Glimpsing Medusa: *Astoned* in the *Troilus*

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IN THESE PAGES I would like to consider the role of Medusa in Chaucer's *Troilus*—a modest enough enterprise except for the fact that there is not a single reference to this puzzling figure in the entire work, or in any of Chaucer's other works for that matter. Such an absence does not of course mean absence of influence. After all, Chaucer does not mention Boccaccio, even though his *Il Filostrato* supplies the narrative material for and fundamental shape of the *Troilus.* Obscuring authorial indebtedness because of some "anxiety of influence" is one thing; alluding to a figure from classical mythology, which Chaucer frequently and plainly does in his narratives, is quite another. A discussion of the ways in which the Medusa figure informs the *Troilus* requires then an answer to the question of how it can even be claimed that this mythological figure has a part in the narrative.

Immediate support for such a claim is patristic, a method of reading, according to D.W. Robertson, inspired by the epistles of St. Paul.[1] In general terms, the aim of this art of reading was to discover the spiritual meaning beneath the veil of the text, a metaphor encouraged specifically by Paul's explanation of the Hebrews' inability to discover the truth beneath the veil that Moses puts over his face of truth (2 Cor. 3:12–16). The veil remains as long as the minds of those interpreting the meaning of the laws carved in stone are hardened by an inability to read spiritually. This ability to read spiritually emanates from a belief in Christ, which removes the veil from the interpreter's face; it transforms the reader of a text—and the text itself (in this case the stone tablets of the old law)—from stone into spirit. For our purposes this method of interpretation emerges most notably in canto 9 of Dante's *Inferno.* Here Virgil covers the pilgrim's eyes to prevent him from catching sight of the petrifying Medusa; and then the narrator suddenly instructs the reader on how to interpret this, and any passage, by uncovering the spiritual meaning hidden beneath the veil of strange verses. On recalling how the snake-haired furies threatened him and Virgil with the appearance of Medusa, who could turn the pilgrims into stone and keep them in hell, the narrator tells his readers: "O all of

[1]D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 286–316.

you whose intellects are sound, / look now and see the meaning that is hidden / beneath the veil that covers my strange verses."[2] As John Freccero argues, this passage is dedicated to the purpose of laying out the entire *Commedia* in terms of a conversion structure concerning Dante's poetic career, and so oversimplification of its meaning is dangerous.[3] Such oversimplification is dangerous also because, as Robert Hollander points out, the address to the reader remains a vexing passage, possibly referring not to the Medusa but ahead to the avenging angel who arrives to unlock the gates of Dis.[4] Even though the direction of Dante's reference in this passage is a matter of debate, the passage undoubtedly activates the Pauline tradition because of its mention of Medusa as a threat.

Medusa represented a variety of threats in the Middle Ages: terror, despair, and, in Boccaccio's view, "an obstinate sensuality blind to spiritual matters."[5] Because of the setting and the problem that Virgil and Dante must overcome—entry through the gates of Dis—the common metaphor of penetrating a surface of a text in order to discover its true meaning also prevails in this passage. The tradition that the Medusa petrifies those who look at her, then, makes her a rich symbol of the dangers of a misplaced emphasis on the surface, literal level of a text: petrification representing spiritual death in the Pauline tradition. Appearing as the aegis on the shield of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and chastity, Medusa represents the false, bodily beauty that obscures the "Athenian" wisdom beneath, a configuration that, according to Howard Bloch, Jane Chance, and Carolyn Dinshaw, for instance, ultimately links sexual with textual seduction.[6]

A powerful tool, this allegoresis can be used rather bluntly, ignoring the individualized prompts of a particular text. Thus, as a member of the female, material element in the body-spirit dichotomy, Medusa can be discovered as part of any text in which its surface represents danger, particu-

[2]The lines are quoted from Mark Musa's translation in *The Portable Dante*, ed. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 48.

[3]John Freccero, "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit," in John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 119–35.

[4]See Dante, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 164, where Hollander summarizes the scholarly controversy over this passage.

[5]Quoted in Robert Durling, ed. and trans., *The Inferno*, vol. 1, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 150.

[6]Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, 346. Here Robertson develops the case that medieval readers would be expected to understand poetry through allegorical analysis. He offers an abundance of examples to support such an assumption, including Richard de Bury's defense of poetry, which refers to "the delicate Minerva [i.e. wisdom] secretly lurking beneath the image of pleasure." Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 21, also quotes this passage from de Bury's *Philobiblon* as she lays out her case that allegorical reading supports male hegemony. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 37. Jane Chance, *Medieval Mythography* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994), 1.

larly the threat of spiritual petrification. No doubt, a hearty sense of the heroic is inscribed within this project of getting past the text's Medusa. "Reading like a man," as Dinshaw calls it, can make of the Wife of Bath or the fictional surface of any of Chaucer's works a gorgon, against which only the wisdom of a Virgil-figure, the experience of a Dante looking back upon his misspent poetic youth, or ultimately the divine power of a Christ-figure such as Perseus, the slayer of Medusa, can provide protection.[7] According to this method of reading, we fail if we do not at least explore the possibility that Medusa lurks within the text of the *Troilus*.

