

From a Petrifying Monster to a Garden Gnome  
Entrepreneur:

An analysis of Medusa's portrayal in *Clash of the Titans*  
(1981) and *The Lightning Thief* (2005)

Bachelor's thesis

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<b>Tiivistelmä - Abstract</b> <p>Kreikkalaisesta mytologiasta tunnettu Medusa on keskeinen hahmo länsimaisessa kulttuurissa. Kuva Medusan kasvoista on voimakas symboli, johon on liitetty monia tulkintoja niin psykoanalyysistä feministiseen teoriaan. Kuten monet muut mytologiset tarinat, myös Medusan tarina on uudelleenkerrottu populaarikulttuurissa elokuvissa ja kirjoissa. Medusan kuvausta moderneissa versioissa ei kuitenkaan ole tutkittu liiemmästi.</p> <p>Tutkielman tavoitteena on analysoida Medusan hahmokuvauksen feministisestä perspektiivistä kahdessa modernissa versiossa Medusan tarinasta: elokuvassa <i>Clash of the Titans</i> (1981) ja romaanissa <i>The Lightning Thief</i> (2005). Molempia kuvauksia verrataan Ovidin alkuperäistarinaan sekä toisiinsa tavoitteena muodostaa kuva siitä, miten naiseuden kuvaus on edistynyt populaarikulttuurissa. Tutkimuksen kohteena on myös arvioida, ovatko kulttuurisidonnaiset asenteet vaikuttaneet Medusan kuvaukseen aineistoissa.</p> <p>Aineisto analysoitiin hyödyntäen kriittisen diskurssianalyysin metodeja. Tulokset osoittivat, että Medusan ja sitä myötä naiseuden kuvaus on edistynyt 1980-luvulta 2000-luvulle. Elokuvassa <i>Clash of the Titans</i> Medusa kuvattiin valtaosin hirviönä, kun taas romaanissa <i>The Lightning Thief</i> Medusasta tehtiin sympaattinen hahmo. Tulokset viestivät ajan saatossa muuttuneista käsityksistä siitä, mitä naiset voivat olla yhteiskunnassa.</p>	
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Medusa, as a myth and image, is deeply embedded in the Western consciousness as a symbol of female rage and sexuality. As the Greek myths continue to compel readers, Medusa, like many other characters from Classical mythology, has appeared in modern popular culture. Monsters are cultural bodies, physical representations of cultural fears (Cohen 1996: 4), which, as society has progressed, can now appear as harmful tropes. Bowers (1990: 217) states that the imagery of Greco-Roman mythology has continually oppressed women and calls for the reconstruction of the harmful tropes of female sexuality and rage. By looking at modern retellings of the Medusa myth, one can analyze the progression of the portrayal of female sexuality and rage, symbolized by Medusa, in popular culture. The present study can provide insight into the progression of attitudes towards femininity in the zeitgeist, as well as shed light on social issues.

In the thesis, I will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze two notable portrayals of Medusa in popular culture: the film *Clash of the Titans* (Davies 1981) and the novel *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan 2005). The progression of the portrayal can be observed because of the 24-year gap between the chosen sources. Medusa's history in Greco-Roman myths is complex and I have chosen to use Ovid's version in the present study, as both *Clash of the Titans* and *The Lightning Thief* are retellings of it. When discussing the myth, I refer to Martin's (2010) English translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (43 B.C.-18 A.D.). By reflecting on the original story, I can draw comparisons between the socio-cultural contexts.

I have found little previous research on modern portrayals of Medusa, which provides an opportunity cover some new ground on said subject. Diver (2020), in their essay *Tomboyish Wisdom Gods and Sexy Gorgons: The Evolution of Ovid's Medusa Rape Narrative in Contemporary Children's Literature*, discusses the Medusa myth in children's literature, touching on *The Lightning Thief* (2005) among others. However, the focus of Diver's essay is on the evolution of the rape narrative in children's literature, and *The Lightning Thief* is merely mentioned in the paper. While the present study compares

the depiction of the rape narrative in the materials, the focus lies on Medusa's characterization. Additionally, the method and a narrower selection of materials of my thesis make it possible to highlight new issues.

