

**THE MEDUSA**  
**or**  
**HOW AN INSIGHT INCREASE FOR THE ANALYST**  
**LEADS TO AN INSIGHT INCREASE FOR THE**  
**PATIENT: THEORETICAL APPROACH**

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Abstract:

*This paper is composed over the spontaneous associations made by the analyst in the interval between two sessions with a group in a group-analytical process group and related to the Mythology and the Group Analysis and the Psychoanalytic theories and increasing the analyst's insight, as a result from the counter-transference and per-elaboration processes, it made possible for the analyst interpret in a different way a comment made by a patient in one of the sessions. The new interpretation lead to an insight increased for the patient and to a change in the communication level inside the group.*

*The present is part of a more extensive work presented in 2008, by occasion of her candidacy and nomination as an accredited member of SPG, and which included: a characterization of the elements of the group; narration of a group analysis session – the basis of the theoretical elaboration of this work; the Medusas subject, which includes a reference research and a reflection on the theme; and a description of Borderline Pathology, including literature since the 1950s.*

**Key-Words:** Counter transference, Interpretation, Borderline Pathology, Group, Insight, Interpretation, Medusa,

## THE “MEDUSAE” SUBJECT

### 1. Introduction

António was the one to introduce this subject, in a session during which, once again, we discussed his necessity to always act out his emotions. He spoke to the women in the Group, in great anger, saying “Shut up! You... Medusas!” (and turned away, as if cutting the dialogue). I did not interpret it – it was close to the end of the session; there was a silence and eventually Rodrigo started to talk about his own subject. I did not see an opportunity to speak at length about it at the occasion, but in any case I could only remember Medusas as “bad creatures” with snakes as hair!

I told António that, if he spoke to the women in the group, the Analyst was certainly included. Even because this agronomist, once having heard about my degree in Philosophy, developed an interest in the subject and reportedly “keeps piles of these books on the bedside table”.

In a subsequent session, I asked the men in the Group: “why are you so scared of women?” This was repeated among them...

I asked António: “In this group, do people like you or are they Medusas?” He did not say much to that.

I later interpreted the incident differently, as explained ahead.

## 2. Development

The subject of the Medusas awakened various association lines:

2.1. Greek mythology – later transferred to Roman and Latin culture.

The universe was populated not only by Gods but also by mythical creatures in the skies, on the ground, underground, in the sea and rivers, the air...

Possibly under the suggestion of the subject of our latest Congress<sup>1</sup>, I interpreted that as a defence against emptiness; a giant screen for the projection of human emotions.

Medusa was one of these beings; one of the Gorgons, female characters that had snakes in the place of hair, wild boar teeth, bronze hands, gold wings, eyes that could shoot flames.

Medusa changed into stone or salt statues anyone who looked directly into her eyes.

The Gorgons were similar to the Nereids, the Erinyes, the Harpies and, in Latin culture, the Furies.

After consultation of texts about Mythology, Symbols, Greek Culture and others, I reached more dynamic interpretations.

Like the (destiny), these beings were, originally, guardians of the laws of nature and the order of things, in both physical and moral sense.

Later they became instruments of divine revenge, chasing men for the faults they committed.

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<sup>1</sup> Congress's Title

Herodotus established that the Deity is always, that is, envious and meddling.

In current days, some scholars of Greek culture and Mythology believe that, in the Ancient World, these characters were already identified with the conscience. Internalized, they symbolised remorse, culpability, auto-destruction by means of the impossibility of reparation.

The Gorgons, as said, were three: Stheno, Euryale and Medusa.

Paul Diel wrote about them: “The monstrous deformities of the Psyche are due to the perverted forces of the three urges – sociability, sexuality, spirituality”.

Euryale represented sexual perversions: Stheno, social perversion; and Medusa, the only among the three who was a mortal, symbolized the principal among these urges: the spiritual urge.

According to J. Chevalier, “(...) the spiritual urge is evolutionary, but perverted in vain stagnation”. And so the only way to fight off the culpability that arises from this vanity and exaltation of one's desires would be by “(...) endeavouring to find Harmony”.

The only way to escape the Gorgons was to take refuge in the Temple of Athena, goddess that represents fertility and wisdom and was “a warrior who inspired the arts and the works of peace”. Or, as we would say today, the possibility of reparation comes through thought – “the meditated work of the spirit” - and creativity.

