

Medusa and the Art of Feminist Rebellion A New Interpretation of an Ancient Myth

Ashank Chaudhary, Dr Shabana Singh

*Department of English, Graphic Era University (Deemed), Dehradun-248002, Uttarakhand, India
Assistant Professor, Department of English, ML&JNK Girls College, Saharanpur-247001, Uttar Pradesh, India*

Abstract-The fascinating mythological determination of Medusa has intrigued pupils and artists alike, embodying a multifaceted image of energy, femininity, and transformation. This paper pursues to get to the bottom of the enigma surrounding Medusa via a multidisciplinary evaluation, encompassing mythology, artwork history, psychology, and feminist theory. By delving into historical Greek mythology, we discover the origins and evolution of Medusa's character, her position as a Gorgon, and the importance of her serpentine hair and petrifying gaze. Moreover, we delve into mental theories and archetypal evaluation to decipher Medusa's deeper mental and symbolic dimensions, her connection to trauma, energy dynamics, and the female psyche. Lastly, we discover the feminist perspective, inspecting Medusa as an image of female agency, resistance, and the reclamation of girl identity. Through this complete investigation, we intend to offer a nuanced expertise of Medusa's enduring allure, her cultural importance, and her relevance in the current discourse surrounding mythology, gender, and representation.

Keywords: Medusa, feminism, Greek Mythology

INTRODUCTION

In modern and popular literature and culture, the figure of Medusa is mostly represented as what Susan Bassnett states in her writing *Gender and Thematics: the Case of Guinevere*, which is 'woman as monster'. Now, if we view Medusa through the lens of Greek mythology, we can see that the fearsome snake-haired Gorgon, whose existence is the fusion of human and animal features, resides within the depths of the Underworld and has the ability to turn people to stone with a single glance.

The depiction of Medusa has seen some change throughout literature and art history, especially in Greece. Primarily, she becomes a maiden who is

helpless and defenceless and is cursed by Athena because of her actions and then exploited by Perseus, the threat of feminization and a femme fatale; that is, a dangerous seductress. Physically, she was seen as an unfeminine beast, who had eyes bulging out, intimidating glares, and a protruding tongue. On the other hand, during the period of 450 BC, the representation of her character changed and came to be represented as Great Mother, who was a victim of sexual harassment and the voice of feminism anger, and rage, and all this was represented in the artworks such as pot and vase paintings and canon literary works.

Throughout the fifth and fourth centuries BC, Medusa, however, became increasingly feminized, like many other monstrous figures in the Classical Era, as evident in various terracotta pottery pieces of the period.¹

Around 450 BC, an artist named Polygnotos made a vase painting, and through that painting, he put aside the cynical judgement and monstrous representations of the snake-haired female and introduced the beauty side of Medusa. There was no protruding tongue and vengeful manner in the figure of Medusa and the other Gorgon sisters- Stheno and Euryale. Instead, they were visualized in a more human way and a true female character.

But even though many such representations of Medusa have been present throughout the world for ages, the words which are most commonly used to describe her are monster, snake-haired woman, seductress, liar, killer, and weapon of gods and heroes. However, two more words should be added to her description: survivor and rape victim. Despite the large number of mythical and historical characters who are rape survivors, a value exists in focusing on the story of Medusa specifically for various reasons. Firstly, Medusa remains an important character in modern

culture, who appears at regular intervals in all forms of media virtually. Secondly, the modern narratives which cover attack and survivorship are both mixed with other contemporary problems which makes it valuable to find stories that are stolen away from us.

MEDUSA AND THE ART OF FEMINIST REBELLION

In order to paint Medusa's portrait as a rape victim, it is imperative that one must analyse her story which is in her own voice. The book 'Medusa' by Rosie Hewlett offers such an opportunity to delve into the mind of Medusa. The book starts with Medusa remembering the time when she used to be beautiful before the curse cast on her by Athena. According to the voice of Medusa, it becomes clear that she herself is unable to recognize her own story as it has been retold and reimagined so many times over.

