

**The Path to Wholeness: The Serpent-Haired Gorgon's
Individuation Journey in Jessie Burton's Retelling *Medusa:
The Girl Behind the Myth* (2021)**

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Abstract:

This study aims to understand Medusa's psychological process at play in achieving wholeness and self-realization throughout the novel *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth*. Accordingly, the study explores the individuation process as manifested in Medusa's journey. Moreover, the researcher analyzes how her experiences reflect the complexities of identity by delving into archetypes within Medusa. Furthermore, the researcher investigates how the process of individuation emphasizes the significance of confronting one's shadow and accepting one's self. By analyzing Medusa, this study aims to highlight the broader implications of her journey to further understand the psyche of Medusa as she embraces her complex intricacies, demonstrating how a deeper understanding of one's own complex human nature is essential to navigate and overcome traumatic surroundings and achieve self-fulfilment.

Keywords: Archetypal theory, Individuation, Jessie Burton, Medusa, Mythology

المستخلص:

هذه الدراسة قراءة سيكولوجية لرواية "مدوسا: الفتاة وراء الأسطورة"، حيث تسعى الباحثة من خلال التحليل النفسي إلى فهم التركيبة النفسية للشخصية المحورية في وصولها لحالة من التحقق الذاتي في إطار أحداث الرواية. وعليه، تركز الدراسة على مفهوم التكامل كما ينعكس في الرواية موضوع البحث. كما تسلط الدراسة الضوء على الخبرات التي تخوضها الشخصية المحورية وكيف أنها تعكس ملامح هويتها من خلال القراءة النفسية للعمل ككل. وفي ذات السياق، تدرس الباحثة العلاقة بين عملية التكامل النفسي من جهة ومواجهة الذات وتقبلها من جهة أخرى .

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الأنماط الأولوية، التكامل النفسي، جيسي بورتون، مدوسا، الأساطير

**The Path to Wholeness: The Serpent-Haired Gorgon's
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1-Introduction

Greek Mythology is known for its heroic mythological figures. Their psychological journeys have inspired generations to go through their own personal journeys of self-discovery. Myths often narrate tales of heroes whose quests involve overcoming inner demons and confronting monsters to emerge stronger and victorious. For instance, in Homer's *The Odyssey* (8 BCE), the great hero Odysseus defeats monsters such as the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis (Morrison, 27). While each monster tests Odysseus' skills and courage on his journey home, he simultaneously faces internal conflicts with his identity and humanity. Thus, the epic celebrates Odysseus' heroic deeds and his "capacity for suffering and endurance" (Higgins,3). Similarly, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE), the great hero Perseus is known for beheading the gorgon Medusa to save his beloved mother from Polydectes (31). By defeating the dreaded monster in her sleep, Perseus becomes a hero "of cunning, an employer of the indirect devious techniques" of a warrior (Dillon,73).

These myths highlight how heroes overcome what the authors considered "monstrous", often casting female figures in limited, monstrous roles such as the Sirens, Scylla, Charybdis and Medusa. For example, despite her importance in Greek mythology, Medusa is rarely explored as a complex female character in traditional narratives. This marks Medusa and Perseus' encounter in myths as nothing but a "side story to the hero's narrative" (Diorio,45). Limiting Medusa to a monstrous antagonist in Greek myths restricts her portrayal and reduces her to a one-dimensional figure. Additionally, she is even seen as a symbol of menace and threat that averts danger like "the modern evil eye" (Glennon). The reason behind this degradation of her character can be because society did not wish to engage with any narrative that revolves around a woman. As a result, "history preferred to remember her [Medusa] as a dehumanized monster, as it made for a more "suitable" story" (Sayeed, Tiwari, 45). This illuminates the need to re-evaluate

Medusa, to examine her psychological traumas and experiences and to view her journey of physical and psychological transformation from a different perspective.

The study's objectives are to investigate how the individuation process is depicted in Medusa's journey throughout *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* (2021), focusing on key moments of transformation and self-discovery. The study also aims to identify the psychological challenges Medusa faces, including trauma, fear of rejection, and the struggle for self-acceptance, and to analyze their influence on her development. Additionally, it explores the archetypes associated with her character and how they reflect her struggles with identity. Furthermore, the study will also examine the significance of confronting inner fears in the individuation process and how this confrontation aids Medusa's pursuit of authenticity. Ultimately, the study seeks to highlight the broader implications of her journey for understanding identity formation and the transformative power of embracing one's complexities in the novel *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* by the English author Jessie Burton.

Questions addressed in this paper, thus, include: How does Medusa portray the process of individuation through critical moments of transformation and self-discovery in Medusa's narrative? What psychological obstacles, such as trauma, fear of rejection, and the quest for self-acceptance, does Medusa face, and how do these obstacles influence her character growth? In what ways do Medusa's archetypal representations illuminate her struggles with identity and contribute to her journey of individuation? What role does the confrontation of internal fears play in Medusa's process of individuation? How does accepting her shadow aid her in attaining individuation?

The best-selling author Jessie Burton has been widely acclaimed for her storytelling skills and her ability to create vivid worlds and characters undergoing personal growth. Readers and critics value Burton's attention to detail, which is one of her strongest literary qualities. Burton's novel *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* (2021) emphasizes a significant departure from traditional narratives that depict Medusa as a mere monster.

