other goddesses. Before she gains any friends, she is perceived by her peers as a very cold and callous person, while all she ever wants is to become popular and accepted.

In the context of the monstrous transformation, the authors describe only the change of Medusa's hair into snakes, as from the beginning she and her sisters have all the features that distinguish them as creatures contrasting in appearance from other characters (green skin colour, etc.). Medusa's hair metamorphosis takes place in the volume *Athena the Brain* and is caused accidentally by the eponymous goddess. The authors put the motif of Medusa's transformation in a new context, distant from the ancient sources, at the same time being able to extract the actual morals from the classical myth. Although Holub and Williams have probably decided to refer to the Ovidian version of the myth by placing Poseidon in the plot, he is not connected to Medusa's hair change, and the authors avoid the topic of Poseidon's seduction or sexual abuse of her. Instead, they focus more on the relation between Athena and Medusa and present Poseidon as a school womanizer who is Medusa's biggest crush. In one of Williams' interviews, she explained why she and her colleague decided to avoid all the tragic motifs in their series. Asked about the challenges faced in selecting or adapting particular myths, she admitted that one of their biggest problems was "how to handle the sexual and violent content of many of the myths" (Williams 2020). She pointed out that the age target played the crucial role in their decisions and she talked about how they dealt with such motifs: "To downplay the violence, we often make it cartoonish and lighten it with humor. Since most of our gods and goddesses are pre-teens (as are our readers!), we deal with inappropriate sexual content by making changes that still allow us to keep to the spirit of the myth" (Williams 2020). Thus, it is worth analyzing how the authors managed to change Medusa's monstrous transformation into a funny event and what kind of ancient "spirit" they decided to preserve.

In *Athena the Brain,* when Medusa realizes Poseidon is flirting with a new student – Athena – she becomes jealous of her, and she starts acting mean. When Medusa hears about the newest invention of the "brainy" goddess – the magical shampoo *Snarkypoo* [sic], she decides to steal it and use it. After washing her hair, she feels strange and eventually, her hair changes into snakes and she gains new abilities. Athena has misspelt the name of the shampoo and called it *Snakeypoo*, and that is why green snakes grow on Medusa's head. Additionally, Athena's invention was supposed to "turn snarky words into stone"(Holub/Williams 2010, 54) – she invented it with Medusa in mind – therefore, when a few drops of it get into Medusa's eyes, she gains the ability to turn people into stone.

Although this transformation brings a lot of trouble to Medusa, she does not perceive it as a negative experience. On the contrary, she observes many positive aspects of her metamorphosis, *inter alia* the fact that she has gained a unique power and she stands out from the rest of the gods and goddesses. The girl fi-

nally feels brave and confident. We can notice all the important lessons she has learned from it, especially in the two volumes dedicated more to her character, *Medusa the Mean* and *Medusa the Rich*. There, we find out that thanks to the *Snakeypoo* accident the Gorgon has gained new friends, specifically her snakes, which she now treats as pets. They always support her, help her make hard decisions and protect her: "Though her snakes had been the result of an accident with *Snakeypoo*, a botched invention of the brainy goddess girl Athena – it had turned out to be a happy accident. Medusa adored the dozen snakes that had replaced her hair" (Holub/Williams 2015, 2). The girl also realizes that being mean is not always the best solution to protect yourself from others and that instead of being jealous, it is good just to be yourself. Thanks to this change of approach, we see that she starts opening up to her colleagues and she builds new connections. Medusa's inner change also affects her perception of the opposite sex – in *Medusa the Mean* she has a chance to discover that Poseidon is not worth her attention, as he reveals himself to be a very selfish, careless man. Going further by achieving her self-acceptance, Medusa becomes ready to notice another god – Dionysus, who understands her better and accepts her as she really is, including the snakes, which demonstrate a kind of affection towards him long before the Gorgon realizes her feelings.

Medusa's story in *The Goddess Girls* talks a lot about female competition, jealousy, and hubris, the elements that the authors were able to preserve from the ancient versions of Medusa's myth. These themes can definitely speak to modern teenagers, who often focus on rivalry and constantly compare themselves with others. By setting the action of the series in a school environment and by "humanizing" the character of Medusa, showing her as a teenager dealing with the current problems of adolescence, Holub and Williams manage to create a message about self-acceptance, tolerance, and the power of friendship. As the character of Medusa starts to understand her uniqueness thanks to her external transformation, she becomes able to point out to the young readers that the best recipe for inner happiness and good relations with others is to love yourself first.