Medusa, a beautiful woman, was raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple and, as punishment, was cursed to turn any man who looked upon her to stone.²

Medusa was born amongst the waves. She entered the world with her naked body soaked and glistening, gritty with salt. Her parents were the primordial sea Gods, Phorcys and Ceto. Yes, she had parents as well. People generally tend to forget that 'monsters' have a family too. But Medusa never really knew her parents. She had never even met Phorcys, her father. This was due to the fact that she was born an ordinary mortal and was therefore, in their eyes, a disappointment. But in modern times, it becomes one of the many things about her with which history disagrees. Centuries of men posturing across pages of baseless claims, disagree on this fact for the sole purpose of feeding their plump egos.

When Medusa's sisters, Stheno and Euryale found their mother cradling her tiny body to her breast, they sneered from behind showing a sense of disagreement and denial toward the being which was born in their family. Her sisters stared so incredulously at her as she was so normal, so ordinary and so...disappointing. But it was just a matter of time before even her mother abandoned her and slipped off into the ocean with her scaly skin melting beneath its restless surface.

On seeing what happened in front of their eyes, both the sisters decided to leave the newborn in a nearby temple where a lonely priestess had served for long.

That temple had once overlooked a proud yet modest city. As time passed the city began to flourish and drew the attention of Poseidon who saw his own greatness reflected in its success. But the people of the city decided to honour Athena over Poseidon and as a result, Poseidon being unable to face this rejection, decided to destroy the city, reducing it to rubble and dust, for if he could not have it, then nobody could. The temple was all that was left standing as Poseidon knew that he could not offend Athena by destroying her sanctuary. The solitary priestess had been the only one who was left after the devastation. Medusa's sisters thought that she would be a suitable mortal for their baby sister.

And so, they left her on the temple steps and that is how she came to be abandoned twice in the first few hours of her life. This proves that starting from the moment she was born; she was abandoned and alienated, and the Fates had made it clear from the beginning how her whole life would end up being, lonely and devoid of any form of compassion, care, warmth, and love.

It was Theia, the priestess who gave Medusa her name. We are quite aware the name is now synonymous with monsters, but it actually means 'protector'. Theia had wanted her to be the protector of her temple and so named her as such, but irony does really have a cruel sense of humour. She was raised in the temple by Theia, and she was taught from her earliest years to live piously. She dedicated herself and her entire life to Athena, spending every day serving her. The fact that Athena's temple was all that remained of the lost city made their responsibility feel even more important. She would play for hours amongst the rubble and the debris, oblivious to the dark reality lying beneath the ruins, proving the fact that ignorance is such a fragile gift. Priestess life was simple enough, considering their temple was so remote she was mostly in charge of cleaning and tidying. Her most precious duty was dusting the cult statue of Athena each morning and evening and she could still remember the rush of excitement the first time Theia gifted her with that task.

Medusa took her duties extremely seriously. Each time she cleaned the statue she treated it as if it were a mini ceremony within itself, one that had to be executed to absolute perfection, in order to please the Goddess. She utterly adored Athena and considered the goddess as her idol, but more than that she even naively

considered her as a friend. Growing up alone and living with a woman of few words, she found herself talking endlessly to that statue. She would tell her everything and anything. She would gush about how much she admired her, confide in her about her most private thoughts and Medusa would just blab on and on, as if she actually thought Athena was somewhere listening.

We have heard versions of Medusa's story that claim that she was transformed into a monster because she gloated too much about being beautiful. But in reality, she never even cared about being beautiful. We might think that beauty is a trivial thing to complain about. However, Medusa's first curse was beauty. It forced her into the confines of a perilous stereotype and exposed her to the world and its repercussions. To put it plainly her beauty was the catalyst for her downfall. *Kiki Karaglou argues that this beautification of monsters serves as a method of male control, "where the monster becomes an ornament."*³

She discovered that she was beautiful a little later than one normally would because her isolated lifestyle had kept her wonderfully oblivious to it all. The connection between Medusa and her sisters Stheno and Euryale improved significantly when Theia passed away the next year when they discovered her grieving at the base of Athena's statue. For the first time, they had no smirks or snarky remarks. Instead, they embraced her, their wings cocooning her shivering body, their feathers tickling against her tears. Medusa had never been so grateful to her family, however small and dysfunctional.