The novel *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* (2021) is an empowering retelling of the serpent-haired gorgon, whose life of seclusion is disrupted when a man, Perseus, arrives on her banished island. Jessie Burton's novel offers a fresh perspective, illuminating Medusa's experiences and granting her a second opportunity at life. In the novel, Medusa exemplifies the true definition of power in the face of

adversity, as she refuses to be Perseus' victim and ultimately defeats him instead.

The rationale behind this study centers on the need to re-evaluate Medusa's character, traditionally seen as a monstrous figure in Greek mythology, by analyzing her journey from a Jungian lens. Additionally, this study aims to illuminate her complexities through the concept of individuation. By challenging conventional portrayals and emphasizing the importance of confronting internal struggles, the study connects Medusa's narrative to contemporary discussions on identity and self-actualization. Moreover, viewing Medusa's journey as an individuation journey offers valuable insights into contemporary discussions surrounding trauma, and identity. This study hopes for a re-evaluation of mythological figures like Medusa, emphasizing that their stories can inspire personal growth. Ultimately, the study seeks to advocate for narratives that promote self-discovery and transformation, thus making the findings relevant to both the literary and the psychological field. The study argues that Jessie Burton's reimagining of Medusa highlights the different psychological aspects of the self to achieve wholeness.

Various critics have reviewed the chosen novel *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* which shows Jessie Burton's profound impact on literature. Ashleigh reviewed *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* through a feminist and political lens in 2021, suggesting that Burton's interpretation of Medusa resonates with current discussions about consent. Additionally, in Franziska Frohlich's dissertation, *Medusa: How the Mythological Monster Became a Feminist Icon*, the author explores the modern feminist reclamation of the Medusa myth and its implications for the feminist movement. Frohlich notes the association of Medusa with the anti-rape #MeToo movement, highlighting how the figure serves as a symbol for sexual assault survivors, allowing them to see themselves in her narrative (24).

The Yoto Carnegies, a website dedicated to children's book awards, offers a brief summary of Medusa, stating that the novel presents a meaningful and beautiful journey of self-discovery and realizing one's potential. It also critiques societal flaws. The legend resonates with modern audiences due to its rich language that challenges expectations for both men and women (2023). Hephzibah Anderson, writing for the Guardian, commended *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* for its feminist viewpoint and its exploration of themes such as the trauma of sexual assault and female autonomy (2021).

On the book review platform NetGalley, many readers shared positive feedback about the novel. One reviewer named Lisa expressed

her appreciation for the book's interpretation of the Medusa myth, noting that Medusa is often portrayed in a misogynistic way as a monster or "man-eater" in popular culture. This highlights the favourable reception of the novel's reimagining of the traditional narrative (2023).

The researcher draws on Carl Jung's theory of Individuation to illuminate Medusa's true personal growth through navigating both external and internal obstacles to achieve self-actualization. Carl Jung defines this process as the process of individuation. According to Jung, individuation is the journey through which an individual evolves acknowledging one's innermost uniqueness. Jung associated this process with "the attainment of the self" or self-realization (Jung, 106). In simpler terms, individualization is self-actualization. Medusa's journey, when examined from this perspective, powerfully illustrates how individuals strive toward wholeness despite immense adversities. Her journey proves the fluid nature of identity, highlighting that it is created through challenges and self-reflection.

The Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) has had a crucial role in the evolution of psychoanalysis (DeYong, 6). Building on Freud's ideas on the unconscious mind, Jung developed his own original psychological theories, which are now referred to as Jungian psychology. The notion of the collective unconscious, archetypes, individuation, dream analysis, and symbolic ways to comprehending the human psyche are the fundamental principles of his school of thought (Maraldi, 2018). The foundation of Carl Jung's archetypal theory is his idea of the collective unconscious, which he initially presented in his 1919 article *Instinct and the Unconscious*.

Jung stated that the psyche (psychological state) is made up of a number of separate, but interacting systems: the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious (1974). First, the ego is formed within "the center of the field of consciousness" (Jung, 6) and is the focus of awareness, including the feeling of personal identity. It has access to unrepressed memories and arranges feelings and thoughts. Second, the collection of aware memories and experiences that have been suppressed or forgotten is known as the personal unconscious. This is evident in Jung's explanation "The feeling-toned complexes are the main contents of the personal unconscious" (4). Lastly, archetypes, which are an inborn, genetic "group experience" that happen subconsciously, make up the majority of the collective unconscious. Jung states that this part of the unconscious "is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals" (Jung, 4).

Archetypes, according to Jung, are innate and universal patterns of behavior that reside in the collective unconscious of each person (Jung, 3-4). He also suggests that these archetypes signify a unique psychological embodiment of the biological 'behavioral pattern', as they are essentially inherent. In his essay *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, Jung states that these patterns are "more or less the same everywhere in all individuals" (Jung, 4). The sole route to access the collective unconscious is by embodying the archetypes in tangible reality, since the archetypes "do not manifest themselves concretely". While these archetypes are found among all people, their depictions vary from person to person. Jung states that archetypes 'take its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear' (Jung, 5).

Archetypes manifest in symbols, myths, and dreams, revealing inner psychic phenomena (Jung, 20). Jung suggests that "symbols serve as a link between the archetype and the unconsciousness and in a like manner between the artist, the work and the audience and the unconscious" (76). This implies that the symbols that manifest reflect what resides deep within the unconscious. Jung identifies two types of symbols: natural symbols and cultural symbols. Natural symbols are "derived from the unconscious contents of the psyche," meaning they can represent an individual's archetypes (93). These symbols appear in a person's dreams or fantasies and are considered spontaneous, in contrast to cultural symbols. Cultural symbols, on the other hand, "are those that have been used to express 'eternal truths' and that are still used in many religions" (93). These symbols also aid in understanding archetypes.

