

“Sad-Eyed Lady, Should I Wait?": A Comparative Exploration of
Classical and Twentieth Century Persephones

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in Classics

A special thanks to my thesis advisor

Professor David Luper

for encouraging and assisting me in my composition of this work.

Gratias tibi ago.

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Introduction

The myth of the rape of Persephone has permeated Western societies for millennia, with evidence of the story reaching as far back as the 8th century BCE in Hesiod's *Theogony* and as far forward as the present day. In every period in between, this myth has reoccurred, appearing in new versions, interpretations and literary allusions. The Persephone myth provides a rich and complex set of themes, making the narrative accessible and appealing for audiences and authors of every period. As Elizabeth Hayes, a scholar of English literature, notes, the myth's "wonderful richness is the reason that Western artists of all eras have reenacted it again and again."¹ Indeed, the myth shares themes and ideas which resonate across time. In its rich complexity, the Persephone myth presents the following themes and contrasts: barrenness versus fertility, light versus dark, life versus death, immortality versus mortality, mother-daughter relations, the transition from maidenhood to marriage, love and sexuality, gender dynamics, religious traditions, and power. Many of these themes deal with opposition, and even present Persephone as a paradoxical character: she represents an embodiment of these contrasting elements. This complexity and internal opposition are what creates such a compelling character, for, in manifesting these opposing traits and roles, Persephone becomes not only powerful both on earth and in the Underworld, but also manages to move easily from one realm to another, as most other divine figures, such as her mother and husband, cannot, making her an elusive and nearly unattainable figure. By gaining such powerful roles in

¹ Hayes 1994: 5.

contrasting realms and in becoming one who cannot be followed from realm to realm, an unattainable goddess, Persephone seems to take on her own agency and autonomy.

Indeed, due to these fascinating and elusive qualities of Persephone, reiterations and allusions to the myth's rich and complex themes have arisen again and again in literature since classical times. In classical texts, Persephone emerges in the ancient Greek works the *Theogony*, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, as well as other lesser known works;² she manifests herself later in the Roman works Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, and Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae* and Cicero's *Verrines*. Post-classical authors further revise and recount this myth, as writers ranging from Dante, Shakespeare, Shelley, Swinburne, Tennyson³ to modern poets Louise Glück, in her *Averno*, Rita Dove, in her *Mother Love*, as well as numerous other recent authors all allude to it;⁴ this myth has even made its way into a recent short story on divorce in *The New Yorker*, entitled "Demeter."⁵ Thus it pervades our society in a variety of contexts, used in each version not simply to call Persephone to mind, but to develop themes from the classical myth into ideas pertinent to the authors' own compositions.

Although interpretations of the Persephone myth occur in a variety of time periods, contexts and artistic modes, I am limiting my comparison to that between prominent versions of classical poetry and select versions of twentieth century poetry. I

² Cf. Gantz 1993: 64-9.

³ Cf. Reid, Davidson & Rohmann 1993: 862-70.

⁴ Cf. Foley 1994: 151-65 for further influences of the Persephone myth on modern works.

⁵ See Maile Meloy. "Demeter." *The New Yorker*. November 19th, 2012: 76-81.

first will examine the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the Persephone episodes in book 4 of Ovid's *Fasti* and book 5 of *Metamorphoses*: the three ancient versions most likely known to a twentieth century audience via their originals, translations or other intermediary versions derived from them. Evidence of intertextuality and allusion already exists between the *Homeric Hymn* and Ovid's two subsequent versions. Ovid alludes to themes and idea from the *Homeric Hymn*, using the Greek version as a source for authority and cross-textual conversation, but also reworking the myth into his own versions which better resonate with his Roman audience. In this reworking, he not only keeps a common thread alive between the preceding mythology and his own versions of the myth, but also develops his own presentations of Persephone in respect to the Cerealia, metamorphoses, and female power and autonomy. Ovid works within a tradition of allusion and intertextuality which later authors continue up through the twentieth century: the poets, echoing themes from the classical texts, rework the preceding mythology – maintaining thematic elements, yet altering the underlying meaning of the myth – in order to discuss their own contemporary matters. As scholar of English literature Lillian Feder states, “classical myth functions in modern English and American poetry as an aesthetic device which reaches into the deepest layers of personal, religious, social and political life.”⁶ Using this same device, my three twentieth century poems, “Bavarian Gentians” by D. H. Lawrence, “Two Sisters of Persephone” by Sylvia Plath, and “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands” by Bob Dylan, allude to the Persephone myth. Although none of these poets make verbatim allusions to the preceding classical texts,

⁶ Feder 1971: vii.

each draws on themes from those earlier interpretations of Persephone to reveal questions and hesitations about their own time periods and ideas.

Indeed, Lawrence, Plath and Dylan, in their respective works, address matters of their own surrounding society, time period, and perhaps even personal life – yet they veil and intensify these matters with allusion to Persephone. By incorporating elements of Persephone’s binary role and powerful nature, the poets enable themselves to rework this mythological content for the sake of expressing their own ideas within the poetry in a more powerful, authoritative and emphatic manner. Indeed, by alluding to the Persephone myth, Lawrence, Plath and Dylan each elevate their own ideas to a mythic and divine level, intensifying the sense of mystery, awe and power by portraying Persephone. Indeed, from version to version of Persephone and across the span of time from Ancient Greece to twentieth century Britain and America, these poets all retain the shared themes of Persephone’s power, agency and unattainability. While presenting Persephone in a variety of poetic contexts, the *Homeric Hymn*, Ovid, D. H. Lawrence, Sylvia Plath and Bob Dylan each examine and question the goddess’ elements of power, agency and unattainability, collectively showing a continual thread of fascination with one particular concept: Persephone’s autonomy.

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* presents a rich and complex narrative, incorporating aetiological elements, a metaphorical representation of ancient Greek society, a comparison between mortal and immortal life, a gender hierarchy, elements of fertility and procreation (both of humans and of plants), and unattainability. Although

scholars refer to this as the *Hymn to Demeter* and its opening line begins with Demeter (Δήμητρ', 1), the fact that her daughter is included in the introductory address (2) indicates that this stands as a hymn to two goddesses, both Demeter and Persephone.⁷ The ancient Greeks did not just intertwine these two as an example of a mother-daughter bond, but also tied them together in religious rites of the Eleusinian mysteries. In examining the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, many scholars have focused upon symbolic hints of the Eleusinian mysteries within the text, hoping to find evidence for a better understanding of these two goddesses' rites. For scholars of the Mysteries, this myth sheds light upon a well-kept cult secret of antiquity and thus proves a prominent area of research for this work. Scholars of ancient religion interpret Demeter's torch-bearing in search of Persephone, her abstention from food, and her interactions with Demophoön as symbolic manifestations of rites of the Mysteries.⁸ Although the Eleusinian mysteries' presence in the *Homeric Hymn* and their effect on the characterization of Demeter and Persephone certainly merit study, the *Homeric Hymn* also presents other rich areas for interpretations and analysis. As classicist Jenny Strauss Clay states, "The relation of the *Homeric Hymn* to Eleusinian cult has, to be sure, been a focal point of scholarly interest, but has also indirectly impeded the study of the poem."⁹ Thus, I, like Clay, intend to explore elements of the *Homeric Hymn* beyond the Mysteries, hoping not only to uncover a deeper understanding of Persephone's character in relation to gender, power, fertility

⁷ Cf. Richardson 1974: 136.

⁸ Cf. Clay 1989: 203-204.

⁹ Clay 1989: 202-203.

and mortality, but also to use this understanding to analyze later receptions of the Persephone myth.

Not only does the *Homeric Hymn* present a mythological example of the typical transition into marriage for a young Greek woman in ancient Greece, but it also demonstrates a stark contrast between Persephone as a maiden and Persephone as a married woman. Yet one must bear in mind that this myth, while reminiscent in some respects of an ancient Greek girl's transition into marriage, presents more extreme and unusual circumstances: her mother, Demeter, is left wholly unaware of the marital agreement, even after Persephone has already been snatched away (*H. Dem.* 44-45),¹⁰ and Persephone, initially, must entirely depart from her family and familiar society into a land with a different society, that of the dead; moreover, she must essentially die in order to make the transition into this next stage of life.¹¹ Indeed, Persephone's marriage even presents itself as irregular on a divine level, because mythological marriages of divinities often did not require the goddess to move away from her family.¹² It is, however, not unusual for a myth to present a hyperbolic example of actual ancient Greek life, so, in some ways, this appears simply an extreme example in order to present the realities of mortal life all the more powerfully. Indeed, as scholar of Greek religion Robert Parker states, "At one level, the Persephone of the myth is just Kore, 'Maiden' or 'Daughter': any maiden or daughter, that is to say, snatched away from her mother in marriage".¹³

¹⁰ Cf. Richardson 1974: 138.

¹¹ Cf. Vandiver 2002.

¹² Cf. Foley 1994: 106.

¹³ Parker 1991: 6.

Accordingly, when Persephone first appears, the narrator refers to her as θύγατρα (2), presenting her as a “daughter”; the narrator calls her κόρη (8) soon after, further stressing her position as a daughter. She later also is referred to as κόρην Δημήτερος (439), emphasizing the mother-daughter bond and, as Δημήτερος is a possessive genitive, Demeter’s possession of Persephone.¹⁴ This represents the youthful and childlike nature of Persephone prior to her abduction, and particularly connects her childhood with her mother.

The narrative further depicts the aspects of Persephone’s maidenhood in describing her flower-picking in the meadow. Just as she is bonded closely with her mother as a maiden and daughter, so too is Persephone associated with other female figures prior to her abduction. The *Homeric Hymn* emphasizes Persephone’s attachment to female figures with her own catalogue of flower-picking comrades (418-424). This surrounding of female comrades stresses Persephone’s youth and virginity at this point. Additionally, because they enjoy their youthful frolicking in the meadow together (ἡμεῖς μὲν μάλα πᾶσαι ἀν’ ἱμερτὸν λειμῶνα, 417), their comradeship and youth appear linked to the idyllic and flower-filled location. This constructs a symbolic relationship between Persephone’s youth and the meadow and flowers themselves. Indeed, the *Homeric Hymn* displays Persephone’s maidenhood in her picking of the flowers, for it presents her, in this flower-filled activity, as entirely female, playful, simple, naïve and helpless. When first in the meadow, Persephone simply plays with the other maidens (σὺν παίζουσιν κόρησι, 5), maintaining a carefree life in the presence of female age-mates. She does not

¹⁴ Although this phrase occurs after Persephone’s abduction in the narrative, it refers to a time prior to her abduction, a time when she interacted with affection with her mother back in her home on earth and Olympus (438-40).

yet interact with any male figures, but instead appears to have led a life in comfort with her mother in her childhood home and with other maidens in the meadow, free to wander the earth and pluck flowers to her heart's content. Furthermore, the lengthy catalogue of flowers she picks highlights this instance of girlish dalliance by coupling her carefree plucking with the vibrance and youth of the fresh flowers themselves (6-8).¹⁵ She acts very much like a child in the meadow, reaching for the narcissus as if it were a toy (ἄθυρμα, 17).¹⁶ Even the fact that she marvels at an object as simple as a flower (θαμβήσασ', 15) enhances the simplicity of her own amusement, and thus further constructs her as an innocent child, distracted entirely by the beauty of a flower and consequently unaware of the imminent danger.¹⁷

Beyond revealing Persephone's innocent fascination with a simple object, the presence of flowers also appears to connect directly with Persephone's own attributes – she becomes like the simple flower, the narcissus, that she covets and plucks.¹⁸ The *Homeric Hymn* refers to her as “flower-faced” (καλυκώπιδι κούρη, 8), assimilating her to the objects she takes pleasure in plucking, and linking her flowerlike epithet (καλυκώπιδι) with her identification as maiden (κούρη). Moreover, Persephone is referred to as a θάλος

¹⁵ Cf. Richardson 1974: 56.

¹⁶ Maidens would dedicate toys to Artemis on their wedding night. One might consider the sacrifice of this narcissus Persephone's offering to Artemis. Cf. Suter 2002: 56.

¹⁷ This innocent act of ignorance follows in a tradition of abductions of maidens. Foley notes that girls are frequently abducted either while gathering flowers or near water (1994: 35).

¹⁸ One might also note the potential irony in Persephone's desire for the narcissus and then her own transformation into such a flower. In a sense then, she finds herself amazed by her own visage, much like Narcissus, after whom the flower is named. It is however uncertain whether the narrator was aware of the Narcissus myth at this time. Cf. Suter 2002: 55.

(66), again presenting her as a plant, and thus flower-like¹⁹; she later also is modified by the adjectival form of this noun (θαλερῆν, 79). Additionally, the narcissus and Persephone are both considered a “marvel” – the narrator calls the narcissus θαυμαστὸν (10) and Persephone θαῦμα (403).²⁰ This not only creates a connection between her and the land’s fertility early on in the narrative, but also presents her as a flower, an object representative of life, vibrancy and beauty – a symbol of the earth, in contrast to the dead and barren Underworld. Yet as she would end the narcissus’ life and vibrancy by plucking it, thus essentially killing it, so is she herself plucked, led away from the world of life and, in essence, killed. Just as she reaches to pick the flower (ὠρέξατο χερσὶν ἄμ’ ἄμφω / καλὸν ἄθυρμα λαβεῖν, 15-16), another, Hades simultaneously reaches to pluck and snatches her up (ἀρπάξας, 19).²¹ Thus Hades leads her from her childhood, represented by the world of flowers and the mortal realm, into adulthood as his queen and into the darkness of the Underworld.

The *Homeric Hymn* further represents this contrast between the upper world and the Underworld as the dichotomy between Persephone’s childhood and adulthood – for her move to the Underworld results in a physical separation from her family, and also, in altering her location, this transition alters Persephone’s own identity. This descent into the Underworld develops a contrast between Persephone’s identity as a carefree virgin with her mother, a symbol of fertility, vitality and vibrance, and her identity as the wife to

¹⁹ Felson-Rubin & Deal define θάλλος as “flower” both in reference to Persephone (*H. Dem.* 66) and in reference to Demophoön (*H. Dem.* 187) (1994: 192).

²⁰ Suter 2002: 55.

²¹ Suter argues that Persephone, by reaching forth for the flower, leads to her abduction, and therefore her maturation; “she has indicated that, on some level, she is ready to destroy this symbol of her childhood, that she is willing to leave childhood behind” (2002: 54).