The heady power of allegoresis in part rules the only extended discussion I have seen of Medusa in Chaucer: that by R. A. Shoaf on the "Franklin's Tale."[8] He persuasively buttresses his discussion by arguing that Chaucer was composing his tale with full knowledge of the passage in the *Inferno*, which is especially relevant because it occurs within the circle of hell where the Epicureans are punished. In the "General Prologue," remember, the Franklin is portrayed as an Epicure. Shoaf launches his study, however, from the description of Dorigen as "astoned," astonished (F 1339).[9] She responds in this way on learning from Aurelius that the rocks she had so feared had been removed from the coast. Because the word monster appears five lines later, according to Shoaf, the passage "authorizes" us to recognize "a pun in *astoned*—namely, *a-stoned*, that is, 'turned to stone.'"[10] The monster that Dorigen sees is the Medusa, who turns those who look on her into stone. Dorigen is "astoned" because she, as a product of the Franklin's materialistic, appearance-dependant, Epicurean world-view, is herself incapable of going beyond the petrifying letter, the surface, of Aurelius's claim. What Shoaf represents as Chaucer's cagey allusion to Medusa, then, expands into a condemnation of the Franklin's superficiality and an exposure of unredeemable literalism.

[7]Concerning the Wife of Bath as *textus*, see Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 113–31; regarding the recursive project in which Virgil aids Dante the pilgrim, see Freccero, "Medusa," 120–21 esp.; and on the reading of Perseus as Christ-figure in the Middle Ages, see Sylvia Huot, "The Medusa Interpolation in the *Romance of the Rose*: Mythographic Program and Ovidian Intertext," *Speculum* 62, no. 4 (1987): 874 n. 9. She quotes, for instance, Bernard Silvestris's commentary on *Aeneid* 4.289, in which Perseus is interpreted as "the virtue that, with the help of wisdom (Athena) and eloquence (Mercury), destroys wicked acts (Medusa)." She also cites, among other sources, the *Ovide moralisé*, which treats Perseus as Christ and Medusa as carnal pleasure. Also see Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, 12, 33, 201–2, and 332 for examples of mythographers' allegorical readings of Perseus's decapitation of Medusa and for examples of battles with Medusa as heroic endeavors.

[8]R. A. Shoaf, "The *Franklin's Tale*: Chaucer and Medusa," *The Chaucer Review* 21, no. 2 (1986): 274–90. For a brief treatment of the subject, see Timothy D. O'Brien, "Troubling Waters: The Feminine and the Wife of Bath's Performance," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1992): 388–89, where the figure of the Medusa is discussed as part of the region of Bath and its titular goddess, Sulis-Minerva.

[9]This and all other quotations from Chaucer's works come from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

[10]Shoaf, "*Franklin's Tale*," 275.

In this interpretation, interestingly, the trope of the monster's (the Gorgon/Medusa's) petrifying face, a trope that actually occurs in the tale beyond the passage from which Shoaf launches his interpretation, becomes Shoaf's own.[11] He describes the Franklin as trying to present "as smooth and glossy a surface as he can" in order to "astone" us so that we do not go beneath its surface.[12] Shoaf goes on to dramatize even more fully the risk we take on reading the tale: "But while we are thus on hold, playing this waiting game—while we are gazing at this Medusa, petrified by the illusion of honor, *gentillesse*, and noble self-sacrifice—precisely what we are *not* doing in our petrification is investigating, penetrating, prodding the tale, its text, to ask the one question sure to betray the Franklin's hand if he fails to keep the Gorgon in our faces.…" He continues: "Arveragus's *soveraynetee*…[is] a Medusa of a name to astonish all who look on the marriage between Dorigen and him"; the Franklin "knows that, in his case, the signifier has hardened, has petrified, into the idolatrous signified of his own self-aggrandizement"; and "Think of his table which 'dormant in his halle always / Stood redy covered al the longe day' (A 353–54)—*fixed*, in other words, or *frozen* in place to be an icon of his wealth" (281).[13] The tale does present an alluring surface whose few seams expose its actual "disconnects." Shoaf is certainly right about this. His reading illuminates the tale's superficiality and its teller's use of literature as a ladder for his social climbing; it exposes, indeed, how spiritually empty the Franklin is.[14] Shoaf does not, however, discuss the tale's use of the Medusa figure, so much as employ it as a trope authorized by his version of the patristic method of reading that makes the literal text, the world, idols, material, women, the Medusa, etc. all interchangeable elements.