The Coming of Age in the Gorgoneous Families

Karolina Anna Kulpa

Among the many reception images of Medusa created in the last decade, Deuce Gorgon from the franchise *Monster High*[33] and Nia from the series *Legacies*[34] are certainly worth special attention. Both characters exemplify how the mythological image of the snake-haired monster can be transformed through the prism of popular culture into anthropomorphic "teenagers", struggling with problems similar to those of their human peers. It is not monstrosity or superpowers that are the main concern of Deuce and Nia, but rather the issue of building their identity and discovering the meaning of true love and friendship. Owing to this, as the viewers, we modify our perception of these characters – ostensibly, so different. In the end, they are no longer "others" and "strangers" in the anthropological meaning, but "the same as us".[35] In my opinion, both characters show how it is possible to open up to otherness, in the world of a child and a young adult, regardless of the other person's physical appearance and background. Especially as their difference is not repulsive and in combination with positive character traits and interesting adventures, they become attractive to a young viewer. As Draculora, Deuce's friend and daughter of a vampire notes in the introduction to an animated film, *Welcome to Monster High*,[36] directed by Stephen Donnelly, Olly Reid, and Jun Falkenstein: "Normal is relative. Normal is about how you feel, not about how you look or what you do. Normal is different for everyone" (*Welcome to Monster High*, 00:49). The social stigma[37] of a monster disappears.

The *Monster High* series, created by Mattel in 2010, is a huge transmedia phenomenon that includes many types of products, for example, dolls with accessories, books, and audiovisual culture works, all dedicated to characters – the teenagers attending Monster High, inspired by a typical American high school. This school, however, is particular, as the teenagers in question are children of famous movie monsters, such as the Creature of Doctor Frankenstein, Dracula, and werewolves. In this paper, I focus on their adventures in the web series, released on an official YouTube channel[38] since May 5, 2010, and the film *Boo York, Boo York* (2015, directed by William Lau).[39]

A Monster High student, sixteen-year-old Deuce, son of "that" famous Medusa, is a tall, athletic, young human-like monster. First, he is an example of a very

33 See: play.monsterhigh.com (accessed May 16, 2020).
34 See: *Legacies*, www.imdb.com/title/tt8103070/ (accessed May 4, 2020). *The Vampire Diaries,* www.imdb.com/title/tt1405406/ (accessed May 4, 2020).
35 About the concept of "Otherness" in sociology, culture and anthropology studies see: Levinas 1979; Bauman 1991; Waldenfels 1997.
36 See: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5898034/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1 (accessed May 21, 2020).
37 About the concept of "stigma" see: Goffman 1963.
38 See: https://www.youtube.com/user/MonsterHigh/featured (accessed May 16, 2020).
39 More information and the soundtrack on https://play.monsterhigh.com/en-au/booyork-dvd/index.html (accessed May 15, 2020).

rare representation of Gorgon as a male. Second, as a son of Medusa he could also be a child of Poseidon, but the identity of his father remains unknown. Of course his potential paternity changes the way this character is perceived, and I will certainly examine this subject in the future. Here however, I will focus on other aspects, especially on reviewing his identity in relation to his peers.

He is very popular, and dates one of the main characters, Cleo de Nile (whose parents are mummies), and together they form a type of high school "power couple", a concept highlighted in many films for young adults.[40] The snakes are one of the features that prove Deuce's "Gorgoneous" ancestry: the hairstyle with snake scales and a mohawk composed of six to nine snakes on the top of his head. He also has green snake scales on his left arm (perhaps a tattoo) and green eyes.[41] As mentioned earlier, despite his "monstrosity" Deuce has an attractive appearance. It is worth noting that the snakes in both the mythological Medusa's image and its pop-cultural incarnations are a very interesting element – although they seem to be separate and independent creatures, they express the subconscious side of the monsters, the intense emotions hidden in their hearts. The snakes on Deuce's head, venomous and terrifying on the mythical Gorgon, here are gentle and friendly, creating a fashionable hairstyle, which accurately reflects his personality. His popularity at Monster High is based on his friendly and kind attitude towards all of his colleagues. He is very cool, funny, addresses others as "dude" and always sees the bright side of life. Of course, he is Medusa's son, so his green-eyed gaze can accidentally turn people and objects into stone, but in contrast with the power of the mother, known from mythology, the transformation is not deadly and lasts only a few hours. Moreover, he wears glasses – he has many pairs of them, to protect others from the effects of his glance, and thus he controls his potentially dangerous power.[42] There is another difference between him and his mythological mother. In one of the versions of the myth of Medusa, her brief romance with Poseidon ends in cruel punishment at the hands of Athena. In *Monster High*, Deuce's adventures do not result in misery; he is fortunate in friendship and love. In this story, his relationships are far from condemned; they give him the strength to act and lead himself out of various troubles to a happy end.