Hades and queen of the Underworld, a symbol of death. Although Persephone is an immortal goddess, she finds herself in the circumstances of a dying mortal, for Hades' capture of her essentially symbolizes her death, as he takes her into the Underworld with no intention of permitting her return to earth. Her *katabasis* into the Underworld signifies both her transition into marriage and her transition into death, both considered major thresholds in the life of an ancient Greek woman²² – both also represent events which would often similarly separate a young woman from her family. At one moment, Persephone undergoes two major life changes which create a chasm between herself and her mother, revealing this rape as the catalyst for polarity between life with her mother and death with her spouse. With Hades she resides in the realm of darkness (ζόφον ἠερόεντα, 80), a representation of the death below; yet, in the world her mother inhabits, many vibrant flowers surround her (ρόδα καὶ κρόκον ἠδ' ἴα καλὰ / λειμῶν' ἄμ μαλακὸν καὶ ἀγαλλίδας ἠδ' ὑάκινθον / νάρκισσόν, 6-8). Thus the distinct opposition between life with Demeter and life with Hades arises through the basic contrast between darkness and death and vibrancy and life. Furthermore, with Persephone gone, Demeter takes plant fertility, the symbol and sustenance of life, from humanity, making the earth yield no crops (305-311). Thus Persephone's time in the Underworld represents death for not only her, but for the plants and humans of the earthly realm, as well as the resultant deprivation of offerings for the gods (311-12). Indeed, just as earlier, on a smaller scale, Persephone's abduction occurred simultaneously with her taking of the narcissus' life (15-19), so too, on a much larger scale, does her time of residence in the Underworld

²² Cf. Vandiver 2002. In Ancient Greek society, because women would often die in childbirth, sometimes a young woman's transition in marriage would also likewise signify her imminent transition into death.

coincide with death of all nature (305-309). In contrast, just as prior to her abduction she is associated with flowers and plant-life, so later does her annual return to the upper world coincide with the period of fertility, the blooming of spring (401-402), resulting in her connection to plant-life once again.

The *Homeric Hymn's* incorporation of the mortal boy, Demophoön, with whom Demeter attempts to replace Persephone further informs the audience about Persephone. The young goddess shares similarities and differences with her mother's mortal nursling. Both children, innocent, are altered by the actions of others and, as a result, receive certain roles and powers. Persephone's helplessness in the face of her abduction, where all she can do is cry (21), corresponds to Demophoön's own helplessness as an infant, as he still requires nourishment of a nurse (παῖδα ... τρέφε, 219).²³ Furthermore, the narrator identifies both children as a sprout (θάλος 66; 188), drawing a parallel between them. By presenting similarities between the immortal child, Persephone, and the mortal one, Demophoön, the interaction between Demeter and Demophoön not only reveals Demeter's desire for her immortal child, but also presents the unchangeable distinction and divide between mortals and immortals. Demeter attempts to transform Demophoön into an immortal child (242), anointing him in ambrosia and immersing him in flames (236-41); she is prevented by his mother (243-49), just as she herself later prevents the total loss of her own child to Hades. In each instance, an outsider attempts to change the ontological state of the child: Demeter tries to make mortal Demophoön immortal, Hades

²³ Cf. Felson-Rubrin & Deal 1994: 193.

tries to take immortal Persephone into death.²⁴ Neither can make permanent this ontological change, for the mortal boy cannot become immortal and must die (262), and the immortal goddess cannot die as a mortal does. Thus, this illustrates the firm divide between mortal and immortal life. Each child, however, does retain a certain level of power from their experiences: Demophoön retains honor from having a divine nurse (τιμῆ, 263), Persephone returns to the Underworld annually and holds powers as queen (365-67) and also receives the ability to continually move from one realm to another.

By the hymn's conclusion, Zeus determines that neither Hades nor Demeter shall wholly possess Persephone, but instead she herself will inhabit the two separate lands, symbolizing two opposing forces. Persephone comes to represent the arrival of spring, fertility and life – also, paradoxically, winter, barrenness and death (305-312). This presents Persephone as a unique combination of contrasting elements: she bears significance for a Greek mythological explanation of both agriculture and eschatology.²⁵ She resides half the time in the Underworld, a place to which Olympians, aside from Hermes, do not usually descend,²⁶ and the other of half in the upper world, a place where Hades does not typically ascend. Yet, in this, she gains dominion over two opposite areas, as Hades tells her she will rule over the living (δεσπόσσεις πάντων ὅποσα ζῶει τε καὶ ἔρπει, 365) and the afterlife of mortals (τῶν δ' ἀδικησάντων τίσις ἔσσεται ἡματα πάντα,

²⁴ Hades' abduction of Persephone into the Underworld symbolizes death. Cf. Felson-Rubrin & Deal 1994: 191.

²⁵ Cf. Parker 1991: 11.

²⁶ Cf. Vandiver 2002.

367)²⁷ – for those who do not appease her in life will receive an eternal punishment, τίσις, in the afterlife. Therefore, it seems, in being split into two dissimilar roles, Persephone holds power in both areas – yet, she possesses these only through the manipulations of her husband, mother and father: Hades, Demeter and Zeus.

Despite her advancement in power, Persephone obtains none of it by her own volition, acquiring it instead through the actions of others. Thus, Persephone herself, although a symbol of power by the myth's conclusion, plays a passive role in her own outcome. Classicist Ann Suter, however, contends that Persephone, in picking the narcissus, indicates her own readiness to leave childhood, thus, in a sense, playing an active role in her own abduction. Suter argues that, viewed through the psychoanalytical lens of an object relations model, this moment in the *Homeric Hymn* falls at Persephone's early adolescence. This psychological model implies a daughter's innate impetus to move away from her mother at the time of adolescence, making Persephone's transition to wife of her own nature.²⁸ Suter further asserts that, on the cusp of adulthood, Persephone's own natural impulse to destroy the flower (15-16), a flower which represents her childhood, signifies her willingness to leave childhood.²⁹ Yet, as Marilyn Arthur argues, Persephone's desire for the narcissus is an act of her naiveté,³⁰ and as a result, she harbors

²⁷ Foley asserts that, while Hades tactfully does not explicitly communicate Persephone's role as queen of the Underworld here, he hints to her future powers in line 367 (1994: 55).

²⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines this as "a subsection of psychoanalysis which prioritizes the role of the object in childhood development." This theory focuses on the infant (subject)-mother (object) relationship, and the development away from mother as object as the child matures (Buchanan 2008). Suter notes that in this psychological progress, a girl rejects her mother's companionship for that of other female companions, as Persephone does by playing with her age-mates in the meadow, and after this progresses towards life with a husband (2002: 53-54).

²⁹ Suter 2002: 54.

³⁰ Arthur 1994: 220.

no conscious intent or wish for her abduction and consequential transition into adulthood. Furthermore, the narrator notes that Persephone is “unwilling” (ἀέκουσαν, 19). Rather, Zeus and Hades force this transition upon the unwilling maiden. Not only does Zeus plan Persephone’s marriage to Hades (Διὸς βουλῆσι, 9) and not reveal this to Demeter (4), but Zeus also provides Persephone herself with no foreknowledge – the maiden screams at her captor, and unaware that Zeus himself plotted this, calls to her father for help (ιάχησε δ’ ἄρ’ ὄρθια φωνῆ, / κεκλομένη πατέρα Κρονίδην ὑπατον καὶ ἄριστον, 20-21). Indeed, the narrator further emphasizes Persephone’s helplessness in her circumstances, asserting a second time that Zeus arranged for her marriage and abduction, and that she herself felt unwilling (τὴν δ’ ἀεκαζομένην ἤγεν Διὸς ἐννεσίησι, 30). Persephone powerlessly falls victim to the plots and agreements of her father and her uncle/new husband. Indeed, she herself, although unwilling, shows no struggle against her abductor, but instead merely laments (ὀλοφυρομένην, 20) and cries to her father (21), hoping that another will take the active role and rescue her. Beyond this, Demeter uses her powers, wiping out human agriculture and thus offerings for the gods by means of blight (305-12), to coerce Zeus into allowing Persephone’s return to earth (334-39). Here again, although Persephone shows a desire to return to earth and Olympus, as is evident in her joy at Hades’ release of her (γῆθησεν ... Περσεφόνη, 270 emphasis added), she makes no effort to escape, but instead finds release through the actions of her parents and husband. Indeed, Hades even must tell her to leave (ἔρχεο, Περσεφόνη, 360), and then takes it upon himself to bestow the powers she receives as queen of the Underworld (365-69). Persephone falls into all her circumstances not as result of her own will, but stemming from the actions of others.

The act which makes certain the permanence of Persephone's role as queen of the Underworld, her consumption of the pomegranate, like the abduction itself, results from Hades acting upon a passive Persephone. Hades ensures that Persephone will return once again to him, giving her the pomegranate that binds her to this return (371-72). Once again he uses his resources and power, here a pomegranate, to force her return, which leads to her eventual power as goddess of the Underworld. While Ann Suter maintains that in consuming the pomegranate – whether it actually represents just eating of a fruit or symbolizes sexual intercourse³¹ – Persephone claims the autonomy of her body and establishes her maturity,³² the fact that Hades gets her to eat the seeds by stealth (λάθρη, 372), thus deceiving her, makes it appear that Persephone, just as when she plucked the narcissus, acts again out of innocence and naiveté, not her own volition.³³ Persephone simply believes that Hades is both bestowing powers upon her and allowing her to return to the earth. Furthermore, when Persephone herself recounts the experience, describing her eating of the pomegranate in more detail, she attests that Hades stealthily (λάθρη) put the pomegranate seeds in her mouth and forced her to eat them (411-13), making herself the passive victim of Hades' force. Again, just as during the abduction (19), Persephone is referred to as “unwilling” (ἄκουσαν, 413). Here Hades' action upon the unwilling Persephone results in her powers as queen of the Underworld (365-67), her transformation into the symbol of coming spring (401-403), and her life of divided time

³¹ Foley contends that Persephone's consumption of the pomegranate may represent consummation of her marriage and the pomegranate seed may suggest sexual seduction (1994: 57).

³² Suter argues that Persephone's choice to consume the pomegranate seeds establishes a break from away from the control of her mother (2002: 58).

³³ Richardson states, “she is full of joy, and does not seem to see Hades' trick” (1974: 57).

(398-400). Now, Persephone does show some agency in her ability to speak and explain her experiences to Demeter (405-33), but Demeter necessitates this speech by asking Persephone to reassure her that she did not consume food (393-94). Furthermore, Persephone's speech differs little from her screams during her abduction (21), and neither of these vocalizations constitutes an actively physical attempt to alter her own circumstances. Therefore, as Zeus, Demeter and Hades all treat Persephone as a passive pawn, they create her circumstances, and confer upon her her powers and role as a goddess.

Although both Hades and Demeter possess the power to alter Persephone and her circumstances, due to the struggle of power between themselves, neither successfully places Persephone in his/her desired position: she remains permanently neither on earth as Demeter's daughter or in the Underworld as Hades' wife. This struggle begins with the abduction, in which, although Hades had Zeus' consent, he still had to abduct her, rather than having her handed over in marriage, because Demeter had not consented³⁴ – this power struggle continues throughout the hymn. Indeed, Demeter's position as Persephone's mother, and particularly her desire to retain her daughter, complicates the transference of Persephone from father's hand to husband's, causing none of those who tug Persephone back and forth to actually permanently receive her. Instead they must share her, positioning her in a rotating system of a third of the year in the Underworld and the rest on earth and Olympus (398-400). Thus, this passive pawn Persephone shows herself, almost paradoxically, to be an elusive figure, manipulable by those around her,

³⁴ Cf. Clay 1989: 209.

and yet not wholly attainable. She permanently fills neither role as daughter nor as wife, instead caused to vacillate between the two, making her belong completely to neither Hades nor Demeter – neither to the Underworld nor to the earth. Therefore, although the *Homeric Hymn* represents Persephone as a passive character and one placed within circumstances by father, mother and husband, it also reveals a certain level of power and autonomy for the goddess. By receiving her roles as both a goddess of the upper world and queen of the Underworld, Persephone obtains power over mortals in both realms, a status of power which no other god or goddess possesses. Furthermore, in developing into a goddess of both realms, and consequently becoming an unattainable figure, Persephone receives not only powers in each place, but, arguably, a position of autonomy.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*

In the first century BCE, Ovid produced two Roman versions of the Persephone myth, one in book 4 of the *Fasti* and one in book 5 of the *Metamorphoses*, revealing the influence of the *Homeric Hymn*, as well as that of Hellenistic versions.³⁵ As both the *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses* were not complete at the time of Ovid's exile in 8 C.E., the question of which version of the Proserpina myth Ovid completed first remains open – regardless, as Stephen Hinds argues, Ovid could very well have composed or edited the two versions simultaneously, allowing each to influence the construction of the other.³⁶ Beyond this, Ovid incorporates further intertextuality, making allusion to Cicero's *Verrines* 2.4.106-107 and utilizing both verbal echoes of the text and its location of the

³⁵ Cf. Hinds 1987: 56.

³⁶ Cf. Hinds 1987: 10-11.

abduction at Enna.³⁷ This allusion to Cicero better places Ovid's version in an area of Roman rhetorical and literary knowledge. In developing his own versions of the myth, Ovid reveals a varied set of intertextual origins, showing use of the preceding texts for authoritative purposes,³⁸ but also integrates multiple sources in order to advance a new version that still resonates with its origins. At the same time, Ovid does not simply retell the myth from his sources, but instead reworks the story, making critical changes to the myth's location, story and function. He demonstrates that one version, that of the *Fasti*, is for indicating the Cerealia festival in the Roman calendar, and the other, that of the *Metamorphoses*, serves as depictions of additional *exempla* in a series of mythical metamorphoses. In the *Metamorphoses* version Ovid also changes the power dynamics and the roles female figures, and particularly Persephone herself, play in developing the myth's outcome from those in the *Homeric Hymn's* narrative. Indeed, in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid enhances Proserpina's agency, presenting a figure in great contrast to the passive object Persephone appears as in the *Homeric Hymn*. The *Metamorphoses*, in exhibiting far more prominent female characters, demonstrating physical transformations of characters and creating a narrative far different from the Demophoön episode in the *Homeric Hymn's* center, diverges from the *Fasti*, a version which makes more constant and explicit references to the *Homeric Hymn*.³⁹

In the *Fasti*, Ovid presents thematic echoes from the *Homeric Hymn*, similarly incorporating religion, fertility and mortality, while also maintaining a similar narrative.

