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

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If one consults many children's books dealing with Greek myth, it becomes clear that the Gorgon Medusa is a popular figure. In the view of Gloyn (2019) in the introduction to her new book on monster reception, Medusa and the Minotaur are the two most prominent classical monsters in modern popular culture. The majority of children's myth anthologies contain a Medusa chapter, and a number of children's and young adult novels take Medusa as a subject. These range from loosely following the frame of the ancient myth (McMullan 2002; Hines 2013) to reimaginings of the character in a different environment (Holub and Williams 2010-2019; Powers 2014; Holub 2015) to works which use the ancient myth only as inspiration and do not necessarily feature the character (Reeve 2001; Keaton 2011). The ancient account of Medusa, however, is hardly an unproblematic story around which to build a children's book.

This essay considers two recent examples of children's literature featuring Medusa which focus on her transformation into a Gorgon, and the reasons behind it: Kate McMullan's *Say Cheese, Medusa!* (2002) and Charles R. Smith's (2008) *The Mighty 12: Superheroes of Greek Myth.* I analyse these in light of Stephens and McCallum's (1998) position that children's retellings of myth work to enforce contemporary values and metanarratives, Sunderland's detailed examination of gender in children's literature (2011) and Weinlich's (2015) tracing of modern misogynistic ideas in visual depictions of female monsters in children's books.

There are several ancient versions of the Medusa story, but Ovid, as is often the case, was the author to introduce the rape narrative. In other versions, Medusa is either stated or implied to be born into her Gorgon status (see Hesiod's *Theogony:* 270-283; Apollodorus' *Library:* 2.4.1-5; Lucan's *Pharsalia:* 9.619-99; Lucian's *The Hall*: 19). In Ovid, Medusa is a beautiful human priestess of Athena, desired by many but raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple. Athena, being a virgin goddess, turns her head away in shame and, not wanting the deed to go unpunished, transforms Medusa into a Gorgon. According to Perseus:

'She was very lovely once, the hope of many
An envious suitor, and of all her beauties
Her hair most beautiful – at least I heard so
From one who claimed he had seen her. One day Neptune
Found her and raped her, in Minerva's temple,
And the goddess turned away, and hid her eyes
Behind her shield, and, punishing the outrage
As it deserved, she changed her hair to serpents,'
(*Metamorphoses* 4.883-893, Humphries translation.)

This backstory is casually recounted by Perseus at his wedding feast. Brown (2005: 32) describes Perseus' narration of Medusa's rape as strikingly callous. This reflects the fact that, to most modern readers, it is clear Medusa is an innocent victim unfairly punished by Athena. A dissenting reading can be found in Enterline (2000), who saw Athena's punishment as deliberately ambiguous, and argued Athena transforms Medusa into a Gorgon to punish *mankind* for their rapacious ways. She points out that Medusa's powers in Ovid are used only against men. All modern retellings discussed in this article, however, respond to a reading of Ovid that places Medusa and Athena against one another.

As Roberts (2015) showed, Ovid is the ancient literary source who has been the most influential in modern children's literature. The ancient Medusa narrative being drawn on in many children's books is therefore the version which centres her status as a rape victim, even when other ancient versions available do not. Implicit in Ovid is also the idea that when Medusa becomes a Gorgon, her beauty is

taken from her. This is not the case in other versions, where Medusa the Gorgon is strikingly beautiful (Apollodorus, Lucan, Pausanias: 2.21.5-6), and her beauty may even be what transforms mortals to stone (Lucian's *The Hall*). Elements of Apollodorus also appear in children's Medusa stories, as will be discussed. These, however, are generic enough that it is not entirely clear whether they are drawn from Apollodorus in any direct way. Internet searches and modern mythography handbooks such as Robert Graves' *Greek Myths* (1955) likely play their part in author research, and we should not assume that authors have always read ancient source material directly.

The influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* whether consumed directly or through other sources, presents authors with a conundrum regarding the rape narrative. Many children's books resolve this by removing Poseidon from Medusa's story. Certain anthologies, however, include a consensual sexual interaction between Medusa and Poseidon. In Robert Graves' 1960 children's anthology, Medusa kisses Poseidon in Athena's temple, prompting the goddesses' revenge (119). In Donna Jo Napoli's 2011 anthology, Poseidon falls in love with Medusa for her unusual features, and the two are happily married (44-45; 128-131). In Rick Riordan's 2014 anthology, a companion to his Percy Jackson novels, Poseidon persuades Medusa to go with him into Athena's temple for a romantic encounter, again prompting Athena's revenge (187-189). Medusa's role in the *Percy Jackson* film *The Lightning Thief,* and the hints as to her relationship with Poseidon, are discussed in Gloyn (2019); for the general classical reception of the *Percy Jackson* novels see Paul (2017).

Other times, Medusa's backstory is vaguely alluded to without explicit mention of Poseidon. In Charles Kingsley's 1856 anthology, Athena claims that Medusa was 'a maiden as beautiful as morn, till in her pride she sinned a sin at which the sun hid his face; and from that day her hair was turned to vipers' (8). Kingsley was influential on later children's authors generally (Murnaghan and Roberts 2018), and this interpretation of Medusa may have helped shape subsequent retellings.

Kingsley (or at least Kingsley's Athena) makes Medusa a 'sinner', to blame for her own transformation. The children's anthology of James Reeves (1969) built on this, elaborating on Medusa's sin and linking it directly to Athena. Reeves presents a rare children's Medusa narrative that appears to draw on ancient versions besides Ovid. In Reeves, Medusa is transformed in punishment for boasting she is more beautiful than Athena (100). Whilst it is unclear if Reeves directly used Apollodorus as a source, this is certainly reminiscent of Apollodorus' suggestion that Athena wanted Medusa beheaded because the Gorgon compared her own beauty to that of Athena (*Library* 2.4.3). With this change, Reeves successfully predicted a trend that would come to dominate receptions in children's literature after his own time: that is, the framing of the conflict between Medusa and Athena as founded in a rivalry over beauty. Such a cause has no basis in Ovid, but does appear in the lesser known Apollodorus. Whether or not modern children's authors are consciously drawing on Apollodorus, such framing has come to frequently replace Ovid's rape narrative.

In this piece, I will consider two children's Medusa retellings which centre the relationship between Medusa and Athena, Kate McMullan's *Say Cheese, Medusa!* (2002) and Charles R. Smith's (2008) *The Mighty 12: Superheroes of Greek Myth.* Both narratives frame the conflict between the two characters as originating in the matter of who is more beautiful. Unlike Reeves and Apollodorus, however, these books make Athena, rather than Medusa, the character who initiates this conflict. In these versions, I argue, Athena is a tomboyish goddess whose main attributes of wisdom and war detract from her ability to be sexually appealing. This leads her to burn with jealousy over the 'sexy' Medusa and the desire she arouses in men. Rather than being a virgin goddess who shuns sexuality, as in Ovid, Athena in recent children's literature has been reframed as acting from petty feminine jealousy over a more desirable female character.

Such an interpretation of Athena is not consistent with ancient ideas of her. For example, Callimachus (*Hymn* 5.15) asserts the eternal beauty of Athena's face. In Athenian vase and coin art, Athena often wears feminine adornments such as necklaces and earrings (Ritter 2001: 153). Athena was even frequently depicted in titillating erotic dress and position in ancient artwork (Llewellyn-Jones 2001; Altripp 2001: 184-185).

Whilst Athena's masculine attributes may not have been a barrier to her being considered beautiful in the ancient world, in twenty-first century children's literature, her masculine nature leads her to be portrayed as both less attractive and unhappy about it. Medusa, on the other hand, is shown to be a more feminine woman. In essence, the Medusa-Athena relationship has gone from being a story of the Io/Callisto type in which a woman is punished by a goddess for her own rape to a Judgement of Paris story in which Athena competes with other women to be considered beautiful, and takes revenge when not judged the fairest. Whilst removing the contentious and perhaps inappropriate theme of sexual violence from children's versions of the myth, these stories replace it with a narrative which arguably perpetuates a shallow and negative view of female desires and relationships.