In fact, the "Franklin's Tale" depends upon images that develop an extended metaphor of petrification. The most obvious case, and one that Shoaf curiously ignores, is the rocks themselves, the central symbol in the story. Dorigen's wanting to wish, hope, or purchase the rocks away is as wrong-headed as the rioters' literal-minded venture to slay death in the "Pardoner's Tale." The rocks reflect her state of mind. Those rocks also belong to a pattern that Chaucer seems to be developing in the descriptive surface of the work. This pattern includes the single pun on "astoned," the several uses of "engrave"/"grave" (see, for instance, F 830, 836 and

[11]See Joseph Parry, "Dorigen, Narration, and Coming Home in the *Franklin's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 30, no. 3 (1996): 264–66. Parry highlights nearly all the textual details related to petrification, though without mentioning Medusa, part of the tradition behind the image.

[12]Shoaf, "*Franklin's Tale*," 277.

[13]Ibid., 279, 280, 281.

[14]See Shoaf's discussion of the critical debate between the apologists for the Franklin and those, like Shoaf, Gaylord, Owen, Roberston, and Spearing, who read the Franklin's character with suspicion. Ibid., 288 n. 12.

1484), and the allusion to Deucalion in the clerk of Orleans's words to Aurelius: "Sire, I releese thee thy thousand pound, / As thou right now were cropen out of the ground, / Ne nevere er now ne haddest knowen me" (F 1613–15). This allusion to the flood myth as retold in the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is relevant not just because it, like the "Franklin's Tale," treats the obscuring of the earth's geographical features with a watery surge but because it also depicts two other themes: the birth of the human race from stones that Deucalion and his surviving mate, Pyrrha, throw over their shoulders and Pyrrha's almost fatal literal-mindedness in not being able to interpret metaphorically the instruction to throw their mother's bones over their backs in order to repeople the earth—their mother's bones being "mother earth's" stones.[15] These details suggest that there are solid textual prompts for placing the Medusa, however vaguely, in the "Franklin's Tale," and, therefore, that there is an alternative to Shoaf's apparent assumption that because the tale is a fiction and deals with perception—as do virtually all the tales of Canterbury—its surface needs to be viewed suspiciously as the face of Medusa.

I make this point not because I want to reject Shoaf's reading, but, as contradictory as it might seem, because I seek the support of its central observation about Chaucer's pun on "astoned" as something that calls into play the figure of Medusa. However, I would like to emphasize that the pun insinuates into Chaucer's richly textured narrative about Troilus's love not just the spiritual meaning of Medusa but her story as well. My claim is that Chaucer's use of "astoned" in the *Troilus* links astonishment to the transformation into stone, and that his use of "stone" as well as "astoned" usually carries the possible link to the Medusa and the issues represented by her troubling story, *including* the wayward fascination with worldly beauty that Shoaf argues is at the root of Chaucer's portrayal of the Franklin's heroine. Even without the allusion to Medusa this claim makes some sense. Chaucer seems terribly interested in portraying emotional paralysis in terms of the transformation of humans into wood and rock, or sticks and stones, to borrow from Pandarus's pledge to Criseyde in book 3 that Troilus is nowhere near, even though he lurks in a closet adjoining her room. Pandarus's swearing "by stokes and by stones" (3.589) is glossed in the *Riverside Chaucer* as "stumps and stones" or "objects of pagan worship" (n. 589). To be astonished is to be turned into stone, the unredemptive material of pagan idols; and to be insane, a state in which we more than occasionally discover Troilus, is to be "wood," also the material of pagan objects of worship.

[15]Huot, "The Medusa Interpolation," 870, discusses Jean de Meun's treatment of this Ovidian story, as it, along with the story of Pygmalion, works to offset the petrification in the Narcissus story and Medusa interpolation with a sense of the regenerative nature of love, as directed by Genius.

In addition to the pun that Shoaf notices in the "Franklin's Tale" and the concentrated attention in the *Troilus* on suggested metamorphoses of the characters into elemental states such as rocks and wood, there is some suggestion also from passages in *Boece* that the Medusa-"astoned" connection must have informed Chaucer's imagination. Under the influence of the Muses, Boethius is "astoned" (398) until Lady Philosophy wipes from his eyes the sight of dark, mortal things. The sight of only those things and the fact that they make him incapable of coping with the sudden appearance of Lady Philosophy constitute his astonishment, which clearly is a condition of physical oppression: he can neither speak nor move. According to her, "*astonynge* hath oppresside" him (399, emphasis added).[16] And it has done this even though she had nourished him and provided him with armor that should have defended him against the despair of being imprisoned. Lady Philosophy here resembles both Minerva and the Virgil of Dante's *Inferno*: her role is to arm the hero—Perseus or Dante's pilgrim—against the petrifying specter of the worldliness that Medusa comes to represent. That person who "desireth thyng that nys noght stable of his ryght, that man that so dooth hath cast awey his scheeld, and is remoeved from his place, and enlaceth hym in the cheyne with whiche he mai ben drawen" (401). "Astoned" is the condition of living entirely within the perturbations of the world: "The moevable peple is astoned of alle thinges that comen seelde and sodeynly in our age; but yif the trubly errour of our ignoraunce departed fro us, so that we wisten the causes why that swiche thinges bytyden, certes thei scholde cesen to seme wondres" (450). As we shall see, Troilus's transformation is in part that of Boethius in that he begins the poem in astonishment (he is "astoned" by the sight of Criseyde) and ends it outside of astonishment because he is transported beyond the realm of the "moevable" into the eighth sphere.