Dreams serve as symbolic expressions of the unconscious, offering insights into identity and archetypes (Feist, 116). Jung explains that dreams are "a spontaneous self-portrayal in symbolic form of the actual situation in the unconscious" (505). This suggests that the unconscious uses the language of dreams to express and reveal what is suppressed. For example, a dream about flying might symbolize a desire for freedom or escape from constraints. Similarly, a dream involving a shadowy figure could represent repressed fears or aspects of the self that need to be confronted. Moreover, Jung hypothesized that the unconscious uses dreams to communicate in order to foster fulfillment and aid in the process of individuation (Jung, 21). For instance, recurring themes in dreams may signal unresolved conflicts or aspirations, guiding the dreamer toward personal growth and understanding.

Jung posits that "Dreams, myth, and works of art through symbols can convey a sense of meaning, living meaning, laden with affect, which relates us organically to life as a whole" (81). Since Myths are a work of

art, that means that myths can influence perceptions and awaken aspects of the psyche with the use of symbolism. As Jung notes, "Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche" (91). By revealing what resides in the unconscious, myths have essentially aided humanity's quest for self-actualization, a process that Jung refers to as individuation.

Additionally, Glen Gill highlights that archetypal theory analyzes recurring symbols in myths to interpret literature and culture (Gill, 396). Similarly, Zimmerman emphasizes the importance of archetypes in understanding character motivations and societal context, particularly in relation to class and relationships, which are vital for character analysis (Zimmerman, 6). Together, these perspectives illustrate how symbols, myths and archetypes contribute to a deeper understanding of human experience and personal growth.

Jungian Archetypes include the shadow, the hero/heroine, the anima, animus and the self archetype. Firstly, the shadow archetype represents the darker, repressed aspects of an individual's psyche, including morally questionable thoughts and behaviors. Achieving self-awareness requires balancing the Ego and the Shadow, accepting one's darker potential for true individuation (Jung, 66). The Shadow also contains positive attributes, including instincts and creative impulses, leading to the concept of 'The Gold in the Shadow' by Robert A. Johnson. Therefore, in order for an individual to become whole, he must not repress the shadow, but one must understand it and accept it to "pick up on the power ... hidden in the shadow" (Johnson, 47).

In addition, the Jungian hero/heroine archetype epitomizes the journey of facing challenges and achieving personal growth. This archetype manifests when the hero faces their shadow and reaches individuation (Jung, 167). The hero's quest frequently includes external threats or adversaries that must be defeated. From a Jungian perspective, these external obstacles can also represent the internal conflicts individuals encounter, the darker aspects of ourselves that must be confronted (Jung, 8). This internal conflict can manifest as the negative attributes of the hero archetype such as hubris and aggression.

Furthermore, the anima archetype represents feminine traits in men, influencing emotions and spontaneity, while the Animus embodies masculine traits in women, manifesting as rationality and assertiveness (Jung, 126). Both the animus and the anima are believed to be important elements of the human psyche, acting as the bridge between the conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind. Successfully integrating these archetypes is considered essential for the development of the self since as

Jung believes that “without this integration, one remains split and incomplete (20).

Finally, the self archetype serves as a symbol of a fully realized and fulfilled individual. According to Jung, the ultimate goal of every person is to develop and attain a state of completeness. Through a process known as individuation, the self-archetype brings together all the other archetypes within an individual. By acknowledging and integrating their archetypes, individuals are able to embrace their true selves, leading to a harmonious and balanced existence (Jung, 24).

The present study is mainly concerned with highlighting the transformative journey of Medusa in Burton’s novel. The researcher aims to analyze Medusa’s journey through the lens of individuation, emphasizing her evolution from a misrepresented monster to a multifaceted character. By examining her psychological challenges and the archetypes that shape her identity, the study highlights the broader themes of empowerment, self-acceptance, and the importance of confronting one's shadow.

This study provides valuable insights into personal growth, illustrating how narratives can facilitate self-discovery and transformation. By selecting a novel that offers a new perspective on the mythological figure Medusa and analyzing her using Jung’s theory of individuation, the study demonstrates the importance of self-discovery and transformation. By using Jungian psychology to uncover Medusa’s complex, symbolic layers in the novel, the study ultimately bridges literary analysis and psychological exploration.

2. Analysis

2.1 Medusa as a Jungian Hero

The Jungian hero is characterized by a miraculous birth, as noted in Jung’s statement that, “the singular circumstances of his (hero) procreation and birth are part and parcel of the hero-myth” (493). Moreover, A Jungian hero is the embodiment of both human and supernatural aspects, with Jung stating that, “the hero himself appears as a being of more than human stature. He is distinguished from the very beginning by his godlike characteristics” (612). This duality allows Medusa to be an exemplar of the Jungian Hero. While Jung traditionally defined the hero as a masculine figure, this does not prevent female figures like Medusa from being considered heroes in their own narratives. Originally born as a human, she is transformed by a goddess, gaining a supernatural quality that provides her with a second chance at life—essentially a form of rebirth. This transfiguration has proven to be a blessing in disguise, a realization she comes to immediately after the

transformation. When Medusa recognizes that her hair has been replaced by a crown of serpents, she reflects, "For the first time in my life, I felt I could really see" (43). While her transformation may not represent a miraculous birth in infancy, becoming a Gorgon sets her on a path toward individuation, thereby fulfilling the role of a Jungian hero.

