

ÉCRITURE FÉMININE AND INTERTEXTUALITY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAROL ANN DUFFY'S "MEDUSA" AND ITS ARMENIAN TRANSLATION¹

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Abstract. This research studies Carol Ann Duffy's reinterpretation of the Medusa myth in her poem *Medusa* alongside its Armenian translation, focusing on the intersections of feminist poetics and intertextuality. Drawing on the theories of such scholars as Beauvoir, Cixous and Bowers, the research explores how Duffy's Medusa defies the patriarchal literary canon and reclaims the voice of the mythological woman. At the same time, the study applies Berman's 'negative and positive analytics' and the Vinay and Darbelnet model to analyze the translation's balance between literalism and necessary transformations. Through a comparative and intertextual analysis, the paper assesses how Duffy's poem subverts the male gaze, portraying Medusa not as a monster, but as an embodiment of female agency and resistance. The findings suggest that, while the translation remains largely literal, certain poetic and cultural adaptations reshape Medusa's empowerment narrative within the Armenian literary context. And finally, this research contributes to discussions on feminist retellings, mythological reinterpretation, and translation as a tool for preserving and reimagining female voices in literature.

Keywords: Greek Mythology, Medusa, intertextuality, rewriting, écriture féminine, feminist translation

Introduction

The Western literary canon has long been dominated by narratives centered on male figures, their heroic conquests, and their perspectives. Women have often been relegated to the margins, their voices either silenced or filtered through the lens of patriarchal structures, "...from Homer's *Odyssey* to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Women have existed as side characters, being only the wives of famous men" (Ask, 2023, p. 2). The absence of female subjectivity in literary tradition has led to a historical misrepresentation of women, reducing them to archetypes such as the temptress, the virgin, the victim, or the monstrous other. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the myth of Medusa.

Medusa, once a fearsome figure of Greek mythology, has transformed over centuries from a monstrous Gorgon into a complex cultural symbol - representing everything from the Freudian male castration anxiety and the phallic threat of the snake to a feminist icon reclaiming female agency and power. Her severed head, once wielded by Perseus as a weapon, now serves as an emblem of female rage, resistance, and the subversion of the male gaze in contemporary literature and art. Benvenuto Cellini's Renaissance statue of Perseus holding Medusa's head offers a striking visual paradox, a perfect metaphor for the interchangeability of victim and oppressor. The similarity between their faces suggests that the boundary between hero and monster is thin, if not entirely artificial, constructed by the very myths that dictate who is feared and who is revered.

Methods

To analyze the translation strategies employed in rendering *Medusa* into Armenian, this research draws upon Berman's theory of 'negative and positive analytics' (Munday, 2016, p. 230) which distinguishes between domesticating distortions that obscure the foreign essence of a text and foreignizing strategies that seek to preserve its original character. The study also applies the Vinay and

¹ All Armenian translations of Carol Ann Duffy's "Medusa" in this paper are my own.

Darbelnet model (Munday, 2016, p. 88). This research employs a comparative analysis to examine the structural, semantic, and stylistic shifts between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT), assessing the extent to which Duffy's poetic techniques and feminist themes are retained in the Armenian translation.

Results

The act of rewriting goes beyond literature and enters the realm of translation. The Armenian translation of Duffy's *Medusa* engages in this same process of transformation, adapting the poem's themes, metaphors, and rhythmic structures within the framework of a different linguistic and cultural context. It demonstrates a commitment to literalism, while also employing modulation, transposition, and ennoblement to navigate linguistic and cultural differences. While key intertextual references and poetic devices (e.g., alliteration, metaphor, and enjambment) are largely retained, certain stylistic elements shift due to phonetic and grammatical constraints in the target language.

Discussion

These findings align with Berman's concept of 'positive analytics' which advocates for preserving the foreignness of a text while making strategic adaptations ensuring that Medusa's voice remains dominant in translation. The Armenian version upholds this by prioritizing semantic equivalence, even when phonetic elements (e.g., alliteration) are lost. Compared to previous studies on *écriture féminine*, this research demonstrates that Medusa's narrative remains resistant to patriarchal erasure even in linguistic adaptation.

