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**Daughters and Mothers through the Reception of the Myth of
Demeter and Persephone: Psychoanalysis and Vulnerability in
Rita Dove's *Mother Love* and Louise Glück's *Averno***

**Hijas y Madres a través de la Recepción del Mito de Deméter y
Perséfone: Psicoanálisis y Vulnerabilidad en *Mother Love* de
Rita Dove y *Averno* de Louise Glück**

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Abstract

Mythology provides us with a better understanding of the world around us. Thus, mythological stories keep finding their way into contemporary literature, and such is the case of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, which tells the story of Persephone's abduction by Hades and Demeter's mourning for the loss of her daughter. This myth addresses matters concerning, among other things, motherhood, death, life, and marriage. Many contemporary authors draw inspiration from mythological tales to create their writings; such is the case of the contemporary American authors Rita Dove and Louise Glück. Both Dove and Glück have incorporated mythological elements in multiple of their writings, and both have received the myth of Demeter and Persephone, exploring psychological aspects and addressing contemporary issues through their perception of this myth. As such, this thesis examines the reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in two books of poetry, Dove's *Mother Love* (1995) and Glück's *Averno* (2006), with a twofold objective: firstly, through close reading, to determine the impact of narcissism and trauma in Dove's and Glück's receptions of the Demeter/Persephone myth; secondly, to establish the role of vulnerability in these two contemporary appropriations of the myth. Thus, I shall apply a combination of Reception Studies, Psychoanalytic Studies, and Vulnerability Studies to achieve these aims. In sum, I will associate the ancient Homeric and Ovidian sources with the contemporary reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in Dove's *Mother Love* and Glück's *Averno*. Then, I will explore narcissism and trauma in these two books of poetry by applying Psychoanalytic Studies. After that, I will examine the concepts of gender, dependency, emotions, victimhood, resistance, and resilience associated with Vulnerability Studies. I will conclude with an overview of Dove's and Glück's reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone as daughters and mothers.

Resumen

La mitología nos proporciona una mejor comprensión del mundo que nos rodea. Así, los relatos mitológicos siguen abriéndose camino en la literatura contemporánea, y tal es el caso del mito de Deméter y Perséfone que narra la historia del rapto de Perséfone por Hades y el duelo de Deméter por la pérdida de su hija. Este mito aborda cuestiones relativas, entre otras cosas, a la maternidad, la muerte, la vida y el matrimonio. Muchos autores contemporáneos se inspiran en relatos mitológicos para crear sus escritos; tal es el caso de las autoras americanas contemporáneas Rita Dove y Louise Glück. Tanto Dove como Glück han incorporado elementos mitológicos en múltiples de sus escritos, y ambas han recibido el mito de Deméter y Perséfone, explorando aspectos psicológicos y abordando temas contemporáneos a través de su percepción de este mito. Así, esta tesis examina la recepción del mito de Deméter y Perséfone en dos libros de poesía, *Mother Love* (1995) de Dove y *Averno* (2006) de Glück, con un doble objetivo: en primer lugar, a través de una lectura atenta, determinar el impacto de narcisismo y trauma en las recepciones de Dove y Glück del mito de Deméter y Perséfone; en segundo lugar, establecer el papel de la vulnerabilidad en estas dos apropiaciones contemporáneas del mito. Por lo tanto, aplicaré una combinación de Estudios de Recepción, Estudios Psicoanalíticos y Estudios de Vulnerabilidad para lograr estos objetivos. En resumen, asociaré las antiguas fuentes homéricas y ovidianas con la recepción contemporánea del mito de Deméter y Perséfone en *Mother Love* de Dove y *Averno* de Glück. Luego, exploraré el narcisismo y el trauma en estos dos libros de poesía aplicando los Estudios Psicoanalíticos. Posteriormente, examinaré los conceptos de género, dependencia, emociones, victimismo, resistencia y resiliencia asociados a los Estudios de Vulnerabilidad. Concluiré con un resumen de la recepción de Dove y Glück del mito de Deméter y Perséfone como hijas y madres.

Résumé

La mythologie nous permet de mieux comprendre le monde qui nous entoure. Ainsi, les histoires mythologiques continuent de faire leur chemin dans la littérature contemporaine, et c'est le cas du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone qui raconte l'histoire de l'enlèvement de Perséphone par Hadès et le deuil de Déméter pour la perte de sa fille. Ce mythe aborde des questions liées, entre autres, à la maternité, à la mort, à la vie et au mariage. De nombreux auteurs contemporains s'inspirent d'histoires mythologiques pour créer leurs écrits; c'est le cas des auteurs américains contemporains Rita Dove et Louise Glück. Dove et Glück ont incorporé des éléments mythologiques dans nombre de leurs écrits, et tous deux ont reçu le mythe de Déméter et Perséphone, explorant les aspects psychologiques et abordant les problèmes contemporains à travers leur perception de ce mythe. Ainsi, cette thèse examine la réception du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone dans deux recueils de poésie, *Mother Love* (1995) de Dove et *Averno* (2006) de Glück, avec un double objectif: d'abord, par une lecture attentive, déterminer l'impact de narcissisme et traumatisme sur les réceptions de Dove et Glück du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone; d'autre part, établir le rôle de la vulnérabilité dans ces deux appropriations contemporaines du mythe. Par conséquent, j'appliquerai une combinaison d'études de réception, d'études psychanalytiques et d'études de vulnérabilité pour atteindre ces objectifs. En résumé, j'associerai les anciennes sources homériques et ovidiennes à la réception contemporaine du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone dans *Mother Love* de Dove et *Averno* de Glück. Ensuite, j'explorerai le narcissisme et le traumatisme dans ces deux livres de poésie appliquant les études psychanalytiques. Par la suite, j'examinerai les notions de genre, de dépendance, d'émotions, de victimisation, de résistance et de résilience associées aux études de vulnérabilité. Je conclurai par un résumé de la réception par Dove et Glück du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone en tant que filles et mères.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The universality of the *Homeric Hymns* and their easily relatable themes have played a crucial role in their continuing appeal. These *Hymns* have been rewritten and reimagined multiple times over the centuries, filling lacunas and adding new meanings. Many centuries after the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* first appeared, it is still finding its way into contemporary literature.¹

The myth of Demeter and Persephone portrays a mother-daughter bond that has been challenged and reinterpreted countless times, leaving us to wonder about the implications of this relationship. Persephone's marriage following her abduction has also been scrutinised over the years, each time debating the extent (or absence) of her willingness to accompany the god Hades—her raptor, the way in which Hades lures Persephone or the events that take place in the underworld. All of these rereadings attempt to shed light on the story of Persephone and her relationship with Hades, as well as on the enduring interest in this myth, which stems from the continuing relevance of the relationship that this story portrays. As regards the reception of this myth in contemporary literature, no one text can always be clearly established as the principal source, but rather authors generally use a combination of sources. Some of the most influential classical subtexts regarding the myth of Demeter and Persephone are Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*. In *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Ovid humanises his characters, emphasising the role of the mother-goddess. The impact of his versions of the myth of Demeter and Persephone has been such that they have continued to inspire contemporary rewritings to this day. At times, Ovid's influence is accompanied by that of modern 'mythographers' such as Robert Graves, Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire and Edith Hamilton.

Among the contemporary authors who have reimagined the myth of Demeter and Persephone are the two American writers, Rita Dove and Louise Glück. Multiple reasons underpinned my decision to study the work of Dove and Glück for this thesis. First, there are strong ties between them; for instance, Glück taught Dove at the University of Iowa (Pereira, *Into a Light* 90). Second, both have written a book of poetry exploring, among other topics, the

¹ See Stange; Bennett; Radford; Louis; Podnieks and O'Reilly; Blackford; Norton; Bijelic; Savva and Apanomeritaki.

mother-daughter bond found in the myth of Demeter and Persephone, and both took over two years to complete their respective books of poetry. Moreover, both Dove's *Mother Love* and Glück's *Averno* were written at the turn of the century, and both were written *to* their mothers and *for* their children.²

Different case studies and framing narratives have been written about either Rita Dove's *Mother Love* or Louise Glück's *Averno* and, at times, both simultaneously. These studies explore the reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in Dove and Glück's contemporary appropriations of this myth and their use of it to address familial, psychological, and feminist issues. All these studies provide informational scaffolding necessary for a better understanding of this thesis. To perceive the evolution of the research done about Dove's *Mother Love* and Glück's *Averno*, I have decided to follow them thematically, concentrating on each of the authors separately and then address those studies done about both authors. Then, I justify the gap that I aim to fill with my original research.

1.1. Literature Review

The reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in Dove's *Mother Love* is undeniable, thus the importance of addressing the subject. Indeed, *Mother Love* cannot be separated from the myth, and so can be seen in the studies that build part of this dissertation. The earliest studies done about Dove's *Mother Love* are Lotta Lofgren's 1996 article "Partial Horror: Fragmentation and Healing in Rita Dove's *Mother Love*" and Lesley Wheeler's 1996 "Attitudes of Mothering: Review of Rita Dove's *Mother Love*." Lofgren points out the way Dove explores our traditional understandings of the relationships among the mother goddess Demeter, her daughter, and the god of the underworld (135) while indicating that the seven sections of Dove's *Mother Love* could allude to a cycle into and back from the underworld (141). Lofgren also remarks how Dove reminds us with this book of poetry that "ideals of order must always contend with the chaos of life" (141). Wheeler remarks on the ambiguity of *Mother Love*, a book that "tells the story of Demeter and Persephone from both perspectives (with occasional interruptions from the

² Louise Glück states in an interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kx0Q_SAaTIE&list=LL&index=96 (access 06/02/2022) that she wrote *Averno* to her mother and the dedication on *Averno* is for Noah, her child. Rita Dove writes in the dedication of *Mother Love*, "FOR my mother TO my daughter."

voice of Hades, the abductor), telescoping between classical myth and photographs on milk-cartons, the clichés of contemporary child abduction” (106). Wheeler pays special attention to the relationships found in Dove’s book of poetry:

Mother Love’s attitude towards poetic influence, the literary version of this troubled relationship, also takes multiple sides and also eventually favors the defiant daughter. The familial metaphor for influence (parent to child, sibling to rivalrous sibling, even, implicitly, mentor to student) presumes relationships between poets rather than, as is often the case, between poems; nevertheless, it has been irresistible to many critics and is invoked here by Dove. (109)

Others pay more attention to the theme of motherhood (e. g. Palaska) while always bearing in mind the myth of Demeter and Persephone. William W. Cook and James Tatum address in *African American Writers and Classical Tradition* (2010) the mythological influence in some of Dove’s writings. As such, they contemplate the poem “Arrow” and other poems in *Grace Notes* (1989), the novel *Through the Ivory Gate* (1993) addressing the *Odyssey*, or *The Darker Face of the Earth* (1994) considering the image of Oedipus and subsequently discussing *Mother Love* and the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Also, Katie Elizabeth Hartsock scrutinises *Mother Love*, in her dissertation *The Past Like Never Before: Classical Women in Revisionary Poetry from Euripides and Ovid to H.D., Rita Dove, and Carol Ann Duffy* (2015), associating it to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and slightly mentioning Glück’s *Averno* as another example of the reworking of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone. Cristina Salcedo González also explores the reworking of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in Dove’s *Mother Love* in “El Mito de Perséfone y El Conflicto de La Maternidad En *Mother Love*, de Rita Dove” (2020). Here, Salcedo González tracks Persephone’s appearance in the ancient sources for a better understanding of Dove’s contemporary characters, justifying the choice of this myth as it contemplates the female role from various perspectives.

Apart from the unquestionable classical influence on *Mother Love*, different studies, aside from addressing the reception of the ancient myth in Dove’s book of poetry, have emphasised the African-American side of *Mother Love*. In this line, Carol Keyes writes “Language’s “Bliss of Unfolding” in and through History, Autobiography and Myth: the Poetry of Rita Dove” in 1999, a dissertation addressing the first five books of poetry published by Rita Dove, which are *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), *Museum* (1983), *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), *Grace Notes*

(1989), and *Mother Love* (1995). The fact that Dove is a black female poet makes Keyes pay special attention to this author within African-American and American women's poetic traditions regarding history, autobiography, and myth. Then, in 2002, Diana Victoria Cruz compared in her dissertation, "A Habit of Translation: Race and Aesthetics in the Poetry of Rita Dove Wheatley, and Melvin B. Tolson," the work of Rita Dove to other black poets aiming for racial specificity in their writings. Cruz, therefore, states how "Dove does find, then, concepts and experiences in African American and Greek traditions to be compatible. In her use, the Greek model does not obscure black tradition, but assists her in illuminating African American experience" (34). Furthermore, Cruz also argues that, "in contrast to those who claim Dove transcends race in *Mother Love* and *The Darker Face of the Earth*, (...) she uses the themes of abduction and familial chaos to underscore the turbulent history of blacks' and whites' relationships in the American family" (126). A prominent researcher that addresses similar points in multiple studies is Malin Pereira.³ This professor of African American and American literature wrote *Rita Dove's Cosmopolitanism* in 2003, going through Dove's writings from 1980 to 1999. This research provides an in-depth comprehension of Dove's publications, evidencing the African-American side of her writings and contemplating the author's poetic anxieties about cultural mixing.

Also, in her 2005 dissertation, Christine A. Murray explores the impact of the African-American influence on Dove's writings while scrutinising the action of reading in her books and pointing out the different personae Dove uses in her poetic writings. In Murray's dissertation, although *Mother Love* is not explicitly associated with any particular ancient text, the reader is introduced to Greek events. Murray fails to treat the book of poetry in question as a unit by choosing to focus on only a handful of the poems in *Mother Love* exploring relevant points such as gender, feminism, patriarchy, identity and self, the vulnerable feminine self, and the importance of voice in these poems. Then, Veronica Leigh House in 2006 writes her dissertation "Backward to your Sources, Sacred Rivers: a Transatlantic Feminist Tradition of Mythic Revision," where she analyses Dove's rewriting of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, exploring the questions of age and race. Hua Ping Liu views in the 2009 dissertation "A signifyin(g) perspective on the western tradition in Rita Dove's *Mother Love*" the reception of the myth of Demeter as an African-American rewriting while exploring the mother-daughter

³ See Pereira 2000; 2002; 2010; 2013.

relationship addressing loss, self-identity, the sonnet form in *Mother Love*, together with the female self-recovering. Also, Althea Tait in 2015 concentrates on Dove's discussion of Black motherhood associated with *Mother Love* while, a year prior, M. Kalai Nathiyal and G. Sankar regarded the recent critical discourse of Cosmopolitanism seeking to understand African American Literature. They determine that the most prominent theme in *Mother Love* is the loss experienced by the parents who let go of their children. They also reflect about "children's loss of innocence as they move into the world" (32). Additionally, they regard Dove as a cosmopolitan poet "who concentrates on multicultural eras" (32).

Similarly to the above-mentioned analyses, Therese Steffen contemplates, in *Crossing Color* (2001), the mythological reception in *Mother Love* and the African-American influence on Dove's writing. However, what caught my attention is the narrow interest in the psychoanalytic conception of narcissism in Demeter's narcissistic grief (131-133) and the narcissistic identification of a child with the mother (134). Prominent psychoanalytic research carried out on Dove's *Mother Love* is that of Holly Ann Schullo. In 2006, Schullo elaborated the dissertation "Persephone: Reworkings of a Lost Daughter" based on an object-relations psychoanalytic analysis of the way two authors receive the tale of Demeter and Persephone, one of them being Dove's appropriation of the myth in question addressing comfort as well as loss. The most recent dissertation along the same lines is that of Rachel C. Morrison (2018), who analyses *Mother Love* as a unit going through each section of this book of poetry and associating them to the Ovidian version while alluding now and then to the *Homeric Hymn* and contemplating trauma, concluding:

Dove is interested in the way that trauma lingers. In "Statistic: The Witness," one of Persephone's companions continues to be haunted by the abduction that she witnessed, forever changed by a secondhand trauma. Demeter's worries and warnings to Persephone in flashbacks suggest that experience has made her all too aware of what terrible things could befall her daughter. Finally, Persephone herself recalls being "returned," putting "returned" in scare quotes to signal that her return could not undo what happened to her. (80)

Other research approaches to *Mother Love* address relevant themes such as resistance and emotions. As such, Susana M. Morris (2007) expands, in her dissertation, on feminist analyses

that seek to recognize the varied and complex history of black women's writing, having as one of the corpora Dove's *Mother Love*, while exploring the contemporalization of the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Morris traces a line between the ancient tales and Dove's contemporary reworking of the mother-goddess motif in the Demeter story examining the relationships between mothers and daughters. Morris focuses on the role of resistance and storytelling in motherhood, placing *Mother Love* among continuing traditions of black women's writing. Therefore, Morris outlines the main themes addressed in each of the different sections composing *Mother Love*, treating this book as a unit, and concluding:

Mother Love is clearly about transformations women undergo as mothers and the power mothers wield. By placing the archetypal mother-goddess as the volume's center, Dove foregrounds the integral nature of change and women's power in literary motherhood, from the inception of ancient Greek myth to contemporary African American literature (2007: 172-173).

Moreover, S. Isabel Geathers (2011) explores *Mother Love* from a thematic perspective contemplating rage and lament in Dove's reworking of the story of Demeter and Persephone without addressing any particular source yet introducing the myth to the reader before the analysis.

As it happened with Dove's *Mother Love*, Glück's *Averno* goes hand in hand with the mythic story of Demeter and Persephone. Therefore, addressing the reception of this myth in Glück's book of poetry is unavoidable. Britta Spann wrote in 2009, "Reviving Kalliope: four North American Women and the Epic Tradition," a dissertation acknowledging the impact of family relationships on *Averno* while determining that some of its poems are centred on the Demeter-Persephone myth. The only poem that Spann focuses on is, as Dan Chiasson (2007) had done two years before, "Prism," where she only contemplates familial relationships. Valerie Frankel (2016) concentrates on a few key points of the reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in three of the poems found in Glück's *Averno*. In 2020, Lily Zhou addressed *Averno* alluding to the influence of the original myth on this book of poetry but focusing on the motif of nature. Unlike previous research, Kristina Kočan Šalamon (2016) contemplates the poem "October," found in *Averno*, as a reflection of the 9/11 attacks, a topic that had already been

introduced by Ann Keniston in 2008 and which she developed in 2011. Similarly, in 2022, Isobel Hurst briefly mentions the 9/11 attacks associated with “October” and Glück’s autobiographical tone when addressing her feeling of being trapped, just like Persephone. Then, Hurst determines the influence of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in *Averno* as a whole and the poem “Pomegranate,” found in *The House on Marshland* (1975).

Aside from the myth itself, as slightly mentioned above, Glück’s poems have been characterised as addressing autobiographical motifs. In fact, in 2006, the same year *Averno* got published, Daniel Morris wrote about Louise Glück’s poetry where he established that her writings range from “the persona poem to blunt confessionalism” (1). Morris goes through Glück’s poetry from *Firstborn* (1968) to *Averno* (2006) by analysing diction, tone, and central themes, which he considers to be “desire, hunger, trauma, survival, commentary, autobiography, nature, spiritual witnessing” (2). He also remarks on the impact of psychoanalysis and mythology in Glück’s writing. As for *Averno*, Daniel Morris determines the presence of a laconic tone and a speaker well acquainted with “the cosmic silence of death” (11) while addressing, very superficially, the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Morris’ study helped shape the understanding of Glück’s poetry. However, this research does not scrutinise any of Glück’s books of poetry but rather discusses her works in general while appreciating certain particular traits in each of these books of poetry and associating her writings to her personal experiences. Then, Chiasson, in 2007, decided to focus on one poem inside *Averno*, “Prism,” which he looks at from autobiographical lenses omitting any relation between the myth of Demeter and Persephone and *Averno*. After this, Keniston (2008) reads each poem in *Averno* separately, associating Glück’s poetry with diverse recurrent motifs in her writings while tackling autobiography and mythic narratives such as that of Persephone. This autobiographical impact on Glück’s works is also acknowledged by Gregory Paul Brown (2009), in his dissertation “Language on the Line: Form and Meaning in Three American Poets,” while pointing out how Glück addresses the Persephone myth, not only in *Averno* but also in “Pomegranate” in *The House on Marshland* (1975). However, Brown only contemplates Glück’s writings in general and does not analyse any poem in particular, attempting to establish the immense impact of autobiography and pattern in Glück’s writing. In 2019, Iman Farouk Mohamed El Bakary alludes, once more, to the mythical sources and contemplates *Averno* as a unit influenced by the myth of Demeter and Persephone and by

Glück's personal experiences. Kacper Bartczak undertakes a critical discussion of Glück's post-confessional formula, starting with *Firstborn* (1968) until reaching *Averno* (2006), pointing out themes found in Glück's poetry:

The female subject renouncing the gender difference, taking up her place in the patriarchal order that can be interpreted as the form of the Lacanian search for authenticity in the psycho-theology of submission to death—this position, worked out between the poems devoted to the father in *The Triumph of Achilles* and in *Ararat* is the defining structure of the female subject in Louise Glück poetry, reaching well into the late 1990s and 2000's. It must be noted that the later volumes, especially *Averno* (2006), contain poems which are an attempt to recuperate from the earlier strict renunciation of the finite. (84)

Psychoanalytic studies are very common when it comes to analysing Glück's *Averno*. Indeed, Morris (2006) introduces the theme of trauma related to Glück's poetry. Then, Cyril Wong Yit Mun (2008), in a dissertation, decides to look at *Averno* as a unit associating it with the myth of Demeter and Persephone while taking a step further and addressing much more of the trauma the speaker has to endure. Won Yit Mun attempts to read Glück's six books of poetry, starting with *Ararat* (1990) and ending with *Averno* (2006) as linked writings united by Glück's autobiographical experiences:

Glück's last six collections, from *Ararat* to *Averno*, are bound by a plot in which the poet negotiates with traumatic, personal events in her life, seeking to accept an existence without the comfort of absolute truths, and manages to do so by her last book, although not without emotional difficulty. The poet moved from just revisioning personal memories to expanding the private self and projecting it onto the realm of allegory, achieving the affect [*sic*] of an increasingly greater universality. (88)

Then, Uta Gosmann (2012) psychoanalyses Persephone, mainly in two poems of *Averno*, "Persephone the Wanderer" (I) and "Persephone the Wanderer" (II), establishing Persephone as the protagonist in *Averno* and viewing this book of poetry as "inspired by Persephone's cyclical experience of life and death" (182). Gosmann uses Psychoanalysis as the main theoretical framework and gives the reader some Ovidian context about the myth while pointing out the fact

that Glück wrote about what she remembered from D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* (1967) regarding the Demeter-Persephone myth. Gosmann scrutinises Persephone from a psychoanalytical perspective and establishes the role of Demeter and Hades in Persephone's state, following Freud's and Jung's theories. In the same vein, Mary Kate Azcuy (2011) focused on the poem "October." Then, two years later, she addressed the poems "Crater Lake" and "Averno," inside of *Averno*, and associated them with the myth of Demeter and Persephone while contemplating this book of poetry as a unit that "relates to Glück's human dilemma" ("Louise Glück's Irenic Poems" 107). Azcuy also mentions the passive anger Demeter displays ("Louise Glück's Irenic Poems" 107) and the "continuing vulnerability of women facing the brutal options of non-existence, as in Kôré's death" ("Louise Glück's Irenic Poems" 112). In 2009, Azcuy had already addressed Glück's appropriation of the myth, focusing on the two poems entitled "Persephone the Wanderer." In this study, she combined a psychoanalytic and feminist approach. In 2017, Allison Cooke explored, among other things, Demeter's narcissistic mother role. As a mother, Demeter questions her existence after Persephone's abduction, since her daughter is the one that gave her identity as a mother. Cooke focuses on two of Louise Glück's poems, namely "Fugue" and "Persephone the Wanderer" (II), tackling the theme of identity and the feminine figures from psychoanalytic and philosophical lenses. Then, in 2023, Natalia Muzyka argued in *Nature as a Mirror Reflection of Human Emotions: Analysis of Louise Glück's Averno Chosen Poems* that Glück uses nature as a mirror to reflect the speaker's psychological states and emotions.

Few studies are concerned with both Dove's *Mother Love* and Glück's *Averno*. In 2012, Hurst explored the reinterpretation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in Rita Dove's *Mother Love* and Louise Glück's *Averno* emphasising the female experiences through Persephone as a daughter and as a wife while alluding at the same time, for instance, to Glück's personal experience in her writing. Then, in 2015, Hartsock discussed the reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in Rita Dove's *Mother Love* and how this book of poetry allows us to better understand the original story. She also mentioned Louise Glück's *Averno* though very superficially. After that, in the most recent dissertation, "The Myth of Persephone: Body Objectification from Ancient to Modern," Melanie Daifotis (2017) starts with a brief introduction to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and then presents

Persephone's, Demeter's, and Hades/Pluto's points of view in contemporary works, including Dove's *Mother Love* and Glück's *Averno*, merely describing the characters' behaviour in these rewritings.