Medusa's story, however, contains complexities in excess of the way in which medieval commentators captured her as part of the conflict between the spirit and body. This excess, in fact, comprises the matter out of which feminists have adopted Medusa as their own aegis. The story of Medusa likely available to Chaucer in Ovidian material begins with Poseidon raping her in Athena's temple in the very presence of Athena, who hides her chaste eyes from the event and then punishes Medusa for the transgression by turning her locks into snakes and inscribing in her face the power to turn anything that looks upon it into stone. The ruling assumption here, as Perseus tells the story to the Ethiopians in the *Metamorphoses*, is that Medusa's physical beauty, represented by her originally gorgeous

[16]According to Guisepp Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of The Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 285, John of Garland and Arnulf of Orleans both interpreted Medusa's metamorphosis of onlookers into stone in a way that coincides with the language in Boethius: it represents the "stupor," the kind of madness, into which she throws the mind.

locks, is the cause of the rape. The punishment essentially glosses her beauty as dangerous and paralyzing. Once turned into a monster, Medusa is the Gorgon (there are usually three of them, Medusa being the only mortal) whom Perseus is tasked by Polydectes, the wooer of his mother, to behead. With the help of Athena and Hermes, Perseus finds Medusa asleep in a cave with the other Gorgons. He approaches by looking not at her but at her reflection in the shield Athena has provided; and thus secured from the fascination of her appearance, he strikes off her head. Pegasus, whose hoof creates the poetic spring on Helicon, is born from that wound. After using the Medusa head to defeat several enemies that he encounters on his return home, Perseus gives it to Athena, who places it in the middle of her shield or aegis. Thus portrayals of Athena include the image of Medusa. They amount to classical versions of what Robert Hanning calls the Eva/Ave palindrome of the medieval period.[17] In the Middle Ages, as Freccero explains, Medusa becomes associated both with the furies (partly because of the furies' threatening to call out Medusa as Virgil and Dante approach in canto 9 of the *Inferno*) and with the dark side of love, as portrayed in some manuscripts of the *Romance of the Rose* that include a description of Medusa as a negative contrast to the Lover's image of the beloved, which is ultimately regenerative rather than petrifying.[18]

If we examine the episode in which Pandarus announces to Criseyde that Troilus is in love with her, we can get an idea of the way in which the story of the Medusa edges its way into the *Troilus*. Criseyde's reaction is astonishment:

> What, is this al the joye and al the feste?
> Is this youre reed? Is this my blisful cas?
> Is this the verray mede of youre byheeste?
> Is al this paynted proces seyd—allas!—
> Right for this fyn? O lady myn, Pallas!
> Thow in this dredful cas for me purveye,
> For so *astoned* am I that I deye. (2.421–27, emphasis added)

Pandarus, as might be expected, matches Criseyde's outrage with an histrionics of despair: he invokes the "Furies thre of helle" (2.436) to witness that he did not mean harm, and goes on to claim "by Neptunus" (2.443) that he will die with Troilus because of Criseyde's antagonism toward the prospect of reentering the social world as the object of man's love. As it turns out, Criseyde relents bit by bit, and so this passage captures just a particular stage, though the important first one, in her relationship with Troilus.

[17]Robert Hanning, "From Eva to Ave to Eglentyne and Alisoun: Chaucer's Insight into the Roles Women Play," *Signs* 2, no. 3 (1977): 580–99.

[18]Freccero, "Medusa," 125–26; and also Huot, "The Medusa Interpolation," 76.

Still the texture of this "primal scene" of her discovery, in a sense, includes many of the features of the Medusa story that work to reinforce the allusive power of "astoned." Especially interesting are the last three lines of Criseyde's response quoted above. Criseyde pleads for Pallas's help in a case in which her beauty has made her the object of Troilus's desire. In fact Pandarus as much as says that her beauty is to blame for Troilus's passion: "Allas, that God yow swich a beaute sente!" (2.336). The sense of petrification contained in "astoned," right next to Criseyde's plea to Athena, goddess of chastity but also punisher of Medusa, the victim of Poseidon's rape, implies something more than an attempt by Chaucer to make characters seem of the ancient rather than medieval world. The same is true for Pandarus's invocation of the Furies and his swearing to Neptune.[19] Both his and Criseyde's responses intensify this sense of there being a specific, not just broadly heuristic, activation of the Medusa story in this scene. Like Criseyde's plea to Pallas, Pandarus's swearing to Neptune, occurring as it does with the use of "astoned" and the emphasis on Criseyde's physical beauty, calls to mind Medusa's rape. In the corresponding episode in *Il Filostrato*, Boccaccio does not highlight Criseyde's astonishment, though she does turn red; nor does he have the characters bring into their exchange allusions to Athena, Poseidon, or the furies.[20] The furies were likely linked in Chaucer's mind with Medusa. Assuming Chaucer's awareness of the passage in the *Inferno*, Freccero conjectures that Chaucer's invocation to one of the furies, Tisiphone, at the outset of book 1 includes the figurative value of Medusa, which amounts to "a sensual fascination and potential entrapment precluding all further progress."[21] Certainly the Medusa Chaucer encountered in Dante resembles the images of the Medusa he himself may have encountered, say, in journeys to Bath.[22]