First, the theoretical framework is to be presented. The framework consists of relevant concepts of feminist theory in addition to previous readings of the Medusa myth. The theoretical framework is essential to the method chosen for the study, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Secondly, the research aim and questions are presented, followed by the material and method chosen for the study. The following section consists of the analysis, in which the materials will be analyzed individually. And finally, in the last section the implications of the study as well as the possibilities for further research are discussed.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To fully construct the 'object of research' of CDA (Fairclough & Wodak 2005: 462), a theoretical framework and perspective must be attached to the material. The chosen perspective, from which Medusa's portrayal is analyzed in the present study is feminist theory. The Medusa myth has notably been interpreted by psychoanalysts and feminists, the latter repurposing the character as a feminist icon instead of a vilified monster. For the theoretical framework, notable feminist interpretations of the Medusa myth, for example by Cixous (1976) and Bowers (1990), will be included. In addition to feminist theory, monster theory will be utilized as Medusa is portrayed as 'a mythological monster' in the materials. First, the role of patriarchy, an essential concept in feminist theory, in the story of Medusa will be discussed. Then, the myth will be discussed from the perspectives of male and female gaze, briefly touching on monster theory.

### **2.1 The perfect victim for the patriarchy**

Ovid's version of the Medusa myth works as an allegory of the position of women in society during Classical antiquity. Medusa, described as a beautiful and widely

desired woman, is raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple, resulting in Athena punishing Medusa by transforming her into a snake-haired monster whose gaze turns creatures into stone (Ovid, trans. Martin 2010: 116). Bowers (1990) reflects on Girard's (1977) criteria for sacrificial suitability; Medusa is a free sexually powerful unmarried woman outside the control of the patriarchy, and therefore, an optimal victim as she is not anyone's property (Girard 1977, as cited in Bowers 1990: 225).

Patriarchy is a relevant concept in feminist theory, which will be referred to in the analysis section. According to Beechey (1979: 66-67), patriarchy has various meanings in feminist writings but can be on a general level defined as the societal male oppression on women. They further note that among others', Eisenstein's (1979) definition of patriarchy puts women at the bottom of the hierarchy due to their role as the mother and domestic labourer in the family. Spector (1996: 25-26) claims that Greek and Roman societies were deeply patriarchal, resulting in the depiction of female characters, such as Medusa, in monstrous forms. They also state that the female ideal was of a mother tending to her child. As a beautiful and independent woman, Medusa contradicts the patriarchal ideals and is turned into a monster. As Spector (1996: 26, 31) cites, gods like Zeus and Athena are symbols for law and rationality. They represent the oppressive patriarchy in the story of Medusa.

Athena is the one to punish Medusa, the rape victim, instead of the untouchable male rapist, Poseidon. Not only is Athena a woman herself, but as highlighted by Bowers (1990: 228), regarded as 'the guardian of rationality'. Spector (1996: 29) notes how Athena is an inherently patriarchal figure as she was born from the head of Zeus. The virgin goddess, guardian of rationality, punishing an independent woman with beauty irresistible for men is a strong allegory of the ideal for a woman in the socio-cultural atmosphere. As Spector (1996: 29) states, Athena later implements Medusa's terrifying face onto her shield, *Aegis*, to make her defence armour more dangerous. Athena carries the symbol of the fate of 'a free woman' on her shield into battle.

## **2.2 The subversive female gaze**

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the story is told by Perseus, the man who decapitates Medusa, using her head as a weapon later to defeat a sea monster (Ovid, trans. Martin

2010: 116). The presence of a male narrator attaches a literal male gaze to a story, which already is deeply embedded in the patriarchy that objectifies women. As stated by Bowers (1990), Medusa is a trope of female sexuality: seductive and dangerous. She further notes that the male gaze constructs both male and female perceptions of women (Bowers 1990: 217). By depicting Medusa as a seductive and dangerous *femme fatale*, the blame is shifted from Poseidon to her. The male gaze justifies her punishment for being too seductive.

