

From Postfeminism to Foucault: The Revival of Medusa in Emma Hamm's *Becoming Medusa*

Estabraq Yahya Mohammed

School of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

Amirhossein Vafa*

School of Literature and Humanities, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

Abstract—This paper examines Hamm's *Becoming Medusa* (2021) through the lenses of postfeminism and Foucault's theories of power and agency, foregrounding the significance of revisionist retelling. Since the 1970s, female protagonists like Medusa have gained popularity due to the postfeminist reimagining of Greek mythology. The reclaiming of Medusa's narrative has undergone a series of shifts in the perception of her character, moving from a position of victimisation and monstrosity to one of agency and empowerment, as evidenced in this novel. Challenging the postfeminist paradigm and considering Foucault's ideas, the paper studies the revival of Medusa as the creation of a new identity. Foucault's critique of power cultivates a detailed view of the interrelations between gender and power that escapes the assumption that oppressing women is caused in an unassuming way by men's power. This study's significance lies in presenting a more in-depth and innovative exploration of *Becoming Medusa* by presenting a different version of Medusa as a real woman who is changed from passive to agent. By intertwining these mentioned theories, a more comprehensive analysis of the context and the authors' intentions transforms their current viewpoints to the readers and audiences presented. The importance of this topic also lies in achieving global postfeminism through Medusa's revival from Greek mythology to the contemporary age.

Index Terms—postfeminism, power theory, Foucault, *Becoming Medusa*, Emma Hamm

I. INTRODUCTION

Becoming Medusa is the latest in a series of retellings of Greek myths. It was written by Emma Hamm and published in 2021. The study's selection of this novel was based on its distinctive portrayal of Medusa. No matter the medium, she is always portrayed as a villainous monster, negating Athena's monstrous transformation. When Poseidon tries to seduce and subsequently rape her in the Temple of Athena, Medusa is transformed into the terrifying monster we know today, with hair made of snakes. *Becoming Medusa* is the first fictional work to depict Medusa as a fully realised human female with a social life and romantic interests. The novel's realism comes from the protagonist's humanity rather than fantastical elements. Being raped transforms her into a monster who can turn the flesh of others into stone. According to the myth, Medusa was beheaded by the Greek hero Perseus. She loses her pregnancy, reputation, and life because of a man's actions.

Medusa consciously distanced herself from her social circle, beloved friends, and family, turning down a proposed marriage to dedicate herself to serving Athena in the temple. She had a pure heart, a supportive family, and an endless desire for new experiences. As she made new social connections and took on additional responsibilities, she gradually adapted to her surroundings and found contentment until Poseidon appeared and raped her. Athena did nothing to right the wrong that had been done to Medusa. Instead, she turned her into a monster, guaranteeing that no man would ever touch her again. Athena exiles her from the temple, imposing a curse that renders her unappealing to any man's gaze henceforth. The Greek myth hero Perseus discovered her and cut off her head as though it belonged to him. It is a story of Medusa's suffering, release, and recovery. This novel has far surpassed the impact of any heroic saga— it presents Medusa as a woman's journey through suffering to ultimate happiness and love. This rendition of the tale of Medusa is a remarkable portrayal. It casts heroes differently and was written from the anti-hero and ostensible antagonist's point of view. It is adored the tragic love story of Alexios and Medusa. It is seen in Medusa's resilience in the face of adversity and Alexios's unwavering devotion to her despite her monstrous appearance. Alexios loved Medusa in both her monstrous and human forms.

Since she is portrayed as a villainous monster, viewers and readers will have no sympathy for her. A plethora of articles exploring Medusa from a variety of angles already exist. Peruses, the hero of the myth, tries to prove his bravery by killing a pregnant woman who has been mistreated, abused, and cursed. There is a widespread belief among postfeminists that Poseidon's misogyny was the seed from which Medusa grew. As Cixous points out, the myth of Medusa misrepresents her (1976). In the myth, she is killed by a hero. She is blamed and punished for a man's crime, but she is also murdered while pregnant. Her portrayal as a monster and antagonist in such horrific imagery will not elicit sympathy from readers or viewers. Many articles have been written on the Medusa myth from various perspectives. The myth shows a man,

* Corresponding Author. Email: a.vafa@shirazu.ac.ir

Peruses, trying to prove his bravery by killing a pregnant woman who has been mistreated, abused and cursed. Armstrong indicates that many postfeminists believe that Medusa was born out of Poseidon's (2004) misogyny.

Even though she was brought back to life in several works, her history as a real woman was almost forgotten. Medusa's monstrous hair and gaze were magnified even though her image was taken to represent a rebellious or mighty woman. The significance and novelty of this study lie in its interdisciplinary approach, which draws on postfeminist perspectives and Foucault's concepts of power and agency to investigate Medusa, the human, for the first time. In the novel's prologue, Olympia, a woman escaping an arranged marriage, succeeds in finding refuge; however, the novel's tone shifts when Xenia drastically begins to tell the story of Medusa, seeking to correct the portrayal of Medusa as a terrifying antagonist in earlier stories. The study departed from previous research by embarking on this journey of discovery, which alters our perspective of Medusa.

