

The Consequences of Avoiding the Topic of Rape in Children's Stories about Medusa



[00:15-00:18]

"So! That's the god Poseidon - (my boyfriend!)..."

Captions from the episode **"Medusa"** from **"I'm a Monster"** series
 Producer of the episode: **Deirdre Barry, Monster Distributes, 2010**
www.monsterentertainment.tv

[01:02 - 01:20]

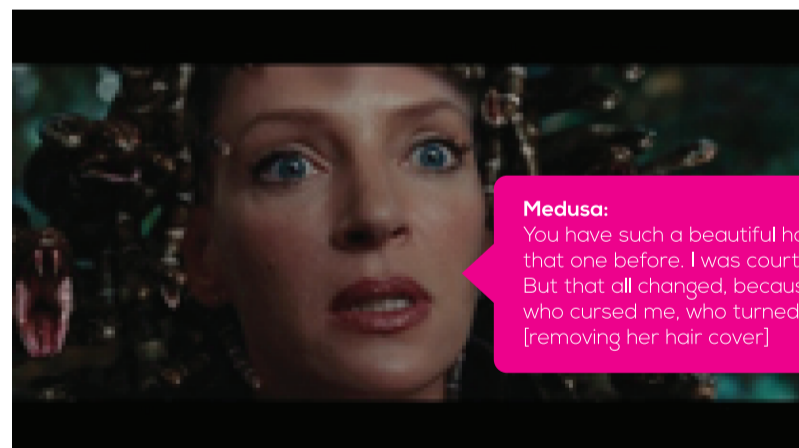
Medusa:

Word of my beauty spread, and young men flocked to look - fall in love and to swoon over me. It was fun but it didn't last. Athena was jealous because I was more beautiful than she - And when the great Poseidon came to call... she flipped! So I became the ugliest of the Gorgon sisters.



"Son of Poseidon... I used to date your daddy."

Uma Thurman as Medusa
 A caption from the movie **"Percy Jackson & The Lightning Thief"**
 directed by **Chris Columbus**
 distributed by **20th Century Fox, 2010**



[50:42 - 51:14]

Medusa:

You have such a beautiful hair. I used to have like that one before. I was courted, desired by many. But that all changed, because of your mother - who cursed me, who turned me into... [removing her hair cover]

Annabeth Chase:
 Don't look!

Medusa: This, [snakes hissing]

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The research results presented in this poster presentation have been achieved within the project "Our Mythical Childhood. The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges" led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, Beneficiary Institutions: Bar-Ilan University, University of New England, University of Roehampton, University of Yaoundé I, with funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme - ERC Consolidator Grant (Grant Agreement No 681202).



"She's the one you're always going on and on about, isn't she?"

Cover of the book **"Say Cheese, Medusa!"** from the **"MYTH-O-MANIA series"**, written by **Kate McMullan**
 Published by **Capstone, Wisconsin 2011**

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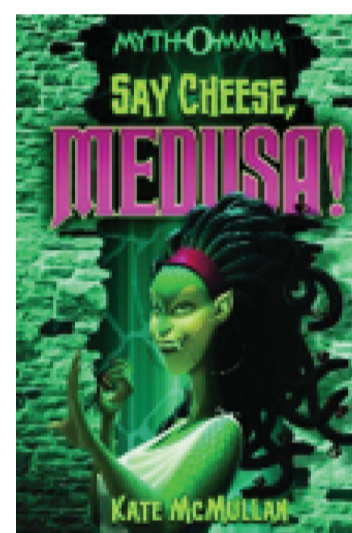
"But it didn't happen that way at all. Perseus never hacked off any Gorgon's head. Medusa is alive and well and, last I heard, she was running a popular seaside spa. She wasn't born with serpents sprouting out of her head, either. Those snakes were Athena's idea. Here let me tell you the story of Medusa."

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"You were just waiting for me to show you my temple, right Medusa?" said Po.
 "Not really, Po," she said. "If you've seen one temple, you've seen them all."
 "Not this temple," said Po. "It's incredible. Sculptures are all over the walls. I promise, you've never seen anything like it. Let me give you a little tour."
 Medusa rolled her eyes. "Okay, Po," she said, standing up.

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"Medusa," Athena nodded slowly. "I've seen you before." She 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."



"[After slaying the Gorgon, Perseus travelled to the land of the Aithiopians (Ethiopians).] A chief, one of their number, asked [Perseus] why she [Medousa (Medusa)] alone among her sisters wore that snake-twined hair, and Perseus answered: 'What you ask is worth the telling; listen and I'll tell the tale. Her beauty was far-famed, the jealous hope of many a suitor, and of all her charms her hair was loveliest; so I was told by one who claimed to have seen her. She, it's said, was violated in Minerva's [Athena's] shrine by the Lord of the Sea (Rector Pelagi) [Poseidon]. Jove's [Zeus] daughter turned away and covered with her shield her virgin's eyes. And then for fitting punishment transformed the Gorgo's lovely hair to loathsome snakes. Minerva [Athena] still, to strike her foes with dread, upon her breastplate wears the snakes she made."

