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Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

## Mythological Elements in Leylâ Erbil's *Cüce* Novel

### Leylâ Erbil'in *Cüce* Romanında Mitolojik Ögeler

Öz

İnsanoğlunun kendisini fark ettiği anda üzerinde düşünmeye başladığı en kadim soru, evrenin ve kendi türünün var oluş sürecinde ortaya çıkmaktadır. Her ulus evrenin ve insanoğlunun ortaya çıkış hikâyesini kendi sembolik araçlarıyla yaratmıştır. Ne var ki değişen çağ, gelişen teknolojiler, bu teknolojilerin şekillendirdiği zihin yapıları ve onların yarattığı yeni dünya düzeni insanla ve düzeniyle ilgili başka soruların da gündeme gelmesine neden olur. Artık tek soru nereden gelinip nereye gidildiği değil, kurumların içerisinde sıkışmış bireyin benlik algısını etkileyen edimlerin nedenleridir. Bu edimlerin sebebini anlamaya çalışan insan, yeni mitlerle çevresinde olup bitenler kadar bireyselliğini de anlamlandırmaya çalışır. Bu çaba, modern edebiyatta da karşımıza çıkar. Bu bağlamda dikkate değer örneklerden biri, Leylâ Erbil'in *Cüce* adlı romanıdır. Leylâ Erbil, çok katmanlı yapısıyla ses getiren eserinde kapitalizmin yok edişleriyle birlikte hüküm sürdüğü bir dünyada evrenselliğin yanlış okuması olan küreselleşmenin insan üzerindeki tahribatını, Latin mitolojisinde ana tanrıça olarak karşımıza çıkan Ma'dan semavi dinlere geçerken anaerkil toplum yapısından ataerkil topluma evrilmenin de bir sonucu olarak kadının uğradığı değer yitimini konu edinir. Yazar bu değer yitimini toplumsal olayların üzerine yerleştirirken yakın dönem Türk tarihi, mitoloji, din gibi imgelerle ortaya koyar. O yüzden bu yazıda Leylâ Erbil'in *Cüce* romanında yer alan mitlerin izleri sürülmüştür. Eserdeki mitolojik ögelerin izini sürerken ilk referans, eser olmuştur. Eser merkezli bir okuma ile eserde metafor olarak yer alan mitolojik ögelerin Türk ve dünya mitolojisindeki ve Leylâ Erbil'in modern dünyasındaki anlamları, bu unsurların günümüz toplumsal meselelerle ilgisi ortaya konulmuştur. Bu çalışma ile elde edilen sonuçlar çok katmanlı bir yapının alt metinlerinin daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Leylâ Erbil, *Cüce*, mitoloji, mit, Modern Türk Edebiyatı.

#### Abstract

The most ancient question that human beings begin to ponder as soon as they realize themselves is the process of the creation of the universe and their own species. Each nation has created the story of the emergence of the universe and humankind with its own symbolic tools. However, changing times, developing technologies, the mindsets shaped by these technologies and the new world order created by them lead to other questions about man and his order. The only question is no longer where we come from and where we are going, but the reasons for the acts that affect the self-perception of the individual trapped within institutions. Trying to understand the reasons for these acts, the human tries to make sense of his individuality as well as what is going on around him with new myths. This effort is also found in modern literature. One of the notable examples in this context is Leylâ Erbil's novel *Cüce*. In her multi-layered work, Leylâ Erbil deals with the destruction of globalization, which is a misreading of universality in a world where capitalism reigns with its destructions, and the devaluation of women as a result of the evolution from a matriarchal society structure to a patriarchal society during the transition from Ma, the mother goddess in Latin mythology, to celestial religions. While placing this devaluation on social events, the author reveals it with images such as recent Turkish history, mythology and religion. Therefore, this article traces the myths in Leylâ Erbil's novel *Cüce*. While tracing the mythological elements in the work, the first reference was the work. With a work-centered reading, the meanings of the mythological elements in the work as metaphors in Turkish and world mythology and in Leylâ Erbil's modern world, and the relevance of these elements to contemporary social issues have been revealed. The results of this study aim to provide a better understanding of the subtexts of a multi-layered structure.

**Keywords:** Leylâ Erbil, *Cüce*, mythology, myths, modern Turkish literature.

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## Giriş

Leylâ Erbil is one of the most important writers of the 1950 generation of Turkish literature. With the issues she raised and the universe of language she created, she was not understood or wanted to be understood for a long time. In fact, like her contemporaries Sevim Burak, Sevgi Soysal and Tezer Özlü, Leylâ Erbil was perceived as a "strange" and "outsider" identity in the Turkish literary world. As a matter of fact, in her works - *Hallaç*, *Karanlığın Günü*, *Mektup Aşkları*, *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*, *Tuhaf Bir Erkek*, *Cüce*, *Üç Başlı Ejderha*, *Kalan* - she deals with the emptiness left behind by nothingness, which is the natural consequence of not representing something. In this context, his novel *Cüce* has a special place.

In this article, we will try to explain the mythological elements that Leylâ Erbil refers to in her novel *Cüce* and the problems that these mythological elements correspond to in the modern world. In order to present the subject as a whole, we will also touch upon the author's multi-layered and sometimes fragmented narration while tracing the mythological elements.