Variations of this theme occur in other recent children's publications which centre a rivalry between Medusa and Athena. Owen Hodkinson's (forthcoming) analysis of Holub and Williams' *Medusa the Mean* (2012) and Powers' *Being Me(Dusa) and Other Things That Suck* (2014) found that in these texts, Athena occupies the role of school popular girl whilst Medusa is the protagonist with boyish traits who fails at being a conventional teen. This dynamic is reversed again in *Athena the Brain* (2010), the first novel in the *Goddess Girls* series of which *Medusa the Mean* is the sixth book, with Athena as the boyish outsider insecure about her appearance, and Medusa as mean popular girl who mocks her. There is thus a pattern in which modern children's literature has transformed the virginal Athena's disgust at Medusa as a rape victim into a competition of feminity in which one figure is jealous of the others' adherence to conventional womanhood, defined by physical beauty and appeal to men.

That Medusa should have become such a popular figure in children's texts in the first place is likely owed to several factors. First, Medusa has undoubtedly benefited from the late twentieth century craze for monster stories (for which see Brazouski and Klatt 1994: 11-13). She has also benefitted from the current trend for sympathetic monster figures. As Gloyn (2019) points out, Medusa's monstrosity is more humanoid than that of other classical monsters. If one requires a sympathetic monster, therefore, Medusa is an ideal choice. Thirdly, there is an ubiquitousness about Medusa's image in modern western society that few other monsters can claim. Many people who never think about Greek myth would still recognise her face - her image is even the logo for fashion designer Versace.

A final notable element of Medusa's popularity in post-1970's reception is her presence in feminist literature. In Britain and America, Medusa's prominence as a reclaimed feminist figure far outstrips that of, for example, the Sirens, harpies or Sphinx. Authors such as Cixous (1976), Duffy (1999) and Plath (1965) write about the nature of Medusa's monstrosity. Hélène Cixous' (1976) *Laugh of the Medusa*, a response to Freud's 1922 essay on Medusa as mythical representative of the male fear of his mother's sexuality, is particularly well known.

Curiously, twentieth century women's writing often positions Medusa not as the victim of forced sexual violence but as the victim of *consensual* love. Both A.S. Byatt (1994) and Carol Ann Duffy reimagine Medusa as a woman wronged by men she has loved, depicting her as either being or believing herself to be deceived and cheated by the man to whom she has pledged herself (for Byatt see Sellers 2001: 38). Her grief and bitterness are what make her into a monster. Ann Stanford's *Medusa* (1977), however, does focus on Medusa as rape victim, and follows a line of thinking similar to Enterline's, where Medusa becomes a Gorgon to avenge herself. Medusa has also been cast as a Black heroine (e.g. Smartt 1995).

When it comes to classical reception in children's literature, however, there is frequent pressure from parents, teachers and reviewers for these stories to be didactic beyond what is normally assumed for children's books. Authors often refer to the alleged educational necessity of mythology for children in their introductions (e.g. Lewis 1987: 6; Russell 1989: 1-6) or to the life-changing impact these stories can have. It is at this point almost a cliché within children's literature scholarship to say it is adults who create and publish children's books, and largely adults who purchase and review them, and that children's books at least partially reflect an adult interpretation of what children ought to read, but it remains true (see Rose 1984; Nodelman 2008).

In Kate McMullan's *Say Cheese, Medusa!*, Athena is spiteful and jealous and Poseidon is manipulative and short-sighed in his desire for Medusa, whilst Medusa's goodness and that of her sisters transcends their selfish behaviour. Charles R. Smith gives a shorter retelling in which Medusa is essentially a Siren. Here, her beauty, though seemingly not her cruel behaviour towards men, arouse Athena's ire.