Traditionally, Medusa has been depicted as the monstrous Gorgon whose gaze turns men to stone, a figure of terror and destruction. However, a closer examination of her origins reveals a story of injustice and victim blaming, "Ovid describes Medusa as a beautiful mortal who is either seduced, or raped, by Poseidon in a temple of Athena. Athena saw this as sacrilege and as gods did not punish other gods, Athena punished Medusa for Poseidon's sin" (Ask, 2023, p. 20).

Medusa's fate is the epitome of broader cultural tendency to vilify female agency and autonomy. As feminist theorists have argued, myths such as that of Medusa serve as instruments of ideological control, shaping the perception of women within society. "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 175). The male-dominated discourse has not only constructed Medusa as a monster but has also framed her as a cautionary tale, i.e. a woman who transgresses boundaries and is, therefore, punished, "But, as we have seen, he does not smash the idol: he changes it into a monster" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 233). The transformation of Medusa from a woman into a beast mirrors the broader historical tendency to dehumanize women who challenge and defy patriarchal norms. "Medusa's mythical image has functioned like a magnifying mirror to reflect and focus Western thought as it relates to women, including how women think about themselves" (Bowers, 1990, p. 217).

In response to these entrenched narratives, contemporary feminist literature has sought to reclaim the voices of mythological women, offering alternative perspectives that challenge traditional readings. Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* is an exemplary work, as it rewrites, redefines classical myths and historical events from the standpoint of female figures who were previously silenced, "The women in the poems could be all of us, and the core problems are problems most women can recognize" (Ask, 2023, p. 4). Through her poem *Medusa*, Duffy reclaims Medusa's voice, allowing her to articulate her own experience rather than remain an object of male storytelling, and here, at last, we behold "the mythological woman reimaged" (p. 15). This act of reclamation is part of a broader movement within feminist literature that seeks to subvert traditional gender hierarchies through narrative revision, "Woman un-thinks² the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield" (Cixous, 1976, p. 882).

Cixous challenges the exclusion of women from literary and intellectual traditions, "Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it's reserved for the great - that is, for "great men"; and

² "Dé-pense," a neologism formed on the verb *penser*, hence "unthinks," but also "spends" (from *dépenser*) (translator's note).

it's "silly." Besides, you've written a little, but in secret" (p. 876). Her theory calls for a radical break from the patriarchal modes of writing that have historically confined female expression.

By rewriting Medusa's story in her own voice, Duffy disrupts, deconstructs and reconstructs the dominant narrative that has traditionally framed Medusa as a monster rather than a victim where "Either she appears simply as a purely impersonal opposition, she is an obstacle and remains a stranger; or she submits passively to man's will and permits assimilation, so that he takes possession of her only through consuming her - that is, through destroying her" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 171). This deconstruction is not merely an act of revisionism but a necessary resistance against the structures that have historically dictated how female figures are represented. Duffy reclaims Medusa's voice and challenges the singular, definitive interpretation of myth asserting that mythology itself is a fluid, evolving discourse that can be rewritten, and this is where intertextuality plays a crucial role.

In *The World's Wife* by drawing upon existing myths and transforming them through new perspectives, Duffy creates a dialogue between past and present, "While the collection questions the stories that its readers grew up with, presenting an alternative view, there is great cognitive dissonance that the poetry causes, another element that needs to be understood in thoroughly analyzing this collection" (Sood, 2022, p. 1). This cognitive dissonance arises from the reader's confrontation with a familiar story told from an unfamiliar perspective, but "Who better to know a man than his spouse or partner? This plausibility is what makes Duffy's poems realistic" (Lum, 2019, p. 16). The Medusa that readers have known - the monstrous figure of myth - collides with the Medusa of Duffy's poem, a woman with her own voice, her own pain, her own story and her own agency.

The first stanza immediately establishes the psychological and physical metamorphosis of Medusa, introducing key motifs that define the poem's trajectory:

ST:

*A suspicion, a doubt, a jealousy
grew in my mind,
which turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes,
as though my thoughts
hissed and spat on my scalp* (Duffy, 2017, pp. 40-41).