My thesis builds upon the existing critical work on Dove's *Mother Love* and Glück's *Averno*. However, my research differs from others in the way I contemplate these two books of poetry. Previous studies lack focus on the establishment and correlation of the ancient sources in Dove's and Glück's appropriations of the myth. Therefore, in an attempt to fill a gap in all these studies, the present research considers highly relevant to, first, study the motifs found in the Homeric and Ovidian sources that are still present in the contemporary ones together with their more modern and well-known mythographical retellings by Robert Graves, D'Aulaires and Edith Hamilton. Then, it is also imperative to explore those motifs through different theoretical frameworks. As such, I will use Reception Studies to evaluate Dove's and Glück's receptions of the Demeter and Persephone myth. After that, I will apply Vulnerability Studies, as it is a framework that has not been explored in this particular context, even if, in some instances, vulnerability per se has been superficially mentioned (Azcu, "Louise Glück's Irenic Poems") or certain vulnerability-related themes have been slightly regarded (S. Morris; Geathers). Then, in spite of the exploration of psychoanalytic terms such as narcissism, trauma, and depression by different authors addressing the contemporary reception of the myth in Dove's and Glück's books of poetry (Steffen; Schullo; D. Morris; Keniston, "Balm after Violence"; Gosmann; Sastri; Morrison; Bartczak) I have perceived that the closer we go in time concerning the publication of, in this case, *Mother Love* the fewer psychoanalytic researches we find. Almost a decade after *Mother Love* got published, researchers started addressing psychoanalytic matters related to the mother-daughter relationship, revealing that Psychoanalytic Studies related to this book of poetry are a contemporary practice. Unlike *Mother Love*, *Averno* has been looked at from Psychoanalytic lenses from the beginning since Glück has overtly confirmed her interest in psychoanalysis, making it unavoidable to consider her poetry from a psychoanalytic perspective, as all her writings contemplate such aspects. On the contrary, Vulnerability Studies have not been so widely applied to Glück's poetry despite her almost exclusive interest in psychoanalysis, as Vulnerability Studies are a more recent trend that share many common areas with Psychoanalytic Studies. Therefore, to fill a gap in the previous studies of the two books of poetry in question, I

attempt to provide an original thesis of *Mother Love* and *Averno* combining different frameworks, namely Reception Studies, Vulnerability Studies, and Psychoanalytic Studies, which I believe go hand in hand as they are all interrelated.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Reception Studies focus on the link between ancient and contemporary sources. The term ‘reception’ emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, thanks to three prominent names, firstly, Hans-Georg Gadamer, then Wolfgang Iser, and Hans Robert Jauss, who later developed this theory. This last one’s influence lies, mainly, in the acknowledgment of the importance of history in the reception theory (Leonard 836), yet authors like Charles Martindale partially question Jauss’ historicized version of the reception theory (9). Clearly, Reception Studies are in a “continuous dialogue between the past and the present and also require some ‘lateral’ dialogue in which crossing boundaries of place or language or genre is as important as crossing those of time” (Hardwick, *Reception* 4). Moreover, the field of Reception Studies is, in William Brockliss’ words, “an inherently interdisciplinary field in its encompassing of a variety of departments and disciplines, each with its own canons, practices, and shared working assumptions” (11). Indeed, as Maarten De Pourcq, Nathalie de Haan, and David Rijser assert, many chose to address “this field of study in its plural form, as classical reception studies, because it consists of various sorts of attempts to think or to engage with classical reception from the perspective of different fields of study” (1).

When it comes to reception, it can take different forms, among which we find “citation, imitation, opposition, re-modelling, parody” (Alexandrou 31). Additionally, for instance, Homeric reception comprises different processes, such as “translation, transplantation, re-imagining, rewriting, re-performance. Sometimes these overlap” (Hardwick, “Homer” 18). Reception Studies relate to Classical Tradition Studies (De Pourcq 222). Nevertheless, the classical tradition might also overlap the receptions of Greece and Rome as they are not the same, mainly because “the reception of Greece and Rome includes readings and rereadings from within the ancient world itself” (Silk et al. 4).⁴ Indeed, as Anastasia Bakogianni explains:

⁴ For further readings on Classical Tradition see Budelmann and Haubold; Broder; Greenwood.

The difference between reception and the study of the classical tradition is that reception offers more of an all-inclusive model of the study of this phenomenon and one that does not offer a canonical reading of the classical model to the detriment of its reception. Reception is about our dialogue with the classical past, whatever form that takes, and as a two-way conversation rather than as a monologue prioritizing one or the other. (97-98)

Therefore, it is imperative to address the concept of “classical tradition” as a study of “the transmission and dissemination of classical culture through the ages” (Hardwick, *Reception 2*).⁵ Martindale points out how our interpretations of ancient texts are “constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected” and therefore “we cannot get back to any originary meaning wholly free of subsequent accretions” (7). Also, as Bakogianni puts it:

Reception theory rejects the existence of the one, original, objective and fixed text that has to be examined as a pure art form as new criticism and many postmodern theorists would argue. In reception we speak rather in terms of text’s’, plural because each time a text is read it is being received and interpreted in a new way. (97)

Psychoanalytic Studies are shaped around Sigmund Freud’s theories in the late 19th century.⁶ Then Carl Gustav Jung followed in his steps, as well as other followers who were active participants in those theories that are still being developed in our twenty-first century. The consolidation of psychoanalysis and mythology might have started with Freud’s reimagining of Sophocles’ Oedipus.⁷ As a result, there has been a complex relationship between psychoanalysis and Hellenic studies since they are “dividing and contesting their use of a central classical source” (Bowlby 802). However, Freud revived the ancient myth and gave it a new identity at a time when classical studies were starting to lose their prominent place (Bowlby 802). Moreover, with Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the beginning of the twentieth century becomes the symbolical “turning-point that would soon mean that ‘Oedipus’, to most ears, meant a ‘Freudian’

⁵ An example of an analysis of “classical tradition” can be found in Hardwick (2011) who traces a path from Classical Tradition to Reception Studies and even offers an example of the application of this study on a case study (Hardwick et al. 41-100).

⁶ On readings related to psychoanalysis see <http://users.uoa.gr/~cdokou/> [accessed 01/04/2023].

⁷ On a feminist counterpoint to Freudian Psychoanalysis, see J. Mitchell.

idea rather than a mythical character” (Bowlby 803). Thus, psychoanalysis appropriated Oedipus causing the Classical Oedipus to be “relegated to an understudy” (Bowlby 803). Thus, it is safe to state that Freud is the one that made the most contributions “to keep that myth alive in the modern world” (Doherty 67). Indeed, in the twentieth century, the mythical figure of Oedipus became known as a complex but not a king (Bowlby 806). Jung’s psychoanalytic theories are also essential for this research as it is the Jungians who have gone the farthest in developing the therapeutic potential of myth (Doherty 68). As Doherty remarks, “psychoanalysis does function as a kind of modern myth— a story shared by successive generations within the same culture, that describes the way things are and explains how they got to be that way” (Doherty 67).

As part of the psychoanalytic scope, the present research will focus on narcissism and trauma. One of the first to give the earliest account of narcissism was Paul Näcke (1899), later on, Otto Rank (1911), and three years later, Freud published *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. When addressing narcissism, everything goes back to when Echo fell in love with Narcissus, yet the latter did not love her back.⁸ Hence, Narcissus was condemned to have his heart broken as he broke that of those who loved him. Therefore, Narcissus fell in love with his reflection in the pool, and when he tried to reach his image, he died (*Met.* 3.339-510). Narcissists are indeed in love with their reflection (Vaknin and Rangelovska 25).⁹ They do not have self-love but are rather self-centred. Narcissists are childish, eternal victims, arrogant, and superior. They see people as extensions of themselves and easily blame others for everything while taking no responsibility for their actions and lacking empathy. They are also manipulators, passive-aggressive, and grandiose, among many other things.¹⁰ As Freud (1917) had established, when the narcissistic self loses their object of love, they experience depression out of the emptiness left. This is closely related to one of the two different types of depression Blatt and Zuroff (1992) consider, which is explained by Dimitris Anastasopoulos, who, alluding to the study Blatt and Zuroff carried, explains:

There is ‘Dependent’ depression in which the primary issues are loss and abandonment; and ‘Introverted’ depression in which the primary issues are failure, guilt and a disturbed sense of autonomy and self-worth. Dependent depression is characterised by loneliness, helplessness,

⁸ On Echo and Narcissus see Gaspar.

⁹ On an analysis of a possible sense prior to Narcissus psychoanalytic interpretation see Rodrigues 23-33.

¹⁰ See Brunell et al.

weakness, difficulty in expressing anger for fear of additional loss and mechanisms of denial and a search for a better (mainly object directed) substitute object. Introverted depression is characterised by self-judgment, feelings of worthlessness, inferiority, failure and guilt. People with this kind of depression constantly strive for perfection and accomplishments and might be judgmental and aggressive towards others. Elements of the ideal ego and narcissism are identifiable. (346)

This clearly explains the connection between depression and narcissism. Interestingly, Freud considers we all have certain narcissism in us. As Freud puts it, “a human being has originally two sexual objects— himself and the woman who nurses him— and in doing so we are postulating a primary narcissism in everyone, which may in some cases manifest itself [*sic*] in a dominating fashion in his object-choice” (*On Narcissism* 88). Sexuality starts therefore with primary narcissism which is also related to Freud’s understanding of the repressed Oedipus Complex which could lead to incest (Jung, C. G., et al. 73).¹¹ Indeed, the oedipal complex:

[It] involves matters of conflictual relationships about and between representations of self and other that are loved and hated; but most profoundly, it concerns the limits of human desire in relation to the ubiquitous traumata of the incest taboo and the way in which the limits of desire delimit the possibility of our knowing and our being. (Barratt 88)

Hence, what unites sexuality and incest is trauma that Garland (25) considers “a kind of wound. When we call an event traumatic, we are borrowing the word from the Greek where it refers to a piercing of the skin, a breaking of the bodily envelope. In physical medicine it denotes damage to tissue.” Freud (1920) takes this definition further and emphasises the piercing of the mind wounded by events. Indeed, trauma is the psychological response to a highly adverse situation. It results in an impact on the brain that might interfere with the ability to live a normal life (Starcevic 1). The brain is highly impacted by trauma, giving sense memories a central role in trauma (Reese) as senses remember trauma (Van de Kolk). As Reese states, “certain sights, sounds, smells, feelings, or tastes may evoke memories of a trauma. This is known as preverbal trauma: when the senses remember the trauma but someone does not have a verbal memory of it” (3). Identification with trauma can be a two edged-sword. On the one hand, it can be protective.

¹¹ On sexuality see Butler, *Bodies That Matter*.

On the other hand, it also adds to the impossibility of moving on. Moreover, “trauma can mimic narcissism, dependency, schizoid states, and so on, wearing many guises” (Starcevic 3). A relevant traumatic event for this analysis is that resulting from incest (Jacobs 104-113). This results in incest trauma.

Freud has influenced many psychoanalytic theories, among them we find Lacanian Psychoanalysis, developed by Jacques Lacan. One of the most relevant understandings in Lacanian Psychoanalysis is the concept of the mirror and the Other. The latter represents not only others but also the external world, being of utmost relevance to the shaping of identity. The Other and the reflection in the mirror condition how we perceive ourselves. Indeed, the ego acquires the image of the Other, which puts the Other at the core of subjectivity despite the apparent independence of the ego (Moncayo 36). This can be reflected in the mother-child relationship:

At first, the mother and the child use the object mirror to link the mother’s desire for the child to the child’s specular image in the mirror, so that the Other may become the I. The child’s body image is framed by the mother and the Name given to the image. That the mother as Other and mirror frames the ideal ego, or the visual representation of the body, remains an existential ambiguity for the subject. Am I me, or an Other? Who am I? If I am another, how can I be me? On the other hand, if the body image is not formed or integrated, and the protection of the mother’s desire and the function of the Name is not there, then these are precisely the conditions under which the world becomes not normally but pathologically persecutory. (Moncayo 37)

This quote connects the mother, the child and the mirror. Here the mother is the Other, which in turn becomes the self. Thus, the child no longer knows who they are and whether they are just an extension of the mother. Hence, the child becomes utterly mystified and does not know their true identity.

Vulnerability Studies. Although vulnerability has been a topic of interest for many researchers (Asad et al.; Couto et al.), there is no universal definition of this term (Füssel; Paul) as it is hard to define but recognisably acknowledged (Parley). Vulnerability studies are associated, on the one hand, with a universal human condition (Fineman, “The Vulnerable Subject”) referring to a shared vulnerability (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality”), therefore, not restricted, for instance, to a distinct gender (Butler et al.). On the other hand, other authors relate vulnerability to a group of people (Herring), such as some groups of women (Kellezi and

Reicher). Martha Albertson Fineman is against the allusion to a particular group of people as vulnerable. Thus, she prefers to point to vulnerability as something “universal and constant” (Fineman 2008: 1) and associated with dependency (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice”). As Fineman illustrates:

There are two related types of dependency relevant to vulnerability theory: inevitable dependency and derivative dependency. Inevitable dependence arises from the body. As embodied beings, we are inevitably dependent on physical and emotional care from others. This form of dependency is physical and developmental and for that reason can be thought of as episodic. We are dependent on care when we are infants or children because without care we would not survive. (...) The inevitable dependency of the infant generates a different social form of dependency for those who undertake the essential task of caretaking. The term “derivative dependency” captures the simple, but often overlooked, fact that those who care for others are then rendered reliant or dependent on access to sufficient material, institutional, and physical resources in order to accomplish that care successfully. (“Vulnerability and Social Justice” 360-361)

Indeed, our human and social condition creates this dependency as “not only are we then vulnerable to one another—an invariable feature of social relations—but, in addition, this very vulnerability indicates a broader condition of dependency and interdependency that challenges the dominant ontological understanding of the embodied subject” (Butler et al. 21). Furthermore, there are studies about our emotional vulnerability and the connection that there is between shame, grief, fear and vulnerability (Brown 2006; Brown 2010; Brown 2012a; Brown 2012b; Brown 2015). Vulnerability also encompasses a wide range of conditions, such as oppression, victimhood, risk (Virokannas et al.), or crime (Chakraborti and Garland). In fact, “although it is often narrowly understood as merely ‘openness to physical or emotional harm’, vulnerability should be recognised as *the* primal human condition. As embodied beings, we are universally and individually constantly susceptible to change in our well being” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 142). Moreover, “the term ‘vulnerable’, used to connote the continuous susceptibility to change in both our bodily and social well-being that all human beings experience, makes it clear that there is no position of invulnerability—no conclusive way to prevent or avoid change” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 142). This is closely related to a not-so-bodily vulnerability (Wainwright and Turner; Turner; Butler, *Frames*

of War), but rather that of the mind, which tends to be disregarded as it is not perceived until it is visible on the body. Psychological vulnerability is quite interesting since it discriminates between genders.

Some studies claim that women are more prone to depression, because women “have learned negative emotional responses to more life stimuli than men, which represents a personality trait difference. Moreover, they face more life situations that elicit negative emotions” (Carrillo et al. 38). This leaves us wondering to what extent we can be individually vulnerable or vulnerable because of someone else. This leads to the impact that others can have on our vulnerability, for instance, “in the context of abuse of vulnerable adults, vulnerability can be considered to be a social condition, because, for vulnerability to be possible, there must be at least a second agent” (Parley 267). Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds distinguish between three different sources of vulnerability, namely inherent, situational, and pathogenic (Mackenzie). The first one alludes to the factors that contribute to intrinsic human vulnerability, such as embodiment or dependency. Then, situational vulnerability refers to the helplessness associated with, among other things, certain personal, economic, or environmental situations conditioned by the context. The pathogenic vulnerability stems from interpersonal relationships as well as institutional structures. Vulnerability is also associated with resistance. Indeed, “public resistance leads to vulnerability, and vulnerability (the sense of “exposure” implied by precarity) leads to resistance, vulnerability is not exactly overcome by resistance, but becomes a potentially effective mobilizing force in political mobilizations” (Butler et al. 14). This explains the correlation between both vulnerability and resistance and the need of both terms to give power to the other, as these concepts “work together” (Butler et al. 25). Another concept that is closely related to vulnerability is resilience:

Understanding vulnerability as inevitably arising from our embodiment and inescapably necessitating the creation of social institutions should make it clear that there is no position of either invulnerability or independence. Fortunately, however, there is resilience. Resilience is centrally important in a vulnerability analysis. Resilience is not a naturally occurring and variable characteristic of an individual, nor is it achieved only by individual accomplishment and effort. Resilience is a product of social relationships and institutions. Human beings are not born

resilient. Resilience is produced over time through social structures and societal conditions that individuals may be unable to control. (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice” 362-363)

Rogers, Mackenzie, and Dodds (2012) also share this notion of the impossibility of invulnerability. Indeed, “although nothing can completely mitigate our vulnerability, resilience is what provides an individual with the means and ability to recover from harm, setbacks and the misfortunes that affect our lives” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 146). As vulnerable beings, we aim for resilience, because, after all, “resilience is the critical, yet incomplete, solution to our vulnerability” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 146). As Fineman explains, “resilience is measured by an individual’s ability to survive or recover from harm or setbacks that inevitably occur over the life course” (“Vulnerability and Social Justice” 363).

The present research will focus on aspects of vulnerability such as victimhood and psychological vulnerability related to vulnerable characters in *Mother Love* and *Averno*. More specifically, Demeter, as a mother, has to undergo a sense of loss that puts her in a vulnerable position. Then, Persephone must overcome various losses and changes, such as becoming a wife or losing herself when swinging between her mother and her husband. Also, narcissistic vulnerability is related to both Demeter and Hades. Although each of them is vulnerable for diverse, sometimes not-so-distinct, reasons, they are all vulnerable mainly because of dependency, which makes it challenging to reach resilience.

1.3. Objectives

The central goal of this research is to analyse the reception of the Demeter/Persephone myth in Rita Dove’s *Mother Love* (1995) and Louise Glück’s *Averno* (2006). An additional aim is to determine the influence of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Graves’, D’Aulaires’ and Hamilton’s versions of the myth, tracing a line between the ancient and modern sources and these two books of poetry. The specific objectives are:

a) To explore the reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in each of the two books of poetry by examining these contemporary rewritings, elucidating the strengths and limitations of

the classical tradition and illustrating how the original myth resonates in *Mother Love* and *Averno*.

b) To establish the impact of narcissism and trauma on the main characters.

c) To determine the role of vulnerability in each of the contemporary appropriations of the myth, focusing especially on how Demeter and Persephone contend with their vulnerability.

1.4. Methodology

The following section presents an outline of the methodology used to achieve the objectives of this research. Since the main goal was to determine the impact of the myth of Demeter and Persephone on Rita Dove's *Mother Love* and Louise Glück's *Averno* and its influence on the different themes, attitudes and values that emerge in these two poetry collections, an arts-based qualitative methodology was used which combined elements from Reception Studies, Psychoanalytic Studies and Vulnerability Studies.

Having applied this methodology, here, I first attempt to show how Dove and Glück have received the myth of Demeter and Persephone while also considering the sources reflected in their receptions. After that, I discuss narcissism and trauma from a psychoanalytic perspective. Then, I explore how Demeter and Persephone contend with their vulnerability in the two contemporary reworkings. The methodology used was theoretical and qualitative in nature, drawing on primary and secondary sources of information. The former comprise a restricted corpus of ancient sources and two contemporary authors within the literary genre of poetry written in English: Rita Dove and Louise Glück. The latter concentrate on the *Hymn*'s main interpretations and the most relevant, solid and recurring lines of its classical tradition. Subsequently, the primary and secondary sources are combined to study the two books of poetry written in the English language at the turn of the century with the aim of establishing analogies, polarities, trends and frequencies in these two appropriations of the Greek myth. Furthermore, given that this study was inductive, I shall build on existing theories by applying an analytic approach with an interpretative method of analysis.

This thesis applies the methodology attributed to Reception Studies and the classical tradition to trace the influence of Homer and Ovid in the poetry under study. Therefore, to better grasp this influence, it will be necessary to establish the myth's plot and subplots, the characters relevant to the poetry studied, the settings, the symbols and the main themes in both the Homeric and Ovidian versions of the myth of Demeter and Persephone. The goal of this scrutiny of the ancient sources is to comprehend the reception of the myth in question in *Mother Love* and *Averno*. Understanding the ancient sources will facilitate subsequent analysis of the contemporary reimaginings of the myth of Demeter and Persephone. After discussing the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, I shall turn to Graves and his reception of the myth, which has aroused considerable interest among many contemporary authors, transforming his work into a major bridge between the original story and its appropriations. Furthermore, along with Graves' version, I shall also refer to D'Aulaires' and Hamilton's versions of the myth.

Psychoanalytic Studies are also used to shed light on the behaviour of the central contemporary characters, through an examination of the concepts of narcissism and trauma. In addition, this thesis makes use of Vulnerability Studies as part of the methodology, in an attempt to identify the different vulnerable subjects in the contemporary poems studied here, while also exploring the terminology associated with vulnerability, namely, gender, emotions, dependency, embodiment, resistance and resilience.

1.5. Corpus Analysis

The enduring popularity of the myth of Demeter and her daughter Persephone is such that numerous authors have retold the same story from different perspectives. Thus, many are the appropriations retelling how Hades snatched Persephone away when she was plucking flowers in the meadow. In the merest blink of an eye, Persephone was gone, and her wrathful mother had to match Hades' heartlessness in order to win her daughter back. Even willing to sacrifice humanity, she did not stop until Persephone was returned from the underworld, at least for part of the year. Despite the multiple sources for this myth, this study will focus exclusively on the impact of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Ovid's two versions in the second half of Book V of

Metamorphoses and Book IV of *Fasti*, Graves's, D'Aulaires' and Hamilton's well-known versions of the myth. Thus, for instance, Claudian's unfinished *De Raptu Proserpinae* will not be addressed in this research. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and *Fasti* are the most notable influences on the contemporary English poems studied here. However, given that the authors under study are contemporary and their works are from the 20th and 21st centuries, it cannot be assumed that they worked from an original version of this myth, rendering it necessary to refer to Robert Graves's, D'Aulaires' and Hamilton's versions of the myth.

The reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone in contemporary literature—and more specifically in poetry—has been quite remarkable. Some of the poems create a different mythical setting, for instance Persephone's abduction as portrayed in Hilda Doolittle's "Demeter" (1921), D. H. Lawrence's "Purple Anemones" (1923) and "Bavarian Gentians" (1932), Charles Olson's "Hymn to Proserpine" (1987), Anne Carson's "IX But What Word Was it" (2000) and Meghan O'Rourke's "Demeter in Paris" (2013). Others reimagine the myth not as abduction or rape but rather as willing sexual exploration, as in D. M. Thomas' "Persephone" (2013), while still others focus on Demeter's search for her daughter, such as Frederic Manning's "From Demeter" (1913), Eavan Boland's "Pomegranate" (1993) and Cleopatra Mathis' "Demeter the Pilgrim" (2000). Some rewrite Persephone's return, as seen in Carol Ann Duffy's "Demeter" (1999) and Alicia Ostriker's "Demeter to Persephone" (2009). A further remarkable example of the reinterpretation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone is Margaret Atwood's book of poetry *Double Persephone* (1961). However, these poems are beyond the scope of this study, which focuses solely on two books of poetry. The first one to be discussed here is Rita Dove's *Mother Love* (1995), followed by Louise Glück's *Averno* (2006). These two female authors and their books of poetry were chosen because of their proximity of publication date, because they both address the role of motherhood from the perspective of two mothers and because both authors were influenced by Rilke and, following in his footsteps, also addressed another very prominent myth in which Persephone and Hades play a role, namely that of Orpheus and Eurydice, a myth that also goes beyond the scope of this research. The present thesis will concentrate on the female perspective when reimagining the myth of Demeter and Persephone.

Chapter II examines the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, using Foley's translation and commentary (1994). Here, I shall present an overview of the plot and subplots, the characters that are relevant to the rewritings of the Demeter/Persephone story studied here, the settings, the symbols and associations and the most pertinent themes, which are marriage, Eleusis and Zeus' project.

Chapter III explores Ovid's versions of the same myth in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. Again, I shall look at the plot and subplots, the relevant characters, the settings, the symbols and associations and the themes, which include emotions, motherhood and metamorphosis, albeit this latter theme is only associated with Ovidian *Metamorphoses*. In this same chapter, I shall also consider Robert Graves, exploring the impact of other authors on him and summarising his version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, influenced by the Homeric and Ovidian versions. I shall also refer to D'Aulaires' and Hamilton's versions of the myth.

Chapter IV scrutinises Rita Dove's *Mother Love* (1995). Based on Reception Studies, I shall first investigate the themes of persecution, motherhood, sexuality, abduction, rape and grief. Then, I shall draw on Psychoanalytic Studies to examine narcissism and trauma before applying Vulnerability Studies to discuss gender and shared vulnerability, dependency, emotions, embodiment, victimhood, resistance and resilience.

