

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Aşkın ÇELİKKOL

AMKE11120 – Edebi Türler

Patriarchal Hierarchay through Myths

Origin myth is a specific type of myth that explains how something came to be, like the creation of the world, the origin of humans, or the beginning of life or death. Myth and origin myth might be considered the same as they both are etiological. However, while myths are considered traditional stories, origin myths convey something that already exists. When we look closely, we can see that those origin myths reflect the ideals of dominant groups while they slowly and transparently embed customs and beliefs that normalize oppression and inequality. For example, myths that show the origins of human suffering around female action, like the Greek story of Pandora or the Blackfoot tale of Feather Woman, serve as vehicles for gendered subordination. In a world where hate doesn't need a resource and hate for women naturally exists, it is easy for men to make place to blame women for the evil occurrences as in these stories, women are the ones to blame for the downfall of humanity. This makes it easier for men to build the patriarchal hierarchy they aim to create and make the society accept the idea that if women can cause these problems, they are dangerous therefore, must be under the dominance and control of men. This essay will examine the installation of patriarchal ideas to society and how society reflects those ideals and should react to them in order to create the ideal social system.

Myths are rarely neutral. When myths are created on a base that favors one over another, the marks of patriarchy and sexism start being visible through the act of the biased society. As a consequence, dominance of certain groups and patriarchy become inevitable. Mostly, myths contain moral lessons that they benefit from to justify social hierarchies. They link certain behaviours such as disobedience, curiosity and longing to moral failure in order to promote an idea that supports one side. Through this way, they create subordinate status, and then link it to specific groups, like women.

Moreover, myths often demonstrate hierarchical systems as a part of the divine order. By putting these demonstrations under the name of sacred order, they destroy the possibility that they and patriarchal ideals were made by human or can be changed by human. This strategic use of myth allows those in power to create a perception that inequality is not only rational but essential and normal.

Two examples of this process of ideological reinforcement are the Greek tale of Pandora and the Blackfoot story of Feather Woman. There are versions of Pandora that are later added and interpreted from Hesiod's Works and Days but mainly, according to Greek mythology, the gods seek revenge after Prometheus steals fire from them to save humanity, as a result Zeus creates the first woman Pandora. Her curse is her beauty and curiosity which are especially given by different gods such Athena, Aphrodite, Hermes, Charites etc. Zeus basically creates her as a machine of revenge and gives her a jar which used to be called



Pithos (Pandora's Box) and warns her not to open the box. Pandora surrenders to her curiosity and opens the box and unleashes disease, famine, war, pain, causing them to spread all over the world. As she closes the box, the only thing left in it is hope.

The second narrative is about the Feather Woman, a Blackfoot (Niitsitapi) origin story about a mortal woman who falls in love with a celestial being. One day, Feather Woman goes outside to pick up Turnips, while she is picking them, she sees the morning star and wishes to be with him. The gods hear her and grant her wish; she gets lifted to the sky world. She marries the morning star and bears him a son. She is happy with her life in the sky world, yet, through time she begins missing her home and longs for knowledge and freedom. Although she is warned not to dig up a special turnip, her longing and curiosity leads her to disobey. She digs up a special turnip, therefore gets exiled to earth and gets to face her mortal-self. As she is no longer an immortal celestial being and separated from her husband and child, she lives with sorrow and dies of a broken heart

By analysing both the myths of Pandora's Box and Feather Woman, we can see the hidden patriarchy and the consequence of female action through the narratives. In the first place, Pandora's creation as a punishment by "male gods" clearly depicts women as tools that can be used for punishment as we observe through the lines: "Zeus said: "I will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction." (Works and Days, lines 55–58). Pandora's creation is framed as an "evil thing", she is stripped of her individuality and reduced to an object that's created for revenge. The line reflects an intense patriarchal point of view, a woman's beauty is a threat, and her purpose is to avenge humanity in order to punish Prometheus which shows that she is not only objectified but also weaponized by the male gods. Also, by creating Pandora as a trap, in the name of so-called divine order, male gods promote patriarchy and control and try to imply that human suffering is tied directly to a woman's existence. They give the impression that if a woman challenges divine order, she will suffer the consequences harshly. Through these messages, they exploit divinity and use it as an excuse to empower themselves to control women.