TT:

*Մի կասկած, մի վախ, մի խանդ,
սողունեց իմ մտքում,
որ դարձրեց գլխիս մազերն օձեր գարշելի
ասես իմ մտքերը
ֆշշացնում ու թքում էին գանգիս:*

The first stanza is rich with intertextual signs that introduce the Greek myth of Medusa. The references to "snakes," "hissing," and the transformation of hair directly connect the text to its mythological roots. These intertextual elements are retained in the TT, ensuring that the cultural and symbolic depth of the ST is conveyed to Armenian readers.

The vivid and grotesque imagery here depict the speaker's psychological transformation. The phrase "turned the hairs on my head to filthy snakes" evokes a striking visual image of self-loathing and emotional decay, mirrored effectively in the TT as «*դարձրեց գլխիս մազերն օձեր գարշելի*». The transformation of emotions into "filthy snakes" symbolizes the corrosive nature of suspicion, doubt, and jealousy which are "misogynistic tropes about women, and as the reader gains sympathy for Medusa they become antagonistic towards the responsible man" (Ask, 2023, p. 21). This metaphor is equally vivid in the TT, where the emotions physically manifest as «*օձեր գարշելի*», preserving the essence of the ST.

The simile "as though my thoughts hissed and spat on my scalp" emphasizes the hostility and toxicity of the speaker's mental state. The TT retains this simile effectively with «*ասես իմ մտքերը ֆշշացնում ու թքում էին գանգիս*», maintaining the same hostile and grotesque tone.

In the ST, the repetition of fricative sounds “s” and “ʃ” in words like “*suspicion*,” “*snakes*,” “*hissed*,” and “*spat*” imitates the snake-like quality of the emotions. While the TT substitutes “s” sounds with “ʃ” (e.g., «*գարշելի*», «*ჭշაგնու*», with the exception of «*թբու*»), creating a similar auditory effect, the sound repetition in Armenian, however, leans more towards consonance than alliteration.

Both the ST and TT personify emotions as living entities, with phrases like “*grew in my mind*” and «*սողոսկեց իմ մտքում*» (“*crawled in my mind*”). The general>particular modulation in the TT adds a nuanced layer of physicality to the emotions, emphasizing their invasive and intrusive nature.

ST:

My bride’s breath soured, stank

in the grey bags of my lungs.

I’m foul mouthed now, foul tongued,

yellow fanged.

There are bullet tears in my eyes.

Are you terrified? (Duffy, 2017, pp. 40-41).

TT:

Կուսական շունչն իմ փտեց, գարշացավ

գորշ պարկերում իմ թոքերի:

Ես գարշաբերան, պղծալեզու,

դեղնաժանիք:

Աչքերիցս կրակ-արցունք է թափվում:

Չե՞ս սարսափում:

The phrase “*My bride’s breath*” refers to Medusa’s past, invoking the mythological background of Medusa as a once-beautiful and devoted priestess of Athena, cursed after her tragic encounter with Poseidon. This allusion is preserved in the TT with «*կուսական շունչ*» (“*virgin breath*”), emphasizing Medusa’s past purity and the devastating transformation she underwent. However, the shift from “*bride*” to “*virgin*” involves a noun>adjective transposition, adding a new layer of interpretation to the original phrase. This choice also adds a layer of elevation and shifts the noun “*bride*” to the adjective “*virgin*” in the TT which could be considered an ennoblement and modulation. “*My bride’s breath soured, stank*” serves as a metaphor for the deterioration of the speaker’s inner self. And, the TT maintains this with «*Կուսական շունչն իմ փտեց, գարշացավ*», where, however, the “*soured, stank*” alliteration was lost.

“*Yellow fanged*” metaphorically conveys jealousy, malice, and decay. This metaphor is preserved in the TT as «*դեղնաժանիք*», though the connotations of “*yellow*” might be less immediate in Armenian. Phrases like “*soured, stank*,” “*grey bags of my lungs*,” “*foul mouthed*,” and “*yellow fanged*” vividly depict disgust. The TT retains these images with translations such as «*փտեց, գարշացավ*» and «*գորշ պարկերում իմ թոքերի*», which reflect the same visceral, decaying quality. In addition, the repetition of the “f” sound in “*foul mouthed*,” “*foul tongued*,” and “*yellow fanged*” creates a harsh and discordant tone that mirrors the speaker’s emotional turbulence. Unfortunately, this alliteration is lost in the TT, as the Armenian equivalents «*գարշաբերան*», «*պղծալեզու*», «*դեղնաժանիք*» do not replicate the original sound patterns. This is a notable loss in auditory effect.