Deuce loves his girlfriend, Cleo, is loyal to her[43] and ready to sacrifice his happiness for her, which is especially noticeable in the full-length animated film *Boo*

40 The theme of many films for young people is love between high school sweethearts. This is true, e.g., of *Grease* (1978, directed by Randall Kleiser), *Sixteen Candles* (1984, directed by John Hughes), *A Walk to Remember* (2002, directed by Adam Shankam), *High School Musical* series (2006, 2007, 2008, directed by Kenny Ortega), *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2019, directed by Susan Johnson), and many others.

41 His favorite animal is the rat Perseus – another reference to Medusa's myth. See more*: Deuce Gorgon*, https://play.monsterhigh.com/en-us/characters/deuce-gorgon (accessed May 29, 2020); *Deuce Gorgon*, https://monsterhigh.fandom.com/wiki/Deuce_Gorgon (accessed May 29, 2020).

42 Similar glasses are worn by the characters of Medusa from the movies *Voyage of the Unicorn*, played by Kira Clawell (2001, directed by Philip Spink), and *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, played by Uma Thurman (2010, directed by Chris Columbus).

43 Especially in the second episode "Varsity Boos" of the second season in the web series: https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=kyI21887YrI (accessed May 23, 2020).

York, Boo York (2015, directed by William Lau).[44] He concludes that he makes his girlfriend unhappy because they come from different worlds. She is an Egyptian princess, while he describes himself as an ordinary boyfriend, who does not know about elegance and high life. As a result of the machinations of Cleo's sister, Nefera, he breaks up with his girlfriend believing that he brings her shame and that his beloved deserves a better partner. But over time he realizes that deep down, he knows they should be together and decides to fight for their relationship. With the help of Ghoulfriends (the main female characters of the series), he recovers his beloved, at the last minute preventing her from becoming engaged in an arranged match to another man – Seth from the Ptolemy family. Deuce and Cleo rediscover themselves as true lovers, and the reconciliation of the couple culminates in a kiss, during which we see one of the snakes on Deuce's head tenderly kissing Cleo on the forehead.

Another attractive Medusa character, this time a teenage girl called Nia (we do not know her last name) is a member of the "Gorgon family" from the series *Legacies* created by Julie Plec. This is a fantasy television drama launched on October 25, 2018, now consisting of two seasons, the third scheduled for January 2021. It is a spin-off of *The Originals* (2013-2018) and *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017), also created by Plec, showing the history of the first vampires, the Mikaelson family, and the relationships between two vampire brothers – Damon and Stephan Salvatore. The *Legacies* reveals the later life of Klaus Mikaelson's daughter, Hope, who is a *tribrid*, a hybrid between a werewolf, a witch, and a vampire; she finds her place at a school for young people with supernatural powers in Mystic Falls.[45]

Nia appears as a guest character in just two episodes of the series ("Let's Just Finish the Dance" and "There's Always a Loophole"),[46] but the audience can see how easily she fits in this school environment. She is beautiful, looks like a teenage African-American girl with a hairstyle made up of many braids, into which red, violet, and blue strands of hair are woven. On the day of the Miss Mystic Falls beauty pageant, Nia visits the Salvatore School for the Young and Gifted, where supernatural creatures such as vampires, witches, and werewolves are secretly educated. Until then, her loved ones lived in the wilderness, avoiding others, so her kind, the Gorgons, have not yet been discovered. Although she blends in perfectly in the crowd of other unconventional, supernatural students like her, Nia has attracted the attention of Milton Greasley (he presents himself as MG), a teenage vampire (turned into this supernatural creature a few years earlier), with whom she later talks freely about comic books as if they knew each other for a long time. The two seem like a couple of ordinary teenagers, discussing their favourite character, the Green Lantern, a figure known from the DC Comics universe.[47] The

44 More information and the soundtrack on https://play.monsterhigh.com/en-au/booyork-dvd/index.html (accessed May 15, 2020).

45 Mystic Falls is a fictional small town in Virginia, where supernatural events often happen and the vampires, witches, and werewolves live among the inhabitants.

