



THE MYTHS IN BRIEF

NARCISSUS

PANDORA

NARCISSUS

The myth of Narcissus was spread in the ancient world in various versions. The most popular is the one of the Roman poet Ovid which dates back to the 1st century AD.

This version is also our basis for the description of the myth below

According to Ovid, the river-god Kifissos raped the nymph Leiriopi and left her pregnant. Leiriopi gave birth to the beautiful Narcissus. The seer Teiresias predicted that the child would live for many years, "as long as he did not know himself".

At the age of 16, the teenager Narcissus was a handsome young man that everyone - women and men - fell in love with, but he himself did not respond to any love call. One day the nymph Echo saw him going out hunting. She fell in love with him at first sight. At that time, Echo still had her body and was not just a voice. However, the voice already had a peculiarity: it could only repeat the last words of its interlocutor. That is, she could not discuss and make her own suggestions. Hera had punished her for speaking in this way. What was the reason for the punishment? Echo kept Hera busy in the forest with her chatter, in order not to find out that Zeus was flirting with other nymphs.

When Echo saw Narcissus, she felt the flame of love inside her, as Ovid says. She could not speak to him at first, because of her punishment. So, she waited to hear Narcissus' voice and repeat his last words. Narcissus after a while started a voice game with her, trying to find out where the voice came from. He told Echo that he wanted to see her and she appeared in front of him. Narcissus then despised her and rejected her.

But Echo was in love with him. Lust smoldered Echo and her body melted, disappeared. The Echo now remained only a voice while her bones became like stones. She hid in forests or caves and everyone listened to it, it lived like sound.

Those who fell in love with Narcissus and knew his contempt, asked the goddess Nemesis to fulfill a curse: he could be loved by others but because he rejected them, if he were to fall in love himself, he would not be able to find a response.

One day Narcissus rested from hunting in a spring of water. He bent down to drink water and there he saw the image of his beauty. In other words, he saw his reflection.

Narcissus thought he saw a real person, a real body and would end up withering from the desire to respond. Narcissus, observing his idol reflecting the same movements he made, thought that the idol was also trying to embrace him, but the water separated them. He began to lose his reasoning that he could not unite with the idol. When he would slowly realize that the idol is himself, the desire would not be lost.

At one point he cried and the tears that fell into the water began to blur the image on its surface, resulting in making him think that the figure he fell madly in love with left him or was distorted. Out of desperation he started beating his chest. Echo that was watching him felt sorry for him and repeated his "e e" voices. Narcissus wanted to die of misery. He died there, melted from the flame of love and his body was not found when the Nymphs went to bury him. In his place grew a flower which was named Narcissus. Even when Narcissus found himself

in the boat of Charos, crossing the river Acheron to the other world, he was dazzled looking at his idol in the water.

PANDORA

The oldest version of the myth of Pandora (pan + gifts) is found in the texts of Hesiod "Theogony" and "Works and days" (end of the 8th century BC) while it is also connected with other ancient Greek myths, such as that of Prometheus.

Prometheus (pro + mitis = thought), son of Titan Lapetus (Τιτάνα Ιαπετού) and Oceanida Clymenes (Ωκεανίδας Κλυμένης), undertaking to protect Man from the power of nature decided to give him fire, which Zeus had hidden from mortals. So he visits the workshop of the god Hephaestus, secretly places the fire on a hollow stem of a reed and transmits it to humans. Because of this move, the development of the Sciences and the Letters is attributed to Prometheus, and therefore the progress of Man.

Prometheus' boldness provoked the wrath of Zeus with disastrous consequences for both him and humanity. For the sinner Titan, the father of the gods Zeus devised an agonizing martyrdom. As Aeschylus dramatizes, Hephaestus, accompanied by State and Violence, was instructed to tie Prometheus to a distant rock in the Caucasus with shackles that no one could untie. There for an eternity, he would be visited every day by an eagle that would pierce its liver. Every night the liver would regenerate and the torture would be repeated, until a descendant of Zeus could bring redemption: the eagle fell wounded by an arrow of the demigod Hercules.

Additionally, Zeus, in order to avenge the people who took the fire from the gods, prepared a deceptive gift: he asked Hephaestus to create from clay the first woman, a beautiful and attractive creature but at the same time insidious and evil (the ancient Greek version of Eve) . The other gods endowed the creation of Hephaestus with gifts, which is why she was named Pandora.

Like all myths, Pandora's is interpreted in various ways. According to one version, the punishment of Zeus towards humans is the woman herself (Pandora). According to another version, the punishment came from the woman's carelessness, or curiosity, or disobedience. It is said that at her wedding, Pandora had received gifts from jealous gods locked in an urn with the order not to open it. But she removed the lid from the urn and all the suffering contained in it was poured out on humanity. The only thing that remained in the urn when Pandora covered it was Elpida- Hope.

Further Reading

Buxton Richard (2004), *The Complete World of Greek Mythology*, New York, Thames & Hudson