The phrase “*bullet tears*” is translated as «*կրակ-արցունք*» (“*fire tears*”), shifting the imagery from something concrete and visual, i.e. bullets, to a more abstract, metaphorical idea of fire, this is an example of concrete>abstract modulation. This choice alters the imagery but retains the overall theme of pain and destruction.

The stanza ends with a direct address: “*Are you terrified?*” This rhetorical device directly engages the reader or an implied subject, blurring the line between the addressee in the poem and the audience. The TT effectively retains this directness with «*Չե՞ս սարսափում*» which is an example of antonymic translation and a negation-of-opposite modulation, maintaining the confrontational tone.

ST:

Be terrified.

It’s you I love,

perfect man, Greek God, my own;

*but I know you'll go, betray me, stray
from home.*

So better by far for me if you were stone (Duffy, 2017, pp. 40-41).

TT:

*Մարսափի՛ր,
ես քե՛զ եմ սիրում,
անթերի, հույն աստված, ի՛նք.
բայց գիտեմ՝ դավաճանելու ես ինձ,
տունդ թողնելու:
Ավելի լավ է՝ մի քար լինես հեռվում:*

Like the previous stanzas, the third one also employs enjambment, where a line flows into the next without a pause, creating a sense of urgency and anticipation. This is evident in “*but I know you'll go, betray me, stray from home,*” where the expectation builds before reaching the final statement. The TT maintains this structure, «*բայց գիտեմ՝ դավաճանելու ես ինձ, տունդ թողնելու*», ensuring that the sense of fluidity and suspense is preserved.

The stanza begins with direct address, “*Be terrified,*” an imperative command that immediately establishes a confrontational and authoritative tone. This directness is effectively retained in the TT with «*Մարսափի՛ր*» (imperative form). Medusa’s question in the previous stanza is a command in this stanza. The shift from “*Are you terrified?*” to “*Be terrified,*” marks a striking transformation in Medusa’s stance - from seeking acknowledgment of fear to actively commanding it. What was once a rhetorical question now has become a declaration of absolute power. Medusa asks that question not because she genuinely seeks an answer, but because she is mocking the fear imposed upon her by myth and society. It carries a tone of irony, as if she is saying, “Oh, so they told you to fear me?” This moment reveals her awareness of the narrative built around her, exposing the way she has been demonized and turning that preconceived fear into her own tool of power.

From the perspective of psychology, this question taps into a deeper commentary on masculinity and fear of intimacy - Medusa, once a figure of beauty and desire, has become the embodiment of love turned dangerous. The idea that a man would be terrified of her suggests not just fear of her physical form, but of love itself, of the power that intimacy holds, and of the inability to control it. Medusa, in this reading, becomes a symbol of feminine power that men both desire and fear.

And it is in this moment when Medusa fully embraces the terror she inspires, turning the fear of the addressee into a weapon of her own agency. The rhetorical shift signifies her transition from victim to avenger, reveling in the glory of her own monstrous intent. She no longer waits for confirmation - she dictates the fear itself.

The phrase “*perfect man, Greek God, my own;*” alluding to Medusa’s mythological past, particularly referencing Perseus, the demigod son of Zeus and Danaë, who ultimately beheads Medusa, includes a caesura that divides the description, adding rhythm and emphasis. The TT «*անթերի, հույն աստված, ի՛նք*» mirrors this pause with punctuation and stress markers, particularly in the first three lines, where suprasegmental stress is introduced to reflect the ST’s rhythmic effect. Here the stanza juxtaposes adoration and anticipated betrayal, as the speaker moves from admiration “*perfect man, Greek God, my own*”, in the TT «*անթերի, հույն աստված, ի՛նք*», where “*perfect man*” was translated as «*անթերի*» and “*man*” was omitted, to certainty of abandonment (“*but I know you'll go, betray me, stray from home*”). This contrast is effectively rendered in the TT, where the thematic duality remains intact through «*բայց գիտեմ՝ դավաճանելու ես ինձ, / տունդ թողնելու*». The phrase also evokes the archetypal Greek betrayer, alluding to figures like Jason, Paris, Menelaus, Zeus, and Odysseus, reinforcing the theme of male infidelity and abandonment.