46 Episode 14 and 16 from the first season, see: *Legacies*, www.imdb.com/title/tt8103070/ (accessed May 4, 2020).

47 Nia's favourite Green Lantern is John Stewart, the first African-American superhero in the DC universe; for more see Cowsill/Irvine/Korté/Manning/Wiacek 2016.

bond she has established with MG – it seems they have a crush on each other – may suggest that a friendly attitude to the world and a beautiful, wide smile could win her many friends. Nia also reacts when someone else suffers, as she proves by turning MG's mother into a stone statue (for a couple of hours) because Mrs Greasley wanted to take her son away from school against his will. When she decides to use her power, her hair turns into living snakes, and her eyes become purple and emit a gentle light. The transformation into stone can be reversed by her; unfortunately, the viewer does not find out how this happens.

Nia is also struggling with an internal conflict between her own beliefs and sympathies and the mission she must accomplish. It turns out that she was kidnapped from her family by the *Legacies*' antagonists – the so-called Triad Industries, who want, at any cost, to keep secret the fact that supernatural creatures live among people. The Triad threatened Nia that all memory of her existence would be erased from the world when they throw her to Malivore,[48] a pit (previously a golem) which consumes its victims into a "hellish" dimension, to clear the earth of "monsters". She is forced by them to cooperate in order to kidnap one of the protagonists – Landon Kirby, who also attends the school in Mystic Falls. In the end, the friendship between her and MG leads to situations where they both save each other. When Nia wants to turn Landon into stone and take him to Malivore, MG appears to rescue his school mate. He knows about two ways to defeat a Gorgon and decides not to kill Nia by decapitation (like Perseus in the myth), but to deprive her of her power by (an invention of the series creator) hitting a bronze bell three times, after which he gives her a sleeping potion. Nia spends a couple of hours in lockdown, regretting her actions and explaining her behaviour to MG. After her release, she is grateful to him for saving her life and defends her vampire friend against the commander of the Triad's forces.

To sum up, both characters from the "Gorgon family" in the *Monster High* and *Legacies* series can control their powers, and they are not murderers. Nia has the same gift as Deuce, but unlike him, she has the skill to use it as she wants. They are the "others", even in their "monstrous" worlds, but know the value of friendship and love, and they can fight for a loved one or defend a friend. It should also be highlighted that both Nia and Deuce can be regarded not as a new kind of Medusa, but a new, teenage incarnation of this mythological creature. The humanization of these characters, shown against the background of peers, in the school environment familiar to the viewers, probably neutralizes the fear of their "monstrosity" and makes them new figures of children's and young adults' culture. This can also change the perception of Medusa – the ancient creature killed by Perseus. Deuce and Nia turn out to be friendly, and their otherness is not repulsive; they just look for their place like typical teenagers who live among us. As Draculora also said: "I am not like other people, but then again, who is?" (*Welcome to Monster High*, 02:23).

48 See: https://vampirediaries.fandom.com/wiki/Malivore (accessed May 12, 2020).

Medusa's Sacrifice: Love that Saves

Agnieszka Monika Maciejewska

The character of Medusa also appears in the TV-series *Atlantis*[49] aired between 2013 and 2015 on BBC One. Many elements from Greek mythology are featured there and combined inventively; they present the mythical stories[50] attractively, in a manner suitable for both younger and older viewers. *Atlantis* is about the adventures of Jason and his two friends, Hercules and Pythagoras. The main character, looking for his missing father who disappeared years earlier in a small submarine, miraculously moves from modern times to the mythical city of Atlantis, as if through an underwater wormhole. Marked by a prophecy, he saves the city from the power-hungry witch Pasiphae, the wife of Minos. Medusa, a minor figure inspired by the myth of a beautiful woman turned into a monster, is a perfect example of the way reception of Classical Antiquity functions here.[51]

The character of Medusa appears already in the second episode of the first series (S01E02 – "A Girl by Any Other Name"). It opens with her running for her life through a forest trying to escape a creature of Dionysus, a human flesh-eating satyr. She is caught and initiated into Dionysus' rites as a Maenad along with another kitchen maid, Demetria, who was kidnapped when picking herbs in the woods. Jason, Hercules, and Pythagoras try to find Demetria at the request of her old and sick father. The Maenads catch Hercules, but instead of being sacrificed to Dionysus, he is saved by Medusa, who avoided her initiation by blocking her ears and faking her devotion. Unfortunately, her lies are discovered and she is thrown to the pit to feed the satyrs. Jason jumps into the pit and saves her, and due to some magical reason, the satyrs are afraid of him. The battle ends when Medusa defends Jason by killing the High Priestess Anysia, who curses her. After the battle, they are all able to return to Atlantis although without Demetria, who is now entirely devoted to Dionysus. When the friends come back to Demetria's father, Medusa tells him that his daughter was happy; she left with the man she loved and asked her to care for the sick father in Atlantis who can now die in peace.

