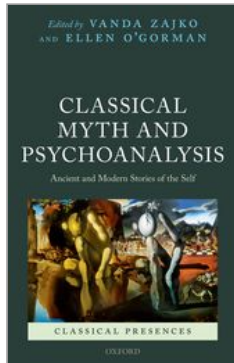


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'Who cares whether Pandora had a large pithos or a small pyxis?'

Jane Harrison and the Emergence of a Dynamic Conception of the Unconscious

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores Jane Harrison's use of the Pandora myth, setting her work in dialogue with Freud's idea of woman as a mystery. It uses this to develop a model of the unconscious.

Keywords: Pandora, freud, Jane Harrison, pithos, jar, woman, unconscious

In memory of Gordon and Jay Williams

Opening the Box, the Enigma of Woman, and the Riddle of Man

The enigma of the first woman encapsulates a family of enclosed boxes and other decorated containers and receptacles. Before discussing the significance of the woman’s emblematic containers, however, her enigmatic character merits attention. Pandora, or the first woman, is the paradigm of an appearance whose beauty alludes to an invisible inner content by way of concealment. The earliest literary accounts about the fashioning of the first woman are in Hesiod’s *Theogony* and in his *Works and Days*. The story of Pandora tells how the gods, under the aegis of Zeus, created the first work of art in the shape of a lovely woman as a gift to humanity.¹ Commenting on the difference between the two versions of Pandora, Debra Steiner (p.98) addresses the woman’s hiding visibility with attention to her ‘cavity inside’.²

Cavity denotes the space of interiority that Zeus commands Hephaestus to open up inside the new clay figure. The poet does not use a noun to represent Pandora’s space of inwardness but uses instead the verb *entithemi* (‘to put in’) and the preposition *en* (‘into’) in order to create the figure’s interiority.³ Cavity derives from the Latin *cavum*, which demonstrates a connection between a hollow space and an enclosed one; between a cavity and a cave. Considering the figure of the hollow Pandora of *Works and Days* in terms of Hesiod’s imagery in the *Theogony* suggests that the cavity in the clay figure has features analogous to the first element of the universe, Chaos, which constitutes Gaia’s dark space. Chaos is the void that underlies Gaia’s primordial spatial dimension. A view of Chaos as a metaphor for Pandora’s cavity is also supported by the reading of Hesiod’s ancient readers, who approach Chaos as a begetting force, *parens*,⁴ a space, *chora*, a receptacle that serves as a place for perceivable bodies,⁵ *topos*,⁶ and a moving first cause, *aition*.⁷ The Chaos metaphor thus helps to elucidate the multiple denotations of the archetypical feminine cavity, shared by Earth and the earthly woman. Earth and Woman have a fertile womb symbolizing fecundity and procreation, while their devouring belly renders the cavity in the form of a frightening Underworld or a grave. In this sense, the feminine form of hiddenness is a signifier of both life and death. The indefinite form of Chaos can also be tied to the uncontrollable appetites that Hesiod identifies with the woman’s immoderate sexuality.

Viewing the female cavity through the analogy of Chaos enables us to consider it as the psychological locus of brooding desires and latent drives. Chaos plays a crucial role among Hesiod’s invisible gods. As the father of Night and the grandfather of Death, Sleep, and Dreams, as well as other invisible forces, Chaos is the mythological source of depth psychology.⁸ In this context, Erik Erikson’s (p.99) comment on Freud’s

dream of Irma, where he examines Irma’s open mouth, attests to the spread of the chaos image as a feminine archetype: “The “mouth which opens wide” ...is not only the oral cavity of a patient and not only a symbol of woman’s procreative inside, which arouses horror and envy because it can produce new “formations.” ...it may well represent, at the same time, the dreamer’s unconscious.’⁹

In *Works and Days*, the creation of Pandora brings to the world a new form of subjectivity, rivalling the preceding, self-transparent human model. The principle of duality is thus a main guideline in the making of Pandora.¹⁰ The first work of art is indeed revolutionary, taking human evolution one step forward—a move essential to the future of humanity. Prior to Pandora, human existence had not been construed through the outside-inside divide. Pandora embodies a duality that plays a crucial role in shaping the idea of what it is to be human at this emerging stage of Greek philosophical thought.