Chapter V looks at Louise Glück's *Averno* (2006). Following a similar structure to the previous chapter, I shall employ Reception Studies to investigate motherhood, life, death and marriage. Then, I shall apply Psychoanalytic Studies to explore narcissism and trauma, and Vulnerability Studies to analyse gender and shared vulnerability, dependency, emotions, embodiment, victimhood, resistance and resilience.

After this last chapter, I shall present my conclusions and a complete bibliography.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER

In this first chapter of the research, there will be an introduction to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The term hymn will be briefly defined, and the similarities between the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and other epic works will be established, among other things. Later, the plot and subplots will be displayed to better understand the resemblances between this initial version of the Demeter and Persephone story and contemporary literature. Also, the relevant characters concerning the selected corpus will be addressed, followed by the settings, which will help determine the impact of this ancient source on the poetical rewritings by Rita Dove and Louise Glück. After this, relevant symbols will also be highlighted, as they reappear in some of the poems by both Dove and Glück. Subsequently, only three relevant subjects or topics will be developed: marriage, Eleusis, and Zeus' project. As such, understanding the characters, settings, symbols, and topics will help us apprehend the degree of the faithfulness of the contemporary poetry chosen while also contributing to a better understanding of the ancient source. Indeed, getting acquainted with the Homeric version will enable a better understanding of the contemporary receptions of the myth.

2.1. Introduction

Their captivating stories, beautiful language, and religious significance have made the *Homeric Hymns*¹² survive for two and a half millennia.¹³ The *Homeric Hymns* were conceived over a period of time in different settings and then they were compiled by the fifth century B.C. (West 20). These *Homeric Hymns* might have started as short introductions to the long oral epic poetry that preceded in popularity centuries before the written tradition emerged. These introductions began as short preludes and became complex tales where the recitation of the hymn was likely to

¹² The *Homeric Hymns* are anonymous, yet Suter 2005 argues that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* could have been composed by a female author.

¹³ See Faulkner. Also, see Taida on the historical development of the editions of the *Homeric Hymns*.

become the major event (Rayor 16). Following the religious terminology, “to ‘hymn’ the god is to sing a song of praise, to celebrate the god through song” sung by a bard as a sign of worship (Rayor 15). The popularity of the myths that compose the *Homeric Hymns* is due to the fact that they “raise questions that humanity still struggles to answer—questions about our relationships with others and our place in the world” (Rayor 14).¹⁴

In 1777 the manuscript of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* was found in Moscow. However, the best known scholarly edition belongs to N. J. Richardson 1974 (Foley 31). The *Hymn to Demeter*, meant to praise and worship the divine Deo, follows a dactylic hexameter verse with a repetitive style. A clear example of this praise can be seen from the beginning till the end of this hymn. The *Hymn* starts with the name of the divine Demeter and ends with some lines about her daughter addressed to her (Foley 31). Other gods and goddesses are mentioned as well, such as Persephone, Zeus, Hades, and others. Nevertheless, the presence of Demeter in this *Hymn* is the most remarkable, and proof of that lies in the emphasis on her powers and honours. As we will see in the remaining part of this chapter, anger strongly defines this goddess. As it is characteristic of Panhellenic poetry, this *Hymn* is independent as it is not tied to a specific location and focuses on an Olympian god or goddess. However, for scholars like Richard Janko, this *Hymn* belongs to the Boeotian tradition dating from between the late seventh century and early sixth century (Foley 29-30).

Describing the acquisition of Demeter’s and Persephone’s new honours, this hymn also owns its share in the epic tradition (Richardson, “Constructing a Hymnic Narrative” 19-30). As it happens in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* presents formulae in which phrases recur repeatedly in dactylic hexameter, an example of such formulae is the epithet “rich-haired Demeter” (Rayor 17). More interestingly, the *Hymn to Aphrodite* and the *Hymn to Demeter* share some similarities such as the fact that Aphrodite disguises herself as a mortal (*HAph.* 109-116) like Demeter does (*HDem.* 94-268). Moreover, Aphrodite says she was playing with other maidens (*HAph.* 119-120) when she was abducted by Hermes (*HAph.* 117-8, 121-127) for marriage purposes—this time with Anchises— (*HAph.* 126-7) paralleling the way Persephone is actually abducted in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* to be wedded to Hades

¹⁴ On hoy to read mythology see González and Mariscal.

(*HDem.* 2-21). Also, Aphrodite's head reaches the top of a mortal's 'house' (*HAph.* 174) as Demeter's does (*HDem.* 188-189). Certain phrases and words absent in the early epic are present in both the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. However, no precedence can be established between the former and the latter.¹⁵ Also, the present investigation will treat the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* separately from the rest of the *Hymns*.

The influence of Homer and Hesiod on the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is much more certain since the impact of the *Theogony*, *Iliad*, and *Odyssey* on this *Hymn* is noticeable (Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 5). The *Theogony* is the one that first introduces the events that take place in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: "And he came to the bed of bountiful Demeter, / Who bore white-armed Persephone, stolen by Hades / From her mother's side. But wise Zeus gave her away" (*Th.* 917-9). These lines describe how Demeter has a daughter, and this daughter is taken away by Hades with Zeus' consent—which is much more detailed in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

Some of the similarities between the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, and the *Hymn to Demeter* are the painful loss of someone to death or symbolic death, such as Penelope and Telemachus' loss of Odysseus (*Od.* 4. 149-154), Achilles' loss of Patroclus (*Il.* 18. 15-49), Hecuba's and Priam's loss of Hector (*Il.* 22. 405-436), Andromache's loss of Hector (*Il.* 22. 460-472), or even Thetis' grief as she warns her son Achilles of his fate (*Il.* 18. 94-95), which resonates with the grief Demeter undergoes after her daughter's abduction, much like the loss of a dead one, as she is taken away by Hades to the underworld. As Rayor states, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*:

helps illuminate the daily life of women in ancient Greece. We do not tend to associate marriage with death, while Greek thought, literature, and ritual closely connect them. For Demeter, Persephone's marriage to Hades is her closest experience with death, since she cannot initially or fully retrieve Persephone. The marriage of Hades and Persephone, frequently retold and referenced, became a motif of marrying death. (9)

¹⁵ On the similarities between the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the *Hymn to Aphrodite* see Maravela.

Then Telemachus looks for his father (*Od.* 2.559-580) the way Demeter looks for her daughter (*HDem.* 47-50). Another topic that relates the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is immortalization. Achilles will have to choose one of two fates because he is not immortal even though he is the son of a goddess (*Il.* 9. 410-416). Similarly, Odysseus refuses to be immortalised by Calypso (*Od.* 7.315-8), and Demeter fails to immortalise Demophon (*HDem.* 248-262).

The sense of fate has much power in these three literary works. The gods seem to have a plan or plans as we can see when Thetis gives Achilles a choice of fate (*Il.* 1.352-3) or when Helios presents Persephone's fate to Demeter as Hades' wife (*HDem.* 75-87). Helios is the one that informs Demeter of Persephone's fate, but she does not want to accept it. To try and change this fate she roams the earth, perhaps not even knowing what to do, not being able to control her frustration towards Zeus. After that, she wanted to exchange humanity's life for her daughter, attempting to change Helios' prediction, but to not avoid since she could not spare her daughter from marrying Hades. She failed to change her daughter's fate, though not completely.

Wrath is a crucial topic in this literary tradition. When, for instance, Achilles loses Briseis, who is taken by Agamemnon, his anger is triggered, and his wrath is shown from the very beginning of the *Iliad* (*Il.* 1.1-32), and it is because of Achilles' anger that warriors perish *en masse* (*Il.* 1.10). Such is the case of Demeter, who is angry because she loses her daughter when abducted by Hades (*HDem.* 91), and she decides to put the existence of humanity at risk when she buries the seed under the ground (*HDem.* 305-307). In the *Iliad* Zeus' plan is said to come to fulfilment (*Il.* 1.6) as we also see in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (*HDem.* 9-20). Moreover, the fact that Demeter roamed the earth for nine days can be associated with the way Apollo throws his arrows after Briseis' father prays to him once Agamemnon refuses to free his daughter (*Il.* 1.43-60):

Nine days the arrows of god swept through the army.
On the tenth Achilles called all ranks to muster—
the impulse seized him, sent by white-armed Hera
grieving to see Achaean fighters drop and die. (*Il.* 1.61-64)

Similarly, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*:

Then for nine days divine Deo roamed over the earth,
holding torches ablaze in her hands;
in her grief she did not once taste ambrosia
or nectar sweet-to-drink, nor bathed her skin.
But when the tenth Dawn came shining on her,
Hekate met her, holding a torch in her hands, (*HDem.* 47-52)

Again, in the *Iliad*, when alluding to the war and the long nine years that the Achaeans did not see victory, Agamemnon told them how on the tenth they would take the Troy (*Il.* 2. 326-9). Then, in the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus recounts his adventures after leaving Troy, one of the things he talks about is the arrival in the land of the Lotus-eaters, saying:

Nine days fierce winds drove me away from there,
across the fish-filled seas, and on the tenth
we landed where the Lotus-eaters live,
people who feed upon its flowering fruit. (*Od.* 9.108-111)

Odysseus continues to narrate his tale talking about how they reach Aeolia and how Aeolus gives them a bag that carries all the winds to help them get home: “For nine whole days and nights we held our course, / and on the tenth we glimpsed our native land” (*Od.* 10.38-9). Nevertheless, when Odysseus fell asleep, his companions opened the bag making all the winds rush out, and now they were away from their native land (*Od.* 10.63-5). Later on, when Odysseus continues to retell his story explaining how he drifts back to Charybdis and then escapes reaching Calypso’s Island, he says:

From that place
I drifted for nine days. On the tenth night,
the gods conducted me to Ogygia,
the island where fair-haired Calypso lives,

fearful goddess with the power of song.

She welcomed and took good care of me. (*Od.* 12.586-591)

Going back to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the *Iliad*, another similarity between Demeter and Achilles is that the same way that Demeter refuses the honours Zeus offers her (*HDem.* 325-328), Achilles rejects Agamemnon's gifts too (*Il.* 9.307-333). The way Demeter, with grief, tore her veil (*HDem.* 40) can be associated with how Hector's wife tore off her headband and veil (*Il.* 22.468-472) because of the grief for the loss of her husband. Furthermore, in the *Iliad* when Iris went to summon Thetis as Zeus had requested (*Il.* 24.64-92), she was weeping for her son, and she also took her veil (*Il.* 24.93). Although in the *Odyssey* Penelope does not tear her veil, we still learn of her tears of sorrow (*Od.* 11.223-7).

Hospitality is also very common in the epic tradition, as it was imperative in Greek culture and societies. In the *Iliad*, Paris did not respect Menelaus' hospitality by taking away this king's wife. Thus, the importance of hospitality does not only rely on the host but also on the guest. If hospitality is not respected, problems begin. Paris and Helen leaving Menelaus' kingdom inspires a war. Metaneria's mistrust augments Demeter's wrath and leads to famine. These were just some consequences of breaking the sacred code of hospitality. Needless to say that hospitality is very present in the *Odyssey* as well when, for instance, Telemachus and Nestor's son are more than welcomed at Menelaus' palace. Menelaus proves to be an outstanding host by giving hospitality to these two before even asking who they are (*Od.* 4.42-51). Another example is how Telemachus and Penelope are hosts to many suitors who want to marry Penelope, even if these guests are unwelcome (*Od.* 1. 204-212). In the *Hymn*, it seems that Hades manages to deceive Persephone precisely by respecting the bonds of hospitality: the young woman, after having been in the palace of Hades and having refused to eat anything, finally ends up complying with the rites of hospitality and remains forever bound to her host (Foley 56). Nevertheless, Warren sees the issue from a contrasting perspective:

When gods do consume human foods in literature, it is usually in the context of hospitality, the gods having taken on mortal disguises. However, this is not the case in the Persephone myth. This is not a case of hospitality, where tables are heaped with good foods described using rich language. The tiny pomegranate seed is out of place here for two reasons: it is marked as an

unusual food for a goddess to consume, in that it is *not* ambrosia, and it is unusual in the context of the absence of banquet. These two aspects then serve to highlight the potential for transformation that its ingestion will bring about. Persephone's food is marked; the pomegranate is out of place here, foreshadowing that this ingestion—and its ramifications—are out of the ordinary. (108)

The style and narrative techniques that characterise the *Hymn* are “grave and gay” (Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 56). Also, as it has been already demonstrated with the references to the epic texts, the *Hymn* presents “epic conventions” (Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 58).

2.2. Plot (core story) & Subplots (Structure):

According to Richardson (*The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 1-3), the actions that take place in the *Hymn* could be divided as follows:

The Rape and Demeter's Search (*HDem.* 1-90) [Suter, “Beyond the Limits of Lyric” 22]:

In this part, we are introduced to Demeter, her daughter Persephone, Aidoneus (Hades), and Zeus (*HDem.* 1-4). Persephone was playing with the *deep-breasted daughters of Ocean* (*HDem.* 5) plucking flowers in a meadow: roses, crocuses, violets, irises, hyacinth, and the narcissus (*HDem.* 6-7). The latter was “a snare for the flower-faced maiden” (*HDem.* 8) to accomplish Zeus' will. When Persephone stretched out her hands to pick the narcissus the earth opened and Hades, “the lord Host-to-Many rose up on her” (17) “with his immortal horses” (18) “and snatched the unwilling maid into his golden chariot” (19). Even though she was lamenting, screaming, and calling her father's name (*HDem.* 20-1) Hades led her off. Demeter heard something (*HDem.* 39) but did not know what had happened to her daughter, “then for nine days divine Deo roamed over the earth” (*HDem.* 47) with torches in her hands (*HDem.* 48), not tasting ambrosia (*HDem.* 49), or drinking nectar, nor bathing (*HDem.* 50). On the tenth day Hekate, who did not see what had happened (*HDem.* 57), took her to Helios, the one that told her what he knew and saw (*HDem.* 75). He reveals that “no other of the gods was to blame but cloud-gathering Zeus” (*HDem.* 77-8) who gave Persephone to Hades as a wife (*HDem.* 79-80).

However, he also told her that Aidoneus was “not an unsuitable bridegroom” (*HDem.* 84), which made Demeter suffer terribly (*HDem.* 90).

Demeter at the house of Celeus (*HDem.* 91-304):

Demeter, angry at Zeus (*HDem.* 91), withdrew from the Olympus (*HDem.* 92), disguising herself among humanity (*HDem.* 94). Keleos’ daughters saw her at the well where they were fetching water (*HDem.* 105-6). When they asked who she was (*HDem.* 113), she introduced herself as Doso (*HDem.* 122) and told them that she had been forced, by pirates, to come from Crete (*HDem.* 123-5) but could escape from them (*HDem.* 131). Then, Keleos’ daughters took the goddess—disguised as an old woman—to their house (*HDem.* 181) so that she could take care of their little brother. At the palace, she met Metaneira —Keleos’ wife and mother of the child that she came to nurse, Iambe —Metaneira’s servant— and Demophon —the child. Metaneira told her to raise her child, who was “late-born and unexpected, much prayed for” (*HDem.* 220) by her. While Demeter nursed the child, she treated him like a divinity (*HDem.* 235) making him grow miraculously fast (*HDem.* 241), and “she would have made him ageless and immortal” (*HDem.* 242) if Metaneira had not been spying the goddess from her chamber (*HDem.* 244-5). Because of this mistrust, Metaneira provoked Demeter’s anger and she decided to snatch the child from the flames that would have made him immortal (*HDem.* 251-60). As a result of this incident, Demeter ordered them to build a temple in her honour (*HDem.* 270) and so they did (*HDem.* 300). Then, Demeter “remained sitting apart from all the immortals” (*HDem.* 303), “wasting with desire for her deep-girt daughter” (*HDem.* 304).

The Famine, Return of Persephone, and Institution of the Mysteries (*HDem.* 305-489):

Demeter “ordained a terrible and brutal year” (*HDem.* 305) “on the deeply fertile earth” (*HDem.* 306) which would have destroyed the human race and taken from the gods and goddesses the gifts and sacrifices of these humans (*HDem.* 310-1). Then, Zeus sent Iris to address Demeter and make her join the other Olympians (*HDem.* 314-23) “but Demeter’s heart was unmoved” (*HDem.* 324). After Iris’ failed attempt to convince Demeter to accept the separation from her daughter, Zeus sent all the other immortals, one after another, to try and persuade her. Again to

no avail (*HDem.* 325-30). She said she would not go back to Olympus until she saw her daughter with her own eyes (*HDem.* 331-3). Therefore, Zeus then sent Hermes to the underworld to bring Persephone back to calm Demeter's anger (*HDem.* 334-40). When Hermes went to the underworld and explained everything that had happened to Hades, the lord of the dead did not disobey (*HDem.* 358). Nevertheless, after telling Persephone all the honours that she would acquire (*HDem.* 365-6), "he gave her to eat a honey-sweet pomegranate seed" (*HDem.* 371-2). When Persephone went back to her mother, she told her everything that had happened to her, starting from the good news that Hermes brought when she was in the underworld, and the pomegranate seed that she ate against her will (*HDem.* 404-413). Persephone then explained how she and her female companions were picking flowers in the meadow when the earth opened, and Hades took her against her will (*HDem.* 414-33). Now, "their spirits abandoned grief" (*HDem.* 436) "as they gave and received joy between them" (*HDem.* 437) joined by Hekate (*HDem.* 438-440). As a result of Persephone eating in the underworld, Zeus decided she would spend one-third of the year with Hades and two-thirds of the year with her mother and the rest of the gods and goddesses (*HDem.* 445-7). After making this last decision, Zeus sent Rheia to talk to Demeter and ask her to restore vegetation and Demeter obeyed (*HDem.* 460-70). After restoring vegetation to life, Demeter taught her rites and the Mysteries to the kings who administered the Law (*HDem.* 471-482) and joined the other Olympians in the company of her daughter (*HDem.* 483-489).

Final Invocation (*HDem.* 490-95):

These are the five last verses that refer to Demeter, "mighty giver of seasons and glorious gifts" (*HDem.* 492), and her "very fair daughter Persephone" (*HDem.* 493). As Foley aptly observes, using "a framing device standard in early Greek poetry, ring composition, the poem begins and ends with Demeter" (31).

2.3. Relevant characters:

In this part of the study, only relevant characters for the subsequent analysis of contemporary literature will be analysed. Thus, many characters will be left out as they either do not play a prominent role in the poetry chosen for this research or do not appear in this poetry at all.

“As is often the case in the hymns, the first word of the poem gives its subject” (Foley 31), which is also the case of this *Hymn*: **Demeter** is the first one to be mentioned in the *Hymn* as this *Hymn* is addressed to her. The first thing that we learn about Demeter in the first four lines is that she has a daughter, and that Zeus gave this daughter in marriage to Aidoneus (Hades) —against her daughter’s will and without her mother’s consent. She is called “Demeter of the bright fruit and golden sword” (*HDem.* 4) although “Demeter is not generally associated with a golden sword” (Foley 33).

Right from the beginning, the *Hymn* depicts Demeter as the archetypal mother: when she heard her daughter’s cries, she felt stricken by grief and desperation as “The mountain peaks and the depths of the sea echoed” (*HDem.* 38) her daughter’s voice and Demeter heard (*HDem.* 39). Therefore, “sharp grief seized her heart, and she tore the veil” (*HDem.* 40) “on her ambrosial hair with her own hands” (*HDem.* 41) and started searching for her even though “no one was willing to tell her the truth” (*HDem.* 44). Also, “the darkness of Demeter’s clothing may thus suggest vengeful wrath as well” (Foley 37). “Then for nine days divine Deo roamed over the earth” (*HDem.* 47) holding torches, not having eaten, drunk, nor bathed, and on the tenth day Hekate saw her grieving (*HDem.* 48-52) and told her she had heard something, but she did not see anything (*HDem.* 57). Demeter’s grief, clothing and fasting are the first signs of her vulnerability as a result of her daughter’s abduction.

In line 47, “the word *potnia* applied here to Demeter, and elsewhere in the poem to goddesses and mortal women, elevates the authority of the female figure to whom it is applied” (Foley 38). Hekate offered herself to accompany the divine Demeter to see Helios, who could tell them what had happened. And so it proves: Helios addresses her as “daughter of fair tressed Rhea, mighty Demeter” (*HDem.* 75) and tells her what happened to her daughter, which makes her angry at Zeus (*HDem.* 91) withdrawing from the Olympus and disguising herself as a very old woman (*HDem.* 101) among humans that did not recognize her (*HDem.* 92-95). Once again,

the poem emphasises the wrath of the mother goddess. As Foley explains, here, “Demeter’s motive for wandering on earth and withdrawing from the gods is *anger at Zeus*” (40). Indeed, as Bond et al. put it:

When people perceive a threat to the ego, they are likely to feel hurt. In order to avoid these negative feelings, they may use defence mechanisms, resulting in the externalising of these feelings as anger towards the source of threat. A negative evaluation of the perpetrator, whether the threat was intentional or not, reduces disturbing feelings of vulnerability. (1087)

Thus, it becomes evident that Demeter’s anger towards Zeus aims to give her a sense of control over her helplessness. Then, when she introduces herself to Keleos’ daughter she says that Doso (*HDem.* 122) is her name and that she came from Crete against her wish (*HDem.* 123-4) saying that pirates led her off against her will (*HDem.* 124-5). She also told them that she had escaped from her masters (*HDem.* 131) and asked them if she could serve in their house either as a nurse for a child or any task that could be done by an elderly woman (*HDem.* 140-1). In her commentary on these lines of the *Hymn*, Foley states that the fake name —Doso— with which Demeter introduces herself to the daughters of Keleos and Metaneira, which means “Giver,” “plays on Demeter’s own function of giving.” (*HDem.* 42). More importantly, Demeter’s fake story evokes her daughter’s predicament. In Foley’s words, the tale “displaces some of Persephone’s experiences on her mother.” (42) Indeed, Demeter tells the girls that she was abducted by violence and against her will, and that she did not want to eat while she was on board. However, Doso manages to escape her captors while Persephone will be forever tied to Hades, at least part of the year. When the girls led the goddess to their house, she “walked behind with veiled head” (*HDem.* 182) and a dark robe (*HDem.* 182). Even if she, “Demeter, bringer of the seasons and giver of rich gifts” (*HDem.* 192) was disguised, “her head reached the roof and she filled the doorway with divine light” (*HDem.* 188-9) but “did not want to be seated on the shining seat” (*HDem.* 193). After she sat in the well-built stool that Iambe set out for her (*HDem.* 195), “the goddess drew the veil before her face” (*HDem.* 197). “By accepting a stool, Demeter will come down to a mortal level” (Foley 44). “For a long time she sat voiceless with grief on the stool” (*HDem.* 198) “and responded to no one with word or gesture” (*HDem.* 199), she did not smile, eat, nor drink (*HDem.* 200) because of her daughter (*HDem.* 201). Nevertheless, Iambe was the only one that with a joke made Demeter smile and laugh and keep a gracious heart

(*HDem.* 204). She refused the “honey-sweet wine” (*HDem.* 206) that Metaneira offered her, but she asked to drink, “for the sake of the rite” (*HDem.* 211), “barley and water with soft mint” (*HDem.* 208-9). When the goddess was given the task of taking care of Metaneira’s son, she gave him a divine treatment (*HDem.* 235-47). Nevertheless, Metaneira, who was spying on the goddess, did not understand the reason Demeter buried the child in the fire (*HDem.* 248-9), to which the “rich-crowned Demeter” (*HDem.* 244) reacted with anger and snatched the child from the flames stopping the process of Demophon’s immortalization (*HDem.* 250-60). Nonetheless, she also said how “unfailing honour will forever be his” (*HDem.* 263) because he laid on her knees and slept on her arms (*HDem.* 264).

While taking care of little Demophon (*HDem.* 231-238), the goddess somehow forgets her daughter Kore. It is as if she found in this foster motherhood a consolation for her motherhood frustrated by the abduction of Kore. The new dependency bond that ties Demeter to Demophon aims to fill the void she feels from losing her daughter. The child cries inconsolably when the goddess places him on the ground (*HDem.* 282-291). The place is symbolic of the mortality to which the goddess returns to deliver the boy, who his sisters cannot calm (*HDem.* 289-290). Although the goddess is irritated by Metaneira, she does not punish her. She knows that mortals are imperfect and lacking in true wisdom to discern what is good for them and what is not (*HDem.* 251-258). As Foley points out, it is striking that, unlike other mythical characters who see what they should not or who transgress express prohibitions to see, and are punished by the gods, Metaneira is not (Foley 50).

“Honored Demeter, the greatest source of help and joy to the mortals and immortals” (*HDem.* 268-9) was asking now for a temple with an altar “under the sheer wall of the city on the rising hill above Kallichoron” (*HDem.* 271-2) because of her anger. That was “what the bright-crowned goddess Demeter commanded” (*HDem.* 295) and that was what they did (*HDem.* 300). As a result of the goddess’ wrath and grief, “she ordained a terrible and brutal year on the deeply fertile earth” (305-6). Apart from destroying the mortal race with a famine (*HDem.* 310-1) she would have also “stolen the glorious honor of gifts” (*HDem.* 311) “and sacrifices from those having homes on Olympus” (*HDem.* 312). Following the understanding of Butler et al. associated with resistance as a way of coping with vulnerability, Demeter uses her anger to

display violent resistance. Indeed, because of her wrath, she decides to stop vegetation from growing.

