PERSEUS' BATTLE WITH THE GORGONS

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Superstitious fear of the Evil Eye, κακὸ ματί or *malocchio*, is familiar to all travelers in Greece, Italy, and Turkey who have observed the blue, eye-bead amulets that are attached by chains or safety pins to innumerable babies, donkeys, and even tractors.[1] The wide eyes within the beads are thought to distract those malicious looks which, in popular belief, have "the power of doing material harm."[2] Although such looks are currently associated with morose and sickly men who menace—or seem to menace—children, in former centuries the Evil Eye was more commonly ascribed to "little old women with squint or deep-set eyes, especially those who were lean and melancholy and had double pupils."[3] Among the ancient Greeks, the prototypes

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The following works are frequently cited in abbreviated form: P. E. **Arias**, *A History of 1,000 Years of Greek Vase Painting*, photographs by Max **Hirmer** (New York 1962); W. R. **Halliday**, *Indo-European Folk-Tales and Greek Legend* (Cambridge 1933); Konrad **Schauenburg**, *Perseus in der Kunst des Altertums* (Bonn 1960); Eduard **Scheer**, ed. *Lycophronis Alexandra*, vol. 2 (Berlin 1908); Karl **Schefold**, *Myth and Legend in Early Greek Art*, tr. Audrey Hicks (New York 1966); Karl **Wendel**, ed. *Scholia in Apollonium Rhodium Vetera*[2] (Berlin 1958); E. **Will**, "La décollation de Méduse," *RA* ser. 6.27 (1947) 60–76; Jocelyn M. **Woodward**, *Perseus, A Study in Greek Art and Legend* (Cambridge 1937); Konrat **Ziegler**, "Das Spiegelmotiv im Gorgomythus," *ArchRW* 24 (1926) 1–18.

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford 1961), s.v. "Evil Eye."

[3] *Chamber's Encyclopedia* (Oxford 1967) 5.467, s.v. "Evil Eye."

of these strangely-eyed crones were creatures such as Lamia (who could remove her powerful eyes so that she might sleep), the Graeae, or Gray Ladies (who had one removable eye among them), and the Gorgons (the entrance of whose cave, according to Aeschylus,[4] the Graeae guarded and whose eyes could turn victims to stone).[5]

The provenance of the Gorgons and Perseus, who beheaded Medusa, is still an open question among scholars. C. Hopkins believed that the Greek story of Medusa's beheading originated in Assyria as the combat tale of Gilgamesh and Humbaba,[6] whereas E. Will, although accepting the hypothesis of a Near-Eastern beginning, moved the date of origin from Hopkins' seventh century B.C. back to the neo-Sumerian period of the twenty-first century B.C. Will believed that the story of Perseus beheading Medusa could be retraced to depictions on Sumero-Akkadian cylinder seals of heroic figures struggling with bearded tauromorphic demons (72–75). M. P. Nilsson, to the contrary, preferred a Greek beginning and believed that, since Perseus was Argive, his legend originated among the Myceneans.[7] Thalia P. Howe Feldman, in an important article,[8] has shown that such theories of either Near-Eastern or Mycenean origins for the Perseus-Gorgon story are based on insufficient evidence, yet none of her own psychological explanations of the Gorgon as an expression of ancient man's fear of nighttime,[9] or his fear of "devouring" mothers of the Freudian type, or his fear of resurgent matriarchal rule,[10] seems entirely adequate.

It is preferable, I believe, to construe the Gorgon—particularly Medusa, whose name means "Queen"—as a faded mother-goddess. The Gorgon would have been a goddess of the type of *πότνια θηρῶν*, who of all Greek goddesses, as Nilsson observed, most resembled a demon.[11] The universally known danger to mortals of seeing a deity face to face explains why the Gorgon was believed to destroy all who

[4] Aesch. *Phorc.* fr. 262 Nauck.

[5] Halliday 115.

[6] "Assyrian Elements in the Perseus-Gorgon Story," *AJA* 38 (1934) 345.

[7] *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology* (New York 1963) 40–41.

[8] "The Origin and Function of the Gorgon-Head," *AJA* 58 (1954) 209–21.

[9] Feldman (above, note 8) 212.

[10] T. P. Howe Feldman, "Gorgo and the Origins of Fear," *Arion* 4 (1965) 492.

[11] *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*[3] (Munich 1967) 1.227. On a Rhodian plate (*ibid.*, plate 30, number 2) the *potnia thêrôn* is actually depicted with a Gorgon's head as though she were identical to the Gorgon.

looked at her. Even the noisiness of the Gorgon that is implied in her name (cf. Sanskrit *garǧ* 'howl' and Greek γαργαρίς 'noise') is appropriate to the mother-goddess type, as no less a lady than Hera, for example, is said to have screamed (ἰάχησεν) in warning when her favorites, the Argonauts, nearly sailed into the stream of Ocean (A.R. 4.640).

Whatever might be the provenance of the Gorgon, for Homer, as for the poet of the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield*, the Gorgon's eyes were her most prominent feature, even if neither poet seems to have considered her glance specifically petrifying or even lethal.[12] The glance of stone (λίθινον θάνατον), however, was mentioned by Pindar, *Pyth.* 10.48, and became thereafter an important part of the literary tradition. Although the *glance* that made man stone was easily generalized into the *face* that made man stone, later writers like Ovid, Lucan, and Alexander of Myndos assigned the Gorgon's petrifying power to her eyes.[13] These authors may have been influenced by the kind of "scientific" explanation of the Evil Eye that was common in the Greco-Roman period. According to Plutarch, the eye was the chief, if not the sole, source of the deadly rays that were supposed to spring up like poisoned darts from the inner recesses of a person possessing the Evil Eye (*Quaest. Conv.* 5.7.2–3 = *Mor.* 680F–681F). The infectious particles, of which the vindictive rays were made up, penetrated, when properly directed, through the victim's eyes, nostrils, windpipe, or other openings and thereby implanted "in the victims a morbid quality like that present in the infectors" (Heliodorus 3.7.3).