### Mythological elements in the multi-layered structure of *Cüce*

In *Cüce*, which Leylâ Erbil refers to as "a cult novel, a root novel", Leylâ Erbil describes nothingness and rootlessness through the sentences of a woman who creates herself in her existence, perhaps in her destruction. In the article titled "Author's Note" at the beginning of the book, Leylâ Erbil states that the main author of the narrative plane is a woman named Zenîme. Zenîme, who Leylâ Erbil says is one of her neighbors in her summer house in the village, was born in Kâbil because of her father's work, then returned to the country and after studying here for a while, she went abroad again and traveled almost all over the world. One day she pretends to have blurted out that her father was a "Babai" sheikh. However, he adds that his father would actually be considered a "diplomat". Zenîme also tells us that she had an older brother whom she lost at an early age, that she married and separated once, that she abandoned the child born from that marriage, and that she did her doctorate in the United States- in Boston - on "The Love of 'Animal and Human' in Aristatâlis". This is the information that Zenîme wanted to tell in her own life story. She is not a person who dares to ask questions unless she wants to tell. "*Whatever she told, she is herself*" (Erbil, 2002: ix). The secret of reality is hidden in what she tells. The ornament of truth is depicted by Leylâ Erbil: She is very interested in politics, art, literature and especially cinema, knows Divan poetry very well, educated but fragmented identity. At times she is grieving and deeply despondent, at other times she seems overflowing with joy. He walks around in strange costumes and each one he wears has a memory.

"*She would have bought this one on Fith Avenue with her father, this one in Lahore with her German lover, this one in Kinshasa. Once I went for morning coffee and she greeted me in a floor-length low-cut Chanel evening gown of black tulle and silk lace. Another time she sat in a Chanel sheath of muslin, also embroidered with black sequins, as if she had swallowed a rolling pin, and on her head a little black wheel hat, reminiscent of Madame Matisse's hat! He told me himself that day that he had been a Chanel enthusiast in his youth.*" (Erbil, 2002: vii).

Zenîme's modern myths of objects are not limited to the clothes she wears and their brands. She lives alone in her father's village house, to which she returns after her



retirement, with the objects that summarize her life and her dog named Kaban. Apart from Dwarf, Leylâ Erbil, whom he sees from time to time, Hatçabla, one of the women suppressed by the patriarchal social order, and Hatçabla's son Yıldırım are the people involved in his late loneliness. Hatçabla is notable for being the opposite of Zenîme. The more Zenîme tries to get rid of the duties of motherhood and companionship imposed and sanctified by society, the more Hatçabla clings to these duties. This commitment and acceptance is Hatçabla's *raison d'être*. During the violence she suffers from her husband, she takes refuge in the garden of the house where she lives with her husband and child. The only thing she knows is the unrequited sacrifice taught to her by her traditions in the midst of which she is caught as a woman. Hatçabla, Zenîme's companion, is the one who produces, forgives, gives birth, and is patient. Nurdan Gürbilek says that Hatçabla's prominence with her productive and nurturing identity evokes Kubaba, the great mother goddess of the Near East, the symbol of universal maternity, who rules the universe, agriculture and the gods, and who is known as Magna Mater in Rome (Gürbilek, 2016: 235-236). Hatçabla is the unremembered one of the society despite her productivity. The only person who sees her and is aware of her ordeals is Zenîme, who is on her way to oblivion.

Zenîme deliberately and willingly takes refuge in her solitude. She was imprisoned for a while in her youth for aiding and abetting leftist groups. Her favorite director was Lütfi Akad. This information about Zenîme is, of course, not information to be simply read and passed over. Because these details in the work are given to express that she comes from the socialist/leftist tradition. The most important of these details is her only book, *Hiçlik (Nothingness)*, published in English by Habsburg Publishing House in the US. There is a reason why this woman, who boasts of having raised three generations of Americans and being one of Kissinger's secret students, has written only one work. Zenîme rejects the commodification and dematerialization of literature. She does not want to be showcased through advertising and marketing policies, to be awarded by authorities, to be famous and especially to be widely read. Because although she is against the policies of the system, she values the "smart" reader. That is why he refuses to say "dear reader". As a matter of fact, in the scattered and fragmented text he delivered to Leylâ Erbil, he says the following:

*"You feel obliged to tell the reader about your struggle with complicated problems, about this escape that you cannot overcome day by day, year by year, or about this deep love... The reader? I thought they didn't exist? I thought you didn't write for them? You don't write; but there are still a few people you look out for."* (Erbil, 2002: 11).

The few people Zenîme is looking out for are the "smart" readers who will understand that she is ready for "oblivion" and who she wants to witness her eager search for "nothingness". He has no story to tell to the intimidated puppets of the society from which he escaped, whose rules he could not digest and which tore his self to pieces. Because for him, *"evil cannot be dealt with! You cannot deal with the world! You will not pity people!"* (Erbil, 2002: xiii).

Zenîme lives with contrasts in the nothingness she creates. For example, Zenîme, who had said that she was an atheist in previous meetings, welcomes Leylâ Erbil on another day by tying her head tightly with a silk shawl, and to Leylâ Erbil's surprise, she mentions that science and the human will are not enough to make people happy and



that everyone needs a belief. He then adds that he does not believe in the existence of God, but living like a believer comforts him. Zenîme's voice suddenly starts to rise as she explains in a calm tone. Even if the author, to whom she is explaining herself, does not say no to this, she still seems to want to defend and explain herself against the echoing, judgmental voice of society:

*"If I feel relieved, why doesn't it happen?" he said. Since man is a weak creature, he said, 'I know that by giving them churches, mosques and synagogues, they keep them busy until they end up in the afterlife, but they also heal them a little, they are a bunch of ignorant ignoramuses; they just believe, they are helpless; their lives have a purpose!' (Erbil, 2002: xii).*

The situation and the explanation quoted above are like the two extremes of the split self. However, according to Leylâ Erbil, Zenîme enumerates her thoughts as if apologizing for welcoming her with her head covered even though she did not ask. So, does Zenîme still have an expectation of being understood? We get the answer from the original text - that is, from Zenîme's fragmented text.