The male gaze is also evident in Freud's interpretation of Medusa in *On the Head of Medusa* (1927). He sees Medusa's petrifying gaze and head surrounded by snakes as a metaphor for mother's genitals as seen by her son. The son is petrified, as he realizes the differences of male and female genitals and becomes afraid of emasculation (Spector 1996: 35). Freud's theory of male fear of becoming female is criticized by Cixous (1976: 884) in *The Laugh of Medusa*. Freud's view is phallogocentric because he views the female genitals as lacking the penis, without even considering the female perspective. As Foster (2003: 185) notes, Freud's description of the petrification does not only symbolize horror, but also literal petrification as the man is aroused by the sight of female genitals, the stiffening of his penis providing instant consolation for the fear of castration.

Foster's claim is in line with Cohen's (1996: 17-18) statement of fear and desire walking hand in hand. According to Cohen (1996: 4), a monster is a representation of the culture it emerged in. They further note that the monster's cultural body incorporates anxieties and fantasies. The character of Medusa being born in a deeply patriarchal culture resonates with this narrative. As an independent and sexual woman, Medusa invokes desire as well as fear in patriarchy, as she resides outside of its reach. Thus, she is given power over the patriarchy.

The feminist reading of Medusa turns the oppressive dogmas upside down and views Medusa as a female icon, freely expressive and sexual (Bowers 1990: 219). Spector (1996: 41) calls Cixous's (1976) interpretation of Medusa's grimace as laughter a mistake; however, viewing the grimace as laughter seems more like an intentional repurposing to fit the feminist manifesto, than a false interpretation. As Cixous (1976:

875) states, women must write about women, providing the needed response to the male gaze: the female gaze, as suggested by Bowers (1990: 218). She also points out that whereas Medusa is the victim of the male gaze, the focus of the story ironically lies on her gaze (Bowers 1990: 219).

### 3. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

Reflecting on the feminist readings of the Medusa myth, as well as monster theory, I intend to analyze the portrayal of Medusa in *Clash of the Titans* (1981) and *The Lightning Thief* (2005). Furthermore, I will compare the two depictions to highlight possible progression in the portrayal of female sexuality and rage via the character of Medusa. Additionally, the connection between the socio-cultural attitudes towards femininity and Medusa's portrayal will be discussed.

The study intends to answer the following questions:

- 1) In comparison to Ovid's version of the myth, how is Medusa depicted in *Clash of the Titans* (1981) and *The Lightning Thief* (2005)?
- 2) What are the implications of Medusa's portrayals about the progression of the representation of female sexuality and rage in these works?

### 4. MATERIAL AND METHOD

In this section, the chosen material and method are discussed in more detail. First, the material is introduced, and then, the method is presented.

#### 4.1 *Clash of the Titans* and *The Lightning Thief*

The material consists of two sources: the film *Clash of the Titans* (Davies 1981) and the novel *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan 2005). In addition, both aforementioned sources will be compared to Ovid's version of the myth, using the Norton Critical Editions translation by Charles Martin (2010). The materials were chosen for the present study



due to their relevance in popular culture. *Clash of the Titans* was one of the top grossing films of 1981 (American Film Institute 2019) and *Percy Jackson & The Olympians*, the book series started by *The Lightning Thief*, has been on the New York Times Best Sellers list for 637 weeks as of September 4, 2022 (New York Times 2022).

From *Clash of the Titans*, only the scenes in which Medusa is either present or discussed will be analyzed. The film itself is a loose retelling of the myth of Perseus, in which Medusa plays a major part. As the film is an adaptation of the original story, the role of Medusa is similar, placing greater emphasis on the differences between the two. Notable differences in the portrayal of Medusa in the myth and the film will be highlighted in my analysis.