The phrase “*you'll go*” was omitted in the TT due to space constraints and the necessity of maintaining rhyme and metric balance. However, compensation was employed through the phrase «*տունդ թողնելու*» (“leave your home”), where the explicit pronoun “you” was added to ensure the meaning remains clear. Additionally, the Armenian verb «*դավաճանելու ես*» (where the verb is in a quintisyllabic form) occupies more space than its English equivalent, justifying the omission for rhythmic cohesion.

The final line “*So better by far for me if you were stone*” references Medusa’s petrifying gaze, which literally turns men into stone. This is successfully retained in the TT with «*Ավելի լավ է՝ մի քար լինես հեռու*», where concept of transformation and distance is preserved demonstrating both modulation and transposition. The word «*հեռու*» (“in the far”) was added in the TT to retain the original poem’s imagery and reinforce the sense of emotional and physical distance, which is integral to Medusa’s isolation. The phrase “*for me*” was omitted in the Armenian translation but remains implied in the sentence structure.

ST:

*I glanced at a buzzing bee,
a dull grey pebble fell
to the ground.*

*I glanced at a singing bird,
a handful of dusty gravel
spattered down* (Duffy, 2017, pp. 40-41).

TT:

*Հայացքս դարձրի բզզացող մեղվին,
անշունչ մի քար մոխիրե*

ընկավ հատակին:

*Հայացքս դարձրի երգ սუნդ հավքին,
մի բուռ փոշեհող*

թափթփվեց գետնին:

In this stanza the transformation of a “*buzzing bee*” into a “*dull grey pebble*” and a “*singing bird*” into “*dusty gravel*” constructs striking visual contrasts. These mundane and lifeless transformations not only depict the impact of Medusa’s gaze but also serve as yet another intertextual allusion to her mythical ability to turn living beings into inanimate objects. The Armenian TT successfully retains these visual elements ensuring that the petrifying effect remains tangible to the reader.

“*Buzzing bee*” is translated literally, i.e. «*բզզացող մեղու*», whereas the phrase “*I glanced*” is rendered as «*Հայացքս դարձրի*» (“I turned my gaze”), which involves transposition, as a simple verb in English becomes a verb-noun construction in Armenian. The ST uses a direct action (“glanced”), while the TT conveys a more deliberate and poetic movement of the gaze.

The adjective “*dull*” (in “*a dull grey pebble*”) is translated as «*անշունչ*» (literally “*breathless*”), which is an example of modulation. While “*dull*” refers to lack of vibrancy or color in English, the Armenian translation shifts the perspective to a lifeless, inanimate quality, intensifying the contrast between Medusa’s gaze and the objects affected by it.

The noun phrase “*singing bird*” is translated as «*երգ սუნդ հավք*» (“song-saying bird”), which is an example of ennoblement. “*Singing*” is replaced with «*երգ սუნդ*» (“*song-saying*”), giving it a more poetic tone. “*Bird*” is replaced with the Classical Armenian «*հավք*» instead of the more common «*թռչուն*», which elevates the register of the translation.

“*Gravel*” (which would be «*խիճ*» in Armenian) is instead translated as «*փոշեհող*» (“dusty soil”), shifting from a concrete material (gravel) to a more diffuse and fine substance (dust). This modulation enhances the dissolution effect of Medusa’s gaze, making it seem like objects are not just falling, but disintegrating under her stare.

The phrase “*spattered down*” is literally translated as «*թափթփվեց գետնին*», which mimics a scattered, dispersed motion, preserving the chaotic imagery.

The phrase “*a dull grey pebble fell to the ground*” was transformed structurally in the TT, i.e. «*անշունչ մի քար մոխիրե ընկավ հատակին*», for metrical and rhythmic balance, while ensuring that the imagery remains vivid. The adjective «*մոխիրե*» (derived from «*մոխիր*», meaning “ash”) conveys a color resembling ash - pale grey with an undertone of decay. In the context of Medusa, the translator’s choice amplifies the theme of destruction and death, as ash is often symbolic of remains, ruin, and obliteration. It suggests that the objects affected by her gaze are not simply turning to stone but reduced to something even more ephemeral - dust or remnants of what once was. This subtle shift intensifies the sense of irreversible destruction in the TT.