These pages, which Leylâ Erbil describes as leaves falling from a great tree, are undated and difficult to connect to each other. She says that she did not touch the original texts left by Zenîme and added a few lines in between. Moreover, on some pages, there are pencil drawings of stunted knights, swords and sword-length phalluses, and marginal ornaments that Leylâ Erbil does not make sense of. Although Leylâ Erbil does not understand which war she is referring to, she says that she likens it to ruthless, bloody religious wars. A few lines before she says *"I am not a man of literature, I am a woman! You will understand when you read the whole thing!"* (Erbil, 2002: xiv) From the point of view of Zenîme, who rebels against masculine language, it is also possible to think of Lilith's struggle within the war waged by the gods of the masculine world when she was destined for Adam and when she rejected this destiny and wanted to be herself. In other words, her struggle against the masculine shadows under which women have been oppressed for centuries.

After the introduction titled "Author's Note", the main text begins. The narrative plane created by Zenîme opens with the moment when she waits in front of the garden gate for the war correspondent who will come for an interview. After cleaning her messy house full of ants, she takes out her most eye-catching dress from the chest, which she thinks the war correspondent, who is also a photographer, will like, and puts on *"a tulip-like dress on a red-rose-colored (alurges-purpura) ground, She puts on a long dress with stylized cross and axe motifs, wears a purple velvet vest with moon and star motifs embroidered with gold glitter, Bodrum sandals on her feet, and does her make-up 'without a mirror' by groping, as if she were a Portuguese empress."* (Erbil, 2002: 22). Zenîme's impersonation of the Empress of Portugal brings together in the same consciousness the madness of Maria, who has gone mad after losing all her loved ones, and the madness of the self, which has lost its past, present and perhaps its future with the losses of the massacres in the 1990s. Maria is now Zenîme. Zenîme is the unpopular rebellious child of the authorities.

In this preparation scene, two concepts are important as they are repeated many times in the text and as a motif. The first is the ants, which Leylâ Erbil emphasizes in her introduction, in the lines describing Zenîme's house. The ants in Zenîme's kitchen, on the floor, even in her sugar bowl, and which she mentions at every opportunity, are the equivalent of society as a mass. Their counterpart in mythology is the Myrmidons.





Myrmidon comes from the Greek word myrmikes, meaning "ant". Myrmidons are the people living on the island of Aigina. The story is as follows: Zeus falls in love with Aigina, who gives the island its name. Aigina has a son named Aiakos with Zeus. Hearing this, Hera gets angry and kills everyone on the island. Aiakos then takes refuge in a temple and begs Zeus. During this plea, Aiakos notices the ants on the ground and says, "Zeus, please help me. Let the ants on the ground become human beings and fill our empty island again." Suddenly, lightning flashes in the sky and the next day Aiakos wakes up to a noise. When he looked out the window, he saw that the streets were filled with people. After this event, the people of Aigina are called Myrmidons (Hamilton, 2021: 230). The Myrmidons represent the hardworking people. In Zenime's text, they are referred to as "colonial, industrious and stubborn" who are constantly on the move. However, these ants are no different from the masses of people who have no other concerns other than being fed, who only work for a living, who are not aware of the self. That is why Zenime makes the first move to welcome her guest with care:

*"... the dungeon that divides your mind and your days from the colorful, thick, thin and plump ants that haunt you and your humble body in summer and winter in this ramshackle building you live in to get rid of; the ants with the leftovers of everything that has been fed all winter in their nests, gnawing and carrying in crumbs the time you spent wounding and killing those who crawled recklessly in your bread, in your soup, in your camisoles, in your soaps and between the leaves of your books; these colonialist, industrious and stubborn bitches, you prepared to waste these colonialist, industrious and stubborn bitches, even for a day, and you prepared to give your guest a high-five, no matter how many dead traces..."* (Erbil, 2002: 2).

Zenime's attempt to get rid of "ant men and women who carry a foreign power behind them" (Erbil, 2002: 3) is at the same time to get rid of the society and the subjects of this institution, which she has been struggling against for as long as she can remember and which still somehow cauterizes her bleeding heart, and to ignore them. However, no matter how much he ignores them, they find an open door, a small hole to sneak in.

A second noteworthy motif in the narrative is the mirror. The mirror also has an important place in Turkish mythology. However, it would be useful to mention its meaning in world mythologies before Turkish mythology. We first encounter the mirror myth in the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. In this epic, Gilgamesh sets out to find the elixir of immortality. During this journey, he meets the sailor Urshanabi and realizes through him that he is on the wrong path. Gilgamesh then asks Urshanabi to help him. Urshanabi tells Gilgamesh to go back to the forest and cut one hundred and twenty branches, make a mirror in the shape of a breast and bring it to him. Gilgamesh then goes to the forest and makes the mirror Urshanabi asked him to make and gives it to Urshanabi. Thanks to this vehicle, they travel through stormy waters. In this epic, the mirror is an important symbol that guides Gilgamesh to the right path (Gilgamiş, 2015: 49-54). However, the real meaning of the mirror, which has also been the material of literatures, appears with Narcissus in Greek mythology. Narcissus, the protagonist of the myth, is the son of the river god Kephisos and a nymph named Liriope. One day Liriope goes to an oracle and asks him about the fate of her son and how long he will live. The oracle tells her that her son will live long if he does not recognize her. When Narcissus is sixteen years old, he attracts everyone's attention with his beauty and charm. But Narcissus does not return any of this attention. Narcissus is so arrogant that those who fall in love with him dare not declare their love. The only being who dares to