When Zeus wanted to address Demeter, “he roused golden-winged Iris to summon” (*HDem.* 314) “fair-tressed Demeter” (*HDem.* 315), thereby Iris obeyed him and “came to the citadel of fragrant Eleusis” (*HDem.* 318) “and found in her temple dark-robed Demeter” (319) and implored her to “rejoin the tribes of immortal gods” (*HDem.* 322) as Zeus had asked. Nonetheless, “Demeter’s heart was unmoved” (*HDem.* 324) by Iris’ words. Demeter’s vulnerability stems from two main factors. On the one hand, she understands that the abduction implies her separation from her daughter. After Persephone’s abduction, Demeter can no longer reach her daughter. Thus, the dependency bond between them is inevitably threatened. Hence, to continue with her role as a mother, she needs to establish another dependency bond. On the other hand, her strong emotions add to her vulnerability as she displays grief and wrath, contributing to her psychological state of vulnerability.

Therefore, Zeus sends Hermes to bring Persephone back with her mother who waited in front of the temple for her daughter (*HDem.* 385) and then embraced her (*HDem.* 389) and asked her what had happened. However, since Persephone had tasted food in the underworld, Zeus agreed his daughter would spend one-third of the year with Hades, and the other two-thirds with her mother (*HDem.* 445-7) “and the goddess did not disobey his commands” (*HDem.* 448). Thus, Rhea, Demeter’s mother, in verse 442 starts to be an active participant in the story as a mediator sent by Zeus to summon Demeter. As such, in verses 459 to 469 we see how Rhea asks Demeter to “rejoin the tribes of the gods” (*HDem.* 461) and tells her how Zeus has offered to give Demeter whatever honours she chooses. She also informs Demeter of the fact that Zeus agreed that Persephone would spend one-third of the year in the underworld and two-thirds with Demeter and the other gods and goddesses. Rhea ends her speech by asking Demeter to give up her rage and to make the grain grow again. Thereupon, “rich-crowded Demeter did not disobey” (*HDem.* 470) her mother Rhea. The *Hymn* highlights the matrilineal bond while accepting a patriarchal order. As Foley aptly observes, at the end of the poem both Rhea and Demeter wear a shining veil. “The veil presents the image of the female integrated into the patriarchal order and contrasts with the torn veil of Demeter at the start of the poem” (Foley 132).

Persephone is Demeter's "slim-ankled daughter" (*HDem.* 2), the one that Hades seized with Zeus's permission (*HDem.* 2). In verse 5, Persephone's female companions are presented as the deep-breasted daughters of Ocean, which implies that Persephone is "accompanied by mature companions" (Foley 34). Hades "snatched the unwilling maid into his golden chariot" (*HDem.* 19) "and led her off lamenting" (*HDem.* 20). To cope with vulnerability, Persephone presents resistance when she cries for help (*HDem.* 20-21).

In the *Hymn*, she is described as a "flower-faced maiden" (*HDem.* 8) which "links her with the plants she picks" (Foley 34). Persephone "still hoped to see her dear mother and the race of immortal gods" (*HDem.* 35-36) after she was taken away by Hades. "For so long hope charmed her strong mind despite her distress" (*HDem.* 37). In lines 38 and 39 "Persephone's abrupt disappearance—only the echo of her voice remains—emphasizes the inaccessibility of the realms below" (Foley 37). When her mother talks about her she describes her as "a sweet offshoot noble in form" (*HDem.* 66), the "deep-girt daughter" (*HDem.* 201 and 304) that she grieved for, "her own fair-faced child" (*HDem.* 333). The *Hymn* clearly presents Persephone as an innocent maiden in the transition from childhood to adulthood. As Foley points out, the fact that at the beginning of the poem she is alone without her mother, only with the nymphs (and other virginal goddesses) at a *locus amoenus*, implies that the young woman is now ready to marry (33). However, the poem highlights, at the same time, the childlike innocence of the girl, who is not named by her proper name until line 57. Line 56 "is the only time before she becomes a bride (*HDem.* 337, 348, 360, 370, 387, 405, 493) that Persephone is so named; elsewhere she is Korê —maiden— or daughter (in the final lines at 493 she is both *kourê* and Persephone)" (Foley 39). As a matter of fact, "the poem may be marking a change of identity or Korê's acquisition of new powers as goddess of the underworld by using the name Persephone" (Foley 39).

Persephone in her turn is presented as Hades' "shy spouse, strongly reluctant through desire for her mother" (*HDem.* 343-4). Then, her father sent Hermes to lead "noble" (*HDem.* 348) and "thoughtful Persephone" (*HDem.* 359) up from the Erebus. When Hades told her she could go with her mother "Persephone rejoiced" (*HDem.* 370). "Eagerly she leapt up for joy. But

he gave her to eat” (*HDem.* 371) “a honey-sweet pomegranate seed” (*HDem.* 372), and after that, “she mounted the chariot” (*HDem.* 377). Through the abduction, Hades attempts to break the dependency bond between Persephone and Demeter and establish a new bond with Persephone. To attain this goal, he informs Persephone of all the honours she will acquire as his wife (*HDem.* 365-69). Indeed, one of Hades' devious ways to convince Persephone to stay in the underworld is by mentioning all the honours she will acquire as his wife. He attempts to show Persephone the strength she will attain as the goddess of the underworld.

When she finally met her mother, they embraced each other passionately (*HDem.* 389) and her mother held her in her arms (*HDem.* 390) right before asking her what had happened in the underworld to which she replied, and how she “leapt up for joy” (*HDem.* 411) knowing that she could see her again. She also told her how Hades compelled her against her will to taste the pomegranate seed (*HDem.* 413) and told her how Hades carried her into the underworld with Zeus' consent (*HDem.* 414-5). Persephone also told her mother how she was not alone while picking flowers (*HDem.* 417-425). The pronoun ‘we’ that Persephone uses includes, as she later explains, Leukippê (*HDem.* 418), Phaino (*HDem.* 418), Elektra (*HDem.* 418), Ianthê (*HDem.* 418), Melitê (*HDem.* 419), Iachê (*HDem.* 419), Rhodeia (*HDem.* 419), Kallirhoê (*HDem.* 419), Melibosis (*HDem.* 420), Tychê (*HDem.* 420), Okyrhoê (*HDem.* 420), Khryseis (*HDem.* 421), Ianeira (*HDem.* 421), Akastê (*HDem.* 421), Admetê (*HDem.* 421), Rhodopê (*HDem.* 422), Plouto (*HDem.* 422), Kalypso (*HDem.* 422), Styx (*HDem.* 423), Ourania (*HDem.* 423), Galaxaura (*HDem.* 423), Pallas (*HDem.* 423), and Artemis (*HDem.* 424). Most of them are just mentioned by their name without giving much detail about them, however, Okyrhoê is called flower-faced, Kalypso lovely, Galaxaura fair, Pallas rouser of battles, and Artemis sender of arrows. Persephone states that they were all playing and picking lovely flowers (*HDem.* 425). Another point worth mentioning is that “the motif of abduction from a meadow and a group of maidens suggests the girl’s readiness for marriage” (Foley 34). However, plucking the narcissus made the ground gap from beneath (*HDem.* 428-9) and Hades rose from that gap and carried her off (*HDem.* 430-1) against her will (*HDem.* 432). After telling her mother her version of the events, Persephone and Demeter “soothed” (*HDem.* 434) “each other’s heart and soul in many ways” (*HDem.* 435), “embracing fondly, and their spirits abandoned grief” (*HDem.* 436), “as they gave and received joy between them” (*HDem.* 437). Apart from her mother, Persephone

also received Hekate's kindness (*HDem.* 438-9). Now that Persephone had eaten in the underworld, her father decided she would spend one-third of the year in the underworld (*HDem.* 445-6) and two-thirds with her mother and the other gods (*HDem.* 446-7). Persephone is lastly mentioned in verse 494. The way Persephone goes to the underworld represents the life cycle. She is taken to the world of the Dead and she comes back from there. Once she spends two-thirds of the year in the world of Life with her mother she has to go back to the darkness the other third of the year. She follows a cycle, the cycle of life and death, the cycle of the seasons, the cycle of humanity. Persephone represents that cycle. After her abduction, she discovers the darkness of the world, and her naive and innocent self starts to change and to engage in very difficult processing of reality. Her coming back from the underworld could be associated with the way seeds germinated from the soil. Ironically the one that obliges her to follow this cycle is a seed, the seed she ate in the underworld. Because of that one seed, she was chained forever. Persephone's return to Demeter represents her rebirth and with her that of the vegetation after her mother's famine (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 83).

Zeus is first presented in verse 3, and then in verses 9, 30, 79 as the one who planned Hades' and Persephone's union, and it was him who his daughter called when Hades snatched her (*HDem.* 21). When Helios told Demeter what had happened to her daughter, he also told her that Zeus was the one to blame (*HDem.* 78). Nevertheless, Helios also told Demeter how Hades was not unsuitable for her daughter (*HDem.* 84) as he was "Zeus's own brother of the same stock" (*HDem.* 85). When Demeter decided to make the ground unfertile, Zeus sent Iris to summon her (*HDem.* 314). When Iris addresses Demeter she says "Demeter, Zeus, the father, with his unfailing knowledge" (*HDem.* 321) "bids you rejoin the tribes of immortal gods" (*HDem.* 322) and as it did not work, Zeus "sent in turn all the blessed immortals" (*HDem.* 325) but again, with no result. Unsuccessfully, he then had no option but to send Hermes (*HDem.* 335) to bring Persephone from the underworld. Hades did not disobey "king Zeus's commands" (*HDem.* 358) and then he told Persephone that he was not an unsuitable spouse, he himself "a brother of father Zeus" (*HDem.* 364). Later, Demeter describes Zeus as the "dark-clouded son of Kronos, honored by all the gods" (397). Zeus is also described as "heavy-thundering and mighty-voiced" (*HDem.* 441 and 460), the one who sent Rheia to summon Demeter (*HDem.* 442) and "agreed his daughter would spend one-third" (*HDem.* 445) of the year with Hades and

two-thirds with her mother (*HDem.* 446), “and the goddess did not disobey his commands” (*HDem.* 448). After the two goddesses are reunited, they joined Zeus (*HDem.* 485). According to Marilyn Arthur, “Zeus’ power is underplayed in the *Hymn*” (241). Suter agrees with this interpretation and believes that “despite the power implied for Zeus in the Olympian frame, within the core story, his power is minimal, his authority is rejected, and his will confused” (*The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 27). Moreover, she also observes that Demeter is not only very powerful, but “more powerful than Zeus” (*The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 38), and that there is a “power struggle between Demeter and Zeus” (*The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 129). Although these views contain a kernel of truth, Zeus’ will is eventually accomplished since Persephone will be forever married to Hades.

Hades is first presented as “Aidoneus” (*HDem.* 2) and then as “the Host-to-Many” (*HDem.* 9). Later, in verse 17, he is not only addressed as “the lord Host-to-Many” but also as “the celebrated son of Kronos” (*HDem.* 18). He was the one that “snatched the unwilling maid” (Persephone) “into his golden chariot” (*HDem.* 19). In verse 31 he is mentioned again as Persephone’s father’s brother, and then, one verse later as a “commander-and Host-to-Many, the many named son of Kronos” (*HDem.* 32). As Foley points out, “Hades is probably said to have had many names in part because Greeks, especially in cult, often feared to name him or wished to propitiate him” (35). Lines 15 until 32 “emphasize the august importance of the bridegroom Hades, whose description is augmented, especially in 31, with elaborate compound adjectives” (Foley 35). Even if it was Hades the one that “snatched” Persephone “screaming into the misty gloom” (*HDem.* 81), he did it with Zeus’s permission (*HDem.* 79). For Helios, Aidoneus is not an unsuitable bridegroom (*HDem.* 84), “commander-to-Many and Zeus’s own brother of the same stock” (*HDem.* 85). Moreover, Helios also states how Hades got his share “at the world’s first division” (*HDem.* 86). When Zeus saw how Demeter’s anger was about to end humanity’s existence on Earth, he sent Hermes to talk with Hades. When Hermes approaches him, we find Hades “reclining on a bed with his shy spouse” (*HDem.* 343) and calls him “dark-haired Hades, ruler of the dead” (*HDem.* 347). As Foley notices, the fact that we find Persephone in Hades’ bed makes it “unclear whether Persephone has consummated her marriage” (108). “Aidoneus, lord of the dead” (*HDem.* 357) “smiled with his brows” (*HDem.* 357-8) at Hermes’ request of reuniting Persephone with her mother who was angry and about to destroy the race of mortals. Scholars

are not sure about Hades' uncanny smiling with his brows. According to Foley, such "cryptic phrase may suggest his inability to produce civilized mirth, or an intent to deceive / engage in secret matters" (54). Indeed, Hades told Persephone to go to the side of her mother (*HDem.* 360). He also told her not to be sad and that he was not an unsuitable spouse, promising her "the greatest honors among the gods" (*HDem.* 366). Nevertheless, before letting her go, "he gave her to eat a honey-sweet pomegranate seed" (*HDem.* 371-2). As Foley explains, "Persephone's eating of the pomegranate seed may signal a shift to seduction, a careful preparation of the bride for sexuality rather than violence" (109). In verse 395, Demeter calls Hades miserable and asks her daughter: "by what guile did the mighty Host-to-Many deceive you" (*HDem.* 404). As such, the mother goddess emphasises Hades' brains and cunning ways, which seem to play down his physical abuse and violence. Indeed, the text does not specify how Hades makes Persephone eat the pomegranate seed, but he cunningly succeeds, almost throwing it inside her mouth (*HDem.* 372-74). This sly tactic to keep Persephone in the underworld—at least for part of the year, was foreshadowed when he "smiled with his brows" (*HDem.* 357-8). In turn, Persephone recounts these events as if Hades had put the pomegranate seed in her mouth (*HDem.* 412) and forced her to taste it (*HDem.* 413).

Hekate appears for the first time in the *Hymn* in line 24 presented as the "daughter of Persaios" and in the next verse as "Hekate of the delicate veil." After that, it is not until she meets Demeter, who was holding a torch in her hands, that she reappears (*HDem.* 52). Hekate tries to help Demeter, but she can only tell her that she only "heard a voice but did not see with her eyes" (*HDem.* 57). After that, Hekate accompanied Demeter to see Helios to ask him what he knew about what had happened to Persephone. Arthur claims that Hekate's Titan heritage is key, as she, "like Helios, was one of the generation who opposed Zeus's dominion and was eventually defeated." (221). However, unlike Helios, she sides with Demeter. As Foley remarks, "in offering support to the goddess and in arriving with a torch, she assimilates herself to Demeter, (...), and provides a female witness who only *hears* (...) to balance the male Helios, who *sees* and serves as an apologist for Zeus" (38). Later, Hekate is presented again as "Hekate of the delicate veil" (*HDem.* 438), and in that same verse we find out that she went near Persephone and Demeter "and often caressed the daughter of holy Demeter" (*HDem.* 439) and that "from that

time this lady served her as chief attendant” (*HDem.* 440). All in all, in the *Homeric Hymn*, Hekate is a sympathetic figure.

Helios is introduced as the son of Hyperion and as the one that “heard the maid calling her father the son of Kronos” (*HDem.* 26-27). When Demeter approaches Helios to know about her daughter’s whereabouts, she asks him for respect, the kind that a god holds for a goddess (*HDem.* 64), and then she asks about her daughter addressing him as follows: “with your rays you look down through the bright air” (*HDem.* 69) “on the whole of the earth and the sea” (*HDem.* 70) making the reader picture Helios as the one that can see it all. To all this Helios responds that he reveres and pities her grief, that Zeus was to blame as he was the one that gave Persephone to Hades against her will, but that Hades was “not an unsuitable bridegroom” (*HDem.* 84). Thus, he “portrays Hades simply as a desirable bridegroom” (Foley 40). Hence, this encounter with Helios made Demeter suffer even more grief as it was Helios who told her what had happened to her daughter.

Keleos’ daughters first saw Demeter in verse 105 as they came to fetch water from a well (*HDem.* 106). In the *Hymn*, they are compared to four goddesses that were in the flower of youth (*HDem.* 108). “This comparison of the girls to flowers and goddesses deliberately recalls Persephone and emphasizes the role reversal (from divine to human) undertaken by Demeter” (Foley 1995: 41). Keleos’ and Metaneiras’s daughters are first introduced by name in line 109: Kallidikê, Kleisidikê, Demo, and Kallithoê, the eldest of the sisters. When the girls met the goddess, they did not know her as gods are hard for mortals to recognize (*HDem.* 111). They asked her who she was (*HDem.* 113). They also asked her where she came from, and the reason she left her city. In her turn, Demeter responds: “Dear children, whoever of womankind you are, / greetings” (*HDem.* 119-120) and starts telling them her tale. A tale where she presents herself as the victim of pirate men from whom she had escaped. After telling her story, she wishes the gods of Olympus to give them husbands to marry and children to bear (*HDem.* 136). Demeter also asks them to pity her and calls them maidens (*HDem.* 136) and again, dear children (*HDem.* 137). Kallidikê, a maiden unwed, in beauty the best of Keleos’ daughters (*HDem.* 146), was the one that replied to the goddess who offered herself to the tasks that an elderly woman could do: nursing a baby or watching over the house. After that, the girls carried the jars of water to their

house and asked their mother about the old lady that they had met (*HDem.* 172) to which she bade them go quickly to offer a boundless wage (*HDem.* 173) and so they did and led the lady to their house. From line 169 until line 189 we see a contrast of “the joyful youth of the girls with Demeter’s sorrow. The imagery of flowers again links the daughters with Persephone” (Foley 44). Later, Keleos’ daughters are the ones presented as those who hear their baby brother’s cries and try to calm him down (*HDem.* 284). One of them took the baby in her arms, the other lit the fire, and another one roused her mother (*HDem.* 285-286).¹⁶ Although they bathed and embraced him lovingly (*HDem.* 289-290) they could not comfort him. They were also the ones to tell their father what had happened after their mother had provoked the goddess’ anger, and what had she commanded (*HDem.* 293-295).

It is after Keleos’ daughters meet Demeter that we hear about **Metaneira**, as her daughter referred to her as their “deep-girt mother” (*HDem.* 161). Once her daughters told her about the old lady that they met she asked them to offer her boundless wage (*HDem.* 173). When they got home, Metaneira was sitting by the pillar of the close-fired roof (*HDem.* 186) and when Demeter entered disguised as an old lady, pale fear seized Metaneira (*HDem.* 190). She gave up her chair and bade the goddess sit down (*HDem.* 191). Metaneira also showed to be a good host by offering the goddess a cup filled with honey-sweet wine (*HDem.* 206) and after she gave her the drink (*HDem.* 210). Indeed, Metaneira proved to be admirably hospitable. Then, she proceeded to compliment the goddesses’ noble presence and to tell her about how mortals were forced to bear gifts to the gods (*HDem.* 213-217). Metaneira is also shown as someone ready to do and give everything for her child when she tells the goddess that everything she has will be hers (*HDem.* 218) with the condition of raising her much-prayed for child (*HDem.* 219-220). She also tells her how people would envy her for raising her child (*HDem.* 222). Nevertheless, even if Metaneira let the goddess take care of her child she did not trust her, she kept watch at night from her fragrant chamber (*HDem.* 244) seeing how the goddess buried the child in the fire caused her “woe and bitter cares” (*HDem.* 249) and so she told Demeter, which provoked the goddess’ anger at her. Metaneira appears to fear losing her role as Demophon’s mother. She does not comprehend what the goddess is doing, but to her, she seems to be threatening the dependency bond between her and her child. Indeed, Metaneira believes the goddess wants to

¹⁶ This is quite similar to the lifting-up ceremony of a new-born’s legal existence, see Dasen 2011: 298.

harm Demophon, threatening her role as a mother. Thus, she is utterly mystified and scared at the same time when she sees Demeter doing something that she cannot understand.

After that Demeter addressed her saying how mortals are ignorant and foolish (*HDem.* 256): words that seemed to be especially directed to Metaneira. When Demeter showed her true appearance and left, Metaneira's knees buckled (*HDem.* 281) remaining voiceless (*HDem.* 282) even forgetting to pick up her little child that was on the floor (*HDem.* 283). Despite being a mortal, Metaneira is similar to Demeter in many ways. Both are concerned for their children's safety, and both fear the unknown. However, Metaneira, as a mortal, ignores many things and does not trust her own senses.

Demophon, shown as Metaneira and Keleos' only son, much-prayed for and cherished (*HDem.* 165), was found on his mother's lap (*HDem.* 187) when the goddess entered Keleos' house. The love that his mother feels for him makes her offer the goddess all that is hers with the condition of raising him (*HDem.* 218) and considers that raising him was an enviable fact (*HDem.* 222). Hence, Demeter gladly embraced the child (*HDem.* 226). In verse 233 Demophon is described as the splendid son of skilful Keleos, the one Metaneira bore, and Demeter nursed (*HDem.* 234). Hence, "he grew like a divinity" (*HDem.* 235) "eating no food nor sucking" (*HDem.* 236). He was anointed with ambrosia like a god by Demeter, who also "breathed sweetly on him, held close to her breast" (*HDem.* 238). The goddess would bury him at night "in the fire's might" (*HDem.* 239), making him grow faster than usual as a god would. "She would have made him ageless and immortal" (*HDem.* 242) if it were not for Metaneira who spied at night the goddess from her chamber (*HDem.* 243-244) as she feared for her child. But when his mother's mistrust provoked Demeter's anger, this latter snatched him from the fire and then "cast him away from herself to the ground" (*HDem.* 254). Demeter told his mother that she would have made him "immortal and ageless" (*HDem.* 260) and that she "would have given him unfailing honor" (*HDem.* 261). "But now he cannot escape death and the death spirits" (*HDem.* 262). Nevertheless, just because he laid on Demeter's knees and slept in her arms he will always be honoured. When Demeter's anger was triggered, his mother forgot to pick him up from the floor, but it was one of his sisters who took him in "her arms and laid him to her breast" (*HDem.* 286), and even if they bathed and embraced him yet "his heart was not comforted" (*HDem.* 290).

In the poem, Demophon plays the role of the surrogate of Persephone. While Demeter is looking after him, she seems to forget about her own daughter's absence. Following Fineman's understanding ("Vulnerability and Social Justice" 360) that dependency stems from physical and emotional care, Demophon depends on her mother because of his embodiment. Then, Demeter wants to make Demophon resilient and therefore tries to put an end to his mortality and avoid the greatest threat to this human child: death. Indeed, as is the case of all mortals, death is the greatest source of vulnerability to Demophon.

2.4. Settings, symbols and associations

2.4.1. Settings

There are different settings in this *Hymn*. First and foremost, Persephone is in the plain of Nysa,¹⁷ in a meadow picking flowers (*HDem.* 1-32). Then we move to Eleusis (near Athens) where Demeter meets Keleos' daughters in the Maiden Well (Parthenion) (Foley 124) from where she goes to their household, which is part of the female world (Foley 123) and gender segregation (Doherty 26), where her anger was triggered by Metaneira leading to famine (*HDem.* 96-333). After that, we find ourselves in the Underworld, where Hades is keeping Persephone and where Hermes goes to bring her back (*HDem.* 334-384). The Underworld's importance resides mostly because of Persephone's and Hades' sexual union "in the Underworld is a *hieros gamos*" (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 98). Later, we go to the Rarian plain in Eleusis (*HDem.* 385-482) and finally the Olympus (*HDem.* 483-489).

2.4.2. Symbols and associations: images, similes and metaphors

Among the wide variety of poetic images, we find similes and metaphors, which are structures of comparison that "are among the primary elements that go into making a poem" (Wolosky 41). In a simile, there is an explicit comparison. "A simile is a comparison that *tells* you it is a comparison" (Wolosky 29) by using words such as "like," "as," "resemble," or "compare" (Wolosky 29). "Metaphor is also a structure of comparison, a likeness. But in metaphor the

¹⁷ The plain of Nysa was placed somewhere "near the city of Nysa in Caria, in Asia Minor" (*Nysa - Livius*). However, others placed it in Boeotia, Aethiopia, or even Arabia (*Nysa - Livius*).

likeness happens without warning, and involves its own distinctive structure. Instead of, as in a simile, stating x is like y , in a metaphor, some quality or trait or action associated with x is directly attributed to, or transferred, to y " (Wolosky 30).

The **Plain of Nysa**, where the events take place, is associated to Dionysus (Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 148-50), Zeus' son, "who later played a role in the Mysteries" (Foley 36).