The Hesiodic woman thus fostered two major courses of inquiry—one into the nature of femininity and the other into the nature of human subjectivity. As a figure of ambiguity, Pandora suggests that the riddle of psychic life cannot be divorced from an exploration of the mystery in the woman. This understanding is hinted in Freud’s celebrated ‘femininity’ lecture of 1932.¹¹ Addressing the mysterious nature of femininity, Freud ties together several features of the current discussion. His formulation of woman as a riddle is in line with the Hesiodic tradition, which had conceived the first woman as a visual enigma. Hesiod sums up the assumption of duality in the feminine, her invisible visibility, in the well-known oxymoronic epithet *kalon kakon*.¹² She is a beauty (*kalon*) that conceals an unknown evil (*kakon*). For Hesiod, the woman’s interiority cannot be thought of as *kalon*, since it does not share the visible traits of a beautiful appearance. The unknown interiority is named *kakon* precisely because its invisibility is not, according to Hesiod’s aesthetics, a delight to the eye. In Hesiod’s world, what is hidden from the light and from the eye represents a dark menace. Pandora’s duality is therefore a source of delight and also a threat to men.¹³ In *Works and Days*, (p.100) the virginal Pandora is also a fine conversationalist and a skilled weaver, gifted with erotic and seductive talents. This oxymoronic woman thus becomes a fruitful source of deceits and illusions, and the key manifestation of her ambiguity focuses on her shape. In becoming a receptacle of voice, thought, intentions, and desire, Pandora’s seductive exteriority turns into a misleading disguise.

The woman of Freud’s 1932 lecture is no less problematic. She is a narcissist who compensates for her sexual inferiority by excessive attentiveness to her appearance. She is envious and insincere. Freud’s woman evokes Hesiod’s Pandora in being an accomplished weaver,¹⁴ a characteristic that Freud comments upon in a concluding note: ‘It seems that women have made few contributions to the discoveries and inventions in the history of civilization; there is, however, one technique which they may have invented—that of plaiting and weaving.’¹⁵ This sole feminine technique, Freud argues, derives from an unconscious motive to conceal the woman’s true nature.¹⁶ Epitomizing the feminine experience as the lack of a penis, Freud interprets the woman’s weaving skills as an expression of her latent desire to cover up for this lack. If, archetypically, weaving is plaiting the pubic hair, then female weaving is, according to Freud, a trope of concealment. In this sense, Hesiod preceded Freud in configuring the feminine as a dangerous *femme fatale* actively engaged in constructing double messages through her misleading appearance and woven textiles.¹⁷

Freud’s woman is an enigma, a riddle; Hesiod’s Pandora is a divine trick, *dolos*,¹⁸ which can be unravelled if our gaze encroaches into her interiority. Freud employs a similar strategy. He stages the decoding of his enigma in just the same manner, directing his audience’s gaze to the object of their mystification: ‘Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem—those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem.’¹⁹ Freud’s perplexing gesture merits attention: he directs our gaze to the woman in a re-enactment of the mythological gaze at the (p.101) mysterious first woman who, in Western tradition, is figuratively associated with the opening of a box. This ancient image gives psychoanalysis its emblematic gesture. Woman’s anatomy, her fertile womb, and her ambiguous sexuality influenced and encouraged a perception of the hermeneutical work on the feminine as an expedition to ‘a dark continent’.²⁰ And yet, the same topographical metaphor of ‘a dark continent’ calls also for an expedition to unknown regions of the human psyche. The classical scholar Jane Ellen Harrison, whose work on Pandora’s box will help us delve into another aspect of the riddle, strongly endorsed this reading.

Jane Harrison’s ‘Pandora’s Box’

No myth is more familiar than that of Pandora, none perhaps has been so completely misunderstood. Pandora is the first woman, the beautiful mischief: she opens the forbidden box, out comes every evil that flesh is heir to; hope only remains. The box of

Pandora is proverbial, and that is the more remarkable as she never had a box at all.²¹

Thirty-two years before Freud introduced woman as a riddle, Jane Harrison had been intrigued by a different riddle whose enigmatic content is borne by the figure of the woman. Harrison’s concern was to clarify a certain confusion hiding behind the idiom ‘Pandora’s box’, and only in an aside does she comment on the significance of tagging the woman associated with the box as a mischief. Her paper ‘Pandora’s Box’ thus addresses the ‘riddle of femininity’ only indirectly, and she does not refer to her central hermeneutical problem as a riddle but as a ‘misunderstanding’, a ‘mistake’, an ‘error’, or a ‘blunder’. Harrison’s articulation of ‘the problem’ seems to suggest that, throughout history, people have actually been troubled by the ‘wrong’ problem. What is the nature of Harrison’s problem, what kind of hermeneutic enterprise does she develop? And how is it related to Freud’s riddle of femininity?