Medusa's Gorgon head, alongside her human body, exemplifies the duality of a Jungian hero. Her transformation has given her a 'divine' power. In a dream, she recalls her traumatic experiences, revealing the immense power she possesses as a Gorgon. She describes the "uncomfortable sensation of power surging through my blood, wave after furious wave like molten metal" (43). As a girl, she had never felt this power—"as if my feet could kick harder than a god's, as if my mouth would pour forth truths so blinding that no one who listened to me would ever be the same again" (43). Thus, she embodies both miraculous birth and the assortment of human and divine elements of a Jungian hero.

2.2 Embodying the Hero Archetype

Medusa, embodying the Hero Archetype within the framework of Carl Jung's archetypes, undergoes the process of confronting and integrating her shadow in order to achieve individuation. In mythology, the Shadow often manifests as villains or monstrous figures, serving as obstacles for heroes to overcome. This can be understood from a Jungian perspective as the hidden, darker side of personalities—the fears, desires, and traits one prefers to ignore. Carl Jung maintains that these hidden aspects are crucial for self-understanding and that confronting the Shadow is vital for genuine personal growth. For Medusa, her external threats are frequent before her transformation. As a beautiful young lady, she is the object of admiration in the eyes of men, and struggles with the notion of being the center of attention without asking for it, 'they carried on staring at me, dissecting me as if I were a moving sculpture they wanted to turn to stone' (52). The only way to overcome these external threats is by ensuring that the aggressors do not affect one's mental well-being, as their threats are their shadows projecting onto Medusa. "You can refuse a shadow projection... if you have your own shadow under control" however, Medusa's shadow is not secure enough for her to set boundaries (Johnson, 37). She refuses to face this adversity and chooses seclusion, feeling objectified and worthless, "I watched myself like a hawk while feeling like a mouse" (53). Furthermore, her inability to take action is a representation of her shadow developing unconsciously, till it manifests as rage, dissociation, and recurring nightmares after her ultimate transformation.

As I moved from being a girl to a young woman, I became two people. I was the one outside myself, looking on, and I was also the other, deeper self, mute within my body, it was impossible to keep them together as one person. (53)

This excerpt shows Medusa's inner fragmentation, dissociation, and her inability to take control of her own life.

Medusa's transformation into a monster diverges significantly from the conventional Hero's journey. Her challenge is not an enemy to defeat but rather the acceptance of a vital aspect of her psyche essential for achieving individuation. Medusa's path is one of self-acceptance, where the "monster" she confronts represents the most shadowed parts of her identity and appearance. This signifies that her journey embodies the Heroine Archetype.

2.3 Transforming into a Heroic Figure

Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), discusses the concept of the Hero's journey. He describes the protagonist's quest with a disturbance of the current state as an invitation to embark on an adventure (Campbell, 55). According to Jungian theory, this invitation may arise from a traumatic experience that changes the hero. This traumatic experience forces the hero into the journey to find his identity by accepting the inner shadow and traumas. Medusa's forced encounter with Poseidon and Athena's curse that transformed her into a gorgon are the two pivotal traumatic events that forced her to go on a journey to find her identity.

Her first trauma, her forced encounter with Poseidon, is the true disturbance of her current state, despite the fact that her childhood cannot be defined as 'stable'. Throughout her childhood, she faces relentless taunting and horror, longing for a life where she can simply be herself. She dreams of a day when she can walk through her village without the piercing gazes of villagers who dissect her every move "I wanted to run up the cliff and hide in the grass, but their opinions were lodged in my ears" (53). She also shares with Perseus the persistent threat of Poseidon's relentless pursuits. She asks him to envision a time in which he is "fishing in the sea with joy and abandon," only to be confronted by the unsettling realization that "something's watching you from beneath...something that will tear your life in two" (52). This vivid imagery highlights the constant fear that accompanies her existence before her transfiguration. After Poseidon successfully assaults her, Medusa finds herself wandering aimlessly, her sense of self shattered. She describes her state as "dishevelled, dress torn, hair tangled, spirit missing" (88). This moment

highlights her loss of identity and the emotional despair that follows her trauma.

Her second trauma is the transformation from a girl into a gorgon. Athena, enraged by the disrespectful encounter between Poseidon and Medusa in her temple, chooses to condemn Medusa and her sisters to become gorgons. While her sisters receive wings as part of their new identities, Medusa's punishment is having a head of serpents for hair. This transformation is not just physical but deeply symbolic. It represented the loss of humanity; the necessary push towards her heroic journey. Medusa recalls the painful moment of her transformation: "hissing, heard for the first time, like waters poured on hot stone. Heaviness on my scalp, dropping past my ears... a snake's head, gazing at me as if waiting for my order" (43). This powerful description highlights the conflicting emotions of fear and power that accompany her transfiguration; the divine power that eventually puts her on the path of heroism and self-actualization.

Since traumas are repressed emotions, they are vital aspects of the Hero's shadow (Jung, 266). Her first trauma forces her to dissociate and forget specific details from her experience. When narrating her assault out loud for the first time, Medusa notices that she does not remember it all: 'I must have cried, or did I? ...I don't remember those moments immediately after' (88). This proves that forgetting is the psyche's own coping mechanism to handle the incident, but it has left Medusa unable to have a complete sense of self. Jung points out that the act of repressing memories is an unconscious act as "repression must have been manoeuvred by the unconscious" for a specific goal (Jung, 303). In Medusa's case, her memories and emotions were repressed to shield her from recalling and reliving her first traumatic experience. Jung emphasizes that such repressed memories can create a significant barrier to individuation, as they prevent the individual from fully integrating their experiences into their identity. Jung states that "real liberation comes not from glossing over or repressing painful states of feeling, but only from experiencing them to the full" (Jung, 335).