ATHENA'S JEALOUSY IN MCMULLAN'S SAY CHEESE, MEDUSA! (2002)

Medusa is the titular character in the third book of Kate McMullan's comedic *Myth O Mania* series. These irreverent novels purport to be narrated by Hades, who asserts that canon mythology represents the lies of his pathologically deceitful younger brother Zeus, and Hades is providing the 'true' version of events through this book series. The first two novels deal respectively with Hades and his siblings' fight against their abusive father Cronus, and with Hades' marriage to Persephone. *Say Cheese* is therefore the first in the series (though far from the last) to retell a myth which essentially had nothing to do with Hades, our narrator, in its ancient form.

Say Cheese begins with Hades being dragged to a party and picnic by his brother Poseidon (called Po in this series). This party turns out to be Po's attempt to seduce Medusa, a charming and friendly nymph with exceptionally beautiful hair. He has invited Medusa and her two sisters, in addition to his own two brothers. Unfortunately, Po and Zeus have decided to hold the party beside the temple of Athena, who is protective of her temple and does not like other deities to be near it. Po and Zeus have deceitfully convinced Medusa and her sisters that the temple belongs to Po. When Po attempts to show Medusa inside, Athena materialises and furiously confronts them.

Athena appears to recognise Medusa as someone she already dislikes.

> Athena…. glanced at Po. "She's the one you're always going on and on about, isn't she?"
> "Right." Po grinned. "She's the one."
> "Medusa," Athena repeated bitterly. "You, who enjoy the attentions of the sea god. You, who arrange picnics at temples where you have no business being. *You* are about to be punished." (31-32.)

These lines of dialogue imply Athena resents Medusa on account of her attractiveness to men as well as for being in her temple, but this is not yet explicit. Athena recites spells to transform the sisters. Her first spell goes as follows:

> *"Hair-proud goddess, vain and haughty,*
> *How you'll wish you'd never been naughty.*
> *How you'll weep for insulting Athena,*
> *Some goddesses are mean, but I'm much meaner!*
> *When you look in a mirror, you'll get shivers and shakes,*
> *Your long thick hair is now a nest of snakes!"* (33.)

Athena's description of Medusa as 'hair-proud' and 'vain' frames her as narcissistic and beauty-obsessed, although Medusa has done nothing within the narrative to reinforce this impression. Athena gives all three Gorgons bulging eyes, tusks, drool, scaly skin, clawed feet and wings. She attempts to give them tails before being stopped by Hades. However, after defiance from Medusa, who refuses to be cowed by Athena's bullying even while her sisters cry, Athena adds the unique curse for Medusa of turning anyone who looks on her to stone.

The rape and revenge narrative from Ovid is thus converted into a form more acceptable to twenty-first century understandings of child-friendly media. In Ovid, Poseidon rapes Medusa in Athena's temple. In McMullan, Poseidon lures her there under false pretences with the end goal of making romantic advances. In both, Medusa is an innocent victim, and in both Athena is unconcerned with Medusa's lack of complicity and punishes her, not Poseidon. However, in Ovid Athena's anger stems from her wish as a virgin goddess for her temple to remain pure from sexual activity, as well as the general sanctity of the temple space which Ovid's audience would have understood without

elaboration. McMullan's child audience do not necessarily understand the temple to be such a space, but in any case, sexual activity does not take place there in *Say Cheese.* Instead, Athena takes umbrage at other gods entering her temple. However, it is made clear from the start that there is something more to Athena's anger and resentment.

We also see, in this retelling, hints of the Ovid version sticking to the modern version even where it has ostensibly been eliminated. In the moment before Athena appears, Poseidon is trying to trick Medusa into either kissing him or moving closer. Another indication of Ovid appears in the passage explaining that Athena does not allow other gods near her temple – 'she absolutely forbid any fooling around near her temples' – and that she previously punished other water nymphs for 'frolicking' there (23). This word choice carries sexual undertones suggestive of the Ovidian Medusa story. Finally, the horse Pegasus, son of Medusa and Poseidon in Greek mythology, also appears near the end of *Say Cheese*. Medusa tells Hades. 'This is Pegasus …. Someday I'll tell you where he came from. It's a long story.' (170.) Again, Ovid's version is hinted at for those in the know.

