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EMOTIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER: FROM CURIOSITY TO SIN, FROM SIN TO SHAME

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MİTOLOJİK ANLATILARDA TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET BAĞLAMINDA DUYGUSAL DÖNÜŞÜM: MERAKTAN GÜNAHA, GÜNAHTAN UTANCA

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Abstract

This study examines how emotions that appear in mythological narratives are constructed within the context of gender with particular emphasis on how curiosity and shame are interpreted through female figures. Since Antiquity, philosophical systems shaped by the dichotomy of mind and soul have also manifested in myths. The mind/male and emotion/female opposition that emerged through this transformation can be traced in narratives belonging to different cultures. Focusing on examples from Turkish, Greek, and Mesopotamian mythology—specifically Havva (Eve), Eci, Pandora, and Psyche—the study explores how curiosity is predominantly portrayed as disobedience, associated with sin, and framed as a threat to the divine order. It argues that attributing this emotion to women serves to reinforce a culturally embedded meaning. Shame, which follows curiosity, is analyzed through themes such as the recognition of nakedness, the awakening of consciousness, and subsequent punishment, prompting questions about the function this emotion assumes within collective memory. Overall, the study demonstrates that curiosity and shame in myths function not merely as individual emotional experiences but as mechanisms that legitimize social norms. In doing so, it reveals the historical patterns through which emotions are gendered in myths and how women's desire for knowledge is depicted in archaic narratives as dangerous, controllable, and inherently transgressive.

Keywords: Emotion, Gender, Myth, Curiosity, Shame

Öz

Bu çalışmada, mitler içerisinde karşımıza çıkan duyguların, toplumsal cinsiyet bağlamında nasıl kurgulandığı incelenmiştir. Bunu yaparken, özellikle merak ve utanç duygularının kadın özneler üzerinden nasıl anlamlandırıldığına değinilmiştir. Antik Çağ felsefesinden itibaren, akıl ve ruh üzerinden gelişen düşünce sistemleri mitlerde de karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Akıl-erkek ve duygu-kadın şeklinde dönüşüm yaşayarak mitolojik anlatılara yerleşen akıl ve ruh çatışmasının izlerini farklı kültürlere ait anlatılarda sürmek mümkündür. Türk, Yunan ve Mezopotamya mitleri içerisinden Havva, Eci, Pandora ve Psykhe örnekleri üzerinden gidilerek, merak duygusunun çoğunlukla itaatsizlik olarak görülmesi, günah ve tanrısal düzene tehdit olarak ilişkilendirilmesi üzerinde durulmuş ve bu duygunun kadınlara atfedilerek kültürel bir anlamı pekiştirmeyi hedeflemeye çalıştığı gösterilmek istenmiştir. Merak duygusunu takip eden utanç duygusu ise, çıplaklığın fark edilmesi, bilincin uyanması ve cezalandırılma aşamalarıyla birlikte işlendiğinden, toplumsal hafızada ne tür bir anlam oluşturduğu sorgulanmıştır. Tüm bunlar değerlendirildiğinde, mitlerde işlenen merak ve utanç duygusunun, bireyin geçici bir deneyiminden öte olduğu, toplumsal normları meşrulaştıracak bir işlev taşıdığı görülmektedir. Böylece, duyguların mitler aracılığıyla belli bir cinsiyete atanmasının, kadınların bilme arzusunun arkaik anlatılarda da tehlikeli ve denetlenmesi gereken, günahkâr bir eylem olarak anlatılmasının izleri ve bunların sonuçları incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygu, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Mit, Merak, Utanç

Introduction

"What is an emotion?" as a question is an interdisciplinary problem. Issues such as the similarities between emotional experiences, the classification of basic emotions, and the physiological or social dimensions of emotions have been the subject of numerous studies. Regarding this, many different definitions of the "nature of emotion" have emerged, and

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thus various ways of understanding emotion have developed. Definitions such as "perceiving with the senses; feeling, sensation," "the impression that specific objects, events, or individuals arouse in the inner world of a person; heart," "the ability to evaluate objects or events in moral and aesthetic terms," and "a unique mental mobility"[1] are made largely in a cultural context and do not contain a physiological, neurological, or psychological dimension. From an etymological standpoint, the root of the word "duygu" (emotion) can be traced to words such as "duymak" (to hear) and "sezim" (intuition); indeed, the act of hearing is related to the word "tuy,"[2] which means to feel, and sezim refers to "understanding, predicting, or sensing something that has happened or will happen without clear evidence." However, examining emotions in a cultural context as required by the aim of this study, necessitates taking into account the beliefs, cultural features, and narratives of past societies. Although the historical lifespan of the term "emotion" is relatively young, when the cultural context is examined, it becomes evident that numerous expressions and narratives functioned in place of this concept.

When modern idea of an emotion began to emerge in researches, many researchers focused on the physiological dimension of emotions. However, by the 19th century, the need for a more inclusive definition began rise. The most significant reason for this was the realization that emotions could not be reduced to the physical realm alone, as they possessed many different aspects worthy of investigation. During this period, philosopher Thomas Brown[3] suggested using the term "emotion," derived from the Latin verb emovere, meaning "to move" or "to move out." The aim was to present a more integrative approach; however, the cultural perspectives underlying the meanings of "movement" and "moving outward," which explain the interaction between individuals, societies, and cultures, had not yet emerged.[4]

Long before the development of modern understandings of emotion, many terms were used in philosophical contexts for an emotion. Terms such as passion, pleasure, intuition, desire, sensation, affection, "accidents of the soul," and moral feelings have frequently been used as equivalents for "emotion" since Antiquity. However, the conceptual systems formed through the use of these terms evolved in different directions over time, alongside developing and changing societies. Therefore, attempting to understand emotions by restricting them to a specific domain, carries the risk of narrowing the subject; for this reason, it must be emphasized once again that emotions can be defined in many different contexts.[5]

Ancient philosophers proposed various ideas in their attempts to understand human nature. The Greeks expressed emotions using the word pathos (plural: pathe). Carrying meanings such as "to suffer" or "experience," this concept derives from the Latin verb *patior*[6] and forms the root of the English words passion and passive. Emotions encompassed by pathos—such as anger, fear, love, jealousy, pity, and rage—were viewed by the philosophers of the period as an enemy of mind. However, if we turn to Ancient philosophy to examine how emotions embedded in myths for create meaning in the context of gender, it becomes clear that the fundamental issue is the conflict between reason and the soul.