The Gorgon's eyes, best illustrated on faces modeled or painted full front, were emphasized by almost every Greek artist who represented her. Because the selective principles of visual artists were often aesthetic or practical and were not necessarily determined by the tradition of myth or popular superstition, we cannot be certain that the prominent

[12] Hom. *Il.* 8.349, 11.36–37; Ps.-Hes. *Sc.* 236.

[13] Ov. *Met.* 5.240–41, *nec* [Proteus] . . . / *torva colubriferi superavit lumina monstri.* Alexander of Myndos (first century A.D.) described, in his *History of Animals* (= Athenaeus 5.221C), a Libyan ewe-like creature, called a *gorgô*, who shakes her mane from her eyes and kills whomever she sees with τῇ γιγνομένῃ ἀπὸ τῶν ὀμμάτων φύσεως φορᾷ. Lucan, 9.683, seems to have had such a prototype in mind when he described Athena as covering the face of Medusa with her snake locks to keep Perseus from being petrified by her eyes: *quantum . . . oculos effundere mortis* (9.680).

eyes of pictured Gorgons were illustrating the Evil Eye as we know it from folk belief. But in Archaic art, the Gorgons glared at the spectator with transfixing eyes that held him with a power that seemed threatening. On a proto-Attic amphora in Eleusis (= Schefold, plate 16), for instance, two Gorgons, pursuing a now partly-obliterated Perseus, glared out at the spectator as though they possessed the malevolent power that Ovid and Lucan later attributed to them. The same type of eyes, molded in an apotropaic mask (see Schefold, plate 19), or Gorgoneion, may have served a function similar to that of the stylized eyes in modern Mediterranean fetish beads and distracted some other, alien Evil Eye from fastening its baleful look on persons or buildings that displayed (and therefore were protected by) the Gorgoneion.

The Gorgons, nevertheless, were more than the average witches of folklore who slowly wither their enemies with the Evil Eye, but, going further, also petrified them. Perseus could not rely for his defense on traditional folk remedies which might not have been powerful enough to neutralize Medusa's glance. The rustic Polyphemus, for instance, in Theocritus, *Idyll* 6.39–40, had learned from an old hag that he could counteract the Evil Eye (ὀφθαλμὸς βάσκανος) by spitting three times into his tunic, but Polyphemus was threatened only by the conceit he felt when he admired his own reflection in the sea (*Id.* 6.35), not by the basilisk-like stare of a Gorgon. The Stygian Nymphs, who armed Perseus against Medusa, gave him a pouch (κίβισις), winged sandals, and Hades' vanishing cap (κυνῆ). Hermes provided a sickle-sword (ἅρπη), and Athena provided a bronze shield-mirror.[14] The uses of these weapons—the shield-mirror and cap excepted—are fairly self-evident. The *kibisis* was not necessarily magical, but certainly useful for protecting innocents from the lethal Gorgon-Head while Perseus was in flight. The winged sandals furnished Perseus with rapid means for long-distance travel, and the *harpê* supplied him with means for decapitating Medusa.

The *kunê*, although it magically made Perseus invisible, was not furnished specifically to counteract the effect of the petrifying eyes.

[14] See Apollod. 2.4.2. The scene of the Nymphs' (there called "Naiads") donation is depicted on a Chalcidian black-figured amphora, British Museum B 155 (= Woodward, figure 12a).

Invisibility, one can argue, would have been a formidable defense against many dangers, but was obviously not useful for avoiding petrifactive rays. Athena on the Trojan field (*Iliad* 5.845) or Hermes in the Titanomachy (*Apollod.* 1.6.2), for example, wore the *kunê* only to become invisible, not to avoid petrifactive rays. Even if Perseus' invisibility had thwarted the Gorgons in their effort to aim visual rays directly at his eyes, the hero, just as effectively, would have evaded their optic rays by turning his own eyes aside. And this simple maneuver was the defense which Perseus and certain allies were shown to have utilized, at least in Greek art, where invisibility was admittedly difficult to show visibly. Representations of the Archaic and Classical periods show Perseus averting his eyes,[15] while an Italiote volute-krater in the Taranto Museum shows satyrs covering their eyes or turning their backs to the Medusa-Head.[16] These and other vase paintings indicate that the deadly Head, however close it might have been to Perseus, was not believed to contaminate him so long as *he* did not look at it.

On a terracotta metope from the Apollo Temple at Thermon, ca. 625 B.C., in the National Museum of Athens (=Schefold, plate 18), Perseus, looking straight ahead of him, is depicted in a kneeling-running position, while he holds the Head, half-covered by the *kibisis*, snugly under his right armpit. The Head does not endanger Perseus, despite its proximity, because its open eyes (visible above the edge of the *kibisis*) do not gaze into the averted eyes of Perseus. On an Attic black-figured skyphos from Vulci, now in the Robinson Collection (=D. M. Robinson, "Unpublished Greek Vases in the Robinson Collection," *AJA* 60 [1956], plate 13, number 62), Perseus, while he decapitates Medusa, looks ahead at her head and not backward as on

[15] Boeotian pithos, early seventh century B.C., Louvre CA 795 (=Schefold, plate 15b; Woodward, figure 3a); Attic black-figured olpe, Amasis Painter, Brit. Mus. B 471, Beazley *ABV* 153, 32 (=Woodward, figure 13a); ivory relief from Samos, 630–620 B.C., Vathy Museum (=Schefold, plate 17); Selinus Temple C metope, ca. 540 B.C., Palermo Museum (=Woodward, figure 15a).

