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EVE MEETS MEDUSA

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Introduction

In this chapter, the myth of Eve encounters the myth of Medusa via the lens of *écriture féminine*, drawing on imagery located in Hélène Cixous's essays "Laugh of the Medusa" (1976) and related texts, such as "To Live the Orange" (1979) and "Castration or Decapitation" (1981). This treatment of the primordial myth of creation (a tale that endures in both Christian and Jewish memory) takes seriously the way in which it arranges and binds the masculine–feminine binary as the driver of the social structure that gives rise to patriarchal hegemony. The chapter is speculative: via a creative reading between the myth of Eve and the myth of Medusa, I illustrate that, within patriarchal texts, there are possibilities in a liberatory form of *écriture féminine* that brings to voice the mythical woman's "I am here." The coils that bind the violations of Medusa to the violations of Eve are not taken lightly. We see Eve's flight to the serpent and her entrapment in an increasingly suffocating space restricted to motherhood and marriage. With Cixous, I resist the violence of the scene in Genesis 3:16, where Eve survives the promise of embodied violations and domestic subjugation. We journey towards possible rewritings and rereadings of the creation text that might provide Eve an escape, so that the violation of Medusa/Eve is not continually re-enacted in this space, and so that instead, through an "other" reading that draws on a sequence of Cixousian imagery, she acts upon an agency that is "life-giving," sovereign, and generative. Thus, through the creative and speculative encounter of the two myths, I draw upon the feminine languages of the body, of darkness, of flight, of serpents, and of fluidity as a struggle for female/feminine self-knowing and self-realization. This reading is a shadow-bible reading (Goh 2010), a reading of the biblical text that seeks the liberatory moment which lies dormant beneath the text and in its margins. It seeks to reinscribe the text in order to liberate Eve again from the press of Father, Word, and Law.

To taste the orange

And there are women whom I don't wish to speak of, don't wish to withdraw from in speaking, don't wish to speak of with words that retreat from things, and the noise of their steps

covers the throbbing of things and with words that fall upon things and fix their quaverings and make them discordant and deafen them; I fear the fall of words on their voices.

(Cixous 1994, 84)

There are women of whom I do not wish to write. My desire is to leave them be, forgotten under the dead leaves of time scattered around that infamous tree. This might in time ease the old grief and hopelessness, the weight of subordination of the feminine that has not ceased over the years. I can't write, my tongue turned to stone, my fingers writhing. I draw back from making the precise marks, notating the stage of events that lead to certain feminine tragedy, a very feminine textual decline be it one of slow degrees or one of instantaneous dispatch. There are women of whom I cannot disavow, though I catch myself in flight from them, fleeing back to avoid the same sword that hangs above my own woman's head. Don't we all pretend it is not there, still hanging, sharp end pointed down towards our uncovered hair? There are women who echo in the great halls of literature, in mythology, whose figures stumble about as repressed subjects under the male gaze—object lessons, headless. They are caught again and again in the net of narrator's words, none less than the worthy translators and interpreters, the celebrated exegetes, the seminal theologians, and first-class biblical and classical scholars, who, like Perseus, strike off women heads again and again and hold them high. Yes, there are women of whom I cannot wish to write.

And to all of the women whose voices are like hands that come to meet our souls when we are searching for the secret ... I dedicate the gift of the orange.

(Cixous 1994, 87)

I do not wish to write of these difficult myths, and sense that the moment I write their names their voices will burst onto the scene like Cixous's "luminous torrents" in her celebrated essay "Laugh of the Medusa" (1976, 876). There is no hope for it, so I will call their names into this current writing—Eve and Medusa—and encounter them again in the established texts where they eternally perform their lines. One story is of a woman, Eve, born to the garden, to the desire of what I will call "the orange" (Cixous 1994). The other, Medusa, is born to beauty. Her very body is a garden. She is the orange, but she is taken. The way these two women of mythology merge and enter each other, when read side by side, is like the way of a snake upon a rock, the way of lovers. These beautiful women are of impossibly ancient times, but they are also women who are yet with us, and women who are yet to come. These primordial tales of women gone awry continue to speak in the present through echoes in the contemporary, through the news and the day-to-day horrors to which women are still heir. In a rewriting of this tale, were I to be brave enough for such madness, perhaps for a moment the woman of mythology might escape the eternal fall into the passive complement, the suppressed and fallible other, the object ripe for violation, the "morally deformed" party of the eternally sexuated couple, the couple represented by the headless woman's body and the exultant hero (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 261).