In the legend, Perseus killed Medusa and presented Athena with her head, which was placed on the goddess' shield.

To Paul Diel, the paralysis caused by the eyes of the Medusa happened because she “reflected the image of personal culpability. The Medusa

symbolizes the deformed image of self... which petrifies through horror instead of being appropriately clarified”.

2.2. I also remembered a short book I had read a few years ago – the work of a colleague, Fátima Andersen, under the orientation of Professor Maria Rita Mendes Leal PhD., published under the title: From the silence of God to the Medusa Mother (original from “Do Silêncio de Deus à Mãe Medusada). It is a still face research made with babies and their respective mothers that concludes that, more than the psychotic or absent mother, it is the depressed mother – who does not respond or express – that creates the worst development prognostic situations.

2.3. This conclusion reminded me of the André Green's Dead mother and the identification children make in relation to these mothers.

Green uses the word Imago to designate the internal construction or representation the patients make to represent them separately from the Historical mother. Starting from this point he talks about trauma and reconstruction.

All the elements of the aforementioned Group had Dead mothers – emotionally dead, living-dead mothers:

- António's mother – an alcoholic since he was very young;
- Rodrigo's mother – mother only in a practical sense, described by him as being masculine;
- Beatriz's mother – afflicted by a serious disease, spent many years behaving as the daughter to her;
- Francisco's mother – depressive and incapable of containing him, suffocating him with anxiety;
- Sofia's mother – idealized and fused with her, she became inexistent as a separate entity and was repeatedly killed in Sofia's anorexia.

Green speaks of the destructiveness of these patients, which would be a result of the identification to a dead mother – the loved object is loved and hated contradictorily, and lost -, the identification with a destructive or dead object. Borderline patients have a central fear of the activation of a traumatic situation, and thus have the attitude of constantly running away from the traumatic recognition of their psychic experience.

2.4. On the subject of the Maternal Imago, Professor Eduardo Luís Cortesão PhD mentions that this Imago may be “appeasing or persecuting, or bisected, including both aspects” – and this is noticeable in the transference. In the session discussed here, it appears most clearly in Rodrigo's transference movements.

2.5. Peter Fonagy formulates the hypothesis of mentalization and auto-reflection and affirms that “the mother's communication includes the empathic clarification of what goes through the baby's mind in each experience and of its reaction to it. The mother of the future borderline patient is, in general, incapable of empathically accepting the baby's communication, and of elaborating it, leaving them alone with what will become an oppressing and unbearable psychic experience that cannot be appropriately mentalized; or is a mother who identifies with the baby but is incapable of establishing an internal difference between her experience and theirs.”

This unbearable oppression originates the loss of the borders of the ego.

Bion would say that these children did not have a “containing mother” and explain that what becomes paralysed is the part of the mind that has become psychotic.

2.6. Another association regarded the concept of looking Daniel Marcelli speaks of looking as the “psychic organ of sense” and the “fundament of human bonds”, which allows for the appearance of intersubjectivity.

The role of eye contact is to “create one among two”, and so it is the origin of exchange and share.

On this same subject I also remember a communication from our colleague Maria da Graça Mexia, in the head office of SPG, in which, among other things, she spoke of the bonding process between mother and baby through eye-to-eye contact.

### 3. Conclusion

In later sessions, I made different interpretations that resulted in an increase of the insight of António and other members of the Group...

“What would happen if António had eye-to-eye contact with us?” He answered immediately: “I would be very scared”. And then asked: “What does this mean?”...

I answered “It means connecting to us, being less fearful of being close and also of having to part with us...”. “It means to stop the look of analysis over yourself, with no fear of being stopped by us in certain actions, outside, that seem to be so destructive to you”.

I then explained to António what the “Medusas” were. “I never thought... did I say that?” he answered. “I apologize – I like you all and think you are beautiful... I didn't want to think – sometimes I don't want to think. I also didn't want you to stop me; it was as if I couldn't bear to stop doing such things. I am afraid of talking about my fears, but have been noticing that I have many. And women? Oh Doctor, I must also have some weird thing about women.

Starting from this interpretation it was possible to start talking about António's mother, a circumstance that resulted in the increase of his insight.

**The increase of the insight of the analyst led to the increase of the insight of the patient and of the Group.**

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