Although Harrison and Freud do not seem to speak about the same riddle, their presentation of the woman discloses at least a common strategy. For both Harrison and Freud, the presentation of the riddle, (p.102) or the misunderstanding, involves a dramatic show whose rhetoric assimilates the final display of the magician’s trick. Harrison begins by telling her readers precisely what she anticipates that they already know about the story and the idiom associated with it. Only then, having established their familiarity with it as a common ground, does she display her trick: ‘But Pandora never had a box at all!’ The effect of Harrison’s denial is a mirror image of Freud’s assertion: ‘You are yourselves the problem.’ Their rhetorical gesture involves a surprising turn: the psychoanalyst’s pointed finger turns every woman into a mystery, while the scholar’s conclusions point at the enigma behind the well-known idiom, which now appears as an empty trope.

Harrison published ‘Pandora’s Box’ when she was fifty years old. The piece reflects the work of a mature woman whose claim to fame had not yet been fully established. It was in 1900 that Harrison and Gilbert Murray initiated their intellectual friendship and, together with Francis Cornford, formed the Cambridge Ritualists group.²² ‘Pandora’s Box’ stands out as the centrepiece of her *oeuvre*, spanning Harrison’s earlier work²³ and her monumental books *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* and *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*. Although ‘Pandora’s Box’ is recognized as a seminal article and is included in bibliographies appended to discussions of the myth of Pandora,²⁴ it is yet to receive the full attention it deserves. Harrison’s scholars may have overlooked it because it was integrated into her

Prolegomena.²⁵ A comparative reading of 'Pandora's Box' and its reworking in *Prolegomena*, however, shows that *Prolegomena* leaves out an important theme found in the Pandora article.²⁶

In 'Pandora's Box' Harrison focuses on a specific object, Pandora's *pithos* (jar), whose memory is repressed by the image of the box. She uses the jar as an archeological finding, through which she wishes to recover deeply buried layers of meaning. Harrison's search for 'the (p.103) real meaning of Pandora's myth' is thus inseparable from a methodology of releasing an unknown and repressed side of the ancient world. Through an interpretation that seeks to release the jar from oblivion, Harrison is able to tie together three research directions that would later develop and emerge as the leitmotifs of *Prolegomena*. These three directions of inquiry are tied to three modes of the jar's signification that Harrison uncovers in this article: (1) The jar, sunk deep in the ground, is a signifier of an old chthonic theological order overtaken by the new Olympian rule. The subordinating Olympian system is responsible, according to Harrison, for establishing the 'unfair division of labour' between the two dichotomous divine systems, whose respective worshipping discloses great disparity: 'The good Olympians are worshipped with temples, altars, and prayers, but the others with exorcism.'²⁷ (2) The jar is a ritual object playing a central role in a forgotten cult. Uncovering the obscure function of the burial jar sheds light on the Olympian praxis of the jar opening, the *Pithoigia* during the first day of the *Antheateria*: 'Now', as Harrison notes with satisfaction, 'the *Antheateria* is seen to be a ghost and Ge cult.' The rejoicings of the Olympian *Pithoigia* are replaced in Harrison's interpretation with the grave aspects of a 'more primitive' ritual of the spirits of the dead. (3) The jar as an emblem of the Mother Earth goddess helps Harrison uncover the motivation behind the Olympian ideology, whose paternalism flourishes in the omnipotent figure of Zeus. She asks: 'What was to become of monotheism, of the omnipotence of Zeus, if Gaia Pandora was the source of good things?'²⁸ This question attests to the repression of Pandora as an Earth goddess who was subjected by Hesiod to 'a bourgeois myth' that associates the woman with a jar of evils. Harrison cannot but see in the construction of the Hesiodic Pandora an attempt to obfuscate the primary predominance of the Earth Mother goddess who embraces, in her view, the original meaning of Pandora.

Prolegomena elaborates most of the features presented by Harrison in her 1900 programmatic article. In the preface, she announces that her mission is to investigate an 'ignored or suppressed...substratum of religious conceptions' that is hidden beneath 'a splendid surface'.²⁹