Helene Cixous, a French feminist writer of Algerian descent, became a famous author in the 1970s. She was born in Oran, Algeria, on June 5, 1937, and her reputation is primarily based on her contributions as a feminist literary theorist who, through her writings, established that both literature and philosophy perpetuate patriarchal dominance. Her article *The Laugh of Medusa* (1976) represents the ideas pertinent to this article, where Cixous argues that the appearance of Medusa's face with snakes for eyes is a misperception. Cixous describes Medusa's face as "horrendous" because the male gaze has directly decided it. Scottish poet Carol Ann Duffy (1999) portrayed Medusa as a victim in the twentieth century.

According to Cixous, Medusa's joyful and disruptive laughter can inspire new feminist writing approaches. Cixous investigates the female body and sexuality concerning writing for the following reasons: women are alienated from their bodies and sexual identities, sexual orientation informs and enhances writing, and both are uniquely female. Until the unnecessary taboo on women's physical desires and sexuality is lifted, women will continue to feel shame about their bodies and writing, preventing them from expressing or claiming all that is beautiful in their experiences and writing. Moreover, most importantly, Cixous (1976) asserts that once women reclaim their bodies, they will reclaim what is rightfully theirs. The result is a more confident woman. *The Laugh of the Medusa*, written by a woman for women, calls for women to reclaim control of their bodies and, by extension, their desires and identities (Cixous, 1976). While Cixous focused on Medusa's myths, Duffy focused on Medusa's transformation. Duffy's (1999) poem does not deny Medusa's appearance or ability to turn men into stone. However, Duffy uses Medusa's monstrosity to make her a victim. Duffy portrays Medusa as cursed, expressing her displeasure upon seeing a dragon instead of a Gorgon in the mirror. Many feminist authors have misunderstood Medusa; for example, Cixous claims men abused her. Like Duffy, others intend to highlight Medusa's curse (Duffy, 1999). Some postfeminists claim that women's anxiety stems from doubts about their abilities. Women would be more accessible to express themselves and see Medusa as beautiful if they stopped worrying about men's thoughts. Rape culture refers to the widespread belief that male sexual abuse is common. As a result, many believe, quite problematically, that women are partly to blame for the assaults perpetrated against them.

Pratt (1994) has claimed that the Medusa archetype has been gynophobic since the Greeks adopted it. According to her, some of the most famous Romantic and Victorian poets discuss Medusa with horror. Male Greco-Roman snake interpretations are more pejorative than earlier depictions (Pratt, 1994). The Feminist theologian Catherine Keller analysed the myth of Medusa and her "hero" Perseus by stating that Medusa is a terrible mother. However, Medusa represents "a great goddess whose power is life-giving and generative" (Keller, 1986, p. 50).

Moniza Alvi explains why she based her work on the Europa myth: "A universalising strategy would be to use the myth representing rape symbolically" (Alvi, 2008, p. xviii). The poem could become dreamlike and surreal if it focused on feelings rather than morality or accountability. As a result of the emphasis on Medusa's suppressed nature in literature and art, Perseus has been inverted as the villain. This shift in perspective has led to modern literature's reimagining of Medusa. In authorised literary works like Dante's *Divine Comedy* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Medusa has been portrayed as a monster femme fatale (Alvi, 2008).

Matt (2012) has discussed that Medusa's early and late stories are undeniably distinct. Hesiod's sparse description of Medusa leaves out her terrifying gaze. This crucial trait gives her immense power and makes her a scary and fascinating figure. Duffy (1999) mentions that readers or audiences generally cannot be sympathetic to Medusa "after erasing her human past and viewing her as the monster." She claims that the tale of Medusa shows that "looking at the Medusa straight on reveals a figure of strength and beauty that should be celebrated. Instead of defending her loyal priestess, Athena blamed the victim. Only men's lustful gazes and society's failure to comprehend Medusa's story allow her monstrous image to exist.

Cixous' desire for a "new world" for women is part of a broader trend of feminist approaches to myth. According to Lillian Doherty, Homer's *Odyssey* is a classic example of postfeminists using androcentric texts to imagine a world free of such constraints (2015). Many Greek myths associated with Hesperia represented values that had no place in the patriarchal world in which Greece found itself (Zajko & Leonard, 2006). In Duffy's poem "Medusa", the title character is a contemporary wife who reasonably believes her husband is unfaithful. In contrast, the poem follows her transformation from a lovely bride into a hideous, murderous monster. Both tragic and terrifying, this new persona highlights the destructive power of hostility, resentment, and suspicion. According to Duffy (1999), Medusa's post-rape experience echoes the survivor's experience millennia later. These responses predate European culture's definition of the issue. The trauma of her assault dehumanises her until the petrified reaction to her suffering transforms her into a tool or weapon.