[19]Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 106, focuses on Pandarus's swearing to Neptune as a typical feature of Chaucer's complex, ironic use of mythology *and* mythography in order to highlight the blindness of his characters. Though she does not address Neptune's rape of Medusa as a feature of this allusion, Chance does remind us of Neptune's enmity toward Troy and thus of the deadly irony in Pandarus's oath. Many of the allusions in the *Troilus*, according to Chance, function in this way. See, for instance, her discussions of the feast of the Palladium and Niobe (118) and of Pandarus's swearing by Cerebus that if Criseyde were his sister she would be married to Troilus tomorrow (116, 123).

[20]R. K. Gordon, ed. and trans., *The Story of Troilus* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1964), 45–46.

[21]Freccero, "Medusa," 126. Howard H. Schless, *Chaucer and Dante: a Revaluation* (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1984), 1025, recommends restraint in regarding Chaucer's invocation to Tisiphone as originating in his acquaintance with the passage from the *Inferno*.

[22]For a brief discussion of the likely appearances of the Medusa in the town of Bath, see O'Brien, "Troubling Waters," 385–88; and John M. Manly, *Some New Light on Chaucer* (New York: Peter Smith, 1926), 232.

Just after Pandarus leaves Criseyde alone to mull over what she has heard, Chaucer marks this scene once more with the images of petrification. She goes into her closet and sits "stylle as any ston" (2.600); and while replaying in her mind every word that Pandarus said, she waxes "somdel *astoned* in hire thought" (2.603, emphasis added) apparently because she feels imperiled, though that feeling wanes as she imagines herself free to bestow her love when and where she chooses. And soon after this private consideration and then her gazing at the triumphant and battle-bloody Troilus from her window, she listens to Antigone's song in which the male lover is depicted as, among other wonderful things, the "*stoon* of sikernesse" (2.843, emphasis added). The value of this image of petrification—Criseyde sitting still as a stone—varies with context: it first captures Criseyde's sudden emotional paralysis; then her mere posture and her fretful considerations about her new position; and finally, as repeated in Antigone's song, the sense of the male lover being the one certainty in the woman's life. Within these variations, however, the image remains anchored in the subtext of the Medusa story.

Though Criseyde is "astoned" by the news of Troilus's passion for her, she is not simply in the position Shoaf ascribes to Dorigen, having seen the petrifying surface, and only the surface, of the world. The petrifying powers of the beloved are also part of the language of the courtly love tradition. Again, Dante provides us with a model. A series of lyrics centered on the metaphor of petrification, his youthful *rime petrose* repeatedly depict the stony, disregarding heart of *Donna Pietra* as having the power to turn the vitality and passion of the lover into stone. Petrarch's *Canzoniere* depends to a lesser degree on the same image of petrification, even in excess of Petrarch's punning on his name.[23] In the tales of Narcissus and Pygmalion, Ovid too develops this theme of petrification as an aspect of romantic love. Criseyde's astonishment as "astoned," then, is a complex evocation that does not have to overcome what seems an obvious problem: that she as female, the petrifying Medusa figure, cannot at the same time be the figure who is essentially stone. The news of Troilus's passion for her makes her a part of the romantic love tradition, whether she wants to be or not: she is the lady of stone to Pandarus and Troilus. Moreover on finding herself unwittingly part of the dynamics of passion, she is Medusa, who though having the power to turn others into stone, is also seen as petrified. Most importantly, however, Criseyde's saying she is "astoned," along with all the

[23]For discussions of the image as part of the romantic love tradition cultivated in the poetry of Dante and Petrarch, see Haddad, "Ovid's Medusa," 216–17, and especially Freccero, "Medusa," 128–32. Mazzotta, *Dante*, 163–64, treats the image as part of the romantic love tradition, but emphasizes petrification as an expression of love's madness. This emphasis follows particularly Augustine's erotic typology in Confessions 13.8, whereby erotic love is depicted as ponderous, weighing the lover down. In contrast, spiritual love has the ascending force of fire.

other resonations from the Medusa story, calls attention to the fact that she is also the pre-Gorgon, pre-apotropaic shield decoration and aegis; she is the beautiful woman that Medusa once was before becoming the object of aggressive, male passion. "Astoned" suggests that in its fundamentals Criseyde's story is that of Medusa, including even her final definition—by Troilus, Pandarus, and even the narrator—as beautiful face that betrays the best part of man. In discussing the "Medusa interpolation" in *The Romance of the Rose*, Huot persuasively analyzes it as an addition that ultimately reads the poem's other episodes of petrification accurately as expressions of the dark side of love.[24] This view, of course, coincides with the patristic reading suggested by Shoaf's discussion of the Medusa in the "Franklin's Tale." However, the Medusa-like implications of Criseyde's astonishment here imply that the dark side of love is also the fact that in a world controlled by men Medusa must inevitably be turned into a Gorgon in order that Minerva survive.