(p.104) What strikes the reader of *Prolegomena* as crucial for the understanding of its author’s vision is her recurrent use of the term ‘superimposition’. This term, according to Harrison, refers to the relation between ‘two diverse even opposite’ religious systems in the Greek ancient world: the Olympian rites which are ‘of a cheerful and rational character’ comprise a ‘superficial serenity’ that ‘had within it and beneath it elements of a darker and deeper significance’.³⁰ For Harrison, Greek religion consists of a twofold structure that distinguishes a surface layer from a depth layer. She views these layers as strikingly different, and any relationship between them as highly improbable: ‘The contrast between the two classes of rites is so marked, so sharp, that the unbroken development from one to the other is felt to be almost impossible.’ In other words, although Harrison admits that the Olympian and the chthonic coexist, she nevertheless emphasizes that ‘the rites of the Olympians have been *superimposed* on another [chthonic] order of worship’.³¹ Considering the relation between the Olympian and the chthonic in terms of superimposition leads Harrison to conceive the Olympian as a visible surface blocking the chthonic substratum from sight. In light of Harrison’s *Prolegomena*, the three significances of the jar—relating it to the chthonic, the *Pithoigia*, and the Earth goddess—pertain to a latent sphere that can be described topographically as encompassing a collective unconscious enclosed and detached from the formal theological system. In this sense, one can see why Robert Ackerman remarks that ‘the 150 year long romantic investigation of the unconscious mind’ inspired the Ritualists and especially Harrison, who dedicated herself to the study of the other, dark side of Greek religion.³² Thinking of the unconscious in topographical terms, Harrison’s structural approach to the jar problem represents an attempt to bring back an unknown content from oblivion. Figuratively speaking, her investigation aims to open up Pandora’s box. But the pre-Freudian unconscious cannot be the only possible source for coping with Harrison’s sophisticated hermeneutical method. Freud’s dynamic notion of the unconscious³³ (p.105) manifests a break from the traditional image of the unconscious, as Henk de Berg explains:

Like the conscious, the unconscious is not a place, but a process, always active, always in motion, always exerting its influence. Therefore, to think of the unconscious as a kind of cellar where we stack away our unwanted urges and memories is to overlook its most fundamental feature, dynamism. Our unconscious is a force that is always operative, *not some Pandora’s box* effective only when its contents are brought to the light of day.³⁴

Harrison’s article was published in 1900, which was also the year Freud published his ground-breaking work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. This coincidence is important for our discussion, though there is no evidence that either Freud or Harrison were acquainted with each other’s work at this point. Harrison did not read Freud until late in her life.³⁵ In 1927, in the preface to the second edition of *Themis*, Harrison attributed to Freud a direct influence on her intellectual development. Her acknowledgement, though not specific (she does not refer to any of Freud’s titles or key concepts), reflects familiarity with Freudian psychology:

My critics have blamed me, and justly, for my intemperate antipathy to the Olympians. Reading *Five Stages of Greek Religion* I see more clearly the debt we owe to these Olympians for ‘slaying the old blind dragon’ still unreasonably dear to me. Moreover, the psychology of Freud has taught me that the full-blown god, the Olympian, has a biological function which could never be adequately filled by the *daimon*.³⁶

In this context, ‘Freud’s psychology’ refers specifically to *Totem and Taboo*.³⁷ The Freudian scheme of the band of brothers killing the father was crucial for Harrison’s abandonment of her earlier unsympathetic attitude towards the Olympians’ subordination of the chthonic divinities. Freud gave her psychological reassurance for her reliance on Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*.³⁸

(p.106) The unknown dark region represented by Pandora’s jar does not simply disappear from sight. The dialectic relationship between the chthonic divinities and the Olympian gods, between the two ritual systems, and between the Earth Mother goddess and the bourgeois figure of the Hesiodic Pandora, is what brings to the fore the essence of Greek culture. As she said in 1927, Harrison’s change of heart concerning the important role of the Olympians’ ‘superficial serenity’ in shaping the idea of humanity is already present in her earlier work and, in particular, in her ‘Pandora’s Box’. Her openness to Freud’s dynamic notion of the unconscious as articulated in his studies on dreams can be traced in her recurrent use of the term ‘superimposition’. This term, which first appears in the eighteenth century, means placing or laying over or above something. By 1878, however, the term acquires a new denotation shaped by a person whose writing was known to and had probably influenced both Freud and Harrison. Francis Galton (1822–1911), half-cousin of Charles Darwin,³⁹ developed the technique of ‘optical superimposition’,⁴⁰ a new photographic technique based on the stereoscope of which he writes that it ‘affords a very easy method of optically superimposing two portraits’.⁴¹ In 1901, when Freud

published *On Dreams*, an abridged version of his *Interpretation of Dreams*, he mentioned Galton’s family composite portraits as a visual paradigm through which he wished to explain dream work and, more specifically, to elucidate the experience of condensation in dreams as an optical event.⁴²

Galton’s technique helps to explain how dream condensation works and how the manifest dream and the latent dream thoughts reshape and redefine one another. Galton’s technique of ‘optical superimposition’ was extremely valuable to Harrison, who was known to think ‘in picture-eidetic imagery’.⁴³ Now, with Galton’s optical superimposition in mind, I turn to re-examine the significance of the Pandora’s box-jar riddle.