Writing of Eve, the church fathers did not attempt to temper their detrimental interpretations of this biblical woman and the exercise of their contempt influenced an aeon of church-sponsored patriarchal oppression, not least of all what was represented by that dread tome, *Malleus Maleficarum*, the manual against witches (1486). Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1956) reminds us of the heavy accusations levelled towards woman by such arbiters of the faith as St. Ambrose, St. Thomas, and St. John Chrysostom, summed up in the words of one of the earliest church fathers, Tertullian, and his now notorious metaphor that the beautiful Eve is *templum oedificatum super cloacam*—a temple built over a sewer (cited in Beauvoir 1956, 185). Thus Eve, thus the pagan

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Medusa. “Do you not believe that you are [each] an Eve?” asks Tertullian (*Apparel of Women* 1.1.1, 117),¹ envisioning a penance whereby each woman’s life should forever be lived in mourning as just deserts for always already standing in for Eve as the origin of the downfall of human race, the root of original sin, the gateway of the devil, justly vomited out from paradise. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar recount in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, because of the damage done by Tertullian’s vicious gaze, “women have seen themselves . . . as monstrous, vile, degraded creatures, second-comers, and emblems of filthy materiality, even though they have also been traditionally defined as superior spiritual beings, angels, better halves” (2000, 231).

Medusa, as Ovid tells us, was a glittering and privileged young woman (*Metamorphoses*, 171).² Like Tertullian’s Eve, she is breathtakingly beautiful. Her long hair cascades around her youthful shoulders. Her hair flows as radiantly as the sparkling Mediterranean Sea on a golden day. This carefree performance of youth and beauty, as well as her powerful connections, draws in the masculine gaze, with throngs of men captivated by her charms and jockeying to possess her as a wife. In a vile act as old as time and as commonplace in the contemporary as ever, her body is taken. She is violated on the stone floor of the temple and thrown away. The rapist is Neptune, an old and powerful male god—a god of a man, or perhaps just a man who thinks he is god. For this sin of circumstance, the object of another’s entitled lust, Medusa is cursed by Minerva to wear a writhing crown of venomous adders, and with her glance she will capture man and beast in the very moment of his greed and turn him to stone.

Eve is born from the first man’s rib. She springs like Pegasus from his side. She is conceptualized from the first as his supplement, *ezer k’negdo* (Gen. 2:18), and though she is bridled, wings bound, it is not long before she is drawn to the orange tree, flies to it, and has a meeting with the strangest and cleverest of creatures (Gen. 3:1). She doesn’t fear the inside of things, she desires them, seeking a certain pleasure from the newborn world (Cixous 1994). She eats the fruit from the serpent’s mouth and the juice of it courses down her body. She is finally awake, as if waking from the longest dream. The sleeping beauty of Eden opens her eyes.

We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bebies—we are black and we are beautiful.

(Cixous 1976, 878)

What do I have in common with these mythical women? Is it the belief as per Tertullian that I am yet another Eve? Perhaps yes, a resounding yes, because like Eve I dally with forgetting the name of the Father, and in its stead, uttering the sound of a woman’s laugh at the moment of that first waking. That same desire to go to the very source is lodged inside of me, a gift from this primordial mother (Cixous 1994, 87). These women call to me from the text of the world. I want to, in mourning and joy, engage in this attempt to dedicate a gift of writing to them, a gift the size of an orange. Eve, from this first beginning, started what would become a movement of women wanting more. This first orange marks the beginning of a thousand voyages, taken by women who through the ages set sail to seek out wisdom. Women who, because of this desire for knowledge and for life, would find themselves in grave danger. Women who, as Cixous (1994) reminds us, have gone up against kingdoms and churchmen, have been cut into pieces before patriarchal thrones, have been prostrated under the hammer of the church and burned at the stake. Eve and Medusa have been our mothers and sisters, having already on our behalf endured “the course of fear and have descended it down into the desert” (Cixous 1994, 91). Eve stretched out her hand, breathing in the fragrance of the tree as her own woman, taking the fruit that makes one wise. And despite all the

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super-uncles—Tertullian and his more recent sons—I am encouraged to read this mythical woman anew. I reread these names, Eve and Medusa, I avow their import, and I write a tale of these ancient women as ones who “go forward by leaps in search of themselves” (Cixous 1981, 53).

