Screaming Silence: Medusa and the Enlightening Darkness of Ancient Texts and Modern Science

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ABSTRACT: *A controversial episode from Alice Walker's novel* The Temple of My Familiar *(1990) – about ancient Greek cultural colonisation of Africa – suggests that the Greeks' Medusa may be more than meets the eye or ear. This paper investigates the Medusa myth enshrined in ancient Graeco-Roman texts and its resurfacing in eighteenth-century biological taxonomy, with a view to identifying telling silences, if any, in the patriarchal construal of Medusa as woman/monster. I use a broad feminist approach to examine the engendering of the silence–speech continuum, for whose conceptualisation I draw here especially upon Hélène Cixous and Teresa de Lauretis. My concern is not so much whether, as claimed by diverse contemporary feminists, Medusa can be used as a potent empowerment figure for women, but rather what her silencing indicates about the patriarchal epistemic project.*

KEYWORDS: *Medusa, Perseus,* The Temple of My Familiar *(Alice Walker), Greek/Roman mythology, Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, (Pseudo-)Apollodorus, Pausanias, Ovid, Fulgentius, biological taxonomy, Linnaeus, women's silencing, monsterisation*

In his lecture on "the *Greek* foundations of Western civilization and art" (Walker 267), a Sorbonne art history professor presents his class a slide which depicts an ancient Greek carving of Perseus slaying Medusa. It sounds too run-of-the-mill a class for the scene to elicit the readers' attention. Yet the one who recounts it – couched as one memory of her undergraduate studies – is Nzingha, a young African woman speaking up (or back) in a polemical and highly controversial scene from Alice Walker's novel *The Temple of My Familiar* (1990). The overall episode features a dialogue between Nzingha – a fictional persona of Walker the womanist activist – and her long-lost sister Fanny. At this point, Nzingha recounts not only her culturally bifurcate education, but also how it enabled her to enquire into the underside of learning. Here is the ekphrasis of the ancient carving whose photo display is meant to illumine the students:

> [T]here was Perseus in his chariot, and in his hand, hanging over the side, was the severed head of Medusa, her snakelike locks of hair presented as real snakes – everywhere in Africa a symbol of fertility and wisdom – and there were even two snakes floating about the corners of her mouth. Her face was horribly contorted, as yours would be, too, if someone had just hacked off your head. The rest of her rather large, womanly body is still on its knees, and in fact she looks decidedly, if you know how to read the carving differently from Westerners, like an angel. Because she *is* an angel. She is the

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> *mother* of Christian angels. She is Isis, mother of Horus, sister and lover of Osiris, Goddess of Egypt. The Goddess, who, long before she became Isis, was known all over Africa as simply the Great Mother, Creator of All, Protector of All, the Keeper of the Earth. *The* Goddess. (Walker 267–8, original emphasis)

Medusa with no writhing serpents in/as her hair, but African dreadlocks; no monster, but the Ur-African deity? The very serpents, not the symbolically evil reptiles familiar from the Christianised Hebrew Genesis, but "a symbol of fertility and wisdom" (Walker 267)? These claims beg attention.

Walker's startling view is worth examining alongside Julia Kristeva's re-vision of Christic iconography of the mandylion/veronica type in Medusan terms – metonymic for decapitation. The *Holy Face* of Laon (*c*. twelfth century; Balkan origin), Kristeva contends (esp. 41–6), frames Christ's head virtually disembodied, viz., *as if* severed. One element which connects the two personages (in representation) is "the idea of the image's actual power" (Kristeva 42), whether Medusa's as an *apotropaion* or the Byzantine icon's as the gateway to divine *invisibilia*. Kristeva thus uncovers the feminisation undergirding such Christic representations:

> The world of speech and that of invisible suffering – death or castration – are reconciled in the Image. And the suggestion of the severed head that haunts the Holy Face betrays its feminine, hemorrhagic,[1] medusan antecedents, which nourished the medieval imagination. (Kristeva 44)

Kristeva's interpretation of Christic iconography in Medusan terms suggests an unforeseen avenue for feminist enquiry into the patriarchal silencing and disenfranchisement of women and the feminisation of silence.

This paper starts from the controversial point raised by Alice Walker, rather than from Kristeva's remarkable insight, to examine discursive representations of Medusa from ancient texts to eighteenth-century biological nomenclature, which baptises (and classifies) aquatic organisms through recourse to the mythical imagination of Europe. Ancient male-authored texts, alongside the discourse of early

[1] Kristeva refers here to Hemorrhissa, the haemorrhagic woman healed by Jesus (Matthew 9.20), whom the fourth-century apocryphal *Acts of Pilate* "call[s] Berenice for the first time, the Macedonian version of the Greek name Pherenice (*Phere-nike*: bearer of victory)" (Kristeva 42–3). Berenike/Pherenice relates etymologically to Veronica (in Latin), a name derived from the phrase *vera icon* ("true image") in the Christian legend of the compassionate woman who wiped Jesus's face on his way to Golgotha and who was gifted the *veronica*, or the Veil of Veronica, one of Christianity's *acheiropoietai* (icons "not made with human hands"). The homophony of *vera icon* and *phere-nike*, as well their differential connection with blood, facilitated the female figures' coalescence (Kristeva 44).

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modern biology, voice an androcentric world's views of a woman – perhaps, through unwarranted generalisation and essentialisation, of Woman – only to silence real women, delegitimise their self-understanding and public self-representation, and malign their agency.

Alice Walker's Medusa

In Walker's novel, the very context of Nzingha's Medusa account indicates the episode's cultural-political stakes:

> "…It had been carved into a wall somewhere – I think in Melos – and looters had just chopped off the part of the wall that interested them and that they could carry." She [Nzingha] laughed, as did Fanny, at this image. (Walker 267)

Ironically, the very artefact depicting a beheading – a resonant one: Medusa's – bears testimony to the physical and symbolical decapitation of a larger "body" of carving. Carried away to a foreign land by a gang of cultural predators, the sculpture is presumably reverently exhibited in a western museum. There is more to such looting, though, Nzingha contends:

> I knew that Notre-Dame [in Paris] was built on the site of a shrine to Isis, who was later called the Black Madonna…. There is no trace of Isis there, of course, nor anywhere in Paris; certainly not today in the souls of its people…. Notre-Dame to me was no different from the Louvre. It had been built for the same purpose. Only it had been built to colonize the spiritual remains of a goddess, as the Louvre had been built to colonize the material remains of devastated cultures. (Walker 268)

Walker's is here a devastating critique of two cultural landmarks of the West, the church and the museum, which, however different from each other, collude as *dispositifs* of power/knowledge/truth (in a Foucauldian sense). The readers can, moreover, glimpse the subtle underside of colonisation, here the whites' appropriation of Africa's pantheon whilst devaluing Africa, as Nzingha contends with respect to the story of Perseus slaying Medusa.