The foundation for registering these percolations of the Medusa story up through the details of this episode in the *Troilus* is situated early in the poem, but is also laid thinly throughout. It begins with the likely association of Tisiphone and the Gorgons/Medusa in Chaucer's mind. Also in place are cultural assumptions that would connect romantic love with poetry. Medusa is implicated in both sides of this connection: first, as we have already seen, she represents, in Freccero's words, "a sensual fascination, a *pulchritude* so excessive that it turned men to stone"; and second, from the severing of her head by Perseus is born Pegasus, whose hoof carved out the spring of the muses on Helicon. It is almost as if the severed head of Medusa, the remnant of violence toward women as much as the threat of her beauty, is at the center of the creative project.[25] The opening stanzas of the poem entangle these associations: instead of invoking the muses, Chaucer's narrator calls upon Tisiphone, the gorgon like creature of Dante's *Inferno*, and simultaneously directs his highly self-reflexive poem to adherents of the god of love.

Following upon these suggestive preliminaries is the description in book 1 of Troilus falling in love with Criseyde. The event takes place in

[24]Huot, "The Medusa Interpolation,"76.

[25]In regard to this connection between Medusa's slaying and the birth of poetic inspiration, Haddad, though largely influenced it seems by Freccero's discussion, writes, "To my knowledge, no critic has yet focused on the link between the killing of the Medusa and the creation of the poetic source; nevertheless, both Dante and Ariosto imply that connection in their treatment of the Medusa legend." Haddad, "Ovid's Medusa, 215. She goes on to argue that the confrontation with the Medusa in Dante and Ariosto is really another way of configuring the artist's confrontation with himself, as is the case with Dante when on facing the threat of the Medusa he is being called to review that fact that he spent himself in youth writing "stony" poetry that served his own erotic sensibilities (217). See also Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), who analyzes Medusa as a symbol of art in Petrarch and Dante (208–10).

Minerva's temple during the feast of the Palladium. This is the site on which Poseidon raped Medusa. It is also a site on which one could expect to see, in addition to the Palladium, representations of the goddess that include images of Medusa's head. Though the setting is religious, it also has, both in Chaucer and Boccaccio, the springlike features of the romantic love's dream vision. It is, of course, April, when the desires of young people are reflected in the new greens of the meads and the fresh colors of the flowers (1.155–60). In this highly charged scene, then, where the conventions of romantic love coexist with the latent suggestions of the inevitable linkage of female beauty, rape, and the complicity of the goddess Athena in that rape, Troilus's eyes penetrate the crowd and light on Criseyde, whereupon "sodeynly [Troilus] wax therwith astoned" (1.274).

Figuratively he is turned to stone. Her "fixe and depe impressioun" (1.298) puts him in a state in which he does not even know "how to loke or wynke" (1.301). Her sight is so powerful "That sodeynly hym thoughte he felte dyen,/Right with hire look, the spirit in his herte" (1.306–7). Unlike Boccaccio in *Il Filostrato*, where Troilus takes his time to "size up" Criseyde during the festival of the Palladium, Chaucer highlights the suddenness of the change, using "sodeynly" three times to capture Troilus's "conversion" to love (1.308). The immediacy of conversion as expressed particularly by "sodeyn" constitutes an important theme in the *Troilus*, one that Chaucer explores in order to get at some fundamentals of human motivation. In *Boece*, remember, "sodeyn" describes the way events appear to the forever "astoned" eyes of those who are too much a part of the "movable" world. Chaucer highlights suddenness later in the *Troilus* by having his narrator contest the anticipated criticism that Criseyde's becoming intoxicated with a feeling of love for Troilus—"Who yaf me drynke?" (2.651)—was too sudden and therefore unworthy (2.667–86).

Certainly, the descriptions of Troilus's reactions here coincide with those of the romantic lover: the event is largely ocular, with sight being the penetrating weapon, and his response conforms exactly with the lover's malady, a symptom of which is the almost catatonic reaction Troilus has. And if we take but one half of the suggestive force of "astoned," the half that Shoaf and Freccero emphasize, Troilus's transformation into stone on seeing Criseyde conforms nicely with the Pauline tradition and thus with the Christian irony that emerges in full force only at the end of the poem: in letting himself be penetrated by Criseyde's beauty, Troilus, in spiritual terms, is turned to stone. That moral tradition and the imagery of petrification involved in the conventions of romantic love go hand in hand. Descriptions of Criseyde's hardness of heart follow naturally upon this emphasis. An example is the subtly arranged scene in which Pandarus and Criseyde are described as sitting down on a "stoon" (2.1228) in order to discuss the letter she has just composed to Troilus.