To the night

When I close my eyes the passage opens, the dark gorge, I descend. Or rather there is a descent: I entrust myself to the primitive space, I do not resist the forces that carry me off.

(Cixous 2005, 185)

There are women of whom I do not wish to write. To write of them appropriates a kind of knowledge. I don't know them. I don't know their particular pains. I have my own. These women, in the guise of everyday women, walk beside us all the time. I read of them in the news, Eves and Medusas everywhere. She is the captive woman, the beheaded woman, the woman who reaches for knowledge and is struck down, the woman whose body is taken against her will. To encounter these women in writing requires, as Cixous (2005) suggests, a kind of clairvoyance, a certain kind of sight, a myopic kind of encounter that unfortunately brings me up very close to their troubles.

And to the woman He said, “I will make most severe your pangs in childbearing; In pain shall you bear children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

(Gen 3:16)

I would like be able to say that I love them, Eve and Medusa. I want to love them both and I yearn for that same return of self. Thus, I will make an attempt to come half way, loving the courage of Eve and the carefree charm of Medusa, because amongst the colourful skeins of the tale, there are moments when their story is my own story, and the story of my generations. The myth of Eve outlays the story of woman in poignant detail, all the more poignant for its brevity and its unapologetic turn. Eve is born, as Tribble will famously aver, “contrary to nature” (1978, 73), for someone else's sake (De Beauvoir 1956) and dependant on them for life. She is a temptress and troublemaker, “untrustworthy, gullible and simple-minded” (Tribble 1978, 73), cursed to occupy a position in the patriarchal order that performs submission—a position like a caged bird. Her gift of being life's container is also a curse, one that emphasizes her original sin. This is what Maya Angelou, in her memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, has Daddy Clidell tell the reader, “Women be gittin' pregnant ever since Eve ate that apple” (2015, 288).

There is a darkness in the biblical tale. The sun sets and the eerie sounds of the night seem close. In the expulsion from Eden, the primordial couple traverse the desert outside. They must make their way alone without kith or kin and divided by an irreconcilable dispute. Yet I hear the voice of Eve as she dares cry from the void: “I have gained a male child with the help of the lord” (Gen. 4:1). It is a jubilant voice that with Cixous (2001) says, “Yes, I am still here.” I begin to relive Eve's tale through Cixous's metaphor of the *speläion*, or grotto; I open to the inside of the myth as if it were “a gourd of voices, an enchanted ear, the instrument of a continuous music, an open, bottomless species” (Cixous 1994, 88). Regardless of the magic of *speläion*, it retains a semblance of that original pain and one I seek intuitively to forget the moment I turn the page. A natural aversion, I think, to the encounter of suffering or shame.

Ovid (2004) tells of Medusa's expulsion from the temple where she had sought refuge—all the adoration becomes silence and then turns to antipathy. Stony faces and closed doors are Medusa's experience when she reports her rape. She is banished to “[r]ocky regions remote and secluded,

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littered with broken trees ... Across the fields and along the tracks ... the statues of men and of beasts transformed to stone” (Ovid 2004, 169–70). Here, Ovid describes Medusa and her adders as “buried” in sleep. We will soon see in the tale that she is already half in the grave, her head full of dreams. She is subterranean, deep in the *speläion*, with her secret hopes and desires decanting. She is still alive, her vivid and ferocious soul, potent and breathtaking, pulsing with such raw and beautiful life. She chuckles in her sleep and the sky bursts open, a murmuration of wings.