do so is a fairy named Echo. One day, wandering alone in the mountains, Echo meets Narcissus wandering after deer and falls in love with him, thinking that there could not be such a beautiful young man in the universe. After this encounter, Echo repeatedly appears before Narcissus to declare her love to him. But he needs the voice of a being to speak to him. That is why Echo cannot tell Narcissus that she is in love. When Narcissus, realizing that he is being followed, calls out, "*Is there someone there?*" Echo can only say, "*There is!*". Surprised, Narcissus says "Come here!" to which Echo only replies "*Come here!*". After failing to get any results with his second attempt, Narcissus gets curious and makes one last attempt and says, "*Come here to me, let's be together.*" Echo then calls out "*Let's be together!*" and comes out of hiding and heads towards Narcissus. As Echo is about to hug Narcissus, Narcissus says with his unique arrogance, "*Get your hand off me! I'd rather die than let you have me!*" and he lashes out at Echo. In the face of this rejection, Echo curses Narcissus to fall into unrequited love like her. Echo's curse is heard by Nemesis, the Goddess of Revenge. Nemesis finds Echo right and punishes Narcissus. Meanwhile, Narcissus gets thirsty. When he leans into the water to quench his thirst, he sees his own reflection. When he thinks that his reflection is not himself but another being, he falls in love with it. When he finally realizes that what he desires is himself, he falls into the river and drowns (Erhat, 1996: 211). In this myth, water functions as a mirror and the reflection there costs Narcissus his life. In other words, the instrument that reflects beauty and aesthetics also represents death. This paradoxical symbol is associated with narcissism in Western literature and used as a means of encountering and turning towards the self, the essential self. In that orientation, past, present and future are together.

The mirror image is present and important in the mythology of almost all nations. Of course, this myth appears with different meanings on different levels of belief. For example, in Ancient Greece, the mirror represents the two extremes of aesthetics and death, while in Ancient Egypt, it represents beauty as it is identified with Hathor, one of the goddesses, and immortality, power and protection with the belief that there is a mirror named ankh next to many Egyptian gods. In ancient Turks, the mirror, known by names such as "közgü, gözgü közgeç"<sup>1</sup>, signifies the border between this world and the hereafter. In other words, the mirror is the threshold between two worlds. As a matter of fact, in Shamanism, the mirror is the window to the spirit world where the shaman can see his own soul and can give news from the future. It is also believed that the mirror is a means of protection in which the shaman can imprison evil spirits and protect the world from evil and disease (Gömeç, 2003: 92).

When we look at Eastern philosophy - that is, Sufism - we realize that mirror and reflection have a divine meaning. In Sufism, the whole universe is a reflection of God.

<sup>1</sup> In *Divân u Lügâti't- Türk*, it appears as "közñü" (Yıldırım and Çifci, 2012: 1238) and its explanation is "iki yüzlük közñü". This expression means "two-faced mirror" and researchers argue that it can mean two things. First, in ancient Turkic beliefs, it was considered inauspicious to look in the mirror, especially at night. Therefore, when one did not use the mirror, one would turn it over and leave it. Therefore, various motifs were embroidered on the back side. This explanation may have been made to indicate that both sides of the mirror were used. Secondly, since it was believed that the mirror served as a bridge between this world and the spirit world, it was accepted that there were different universes on both sides of the mirror. One side reflects the concrete, real world; the other side reflects the external world.

Thus, the living and non-living beings in this universe are attributed the quality of mirrors.

The mirror has been a mysterious object for mankind for centuries. Because human beings can see and make sense of what their hands, feet, legs or arms look like without an intermediary, that is, with their own eyes. But he cannot see his face.

In order to see one's face, one needs a reflection. On the other hand, since the face is considered to be the place where the soul, or consciousness as it is scientifically called, is reflected in the religious dimension, the vehicle that delivers it to the human being is also considered interesting and sometimes sacred. This sacredness stems from a God-centered perspective. Since the Age of Enlightenment, when the God-centered perspective was replaced by realistic and rational thinking, and especially since psychology became a discipline, we begin to encounter more grounded explanations that get rid of the dimension of belief. One of these is the theory of Jacques Lacan, one of the most important psychoanalysts, which he defines as the "Mirror Phase". "Mirror phase" is the name of a process. From the moment it is born, the baby perceives itself as a whole with everything around it - especially its mother - and reacts in various ways when it sees its reflection in the mirror. Based on this observation, Lacan reaches the view that the "I" in human beings does not pre-exist, but is formed later. However, he underlines that it is the imaginary "I" formed in the infant, not the "I" in language (Lacan,1949).

*"The mirror phase, which can be considered as the narcissistic phase, is meaningful in the sense that the child reaches an experience that he/she has not yet experienced as a wholeness at the level of psychomotor coordination, thanks to his/her own image in the mirror or the holistic image of someone else (especially his/her mother), and thus gains an experience that can be called 'I', that can be expressed and represented by 'I' in the language. The importance of this observation is that it links narcissism to an integrated image, an ideal, a fantasy from the very beginning." (Tura, 2005: 234).*

As understood from Lacan's paper presented on July 17, 1949, this experience in which the child discovers his/her own body separate from other beings constitutes the beginning of "narcissistic individuation".