Now comes the darkest chapter of Medusa's life. It was part of her life which ultimately changed everything for Medusa. This was the day when Poseidon arrived and stole Medusa's innocence, chastity, and complete identity from her. As the world started to gently awaken around her, Medusa was out for her routine morning stroll down the seashore, taking in the soft sighing of the waves. The sea was calm that day skipping stones absent-mindedly, taking pleasure as they lightly kissed the water. The world felt still and peaceful, it only took a moment for everything to change. The water started trembling and suddenly the waves began to surge and swell restlessly, as a furious foamy bubbling began exactly where her last Pebble had sunk. Then, all of a sudden, a mighty figure rose from the depths. The figure gave an amicable wave with one hand and in the other he held a magnificent

golden Trident. That figure was the God of the Seas, Poseidon.

His strides were heavy yet somehow graceful as if he were not touching the ground at all. With each step the waves rushed to meet him, obediently bubbling up at his feet. Medusa walked quietly beside him, terrified of the power that radiated from him. The air felt charged around them, fizzing with his godly energy. Poseidon the sea God himself started admiring Medusa and as a result, she felt nice, to be admired by an Olympian. She had spent so much of her life feeling inadequate. She thought that she was just dazzled by his overwhelming presence, allowing his charm to cloud her better judgment, making her feel almost giddy. She started thinking that the rumours could have been false all along, but it was just a foolish thought. As he spoke, she felt something shift in the air around them. She tried desperately to ignore it, focusing on the ground before them, concentrating on each careful step. He reached out without warning and stroked her hair. His touch was surprisingly gentle, sending shivers across her skin. She captured his attention and could see the vile, unrepentant hunger burning there. His voice was a sickening mixture of amusement and condescension. His words fell like cold stones in the pit of her stomach. He leaned forward, so close that the curls of his beard scratched her skin

Medusa feigned engagement as he talked, nodding and smiling at the appropriate moments. But inside her mind was racing, clutching helplessly at impossible ideas, desperately trying to form a plan to escape. Knew of Poseidon's lust, which was said to be even greater than his temper. Suddenly an idea sparked in her head. The temple. It was a sacred and holy space, and she thought that Poseidon would not dare to offend Athena by desecrating it. With each step they took she felt herself getting closer to safety; it took all her willpower not to break out into a run.

Medusa gave a sigh of relief as she finally stepped into the temple. She felt as if she had reached her lifeboat at last. She tried to gather herself together, repeating over and over that she was safe, and Athena would protect her. Poseidon entered the temple slowly, his godly presence making the temple look small and shabby. He murmured that he never liked Athena, as he approached her statue. He said that she thought of herself above the rest of them because she was the favourite of Zeus. But in the following moments smoke coiled around his lips like a snake ready to

strike. His smile began to twitch, hinting at a grimace, Medusa felt his unspoken intent constricting the space between them causing her breath to catch in her throat. A dangerous mixture of passion and power curdled in Poseidon's eyes as he took slow, deliberate steps toward her. She backed away until she was pressed against the wall. She could feel the sweat prickling down her spine. But all she thought was that Athena would protect her. Poseidon was so close now the heat of his body was burning against her. He tugged at one of her girls idly, then stroked her cheek with his large hand against her skin. She winced as he traced his fingers along. She recoiled away immediately, with hot tears streaming down her cheeks, mingling with snot and swearing.

Poseidon laughed emptily at his heavy frame trembling with the sound. She continued to beg him, desperate pleas ripping from her chest as blind panic overwhelmed her. But Poseidon did not listen to her. She began to scream for Athena to save her from this animalistic hunger of Poseidon. At first, she had fought against him, but she was just a drowning woman desperately trying to fight against the ocean, kicking and screaming hopelessly against the forceful waves. Her mortal body eventually got weak and worthless to the point that she had no choice but to give up and let the ocean engulf her completely.