Of serpents

I am a child of the primordial myths, especially that of the first woman and that of Medusa the Gorgon. These myths, and their effects, have complemented the law and ensured the kind of destiny into which I was born. In each reading of these myths, the enduring masculine–feminine binary is rebound, reformed, its walls strengthened. But the blood that binds this duality is continually that of the woman, murdered again and again, violated and torn, held captive and confined, this blood that is both venom and a cure. The sibilant notes of ancient memory weave around me as I write. I struggle to write it, “Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, its reserved for the great—that is, for ‘great men’” (Cixous 1976, 876). And so in my own kind of metamorphosis, I transform in order to share in this orange. My skin becomes covered in golden scales, my eyes harden into diamonds, my teeth are bared to sharp points. I follow the serpent’s way.

And the serpent said to the woman, “You are not going to die, but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like divine beings who know good and bad.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate.

(*Gen. 3:4*)³

In her essay “La” (1994), Cixous writes of Eve and the serpent in the scene beside what I shall call the orange tree. For Cixous, Eve is caught between two extremes, that of madness and that of belief in herself. She describes the serpent as the manifestation of this panic and anguish, an anguish that is the consequence of constant interference by God and gods. This is the moment when Eve’s desire becomes serpentine. The serpent represents the desire of the feminine that has been drawn so far away from its own unique source, seized, and squeezed out. God’s curse on the serpent, then, has a double sting (*Gen. 3:15*): “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They shall strike at your head, And you shall strike at their heel.” The gifts of the feminine are Eve’s first offspring, here being her joys and delights, her books and paper, the room of her own, the need to go beyond her confinements, to desperately yearn to be born anew into life itself, and, as per the rabbinic interpreter Rashi, to create worlds (Gottlieb 1995). And what a strange and golden creature this serpent is who bears off the fruit of the Trees of Knowledge and of Life. Look how this same creature foiled Gilgamesh, Adam’s older brother from an even more ancient book, who “found a pool whose water was cool, down he went into it, to bathe” (George 2003, 99). Just as Eve did with this glorious creature with its glittering scales, when she went to bathe in its sibilant promise of knowledge, that of God’s secret name. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* it is said that, “of the plant’s fragrance a snake caught scent, came up [in silence], and bore the plant off. As it turned away it sloughed its skin,” a sign of eternal life (George 2003, 99). In the story of Eve, the serpent is a temptation and a resplendent gilded mirror that holds her soul entire. It whispers to Eve and stokes her limitless curiosity with its fragrance; she yearns to

choose knowledge and life, and to say no to death. As the serpent lives forever, I imagine so does Eve. There is no record of Eve's death in the Bible.

Like Eve, Medusa is also signed by the presence of serpents and the presence of blood. The serpent is a curse in *Metamorphoses*. Medusa's adders are the collateral of the goddess Minerva's rage. According to Ovid, "Jove's daughter screened her virginal eyes with her aegis in horror, and punished the sin, by transforming the Gorgon's beautiful hair into horrible snakes" (*Metamorphoses*, 171). This is a troubling part of the myth. It is one thing for a woman to be attacked by a man, but to be condemned by another woman for this crime against her seems an ultimate betrayal. For Cixous (1981), a judgement signed by a woman does not necessarily mean an exercise of the feminine. Sometimes, it is a reiteration of the patriarchal order. But Gillian Alban (2017) offers another reading. Minerva has granted a two-edged sword to Medusa. On the one hand, Medusa's golden hair becomes a writhing fright, but on the other hand, this also empowers her beyond her mortal means. Medusa is gifted with an apotropaic gaze and other more marvellous powers that are wondrous and unique. And at the end, the goddess Minerva seems to keep constant watch until she draws Medusa into herself, emblazoning her in lasting memorial on her own shield, the "dark aspect of the goddess" (Alban 2017, 2).

These two women of myth, Medusa and Eve, are my mothers, and thus I too have been bound to the serpent from my birth. The serpent's name is Ouroboros. It is the symbol of a turmoil that pulls in every which way, firstly that of my own eternal alienation from myself as woman (the desert, the bed, the loss of her mind to truth-himself), and then the other, the diametrically contrary possibility of the encounter of my own self (love, the woman to come, life itself). In writing myself into this genealogy of mythical women, I also voice my "I am here."

If serpents had written History they would have proudly related how their ancestor belonged to woman ... But serpents are a people with no writing and it is god who has the world.