*The Lightning Thief*, however, is a modern retelling set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, resulting in drastic changes to Perseus's encounter with Medusa. Perseus "Percy" Jackson, the protagonist, is a different character to the mythical Perseus, and the circumstances of the encounter in the novel differ greatly from Ovid's original story. However, the end result remains the same; Perseus kills Medusa. Like with *Clash of the Titans*, the chapter focused on Medusa, as well as other mentions of the character will be analyzed.

#### **4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis**

The method used in the thesis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As described by Jessop (2004), CDA implements critical social analysis into language studies, studying the relationship between the discourse and social elements (Jessop 2004, as cited in Fairclough 2013: 9). CDA can for example focus on social elements such as power relations and racial, gender, or class inequalities (Van Dijk 1993: 249). Jessop (2004) states that these social elements are "conceptually mediated", meaning that the discourse around social elements is part of their reality (Jessop 2004, as cited in Fairclough 2013: 9). Therefore, critical interpretations of discourses are part of the discourses in question. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, as cited in Wall, Stahl & Salam 2015: 261), critical methods such as CDA are subject to researchers' interpretations and subjectivity. They, however, note that it is integral to critical and interpretive research and not problematic due to the researchers' critical reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, as cited in Wall, Stahl & Salam 2015: 261).

Fairclough (2013: 13-14) notes that the process of constructing 'the object of research' involves attaching theoretical frameworks and perspectives to the topic. They further describe the nature of CDA as 'transdisciplinary' due to different theoretical frameworks and disciplines being at play at once. Being transdisciplinary, CDA opens possibilities for conducting a specific object of research without the limitations of utilizing the tools of a single discipline.

In CDA, the study is conducted on different levels to provide a thorough analysis of the text. According to Huckin (1997), the three levels from the smallest to the broadest are: the text itself; the discursive practices that produce and interpret the text; and the larger social context the text is in. They further note that the levels are tightly interrelated (Huckin 1997: 87). These levels provide an in-depth look on the text, written or orated. On the smallest, micro-level, the researcher focuses for example on word choices and the use of metaphors. On the level of discursive practice, the researcher focuses on the possible intentions of the author, the intended audience for the text, and possible interpretations of the text. In spoken text, the delivery and intonation should also be taken into account. On the macro-level, the researcher puts the studied text in a larger cultural, temporal, and social context. Huckin (1997: 88) also highlights the CDA researchers' tendency to "take an ethical stance" to shed light on social issues that the study in hand is critical of. This is in line with Fairclough's (2013: 13-14) comments on creating the 'object of research' by choosing a theoretical framework and a perspective from which to critically analyze the topic.

The materials are analyzed on the three levels of CDA; however, the analysis is not structured level-by-level to portray the narratives coherently. Instead, the analysis transitions naturally from level to level to suit the material. The three levels of CDA are implemented in the analysis as follows. On the micro-level, the focus is on the word choices and metaphors present in the texts. On the discursive level, the voice of the author is the most present, as possible readings are part of the reality of the text. In this thesis, the text is viewed from the perspective of feminist theory. The concepts of male gaze and patriarchy, presented in the theoretical framework, are attached to the material, and discussed. Furthermore, on the macro-level, the focus is on the

implications the materials have about the attitudes towards women and femininity in the zeitgeist. Feminist theory is suitable for CDA due to its keen interest in gender inequality, which is one of the possible focal points of a CDA study listed by Van Dijk (1993: 249). It also makes the researcher take the ethical stance described by Huckin (1997: 88). The nature of the materials also allows room for interpretation, which is central in CDA because the critical interpretations are included in the reality of the object.

## 5. ANALYSIS

In this section, the material is analyzed by using methods of CDA. By observing the portrayal of Medusa in *Clash of the Titans* and *The Lightning Thief*, the aim is to paint a picture of the progression of societal attitudes towards female rage and expression. To observe the progression, the materials are presented, compared to Ovid's original story, and analyzed in chronological order, starting with *Clash of the Titans*, and then moving onto *The Lightning Thief*. In both sections, a brief summary of the protagonist's encounter with Medusa and necessary story context are provided.

