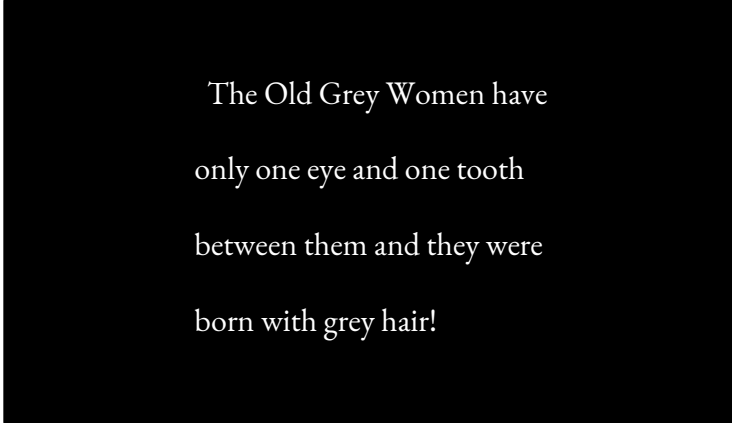


The Crouching Graeae¹

perseus finds them in hiding — the sisters who hunch in the hollows
grasping around, for between them is one displaced eye they all reach for
they cannot see, but the camera can see how they bicker and wonder



The Old Grey Women have
only one eye and one tooth
between them and they were
born with grey hair!

not just our hair, but our everything — our robes monochrome, our skin —
greybodied performers, speechless and blind / holding onto each other

crouched

in a cavern, swaying from side —

to side —

— not a hero's destination but a station
on his way.

three seated sisters, bound to each other by our waists and hands

unholy trinity /

three silent cacklers / unspeaking, unseeing triptych / a blind-worm's sting
flung into a hell-broth caldron.

¹ This poem takes its subject matter from the scene depicting the Graeae from the 1925 silent film *The Gorgon's Head*. The film can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's moving-picture archive, and was published online in 2020: <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/videos/2020/3/from-the-vaults-gorgons-head>.

our faces, commedia-masked,
we fumble, breathe warm, shallow breaths —
the paint-smelling papier-mâché pressing our noses —
knowing where perseus, the leading man, stands
by the
shuffling
of
his
feet.

the screen speaks: the screen says we are horrors
not because we pose a threat, but because
we are Old Grey Women.
in raggedy wigs, one makeshift eye
between us — playing a trebled part.

every coven crouches with us — furies and gorgons.
some '90s disney hero might have you
convinced that we are the blade-bearing fates.
perhaps we are — blurred into one triple-faced crone.

off-camera, turtle doves flock around us — not the pristine
white bird, but the common, dusky creature.
grey-feathered and red-eyed like a pigeon —
two seen in a tree means death is coming.
but still, they call to their mate
with an affectionate purr —
favourite of fides — emblem of love —

favourite of ours — spinster sisters —
denied all intimacy but the rolling of an eye
from her / to i / then her / then her again.
only friendship with faces that look just like mine.
locked in an unlovable pose — shut away in a cave.

now, you may uncover us on a laptop,
in the dead of night, if you like.
hunched before your screen

alone, tired and wide-awake
yourself crouched in a cave of sorts — wrapped
in your robes / a warm, grey duvet.

press replay and we'll sway forever.
three-headed monster — sea hags on white horses
administrators of impersonal fate — beldams chanting
adder's fork — winged vengeance goddesses.
a mane of pitvipers and a stare to hold you still.
which three are they, again? perhaps none, perhaps all.
we rise out of the nowhere. unexpected. wyrd.
with a silent will that we too could live / could love like you
unrecorded, ongoing purr:

you are born / you will die / you will love

Perseus:

“Tell me what I wish to know
or you will never SEE again!”

flickering fast, the old creatures are only onscreen for a moment
blinded completely, before he returns their one eye, journeys onward
frozen in pose — and obscurity, spinning on destiny's grey threads