(Cixous 1994, 62)

The gaze of Eve

Freud had the most incredible reading of the gaze of Medusa. "Medusa's Head" was a little text he wrote that was only published in 1922. The hermeneutical key to the myth of Medusa, according to Freud, was that to decapitate was to castrate (1922, 274). He saw that the terror felt at the sight Medusa was the same as the terror of castration. Freud hints that the male gaze is not inviolable. To catch a glimpse of the Medusa is as if to catch a glimpse of the female genitals, those of a man's own mother. The effect of that intimate glimpse of the maternal feminine is apotropaic. It turns the male gaze to stone—stone as in the inability to move, and stone as in an erotic charge. Freud goes as far as saying that the Devil himself takes flight at this witness of the most stupefying of scenes: "We read in Rabelais of how the Devil took to flight when a woman showed him her vulva" (1922, 274).

But for Cixous (1976), Alban (2017), and others, we might take up the Medusa gaze and with it the gaze of Eve. With the courage of every Eve and Medusa we might testify as witnesses. What would happen if we looked squarely into death's face and named him Perseus? What if in the lineup we pointed out both Perseus and his Father God? For evidence, I would submit before the court of women Cellini's sculpture (1545), with its representation of the trampled body of Medusa and Perseus caught directly in his crime, a slaughterer of women in their sleep.⁴ Then we would offer a recounting of the violence of the scene in Genesis 3:16, where Eve learns her fate that is brought

upon her simply on account of her desire to awaken. To the threat of embodied violations, domestic subjugation, and the endorsement of an epoque of male censure, I would need look no further for criminal evidence than the leaden script of our own sacred works. Sitting with Eve and Medusa in the docks, I might see God, Adam, Perseus, and Neptune on the other side, blinking wildly, as if we were the ones that had raped *them*, cut *their* heads off, cursed *them* like Eve with pregnancies year after year, cursed *them* to the captive grind of domesticity and servitude. In remembrance of Medusa and Eve, and another young girl named Marguerite (Angelou 2015), I stare directly at Neptune and then at God, taking on Marguerite's natural courage when I utter her words, "Ole, mean dirty thing, you. Dirty old thing" (85).

This chapter is speculative and interested in a kind of sight: the gaze of Medusa–Eve, the gaze of the mythical woman. In a world where the patriarchal gaze turns women into wraiths, the possibility of an empowering feminine gaze is seductive. In place of sewers and monstrosities, we might have an erotic, ferocious, and beautiful Eve with a castrating and deadly gaze (Alban 2017, 3). In her essay "Veils," Cixous writes of her experience of myopia, "her fault, her lead, her imperceptible native veil ... she could see that she could not see, but she could not see clearly" (2001, 3). For Cixous, this experience invoked a meditation on women and sight. Is woman born with a veil in her eye, wearing spectacles like "feeble forks" (2001, 6)? What do we make of this world and its discontents through the eye, the misrecognition of this, our own primordial mothers? Would the story unravel if I look into the shadows, change spectacles, put on lenses? We might, like Eve, look upon a jubilant scene and with our newly acquired spectacles see with crystal clarity that this tree continues to be "good for eating and a delight to the eyes," a tree that is "desirable as a source of wisdom" (Gen. 3:6), and whose fruit is a round succulent orange that erupts in vivid colour.

Eyes are the most delicate powerful hands, imponderably touching the over-there. From over there I feel a self return to me.

(Cixous 2005, 187)

Womanfish

I am painfully like a womanfish who has decided that now it is time to look the sea in its face. All flexed and anguished, she wrings her fins and spreads them wide—to no avail, she only surfaces between two waves and still has no wings.

(Cixous 1991, 18)

Medusa's parentage, according to Hesiod's *Theogony*,⁵ is of Phorcys and Ceto, both oceanic deities, so it is no surprise that Medusa is associated with water. This confers a further political motive for Neptune's rape of Medusa and adds a layer of premeditation to the attack on the daughter of another aquatic god. But Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tells another fascinating tale, which reconnects Medusa to the sea long after her murder. It seems the touch of Medusa remained so powerful that even after her death it remains a potent, generative force. Following Perseus, Ovid invites us to a scene of the victorious hero on the seashore, washing his hands in saltwater drawn by nymphs:

Fearing to bruise the Gorgon's snake-covered head on the hard sand, he softened the ground with leaves and covered it over with seaweed, to serve as a mat for the head of Medusa, the daughter of Phorcys. The fronds which were fresh and still abundant in spongy pith

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absorbed the force of the Gorgon and hardened under her touch, acquiring a strange new stiffness in all the stems and the foliage.

