



Re-reading the myth of medusa in ecological crisis

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ABSTRACT

Background: This paper reinterprets the myth of Medusa in the context of ecological crisis. By exploring the relationship between myth, the unconscious, the oppression of women, and nature, this paper attempts to reveal how hierarchical structures of domination shape the human perspective in understanding nature as an object. **Methods:** This study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach using symbolic hermeneutics grounded in Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and Hélène Cixous' feminist deconstruction. Jung's framework is used to read Medusa as an archetypal symbol of repressed fear and human–nature relations, while Cixous' perspective critically reinterprets the myth to expose patriarchal narratives and reconstruct Medusa as a metaphor for liberation and ecological consciousness. **Findings:** This paper asserts that the root of the oppression and exploitation of nature lies in the binary logic that separates humans and nature. The human narrative of nature is also a narrative of domination, in which the distance between humans and nature is constantly maintained. Humans construct the "shortest distance" through an awareness of duality, distinguishing themselves from nature while remaining connected and dependent, and the "longest distance" through an awareness of an entity that places itself outside and above nature. As a result, humans become alienated from nature and lose the ability to listen to its voice. **Conclusion:** This paper concludes that restoring the position of nature and humans requires reclaiming the language of nature, which has been usurped by technology and the scientific revolution. A new ecological consciousness must arise from the recognition that humans are not the only subjects in power, but rather part of an interconnected web of life. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** Medusa's petrifying gaze and the nature gaze that awakens consciousness become reflective metaphors, suggesting that it is not only humans who are capable of conquering; nature can also "gaze back" through disasters, famine, drought, and death.

KEYWORDS: ecology; language; myth; medusa; nature.

1. Introduction

Myths are the simplest medium for expressing human unconscious experiences. Myths always contain hidden wisdom, articulated ignorance, or temporary solutions to unanswered problems. Following Jung, as content of the unconscious, myths are always imbued with the environment's desire to express what cannot be expressed verbally (Segal, 1998). As a result, myths always convey passive absorption or symbolic meaning, flowing from the myth-creating society to the myth-receiving society. The goal is to preserve ancient knowledge, policies, and interpretations of truth. Locher (1975), further captures myths as something ideologically and politically charged, created by dominant groups to control the worldview of the societies below them. In turn, myths become collective memories, an unconscious psychological legacy that continues to be believed as a way for truth to

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manifest in us. Myths never die entirely with the demise of a power system. The central myths that once supported power remain intact. They resonate in the mindset, values, and socio-political actions of the society that inherits them (Gabriel, 2021). In other words, myths function as collective memories that bind and direct social consciousness, even after the institutions that gave birth to them no longer exist. Therefore, myths are never in a state of balanced neutrality. Myths are always created by those who are in power.

The mystical imagery in myths should not be interpreted literally, nor should it be considered a 'mere illusion' as is often assumed in the scientific world. Instead, myths must be approached symbolically as 'truths' about the psychic existence of humanity and the reality of the soul (Kalsched & Jones, 1986). The dominance of power in the creation of myths is most evident when myths are understood within a feminist framework, especially when myths are treated as ideological texts that shape ways of thinking and seeing the world. In this context, myths are not merely sacred stories or ancient truths, but cultural instruments that naturalize power relations, making unequal social structures appear normal, natural, and even divine (Chaudhari, 2024).

This understanding is very dangerous, especially when mythical narratives perpetuate hierarchies of domination and separate dualistic systems. As noted by Kumari and Ali (2025), myths accepted without balanced interpretation will widen the gap not only between male and female relationships, but also between rational and emotional, *culture and nature*, and humans and nature. Moreover, when myths are understood as imaginative projections of human perceptions in capturing the reality of their environment (Singh, 2025). The unequal depiction of hierarchical perceptions of reality causes the content of mythology to become the basis for unconscious legal exploitation of non-dominant parties. Therefore, re-reading myths through a feminist lens is not merely a matter of criticizing outdated models, but instead reconstructing history and rebuilding awareness of equality and unity. In a more radical move, (Kerr & Key, 2010) suggest reinterpreting the most primordial myths in a more neutral tone, primarily when they are rooted in spiritual beliefs. In this way, awareness of equality and unity can be reconstructed without a hierarchy of domination.