[16] Karneia Painter, ca. 410 B.C., Museo Nazionale Archeologico 8263 (=Arias-Hirmer, plate 234). Cf. also a Lucanian vase, A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania Campania and Sicily* (Oxford 1967) 1.1/584, plate 59, number 2; Italiote bell-krater, Leipzig T 83 (=Frank Brommer, *Satyrspiele: Bilder griechischer Vasen*[2] [Berlin 1959], plate 24); Apulian red-figured bell-krater, Eton-Nika Painter, Bonn 79 (=Schauenburg, plate 34, number 1).

the other side of the same vase (ibid., number 61). But Medusa is shown on both sides of the Robinson skyphos *in front view*, and thus, whether Perseus looks forward or backward, his and Medusa's gazes do not meet.

I am not aware of a single representation of Perseus looking into Medusa's open eyes. I cannot agree, therefore, with K. Schauenburg that artists who portrayed Perseus looking at Medusa or the Head were working under the misapprehension that "keine versteinernde Wirkung" (23) was ascribable to her. It is more likely that they identified Medusa's eyes as the source of her most fateful rays. So long as her gaze did not meet Perseus' gaze, the danger to the hero was minimal.

Although Perseus—by exercising reasonable care, if not by virtue of being invisible—could avoid the sight of the severable Medusa-Head, he would have eluded with far greater difficulty the glance of the two indestructible Gorgon sisters, Sthenô and Euryalê (Hes. *Th.* 276–77), whom it was impossible for the hero to behead. These immortal Gorgons, in both Greek art and literature, set out to pursue and seize the intruding assassin with their hands, even though, strictly considered, they might more easily have kept their place and petrified Perseus by glancing into his eyes, if he had looked in their direction.

In the pseudo-Hesiodic *Shield*, which has been dated by C. M. Bowra to the early sixth century,[17] "the terrible and unmentionable Gorgons," depicted on Heracles' shield, "were rushing after him [Perseus] and longed to seize him" (*ἱέμεναι μαπέειν*).[18] In the fifth century B.C., Pherecydes of Athens and, some six centuries later, Apollodorus concurred with the author of the *Shield* in his version of the Gorgon's chase of Perseus. Both the later authors used the verb *διώκω* 'chase' of the Gorgons' headlong pursuit of the murderer, and, according to both authors again, Sthenô and Euryalê were balked of their prey because they could not see Perseus who was invisible (*οὐχ ὁρῶσιν / συνιδεῖν αὐτὸν οὐκ ἠδύναντο*).[19] In this case, the *kunê* was appropriately useful, since the immortal Gorgons did not want to petrify the hero so much as to catch him, and Perseus could better avoid their

[17] *Greek Lyric Poetry*[2] (Oxford 1961) 80, footnote 1.

[18] Ps.-Hes. *Sc.* 229–31. The pursuit is said by Pausanias, 5.18.5, to have been depicted on the seventh- or sixth-century Cypselus chest.

[19] Pherecydes, in Wendel 320, line 16; Apollod. 2.4.2.

grasp when they could not see him. Perseus had been provided with the magic cap, it seems, not to protect him from Medusa's or the other Gorgons' petrifying eyes, but so that he might escape from the pursuing survivors, Sthenô and Euryalê, who wanted to seize him in their talons and perhaps dismember him with their giant teeth.[20]

Out of several possible pictorially vivid scenes in the Persean legend, the pursuit of Perseus by the two immortal Gorgons was frequently depicted on vases of the Archaic and Classical periods. Thus, the verbal description of the pursuing Gorgons in the *Shield* may have been directly suggested to the poet by earlier or contemporary painted versions. In most painted versions of the pursuit, the two Gorgons pursued Perseus while their eyes were turned full-face toward the viewer rather than toward Perseus. The setting of Perseus' escape was suggested by dolphins,[21] symbolizing the hero's flight across Ocean (Hes. *Th.* 274), or by mountains,[22] signifying the wild, uninhabited terrain in which the Gorgons nested and which was described later by Ovid as *abdita longe | deviaque et silvis horrentia saxa fragosis* (*Met.* 4.777–78).

In some representations Perseus was shown looking straight ahead, doubtlessly the wisest direction in which to look when he was engaged in precipitate flight.[23] In other representations, Perseus was shown looking back toward the pursuing Gorgons—whether because of natural anxiety or a desire to assess their position, is not clear.[24] But

[20] The jagged teeth of Gorgons were as prominently featured in Greek visual representations as were their eyes. Apollod. 2.4.2 credited the Gorgons with boar tusks, such as those molded, e.g., on the Gorgon plaque, ca. 620–610 B.C., in Syracuse's Museo Archeologico Nazionale (= Schefold, Plate II). "Grinding" teeth are mentioned by Ps.-Hes. *Sc.* 236.

[21] Attic neck amphora, Nettos Painter, ca. 610 B.C., Athens, National Museum 1002, Beazley *ABV* 4, 1 (= Schefold, plate 59; Arias-Hirmer, plates 18 and 19).

[22] Attic black-figured neck amphora, Leagros Group, Brit. Mus. B 248, Beazley *ABV* 373, 173 (= Woodward, figure 14a).

[23] Attic black-figured dinos, Gorgon Painter, Louvre E 874, Beazley *ABV* 8, 1 and 679 (= Schefold, plate 45; Arias-Hirmer, plates 36 and 37; Woodward, figures 6a and 6b); Boeotian black-figured tripod vase, Berlin 1727 (= Woodward, figures 10a, 10b and 10c); Attic black-figured neck amphora, Brit. Mus. B 248, Beazley *ABV* 373, 173 (= Woodward, figure 14a); red-figured amphora from Vulci, Berlin Painter, Munich 2312.

[24] Attic black-figured lekythos, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 277 (= Woodward, figures 11a and 11b); Italiote red-figured hydria, Brit. Mus. F 500 (= Woodward, figure 28a).