Some of the most important symbols of this *Hymn* are the **flowers** as these are associated with Persephone making us see her blooming like a flower and ready for marriage in Hades' and Zeus' eyes. Persephone and the rest of the girls were plucking roses, violets, irises, hyacinth, and narcissus (*HDem.* 6-7). "Roses are associated with eros, and the narcissus, like many other flowers that grow from bulbs and produce fruits, was thought to be an aphrodisiac" (Foley 34). Moreover, "most of these flowers are known at least at a later date to have developed underworld associations" (Foley 34). The narcissus "was thought to have soporific qualities (the root *nark-* in *narkissos* suggests torpor and death)" (Foley 34). The flowers represented Persephone in their beauty and purity. Also, she is called "flower-like maiden" (*HDem.* 8).

The presence of the narcissus is imperative as this is the first way Persephone is manipulated, controlled, and tricked by Hades. With help of the Earth, and Zeus, Hades used the narcissus' beauty and charm to attract and catch Persephone. In the *Hymn*, the narcissus is called a "lovely toy" (*HDem.* 16) alluding to the fact that Persephone is still a very young maiden. The narcissus also represents Persephone's early and partial death as it is the narcissus that she reaches out right before her abduction. The narcissus could be viewed as an erotic symbol that Persephone wants to possess (Scarpi 49, in Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 55), as a symbol of "the child's pre-oedipal period of narcissistic identification with the mother" (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 55) putting special attention to the fact that it is a narcissus that Persephone plucks, or as a symbol of narcissism and death (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 55). Also, by associating the narcissus to a toy, the *Hymn* makes references to the toys brides devoted to Artemis in Antiquity, which implies the way "Persephone is giving up her childhood, her narcissus, her toy" (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 56). Suter also

views Persephone's abduction as something that was hastened "by her own readiness to mature and in which she joined happily on her own conditions" (*The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 20).¹⁸ In my view, Suter makes a very good point: some interpret and see the abduction as a rape but things are rather more complex in this version of the myth, since "Persephone is taking over control of access to her body, control over her body (or ego) boundaries, a control which she must wrest from Demeter if she is to establish her own nature, separate self" (*The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 57-58).

That said, we cannot ignore **Persephone's cries** which contradict the term "happily" that Suter uses. These cries prove Persephone's unwillingness to be snatched by Hades, and the ones that make us consider the possibility of rape. Indeed, "the cry for help is a call for witnesses standard in primitive justice" (Foley 36) which clearly shows that, in this case, Persephone is taken against her will. One thing is clear, the flower picking, and the abduction represent Persephone's separation from childhood and initiation into womanhood (Lincoln 224). She is ready for marriage but not for assault or rape.

The **sun** and the **moon** are symbols that represent Helios and Hekate. The sun is represented as the one that sees and the moon as the one that hears (Foley 38-39).

The **meadows** and the **wells** are a very strong symbol here as they allude to rape and abduction (Foley 33 and 41). They, along with water in general, also symbolise readiness for marriage (Foley 41).

The **olives** represent Demeter as she is connected with vegetation. The first time that the olives are mentioned is to say that even they did not hear Persephone's cry (*HDem.* 23) perhaps referring to the fact that Demeter did not know where her daughter was. "The olives are also expected to be able to hear Persephone. This may express a special symbiosis between Demeter and the vegetable world and above all with cultivated plants because they mediate between nature and culture" (Foley 37).

¹⁸ The Sapphic volume *Long Ago* also refers to Persephone's agency while gathering flowers, see Cantillo-Lucua 53, which I contend matches Suter's perspective.

The **torches** that Demeter carries while looking for her daughter could be seen as an attempt to know the truth, to see as the sun did, and of fertility since, while she is looking for her, Hades made her his wife in the underworld. Furthermore, it represents the marital union of Persephone with Hades. For Doherty (25) Hades' chariot, the torches carried by Demeter, and the pomegranate seed that Persephone eats in the underworld symbolise the marital union between Hades and Persephone. Moreover, the "torches may be associated with purification, the bringing of fertility" (Foley 38).

The **pomegranate** represents fertility, blood, death, sexuality, and seduction. Persephone was given the pomegranate seed when she was about to leave the underworld (*HDem.* 371-2), the fact that moment could be a reminder that nobody can easily leave the underworld. The pomegranate also refers to the consumption of marriage. The fact that Hades forced Persephone to eat the pomegranate seed (*HDem.* 411-13) may represent the rape. Nevertheless, as Suter states, there is no clear evidence in this version of the myth of explicit rape.

2.5. Topics

In this part of the research three main topics will be addressed: marriage, Eleusis, and Zeus's project.

2.5.1. Marriage

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* "both inscribes the story of mother and daughter within patriarchal reality and allows it to mark a feminine difference. Hades occasions both the separation and a narrative which will repair the breach" (Hirsch 5-6). Although this myth revolves around conflicting agendas, the main purpose of this myth is to explain Kore's transition to becoming Persephone through her marriage to Hades. Therefore, marriage plays a major role in this Greek myth. Generally speaking, the ancient Greece weddings were a social concern where women had a main role as brides or as the mothers of the brides. Indeed, every ceremony held in the *thalamos* (bedroom) holds great importance in Antiquity. The wedding is normally arranged by the bride's parents (Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2). On the wedding day, the

groom takes the bride as soon as the night falls in the month of Gamelion (January), the month of the weddings, in winter (Magnien 115). The bride's mother holds torches during the wedding procession and the groom's mother receives the couple with torches at the arrival (Redfield 189). Both families, the bride's and the groom's, decorate their door houses with plants such as laurels and olive branches, letting people know that a wedding is taking place (Margariti 321). This ceremony is held on a full moon, and it usually lasts three days, a period during which different practices take place, such as hymns, libations, and dances (Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2).

In this context, Redfield points out how "virginity is precious and is not abandoned voluntarily. Hence the elements in the wedding ceremony which imply that the wedding is after all a rape" (191). Moreover, he adds, "the bride is expected to be unwilling, to take with her into marriage a certain virginal modesty; that is one of the two necessary ingredients of that contradiction in terms, the chaste wife" (Redfield 191).

Demeter's rage towards Zeus may be interpreted as just an internalised anger at Persephone because of her betrayal to the mother-daughter bond (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 64). Nevertheless, Suter also mentions the possibility that Demeter addresses her anger towards Zeus as "she may have experienced something like rape at the hands of Zeus when Persephone was conceived" (*The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 64). Indeed, later, Suter also mentions a Phigalian version of the myth where Demeter was angry at her rape by Poseidon (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 111).¹⁹ Also, "marriage to a paternal uncle was not uncommon in Greek culture" (Foley 36). In Persephone's case, the only ingredients for such union are the agreement of the bride's father, a virgin bride, and a suitable husband. As Foley remarks, the "motif of abduction from a meadow and a group of maidens suggests the girl's readiness for marriage" (34). Persephone and Keleos' daughters share youth and beauty, which could be related to their readiness for marriage. Surprisingly, Demeter wishes these girls what she does not want for her own daughter: marriage (*HDem.* 135-137). This could suggest that she is not against marriage, but against marriage by abduction. Moreover, she did not have a say in her daughter's marriage and in addition to this, her daughter got married to the god of the underworld, which is a place she cannot access. Also, Demeter knew that this would be what

¹⁹ On Demeter's rape by Poseidon see Balériaux 3.

Keleos' daughters and women in general would want to hear, especially Kallideke who is, interestingly, described as "maiden unwed" (*HDem.* 146).

Even if "marriage by abduction had a place in Greek tradition and marriages may often have taken place without the consent of the bride and her mother" (Foley 31) Demeter does not appreciate her daughter's marriage to Hades, who was left to rule the underworld in misery living off the mortal's fear because his brother ruled so.²⁰ Thus, perhaps, this is the reason Zeus gave his daughter to him. Zeus is again and again described as a wise god in the *Theogony* (55, 287, 461, 522, 552, 892, 899, 909, 919). He might have felt he owed his brother for sending him to darkness for eternity, or perhaps he just wanted to establish his power by giving his daughter in marriage and making her become, that way, the goddess of the underworld.

In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone "screamed with a shrill voice, calling on her father" (*HDem.* 20-21), therefore, she did not fail to ask for help. However, even after she cried for help, no immortal nor mortal is shown to have heard her initially. Later, we discover that there were witnesses since Hekate heard her voice, and Helios even witnessed her kidnapping. Indeed, Hades took Persephone against her will, and the fact that she was lying on his bed suggests that something between them might have taken place or simply serves as a reminder of what all of this is: a marriage by abduction. When she saw her mother again, she told her what had happened to her, omitting things like the honours Hades had told her about, perhaps thinking that she would be betraying her mother if she ever felt like she had reasons to want to stay with Hades. In this *Hymn* everyone hopes for something: Demeter to find her daughter, Persephone to be rescued, Hades to marry Persephone, and Zeus not to lose humanity.

As we can appreciate in the *Hymn to Demeter*, there are two different versions of the same reality. On the one hand, we find Zeus, Hades, and Helios representing the male perspective in this tale, while Demeter, Persephone, and Hekate represent the female version of the same story. Helios is presented as the one that knows the truth, but Hekate is willing to help Demeter when she does not know what happened to her daughter. Nobody but Hekate reaches out to tell her what she heard after seeing her sadness. Persephone was not alone when she was

²⁰ For further information about marriage in this hymn, see Scarpi 109-30.

abducted, as we know from the first lines of the *Hymn* (*HDem.* 5-6), and from what she tells her mother that had happened (*HDem.* 417-425), so there must have been more witnesses to the abduction. Nonetheless, it is Hekate —someone that only heard something from afar— the one who reaches Demeter to help her. When Hekate tells Demeter to ask Helios what had occurred, he tells her not to “nurse in vain insatiable anger” (*HDem.* 83). Even though he acknowledges the pain that Demeter, as a mother, feels for having lost her child, he sees Hades as a good match for her daughter giving almost no importance to the fact that she had been kidnapped and that he heard her ask for help. Notwithstanding, being a male god might have to do with how he perceives what happens to Persephone. Helios tries to reason while Demeter and Hekate are very emotional about the abduction. Helios knows nobody can undo the kidnapping, and he tries to make Demeter share his perspective by telling her that Hades would be a good groom.

Hekate, as a female, shows empathy and understanding toward Demeter’s situation. She understands the goddesses’ pain and sadness. Helios, as a male, tries to make Demeter see the advantages of a marriage with the god of the darkness, showing only partial empathy for her pain and Persephone’s, just as Zeus might have reasoned when he agreed to give his daughter to Hades in marriage. Furthermore, Helios is represented as the only one that knows the truth about what happened, and Hekate is someone that hopes to find the abducted girl. Zeus, Hades, and Helios concentrate on the fact that Persephone got married while Demeter, Persephone, and Hekate focus on the abduction.

Although we can see in the *Hymn* many hints of a patriarchal society, as Zeus’ will is accomplished and Hades ends up marrying Persephone, many others show us sometimes of a vestigial matriarchy. Indeed, Demeter introduces herself to Keleos’ daughters, saying: “Dodo’s my name, which my honored mother gave me” (*HDem.* 122). Furthermore, in Suter’s words, “the *Hymn* shows that women are in the positions of authority and that despite the power implied for Zeus in the Olympian frame, within the core story, his power is minimal, his authority is rejected, and his will is confused” (*The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 27). Moreover, Demeter’s power is shown many times throughout the *Hymn* with her anger, and the way she does not accept Zeus’ honours. Also, when Demeter first encounters the daughters of Keleos, she addresses them using the word *womankind* γυναικῶν θηλυτεράων (*HDem.* 119), a word that

defines women that come from women. Using this word could also reflect the resentment that Demeter felt towards males and an unfair patriarchal system where females were treated unjustly, as she herself felt like a victim of a system that took her daughter away from her. However, how Demeter tries to immortalise Demophon reminds us of the displacement that Doherty (55) discussed. In this case, Demeter could be trying to substitute Persephone for Demophon, that is to say, a female child for a male child. Demeter trying to immortalise Demophon but failing to do so implies showing the separation between mortal and immortal beings. Each owns a place in the universe, and nobody can change that.

Even as a goddess, Demeter could not undo her daughter's marriage, therefore, Persephone had been doomed to darkness for the other third of the year, following a cycle for eternity. Demeter and Persephone felt powerless over the unfair whims of a patriarchal system that was applied to both immortals and mortals. The female role, mortal or immortal, is imperative in the *Hymn to Demeter* as the main character is a goddess unhappy with the male rules. Women were in charge of the household and the children, while men managed matters outside the house. The fate of mortal women that did not have their own homes and children was, if they were lucky, to take care of someone else's household or nurse someone's children. Some that were not lucky were sold (*HDem.* 132). Thus, a woman's wish, and what any parents wished for their children was that they would get married and have children of their own (*HDem.* 135-7).

Demeter's self-centredness on her own rage and powerlessness made her make humanity suffer, but it is thanks to that selfish and not-so-selfish grief that immortals and mortals get what they want. The former want to be feared, praised, and receive gifts and honours, while the latter want hope, and their prayers to be heard. Something that catches the attention is that both Demeter and Metaneira, goddess and human, share the same concern about their child's welfare. Demeter shows sadness because of her daughter since she cannot get to her and be there for her in the darkness. Metaneira is concerned with her baby because she does not comprehend what the goddess is doing to her child. Both think their child is in danger because they ignore what is happening. There is an association between both Persephone and Demophon because of Demeter. Both cry when they are separated from Demeter, and both find joy in her company.

Immortal or not their powers are limited. Demeter does not know where her daughter is at the beginning of the *Hymn*. Once she knows, she cannot bring her back herself, and she cannot undo the abduction. Moreover, Zeus, even if he is described as the “highest and best” (*HDem.* 21), ignores the fact that his daughter ate food in the underworld, so he feels obliged to follow the rules and find a way to soothe Demeter’s anger while keeping his promise to Hades. Indeed, Persephone, a goddess, was abducted as any mortal woman was before and after, namely she was married against her will as it happened to mortal women. Hades, as a god, could not oblige anyone to love him but he managed to persuade or trick Persephone.

In the *Hymn*, there seems to be obvious gender segregation: Persephone was first found gathering flowers with other female companions. Demeter addresses other females at the well and then stays with them in their house. Zeus sends Hermes, a male god, to talk with Hades, another male, while he sends Iris, a female, to talk with another female, Demeter (Doherty 26). Hence, there exists a clear separation between genders which leads us to wonder if these can be harmonically united in marriage or if the main purpose of marriage is to end this forever existing conflict. For Doherty, while both genders present different stereotypes, these remain on many occasions contradictory. For instance, men are seen as protectors for some and abductors for others. Likewise, “in the *Hymn to Demeter*, Zeus is Persephone’s father and Hades her husband, two roles that ostensibly involve guardianship and protection. Yet Zeus permits, and Hades carries out, Persephone’s forcible abduction” (Doherty 35).

Zeus trying to offer Demeter honours and Demeter’s rejection of these (*HDem.* 328) and Demeter doing the same with Persephone and Persephone not being able to accept them because of the seed she ate in the underworld (*HDem.* 371-2) is evidence of the power struggle between Zeus and Demeter, and the latter and Persephone (Suter, *The Narcissus and the Pomegranate* 129). Also, the omission of Persephone’s participation in the Mysteries corroborates, from Suter’s perspective, the conflict between the two goddesses. There are many differences between the way the narrator tells us the story of the abduction and how Persephone gives her version of the events. First and foremost, the narrator does not mention the names of Persephone’s companions while she was in the meadows picking flowers. Then, Persephone mentions her

companions making herself part of a group. Later, she omits the narcissus from her version of the events while talking to her mother, whereas the narrator pays special attention to the narcissus. All of this could either suggest that Persephone omitted that part on purpose or that she did not realise the importance of the narcissus in her abduction that resulted, thus, in her marriage.

2.5.2. Eleusis

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* explains the origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and as Frazer remarks:

The revelation of the mysteries is the triumphal close of the piece. This conclusion is confirmed by a more minute examination of the poem, which proves that the poet has given, not merely a general account of the foundation of the mysteries, but also in more or less veiled language mythical explanations of the origin of particular rites which we have good reason to believe formed essential features of the festival. Amongst the rites as to which the poet thus drops significant hints are the preliminary fast of the candidates for initiation, the torchlight procession, the all-night vigil, the sitting of the candidates, veiled and in silence, on stools covered with sheepskins, the use of scurrilous language, the breaking of ribald jests, and the solemn communion with the divinity by participation in a draught of barley-water from a holy chalice. (37-38)

These Eleusinian Mysteries or Great Mysteries were secret religious acts practised around 1450 BCE to 392 CE in Eleusis (Kellis 159). These rituals were held the third month of the Attikon calendar, starting the 15th day and lasting 9 days (Kellis 159), which coincided with early autumn (Roisman 187). The Eleusinian Mysteries encouraged agricultural fertility and provided an afterlife free from suffering (Roisman 186). Everyone —men, women, children, slaves— that spoke Greek could participate in these rites, but murderers were excluded from this practice. The Lesser Mysteries were celebrated seven months prior to the Great Mysteries as a sort of preparation for these last ones. In these rituals piglets were sacrificed at the Athenian Eleusinian altar (Bremmer and Erskine 101-104). After that, another attributed day was established to march on the Sacred Way, going from the Altar of the Twelve Gods to Eleusis sacrificing to Demeter, Persephone, and Hades (Roisman 187).

Mythology explains the origins of cults, rituals, and the relationship Greeks had with their deities, therefore, the events that take place in Eleusis in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* are of utmost relevance as it is because Demeter disguised herself among humanity when she met the daughters of Keleos and subsequently nursed Demophon. Interestingly, the episode that takes place in Eleusis has as main participants female characters (Richardson, “The Homeric Hymn to Demeter” 47). Going back to the rituals, the Great Mysteries took place in Demeter’s temple at night (Bookidis and Pemberton 18) using torches, the participants fasted and drank *kykeon*, and they even joked, imitating Iambe (Roisman 187). The torches and the light not only allude to Demeter’s search for her daughter, but they could also be addressing Kore’s descent to the underworld and Persephone’s life there (Bookidis and Pemberton 19).

The presence of this *Hymn* not only explains the creation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the gifts and honours resulting from Persephone’s abduction but also focuses on the revelation of the Eleusinian Mysteries (W. Harris 29). In fact, one of the practices conducted during these Eleusinian Mysteries dealt with the myth of Demeter and Persephone. These Mysteries were believed “to bring eternal life, elevating the practitioner to the level of deity after death” (McMullin 47).

These Mysteries, lasting over a week during autumn, were, thus, celebrated to honour Demeter, Persephone, and Hades—as the one representing the underworld. The Mysteries represent a connection of humanity with the underworld, which was a relief for human beings since it allowed them to lose the fear that they had of death. They considered that they would have a better fate after they died, thanks to the connection of Persephone with the underworld.²¹ Agriculture and the establishment of the seasons are the legacies of this *Hymn* as well (Brunel and Karakostas 515-516).

A remarkable part of these Mysteries is how the participants felt such empathy for the story of Demeter and Persephone. Another exceptional legacy of the *Hymn to Demeter* is the

²¹ On the relationship between the *Hymn* and the Eleusinian Mysteries, see Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 12-30; Foley 65-75; González González 51-88

important role that women adopted in the Mysteries. The Mysteries were also, on their way, a form of striking against men and the unjust fate of many women that lived what Persephone and Demeter did. Apart from the Eleusinian Mysteries, other scholars connect Demeter and Persephone to the rites of the Haloa, and the Thesmophoria.²²

The events that take place in Eleusis define the long central episode of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. The attempted immortalisation of the child sets the stage for the Mysteries since Demeter's failed attempt to immortalise Demophon implies the mitigation of death by another route (Foley 48). Demeter hides the child in the fire foreshadowing the way she will hide the seed in the earth and how Persephone will be hidden in the underworld and then brought back, mimicking when Demeter snatches Demophon from the fire, or as she does once more when she restores the vegetation.²³ Secrecy was imperative in the Mysteries (Foley 35 and 62) as so it was the fact that Demeter had to immortalise Demophon secretly as "the original point was probably that magic could only be worked in secret" (Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 241, qtd in Foley 50).

There is a parallel between Demeter and Metaneira: both are speechless (*HDem.* 198 and 281-3) because of their concern about their children as both are afraid of loss. When Demeter is about to condemn humanity with famine, she acknowledges her roles as the one "providing grain to mortals and sacrifices to gods and her future offer of a better afterlife in the Mysteries" (Foley 52). The Eleusinian Mysteries were the most prominent of the Greek mystery cults of antiquity (Foley 65). As Foley points out:

The Hymn itself refers in detail only to the mythical origins of preliminary rites at Eleusis that could be revealed to outsiders and culminates with the founding of the cult and veiled references to the promises it offered to the initiate. References to the Demeter/Persephone myth apparently played a role at every stage of the rites, however, and it seems likely that the Hymn might illuminate some aspects of the Mysteries and their meaning for the initiate even if it reveals no details about the most secret proceedings. (65)

²² See Lincoln.

²³ As White explains, by placing Demophon in the fire Demeter becomes a sort of mother to this child as she attempts to give him a new life as a god (31).

Persephone had a starring role in the celebration of the Lesser Mysteries that were celebrated in her honour and which final initiation was celebrated in Eleusis (Foley 66).

In the *Hymn* we find allusions to some of the preliminary stages of the Mysteries such as “fasting, washing, purification by torches, sacrifice, and the wearing of special clothing (and amulets)” (Foley 68). The Mysteries, as the name suggests, were a mystery, which does not allow us to reconstruct everything that took place in them as the only information about them comes from indirect sources but “initiates seem to have experienced in some form the sufferings and reunion of the goddesses” (Foley 68). As Foley remarks, this hymn, like many others, “is an aetiological poem; that is, it explains how Demeter and Persephone came to have the honors that they have in the universe and how the Mysteries were founded” (84). Moreover, “the Mysteries are the result of a unique and complex intersection between mortals and immortals and examine the role that female experience plays in modifying forever the relations between divinity and humankind” (Foley 84). Demeter’s failed attempt to immortalise Demophon is an example of the impossibility of uniting the world of the mortals with that of the immortals. Thus, the Mysteries attempt to bring humanity closer to divinity, giving a glimpse of hope to cope with what came after death.²⁴

2.5.3. Zeus’ project

The *Theogony* elaborates on the greatness of Zeus and his supreme power over mortals and immortals by explaining the process that led Zeus to establish his authority (*Th.* 886–969). He is praised for his wisdom surpassing that of any other immortal or mortal (*Th.* 892) and therefore constantly alluded to as “wise Zeus” (e.g., *Th.* 56, 287, 522, 909, 919). Zeus is also the one that brings thunder and lightning (*Th.* 287). Then, throughout the *Iliad* the role Zeus holds is quite clear. As it had already been established in the *Theogony*, Zeus is recognized as the father of the gods and the men, and the most powerful among the immortals. He is associated with thunder (e.g., *Il.* 1.520, 3.751, 7.485, 7.538, 8.2), Zeus’ authority is viewed as omnipotent (e.g., *Il.* 2.425, 485, 7.371, 11.878), and by his will the actions take place. He is also depicted as wise (*Il.* 2.491,

²⁴ See Agha-Jaffar 10-13.

779) and a commander (*Il.* 2.818) with a sober judgement (*Il.* 6.288). Also known for his anger (*Il.* 2.960) and wrath (*Il.* 4.186), victory or failure are attributed to his will. For something to succeed, Zeus has to give signal by granting favourable signs coming from heaven, as he is indeed the “glorious father” (*Il.* 7.236), the “deep-planning” (*Il.* 7.563, 10.121) and the “cloud-assembler” (*Il.* 7.331). His will is the only one considered (*Il.* 12.295) as he is the almighty (*Il.* 13.1001). Zeus is also praised for his intellect (*Il.* 14.298) as he oversees everything that takes place. Also, the *Odyssey*, once more, alludes to Zeus as the thunder (*Od.* 203) and the one that is feared (*Od.* 205). Here we also see the greatness of Zeus’ will, everything happens as he dictates.

Furthermore, throughout the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* we see how Zeus’ plan is accomplished. As Persephone’s father, he gives her as a wife to his brother Hades. Everything that takes place in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* leads to Zeus’ plan, which is the union of Persephone and Hades in marriage. Even the flower that Zeus presents in front of Persephone is a snare to accomplish his will. Hades abducts Persephone without taking into consideration her will nor her mother’s will because he knows that the only opinion that matters is that of the cloud-gathering Zeus. Moreover, at the end, Zeus is the one in charge to decide his daughter’s fate after she ate food in the underworld.

Since long hymns such as the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* address mythological events that establish the origin of things (Foley 29), and as Jenny Strauss Clay points out, such hymns allude to events taking place after Zeus consolidated his reign (15-16, in Foley 29) we find here the need that Zeus must establish his project and thus to shape his world. One of the main aims of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is to establish the correlation Zeus-Hera, and Hades-Persephone. The latter is necessary to establish the rulers of the underworld since Zeus and Hera represent the rulers of Olympus, and Zeus’ role is to succeed in this establishment, thus the imperativeness of Zeus’ project. Also, with the arrangement of Hades’ marriage to Persephone, Zeus enhances his power over the rest of the gods and goddesses by marrying his daughter to his brother, the god of the underworld. Perhaps with this marriage Zeus aims at having Hades on his side as Zeus has no access to the underworld. Marrying Persephone to Hades seems therefore Zeus’ calculated plan.