³⁷ Cf. Hinds 1987: 38-42.

³⁸ Hinds suggests that Ovid's use of multiple Ciceronian allusions endorses the idea that Roman readers of the *Metamorphoses* would have been well-aware of Cicero's version (1987: 40).

³⁹ Cf. Hinds 1987: 71.

The *Fasti* refers to a Roman religious festival, the Cerealia, much as the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* refers to a Greek religious festival, the Eleusinian mysteries. Furthermore, in both the *Fasti* and the *Homeric Hymn*, Demeter and Ceres each spend time at the place where the Greek religious rites originated, Eleusis.⁴⁰ As Ovid retains the religious aspect of the myth, yet switches it from Greek religious practices to a Roman one, so too does he retain themes from the *Homeric Hymn* and rework them for his Roman version. Thus, in his *Fasti* version of the Persephone myth, Ovid displays allusions to and an intertextual conversation with the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, yet he also deviates from it, adapting it to convey his own presentation of Roman society and ideas.

Like the *Homeric Hymn*, Ovid begins the *Fasti* version – as well as the *Metamorphoses* one (*Prima Ceres*, *Met.* 5.341) – with mention of the goddess (*Hinc Cereris ludi*, *Fast.* 4.397), and then too demonstrates the goddess' and her daughter's roles as divinities of fertility. Just as the *Homeric Hymn* does, he shows Ceres as responsible for fertility of the land, yet, unlike the *Homeric Hymn*, he furthers the connection between Ceres and plant fertility for the mortals' benefit by introducing her role in creating agriculture (395-404). In this choice, Ovid creates a close association between Ceres and the earth's fertility as she holds power over and aids mortals. Ovid also presents Proserpina as associated with this fertility, foregrounding the younger goddess' own eventual power over the land and sustenance of mortals: that she becomes a symbol of the coming and going seasons. As the flowers which Persephone picks are catalogued in the *Homeric Hymn* (*H. Dem.* 6-8), so too does Ovid catalogue Proserpina's

⁴⁰ Fantham rightly assesses that, compared to the hymn, the stay at Eleusis is a mere notice in the *Fasti*, as the Sicilian landscape plays a larger role, placing the myth in more Italic origins (1998: 173).

flowers in *Fasti* (437-42), similarly connecting the maiden's childhood activities, those she can do while with her mother on earth, with the fertility of flowers. In the meadow Ovid refers to Proserpina as *filia*, much like the *Homeric Hymn's* Greek θύγατρα (2), and Ovid also presents her comrades as girls with girlish minds (*puellis*, 425 and *puellares animos*, 433), further emphasizing the association between Proserpina, as her mother's daughter, and fertility, while also drawing attention to the girlhood and innocence she initially possesses while in this flourishing *locus amoenus* setting. Therefore, Ovid links fertility and both goddesses' power over it with Proserpina's life as a maiden with her mother on earth.

In further connection with the *Homeric Hymn*, Ovid's *Fasti* version shares a center sub-story, much like the Demophoön episode, presenting Ceres' attempt to transform Triptolemus into an immortal child. Just as Demeter first meets Metaneira's and Celeus' mortal daughters (*H. Dem.* 105-17), all still maidens, so too does she first speak with a mortal maiden in this version: one daughter of the same parents (*virgo*, 513); in each instance the maidens first address her. Yet Ovid's version differs here in that Ceres speaks more with Celeus, the father, himself, showing him to be a humble and welcoming man. In the *Homeric Hymn*, Celeus himself does not interact directly with Demeter, but instead his daughters bring her home and his wife makes arrangements for Ceres to stay with them (160-223). Furthermore, the *Homeric Hymn* represents Celeus as powerful and almost heroic, describing him with adjectives such as διοτρεφής (184), ἀγήνωρ (155), and εὐρυβίης (294), presenting him as a man of high status in his society. Ovid's Celeus and his family, on the other hand, embody a more humble and rustic

lifestyle than implied by the *Homeric Hymn*.⁴¹ Despite these differences, Demeter and Ceres both join the mortal families to nurse the son, and each attempts to transform the boy by placing him in fire, making a surrogate for her own lost immortal child; in both versions Metaneira, the boy's true mother, prevents the ontological change (*H. Dem.* 248-49; *Fast.* 4.550-56). Thus, each version points to the mother-child bond, as well as the proper ontological state of mortals and immortals – showing that the boy cannot become immortal and Proserpina cannot entirely succumb to the Underworld as mortals do in death. With these resonances, Ovid shares in the same story as the *Homeric Hymn*.

The interactions between the gods and goddesses in the *Fasti* version also recall similar interactions from the *Homeric Hymn*. In the *Homeric Hymn*, Demeter consults Helios about Persephone's abduction (*H. Dem.* 60-87), and in the *Fasti*, Ceres consults Sol (*Fast.* 4.583-84)⁴² – in each, the Sun god reveals the maiden's location to her mother and praises the power of Proserpina's new husband. Similarly, when Demeter and Ceres confront Zeus and Jupiter in their respective versions, the two fathers send Hermes (*H. Dem.* 335-45) and Mercury (*Fast.* 4. 605) respectively as correspondent between the under and upper worlds. Thus, in the *Fasti*, Ovid maintains a close correspondence to the *Homeric Hymn*'s narrative, retaining the male gods' roles in conveying information regarding Persephone's circumstances. In these allusions, Ovid retains the importance and agency of the male gods in the myth, particularly in Ceres' choice to seek their aid, thus still demonstrating a patriarchal society.

⁴¹ In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Metaneira, her daughters and Demophoön present a more regal household. Celeus also appears to hold more power in their city, rather than being a simple man of a country-life, as he is in the *Fasti*. Cf. Hinds 1987: 64-6.

⁴² Cf. Hinds 1987: 58-59.

Despite these numerous close correspondences, Ovid does, in certain aspects, stray from the *Homeric Hymn* in his *Fasti* version. Although Ovid retains the trip to Eleusis, he first has Ceres wander Sicily, altering the myth to better suit his location and period by placing it in a more Italic location (461-504).⁴³ Furthermore, when she is abducted, Ovid has Proserpina call to her mother (*io carissima mater*, 447) rather than her father as she does in the *Homeric Hymn* (*H. Dem.* 21). Again, this change better suits Ovid's context: as Hinds states, "in Roman culture at least, a cry to a mother is more suggestive of a child's domestic distress than a cry to a father."⁴⁴ Although Ovid retains the male gods' active roles as those to whom Ceres looks for aid, the absence of Proserpina's call to her father to a certain extent diminishes the concept of a patriarchal society. Indeed, in contrast to the *Homeric Hymn*, Ovid lessens the prominence of gender hierarchy in the *Fasti*, perhaps hinting at a greater importance of the female characters, as Ceres, not her father, seems to matter most to Proserpina here. Beyond this, Ovid does not attribute the rape to a father-husband agreement, an agreement made between Zeus and Hades in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, but instead attributes it to a theme more appropriate to elegy: love. Indeed, when Ceres confronts Jupiter, he excuses the rape with the reason of love (*excusat amore*, 597).⁴⁵ Although Ovid does make direct allusion to the narrative and themes from the *Homeric Hymn*, he also makes slight changes to the myth in his *Fasti* version, better adapting it to his own contemporary purposes: he transforms

⁴³ This Sicilian location also more reflects the influence of the earlier Roman version of the myth, Cicero's location of the rape at Enna in *Verrines* II. 4.

⁴⁴ Hinds 1987: 61.

⁴⁵ Ovid similarly uses love to link Persephone and Dis in Orpheus' supplicating speech of *Metamorphoses* 10 (*Vos quoque iunxit Amor*, 10.29).

the religious and hymnic Greek version into one fitting the Roman calendar, society and elegy.

In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid continues to echo elements of the *Homeric Hymn*, but further alters Persephone's story, developing a new story of metamorphoses and changed characteristics of Proserpina. Ovid so greatly changes his Proserpina from the Persephone/Proserpina in both the *Homeric Hymn* and the *Fasti* that he presents not a passive maiden, helplessly moved and manipulated, but rather a character with agency, autonomy and power. The *Metamorphoses* version, on the one hand, echoes themes from the *Homeric Hymn*, emphasizing fertility, the dichotomy between Persephone as helpless maiden and as a mature powerful queen of the Underworld, her eventual dual role as both symbol of returning fertility on earth and queen of the dead, and divinities' influence over mortals. On the other hand, Ovid differs from the *Homeric Hymn* in several respects: he makes *amor* (Ov. *Met.* 5.396), just as in the *Fasti*, rather than a father-uncle agreement culpable for the rape, he incorporates numerous permanent metamorphoses,⁴⁶ he creates more powerful and outspoken female figures, and he provides Proserpina herself with a greater level of agency. Therefore, he alters the myth, presenting what appears to be a more equal society between male and female divinities, a society with more autonomous female figures.

As the *Homeric Hymn* does, Ovid demonstrates a distinct contrast between the fertility Proserpina's earthly life with Ceres represents and the barrenness of Proserpina's life in the Underworld. Prior to Proserpina's abduction there exists constant spring

⁴⁶ This differs from the hymn, in that Demeter's one attempt to enact a metamorphose, hoping to change Demophoön's ontological state from human to divinity, fails.

(*perpetuum ver est*, 391), a time at which Proserpina picks an abundance of flowers in a carefree manner (391-94). As she fills the folds of her clothing with flowers (*sinumque / inplet*, 393-94), Proserpina, keeping them near her body, and thus assimilating them almost as a part of herself, forms a close association between herself and these florid symbols of fertility. Further connecting the myth to fertility, Ovid remarks that first Ceres created agriculture (*Prima Ceres unco glaebam dimovit aratro*, 341) and she also first provided fecundity to the land (*prima dedit fruges alimentaue mitia terris*, 342). In this description, Ceres represents fertility and agriculture, and Proserpina, as her daughter, possesses the same associations when on earth. Indeed, Proserpina affects Ceres' interactions with agriculture and the earth. Just as Demeter, having lost her child, causes a blight in the *Homeric Hymn*, when Dis takes Proserpina away, Ceres likewise takes fertility from the land in the *Metamorphoses* (477-86).⁴⁷ Ergo, barrenness occurs when Proserpina inhabits the Underworld, a sharp contrast to the perennial spring and flower-plucking of her time on earth (391-94). Ovid, however, modifies this concrete contrast between Proserpina's life on earth as symbolic of fertility and her time in the Underworld as symbolic of barrenness and death. Unlike in the *Homeric Hymn*, where a sharp distinction appears, in *Metamorphoses*, Ovid places a lush garden within the Underworld itself (*cultis ... hortis*, 535), somewhat blurring the lines between the boundaries of earth and the Underworld, and consequently, between life and death. With the adjective *cultus*, meaning "cultivated," Ovid further allows Ceres' world – as she first created such

⁴⁷ Anderson notes here that, unlike in *the Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in which Demeter causes a blight upon the land due to inactivity, in these lines (477-86), Ceres actively attacks the land, punishing it for the loss of her daughter (1997: 547). In this version, Ceres plays a more active and aggressive role; moreover, she does not take away fertility to harm the gods' receiving of offerings, but rather does it to punish the earth itself.

cultivation as the bringer of agriculture – to seep into Dis’ world of the dead, thus, to an extent, integrating both of Proserpina’s worlds into one. Therefore, cultivation and life spring up in the region which embodies the opposite, and also appear at a time in which Proserpina’s residence there causes death and fruitlessness on the earth. In this way, Ovid suggests that Proserpina signifies a blurring of these lines herself, simultaneously symbolizing vitality and fertility and death and infertility. Yet Ovid goes beyond simply blurring the boundaries of life and death. Indeed, he also inverts the earth and the Underworld, presenting the Underworld as fertile (535) at a time when the earth remains dead (477-86). Here, Proserpina’s two worlds collide and integrate in a manner far less apparent in the *Homeric Hymn*, for, although Hades offers pomegranate seeds, no garden appears in the *Homeric Hymn*. In colliding the two worlds, however, Ovid nonetheless still draws a contrast and a boundary between Proserpina’s life with her mother and life of death with Dis.

Just as in *the Homeric Hymn*, while Proserpina first resides on earth with her mother, she possesses childlike and naïve attributes, but once her role in the Underworld is fully established, she transforms into a more mature and powerful figure. Ovid presents her initially as girlish, calling her *filia virgo* (374), her grief *virgineus* (*virgineum ... dolorem*, 401), her eagerness *puellaris* (*puellari studio*, 393) and her age *puerilis* (*puerilibus ... annis*, 400) – in each instance, he emphasizes her maidenhood, using words related to *virgo*, or her childhood, using words related to *puella* and *puer*. He also stresses her role as Ceres’ daughter, using the word *filia*, and, unlike in the *Homeric Hymn* in which she calls to her father for aid, as Jupiter is wholly absent from her cries in this

version, Ovid further highlights the mother-daughter connection by having Proserpina call to her mother more often, *saepius*, than anyone else (*matrem saepius ... / clamat*, 397-98). Ovid also points to her childishly naïve nature, noting the simplicity of her thoughts and desires, associating her with *simplicitas* (400) and presenting her simple yearning for flowers. Again, as in the *Homeric Hymn*, the flowers seem to represent her carefree childhood. Indeed, Ovid recalls Persephone's childish and simple delight in picking flowers from the *Homeric Hymn* (*H. Dem.* 417 - 425) with lines 391-2, for, just as she played in the meadow as a child in the *Homeric Hymn* (*παίζομεν*, *H. Dem.* 425), so too does she in *Metamorphoses* (*ludit*, 392).⁴⁸ Moreover, in her playful plucking of flowers, Proserpina shows such simplicity that she laments not her abduction wholeheartedly, but also, more explicitly expressed, the loss of her flowers (*collecti flores tunicis cecidere remissis, / ... / haec quoque virgineum movit iactura dolorem*, 399-401). It appears as if she does not realize that her true peril is not the loss of few earthly flowers, but loss of her life on earth entirely. Yet, as these flowers symbolize her maidenhood, particularly because her grief itself is "maidenly" (*virgineum ... dolorem*), this loss and her subsequent grief can be seen, as Anderson attests, as "loss of her girlish pleasures and innocence."⁴⁹ Therefore, in her simple and innocent lamentation over flowers, Proserpina simultaneously laments loss of that same innocence, but shows little ability to fully comprehend her suffering or physically fight against it. At this point, like Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn*, aside from snatching flowers (536), she is passive.

