

## **Tomboyish Wisdom Gods and Sexy Gorgons: The Evolution of Ovid's Medusa Rape Narrative in Contemporary Children's Literature**

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### ABSTRACT

The Gorgon Medusa appears frequently in children's literature of the modern day. This article considers examples of these, focusing on Kate McMullan's (2002) *Say Cheese, Medusa!* and Charles R. Smith's (2008) *The Mighty 12: Superheroes of Greek Myth*. It argues that the narrative of Ovid, in which Medusa is raped by Poseidon and transformed into Gorgon form as punishment by Athena, has been replaced in children's literature by a narrative in which Athena transforms Medusa into a Gorgon out of jealousy at Medusa's beauty and appeal to men. In these texts, I argue, Athena's divine attributes of war and wisdom render her unattractive, and this is something she deeply resents. Medusa, meanwhile, is shown prior to her transformation to be beautiful, sexually appealing and desired by men. Rendering Medusa as a monster is Athena's way to take this from her, although some space is left in McMullan's text for the interpretation this does not succeed, and Medusa is still desirable as a monster. The popular modern interpretation of Athena as unattractive due to her masculinity and intellect is not borne out in the ancient world, where the goddess Athena was both depicted and described as beautiful.