Zeus' will is the one that sets the myth of Demeter and Persephone in motion, as he is the one that gives Persephone to Hades without Demeter's consent. Nevertheless, Zeus' project is at stake because of Demeter's course of reaction as she stops the seed from growing, which would have destroyed humanity and risked the gods and goddesses from losing the gifts and sacrifices from humans (*HDem.* 305-312). Zeus disregards Demeter's opinion when it comes to their daughter's marriage which results in Demeter's wrath threatening the existence of humanity. "The poem's events also occur in heaven, earth, and the underworld, and in the end these three spheres of the cosmos are drawn into a new relation to each other" (Foley 35), and this seems to be the aim of Zeus' project: to establish a harmonious correlation of the three that allows him to settle his power on them all in a sort of way: in the union of Hades and Persephone, he is not only the groom's brother but also the bride's father.

In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, there seem to be two kinds of groups: those who support Zeus' project and those who do not. In the former group, we find Zeus himself, as he is the one that plans this marriage; Gaia, as she is the one that creates the narcissus to trap Persephone; Helios who, although understanding Demeter's position, sees Hades as a suitable husband; and Hades, who tries to convince Persephone that he is a worthy husband. In the latter group, we find Demeter, who is against this marriage; Hekate, who empathises with Demeter; and Persephone, who cries for help while abducted. Others like Iris, Hermes, and Rheia follow Zeus' orders and serve as his messengers, showing implicit support for Zeus' project. Thus, Zeus' world seems to be composed of those who see the abduction and those who hear it. "The poem may be marking a change of identity or Korê's acquisition of new powers as goddess of the underworld by using the name Persephone" (Foley 39) which seems to be the role Zeus has as his father: help his daughter reach the honours that will make her goddess of the underworld, that is to say, help his daughter change from Korê to Persephone that can only be reached with her marriage to Hades. Interestingly, when Hermes goes to the underworld to bring Persephone back, Hades smiles with his brows (*HDem.* 357-8), which might be because he knows that even if Persephone goes back to her mother, there is still a chance of her returning to the underworld if he feeds her a pomegranate seed, otherwise said, the smile with his brows might be because he knows that Zeus' project is unavoidable.

CHAPTER THREE: OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES* AND THE *FASTI*

The following chapter introduces Ovid, focusing on the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. Then the plot and subplots are explored, followed by the analysis of the most relevant characters for the present dissertation. After that, this chapter surveys the main settings, symbols, and associations, and finally, the topics, which include emotions, that is to say, anger, grief, and love, and other relevant topics such as metamorphosis and motherhood. Aside from the topic of metamorphosis, which will only contemplate the *Metamorphoses*, the rest of the chapter merges the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*, as I argue they are meant to complement each other. Then, there is an additional part devoted to Robert Graves as well as to D'Aulaires and Edith Hamilton. It includes how Graves appropriated the Homeric and the Ovidian versions of the Demeter and Persephone myth. It also explores matriarchy, which is pervasive in his writings and helps the understanding of the myth in question and its reception in contemporary poetry.

3.1. Introduction

Born on the 20th March 43 B.C. in a small Italian city known now as Sulmona, Publius Ovidius Naso or, as we know him, Ovid witnessed a Rome ruled by Augustus, who defeated Antony and Cleopatra at Actium. Ovid received a prosperous education and initiated himself into a political career that he soon abandoned for poetry (Hill 1). Some of his works were *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Heroides*, or *Remedia Amoris*. Nevertheless, after A.D. 1 his production takes a new direction leaving behind the love poems (Syme 21). He was exiled in A.D. 8 to Tomis on the NW coast of Black Sea (Fantham, *Ovidius* 1) for unknown reasons, although as Hill points out, "Ovid's rather cavalier attitude to authority and sexual propriety throughout his amatory elegiacs must have earned him disapprobation at a time when Augustus was constantly legislating in an attempt to enforce high moral standards" (2).

Written in dactylic hexameter, Ovid's epic the *Metamorphoses* is his most important piece of work, and it was almost complete when he was sent into exile. The *Metamorphoses*

represent a radical break from elegy to epic (Otis 4) where “old gods and heroes were modernized” (Otis 5). Interestingly, Ovid concurrently²⁵ worked on the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* (Liveley 3), which explains the recognisable echoes and cross-references of these two (Fantham, *Ovidius* 3) although their textual tradition differs from one another (Fantham, *Ovidius* 49). The former is composed of fifteen books that retell different mythological and ancient stories, and the latter, of twelve books, which addresses the Roman calendar, each of the books corresponding to a Roman month.

It is very common to read the different episodes in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in isolation (S. Wheeler 2), an example of this would be the present research as it focuses on the second part of Book V scrutinising the myth of Ceres and Proserpina. However, we have to bear in mind that the topic of metamorphosis connects all the episodes somehow. The subjects and style used in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* indeed differ from one episode to the other, however, the narrator remains Ovid himself (Solodow 37). The topic of metamorphosis is pervasive in each of the different books found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as the title suggests. While following a chronology in the retelling of the reshaped myths (Galinsky 3-4), deferring this way from the previous Hellenistic genre of metamorphosis poetry of which he clearly knew a lot (Galinsky 2). One of the other main inspirations for Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* was Vergil’s *Aeneid*²⁶ (Galinsky 15) although lacking “Vergil’s sense for the historical and mysterious aspects of myth, but he adopted other Vergilian innovations” (Galinsky 22) and emphasising and reemphasizing the subject of metamorphosis (Galinsky 234). Nevertheless, we cannot turn to any classical source and claim it to be the main inspiration of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as “it is an omnivorous poem that digests and incorporates within itself a virtual library of Greek and Roman authors” (S. Wheeler 27).

The *Fasti* is an elegiac calendar-poem that was intended to be composed of twelve books, but we have only six referring to the six first months (Miller 167). However, as John F. Miller also points out:

²⁵ Nonetheless, authors like Syme (21) think differently since the previous claim cannot be proven and he suggests that the *Fasti* could have been written earlier than the *Metamorphoses*.

²⁶ On Virgil’s *Aeneid* see Marques Pereira 1998; Marques Pereira 1999a; Marques Pereira 1999b; Marques Pereira 2000a; Marques Pereira 2000b; Marques Pereira 2001.

Strong intertextual links between Book 1 and 6 (among other things) suggest to some that Ovid finally designed the calendrical fragment which we possess as an integrated work. Even the poem's incompleteness has been interpreted as part of its meaning, as Ovid's refusal to surrender his identity to the Emperor and the state —just ahead lay the months of Julius and Augustus. However, Book 6 ends with straightforward praises of the imperial family (6.801–10), and the closely knit structures of the first six months hardly rule out a balancing final half. (2002: 167)

The *Fasti*, Ovid uses gerundives and imperatives to switch from one section to the next (Miller in Boyd 182). Also, it addresses a wide range of topics, for instance “festival, temple dedication, catastrophism” (Miller 183) while presenting different presentational modes, such as “narrative, instruction, hymn” (Miller 183) combined with different section lengths, and addressing politics, religion, and history (Fantham, “Ovid’s *Fasti*” 231). Some of the main subjects that each of the books addresses are: Book I (January) starts with a dedication to Caesar Germanicus (*Fast.* 1.1-62). Then it describes Rome and its origins (*Fast.* 1.63-294) along with Janus and his festivals (*Fast.* 1.63-586) followed by the rites of Carmenta (*Fast.* 1.461-586), which are once more addressed (*Fast.* 1.617-636). We also have gifts for Jupiter (*Fast.* 1.579-616). Then the temple of Concord (*Fast.* 1.637-650). We also learn of the sacrifices to Earth and Ceres (*Fast.* 1.655-704) and the altar of Peace (*Fast.* 1.709-722). Book II (February) tells the stories of Arion (*Fast.* 2.79-128) and Callisto (*Fast.* 2.153-192). This Book also concentrates on the festival of Lupercalia, celebrated in honour of the god Lupercus (*Fast.* 2.1-424). We also learn the story of Juturna and Lara (*Fast.* 2.533-616), the rituals of Terminus (*Fast.* 2.639-684), and the Equirria (*Fast.* 2.857-862). Book III (March) relates the story of Mars and Silvia (*Fast.* 3.1-166), followed by the festival of Mars (*Fast.* 3.167-498). We also learn the story of Bacchus and Ampelos (*Fast.* 3.403-414) and Bacchus and Ariadne (*Fast.* 3.459-516), and the Equirria (*Fast.* 3.517-522), the festival of Anna Perenna (*Fast.* 3.523-710), the festival of Minerva (*Fast.* 3.809-848), and the worship of the Moon (*Fast.* 3.883-884). Book IV (April) recounts the festival of Venus (*Fast.* 4.1-164), the story of the rape of Proserpina by Pluto, and Ceres' quest to find her daughter (*Fast.* 4.393-620), the story of Numa (*Fast.* 4.629-672), the Parilia (*Fast.* 4.721-862), the Robigalia (*Fast.* 4.901-942), and Floralia (*Fast.* 4.943-954). Book V (May) presents a debate over the name of May (*Fast.* 5.1-110), the goddess Flora (*Fast.* 5.183-378), the rituals of the Lemuria (*Fast.* 5.419-492), the rape of Europa by Jupiter (*Fast.* 5.603-662), and the

story of Castor and Pollux (*Fast.* 5.693-720). Book VI (June) starts with a debate over the name of June (*Fast.* 6.1-100), the story of Carna (*Fast.* 6.101-196), the goddess Vesta (*Fast.* 6.249-468), Matralia (*Fast.* 6.473-568), the murder of Tullius (*Fast.* 6.569-710), the story of Aesculapius (*Fast.* 6.733-62).

The *Metamorphoses* is an Ovidian poem that “narrates the story of the world” (Rosati 271) and “storytelling is one of the most frequent actions in the world of the poem” (Rosati 271). There has been a debate over the genre to which the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* belong. Indeed, as Alison Keith remarks:

In an elegant study of the twin Proserpina narratives of *Metamorphoses* 5 and *Fasti* 4, Heinze argued that the version in the *Metamorphoses* constitutes an essay in the diction, style, and thematics of high epic, while the *Fasti* presents a less elevated account of the rape conforming to the stylistic principles of elegy. These findings he extended to the poems in their entirety, to conclude that the question of genre is a central preoccupation of both texts and that the *Metamorphoses* displays a consistent generic alignment with epic, the *Fasti* with elegy. (235)

The *Metamorphoses* is composed of fifteen books. The First Book invokes the gods and addresses the creation of the world. It starts from the beginning of time to the present day and addresses the four ages —gold, silver, bronze, and iron— (*Met.* 1.1-162). Book I also tells how Jupiter punishes humanity as a result of the anger triggered by Lycaon (*Met.* 1.163-451). In this Book, we also learn how Apollo rapes Daphne (*Met.* 1.452-566) and Jupiter rapes Io (*Met.* 1.567-779). Book II tells the story of Phaeton (*Met.* 2.1-400), how Jupiter rapes Callisto (*Met.* 2.401-531), how Apollo kills Coronis for being unfaithful to him (*Met.* 2.532-632), how Apollo entrusts his child from Coronis to the centaur Chiron, who gladly carries out this task (*Met.* 2.633-678). This Book also relates how Mercury uses Apollo’s absence for his own ends (*Met.* 2.679-707), how Mercury attempts to win Herse with Aglauros’ help (*Met.* 2.708-845), and how Jupiter plans to rape Europa (*Met.* 2.846-875). In Book III Agenor sends Cadmus to find Europa, but since he fails to locate her, he cannot return home, and as a result, he prays for Apollo to find a new place to live (*Met.* 3.1-250). This Book also tells how Cadmus’ daughter Semele is pregnant with Jupiter and how she dies (*Met.* 3.251-315). Then, Tiresias is punished by Juno for agreeing with Jupiter that women enjoy sex more, and Jupiter repays Tiresias the power to

predict (*Met.* 3.316-338). Tiresias' first prophecy concerned Narcissus (*Met.* 3.339-508). This Book also addresses how Pentheus attempts to make Bacchus lose worshipers (*Met.* 3.509-579), fails to convince everyone, and dies (*Met.* 3.580-733). Book IV retells how the daughters of Minyas tell love stories (*Met.* 4.1-54). Firstly, Thisbe and Pyramus fall in love, run away and end up dying (*Met.* 4.55-166). Then, Venus has an affair with Mars (*Met.* 4.167-189), but since the Sun revealed their secret to her husband Vulcan, Venus decides to make the Sun fall in love with Leucothoe but Clytie, the Sun's wife, finds out (*Met.* 4.190-284). Finally, we learn about how Salmacis desires Hermaphroditus and how they become one (*Met.* 4.285-388). After telling this story, Bacchus turns the three daughters of Minyas into bats (*Met.* 4.389-415). The Furies make Athamas insane and his wife Ino and their children are in danger (*Met.* 4.416-562). Then Cadmus and his wife are changed (*Met.* 4.563-603). Later Perseus saves and marries Andromeda (*Met.* 4.604-803).

In Book V, at Perseus and Andromeda's wedding, Phineus appears and is turned into stone (*Met.* 5.1-249), Minerva visits the nine Muses (*Met.* 5.250-340), Calliope sings the stories of Proserpina's abduction by Dis (*Met.* 5.341-571), Arethusa and Alpheus (*Met.* 5.572-641), and Triptolemus and Lyncus (*Met.* 5.642-661). Then, the Pierides were turned into magpies (*Met.* 5.661-678). Book VI starts with the tale of Minerva and Arachne's argument and competition (*Met.* 6.1-145), the story of Niobe (*Met.* 6.146-312), Tereus rapes Philomela (*Met.* 6.412-674), and the story of Orithyia and Boreas (*Met.* 6.675-721). Book VII starts with the story of Jason and Medea (*Met.* 7.1-158), Medea gives Aeson youth (*Met.* 7.159-296), Pelias' death (*Met.* 7.297-390), Medea goes to Aegeus, king of Athens (*Met.* 7.391-424). Then there is the story of Aescus and the Myrmidons (*Met.* 7.425-660), and the Book ends with the tragic tale of Cephalus and Procris (*Met.* 7.661-865). Book VIII begins with the story of Minos and Scylla (*Met.* 8.1-151), Minos wants to conceal the Minotaur (*Met.* 8.152-182), Icarus' death (*Met.* 8.183-261), the story of Atalanta and Meleager (*Met.* 8.262-444), Meleager's death (*Met.* 8.445-546), the story of Perimela (*Met.* 8.547-610), Baucis' and Philemon's hospitality (*Met.* 8.611-727), and the story of Erysichthon (*Met.* 8.738-884). Book IX initiates with the tale of Hercules and Achelous (*Met.* 9.1-97), Hercules dies (*Met.* 9.98-272), followed by the stories of Galanthis (*Met.* 9.273-323), Dryope (*Met.* 9.324-393), and Iolaus (*Met.* 9.394-449). Then, we learn of Byblis,

who is in love with her brother Caunus (*Met.* 9.450-665), followed by the story of Iphis and Ianthe (*Met.* 9.666-797).

Book X begins with the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice (*Met.* 10.1-85), followed by the stories of Attis (*Met.* 10.86-105), Cyparissus (*Met.* 10.106-154), Ganymede (*Met.* 10.155-161), Hyacinthus (*Met.* 10.162-219), the Propoetides (*Met.* 10.220-242). Then come the tales of Pygmalion (*Met.* 10.243-297), Myrrha (*Met.* 10.298-559), Atalanta (*Met.* 10.560-704), ending with the story of Adonis (*Met.* 10.705-739). Book XI starts with Orpheus' death (*Met.* 11.1-84). Then, Bacchus offers Midas a wish (*Met.* 11.85-145). After this, we read about the musical contest of Pan and Apollo (*Met.* 11.146-193) followed by the story of Hesione (*Met.* 11.194-220), the birth of Achilles (*Met.* 11.221-265), the tales of Daedalion (*Met.* 11.266-345), Peleus and the wolf (*Met.* 11.346-409), Ceyx and Halcyone (*Met.* 11.410-748), and ending with the story of Hesperia and Aesacus (*Met.* 11.749-797). Book XII opens with Priam's mourning, Paris brings his wife Helen with him, and the Greeks are about to start a war against Troy (*Met.* 12.1-38), the Trojan Cycnus' role in the war against the Greeks (*Met.* 12.39-145). Then, Caenis becomes Caeneus, and after that a bird (*Met.* 12.146-535). After that, we learn of the combat between Periclymenus and Hercules (*Met.* 12.536-579), and the death of Achilles (*Met.* 12.580-628). Book XIII initiates with Ajax's and Ulysses' argument (*Met.* 13.1.398), Hecuba is transformed (*Met.* 13.399-575), the death of Memnon (*Met.* 13.576-622), the daughters of Anius are transformed (*Met.* 13.623-704). Then comes the story of Galatea and Polyphemus (*Met.* 13.705-897). The Book ends with Glaucus' transformation into a sea god (*Met.* 13.898-968). Book XIV starts with the story of Scylla (*Met.* 14.1-74). Then, the Cercopes are transformed into Apes (*Met.* 14.75-100), Sibyl becomes gray and decrepit (*Met.* 14.101-153), followed by the tale of Ulysses and Polyphemus (*Met.* 14.154-307), Picus' faithfulness to Canens (*Met.* 14.308-440), Diomed's followers are transformed (*Met.* 14.441-511), Aeneas is granted the godhead power (*Met.* 14.512-608). After that, we learn of the story of Vertumnus and Pomona (*Met.* 14.609-697), Anaxarete is transformed (*Met.* 14.698-771). The Book ends with tales about Romulus (*Met.* 14.772-851). Book XV initiates with how Myscelus builds the city of Crotona (*Met.* 15.1-59). Then, Pythagoras teaches his philosophy (*Met.* 15.60-478), Egeria is changed into a fountain (*Met.* 15.479-551), followed by the story of Cippus (*Met.* 15.552-621),

Aesculapius is brought to Rome (*Met.* 15.622-744), the Book ends with Julius Caesar's transformation to a star (*Met.* 15.745-879).

Similarly to Book V of the *Metamorphoses*, this research will only focus on the retelling of the story of Ceres and Proserpina/Persephone in Book IV of the *Fasti*, as each of the books that compose the *Fasti* is self-contained (Fantham, *Ovidius* 36), which allows the reader to read each book independently. As if these two Ovidian versions of the same myth were meant to be compared (Hinds 77), they complement each other. Ovid went back to writing the *Fasti* after Augustus died in AD 14, composing a new dedication to Germanicus, the son of Drusus, who was Tiberius' dead brother (Fantham, *Ovidius* 3). In the *Fasti*, we perceive how Ovid addresses the Roman religious festivals using the elegy (Fantham, *Ovidius* 25), although the *Fasti* present narrative aspects found in the epic models (Fantham, *Ovidius* 45).

As stated above, this research will only focus on the tale of Ceres and Proserpina in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. Both accounts of the same myth seem to be complementing each other. However, the *Fasti* is the closest to the Homeric version of the myth, although not quite the same as some elements are either missing or added in the Ovidian version. For instance, Keleos has only one little daughter in the *Fasti* (*Fast.* 4.543-4). Moreover, now, instead of nursing Demophon (*HDem.* 233-235), Ceres heals and tries to immortalise Triptolemus (*Fast.* 4.550-4). Also, in the *Fasti* Ceres does not bury the seed but instead displays very vulnerable human signs of grief such as tears (*Fast.* 4.521-2), while in both the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and the *Metamorphoses* she is distinguished because of her wrath (*HDem.* 305-307, *Met.* 5.477-480). Also, when it comes to the settings where the abduction takes place, the main setting of this story is Sicily in the *Metamorphoses*, and so, Pelorus, Pachynus, and Lilybaeum, which are the places mentioned (*Met.* 5.350-351), are the Sicilian north-east, south-east, and south-west corners (Hill 155). Not far from Henna, a city located in the middle of Sicily (Hill 157), it is where Proserpina's abduction takes place (*Met.* 5.385-401), where Cyane, the lake, tries to save Proserpina from her fate (*Met.* 5.412-420). Cayster is a place that reminds us of the Homeric Nysean plain (Hill 157). As Hinds remarks:

The narrative of the *Metamorphoses* embraces the whole world of Graeco-Roman myth from the Creation down to the Augustan present; but we may still reasonably expect Mount Helicon here in Book 5 to be more than just another setting, and its inhabitants more than just another group of mythological characters (3).

The *Fasti* gives a much more detailed account of the places Ceres went by looking for her daughter, starting from the plains of Henna (*Fast.* 4.462), passing by Leontini, the river Amenanus, the banks of Acis, Cyane, the springs of Anapus, the Gelas, Ortygia, Megara, Pantagias, Symaethus, Cyclopes, Himera, Didyme, Acragas, Tauromenum, Melas, Camerina, Thapsus, the Temple of Helorus, Eryx, Pelorias, Lilybaeum, Pachynum (*Fast.* 4.467-479), and then more places are mentioned: Etna, Typhoeus, Syrtes, Zanclean Charybdis, Nisaeon, Adriatic, and Corinth (*Fast.* 4.491-501), until she reaches Attica (*Fast.* 4.502).

Although authors²⁷ like Little (69) advise against comparing the Ovidian versions of the same myth, this has already been done by Heinze (1919) or Hinds (1987). Even if the two Ovidian versions differ in some parts of the same tale, they complement each other, thus, sharing Hinds' views, this research will simultaneously address their plots and subplots, characters, and topics having as main purpose to address the two Ovidian tales of the same myth, almost, as one. Nevertheless, on some occasions, for instance, when the topic of metamorphosis is addressed,²⁸ for clear reasons, only one of the two Ovidian versions will be conveyed.

3.2. Plot and subplots

A possible division of the events that take place in the second half of Book V of the *Metamorphoses* and Book IV of the *Fasti* could be the following:

Proserpina's abduction (*Met.* 5.341-437, *Fast.* 4.393-469):

²⁷ Interestingly, Johnson makes a similar remark since he finds it unfair and misleading to compare the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* (15), even if he does so himself.

²⁸ See Feldherr 163-179.

We are first introduced to Ceres as the one to whom nature and agriculture are owed (*Met.* 5.341-343, *Fast.* 4.393-416). Then, only in the *Metamorphoses* do we learn about Pluto's ascent from the Underworld and Venus' project of making a match between him and Proserpina (*Met.* 5.349-379). Once Venus persuades Cupid of her plan, this latter throws an arrow at Pluto, making him fall in love with his niece (*Met.* 5.380-384), whom he then decides to abduct while she is playing and plucking flowers (*Met.* 5.391-396, *Fast.* 4.431-446). Unlike the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, where Persephone cried for her father's help, now, while being taken by Pluto, she cries for help calling her mother and her comrades (*Met.* 5.397-399), but in the *Fasti*, she only asks for her mother's help (*Fast.* 4.447-8), and it is her comrades who call for her (*Fast.* 4.452). In the *Metamorphoses*, Cyane tries unsuccessfully to persuade him not to take her away by telling him he should ask for her love and not just take her away (*Met.* 5.417-418). When Pluto was about to leave, he penetrated Cyane's waters to get to the Underworld, leaving her behind, grieving for both violations (*Met.* 5.423-437). However, in the *Fasti*, Cyane is only one of the places Ceres passes by while looking for her daughter (*Fast.* 4.469).

Ceres' search for her daughter and her grief (*Met.* 5.438-486, *Fast.* 4.470-597):

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ceres is looking for her daughter (*Met.* 5.438-439), but the *Fasti* gives a much more detailed account of the places she went by when looking for her daughter and calling for her (*Fast.* 4.455-502). In the *Metamorphoses*, during her search, she gets thirsty and receives a drink from an old lady (*Met.* 5.449-450). While she drinks, a boy mocks her provoking her anger and making her transform him into a lizard (*Met.* 5.451-458). As she keeps looking for her daughter, she finds her girdle floating on the water (*Met.* 5.470), realising her daughter's fate. Then, we are introduced to another display of her wrath, but now she wants Sicily to pay for her loss, deciding to starve humanity by forbidding the seed from growing (*Met.* 5.477-486). Differently, in the *Fasti*, Ceres is sitting on a cold stone when she meets Celeus and his little daughter, telling them about the sadness of losing her daughter. Celeus invites her to their place, and once there, she meets his wife, Metaneira, and their little son, Triptolemus, that the goddess cures and in her attempt to make him immortal burying him in the fire, Metaneira mistrusted her and Ceres (*Fast.* 4.503-560).

Proserpina's return (*Met.* 5.487-641, *Fast.* 4.598-614):

In the *Metamorphoses*, Arethusa talks some sense into Ceres so that she does not selfishly make humanity pay for her daughter's loss (*Met.* 5.487-508). What Ceres does then is approach Jupiter asking for her daughter back (*Met.* 5.512-522, *Fast.* 4.585-596), to which he replies how suitable a husband Pluto could be and how he did not abduct Proserpina for another reason but love (*Met.* 5.509-529) and that he owns one-third of the world's division (*Fast.* 4.598-600). Nevertheless, Jupiter stated that Proserpina would return to her if she did not eat anything in the underworld (*Met.* 5.529-532, *Fast.* 4.601-604). Overcome by hunger, Proserpina had eaten seven (*Met.* 5.534-538) or three pomegranate seeds (*Fast.* 4. 607-8). Ceres, angry at Ascalaphus—the witness of her daughter eating in the underworld—transformed him into a bird (*Met.* 5.534-358). Thus, Jupiter decided Proserpina would spend only one half of the year with her mother and the other half with Pluto in the underworld (*Met.* 5.364-571, *Fast.* 4.613-4). Reunited with her daughter, Ceres goes back to Arethusa to hear her tragic story of rape by Alpheus (*Met.* 5.572-641).