Returning to our main topic, Zenîme's relationship with the mirror is a space for narcissistic moments of confrontation, that is, a space for talking to the "I" that is the creation of the past and the present. Bachelard says that "mirror psychology", which forms the basis of narcissism, can be seen as a whole or as one of masochistic and sadistic attitudes, expectations, hopes and disappointments experienced as a result of the unrealisation of expectations, defense mechanisms developed against disappointments, that is, self-consolations (Bachelard 28). In this context, we read Zenîme's disappointments with institutions such as religion, family, media, and most importantly, the contradictions in the self, and her rebellion against these institutions and the self as a result of this, against her self that is swung between two extremes, in what is reflected in the mirror. For a long time, Zenîme resists the culture that tries to create her belonging with the identity given to her at birth, and tries to get rid of the values that are necessarily imposed on her in order for belonging to be realized. Adoption, companionship, motherhood or being among the people chosen to take a place in this society. She turns her back on all of these and lives with the desire to be herself, to find her essence, to be



a motif to be looked at away from the realities of "the earth whose credo is the owl". He believes that only in this way can he serve the justice of nature. He wants to be a motif at the cost of dying and rising again and again as a traitor, like Nesimî, who was flayed to death because he did not share the beliefs and thoughts of the general public. That's why he wants to be "a cadaver that has remained unaltered; a cadaver that has remained undeceived by money, property, men, fame, and fame, and in his eternal resting place ruled by ants while he sleeps with his mind left in all of them, content with a cardigan, a morsel brought by Hatçaabla..." He wants to be a "writer of nothing", even an "identity without belonging", a "identity without belonging" that is passed down through history. Zenîme is a woman who seeks to be forgotten, who wants to be a nobody writer who has set up a "game of forgetting" for herself:

*"Have we ever met a 'nothing writer'? I don't think so: it was a type you invented, a type you invented with the foreignness you heard in America in your youth; you thought a lot about the 'nothingness' I mentioned above, you wrote a book about 'Ma' as the first-born 'Ma', whose pictorial equivalent was a female owl! However, although there is no example or model in the world, the 'nothing writers' were more numerous than we thought before and after Christ, like the 'nothing peoples' of the peoples, and if they are not, they are waiting in the hamlets, in torture, in the mountains, on the slopes or under the soil, like the consciousness that does not forget its days, which is gradually becoming giant; even if our ashes, dreams and ants are mixed together, you are not one of them, you do not belong anywhere, you are the identity without belonging, 'Identity Without Belonging!'" (Erbil, 2002: 19).*

It is noteworthy that the above quote associates women with the mythological element known in Anatolia as the mother goddess Ma. Ma, which also means mother, is called the warrior goddess as well as the mother goddess. In other world mythologies, Ma is identified with other goddesses. For example, the Ancient Greeks liken Ma to Enyo and Athena and associate her with them. In the interview İdil Önemli conducted with Leylâ Erbil in 2002 in Varlık magazine issue 1134, Leylâ Erbil explains Ma's relationship with femininity as follows:

*"'Ma' sound is of cattle origin. Manda, cow; the sound of those who give milk. It is also the voice of the universal God Mother. In myths, images and symbols, in research, the concept of the first god is related to the woman who is productive and fertile. L. Strauss, who gives birth and nourishes and sustains with her own milk, says that the name of the womb is 'Um'. The sound of M, Ma is the sound of the Neolithic period, a motherly, peaceful, protective, protective, loving period without nationality or religion that dominated all geographies." (Önemli, 2002: 26-29).*

We understand that the sound "m", "Ma" is associated with woman in Zenîme's interior novel in the lines where she criticizes herself for agreeing to an interview with the reporter and willingly waiting for him despite her desire to break away from the masculine world. In these lines, a connection is established between the commonality of the word "I" in the sound "m" in different languages and "Ma", meaning woman:

*"...I am in English, ama-mayaya in Zimmer, ah-am in Hindu, es-em in Asian, t-ama (book) in Egyptian, aum in the Vedas, en'am in the Qur'an, the I who gave birth to man, who turned the first living object into a book in which all letters, syllables and words are contained; T'ama, Amen, amentü... The pure voice of the first nature vibrating with 'M'..." (Erbil, 2002: 6).*





While Zenîme wants to write her own story of oblivion, she also wants to tell the "I", her goddess fate in the Ma of Rome. Because according to her, she was also the child of such an age of gloom and still bears the color of sorrow on her forehead. However, even though she wants to be forgotten, she is not completely forgotten. Because he has begun to understand his complex self and thinks that he inherited this self from Pessoa, whom he regards as his great-grandfather - that is, Fernando Pessoa, in whose name "nobody" is imbued. His self, drifting in uncertainty, turns him into a person who carries two hearts without chords, even though he seems to ignore the advice of billions of people to "conform or perish". As in the words of her leftist brother, who lost his life as a result of the tortures he was subjected to in prison, to Zenîme before his death: *"If you are not a true revolutionary, you will have such a double heart that becomes one in word and deed, you will be a headache for people"* (Erbil, 2002: 36).