### 5.1 Medusa in *Clash of the Titans*

In *Clash of the Titans*, Medusa's backstory is told to Perseus by Ammon, a playwright who has written a play about her. Perseus must defeat Medusa to obtain her head, which is the only weapon that can defeat the sea monster Kraken. Perseus confronts Medusa alongside two soldiers, both of whom get killed by her. Perseus manages to decapitate Medusa using his wits and takes her head as a trophy. He later uses the head successfully to turn Kraken into stone and save princess Andromeda. He then tosses Medusa's head into the sea spawning Pegasus, the flying horse.

The film is a loose retelling of Ovid's version of the myth and changes several details. Instead of Perseus recounting his encounter with Medusa, he asks Ammon whether Medusa was Aphrodite's priestess, and he answers:

Yes, and a most beautiful woman by all accounts. But she was seduced by Poseidon. They made love in a temple of Aphrodite. And that goddess was so jealous that she punished Medusa. She transformed her into an apparition so horrible that one look from her will turn any living creature into stone. (Davies 1981: 1:14:14-1:14:50).

The first significant difference to Ovid's story is that Medusa was Aphrodite's priestess and the sexual act between her and Poseidon took place in Aphrodite's temple instead of Athena's. Therefore, the punishment was also carried out by the goddess of love. Ammon recites Aphrodite punishing Medusa out of jealousy. This contrast Ovid's version, in which Athena punished Medusa for sexual behaviour in the virgin goddess's sacred temple. Therefore, the subtext of a patriarchal female figure restraining women's sexual behaviour is not applicable to the film portrayal of Medusa's story. According to Miller (2006: 39), in post-Jungian feminist interpretation, Aphrodite's birth provides the world the suppressed feminine qualities including love, desire, and human connectedness. The replacement of a virgin goddess as the punisher with a feminist figure is an implication of a harmful stereotype of women spiting each other out of jealousy of one another's beauty. Thus, female expression is not suppressed by a patriarchal figure but the actual goddess of female expression. The change of Medusa's origin shifts the blame away from the patriarchy.

Another deviation from the source material is the change of Medusa and Poseidon's encounter from a sexual assault to 'love-making'. This change further shifts the blame for Medusa's fate to Aphrodite. However, Poseidon is not completely free of blame as he 'seduced' Medusa. The exclusion of a rape narrative in the story removes the implied social commentary of the stigmatization of victims of sexual assault present in Ovid's story, and additionally gives Medusa some agency in the act itself. However, her agency is limited. The punishment delivered by Aphrodite follows the source material, the focus being on the hideousness of Medusa's new physical form.

Perseus's confrontation with Medusa is played as an action sequence without dialogue (Davies 1981: 1:25:05-1:32:34). Medusa fights Perseus and the two soldiers using a bow and arrow in addition to her gaze. The action sequence takes place inside a dimly lit temple with many pillars and statues, behind which the heroes hide from Medusa. The

confrontation deviates from the source material, as in Ovid's text, Perseus kills Medusa when she is asleep, not in combat. Thus, Perseus is depicted as a more heroic character in the film. Additionally, portraying the encounter as a fight likely entices audiences better.

In the scene, Medusa is introduced by first showing the viewer the shadow of her snake-tail and then of her head with serpents as her hair. Suspense is built until one of the soldiers is killed by an arrow in his back. Then, Medusa shows herself by crawling from behind a wall. In the sequence, she is portrayed as a horror film monster, lurking in the shadows. Her upper body is humanoid but covered in snakeskin and instead of legs she has a tail. Additionally, she has snakes for her hair and her face is not humanlike. The character is executed in stop-motion animation, meaning that she is not portrayed by an actor. Furthermore, she does not say anything in the film. The dehumanization in addition to Medusa's aggressive behaviour justifies Perseus's killing of her. In the fight, Perseus manages to defeat Medusa by tricking her into thinking that she is looking at him when she is actually looking at his reflection on a shield. This further adds to her depiction as a brainless monster.