It is Medusa's second trauma – the transfiguration into a gorgon – that truly activates her shadow. The metamorphosis does not only change her appearance, but it provides more psychological strains. This transformation, from a Jungian perspective, is a manifestation of her shadow, her repressed memories and emotions. Her ability to visibly see the snakes as a part of her that she cannot escape, forces her to confront her shadow. Evidently, Jung states that "repressed contents are the very ones that have the best chance of survival, as we know from experience

that nothing is corrected in the unconscious” (265). This marks Medusa’s first steps towards individuation, which are acknowledging and integrating the shadow. Jung further explains that “the shadow is not only the dark side of the personality but also contains the repressed desires and emotions that, when acknowledged, can lead to personal growth” (Jung, 257). Thus, Medusa’s transformation becomes a pivotal moment in her journey of self-actualization.

2.4 Manifesting the Shadow

Carl Jung stated that the shadow is fundamentally anything an individual “refuses to acknowledge about himself.” It manifests in an individual’s “inferior traits of character and other incompatible tendencies.” This means that, despite being repressed, the shadow is prone to manifest unconsciously as emotions and actions driven by emotions such as “envy, aggression, greed, laziness, and jealousy” (Ann Casement, 94).

Medusa’s shadow manifestations become evident with the arrival of Perseus on the island. Driven by a repressed desire for love and acceptance, rooted from her banishment and curse, Medusa’s search for companionship leads her to deceive Perseus. She conceals her true identity, motivated by the fear of inflicting harm on him and the dread of potential rejection. This paradox creates an internal conflict, highlighting her struggle between the loneliness of isolation and the risk of harming him, which forces her to make irrational decisions:

I wanted stories, company, closeness” (17), “the ache of loneliness and the bitter soup of boredom are more dangerous than any snake venom” (17) / “I am a liability” (20)/ “Despite a resistance deep inside me, I wanted to tell Perseus everything” (20) / “ I felt the clash of my two selves, new and old, burdened and carefree, hideous and beautiful. How was it possible to be all these things at once? (26).

This fluctuation of emotional turmoil weakens her, eventually allowing her shadow to manifest as manipulative tendencies. She manipulates Perseus, making him emotionally connected to her in order to serve her emotional need to connect while risking his death and hers simultaneously.

The study argues that these unrealistic expectations are manifestations of the Shadow archetype. Her thought patterns shift from trying not to cause him harm, to a more deluded idea that no harm will inflict them from their encounter. As they share stories, she attempts to search for personal similarities between them: “I was clinging to these commonalities, fearing how soon my snakes might wrench us apart” (35)

to “what, really, did I have to lose? Maybe, by spending time with him, I could feel lovely again?” (50). This quote shows Medusa’s thought process shifting out of her selfish driven desire to bond with a man for the sake of regaining her sense of beauty and self-worth. These delusional thoughts along with the excessive unconscious preoccupation of her own personal gain, without consideration of how this bond could affect Perseus is evidence of her shadow manifestations.

The Shadow can foster unrealistic expectations and create misconceptions, despite the individual being aware of its improbability. The researcher believes that delusions are a traumatic response to her disfigurement from a beautiful lady to a snake-haired monster, and being warned not to lay eyes on any man, or ‘misfortune would befall him’ (12). This initially forces Medusa to seek shelter on a deserted island along with her sisters. As she begins communicating with Perseus after his arrival from a hidden spot, she becomes aware of what he will do if he knows she is a Gorgon “he’d take one look at my snakes and run a mile” (28). However, her reminiscing thoughts of when she is “a friendly, thoughtful child” (28) creates the misconception that she can strengthen their connection, disregarding the presence of Athena's curse.

Jung states that the shadow’s dark characteristics are emotional in nature (Jung,8). He explains that emotions emerge when one is at his weakest, where one is unable to handle a particular reality (8). Additionally, he states that these emotions reveal the reason behind this weakness, which forces one to act primitively (8). This explains why Medusa acts irrationally, and attempts to get closer to Perseus: ‘You think it’s so great to be special,’ I hissed, hiding my pain in anger... I pointed at my head, my snakes stretched in all directions, baring fangs. It isn’t. It’s horrendous. I want to be normal!’(71) Based on this excerpt, it can be indicated that Medusa’s repressed anger towards Athena and Poseidon is projected onto her sisters, Euryale and Stheno, when their attempt to help her see herself as strong and free failed.

It can be concluded that Medusa’s shadow surfaces as a form of trauma-repressed anger. At this moment, Medusa cannot accept her fate. She struggles to adapt to her reality, as she rejects her new form.

I envied them, that confidence with such ferocity that my snakes turn to red-hot poker spanning my skull. I was trapped; I was the one person I could never escape, if only I could be Merina, with normal hair. But no, I was Medusa. A monster. A hidden girl. All things I never dreamed I’d be (71)

In this excerpt, Medusa's shadow manifests as intense envious emotions towards her sisters, as they are confident in their wings, while she is trapped within herself because of her snakes. Medusa's shadow manifestation of jealousy creates internal conflict. This conflict can be seen in her desire to be Merina, Medusa's persona that symbolizes herself before her transformation. She creates the Merina persona to communicate with Perseus. This alter-ego represents her wish to be a normal girl leading an ordinary life she does not currently lead. This feeds her negative self-perception as a monstrous girl who should be hidden. This explains her sense of isolation and emphasizes how her true prison is her own physical body.