Within the ecofeminist framework, this awareness is essential because the absence of hierarchical domination in myths makes the relationship between humans and nature equal. Ecofeminism highlights the patriarchal system that places men, rationality, and culture as superior, and becomes the basis for the exploitation of nature, which is positioned as passive, emotional, and must be subjugated. Thus, the hierarchical relationship between men and women reflects the same relationship between humans and nature. Carolyn Merchant, in *The Death of Nature*, symbolizes nature as female, with a body, emotions, and reproduction, while men are associated with reason, control, and rational knowledge. In her essay, *The Scientific Revolution and The Death of Nature*, Merchant dissects scientific thinking that is always dualistic in separating humans and nature (Merchant, 2006). For example, Descartes separates *mind* and *matter*, and only humans are able to think and be conscious, while nature is considered dead matter without moral value. In the essay, Merchant also criticizes Bacon, or at least Bacon's followers, who use masculine and aggressive metaphors, referring to science as a way of subjugating and torturing nature so that it will reveal its secrets (Merchant, 1980, 2006). Merchant also asserts that, just as women today are fighting against society's domination of nature, they are also challenging modern constructions that portray nature and women as passive, weak, and subordinate.

Shiva (1988) also sharply criticizes the tradition of scientific revolution, which she considers too reductionist towards women and nature. For her, modern Western epistemology significantly reduces humanity's capacity to understand nature and reduces nature's ability to regenerate and renew itself. In *Staying Alive*, Vandhana Shiva realizes that the ecological crisis and the crisis of women stem from the same source, namely the patriarchal and capitalist paradigm that views nature and women as resources that can be exploited for economic growth and power (Shiva, 1988). Shiva also agrees with Merchant that modern civilization has shifted the organic and relational worldview to a mechanistic

and hierarchical one. Nature, which was once considered alive and productive, is now seen as an inanimate object that must be reproduced through technology.

The ecofeminist frameworks proposed by Merchant and Shiva open a new space for reinterpreting the myths produced within patriarchy. Both agree that ecofeminism is a major project to demythologize the grand narrative that places nature and women as passive and subjugated. If the scientific revolution has separated humans from nature and placed them in a relationship of domination, then myths become a symbolic mirror of the same cultural process. Myths not only record human imagination about the world (Neumann, 2023; Segal, 1998) but also preserve traces of ways of thinking that regulate who is powerful and who is subjugated (Ali, 2024). Therefore, re-reading myths is an important effort to trace how structures of domination shape symbols that become unconscious ideologies in positioning nature and women. In the context of ecofeminism, myths are re-read as textual discourses that contain traces of the relationship between women, the body, and nature that is manipulated by modern masculine logic. Through re-reading, myths can be reconstructed as spaces of resistance against discourses of domination that separate humans from nature and subjugate the feminine under the sway of rationality and power.

This paper raises the myth of Medusa in Greek mythology as an ecological metaphor that reinterprets the relationship between nature and humans. Myths, as imaginative mirrors of human consciousness, often contain power structures that shape how the world is understood. In the story of Medusa, the fear of women with destructive powers can be read as a reflection of humanity's fear of uncontrollable forces of nature. At this point, Jung and the concept of the unconscious. They are used as a way to reveal the hidden symbols and meanings of myths. Medusa is a representation of the dark side and fears of humanity that are repressed in the unconscious. The creation of Medusa is an attempt to accommodate the dark side of humanity so that it does not become toxic to the psyche. The creation of Medusa as a monster is a form of projection of that dark side, a psychological mechanism to isolate and subdue forces that cannot be understood. This project is inspired by a reading of Helene Cixous' *The Laugh of Medusa*, which deconstructs the terrifying narrative of Medusa and reinterprets her as a woman who laughs and is free (Cixous et al., 1976). Thus, this paper seeks to reinterpret Medusa within an ecological framework. The myth of Medusa is used as a metaphor for the silencing of nature by humans through technology and scientific rationality. Like Cixous, reinterpreting Medusa means reversing the established narrative of the position of nature and humans and allowing nature to laugh as a form of liberation from the confines of human domination.

2. Methods

2.1 Study design

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive design grounded in symbolic hermeneutics, integrating the psychoanalytic framework of Carl Jung and the feminist philosophical perspective of H el ene Cixous. Symbolic hermeneutics is employed to interpret myth not merely as narrative, but as a system of symbols that reflects deeper psychological structures and cultural meanings. The study is conceptual and analytical in nature, focusing on the myth of Medusa as a site where psychological, cultural, and gendered meanings intersect. By combining Jungian and Cixousian approaches, the design allows for a dual-layered interpretation: first, uncovering unconscious symbolic structures, and second, critically re-reading them through a feminist lens. In Jung's framework, the myth of Medusa is interpreted as a symbol of the unconscious, representing humanity's dark side and its fear of inexplicable forces. This approach helps to reveal the hidden meaning behind the figure of Medusa as a psychological and cultural projection. Meanwhile, Cixous' ideas are used to reinterpret Medusa as a symbol of liberation and rejection of patriarchal structures that oppress the body and nature. By combining the two, this study seeks to interpret Medusa not only as a mythological figure but also as a metaphor for a new, more equal, and vibrant relationship between humans and nature.