Today's survivors of sexual assault are not monsters, but their pain is often only valuable to those who exploit and interpret it (Duffy, 1999).

By interweaving the theories of postfeminism and the Foucauldian view of power, a broader analysis of Hamm's context and intentions transforms her current views on the character of Medusa for the reader. The importance of this paper lies in understanding the multiple shifts in the representation of Medusa as an example of the subordination and castration complex of women, the female gaze, as opposed to the male gaze. Most importantly, the two theories work together to help us understand the experience of the rape victim's saviour and the process of healing. Unlike the selected novel, the previous portrayal of Medusa as a monster or antagonist will not elicit sympathy from readers. This study focuses on how cultural discursive practices and performances contribute to, resist, and transform social power relations around gender, sexuality, and the agency of female characters through the interplay of myth and realism.

The paper tries to answer the following questions: 1. How is Medusa transformed from a passive being to an agent in *Becoming Medusa* (2021)? 2. How does the novel *Becoming Medusa* represent the concepts of power and agency? 3. How does postfeminism affect the protagonists' identity as postfeminist Medusa? To answer these questions, the paper is divided into three main sections. The first deals with Medusa as a postfeminist character, and the second presents a theoretical view of Foucault's theory of power and agency. At the same time, the third part completes the other two by linking them to Foucault's concept of power to justify the representation of Medusa as a human being. Previously, Medusa had been sexualised to the extreme, making her both a sexual object and a terrifying threat, with the implication that men should conquer and control her. Foucault's critique of power, the body and sexuality has attracted the attention of postfeminists. As the title suggests, the protagonist, Medusa, undergoes a metamorphosis throughout the novel. Now, for the first time, readers learn about Medusa's past - how she was once a beautiful young girl, a beloved lover, a devoted priestess and a confident, independent woman - before she underwent her horrific transformation into the monster she is known as today. The support she received was a curse and victim shaming. However, she is recovering from her trauma and seems to have more honour than the god she once worshipped.

II. THE POSTFEMINIST LENS: REIMAGINING MEDUSA'S IN *BECOMING MEDUSA*

Feminism refers to a social movement that aims at terminating sexism, sexist mistreatment, and subjugation of women, and postfeminism emphasises such features as freedom, choice, and agency (Hooks, 2000). Postfeminism can be assumed as a reaction to paradoxes and deficiencies of feminism as an important and meaningful way of comprehending the rehabilitated associations between feminism and the dominant beliefs regarding femininity in society. He also asserts that postfeminism concurrently integrates, reviews, and socialises diverse facets of feminism in ways that renounce feminism as unrelated and objectionable (Hooks, 2000).

According to Greek mythology, Medusa, one of the three atrocious Gorgons, is generally referred to as a flying humanoid female with many live poisonous snakes, a hair-looking woman; she was first punished by Athena, who malformed her lovely hair by changing it into horrifying snakes because of having been raped by Poseidon in Athena's place of worship. Medusa was then decapitated by Perseus, who used her head as an armament before he gave it to Athena (Seelig, 2002).

Thus, men victimise Medusa, and her punishment by Athena is due to what happened to her by Poseidon. Medusa's story resembles many other myths in which women are considered bothersome, whereas men are portrayed as powerful and ruling figures. Even Perseus, who killed Medusa and used her head as a weapon, is described as a hero. This issue emphasises the patriarchal and misogynist themes in Greek mythology. Holland (2007) declares that misogyny has existed in all societies worldwide since the very beginning—Greek and Roman cultures initiated hatred toward women.

This theory can also be used to understand better many female characters, including the female protagonist of *Becoming Medusa*, which is produced to empower women through their representation of femininity. What is noticed in this work's female protagonists proves the evolution of female characters. They are no longer passive or obedient and can sometimes be very dangerous. Despite being based on old mythological characters, *Becoming Medusa* gives voice to the glitches and complications of women living in the modern era. Thus, it presents powerful narratives to be adapted and restructured into the portrayals of present-day women.

Becoming Medusa can be read in terms of the revisions that embrace substantial alterations in the storyline, the dialogues, and the characterisation of the protagonists; this issue has led to the formation of different stories that are interesting for present-day readers and viewers. *Becoming Medusa* allows the researchers to study the lives of postfeminist females, particularly those of Medusa. Such representations of powerful female characters may also be a reaction to female audiences being overlooked by many authors and filmmakers. Whether male or female, the writers and directors care about the audience's identification with the characters, and females play a significant role in this respect.

Along with Olympia's story and her struggle to adjust to her new life, we also get a fantastic account of Medusa's life before the curse and the start of a love story that transcends the confines of mortal life. Medusa turned down a marriage proposal and other personal ties to devote herself to the Athena temple. After moving to a new city and starting a new life with a new group of friends and responsibilities, she was settling in when Poseidon visited her. One fateful evening, she would lose everything that meant the world to her. Athena casts her out of the temple with a curse that guarantees no man will ever want her again.