3.3. Relevant Characters

The story of the myth of Ceres and Proserpina starts with the name of **Ceres** (*Met.* 5.341). Ceres is introduced as the giver of the gift of corn and the good harvest, reminding the reader of all that is owed to her. Matching the anger we explicitly see in the *Metamorphoses* (5.477-486), Ceres displays human traits as she cries for her daughter in the *Fasti* (4.455-502). Anger, sadness, and selfishness define Ceres in both Ovidian accounts. Ceres' lament is much more visible in the *Fasti*, while her wrath and short temper are expressed in the *Metamorphoses* when she wants to punish everything and everyone, reminding her of her daughter's abduction. Interestingly, Ceres seems to find tracks of her daughter in the *Fasti* (4.463-4), and the girl's girdle in the *Metamorphoses* (5.470). In the *Fasti*, she uproots two pine trees as torches (*Fast.* 4.493-4) that represent Ceres' search.²⁹ Her word is respected by Jupiter, who agrees to bring Proserpina back if she does not eat in the underworld (*Met.* 5.529-532, *Fast.* 4.601-604). Ceres is respected as a goddess and a mother (*Met.* 5.527). In the *Fasti*, when she finally rests, sitting on a stone,

²⁹ A powerful reminder of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, see also Fantham, *Ovidius* 172.

Celeus and his daughter approach her and convince her to join and go with them to their house, where she finds a replacement for her daughter. Before getting there, she breaks her fast with a poppy, a flower she plucks (*Fast.* 4.531-548), emblematic as her daughter is abducted while picking flowers.

Demeter tears her veil on her head with her own hands (*HDem.* 40-1), which is an act transformed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* into Ceres tearing her hair and beating her chest (*Met.* 5.472-473), as a sign of mourning.³⁰ In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter isolates herself in the temple built in her honour (*HDem.* 397-398), which matches the fact that she is sitting on a cold stone (*Fast.* 4.503-504). The only difference is that her isolation this time, in the Ovidian version, takes place before she enters Celeus' house. Also, when she puts in danger the vegetation in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, it is Zeus who sends the other gods and goddesses to address Demeter and calm her anger (*HDem.* 314-328). Also, in both Ovidian accounts (*Met.* 5.513-514, *Fast.* 4.585), Ceres is the one that approaches Jupiter.

Jove/Jupiter has an almost identical approach to Proserpina's abduction in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*, unlike the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* where he is, as opposed to the Ovidian texts, responsible for his daughter's union with Hades in marriage. Ceres asks for Jupiter's understanding; she addresses him as a grieving mother and reminds him that Proserpina is his daughter (*Met.* 5.515-6), but she asks him not to care less for Proserpina just because she is her daughter (*Met.* 5.516-7). Jupiter acknowledges Proserpina as his daughter and Ceres' and thus both his concern (*Met.* 5.523-4). Jove saw in Pluto a suitable husband for his daughter as his brother, knowing that it is an honour to be "Jove's brother" (*Met.* 5.527-8), as one who has one-third of the world's share (*Fast.* 4.600) and as someone that loved her (*Met.* 5.525-526). He shows empathy for Ceres and Pluto, understanding both sides of the story and trying wisely to reach the most reasonable decision. Unlike the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, this time, in both Ovidian accounts, Jupiter is not related to Proserpina's marriage to Pluto. In the *Metamorphoses*, Venus, greedy for power, is responsible for Pluto's erotic desire, while in the *Fasti*, no one is to be held accountable but Pluto himself. However, although Jupiter is not

³⁰ See Šterbenc Erker 44 on describing the mourning. See also Fantham, "Mater" 113-124 on the mourning of a mother for her adult child as represented in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

the one that plans this union in the Ovidian versions, it is under his command as a result of eating in the underworld that Proserpina will stay one half of the year with Pluto and the other half with Demeter (*Met.* 5.564-567, *Fast.* 4.613-614), thus showing his power. Also, Jupiter is the first to acknowledge what Pluto and Proserpina have as marriage (*Fast.* 4.602). Although Jupiter here does not plan Pluto's marriage to Proserpina, he advocates it while complying with Ceres' wish of bringing Proserpina back as long as she does not eat in the underworld (*Met.* 5.530-532, *Fast.* 4. 603).

In the *Metamorphoses*, **Pluto** plays the role of a mere puppet in Venus' hands as she sees in him a way to empower herself (*Met.* 5.363-384). Thus, Dis, the god of the underworld, is a victim of Cupid's love arrow and, therefore, falls in love with Proserpina, whom he takes against her will to the underworld. Only in the *Metamorphoses*, apart from his interaction with Cyane, whom he penetrated on his way to the underworld (5.420-421), little is known of him in the Ovidian versions, especially in the *Fasti*, where he only appears when he abducts Proserpina (*Fast.* 4.445-450). Pluto's intentions are not shown in the *Fasti* as he only takes Proserpina away, while the *Metamorphoses* highlight it is about his love for Proserpina due to Cupid's arrow. Ceres considers him "a robber husband" (*Met.* 5.522) and, thus, not worthy of Proserpina.

Proserpina's abduction is explained in detail in the *Metamorphoses* than in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* or the *Fasti*. In the *Metamorphoses*, she is first mentioned by Venus, who wants to put an end to her virginity (*Met.* 5.376-7). Proserpina is characterised by her enthusiasm (*Met.* 5.394) and innocence (*Met.* 5.400). She is playing and picking flowers (*Met.* 5.391-394, *Fast.* 4.425-444), and then she is forcefully taken by Pluto (*Met.* 5.395, *Fast.* 4.445-450). She cried for help, calling her mother (*Met.* 5.397, *Fast.* 4.448) and comrades (*Met.* 5.397). In the *Fasti*, she is called Persephone (*Fast.* 4.485, 4.578, 4.591) and only once Proserpina (*Fast.* 4.587), subtly alluding to the closeness of this version of the myth to the original *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. However, unlike in the Homeric version, in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*, she is the one that takes the pomegranate seeds willingly (*Met.* 5.534-538, *Fast.* 4.607-608). Proserpina's companions seem to enhance her abduction in the *Fasti* by calling her (*Fast.* 4.452-454). The fact that Persephone willingly eats in the underworld could suggest that she, perhaps partially, forgets about her abduction, almost as a

child who, after crying, succumbs to her hunger, forgetting her pain. In the Ovidian versions, Proserpina is an active partaker by reaching to take the pomegranate and eating the pomegranate seeds, similar to when she picked the narcissus in the Homeric version, although in that version Hades made her swallow the pomegranate seed (*HDem.* 371-372). As Holly Virginia Blackford points out:

[Proserpina] is of ambiguous age but young and human enough to cry as much over her spilt flowers as over her abduction (in Ovid's re-working of the *Hymn*); innocent and curious enough to reach for a lovely narcissus without realizing the consequences of that action; vulnerable and scared enough to cry out for her mother as she exchanges her life as a maiden for the awesome powers of underworld queen. (21)

Indeed, in the Ovidian versions, there seems to be a complicity and duplicity of Proserpina since she is taken away against her will, being subjected to Pluto's will while also being an active participant.

In the *Metamorphoses*, when Pluto was taking Proserpina away, **Cyane** bravely tried to stop him from carrying her away, upsetting Pluto with her speech of how he should have asked for Proserpina's love and not just taken her, giving her experience with Anapis as an example. Yet Pluto took her away, and before reaching the underworld, he penetrated Cyane's waters (*Met.* 5.412-429). Her role as the only witness of the abduction in the *Metamorphoses* is prominent. The fact that she tries to stop the kidnapping by confronting Pluto, crying for the maid, and wanting to tell Ceres about her daughter's whereabouts sets the story in motion. Cyane's tears (*Met.* 5.427) match Celeus' and his daughter's weeping for the goddess (*Fast.* 4.469). In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Hekate is the only one willing to help Demeter, and Cyane seems to be representing the same role. However, now Cyane is the only one that knows of the abduction, but even if she wants to help Ceres, she cannot speak. Nevertheless, she does not let this prevent her from showing Ceres her daughter's girdle (*Met.* 5.468-470), making her understand her daughter's situation.

In the *Fasti*, **Triptolemus** is Celeus' and Metaneira's son, who is sick (*Fast.* 4.4.537-8). Ceres finds in him a sort of replacement or a consolation for losing her daughter (*Fast.*

4.550-560). The fact that he is close to death (*Fast.* 4.537-8), the goddess' previous godly tear (*Fast.* 4.521-2), and the sympathy of Celeus and his little daughter for the goddess' pain making them weep with her (*Fast.* 4. 523) transmits the sadness of the situation adding to the lament (Hinds 105) found in this scene related to Triptolemus. Nevertheless, only with her lips, the goddess succeeded to end the child's pallor (*Fast.* 4. 540-2). All the family rejoiced (*Fast.* 4.543-4). Ceres brings Celeus' and Metaneira's son back to them while she is devastated by her daughter's loss. She does for them what she would have wished for herself. In the *Fasti*, Ceres gives Metaneira's child something to drink, poppies in warm milk to make him sleep (*Fast.* 4.547-8). Also, these poppies that Ceres gathers for Triptolemus echo "her daughter's culling of flowers a hundred lines earlier" (Hinds 89), but this time Triptolemus, a sort of consolation for her daughter's loss, is the one that receives these poppies. The fact that now Triptolemus is only said to have one sister emphasizes his presence. The only attention that his sister gets is for weeping with her father for the goddess' sadness (*Fast.* 4.523), for leading the goddess with her father to their house (*Fast.* 4.525-528), and finally, for the joy she shows along with her parents for her brother's healing. As for Triptolemus' mother, Metaneira thinks she is guarding her child while only preventing his immortalisation, but she fails to protect him the same way Ceres does with her daughter. It is in Metaneira's absence that Ceres buries Triptolemus in the fire, the same way that it is in Ceres' absence that Pluto takes Persephone away, though with very different intentions. All of this might be why Ceres shows her understanding of Metaneira's position as a mother and Triptolemus' vulnerable situation.

3.4. Settings, symbols and associations

3.4.1. Settings

The *Fasti* gives an account of the places that Ceres passed while looking for her daughter (*Fast.* 467-479): Leontini, Amenanas, Acis, Cyane, Anapus, Gelas, Ortygia, Megara, Pantagias, Symaethus, Cyclopes, Himera, Didyme, Acragas, Tauromenium, Mylae, Camerina, Thapsus, Helorus' Tempe, Eryx, Pelorias, Lilybaeum, and Pachynum. Differently, the *Metamorphoses* (5.462-465) only states that Ceres searched the whole earth, failing to find her daughter. Then she went back to Sicily, where she kept looking for her daughter arriving in Cyane. However, most importantly, the image of the rape is found in a *locus amoenus* as a poetical space for the

erotic encounter between Pluto and Proserpina. Also, there are places like the underworld or Celeus' place where important events take place.

3.4.2. Nature

The motif of nature and landscape is of utmost relevance because, before knowing how the different stories will unravel themselves, Ovid provides a visualisation of the landscape before introducing the events. Indeed, the landscape is not only a narrative technique, as Segal argues:

Yet landscape in poetry may also trace the outlines of the poet's world –his spiritual as well as his spatial world– and may express elements in the world-view and moral and metaphysical presuppositions which underlie his poem. From Homer on, nature in classical poetry proves a large, ultimately moral frame for human action; and it is plausible, if not inevitable, that the natural world will have a similar function in Ovid as well. That this is the case is all the more likely because Ovid so often draws upon and self-consciously transforms the use of landscape in earlier poetry. (1)

Many are the different settings where we can locate the variety of stories Ovid tells in the *Metamorphoses*. Proserpina's abduction starts with Venus persuading Cupid to throw an arrow at Pluto, and then "Ovid launches at once into a description of the lake at Enna (5.385-91). Nothing in the preceding narrative has made clear who the girl will be. Only after a seven-and-a-half-line ekphrasis of the scenery is there mention of Proserpina (391)" (Segal 7). This description is proof of the prominent place Ovid gives to the scenes in his writings to the point where he presents a detailed description of the landscape before even addressing the subject of the story. Indeed, a vivid example of this is the description that precedes the introduction of Proserpina gathering flowers:

'Not far from Henna's walls
There is a pool called Pergus, whose deep water
Hears the swans singing, even more than Cayster.
A wood surrounds the pool, and the green leaves
Keep off the sunlight, and the ground is cool,

And the ground is moist, with lovely flowers growing,
And the season is always spring; and in this grove
Proserpina was playing, gathering flowers, (*Met.* 5.383-90)

Natural settings are way more relevant in the story of Ceres and Proserpina as nature is represented by Ceres, who, as stated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is the one to whom corn and harvest are owed (5.342). Since she is the one that gives vegetation and makes the grain grow, she is also the one with the power to take it away and bury the seed in the ground forbidding its growth which is quite a role in Ovid's narrative.

3.4.3. Water

The clear pool, which plays a prominent role in stories such as those of Narcissus, Salmacis, Proserpina, or Arethusa, is only part of a complex of recurrent elements in these landscapes which centre around *water* thus, the undeniable importance of water in these landscapes. As historians of art have repeatedly pointed out, it is often art or literature that shapes an appreciation of the beauties of nature rather than the reverse (Segal 23).

Attention is drawn to Cyane's waters to emphasise Pluto's violation of the water, drawing a line between the violence used with Cyane and the violence of Proserpina's abduction. Arethusa, another water goddess, is closely related to Cyane and is also involved in a violent violation. Indeed, the water links these tales. As Segal states, "the book proceeds from innocence to its loss and from the virginal Muses and Minerva to the triumph of Venus, the still water of these sheltered places changes from being a symbol of purity to a symbol of sexuality" (Segal 57).

3.4.4. Flowers

As for the role of the flowers, their presence combines innocence and vulnerability, which is seen in Proserpina's abduction, taken away by Pluto while she is plucking flowers. Indeed, "the flower-motif stands in close connection with the narrative, perhaps as a symbolical equivalent of

the rape itself” (Segal 34). The flowers that Persephone picks in the *Metamorphoses* are violets and white lilies (*Met.* 3.391), and in the *Fasti*, she picks dainty crocuses and white lilies (*Fast.* 4.444), while her comrades gather marigolds, violets, poppies, hyacinths, amaranths, thymes, poppies, melilots, roses, and many other flowers (*Fast.* 4.431-43). Also, Ceres plucks a poppy and gives Metaneira’s child poppies to drink (*Fast.* 4.531-48). As such, Ceres mimics her daughter’s plucking of flowers (Hinds 89).

3.5. Topics

3.5.1. Emotions

3.5.1.1. Anger

In the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*, we find a humanization of the gods and goddesses, mainly of Ceres as a mother goddess, deeply affected by her daughter’s abduction. One of the emotions that rules Ceres’ character is anger, which mainly stems from her vulnerable position while facing the loss of her daughter. Ovid humanises the feelings of this goddess and describes her as wrathful as Ceres is easily triggered. Ceres falls for the mockery of a mere boy, who should not have been a threat to her as she, a goddess, could have easily ignored his foolishness, but, due to her unbearable anger, she transformed him into a lizard (*Met.* 5.455-458), in an attempt to teach him a lesson. This is a clear example of the emotional side of Ceres, foreshadowing another instance of her anger: the moment she decides to stop vegetation from growing as a result of the sadness she feels from losing her daughter and the hatred she experiences towards Sicily, the place where her daughter had been abducted (*Met.* 5.474-486). After Ceres bursts with anger, trying to destroy vegetation, Arethusa tells Ceres to open her eyes and makes her see the selfishness of her actions (*Met.* 5.489-508), saving the world (Zissos 102). Arethusa also relates the moving and touching story of her own rape by Alpheus (*Met.* 5.599-638). Hence, Arethusa is “granted the status of internal narrator in her own right” (Zissos 102). Nevertheless, what we find in the *Fasti* is a goddess who is overcome by pain and sits alone on a cold stone (*Fast.* 4.503-4) and, even as a goddess, lets what could be considered a tear roll down as a result of her grief (*Fast.* 4.521-2).

Although Ceres' wrath is not found in the *Fasti*, or at least not as strongly as in the *Metamorphoses*, we perceive how Ceres presents grief traits in both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. Ceres is vulnerable to all these emotions because of her love for her daughter. Ceres is mainly vulnerable because of the dependency bond she wants to preserve at any cost with her daughter. Hence, she uses wrath to violently resist her daughter's fate. Also, later, when Jupiter decides to bring her daughter back from the underworld, she transforms the witness to her daughter eating in the underworld into a bird (*Met.* 5.543-550) since now that Proserpina ate seven (*Met.* 5.537) or three (*Fast.* 4. 607-608) pomegranate seeds in the underworld, she has to spend half of the year there and half of the year with her mother. All the places she goes through looking for her daughter are also a reminder of the pain and her desperate attempt to find her daughter. A very touching and emotional moment that is omitted in the *Metamorphoses* but present in the *Fasti* is when Ceres is desperately calling her daughter (*Fast.* 4.456), failing to reach her.

3.5.1.2. Grief

The way Cyane tried to stop Pluto from taking Proserpina away by telling him how he should ask her for her love and not just take her (*Met.* 5.414-418), giving her own experience as an example, depicts a desperate attempt to save Proserpina, also showing how Ovid's characters constantly resort to story-telling (Solodow 34). Cyane herself manifests a range of emotions. First, she sees what happens to Proserpina and Ceres with empathic lenses but is unable to do anything about it, and having failed to save Proserpina makes her feel deep sorrow. She knows Ceres will not approve of Pluto (*Met.* 5.415), and she understands the fact that Proserpina is unwilling to go with Pluto.

Proserpina's and Arethusa's stories could be associated as they share a similar experience and hence similar feelings. The way her mother reacts to her abduction makes the reader picture the danger Proserpina might find herself in. The *Fasti* gives a few more words to Proserpina. She intensely calls for her mother's help (*Fast.* 4.447-448), although, in the *Metamorphoses*, she calls her comrades and mother (*Met.* 5.396-398). Also, Proserpina seems to have left some traces behind her, but they were wiped out (*Fast.* 4.463-466), giving false hopes to her mother. In

the *Metamorphoses*, a girdle (*Met.* 5.470) enlightens her mother on what happened to Proserpina. Nevertheless, even if she was taken against her will, she appears naive as she willingly eats food in the underworld, perhaps forgetting her pain and stopping her fast in the underworld.

Arethusa is shown as a strong and wise nymph. However, she has also suffered her share. At the end of Book V, Arethusa looks back with sadness at what had happened to her, being the prey of Alpheus, who finally got her, much against her will. She displays sadness, sorrow, and pain. Her tale is not randomly told; Ceres asking her about what had happened to her might suggest an identification between Proserpina and Arethusa.

When Ceres approaches Jupiter requesting to bring her daughter back, he shows understanding towards Pluto and even considers him a suitable husband, as he is indeed his brother. Jupiter understands and empathises with both sides, which is quite remarkable as Ceres is blinded by her feelings. He shows emotional control, wisdom, and even emotional intelligence. The same happens with Arethusa, who despite everything she went through, displays total control of her feelings and even succeeds in convincing Ceres not to make the ground pay for her sadness and selfishness. Thus, it is safe to say that we encounter two groups: those prone to let their emotions govern them and those able to control them. Ceres belongs to the first group as she is blinded by her grief. When Ceres saw the girdle that proved her daughter's abduction "only then appeared to fathom / Her daughters fate, and beat her breast in sorrow, / And tore her hair" (*Met.* 5.471-3). All of this leads Ceres to feel wrath and despair.

3.5.1.3. Love

On the one hand, when we address the idea of violation or chase, there seems to be an invisible horizontal line that can only end with the violator or the chaser reaching the prey. Sometimes this chase does not get to an end. On the other hand, when it comes to abduction, there is a vertical line that can go up or down depending on where the abductor takes the abducted subject making this last one disappear. An example of the former is Alpheus chasing Arethusa and the latter Pluto taking Proserpina away. In both cases, there can be brutality as the prey tries in vain to run away from the chaser or the abductor; for instance, crying for help gives us a glimpse of this

brutality. Pluto loses his will, feeling uncontrollable passion towards Proserpina that could be associated with a virus whose vaccination is the act of desire.³¹

Dis took Proserpina against her will, and the latter did not have the chance to escape. Although there is no explicit violation, there could be an association between the chase and the attempted rape (Delattre 208). In the case of Dis and Proserpina, there is no chase, but the main reason is that Proserpina is not given a chance to run; therefore, Dis does not need to chase her. Yet, there is indeed a chase when Arethusa runs from Alpheus (*Met.* 5.599-638), where the attempt of rape is established even before Alpheus succeeds in violating her. Hence, like a chaser (Delattre 213), Alpheus tries to submit Arethusa to his will. Thus, as we find in this last example, the act of chasing becomes an erotic metaphor caused by the desire (Delattre 213).

Although there are many ways of looking at Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we would be wrong to judge it only from contemporary standards as the definition of ancient and modern "rape" differ since the word "rape" is a twentieth century terminology (Gloyn 678-9). Hence, the notion of what nowadays is called "rape" does not affect Proserpina's abduction in the same way. Therefore, many authors allude to what happens to Proserpina in Book V (346-661) using the word "rape" (e.g., Solodow 20; Graves 56; Gloyn 678; Zissos 99) either because they are reading Ovid with contemporary lenses or because they understand "rape" as an act of carrying away someone forcefully. To better understand the events in the Ovidian versions, I will go through those events and scrutinise them to comprehend the concept that Ovid had of "love" and thus understand his writing much better. Nevertheless, I will bear in mind the contemporary reception of the events in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* related to Proserpina and Pluto.

Love seems to play a major role in the *Metamorphoses*. As Galinsky puts it:

Love, of course, is the principal subject of the *Metamorphoses*, but this should not lead us to believe that even Ovid was not bold enough openly to proclaim just this state of affairs by choosing an appropriate title and that the metamorphosis theme is of no great significance except for giving the whole poem an appearance of unity. (43)

³¹ The understanding of horizontality and verticality, and the association of uncontrollable passion were inspired by a conversation with Charles Delattre on December 3rd, 2021, thus, these ideas are owed to him.

Pluto is a victim of Cupid's love arrow and thus falls in love with Proserpina, whom he takes against her will to the underworld. Little is known of him in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and much less in the *Fasti*. His only interaction, apart from Proserpina's abduction, was with Cyane, whom he willingly or unwillingly penetrated on his way to the underworld (*Met.* 5.420-424). He is shown to be a sort of puppet in Venus' hands. Thus, it is difficult to blame Pluto for what he did after knowing he is only a victim of Venus' plan. However, the wise words Cyane decides to address Pluto remind us of the choice he had regarding Proserpina. As Cyane says, Pluto could have approached the maiden goddess the way Anapis approached her, wooing her (*Met.* 5.417-18) and not just taking her against her will as Pluto did (*Met.* 5.395-437). The fact that Pluto got angry (*Met.* 5.420) raises the question of whether what Cyane had told him made him reflect upon what he was doing or if he got angry just because she was trying to stop him from taking Proserpina. As Ceres approaches Jupiter to ask him to bring her daughter back, he claims love to be the one inspiring Pluto (*Met.* 5.525-526). Love itself is the one that drives Ceres to look for her daughter. Also, Jupiter seems to care for Proserpina as he acknowledges her as his daughter and concern (*Met.* 5.524-525).

Proserpina was first seen, then adored, and finally ravished by Dis (*Met.* 5.395). His love was hurried, and he did indeed terrify Proserpina (*Met.* 5.396), who cried out for help (*Met.* 5.397), but even after he surprises and even frightens the maiden, she is still called a virgin (*Met.* 5.400). Love seems to be a power that goes beyond will, so is shown in Pluto's behaviour, who was indeed injured by one of Cupid's arrows (*Met.* 5.379-384). Everything leads us to think that Ovid's concept of "love" is undoubtedly *Eros*. If we look back at Ovid's *Amores*, we find ourselves reading about a concept of love that controls the one it overtakes, a terminology that refers to a power that commands the mind and body of the one it hits. Even Ovid claims to find himself powerless, much against his will, before Cupid and Love in his *Amores* (1.1-4). Love for Ovid seems to be an uncontrollable force that is both a physical and an emotionally unmanageable state where the subject of this "love" is blinded by emotions. This is more distinguishable in *Amores*, but in Book V of the *Metamorphoses*, we are still able to find such differentiation, as when Venus talks about the capitalised word "Love" she alludes to the force and major power (*Met.* 5.374) that seems to be inside the arrow Cupid throws at Pluto resulting

in a non-capitalized “love” (*Met.* 5.395) that later characters like Cyane and Jupiter talk about (*Met.* 5.417 and 5.526). The arrow, as Faraone and Obbink would say (45), is one of the standard weapons of *Eros* and the weapon of Love/love in Ovid as he explicitly states: “Cupid’s weapons are still the torch and arrows” (*Am.* 15.27). Since Ovid continues the legacy established before him with the image of arrows as weapons of *Eros*, he makes the reader perceive what is seen in Pluto as an understanding of “love” that means *eros*. This would indeed explain why Pluto establishes his power over Proserpina: he is, in many ways, controlled by an extremely powerful feeling. Moreover, similarly to an arrow with only one direction to go through, love, in most of Ovid’s writings, goes from one direction to another with no reciprocity, for instance, from Pluto to Proserpina.