Ovid, "Metamorphoses" 4. 770 ff (trans. A. D. Melville)



"I was alone with Poseidon. The force of the seawater was strong, too strong."

Illustrations from the book **"Medusa Tells All: Beauty Missing, Hair Hissing"**, written by **Rebecca Fjelland Davis**, illustrated by **Stephen Gilpin**, published by **Capstone, Minnesota 2014**

[page 3]

"I am Medusa. You've seen my face before. It's supposed to be one of the scariest in the world. But let me tell you - it's not my fault. I'm scary! It's all Athena's fault."

Quotes

[page 4]

"You wouldn't know it now, but I was born beautiful. Stunningly beautiful. Everybody wants to be beautiful. There's nothing more important than beauty."

[page 12]

"Medusa, is it?" Poseidon smiled a smile like the ocean, full of sandy beaches and polished sea glass. I liked his smile. I liked him.

[page 13]

"Athena my dear," Poseidon bellowed, "why have you kept the most beautiful girl in the world hidden from me in your temple all this time?"

[page 14]

"That's when Poseidon's tide knocked me off my feet. I really didn't mind at first. But then I couldn't get up. I got nervous. Waves of Poseidon's laughter slammed against the walls of the temple. Athena! I cried out. Help me! But Athena glared at me, turned on her heel and disappeared. I was alone with Poseidon. The force of the seawater was strong, too strong, and I could not get up, no matter how hard I tried. I felt as if I were drowning."

Overview

What is the potential of Medusa's story and how is it used by contemporary children's authors? What are the consequences of avoiding the topic of rape in stories about Medusa's monstrous transformation?

The modern children's stories about Medusa are often detached from the contemporary values and they present the main character in a very traditional perspective. Contemporary authors, who try to avoid the topic of rape, are changing the perception of the whole myth and the perception of femininity by children. They shy away from the opportunity to talk about difficult subjects, something impossible to avoid in the contemporary world, while the ancient myth of Medusa (of course after the appropriate adjustment) would allow them for such a dialogue. They decide to turn child's attention to other issues, such as pride, treason, punishment and jealousy, which gives them a vision of Medusa as guilty - not only because of the ancient pride - hubris - but also because of her deep interest in Poseidon.

The examples presented in my poster presentation demonstrate that avoiding the topic of rape affects the transmission of the whole Medusa's myth. Encoding such vision of the myth in the young audience, may cause flattening of the myth or an anti-woman reception of the myth during the later interaction with it, already in the adult culture. This is another indication of the importance of the youth culture inspired by Classical Antiquity in transmitting the cultural heritage and contemporary views within the society.

Covers of two books from the series **"Goddess Girls"**, written by **Jean Holub & Suzanne Williams**. From the left to right: **"Medusa the Rich"**, **Simon & Schuster, 2015** and **"Medusa the Mean"**, **Simon & Schuster, 2012**

Quotes

Chapter 6:

"Fin-tastic" [in:] "Medusa the Mean", Simon & Schuster, 2012

"Medusa's ears perked up. After years of crushing on Poseidon, this could be her big break. Whatever contest he decided on—she was going to win it!"

"(.) She had her heart set on Poseidon!"

Chapter 10:

"The Contest" [in:] "Medusa the Mean", Simon & Schuster, 2012

"They could have drowned, you know! How could you be so careless?" "You're right, you're right. Sorry about that," Poseidon said. Glancing around at everyone watching, he smiled and waved. He didn't seem to be taking this at all seriously! "Hey," he added, winking at the onlookers, "no harm done, right? And wasn't Medusa amazing out there? A real hero! Let's give her a hand. Woo-hoo!"

"Gazing into Poseidon's gorgeous turquoise eyes, Medusa wondered why she wasn't jumping for joy. This was what she wanted, right? His attention focused on didn't it feel as good as she'd expected?"

"I'll tell you what I think," she told Poseidon. She paused to slip on her sandals, waist. "I think you are self-centered beyond belief. And you know what else I think? I think you should take that trident of yours and stick it up your nose, fishboy!"

Chapter 1:

"Queen of Mean" [in:] "Medusa the Rich", Simon & Schuster, 2015

"SNAPI SNAPI SNAPI THE SNAKES on top of twelve-year-old Medusa's head gobbled down the handful of dried peas she tossed up to them as she sat cross-legged on the floor of her dorm room at Mount Olympus Academy one Friday afternoon. Though her snakes had been the result of an accident with Snakeypoo, a botched invention of the brainy goddessgirl Athena's—it had turned out to be a happy accident. Medusa adored the dozen snakes that had replaced her hair. She'd even given them all names: couldn't imagine life without them."