All these destructions caused by Medusa's gaze serve as foreshadowing of her own fate. These shattered and lifeless remnants mirror her past self, the vibrant woman she once was before her transformation, as well as her inevitable demise at the hands of Perseus. Just as everything she looks at turns to ruin, so too has her own life been reduced to a tragic distortion, and so too will she herself be stripped of power and turned into nothing more than a lifeless relic of myth.

The stanza's metamorphic transformations serve as a symbolic reflection of the speaker's internal turmoil and destructive power. The buzzing bee, often associated with energy, vitality, and productivity, is reduced to an inert pebble, stripping it of its agency. Similarly, the singing bird, a traditional symbol of freedom and voice, disintegrates into dusty gravel, suggesting silencing, decay, and erasure. These symbolic shifts emphasize the irrevocable nature of Medusa's power and, by extension, the emotional devastation that fuels it.

On a structural-stylistic level the stanza follows a deliberate pattern of repetition with the phrase "I glanced at" («*Հայացքս դարձրի*») followed by an animate object, which is then stripped of life and agency. This parallel structure reinforces the inevitability of transformation under Medusa's gaze. The repetition also creates a rhythmic cadence, mirroring the mechanical, almost fated nature of the destruction she brings. The TT preserves this parallelism, ensuring the structural integrity of the stanza remains intact.

ST:

*I looked at a ginger cat,
a housebrick
shattered a bowl of milk.
I looked at a snuffling pig,
a boulder rolled
in a heap of shit* (Duffy, 2017, pp. 40-41).

TT:

*Ես նայեցի շեկլիկ կատվին,
մի կտոր աղյուս
փշրեց ամանը կարթի:
Ես նայեցի խոնչացող խոզին,
քարի մի կտոր շրջվեց
միջուսը կեղտի:*

This stanza continues the pattern of stark contrasts between the initial subjects and their transformed states, intensifying the destructive effect of the speaker's gaze.

The transformation of a ginger cat into a housebrick and a snuffling pig into a rolling boulder highlights a complete negation of life - soft, warm, living creatures are reduced to hard and lifeless objects. The finality of these transformations, particularly with the additional destructive consequence (the brick shattering a bowl of milk, the boulder rolling into filth), reinforces the idea that nothing survives Medusa's gaze unchanged. The shattering of a milk bowl (a traditionally nurturing symbol) evokes destruction, loss, and Medusa's own fractured past.

In previous stanza, the phrase "I glanced" was used, whereas in this stanza, it shifts to "I looked". In English, "glance" implies a quick, possibly involuntary act, whereas "look" is a more deliberate and focused action. This subtle change emphasizes Medusa's agency - here, she is not merely catching something in her peripheral vision but is actively engaging with her gaze, exerting conscious control over the transformation.

The repetition of "I looked at" creates a consistent rhythmic pattern, reinforcing the inescapable pattern of transformation and mirroring the mechanical nature of Medusa's curse. This structural repetition, preserved in the Armenian TT («*Ես նայեցի*»), conveys a focused and intentional gaze, reinforcing Medusa's control over her curse.

The word "shit", which is vulgar and explicitly crude in English, was translated as «*կեղտ*» ("dirt" or "filth"), which is a more neutral and refined term in Armenian. This substitution could be classified as ennoblement, as it adds a new interpretation to the explicit vulgarity of the ST while still conveying the same sense of uncleanness and degradation.

The noun “*heap*” was omitted in the Armenian TT, as the idea of something being in a pile is naturally implied in the Armenian phrase and that is done with the help of the word «*միջուძը*» (“in the middle of”). This is an example compensation which ensures that the image of the pig rolling in the dirt is preserved without breaking the rhythm of the line.

ST:

I stared in the mirror.

Love gone bad

showed me a Gorgon.

I stared at a dragon.

Fire spewed

from the mouth of a mountain (Duffy, 2017, pp. 40-41).