The problem of emotions in Ancient philosophy emerges as a step toward understanding the human nature. The problem of human existence is related not only to reason but also to the soul and passions. For this reason, approaches opposing the necessity

[1] "Duygu", https://sozluk.gov.tr/?ara=duygu, November 4, 2025.
[2] Tuncer Gülensoy, *Türkiye Türkçesindeki Türkçe Sözcüklerin Köken Bilgisi Sözlüğü, Etimolojik Sözlük Denemesi II (O-Z)*, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları Ankara 2007, p. 940.
[3] Thomas Brown (1778-1820), a Scottish philosopher and doctor.
[4] Sara Ahmed, *Duyguların Kültürel Politikası*, Transl. Sultan Komut, Sel Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2004, p. 21.
[5] Robert C. Solomon, *Duygulara Sadakat Hislerimiz, Gerçekte Bize Ne Anlatıyor?*, Translate: Funda Çoban, Nika Yayınevi, Ankara 2016, p. 20.
[6] Filiz Cluzeau, "Platon'un Ruh Kuramı'nda Pathos", *Cedrus,* Volume: 2013/1, p. 66.

of reason also developed. One of the first ideas within these approaches is that passions constitute a problem standing against reason. On the other hand, some philosophers argued that passions could not be entirely at odds with reason. Because it was impossible for a human attribute to be completely independent of reason, it was also unacceptable for an attribute belonging to reason to be entirely wrong. For this reason, although it does not offer a comprehensive proposal covering all emotions, some passions were argued to be beneficial. However, as in most ethical inquiries of the period, the matter is related to a search for "goodness." Goodness is an essential requirement for seeking absolute good and achieving absolute virtue, and attaining this good is often described as the feeling of happiness[7]. In this context, the aim of Ancient Greek philosophy is to reach the good required by morality—namely, the highest good[8], as Plato calls it, happiness. But the acceptability and usefulness of this happiness depend on the individual's ability to control it. The process of self-knowledge requires using reason to orient oneself toward the absolute good and attaining the happiness that this good brings. Thus the individual's primary task is to control emotions and preserve the primacy of reason.

In Ancient philosophy, emotions—or elements that could be considered emotions—were defined as weaknesses of the human soul and passions that needed to be suppressed. Therefore, approaches defending rational reason developed within the context of precautions that must be taken against emotions and produced suggestions regarding how such passions could be suppressed or controlled. When examining the history of emotions, the noteworthy conflict between reason and soul merges in myths with the reason/male and soul/emotion/female dichotomy and becomes embedded in sacred narratives, forming a subject of storytelling that extends to the present day.

The examples studied in this paper were selected from Turkish, Greek, and Mesopotamian myths. A comparative myth analysis was thus conducted, allowing these narratives to be interpreted through the duality of gender and emotion that is also evident in the history of philosophy. In this process, our attention was paid to the sacred character of the myths and to the power derived from this sacredness. The emotions under examination were addressed through female subjects, and priority was given to an interpretive approach that aims to demonstrate how patriarchal domination is legitimized through myth. The analysis of the emotions discussed in this study through the examples of Eve/Havva/Eci is also important. The narratives begin with the inclination of the first created woman toward deception, betrayal and proceed through acts of disobedience against divine authority. The woman's attraction to curiosity is presented as the cause of this disobedience. This structure is crucial for demonstrating the association between women and curiosity within the framework of sin and prohibition. When myths are considered as instruments used to regulate perceptions concerning women's relationship with the desire to know or with knowledge itself, the punishment of the woman who experiences curiosity becomes more meaningful. Womans expulsion from heaven or from a divine position, or punishment through suffering such as childbirth emerges as a norm that is likely to spread within society and become firmly established through the sacred. For this reason, the study prefers a comparative examination of this texts drawn from different myths and cultures, analyzing

[7] Mehmet Fatih Elmas, "İyiyle Dönüşmek, İyiye Dönüşmek: Platon'da İyinin Yüksekliği Üzerine Bir İrdeleme", *Dört Öge,* Volume: 2022/XXI, p. 72.

[8] The concept of the highest good was later transformed by the Roman philosopher Cicero into the expression *Summum bonum*, which encompassed the notion of goodness mentioned by Plato. Plato, however, used the same concept as *Agathon*. For Plato, *Agathon* was the "Form of Forms" or the highest Form, an understanding composed of three distinct elements: ethics, epistemology, and ontology. Aristotle subsequently employed the same term to refer to the good toward which all existing things aim, and also as *eudaimonia*, corresponding to an intellectual cultivation or virtue.

them within the context of gender and through the reason–soul dichotomy found in the philosophy of emotions.

1. Myth and Emotions

Myths are creation stories that tells what was existed at the beginning and what came to an end. These narratives, which explain how something, someone, or an event was created, belong to an archaic time and carry multiple functions[9]. One of these functions is providing the society they were formed with an origin story. However, origin myths are not necessarily about the origins of a thing, the world, animals, plants, or human beings. A myth also constitutes the origin of the world of meaning that presents the norms enabling a society to exist as a whole and to preserve this order.