Nonetheless, Perseus is interested in her. He is a future hero, the son of Zeus, and obtaining Medusa's head is a significant step toward immortality. Do not mind the fact that his friend was once Medusa's and the one who proposed marriage. It was thought that putting Medusa to work in the temple of Athena would protect her from harm. Because her mother was afraid that her daughter's stunning beauty would spell disaster for her, she would find out soon enough that her apprehension had been well-founded. After catching his first glimpse of her, Poseidon knew he had to have her—an instant recognition. There was one evening that would change everything.

Moreover, from that moment on, nothing would be the same. Even though Medusa does not want to be a part of what happened that night between her and Poseidon, Athena still curses her so that no man will ever want her again because of what happened. Although Perseus knows Medusa's monstrous nature, he still ignores her. Perseus cannot get over her, no matter how many other women enter his life. Thus, he sticks by Medusa as a friend until he is offered the chance to wed a princess and assume his birthright as the son of Zeus. Perseus will do whatever it takes to assume the throne, as much as that may involve murdering his friend.

There are lots of modern novels, poems, and plays that are based on myths. In these revisions, female roles have significantly altered, a highly significant act of feminist intervention. Regarding the significance of myth for feminism, Doherty (2015) states that myth is vital to feminism because it is one element of literate cultures that can incorporate women's traditions and perspectives. Emma Hamm is amongst the many female revisionist authors who have benefitted from the mythological figure of Medusa to speak out about the repressed female voice and help women, particularly young girls, develop more confidence. This issue has been confirmed by Donna E. Shalala, who says:

Too many girls are taking dangerous chances with the only lives they will ever have. We hope to reach girls at this critical transitional age when they are forming their values and attitudes. As caring adults, we help girls build confidence and pursue opportunities. (cited in Lauber, 1969, p. 5)

In *Becoming Medusa*, the first thing readers know about Medusa in this novel is through the character of Olympia. Olympia is a young girl who was forced by her father to marry a wealthy, old man whom she despised; thus, she decided to escape, and while wandering in a town and searching for a job, she is led by a man to a part of the town which is inhabited by whores and prostitutes. The stranger man says to her, "Easy work there, and that is the only place that will take a lone woman like yourself" (Hamm, 2021, p. 12). While walking in that part, she sees the symbol of Medusa on the houses' doors. So, she asks Xenia, the woman who takes her in, "Wasn't it Medusa? I do not know what services you provide here, but I cannot imagine they are easy. Medusa is a monstrous creature. What men would seek her out?" (Hamm, 2021, p. 13).

Olympia is shocked to see Medusa's symbol because she thinks of her as a vicious woman who turns men into stone. Xenia answers, "No men at all. Only women seek their pleasures here because Medusa is the only one who knows what we want" (Hamm, 2021, p. 13). This statement signifies the truth behind 'Medusa's character and that she was not that horrific. Xenia describes that space as "a place to get away from men folk and the things they do to our kind" and says, "I recognise the marks. You, more than anyone else, need Medusa" (Hamm, 2021, p. 13). Olympia's marks resemble Medusa's sufferings. This is why she must know the true story of Medusa, who is, according to Xenia, the only one who would rescue and protect such defenceless women and the only one who would truly understand what they had experienced. She is regarded as the only "deity" who cares about women.

In the novel, Medusa is a young, beautiful girl who used to be adored by so many boys. Alexios, as her true lover, wished to marry her. Despite loving Alexios, Medusa still desired to worship Athena in her temple. One night, while unable to sleep, Medusa decided to sneak around and see what Athena would look like. It was at that point when she also met Poseidon for the very first time: "His skin was so dark it was almost blue. His white beard floated in the air, as though he were still underwater. And his eyes were the vivid azure of the ocean" (Hamm, 2021, p. 66). She heard Athena telling him, "You will not meddle with the women I have here. I know it is in your nature to explore whatever desires you might have, but my priestesses live with rules" (Hamm, 2021, p. 66).

Athena and Poseidon were having a conversation when they suddenly saw Medusa, and Poseidon felt like he was too interested in her. Hence, once she was alone and helpless, he raped her, "Poseidon stood behind her, and she was out here in the farthest part of the temple. Alone. No one would come to her aid. No one would even try to see where she was for a very long while" (Hamm, 2021, p. 89). Moreover, Medusa had to be punished because Athena could not punish a god. Even after being altered into an evil-like creature, she did not desire to turn any man into stone if she did not have to.

As mentioned, *Becoming Medusa* is written by a female author who has stressed a series of feminine issues. The main characters are Medusa and Alexios, a gentleman whose love for Medusa is admirable. This novel is often measured as a product of postfeminism due to reflecting an imperative visualisation of female empowerment; in other words, it echoes modern challenges to appreciate both feminine power and sexuality.