(Metamorphoses, 168)

This miraculous transformation of the seaweed is tested again and again by the nymphs until finally they cast the seeds of the transformed plant into the billows. The result is the creation of an underwater forest of stone, a coral reef that would become a fecund habitat for all kinds of colourful fishes. “Coral even today preserves this identical property,” notes Ovid, “contact with air induces its hardness and what was a flexible shoot under water is turned to rock on the ocean’s surface” (*Metamorphoses*, 168).

Both Medusa and Eve are daughters of the water. Eve’s primordial relation to water is the water of creation, the water of the womb, and the water of all kinds of fruit. Genesis notes that Eve was born at the meeting place of four rivers (2:14). As Catherine Keller writes, the watery deep belongs to the face of an older woman than Eve: “The face of the deep was first—as far as we can remember—a woman’s” (2003, 28). The feminine is associated with the shadowy reaches of the sea. She is oceanic, dark, with womb-like fluidity, “deadly in its very permeability” (Keller 2003, 31). Kristeva puts it this way: “Fear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially the fear of her generative power” (2003, 77). Thus, for Kristeva, the hero strikes because he fears that he will sink irretrievably into this maternal deep, his very identity drawn down into the abyss of the feminine. For Cixous, water brings about the possibility of rebirth and regeneration:

Through the window she comes, breathing hard, and alive as can be, she flings herself into the book, and there are bursts of laughter and splashes of water everywhere, on my notebook, on the table, on my hands, on our bodies.

(1991, 15)

This watery chain of signifiers draws Medusa and Eve back to their sources. Their echoes persist, their names continue to be whispered: “bod[ies] arched, scales glittering with sweat, fins spread wide, gills throbbing, trying, at the risk of bursting, to make the transition from the realm of water to the realm of words” (Cixous 1991, 18–19).

But look, our seas are what we make of them, full of fish or not, opaque or transparent, red or black, high or smooth, narrow or bankless; and we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, sea-weed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves.... More or less wavily sea, earth, sky-what matter would rebuff us? We know how to speak them all.

(Cixous 1976, 889)

Flying with Pegasus

Flying is woman’s gesture—flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we’ve been able to possess anything only by flying; we’ve lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers.

(Cixous 1976, 887)

In the “Laugh of the Medusa” (1976), Cixous unites woman with flight. She finds that it is no coincidence that the French word *voler* means both “to fly” and “to steal.” Cixous (1976) exhorts

that women must draw from the curious canniness we inherited thanks to Eve's orange and what we have learned from centuries of escapes from the patriarchal labyrinth. She charges woman to resist the structures, the orders, and the household furniture that signifies masculine pre-eminence—to take apart the values and the codes, all the laws that have hung around the neck of women and prevented them from flight, thus “turning propriety upside down” (1976, 887). When a woman like Eve inscribes her very body with self-spoken truth—when she utters the words, “I desire to be made wise!” and, in spite of man and God himself, she takes and eats the orange with serpentine delight—she lives. She finally lives. She grows. She multiplies. She gives. She laughs. As Cixous (1976) will say she is the “erotogeneity” of the heterogeneous. As an “airborne swimmer” (1976, 889) she is unafraid; she is the girl-child Marguerite, prodigious, vivacious, buried in dreams, and yet alive, beautifully free from Tertullian's stink. In the beginning, says Cixous, are our differences, but “the new love dares for the other, wants the other, makes dizzying, precipitous flights between knowledge and invention” (1976, 893). This did Eve, who made the dizzying flight “between knowledge and invention” with her flight to the tree, her flight from the false peace of Eden, and her flight as she haunts each one us, whispering that we should “take and eat.”