> *"Indeed, myths not only recount the origins of the world, animals, plants, and humankind, but also all the major events that occurred up to the point at which humans reached their present state; in other words, they describe the essential events through which humans became beings who are mortal, gendered, socially organized, required to work for their survival, and functioning under certain rules."*[10]

Since the story narrated by myths belongs to a sacred narrative of the archaic human, it is always regarded as a religious narrative that tells the truth. These sacred narratives are a form of origin story. Through these sacred narratives, individuals reach the "sacred word" by making sense of human behavior, thoughts, emotions, material of cultural elements, apocalypse narratives and the origins of the ancient world. Myths form sacred narratives by returning to the beginning and thereby shape the meaning. One of the most essantial features of myth—offering a supernatural narrative belonging to a time that cannot be repeated—is that it recounts the first instance of an action. Myths return to the original form of an act and present its true meaning and reality, thus enabling individuals to draw closer to the divine order and god.

The sacred nature of myths also requires considering the religious functions embedded within the narrative. A mythic story is takes place in a sacred, extraordinary time. The supernatural events that occurred within this sacred and inaccessible time establish the believer's faith. This faith becomes grounded within the individual, who seeks a place within the social order and who needs a role model to understand how one should be behaving. It functions as a law-making and guiding force. Individuals who look to the sacred narrative told by the myth perceive both the moral principles they must obey and the origins of the existing social order.

In *The Interpretation of Cultures*[11], Clifford Geertz discusses how religions serve the function of creating enduring moods and motivations in people. These moods and motivations may be evoked in many ways—like through sacred texts or rituals. And to provide the foundation for this endurance, impact, and motivation, narratives supported by emotions—or that directly explain emotions—may be used. In this context, sacred images such as myths carry the power to transmit a community's identity, culture, spiritual states, worldview, and life in a daily basis. The unquestionable nature of a sacred image and its capacity to reinforce social norms and order, grant it the power to inspire new ideas or emotions in individuals. The fact that religious beliefs and practices reveal a culture's *ethos* strengthens the idea that these practices—myths—represent the culture and daily life of the

[9] Mircea Eliade, *Mitlerin Özellikleri*, Transl. Sema Fırat, Alfa Yayınları, İstanbul 2021, p.17.
[10] Mircea Eliade, Ibid., p. 23.
[11] Clifford Geertz, *Kültürlerin Yorumlanması*, Transl. Hakan Gür, Dergah Yayınları, İstanbul 2020, p.136.

period in which they were living in. Thus, it becomes necessary to focus on the question of what a myth is.

When evaluated in this context, searching for an origin story of emotions within mythology is not about discovering the exact moment of an emotion was created, but rather about understanding how the emotion shapes the narrative, the events in which they emerge in, who its subject is and what message it conveys. Myths ensure that a society maintains its existence within certain rules, and it is impossible to consider this society apart from the emotions of the individuals who belong to this society. The events through which an emotion emerges, what the repetition of that emotion within the narrative attempts to reinforce, how it concludes, which gender constitutes the dominant subject in the story, and whether the emotion is punished or rewarded—all of these shows that the narrative enters the mind of the individual and the social order. Therefore, the origin we seek to examine is the cultural and social conception of emotion constructed by myths.

In attempting to understand how emotions are narrated within myths and the context of these n-arrations, it is necessary to consider different cultures. When examining myths that belong to distinct cultures, looking for whether a recurring meaning connected to the origins of emotions exists—and interpreting this by considering the heroes who enhance the sacredness of the myth and their gender—can be more useful. Myths, especially when the focus is on gender, can appear as narratives that reinforce social distinctions. Narratives that assign specific emotions to specific genders, along with their underlying messages, reveal the social structure of the archaic period and the understandings embedded within myths. Because the fact that sacred narratives were eventually replaced by various religions and belief systems does not mean that centuries-old traditions, beliefs, or social structures were abandoned easily. Systems of thought embedded within the social structure—carried into the future through myths and reinforced by their sacred character—have preserved their place.

2. Emotional Transformations in Mythological Narratives in the Context of Gender

In most social studies conducted on emotions, emphasis is placed on the importance of the needs that arise from an individual's desire to understand oneself and the "other.". Alongside the desire to recognize and classify emotions, one also observes—just as in myths—a search for origins and a tendency to assign emotions to genders. In myths where a particular emotion is predominantly emphasized, the events that give rise to that emotion, the gender of its subject, the problems it causes, the consequences of these problems, the punishments that follow, and ultimately the lesson that the myth intends us to extract from the narrative all reveal the moral message we are expected to derive from the story as a whole. Thus, by explaining the events that occur due to an emotion—or the emotions that arise as a result of events—the myth presents the individual with a behavioral pattern. To some extent, the myth becomes a force that tells us what emotion that we should be feeling.

In this context, the topic we aim to focus on is the two ends of feminine emotionality. In one end of feminine emotionality as it appears in the social order, consists of the negative perception that accuses women of being overly emotional and lacking rational thinking. This approach strongly resembles the conflict between reason and emotion that has been discussed since Antiquity. The positive end on the other hand, is constructed through gendered examples that continue to serve patriarchal society. A woman is seen as a caregiver, and this is attributed to her supposed inclination toward affection and nurturing. In other words, excessive emotionality becomes acceptable—or even desirable—only when it manifests in a woman's giving nature. This giving subject is mostly is a mother, sister or wife who is responsible for caring for others. What must be considered here is how we should interpret this within the context of myths.

The first point to recall when examining to whom emotions are assigned in myths is the longstanding conflict between reason and emotion that dates back to Antiquity. The placement of emotions in opposition to—and beneath—rational thinking stems from the belief that emotionality distorts or interrupts an individual's judgments. These judgments, moreover, are also considered feminine. In this context, the portrayal of the myth's female subject as removed from rational thinking, impulsive, and enslaved by emotions becomes a familiar issue inherited from Ancient philosophy[12].

The words "*passion*" and "*passive*" both derive from the Latin *passio*, meaning *"to suffer."* Thus, passivity, suffering, and negativity are interconnected notions. According to the understanding in which passion is treated as the emotion standing in opposition to reason, the fear toward passivity and emotionality shares a common root: the fear of being controlled by others. This approach argues that emotional individuals lack qualities such as reason and willpower and, moreover, are "closer to nature" in the same way emotional people are believed to be.