The inconceivable status of Medusa reveals, establishes, and preserves postfeminist principles. Personal choices and rights are respected a lot in postfeminist viewpoints because women are entitled to be satisfied with themselves and their decisions (Shugart et al., 2001). This is why Medusa prefers to devote herself to worshipping Athena and not marrying her lover. Moreover, her freedom and autonomy are noticeable when she thinks of continuing her family business instead of just sitting at home and doing the household chores. This is Hamm's method to show Medusa's authority:

Medusa did not want a future seated on a couch while others worked for her. She had never aspired to be anyone other than the miller's daughter and to continue her father's work. Even if it was unusual for a woman to hold

such a job, she was sure her brother would let her. A family business was a family business, after all. (Hamm, 2021, p. 18)

Thus, individuality and self-sufficiency are significant values in the novel, and such a postfeminist writer as Hamm has represented Medusa as an independent woman with determination and willpower (Gorton, 2004). Even after she is changed into a monstrous creature, she seems to be content due to her power to eliminate those who bother her:

Medusa had never desired to cause anyone else pain. She had always wanted to be a kind, softer soul more likely to help than hinder. Nevertheless, now, she seemed doomed to become the reckoning for many people simply trying to make their way in life. Alternatively, perhaps she was meant to be a sword, as Athena had said. She was told to harm those who took what they were not given. (Hamm, 2021, p. 108)

Medusa appears to hate that girlhood image of herself because she is a powerless little woman Poseidon deceived without understanding. She intends to be a monster who can look after herself. This is why she can be regarded as a liberated woman who is understood concerning the graphic patterns of postfeminism.

Emma Hamm is a contemporary American novelist raised in a small village surrounded by nature. Her writings revolve around strong, self-reliant, powerful women, and they are considered feminist writings that focus on empowering women. Hamm's choice of Medusa as the central character in her novel can also be regarded as a reaction to Gill's statement that postfeminist "femininity is defined as a bodily property rather than a social, structural or psychological one. Currently, possession of a 'sexy body' is presented as a woman's key source of identity" (Gill, 2007, p. 149). Hamm has proven that what has caused women to identify with Medusa is not a sexy body but her power to struggle with many restrictions and patriarchal principles.

III. EXPLORING POWER AND AGENCY: FOUCAULT'S INFLUENCE

Women have adopted Foucauldian theory and used it in a postfeminist context in Western literature. Postfeminists cannot deny the differences, but issue-based coalitions may be the best way forward. As opposed to the broad coalition, which implies that humans only must find the universal instinct in the human condition (Davis, 2020), this is a mobile system of difference in power that makes it far more challenging to connect and share interests within diversity. Myfanwy (2002) states that pragmatic feminism aims to improve the conditions for women by transforming the cultures and environments in which they live. Women's empowerment is thus defined as women challenging the social norms and cultures in which they live.

From the postfeminist point of view, discourse is power, and when it comes to power and gender talk, postfeminism must thank the theory of Foucault. Michel Foucault proposed the concept of the 'disciplinary gaze' to discuss people's behaviour, how people rule themselves, and how they rule others through 'creating truth'. As a metaphor for how all members of society are supervised, Foucault also established the concepts of 'panopticon' and 'control of power'. Foucault argues that social sexual disciplines and knowledge are used by those in positions of power who define what is considered "normal" sexual behaviour and orientation. Following an interdisciplinary analysis starting from the postfeminist revisionist tale of Medusa, it is clear how the Foucauldian theory of power helps us to comprehensively understand and analyse the character of Medusa in *Becoming Medusa*. Previously, Medusa has been sexualised to the extreme, making her both a sexual object and a terrifying threat, with the implication being that men should conquer and control her. Foucault's critiques of power, the body, and sexuality have attracted the attention of postfeminists. The protagonist, Medusa, undergoes a metamorphosis throughout the novel, as the name implies. Now, for the first time, we learn about Medusa's past—how she was once a beautiful young girl, a cherished lover, a devoted priestess, and a confident, independent woman—before she underwent her horrific transformation into the monster she is known as today. The support she received was a curse and victim shaming. However, she recovers from her trauma and appears to have more honour than the god she once worshipped.

Michel Foucault is one of the most significant thinkers in developing poststructuralist, postmodernist, postfeminist, post-Marxist, and postcolonial theories. Foucault's viewpoints have been effective among feminist intellectuals because, as King (2004) asserts, his opinions regarding discipline, power, sexuality, and subjectivity are chiefly relevant to feminist studies. Dorothy E. Smith (2015) once claimed that Foucauldian theories, particularly those regarding power, "capture a sense of something significant about contemporary society that they are incapable of explicating" (Dorothy, 2015, p. 70). It is believed that:

Foucault and feminists recognised that power relations governing sexuality run more profoundly than is presupposed by strategies that aim to lift restrictions on sexual behaviour. Their shared suspicion of the promise of liberation potentially unites Foucault and feminists in a genuinely critical project. (Downing, 2008, p. 105)

As noticed, Foucault's theories have appealed to many feminists because of challenging Western ideology and philosophy's prototypes, which have been unnoticed since the Enlightenment. Foucault, the traditional conduct of referring to the subject as a sensible, amalgamated being with a static base or soul, claims, "Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (Foucault, 1984, pp. 87-88).