(p.107) The *Pithos/Pyxis* Riddle

We may be right to assume that most readers of the 1900 volume of the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* had read their Hesiod and that most of them had at least some recollection that in *Works and Days*, as already noted the first account of Pandora in Western tradition, Pandora is not said to open a box (*pyxis*) but rather a jar (*pithos*). Harrison guesses that, although some of her readers know this fact, their knowledge is somehow clouded, repressed, or forgotten due to a different memory that had exerted a stronger impact. The wane of the jar and its replacement by a box is the starting point of Harrison’s 1900 article, an issue that in 1903 she prefers to omit from *Prolegomena*. *Prolegomena* leaves out all traces of the *pyxis*: ‘So the great figure of the Earth-goddess, Pandora, suffered eclipse: she sank to be a beautiful, curious woman; she opened her great grave-*pithos*, she that was Mother of life.’⁴⁴ The cultural eclipse caused by the rise of the Olympian cult hid the original powerful image of Pandora as an Earth goddess by superimposing on it the image of a beautiful and curious woman. Harrison’s analysis of the figure of Pandora, however, leads to a similar eclipse when it conceals from the readers of *Prolegomena* the perplexing appearance of the *pyxis* that had surfaced earlier in her horizon. The fact that ‘generations of scholars have known that the word used by Hesiod was *pithos*’, and that ‘they were nevertheless captured by ‘the *idée fixe* of the *pyxis*’,⁴⁵ was not only intriguing but also essential for the interpretation offered by Harrison.⁴⁶ The wane of the *pithos* is a crucial issue for Harrison, who had argued in her essay that the domineering image of the box had prevented generations of scholars from seeing the conjunction of Pandora and the Athenian festival *Pithoigia*. Pandora’s jar opening should be seen, according to Harrison, as an aetiological myth that recovers the initiatory function of the *Pithoigia*. Hence, Pandora’s jar is actually an urn, or rather a grave, and it is this particular usage of the jar that is the gist of Harrison’s argument. She refers us to the description of the *Pithos* in *W&D* 90–5 where Pandora opens the (p.108) storage jar with her hands and scatters all its contents abroad. Glenn Most’s translation emphasizes the size of the jar, rendering it as ‘a storage jar’. His choice of words, however, given the traditional reading of this passage, is symbolic. The *pithos* stores evils (*kakoi*), grievous toils (*chalepos ponos*), and crushing illnesses (*nosos argaleos*), which give death—*keras*—to men. Others translate the plural *keras* as doom. Harrison, however, reconstructs a different sense to the jar based on a mythological iconography. She changes *keras* in the accusative plural into *keres* in the nominative plural, which she translates as ‘ghosts’, hereby endowing this passage with the opposite meaning. Her emendation makes the *keres*, the ghosts, dwell in the jar. Pandora’s opening of the jar causes them to

roam around to scatter evil, toil, and disease. For Harrison, Pandora’s jar is a grave, a *pithos* that houses the winged *keres*. Opening the jar releases the *keres* as maleficent ghosts, *daimones*, from the grave.⁴⁷

Uncovering the original sense of Pandora’s *pithos* as a grave jar is important in order to recover the meaning of the *Pithoigia*. Harrison treats the forgotten sense of the *Pithoigia* as a pathological instance of a cultural repression mechanism. We are made to forget the source of our fears and the causes of our anxieties. Hence, as Harrison argues, the merriment associated with the Dionysian aspects of the *Pithoigia* covers up an unpleasant memory of a ritual connected with death. Harrison wants us to become attentive to the transition from the opening of the spirits of the dead in the *pithoi* to the familiar broaching of the wine vessels of Dionysus in the Athenian polis. The repressed origins of the *Pythoigia* resurface as the sense of Pandora’s funerary jar is restored.

The mistaken substitution of a big urn for a small container is also indicative of ‘one of the vital errors that breed the corruption of a total mythological misconception’.⁴⁸ To dismiss the significance of Pandora and the *pithos* is to undermine the essence of the tale that binds Pandora to the Mother Earth figure Gaia: ‘Pandora is a cultus epithet of the great goddess Ge; she is the earth herself.’⁴⁹ In this context, dismissing the *pithos* is an act of suppression typical of a patriarchic and monotheistic system. Hence, Harrison critically remarks, ‘to give (p.109) her a *pyxis* only is to detach her from earth, which is her very substance’.⁵⁰ Harrison understands the association of Pandora with a *pyxis* as a condescending gesture of the new Olympic order towards feminine and chthonic divinities, though she does admit that the attribution of the *pyxis* to Pandora is not the invention of the ancients. Harrison traces back the casket (*pyxis*) error to Lilius Giraldius of Ferrara, who in 1580 published a systematized mythology, but she is clearly uncertain about this finding. Harrison cites Lilius Giraldius who tells how Jupiter invented Pandora in order to deceive men, and to this end furnished her with a beautiful box, *pulcherrima pyxis*, with a whole tribe of calamities hiding inside. Harrison sees in the rendition of the box as a beautiful article a contamination between the figure of the woman and the *pithos*: ‘The *pyxis* was a whited sepulcher, a beautiful fraud like its mistress.’⁵¹