49 *Atlantis*, created by Johnny Capps, Julian Murphy, and Howard Overman, directed by Justin Molotnikov, Declan O'Dwyer, Alice Troughton, Jeremy Webb, Julian Murphy, Lawrence Gough, UK, 2013-2015.

50 The series combines many mythological threads. The main action takes place in Atlantis, referring to the lost metropolis. In the city, you can see references to the Minoan culture (not only by referring to the famous ruler of Crete, King Minos, but also to the myth about the Minotaur's Labyrinth, which was located near the city). The series also features inspirations from other Greek stories, including Oedipus and Pandora's Box.

51 As Martin Lindner writes, in the context of animated films, Greek mythology offers amazing opportunities for directors to show the story of individual characters. The researcher points out that the question remains how much of a myth an artist wants to convey to a young recipient. Individual changes in the character's appearance, history, or behaviour show how strongly mythology affects the imagination of artists and how modern reception works in filmography inspired by Antiquity (see: Lindner 2008, 39-55). The same process can be seen not only in animated films for children and teenagers but also in television series, including *Atlantis*.

In the next episode (S01E03: "A Boy of No Consequence"), affection grows between Medusa and Hercules.[52] The three friends "are called to the bulls" to face Poseidon's judgment for offending Pasiphae's nephew; Jason is again saved by Medusa, who manages to prevent Pasiphae from magically murdering him. Jason confides in the Oracle that where he comes from there is a horrible tale about a girl named Medusa. The Oracle confirms that Medusa cannot escape her fate, just as Jason cannot avoid his own.

The subsequent episodes further highlight the positive qualities of Medusa: good, kind, and helpful. She always helps her friends in need and is also able to forgive – especially when she is hurt by those she loves.[53] In the ninth episode (S01E09 – "Pandora's Box"), the idyll between Medusa and her beloved Hercules ends. Anysia's curse catches up with her. She is kidnapped by a man who wants to force Hercules and his friends to recover a mysterious box from the Underworld. It turns out to be the notorious Pandora's Box. Medusa cannot resist her curiosity, opens the box and because of Anysia's curse transforms into a snake-haired monster whose glance turns people to stone.

The series' creators perfectly fused two mythological themes – they not only duplicated the motif of punishment for sacrilege (in this case, killing the priestess of Dionysus) but also combined the myth of Medusa with that of Pandora, highlighting the fatal power of curiosity.

However, it seems that here, the transformation into a monster is not the worst punishment for Medusa, who loves Hercules. Now she must abandon the love she found, indeed cease all contact with him. She decides to escape from Atlantis not to hurt anyone. Hercules decides to sacrifice himself to overturn the curse. Unfortunately, in the end, all efforts fail, and when Pasiphae threatens Atlantis' survival, Medusa becomes a Gorgon again. She asks Jason, immune to her gaze, to kill her and use her head to vanquish Pasiphae's army. In episode 9 of the second season, these emotionally supercharged events develop, and Medusa becomes the greatest hero of them all, sacrificing her life and her love for the good of the people of Atlantis. The viewers are faced with an entirely different image of Medusa, who may have looked like a monster but was the opposite.

Martin Winkler, a classicist fascinated by the reception of mythology on-screen, emphasizes that Greek mythology has allowed filmmakers (and, as can be seen from the example above, also creators of television series) endless possibilities of presenting the myth:

52 The figure of Hercules is most often associated with a man who is strong, masculine, or athletic. The character presented by the directors of the series is a hero whose fame has already passed. He no longer has a fit body and his favorite place is the tavern, where he often indulges in alcoholic libations.

53 In one episode, Hercules decides to go to Kirke for a jar with mermaid singing, to make Medusa reciprocate his feelings. However, the spell causes the girl's sickness. Her body begins to break out in bubbles that cause inflammation. After friends reverse the spell of Kirke, and Medusa learns what he did, she initially limits her contact with him. Later, however, she forgives him and they become a harmonious couple.