When it was over, he did not say much, he had gotten what he wanted and now she was just another used toy, dull and uninteresting. He was probably already thinking about his next conquest. She never saw Poseidon again after this incident. But as she lay on that cold, hard floor, she just had one thought running through her head: Athena.

This incident shows that even though Medusa performed her duties towards Athena well but still during the moments when she was getting raped by Poseidon, Athena did not show up in order to fight against Poseidon or even protect Medusa from his hunger for sex. Instead, she was just left alone on her own which again brings out the focus on the fact that she was supposed to be lonely throughout her life according to what the Fates had decided for her.

We have heard accounts that claim Poseidon and Medusa were in love, that they were star-crossed lovers who started a secret affair, behind Athena's back. We can say that this is the version people are more comfortable with telling as it is politer and more palatable. There are also some versions that claim that

Medusa was the seducer luring in the unsuspecting Poseidon with her devious female ways. She wasn't the first woman, though, and she most surely won't be the last, to be held responsible for a man's failings.

People love to tell these stories because they are absolved of responsibility, they can continue to ignore the facts of the world, and they can shift the blame on Medusa by claiming that she was to blame.

Later that day, her sisters found her collapsed on the temple floor, staring at the small pebble in her hand. She could not speak and could not even cry. Euryale tried to embrace her, but she recoiled away instantly. She could still feel him on her as if she had been branded by his touch. It made her want to rip out of her skin, to tear the remnants of him from her body.

Suddenly, the atmosphere grew heavy and swollen, as if a mighty thunderstorm were about to break out. The whole temple began to hum with unearthly energy, and Medusa could feel it prickling over her skin. Euryale Glanced around them and she could sense the change too. Stheno looked at her dead in the eyes. All of them could tell that it was her and they knew that she was angry. Medusa felt the panic rising inside her, like a bird beating in her chest, trying frantically to escape.

Athena, the goddess of war appeared before them. She was magnificent and terrifying. She had a breathtakingly unforgiving beauty that one would dread rather than want. She was dressed in her full battle gear, the plume of her glittering helmet brushing against the ceiling as she glided forward. In her right hand, she held a long spear, its blade winking threateningly in the light. She looked as if she were heading to war, a war she would undoubtedly win. She hissed at her sisters as they positioned themselves protectively in front of her. She did not even have to raise her voice as even when speaking quietly she made the walls tremble.

Medusa felt her lips trembling as she bit back her tears. She could not bear Athena seeing her like this, ruined and defiled. She knew that she could not disobey her direct command. As she reluctantly looked upwards, she prayed that the ground would fall away beneath her so she could disappear into the depths of the earth. Athena's grey eyes glowed in the half-gloom of the temple as if they emitted a light of their own. They looked so familiar to Medusa, those eyes she had spent her entire life gazing up at. But for the first time ever, they were staring right back at her. She felt a sudden

rush of emotion overwhelm her, threatening to spill over.

Athena inclined her head slightly, her grey eyes burning brightly and asked Medusa if she took pleasure in defiling her temple. Her question dripped with malice distinguishing Medusa's home immediately. Medusa opened her mouth to try to reason with Athena, but suddenly an overwhelming sense of defeat descended over her, draining the fight from her body. Just as she had with Poseidon, she felt herself giving in and letting go. She remembered hearing Theia's words faintly echoing in her mind: what will be will always be. Suddenly, it all became clear to her that fighting against that would only prolong the inevitable.

On witnessing this, Stheno suddenly rushed forward, moving in between Medusa and Athena. Euryale appeared beside Medusa and Stheno as well. They both tried to make Athena understand that she should be punishing Poseidon, not Medusa. Stheno's voice was surprisingly strong in the face of an Olympian. Euryale enthused, looking a little more nervous under Athena's penetrating glare. Medusa felt a muddle of fear and love battling inside her, as she watched her sisters risk everything to protect her. She realized that at that moment, despite all their mocking and teasing, and seeming indifference, they loved her.