After Athena's revenge, Poseidon and Hades fear that Athena might want to harm the Gorgon sisters further, and thus they place them in a godly form of witness protection. All is quiet for a while. Unfortunately, however, the hero Perseus promises King Polydectes the head of Medusa. Hades follows Perseus on his adventures, attempting to prevent this, but eventually things come to a showdown between Hades, the Gorgons, Perseus and Athena (who is helping Perseus) on the beach. At this point, the reason for Athena's hatred of Medusa is revealed. Athena's helmet has given her a terrible case of helmet hair to the point she has thin hair, bald patches and can never take off the helmet in public. Her jealousy of Medusa's former beautiful locks is what has driven her hatred. In the words of Medusa, her trespassing in the temple was Athena's excuse, not the 'real reason' (165) for her to punish the Gorgon sisters. Medusa, who has been spying on Athena, elaborates on Athena's grief at her unattractive hair:

> "… You were jealous of our long, incredibly healthy, shiny hair…. I know how each night you sit before your dressing table mirror and remove your helmet. How you brush your thin, lifeless hair, trying to cover the bald patches on your scalp. How you rub oils and ointments and –"
> "Stop!" cried Athena. "You've been spying on me!" (165-166).

Medusa offers Athena her secret shampoo recipe if she will transform all three Gorgons back into moon goddesses, and all is resolved happily. Athena, Hades, the Furies and Perseus are invited in for celebrations, because as Medusa tells Athena 'I don't believe in holding grudges' (170). The three Furies cheerfully discuss hair as a universal problem, celebrating their own easily maintained snake hair:

> "Hair," said Tisi. "It takes so much looking after."
> "Snakes are care-free," said Meg.
> "I never have a bad snake day, *ever*!" said Alec. (170-171.)

Since neither Hades nor any of the other male cast of the story are ever shown considering their hair or looking after it, the implication is that this wisdom is specifically for women.

In this way, Athena's jealousy, as a masculine woman, over the more feminine Medusa's style and beauty is the replacement for her virginal disgust at Medusa's sexuality in Ovid (albeit a sexuality forced on her). Whilst Ovid's Athena was a virgin excluded from the conventionally feminine world by her lack of sexuality and determined to keep it off her premises, McMullan's Athena is a tomboy excluded from the conventionally feminine world by her lack of knowledge of how to be beautiful, and wanting to keep the beauty she envies off her premises. Whilst Athena in the ancient world is described as extremely beautiful, modern children's reception seems to envision a conflict between this supposed beauty and Athena's masculine persona.

In Terry Deary's 1998 *Horrible Histories* anthology of myth, Aphrodite writes to Zeus about the Judgement of Paris: 'For some reason your wife Hera thought she should have the apple and then

your daughter Athena tried to say she was the fairest. (That, in my opinion, is a joke, but I wouldn't want you to think I'm being bitchy.)' (*Top Ten Greek Myths:* 31.) Here, at least according to Aphrodite, Athena's belief in her own beauty is comically ridiculous. Hera's belief that *she* is the fairest is not similarly comedic. Again, Athena is sidelined as unattractive and masculine in modern children's literature. McMullan in some ways goes further. Athena's lack of beauty in *Say Cheese* is directly caused by her masculine action of wearing a helmet, which Medusa advises her she must stop doing all the time, since the shampoo recipe can only do so much to repair the damage the helmet will cause.

Furthermore, Athena's cruel and jealous actions are forgiven extremely quickly in *Say Cheese.* Whilst to some extent this is standard for children's fiction, there is also perhaps an underlying implication that Athena's malicious behaviour is forgiven because, under the circumstances, it is somewhat understandable. It is natural for Athena to be so distressed over a physical flaw that she ruins the lives of those who remind her of it. As in the Judgement of Paris, beauty is positioned as of the greatest importance, even to goddesses whose aspects do not obviously relate to such concerns. Yet the idea that Athena's masculinity is what *makes* her less beautiful is McMullan's creation. It is not enough for Athena's self-image to be an important goddess with an ability to do magic that is canonically the envy of other gods in this novel, nor that she is so powerful in this version even her own father Zeus, the king of the gods, is afraid of her. If Athena cannot be beautiful, none of these things can make her feel worthy or prevent her bitterness, and Hades' narrative endorses this view to some degree.