Foucault's concept of power and its role in establishing identity has been of principal attention to many researchers and critics (Nichols, 2010). Also, the agency issue has always been a central subject in feminism, especially in how to put up with other diversities of sexuality and react to the conceptual interpretation of power. For feminists attempting to elucidate

power, Foucault's statement that power is what one does and not what one is exposed to is significant (Youdell, 2006). The following section will analyse how the female protagonist in *Becoming Medusa* defies her 'society's male-controlled structure through challenging power relations.

IV. FOUCAULDIAN READING OF *BECOMING MEDUSA*

As was already explained, Medusa's myth represents her lack of agency, which happened initially through her sexual abuse and then by being deprived of love and death. This part of the article analyses *Becoming Medusa* as a modern retelling of this myth based on Foucault's postfeminist viewpoints. As Foucault believed, "Power comes from below: that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations" (Foucault, 1990, p. 94). By writing *Becoming Medusa*, Emma Hamm has made a revolutionary change in characterising a mythological female character.

Hamm's novel shows her captivating resourcefulness, outstanding writing abilities, and perceptive depiction of Medusa's power and agency. As an aware, groundbreaking writer, Hamm has challenged several mythological ideas and viewpoints during her writing vocation. This is why Foucault's theory of power would authenticate the discussion of Hamm's novel.

Medusa's image in Greek mythology has been regarded as a tool for developing adverse attitudes toward women deemed necessary to be ignored in patriarchal societies. Owing to such misogynistic outlooks, which can also be noticed in contemporary society, numerous feminists and writers have revised this myth to signify Medusa as a source of power and agency. In all these revisions, Medusa is not only a character that provokes the readers' sympathy, but she is also shown as persecuted by fierce masculine deeds like rape and homicide. Ostriker (2014) refers to the realisation that feminist authors like Hamm can attain through revising different myths:

It exists or appears to exist objectively in the public sphere and consequently confers on the writer the authority unavailable to someone who writes 'merely' of the private self. Myth belongs to 'high' culture and is handed 'down' through the ages by religious, literary, and educational authorities. At the same time, myth is quintessentially confidential material, the stuff of dream life, forbidden desire, inexplicable motivation—everything in the psyche that, to rational consciousness, is unreal, crazed, or abominable. (Ostriker, 2014, p. 72)

So, this is why many feminists have used myths to reconsider old views regarding women. In other words, reviewing and rewriting mythology enables such literary authors as Hamm to defy the dominant masculine ideology observed in myths and transfer mixed messages related to the present world. As declared by Foucault, in primitive societies, power was in the hands of an autonomous authority that had absolute control over many people through violence and vehemence (McHoul & Grace, 2015).

However, the situation is currently different since a novel apparatus of power was discovered that was more reliant on bodies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This mechanism is more dependent upon time and labour rather than affluence and possessions and the means through which agents primarily use power. According to Foucault, power is not physical or a set of skills specific individuals can possess. Instead, a connection between various individuals and communities arises when the term is only used (McHoul & Grace, 2015). We add that Medusa's strength is predicated on the presence of males intending to harm her. She is an intermediary who uses her influence to combat evildoers. Thus, in *Becoming Medusa*, the concept of power signifies circles of associations that occur between Medusa and men:

If this man wanted to hurt her or her sisters, she would rip him limb from limb. She would tear his entrails out from his belly, just as the snakes claimed Stheno had done. He would be in a world of darkness and fear if he considered killing them. (Hamm, 2021, p. 120)

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses how power and the body are connected. In *Becoming Medusa*, the vital role of the body and its relationship with Medusa's influence cannot be ignored either. According to Foucault, the body is not merely a submissive and inactive object subjugated by discourses and power. The body is the "seed" to confront governing discourses and power. Hence, the body is not entirely obedient (cited in Oksala, 2014, pp. 93-106).