For Nzingha, the Perseus–Medusa story represents "the Western world's memorialization of that period in prehistory when the white male world of Greece decapitated and destroyed the black female Goddess/Mother tradition and culture of Africa" (Walker 269). Africa's "Great Mother, Creator of All, Protector of All, the Keeper of the Earth" (Walker 268), and with her a mother-worshipping culture, were subjected to the ancient Greeks' patriarchal pantheon of civilising heroes. Considering the arcane Medusa–Perseus mythography, Walker's hypothesis is not entirely fanciful. We shall see that Pausanias's Perseus may be regarded as an

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embodiment of the colonising culture, in a story about betrayed Medusa's decapitation allegedly for her beauty's sake. Furthermore, Pausanias's and Diodorus Siculus's accounts of a Libyan Queen Medusa may (or may not) have informed feminist hypotheses about the African origins of the Gorgons (Bowers 220–2), hence Alice Walker's own metaepistemic myth.

Neither her Sorbonne professor nor her Notre Dame visit but the white missionary nuns working in Africa open Nzingha's eyes to the origins of Christian angels in the *arch-angel* Medusa:

> "Haven't you ever wondered where angels come from?" one of the nuns – my favorite, Sister Felicity – once asked our class sweetly. "Well, when you study Egyptian art and life you will see where they come from. They come from the Gods and Goddesses of Africa." (Walker 268)

Undertaken – surreptitiously *under-taken* – "far away from the indoctrination of their church's teaching in Europe" (Walker 268), the nuns' virtually maieutic teaching project clandestinely *undermined* received western patriarchal wisdom. The nuns "debunked every spirit obstructionist, antifemale, white-supremacist theory they'd been taught" (Walker 268), Nzingha contends in retrospect.

Could Alice Walker's fictional postcolonial re-vision of the Medusa story contribute to "mak[ing] audible the multiplicity of voices of which knowledge and epistemologies are made" (Code 208), i.e., those delegitimised and repressed "subaltern knowledges" (Foucault 82) which Foucault investigates?[2] The circumstances enabling Nzingha to intuit the colonist underside of the western pantheon, I submit, make Walker's polemic backfire. Nzingha's account, which claims white *female* (fore)knowledge, viz., the Catholic nuns', if in close contact with Africa's spirituality, indicates the radical revaluation of the feminine principle as both divine and knowledgeable (or anyway privy to divine mysteries), unlike in the religion of the nuns or in the Graeco-Roman Medusa myth. Nonetheless, showing such knowledge imparted by whites to blacks, by adults to children (and, symbolically, to an infantilised people) and, methodologically, by Socrates through Plato to a philosophically inclined mankind (*sic*), should give us pause. This chain of epistemic transmission sounds suspiciously First World, white supremacist and patriarchal to be consistent with the mindset of Alice Walker, the African-American founder of *womanism* as a movement critical of white racist liberal feminism. Has

[2] In this connection, see also Le Doeuff on the *feminised* "philosophical unthought"; Cixous on the concealed built-in hierarchy of western philosophico-linguistic dichotomies ("Sorties" 37–8); or Irigaray on the western philosophical (and psychoanalytic) reduction of difference – the West's hom(m)o-sexual monopoly (*Speculum* 26, 74, 135; *This Sex* 74, 171) – and the elision of woman from the discourse of and on the subject. Likewise, Edwin Ardener's metatheory of western anthropology critiques its blindness to women. All these theorists uncover women as a "muted" or "inarticulate" group (in Ardener's terms) vis-à-vis legitimate discursive/ideological (self-)representation.

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Walker reached an epistemic loop? Is Medusa a figure not to think with, even when women endeavour to do so? Who *is* Medusa?

Medusa: A fragmentary mytho-biography

None but the classicists are conceivably familiar with the origins of the Medusa myth and its interweaving with the Perseus myth – as possibly commonly derived from "earlier 'Eastern' prototypes, such as Humbaba and the epic of Gilgamesh" (Mack n. 30). Whilst (Pseudo-)Apollodorus's *Library* (first or second century CE) includes our earliest extant *full* version of the Perseus legend, the account itself (*Bibl*. 2.4.1–5)[3] draws on Pherekydes, a late fifth-century BCE mythographer; furthermore, many individual elements and scenes occur already in the art and literature of the Archaic Period (800–480 BCE) (Mack n. 20; Felson 128).[4] Indeed, the Medusa myth "probably dates back to Mycenean times as part of the oral tradition, with likely Ancient Near Eastern antecedents" (Felson 128).

The earliest Medusa representations are carvings of a scary head with snake-hair, frightening eyes and a screaming mouth (complete with protruding fangs): the *gorgoneion* (Gorgon[5] head). Medusa as terrifying head – implicitly referring to its apotropaic use – is represented textually earliest in Homer's *Iliad* (prob. late eighth or early seventh century BCE) and the *Odyssey* (prob. eighth to mid-second century BCE),[6] though not in relation to Perseus (Dexter 27). The *Iliad* offers a brief (implicit) ekphrasis of "the Gorgon's monstrous head / that rippling dragon horror" (*Il*. 5.849–50) placed in the centre of the shield/*aegis* which Athena dons for battle. Agamemnon's shield also places centrally "like a crown the Gorgon's grim mask / the burning eyes, the stark, transfixing horror" (11.39–40).[7] A three-headed snake – "rippling" on Agamemnon's shield-belt (11.422) – completes the latter Medusa representation: "a dark blue serpent, two heads coiling round a third, / reared from a single neck and twisting left and right" (11.423–4). In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, who has descended into Hades, fears that Persephone might deploy against him "some

[3] The abbreviations of ancient writers and their works are those used in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

[4] Mack reviews the Perseus entry in *LIMC*, vol. 7. "The Perseus legend was also given extensive treatment by fifth-century tragedians (Phrynichus, Aeschylus, Sophokles, and Euripides), though we only have fragments and titles preserved" (Mack n. 20).

[5] "Grim, fierce, terrible" (*LSJ*, s.v. γοργός).

[6] I retain the traditional attribution of the two epics to Homer, however disputed nowadays. Not only with respect to the *Odyssey*, scholars are divided over the composition time, given its originally oral nature; the above date uses Gregory Nagy's evolutionary model, which purports to trace the transformation of the *Odyssey* from oral song to fixed text (Walsh, Merrill 14–15). All my references to the ancient texts/authors follow the cited editions' chronological assumptions.

[7] During the battle, "Hector's eyes [are] glaring bright as a Gorgon's eyes / or Ares', man-destroying Ares'" (*Il*. 8.398–9). Unsurprisingly, in French the colloquial *méduser*, like the non-colloquial verbs *pétrifier* and the Latinate *sidérer* and *stupéfier*, is used to express one's astonishment (Larousse online, s.v. "méduser").