At the same time, the *Myth O Mania* series also arguably praises women for not dedicating *too* much time to self-beautification. In the fourth novel, *Nice Shot, Cupid!* (2002), Psyche is sent by Aphrodite to obtain Persephone's make-up, as in Ovid. Persephone, our major female character for the series and Hades' love interest, comments on the ridiculousness of this task because she barely wears make-up:

> "Aphrodite is the beauty-products expert. Her potions are sold in all the best stores in Athens and Thebes. Even Olympians use them on the sly. She has seven different lines of products …. I spend about two minutes a day on makeup" (135-136).

The version of Athena that appears in the ancient text of Lucian's *Dialogues* would likely agree with Persephone here, since it is she who, echoing contemporary misogynistic criticisms, attacks Aphrodite for wearing too much make-up like a courtesan (*Dialogues of the Gods* 20.10). In McMullan, Persephone is implicitly contrasted to the appearance-obsessed Aphrodite, who is the villain of the novel. Female readers of this series, therefore, might understand from these books that the extent they ought to consider their appearance once they are adults is a delicate balance which they should strive to get right.

Elsewhere, *Say Cheese* still carries the 'what's on the inside is what counts' message often found in twenty-first century children's literature, but this is only in line with the sympathetic monster trend in reception. At the start of the novel, Medusa tells Hades that her mother sent away her sisters, the Grey Sisters, at birth because of their monstrous ugliness. Since learning of their existence, Medusa has been visiting them and has got permission to tell the world about them. Hades compares this to his grandfather Ouranos (called 'Sky Daddy' here) imprisoning his own ugly Cyclops and Hecatoncheires children. Medusa comments "It's so unfair to judge gods or goddesses – or even mortals – by the way they look.' (21.) Judging monsters for how they look may be wrong, but as we see in the case of Athena, more ordinary ugliness is a matter of concern and something to be fixed. The tendency to associate monstrosity specifically, but not other mythological ugliness, with disability and racial minorities is perhaps significant. Overall, *Say Cheese* presents children with the idea that whilst *shunning* based on appearances is wrong, haircare and concern over hair is a universal female concern and that it is reasonable to expect women who cannot be adequately beautiful to become not only frustrated but also vengeful.

ATHENA'S JEALOUSY IN SMITH'S THE MIGHTY 12 (2008)

Charles R. Smith's *The Mighty 12: Superheroes of Greek Myth* is a poetry anthology and graphic novel introducing the twelve Olympians with a poem and a cartoon drawing. Two additional poems are added – a Cerberus poem to accompany that dedicated to Hades and a Medusa poem to accompany that dedicated to Athena. In this version, therefore, Medusa is accorded a narrative importance on level with the ruling divine family.

Medusa is first introduced in an illustration before Athena's poem. The cartoon shows Medusa as a Gorgon, snarling, whilst Athena looks on. A caption reads 'Athena watched Medusa – the young, boastful beauty – with anger, and with a jealous rage made it her duty to turn her into the most monstrous of creatures.' (34.) This caption therefore presents a condensed version of McMullan's narrative: Athena transforms Medusa out of jealousy at her beauty.

Once we meet Medusa in her own poem, however, it becomes clear she is a very different character from the brave and kindly version of her that appeared in McMullan. Smith does not appear to be as interested in the sympathetic monster literary trend as was McMullan. Instead, Medusa's transformation in Smith resembles the line of Ovidian scholarship that characters in the *Metamorphoses* are transformed into shapes suggestive of their true nature (e.g. Feldherr 2002). Medusa in Smith begins as an outwardly beautiful woman with a monstrous nature.