> Filmmakers follow their own rules when they make mythological films and do not consider themselves bound by their sources. In the process, they become adaptors of stories comparable to the ancient poets themselves, who took the materials for their epics or dramas from older versions of myth. (Winkler 2007, 461)

The *Atlantis* series and the character of Medusa are a great example of this. The creators did not portray Medusa as a monstrous creature that turns people into stone. Quite the opposite – they decided to introduce Medusa before the transformation, showing her as a good, helpful woman who wants to love and make her dreams of happiness come true. She is ready despite her tragic fate to sacrifice her contentment for the needs of other people. In this way, the series' creators also help us to realize that in pop culture, there can be many images of a character, some authentic, some fictional. A seemingly (and traditionally) evil character, a monster, may show a tragic human face and earn our pity, even understanding and sympathy. In the case of Medusa, her role is reversed – she turns from a normal girl into a monster, and finally into a heroine, thus showing to a young audience that there is a multitude of dynamic layers in a personality, and we cannot judge someone just based on a snapshot, or a superficial glance.

Aunty Em: Between Love and Hate

Anna Mik

In most of the presented works so far, Medusa is depicted as a child, teenager, or as a young woman, which appears to be a widespread motif in popular culture of the 21st century. However, there is one text in which the reader encounters Medusa as an older adult. This text is Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2005), one of the most famous retellings of classical mythology for young adults today. In the story, Percy, the descendant of Poseidon, settles for a quest to find the stolen lightning, a possession of Zeus, to prevent a war between the gods. On his way, along with his friends, he meets Medusa. She lives, just like the mythological Gorgon, far away from humans – in this retelling: at the edge of the woods (just like fairy-tale witches), running a small business: *Aunty Em's Gnome Emporium*. The connection to fairy-tale witches is strengthened further in the narrative, as Aunty Em (as she calls herself) lures lost children inside with the smell of food. Even though Medusa is a mythological monster, we may observe her character – here, as well as in the previous examples – blending with other motifs and traditions.

Riordan's Medusa is presented stereotypically as an older Middle Eastern woman: "Her coffee-coloured hands looked old, but well-manicured and elegant, so I imagined she was a grandmother who had once been a beautiful lady" (Riordan 2005, 172). In the beginning, Aunty Em is also kind to hungry and tired children. She tells them the story of her business, how her two sisters once helped

her, but unfortunately, now she has to run it alone. Asked for more details, the Gorgon replies that this is not a story for children, which might be seen as a commentary on the "original" myth as well. The only thing that they should know is that once, a woman punished her, jealous of her and her boyfriend (who later turns out to be Percy's father, Poseidon – an echo of the Ovidian myth, yet with no mention of the rape, but rather of an "unrequited love"). Aunty Em is not clear about her fate: she only comments that she was able to survive, but she paid the price, which might be the result of a trauma Medusa does not wish to discuss. After telling her story, Aunty Em lures the children progressively deeper into her realm, making them comfortable and unaware of the potential danger. Grover, a satyr, is the first to suspect that something odd is going on in Medusa's garden, but it is too late. The monster asks the heroes to take a picture and simultaneously loses her veil, becoming the Gorgon known from classical mythology.

Just like the mythological monster and the witches of early 2000s pop-culture, Medusa's destiny is to die and exactly this fate meets Aunty Em. While the Medusas discussed in the previous sections of our paper are usually somewhat redeemable villains, Riordan's Medusa, apparently, deserves death and evokes rather negative feelings. Her monstrosity is built not only on the classical monster but also on Aunty Em's age and, possibly, her ethnicity (however, this motif should be discussed in a broader context).[54] As an older adult, she poses a threat to the protagonist. Her age, as pointed out previously, is strongly associated with the figure of a witch, rarely favourable to humans. These features, incorporated in a monstrous villain, give a negative connotation to this character, not only due to her mythological "monstrous" origins. For the implied child reader, such a pattern can build a harmful image of older adults, especially women. Therefore, it can be claimed that in Riordan's version Medusa poses as a double threat – as a dangerous monster and dangerous stereotype.

It is worth stressing that, even though Aunty Em is an older Middle Eastern lady in the book, in the movie adaptation directed by Chris Columbus (2010) she is played by Uma Thurman, portrayed as a mature and beautiful woman. In *Clash of the Titans,* also produced in 2010, the role went to the top model Natalia Vodanova (see the first section of the present paper); presumably, this character would not be so appealing if played by an older actress, evoking ethnic stereotypes. It reflects a broader phenomenon of Hollywood production, where beauty and youth always play the lead – even in case of a monster, who hides its intentions behind a beautiful facade. Here, it is not an older Middle Eastern lady that children should be worried about – it is an attractive, mature woman, not to be trusted. In both versions, Medusa is not someone to be befriended – she is just another monster to eliminate, without so much as a reflection on whether her head should be cut off.[55] For contemporary texts, these versions do not cor-

54 In the future, I would like to analyze Riordan's and Columbus' Medusas from a cultural-ethnic perspective, as I have written a similar study on satyr Grover Underwood (Mik 2019, 130-146).