Zenîme also believes that the valuable aspects of human beings cannot be valuable without other people discovering their existence, which is her fear. In the friendships and relationships she establishes, it is this belief that she finds in others and others in her. However, when he looks back, he cannot find those who would bear witness to his values in his nothingness, he has lost them all. He feels that he, like them, has been lost and that it is time to die. Before realizing this idea of disappearing, of being lost in nothingness, and before relieving the "depression" created by the family, traditions, in short, by every institution to which he does not belong, he says for the last time to the society that is his nightmare and to his creations, "I exist". At first, he tries to change something and relieve this depression by retreating to his loneliness, which he has woven from his past, and by making his own "Heart Wine" in his loneliness. Heart Wine is similar to the elixir in fairy tales and legends that turns bad into good in an instant. Nurdan Gürbilek says that the "heart wine" motif brings to mind the matriarchal worship suppressed by the cult of Apollo and the Dionysian culture associated with viticulture and wine production (Gürbilek, 2016: 235). The recipe for this "Heart Wine", which is recommended for weak hearts, heart fatigue, coronary insufficiency, double hearts born out of compassion, three hearts born out of disgust for society, five hearts and those who suffer from constant heart pains due to love, is as follows:

*"Ten stalks of fresh parsley are washed cleanly and added to a liter of natural wine, along with the leaves. (The natural wine was prepared at Hatçablac's house between the eyebrows and the eyes with grapes from the vineyard of the Merzifonians carried by Yıldırım.) After that, add two tablespoons of natural grape vinegar (natural grape vinegar also from Hatçabla) and boil for ten minutes on a slow fire. (Watch out for overflowing.) Then add three hundred grams of natural honey (natural honey also from Hatçabla) and boil gently for another four minutes. Strain the hot Heart Wine and pour it into a bottle that has been previously rinsed with high proof alcohol. The bottle should be well sealed. The sediment that accumulates at the bottom of the bottle is not harmful and is sewn together."* (Erbil, 2002: 23).

He is compelled to share the truth that he cannot change with the "Wine of the Heart" he makes with this recipe, and he calls his journalist friends, members of the media whose principles he does not believe in, and says *"...I've decided I'm going to speak, I'll be on TV, I'll do flips in the air and play steel clomps depending on the channel, I'll 'share' this animal life with everyone, as long as you send someone to me immediately."* (Erbil, 2002: 34). However, as with everything else, nothing is in place in the media. There are those who dodge Zenîme by saying that they will call her soon, as well as those who mock her



by saying "You are no longer newsworthy!". After hanging up the phone, Zenîme thinks about this effort to find herself so guilty and nothing, and how this stereotype makes her believe that establishing equality by humiliating herself is the highest human value. Zenîme, who loses her self-confidence after this incident, looks in the mirror and sees that she has no face, that the mirror has swallowed her. Zenîme looks at the mirror and the mirror looks at Zenîme. Zenîme's consciousness, her self, is now a mirror, and thus she is at the peak of absurdity and confusion. Because she loses her narcissistic self in the mirror:

*"You began to move your face in horror closer and further away from this glazed glass, whose gilded frame remained lifeless and mute, with carved 'lilies of the Virgin Mary' (lilium candidum) clustered in its upper edge water and lower arch; you huffed, you huffed, you wiped, you rubbed the lightlessness whose center flickered in the moonlight; you wanted your own face back from it..." (Erbil, 2002: 35).*

Zenîme asks the mirror to return her face/self as well as her past, the lovers she waited for in Boston, her memories. However, the mirror now reflects its mirror to Zenîme. In other words, the mirror/consciousness tells the hearsay stories of her feminine history, the stories of her "horse thief" ancestors in Zenîme's eyes:

*"...the conversion of their great-great grandfathers to Zoroastrianism, then to Orthodoxy, and then to Islam by persuasion through persecution and torture, and the first grandfathers who never accepted religion; the first haminnen with an axe breaking their legendary kneecaps to the settled order, and the first women pressing Islam to their bosoms and stomping their offspring with joy, horon." (Erbil, 2002: 38).*

Another branch of Zenîme's timeless history comes to light when she remembers how her grandmother's descendant, whose real name was "Pythia" and who counted the cruel future of humans in their faces at the Temple of Delphi, which descended from the Karaites to the Balkans thousands of years ago, and who descended two thousand years later, Mrs. Yezdân, recalls how her little daughter Mrs. Sebiyye, whom her husband impregnated, was driven to suicide. Everything she remembers frightens Zenîme like a medieval epidemic. However, she does not yet want her parents' heirloom mirror to be shattered for the sake of getting rid of her social history, which she tells in her spare time to "armchairs tired of life, doors bowed, thresholds fainting, and books preparing for rebellion". Because with the shattering of the mirror, the past, present and future will be lost, and suicide, that is, annihilation, will be added to the swallowing. Zenîme is not ready for this yet. Because she needs to realize her weakness, her desire to tell herself to someone else, which she has succumbed to for the last time. She fulfills this desire with the war correspondent, whom she likens to a dwarf, Menipo, when she sees him.