Firstly, the Medusa myth is examined through a Jungian lens, drawing on concepts of the unconscious, archetypes, and symbolic projection, in which Medusa is interpreted as a manifestation of the “shadow,” representing the repressed and feared dimensions of the human psyche; this stage aims to uncover how the myth encodes deep-seated anxieties toward the unknown, the irrational, and the forces of nature. Building upon this, the second stage reinterprets these findings through Cixous’ feminist perspective, repositioning Medusa not as a monstrous or terrifying figure but as a symbol of resistance, liberation, and the reclamation of the feminine body; this reading challenges patriarchal constructions that depict femininity and nature as chaotic or threatening, instead foregrounding their creative, generative, and transformative capacities. These two interpretive movements are then brought together in an integrative analysis that synthesizes psychoanalytic and feminist insights, allowing Medusa to be understood as a complex metaphor for a reimagined relationship between humans and nature—one that is more reciprocal, dynamic, and life-affirming—thereby revealing the myth as a cultural site where psychological fear and emancipatory potential coexist. To ensure analytical validity, the study employs theoretical triangulation by juxtaposing these distinct yet complementary frameworks, minimizing reductive or one-dimensional interpretations while grounding its conclusions in established theoretical principles and supported textual evidence.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 *The origin of medusa*

Medusa is a deadly and mysterious figure, yet she is also ubiquitous, with an undeniable energy that inspires artists to reiterate her likeness and story in various forms across literature, knowledge, and art (Amin, 2017). The most common interpretation of Medusa is that she is an apotropaic symbol used to protect against and ward off negative forces. Medusa also represents a dangerous threat intended to prevent other dangerous threats, an image of evil to ward off evil (Glennon, 2017).

Medusa is best known for her snake hair and her ability to turn anyone who looks at her to stone. Several works by ancient sources, such as Homer, the 8th-century BC poet Hesiod, and the 5th-century BC lyric poet Pindar, provide extensive descriptions of Medusa. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Medusa is described as one of three Gorgon sisters born to Phorkys and Ceto, ancient sea gods (Glennon, 2017). Among the three sisters, Medusa was the only beautiful and mortal woman, unlike her two sisters, who were terrifying and immortal monsters (Ali, 2024). Medusa was described as a charming woman with stunning blonde hair and elegant golden curls (Schmidt, 2021).



Fig. 1. Sculpture of bust of medusa by Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1731)

Originally, Medusa was a beautiful virgin who served at the Temple of Athena. Because of her beauty, Poseidon was attracted to Medusa and could not resist the temptation to rape her. The goddess Athena, upon learning of this, became furious with Medusa and cursed her to become a Gorgon or monster like her sisters. Medusa's beautiful face was transformed

into that of a monster with venomous snake hair, fangs resembling those of a wild boar protruding from her mouth, her tongue sticking out between her sharp teeth, and her appearance became so terrifying. Athena cursed her so that anyone who looked directly at her would turn to stone (Ali, 2024; Schmidt, 2021).

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medusa is portrayed merely as a symbol of Perseus' victory. *Metamorphoses* focuses more on Perseus' struggle to conquer Medusa and become a hero (Jeelani, 2025). In the story, Polydectes, the King of Seriphos, wants to get rid of Perseus and sends him on a dangerous mission in the hope that he will be killed. Perseus is tasked with killing Medusa, who lives in the Sacred Temple of Athena. Perseus asks the gods to help him defeat Medusa in Serpedon. There, Perseus found Medusa sleeping in a cave. Using the shield given to him by Athena, Perseus looked through the reflection of the shield so as not to look directly at her and turn to stone. Through the reflection, Perseus discovered Medusa's position and beheaded her using the Adamantine Sword given to him by Zeus (Diver, 2020).

