

Clarice

To what extent does Carol Ann Duffy portray Medusa as a victim rather than a perpetrator.

Medusa is a notorious monster born from Greek mythology. She was first described in the fourteenth song of the Iliad by Homer (762 BC)¹ a monster that Perseus, the hero, must vanquish. The first depiction of her as something but a monster was introduced in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD)² as a woman with "a crowd of envious lovers [... who] ne'er did trace More moving features in a sweeter face." The only mortal Gorgon sister who was cursed by the Greek Goddess Athena for having been raped by Poseidon in her shrine, according to her origin stories³. The reason behind being given snakes for hair and a gaze that turns people into stone, that literally petrifies, varies by source⁴; it has been interpreted either to punish her for disgracing a sacred place or as protection as Athena is said to feel sorry for Medusa. Many works have come out from the description of her condition throughout history, through art, literature, and theatre⁵. Though many of the works deviate from each other, one thing to note is that after she was beheaded by Perseus, against all odds, her head is seen as a symbol to ward off any malice: an evil to ward off evil.

✓ good
↓
engage with the quotation as well
good - considering alternatives

make a link to your question in your thesis

→ Despite having a history of being wrong or doing wrong, Carol Ann Duffy's *Medusa*⁶ focuses on portraying Medusa as a jealous lover who has done both. The extended metaphor of Medusa trying to remain seductive, and keep her looks while not being able to look at her lover, in lieu of ageing. Medusa was also described as the only one out of her

nice link

↑ re-read this sentence - it sounds incomplete

¹ Alighieri, Dante and Musa, Mark. *Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.

² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* [Online] [Garthm S., Dryden, J., et al (trans.), 1717. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.] Available at: <http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.html>

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Medusa-Greek-mythology>

⁴ https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/reinvention/archive/bcur2011specialissue/wallace/

⁵ https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/medu/hd_medu.htm

⁶ DUFFY, C. A. *The world's wife* 2000 - Picador - London

sisters that is mortal despite being the offspring of two primordial sea gods⁷. The very first stanza establishes the negativity that Medusa harbours. Having had normal hair and no problem with eye contact before being punished by Athena, Medusa can compare how it is to live lonely with only your thoughts to manifest into more than just thoughts. Duffy uses rhetoric by use of tricolon in, "A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy grew in my mind," having right away begun with sibilance in the words "suspicion" and "jealousy" to over exaggerate the words with the S sound. The tricolon rises in intensity, noting the development of the feeling as compared to poison that slowly grips on your mortality. With this, a sense of discomfort arises as these thoughts share space with the snakes on Medusa's head; they exist on the same plane. The semantic field of actions that a snake would be associated with is directly compared to her thoughts of jealousy and self-decreed incompetence.

expand on this.

structurally

Good - answer the question though!

With the tricolon of half-rhymes, "I'm foul mouthed now, foul tongued, yellow fanged," in the second stanza, Duffy alludes to how when women who speak out of turn in concern to the fidelity of their partner they could be accused of using arguments that hold no substance, that only means to hurt and not to really understand what is going on. The alliterative 'f' sounds are already toned down from the sibilance of the first stanza, the softness shows how she has already become less aggressive due to her limitations. Duffy shows that Medusa does know the downfalls of what she is doing, however, through the metaphor of having "there [be] bullet tears in [her] eyes," as she knows her efforts of consoling her growing jealousy are painstakingly taken in vain as she can no longer look anyone in the eye. This stanza ends in a question she then answers in the next stanza: "Are you terrified?" Having the structure end this way connotes the uneasiness of being an ostracized villain. Duffy shows that Medusa knows the answer she wants but still asks as we need to ask ourselves.

Make your topic sentences address the question

evidence? let the expert speak for you

be careful with formatting

good - answering the question

engage with this!

She is seen on many works of art as "she stares ahead and uncompromisingly confronts the viewer,"⁸ which even past death she shows herself in some kind of accusatory way. In the penultimate stanza, Duffy uses a question in a different manner than the last saying "wasn't I beautiful? Wasn't I fragrant and young?" which she doesn't respond to, creating another rhetorical question. The poem ends with a one line stanza saying "look at [her] now," which is a double entendre as she wants the reader to face her as well as turn into stone. She adheres to Virgil's⁹ depiction of her as "an enormous monster about whom snaky locks twist their hissing mouths; her eyes stare malevolently, and under the base of her chin the tail-ends of serpents have tied knots," and the stereotypical views of it¹⁰. Challenging that, the feminist theorist Hélène Cixous she confronts the fear of Medusa as a monster and rather as people fearing her body. This becomes a vital part of Medusa as being a symbol of women as a threat because of their bodies as taboo, traditionally. Cixous challenges that if Medusa is looked at as she is, "she is not deadly, she's beautiful and she's laughing," in her *Le Rire de Meduse*¹¹ Her monstrous legacy is told to be misrepresentative of what she actually stands for.

very good use of secondary sources to explore your argument
good

Duffy also creates a point of sympathy for the infamous Gorgon sister as she is shown to be confused and disheartened by her own perception. Though she is seen in many different ways, as a monster, an antagonist, as well as an apotropaic symbol to ward off evil¹², her confusion is first portrayed as wanting others to see her back. There is no affirmation for Medusa as being anything other than threatening because no one can look back at her.

⁸ https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/medu/hd_medu.htm

⁹ Homer. *The Iliad of Homer*. Tr. by Richard Lattimore. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1951.

¹⁰ https://www.academia.edu/33416257/Medusa_the_Victimized_Monster

¹¹ <http://dangerouswomenproject.org/2016/11/28/helene-cixous/>

¹² CIXOUS, H.

Hélène Cixous *Le Rire de Meduse*

2010 - W.W. Norton & Company - New York

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322857176_Female_power_that_protects_Examples_of_the_apotropaic_and_decorative_functions_of_the_Medusa_in_Roman_visual_culture_from_the_territory_of_the_Central_Balkans

You clearly have a very good understanding of this poem. Chance -> you've also used a good range of sources - well done!

- ① You've integrated some interesting secondary reading, but try to engage with it too - eg challenge it or expand on it
- ② Keep linking your points back to the question
- ③ Formatting quotations / bibliography