The award-winning photographer, a former war correspondent, appears at the garden gate, where Zenîme is waiting with her inner questioning. As soon as she sees the journalist, a thick man with high heeled, pallet-soled boots, a hunting vest over a gringo-patterned cotton t-shirt, a row of zippered pockets parallel to each other on the vest, and an arsenal of ammunition, Zenîme mistakes him for a dwarf. At first, she cannot understand who or what he resembles, but with his noble and imperious speech, she compares this man, who takes her to the top of things and takes her photographs, to one of the dwarfs depicted next to the king's little daughter in the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*. As a matter of fact, during her inner monologue



while being subjected to the man's behavior that dominates her with the authority given to him by patriarchy, Zenîme says, "He is exactly like the dwarf Menipo of Las Meninas!" (Erbil, 2002: 66) with an Archimedes-like attitude shouting "Eureka". Zenîme, who from the very beginning has been subdued to the journalist's orders and rude behavior "without losing her words or her manners", gets angry after this moment of recollection, as if the man's resemblance to Menipo was a crime, and for the first time she says to the journalist's directing the interview according to her wishes, "What kind of an interview is this? Are you answering the questions or am I?" (Erbil, 2002: 67) she rebels. Zenîme's rebellion is also against the attempt to socialize the outsider. As a matter of fact, Zenîme speaks out after the journalist says: "No one can know anyone's worth, why should anyone else bother with you? You will determine your own worth; you will insist on it until they get it into their heads; you can't get tired, you can't withdraw, you can't wait!" (Erbil, 2002: 67) and then she speaks out. However, this rebellion does not last long. Because the Dwarf searches for a remedy for the salvation of this woman, who has been transformed from the Mother Goddess Ma into a "şeytan-ı lâine" (cursed devil) and whose ties with all the holy ones have been severed, in other words, the answer and the way to "Let's see if I can save you". He tries to carry her to all the summits he sets his eyes on. Finally, he drags Zenîme to the backyard and asks her to climb the tall apple tree with her special/feminine ancestral history. The dwarf commands the woman to "CLIMB UP! REMAIN WITH YOUR ANCIENTS WITH ALL YOUR SPIRIT!" (Erbil, 2002: 76). Zenîme has only one question on her mind: "Why do I have to climb to the highest heights?" (Erbil, 2002: 76). But her self, which has been trying to exist all her life in exchange for an identity, has no answer to this question. Accompanied by the dwarf's cries of "OUR LAST CHANCE!" (Erbil, 2002: 77) and vomiting the thoughts in her mind, she climbs to the very top of the tree. As Zenîme ascends, she looks at the world away from the identities given to her and her self, which is the sum total of these identities, just as the soul in Sufism is freed from worldly bondage and reaches marifetullah. Zenîme watches the "creature-city" and the chaos destined for her in it, like those seen from the "coffin that is slightly opened while being put into the car". While she is watching, a blood-red (phoinious-puniceus) "apple" catches her eye. Zenîme plucks the apple and chews it. Thus, she becomes a partner in the first sin, Eve's sin. This motif, which is handled in a delusion, is a reference to the story of Eve and Adam, that is, to sexual intercourse. As a matter of fact, many researchers such as Elmas Şahin<sup>2</sup>, Hülya Dündar<sup>3</sup> and Nurdan Gürbilek<sup>4</sup>, who analyze the novel Cüce from different aspects, agree that this reference points to the sexual union between Zenîme and the journalist.

As Zenîme climbs, Menipo, who carries her from peak to peak, shouts after her, "Please come down!" As Zenîme contemplates climbing higher, she cannot believe that the noble Dwarf is calling out to her in a pleading voice for the first time, so she responds and descends. What goes through her mind at this moment is valuable in terms of what a woman wants to do and what she cannot or will not do:

<sup>2</sup> ŞAHİN, E. (2009). *Leylâ Erbil'in Eserlerine Feminist Bir Yaklaşım* (Yayımlanmış Doktora Tezi), Doktora Tezi. Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı, Erzurum, s.132-238.

<sup>3</sup> DÜNDAR, H. (2004). *Leylâ Erbil'in Romanlarında Cinsellik Sorunsalı* (Yayımlanmış Yüksek Lisans Tezi). Bilkent Üniversitesi Ekonomi ve Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi, Ankara, s.60-69.

<sup>4</sup> GÜRBİLEK, N. (2016). "Çiftkalpli Yapıt- Tikinti ve Çilekeşlik, Kendi ve Öteki", *Kör Ayna, Kayıp Şark – Edebiyat ve Endişe*, İstanbul, Metis Yayınları, s.215-242.



"I thought for a while, my dear readers, of climbing higher and higher hills, and if I had wanted to, I could have had the opportunity - the word 'opportunity' is the most obvious vulgarity in this world, just like the writers who insist on saying 'my dear readers' - to show my ingenuity, but I realized that there were no more hills; there were false hills that thought they dominated all the hills and mocked my ingenuity as I wanted to ascend them, and there I encountered the pathetic and humiliating meaning of ascending alone into infinity, because the sky and the earth were under our feet..." (Erbil, 2002: 79).

Realizing that the hills that were thought to be a feat to climb were actually nothing, Zenîme begins to descend. Her descent is more difficult than her ascent. It is as if the tree puts obstacles in front of her to prevent her return. When she realizes that she cannot descend from the tree easily, she slides down on her head "with her soul". Menipo's words "*This is our last chance!*" (Erbil, 2002: 77) ring in her ears. Knowing that she has no choice but to descend, Zenîme makes the last journey of her life towards Menipo, who is waiting for her, and when she comes to Menipo, she offers him the apple. Menipo nibbles the apple. From this moment on, Zenîme sees that he is not a dwarf but a "tall man" and says, "*I looked at my man as if seeing him for the first time. He had given birth to me once again like the god Zeus recreating the thousand-year-old mother goddess from his head; the goddess who is es-em in Asian, ah-am in Hindu, aum in Vedas, t-ama in Egyptian.*" (Erbil, 2002: 85). During these delirium, Menipo asks "*Who gave you this apple?*". Zenîme replies, "*God!*" (Erbil, 2012: 85). However, Menipo is surprised by Zenîme's answer and protests, "*You don't believe in God!*" (Erbil, 2002: 86). Zenîme does not reveal how she discovered female sexuality, and in her great silence, she poses for Menipo "with the 'Good News of Mary's Conception', pouring her face to her Athena".