Stephanie A. Shields, in her work **"**Gender and Emotion: What We Think We Know, What We Need to Know, and Why it Matters,**"[13]** discusses why and how an emotion becomes gendered. She argues that by examining how emotions are represented within belief systems and everyday thought, we can understand how individuals perceive these emotions in themselves and in others. Shields emphasizes that the role of sacred beliefs in reflecting ideologies deeply embedded within the social structure cannot be denied. By examining these beliefs, she notes, we gain insight into the nature of emotions, the nature of gender, and the cultural assumptions formed through the values that connect these two. Following Shields' approach, we must reconsider which social norms a myth reflects, which emotion it uses to reflect them, and which gender the myth assigns this emotion to. The plot, characters, recurring behavioral patterns, and most importantly the gender of the heroes in myths that deal with emotions such as anger, jealousy, pride, shame, and curiosity—all reveal what the myth shows us about the archaic society to which it belongs.

Considering all of this, attempting to discuss any narrative within the context of gender also requires an understanding of the gender roles and norms attributed to women that have persisted for thousands of years. The question of what gender roles assign to women, as emphasized by Judith Butler—one of the most prominent figures of third-wave feminism—allows us to observe within a historical process the aspect of womanhood that has been identified with evil[14]. Just as in the modern period, societies of the archaic time periods also possessed their own distinctive social orders. With that, the norms that are created and accepted can readily assign duties, behaviors, or emotions to individuals who belong to that society, whether female or male. The most crucial point here is the issue of social exclusion experienced when the norms said to maintain order are not observed. That is, just as we see in myths, if the things assigned to women or men are not fulfilled, the individual may be expelled from the society to which they belong, ostracized, or punished in the harshest manner. One of the most important reasons we are able to seek examples of this in myths is that gender roles, which have consolidated their place throughout history through language and culture, also present manifestations of themselves within myths. Within the context of myths, the transformation of emotional attributions assigned to women over time into a structure that intensifies the power of male domination, and the realization of this through

[12] Sara Ahmed, *Duyguların Kültürel Politikası*, Transl. Sultan Komut, Sel Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2015, p. 11.
[13] Stephanie A. Shields, "Gender and Emotion, What We Think We Know, What We Need To Know and Why it Matter?", *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Volum: 37, Issue: 4, 2012, p. 423-435.
[14]Öz, R. - Aksel Durmuş, E. S., "Judith Butler'a Göre Kadının Özneliği Problemi" *Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Issue: 18, p. 128-139.

the function of belief, is an important issue that deserves attention. As Judith Butler has also stated, it is not possible to find the root of the existence of gender roles. This is because the issue of the existence of these gender roles is related to a kind of process of creation and to the norms required by male power. However, it is possible to observe how these roles emerge as a result of human actions and creations, and for this purpose, returning to myths will be quite beneficial. Another figure that must be mentioned in order to examine the place of gender meaning within feminist theory, which we will also observe in the myths we analyze is Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir, who argues that cultural constructions assign women a secondary position, explains how this occurs through supposedly negative elements associated with women's existence. The positioning of woman as the "other" in relation to man, and the fact that this imposed otherness spreads into every sphere of the historical stage and nourishes the power of male domination, is a reality evident both in the modern world and in the world of narrative. In myths as well, the woman as the other appears either punished or cast down from her position within narratives that manifest themselves through the function of the sacred.

As products of oral culture, myths constitute significant examples that allow us to see how meaning and order can be established when the power of language and the sacred text come together. Myths serving the patriarchal order through the use of religious power has played a significant role in the maintenance of gender. And for understanding that, we will look to myths that examine emotions like curiosity and shame.

2.1 Curiosity

Curiosity, which we may define as the desire to learn or the wish to know, can be described as a secondary emotion. Desire is one of the basic emotions felt by an individual, and when directed toward different things, it becomes identifiable as curiosity. In this sense, the desire to learn and to know is called curiosity. In many cultures, curiosity is narrated as the effort to learn more about something, followed by punishment.

Curiosity manifests itself in narratives in which a prohibition is violated. Eating the forbidden fruit, disobedience to divine command, and separation from the divine order are all actions driven by curiosity, and they also open the doors for shame. Among narratives in which curiosity is dominant, the myths about expulsion from heaven are among the most notable.

In the *Book of Genesis*, the woman and Adam live without eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as commanded by God, until the serpent seduces them. The serpent—described as the craftiest of all creatures—tries to persuade the woman to eat the fruit and to convince her that she will not die:

"You will not surely die," the serpent told the woman. "For God knows that in the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom, she took the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it." (*Romans 5:12–21)*[15]

The desire to know the unknown and to acquire the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes the knowledge of immortality and may be seen as a path toward attaining divine power. This arises not only from curiosity but also from pride. The human who commits the first sin, seeking to possess the power of the God which he disobeys, succumbs to the allure of the desire for knowledge. However, the point that must be emphasized here is the trigger of this desire. In the Altai creation myths, Erlik—who is the devil himself—acts out of curiosity toward what God created, but this curiosity is not the same as that which causes

[15] The Company of Kitabı Mukaddes, *Kutsal Kitap*, Yeni Yaşam Yayınları, İstanbul 2022, p. 3.

the woman to commit the first sin and eat the forbidden fruit. Just as anger may originate in virtue, divinity, or jealousy (when embodied by women), curiosity also has different origins. Erlik's evil-rooted curiosity has no clear explanation and is presented as if it lacked any real cause:

"Erlik was the brother of the god Ulgen, but for some reason his heart was filled with greed."[16]

Erlik becomes increasingly ambitious due to his curiosity toward God's power and creations. In Radloff's recorded version of the myth, after the creation of humans, Erlik's curiosity and desire for divine power intensify, leading him to beg God to let him create his own people:

One day Erlik sat beside the God,
He knelt down before the God.
A great noise came from the God's palace,
Erlik died of curiosity, wondering what it was.
Hearing this, Erlik immediately asked the God:
"What are these noises coming from outside?"
God replied: "What else could it be? You are a Khan, I am a Khan,
"They are my people, obeying my command."
Upon hearing this, the Devil suddenly rejoiced:
"Give me this people, God!" he said. [17]

Erlik's curiosity is directed not toward what God created, but toward the act of creation itself. His desire for divine power does not arise from temptation, the testing of will, or the promise of becoming like God. Since he is inherently evil, his curiosity serves only his ambition.