Perseus, by looking into the Gorgons' eyes, was surely courting instant petrification. We may infer, then, that the painters who pictured Perseus looking back toward the pursuing, immortal Gorgons associated the power of the super-Evil Eye primarily, if not solely, with Medusa. Or they purposely ignored its consequences for Perseus, because they preferred a vigorous pursuit scene to a more static interpretation that might have stressed the petrifactive quality of the Gorgons' eyes.

During the fifth century B.C., there appeared a literary variant of the Gorgon story in which Perseus was said to have discovered the Gorgons asleep—a variant that rendered the cap of invisibility and the shield-mirror functionless (see Schauenburg 54–55): Pherecydes, in Wendel 320, lines 12–13; Ov. *Met.* 4.784; Apollod. 2.4.2; Tzetz., in Scheer 2.270, lines 4–5. Lucian, *Dial. Mar.* 14.2, states that after the beheading Perseus flew away "before the sisters woke up." In the variant tradition which Lucian invented or adopted, Perseus' magical cap was quite forgotten.

Simultaneously, in the fifth century B.C., pictorial representations of Medusa overtaken in her sleep and beheaded while she lay on the ground became popular.[25] And once the grotesqueness of the Archaic beheading scenes had been de-emphasized and softened, the face of Medusa herself was made increasingly beautiful. Artists by the third century B.C. were less interested in portraying the *act* of Medusa's beheading than they were in showing the *pathos* of the now lovely victim (see Schauenburg 55). There were two types, according to A. Furtwängler, in Roscher, ed. *Myth. Lex.* 1.2.1721, s.v. "Gorgones," of the beautiful Medusa: one with a peacefully beautiful face (end of the fifth century B.C.), and another with a pathetically beautiful face (third century B.C. and later). Inevitably the debogeyfying and resultant beautifying of Medusa obviated much of the demand for additional beheading scenes of the bizarre Archaic type and even of the anthropomorphized Classical type. Once the monster had become attractive and appealing, she engaged the sympathy of her

[25] Attic red-figured hydria, Pan Painter, early fifth century B.C., Brit. Mus. E 181, Beazley *ARV*² 555, 96 (=Woodward, figure 18a); fragments of Attic red-figured krater, Villa Giulia Painter, middle fifth century, Brit. Mus. E 493, Beazley *ARV*² 619, 18 (=Woodward, figure 23); Attic red-figured hydria, Nausicaa Painter, Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts 62.1.1, Beazley *ARV*² 1683.

audience and the latter could no longer take pleasure in her killing. The point of the old adventure—the exciting triumph of good over evil—had been obscured, and concurrently, as Schauenburg adds, "die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten seiner Gestaltung erschöpft waren" (55).

We may draw some initial conclusions about Perseus' battle with the Gorgons from the evidence of extant Archaic and Classical art and ancient mythographers. (1) Perseus protected himself from Sthenô and Euryalê chiefly by running or flying from them as fast as he could; the cap of invisibility facilitated this escape only in written versions, since invisibility was not the visual artists' concern. (2) Perseus, in artistic representations, was shown to have protected himself from the petrifying power of the Medusa-Head chiefly by looking away from it or at least avoiding its direct glance. (3) All these defenses—rapid escape, invisibility, averted gaze—became otiose when the mythic variant of the Gorgons asleep appeared in the fifth century B.C.

If Perseus adequately defended himself against the Head by simply avoiding its gaze, the inclusion among his defensive weapons—in some written variants of the beheading only—of the celebrated mirror, or shield-mirror (in which Perseus is said to have watched Medusa's reflection while beheading her),[26] becomes problematical. Is the mirror an extraneous or late accretion on an already complex story, or does it represent ancient storytellers' efforts to explain how Perseus was able to locate the position of Medusa and guide his sword while at the same time avoiding direct sight of her? Both of these options, I think, will appear to be acceptable.

A mirror as a kind of guideboard for the beheading would have presented several types of annoying distortion which were as familiar to the ancients as to us. Apuleius, in the sixteenth chapter of *De Magia Liber*, enumerated some curiosities of mirror reflections which, although he claimed to have culled them from the writings of Archimedes, must nevertheless have been common knowledge. A convex

[26] Shields in ancient Greece served more obviously as mirrors, since ancient mirrors, like many ancient shields, were generally made from polished bronze discs. Mirrors, to the contrary, were not generally, if ever, convex like shields. See Gustav F. Hartlaub, *Zauber des Spiegels* (Munich 1951) 34–37.

mirror (if Perseus had viewed the Medusa-Head on the outside of a shield) would have decreased the apparent size of the Head; a concave mirror (if Perseus had viewed the Medusa-Head on the inside of a shield) would have enlarged the Head and might also have blinded him by focusing sun rays that were then reflected back into his eyes (but perhaps there was little light to the west across glorious Ocean); imperfections in the metal or ornamentation might have led to doubling or tripling of images; and, most confusing of all, the images of the Head and sword would have been reversed.

If Perseus held his own shield up to use as a mirror, which Ovid and Lucan explicitly say,[27] the motion of his left arm—attempting to arrange an unimpeded view of Medusa above or below his forearm which would have been strapped across the middle of the shield and thus have broken the reflecting surface along the length of the shield's diameter—might have interfered with the methodic movement of Perseus' right hand which was directing the sword. Lucan may have been the first to realize that Perseus' right arm needed steadying, if his attention were concentrated on the inequable image in his shield: *ipsa regit trepidum Pallas, dextraque trementem / Perseos aversi Cyllenida derigit harpen* (9.675–76). Or Lucan was following the mythographic tradition preserved by Apollodorus: κατευθυνούσης τὴν χεῖρα Ἀθηνᾶς (2.4.2). In either case, E. Kuhnert (in Roscher, ed. *Myth. Lex.* 3.2.2010, s.v. "Perseus") was right in dating the detail of Athena's arm-steadying to a time after the mirror theme had been introduced into the story. Otherwise, such direct aid would have seemed unnecessarily officious even for a goddess as solicitous as Athena.