Medusa, according to her poem, was:

> Envied by Athena,
> The Goddess of Wisdom,
> Because the Lovely
> And Young *Medusa*
> Sparkled on the Sea
> With Hair like Sunlight
> Flickering so Bright
> In the Dark, Drawing Boats
> Like a Beacon at Night.
> Her Voice Called to Sailors
> And with each Exhaled Breath
> She *Intoxicated* Them
> Causing Shipwrecks and Death.' (Emphasis original, 39.)

Here we see that Medusa plays the role of a siren in Smith, deliberately luring men to their deaths with her beautiful hair and voice. Athena is now presented as the goddess of wisdom, rather than as a masculine war deity like in McMullan. Athena's intellect, rather than her masculine warrior characteristics, are what appear to be set up in juxtaposition to Medusa's beauty. It may be significant that Medusa's youth is one of the features emphasised as part of her beauty which Athena envies, youth traditionally being set up in opposition to wisdom. Oddly, the sentence structure also positions Medusa's siren behaviour as one of her traits so envied by Athena.

In McMullan, however, the device of Medusa trespassing in Athena's temple was also present to give Athena an excuse for her actions. Here, Medusa does nothing to Athena besides being 'boastful', and Athena still takes revenge. The idea of women competing with one another in beauty is even more apparent, since the muffling factor from McMullan of Medusa's trespassing is removed. The word 'boastful', however, links back to Apollodorus' claim that Medusa boasted her beauty was greater than Athena's.

Athena thus decides to turn 'the poor girl/with such gorgeous features/into the most/*monstrous* of creatures.' (39, emphasis in original.) She strikes whilst Medusa is gazing in the mirror 'at her pride-filled reflection' and combing her hair (39). This phrasing is reminiscent of McMullan's Athena's description of Medusa as 'hair-proud'; however in McMullan the phrase was not meant to be an accurate description, whilst in Smith it is the voice of the narrator. Athena makes snakes sprout from

Medusa's hair and gives her 'a face of brass', a red tongue, boar teeth and golden scales (39). Presumably because her beauty is the centre of her own identity, this Medusa reacts much less calmly than her McMullan counterpart, screaming, howling, shrieking and running into the sea. Athena puts a price on Medusa's head. However, 'men who were willing … ended up dead' due to Medusa's petrifying powers. The ending in which she is killed by Perseus is not included.

Again, we therefore see Athena's virginal/sexual motivation for transforming Medusa replaced with the motivation of jealousy at her greater beauty. There is little discussion or justification of Athena's reasons in Smith; they are presented as self-evident, perhaps even something one would expect to see. The implication that competition over beauty is a central part of a female identity is thus arguably stronger than in McMullan. Poseidon here is not a part of the Medusa/Athena narrative. Instead of being preyed upon by her sexual admirers, Medusa now preys upon them herself, using her beauty to lure innocent men to their deaths. She fits the modern role of a femme fatale, and the modern view of beauty as a woman's weapon, rather than Ovid's frequent positioning of beauty as something used against women.

The loss of Medusa's beauty once she is transformed is also presented as a greater misery than it was in McMullan. Whilst McMullan's Gorgon sisters were devastated by Athena's punishment, they still continued to lead seemingly fulfilling lives, with one becoming a photographer, one a sculptor and Medusa herself becoming a spy with Poseidon's secret nymph forces. The three are apparently enjoying life when Hades visits them, although they are overjoyed when transformed back into their original forms. In McMullan, unlike in Smith, ugliness does not inevitably cause misery.

It is also not clear in McMullan that Medusa loses Poseidon's interest post-transformation, since the two remain in contact and the hint about the existence of Pegasus is dropped, suggesting Medusa and Poseidon may have had a secret relationship at some point. In Smith, however, Medusa's life seems completely wrecked by her transformation. The poem ends with her fleeing to the sea and resurfacing 'in a land far away/where no humans exist/nor light of day.' (39.) The fact she chooses a land with no light of day suggests that Medusa is hiding not only from others' judgement but from her own self-awareness; she does not wish to be able to see *herself.* Overall, the implication is of a sad, empty life now that Medusa is ugly. This is in contrast to, for example, Napoli's (2011) *Treasury of Greek Mythology* where Medusa is beautiful and exotic to Poseidon in her Gorgon form and Powers' (2014) *Being Me(Dusa)* where Medusa is incredibly attractive to men in her Gorgon form.