⁴⁸ Cf. Hinds 1987: 78.

⁴⁹ Anderson 1997: 540.

Proserpina displays a similar simplicity once already in the Underworld by snatching the pomegranate, just as she did the flowers – in this act, however, her simplicity does not represent her lamentation of loss as she is passively carried off, but instead it depicts her own agency in prompting her own resulting circumstances. As she wanders alone and autonomously in the Underworld’s garden, Ovid calls Proserpina *simplex* (535). She snatches the pomegranate (*puniceum curva decerpserat arbore pomum*, 536 emphasis added), echoing her earlier snatching of flowers (*violas aut candida lilia carpit*, 392 emphasis added).⁵⁰ In each instance, Proserpina shows a similar moment of simplicity, drawn in by the beauty of some natural object. This reveals her simple desires for basic objects of physical beauty, thus demonstrating her persisting naïve and childlike nature. Indeed, her own nature appears entirely at fault for her eventual outcome. In contrast to the *Homeric Hymn*, Dis plays no role in her consumption of the pomegranate, and thus Proserpina suffers no deception or force as a passive figure, but instead, with the active verbs *decerpserat* (536) and *presserat* (538), she actively and singlehandedly consumes the pomegranate and prompts her own resulting fate. Indeed, Hinds argues it is her persistence in the *simplicitas* revealed in her first crisis, her abduction while plucking a flower, that leads to her second downfall, making her inhabitation of the Underworld permanent by consuming the pomegranate, as well⁵¹ – ergo, Proserpina, in an active role, does not endure the prompting and control of others, but decides her own fate. Although the adjective *simplex* (535) implies that she consumes the pomegranate unaware of the consequences, the fact that she attempts to silence the

⁵⁰ Cf. Hinds 1987: 88.

⁵¹ Hinds 1987: 89.

witness to this act (*testem*, 543), Ascalaphus, by transforming him into an owl (539-550), shows a certain awareness of the consequences which occur from one witnessing her consumption.⁵² One might argue that this act of cruel transformation potentially reveals Proserpina's own knowledge that eating the pomegranate ensures her stay in the Underworld, and, consequently, establishes her permanent role as the adult queen. In this instance, Suter's assertion about Persephone's self-determining choice of her own outcome by plucking the narcissus and later consuming the pomegranate in *the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* seems to accord better with Proserpina in *Metamorphoses*, as Ovid's goddess shows autonomous agency.⁵³ In this version, Proserpina certainly chooses on her own to pick and eat the pomegranate, perhaps, in this sense, playing an active role in deciding to transform herself from maiden into wife and queen. Beyond this, her choice and ability to silence this witness demonstrates her agency and power over those in the Underworld as its queen, called here *regina Erebi* (543).

Indeed, once abducted into the Underworld, Proserpina transforms into a more mature and powerful figure, referred to by Arethusa as *regina* (507), *inferni pollens* and *matrona tyranni* (508), not only a queen and a mature *matrona*, but one who wields power over others, rather than just a snatched object. She even shows the power to change the fate and form of others by transforming Ascalaphus into an owl, revealing her own power over elements of nature (543-550) – for she alters Ascalaphus' innate

⁵² Anderson notes that Calliope calls Ascalaphus cruel “on the dubious grounds that he robbed Proserpina of her return—regardless of her eating the seeds” (1997: 554-55). This reveals Proserpina's knowledge of her own transgression, consumption of an underworld food, and the consequence of this act being known, a required stay in the Underworld.

⁵³ See note 20. Suter further contends that, in psychoanalytic analysis, by eating the pomegranate, Persephone takes control of her own body and decides to share part of her life “with her ‘bedmate’ as an adult female” (2002: 57-9)

ontological state. In this transformative act, she also shows herself becoming much like her adult mother, for Ceres transforms a child into an animal out of anger, as well: she turns a boy into a small lizard for mocking her (451-58).⁵⁴ This not only illustrates Proserpina playing a similar role to her mother, but also demonstrates the power of both goddesses. Thus Proserpina develops into a mature and powerful goddess. Indeed, She reappears later in *Metamorphoses*, in book 10, now holding shared power with her husband, for Orpheus approaches and sings a beseeching song to them both (10.15-18), and Proserpina, as *regia coniunx* (46), along with her husband, accepts Orpheus' plea (46-47). In this, Ovid shows Proserpina undergoing a metamorphosis, transforming from a naïve and powerless child, originally the maiden daughter of Ceres, into a queen who holds power over mortals and inhabitants of the Underworld, and mature wife to Dis.

As Proserpina performs a more active and powerful role in this Ovidian version of the myth, so too do other female figures play more prominent and bolder roles in this version. Unlike in the *Homeric Hymn*, in which Zeus is culpable for the rape, at the beginning of Ovid's version, Venus is responsible. Seeing Dis wandering through Sicily, Venus compels *Amor* to strike Dis with love for the sake of increasing her own power (365-74). It is a desire for her own and her son's power, as she asks, *cur non matrisque tuumque / imperium profers?* (371-72), that instigates Proserpina's rape. Venus desires to extend their power into Tartarus (*Tartara quid cessant*, 371) and to prevent Proserpina from becoming a virgin goddess like Pallas and Diana (*Cereris quoque filia virgo, / si*

⁵⁴ In accordance with this idea that Proserpina undergoes a metamorphosis into Ceres, Hinds points out that as Ceres was *maestae* (*Met.* 5.564), soon after, Proserpina is (*Met.* 5.569); likewise, as Ceres was shrouded in a clouds of despair (*ibi toto nubila vultu / ante Iovem passis stetit invidiosa capillis*, *Met.* 5.512-13), later Persephone is (*laeta deae frons est, ut sol, qui tectus aquosis / nubibus ante fuit, victis e nubibus exit*, *Met.* 5.570-1). Thus he shows that Ovid uses like-language to display Proserpina's transformation into an adult and powerful goddess, just as her mother (1987: 95-6).

patiemur; erit, 376-77), others who offend her reputation (375-76). The rape is a power-play by Venus, and so a female figure causes Dis' action of rape. Also unlike in the *Homeric Hymn*, a female figure directly addresses Dis about Proserpina: Cyene. Not only does she speak about the mother first, calling Dis' action forced and inappropriate towards her (*non potes invitae Cereris gener esse*, 415), but rather than leaving Proserpina as an object transferred from her mother to a husband, Cyene also addresses Proserpina's agency in this marriage, saying she herself should have been asked and not simply snatched (*roganda, / non rapienda fuit*, 415-16). Cyene furthers this idea by comparing her husband Anapis' wooing of her to Proserpina's present circumstances, pointing out that he did not take her by terrifying force, but persuaded her (*exorata tamen, nec, ut haec, exterrita nupsi*, 418). In this, Cyene pleads for a more balanced society, one in which both mother and daughter are consulted by the husband in the decision of marriage, and one in which the woman actively agrees to marry. Whether or not Ovid intends this as an honest push for female rights is questionable, for, as Latin literature scholar William S. Anderson asserts, Cyene's comparison of her trivial love to that of a god like Dis shows the ineptitude of the female narrator, nymph Calliope, and causes one to wonder if Ovid means for this episode to be comedic.⁵⁵ Regardless of authorial intent, however, Ovid pushes forth narrative elements of a male-female equitable society. When addressing Ceres about Proserpina, Jupiter refers to her as communal between himself and her (*commune est pignus onusque / nata mihi tecum*, 523-25), indicating equal parental sharing, rather than the patriarchal society of the

⁵⁵ Anderson 1997: 541. Anderson sees Calliope the narrator's own naïveté as potentially Ovid's way of representing this entire version of the myth as comedic.

Homeric Hymn. Therefore, in relationships and decision-making, it seems Ovid grants the female goddesses, Ceres and Proserpina, both equal power with the male gods, Jupiter and Dis.

With this focus on a balanced society, one might attribute the eventual dualistic and shared role of Proserpina, half mother's maiden of the earth and half husband's wife of the Underworld, to this same sense of sharing between the male and female characters. Indeed, the same word Jupiter uses to present Proserpina as shared between himself and Ceres, *commune*, appears again in Ovid's description of Proserpina's shared role between the upper and lower realms with her mother and husband respectively (*regnum numen commune duorum*, 566 emphasis added). Yet, as in the *Homeric Hymn*, neither Ceres nor Dis wholly receive what they desire: to possess Proserpina entirely as their own. Indeed, it is on account of Proserpina's own agency, in eating the pomegranate, that she prevents all others from achieving their goals, and she is the one who receives power in the end. Jupiter decrees that Proserpina divide her time between mother and husband (565-67), and Proserpina receives power over both realms as a result (*regnum numen commune duorum*, 566). Thus, while Dis, Ceres and even Venus – she who desired Proserpina to become solely Dis' wife and no longer a maiden in the earthly realm – do not attain their coveted outcomes, Proserpina attains an elevated status and an increase in power. She transforms into a figure of dual and opposing roles, as easily changeable as her expression and mind now appear (*vertitur extemplo facies et mentis et oris*, 568), but also one powerful now, as she continually changes, in both lives and kingdoms. She gains power over mortals as queen of the Underworld, and yet, as in the *Homeric Hymn*, cannot

herself wholly be possessed by any other, remaining impermanent in each realm, and thus unattainable. Indeed, as Ovid enhances both female agency and the individual agency of Proserpina herself in his *Metamorphoses* version, he develops her into a powerful, elusive and autonomous figure.

D.H. Lawrence's "Bavarian Gentians"

D. H. Lawrence shows evidence of knowledge and interest in classical mythology in his works, demonstrating familiarity with texts such as Gilbert Murray's *Four Stages of Greek Religion* and Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*,⁵⁶ as well as making direct allusion to classical texts in his poetry, novels, and letters.⁵⁷ Indeed, Lawrence reveals use of classical allusion through a variety of influences. H. D. and Lawrence, as they were romantically involved and influenced one another's works, both use the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in their works, and their employment of these allusions appears influenced by the two poets' own relationship.⁵⁸ Similarly, Lawrence conveys an understanding of the Persephone myth in several of his works, echoing themes from the myth to facilitate his own exploration of relations between the two sexes, as well as concepts of death and immortality.⁵⁹ As Virginia Hyde notes, several of Lawrence's female characters have been identified with Persephone – Alvina in *Lost Girl* (1920), Dolly in "The Princess" (1924), Kate in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), and the virgin in *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (1930) –

⁵⁶ Cf. Hyde 1994: 101.

⁵⁷ In "Medlars and Sorb-Apples", Lawrence directly quotes from the Orpheus myth in Vergil's *Georgics*, repeating Eurydice's *Iamque vale!* (Ver. G. 4.497; Lawrence 41) as he makes direct allusion to Orpheus (Lawrence 42). Cf. Sword 1989: 418.

⁵⁸ Cf. Sword 1989: 409.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hyde 1994: 99.

revealing his rich interest and development of this particular myth.⁶⁰ For his allusions to Persephone, Lawrence uses a diverse set of sources, ranging from Roman versions and Pre-Raphaelite 'Fatal Women' to texts on ancient religion, as well as preceding poets' receptions of the myth, such as his allusion to Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine" in *Quetzacoatl*.⁶¹ Persephone appears to play a critical role in Lawrence's works, as he frequently incorporates her to create his own female characters; however, Lawrence pushes beyond using Persephone only for character development, allowing her to symbolize his ideas regarding death, immortality and regeneration. He presents her as an entity greater than a mere mortal woman, a mythical and holy concept. In his poem "Bavarian Gentians," written near the end of his life and published posthumously in 1933, Lawrence utilizes Persephone and themes from her abduction myth to produce a poem which raises not only questions of gender dynamics and nature, but questions regarding the mystery of death, immortality and the potential of regeneration. As Donald Gutierrez argues, "Bavarian Gentians" presents human affinity with nature through a depiction of holy dying. Indeed, Lawrence integrates into the poem elements of nature, the gentians, holiness, Persephone and Pluto, and dying, as one descends into the dark unknown. Yet, in elevating "Bavarian Gentians" to the level of the mythical and divine, ennobling the concept of death, Lawrence also discusses death within metaphors of sexuality and immortality, suggesting the prospect of regeneration.⁶² In this section, I

⁶⁰ Hyde 1994: 104.

⁶¹ Hyde 1994: 99. Hyde also notes that in *Quetzacoatl*, along with allusion to Swinburne, Lawrence also incorporates references to the Bible and ancient mythology, displaying a diverse range of sources for his works (1994: 111).

⁶² Gutierrez 1978: 182.

intend to analyze the version of “Bavarian Gentians” from Manuscript A, yet will also make mention of the alternate version. Within *Last Poems*, there exist two versions of “Bavarian Gentians.” One comes from manuscript A of Lawrence’s manuscripts A and B that were found and published posthumously; the other is a different discovered version which Aldington and Orioli include in the book’s appendix.⁶³ Although Lawrence makes no direct allusions to preceding versions of the Persephone myth, his poem, in both versions, utilizes themes – fertility, death, immortality, transition and dual opposing attributes – from *the Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

In his earlier works, Lawrence alludes to the Underworld in order to illustrate a separate female realm. With this depiction of the Underworld, Lawrence set up a sharp dichotomy between men and women, arguing that women metaphorically inhabit their own land, one worthy of exploration, yet foreign and mysterious to a man. Moreover, he implies that women, although mysterious and intriguing, are also inherently beneath men, as they symbolize the world below. This leaves one to consider the gender and power dynamics truly involved in Lawrence’s mythical and mysterious illustration of women. In response to Cecil Gray’s letter criticizing his encouragement of an “esoteric female cult” revolving around him, Lawrence states that his women “represent ... the threshold of a new world, or underworld, of knowledge and being.” He continues, “my ‘women’ want an ecstatic subtly-intellectual underworld, like the Greek– Orphicist – like Magdalen at her feet-washing.” Yet he also admits they represent these concepts for him in a

⁶³ Cf. Aldington & Orioli 1933: viii. There also exists another previous version of this poem entitled “Glory of Darkness” (1933: vi).