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head of a Gorgon, an ugly and terrible monster" (Hom., *Od*. 11.634, trans. Merrill) – translated by Fagles as but a "staring face" (*Od*. 11.726).

Other early texts which feature the *gorgoneion*, however, conflate the Medusa and Perseus myths. So do Hesiod's fragmentary *Shield* (*Aspis Hērakleous*; in Latin, *Scutum*), Herodotus's *Histories* and Pausanias's *Description of Greece*. In Hesiod (late eighth or early seventh century BCE), one of the scenes carved on Heracles's shield depicts Perseus pursued by Medusa's enraged sisters, each with two serpents hanging from her girdle (Hes., *Sc*. 216–37); Perseus bears the Gorgon's head on his back, in a silver pouch with gold tassels (*Sc*. 224–5). In Herodotus (*c*. 484–430 BCE), the Thebans of Chemmis celebrate Perseus not for his Gorgon (or any other) exploit, but as an Egyptian. They tell that Perseus "came to Egypt for the reason alleged also by the Greeks – namely, to bring the Gorgon's head from Libya" (Hdt. 2.91, p. 377).[8] Herodotus's brief account takes pride of place in (deified) Perseus's genealogy: the hero's name occurs seven times within the thirty-three lines, unlike the Gorgon's only once. By contrast, Pausanias (*c*. 115–*c*. 180 CE) mentions Medusa a lot in his *Description of Greece* (*c*. 143–176 CE); yet Medusa first (and foremost) appears indirectly, viz., in *representation*: the apotropaic[9] *gorgoneion* (1.21.3, 1.24.7, 5.10.4, 5.12.4, 8.47.5), with its petrifying powers (9.34.2).[10]

From the *gorgoneion* to the full-bodied Gorgon there was only a step, first taken by Hesiod in his *Theogony*, the earliest extant text to call her "Medusa" (*Theog*. 276), i.e., ruler-*cum*-protectress,[11] and to entwine her story with Perseus's. Medusa "suffered woes" (Μέδουσά τε λυγρὰ παθοῦρα, *Theog*. 276), seemingly because "with her alone [of the three Gorgons] the dark-haired one [Poseidon] lay down in a soft meadow among spring flowers" (278–9). The text switches immediately (and unaccountably elliptically) to Medusa's decapitation by Perseus, in whose wake the giant warrior Chrysaor and the horse Pegasus were born (280–1). It is unclear,

[8] Libya is the Greek name of the Lake Tritonis region in North Africa (Dexter 30).

[9] However, ancient writers frequently associate the evil-averting (ἀποτροπαιος) role with Apollo (*LSJ*, s.v. ἀποτροπάδην).

[10] Yet Pausanias also embeds the myth of Medusa in that of Perseus, her nemesis (Paus. 1.22.7, 1.23.7, 2.27.2, 3.17.3, 3.18.11, 5.18.5). Medusa's story proper (2.21.5–6) is elicited by the Argos site where her very head is allegedly buried (2.21.5). Pausanias's is an account of treachery vis-à-vis Medusa both intra- and extra-textually, the former articulated explicitly in the main story, the latter implicit in providing an alternative version which reduces the queen to a wild woman.

[11] Μέδουσα is the present participle of μέδω, to "protect, rule over"; Homer uses μέδω as the participial noun μέδων ("lord, ruler"), often in plural form (*LSJ*, s.v. μέδω). As Ruck aptly notes, μέδω, which renders Andro*meda* herself a "man-sovereign" (which she *is*, as heiress), describes "the Medusa's male or hermaphroditic attribute as bearded, as well as her sovereignty over men" (799). A repulsive sovereignty under patriarchy, I must add. The *LSJ*, the standard lexicographical reference, in English, for Ancient Greek, has no Μέδουσα entry, and the μέδω entry shows the verb's forms typically descriptive of male gods. Likewise, the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*'s "Medusa" entry in the second volume cross-references to "Gorgo/Medusa" in the first. Medusa is silenced in modern lexicography too.

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though, whether Hesiod is fully committed to the monstrous view of the Gorgons. He points in the latter direction implicitly, when the next story, Echidna's, begins, ambiguously: "She [probably Ceto, the Gorgons' mother, herself the "beautiful-cheeked (καλλιπάρηον)" daughter of Pontus and Earth (*Theog*. 238)] bore in a hollow cave *another monster* (ἄλλο πέλωρον)" (*Theog*. 295; *LSJ*, s.v. πέλωρον; πέλωρος; καλλιπάρηος).

By contrast, Pindar's (*c*. 518–*c*. 438 BCE) odes, which also entwine the myths of Medusa and Perseus, relish in the monstrous, if not unambiguously so. The central narrative of *Pythian* 10[12] describes Perseus's journey to the Hyperboreans and, briefly, the story of slaying Medusa and petrifying his mother's captors:

> … He slew
> the Gorgon, and, bearing her head adorned
> with locks of serpents, came to the islanders,
> bringing them stony death…. (Pind., *Pyth*. 10.46–8)

Perseus's "blessed life serves as a measure of the success enjoyed by the victor [in the games of the Pythian festival] and his father" (Rice, in Pindar 356). Pindar's *Pythian* 12 (12.11–18) elaborates on *Pythian* 10. It recounts the story of Perseus, if erratically chronologically, from his miraculous conception by Danaë to the banquet held by King Polydektes of Seriphos, who has made Danaë his mistress; Perseus petrifies the king and his court with Medusa's head, acquired as his present for Polydektes. In Pindar, all three Gorgons have snaky hair (*Pyth*. 12.10); notwithstanding, Medusa is "beautiful-cheeked (εὐπαράου)" (12.16; *LSJ*, s.v. εὐπάρειος). Pindar seems unperturbed by depicting such an anomalous monster, whose head juxtaposes beauty and hideousness. However, "throughout Greco-Roman texts, Medusa was portrayed as both beautiful and ugly,"[13] according to Daniel E. Gershonson (qtd. in Dexter n. 13), mesmerising and *gorgos*, although rarely within the same text (Felson 127).

The *Library* (*Atheniensis Bibliothecae*), long wrongly attributed to Apollodorus (b. *c*. 180 BCE), includes the canonical version of the Perseus and Medusa story (*Bibl*. 2.4.1–5).[14] The account unambiguously depicts all three

[12] The scholia dates *Pythian* 10 to 498 BCE, which, if correct, makes it the earliest epinikion in the collection (Rice, in Pindar 356).

[13] Quoting the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (*LIMC*, vol. 4, s.v. Gorgo, Gorgones, nos. 80–145), Mack (n. 4) draws attention to the late fifth-century BCE *iconographic* shift of Medusa from a monster (see also Vernant 112–13) to the familiar beautiful woman; the latter image becomes the norm only in the fourth century BCE.