After the fight, Perseus walks out of the temple holding Medusa's head high up as a trophy while triumphant music plays (Davies 1981: 1:32:35-1:32:57). He later uses the head to defeat Kraken and save princess Andromeda (Davies 1981: 1:50:25-1:52:00). This follows the source material apart from the change of the sea monster's name. Medusa's female gaze is once again weaponized by her killer and used to save the helpless princess from danger. Furthermore, Medusa barely uses the gaze herself. She primarily utilizes the bow in the fight sequence to defeat her enemies, turning only one of the soldiers into stone after already stunning him with the bow.

In the larger socio-cultural context, the portrayal of Medusa implies negative attitudes towards femininity. Medusa is a beautiful woman who is condemned by the goddess of female expression for being sexually active. In contrast, Poseidon, the male god who 'seduced' Medusa is not held accountable. Medusa's backstory is described in the film as a tragedy (Davies 1981: 1:14:00-1:14:13) but the statement is not explored further, nor is Medusa's character made sympathetic. Medusa is depicted as a victim of female

rage, petty jealousy over beauty and male companions. The rage is Medusa's punishment, as she is punished to live as a spiteful monster blindly attacking anyone she encounters. Medusa's gaze is described as the only thing that can defeat the sea monster Kraken (Davies 1981: 1:11:39-1:13:15), giving female rage formidable power in the film. This uncontrollable rage is then harnessed by a male hero to defeat the monster and save the helpless princess, further implying attitudes of male superiority.

Medusa's lack of agency may stem from her role as a minor character. However, in addition to her portrayal as a monster with little to no humanity, the implications of harmful female tropes are there. The changes to the backstory and the male perspective further support this statement. She is a product of cultural fears and attitudes towards women, as suggested by monster theory. Therefore, the feminist idea of a subversive Medusa is not present in the film.

## **5.2 Medusa in *The Lightning Thief***

In *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan 2005), the three protagonists: the demigods Percy and Annabeth, and the satyr Grover are on a quest to retrieve Zeus's stolen lightning bolt and prevent a war between the gods of Olympus. Not short after leaving for the quest, they are on the run from mythological monsters and end up tired and hungry at 'a closed-down gas station', from which they seek shelter. Inside the gas station they meet Medusa, who runs a garden gnome shop, 'Aunty Em's Garden Gnome Empire', under the alias 'Aunty Em'. (Riordan 2005: 168-172).

When the protagonists meet Medusa for the first time, she is described by Percy's 1<sup>st</sup> person narration as 'a tall Middle-Eastern woman'. The narrator further explains the assumptions by noting that she is wearing a long black gown covering everything apart from her 'elegant well-manicured coffee-coloured hands' (Riordan 2005: 162). Medusa then tempts the children to stay by offering them food. While eating, Percy asks whether she makes her statues herself:

'Oh, yes. Once upon a time, I had two sisters to help me in the business, but they have passed on, and Aunty Em is alone. I only have my statues. This is why I make them, you see. They are my company.' The sadness in

her voice sounded so deep and so real that I couldn't help feeling sorry for her. (Riordan 2005: 176).

As opposed to *Clash of the Titans* and Ovid's poem, Medusa is given a voice of her own, the ability to tell the story from her perspective. Her loneliness and sorrow are emphasized by the recollection of her deceased sisters, both of which are mentioned in Ovid's poem in passing. Percy Jackson feels empathy for Medusa, and as the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator, prompts the reader to do likewise. Furthermore, giving the statues the purpose of giving Medusa company acts as a justification for her acts of violence. Medusa's backstory is further recounted by her:

'It's a terrible story', Aunty Em said. 'Not one for children, really. You see, Annabeth, a bad woman was jealous of me, long ago, when I was young. I had a . . . a boyfriend, you know, and this bad woman was determined to break us apart. She caused a terrible accident. My sisters stayed by me. They shared my bad fortune as long as they could, but eventually they passed on. They faded away. I alone have survived, but at such a price. Such a price.' (Riordan 2005: 176).