“subservient” manner.⁶⁴ Lawrence places his women on a religious and mythical level, likening them to Orphic followers and the prominent religious figure of Mary Magdalen and attributing to them a separate, underworld-like, realm of knowledge and subtle intellect; he, however, also places them in a lesser role, considering them denizens of a lower realm and like Mary Magdalen, who physically positions herself beneath a man deemed divine, Jesus. As scholar Of English literature Helen Sword asserts, “the Underworld is female: a dangerous but alluring realm where mystery and intuition are privileged over conventional wisdom and reason,” and Lawrence himself plays the role of an Orpheus figure. In respect to his Orphism reference, he considers these women symbolically Eurydice or perhaps even Persephone herself, hoping to grasp some understanding of this mysterious place.⁶⁵ Although these women appear mythical and alluring, Lawrence does not seem to suggest they are to be worshipped as above or even equal to men. Indeed, in his “Nathaniel Hawthorne” essay, published in 1919, Lawrence wrote, “Man must either lead or be destroyed. Woman cannot lead,”⁶⁶ implying a patriarchal hierarchy in his mind. Thus Lawrence associates femininity with the Underworld, simultaneously promoting women as mysterious and awe-inspiring, as they reign over a mythological realm of intrigue and intellect, and designating them as inherently separate from and beneath men, as they reside in an entirely separate realm below.

⁶⁴ Cf. Sword 1989: 411-12.

⁶⁵ Sword 1989: 412.

⁶⁶ Cf. Sword 1989: 416.

This sentiment arises in Lawrence's poetry, as he turns to the mythical Underworld and places women within this realm of darkness and mystery. In "Medlars and Sorb-Apples" from his 1923 collection *Bird, Beasts and Flowers*, Lawrence makes allusion to the Underworld and the Orpheus myth (38-42), while also hinting at Eurydice by quoting Eurydice's line *Jamque vale* (Lawrence 41; *Ver. G.* 4.497) from the *Georgics*; he also depicts fruit as a main focus in this poem, a symbol of fertility and women,⁶⁷ in a sexual context. In this allusion, Lawrence displays a fascination with the Underworld, as well as what seems an attempt to associate themes of fertility, sexuality, dying, classical mythology and the Underworld all with women.⁶⁸ Although this poem offers many complexities of meaning and interpretation, on one level, it does display an Orphic descent into the Underworld where the female figure of his interest, Eurydice, is present and able to bid him, with her "*Jamque et vale*" (41), farewell. Due to the impermanence of Orpheus and Eurydice's interaction, as he must leave and she must remain, it seems Lawrence presents the Underworld as a place to seek out mysterious and ultimately unattainable women. In "Bavarian Gentians," Lawrence likewise shows an interest in the female aspects of the classical Underworld and depicts another descent into the Underworld. He exhibits Persephone as a primary focus in his construction of the Underworld's darkness. He begins the poem with flowers, object of fertility with which she is associated; he calls this darkness the place "where Persephone goes" (17); he

⁶⁷ Sword explains that Lawrence even states in the preface to the "Fruits" section of *Birds, Beasts, and Flowers*, that "fruits are all of them female" (1989: 416).

⁶⁸ Cf. Sword 1989: 416-17.

makes her the final object of discovery, “the lost bride” (22-23) in the poem’s closing lines.

Presenting Persephone as a “lost bride” (23), Lawrence also demonstrates her passivity, implying a patriarchal power dynamic – as the wife, Persephone, becomes almost wholly encompassed in Pluto’s darkness. As in the *Homeric Hymn*, Lawrence sets up a dichotomy between the mother Demeter’s world and the husband Pluto’s, stating that his “black lamps” (9) are “giving off darkness” (10), just “as Demeter’s pale lamps give off light” (10). Thus he creates a stark contrast between the “light” Demeter represents and the “darkness” Pluto does. Hyde notes that Lawrence often associates women with light, and this lightness connects with the elements of nature, whereas men represent society.⁶⁹ With this in mind, Demeter’s light here could represent nature, and Pluto’s dark, the opposing society. Contextualizing this, Carol Dix argues that “Lawrence saw [the women’s suffrage movement of his time] as introducing women into the male mode of being; seducing women to becoming part of the male world ... Lawrence wanted women to go somewhere beyond that.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Lawrence’s Persephone in this poem, being seduced away from her mother’s natural light, seems entirely consumed by this darkness. Demeter’s “light” (10) appears only once in the poem and already as something “pale” (10), and thus fading from its natural vibrance of life; Pluto’s darkness pervades the text, as the terms “dark,” “darkening,” “darkness,” “darkened” and “darker” emerge seventeen times. Indeed, Lawrence states that Persephone here, stolen from her mother’s light, “is but a voice” (20), reminiscent of her only means of struggle in the *Homeric*

⁶⁹ Hyde 1994: 102-103.

⁷⁰ Dix 1980: 11.

Hymn, a cry for help (*H. Dem.* 21). She disappears into only a voice, she becomes “invisible” (19), completely “enfolded in the deeper dark” (20), just as Persephone, snatched by Hades in the *Homeric Hymn*, is dragged into the dark depths (ζόφον ἠερόεντα, *H. Dem.* 80). Lawrence even identifies this “deeper dark” as “of the arms Plutonic” (21), presenting this darkness as an element of Pluto himself, and therefore demonstrating Pluto’s overwhelming control over Persephone. Furthermore, Lawrence presents this descent as a result of “passion of dense gloom” (21), alluding to Pluto’s passion for Persephone as the reason for her plummet into the Underworld. So greatly does Persephone fall into Pluto’s Underworld and grasp that she transforms into part of it herself, for she is “a darkness” (20), just like her husband and his realm. Much like how Hades’ abduction changes Persephone, transforming her into queen of the Underworld, so too does Pluto’s darkness here transform her, making her “darkness” just as he is. Lawrence qualifies her as “the lost bride” (23), one lost to her previous life in the natural world. This displays her utter submission to Pluto, the complete submission of a woman to her husband, and perhaps, in accordance with Dix’s argument, of nature to society. Thus, the darkness which consumes Persephone in *Bavarian Gentians* could symbolize the overbearing masculine society’s engulfment of the feminine role; and just as “darkness is married to dark” in the alternate version of this poem (15),⁷¹ so does the feminine society, seduced, blend wholly into the masculine. Indeed, Hyde states that Lawrence uses the Persephone myth “to depict relations between the sexes [and] also to

⁷¹ Here Lawrence writes “darkness is married to dark” rather than the “darkness is awake upon dark” line from the manuscript A version.

explore the archetypes of death and immortality.”⁷² Despite this focus on Persephone’s fall and surrender to Pluto and his darkness, Lawrence’s prominent focus of the poem likely lies more with the latter themes of “death and immortality,” themes which potentially found influence in the tuberculosis he was dying from while composing this poem.⁷³

Rather than the encroachment of society, for Lawrence, Pluto’s darkness and his mythological Underworld symbolizes that movement towards death. Lawrence uses allusion to the Persephone myth and Persephone’s own descent into the Underworld to aid in his metaphorical representation of one’s journey into death. Indeed, scholar of English literature Sandra M. Gilbert contends that Lawrence’s explicit reference to Pluto, rather than just “blue darkness,” clearly presents this as a poem about death.⁷⁴ Just as the *Homeric Hymn* begins with flowers, prior to Persephone’s abduction into death (*H. Dem.* 5-16), so too does Lawrence open with flowers, “gentians” (1), presenting the symbol of youth, life and vitality from the *Homeric Hymn*. These flowers offer not only symbolism of life, but also the concept of perennial renewal,⁷⁵ as gentians are perennial flowers. This associates the flowers with Persephone, for she too returns annually, blossoming again into the earth in the springtime, and likewise is connected with flowers in the classical versions of the myth. Indeed, as in the *Homeric Hymn* she, in her maiden-form, becomes

⁷² Hyde 1994: 99.

⁷³ Hyde 1994: 101.

⁷⁴ Gilbert 1972: 294.

⁷⁵ Cf. Hyde 1994: 104.

assimilated with the flowers.⁷⁶ In each version, a flower implies a secondary representation of Persephone herself – for Lawrence, both represent fertility and life, yet succumb to the darkness: symbolic death. Parallel to Persephone’s own surrender into becoming “a darkness” (20), the gentians transform into darkness, called “big and dark, only dark” (3), and although they also represent “the day-time” (4), and are considered “torch-like” (4), thus presenting the light side, that of life, of Persephone’s dual opposing roles, the darkness of her alternate role seeps over this light, as the torch light is darkened “with the smoking blueness of Pluto’s gloom” (5). In this, the darkness and gloom of Pluto overtake the light and lifelike role of these flowers, and of Persephone, not only encompassing them in the dark, but, with this merging of the flowers and darkness, transforming them into symbols of darkness themselves: Persephone becomes “a darkness” (20) and gentians “blue-smoking darkness” (10). These icons of fertility and life metamorphose into representations of darkness and death. With this transformation, Lawrence demonstrates the transition from life into death, yet as both Persephone and the gentians rise again annually, he also suggests the potential of regeneration. Indeed, Lawrence even alludes to Persephone’s resurrection, noting that she descends into the Underworld in “frosted September” (16), implying the outcome in her classical myth that, going down in the winter, she also reciprocally rises again in the spring.

By representing his gentians as “torch-like,” Lawrence integrates another layer of allusion into his poem, recalling Demeter’s use of torches (αἰθομένας δαΐδας, *H. Dem.* 61) in her search for Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn (H. Dem.* 59-61), an act which the

⁷⁶ See *the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* section P. 8-9.

initiates of the Eleusinian mysteries imitated in their rites.⁷⁷ He presents the speaker much like Demeter or an initiate, searching for Persephone or the potential reward in the afterlife.⁷⁸ Indeed, Lawrence's speaker, like the initiates, seems to seek a potential prize in the afterlife, as he descends, in hopes of finding "the splendor of torches" (22) looking towards some form of existence and some form of discovery within the afterlife. Much like the Orpheus role Lawrence presents in "Medlars and Sorb-Apples," and other works,⁷⁹ here too does the speaker make a *katabasis*, descending into the dark and discovering "the lost bride" (22-3). Whether Lawrence's speaker in "Bavarian Gentians" plays the role of Demeter, an initiate, or Orpheus, each strives for the power of life after death: Demeter wishes to return Persephone to the realm of the other immortal gods, an initiate seeks some prize and existence after death, and Orpheus hopes to regain a resurrected Eurydice. Persephone, however, the one who makes a complete descent and return from the Underworld annually, possesses what the others seek – she holds the power of regeneration and immortality.

Lawrence incorporates elements of potential light into his symbols of darkness and death, hinting at the possibility of life existing in the afterlife or even renewed. Although the gentians exhibit a darkness and deep Plutonic blue, they also show indications of potential returning light – Lawrence describes them as "torch-flower" (8), "lamps" (9), but integrates the dark, making them paradoxically dark objects of light:

⁷⁷ A torch bearer, *Daidouchos*, played a key role in the Eleusinian rites. The torches likely represented an imitation of Demeter's experiences – the initiates may have performed a similar search for Persephone by torchlight in the rites' procession. Cf. Foley 1994: 38.

⁷⁸ As Gantz states, one's performance of the Eleusinian mysteries' rites resulted in the promise of some form of reward in the afterlife (1993: 65).

⁷⁹ Cf. Sword 1989.

“torch-flower of the blue-smoking darkness” (8), “black lamps” (9) and “splendour of torches of darkness” (22). They are both the potential of light in a dark place, as these torches and lamps represent illumination, and bringers of darkness – thus Lawrence seems to indicate they simultaneously represent the possibility of new life and the existence of death. Even though the gentians, like Persephone, fall into darkness and death, the potential cyclical return to life lingers in their traits. Indeed, as the flowers and Persephone’s two roles, those of life and death, appear merged here, they demonstrate a close link between two supposedly opposing states of being. Gilbert states:

Persephone stands at the crossroads of two truths—the truth of life and the truth of death, the truth of the spirit and the truth of the flesh—and through her Lawrence is able to show that the two truths are ... ultimately one. There, in the incomprehensible marriage with darkness, life begins again.⁸⁰

By unifying life and death, Lawrence offers the idea that death does not signify an ultimate end, but instead is part of a greater continual life cycle. Indeed, Lawrence seems to suggest existence, perhaps even life, after death. By using the Persephone myth in “Bavarian Gentians,” he presents hope for a process of death and immortality like that of the goddess.

Lawrence’s speaker in the poem attempts to convey himself as a figure like Persephone, knowingly heading towards her same fated descent to death. The speaker exclaims, “Reach me a gentian” (13), hoping to pluck a flower, just as Persephone did at her abduction. The speaker requests Persephone’s fate, and yet takes agency in this, not abducted unwillingly, but hoping to descend by his own will, saying, “let me guide myself with the blue ... flower” (14). Conscious of the Persephone myth and her eventual

⁸⁰ Gilbert 1972: 297.

outcome, as he knows this dark realm is where “Persephone goes” (17) in her seasonal cycle at “September” (17), the speaker implies a desire to replicate her experience as his own – or at least a desire to explore the realm in which she now rules. Although he qualifies this world as “the sightless realm” (18), he also calls it the place “where darkness is awake upon the dark” (18),⁸¹ and thus, in this wakefulness, there seems to exist a form of action and sentience in this underworld. These contradictions create an element of mystery, causing one to wonder just what this afterlife might offer. Lawrence seems to ask: could this Persephonic afterlife offer some form of immortality? In the alternate version of the poem, Lawrence composed the lines:

Give me a flower on a tall stem, and three dark flames,
for I will go to the wedding and be wedding guest
at the marriage of the *living* dark⁸²

By using the phrase “living dark,” Lawrence refers to the continual sentience of Persephone and Pluto, and particularly seems to hint to Persephone’s continual role as a continually living and renewing entity in her transient life of shared time between the land of the dead and the land of the living. Both divinities, in their immortality, live on in the land of the dead, and Persephone even returns alive into the land of the living. In hoping to be a “wedding guest,” the speaker aspires to a similar form of immortality: to enter the Underworld and yet continue in existence.⁸³

⁸¹ This line likely alludes to H.D.’s *Eurydice*, in which she presents the lines, “Here only flame upon flame” (II.1), “black upon black” (III.8), “Fringe upon fringe” (IV.1), and “blue of depth upon depth of flowers” (IV.5). This final quotation in particular reveals a close correlation in phrasing and imagery – blue, flowers and a sense of descent – between Lawrence’s “Bavarian Gentians” and H.D.’s “Eurydice.”

⁸² Gilbert 1972: 297. Emphasis added on “living.”