Once Medusa's head was severed, two creatures emerged from her neck: Pegasus and Chrysaor. Upon learning of Medusa's death, her two sisters became enraged and pursued Perseus. The pursuit by Stheno and Euryale is described in Pindar's *Twelfth Pythian Ode*, which recounts how Perseus escaped the two Gorgons with the winged sandals given to him by the god Hermes and the helmet of invisibility given to him by the god Hades. However, even death could not extinguish Medusa's power, and Perseus had to store her severed head in a special bag, called a kybisis (Glennon, 2017), strong enough to contain it. During his journey, Perseus used Medusa's head to turn his enemies into stone and save Princess Andromeda from a sea monster before presenting it to Athena for safekeeping.

3.2 Jung, Cixous, and myth

It must be acknowledged that this section is the most challenging part of this paper. This section must serve as a bridge between Cixous' ideas in *The Laugh of Medusa* and the discussion of the ecological crisis. This is because, fundamentally, ecological ideas do not live explicitly in Cixous' works. Cixous's thinking stems from the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan, which defines the world based on the symbolic phallus (Rine, 2010). Cixous constructs feminist theory as an attempt to dismantle the established world order that robs women of their experiences. Using Derrida's deconstruction, Cixous seeks to restore women as active subjects who stand on their own, who have long been understood as passive and objectified. In her work, the first thing Cixous criticizes is the binary logic that divides reality into two distinct opposites.

In this work, the first question posed by Cixous is "*Where is she?*". This question is not a geographical one, but rather an existential question that asks where women have been positioned in reality all this time. Women have never been present as subjects who tell their own stories; they have always been told by dominant subjects. This is related to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, which places the formation of the subject in relation to *the phallus* as the primary signifier in language (Webb & Sells, 1995). Cixous notes that women and men enter the symbolic order through language as a structure. However, *phallogentric* language is considered to have a patriarchal bias because it centers on *the phallus* as a male signifier. Therefore, following and then criticizing Lacan, women have no place in language. *Phallogentric* language is unable to describe women's experiences, so women's selves and experiences are not heard (Nye, 1986).

For Cixous, a binary view that rigidly separates two distinct poles has already been established. In her work, Cixous strongly criticizes Freud as the mastermind who perpetuates binary oppositions, the separation between activity and passivity, culture and nature, masculine and feminine, rational and emotional. Cixous argues that these binary oppositions always contain a hidden patriarchal system that not only differentiates but also classifies hierarchically. Women are always the other of the other, making it impossible for them to tell their own stories. Cixous carefully observes that this patriarchal hierarchical concept has entered the unconscious system, and it must be acknowledged that it will be very difficult to rectify.

In the tradition of psychoanalysis, the unconscious is believed to be an eternal condition that is embedded and reproduced throughout life. Freud believed that the unconscious determines the direction of an individual's life. The unconscious will never become conscious, because it always lies dormant deep within the human psyche. However, the unconscious can emerge in other forms as symptoms of psychosis, such as *slips of the tongue*, dreams, symbols, and somatic symptoms, which are described as the unconscious seeping to the surface (Błocian, 2015). On the other hand, Jung expanded on this understanding by explaining the unconscious as the collective heritage of humankind (Neumann, 2023). For Jung, all humans have similar unconscious content that transcends geography and history. The unconscious always seeks a way to surface in an effort to balance the psyche. Jung captures the content of the unconscious as universal and symbolic patterns in myths, culture, and religion (Kalsched & Jones, 1986).. In *Jung on Mythology*, myths are manifestations of the unconscious mind to form a concrete body (Segal, 1998). Myths always contain symbolizations of human desires, hopes, and hidden thoughts. Through myths, the contents of the unconscious acquire form, body, and narrative. They become living symbols within society.

Through Jung's perspective on the unconscious, Cixous's efforts and difficulties are easier to understand. Cixous's struggle is to dismantle the patriarchal order that has long lived and resided in the unconscious, and Jung emphasizes that the unconscious is very difficult to change because it has been accumulated since humans have existed. However, change can be achieved by redefining the established order through the reconstruction of lived mythic narratives. Both agree that the unconscious cannot be erased, but it can be acknowledged and rewritten through symbolic narratives, myths, and language. The two are in harmony in explaining how difficult it is to dismantle the order that has been neatly arranged throughout human development. In this case, Jung provides a framework that shapes the dominant way of thinking that has existed long before humans realized it, stored in the unconscious, and Cixous wants to reveal that part of the unconscious as something that must be changed. Therefore, Jung serves as the foundation for reading the archetypal structure in myths, while Cixous is used as a deconstructive tool to uncover the patriarchal bias hidden behind established structures.