Although the *pyxis* is a beautiful receptacle, it retains the frightening contents of its Hesiodic counterpart. The earthly huge *pithos* is replaced by a beautiful box, but both remain foreboding. By being a beautiful object, the *pyxis* is a composite of the jar and the first woman. As such, it advances the ideology that beautiful appearance is a

harbinger of evil and that the woman is far from being a powerful and bountiful Earth goddess. The replacement of the two objects matches the ‘archpatriarchal bourgeois’ ideology that had originally introduced the first woman as an Olympian jest. Harrison elaborates on this idea in *Prolegomena*:⁵²

Zeus the father will have no great Earth-goddess, Mother and Maid in one, in his man-fashioned Olympus, but her figure is from the beginning, so he re-makes it; woman, who was the inspirer, becomes the temptress; she who made all things, gods and mortals alike, is become their plaything, their slave, dowered only with physical beauty, and with a slave’s tricks and blandishments.⁵³

This passage makes no mention of the *pyxis* as a sign of Olympian subordination. The reason why Jane Harrison does not mention the box in the *Prolegomena* lies in her earlier observation made in ‘Pandora’s Box’ that the only few images of Pandora left from antiquity never show her with a *pyxis*. Although she writes on the sacred *cista* (p.110) in relation to the *Arrephoria*, and she comments on the role of the chest in the myth of Erichthonios,⁵⁴ Harrison strangely ignores the relationship between the rich variety of mythical and daily scenes involving the opening of boxes and the Hesiodic Pandora.⁵⁵ In ‘Pandora’s Box’, however, Harrison dwells on the *pyxis* interpolation. As a relatively new addition to the myth, the box seems irrelevant and extraneous to the deep significance of Hesiod’s Pandora story. And yet, the *pyxis* is not a mere error; Harrison conceives it as a major source of a mythological corruption:

Who cares whether Pandora had a large *pithos* or a small *pyxis*? No one, not even an archeologist. Yet, this is far from being the case. This is no mere blunder, best corrected and quickly buried out of sight. It is one of the vital errors that breed the corruption of a total mythological misconception. So fixed is the idea of the small portable box in the mind of the mythologists that they never sought an explanation of the myth in the uses of the *pithos* and, stranger still, never saw in Pandora’s jar opening an aetiological myth based on the Athenian festival of the *Pithoigia*.⁵⁶

Harrison is convinced that our first impression of Pandora is trapped in the illusionary impact of the various images associated with her because the image connected with the name ‘Pandora’ is not one but rather the product of a condensation superimposing different images. Thus, the object associated with Pandora—*pithos-pyxis*—is a hybrid that classic philologists know how to tell apart. This composite image has

two components: ‘*Pithos* is a very large jar, that either stands on or is partly buried in the earth....It is when *pithos* is rendered box, or still worse casket, that the mischief begins. Box connotes a certain portability, casket adds the idea of smallness and preciousness, both entirely *foreign* to the meaning of *pithos*.’⁵⁷

Despite the apparent difference in their look and function, the affinity between *pithos* and *pyxis* is significant. Their family resemblance is first of all noticeable in the similar sound created by the syllables ‘*Pi*’ and ‘*Py*’, and in their belonging to the category of containers. The affinity between these two containers explains why the ‘*pithos-pyxis*’ was created in the first place. In light of Freud’s (p.111) studies on dream work, the ‘*pithos-pyxis*’ compound displays a form of hybridity typical of the picture-eidetic content of the condensation that integrates different images pertaining to the open and latent layers of the dream:

You will have no difficulty in recalling from your own dreams of different people being condensed into a single one...The process is like constructing a new and transitory concept which has this common element as the nucleus. The outcome of this superimposing of the separate elements that have been condensed together is as a rule a blurred and vague image, like what happens if you take several photographs on the same plate.⁵⁸

Aware of the composite nature of the ‘*pythos-pyxis*’ image, Harrison still senses that a component is missing from the analysis of how this confusion developed.⁵⁹ This missing element was retrieved only in 1956, when Dora and Erwin Panofsky identified it as the missing layer in the condensed ‘*pythos-pyxis*’ image. In their book *Pandora’s Box* they show that the substitution of a jar for a box occurs before Lilius Giraldus and refer the reader to Erasmus of Rotterdam who, in his 1508 *Adages* (1.31), collapsed the two together for the first time. But the *pithos-pyxis* conflation entails another pivotal conflation of two feminine figures: Pandora and Psyche.