In search of flight in the myth of Medusa, we follow Ovid as he journeys to a desolate scene (*Metamorphoses*, 169–70). Brave Perseus has arrived at Medusa's eyrie. It is remote wilderness and there is not a soul in sight. The ground is raised and the trees are broken, as if a volcanic eruption has taken place. In a circular display there is a gothic statuary—men and beasts, Ovid tells us, who had posed a threat to this young woman in her place of refuge. Medusa is asleep, resting on her crown of adders, and in the final act of this tragedy Perseus takes her head. However, at the moment of her death, Medusa continues to escape the ultimate sentence that the patriarchal order has for her. From her neck springs a foaming, flying horse. Ovid tells us that the “swift-winged Pegasus sprang from his mother's blood, along with his brother Chrysaor” (*Metamorphoses*, 170). This is the miraculous birth of Pegasus, which in a single second connected blood and water with air, an emblem of the irrepressible Medusa that marks forever her “Yes, I am here!” in the golden-winged horse who births springs and fountains with every strike of his hoof. Medusa's eyrie is thus transformed into a temple of eternal memory. Here, hidden in the text, is the indefatigable feminine that Ovid cannot fail to recount. The effects are Edens everywhere, magical springs, “clusters of grand, primeval trees, mysterious caves and grass bejewelled with myriads of flowers” (*Metamorphoses*, 187). This would become, with Minerva's approbation, the home of Memory's daughters.

With her great deep blue hands and her silver mane, whinnying as she gallops west, or east of the volcano, where she was still erupting, spewing litters of sparks, bellowing incandescence.

(Cixous 1991, 146)

The woman arriving

The woman arriving over and over again does not stand still; she's everywhere, she exchanges, she is the desire-that-gives ... She comes in comes-in-between herself me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me, without the fear of ever reaching a limit; she thrills in our becoming.

(Cixous 1976, 893)

In this chapter, I have swum and flown with Hélène Cixous, allowing the theorizing of écriture feminine to inspire the possibility of reimagining the myths of Eve and Medusa. It is with gratitude I offer

the mythical woman an orange on her latest arrival. These imaginings provide a moment of grace, so that the violations committed on Medusa and Eve are not continually re-enacted in this space; but through an “other” reading, we recover a feminine agency that is “life-giving,” self-determining, reclaiming sovereignty of the body and mind, self-creating, and self-knowing via a particular exercise of the Cixousian imaginary. This reading is a shadow-bible reading that unveils subterranean layers in the mythical story. It constitutes a feminine exodus taking place yet again from the press of Father, Word, and Law. As per Irving Goh (2010), it is a reading of the Bible and the classical text that side-steps religion’s God, where woman has always already been banished from paradise. It disavows the “He-Bible” (Cixous 1993) and its allegations of the abomination of the feminine.

Women still in this day are witness to setbacks and fears, having to continue to unearth the word “liberation” and to wrest it from “truth-himself,” to struggle against the old gods until the dawn rises in a new day. Haven’t we learned that acts of resistance can seem as fruitless and dangerous as casting one’s voice into what seems the darkest and endless abyss? But even after our deaths (both symbolic and real), our blood like Medusa’s retains its potency. This text is a small gift the size of an orange but contains a drop of my own blood. It is a modest piece of magic that relies on the revivifying powers of Medusa’s blood and Eve’s pangs in order to come to life. We learn again that woman does not stand still in the face of our struggles of the age. We are like Medusa and Eve, who even in sleep birthed winged horses and brought forth myriad waters, and set to flight all kinds of delights and desires. The possibility of further becoming for women is limitless through the feminine “desire-that-gives” (Cixous 1976). Thus here, we reimagine in these myths the language of the orange, the gaze, the night, the seas and serpents, and the flight of the Pégasus as primordial and poetic emblems sustaining women’s unceasing arrivals into the world.

Notes

- 1 The page number for this Tertullian quote refers to the 2008 translation of his work included in the reference list.
- 2 Page numbers for quotes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* refer to the 2004 edition included in the reference list.
- 3 Unless otherwise stated, all biblical citations are from the JPS translation.
- 4 An image of Cellini’s sculpture can be seen here: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2016_Loggia_dei_Lanzi_02.jpg
- 5 Hesiod’s *Theogony* is a poem (usually dated to the eighth to seventh century BCE), which relates the origins and genealogies of Greek deities.

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