[14] The *narrative* incipit hints at the aetiological legend of the founding of Argos, the oldest Greek city, by the Egyptian Danaus, who thereafter bestows his name on its inhabitants, the Danaids. Perseus is the son of Danaë, the daughter of King Akrisios, himself the grandson of Danaus's successor and nephew. Perseus defeats Medusa on the advice of Hermes and Athena (his half-siblings), and overpowers her with Athena's help (Apollod., *Bibl*. 2.4.1–5).

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Gorgons – of whom only Medusa is mortal[15] – as monsters able to petrify anyone who beholds them (*Bibl*. 2.4.2). Golden-winged, with "heads twined about with the scales of dragons, and great tusks like swine's, and brazen hands" (*Bibl*. 2.4.2), (Pseudo-)Apollodorus's Gorgons are actually "bird/snakes, similar to the Neolithic European and Near Eastern female figures" (Dexter 30).

Frightening though she may look, (Pseudo-)Apollodorus's Medusa has no live serpents in/as her hair; they are Pindar's and Ovid's contribution to the story. In keeping with his overarching topic, Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) prefers a (misogyny-driven) metamorphosis: raped by Neptune in the temple of Minerva, the beautiful Medusa is punished by the goddess to become an ugly monster[16] for the temple's desecration (Ov., *Met*. 4.793–801).

Yet Medusa's is a fragmented story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (completed *c*. 8 CE) – one which erects a monument to the victor by raising him on the decapitated body of his victim.[17] The Medusa story proper is preceded by the Gorgon's notoriety[18] for her powers to *petrify*. First succumbs to the lethal gaze of her severed head Atlas (*Met*. 4.654–60), for denying Perseus hospitality (on account of a prophecy). Next do corals, if accidentally, in an aetiological legend (4.741–52) embedded in the story of Perseus rescuing Andromeda from the sea monster, to whom she is offered to placate the gods for her mother's reckless bragging. Before engaging the monster in combat, though, Perseus boasts about his "victor[y] over Gorgon of the snaky locks" (*Gorgonis anguicomae Perseus superator*, 4.699) to buttress his claim to a nuptial contract.

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[15] No extant account explains the immortality differential between the Gorgons.

[16] However, one of the Erinyes, Tisiphone, is similarly equipped with grey tresses indistinguishable from the snakes framing her face (Ov., *Met*. 4.474–5, 4.490–4) – a frightening monster (*monstris exterrita*, 4.488) indeed. Tasked by Juno to drive Athamas and Ino mad, Tisiphone uses her snakes and also prepares a venomous concoction for the job.

[17] My phrasing draws visually upon Benvenuto Cellini's (1500–1571) *Perseo con la testa di Medusa* (1545–54), commissioned by Cosimo I de'Medici to connect Perseus's victory over Medusa with *masculine political power* (Bardi 807–12; Hirthe 211; Cole 215–26). The bronze statue (now its replica) stands symmetrically with Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* in the Loggia de' Lanzi (aka Loggia della Signoria) of the Piazza della Signoria, then the seat – in the Palazzo Vecchio – of Florentine power as embodied by Cosimo I. The victor presents to the world the head of the vanquished Gorgon, a gesture which could conceivably petrify the statue's viewers, for it is the gesture through which Ovid's Perseus destroys his enemies at Cepheus's palace to release Andromeda from her engagement chains to Phineus (*Met*. 5.179–80). In Florence, Perseus's foot not on the *chest*, as the victor's typical posture is, but on the *abdomen* of Medusa signifies, I submit, the raping of (the) woman. To add insult to injury, Medusa is symbolically raped even in death, not by the god Poseidon, but by the demi-god Perseus: (the) Woman is abjectly defeated. Hirthe (199), however, does not interpret Perseus's foot position as suggestive of rape (in German, *Vergewaltigung*).

[18] Ovid first mentions Medusa obliquely, in an aetiological legend about Libya's deadly serpents emerging from her blood drops (*Met*. 4.616–20) when Perseus flies with her head, and synecdochically: Perseus is "bearing the wonderful spoil of the snake-haired monster" (*viperei referens spolium memorabile monstri*, 4.615).

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Ovid's fragmentary Medusa tale introduced by the Gorgon's "traces" will find a comparable version in his successor Pausanias's. However, unlike Pausanias and much more obviously than (Pseudo-)Apollodorus or Herodotus, Ovid embeds his Medusa account in a paean to Perseus. Only during his nuptials with Andromeda will Perseus, on a prince's request, *recount* his victory over Medusa (*Met*. 4.769–86),[19] whom he decapitated during her sleep (4.784–5), not in combat proper. Rather than being shown *performed* in the Ovidian story, Perseus's victory exists in *representation* (Feldherr 313). According to Feldherr (315), the latter may be regarded as a verbal monument that doubly commemorates the Medusa–Perseus encounter: as the narration of his victory and as a *spolium* (a representation brought home as booty by the victor), *viperei referens spolium memorabile monstri* / "bearing the wonderful spoil of the snake-haired monster" (*Met*. 4.615). Asked by another prince about the serpents on her head, unlike on her Gorgon sisters' (4.790–2), Perseus offers the metamorphosis story (4.793–801), with its (for us now) perverse punishment not of the rape (*vitiasse*, 4.798) perpetrator, but of the victim for the defilement of Minerva's temple in the act. Yet Ovid's goddess also punishes the rapist – another Olympian and her uncle, with whom she had competed for patronage of Athens – if, more perversely still, by punishing generations of mortal men (*sic*) to come![20]

On the contrary, both Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (*c*. 80–20 BCE), in his *Library of History* (*Bibliothēkē*), and Greek traveller and geographer Pausanias (*c*. 115–*c*. 180), in *The Description of Greece* (*Periegesis Hellados*, *c*. 143–176 CE), describe the Gorgons in alienating terms to patriarchal Greece. Pausanias's Medusa is the queen of Libya who valiantly fights Perseus's invading army until treacherously "assassinated by night" (Paus. 2.21.5).[21] For Diodorus too, Libya is the abode of "a number of races" of "warlike" women "greatly admired for their manly vigour" (Diod. Sic. 3.52.4). The first such "race" Diodorus mentions – introduced as "tradition tells us of…" (3.52.4, p. 247) – is that "of the Gorgons, against whom, as the account is given, Perseus made war, a race distinguished for its valour" (3.52.4, pp. 247, 249). The text insists on *reporting* "the pre-eminence and the power of the women" whom only "the son of Zeus" could "campaign against"; their "manly prowess" strikes Diodorus as "amazing[ly]" different from "the nature of the women of our day" (p. 249). Next, Diodorus (3.53.1–6, 3.54.1–7, 3.55.1–11) describes the

[19] "Medusa's metamorphosis as presented in Ovid provides a prime example of the *fascinating* capacities of narrative: 'her' story is delayed and emerges at the closure of Perseus' account. It would have remained untold without the intervention of Perseus' listeners" (Baumbach 232, original emphasis).