Athena sighed irritably, bashing her spear on the ground to silence them. Athena then widened her arms and as she did so, the shadows began to come alive around them, as an almighty storm started to raise outside, hammering relentlessly against the walls of the temples. Athena's voice cut cleanly across the howling wind and cursed Medusa that she would become as repulsive as her actions. She would never again be able to use her temptress ways, for she would be so hideous that no man would ever be able to look at her again. She also cursed Euryale and Stheno that they would suffer the same hideous fate as their sister. She clapped her hands once and the sound reverberated outwards, cutting into Medusa's body like a blade. There was a moment of quiet but then the blinding pain hit Medusa, engulfing her entire body, ripping from the inside out. She could hear Euryale and Stheno screaming and tried to reach out to them but the pain was too much. It felt as if her body were being broken apart, every muscle tone, every bone shattered, it was like her skin was on fire. But, as she

writhed in agony, the most disturbing thing she remembered were those grey eyes smiling.

This event was the turning point of Medusa's life as primarily, we saw that even though Poseidon was at fault for forcing himself upon her, the one who was punished by Athena was Medusa herself. Athena did not even try to consider what she must have gone through. Medusa's helplessness and defencelessness gave Poseidon the power to use her body for his sexual pleasures and desires, and got away with his doing, because of him being an Olympian.

We should just take a moment to realize that Poseidon was never punished for his actions. Athena never even mentioned it to him. Poseidon carried on as usual, taking everything he wanted at any cost and never being held responsible, while Medusa's life was irreparably destroyed. Medusa cannot be known as his only victim because there were so many others as well. Generation after generation is affected by the same catastrophe, which leaves a never-ending path of damaged victims and untouched offenders.

*In a male-dominated society such as Athens, the control of female sexuality and power was not unusual, and the demonisation of powerful women like Medusa and their deaths aided in that control.*⁴

We can wonder what would have happened if the life the fates had drawn out for Medusa had been woven differently. There are many endless possibilities of how things could have turned out. One scenario which sticks like a splinter is- what if Athena had acted differently? What if she had perceived Medusa as the victim rather than the villain? What if, on that particular day, she had hugged her, wept with her, and held her in a way that her own mother had never done? And what if she had faced Poseidon, called him out on his wild actions, and shamed him in front of the other Olympians?

This alternate reality is just a naive fantasy. Athena is not capable of such compassion towards other women. In actuality, there is no evidence to support the notion that Athena abhorred all females. Maybe because she never considered herself to be one. Born from the head of Zeus, in full battle gear, Athena never had the gentle touch of her mother or the softness of youth. She entered the world a cold warrior and that is how she would forever be. However, she was not entirely devoid of feeling. She did have a certain fondness for heroes because they were the only mortals, she felt an affinity with. Athena would all too readily save her

beloved heroes from the wrath of the other Olympians, but it was far too much to expect her to save a pious, vulnerable, young woman like Medusa.

Medusa woke to the smell of smoke. Great wafts of it seeped into her lungs, forcing her awake. When she opened her eyes, the world around her was on fire. Giant flames danced before her eyes, their flickering fingers reaching out toward her. She tried to stand up, but her body grew sluggish as if her limbs were weighed down by some invisible force. The world started to slip out of focus, shimmering around the edges and then blurring completely. Suddenly, there was a force around her arms, dragging her backwards. She could just make out her sister's faces through the smoke; They were shouting something at her, but all she could hear was the blood rushing in her ears. When she sat up, she finally registered what was happening. The temple was on fire. Every inch of it was engulfed in flames, burning with an unnatural ferocity. She knew it was Athena's doing, though she was nowhere to be seen then. Soon there would be nothing left, it would be reduced to dust just like the rest of the city.

It was her only home, her only purpose, the one thing she had promised Theia she would protect. And yet, it was also the place where Poseidon had defiled her, the place where she had wasted her whole life dedicating herself to a callous, uncaring goddess. Just then, she heard an unfamiliar voice whispering in her ear, soft and sinister. She stared silently at Euryale and then looked down at herself. Her body, like her own, was the texture of snakeskin, scaled and glistening. The voice tickled in Medusa's ears and suddenly she felt it, that new, unfamiliar with quivering on her back.