However, Eci's actions in the same myth are presented as the result of being deceived by Erlik, and this leads her to commit the first sin. Her desire to eat the forbidden fruit—and the divine disobedience inherent in this desire—mirrors the promise seen in Genesis: the promise of becoming like God. The first sin committed by the woman—and extended to the man—is grounded in the idea that curiosity and pride belong to the Devil. Eci's gullibility in the face of the serpent's words, and her act of applying the fruit's juice to Törüngei's lips, reinforce the idea that curiosity and the desire to know also exist in women and that these qualities come from Erlik:

"There was this guy named Törüngei,
He was smitten with a girl named Eci.
While eating the forbidden fruit, the snake shouted:
"Eci and Törüngei, you eat some too!"
Törüngei was smart, he said: "I won't eat them!"
"How can we eat them, eating them is forbidden;
God commanded us, saying, 'Don't eat them,'
I won't eat them, even if you give them to me!"
When the snake heard this, he saw that it wouldn't work,
He took a piece of fruit and offered it to the girl Eci.
Eci took the fruit, cut it in half,
and rubbed the fruit's juice on her lover." [18]

The emphasis on Törüngei being wise shows that his involvement in the sin is not comparable to Eci's. While the serpent can't deceive the man, Eci's weakness allows her to

[16] Bahaeddin Ögel, *Türk Mitolojisi (Kaynakları ve Açıklamaları ile Destanlar)*, TTK Yayınlarrı, Ankara 1989, p. 435.
[17] Bahaeddin Ögel, Ibid., p. 453-454.
[18] Bahaeddin Ögel, Ibid. p. 455-456.

commit the sin and draw her husband into it. Thus, the narrative reinforces the idea that the man is rational enough to resist evil while the woman lacks such willpower. That the act leading to expulsion from paradise and the punishment of childbirth originates from a woman's curiosity—and that this curiosity is said to come from the Devil—is a crucial point.

A similar example of violating divine command due to a woman's curiosity appears in Greek mythology as well. In the myth of Pandora, which we also examine in relation to shame, the root of the violated prohibition is again curiosity.

When Prometheus steals fire and gives it to humans, Zeus becomes angry and creates woman as the greatest punishment for humankind. Pandora "the one gifted by all the gods" is given to Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. Although Pandora is adorned with beauty and other gifts, her true role is to bring suffering to humanity[19].

In Theogony And Works And Days, Hesiod describes Pandora in striking terms. She is the origin of a troublesome race—a deceptive, alluring, and destructive being created to punish men. Yet it is crucial to note that Pandora does not commit any sin before opening the box. She is not created with an inherently evil characteristic. Rather, the disaster she brings is the end of the peaceful era during which humanity lived without pain or disease. As in the expulsion from heaven narratives, a woman's disobedience disrupts the lives of men.

Pandora's weakness of will causes her to open the box. All the "evils" escape into the world, and this becomes attributed to her curiosity. Just like Eci, the origin of Pandora's curiosity is not explained. She is simply not strong enough to obey divine command. The etiological nature of Pandora's myth—explaining why women were created, why evils entered the world, and how suffering began—is particularly significant[20]. It also preserves, across generations, the idea that a woman's curiosity brings disaster.

Greek mythology offers another example in the myth of Eros and Psyche, where a woman succumbs to curiosity and loses a divine space.

Psyche, the youngest daughter of a king, is exceptionally beautiful yet unable to marry. After being delivered to a mountain at the command of the gods, she is carried to a heavenly palace where she lives in bliss—on the condition that she never attempts to see her husband's face.

But influenced by her envious sisters, Psyche finally gives in to curiosity and disobeys the divine command. The moment she looks upon Eros, he abandons her[21].

This narrative, too, portrays a weak-willed woman who succumbs to temptation—much like Eve and Eci eating the forbidden fruit or Pandora opening the box. Psyche loses both her husband and her heavenly home because she can't control her curiosity. Although Psyche later undergoes trials and ultimately achieves reunion and happiness, the crucial point remains: she must first pay the price for violating divine law. Her story is similar to others we have examined—only after expiation can she return to her former life.

We encounter another mythological figure who is forbidden to look upon the form of his spouse is in the story of Orpheus. Orpheus who travel into hell by using the power of his art in order to bring back Eurydice from the underworld, makes an agreement to reclaim her. What he must do is that wait until he sees the sun and not turn back, and not look at Eurydice until he reaches the surface of the earth. However, Orpheus turns back and loses Eurydice once again[22]. Psyche's expulsion from a divine place and her obligation to pay penance as a result of succumbing to curiosity by looking at Eros constitute one of the significant

[19] Hesidos, *Theogonia- İşler ve Günler*, Transl. Azra Erhat. Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2016, p. 26.
[20] Hesidos, Ibid., p. 115.
[21] Lucius Apuleius, *Altın Eşek*, Transl. Furkan Akderin, Alfa Yayınları, İstanbul 2007, p. 85-108.
[22] Ovidius, Dönüşümler, Transl. İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu, Payel Yayınları, İstanbul 1994, p.235.

examples that allow us to observe how the emotion of curiosity is constructed through feminine figures. But how does Orpheus's curiosity has a difference from Psyche or other feminine figures? How does the curiosity of a masculine figure—particularly within a narrative shaped by a context such as love—diverge from the depiction of feminine curiosity which is already seen as demonic and forbidden? When all these taken into consideration and we look into the depth of Orpheus's curiosity, it becomes particularly important to focus on the source of this curiosity. How might the source of Orpheus's curiosity differ from the punished curiosity attributed to feminine figures?