In the stanzas immediately following, Pandarus refers to her "hardness" (2.1236–45), and then the narrator contributes by saying that as hard of heart as Criseyde has been up to now, he hopes a thorn of love has finally penetrated her heart (2.1271). With Pandarus, the narrator employs imagery of petrification as features of the romantic love tradition. Even Troilus's swooning on the night of the lovers' consummation is a matter of Troilus's spirits being "astoned" (3.1089), as the narrator tries clinically to describe in terms of love sickness, or some other physical event, Troilus's comical swooning while in bed with Criseyde.

Chaucer has his characters use images of petrification in terms of romantic love conventions, but he also loads those images with suggestions of the moralistic tradition that undercut their use within the system of romantic love. On the one hand images of petrification and stoniness help to display the human, romantic softening of heart that the narrator promotes, or the rigid coldness that he resents. On the other hand those images and the allusions to Medusa establish a presence condemning those who follow that tradition as helplessly and forever turned to stone because of their allegiance to flesh. In loving Criseyde, for instance, Troilus admits to having failed as a reader of a "hard" text. After the consummation of their love, Troilus engages in some pillow talk with Criseyde—the usual recap of how they have arrived at this stage. Troilus's talk is filled with the conventions of romantic love: the entrancing eyes, the capturing net, and even the inextricable link between poetry/text and love:

> Oh eyen clere,
> It weren ye that wroughte me swich wo,
> Ye humble nettes of my lady deere!
> Though ther be mercy writen in youre cheere,
> God woot, the text ful hard is, soth, to fynde!
> How koude ye withouten bond me bynde? (3.1353–58)

Though Troilus does not know it, this is also the Medusa story allegorized. He is turned to stone by her features, by the gaze of her eyes, and by the "hard" text those features symbolize, a text that he is not equipped to penetrate. This is the text that Dante warns his readers against approaching without care. Thus, according to this structural undercutting of the romance conventions, Troilus's being "astoned" with the sight of Criseyde means the same thing here as it does, according to Shoaf, for Dorigen in the "Franklin's Tale."[26]

[26]Winthrop Wetherbee's comment on this passage in *Chaucer and the Poets: An Essay on "Troilus and Criseyde"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 86, is worth quoting: "Criseyde's beauty, then, is itself finally a corrupted text. Its angelic perfection is contaminated by an erotic appeal that reflects both the corruptibility of her own malleable, 'slydynge'

This Patristic reading has to be assumed to be part of what Jauss calls the "horizon of expectations" with which Chaucer was working.[27] At the same time, however, he seems to offer hints of the petrifying Medusa in such detail as to suggest that we also ought to see Criseyde in terms of the Medusa story, not just the allegorized version of it.[28] In the allegorized version of the story, she is little more than the petrifying Medusa head, the bloody guise that Perseus used to turn his foes into stone and the image that Minerva has on her aegis and/or shield to warn men of the dangers of physical beauty and love. Hints of Medusa's story within the *Troilus* produce at least two ironies: first, a kind of "cosmic irony," by which we know what happens to Medusa in Minerva's temple and so any sense of Criseyde's power over Troilus and possibility of fulfillment is seen jointly with its inevitable failure and even vilification (rape and transformation to Gorgon); and second, an irony that undercuts the romantic love conventions, which seem to glorify and worship the women but only in the end as cover for a kind of rape. Such an irony would extend to the scene in book 2 where Criseyde is "astoned" by Pandarus's news that Troilus loves her. There, Criseyde prays to Minerva for protection. Because she has already been captured earlier in this goddess's temple as the object of male desire and therefore as Medusa, her call for help borders on the futile. It is even grim, as we realize that traditionally Minerva's sympathies are with the male hero—Perseus, of course, but also, famously and more relevantly for Chaucer's poem, Diomedes, whose aggressiveness towards women clearly emerges in Chaucer's treatment of him and is later projected by Henryson in his *Testament*, and whose violence toward women is suggested by Ovid in *Amores* 2.7, where he is compared with the persona, who has beaten his beloved.[29]

"Astoned" then is part of at least three competing stories within the *Troilus*: romantic love, entrancement by passionate response to the physical

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character and the deeply flawed nature of the vision accessible to even so pure an imagination as that of Troilus in the absence of sure knowledge of the divine."

[27]Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 25.

[28]This discussion assumes that medieval readers could also read literally, which does not mean literal mindedly but rather imaginatively in terms of textual and historical context. The discussion of the ascendancy of one mode of reading over the other is, as students of medieval literature well know, rich and thoughtful. For a discussion of medieval readers as increasingly "literal," see the John P. McCall, *Chaucer among the Gods* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press), preface and 7–25; Douglas Wurtele, "Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Nicholas of Lyre's *Postillae litteralis et morales super totam Bibliam*," in *Chaucer and the Spiritual Tradition*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1984), 90; and Janet Coleman, *English Literary History, 1350–1400: Medieval Readers and Writers* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 205–74.