She felt like poison, infecting everything she touched. Her sisters called after her, but she had already broken into a run. She did not know what possessed her, but she knew that she just had to get away, away from her sisters, away from the temple, and away from that cursed patch of land. She did not stop running hurtling straight towards the cliff edge and then, without hesitation, she threw herself off.

The wind whistled past her as she plunged toward the ocean. A dark part of her wondered if she should just let herself continue falling. The voice in her ear ordered her to fly and suddenly she felt her wings unfurl, beating against the wind until she was soaring upwards. She felt incredible, but the feeling was quickly soured by the overwhelming guilt as she thought that she did not deserve to feel incredible. She

glided over the ocean, watching the restless waves churn beneath her. The sight of them made her nauseous, bringing back all too recent memories. But she did not turn back, she could not. She flew through the night and all the next day. She flew until her lungs burned and her wings began to seize up, though that pain was a welcome distraction from her inner torment. The voice in her kept telling her to stop, but she could not.

Eventually, her wings gave out in exhaustion and she crashed down onto an unfamiliar island, though she barely felt the impact. She caught sight of a cave tugged against a sheer cliff edge. The cave's inky darkness was cool and inviting as she landed carefully inside. She took one step and her body immediately gave out, collapsing heavily into the reassuring shadows. She welcomed the silence that followed and was alone at last.

A few days later, she saw a ship and landed silently on it, obscured by the moon-cast shadows. The only sound she could hear was the gentle shushing of the waves and the creaking of oars, as most of the crew was sleeping. A little way ahead, she made out a figure lolling against the mast, drunk and pathetic. She had no idea what her plan was as she approached that man. She was driven blindly by the anger humming inside her, and she could feel it singing through her veins. The snakes were also urging her on, their slithery voices overlapping and intertwining excitedly in her ear.

The man squinted and stepped closer and that is when she noticed the scratch marks around his neck. Somehow, she just knew that they were the marks of someone who had been trying to escape, someone who had been trying to force him off then. Those were the marks of a frightened woman. In that moment, she was immediately transported back to that cold temple floor, feeling the force of Poseidon on top of her as she fought helplessly against him, crying out for Athena. Those marks could have been scratches from anyone or anything, but at that moment, she was so sure, so certain.

Driven forward by the snakes' encouragement, she stepped into the delicate pool of light and raised her hands ready to strike. Her hatred was blinding her from any better judgement, her confidence spurred on by the encouragement of the snakes. As the man stepped forward to strike her, she locked her eyes on his and felt the strangest sensation overcome her. The man did

not even have time to scream. As she gazed into his eyes, she saw his shock curdle with fear and then harden into something else entirely, turning dull and unresponsive, the life draining out until all she was staring at was cold stone. When she looked back at the man, he was entirely frozen, solid, and motionless. His mouth was half open, forever held in a silent scream. She then turned to meet the rest of the crew, casting her deathly gaze across each man in turn. She felt the same coldness cutting through her as she looked into each pair of defiant eyes. The effect was almost instantaneous, and it happened so quickly they did not even realise what was happening. Within seconds, she was surrounded by motionless statues, frozen mid-action, weapons held aloft to strike her down. They were forever trapped in the moment of their final failure.

The journey of Medusa continued for a long time during which many such instances occurred which led to the rise of her image being represented as a 'monster' or 'villain'. Medusa did not regret most of these actions. However, there was one victim who had haunted her since the day she took his life. The sisters were heading towards a small fishing town settled right at the water's edge. The town appeared fast asleep as they approached, the only sound they could hear was the gentle lapping of the waves against the creaking boats, tied up in near bobbing rows. They saw two shadows shuffling a little way ahead. Medusa nodded to her sisters and they immediately surged forwards, letting out a screech of excitable fury.

One of them was a woman who ran off screaming, whilst the sisters surrounded the man. The man fell on his knees, spluttering out the usual string of useless pleas. Medusa narrowed her deadly gaze, preparing herself for the final moment when suddenly, her attention was caught by a rush of footsteps behind her. She turned instinctively and met a different pair of eyes, softer, younger. The eyes of a child. The child's face was frozen in a look of innocent fear, his mouth slightly open, revealing a missing front tooth. As the realization dawned, she felt guilt rising up inside her, threatening to spill over and consume her.