A key difference to Ovid's story here is the description of Poseidon as Medusa's boyfriend, and furthermore, the dismissal of the sexual assault present in the original myth. However, this change was likely made due to the young target audience of the novel. Medusa calls Annabeth by name when telling this story, as she is the daughter of Athena, whom Medusa is referring to as 'a bad woman jealous of her'. This implies that Medusa holds solely Athena, and not Poseidon, accountable for her fate. After telling her backstory, Medusa wishes to take a photo of the children (Riordan 2005: 177), who then finally realize her identity and intent to turn them into stone. Medusa's previously beautiful appearance then changes to a monstrous one.

My eyes rose to Aunty Em's hands, which had turned gnarled and warty, with sharp bronze talons for fingernails. (. . .) I stared at Aunty Em's gnarled claws, and tried to fight the groggy trance the old woman had put me in. 'Such a pity to destroy a handsome young face,' she told me soothingly. (. . .) Her hair was moving, writhing like serpents. (. . .) 'The Grey-Eyed One did this to me, Percy', Medusa said, and she didn't sound anything like a monster. Her voice invited me to look up, to sympathize with a poor old grandmother. (Riordan 2005: 179-180).

The reveal implies that Medusa's beauty was merely a facade, behind which she hid her true form. The monstrous form is described in graphic detail, othering the character. However, her monstrous looks are contrasted by her voice, which does not sound 'anything like a monster'. Due to this contrast, the reader is put into a position in which they view Medusa as a monster, but a sympathetic one. On the other hand, Medusa not having a monstrous voice could also further emphasize her deceiving nature in the story. She likens grey-eyed Annabeth to her mother, Athena, by calling the god 'The Grey-Eyed One' while directly addressing Percy, thus creating friction between him and his friend. Similarly, Medusa directly questions Percy's willingness to help the gods of Olympus by completing his quest: "'Do you really want to help the gods?' Medusa asked" (Riordan 2005: 180). She follows up with a soft command: "'Do not be a pawn of the Olympians, my dear'" (Riordan 2005: 180). These lines affect Percy's attitude and eventual rebellious acts against the gods, shaking up the status quo.

Akin to Perseus, Percy also decapitates Medusa, taking her head as a trophy. However, the story deviates from the myth, as Percy does not weaponize Medusa's head but sends it to the gods of Olympus to provoke them, declaring himself 'impertinent' in the process. (Riordan 2005: 186-187). The encounter with Medusa also prompts an argument between Percy and Annabeth:

Finally I said, 'So we have Athena to thank for this monster?' Annabeth flashed me an irritated look. 'Your dad, actually. Don't you remember? Medusa was Poseidon's girlfriend. They decided to meet in my mother's temple. That's why Athena turned her into a monster. (Riordan 2005: 185).

Although the narrative of sexual assault is not present in the story, Poseidon's role in the tragedy is brought up by Annabeth. As a god, Poseidon is held responsible for jeopardizing Medusa by meeting her in Athena's temple due to the feud between the gods. On the surface-level, the argument is about Percy and Annabeth's struggle to get along due to an inherited rivalry between Poseidon and Athena, but the conversation works as a commentary on the faulty behaviour of the gods. The portrayal of the Olympian gods in the story echoes the narrative of patriarchy in feminist theory. The gods act pettily and take no responsibility for their deeds that may harm innocent



people, and in this case a woman, Medusa. As a victim of the gods, Medusa claims agency and affects Percy's thinking: "I thought about what Medusa had said: I was being used by the gods" (Riordan 2005: 192).