⁸³ Regarding Lawrence’s perspective on death, Gilbert states that only in death can humans “participate in that inhuman purity of being divine” (1972: 294). In “Bavarian Gentians,” Lawrence displays this form of divine death, presenting a potential divine immortality.

Although Lawrence uses references to Persephone in order to craft a number of his female characters in earlier works, in this late poem, “Bavarian Gentians” – although the contrast between Demeter and Pluto, and the encompassing power of Pluto over Persephone point towards a gendered power dichotomy – Lawrence uses allusions to Persephone to focus on the concept of death rather than women. Due to Lawrence’s illness of tuberculosis, this poem is possibly influenced by his own impending death. Within the poem, Lawrence demonstrates the *katabasis* of a speaker who hopes to discover a form of existence in the afterlife. This speaker, a figure similar to an initiate of the Mysteries, Orpheus or even Persephone herself, in descending to the Underworld, seeks to discover an escape or return from death – yet, only one of these figures successfully undergoes the resurrection they all seek, Persephone.⁸⁴ By presenting immortal gods, and one, Persephone, who even rises to the earth again every year, Lawrence shows hope for mortals’ existence beyond death and perhaps even a form of reincarnation. Yet, just as the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* can be read as mortals’ hope for perpetual existence, revealed particularly by Demeter’s failed attempt to transform Demophoön into an immortal being and the Greek religious practices of the Eleusinian mysteries themselves,⁸⁵ immortality identical to Persephone’s proves a fruitless hope for mortals. The speaker hints at Persephone’s regenerative abilities, particularly by integrating perennial gentians into the work, showing the opinion that she possesses a mysterious and wondrous ability, making her enviable and powerful – yet also revealing,

⁸⁴ Although Orpheus too returns from the Underworld, in failing to bring back the mortal who was taken by death, Eurydice, he does not achieve his goal of surpassing death.

⁸⁵ Cf. Foley 1994: 49.

with the absence of the speaker's own return from the Underworld, that Persephone's characteristics appear unattainable, a mere hope for mortals. Indeed, as the poem's speaker presents himself entering the dark realm, but not returning up again, it seems that his hope is for an afterlife in death.

Sylvia Plath's "Two Sisters of Persephone"

Sylvia Plath possessed a familiarity with classical literature and mythology and revealed it in her use of classical themes, and myth in particular, within her writings. Plath took much of her pagan mythology from Greek tragedies, and, like Lawrence, Graves' *White Goddess* and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.⁸⁶ Plath reveals these influences in several of her poems regarding her deceased father: "Electra of Azalea Path," "The Colossus," "The Beekeeper's Daughter," "Poem for a Birthday," and others. Judith Kroll argues in these works that Plath "is sentenced to living out her life in terms of her daughterhood—as her father's priestess, votary, bride, queen," sharing elements with "sacred marriages" from *the Golden Bough*.⁸⁷ Furthermore, acting as a bride to her deceased father, Plath, or at least her speakers in her poetry, resembles Persephone, a living woman married off to an inhabitant of the Underworld.⁸⁸ By incorporating classical references, Plath mythologizes her father and herself. Her use of mythological allusion allowed her to create works in their own mythic style. Indeed, Kroll argues that, although many refer to Plath as a 'confessional' poet due to the autobiographical aspects

⁸⁶ Cf. Kroll 1976: 39-43 and 77.

⁸⁷ Kroll 1976: 83.

⁸⁸ Kroll states that the speaker of "The Beekeeper's Daughter" marries her dead father, and he represents an underground god (1976: 84-5).

to her work, Plath's poetry appears far more complex, as it is created in a mythic system. Rather than simply discussing the narrative of her life, Plath alludes to mythology to express her state of being in her poetry.⁸⁹ Just as the *Homeric Hymn* not only tells Persephone's story, but also represents the life of a *kore*, "maiden," so too does Plath use myth to depict societal roles in her poetry. Indeed, in "Two Sisters of Persephone," Plath makes use of mythical allusion and themes in order to discuss the real life states of existence for women in the 1950s, influenced by her disdain for the inequalities between men and women, and thus the expected roles of women at the time. Kathleen M. Lant notes that Plath in her poetry and journals "associates power so exclusively with men [she considers] femininity ... suffocating and inhibiting," and also shows a desire "to mask herself" both in poetry and life, yet finds attempting it futile.⁹⁰ Greatly conscious of this gendered division of roles in her time period, as well as the expectations this divide implies for women, Plath, within "Two Sisters of Persephone," demonstrates the two options presented to women: the intellectual life of a career or life as a bride and mother. To present these two opposing roles for women, Plath splits the persona of Persephone into two, showing one sister as associated with fertility and the earth and the other with barrenness and death. With this symbolism, Plath alludes to Persephone's dualistic nature and her own two halves: goddess of springtime on the earth and queen of the Underworld. Thus, in "Two Sisters of Persephone," it seems Plath uses a Persephone

⁸⁹ Kroll 1976: 1-2.

⁹⁰ Lant 1993: 631, 635. Wilson notes that Plath viewed unfair female constraint also in the matter of sex. While men were able to express themselves sexually, abiding by proper etiquette of the time, women were restrained, and meant to remain, at least symbolically, chaste (2013: 6).

allusion, pointing to the goddess's dualism, in order to explore the two opposing potential female roles.

In January of 1957, shortly after she met and married Ted Hughes in 1956,⁹¹ Sylvia Plath published the poem "Two Sisters of Persephone" in *Poetry*.⁹² The poem makes explicit allusion to the Persephone myth, providing the goddess' name in its title, and also employs traits from Persephone's dual roles, developing its own two contrasting figures. Plath presents "two girls" (1), one of "shade" and one of "light" (3), showing in two separate figures the opposing roles Persephone herself assumes in the classical texts. One girl adopts Persephone's position on earth, identified with the land, fertility and life; the other adopts her position in the Underworld, identified with the world of graves, barrenness, and death. Although Plath labels these two as the "two sisters of Persephone," presenting them as physical separate entities, the correspondences between these two and Persephone's two roles suggest they are the division of one Persephone-like entity. Thus, Plath uses these Persephonic themes, physically splitting the goddess into her two opposing roles, to develop two contrasting women, and two alternative lives for a woman. The one of earth and fertility lives out the expected role of a 1950s woman, marrying, and procreating; the one of the grave chooses an unconventional path, working instead in a world of intellect.⁹³ As Plath demonstrates a sense of ambivalence towards

⁹¹ Cf. Wilson 2013: 1.

⁹² Plath's "Two Sister's of Persephone" was published, along with five of her other poems, in *Poetry* 89.4, an issue released January of 1957.

⁹³ Foley states, "In Sylvia Plath's 'Two Sisters of Persephone,' the two Persephone's in the worlds above and below become alternative and limiting fates for woman: the spinster office worker computes in the dark 'problems on / A mathematical machine,' while her sister 'sun's bride ... Grows quick with seed' and 'bears a king'" (1994: 162).

both options in the poem, these two depictions leave the reader to wonder which, if either, is a preferable life for a woman – leaving a lingering sense that perhaps neither provides an ideal existence. Indeed, each sister appears trapped in her own way, the sister of shade in her isolation and the sister of light in her passive submission to societal expectations.

Plath uses the dark and light contrast from the Persephone myth, in its upper and underworld comparison, and the fertility versus barrenness dynamic of the goddess's seasonal migrations, to illustrate a dichotomy between the "two sisters." Together they share in "a duet of **shade** and **light**" (3 emphasis added), revealing in the first stanza a stark contrast, as well as a balance between the two figures. As part of a "duet," the two seem reciprocally to answer to one another's existence. They continually show a contrast in their hue. The prior is described as "Root-pale" (12) and "sallow" (25), possessing a pale and deathlike pallor; the latter is called "Bronzed" (13), and she is the "sun's bride" (21) and interacts with surroundings qualified as "gold" (14) and "bright" (15), encompassed in the light of the "earth" (13). Likewise, Plath associates the former, she of shade, with barrenness and death, and the latter, she of light, with plants and fertility. For the shade girl, on the one hand, "Dry ticks mark time" (8), implying with "dry" dry and infertile earth; the light girl, on the other hand, hears "ticks blown gold" (14), a sunny and airy direct contrast to her counterpart's stale, dry time. Despite this opposition, both girls, hearing "ticks," are accountable to a progression of time – implying that both progress forward and mature, just as Persephone herself matured from maiden to wife. Yet both continue this same path of maturity in opposing manners. In this, Plath presents the two

options for a woman. The one of shade remains “barren” (10), associated with “root” (12) – the dried plant part which dwells beneath the ground, like an Underworld inhabitant – and eventually travels “graveward” (27), joining the “worm[s]” (28) beneath the earth. Ergo, she becomes aligned with barrenness and death, the side of Persephone who resides as Hades’ wife in the Underworld. The one of light, however, is associated with and surrounded by aspects of plant fertility and flowers: “pollen” (15), “poppies” (16), “petaled” (18), “green” (20), “seed” (22), and “Grass” (23). Indeed, “near a bed of poppies” (16), she becomes closely aligned with flowers, just as the maiden Persephone; indeed, she, like earth producing flowers, “grows quick with seed” (22). Furthermore, these flowers are “open to the **sun’s** blade” (21 emphasis added), and “becomes the **sun’s** bride” (21 emphasis added), showing the plants’ earthly nourishment, sunlight. The girl of light, connected closely with these flowers, also seems to find nourishment and growth in marriage to the sun. This contrast between fertility and barrenness goes beyond displaying the two sides of Persephone’s life, for Plath uses these elements of plant fertility and death to depict the fertility of women.

Straying from details of the original myth, Plath switches Persephone’s role on earth and in the Underworld, presenting the girl associated with flowers and on the earth as married and maturing, rather than married to Hades in the Underworld, and the one beneath the earth as a “wry virgin” (26), unmarried and left in isolation. With these inverted roles, the poem seems to promote choosing the life of fertility, displaying the symbolism of plant growth as well as explicit reference to the woman’s own body. The flowery sister shows fertility of her body, as she “grows quick with seed” (22), becomes

pregnant, and “in her labor’s pride / She bears a king” (24), gives birth to a male child. In contrast, the girl of a “barren enterprise” (10), indicating not merely the concept of barren land, but her own barren body, has a “meager frame” (12), skinny and deathlike, rather than full and pregnant. Plath states that she dies “with flesh laid waste” (27) – wasted in that it never gave way to seed and produced offspring. Indeed, Plath even writes that she is considered “no woman” (28) in the end, implying one must wed and generate children to truly develop into a woman. In this, Plath communicates the expectations for a young woman in her society. This barren girl chooses a life in which she “works problems on / A mathematical machine” (6-7). This device, likely an adding machine, signifies either work for academics or a career. With this Plath presents this sister’s meticulous work in solitude as her selection of a life occupied by logic, intellect, reason and a career path.⁹⁴ For this choice, she suffers confinement, residing “In her dark wainscoted room” (5), and becomes married to none but eventually death itself, as she is “Worm-husbanded” (28). As Lynda Bundtzen contends, this “sister provides a sorry lesson for the intellectual woman. Mental activity is depicted as a barren, unnatural enterprise for a woman.”⁹⁵ The other girl, however, associated with the poppies, “**Freely** become the sun’s bride” (21 emphasis added), and appears similarly free in her society to choose this path of life. As her role is identified closely with natural fertility in this poem, Plath presents it as the natural and expected choice in society. Plath furthers this concept in her final stanza, writing, “While flowering, ladies” (30), that is, while still of a youthful marriageable age, “scant love not” (30), give in to the cycle of reproduction, “Lest all your fruit / Be but this

⁹⁴ Cf. Agarwal 2003: 117.

⁹⁵ Bundtzen 1983: 39.

black outcrop of stones” (31-2). Thus, Plath presents women as plants, naturally meant to be fertile and productive, and in this notion, given the natural imperative to become a wife and mother. Plath’s use, however, of archaic language in this final stanza suggests a darker tone than sincere celebration of this role. Her choice of the words “scant” (30) and “lest” (31) appear anachronistic for a 1950s publication, suggesting the possibility that these cautionary words are not entirely genuine. This word choice potentially indicates instead that, just as the words themselves, this imperative for women to wholly accept a role as wife and mother is itself outdated.

Plath shows a tension between promotion of the sun-husbanded sister’s life and a sense of distress at the passive role she plays in this life; furthermore, this platitude Plath preaches here seems to contradict a value system she developed in her teen years.⁹⁶ This leaves one to wonder whether this girl of light is any happier or freer than the girl of shade – yes, “freely” (31) she may marry, but is that simply because societal constraints permit and heavily encourage her to? The girl free to marry lacks agency in succumbing to the role as mother and wife. This girl, symbolically a flower, just like that flower, simply exists in her fixed location and endures the forces around her. She “lies” (13) “Near a bed of poppies,” “Hearing” (14) and “see[ing]” (17), passively taking in the world around her. Her state of being changes, as she “Grows quickly with seed” (22) and “bears a king” (22), but these are actions which happen to her body, rather than active choices. Indeed, she remains “Grass-couched” (23), stuck in the earth where she first sprouted, and thus stuck there to bear her expected role as a fertile entity. Bundtzen, a

⁹⁶ Even at seventeen, Plath indicated a fear of falling into the mundane and conventional pattern of acting as housewife to a husband and children. Cf. Wilson 2013: 80.

scholar of American literature, argues that, as this girl, “lulled” (15) by the poppies, lies passively open to the sun, the fourth and fifth stanzas read more like the sacrifice of a woman, or even a rape, rather than the desirable interactions of an autonomous woman. Indeed, she lies motionlessly on a “green altar” (24), and “Burns open to the sun’s blade” (19), enduring what appears the pain of burning as a sacrifice to the sun.⁹⁷ Indeed, placed on an “altar,” cut with a “blade,” and then burned, she looks nearly identical to a sacrificial offering. Even the poppies which surround her suggest a violent act: Plath considers their red color “Of petalled blood” (14). Yet because she becomes subsequently pregnant after this act, growing “quick with seed” (22), Plath depicts not only a suffering of violence as the woman’s self-sacrifice to the sun, but as a rape.⁹⁸ This sister, rather than free and happy, instead becomes violently forced into submission to her husband and confined in her position as maternal. Alternatively, the girl of shade, despite her dark isolation, shows more autonomy: she actively “works” (6), “calculates” (9), and even “Goes” (27) when moving towards death. In this sense, these actions are of her own volition. It seems, by utilizing Persephone’s themes of fertility and death, Plath creates a tension between the two halves, finding both constraining, and consequently neither satisfactory. One possesses autonomy in a career, yet lives out an isolated life, considered a “waste” (27); the other submissively yields to the life of wife and mother, the one deemed appropriate.