After this internal and sexual journey, which she sees as a last resort, Zenîme offers him a coffee for exhaustion. However, he refuses, saying that his wife is waiting at home. With this rejection, Zenîme is once again confronted with her loneliness and locks herself in her bedroom and, without looking in the mirror, strikes a fist and shatters it. Zenîme, "the degenerate woman who does not belong to a tribe", shatters the mirror, that is, her self, and leaves the world she has lost in its desolation by committing suicide with her "supposedly 'übermensch' engraved crest" on her back.

### Conclusion

Man's struggle for existence has been going on for 4 billion years, that is, since the moment he appeared on the world stage. This struggle has often occupied the human mind with "why and how" questions, and with the simplest of questions, humans have tried to make sense of their complex relationships, behaviors, jobs, in short, their actions. In the modern world, this effort has been made through philosophy and the methods of thinking that are products of this field, but in times when technologies were not developed and the universe was not sufficiently known, the answers were, of course, sought in beliefs. This search eventually led to the creation of myths. In the shortest and most concise explanation, although the creation of myths begins with man's effort to understand the universe and himself, human beings continue to create myths in today's modern age, where logical explanations of this network of relationships can be given and their proofs can be made in laboratories. Because the changing age, the technology brought about by the ages and development, the mind structures shaped by these technologies and the new world order created by them cause other questions to be raised





about human beings and the order they create. The question is no longer only where we come from and where we are going, but also the reasons for the acts on the self-perception of the individual trapped in the institutions created and reorganized over and over again. As a matter of fact, trying to understand the reasons for these acts, man tries to make sense of his individual existence as much as what is happening around him with the new myths he invents. This endeavor to make sense of things finds its concrete counterpart in the products of thought in fields such as philosophy and art. In this context, examining the works of modern Turkish literature provides an understanding of the troubles in the minds of one's compatriots regarding existence-non-existence or the causality-how of the institutions created by human beings. Leylâ Erbil is one of the important Turkish writers who, while bringing up the problems of the day, tries to explain to her readers that these problems are as old as human history.

Leylâ Erbil is one of the important but at the same time incomprehensible writers of the 1950s generation. Leylâ Erbil, like Sevim Burak, Sevgi Soysal and Tezer Özlü, who made a name for themselves in the world of literature in the same period, is one of the writers of the Turkish literary world who could not be understood at the time she lived with her "strange" but at the same time "non-belonging" character. Of course, her work *Cüce* also has a share in this reception. When it was first published, *Cüce* was not understood due to its multi-layered structure, the fact that it did not "wag its finger" at the reader about the issues discussed, but often hinted at them, and its fragmented narrative. Considered by Leylâ Erbil herself as a "cult novel/root novel", this work tells the history of the mind of a woman/Zenîme who does not belong anywhere, but above all wants to blend into "nothingness" with the absurdity of the current age, and the history of the human in her mind. Like Zenîme's mind, what is told there is chaotic and often "rootless". In other words, the issues in the work belong not only to a place - Turkey- but also to every place where human beings have set foot.

Zenîme has issues that occur in women's history, which complement her existence and eventually lead her to disappear into nothingness. Although the issues that the author deals with are the means that take Zenîme to the place she wants to reach, they are in fact problems that are still unsolved. These problems take their place in the novel, sometimes as violence against women, which is still unresolved today, sometimes as sectarian wars, and sometimes as the orphanhood of children caught in the middle in the wars of adults. Zenîme carries on her back the burdens of all the shame of humanity, all the massacres, all the annihilations, and as she tries to get rid of these burdens, she moves towards extinction - her "nothingness" as she calls it. In other words, while Zenîme thinks, "I thought that you were a completely different person, as if you were a person who was too big for the sky and had the haram of seventy different nations left on you; you had to do justice to this world...", she realizes that it will not be possible to ensure the justice of the world.

Leylâ Erbil does not directly present the issues in Zenîme's inner struggle to the reader. The author describes them through metaphors. Sometimes ancient mythological elements; Zeus, the most typical representative of patriarchy, the Mother Goddess Ma, the symbol of creativity but also of exclusion/ marginalization in Latin mythology, Narcissus, the victim of his own selfishness, or Myrmidons, the ants - that is, humans - who work non-stop most of the time and are incapable of questioning what is happening, and sometimes the myths of the current age, luxury consumer goods,



brands, places, constitute the author's narrative universe. As a result, Erbil, through these ancient and modern myths, reveals the devaluation of women as a result of the evolution from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society during the transition to celestial religions. The author also places this devaluation on social events.

This study was carried out in order to make visible the layers of the novel *Cüce*, which is often considered as a "difficult text" by readers, and to explain the connection of the mythological elements discussed in the layers with the events that took place in recent Turkish social history. In order to realize this aim, the author's discourses on the work and the work itself were taken as references and their equivalents in Turkish and world mythologies and the connections of the narratives with today's problems were investigated. Not only in this work but also in Leylâ Erbil's works such as *Hallaç*, *Karanlığın Günü*, *Mektup Aşkları*, *Tuhaf Bir Kadın*, *Tuhaf Bir Erkek*, *Üç Başlı Ejderha*, and *Kalan*, which she does not deal with with a monist approach, a multifaceted reading will provide an understanding of her and what she wants to tell

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