55 This motif appears often in video-games, e.g. *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey* (Ubisoft Quebec, 2018), where Medusa has to be eliminated as a threatening monster.

respond to the updated monstrous stories featuring women (such as Disney's *Maleficent*, 2014, dir. Robert Stromberg), where the title character is appreciated rather than devalued.

Medusa the Mother, or Cutting Hair Again

Anna Mik

Last but not least, in children's culture, we also encounter Medusa in the role of a mother. One of the examples would be the Gorgon from the Belgian picture book by the 2010 ALMA (Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award) winner, Kitty Crowther, titled *Mère Méduse* (2014).[56] The story begins with two women walking in the dark of night. The older one seems frightened, while the younger looks rather irritated. The weather is strange: the wind is strong, and the moon has a special glow. Finally, the women reach their destination – Medusa's house. Just like evil witches from fairy tales (and the Gorgon from the Percy Jackson saga), she lives in the woods, far away from humans.[57] The first illustration of the mythological monster is rather vague: she is simply a bundle of (human!) hair. After the maids untangle it, it turns out that not only does Medusa have a human body, she is also pregnant. The women help with the delivery, and after the child is born, they are, not very kindly, dismissed by Medusa. Her loving gaze suggests she wants her child all to herself. She names her Irisée, which is French for "iridescent".

After the child's birth, we see more and more of Medusa's human body – first only the face, later also hands and legs. When she introduces the child to the rest of the village, Medusa starts to feel overwhelmed and is uncomfortable that so many people want to touch Irisée. Her motherly instincts guide her to protect the girl from everything and everyone – as Medusa says, she wants to be a shell for her little pearl. Medusa goes on long walks, and Irisée initiates more and more such hikes as she grows up, curious of the world and other humans living far from home. Nonetheless, the Gorgon does not allow her child to play with humans. Physically, they are both getting closer to people, but the social distance is maintained.

56 I have analysed this book as well as the previous examples of the Gorgon from Riordan's and Columbus's works in my doctoral dissertation, in the context of mythological monstrosities: *Signs of Exclusion. Monsters Inspired by Greek and Roman Mythology as Symbols of Rejected Minorities in Literature, Film, and TV-Series for Children and Young Adults: From Mid-20th Until Early 21st Century*, supervised by Prof. dr hab. Grzegorz Leszczyński and Prof. dr hab. Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw, 2020.

57 Crowther says herself that initially the character of Medusa reminded her of a witch (The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award [n.d.]).

Despite possessive issues, "the monstrous mother" is patient and loving:[58] she protects her daughter, teaches her how to read and play – assisted by her hair, which even though is not snakes, is very much snake-like. It can grab objects and people, such as Irisée, who finds safety and love in her mother's loving hair. However, it cannot be Irisée's shelter forever. Unfortunately for Medusa, Irisée growing up develops the need to socialize – to go to school and play with other children. At first, Medusa does not support Irisée's idea, and she would rather have her daughter home-schooled than take any risks from the outside world. However, after observing how miserable Irisée gets, Medusa decides to let the child attend school. When the Gorgon picks her up after classes, the "monstrous hair" is gone – she has cut it off – and greets Irisée as an average woman, not a mythological monster.

Marine aesthetics accompanies the story. Not only do the women live by the seashore, and Medusa calls her daughter her iridescent pearl. The connection to the sea world is also strengthened by Medusa's name – on the inner covers of the book, medusas (jellyfish) flow in between the story. In the narrative, Medusa does not play the central role as such. In a way, it is her hair that guides the reader through the plot. Nonetheless, the ancient roots are apparent; Crowther herself admits in one of the interviews that classical mythology has been an inspiration for her.[59] She wanted to present unconventional motherhood, which even if not perfect, is still very loving. She also considers her Medusa a descendant of the ancient one – even though their stories differ, the connection between them is solid: both were neglected by their surroundings, both were longing for love and did not get it, and both were mothers – even if their maternal experiences were not the same.[60] In a blog post, Crowther writes: "The power of the woman, the power of the look (a fatal woman), the fear of castration, the intimate relationship with the monstrous and the existence of prehistoric matriarchal societies. All of this in one woman!" (The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award [n.d.]). The connection between classical mythology and Crowther's picture book is direct and justified, even if other traditions, like the fairy-tale, enrich the story as well.