⁹⁷ Bundtzen 1983: 40.

⁹⁸ To a certain extent, the passive endurance of this sister here recalls Persephone’s own endurance in the *Homeric Hymn*. As Persephone undergoes a rape – albeit not sexual at this point – in the meadow (*H. Dem.* 16-21), so too does this sister, bride to the sun, undergo a rape in a meadow (Plath 15-20).

Indeed, in never merging the two sisters into one in her poem, Plath seems to suggest an either/or circumstance, neither resulting in a completely satisfactory outcome. Instead Plath presents both women, both halves of the Persephone persona, as in a paradoxical bind: each is liberated or accepted in one respect, but then finds her trapped in another. The sun's bride finds freedom in societal acceptance, but discovers herself conversely captured and submissive in the role this acceptance requires; the intellectual and barren woman possesses autonomy in her mathematical endeavor, but, as a result, goes graveward early and alone. As Foley states, this dichotomy displays the "alternative and limiting fates for women."⁹⁹ As this poem argues, a woman may possess the power of acceptance into society or the power of personal autonomy, yet she may not have both – and indeed both come with rather severe disadvantages.

Despite a wish to elevate her poetry to the mythic level, while making use of mythological allusion in "Two Sisters of Persephone," Plath also conveys the realization that a mortal woman's life cannot reach a level of mythical or divine power. Regardless of what path women choose, they remain trapped in some respect and equally conscious of and subject to the constraints of time. Plath presents an awareness of mortality in warning women to give way to love before they become barren (30-32), and moreover by not having the girl who went "graveward" (27) rise again in her poem. In exploring the two alternative lives with this "duet of shade and light" (3) and acknowledging mortality, Plath presents a sense of finality for each – making the choice between becoming autonomous in a career or proud as a wife and mother decide the remainder of one's life.

⁹⁹ Foley 1994: 162.

Indeed, both sisters remain trapped not only by societal expectation, but by the constraints of mortality itself. Although each receives some positive form of power, whether that be respect of society or autonomy, in the end, as both are mortal inhabitants of their society, they are powerless.

Bob Dylan's "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands"

In 1966, Bob Dylan released *Blonde on Blonde*, sharing with the world its longest track "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," a song he once referred to as "religious carnival music."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, this song seems to possess hymn-like qualities of religious praise, not unlike ancient poet's words to a Greco-Roman divinity. Although Dylan does not explicitly refer to Persephone or directly quote prior versions of the myth in "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," he fills the song with veiled allusions. Dylan possesses a background of interest in Classics, for he spent two years in the Hibbing High Latin Club and also makes reference to Ovid, Tacitus, Suetonius, Thucydides, Sophocles and other ancient authors in his recent memoir, *Chronicles: Volume One*.¹⁰¹ Similarly, in his 2001 *La Repubblica* interview, when asked about a reference in *World Gone Wrong*'s liner notes, Dylan expounded on different classical ages, including the Golden Age, which he calls "the Age of Homer," and the Silver Age, the Bronze Age, the Heroic Age, and the Iron Age – which Harvard Latinist Richard Thomas sees as an allusion to Hesiod's five ages in *Works and Days*.¹⁰² This background leaves one to wonder how greatly his

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Wilentz 2010: 118

¹⁰¹ Thomas 2007: 30. *Chronicles* was published in 2005.

¹⁰² Thomas 2007: 39-40.

literary readings, both classical and otherwise, influence his songs. Indeed, Thomas E. Strunk, a Roman historian, states that Dylan incorporates an “eclectic use of the Western literary and musical tradition”¹⁰³ into his songs, reaching far back into the origins of Western culture. Dylan reveals interest in Classics in several of his works: his most recent album, *Tempest*, released September of 2012, includes a song entitled “Early Roman Kings”; and another song from the same album as “Sad-Eyed Lady,” *Blonde on Blonde*, “Achilles in the Alleyway,” mentions a Greek hero; Strunk and Thomas both note direct quotes from Allen Mandelbaum’s translation of the *Aeneid* and Peter Green’s translation of Ovid’s exile poems.¹⁰⁴ No doubt Dylan also discusses other topics in “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands” as well, but the allusion to Persephone still resonates.

Within a number of his songs, one can discover an abundance of intertextuality – and particularly a penchant for classical allusions. Dylan once even referred to himself as “a thief of thoughts,”¹⁰⁵ revealing his own tendency towards allusion and intertextuality. Yet, as Michael Gilmour, a Canadian biblical scholar, notes, he does not merely repeat thoughts and phrases of preceding artists, but rather “Dylan reworks those sources for the new environment created by a song or poem.”¹⁰⁶ Richard Thomas notes a close correspondence between lines from Mandelbaum’s translation of book 6 of *The Aeneid* and Dylan’s “Lonesome Day Blues.” The translation reads:

¹⁰³ Strunk 2009: 120.

¹⁰⁴ This discovery was first made by New Zealand poet and creative writing teacher Cliff Fell, and his discovery was followed up by Dylan aficionado Scott Warmuth, who had followed-up and discovered further Ovidian intertexts. Cf. Thomas 2007: 35-36.

¹⁰⁵ Gilmour 2004: 18.

¹⁰⁶ Gilmour 2004: 19.

remember Roman, these will be your arts:
to teach the ways of peace to those you conquer,
to spare defeated peoples, tame the proud (Verg. *Aen.* 6.851-53, [trans.
Mandelbaum])

Dylan echoes:

I'm gonna spare the defeated, boys, I'm gonna speak to the crowd
I'm goin' to teach peace to the conquered
I'm gonna tame the proud ("Lonesome Day Blues")¹⁰⁷

In this, Dylan seems to imitate Vergil's words to speak of his own contemporary turmoil. Moreover, as Thomas reveals, Dylan maintains close parallels between his own lyrics and Peter Green's translation of Ovid's exile poems *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto* – such as in "Ain't Talkin'" where he sings, "I'll make the most of one last extra hour," echoing Green's translation of Ovid's line from *Tristia*, "let me make the most of one last extra hour" (*Tri.* 1.3.68), and the even more precise echo, where he sings, "Every nook and cranny has its tears" and Green translated, "every nook and corner had its tears" (*Tri.* 1.3.24).¹⁰⁸ Yet, he does not simply transpose the words and ideas of classical works into his songs, but rather integrates the allusions into his music for his own contemporary purpose and meaning.¹⁰⁹ As Thomas claims, "Dylan then, provides a case study of how intertextuality creates glimpses into the multiplicity of related contexts."¹¹⁰

Indeed, beyond the noted word-for-word correlations between Green and Mandelbaum's translations of Ovid and Vergil and Dylan's own lyrics, Thomas Strunk and Richard Thomas both argue for more veiled allusions to classical literature in Dylan's

¹⁰⁷ Thomas 2007: 30.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas 2007: 36.

¹⁰⁹ Wilentz states that Dylan's snatches of classical poetry were turned into something new that also retained a sound of something old (2010: 328).

¹¹⁰ Thomas 2010: 296.

other works. In the farewell to an unrequited love of Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right," Strunk hears reminiscence of the protreptic and farewell nature of Catullus 8. Both poets betray hesitation in their farewells, Catullus asks a series of questions about who now will take his place as her lover, and yet, caught up in an emotional whirlpool of hypotheticals of her future without him, tells himself to remain resolute, revealing how he verges on returning to her, if he were just given the words of an answer; Dylan outright sings, "But I wish there was something you would do or say / to try and make me change my mind and stay" (13-14). In each instance, the poets realize they must say farewell – as Catullus says, *vale puella!*, and Dylan sings "So I'll just say fare thee well" (28) – yet they cannot bring themselves to no longer dwell on thoughts of the beloved. Thus, Dylan appears at least to share a Catullan style of farewell to an unrequited love. Thus is the case in "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," that although Dylan makes no word-for-word connections, Ovidian and Homeric echoes of the Persephone myth resonate.

On his 1976 album, *Desire*, within the lyrics of "Sara," Dylan himself confesses, addressing his wife of the time, that he was "staying up for days in the Chelsea Hotel / writing 'Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands' for you" (27-8) – therefore, the song does not explicitly act as a modern version of the Persephone myth. Indeed, even the potential play on her last name, Lownds, with the word "lowlands" connects Sara to the song. Yet, Dylan does not simply address Sara in the song either, but instead creates a mysterious and unattainable female figure, labeled as the "Sad-Eyed Lady." As NPR music critic Tim Riley states, "The words take pains to enshrine this woman--exotic, mysterious, prevailing--but at the center of things lies the singer as supplicant, questioning not only

this fantastic creation of an unreachable, unknowable woman but his inexplicable desires" (142). Within these mysterious lines and the constant supplication lies the possibility of numerous intertextual interpretations. As the song invites the possibility of a number of different intertextual influences, I believe Dylan uses allusion to the Persephone myth in order to convey his own feelings and his own presentation of a woman, a Sad-Eyed Lady, as elusive, mysterious and, to a certain extent, goddess-like.

Princeton American historian Sean Wilentz and eminent British literary scholar Christopher Ricks both hear post-classical influences in Dylan's "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands." Sean Wilentz likens "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" to Blake's "Tyger," noting that both pose a series of questions and provide no answers,¹¹¹ thus shrouding the topic of discussion in an element of mystery and awe. He also refers to the song as a "psalm to the mysteriously wise Sad-Eyed Lady."¹¹² Indeed, this series of unanswered questions, following in a tradition of earlier poets, presents the lady as not only mysterious, but almost unattainable – she resides on a level higher than the speaker, an object of praise and inquiry. Ricks too notes that this mystifying sequence of questions bears resemblance to prior poetry. He identifies "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" as alluding heavily to Swinburne's "Dolores," drawing connections between a Lady of Pain and a Lady of the Lowlands.¹¹³ Not only, as Ricks points out, do correlations between "Dolores" and "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands" arise, but Swinburne himself also steeps his poetry in classical allusion, likewise connecting both his own work and Dylan's

¹¹¹ Wilentz 2010: 126.

¹¹² Wilentz 2010: 162.

¹¹³ Ricks 2003: 97.

with classical origins. Ricks well points out that both poems present a series of unanswerable questions,¹¹⁴ much like Blake's "Tyger," but what is even more noticeable about this connection are the classical elements that seem to appear in both "Dolores" and "Sad-Eyed Lady." Not only does Swinburne show interest in Persephone, for he also wrote "The Garden of Proserpine" and "Hymn to Proserpine,"¹¹⁵ but allusions to her characteristics appear in "Dolores," as well. Swinburne writes, "Libitina thy mother" (51), integrating a Roman goddess of funeral, and thus the element of divine death, into the poem. Furthermore, Swinburne calls his "Lady of Pain" "A queen over death and the dead" (348). Even her name, Dolores, shares a trait with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Persephone, who herself possesses *dolor*, grief (5.401). The incorporation of flower imagery, in the context of sexual plucking, in Swinburne's lines, "What bud was the shell of a blossom / That all men may smell to pluck?" (45-46), preceded by a juxtaposition between "pure" and "desire" (44), furthers the reminiscence of Ovid's Persephone, whom Dis plucks as she herself plucks the flowers, creating a close parallel between plucking away of her innocence and flowers (*Met.* 5.391-95). Moreover, those who are unable to "resist" (34) Dylan's Sad-Eyed Lady await a flowery sexual allurements as well, her "geranium kiss" (28). Therefore, given the allusive connections between these works and Persephone, the possibility of transmission of Persephone's qualities through Swinburne, or even the influence of both Swinburne and Ovid on Dylan appears likely.

¹¹⁴ Ricks 2003: 99.

¹¹⁵ The three poems were published together in Swinburne's 1866 volume *Poems and Ballads*.

Dylan, in addressing his Sad-Eyed Lady, further connects his song with Persephone's relationship to fertility. In line 44, he sings, "They wished you'd accepted the blame for the farm," making the Sad-Eyed Lady potentially responsible for this place of agriculture. When Persephone is abducted in both the *Homeric Hymn* and *Metamorphoses*, it is on account of her absence that Demeter inflicts a blight upon the land, destroying mortals' agriculture – thus, Persephone, by her absence from land, is to blame for destruction of farmland. Therefore, Dylan seems to hint to the Sad-Eyed Lady's relationship with agriculture, and in this, a role like Persephone's with fertility and its effect on mortals.

Beyond her role in fertility, Dylan's lyrics also allude to the abduction, introducing not only her thieving husband, Dis, but also by what means and to where she is taken. He questions, "who ... could bury you" (4) and "who ... could carry you" (8), bringing to mind that Dis both carried Persephone off and buried her beneath the earth in that act (*Met.* 5.420-24). Beyond this, by inquiring "who among them could..." (4;8), Dylan implies the response, "no one." Indeed, initially in Ovid's version, prior to Venus and Amor's interference, no suitors for marriage (and thus none of "them") were to "carry" Persephone, for she was on track to become another virgin goddess (*Met.* 375-77). Although Dis, as a result of Venus' intervention, at first both carries and buries Persephone successfully, by the myth's conclusion he appears to actually fail in both aims – for he cannot entirely retain or possess Persephone in the Underworld, but instead must share her with Ceres and the Earth (*Met.* 5.564-67). In this sense, neither Dis nor Ceres can "carry" Persephone off as his or her own, but instead, she, traveling between the two

worlds as Dis and Ceres cannot, takes on an elusive and unattainable form. Dylan later sings, “Now you stand with your **thief**, you’re on his **parole**” (57). Ovid calls Dis *raptor* (*Met.* 5.402), presenting him also as a thief. Likewise, he displays this parole, as a parole can be a temporary release on the condition of certain terms¹¹⁶ and Persephone undergoes an annual temporary release from the Underworld. Persephone, due to her abduction and consumption of pomegranate seeds, must endure a parole in which she, due to divinely mandated conditions, divides her time between the earth and the Underworld (*Met.* 5. 566-67). Moreover, Dylan makes the dualistic nature of the lady’s constant parole apparent, qualifying her with a “saintlike face” and a “ghostlike soul” (59), being both of the divine-like figures of the world above and the ghostly entities of the world below.