In the Feather Woman myth, male dominance is exercised through divine power and female obedience. Firstly, through marriage to the Morning Star, Feather Woman is set under strict and harsh circumstances by male figures, particularly the Sun, who sets the rule that she never touches the special Turnip, which pressures her curiosity. Her exile as a punishment for digging up the special Turnip causes her permanent separation from her husband and child. This harsh punishment shows us that the consequence of female curiosity and desire should severely be punished. This punishment is deeply gendered: only she suffers consequences while the male figures remain untouched. The myth promotes the idea of female obedience and self-sacrifice and warns women that curiosity or independence leads to their own end as she dies of a broken heart at the end. Furthermore, the story's depiction of Feather Woman's self-knowledge as a "punishment" clearly depicts a patriarchal desire to control female identity. By punishing her for seeking self-awareness, the myth defends that a woman's identity must be defined by male authority like sun, Zeus etc. not her own ideals.

Both Feather Woman and Pandora are significant examples of male control by punishing female disobedience and curiosity. In each story, male figures hold power, they set the rule and expect women to follow without an obligation. When those rules are broken, whether by pulling up a turnip or opening a jar, the consequence is immense suffering and the ones to blame are the women while the men are blameless. Both myths present female need



for knowledge as a threat to the existing order and imply that curiosity is not good for women and that women should know their places. Through these mechanisms, the stories favor male dominance and embed patriarchal values into cultural memory, implying that women's independence is destructive and must be controlled.

Now, let's compare the consequences of male action vs female action through origin myths. In the myth of Prometheus, Zeus commands Prometheus to create the first humans. Prometheus creates humans and deeply cares about them; therefore, he teaches them trickery and the humans trick Zeus by giving him the bad part of their sacrifice disguised in a good part of the meat. When Zeus finds out, he decides to punish Prometheus by punishing the human he created and forbids the use of fire on earth. Prometheus, not being able to watch his people suffer, steals fire from the mount Olympos and gives the fire to his people to make civilizations. This action makes Zeus angry and by chaining Prometheus to a rock for a long time, he takes his revenge.

Though Prometheus is punished by the gods, he is seen as a hero by the people still today. His actions are considered heroic and brave, yet he did the same thing that Pandora and Feather Woman did. Disobedience against gods. Why is Pandora and Feather Woman seen as evil while Prometheus is seen as a hero? Should the punishment of curiosity be subordination and endless hate for women? No. If a woman is created as a tool, to bring the downfall of mankind, then she should not be hated by the people as God is responsible for her creation as revenge. Same goes for Feather Woman as she is just a woman who yearns for her life on earth, which is a most natural feeling for a woman separated from her normal life.

These myths are not just about individual failure but are collective because not just specific figures, but all women are shown as the target of the hate and the reason for disorder. By linking this behavior with transgression and its consequences, the myths try to create a perception about the dangers of female power. They suggest that a peaceful society can only be maintained with quiet women under male control. Through this way, mythic narratives become cultural scripts that justify gender-based ideals under the name of protecting society from chaos. And in a world where patriarchal hierarchy is passed down by generations, women keep suffering while men enjoy being the ones favoured.

Finally, the myths are not only narratives but also stories that we take as examples, the people we idolize and the rules we follow. And as they affect today's world significantly, it's important to have a clear grip of what they imply and what should be taken as right and what should be taken as wrong. Though some are unequal and sided, we are creatures that can separate wrong and right which means that we should be able to reinterpret these narratives from the right point of view and add them to our cultural memory in a way that will help create a foundation for peace and equality rather than subordination and sexism. With the effort to fix what's been thought wrong, we might achieve the ideal society that we dream of.



WORKS CITED

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origin_myth

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pandora-Greek-mythology>

<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/fools-crow/characters/so-at-sa-ki-feather-woman>

<https://sarahsoderlund.blogspot.com/2018/05/soatsaki-and-story-of-feather-woman.html> <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/sarkiat/article/541704>

<https://youtu.be/hJZYRhW1Oek?si=x3Ta-6VQkAJ2qcfM>

<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/world-museum/greek-myths-and-legends/prometheusstealing-fire-gods>

<https://outside.substack.com/p/silencing-the-divine-myths-patriarchy>

<https://familyforwardmo.org/blog/what-is-collective-trauma-and-how-can-we-heal/#:~:text=Th>
is%20is%20called%20collective%20trauma,affected%20will%20be%20impacted%20differe
n tly.

<https://familyforwardmo.org/blog/what-is-collective-trauma-and-how-can-we-heal/#:~:text=Th>
is%20is%20called%20collective%20trauma,affected%20will%20be%20impacted%20differe
n tly.