In the examples discussed, women's curiosity is directed toward forbidden knowledge. The reason Eve/Eci/Havva, Pandora, or Psyche disobey the divine law is that their desire to obtain knowledge, which is presented as a masculine power. However, the cause of this disobedience is most often attributed to their weak will. Just as observed in the philosophical history of emotions, woman—associated with the soul and lacking a rational side—cannot suppress the emotion of curiosity and thus disrupts the divine order. Orpheus's curiosity and the reason for his loss are not rooted in a lack of will or rebellion as they are for feminine figures. While the feminine figures we examine are narrated as threats directed at the divine order, Orpheus's power reveals the mortality of even humanity's greatest ability and, unlike the case of women, does not dictate a norm that extends into modern narratives. In every narrative, a woman's curiosity results in the violation of divine command and the destruction of divine order. Thus, myths repeatedly present curiosity as a feminine flaw rooted in evil, warning archaic societies about the dangers of women's desire for knowledge.

2.2 Shame

It is possible to trace the word *shame*, which carries meanings such as "to feel sorrow at falling into a dishonorable or ridiculous situation, to be embarrassed or abashed, to feel shy,"[23] back to its root "*ut-*". This root, which conveys meanings such as "feeling ashamed, insolent," also forms the basis of words meaning "shameless, revealing, exhibitionist."

One of the most common mistakes made when defining the emotion of shame is that the tendency to conflate it with examples related to guilt. While guilt is a feeling confined to the individual's inner self, shame generally contains the fear of being despised or condemned by society[24].

As will be seen in myths, shame appears in narratives that follow a certain tradition of punishment. When we examine examples of shame in archaic narratives, we encounter what may be considered an actual origin myth. In many cases in which the feeling of shame arises, the conditions and causes necessary for this emotion to occur are deliberately created, and the character through whom the emotion is conveyed experiences this feeling for the first time—an element that appears across examples belonging to more than one culture.

Shame also carries a sociological dimension. It arises in situations where an individual is humiliated or blamed, and it generates a desire to disappear. This desire to become invisible[25] is particularly striking in the context of myths. As seen in the myths we will examine, shame is portrayed as a feeling that renders a person visible; thus, the first thought that occurs to the individual is to make themselves invisible and find a solution for their nakedness.

Another important point regarding shame is that it creates a kind of status dynamic. Shame marks the person who is to be judged and thereby indicates who is to be shamed. In

[23] Tuncer Gülensoy, *Türkiye Türkçesindeki Türkçe Sözcüklerin Köken Bilgisi Sözlüğü, Etimolojik Sözlük Denemesi II (O-Z)*, Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 2007, p. 973.
[24] Tiffany Watt Smith, *Duygular Sözlüğü: "Acıma"dan "Zevklenme"ye,* Transl. Hale Şirin, Kolektif Kitap, İstanbul 2023, p. 272.
[25] Tiffany Watt Smith, Ibid, p. 272.

this way, it may serve a hierarchical structure and more often than not, a patriarchal form of domination[26].

One of the important themes that must be addressed in myths where shame dominant events that bring this shame into existence. Is it possible for shame—observed to arise under similar circumstances in myths belonging to different cultures—to be universal? Or might be the things considered shameful simply be those determined by society, and could the explanation of their origins through myths for understood as a characteristic of the archaic period? The feature of shame that may be considered universal is how it emerges within a social context. A person frequently experiences shame when they realize that they will face a social sanction and be judged for their actions. Thus, what can be identified as universal is not a specific cause of shame, but the existence of a socially constructed norm—archaic or otherwise.

In the Abrahamic religions and in Turkish mythology (as one of the examples we will discuss), the most common example of shame appears in narratives of eating the forbidden fruit and committing the first sin. The expulsion from heavenly garden—mentioned both in the *Book of Genesis* and the Qur'an—illustrates the emergence of shame in connection with the first sin.

Although the Qur'an does not state that eating the forbidden fruit directly produces shame, it does describe the sudden visibility of nakedness—considered a form of disgrace—and the attempt of Adam and his spouse to cover themselves:

> *"But Satan whispered to him, saying, "O Adam! Shall I show you the Tree of Immortality and a kingdom that does not fade away? So they both ate from the tree and then their nakedness was exposed to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from Paradise. So Adam disobeyed his Lord, and ˹so˺ lost his way"*[27].

The eating of the forbidden fruit—granting access to immortality and knowledge—is also found in the *Book of Genesis*. The prohibition of the knowledge of good and evil and the breaking of the divine command constitute the narrative of the first disobedience. This disobedience results in the recognition of nakedness, the awakening of sexuality, and thus the emergence of shame.[28].

While the Qur'an emphasizes the "tree of eternity" and "unending dominion," the Book of Genesis highlights the knowledge of good and evil. In the Garden of Eden, the tree is both the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but the Lord commands Adam not to eat from it:

> *"God commanded the Man, "You can eat from any tree in the garden, except from the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil. Don't eat from it. The moment you eat from that tree, you're dead".* (Genesis 2:16-17)[29].

Before being tempted by the serpent, Adam and the woman obeyed this command:

"Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame" (Book of Genesis 2: 24)[30].

In *Kışaşü'l-Enbiyā* by Rabġūzī—an extensive and rich narrative source on Turkic Islamic culture—the emergence of shame is also described: [31]

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[26] Nadir Ateşoğlu, "Bir Eril Tahakküm Aracı Olarak Utanç Duygusu", *Cumhuriyetimizin 100. Yılında Kadın Çalışmaları*, Ed. Nuriye Çelik, Derya Şahin, Ayşe Çağrıcı Zengin, Eğitim Yayınları, Ankara, 2023, p. 9.