At the end of the book after meeting the gods, Percy is told by his father that Medusa's head is in his home waiting for him and notes that he has an important choice to make (Riordan 2005: 346). Percy contemplates weaponizing Medusa's head and turning his mother Sally's abusive husband into stone: "I *could* solve her problem. (. . .) I could start my very own statue garden, right there in the living room" (Riordan 2005: 351). He further asserts that it is 'what a Greek hero would do in the stories' (Riordan 2005: 351). However, Percy decides not to choose for her mother and leaves Medusa's gaze for her to wield:

A steely look of anger flared in my mother's eyes, and I thought, just maybe, I was leaving her in good hands after all. Her own. 'The meat loaf is coming right up dear,' she told Gabe. 'Meat loaf surprise.' She looked at me, and winked. The last thing I saw as the door swung closed was my mother staring at Gabe, as if she were contemplating how he would look as a garden statue. (Riordan 2005: 353).

Here, Sally already inherits Medusa's way of sweetly and deceptively talking to her victim-to-be. It is later revealed that she has sold a sculpture called 'The Poker Player' and funded her studies with the money (Riordan 2005: 355). Sally claims agency and decides to wield Medusa's gaze and free herself from the oppressor. Fittingly, she decides to further educate herself with the money she gains from selling the statue of her ex-husband. As opposed to the myth, Medusa's gaze is not weaponized by men but is wielded by a woman, who chooses to empower herself. Medusa's sacrifice is not for the hero to slay the monster and free the princess but for a woman to rise against the status quo.

In the socio-cultural context, this portrayal of Medusa implies a shift in attitudes towards femininity and female rage when compared to *Clash of the Titans*. Although the book is narrated from a male perspective, Medusa is given a voice of her own, a voice which affects the protagonist. She is not a victim of sexual assault, as in Ovid's story, but a victim of the wrongdoings of gods, who represent patriarchy. Despite

being the victim, Medusa is not passive. She is an entrepreneur who utilizes her curse to make ends meet. She criticizes the gods and prompts an effort from the protagonist to make them take responsibility. Even after her death, Medusa fights patriarchy via Percy's mother, who frees herself with the female gaze. Medusa may be a villain in the story, but she is empathetic and has a lasting positive effect on the story.

Overall, the portrayal of Medusa implies a more modern attitude towards femininity, represented by Medusa's depiction. She does not appear to be a representation of cultural fears as suggested in monster theory but a symbol of rebellion against the patriarchy, a subversion of harmful tropes.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Considering the research questions, the present study discussed the portrayals of Medusa in two popular culture materials, *Clash of the Titans* and *The Lightning Thief*, and found implications of the progression of the depiction of female sexuality and rage from the 1980s to the 2000s. The former material portrayed Medusa merely as a monster, whereas the latter depicted her as a complex empathetic character.

Both *Clash of the Titans* and *The Lightning Thief* differ from Ovid's story, however, the depictions are vastly different from each other, despite Medusa being a villainous character in both stories. In *Clash of the Titans*, Medusa is portrayed purely as a monster, whom Perseus kills to obtain her head and use it as a weapon. In *The Lightning Thief*, Medusa is a more sympathetic character, whom Percy (Perseus) must kill because she attacks him and his friends. By giving Medusa sympathetic qualities, Medusa becomes a more rounded character in *The Lightning Thief*. Furthermore, in *The Lightning Thief*, Medusa tells her own backstory, giving her a voice. Whereas in *Clash of the Titans*, her story is told by another character and Medusa herself does not say anything. Therefore, as a symbol of femininity and female rage, the depiction of Medusa has progressed from *Clash of the Titans* to *The Lightning Thief*.

Using CDA as the method enabled choosing a perspective from which to focus on minute details in the materials. Said details had clear implications of a progression of the depiction of female sexuality and rage. However, due to the limitations of a bachelor's thesis, the analysis was restricted to only two popular culture examples. Therefore, any drawn conclusions cannot be definitive answers about the representation of femininity in popular culture as a whole. The study has, however, managed to shed light on possibly social issues, which is in line with the nature of CDA (Huckin 1997: 88).

This thesis opens options for further research. Regarding the portrayal of Medusa, the 2010 remake of *Clash of the Titans* and *Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, the 2010 film adaptation of the novel could be considered. The representation of femininity and female rage in popular culture could be studied by focusing on other relevant characters in popular culture.

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