[20] The punishment – consistent with Hermaphroditus's curse on Salmacis's waters in the same Book 4 (Ov., *Met*. 4.385–8) – sounds like standard Judaeo-Christian explanation of suffering: punishment meted out down the generations (on the Adamic template).

[21] Akin to the treachery depicted by Pausanias (2.21.5) is the self-emasculating feat of Ovid's Perseus, who decapitates Medusa during her sleep.

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female warriors living in western Libya, called Amazons by the Greeks (3.53.3), by appeal to what "mythology relates (Μυθολογοῦσι)" (3.53.4) about their waging wars of *invasion* (3.54.1–7, 3.55.1–11). It is during the description of the Amazons that Diodorus mentions the Gorgons again:

> But the Gorgons, grown strong again in later days, were subdued a second time by Perseus, the son of Zeus, when *Medusa was queen over them*; and in the end both they and the race of the Amazons were entirely destroyed by *Heracles*, when he visited the regions to the west and set up his pillars in Libya, since he *felt that it would ill accord with his resolve to be the benefactor of the whole race of mankind if he should suffer any nations to be under the rule of women*. (Diod. Sic. 3.55.3, emphasis added)

Diodorus's Gorgons are not simply a most valiant female race; they are ruled by Queen Medusa. Diodorus seems to capitalise on the meaning of Medusa's name (Dexter 30), only to – implicitly approvingly – mention Heracles's destruction of both Gorgons and Amazons to advance a man as the civilising hero cum benefactor of mankind (*sic*). As to Diodorus's contemporary womankind, it is but a pale replica (3.52.4, p. 249) of the races destroyed by Heracles – or else it wouldn't live at all.

Nothing, however, is as simple as that, for both (Pseudo-)Apollodorus and Pausanias include alternative versions. Whereas (Pseudo-)Apollodorus downplays the alternative in which he depicts Medusa as a woman whose beauty matches Athena's (Apollod., *Bibl*. 2.4.3), Pausanias implicates that his alternative account is untrustworthy. Yet both the inclusion of alternative Medusa stories and their narrative contexts are worth examining.

(Pseudo-)Apollodorus introduces the variations as impersonal reporting: "some say." The phrase's second and final occurrence[22] concerns the reason for Medusa's decapitation, which "some … alleged" was perpetrated "for Athena's sake" (*Bibl*. 2.4.3). (It is at this juncture that Medusa's beauty is mentioned.) With this alternative, (Pseudo-)Apollodorus reaches a psychological (and narrative) cul-de-sac which he circumvents by resuming the main story, Perseus's – hence the genealogical account of his progeny (2.4.5–6), which concludes the Medusa story proper. Does the decapitation proclaim who is not just the more beautiful woman, but the only one who can claim so legitimately, viz., by dent of the power she wields? Is it a travesty of the contest of power/skill which Ovid encapsulates in his Arachne story (*Met*. 6.1–145)? Is it something else altogether?

Pausanias adopts a different strategy to undermine his alternative account. On mentioning the burial mound of Medusa's head (Paus. 2.21.5), he continues: "I

[22] The first "some say" hesitates between Proetus and Zeus (*Bibl*. 2.4.1) in identifying the rapist of Danae by whom she conceives Perseus; (Pseudo-)Apollodorus, however, continues as if the latter possibility were indubitable.

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omit the miraculous (μύθου[23]), but give the rational parts of the story" about the Libyan Queen Medusa and treachery, in whose wake Perseus, "admiring her beauty even in death, cut off her head and carried it to show the Greeks" (2.21.5).[24] Here Pausanias introduces the alternative account: "But Procles … thought a different account (ἕτερος λόγος) more plausible (πιθανώτερος) than the preceding" (2.21.6). Drawing on hearsay, Procles "guessed" that Medusa is but one of the wild inhabitants of the Libyan desert, who "wandered [away]…, reached Lake Tritonis, and harried the neighbours until Perseus killed her" (2.21.6). Through framing his accounts thus, Pausanias sounds sympathetic to Medusa.

What does the kaleidoscopic ancient picture of Medusa presage? Before attempting a tentative answer, I will briefly look at the Middle Ages and early modernity, in two distinctive epistemic cases.

The medieval Medusa

The ancient myth's *en-gendering*[25] of the clash for power or sovereignty (viz., the right to self-determination) resurfaces, if inadvertently, in an early medieval allegorisation of Medusa, "The Fable of Perseus and the Gorgons" (Fulg., *Mythol.* 1.21), in Fulgentius's *Mythologiae* (late fifth–early sixth century). Not the allegorisation of the Gorgons as stages of terror that manliness (symbolised by Perseus) aided by wisdom (Athena) should successfully confront, concerns me here; rather, I am interested in what Fulgentius allegorises thus. Fulgentius, who prefers Theocnidus's account to Lucan's or Ovid's, identifies Medusa, the youngest daughter of King Phorcys, as "the more forceful" of the three sisters (Fulgentius 61). She therefore "increased her wealth by her rule and by cultivation and husbandry" (61), hence a fanciful etymology of her name: "Gorgo, for *georgigo*, for in Greek *georgi* is the name for husbandmen" (61), and "Medusa for *meidusam*, because one cannot look upon her" (62).[26] Fulgentius rationalises her appearance too: Medusa had "snakelike head because she was the more cunning" (61).[27] Medusa's beheading furnishes a story of covetousness embedded in a proto-imperialist narrative: "Perseus, coveting her rich domain, slew her…; and carrying off her head, that is,

[23] *Mythos* may mean "word, speech" or "tale, story, narrative (without distinction of true or false)," hence "fiction (opp. λόγος, historic truth)" (*LSJ*, s.v. μῦθος).

[24] The motif of treacherous killing is not Ovid's or Pausanias's invention, for it occurs in one of the earliest cases documenting the iconographic shift to a beautiful Medusa. An Attic vase with red figures (*c.* 450–430 BCE; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), attributed to Polygnotos, depicts Medusa asleep, about to be decapitated by Perseus (McLaughlin 531). Kathryn Topper argues that the image "corresponds to a tradition that depicts the Medusa's death as a 'perversion' of an 'erotic abduction' motif common in ancient vase paintings – 'perverted' in that Perseus has come to kill the Medusa, not rape her" (qtd. in McLaughlin 526), which *emasculates* the "hero" (McLaughlin 533).

[25] I use Teresa de Lauretis's concept of *en-gendering* to signify identity generation along gender lines.

[26] The translator's note reads: "*meidusam* appears to be a solitary example of a reversed etymology, for δυσ-, 'evilly,' and μειδάω, 'smile'" (Fulgentius 62).

[27] Fulgentius draws upon Jerome's maligning of the Genesis sage serpent as demonic.