According to Erasmus, Zeus gave the box as a gift to Pandora, who was herself a gift. As a beautiful and fallacious object, *pyxis pulcherrima*, the box clearly provides a visual analogy to the feminine figure.⁶⁰ The box is construed by Erasmus as a feminine object of deceptive beauty. But why was it specifically a box that Erasmus associated with Pandora? Was the composite ‘Pandora’s box’ coined merely as a result of a mistake; a textual intervention? What is the reasoning behind Erasmus’ failure to remember Hesiod’s *pithos*, and how can the repression of the jar be connected with the surfacing of the *pyxis*?

Erwin and Dora Panofsky explain Erasmus’ slip as a matter of confusion between the Greek Pandora and Apuleius’ Psyche: ‘It is far more probable that he, his philological instinct sensing a connection evident even to an educated painter of the eighteenth (p.112) century, fused—or confused—the crucial episode in the life of Hesiod’s Pandora with its near duplicate in Roman literature, the last and equally crucial episode in the life of Apuleius’ Psyche.’⁶¹

Not only does Erasmus’ mistake cover up Hesiod’s jar, but it also uncovers an interesting family resemblance that binds different feminine figures together; another occurrence of superimposition. But is this composite feminine image completely coincidental? Pandora and Psyche do belong to very different historical and cultural backgrounds but they nevertheless have much in common, as is revealed, albeit unintentionally, by Erasmus. In attributing Psyche’s box to Pandora, Erasmus is in fact tying the forbidden opening of the concealed to the promise of eternal beauty. Psyche’s last mission, we recall, is to bring Venus’ *pyxis* to the Underworld goddess, Proserpina, so that she might bring back in it some of Proserpina’s beauty. Psyche serves as a go-between messenger. Venus gives her the box with the assignment to descend into the Underworld and approach its queen with the following request: ‘Venus requests that you send her a little of your beauty’ (*petit de te Venus...modicum de tua mittas ei formositate*).⁶² It is Psyche rather than Pandora who is advised not to open or look into the *pyxis*. Moreover, Psyche is told that she must not even think about the hidden treasure of divine beauty.⁶³ The relation of the three feminine figures to the concealed beauty located in the Underworld gives rise to the triple-figure title ‘Aphrodite-Kore-Pandora’ that Harrison discusses in both her ‘Pandora’s Box’ and in *Prolegomena*.⁶⁴ The images of these three figures are never really differentiated.⁶⁵ (The myth’s components create a set of superimpositions: jar-box, Pandora-Psyche-Venus-Proserpina.)

But Erasmus’ mistake sheds light on an interesting yet neglected relationship in the imagery: the deeper truth of the confusion between Pandora and Psyche is the inner connection, alive in both Greek and Latin literature, between the idea of the soul and the figure of (p.113) woman.⁶⁶ In Apuleius’ story, Psyche is the obedient slave of Venus, who is the one that yearns for Proserpina’s beauty. Psyche’s simultaneous terror of and fascination with the inside of the box as the site of the unknown creates a semblance of the figure of the first woman. In both figures, ignorance is tied to Eros tempting them to search for knowledge. Thus, the woman, ‘The Enigma’ who is Freud’s paradigmatic analysand, is the one to create a radical transformation in

our visual routine. Being herself a trope of superimposition, the woman is the first to present the dynamic play between open and latent layers of meanings that introduces the idea of the unconscious into the history of humanity.

Notes:

(¹) I elaborate on the interpretation of Pandora as the figure that leads to the birth of the *homo spectator* in (2008) 17–47 and in (2011) 13–26.

(²) Steiner (2001) 116.

(³) Ibid. Steiner discusses how Hesiod’s language creates a cavity effect through acts of filling and inserting.

(⁴) Manilius, *Astronomica* 2.11–14.

(⁵) Philo, *De aeternitate mundi* 5.17–19.

(⁶) Aristotle, *Physics* 4.1.208b 27–33.

(⁷) See Aristotle on Hesiod’s *Chaos* in *Metaphysics* A4 984b 23–32.

(⁸) Hesiod, *Theogony* 211–213.

(⁹) Erikson (1954) 48.

(¹⁰) Hesiod, *Works and Days* 59–68. All translations are by Most (2007).

(¹¹) Freud (1933b).

(¹²) Hesiod, *Theogony* 585.

(¹³) Hesiod, *Works and Days* 58.

(¹⁴) Ibid. 65.

(¹⁵) Freud (1933b) SE 22: 132.