CONCLUSION: ATHENA'S JEALOUSY AND MEDUSA'S BEAUTY

Medusa's presence in children's literature can loosely be divided between versions which centre Perseus (e.g. McCaughrean 1997; Storrie 2008; Naden 1981; Osborne and Pope Osborne 1988, and the vast majority of children's anthologies of myth) and versions which centre Medusa (such as most texts mentioned in this paper). The Medusa-centring texts are somewhat more likely to have girls in mind as an audience, although not always – Smith's text, for example, is marketed as a superhero inspired comic book, likely with the intent of capturing a male audience.

An overwhelming number of Medusa-centred texts make Medusa's relationship with Athena a central focus. In some cases, this focus is on Medusa's loyalty to Athena, and Athena's betrayal in punishing her for rape. This is the case for Lyons' 2014 *The Deep End of the Sea* and Summers' 2012 *Medusa: A Love Story*. In these versions, Athena plays the role of the betrayer; she is the close friend who inexplicably turns against a rape victim who trusted her, repaying Medusa with slut-shaming and cruelty. This is closer to, though not identical with, her role in Ovid, since bonds of affection between the two do not appear in Ovid besides the fact that Medusa serves Athena.

Other times, however, Athena is not Medusa's friend. Instead, she is a self-perceived rival who inhabits the same spaces, be those spaces the mythical social world of the gods or an American style high school. This is the case for *Say Cheese, Medusa!*, *The Mighty 12, Being Me(Dusa)* and both Athena/Medusa focused novels in the *Goddess Girls* series: *Athena the Brain* and *Medusa the Mean*, even though they flip the dynamics between the two. In *Say Cheese* and *The Mighty 12* in particular, Athena is depicted as undesirable to men and unattractive because of her goddess attributes of

wisdom and war. She is a masculine woman, in appearance as well as nature, who secretly longs for Medusa's beauty (in McMullan) and her beauty and, by implication, way with men (in Smith). This jealousy causes her to exact a terrible revenge on Medusa. Such motivations are not really examined or questioned, leading the reader to perhaps conclude that such antagonism between women based on appearance is a natural part of life.

One striking element of the trends I have outlined in this article is the perceived fragility of female beauty in modern retellings. In ancient accounts such as Apollodorus and Lucian, Medusa's monstrosity did not take away her ability to be beautiful, and perhaps enhanced it. Likewise, the goddess Athena was beautiful in a way not detracted from by her masculinity or her intellect in the ancient world. Yet this is not the case in contemporary reception of these characters. In Smith, a transformation into Gorgon form not only shatters Medusa's exceptional beauty, but implicitly destroys her ability to experience joy. In McMullan, the act of wearing a helmet causes damage to Athena's hair to the point of balding and density-change, an unlikely consequence for the majority of human women. The fragility of female hair in the universe of McMullan's novels is enforced through talk by both the Gorgons and the Furies about their own hair. In McMullan and Smith, Athena's war and wisdom attributes are implicitly at odds with her desire as a woman for beauty. Even personality traits appear to be a threat to sensitive female beauty in these texts. None of this is an issue faced by male characters.

Ideas of fragile female beauty and its tricky maintenance perhaps makes sense in an age where one's attractiveness is increasingly determined by styling ability, fashion choices and the application of beauty products, compared to the genetic lottery which may have been harder for women to overcome in the ancient world. Yet the choice of this as a theme to replace a rape narrative is curious, and its popularity in books aimed at a demographic too young to really be reliant on high levels of beautification seems to pessimistically prepare the female portion of the audience for their adult future.

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