Dylan furthers this reminiscence of an earlier time period and previous poetry by continually referencing a sad-eyed prophet. Ricks identifies this prophet as Ezekiel, connecting the prophet’s sad eyes with Ezekiel’s sadness over the fall of Jerusalem due to the people’s moral and ceremonial transgressions, and to God’s prevention of his weeping in Ezekiel 24:16. Furthermore, he notes a close correspondence between Dylan’s lines “The kings of Tyrus with their convict list / Are waiting in line for their geranium kiss” (27-8) and lines from Ezekiel, “take up lamentation upon the king of Tyrus” (Ez. 28:12), and also the notion that Tyre will be set “in the low parts of the earth” (Ez. 26:20), aligning with Dylan’s “lowlands,” and that a king “shall enter into thy gates” (Ez. 26:10), correlating to Dylan’s repeated “gate.” He further asserts the presence of biblical

¹¹⁶ In the *Oxford English Dictionary* Online, entry 1.c. defines parole as “Conditional release of a prisoner (now esp. before the expiry of a custodial sentence), either temporarily for a special purpose or permanently, on the promise of good behaviour; an instance of this. Also: the terms and conditions attached to such a release; the state of being so released; a system of such conditional release. Also in extended use.” Cf. “parole, n.1.” *Oxford English Dictionary* Online. Oxford University Press, 2013. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138071?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=rdry01&>

allusions by connecting “the kings of Tyrus with their convict list” to God’s condemnation in Ezekiel of the people of Tyre for their greed.¹¹⁷ While Ricks makes some very compelling correlations, the question does arise, how does the Sad-Eyed Lady factor into this allusion? Is she the city of Jerusalem or Tyre, or is she the women of those cities? Or is she a figure with power over them, given that the kings are awaiting “her geranium kiss”? As no female figure of power appears in “Ezekiel,” the close proximity of the sad-eyed lady and the sad-eyed prophet demands a closer connection between the prophet and the lady.

Rather than a biblical prophet, the sad-eyed prophet seems to embody traits of the Roman pagan religion. In Latin, a prophet is *vates*, which Lewis and Short define as “fore teller, seer, soothsayer, prophet,” as well as, “poet.”¹¹⁸ One can interpret the presence of both a prophet, he/she who speaks for the goddess, as well as a poet here – indeed, the poet and the prophet appear one and the same, assimilated together as the singer, telling of the Sad-Eyed Lady’s attributes by pouring forth poetry. In Roman poetry, two prominent *vates* interact with Persephone, Vergil’s Sibyl, called *sanctissima vates* (6.65) in the *Aeneid* and Ovid’s Orpheus, referred to multiple times as *vates* in *Metamorphoses* (10.12, 83, 89, 143; 11.2). In accordance with Dylan’s assertion that the prophet says the lady’s “lowlands” are a place “that no man comes,” so does it seem this lowland is the Underworld where no “man,” or rather mortal, comes. The term “lowlands” suggests the geographical terminology of lowlands and highlands – physically, the higher land and the lower land. A similar geographical distinction can be made within context of

¹¹⁷ Ricks 2003:104-106.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Lewis & Short 1879 s.v. *vates*.

Metamorphoses: Ovid presents a boundary marked differentiation between the earth above, for an earthquake (*tremet tellus Met. 5.356*) creates a gap (*hiatus, Met. 5.357*), a passage of sorts, between the two realms – thus the earth sits above the Underworld, showing the layers of a higher land above a lower. Thus, earth itself represents the Ovidian highland, contrasted with the Underworld, a geographically separate realm, and therefore, its relative lowland. In Vergil’s *Aeneid*, the Sibyl tells Aeneas that only some demigods have made the journey into the Underworld (6.131), thus no “man” or rather mortal goes alive into the lowlands. Indeed, it appears this Sad-Eyed Lady’s domain, her “lowlands,” represent the lowest of the lands: the Underworld. Furthermore, the Sibyl tells Aeneas, once he reaches those lowest lands, to entreat Persephone herself with a golden bough for entry, presenting her as the keeper of permission of entry to the Underworld’s gate. Although Persephone does not physically guard the gate by standing in its immediate proximity, she possesses the power to allow entry and exit through it. Similarly, Dylan does not express that his lady stands at her “gate,” but rather that she possesses the power of the speaker’s permission or denial of entry. This presents Persephone both as one difficult to reach physically and a powerful figure, she who requires gifts and entreaties at the entrance to the Underworld. This active role she plays as one who permits entry and departure from the Underworld, which appears not only in Vergil’s text, but also in Ovid’s Orpheus myth (*Met. 10.45-47*), emerges in Dylan’s song, as the speaker sings repeatedly about whether he should leave or remain at her gate. In Dylan’s version, the singer offers his “warehouse eyes and Arabian drums,” asking, “should I leave them by your gate?”, and also presents another offering, like Orpheus, the

supplicating song itself. Dylan seems to echo, with his Sad-Eyed Lady, the power and prominence of the classical Persephone.

In *Metamorphoses*, Persephone undergoes a transition from the helpless abducted maiden to a powerful queen. Ovid presents her initially as girlish and naive, referring to her as *filia virgo* (374) and *puellari* (393); prior to abduction, as she picks flowers, Ovid attributes *simplicitas* (400) to her, again emphasizing her youthful and naive attributes. Once abducted, however, Persephone transforms into a more mature and powerful figure, referred to by Arethusa as *regina* (507), *infernus pollens* and *matrona tyranni* (508), not only a queen and a mature *matrona*, but one who wields power over others, rather than just a snatched object. Indeed, she even shows the power to change the fate and form of others by transforming Orpheus into an owl, revealing her own power over elements of nature (543-550). She reappears later in *Metamorphoses*, in book 10, now holding shared power with her husband, for Orpheus approaches and sings a beseeching song to them both (10.15-18), and Persephone, as *regia coniunx* (46), along with her husband, accepts Orpheus' plea (46-47). In this, Ovid shows Persephone to undergo a metamorphosis, transforming from a naive and powerless child, originally the maiden of Ceres, into a queen who holds power over mortals, mature wife to Hades, particularly when they hold power over the entrance and exit through the threshold of the Underworld. Dylan presents a similar figure, yet, although he makes brief mention of her childhood, already one transformed into a powerful female figure.

Dylan reveals his Sad-Eyed Lady to possess a similar form of power over admittance to people at the entrance of a threshold; yet, he does also acknowledge the

previous existence of her childhood attributes. He sings to the Sad-Eyed Lady of “childhood flames” (31) and her “mother’s drugs” (32), which bears a certain resemblance to Persephone’s mother’s interactions with children. In Demeter’s attempt to transform Demophoön into an immortal child, a substitute for Persephone herself, she incorporates “childhood flames,” encompassing the boy in fire, and feeding him the drug of immortality which the divine, and Persephone herself, would typically consume: ambrosia. These flames appear in both *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (237-240) and Ovid’s *Fasti* (4.553-554), and Demeter uses ambrosia to give immortality in the *Homeric Hymn* (237-238) and poppy drug in the *Fasti* (547-48). Although given to a mortal boy in these instances, Demeter intended the gift of immortality to be bestowed upon her daughter,¹¹⁹ and thus one can consider the flames and drugs of her mother hopes for her childhood.

The speaker of the song, an Orpheus-like figure, who is a musician singing and bearing “Arabian drums” – just as Orpheus makes entrance to the Underworld by use of his lyre and voice (10.15-16) – sings a beseeching song to the lady at what he calls “your gate” (12). Indeed, he questions, “Who among them would try to impress you?” (21), “How could they ever, ever persuade you?” (47) and “But why did they pick you to sympathize with their side?” (42). In each instance, the Sad-Eyed Lady is looked to for support from others, through their beseeching, via attempts to “impress” (21), “persuade” (47) and elicit sympathy (42). This direct address much resembles Orpheus’ plea to the goddess of the Underworld. Although, in asking these

¹¹⁹ As Persephone is taken into the Underworld and thus, in a sense, taken into a symbolic death, her mortality, or rather immortality, itself is brought into question.

questions, the speaker himself does not directly entreat the lady, he instead sheds insight about others who may have imposed upon her consideration in the past, be they humanity in need of fertility, Aeneas desiring entrance, or Orpheus wishing to lead someone out. Furthermore, with each chorus, he does present his own entreaty, asking again and again, “sad-eyed lady should I wait?” In this, he conveys with allusion the power of the Sad-Eyed Lady and her ability to admit entry to others.

“Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands” not only resembles the plea of an Orpheus-like musician to a goddess, but also an encomium of her and her power. This praise is not unlike the oldest written source of the Persephone myth, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, for it too offers praises to a female entity, simultaneously setting her on a divine pedestal, while also requesting her kindness. Indeed, Dylan follows in an ancient tradition of praising one in a song: a hymn. He mentions the Sad-Eyed Lady’s “gypsy hymns” (20), terminology rather reminiscent of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, yet also self-referential, in that this song itself, is a hymn, a prayer, to the Sad-Eyed Lady. Hellenist Mary Depew, in discussing Homeric hymns, notes, “Poems were not meant to be read, but rather performed publicly”¹²⁰, and even notes that *hymnos* simply means “song” in its earliest uses (61). Indeed, hymns are a form of non-physical offerings to the gods: a sacrifice of words rather than physical actions. Dylan himself plays into this tradition, presenting his hymn-like poetry in a performative mode: song. He presents this song as an offering, perhaps even a gift, to the Sad-Eyed Lady – using words, rather than actions, to express narrative emotions and desires.

¹²⁰ Depew 2000: 59.

By incorporating these mythological allusions into his song, Bob Dylan does not simply cause his listeners to consider Persephone while hearing his song to the Sad-Eyed Lady (arguably, Sara Lownds), he intertwines the two women, using the allusion to intensify his presentation of the lady. With attributes of Persephone, Dylan's lady transforms from a mere mortal into one on the divine level. This portrays her as on a higher level, subject to the supplication of the singer, but not entirely reachable or attainable to him. Indeed, as he constantly asks her how he "should" interact with her, he places her in a position of power, the position of a goddess-like figure. She is one whom he can question and pray to, but just as Persephone belongs neither wholly to Demeter or Hades, so too does he express that she cannot belong wholly to him. To an extent, Dylan also echoes sentiments from a tradition established by the elegiac poets, sounding much like the lyrics of a paraklausithyron: he shows longing and affection for a beloved figure who is behind a threshold and simply out of reach. Although, as Richard Thomas aptly states, "Difficulty of comprehension seems to be part of Dylan's game,"¹²¹ I believe that Dylan uses Persephone allusions to enhance his Sad-Eyed Lady, developing a powerful, mysterious and unattainable female figure.

Conclusion

Sustaining a common idea across centuries, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Ovid, D. H. Lawrence, Sylvia Plath and Bob Dylan all explore the dual and opposing character of Persephone. They each examine a number of her and her myth's contrasting themes: light versus dark, fertility versus barrenness, life versus death, mortality versus

¹²¹ Thomas (2007): 54.

immortality, childhood versus adulthood, and agency versus submission. The complex unification of these contradictory traits develop the character of Persephone: Persephone adopts contradictory attributes, breaking free from the boundaries between them which remain fixed and obstructive to all others. Therefore, in her ability to transcend such boundaries, she becomes the embodiment of opposing qualities; yet belonging wholly to neither side of her binary life, Persephone exists as an elusive entity. As in the *Homeric Hymn*, where her eventual divided time and opposing roles lead to her assumption of power, so too do the subsequent poets view Persephone, in her dual roles, as a powerful figure.

Just as Ovid's allusions to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* provide a familiar authority of the myth to his works, yet also allow him to rework the narrative into his own representation of Persephone, so too do D. H. Lawrence, Sylvia Plath and Bob Dylan allude to the classical interpretations of Persephone in order to give their poetry mythic authority, and thus elevate their own ideas to the level of myth, divinity and wonder. In this elevation, the poets allude to Persephone to reveal anxieties about their own concern of agency, mortality and the unknown. Lawrence alludes to Persephone in order to discuss the ideas of death, immortality and regeneration – revealing his own hopes and uncertainties regarding the afterlife. He indicates Persephone's ability to transcend this fate due to her divided time and roles. While she ascends back into the world annually in an act of regeneration, Lawrence's speaker remains uncertain of his own fate, only able to hope for the regenerative power of Persephone. By alluding to Persephone, Plath draws a dichotomy between the two roles available to women: one role

works against societal expectations, finding autonomy in a profession, yet, in rejecting the role of wife and mother, deemed unproductive in society's eyes; the other, cedes to social pressures, submissively becoming wife and mother. Both roles provide positive and negative possibilities, and, by splitting the Persephone in two, Plath shows distress that a woman has two separate options, but neither is ideal: one leaves a woman an intellectual social outcast and the other the passive, and potentially abused, recipient of position as wife and mother. Plath utilizes allusion to Persephone in order to examine female autonomy and power, yet she concludes that, although each sister of the split persona possesses power in some respect, each one ultimately remains powerless in the confines of society. Dylan alludes to Persephone to present a powerful, mysterious and unattainable female figure, also displaying his own anxieties, but, unlike Lawrence and Plath, anxieties in respect to his own interactions with Persephone. As he supplicates her, he wonders if he can persuade this powerful woman and pass through her gate, yet, by presenting her as unattainable, he reveals that only she has the ability and power over crossing this threshold. Thus, the three incorporate this same mythological figure, similar elements and themes, and a similar questions of transcending boundaries and power, in order to express opinions about a varied set of topics: mortality, female societal constraints, love.

Each poet chooses a theme which resonates with the classical myth, as all three appear as prominent topics in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Ovid's *Fasti*, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. They use these themes, however, not only to elevate their own poetry to a mythic level, but to address a question of power and agency. In each circumstance, the

poet attributes some power to Persephone, yet also brings her agency into question. For Lawrence, she holds power over immortality and regeneration, but also appears nearly consumed by Pluto's dark; for Plath, her two Persephones both possess the power of autonomy or social acceptance, but each respectively trades one for the other; for Dylan, she, holding power over the supplicating speaker and depicted as one not easily taken and persuaded, exemplifies an autonomous female figure. By alluding to Persephone, the three twentieth century poets maintain aspects of Persephone's classical character, sharing consideration of her power and agency, but also using these qualities to address their own mortal and personal concerns. Just as centuries ago ancient Greeks used Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* to better understand their own mortal experiences, so too did twentieth century poets make use of Persephonic allusion to better express and understand theirs.

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