[29]Ovid, *The Heroides and Amores,* Loeb Classical Library (1977), 345. The speaker refers to Diomedes as the son of Tideus: "The son of Tydeus left most vile example of offense. He was the first to smite a goddess—I am the second!"

world, and male violation of women and women's complicity in that violation. They are all related but not uniformly. The story of Medusa's rape and vilification undercuts the rhetoric of womanly adoration in romantic love. That same story, when the emphasis falls on who turns Medusa into a Gorgon, also unveils the male force that positions female beauty as responsible for male waywardness and in turn causes the female to adopt the self-defeating fiction that she, in fact, is responsible for that waywardness.

While being rooted in all three of these competing stories, "astoned" also expresses a sudden disorientation, a return to a kind of elemental condition where consciousness, the remembered private history of identity, has vanished. In this way the word gets at the fundamental instability of the world that Chaucer builds into his poem. How can the amazed reaction of petrification described by "astoned" on the one hand and Antigone's version of the male lover as the "stoon of sikernesse" on the other coincide even though Chaucer's punning links them? Criseyde tells Troilus that "everich roche out of his place sterte, / Er Troilus oute of Criseydes herte" (3.1497–98) and, as if her very heart is the enduring stone that monumentalizes their love, "Ye ben so depe in-with myn herte grave, / That, though I wolde it torne out of my thought… / To dyen in the peyne, I koude nought" (3.1499–1502). Yet the brooch that Troilus gives Criseyde when she leaves for the Greek camp turns up later in the coat that Deiphebus had rent from Diomedes during a skirmish (5.1658–63). Troilus's heart goes cold on discovering this forgotten symbol of their love, and even Pandarus for once is "astoned" by the fact: "As stille as ston; a word ne kowde he seye" (5.1728–29). If there is any doubt that such an ornament relates to the imagery of stones and petrification, consider Pandarus's crudely pragmatic and antiromantic comment to Criseyde when she proposes putting off Troilus's entry into her room by sending him a ring as token of her devotion: "'A ryng?' quod he, 'Ye haselwodes shaken! / Ye, nece myn, that ryng moste han a stoon / That myghte dede men alyve maken'" (3.890–92). Cynically expressing confidence that Criseyde does not have such a regenerative stone (Pandarus is sure in his pragmatism that the romance he is "authoring" is of the more realistic variety), he urges Criseyde to save Troilus from bodily death with her own body.

The stone that symbolizes durability and dependability functions also to undermine those values, marking the waywardness and unpredictability of human emotion and attachments, especially as circumstances impinge upon them. Troilus's return to Criseyde's house captures this irony, as he worships that structure and in the process speaks of Criseyde as the stone in the ring, idealistically using a trope out of which Pandarus, as we have seen, has already taken the air. Criseyde's house is a shrine, a "ryng, from

which the ruby is out falle" (5.549).[30] Then as "stone" she shows up in the form of the brooch that Troilus discovers inside Diomedes's coat. In this form, her stoniness, as it did in Athena's temple, becomes that power to turn Troilus's heart cold: when he discovers the brooch, his heart "Ful sodeynly" turns "colde (5.1659). In this way, the trope of the poem's beginning, Troilus's being "astoned" by the sight of Criseyde, is reconfigured here and at the end of the poem where "astoned" expresses the only durable thing in this world, sudden change and lack of stability. "Stoon of sikernesse" amounts to a brutal irony to the extent that "astoned" as unstable worldliness, as an unavoidable response within the "movable" spheres, is a certainty.[31]

As Medusa, Criseyde embodies that paradox. Even the poem's concluding stanzas in which Troilus, released from temporal and physical constraints of the moveable realm, looks down upon "This litel spot of erthe that with the se / Embraced is" (5.1815–16) reinforces the Medusa connection, while repeating several vital images. Here again Troilus is gazing into a visual field and being attracted to a particular element in it, just as he was in Athena's temple when he was "astoned" by the sight of Criseyde. Without the threat of astonishment, he sees a spot, a little stone, even a version of the jewel that had been lost from the ring of Criseyde's house, now back in its appropriate setting. Criseyde and the little spot of mutable earth are synonymous, though I think it is important to realize à la Dinshaw that the vision identifying them is particularly male. No matter how thoroughly Troilus turned her into an ideal, Criseyde has always been this stone embraced within this worldly setting. In addition, the image upon which Troilus focuses repeats his dream of Criseyde embraced by the boar (5.1241); but finally and more importantly, it also reconfigures part of the subtext behind the story of his loving Criseyde, the primal scene of the Medusa story: as a version of the earth here, she is as much as anything Medusa locked in the mastering embrace of Neptune.

[30]For a thorough interpretation of the suggestive associations of the ring image in the *Troilus*, see John Fleming, *Classical Imitation and Interpretation in Chaucer's "Troilus"* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), esp. 8 and 12.

[31]Robert M. Durling and Ronald Martinez, *Time and the Crystal: Studies in Dante's "Rime Petrose"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 33–37, analyze the ways in which medieval discussions of gems relate to the concept of the "stone lady." In light of their analysis, the identification of Criseyde with gem, jewel, brooch, and the power to fascinate and petrify is lodged in more than just the imagery patterns of Chaucer's poem.

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