Now it is time to take a moment in order to discuss Perseus, as it is important to know the background of the man who ultimately ended Medusa's life. Perseus was a child of rape. We might have heard many retellings of this myth where Zeus supposedly transformed himself into golden rain and seeped into

the skin of Perseus' mother, Danae. But in reality, Zeus forced himself on Danae, and from that violent lust, Perseus was born.

We have seen many depictions of Medusa's death. Perseus is always portrayed as the triumphant hero, handsome and powerful.

*Our 'hero' in Cellini's 'Perseus with the head of Medusa' raises Medusa's head to open-eyed spectators, while Medusa's own eyes are closed and her lips locked in a (literal) deadly silence.*⁵

Whilst Medusa is continuously reduced to nothing more than a head that looks at you with its jaws hanging open like a grotesque sex doll. However, the reality is completely different from how it is portrayed in multiple retellings. Perseus and Medusa became friends while Perseus decided to wait for Medusa to deliver the child with whom she was pregnant. He saw her as a 'woman', a 'mother', and a 'victim' of patriarchal oppression rather than a 'monster'. They made a deal that when the child was delivered, Medusa, with her own consent, would allow Perseus to cut off her head and he accepted this offer. This proves the feeling of honesty, and that of friendship they had for each other, but both of them kept this feeling hidden as they were supposed to be enemies.

The truth of her death comes out with a far more interesting image. Perseus' tear-streaked face, striking out remorsefully. Medusa faces her death with a calm resolution. Athena oversaw the execution with those calculating grey eyes. History has watered her death down into a dull cliché- 'the hero slays the monster'. The popular version claims that she was slain whilst sleeping. There are some accounts that tell of 'stupid' Medusa being fooled by Perseus' shiny shield as if she had never seen a reflection before. We can find that any mention of her deal with Perseus has been scrubbed clean from history.

The rape of Medusa and the unwarranted punishment, as well as Poseidon getting away with little repercussion, are disturbingly familiar to spectators in our contemporary world. 22 Many people hold the misconceptions that males expect sexual violence and that women are largely to blame for their own exploitation. Even Athena, the assumed defender of her priestess Medusa, instead straight away punishes her. She turns her hair into snakes so that the sexual exploitation would not go undisciplined, which suggests that Medusa was the only figure who had to be held responsible for her rape. In societies, these

beliefs, often unsaid, are now connected to “rape culture”.

*Medusa’s voicelessness is paralleled to Athena, who acts as the mouthpiece of patriarchy.*⁶

CONCLUSION

By interpreting the story of Medusa through the lens of survivorship, it can be revealed that many survivors would still have an experience parallel to the events in this million-year-old myth. There are many possible explanations for why the modern retellings of Medusa rarely capture her identity as a survivor. Medusa’s humanity along with her position as a survivor is minimised to a great extent because the cultural tools are created to make people do so. Doing so made it easier for future cultures to ignore her humanity further.

History preferred to remember her as a dehumanized monster, as it made for a more ‘suitable’ story. A female monster that can murder men and think for herself would be difficult for the frail patriarchy to accept. The world will, in fact, hear what it wants to hear. What history chooses to remember, it will remember. Medusa’s life will continue packaged up and passed down across generations, the lies will never mingle with the truths, and the ‘monster’ Medusa will remain destined to be misunderstood.

REFERENCE

1. Karoglou, *Dangerous Beauty*, Attributed to Polygnotos, *Terracotta pelike (jar)*, ca. 450-440 BC, *terracotta*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
2. Mary Beard, *Women & Power: A Manifesto (United Kingdom: Profile Books, 2017)*.
3. Hansen, *Dangerous Beauty in the ancient world and the age of #Me Too*.
4. Ibid.
5. Cellini, *Perseus with the head of Medusa*.
6. Diorio, *The Silent Scream of Medusa*, 4.