TT:

Հայելու մեջ տեսա

Մերս թունավոր

ցույց տվեց Գորգոն:

Դեմք է վիշապի:

Կրակ է ժայթքում

լեռան բերանից:

The stanza describes striking imagery to portray Medusa’s perception of herself and the world around her. The transformation of her reflection into a Gorgon directly invokes Medusa’s myth and her self-awareness as a monster, while the dragon spewing fire from a mountain intensifies the violent and destructive imagery. The TT effectively retains this imagery, though it slightly intensifies the volcanic allusion through «*Կրակ է ժայթքում*» (“Fire bursts/erupts”), evoking an eruption rather than a simple exhalation of fire. “*Fire spewed from the mouth of a mountain*” can be read metaphorically as rage or emotional explosion, which is enhanced in the TT, i.e. «*Կրակ է ժայթքում լեռան բերանից*», through the stronger verb choice «*ժայթքում*» (a verb associated with volcanic eruptions).

The progression from “*I glanced*” > “*I looked*” > “*I stared*” across the poem represents a gradual intensification of engagement, emotional turmoil, focus and self-awareness. Here “*stared*” conveys deep focus, confrontation, and after all, realization of the monster she has become. The TT maintains this intensification, though the second instance of “*I stared*” is omitted, replaced with «*Դեմք է վիշապի*» (“It is a face of a dragon”), which shifts the focus to the realization of transformation rather than the act of looking.

Next, the Gorgon serves as a symbol of self-identity, showing how the speaker perceives herself after experiencing betrayal, isolation, and transformation. On the other hand, the dragon and volcanic fire symbolize raw, untamed emotion - rage, vengeance, and passion - aligning with Medusa’s own destructive potential. The TT successfully preserves these symbols through modulation while making “*Love gone bad*” more personal and internalized through «*Մերս թունավոր*» (“*My toxic love*”), shifting from a universal failed romance to an individualized sense of corruption and suffering.

The original alliteration in “*from the mouth of the mountain*” (m-m-m) is lost in translation, as «*լեռան բերանից*» follows the natural structure of the target language without a direct phonetic equivalent.

ST:

And here you come

with a shield for a heart

and a sword for a tongue

and your girls, your girls.

Wasn't I beautiful?

Wasn't I fragrant and young?

Look at me now (Duffy, 2017, pp. 40-41).

TT:

Այսժամ դու գալիս ես
 արտիդ տեղ՝ վահան
 լեզվիդ տեղ՝ մի սուր
 և քո կանայք, քո կանայք:
 Բսկ գեղեցի կ'էի ես,
 անուշ ու ծաղկուն:
 Նայի՛ր ինձ հիմա:

In this stanza the addressee arrives with “*a shield for a heart*” and “*a sword for a tongue*.” Not only do these images suggest allusions to Perseus who was aided by Athena and Hephaestus with a shield and a sword but also serve as emotional armor and verbal aggression. Moreover, we are all Perseus. This represents universal tendency to accept dominant narratives without questioning them, particularly in mythology and history. Perseus is the traditional hero, the savior. It represents the way society views figures like Medusa - through the lens of demonization, conquest and destruction rather than understanding.

The poem highlights how we have been conditioned to see Medusa as a villainous, demonized figure, rather than a victim of injustice. “Yet, historical revisionism is unacceptable to purist because; re-evaluating concepts and past occurrences has the propensity to uncover truths that deconstructs grounded ideologies and this constitutes controversies that many would prefer to leave in the past” (Lum, 2019, p. 14). This also ties into the broader theme of erased voices in literature and history - Medusa’s story has always been told from the perspective of those who silenced her, much like how many marginalized voices throughout history have been misrepresented or vilified. By recognizing that we are all Perseus, the poem challenges the reader to reconsider their complicity in perpetuating one-sided narratives and to re-examine Medusa’s fate with empathy rather than judgment.

In the Armenian translation, this idea remains intact as the gaze shifts from Perseus as an individual to Perseus as a collective representation of human bias.

The structural choices in the Armenian translation, such as word order shifts in the shield/sword lines, function as transpositions that enhance readability and poetic rhythm.

The repetition of “*your girls, your girls*” emphasizes betrayal and infidelity, reinforcing the speaker’s growing disillusionment.

The rhetorical questions that follow - “*Wasn’t I beautiful? Wasn’t I fragrant and young?*” - serve to contrast the speaker’s past and present, evoking a deep sense of loss and longing.