The most fundamental error in reading myths lies in the tendency to interpret symbols rigidly as if their meanings were fixed. Jung shows that symbols and myths are actually living forms of the unconscious that are constantly transforming (Adamski, 2011; Neumann, 2023). Myths are the latent language of the human soul that seeks to balance itself through symbolic representation. Therefore, reading myths means reading the ever-changing dynamics of the psyche (Homans, 1969).

However, Cixous emphasizes that the language used to interpret myths is not neutral. Inherited language is phallogocentric, dismissing women's bodies and erasing non-masculine experiences from the symbolic order (Rine, 2010). If, for Jung, symbols are the path to the collective unconscious, then for Cixous, symbols are spaces that are represented and silenced. This is where the problem of reading the myth of Medusa begins; she is narrated by a linguistic structure that is hostile to her own body. Medusa is written not as a subject, but as men's fear of an incomprehensible power (Bray, 2004). In this case, uniting Jung and Cixous means not merely adding psychoanalytic and feminist layers, but bringing together two forms of consciousness, namely archetypal consciousness and body consciousness. Both open the way for the repression that occurs in myths to be not only repression against women, but also against the natural dimensions embedded in the human soul. The unconsciousness described by Jung and the symbolic repression criticized by Cixous are two faces of the same exclusion, the exclusion of aspects of life that are wild, disorderly, unrecognized, and frightening.

3.3 Recognition and reconstruction

From this point, the reading of Medusa begins to move towards the realm of ecology. If the female body in *The Laugh of the Medusa* is a body that must be rewritten in order to be

present in language, then the body of nature is a body that must be reread in order to be present again in human consciousness. Nature, like women, has been a victim of an oppressive and divisive phallogocentric system. The domination of the female body in the symbolic realm is a mirror of the domination of the body of nature in the material realm.

In this context, the figure of Medusa can be interpreted as the most complex symbol of the relationship between humans and nature. A relationship shrouded in fear, rejection, and the desire to conquer. Since her creation, Medusa has been a representation of *the human shadow* (Omran, 2025). Medusa was deliberately created to embody human fear, an unwanted feeling that must be expelled from the human soul. The shadow is a hidden, repressed part of the self that is inferior mainly (Perry & Tower, 2023). It contains various qualities, capacities, and potentials that individuals want to remove from their consciousness. Individuals do not want to reveal their shortcomings and inferiority, so these feelings are buried in the psyche. However, the soul cannot hold these feelings forever, so the mechanism that is carried out is to release feelings of inadequacy and inferiority into a different form (Boscaljon, 2024). The creation of the Medusa myth also stems from the exact mechanism. Men acknowledge that women are far more powerful than themselves. They have an excess within themselves that men do not have. Men's feelings of inferiority are transformed into mythical narratives that place women as inferior and men as powerful and superior. The myth of Medusa is a manifestation of men's acknowledgment of their shortcomings, which they do not want to consciously and directly admit (Sakulwattana, 2013).

In an ecological reading, Medusa is a depiction of nature that is being subjugated because of its excess. Humans have come to recognize and agree that they are the ones in power and the ones to depend on. However, behind this, humans realize that it is humans who are powerless and always dependent on others. Deep down, humans recognize their inferiority, but are reluctant to admit their weaknesses. Humans seek alternatives to cover up their own weaknesses by placing nature, on which they depend, in a position where they are dependent on it. Humans portray nature as powerless to show that humans are powerful over everything.

This cowardly nature, unwilling to admit their shortcomings and dependence on nature, grew stronger after humans discovered technology. This discovery further enhanced humanity's nature as rulers and placed nature as an object of exploitation. Technology has widened the gap between humans and nature and trapped them in an inevitable dualism of domination. With the ability to manipulate and control the environment, humans began to view nature not as part of themselves, but as something external that must be controlled, measured, and exploited for their own interests. In this view, what was once a reciprocal relationship has turned into a dominant one. Humans are no longer part of the web of life, but rather the center that subjugates everything to the logic of rationality and efficiency.

This view finds its historical roots in Carolyn Merchant's analysis. Merchant argues that before the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century, nature was considered the mother of all things, a cosmic figure that nurtured, yet was wild and full of mystery. Nature was personified as a feminine entity that had the power to create, grow, and heal. However, with the emergence of modern science, this metaphor was slowly replaced by a new paradigm that placed nature as an object that could be understood, analyzed, and controlled. The Scientific Revolution shaped a new imagination of the world and defined nature as a large machine that worked mechanically and could therefore be engineered by the human mind. As nature "revealed its secrets" through scientific experiments and observations, humans felt they had gained moral legitimacy to control it (Merchant, 1980, 2006). Nature was no longer understood as *a mother* who gave birth and nurtured, but as a resource that could be exploited without limits.