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her substance, he grew all the richer by securing her wide territories" (61); subsequently he "invad[ed] the kingdom of Atlas" (61). Fulgentius's allegorisation vindicates patriarchy as the legitimate "coming of age" of men and polity alike through colonising, disinheriting and annihilating women/others. Alice Walker's Nzingha would nod.

However, the medieval and Renaissance allegorisation of Medusa typically warned that she was a mor(t)al danger to men (qtd. in Deacy et al. 828): so did Isidore of Seville (d. 636), whose *Etymologiae* (11.3.29) "harlotised" the Gorgons; Pierre Bersuire (*c*. 1290–1362), whose *Ovidius Moralizatus* (cap. 5) branded them "bad and beautiful women"; Christoforo Landino (1424–1498), whose *Disputationes Camaldulenses* (235–6) allegorised Medusa's head as "the allurements of passion" dangerous to the foolish, but harmless to the prudent, who wield "Pallas' shield and Mercury's sword"; or Natale Conti (1520–1582), whose *Mythologiae* (7.11) interprets Perseus's vanquishing of Medusa as the defeat of lust by reason.

Male writers hardly needed Christian allegorisation to vent misogyny. In Heraclitus's (first or second century CE) *On Unbelievable Tales*, the prostitute Medusa fell for her love for one of her clients, Perseus (qtd. in Deacy et al. 829). Indeed, early Christianity forged the legend of the *harlot* Mary Magdalene to discredit and thus disenfranchise the *apostola apostolorum*, and with her women in the church (Schaberg 9, 75–8, 83). By contrast, not the rhetoric of *harlotisation* (Schaberg's term) do Dante and, in his footsteps, Petrarch draw upon in their depiction of Medusa. Rather, they evoke her powers of fascination, which conceal deep-seated mysteries (qtd. in Deacy et al. 829) – for men to unveil (or malign).

Silencing Medusa yet again: Monsters lurking in the corners of biological taxonomies and everyday speech

Doubly silenced through both muteness (alternatively, shrieks) and un-representation or reporting by male authors, in a classic instance of *transvestite ventriloquism* (Elizabeth Harvey's term),[28] Medusa's "voice" is one that can conceivably tell the story of silencing (fearing?) women's voices under patriarchy. In claiming this, I beg to *differ* from the standard reception of Medusa (and her snakes) as simply the monstrous source of horrifying sounds.[29]

[28] Harvey's "transvestite ventriloquism" refers to male-authored texts "voiced by female characters in a way that seems either to erase the gender of the authorial voice or to thematize the transvestism of this process" (1). Drawing on Goldberg's *Voice Terminal Echo*, Harvey (1) argues that the "trope of voice is frequently metonymized in the tongue, or conversely in silence, and it is often embodied in mythical figures associated with voice or rhetoric – the Sibyl, Echo, Philomela, Medusa, the Muse." Such figures "possess a reflexive dimension": they "point[] … to an author and to the way he (or she) represents and thematizes the conception or production of the text" (Harvey 1). Goldberg (12) rightly cautions against "the fiction of the transparent text" through "the registering of the poet's voice in other voices – particularly in the voices of women, descendants of Echo and Philomela and Syrinx."

[29] Hesiod, Pindar, and Euripides (in *Herculens furens*) illustrate the meaning of the Sanskrit stem – *garǧ* ("to roar or shriek") – of her generic name, Gorgon (Mack n. 5). Pindar's *Pythian* 12 (12.6–11,

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Ironically, the other, lower-case medusa of Europe, biology's, cannot even lay claim to her mythological ancestor's family name. She is no Gorgon, for she utters no sounds discernible to human ears. Mythology's Medusa, although not visibly an aquatic *monster*, has survived as nearly one, good to warn – or, alternatively, playfully frighten – with. The jellyfish was first named medusa in 1758 (Ruck 798). The Enlightenment drive for knowledge, intelligibility, classification and colonial mastery – virtually interchangeable pursuits – enabled Carl Linnaeus, the father of the system of binomial nomenclature in biology, to christen Medusa "the nonpolyp forms of the phylum cnidaria, which are marine animals with gelatinous umbrella-shaped bodies from which tentacles resembling the streaming hair of the Greek Medusa flow" (Toscano 820).[30]

Medusa is hardly the only mythological "monster" to have been awarded a place (if of horror, rather than honour) in biological taxonomies and/or everyday parlance. One would be hard pressed to enumerate all the ancient monster names that pervade today's vocabulary in European languages and Europe's collective imagination.

For the sake of contrast, I will start not with a monster proper, but with the Sirens. The *Odyssey* shows what I would call the Siren effect: Circe teaches Odysseus (*Od*. 12.39–54, trans. Merrill) how to resist being enchanted by the Sirens, who are wont to lure men to their island (12.154–180).[31] As he subsequently reports the encounter (12.181–200), the Sirens promise Odysseus *knowledge* (12.187–191)[32] for they "know all that is on the much nourishing earth generated" (12.191). Unfortunately, stopping over would delay Odysseus's voyage home – or would rank the Sirens above the sibyls. By contrast, Ovid tells their story (*Met*. 5.552–63): the song-skilled companions of Proserpina seek her worldwide unsuccessfully, after her abduction by Hades, and eventually pray for wings to do so over the ocean too; metamorphosed into Sirens with golden plumage, they nevertheless retain their voice and, to enable it, their visage (*vultus*, 5.563).[33] According to Walsh and Merrill (x),

12.19–21) links the aetiological legend of Athena's invention of the flute with the wailing and dirge the goddess heard "pouring forth from under the unapproachable snaky heads of the maidens [Euryale and Stheno] in their grievous toil" (*Pyth*. 12.9–10) at their loss of Medusa. By contrast, Hesiod's *Shield* mentions the two Gorgons' teeth grinding – alongside their savage glaring.

[30] The tenth edition (1758) of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1st ed. 1735), the starting point for zoological nomenclature, includes Medusa (no. 263) after Sepia (no. 262) and describes it as "corpus gelatinosum, orbiculatum, depressum" (1:659).

[31] *Odyssey* 12's "female supernatural beings … have little bearing on women in the world, but they luridly represent male fears" (Walsh, Merrill 35). Circe can transform men into swine. (Some would call this a revelation.) The Sirens sing them to deadly oblivion. Scylla and Charybdis drown/engulf them sans singing.

[32] He (*sic*) who "from our lips … has heard the melodious voices [, …] having taken delight, he goes on greater in knowledge" (*Od*. 12.187–188, trans. Merrill).

[33] See March (704–5) on other ancient discursive/iconographic representations of the Sirens as musicians.

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the ancient Sirens share ground with the mermaids of northern Europe, who lure passing sailors to destruction.[34] The song of both types of sea creature – Siren and mermaid – symbolises nowadays "the temptation to yield to the attractions of destructive females" (Walsh, Merrill 35).