If Athena held her shield as a mirror before Perseus, which Lucian (*Dial. Mar.* 14.2) states, Perseus would have freed his left hand for seizing Medusa by her hair and thereby steadying her head for the slicing blow with his right hand in the very way that he is described as doing by Lucian and shown to be doing—without the aid of the mirror—in many visual representations (see above, note 15). Perseus' left arm was more effective steadying the Head than it was manipulating a shield-qua-mirror.

[27] Ov. *Met.* 4.782–83, *se tamen horrendae clipei, quem laeva* [Perseus] *gerebat, / aere repercusso formam adspexisse Medusae*; Lucan 9.669–70, [Athena] *et clipeum laevae fulvo dedit aere nitentem, / in quo saxificam iussit spectare Medusam.*

Apollodorus, clearly aware of the conflict between literary traditions (reflected by Ovid and Lucan on one side, by Lucian on the other) on the identity of the mirror-bearer, hedged himself against criticism by not mentioning the bearer at all. Perseus, according to Apollod. 2.4.2, beheaded Medusa while looking in "a bronze shield" (ἀσπίδα χαλκῆν), otherwise unspecified.

A shield-mirror, then, whether it was held by Perseus or Athena, would not seem to have been practicable. The distortions in the reflected image of Medusa would alone have sufficed to perplex the hero. If Perseus had been carrying a shield on the same arm that he was using to grasp Medusa's head, he would have been hampered in his seizing action by the obtrusive mass of the metal. The picture, however we may imagine it, of Perseus holding three objects (Medusa, shield, and sword) with two arms is not, in the context of myth, ludicrous, but it is certainly remarkable. For this reason, Schauenburg (25), following K. Ziegler (5–6), rejects the popular theory (developed by G. Loeschcke in *Die Enthauptung der Medusa* [Bonn 1893]) that a Hellenistic painter was responsible for introducing a mirror into the action. Since an artist working in a visual medium would have been forced to see that Perseus could not, with the same left arm, have held his own shield and clutched Medusa's head simultaneously,[28] perhaps a writer, whose medium demanded less exact visualization—suggest Ziegler (18) and Schauenburg (26)—was the first to imagine Perseus holding his shield as a mirror. This seems a natural inference, if we accept the premise that good writers may be indifferent visualizers, but both the premise and conclusion that the mirror's origin is literary require further examination here.

[28] Schauenburg, however, reduces Loeschcke's hypothesis somewhat *ad absurdum* by arguing that no visual artist would have made Perseus simultaneously "den Schild halten und den tödlichen Streich führen" (25), since in Loeschcke's hypothetical prototype *Athena* held the shield-mirror. Ziegler's objection to Loeschcke's Hellenistic prototype rests on his unproven assurance that "für die Gorgosage in ihrem Kern bieten alle späteren Darstellungen (bis eben auf das Spiegelmotiv) keinen Zug, der nicht schon bei den Zeugen des 5. Jahrhunderts zu finden wäre" (4). But Loeschcke did not so underate his artist's sense of what was feasible (Schauenburg's criticism) or date the artist to the wrong period (Ziegler's argument). I believe that Loeschcke was right to suspect a visual prototype of the post-Classical period as being responsible for the mirror theme, but, since the supposed original is still conjectural, I cannot be certain.

The presumed litterateur, by definition, would have been insensitive to the tactical problems that, we have seen, the mirror as a defensive weapon introduced. He also would have been unaware of contemporary physical science, for the mirror, in terms of optical laws as defined in Classical times, was the worst possible defense for a hero to use against the outflow of deadly rays emanating from Medusa's eyes. All known ancient theories explicating mirror reflection, including the elaborations of the authoritative *Optica* by Euclid, were based on the presumably Pythagorean premise that sight was effected through light rays that proceeded "from the eye to the object perceived (and not in the opposite direction)."[29] Thus, according to Aëtius, who in the second century A.D. compiled summaries of philosophical doctrines, Pythagoras and his followers believed that mirror images were formed by "bending of the visual ray (*κατ' ἀνάκλασιν τῆς ὄψεως*), because the visual ray was aimed at the bronze [mirror] and, when it reached the dense and smooth surface, was hurled back and returned to its origin (*ὑποστρέφειν αὐτὴν ἐφ' ἑαυτήν*), somewhat as though it were a hand that had been outstretched and then bent back toward the shoulder."[30] Empedocles added that the visual ray(s), or effluences (*ἀπόρροιαι*), were arranged on the surface of the mirror by pressure "from the fire forced out of the mirror" (*ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐκκρινομένου ἐκ τοῦ κατόπτρου πυρώδους*).[31] The light rays which a person saw in the mirror, according to these theories, had their source, not in the sun, but in the viewer's own eyes.

Plato, *Timaeus* 46B, explained that reflections occurred when the fire belonging to the reflected face coalesced on the mirror with the fire belonging to the visual ray of the viewer and then both fires mixed were thrown back to the eyes of the viewer. Epicurus and his follower Lucretius likewise considered the mirror image to be a gathering of emanations upon a smooth surface, although they substituted their own *εἴδωλα*, or *simulacra*, for the *ἀπόρροιαι* of Empedocles.[32] Epicurus and the Epicureans believed that every sensible object con-

[29] George Sarton, *A History of Science: Hellenistic Science and Culture in the Last Three Centuries B.C.* (New York 1965) 118.

[30] Hermann Diels, *Doxographi Graeci*[2] (Berlin/Leipzig 1929) 405 = Aetii *Placita* 6.14.3.

[31] Diels (see above, note 30) 405 = Aet. *Plac.* 6.14.1.