The conception of the Earth as a living, sentient body was slowly replaced by the view that it was merely passive matter subject to instrumental logic. Merchant explains that the female Earth was once the center of an organic cosmology that emphasized the interconnectedness of humans, society, and the cosmos. Within that framework, everything in the world is interdependent and supports shared life, just as the organs in the human

body work for the sake of wholeness. However, this cosmology was destroyed when the Scientific Revolution and market culture replaced the principle of interdependence with the principle of domination and competition (Merchant, 2006).

Meanwhile, through Cixous, the identity of nature must be reclaimed through repeated re-narratives. The image of Medusa as a terrifying monster must be dismantled. Medusa should not be perceived as cursed but as laughing. Her laughter represents liberation from male patriarchy, which has constructed her as both terrifying and monstrously beautiful. Nature should not be understood as passive or subject to exploitation; rather, it must be recognized as living and dynamic. The language of nature must be restored so that it can articulate its own narrative, allowing nature to speak and laugh as an expression of freedom and an acknowledgment of its agency.

Humans condemn nature out of jealousy that nature can stand on its own with its naturally formed mechanisms. Humans feel that nature was created independently, while humans are always dependent on nature. Within the hierarchical framework of the Anthropocene, nothing can be higher than humans as the ecological center (Boersma, 2022). Therefore, nature must be reduced to something that depends on humans. Nature must submit to humans because, without humans, nature cannot grow. Without human pollination, forests will not recover.

Nature's language has been appropriated and silenced by human noise. Nature does not have time to speak; it only whispers, but the noise of humans silences it too. Medusa does not cry; she laughs, but her laughter is silenced by the narrative of monsterization. Nature is actually crying silently, but it is never heard because nature is silenced by the narrative of "must be exploited". The rustling of the wind, the chirping of birds, and the natural sound of water are rarely heard. The sound of falling trees, broken branches, and falling twigs is another form of neglected laughter. The silence of nature, the faint sound of birds, and murky water are signs that nature is crying. This is where nature reveals its language.

The Laugh of Medusa presents an effort to reclaim the language and writing of women's bodies from the constraints of domination rooted in patriarchal dualism, including the divisions between male and female, rational and emotional, body and soul, and culture and nature. Cixous argues that women must reclaim their own language and describe their bodies and experiences in it, free from subjugating language. By speaking in their own language, women reclaim ownership of their bodies and experiences.

The same goes for nature. The language of nature has been appropriated, constraining it within human discourse and the framework of the Scientific Revolution. Nature has not been given the opportunity to tell its own story. Humans have never captured the body and experience of nature, because nature and humans have different languages. Ecofeminism captures that those who are able to capture the language and feelings of "the other" are those who have similar experiences of oppression that are on the spectrum of experiences that are in harmony (Gaard, 2010). At the very least, such sensitivity is necessary to speak from a position of equality. From an ecofeminist perspective, women are in a position equivalent to nature, which is exploited and trapped within a patriarchal framework. The domestication of women and the domination of men are described as equivalent to the exploitation of nature and human anthropocene capitalism. Nature is rendered powerless as a passive object that exists only to be exploited, not as an equal entity, as a living being that also wants to live.

3.4 *Beheaded nature*

The language of nature always has something unique, something that can never truly be touched, grasped, or mastered by human language, even by women with all the assumptions mentioned above. Nature and humans are different in their overall interactions; there is an untouchable distance between the two, a distance that cannot be fully bridged by language or knowledge. The shortest distance between humans and nature

stems from an awareness of duality, and the longest distance stems from an awareness of entity.



Fig. 2. Sculpture of Perseus and The Head of Medusa by Benvenuto Cellini (1554)

At the shortest distance, humans and nature are separated by an awareness that distinguishes between the active and the passive. This shortest distance assimilates the relational connection between humans and nature as something different, yet leaves a feeling of dependence. Humans can identify themselves as *I* and *not I*. Humans realize that they are not trees, not water, not grass, nor wild animals. Nevertheless, humans realize that within themselves there are such characteristics that have been transformed into part of a bodily order controlled by consciousness. This distance is not merely an existential distance but also a geographical distance, how far humans are from nature. This geographical distance affects the relationship between human consciousness and dependence on nature. When humans have direct proximity to nature, the interaction that is built is intense, and humans will find it easier to sympathize with nature. Thus, nature is not merely an external object, but part of the human experience of life. When the physical distance from nature is reduced, ecological awareness will increase through reconnecting with nature (Eli, 2013).

