

The Dynamic Duo: A Study in Opposition

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Divine vengeance was an expected part of life within the society of Ancient Greeks. Offenses against the gods, such as Hera or Zeus, were portrayed in many Greek myths for a variety of offenses. The punishments for these offenses did not necessarily correspond to the same degree or validity of the offenses. These stories of divine punishment offer an interesting look into the heart of Greek mythology. Many myths involving the punishment of mortals (and immortals) regarded acts of sexual transgression or the violation of a moral code regarding acceptable sexuality. This is especially true of myths where either Apollo or Artemis fills the role of the punisher. However, though both gods punished mortals for sexual transgressions, both did it often for very different reasons. These differences resulted from the twins' difference in gender identity. For example, Apollo often punished women for not completing a sexual contract with him, while Artemis punished women who did complete sexual contracts with male gods and entities, even if the sexual act occurred without the woman's consent. Also of note is that Apollo did not punish male offenders for sexual transgressions, while Artemis did – mostly only for violations of the sexual code that involved her. These differences in punishment ideology between Apollo and Artemis occur along gender lines, despite the fact that the two gods also did punish mortals together. Though Apollo and Artemis were twin gods, their divine vengeance against mortals occurred for polar opposite reasons on the scale of sexual transgressions, though the vengeance was carried out in a similar manner.

Like a majority of his fellow gods, Apollo frequently pursued women for romantic and sexual relationships. Unlike Zeus, however, Apollo was less successful in his affairs because the women that he chose to pursue often did not return his feelings and he was an unsuccessful

rapist. Though Apollo did not get his way in these cases, he often punished the women who defied him, leaving them eternally altered. Perhaps Apollo's most famous love affair was for Daphne, a nymph who rejected him. Apollo intended to pursue and rape her – which would have been her punishment from him – but was thwarted when she prayed to her father to save her, which he did by turning her into a tree (Powell 170). Though Apollo was unable to carry out a punishment, he had intended to force Daphne into accepting a state of affairs that she did not desire. Apollo's punishment was prompted by Daphne's act of rejection. When Apollo punishes a female, it is often because she rejected him. This reasoning helps explain why Apollo punishes fewer males than he does females, even though Apollo did have a soft spot for young boys. Apollo's decisions to punish women assert the power that he wields as a man as well as a god, establishing his wills and desires as most important.

Daphne was not the only female who rejected Apollo, as Cassandra and the first Sibyl at Cumae also rejected him. These two rejections, however, were different from Daphne's because Cassandra and the Sibyl promised Apollo sexual favors and then reneged on the deal. Cassandra “grew into a woman beautiful enough to rouse the lust of Apollo and shrewd enough to demand that he give her a prophet's powers in return for her sexual favors” (Powers 170). By Ancient Greek standards, her promise justified Apollo's punishment, though this would be a socially unacceptable justification today. As Apollo had already given Cassandra the powers of a seer, he punished her by ensuring that no one would ever believe her predictions. The myth transferred blame to Cassandra and justified Apollo's actions. However, what the myth does not take into account is that it was likely that Apollo would have become enamored of Cassandra regardless and she would have become a second Daphne. Cassandra, as a woman and a mortal, becomes marginalized while Apollo, as a man and a god, easily alters her life. In this myth, the woman is

victimized and stripped of the legitimacy of her rights and opinion. The case with the first Sibyl was very similar, as Apollo expected sex in exchange for one of his gifts. However, the Sibyl did not make a promise like Cassandra did so to speak, but she “accepted the gift, then she too refused to sleep with him” (Powell 170). Apollo, unhappy that she refused, did not accompany the gift of eternal life with the gift of eternal youth. The Sibyl was forced to relive her choice as she shriveled throughout eternity. Apollo’s punishments, though infrequently fatal, were devastating in their capacity to destroy his victims’ quality of life. Apollo carried out most of his punishments against women in the manner that a vindictive schoolboy would. The first of the twin gods, Apollo, brought divine vengeance down upon women who did not respect his sexual desires or his idea of sexual norms.

Artemis, the second of the twin gods, punished mortals for very different reasons than her brother Apollo did. Artemis was concerned with the purity of women and protecting that purity. The majority of her punishments had to do with violations of a code of morals that she championed and maintained regarding sexuality. Unlike Apollo, Artemis gave punishments to offenders regardless of their gender. Both men and women failed to live up to her standards and were punished accordingly. In the myths of Artemis, two versions of myths often coexist. One conclusion portrays Artemis as the defender of female virtue and the other portrays her defending herself. One male mortal, Orion, attracted the anger of Artemis for his rape of King Oenopion’s daughter and subsequent affair with Eos, the dawn goddess. Alternative versions of this myth, declare that Orion “attempted to rape Artemis herself, [so] Artemis placed on his head a scorpion, which poisoned and killed him...Orion became the constellation that still bears his name, forever fleeing Scorpio” (Powell 219). Artemis not only ended Orion’s life but also haunted his afterlife by granting the scorpion that killed him constellation status. Perhaps the

most famous myth involving Artemis is an instance of her punishing a male offender, Actaeon, who “also fell victim to the wrath of Artemis, and again for a sexual transgression” (Powell 219). The more prevalent version of the myth declares that Actaeon saw Artemis bathing naked while he was hunting on Mount Cithaeron. Seeing Artemis naked was a capital offense and so Artemis transformed Actaeon into a stag, destined to be mutilated and killed by his own hounds. An earlier version of this myth contradicts the version mentioned above, declaring that Actaeon’s punishment was a response to his desire to marry his Aunt Semele, the mother of Dionysus. Either way, Artemis is defending feminine virtue from male desires and transgressions. Artemis punished males who violated her code of ethics brutally.

Artemis did not reserve all of her harsh punishments for males, however, also punishing women in a similar manner. Artemis took her role as guardian of female purity and chastity incredibly seriously. Callisto, a chaste nymph and companion of Artemis’, also fell victim to Artemis’ divine punishment. Unfortunately for Callisto, Zeus had decided to possess her. Through no fault of her own, Callisto became Zeus’ unwilling victim as Zeus took “the form of Artemis herself, or of Apollo, [and] Zeus disarmed the girl’s suspicions and raped her” (Powell 222). Likely because she knew Artemis’ policy on female purity, Callisto did not share this with her mistress until that fact that she was pregnant became impossible to hide. When Artemis found out that she was pregnant and assumed that she had been betrayed, she turned Callisto into a bear and killed her. Instead of protecting women themselves, Artemis was more concerned with chastity. The story of Callisto solidifies Artemis’ policy on sexual transgressions as 100 percent unacceptable, no matter the circumstances or the gender of the offender.

Artemis and Apollo defended their beliefs and self-interest without following any semblance of a judicial process. Though they pursued their own ends with a stubborn sense of

self-righteousness, Apollo and Artemis had opposing end goals in mind. Apollo wanted women who promised him sexual favors to keep their promises, while Artemis wanted chastity and purity to be untainted. These goals perhaps would have led the twins into direct competition if Apollo had tried to seduce one of Artemis' chaste companions. Their divine punishments took place after violations of the policies above. Therefore, it is clear that Apollo and Artemis utilized divine vengeance for opposite reasons in regards to sexual transgressions. Artemis and Apollo behaved in very similar ways in the pursuit of meeting their end goals. The similarity especially applied to their interest in punishing mortals for sexual transgressions as defined in each's individual code of ethics, respectively. For the twin gods of Mount Olympus, sexual ethics necessarily must have been a point of contention. Artemis and Apollo punished mortals for violating completely different philosophies on sexual ethics.