[32] Diels (see above, note 30) 405 = Aet. *Plac.* 6.14.2; Lucr. *Rer. Nat.* 4.294; Apul. *Mag. Lib.* ch. 15.

tinually reproduced phantasmic images of itself, which, though they might be stopped and turned back from the surface of a mirror, eventually poured through the eyes of an observer and thus transferred to his mind a copy of the object perceived. The light rays of the viewer and viewed, according to these last two theories, were mixed during the process of reflecting sight. Perseus, accordingly, would have polluted his vision with the deadly optic rays of Medusa.

The common assumption in all these hypotheses, that the eye provided its own light rays as though it were a lamp, indicates that Greek philosophical theories of vision did not improve upon folkish (mis)explanations of vision by eye-lamp. The entire construct of the Evil Eye and all its elaborations, moreover, was itself based upon the popular conception of eyes as sources of energy, which could be imagined as harmful and negative as well as bright and illuminative. Consequently, a Greek writer, if he had been acquainted with the elemental physics of his day, should not have equipped Perseus with a mirror as defense against the petrifactive Evil Eye. For—according to the natural scientists—if Perseus had held up a mirror before the Medusa-Head, he would have risked diverting the deadly rays, which scintillated away from her eyes, into his own face.

The presumed writer, therefore, who interpolated the mirror into the Perseus legend would not only have been inept at or indifferent to visualizing the physical combat between Perseus and Medusa, but he also would have been unconcerned with the physical science, such as it was, of his day. He would have discerned in the mirror only one possible merit: its negativing effect on the deadly radiance of Medusa's head, which would have appeared, in accordance with common opinion, as an ἄψυχον εἰκώ in λαμπρῷ κατόπτρῳ (Eur. *Med.* 1161–62). This account by Euripides of a mirror image, on the occasion of Creon's daughter's fatal primping, seems to have arisen from the universal estimation of reflected images as inactive and thereby harmless—an easy and commonsensical notion which, though questioned by every physicist in antiquity, suited the unadorned texture that was common to this and most other ancient myths. Among the various ancient writers who are known to have described Perseus' beheading of Medusa, those more-or-less suiting the above

qualifications for mirror-interpolater were Pherecydes of Athens, Euripides, Lycophron, and Ovid.

Among extant writers, Pherecydes, historian and genealogist of the fifth century B.C., has been considered the earliest to mention Perseus' mirror,[33] and he would have copied the reference, if he had made it, from one of the older epics which he used as sources for his prose *Histories*. But there are no known visual representations of Perseus' mirror dating either to the fifth century when Pherecydes lived or to an earlier time,[34] and the version of Pherecydes' Perseus narrative, which is preserved for us among the Scholia to Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, has probably been expanded with additions from later variants of the legend. The few phrases referring to the κάτοπτρον (not called specifically a shield) cannot be found in the main manuscript tradition of Apollonius' scholia, but in a recalcitrant sixteenth-century A.D. manuscript (Parisinus 2727) that descends from an earlier, so-called "Parisian" recension whose editor, according to Karl Wendel, is known to have altered the traditional scholia by recasting sentences and adding his own interpretations.[35]

Wendel, like F. Jacoby, who had edited the fragments of Pherecydes, relegated all mention of Perseus' mirror in Pherecydes' supposed account, as witnessed by *Parisinus* 2727, to his apparatus criticus,[36] yet neither scholar explained his reasons for athetizing the lines. But the correspondence between the wording of Ps.-Pherec. (Wendel 320, app.crit.), ἐν τῷ κατόπτρῳ ὁρῶν τὴν Μέδουσαν . . . καρατομεῖ αὐτήν, and that of Tzetz. *ad* Lyc. 838 (= Scheer 2.270, line 5), καρατομεῖ τὴν Μέδουσαν ἐν τῷ κατόπτρῳ βλέπων, shows, in my opinion, that the "Pherecydean" mirror was interpolated by a Byzantine scholiast. Not only is the wording of the two passages parallel, but both authors, by not specifying the κάτοπτρον as an ἀσπίς, indicate that they are

[33] E. Kuhnert, in Roscher, ed. *Myth. Lex.* 3.2.1986.

[34] Reflections pictured in mirrors of any kind are rare in Greek art before the fourth century B.C. (a black-figured lekythos once in the Sammlung Preyss, Munich [Beazley *ABV* 497, 186], showing a woman looking into a mirror, is a notable exception). "Soweit ich sehe," notes Schauenburg, "kennen wir es [das Spiegelbild] bisher auf Vasen . . . nur in böotischen und unteritalischen Bereich, vor der Kaiserzeit sonst vor allem vom Alexandermosaik und aus etruskischen Kunst" (25).

[35] Wendel xv, s.v. "Praefatio."

[36] Scholia *ad* A.R. 4.1091 & 1515A (Wendel 305–6 & 319–21) = F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin 1923) 1.61–63 (Pherecyd. fr. 10–12).

writing late in the mythic tradition. By their time, the nature of the mirror was commonplace knowledge. The mirror supposedly mentioned by Pherecydes, then, was probably the gratuitous addition of a Byzantine copyist who wanted to "complete" the version of Pherecydes by fleshing it with details from versions such as that of Lucian.[37]