On the other hand, the greatest distance between humans and nature is the awareness of being an autonomous entity separate from nature, with humans standing above nature. This is where awareness turns into awareness of entities. Humans view themselves as the center of existence, while nature is reduced to an object that can be controlled, utilized, and exploited. This awareness is the pinnacle of anthropocentrism, which severs the possibility of spiritual connection between humans and nature. Human consciousness that places itself above nature is a form of alienation from the ecological self (Kerr & Key, 2010). This has unconscious implications for the motivation to preserve nature based on human interests. The struggle to preserve nature is not based on the awareness that nature also has a will to live, but rather that nature must continue to live so that humans can use it to continue living.

Perseus, who beheaded Medusa, is a representation of humans who destroy nature for their own needs. Perseus is considered a hero for killing a terrifying monster and saving humans and gods from Medusa's power. Medusa never had any dealings with Perseus or anyone else who came to the temple where she lived. She only wanted to live peacefully with her sisters. She had accepted the curse of the goddess Athena even though it was not her fault. However, Perseus came and killed her while she was sleeping without resistance. Her sisters were angry and chased Perseus, but he escaped with the help of Athena and Hermes.

Nature is always beheaded by humans, silenced, given no chance to fight back. Nature has become passive in human minds so that humans can do anything to it. Humans behead peaceful nature to prove that they are heroes who save lives. Humans always justify the exploitation of nature by claiming it is for a better life, for the sustainability of humanity, and for technological progress.

Just like Perseus, who beheaded Medusa and from her birth came Pegasus and Chrysaor, humans behead nature with the belief that new life will be born from the wound. In every exploitation of nature, deforestation, land excavation, and river conquest, humans

always argue for the sake of life, for the sake of a sustainable future. However, humans forget that every birth from a wound will bear the trauma of its origin. Pegasus and Chrysaor may symbolize freedom, but it is a freedom born from the destruction of their mother's body. Such is the development of the world today. Life unfolds upon the body of the earth that has been cut, beheaded, and depleted, to the point that nature has lost its original form. Humans behead nature so that they can live longer, but they also behead themselves and sever their awareness of their connection to nature. By continuing to behead nature from the body of the earth, humans deliberately sever the chain that connects them to nature. By continuing to behead nature from the body of the earth, humans deliberately cut off communication with nature. Humans take back the language of nature, because when humans behead nature, it is not only its body that is separated, but also its voice.

Nature loses its language, loses its way of speaking, leaving only the silent echoes of mountains, water, and wind that have been narrowed down to data, formulas, and numbers. Humans often assume an understanding of nature, yet what is perceived may merely be the echo of human interpretations. It may be more appropriate to refrain from hastily defining nature, recognizing that understanding does not require imposing fixed meanings on how nature speaks. A wise yet straightforward approach is to allow the unknown to remain as it is, and to let nature speak for itself without human mediation. Putting the unutterable into words can actually be a form of unconscious repression, such as reducing the language of nature to human language. Allowing nature to be what it is is the best way to place it as strong and independent. Let nature speak through the body, not through human language. Nature continuously expresses itself through signs as a form of language. A noisy nature is a laughing nature, and a silent nature is a nature that cries in silence, its body torn apart by machines and humans.

3.5 *Nature gaze*

Meaningful engagement with the language of nature remains elusive when lived experience with and for nature is absent. Genuine understanding is further constrained by the persistence of anthropocentric perspectives that position nature as inferior to humans. Such a stance raises a critical question: must recognition emerge only when nature responds with force, evoking the image of Medusa, whose gaze petrified those who confronted her? The possibility that nature may now return the gaze toward humanity invites a reconsideration of this relationship.

Jung and Cixous suggest that Medusa symbolizes humanity's fear of forces that remain unacknowledged. Medusa's gaze, which turns humans to stone, is often understood negatively. This gaze causes humans to stop moving, to stop running from reality, and to face the consequences of their own actions. For Jung, Medusa, who stares and turns people to stone, is a representation of humanity's fear of seeing itself. They are afraid of the reality that is known but hidden. Humans basically know that what they do will have an impact on themselves. Medusa, who stares, represents the shadow of humanity staring back at humanity itself. For Cixous, Medusa's gaze is a moment of courage to challenge those who condemn. Medusa, who stares back, is Medusa who has dared to reclaim her own language, who challenges back those who have made her an object. Medusa, who is petrified, is a depiction of Medusa who has become an active subject, free from the patriarchal narrative in her story.

