

Why Does Hope Remain Inside Pandora's Jar?

In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the meaning of Hope trapped inside Pandora's jar remains as elusive as the spirit itself. Beall argues that Pandora's jar held benevolent guardian spirits that abandoned mankind upon Pandora opening the lid (Beall 1989). Fraser argues that Hope is ambiguously good or bad, and whether Hope is trapped for mankind's protection or mankind's benefit is an intentional ambiguity on Hesiod's part (Fraser 2011). Walcot argues that the evils that escape from the jar only become evil upon their release, and that Hope's imprisonment allows humanity to use it for good or for evil (Walcot 1961).

This paper will argue that whether Hope and the other spirits are good or bad is not the primary concern of Hesiod's myth. Taking a psychoanalytic perspective, it attempts to show that Hesiod's depiction of Hope is akin to Lacan's *objet petit a*, as something which the subject perceives itself to lack and repeatedly attempts to recapture for its ephemeral satisfaction (Lacan 1997). This constant drive to recapture what seems to be lost constitutes Hesiod's view of what underlies mankind's role in the cosmos. The Pandora myth is Hesiod's explanation for mankind's lack and, by extension, the foundational myth of *Works and Days*.

The paper takes as its starting point that Zeus wants to prevent mankind from being able to live without care like the gods, and thus let the Earth go to waste. Building on Vernant's analysis, it suggests that in order to accomplish this, Zeus conspires to hide mankind's *bios* or livelihood: his ability to sustain himself without strife (Vernant 1980). Zeus first attempted to hide fire, but Prometheus recaptured this instance of *bios* and gave it back to mankind. To reinstate mankind's drive, the Olympians create the first woman, Pandora, to reintroduce lack and strife to mankind.

The paper then analyzes how Pandora accomplishes this task by opening her jar and releasing the *keres* or deadly spirits to torment mankind, while Zeus prevents Hope from escaping the jar. This advances Marquardt's insight that the *keres* correspond to Hesiod's "bad strife" that discourages mankind from working, whereas Hope corresponds to the "good strife" that encourages mankind to work to temporarily recover his missing *bios* (Marquardt 1982). Ultimately the paper shows that Hesiod antagonizes Pandora, appropriating and undermining her origins as a benevolent earth goddess (Harrison 1900). That is to say Hesiod transforms Pandora into the malicious embodiment of both Woman and Earth against which mankind must constantly strive to satisfy his desire for Hope as a substitute for his missing *bios*. Children and grain may be necessary to survive, but in this dimension of cosmic significance, they represent symbolic victories over Pandora. Hope represents these objects' ephemeral ability to substitute for the *bios* originally hidden by Zeus. Hope is therefore the *objet petit a*, the cause of desire for the Hesiodic male peasant that constitutes his need to work and his relationship to the gods.

Bibliography

- Beall, E.F. 1991. "Hesiod's Prometheus and Development in Myth," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 52.3: 355-371.
- Fraser, Lilah-Grace. 2011. "A Woman Consequence: Pandora in Hesiod's 'Works and Days'," *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 57: 9-28.
- Harrison, Jane E. 1900. "Pandora's Box," *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 20: 99-114.
- Hesiod. *Works & Days*.
- Hesiod. *Theogony*.

Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Marquardt, Patricia A. 1982. "Hesiod's Ambiguous View of Woman," *Classical Philology* 77.4: 283-291.

Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*. Sussex: 1980.