Euripides, according to Ziegler (17), first introduced the mirror into the action of the beheading and, without thinking the matter out clearly, had Perseus carry his own shield as mirror while simultaneously attacking Medusa with both arms. Ziegler's argumentation, however, is somewhat questionable. Given Euripides' undoubted interest in mirror imagery (Ziegler [6–7] lists seven instances, none of them associated with Perseus) and the fact that he wrote a play called *Andromeda*, there is little real evidence which Ziegler can bring forward to support his claim that Euripides described the beheading of Medusa. Although Euripides, in *Andromeda*, fr. 133 Nauck (ἀλλ' ἡδύ τοι σωθέντα μεμνῆσθαι πόνων), seems to imply a narration by Perseus of his past adventures, we may not be sure that such a narration occurred during a wedding banquet such as Ovid, *Met.* 4.765–803, describes—much less that Euripides, like Ovid later, described Perseus bearing his own shield during the beheading. To the contrary, if Lucian's description of the beheading in *Dial. Mar.* 14.2 may also, according to Ziegler's own argument (15), be traced back to Euripides' *Andromeda*, one might argue equally well that Euripides described Athena holding the shield-mirror for Perseus. L. Dreger, in her unpublished dissertation, "Das Bild im Spiegel" (Heidelberg 1940), and Schauenburg (25) have tentatively accepted Ziegler's hypothesis of a Euripidean origin for Perseus' mirror. But the evidence is tenuous at best, and, in our eagerness to relate Ovid's banquet account of the beheading to a presumably analogous narrative in Euripides' *Andromeda*, we run the risk of an infinite regress, especially since now Francesco della Corte has introduced a third man into the argument: the author of the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*.[38]

[37] Lucian *Dial. Mar.* 14.2, ἐνορῶν δ' ἐς τὴν εἰκόνα . . . ἀπέτεμε τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς.

[38] "Il Perseo Ovidiano," in *Ovidiana: Recherches sur Ovide*, ed. N. I. Herescu (Paris 1958) 260, "Anzi siamo certi che proprio nel 'Catalogo' si trovava cenno alle nozze di Perseo con Andromeda." But I am less sure than della Corte that there was a banquet narrative in the *Catalogue*, since he grounds his theory on a brief statement that Heracles was descended from Ἀνδρομέδας Κηφη[ίδος (Ps.-Hes. fr. 135.6 Merkelbach-West).

K. Wernicke, in *RE* 1.2.2156, s.v. "Andromeda," suggested that Lycophron, in his lost play, *Andromeda*, may have described Perseus' wedding banquet. But we may ignore as evidence any drama of which we presently possess only a title cited in the *Souda*.

Pherecydes, Euripides, and others aside, only Ovid remains among available writers on the Perseus theme as likely candidate for interpolater of the mirror into the legend of Perseus. Perseus, according to Ovid, beheaded Medusa after he had located the position of her head in the shield which he bore on his left arm:

> se tamen horrendae clipei, quem laeva gerebat,
> aere repercusso formam adspexisse Medusae,
> dumque gravis somnus colubrasque ipsamque tenebat,
> eripuisse caput collo . . . (*Met.* 4.782–85).

In this account of the beheading, we may identify the earliest—albeit none too early—datable literary reference to the mirror of Perseus, since Ovid composed the *Metamorphoses* in the seven or eight years before his banishment in A.D. 8.[39] Because the date is late, we may well ask whether this variant of a guide-mirror personally wielded by Perseus during the beheading was original with our poet.

There are no discernible literary references to Perseus' mirror earlier than Ovid's. In art there are both hypothetical and actual representations of Perseus causing the severed Gorgon-Head to be reflected in the surface of a shield, but no evidence at all for a variant in which the shield was used as mirror *during* the beheading. As the model of numerous Roman gems, lamps, coins, wall paintings, and grave reliefs which depict the Gorgoneion reflected in a water spring or on a shield, Schauenburg (81), following G. Lippold, is inclined to hypothesize an early Hellenistic painting. If this painting did exist, it depicted a post-decapitation scene, since Andromeda, according to these two scholars, was portrayed in it. The solitary Perseus who appears on Roman gems holding the Medusa-Head high, but looking at its reflection in a shield at his feet (e.g., a sard ringstone in the New York Metropolitan Museum [G. M. A. Richter, *Catalogue of Engraved Gems* (Rome 1956) 91]), may, like Ovid's Perseus, appear alone because of the straitened limits of his frame. Richter (*loc. cit.*) has suggested

[39] Brooks Otis, *Ovid As an Epic Poet* (Cambridge 1966) 21.

that the original of the New York sard was a statue of the fourth century, but the original may also have been a fifth-century statue of Perseus Triumphant. E. Langlotz, *Der triumphierende Perseus* (Köln/Opladen 1960), has interpreted the separable head of the Albani Athena in Rome to be a male head belonging to a Perseus (14), has coupled it with three similar Roman copies of a nude male torso (17–18), and traced these reassembled imitations back to what he believes was a fifth-century statue, by Pythagoras the Samian, of Perseus Triumphant (30). This statue, by means of its preservation in the iconography of medieval astrological manuscripts, would have been a prototype of the celebrated Cellini Perseus in the Loggia dei Lanzi (37–42). Whatever are the merits of Langlotz' highly conjectural argument, we should note that there is no possibility of Langlotz' Perseus Triumphant having held a shield-mirror during the beheading. For, as Langlotz describes his presumed sculpture, "der Heros ist nach Tötung der Medusa dargestellt" (24).

Schauenburg has identified two Apulian red-figured vases which portray the Medusa-Head's reflection on a shield.[40] To these two vases, a Ruvo bell-krater and the Resta pelike in Taranto (plate 1), we may now add a bell-krater formerly on the Swiss Market, but acquired in 1970 by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (plate 2), which has recently been attributed by Cambitoglou-Trendall to the Tarporley Painter, to whom they had previously attributed the Resta pelike.[41] On all three of these vases, Perseus is not shown (as Ovid describes

[40] Schauenburg 78: bell-krater in the Jatta Collection, Ruvo (=A. D. Trendall, *Frühitaliotische Vasen* [Leipzig 1938] 40, number B 54); pelike, Tarporley Painter, in Resta Collection, Taranto (=A. Cambitoglou and A. D. Trendall, *Apulian Red-Figured Vase-Painters of the Plain Style* [Tokyo 1961, for AIA] 32 and Plate XIII, numbers 57, 59–60). Schauenburg also identifies a fragment of a third-century B.C. Etruscan mirror (Berlin fr. 140) on which the reflection scene of the Resta pelike seems to have been copied. Both the Resta pelike and the Berlin mirror fragment are remarkable in that each depicts two Gorgoneia: one in Athena's hand and the other (as traditionally) on her aegis.