In his book *Owning your Own Shadow* (1991), the American author Robert A. Johnson discusses the concept of 'The Gold in the Shadow', which is the positive attributes within the darkness of one's shadow. Johnson believes that "if you can touch your shadow—within form—and do something out of your ordinary pattern, a great deal of energy will flow from it" (47). Applying this concept to Medusa, it becomes clear that her anger stems from her inability to change her reality, which made her feel inadequate and weak. However, this vulnerability later becomes a part of a shadow that will help her accept her fate. Since The Shadow archetype is not entirely evil, the study argues that Medusa's selfishness stems from the need for intimacy. Consequently, she displays kindness towards Perseus, and wishes to endeavour her intentions whenever possible. This is apparent in her desire to "cheer him up" (28) and her feeling "desperate to reassure him" (35). Additionally, she never once attempted to risk facing him, despite her recurring internal thoughts to do so.

Furthermore, Medusa's disfiguration and transformation into a monster also represent the displacement of her animus. Jung describes how a displaced animus can manifest as difficulties in expressing needs, often leading to emotional outbursts. Medusa's irrational emotional connection to Perseus reflects this displacement, as her desires and fears intertwine in a tumultuous dance that drives her to pursue a connection despite the inherent risks involved. Her emotional instability reveals her struggle to balance her feelings of love and fear. This internal conflict often manifests in fits of rage or despair, illustrating the difficulty she faces in reconciling her monstrous identity with her longing for human connection. The tension between these opposing forces highlights the broader theme of how trauma can distort one's sense of self and relationships with others.

Jung's assertion that "the recurring dream is a noteworthy phenomenon. A dream... may date from a traumatic moment that has left behind some prejudice" (Jung, 53) provides valuable insight into Medusa's recurring dream of sexual assault. This dream transcends mere recollection. It symbolizes the deep psychological wound inflicted by trauma, representing not only the loss of her physical innocence but also the shattering of her identity. Such trauma acts as a significant barrier in her individuation process, preventing her from fully integrating this painful experience into her identity.

This recurring dream can be interpreted as a manifestation of Medusa's shadow. The shadow, in Jungian psychology, represents the repressed, often darker aspects of the personality. In Medusa's case, the trauma of the assault, and the complex emotions associated with it – the fear, the anger, the shame, the sense of violation – are related to the shadow. She has repressed the memory in order to bury it deep within her unconscious. This repression, however, does not eliminate the power of the trauma; instead, it festers and manifests as recurring dreams. The dream becomes the shadow's way of forcing the conscious mind to acknowledge the unresolved trauma. Medusa's repressed trauma becomes an obstacle in her individuation process. It acts as a barrier, preventing her from fully understanding herself, thus becoming a source of internal conflict.

2.5 Achieving Individuation

Individuation is a journey of self-actualization. The goal of the psyche is to develop the 'self', representing wholeness, guiding the process of individuation. Jung explains that the self that the individual aims to create is 'not the artificial self, created out of personal wishes...but the genuine self, that wholeness which embraces both conscious and unconscious elements' (Jung, 21). Jung explains that the key to individuation lies in confronting the shadow. This can be achieved by 'making the darkness conscious', rather than ignoring or repressing the shadow (23).

Medusa's story is a powerful exploration of individuation, the process of becoming a whole and integrated self. This journey, as described by Jung, involves confronting the shadow self – the darker, repressed aspects of the psyche. It's about acknowledging flaws, letting go of idealized self-images, and ultimately embracing one's identity as a whole.

2.5.1 The First Stage: Acknowledging the Shadow

The integration of the Shadow begins once the individual becomes aware of one's faults and lets go of the false sense of "ideal self" created by the ego, which is not an easy feat. Medusa's initial struggle stems from

her disfigurement and the societal rejection that follows. Her ego is shattered. In other words, her shadow is rooted in her refusal to accept her new reality. It's only when Perseus enters her life, and she feels compelled to share her story, that she takes the first step towards acknowledging her shadow. Confiding in him forces her to confront her trauma. As she narrates her source of torment, her fragmented psyche becomes apparent: "The more I talked to Perseus, the more I kept revealing... my whole life, I wanted to tell someone who wasn't my sisters what it felt like to be me- to have been hated, so misunderstood" (50).

According to Jung, once the ego is unstable, an individual feels like 'a stranger' to oneself (Jung, 442). Likewise, being threatened by Poseidon has made her live in constant fear: 'He'd force me into this open-ended promise by threatening my death, but day by day he was taking my life anyway' (80). The constant haunting of Poseidon and being forced to give consent fragmented her ego, and made her lose her sense of self: 'I didn't belong to myself anymore, I belonged to Poseidon' (80)/ 'Poseidon took what I had never wanted to give him. Me.' (80) 'He gave me nothing in return for what he took. He tried to make me lose myself' (87). These excerpts exemplify a manifestation of her shadow in her rage, fear and loss of identity. By verbally narrating her traumatic experience, Medusa starts acknowledging her reality, which means she begins her individuation process and that her ego no longer focuses on victimhood. This is apparent in the following excerpt:

I leaned back against the rock, my heart now strangely settled. Talking to someone about my experience in the temple, while never removing the sting, had somehow given it flight. I could sense how my experience had moved a little away from me, how the revelation of my sadness had made me feel lighter- for how long, I did not know – but it was refreshing, amazing, to realize I could feel this way. I was in possession of my own story. I was the one who could either keep it or discard it (88).