Furthermore, “his girls” clearly show that her suspicion of unfaithfulness was correct and her rage justified. However, as she states “Wasn’t I beautiful / Wasn’t I fragrant and young?” (lines 40-41), her insecurity and despair caused by his actions become clear. He has made her into a monster, and all the blame falls on her (just like Poseidon received no blame in the myth). Duffy is criticizing the misogynistic treatment of women as property to be used and discarded without consequences (Ask, 2023, p. 22).

In Armenian, however, the second “*Wasn’t I...*” is omitted to maintain rhythmic and poetic fluidity, a choice that ensures naturalness in the target text while subtly shifting the intensity of repetition. The phrase “*and your girls, your girls*” is modulated into «*և քո կանայք, քո կանայք*» (“and your women, your women”), a shift that aligns with the Armenian lexicon while still retaining the essence of the original repetition.

Another modulation occurs in the translation of “*fragrant*” as «*անուշ*» (“sweet” or “dear”), shifting from a purely sensory description to an adjective that conveys warmth and tenderness. Similarly, “*young*” is translated as «*ծաղկուն*» (“blooming”), an example of ennoblement, as it elevates youth to a poetic metaphor of vitality.

The final line, “*Look at me now,*” serves as both a plea and a threat, demanding the subject’s (and reader’s) attention to the speaker’s transformation. The Armenian retains a near-literal translation, with

the addition of stress on «*საჟი რ ինձ հիմա*», reinforcing the weight of the statement and its emotional urgency.

Conclusion

Carol Ann Duffy's *Medusa* is a striking example of how *écriture féminine* and intertextuality work to reclaim female voices in literature, "Women in her poems are given chances to speak out for themselves, which can be seen as a form of resistance against patriarchy" (ZENG Jing-yun & LI Ju-yuan, 2018, p. 373). Through an intimate first-person perspective, the poem offers Medusa a voice, allowing her to articulate her own experience rather than remain a monstrous figure in a male-dominated narrative.

Duffy reconstructs Medusa's image, moving from a feared monster to a woman whose pain, betrayal, and transformation reflect a deeply human experience, "The antidote to the male gaze, and one avenue to women reclaiming their own sexuality, is the female gaze: learning to see clearly for themselves, thus reconstructing traditional male images of women" (Bowers, 1990, p. 218). In this sense, Duffy's poem is both a subversion and a reclamation, introducing Medusa not as a cautionary tale but as a symbol of self-awareness and defiance. And this is relevant in the macro historical context as well, "The journey of Medusa in Western culture is a journey from the mutilation and destruction of the female body in Greco-Roman myth to the celebration of the whole female self" (p. 235). Medusa's voice mirrors a larger cultural transformation. One that has seen women's voices move from silence to resistance, "It is time to liberate the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her..." (Cixous, 1976, p. 878)

In translating *Medusa* into Armenian, priority was given to a predominantly literal approach, ensuring that the linguistic and stylistic features of the original were preserved as much as possible. However, as with any literary translation, moments of modulation, transposition, and, in select cases, ennoblement were strategically employed to maintain natural fluency, preserve rhythm, and enhance meaning where necessary. As a translator, my objective was to embrace the foreign as foreign, following Berman's concept of positive analytics, where foreignization serves as a means of retaining the essence of the source text rather than assimilating it to the structures of the target language (Munday, 2016, p. 230). This approach acknowledges that literal translation is not a mechanical word-for-word substitution but rather a deliberate engagement with the deeper semiotic and cultural processes at play in both the source and target languages.

By "literal", I, following Berman, refer to the Sausseaurian concept of the signifying process, which extends beyond lexical equivalence to explore how meaning is constructed, conveyed, and retained across linguistic and cultural systems. The challenge of translation, then, lies in navigating the dynamic relationship between the signifier and the signified, ensuring that the target text does not merely mirror the words of the original but also preserves its semiotic integrity and poetic intent. In the case of *Medusa*, this means engaging with the broader social and feminist implications of the poem, ensuring that its act of giving voice to a silenced woman remains just as powerful within the Armenian context. In this way, translation becomes not only a linguistic exercise but also an act of resistance, reclaiming Medusa's narrative across languages and cultures.

No longer the villain of a hero's story, Medusa is now a complex figure of agency, emotion, and power. And perhaps, finally, "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous, 1976, p. 885).

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