In the beginning, Medusa is just the hair – only after Irisée's introduction to the story is "the monster" motivated to present her human side. The hair is Medusa's defence mechanism but also a representation of motherly love and affection. At times the hair plays the role of a nest in which Irisée can hide, it picks her up, plays with her, etc. The decision made by Medusa to cut her hair might stand for discarding the possessive aspect of motherhood. At the end, the cut hair, as the book instructs the reader, transforms into water snakes and joins the nearby stream, which would be yet another connection to water aesthetics and the Greek myth.

58 Another example of a loving mother-Medusa would definitely be the Gorgon from *Mythopolis* by Alexandra Májová (2013).

59 See: Rybak, June 5, 2017.

60 The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award [n.d.].

Crowther's *Mère Méduse* is not a pop-cultural depiction of the Gorgon known from earlier mentioned texts. Even though the motifs of isolation and loneliness are common to all Medusas presented in this article, here we do not encounter the visual representation of a monster – even the protagonist's hair is not divided into snakes, at least until it is cut-off and "released" into the wild. The main topic of the picture book would be the marginalization of single women, who only after having a child may be accepted by society – assuming the role of mother, not as a mythological monster. From another perspective, it might be claimed that the child creates the bridge between "the monster" and society. Not only does Medusa become part of the community, but she also changes her looks to be like other women. This motif might provide an implied child reader with an example of acceptance towards excluded people. In their surroundings, those excluded people can be women who are misunderstood, and those who are mistreated by other grown-ups. In such a structure, the child becomes a link between "the monster" and the humans, who did not develop or otherwise lost their kindness and ability to accept "the Other" and to look at the monster with love, not fear or hate. Nonetheless, the question persists – did Medusa have to cut her hair, did the hair mean anything to her, or was it just a simple maintenance procedure? The interpretation remains open. However, it is a shame she had to lose her hair. At the end of the day, it is the hair that determines her uniqueness, which should be celebrated, not rejected.

The Team's Conclusions

Our composite biography ends here, with Medusa as a psychologically mature woman who puts the good of her child first; not a monster at all.[61] Because while all of the varieties of Medusa discussed here were created for young audiences, only those who function within a more or less traditional mythological setup share the fate of the original villain. This transformative reception occurs through several narrative devices that generate creative questions and new perspectives, both in a younger and older public. The idea of Medusa, when transferred to our times, provokes an inquiry rooted in reality. The children may play with the myth and ask, if they were Medusa, how would they be able to brush their hair? Or, if they were a teenage boy, a teenage girl, a child of Medusa, what their life would be? The grown-ups, however, may reflect on this myth to face the crucial issue for each parent or tutor: How would I bring up my children to ensure that their childhood is happy? This stream of reception of Medusa has great potential (we have discussed but a few chosen examples) and it appears quite fertile in youth culture, undoubtedly nourished by all kinds of diversity that children encounter today. By coming of age with the Gorgon, they can become more aware of themselves and develop greater empathy towards the Other.

61 There are of course many other interesting cases of Medusa's reception, see, e.g., Susan Deacy (2020, 177-195).

Retelling, questioning, and transforming the myth is another avenue of contemporary reception. Departures from the original story may be quite significant. They inform today's reflection on our perspectives on life and death, fate, love, friendship, and community which are whole millennia younger. Nobody questions the fact that, in the 21st century, mythological fantasy may produce widely divergent Medusas. The Gorgon could just as well be an elegant, older or former beauty and a repulsive serial killer who targets children (Rick Riordan's novel of 2005, Chris Columbus' film of 2010), a young, gorgeous woman who sacrifices her love and life to save her city from tyranny (BBC TV series *Atlantis* 2013-2015), an untamed child (Holub and Patricelli 2015), a rebellious teenager (Holub and Williams 2010, 2012, 2015, *Monster High* 2010, 2015, *Legacies* 2018-), or a caring mother (Crowther 2014). On the whole, an enchantingly diverse mix with dramatically altered elements, but all of Medusa's incarnations being entirely legitimate products of contemporary culture, whether children's, teens', young or not so young adults'.

Our quest for the Gorgon proves that it is worth mustering the courage to cast a look at her. Instead of turning us to stone, Medusa teaches us how to see the world differently. As Constantine P. Cavafy writes in his poem *Ithaca*, you will not meet the monsters, "unless you carry them in your soul, / unless your soul raise[s] them up before you"[62]. Medusa helps children understand this truth just as she helps adults remember it.

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