By facing her shadow, Medusa uncovers the power to dictate the course of her life.

2.5.2 The Second Stage: Confronting the Shadow

Medusa becomes aware of the need of her inner persona to break free from the 'Merina' facade she created to initially communicate with Perseus. This protective 'Merina' mask is what allows Medusa to hide her true identity and present a more approachable version of herself without causing Perseus fear. However, she realizes that she needs to embrace her desire to express how she feels towards Perseus without hiding, all

while fully understanding that the probability of them becoming together is non-existent. Carl Jung states that active imagination is a tool that accesses the unconscious psyche and allows it to surface (Jung, 707). Thus, Medusa begins to search for the balance by imagining what her life would be like if she could transform back to a beautiful woman,

I realized a strange thing: I complained about them (snakes) all the time, I resented them, and when it came to Perseus, I thought they were a massive liability – but I knew I would miss them if they were taken away. They were part of me now (96).

This realization illustrates how she begins accepting her shadow, and how her snakes, what she once despised, have become a part of her identity.

Since Medusa's ego has shattered after Athena's curse, Medusa is forced to live in isolation on the island. Nevertheless, this seclusion helped her to confront her shadow, redefine her identity, and accept her surroundings, which is a manifestation of the self archetype, aiming for individuation. By integrating the shadow, Medusa finds liberation from her own self-degrading thoughts. She questions her past: 'And would you want to go back now, I wandered to myself, despite it all?' (96). Additionally, she liberates herself from the misogynistic social expectations of women; how their worth is defined by their appearance. 'Yes... but what was there for me except a reputation unfairly in tatters, hated as a beauty even worse as a hag, and a punch of neighbours unwilling to change their minds about me?' (96-97). Another example of Medusa's integration of the shadow and manifestation of the self-archetype is seen in the following excerpt as she explores her desire to be her true authentic self

At least here I had some freedom to roam, to be myself...I'd come to love the rocks, changing color as the sun moved.... I'd told Perseus that I was hiding, but maybe I wasn't at all. Maybe I had found my space to simply be... maybe I hadn't realized it, but I'd found a kind of peace (97)

2.5.3 The Third Stage: Integrating her Shadow

Medusa's sense of self becomes more rounded as she lets go of Merina entirely, and exposes her true identity to Perseus. The Medusa, who is fragmented and not integrated at the start of the narrative, has the potential to disintegrate completely when Perseus fled after her admission. However, her psychological growth changes her thought patterns, from dark, overbearing thoughts such as: "before now, a different version of me might have welcomed my own murder- an end, at least, ...of feeling uncomfortable in my own skin' (116) to 'I hadn't come this far to die' (116)/ 'I was not going to justify myself again' (116) this

is an important step towards individuation. These excerpts show Medusa's new sense of self-worth and refusal to be defined by other's perceptions. 'I had my snakes and I had my dignity and I realized, for the first time, that I could not tell the difference.' (116).' This phrase shows Medusa's assimilation of her shadow, dark, monstrous form into her identity, as she no longer sees herself as a woman who was once beautiful, victimized by Athena and Poseidon, but a full-fledged, powerful individual.

2.5.4 Final stage: Integrating the Animus

Jung states that the integration of the shadow is considered "the apprentice-piece", while integrating the Anima and the Animus is the "Master piece" (Jung,29). This highlights the complexity of the individuation process. Integrating the shadow allows individuals to confront their darker tendencies; however, integrating the animus provides women with the ability to think rationally and responsibly (Jung, 267). The confrontation between Medusa and Perseus highlights the presence of Medusa's integrated animus. Having stable, rational thoughts during the conflict represents her integrated animus. This is evident in her identification of the animosity in Perseus's tone: "he didn't sound like a hero. He didn't sound like a friend (120).

Medusa's acknowledgment that Perseus intends to hurt her, and her request for him to leave, demonstrate her ability to make rational decisions, which is an attribute of her integrated animus. Additionally, running away from Perseus to avoid hurting him, further asserts the integrated animus attribute of rational thinking. When Perseus finds Medusa and swings his sword to attack her, she holds the sword to protect herself, rather than attack him "all I wanted was to cast it [sword] to one side, to get Perseus out of my cave and back on his boat" (123). Perseus attempts to blame her for the situation, she replies "and I trusted you. And look who's holding a sword!" (121). This response reflects Medusa's willingness to hold Perseus accountable for his actions, further indicating the presence of her integrated animus.

2.5.6 Manifesting the Self Archetype

The self archetype is clear in Medusa's shifted thought pattern. 'Now was the time for resolution. True knowledge of myself. No fear,' (119). This emphasizes how Medusa has accepted herself after confronting her shadow and integrating it. During their duel, the newly integrated, self-aware Medusa knows better than to succumb to her shadow and accept death. Moreover, the individuation process appears to be complete in her acknowledgment of her right to survive, defend herself and protect the land that kept her safe: 'I don't want to go, Perseus. This

is my home now. You're the one who can leave'/ 'I just want to live. I just want to be me' (121).