[41] Apulian red-figured bell-krater, Boston Museum of Fine Arts 1970.237. The Boston bell-krater, now attributed to the Tarporley Painter, is listed in A. Cambitoglou and A. D. Trendall, "Addenda to *Apulian Red-figured Vase-Painters of the Plain Style*," *AJA* 73 (1969) 426. On one side, it shows Perseus, Athena "reflecting the gorgoneion in his shield," and Hermes. Cambitoglou-Trendall (see above, note 40) 33 date the Tarporley Painter's earliest work to just before the end of the fifth century B.C., and his latest work to not much later than 380 B.C.

him) watching Medusa's reflection while beheading her, but, rather, viewing the reflection of the separated Head in a stationary shield. On the Ruvo bell-krater, Perseus holds the Medusa-Head before the shield-mirror, and on the Resta pelike and Boston bell-krater, Athena. Because Medusa's truncated body does not appear on any of these three vases, Schauenburg seems correct in interpreting the scenes as tranquil "Betrachtung des Gorgoneions" (81), or examination of the Head sometime after the successful escape from the Gorgons' lair. But there is no evidence for Schauenburg's theory that the "Head-viewing" scene of the vases has "eine literarische Quelle" (79), or that it represents a "Weiterbildung" (81) of the tradition that Perseus viewed the image of Medusa while beheading her. Ovid is our first attested source for the tradition that Perseus held a mirror during the beheading, and Lucan copied Ovid (see above, note 27). The "corrected" version of the Ovidian tradition, that Athena held a mirror during the beheading—for which Lucian, *Dial. Mar.* 14.2, is our first literary source—enjoyed its artistic vogue in the later Greco-Roman period.[42] Whatever the origin of Lucian's version may have been, it was not likely to have been vases like those of the Tarporley Painter on which Athena displayed, not the shield (as Lucian said), but the Gorgoneion —and this at a time *after* the beheading.

Because, as Schauenburg states, the Apulian "Head-viewing" motif "hatte in der Kunst nur eine kurze Blüte" (81), we may well doubt that Ovid was dependent for the mirror theme on either the "Head-viewing" vases or their hypothetical congeners. Perseus as mirror-wielder in combat seems to have been Ovid's private image of Perseus beheading Medusa. Ovid's account was short, related as a flashback by Perseus to the guests at his marriage feast, and perhaps for that reason many elaborating details were omitted. Athena and Hermes,

[42] See, e.g., the late Roman sepulchral relief in Budapest (=G. G. King, "Some Reliefs at Budapest," *AJA* 37 [1933], plate 13, number 1). On this relief, King described Perseus as "looking at the image of Medusa reflected in the shield which Athena holds to serve him as a mirror" (72), but examination of the reproduction shows Perseus looking *over* Athena's shield and out at the spectator. Will noted this discrepancy, and he explained it as a simple transposition "du Mithra tauroctone" (61), whose gaze is regularly turned away from the bull into an undefined distance. But Schauenburg (27), following R. Hampe, has observed that Perseus, during the beheading, regularly faces the viewer in reliefs and plastic works, but turns his head backward 180° from the Gorgon on painted scenes.

PLATE I. Athena reflecting Gorgoneion in Perseus' shield. Apulian red-figured pelike, Tarporley Painter, in Resta Collection, Taranto (Courtesy Soprintendenza alle Antichità, Taranto)

PLATE 2. Athena reflecting Gorgoneion in Perseus' shield. Apulian red-figured bell-krater, Tarporley Painter, Boston Museum of Fine Arts 1970.237 (Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Perseus' tutelary gods, were not mentioned, and their omission from the narrative may explain why Ovid chose to have Perseus wield a mirror during the beheading. In Pherecydes' version, Athena and Hermes had pointed out Medusa (*δεικνύουσι Μέδουσαν* [Wendel 320, line 14]). In Ovid's version, without the gods' help, Perseus located her in his ready shield-mirror and *aere repercusso formam adspexisse Medusae* (*Met.* 4.783).

We may now draw final conclusions about Perseus' battle with Medusa from the evidence of Italiote art and Greco-Roman texts. (1) The variant of the Perseus legend, that the hero used a shield-mirror to reflect the severed Gorgon-Head sometime after the beheading, is demonstrable in fourth-century B.C. vase painting. (2) The variant that Perseus looked in a shield-mirror in order to locate Medusa and to guide his cutting arm while decapitating her seems to have originated with Ovid. (3) The variant that Athena held a shield-mirror for Perseus while he beheaded Medusa seems to have been an amendment by Lucian or his sources of the somewhat awkward Ovidian account.

The idea of Perseus seeing Medusa in a mirror—irrespective of how, when, or where he saw the reflection—inevitably came to the mind of vase artists like the Tarporley Painter, who lived in the fourth century B.C. At this time the need to vary Classical motifs led artists to experiment with perspective, to visualize old themes from new points of view, or simply to be different. The Tarporley Painter's "Head-viewing" scene, for example, typified the post-Classical interest in idyllic scenes; for Perseus, after the battle, found time to calm himself and closely examine the deadly weapon which he had acquired at great personal risk. The scene also alluded to the beheading by presuming it, and thus viewed the story from a novel point of time. Archaic artists depicted the beheading during, or immediately after, the beheading; the Tarporley Painter, quite some time after. But most important, the mirror allowed the Tarporley Painter or the painter of the Ruvo bell-krater to attract the attention of a public that was perhaps more interested in mirrors than it was in Perseus.