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Jenny Blackford

Andromeda

Australia (2008)

TAGS: Andromeda Barbarians Medusa Monsters Perseus





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General information	
Title of the work	Andromeda
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2008
First Edition Details	Jenny Blackford, "Andromeda" in *Trust Me!* edited by Paul Collins, Melbourne: Ford Street Publishing, 2008, 129–139.
ISBN	9781876462574
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Mythological fiction, Myths
Target Audience	Young adults (11+)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Jenny Blackford , b. 1957
(Author)

Jenny Blackford is a writer of speculative and historical fiction, both for adults and children. Born in Sydney, she studied Classics, Sanskrit and German at the University of Newcastle, where she began a PhD on comparative religions.She has also worked as a systems engineer for the technology company IBM. Her writing for young readers has appeared in Australia's longest running literary magazine for children, The School Magazine, as well as the Random House Australia anthologies *Stories for Seven Year-olds* and *Stories for Nine Year-olds*, first published in 2011. In 2009 Hadley Rille Books commissioned her to write The Priestess and the Slave, an archaeologically accurate novel set in Athens and Delphi during the 5th century BCE. In 2016 she won a Sisters in Crime Scarlet Stiletto Short Story Award for *Cooking up a Murder*, a short story set in ancient Delphi with a priestess of Apollo as an amateur detective. Her poems have appeared in a variety of publications and her work has been recognised with a number of awards, including the Humorous Verse section of the Henry Lawson Awards (2014 and 2017) and the New England Thunderbolt Prize (2017). Her most recent collection of poetry, *The Loyalty of Chickens*, was published in 2017.

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Additional information

Summary

Andromeda is a feminist reimagining of the story of Andromeda and the sea monster. It fleshes out the personality of the princess, who, whilst mindful of the obligations of her royal role, longs for freedom from its obligations. She has an unaccountable sense of needing something, 'something she had been missing for such a long time' (130). Since the onset of puberty Andromeda has suffered overwhelming fits of rage. Her maturation is symbolically tied to the sea monster, who begins to menace Cepheus' kingdom at the same time. Like Andromeda, the creature experiences wild fury and feelings of longing that cannot be satisfied. Nominated for human sacrifice by a faraway Egyptian priest, Andromeda is chained to a rock and left to await the sea monster's arrival. Winging his way home from vanquishing Medusa, the hero Perseus catches sight of her. He carries Medusa's severed head in a bag, dripping vicious poison, and though decapitated, still plotting her revenge. Having had the full support of the gods on his quest, he assumes that they will support him in liberating this beautiful young woman from her brutal fate. But when the sea monster finally emerges from the ocean, it does not menace Andromeda, but instead carefully breaks her bonds. Gazing into each other's eyes, woman and sea monster recognise in each other what they have been missing, and know that they are one and the same.

Perseus is blind to everything but Andromeda's beauty. Still looking at Andromeda, the creature ignores him. When his sword proves useless against the stone-like surface of its neck, Perseus pulls Medusa's head from the bag and, with his eyes tightly closed, shows it to the creature. Released from the bag, the snakes of the Gorgon's hair bite into Perseus' wrist, and he falls down dead. The sea monster quickly devours him. As Medusa looks on rejoicing, the princess and the creature merge their forms, and Andromeda sets off to confront her father.

Analysis

Blackford's feminist revisioning of the Andromeda myth explores the subjugation of women by men and creates a scenario in which female characters claim power through joining forces. The female voice dominates the narrative of this short story. Andromeda, Medusa and the sea monster (represented as female, like the majority of the monsters in Homer's *Odyssey*) are each given the opportunity to

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speak. As a royal princess Andromeda resents the limitations placed on her body and her freedom, but still strives to fulfil the obligations of the role, including being chained to a rock as a human sacrifice in an effort to save her city.Medusa laments her change in status from Poseidon's lover to hero's booty. The sea monster longs to satisfy her endless hunger with a worthy opponent.The three figures are united by the ferocity of their rage.

Perseus is cast as a well-intentioned but misguided figure. He has performed the task the gods demanded of him and is proud to have received their support and the loan of their accoutrements. Still incredulous that he has managed to slay Medusa, he cannot bear to look down and discover whether the venomous blood leaking from the bag is eating into his flesh.

Blackford emphasises the motifs of skin, stone and the gaze as she plays with the central elements of this myth. In the quintessential scene, Andromeda stands chained to the rock, her white linen dress soaked by the waves, while the citizens of her father's kingdom watch and wait. The sustained eye contact between Andromeda and the sea monster recalls the intensity of Medusa's petrifying stare. The insight that these three female characters gain from looking at each other is contrasted with Perseus' inability to see what is going on (and indeed be seen). The text's conclusion, in which Andromeda, having subsumed the sea monster, prepares 'to deal' with her father (139), completes this reworking of this episode of Perseus' hero myth into a narrative of female triumph over male authority.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Andromeda Barbarians Medusa Monsters Perseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Coming of age Emotions Family Gender, female Girls Sacrifice

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