One of the most significant points about Medusa is her body. It seems as if all her power depends upon her body, changing her from a weak girl to a powerful creature. It is also the primary means she can resist subjugation and attain freedom. In *Becoming Medusa*, the body has two contrasting roles; on the one hand, it is why Medusa is suppressed and raped by Poseidon; on the other hand, it is the indicator of her power. Wilk (2000) states, "One thing is obvious: the Amazon Gorgon's face is female fury personified" (Wilk, 2000, p. 217). This Gorgon/Medusa image has been rapidly adopted by many feminists who recognise her as one face of our rage. As specified by Wilk and Foucault, this body is the symbol of anger, power, and agency in women, which enables them to survive:

Feminism has shown me ways to break through years of conditioning (mine was the white southern trying to become middle-class variety) to be consistently pleasant and "nice." Learning to fight involves exploring your capacity for fierce determination and its focused expression... Identifying with Gorgons is not an unreal escapist romanticising female ferocity. It is an important survival tool to engage self-consciously in a realistic way. (Culpepper, 2003, p. 22)

As asserted by Foucault, the sort of body someone has and how by which s/he resides in it from their type of life. One's body is that person's most important centre of power and knowledge. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault discusses the close link between truth and sex. According to him, truth is an arrangement of organised processes for the construction,

circulation, direction, transmission, and operation of statements. It is, in fact, through this system that power arrangements are established and applied (Foucault, 1990).

Thus, Foucault states that sexual discourses are united with truth because sex leads to pleasure and can also reveal the truth. In other words, although sex may limit obscenity, it may also bring one to light (Weeks, 2005). Medusa is completely tortured due to Poseidon's rape, and her punishment by Athena intensifies this darkness. Her body initially limits her, and she cannot leave the place where she is. She is somehow imprisoned in a dark place and inside her current body.

Still, after these sufferings, she can see the truth and realise the reality of her being or such immortal ones as Poseidon. When she finds a mirror to show her the new version of herself as the truth, she takes it to the cave where she lives. This cave and the tunnels that she must pass through reflect the darkness she has to spend the rest of her life in:

She dragged it to the cavern and called it her own. The cave system they lived in was a network of many tunnels connecting to a much larger cave with outcroppings and pools of water. Medusa preferred to be as high as possible, away from anyone who might accidentally walk in and find them. So, she had chosen a network of tunnels that opened to the enormous cavern high above the ground. (Hamm, 2021, p. 118)

It is also believed that a woman's value generally depends upon the male gaze since women are judged and assessed according to patriarchal viewpoints. This outlook implies that the female body is an object, thus lacking agency (Tylor, 2014). Mulvey (2006) says that female characters in Hollywood cinema are delimited mainly by the male gaze on two levels:

Firstly, the male protagonist objectifies the hero through his gaze. Secondly, the male spectator identifies with the film's hero and uses his gaze to frame the heroine as a passive object. In a psychoanalytical frame of reference, the male urge to control a woman stems from the fact that her lack of a penis implies the threat of castration and is thus a source of anxiety. Men have two options available in coping with this anxiety; both rely on the objectification of women through the gaze. Objectification can take two forms, and a particular stereotype of femininity ensues. (Mulvey, 2006, p. 350)

Cavallaro (2001) declares that, on the one hand, women are devalued and demonised as exemplifying sexual corruption. The demonic woman is a vehicle for male fantasies of controlling the female body as a formidable and seductive being to be subdued. This possibility is linked with sadism. On the other hand, women are also regarded as fetishes. In Hamm's novel, Medusa is initially a beautiful girl whose body makes her oppressed and abused by Poseidon. Her humanity and feelings are entirely ignored by Poseidon, who treats her as an object. This maltreatment follows Foucault's statements in *Discipline and Punish*, "In every society, the body is in the grip of rigorous powers, which impose on its constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (Foucault, 1977, p. 59). After transforming into a so-called monster, she has power and freedom from the male gaze. Although she is not that beautiful girl anymore, she seems more pleased with her current circumstances because no one can ever treat her as an object.

Hamm is entirely aware of the central part of the body in one's identity since, as Foucault declares, people are categorised in terms of their bodies and physical roles. This is why she is fascinated with a mythological creature as the authentic representation of a strong woman in the modern era. In other words, Medusa has continuously symbolised women's loss of power and oppression. However, in Hamm's revision, she represents agency and empowerment among women. Hamm's attempts to deconstruct such a monstrous image of women as Medusa are due to her desire to announce that this unreceptive representation of women is for restraining women by the societal standards in patriarchal societies in which power is totally in the hands of men.

In the *States of Injury*, Wendy (1995) summarises her latest approach to Foucault by declaring that "for Foucault, insofar as power always produces resistance, the disciplinary subject is perversely capable of resistance, and in practising it, practices freedom" (Wendy, 1995, p. 63). According to this statement, Medusa's power and agency cause her to resist, and this resistance is the origination of her freedom. Foucault believed everyone could alter the issues restricting their liberty (Tylor, 2014). Although Medusa's change by Athena was not according to her will, she has the capacity and power to eliminate limitations and be free from oppression.