[27] Presidency of Religious Affairs Kur'an-ı Kerim, "Tâhâ Suresi 120-121 Ayet Tefsiri, https://kuran.diyanet.gov.tr/tefsir/T%C3%A2h%C3%A2-suresi/2463/115-128-ayet-tefsiri, October 27, 2025.

[28] Mehmet Açа, "Ergenlik: Cennete İkinci Bir Veda Mı?", *Motif Akademi Halkbilim Dergisi*, Volume: 2009/ II, p. 372.

[29] The Company of Kitabı Mukaddes, *Kutsal Kitap*, Yeni Yaşam Yayınları, İstanbul, 2022.

[30] Kutsal Kitap, Ibid., s.3.

[31]Rabġūzī, *Ḳışaṣü'l-Enbiyā,* Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 2019.

"The decree came: O Adam, are you running away from me? Adam said: O God, I am running away from you out of shame. Gabriel took Adam by the hand and brought him before God. The command came: O Adam, did I not create you from the earth? Did I not honor you with knowledge? Did I not adorn you with a beautiful face? Did I not raise you up among the angels? Did I not admit you into Paradise? Did I not tell you to eat of its bounty? Did I not make Eve your companion? Did I not tell you not to eat from the tree of wheat? Did I not warn you that Satan would be your enemy?"[32]

As seen in the examples above, within the Abrahamic religions the emergence of shame is explained through the opening of the human eye and the awareness of nakedness. The recurring emphasis on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Book of Genesis becomes significant in explaining shame and the subsequent punishment as disobedience to divine command. The desire to know good and evil—a theme also examined under curiosity—progresses through the violation of divine command and the punishment of the human who initiates this disobedience, namely the woman, along with the man.

A similar theme appears in the Altai Creation Myth collected by Radloff. Bahaeddin Ögel argues that the distinct presence of the forbidden fruit and the first-sin motif in this myth reflects the influence of the *Torah*, a connection he attributes to the spread of Manichaeism in Central Asia [33].

The narrative progresses after Erlik approaches the humans who were created from the nine branches of the tree we may call the tree of life. Upon seeing that humans eat only from one side of the tree, the devil becomes curious and asks why. He learns of God's command.

"We eat from these branches, God gave this command,
"We are His servants, our God said so.
"God said to us, look at these four branches,
"Do not eat from any of them, do not touch them with your lips.
"He said, in the east, there are five branches,
"Let them be your food, reach for this fruit.
"Our God, who said this, went up to the heavens,"
(…)
He said: "Keep away from those five branches in the east.
"Whoever approaches them and takes the fruit,
"Keep them away, don't let them near the branches!
"Don't let anyone lay a hand on any of these branches!"
"But what can we do? We eat from these five branches.
"It is God's command, we obey the order!"[34]

In many mythological stories, the forbidden fruit often functions as a test of human will, and the human who fails this test encounters shame. God's command is both a means of protecting the perfect order given to humans and a test of human obedience. A human who obeys God has not yet been punished, has not yet encountered obligations such as birth and reproduction and has not yet learned the emotion of shame. In God's ideal world, they live far from the knowledge of the tree and from the emotions of shame and curiosity. However, as in most prohibition narratives, the testing of human will is inevitable.

Erlik's recurring jealousy, ambition, and pride lead him to approach humans, after which he influences the serpent to tempt them into eating the forbidden fruit. We then see how the serpent, affected by the devil's evil, encourages Törüngei and Eci to eat the fruit:

"While eating the forbidden fruit, the snake shouted:

[32] Rabġūzī, Ibid, p. 51.
[33] Bahaeddin Ögel, Ibid, p. 475.
[34] Bahaeddin Ögel, Ibid. p.454-455. 59

'Eci and Törüngei, you eat some too!'
Törüngei was wise and said, 'I won't eat them!'
'How can we eat them, they are forbidden;
God commanded us not to eat them,
I won't take them in my mouth, even if you trick me!'
When the snake heard this, he saw it wouldn't work,
He took a piece of fruit and offered it to the girl Eci.
Eci took the fruit, cut it in half,
and rubbed the fruit's juice on her lover.
In those days, people were hairy,
and when they tasted this fruit, their hair fell out.
They were left both hairless, naked, completely bare,
ashamed, looking for a place to hide."[35]

As seen above, the eating of the forbidden fruit by a woman introduces the shame—an emotion never before experienced by humans. The association of shame with the breaking of a prohibition or with nakedness is an important point. A human far from civilization is unaware of their nakedness. Yet shame leads humans to become aware of their bodies and sexuality. After this awareness, the way God Ülgen punishes humans reinforces the meaning of the narrative. The recognition of nakedness, the awakening of sexual awareness, and the emergence of shame are tied to the punishment of woman with childbirth:

"The God who was most angry with the woman said:
"You are an example of unfaithfulness, O woman named Eve!
"You were deceived by the devil's words, you ate his food!
"You took and ate the fruit I told you not to eat!
"Moreover, you told your husband to take it and eat it too!
"From now on, children will always be born to women,
"And the pains of childbirth will overwhelm them!"[36]

The motif of recognition of nakedness and then the exile, also appears in Mesopotamian mythology. Although the specific word "shame" is not used, similar elements recur in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, particularly in the story of Enkidu's creation. The recognition of nakedness and sexuality is portrayed as the reason for being torn away from a heaven like existence and entering the world of civilization.

Enkidu, created by Enki as an opponent to Gilgamesh, initially lives in the wilderness with animals, far from civilization and without fully awakened consciousness. To separate him from this life, a woman—who functions as a bringer of civilization—is sent to him. Through sexual union, she awakens his consciousness. This awakening results in Enkidu's exclusion from his former life:

Enkidu lay with her for six nights and seven days;
once he had fully savored the pleasure she gave him,
he wanted to return to his animals;
but when the animals saw Enkidu, they fled,
the wild beasts shunned him;
he wanted to charge forward, but the old strength was gone from his body,
he could not move his knees as his herd departed,
Enkidu was spent, he could not run as before,
but his understanding had grown, expanded."[37]

[35] Bahaeddin Ögel, Ibid., p.455-456. 60
[36] Bahaeddin Ögel, Ibid., p.457.
[37] Anonymous, *Gılgamış Destanı*, Transl. Sait Maden, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2017.