What does today's Siren look like? For most people, she has lost both wings and voice,[35] but gained a tail instead, courtesy of Walt Disney Pictures – in fact, of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *Den lille havfrue* (1836), the source of *The Little Mermaid* animation (1989). Today's lower-case siren is Ariel, the little mermaid. In biology, "siren" names an aquatic salamander of the Sirenidae family, "now largely restricted to the southern United States and northeastern Mexico," whose "unusual morphology: large external gills and only front limbs" (Anderson n.p.) has likened the species to the Christianised mythical siren.

The conversion of the ancient winged siren into a mermaid, a woman/fish (Ariel) or woman/serpent, owes to Christian writers and reformers.[36] Deemed symbolic of concupiscence – and duly allegorised as female (on account of both the classical languages' noun gender system and the chauvinistic pejoration of women) – the mermaid qua *femme fatale* haunts the Christian discursive practices of asceticism. Deemed a capital sin, feminised unbridled sexuality is pictured, however counterintuitively, in a hybrid body that "locks" the woman's sex/legs into a serpent's tail – too phallic to be feminine or sexually welcoming. (Remember Ariel, who trades her voice for the metamorphosis of her mermaid tail into human legs to become, euphemistically speaking, lovable to men?) At another level, the feminisation of body, sexuality and guilt/excess belongs with Christianity's sustained efforts, ever since Apostle Paul, to suppress women's voices (remember Ariel again?) and meaningful religious participation by evoking Eve's guilt for what has been nominally appropriated from Eve as the Adamic sin.

Now the ancient monsters proper. Scylla and Charybdis, two fierce female monsters, receive somewhat different treatment in the *Odyssey* (12.101–127, 12.222–261, 12.426–446) and the *Metamorphoses*. Homer's Charybdis, the whirlpool goddess, threatens to engulf the ships (*Od*. 12.104–108); Scylla, the frightening six-headed monster awaiting opposite the former, seizes and devours even the strongest sailors (12.245–259). Ovid's corresponding monsters are no different in this respect: Charybdis remains a dangerous whirlpool between Italy and Sicily (*Met*. 7.63, 8.121, 13.730, 14.75); Scylla is a monster with multiple dog heads

[34] Such is Heinrich Heine's Lorelei in the eponymous 1824 poem.
[35] Unless the proper noun is demoted to a common noun to name a warning device such as on ambulances.
[36] The change is earliest documented in the *Liber miraculorum* (*c*. 650–750), whose iconography draws on the *Vulgate*'s description of the houses of pleasure as the abode of various beasts (Isaiah 13.21–22), among which *sirenes* (13.22). See Dale (418–20) on the Christianised siren as a courtesan, i.e., the symbol of the forbidden carnal pleasures which lead both the religious and the laity, male and female, away from God.

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(*Met*. 7.65, 13.732, 14.59 ff.); after seizing some of Ulysses's men, in revenge on Circe (14.70–1), Scylla is changed into a rock (14.73). Nonetheless, Ovid starts his account with an originally non-monstrous Scylla. The beautiful maiden *repulses* her suitors (*Met*. 13.734 ff.), amongst whom Glaucus, a sea-god (13.900 ff., 13.967). Glaucus seeks the aid of Circe (14.18 ff.), but the latter, who desires him yet is repulsed in turn, takes revenge on Scylla, whom she transforms into a hybrid sea monster. In Ovid, Scylla's fate appears comparable to Medusa's: no victim of rape, as Medusa is, Scylla nevertheless bears the brunt of Circe's spite occasioned by erotic appeal and rejection, respectively. What connects the two ancient accounts is sexuality – women's maligned agency. "[R]ight out of the cauldron of folk literature" (Walsh, Merrill 31) Homer's Scylla and Charybdis may have come; nonetheless, "[s]uch nakedly nightmarish fantasies of being swallowed up by females reveal a dark extreme of the psychological world in which the Homeric hero moves" (35).

Not men's psychosexual drama does this duo evoke nowadays, but "a situation involving two dangers in which an attempt to avoid one increases the risk from the other" (Oxford Dictionary online, s.v. "Scylla and Charybdis"). The female monsters have been tamed by diluting their threatening "water-borne" men-aimed sexual voraciousness into general danger to anyone. What is more, to name an impossible choice between equally dangerous options English-speaking people nowadays prefer the homely "to jump out of the frying pan into the fire" to this cultural relic, a monster sui generis in an age of shifting cultural standards. In French, *aller de mal en pis* is preferred to the literary *tomber de Charybde en Scylla*. In Spanish, the literary *salir de Escila y caer en Caribdis* has several counterparts: *huir del fuego* (or: *salir de la sartén*) *para caer en las brasas* (literally, "to run away from the fire (or: leave the frying pan) to fall into hot coals"); and *salir de Málaga para entrar en Malagón* (used in Spain) / *salir de Guatemala para entrar en Guatepeor* (literally, "to leave Málaga/Guatemala in order to enter Malagón/Guatepeor").[37]

If the sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis are culturally imperilled, other ancient female monsters fare no better. Some, like Medusa (as we have seen) and the Hydra, have survived courtesy of the natural sciences.

Thanks to the natural scientists' classical education, the Lernaean Hydra,[38] a venomous monster (Ov., *Met*. 2.651–652, 4.501, 9.129–133, 9.152–158) renowned for its capacity for renewal of what is deemed threatening or harmful, has metamorphosed into Hydra Hydrozoa. The 10–15 cm long freshwater invertebrate polyp with a ring of tentacles around the mouth of a tubular body and amazing

[37] See also the Collins Dictionary online (bilingual versions, s.v. "frying pan"): in Italian, *cadere dalla padella nella brace* (literally, "to fall out of the frying pan into the embers"); in German, *vom Regen in die Traufe kommen* (literally, "to come from the rain under the eaves"). Likewise, Romanian uses *a cădea din lac în puț* (literally, "to fall from the lake into the well").

[38] It is the offspring, alongside Cerberus, Chimaera and the Sphinx, of Echidna, a half-woman, half-snake monster.

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regenerative ability[39] was christened the hydra in 1702 by Antonie van Leeuwenhoek (Ruck 798). Linnaeus adopted the name and classified the hydra (Linnaeus 1:816, no. 309) within the Cnidaria phylum alongside the jellyfish/medusa and the stinging corals. Paradoxically, the Hydrozoa were unknown to the ancients, the extant sources indicate (Ruck 797); nor are the hydra's characteristics "observable to the unaided eye" (795). (Luckily, Leeuwenhoek used the microscope.[40]) Yet, rather than a figment of imagination,

> [t]he mythical Hydra was a zoomorphism of a psychoactive drug[41] that figured in the very ancient Mystery rites that were still being enacted at the sacred [Halcyon] lake well into Roman times, when the original offering of human victims was replaced by initiatory experiences of spiritual transcendence. (Ruck 795)

Defeating Hydra, Hercules's second labour, equips the hero with the toxin for his arrows.[42] It also equips Dejanira, his wife, however inadvertently, with a substance for a love philtre for Hercules that proves lethal. It moreover equips Europe's collective imagination with yet another monster that civilising heroes have successfully confronted and subdued lest their kingdom fail to be erected and women seek as much sovereignty and a voice as men do.

