

Cheryl Walker: On "Medusa"

"Medusa," from Bogan's first book, mythologizes the experience of psychic injury:

When the bare eyes were before me
And the hissing hair, Held up at a window,
seen through a door. The stiff bald eyes, the serpents on the forehead
Formed in the air.

Since this scene becomes frozen in the mind, and since it retains not only terror but beauty, as we shall see, the poet seems to be inviting us to note the connection between the traumatized individual and the artist who would preserve in form the content of psychic crisis.

[. . . .]

Through her final years Louise Bogan became a woman obsessed with the memories she had accumulated in her childhood and in her young life with Raymond. [Her marriage with Raymond Holden had disintegrated by 1933]. Thus the "Medusa" poem written in the early 1920s may be read in part as a terrifying prolepsis:

[. . . .]

This is a scene whose beauty and terror has pollinated her imagination with its "yellow dust" that does not drift away. The shadow to which she refers in line eighteen suggests both the sense of her own insubstantiality in the face of this trauma and the embodiment of her desire to echo it, to become the shadow of suffering.

From *Masks Outrageous and Austere: Culture, Psyche, and Persona in Modern Women Poets*
. Copyright © 1991 by Cheryl Walker.

Publication Status:

Excerpted Criticism [1]

Publication:

- Private group -

Criticism Target:

Louise Bogan [2]

Author:

Cheryl Walker [3]

Poem:

Medusa [4]

Source URL: <https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/cheryl-walker-medusa>

Links

[1] <https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

[2] <https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/louise-bogan>

[3] <https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/cheryl-walker>

[4] <https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/medusa>