Unlike the other examples, Enkidu's departure from his natural environment and entry into a new life does not involve a divine command being broken, nor is shame explicitly invoked. The striking point, however, is that consciousness arises through the recognition of nakedness and sexuality. The knowledge awakened by the forbidden fruit—leading to awareness of nakedness and shame—parallels Enkidu's awakening through sexual union. His transition to a new life and eventual death recall the expulsion from heaven like life and the mortal existence introduced by the forbidden fruit.

Another narrative in which a divine law is broken, without involving the forbidden fruit, is the story of Pandora's Box in Greek mythology. Pandora—the first woman created by Zeus to punish Prometheus—is described as a great evil sent upon humanity:

But know that you've brought trouble upon yourself:
For the fire you've stolen, I'll send a curse,
Such a curse upon people's heads,
They won't be able to get enough of loving and caressing this curse."[38]

Pandora is given to Epimetheus along with the box, despite Prometheus' warnings not to accept any gifts from Zeus, Epimetheus can't resist her beauty. Pandora, like Eve and Eci or Psyche, disobeys divine command and give in to the curiosity by opening the box:

In the old days, mankind lived in this world
Far from troubles and worries,
Unaware of the diseases that bring death.
When Pandora opened the box's lid,
She scattered sorrows and troubles among people."[39].

Although Pandora's story does not involve a forbidden fruit or a direct emergence of shame, different events occur in its place. Enkidu's transition to civilization and the new world filled with the evils released by Pandora is parallel the new life that begins after the emergence of shame in the Abrahamic stories. Thus, the forbidden fruit appears in different forms in Mesopotamian and Greek mythology. Instead of a fruit, Enkidu's consciousness awakens through sexual union, allowing him to enter a new life. This awakened consciousness is another form of the first shame experienced by Törüngei-Eci and Adam-Eve. In different cultural narratives, the forbidden fruit, sexual union, and Pandora's box, all function as agents of disobedience. Like Eci and Eve, Pandora also can't resist to curiosity, and by opening the box, she introduces eternal suffering to humanity—or more specifically, to men within the context of the texts. Although Pandora does not become aware of her nakedness, it is possible that shame is among the emotions released from the box.

Being expelled from paradise, releasing evils into the world, or bringing a wild man into civilization— all of these myths ultimately lead human beings into a new order, introducing them to mortality and a life distant from divine beauty. Thus, humanity's encounter with shame and transition into a new order once again occurs through a woman's succumbing to curiosity and disobedience to a divine figure. In this sense, myths repeatedly punish women's desire for knowledge or use them as tools.

Conclusion

This study aimed to demonstrate, through the example of emotions, that myths are more than archaic narratives developed within the scope of belief; they also possess the power to legitimize and reinforce social norms and in this context: gender roles. Through examples taken from Turkic, Greek, and Mesopotamian myths—focusing primarily on female subjects such as Eve, Eci, Pandora, and Psyche—the comparative analysis sought to

[38] Hesidos*, Theogonia- İşler ve Günler*, Translate: Azra Erhat, Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2016, p. 51.
[39] Hesidos, Ibid., p. 52.

reveal how the emotions of curiosity and shame are constructed and how the ways in which these emotions are experienced function not as momentary expressions but as elements that shape collective memory.

The fact that the reason/emotion duality, which has appeared since Ancient philosophy, is embedded in myths as reason/man and emotion/woman is an important issue that must be addressed. Throughout a significant time of history, emotions have been positioned as inferior to and in opposition to rationality. When we look at the emotions of curiosity and shame as represented in myths, we observe reflections of this approach. The frequent portrayal of curiosity—an emotion showing women's desire to know and to question—as associated with violating a divine law, disobedience to divine command, and sin in narratives belonging to different cultures is a significant example of this. As emphasized in our study, feminine curiosity is depicted as an act that violates divine command, triggers the process of awakening the consciousness that will result in mortality through knowledge, and ultimately leads to expulsion from heaven; thus, it is interpreted as the cause of the punishment suffered by all humanity. This situation enables us to more clearly see how the idea that women lack rational thinking and act through their emotions is transformed into unquestionable narratives through myths that considered as sacred texts. As seen in the myths we examined, the emotional process that begins with curiosity ends in shame and is evaluated as the medium of a social sanction. The emotion of shame, arising from the first sin committed together with curiosity, is expressed in connection with the awakening of consciousness through the recognition of nakedness and the motif of exile from paradise. In this way, the punishment of the disobedient woman who violates the divine command is takes place in the text and the consequences of the desire to know are demonstrated. The emotion of shame extends beyond being a mechanism ensuring the individual's internal regulation within social order; it is reinforced through actions such as punishing the female subject with childbirth. Thus, examples in which shame functions not as an individual experience but as a reminder of divine command and a tool of collective sanction are read more comprehensively.

The primary issue this study seeks to emphasize is that the construction of female emotionality in myths -much like in modern societies- is shaped through a masculine approach that serves the social order. As seen in the examples we shown, the treatment of curiosity and shame within the context of female emotionality is most often associated with sin and the involvement of demonic forces. Women's curiosity is narrated as a power capable of threatening divine law, and it is repeatedly emphasized that in order to preserve this divinw order, women must be disciplined through punishment, childbirth, or expulsion from paradise. In this way, through a chain extending uninterrupted from archaic societies to the present, an ideological framework is produced that presents patriarchal domination as a necessity. Even within the sacred framework of myths, norms were established through woman and their body. The aim was to normalize woman's suppressed position within the social order and make sure no one questions this hierarchial and patriarchal inequality in gender roles.

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