(¹⁶) Ibid.: ‘Nature herself would seem to have given the model which this achievement imitates by causing the growth at maturity of the pubic hair that conceals the genitals.’

(¹⁷) On the relation between woven textiles and texts, see Lev Kenaan (2008) 161–86.

(¹⁸) Hesiod, *Theogony* 589.

(¹⁹) Freud (1933b) SE 22.

(²⁰) Freud (1926b) SE 20: 212.

(²¹) Harrison (1900) 99.

(²²) Peacock (1988) 124 and Ackerman (1991a) 1.

(²³) *Myths of the Odyssey in Art and Literature* (1882), *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (1885), *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens* (1890), *Greek Vase Paintings* (1894). On Harrison’s scholarship and intellectual world in her early work, see Ackerman (1972) 209–30.

(²⁴) Two important studies do refer to the article’s significance: Panofsky (1956) 14–5 and Lissarrague (1995) 91.

(²⁵) Specifically in her discussion of the *Antheateria* in [1903] (1980) 32–76, and in her discussion of Pandora [1903] (1980) 276–85.

(²⁶) Harrison refers to it in [1903] (1980) 285.

(²⁷) Harrison (1900) 108–9.

(²⁸) Ibid. 108.

(²⁹) Harrison [1903] (1980) vii. By ‘splendid surface’ Harrison refers here specifically to Homer’s poetry.

(³⁰) Ibid. 10.

(³¹) Ibid. 11 (my emphasis).

(³²) Ackerman (1991a) 1. For a historical review of the unconscious before Freud, see Ellenberger (1970).

(³³) The Freudian unconscious is, of course, a term that changed over the years, shifting mainly from a dualistic to a tripartite model.

(³⁴) de Berg (2003) 5. My emphasis.

(³⁵) Peacock (1988) 237. See also Ackerman (1991b) 72, who views Harrison as an advocate of Freud’s work within her intellectual milieu.

(³⁶) Harrison (1962) viii.

(³⁷) Peacock (1988) 236–7 sees the imprint of *Totem and Taboo* in Harrison’s *Epilegomena*.

(³⁸) Harrison (1962) viii.

⁽³⁹⁾ Harrison must have known Galton’s work and his intellectual milieu since she kept a close relationship with Charles Darwin’s family, see Peacock (1988) 155–7. In 1909 Harrison contributed an article titled ‘The Influence of Darwinism on the Study of Religions’ to the collection of essays commemorating the centenary of Charles Darwin’s birth.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Galton (1878) 139.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Ibid. 135–6.

⁽⁴²⁾ Freud (1901a) SE 5: 648.

⁽⁴³⁾ Ackerman (1991b) 71.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Harrison [1903] (1980) 285.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Harrison (1900) 101.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Harrison counts the seventeenth-century English classics scholar John Lemprière as a crucial source responsible for the transmission of the old error to her own time: see Lemprière (1788). We should also not overlook the significance for Harrison of the Dante Gabriel Rossetti painting and his poem *Pandora* of 1869.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Harrison expands on the rich significance of the *ker* with its positive and negative, enriching, and fatal connotations in [1903] (1980) 163–256.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Harrison (1900) 100.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Ibid. 108.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Ibid. 100.

⁽⁵²⁾ ‘The making of the first woman becomes a huge Olympian jest.’ Ibid. 108.

⁽⁵³⁾ Harrison [1903] (1980) 285.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Ibid. 133.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ See Lissarrague (1995) who discusses the ancient image of the box in Greek art.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Harrison (1900) 100.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Ibid.

(⁵⁸) Freud (1933b) SE 22.

(⁵⁹) ‘From what source Lilius Giralduus was translating or copying I do not know, but it seems clear that at some time or other the word *pithos* was translated *pyxis*, and the error took root and blossomed abundantly.’ Harrison (1900) 100.

(⁶⁰) Erasmus, *Adages* 1.31.

(⁶¹) Panofsky (1956) 18.

(⁶²) Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 6.18, trans. J. Arthur Hanson.

(⁶³) *Ibid.* 5.19.

(⁶⁴) Harrison (1900) 108 and [1903] (1980) 285, 312.

(⁶⁵) See how Harrison, for instance, ties these figures through the image of the *anodos*: ‘No one, so far as I am aware, sees that the artist is haunted by, is as it were halting between, reminiscences of each and all. Or rather the Anodos, the Bath, the Birth are as yet undifferentiated.’ Harrison [1903] (1980) 312–13.

(⁶⁶) Harrison refers to the twelfth-century Byzantine scholar and archbishop Eustathius who commented on *Iliad* 24.527 that *pithos* stands for the soul. Harrison (1900) 105.