Jung believes that the individuation can be reached with the help of external factors (442). The support of family members can serve as a catalyst for individuation. This is apparent in Medusa's sisters and how they treated her and supported her throughout her journey: 'Darling, you're not horrendous, you're our medusa' (71)/ 'you're worth dying for' (105) 'a man who truly loved you, would also love those snakes' (105). With the help of her sisters, especially Sytheno, Medusa forms her resolve to show her true identity and to share her story with Perseus. By trusting her sister, and accepting the outcome of Perseus' physical confrontation, Medusa believes that Sytheno's advice is crucial in her development: "Sytheno was right... in the end, he saved me from a lifetime of assuming that romance would rescue me' (136).

From an archetypal perspective, The Jungian psychologist Joseph L. Henderson explains in the book *Man and His Symbols* (1964) that the appearance of Athena in a dream symbolizes transcendence - the process of individuation. Athena embodies the theme of "the lonely journey," characterized by release, renunciation, and atonement (151-152). Following this dream, Medusa begins to reveal fragments of her traumatic experiences, particularly the relentless pursuit by Poseidon, indicating the liberation phase of her journey. She recalls a sensation of truth overwhelming her: "as if my mouth would pour forth truth so blinding no one listened to me would ever be the same" (43). Hence, Athena's curse is not crippling but liberating. By refusing to conceal her narrative and rejecting the victim label, Medusa embodies the renunciation phase "My story finally made mine" (127). Moreover, she demonstrates growth by agreeing with her sisters not to apologize for protecting herself, or acknowledging her right to exist: "...But when Perseus came for me in that cave with his sword, something had shifted. I was proud of who I was and I had as much right to be alive as Perseus did" (130). Her contemplation of whether she even wanted him resurrected (129) signifies her progress. Had she not undergone her individuation, she may have fixated on the trauma of turning a loved one to stone. Instead, her acknowledgment of her lack of desire to revive him and her ability to move forward symbolize the integration of her Shadow and the success of her individuation journey.

Serpents carry powerful symbolism, often linked to transcendence. Moreover, from an alchemical perspective, they represent 'prima materia'- the raw material necessary for transformation to achieve the philosopher's stone, a symbol of wholeness (Jung, 238). Medusa's snakes

embody this wholeness; her transformation mirrors the process of 'prima materia' on the path to individuation. The self-actualized Medusa expresses this blend: "Whatever I said or whatever I did was in perfect synthesis with my soul inside. As the serpent eats its tail, every day I died with the sun, but by morning I gave birth to myself again" (130). Besides, the Uroboros, a symbol of the serpent biting its own tail, represents the continuous cycle of natural processes (Jung, 190) and signifies Medusa's successful transcendence.

In another significant moment, Medusa reflects:

Raising the anchor that first sunny morning, I felt a sense of courage, a thrill of power, a slither of potential. While sailing was familiar, these feelings were new to me... I hadn't been in the water for so long—because I'd been scared of Poseidon. But he no longer frightened me (133-134).

The sea, often viewed as a symbol of the unconscious and the mother of all that lives (Jung, 369), represents Medusa's return to the depths of her inner self. By setting sail after years of isolation, she confronts her shadow and achieves individuation.

Ultimately, Medusa's journey toward individuation is a symbol of hope in the face of adversity. By confronting her shadow, she evokes her inner strength to face internal and external conflicts. Her move towards intimacy and vulnerability has helped her navigate her psyche and find meaning in her experience. Understanding that she and Perseus could not form a relationship is due to his inability to accept her for who she is and not because she is a gorgon is the epitome of hope, making Medusa a symbol of perseverance and self-acceptance.

3. Conclusion

This study has explored Medusa's journey in Jessie Burton's *Medusa: The Girl Behind the Myth* through the lens of Carl Jung's theory of individuation. Medusa's evolution from victim to empowered individual serves as a metaphor for individuation and personal growth. Initially depicted as a monster unjustly punished for her beauty, Medusa's journey illustrates the challenge of overcoming trauma and reclaiming her identity. This transformation highlights the individuation process, one that encourages an individual to confront and integrate the darker aspects of the self to achieve self-actualization. By becoming a complex female figure, in contrast to a one-dimensional monster, Medusa overcomes her traumas and emerges as a symbol of empowerment.

Symbolism plays a crucial role in her development and transcendence. At the beginning of the novel, her serpentine hair serves as

a constant reminder of injustice and assault. Additionally, it symbolizes the difficulty of navigating one's identity in a world that defines her solely by her monstrous traits. By facing and integrating her repressed shame and anger, and ultimately accepting herself, Medusa's snakes transform from symbols of fear into symbols of strength. Moreover, the sea represents liberation from psychological and societal restraints. Thus, Medusa becomes a symbol of empowerment that challenges extreme societal pressures and inner turmoil.

Burton's retelling reshapes cultural narratives by recontextualizing Medusa and reinterpreting the myths that often reduce her to a mere monster. Reframing her as a self-actualized woman encourages a re-evaluation of how myths shape our understanding of identity. Medusa's story invites readers to confront their repressed traumas and memories in order to achieve self-acceptance and integration. Ultimately, Medusa's journey reflects the struggle with one's inner darkness, serving as a reminder that within fears and vulnerabilities lies the potential for growth, understanding, and transformation.

In conclusion, Jessie Burton's retelling brings forth an empowered Medusa that aligns with contemporary themes of empowerment and self-realization. This self-actualized Medusa demonstrates that embracing one's identity can lead to a sense of wholeness and liberation.

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