Throughout this time, perception has been framed as a one-sided act in which humans observe nature, while overlooking the possibility that nature, too, gazes back. Nature can be understood as possessing the capacity to return that gaze toward humanity. Nature is always seen, measured, and categorized, but it is not really allowed to look back. When nature stares back, humans turn to stone, stop moving, and are trapped in their own fear. Nature, gazing back at humans, can shake human consciousness and force them to realize they are not the sole rulers but part of a wider network of life. Nature's gaze is present in climate change, murky rivers, droughts, the loss of natural resources, declining food production, and ultimately, hunger and death. All of this can be understood as nature's way

of looking back at humans who have been staring without listening for too long. Ecological disasters can be understood as nature's way of returning the gaze, reminding humanity that the relationship that has been constructed is not one of domination but of interdependence. Nature's silence may manifest through conditions of suffering, deprivation, and scarcity, revealing the consequences of this imbalance.

When openness toward nature is cultivated, and the boundaries between humans and the natural world are set aside, it becomes possible to listen to nature and observe it more attentively. Is it laughing or crying, is it speaking or being silenced? As in the story of Medusa, petrification is not just a punishment, but a moment of self-reflection. When humans freeze under nature's gaze, they are confronted with their own fragility, with the limits of their dependent existence. Nature is no longer perceived as a source of life to be exploited, but as a mirror reflecting a lost human identity. An awareness must be cultivated that the relationship between humans and nature is characterized by a reciprocal gaze.

Perseus never actually saw Medusa. He used a shiny shield to determine Medusa's position and behead her. Contemporary engagement with nature is marked by a reluctance to confront it directly, shaped by a fear of losing control. Nature is frequently mediated through data and reports rather than encountered in its immediacy. Direct sensory connection has diminished, as the ground is interpreted through numerical representation, and the river is understood primarily through measurements of its discharge rather than through lived experience.

Like Perseus, observation is mediated through a shield of reflection. But nature cannot be understood through reflection; it can only be understood through encounter. Direct engagement must be undertaken without intermediaries, by setting aside the technological and symbolic shields that create a sense of safety from the very forces that sustain life. Direct contact with nature is not merely an ecological act, but also an expression of the courage to be fully present in a world from which distance has been created. Suppose humanity's gaze upon nature is one of domination. In that case, nature's gaze is one that restores equality, forcing humanity to realize that it, too, is an object in the eyes of the world.

4. Conclusion

Through a reinterpretation of the Medusa myth in relation to the environmental crisis, this article asserts that nature is subjugated within an oppressive hierarchical structure. Nature loses its identity as an active subject and is redefined by humans as a passive object that can be exploited. This stems from a perspective that separates humans from nature and places one above the other. In this context, the myth of Medusa becomes a mirror for human arrogance that wants to conquer everything that is considered wild, disorderly, and uncontrollable, both women and nature. Perseus' beheading of Medusa becomes an allegory of human actions that behead nature in order to give birth to life, without realizing that life born from wounds also inherits its original trauma.

The myth of Medusa is used as a symbolic representation of humanity's unconsciousness of its unacknowledged fears. Through Jung's interpretation of symbols, Medusa is understood as a symbol of humanity's *shadow* fears of the unspeakable. Medusa reflects the fear of something that cannot be controlled because of its power. Therefore, Medusa was created as an unconscious manifestation of men's desire to avoid their fearful side. From Jung's perspective, Medusa is the embodiment of men's unwillingness to acknowledge women's excessiveness, thus creating a mythical narrative that subjugates women. From this, the narrative of nature that must be exploited and its resources drained stems from humanity's unacknowledged fear of nature's excessiveness. Through Cixous, the identity of nature is reclaimed and restored as an active subject. *The Laugh of Medusa* provides an important framework for deconstructing the narrative of human domination over nature. By restoring the narrative of nature as an active subject, the anthropocentric position of humans can be reversed. Nature is not inherently powerless; rather, it has been rendered powerless through human actions, and thus calls for closer and more attentive engagement.

Medusa is not a terrifying monster; she laughs as proof of liberation. Nature is not an object to be conquered, nor is it mute; it can laugh and speak through birds, water, air, soil, food, and coolness. Medusa, who petrifies humans with her gaze, is an image of nature looking back at humans for their actions. Nature demands accountability for actions that oppress it. Nature's gaze is a reflective gaze that returns humanity's perspective and position in nature. It is the moment when nature demands recognition of its existence as a subject, not an object.

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