V. CONCLUSION

By intertwining the theories of postfeminism and the Foucauldian view of power, a more comprehensive analysis of the context and Hamm's intentions transforms her current viewpoints concerning the character of Medusa to the readers. The importance of this paper lies in understanding the multiple shifts of Medusa's presentation as an example of a woman's subordination and castration complex, the female gaze, as opposed to the male gaze. Most importantly, the two theories, in cooperation, help us to establish the experience of the saviour of the rape victim and the process of healing. Unlike the selected novel, the previous portrayal of Medusa as a monster or antagonist will not elicit any sympathy from the readers. This study focuses on how cultural discursive practices and performances contribute to, resist, and transform the relationships of power in society concerning gender, sexuality, and agency of female figures through the interaction of myth and realism. Thus, the paper answers these questions.

1. How is Medusa transformed from passive to agent in *Becoming Medusa* (2021)?

In the novel, Medusa starts as a beautiful young priestess devoted to Athena. She turns down marriage and wants to focus on her duties at the temple. However, she is raped by Poseidon, which causes her transformation into a monstrous creature by Athena. Throughout the novel, though, Medusa gains more agency. She rejects the victim role and learns to

accept and control her powers. By the end, Medusa has fully transformed into a strong, independent woman who can defend herself and is no longer controlled by men.

2. How does the novel *Becoming Medusa* represent the concepts of power and agency?

The novel represents power and agency through Medusa's journey. In the beginning, Medusa has no power or agency as she is at the gods' mercy and cursed by Athena. However, as the story progresses, Medusa learns to embrace and wield her monstrous powers. She gains confidence and uses her abilities to help other women in need. By the climax, Medusa has flipped the power dynamic and takes control of her story and destiny rather than being a victim of the male gods.

3. How does postfeminism affect the protagonists' identity as postfeminist Medusa?

Medusa's character embodies postfeminist ideals of independence, choice, and empowerment. Though a victim of rape initially, she refuses to be defined by this traumatic event. Medusa rejects prescribed gender roles like marriage and chooses a path of her own making as a priestess. Even after her transformation, Medusa does not lose her sense of self and continues pursuing her goals. By the end, she emerges as a strong female character who defies the patriarchal oppression of Greek myths on her terms. Medusa represents a noticeable feminist withdrawal from masculine politics in media and literature. Furthermore, Medusa has the role men generally take; they are authoritative combatants in their proficient use of power. Thus, it is inferred that in *Becoming Medusa*, women have attained freedom and "that women of today can 'have it all'" (Lazar, 2006, p. 505).

Becoming Medusa (2021) is, in fact, one of the first literary events in which Medusa is seen as a resilient woman, not the terrifying monster or villain depicted in other retellings and films. In this story, the hero saves herself from her inner demons and is decidedly not the knight in shining armour because she has survived the gods' adoration and abandonment. Medusa is raped in the original myth, and her story is one of loss and despair; gods have betrayed her, and men fear her, even though her enemies have used her as a weapon. Thus, rather than the tragic saga of Medusa as a tale of woe, she becomes a memorable symbol of strength regardless of all her suffering. This story is about Medusa, the human, not the monster, in which Medusa's life and dreams are celebrated. It is common knowledge from Medusa's mythology that she is raped in this story, though the act is not depicted graphically. Although there is a point to it, going through it is traumatic. Nevertheless, she overcame every obstacle and lived to tell the tale! She rebuilt herself from the naive young girl she had been into a strong and self-reliant woman by taking charge of her life.

Foucault's concept of power also demonstrates how Medusa would oppose her patriarchal structure and our society through challenging power relations. As a source of physical and mental strength, the body is central to the protagonists' agency and power in *Becoming Medusa*. Foucault argues that the female protagonists' physical embodiment of resistance to dominant discourses and authority makes the body more than just a passive object to be subjugated. The events in *Becoming Medusa* demonstrate how one's identity is rooted in the physical form one inhabits. For this reason, *Becoming Medusa* portrays a mythological creature as the authentic embodiment of a robust and self-reliant woman in the modern world. By presenting Medusa's backstory and humanity, Hamm has transformed her from a one-dimensional monster into a fully realised character with whom readers can empathise. Through Medusa's journey of gaining power and agency, the novel challenges patriarchal oppression and misogyny in Greek myths. It provides an inspiring portrayal of overcoming trauma and refusing to be defined by the actions of men. This paper has analysed how *Becoming Medusa* revives Medusa through a postfeminist and Foucauldian lens. It highlights the significance of revisionist retellings in empowering mythical females and furthering feminist goals.

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Estabraq Yahya Mohammed is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Literature and Humanities Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics at Shiraz University and a faculty member of the University of Babylon - College of Education for Human Sciences since 2020. Her research interests are cultural Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Film Studies, Literary Studies, Comparative Studies, Iraqi literature, Literature and Media Studies, Children's Literature, Shakespearean studies and Interdisciplinarity. Email: estabraqyahya@gmail.com

Amirhossein Vafa, the corresponding author of this paper, is an assistant professor of English and comparative literature at Shiraz University, Iran. He is the author of *Recasting American and Persian Literature* (2016). He is also interested in critical perspectives on postcolonial theory and men, masculinities, and gender relations. Email: a.vafa@shirazu.ac.ir