Conclusion: Of shrieks and women's *monsterisation*

About what, not just why, does the mythical snaky Gorgon roar/shriek? Is it a roar of rage, a shriek of terror or pain, or what else? Is it deep or rather high-pitched and piercing? My observations here draw on interpretations of the *scream*[43] in psychoanalysis, film studies and performance studies as reviewed by Deborah Dixon. According to Michel Poizat, "the scream appears where speech fails or is

[39] The hydra "is now recognized as potentially immortal, avoiding senescence by continual regeneration, able to grow anew from its severed parts" (Ruck 797).

[40] By contrast, Linnaeus made little use of the microscope (Ruck 797). In 1735 Linnaeus "debunked the famous taxidermied remains of the quite sizeable seven-headed monster preserved in Hamburg as a pious fraud, assembled from weasel jaws and feet and the skins of serpents, probably the work of monks attempting to create the beast of Revelation" (Ruck 797).

[41] However, not the freshwater hydra but rather the sea anemone (another Cnidaria) offers a plausible analogy for the mythical Hydra zoomorphism of the toxin (Ruck 798).

[42] "The word 'toxin' is derived from the Greek word for the archer's bow (*tóxon*), and the words for arrow and poison (*iós*) are homophonous in Greek" (Ruck 795). Discussing the zoomorphisation which underpins the Hydra myth, Ruck contends that iconographically the defeat of the Hydra (or of Medusa) suggests, in certain cases, not combat but harvesting of wild botanical growths for toxin extraction (797). Granted that iconography may prove Ruck correct, should one ignore, as he does, the paradigmatic othering of women as poisonous monsters lethal to men alone (as men alone can be deemed heroic)?

[43] "Shriek" (part of the etymology of the Gorgon's name) and "scream" are often paired up in English descriptions of piercing sounds.

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inaccessible" (Dixon 437). Regarded as the original communication of babies, the scream "as the haunting reminder of maternal care … is almost exclusively (for we must also remember the *castrato*) sought in the female body" (437), whether in psychoanalytic or media studies, for "[s]creaming is taken as a lack of control over the voice and so can connote a suitably feminine lack of power" (438). Michel Chion pairs *screams* as "female on-screen vocalizations" and *shouts* as "their male counterparts" (qtd. in Dixon 438); as Angelica Fenner argues, "a man's shout is regarded as exercising will and thereby delineating the boundaries of the self, while a woman's scream becomes associated with limitlessness and the dissolution of self" (qtd. in Dixon 438). Such dichotomous en-gendering of *scream* and *shout* recalls that of *speech* and *talk*/*chat*; according to Cixous, *speech* and *talk* denote respectively male discourses of substance (which transmit knowledge) and female lack thereof ("Castration or Decapitation" 52).

Medusa shrieks, I submit, to signify (her) *fabricated* monstrous femininity as the condition of liminality. She is the muted, non-agentive non-subject lurking in the madman-haunted (Lacan 51) interstices of the Symbolic. Pindar's monster's anomaly, on the one hand, and Diodorus Siculus's and Pausanias's royal makeover of Medusa, on the other, suggest to me not so much the textual passage, aligned with the visual one, from Medusa the *monster* to a (cursed) beautiful *woman*, royal by virtue of her name. Rather, both media may indicate an originally unconscious slip of the pen (or chisel) suggestive of an epistemic fault line. Medusa's early representations as a monster translate men's *monsterisation* of women to legitimate patriarchal inequity.[44] In stating this, I am drawing upon Jerome Jeffrey Cohen's concept of *monsterisation*: in colonial contexts, the conqueror wilfully misrepresents the aboriginal group as primitive, subhuman and/or monstrous and dangerous, in self-legitimation of the project of subduing and "civilising" it (Cohen 34). My suggestion tallies with Dexter's (25–6) observation about the "feminine monster" of male-centred cultures and Decker's (748) about Freud's uncanny (qua monstrosity) as representing the repressed maternal body. Such libellous monsterisation of the female principle obliterates, in Medusa's case, the memory of her sovereign power encapsulated in her name.

Medusa's visceral shrieks, worthy of the horror genre, *en-gender*, sans words, the somatic dis/articulation of the subject in the Symbolic: stone-solid men waging war against serpent-cunning women to deprive them of their due, whether voice, territory or sovereignty. Paradoxically, her "transvestite ventriloquism" in patriarchal culture posits Medusa as the harbinger – indeed, agent, through

[44] See de Beauvoir (e.g. 15–24) on the gendered clash of sovereignty: women's sovereignty jeopardises men's sovereignty (and thereby the myth of masculine pre-eminence), men fear; women's self-determination must therefore be suppressed. Men's self- and other-definition prerogative, including the assignment of sovereignty, with the corresponding silencing of the other as concerns self-representation/sovereignty, depends on which gender performances are deemed legitimate under patriarchy; see Butler (141–90) on the performative construction of gender.

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petrifaction – of somatic de-differentiation of taxonomies, patterns, self/other/world boundaries, and rationality, when everything is turned to stone. Yet, a stony landscape highlights the narrow masculine-imposed (view of) order (which levels out differences) qua Order/Universe. My interpretation tallies with Cixous's in "The Laugh of the Medusa," where Cixous contrasts men's and women's writing in terms of libidinal economy. *Écriture masculine*, grounded in the "centralized body" (889), is phallogocentric, imperialistic, homogenising, repressive of women (879); *écriture feminine* "will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes" (886).[45]

Does the *monsterised* Medusa undermine the patriarchal edifice of order and intelligibility? Or is the myth merely an epistemic *trompe-l'oeil*, a booby trap (for the naïve feminist) which posits the powerful female/monster only to showcase her as a negative example, vanquish her and then further tame her through apotropaic deployment as multiply (if not mass) reproduced representation?[46] Certainly, to the taxonomic dissolution which Medusa works, the Perseus myth provides an antidote through her decapitation, lest she unmake the world, or rather mankind (*sic*). Monsterisation becomes an effective technology of discrediting and, in the long run, silencing women/the other. The monster, moreover, cannot be articulate: it utters unintelligible but menacing sounds – it roars, shrieks and generally frightens, lest anyone attempt to decode its meaning-full scream.

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[45] Notwithstanding, Cixous avoids the pitfall of defining what *écriture feminine* is (883).

[46] Such representation de-auriticisises Medusa, to misquote Walter Benjamin on, ironically, the work of art, which might also include paintings of Medusa's head (carved on shields) – for the sake of multiple reproduction from the outset.

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