This being said, one of the things that plays a major role in the interpretation of Proserpina’s abduction is Arethusa’s story. She is chased by Alpheus, who does not rest until he finds her. This chase could be assimilated into a blind desire that leads Alpheus to find Arethusa wherever she is, a much more powerful depiction of *eros* than the one we perceive in Pluto. This story is told with empathy for what happens to Proserpina. What occurs to Persephone is something ubiquitous, as seen in each of the different books of the *Metamorphoses*. It is almost like a pattern; some examples are Daphne (*Met.* 1.547-556), Syrinx (*Met.* 1.706), Philomela (*Met.* 6.523-6), Dryope (*Met.* 9.351-355), among many others. After seeing all these patterns, *eros* becomes undeniable. Arethusa is hunted by Alpheus, which reminds us of Delattre’s association between the hunting and rape attempt (208), correlating the act of hunting and desire (213). He also makes an association between the rapist, the assassin, and the lover that desires (215), which could be applied to Arethusa’s story and even Proserpina’s. Indeed, we do not perceive the pain Arethusa undergoes reflected in Proserpina, but Cyane’s attempt to save Proserpina, along with her mourning for both rapes, as Segal remarks (54), makes the reader consider Proserpina’s pain too. Also, Ceres’ failed search for her daughter gives us a glimpse of Proserpina’s feelings as well as her psychological and physical states.

Proserpina’s abduction still haunted Cyane’s memories; thus, we cannot forget how Pluto fed his *eros* with Proserpina’s flesh. Hence, defenceless, she fell prey to his hunger for her. No one is keen on tempting fate, Proserpina was not willingly abducted, and her cry for help

suggests that she would have run for her life if she had been given that choice. Cyane failed to take Proserpina out of harm's way, opening the reader's eyes to what Pluto could get away with without being punished, because, after all, he is Pluto. Indeed, Cyane appears as one of the most active participants in this story (Zissos 98). Also, "the first major innovation in the Rape narrative is the insertion of a heroic but ultimately disastrous attempt by Cyane to save Proserpina" (Zissos 99). When Pluto abducted Proserpina, Cyane bravely tried to stop him from taking her away (*Met.* 5.414) upsetting Pluto with her words. Thus, Cyane is granted "startling narrative and prominence and even moral authority" (Zissos 99). Yet, Pluto took Ceres' daughter away, and before reaching the underworld, he penetrated Cyane's waters (*Met.* 5.420-424), making her a surrogate victim of rape (Zissos 101).

When Ceres found out about what had happened to her daughter at that moment, in her heart, she knew that extreme measures had to be taken if she wanted to see her daughter again. All of a sudden, the reality was sinking in, she had to make a choice, and she was ready to sacrifice the mortal race by cursing the land where her daughter had been taken from. She wanted both mortals and immortals to taste her wrath, and so would she have done if it were not for Arethusa's intervention. Ovid seems to be either living in a world where there is no distinction between *eros* and *philia*, or perhaps what he considers *love* varies depending on the situation, thus alternating, at least, two different conceptions of love. It is beyond dispute that what Pluto displays is a form of *eros*, but Ceres' actions are driven because of the love she feels for her daughter. Cyane also expresses a different understanding of love, one that differs from what Pluto feels. Moreover, even Jupiter appreciates his daughter, which is indeed a form of love.

The female role in the *Metamorphoses* is of utmost relevance, as seen in how "Venus assumes moral and intellectual responsibility for the abduction of Proserpina" (Zissos 108). Moreover, unlike the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Pluto is not granted a speech which makes him a mere character (Zissos 108). Also, as Anderson (266) remarks, in *The Metamorphoses*, Ovid seems to be giving the female lover a voice. In Book V, for instance, Cyane advises Pluto to ask for Proserpina's love (*Met.* 5.415). When Proserpina, terrified, asks for help, she makes it clear that she does not want to be taken away by Pluto. Also, Arethusa retells how she attempted to

escape from Alpheus (*Met.* 5.599-638), making it clear that she did not want him. Unlike them, Cyane retells a different story as she was wooed and accepted Anapis' love (*Met.* 5.417-418) as he did not try to abduct or take her against her will. Nevertheless, the fact that these female characters retell their own story does not necessarily mean Ovid thinks highly of them, as he is constantly objectifying and victimising them by representing them as natural objects for love, as also seen in his *Ars Amatoria*.

Contemporary speaking, the main question in Proserpina's kidnapping by Pluto is at what moment the abduction leads to rape, understood as a forced sexual interaction. We perceive how Pluto takes Proserpina away against her will, and we also witness how he penetrates Cyane's waters, but where does he exactly rape Proserpina? Reading about the experiences of the other female characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we get explicit descriptions of what we would now describe as rape. However, in Proserpina's tale, we get hints of her sexual assault (*Met.* 5.395-426) but it is hard to distinguish the moment the abduction leads to rape as a forced sexual interaction. As it is clearly stated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pluto fell in love with Proserpina (*Met.* 5.395) and so seem to think characters like Cyane, who acknowledge Pluto's love for Proserpina but does not accept the way he takes her away against her will (*Met.* 5.416-418), or even Jupiter who reminds Ceres of the reason Pluto takes Proserpina away: love (*Met.* 5.525-526). Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore how Pluto forcefully takes Proserpina. Even if he is not trying to dishonour nor shame her with his abuse, he makes her hopeless, asking for help as he puts his hands on her (*Met.* 5.395-401). He made clear that his overt aim was to take Proserpina with him and make her his wife, but he is not the main reason she has to stay in the underworld for half of the year, as it is her own actions that doom her fate when she was overcome by hunger and decided to eat a few pomegranate seeds in the underworld. In the *Metamorphoses*, the first time we learn of Proserpina's virginity is in verse 377, to which Venus wants to find a solution.

Proserpina's cry for help is not the one that hints to rape as a sexual assault, but rather Cyane's tears for both herself and Prosepina (*Met.* 5.425-426). Cyane's grief is the one that alludes to Proserpina's implicit unwilling sexual intercourse with Pluto, and the latter's explicit violent abduction. It could seem that in his writing, Ovid does not shame the female victims of

sexual assault, as he shows us the persistence and strength they have while giving them a voice. Nevertheless, the fact that he constantly puts these female characters in vulnerable positions —haunted or abducted by male characters— suggests otherwise.

Proserpina's sexual vulnerability differs from that of Arethusa, who was pursued by Alpheus (*Met.* 5.599-638), and even after so many attempts to escape him, she ended up being his victim (*Met.* 5.638). Unlike Proserpina, Arethusa is presented as a mature, wise, and strong female who even if she tried her best, could not escape from an erotic pursuit. However, Proserpina is presented as a child who innocently needs someone else to speak for her as Cyane does (*Met.* 5.414-418) or protect her, as Ceres fails to do.

As Cyane states (*Met.* 5.415), Pluto does not have Ceres' approval to be Proserpina's husband. Hence, he is forcing himself on Proserpina and Ceres at the same time. However, Cyane does not see him as unsuitable to Proserpina, but she tries to make him see that there are other ways to approach someone he loves. Pluto blindly follows his desire to have Proserpina, not caring or thinking about what she wants. Also, he does indeed have frustrated feelings as he displays anger after hearing Cyane's speech (*Met.* 5.420).

Like animals, Ovid shows how gods can get away with their lusts. Even if Ceres and Cyane see what happens to Proserpina as an injustice, Pluto does not receive any punishment. Instead, he is understood by Jupiter and gets his way as he spends part of the year with Proserpina. Likewise, Alpheus also gets away with Arethusa's violation since he receives no punishment. This shows the main difference between mortals and immortals, and the power of the Ovidian understanding of "love."³²

3.5.2. Metamorphosis in the Ovidian *Metamorphoses*

The theme of metamorphosis seems to be present in each of the different books of the *Metamorphoses*. There are different metamorphic instances in Book V where we find two different kinds of transformations: an external and obvious modification and an internal

³² See Liveley 7-15; Sharrock 150-162.

metamorphosis. What this shows is that change is unavoidable. There is no way for Pluto to get rid of nor avoid Cupid's arrow, which makes him undergo an internal transformation, leading to his desire for Proserpina. Then, no matter how badly Cyane wants to speak and tell Ceres about what happened, she cannot undo her metamorphic water transformation.

Moreover, Ceres cannot undo her daughter's marriage with Pluto, as nothing can undo the metamorphic change that marriage to the god of the underworld implies. Burying or not the seed under the ground will not change what happened to Proserpina. This behaviour will not bring her back, which is the message conveyed in Arethusa's words when convincing Ceres of her selfish act. Then, Ceres comprehends this and decides to address Jupiter because she knows he is the only one that could do something about it. If he could not restore her daughter, then no other of the immortals would be able to. Neither mortals nor immortals can undo a change, and so is seen in the *Metamorphoses*. Ceres, although a goddess, cannot undo her child's metamorphosis, nor can, for instance, the boy she transformed into a lizard go back to the boy he was. She is, in a way, like him since she cannot undo metamorphosis.

Ceres' internal change because of the feelings she presents when her daughter is abducted shows us her strength as a goddess and a mother, along with her desperation while facing her loss. Thus, her internal change is conditioned by her daughter's absence, while, differently from her, Pluto's change results from the presence of Cupid's arrow. Thus, we find ourselves reading about a strong sense of Fate, a force that cannot be avoided nor controlled by anyone, not even immortals. Also, apart from the immortality and power of the gods and goddesses, nothing else seems to differentiate them from mortals.

Metamorphosis is the topic that brings together all the books found in *Metamorphoses*. Nevertheless, this metamorphosis does not exclusively allude to a metamorphic change as Wheeler suggests:

Ovidian metamorphosis is *not* limited to the change of humans into other forms. Right from the start, Ovid expands the definition of metamorphosis to embrace and make sense of different types of change, including those that occur at the level of his language and word-order. (S. Wheeler 13)

Moreover, “the choice of metamorphosis as the titular theme set the tone for his work, while the actual place of metamorphosis in each story ranges from being the focal point to being a perfunctory addendum” (Galinsky 61). A clear example is Proserpina’s metamorphosis: she does not undergo a physical transformation. Thus, Ovid’s concept of metamorphosis goes beyond a simple physical transformation. Even when the physical characteristics of the characters change “their quintessential substance lives on” (Galinsky 45). From Solodow’s perspective, “metamorphosis is the opposite of morality” as he considers it to be “a process through which the characteristics of men are only rendered visible and manifest, metamorphosis precludes the judgments on them that morality would make” (157).

There are multiple metamorphic changes in the story that retells Proserpina’s abduction. For starters, Ceres transforms a boy into a lizard for making fun of her (*Met.* 5.453-458), and later she transforms Ascalaphus into a bird for witnessing her daughter eat in the underworld (*Met.* 5.537-550), both are transformations into animals, perhaps attempting to degrade them or simply as an automatic result of her wrath. However, as Solodow remarks, Ovid “attaches no moral connection to the turning of men into animals. An animal is not a degraded but a clarified form of man. It is simply a creature that has no inner life or concealed character, no chance for growth, whose appearance and customs declare everything about it” (191). Another different metamorphic change is the one that suffer the Acheloides, i.e. the Sirens (*Met.* 5.552), who received the feathers and feet of a bird while keeping their own faces. This is a different transformation, more like a severe punishment (Hill 162). Unlike all these metamorphic examples, we find Arethusa’s willing metamorphosis (*Met.* 5.621-638), which has the purpose of escaping Alpheus. Yet, this metamorphic transformation does not serve its purpose as she fails to avoid the violation.

Although the metamorphosis theme is not the main subject in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Galinsky 61; Solodow 26), every story includes one (Solodow 3). Thus, it becomes inevitable to address Proserpina’s transformation, and Pluto’s. By the time we shift to Proserpina’s metamorphosis, in the same episode, we have already encountered a list of transformations similar to Proserpina’s metamorphosis. It is ironic how Ceres grants herself the

right to transform the country boy into a lizard but is frustrated and angered at her daughter's transformation into Pluto's bride when becoming the goddess of the underworld, even if this transformation allows her daughter to remain, in a sort of way, herself. Furthermore, as Galinsky determines:

The *Metamorphoses* are a variable anthology of human conflicts, and the depiction of the whole range of human nature—love and hatred, fear and anxiety, and the fluctuations of jealousy, shame, pride, and recklessness—is vivid and refined. This emphasis on human psychology is related to the metamorphosis theme. The subject of metamorphosis naturally bears on the question of the identity of the persons involved. (45)

Also, Wheeler interestingly points out, “One might therefore conclude that the experience of reading the *Metamorphoses* turns out to be didactic after all as the reader learns the truth of a metamorphic universe, both as a phenomenon in the world and as a way of understanding how the world changes” (S. Wheeler 33).

3.5.3. Motherhood

The role of the mother is emphasised in both Ovidian accounts. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ceres knows something happened to her daughter as she is nowhere to be found, but in the *Fasti*, it is not until Ceres hears her daughter from the distance that she knows something happened to her. Also, it is worth highlighting that in the *Fasti*, Ceres is desperately calling her daughter to try to find her twice (*Fast.* 4.455-7; 4.483-8). This shows the grief of the Mother Goddess for the absence of her daughter. Ceres' motherhood seen in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* could complement each other and show two different, yet similar, ways of grieving the loss of a daughter. On the one hand, in the *Metamorphoses*, we have a mother ready to eliminate the human race by destroying vegetation and cursing the land where her daughter was abducted. On the other hand, in the *Fasti*, a desperate mother that is overcome by grief sits alone on a cold stone, weeping for her daughter. Even if she is shown full of wrath and resentment in the former account, she does not unjustly fulfil her wish because she hears Arethusa's intervention. Again, this certainly shows the humanity of this goddess, as she does not ignore Arethusa's words, she understands injustice as she is herself a victim of injustice.

In the *Fasti*, we are presented with a set of events absent in the *Metamorphoses* but of much relevance. Firstly, Ceres meets Celeus' daughter and calls her "mother," which touches the goddess' heart (*Fast.* 4.513). Then, even as a goddess, she weeps after telling Celeus and his little daughter about her daughter, this touched them, and they wept with her (*Fast.* 4.523). Then Celeus wished the goddess to be reunited with her daughter. He convinced her to go with them to their place, and since she was touched by his words, she followed them. At Celeus' place, she meets his wife and sick son. Ceres takes care of him and attempts to immortalise him, and she would have succeeded if it were not for Metaneira's mistrust, the child's mother. This character is imperative due to her correlation with the goddess since both are concerned for their children and therefore share a sentiment of motherhood. The way Ceres nurses Triptolemus is similar to that of the love of a mother. Indeed, she found, in this child, the daughter that she had lost, but the child's mother and the way she mistrusts the goddess reminds her of her daughter, leaving the place to look for her again. The brief consolation she had found in that child vanished, and she remembered her daughter again.

3.6. The merging of the Homeric and Ovidian influences: Robert Graves

Born in 1895 and dying in 1985, Robert Von Ranke Graves lived for almost a century. He attended Charterhouse School and then joined the Welch Fusiliers in World War I, serving in France from 1915 to 1917, where he met Siegfried Sassoon. After that, Graves went to St John's College, Oxford, where he met T. E. Lawrence, who influenced him greatly. In 1918 he married Nancy Nicholson living in Oxford and then in London. Then, he left her and their four children for the writer Laura Riding in 1929, with whom he lived in Majorca. With the Spanish Civil War, Graves and Laura went back to England, the former leaving the latter in 1939 and marrying Beryl Pritchard in 1959 (Gibson 4). Over the years, his writing was motivated by a range of different family members, friends, and writers such as Nancy, Laura, Beryl, T. E. Lawrence, or W. H. R. Rivers, (Gibson 4) among others. Also, he was persuaded by the idea of matriarchy and the mother goddesses of Bachofen, Harrison, and Frazer (Gibson 170). Along with Siegfried Sassoon, the war had a massive impact on his writing (McPhail and Guest 7). Graves was also influenced by Rivers, as he "asserted that the mind-life of the poet is the origin of the poem" also

“he believed that early drafts of poems directly express that origin” (Kersnowski 25). Rivers was “fascinated by the examples of ‘mother-rights’ or matrilineal societies, which he found in the South Seas, an interest he passed on to Graves, who would develop his theories in one of his most controversial works, *The White Goddess*” (Wilson 3379). Moreover, he was also influenced by his first wife and her views “on the current and historical mistreatment of women (...) Correcting patriarchal misrepresentation of women became a deep commitment for Graves” (Kersnowski 70). Additionally, Graves was influenced by Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, from where his existential awareness and conscience came (Mounic 95). George Mallory, a teacher, introduced Graves to some modern authors such as Shaw, Rupert Brooke, H.G. Wells, and John Masefield, among others (McPhail and Guest 25), who would also influence Graves’ writings. The importance of poetry for Graves is remarkable, and he is very well known for writing *The White Goddess*. Also, “from his earlier writings on the subject, Graves claimed that poetry was magic” (Mounic 93). Moreover, Anne Mounic reflects upon the way Graves deals with poetry:

He was aware that the poet’s task was not to reverberate trite certainties but to question the simple fact of being, which is a mystery to be unveiled in the novelty of the present moment through words, rhythms, and images. Rather than summing up what is already known, the poet goes in search of the new embodiment of life in the present moment. (5)

Although his care for writing is remarkable and easy to see, trying to classify Graves into this or that category becomes very hard:

Graves’ stance is paradoxical throughout: he was not politically involved (except immediately after the war when he said he was a Socialist), but evinced some political ideas in his essays. He was not religious, but poetry took the place of religion for him. He evinced a very original poetic outlook, but kept within the limits of well accepted prosody. He liked to provoke his audience, but his poetry is never provocative. In other words, it is not easy to situate Graves according to time-honoured categories. He is too much of an individual poet to stand general classification. Yet his poems have a direct appeal to the reading public. He is a poet of unrest. (Mounic 19)

As a poet, his interest in and knowledge of ancient mythology was outstanding. In Graves' *The Greek Myths*,³³ Hades, who was not allowed to go to Olympus, met Zeus in Greece and confessed to him his love for Persephone, asking for his permission to marry the girl. However, Zeus did not know how to reply to that request. As he did not want to offend Hades nor Demeter with his decision, he decided not to give a clear answer and winked at Hades instead, which this latter interpreted as an answer. Then, Hades took Persephone away while she was picking flowers in Colonus. The girl started screaming, but by the time her friends came to the rescue, she was gone, but they told Demeter what had happened. Thus, Demeter disguised herself among humanity, searching for her daughter. And so, for nine days, Demeter did not taste any food or drink. Close to Eleusis, she received a position as a nurse to a King and Queen's youngest son, Demophon. Then, the oldest prince Triptolemus, whose brother Eubuleus had seen how the earth opened and how a chariot driven by black horses appeared, recognised the goddess and told her about what had happened to her daughter. Demeter went with Hecate to ask Helios the truth about what had happened. After Hecate threatened Helios with eclipsing him at noon, he decided to tell them that it was Hades who took Demeter's daughter. Demeter assumed that Zeus was the one that had planned this unification. Thus, angry at Zeus, she decided to make him pay for her pain by not going back to Olympus and forbidding the trees from bearing fruit and the grass from growing, putting humanity's existence at stake. Following this, Zeus made Hera send Iris to ask her to make the seed grow again, but Demeter ignored this request. Thus, Zeus sent Poseidon, Hestia, and Hera to offer the goddess presents. Demeter rejected them and said she would not do anything for any of them unless they brought her daughter back to her. Hence, Zeus decided to send Hermes to the underworld to tell Hades about the dangers of not sending Persephone back to her mother. He also told Hermes to inform Demeter that she would only have her daughter back if Persephone did not eat in the underworld. Then, Hades obeyed Zeus' request and let Persephone leave, telling her kindly how she seemed unhappy in the world of the dead and saying that perhaps she should better go home. However, Ascalaphus, one of Hades' gardeners, had seen her picking a pomegranate from the underworld orchard. This made Hades smile to himself. He took Persephone to her mother, who hugged her daughter and cried of pleasure. Then Hades informed Demeter that Persephone had eaten seven pomegranate seeds in the underworld, that the gardener was the witness, and that, as a result, Persephone had to return to

³³ See Graves 55-59.

Tartarus. Demeter replied that she would not lift the curse from the earth, letting men and animals die. As such, Zeus sent Rhea to plead with Demeter. They agreed Persephone would marry Hades and spend seven months of the year with him, one for each of the pomegranate seeds she had eaten, and the rest of the year she would spend above. Demeter punished the gardener who had seen Persephone pick the pomegranate in the underworld and turned him into a hooting long-eared owl. Also, Demeter rewarded those that had helped her and taught them how to plough the fields, sow barley seeds, and reap the harvest.

Graves' version of the myth combines the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As for the similarities with the former, Demeter spent nine days without eating or drinking anything, and Hecate is the one that takes her to see Helios. Also, Zeus sends Iris to plead with Demeter, and then, when he sees that humanity is at stake, he sends Hermes to bring Persephone back from the underworld. Furthermore, similarly to the *Homeric Hymn Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone initially rejects eating food from the underworld. As for the similarities with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Proserpina eats seven pomegranate seeds, and there is a witness transformed into a bird by Ceres. Also, Persephone is bound to spend seven months with Pluto and the rest of the year with her mother.

As mentioned before, another influence of Graves was Jane Ellen Harrison, who was one of Frazer's and Bachofen's disciples. She was not only a British classical scholar and linguist but also a feminist and, along with Karl Kerényi and Walter Burkert, one of the founders of modern studies in Greek mythology, an example of such studies is her book *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* where she attempts to analyse the ancient Greece rites explaining their mythical thinking (Gibson 174).

Interestingly, Graves worked simultaneously on *The White Goddess* and *The Greek Myths* (Gibson 168). In his *The Greek Myths*, Graves is influenced by Bachofen and Frazer and states that in this book, he harmoniously assembles the elements of each myth (Gibson 175). Also:

It has been demonstrated that Graves constructs an imaginary world out of his interpretations of Greek myth. He considers the old stories as a source of information for prehistoric times, and the reason for his view can be found in the works of Bachofen, Frazer, Harrison, and others, who

developed ideas of the matriarchy, great goddess, and sacred king. Graves sought proof for these theories in the Greek myths themselves. (Gibson 176)

Because of the influence of the Cambridge Ritualists and Frazer's *Golden Bough* through Max Müller, Andrew Lang, and Herder's *Volk*, and also mentioning Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* in the introduction to *The Greek Myths*, Graves developed a concern about origins while addressing myth. His interest in the prehistorical was not the only result of this influence but also his formal education (Gibson 184). Furthermore, as stated above, one of the authors that has had a massive impact on Graves and who has also addressed the myth of Demeter and Persephone is Frazer, who points out the assimilation of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone with other stories, such as the Syrian myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, the Phrygian myth of Cybele and Attis, and the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris (Frazer 35).³⁴ As Frazer tells the story of Persephone in his seventh volume of *The Golden Bough*, he remarks that the flowers Persephone was plucking were "roses and lilies, crocuses and violets, hyacinths and narcissuses" (36) and even as he tells the tale pointing out how Demeter meets Keleos' daughters as she was sitting under the shadow of an olive tree next to the well, he omits Demeter's stay at Keleos' house. Additionally, Graves has also been influenced by other authors:

As in the works of the German-speaking psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and, even more so, C. G. Jung, ideas which should explain a state of mind or being become a source and guideline to a movement which tries to transform or establish those texts in reality. Influenced by his time, but most likely by his German origins too, Graves was one of those scholars to whom a mixture of methodology and imagination was just right. (Gibson 179)

Graves favours matriarchy, addresses the myth of Demeter and Persephone, and unites a long list of prominent authors. Also, his mythological versions have been of great importance to many contemporary authors who have read him. As Heide Goettner-Abendroth explains:

Matriarchies are not just a reversal of patriarchy, with women ruling over men – as the usual misinterpretation would have it. Matriarchies are mothercentered societies, with complementary equality between the genders and generations. They are based on *maternal values*: care-taking,

³⁴ See also Rodrigues 180.

nurturing, motherliness, peace-building, which holds for everybody: for mothers and those who are not mothers, for women and men alike. (1)

Matriarchy is not recent, as reflected in Greek sources for centuries. Johann Jakob Bachofen is one of the first authors to give a prominent role of matriarchy in *Das Mutterrecht* (1861). However, as Joan Bamberger describes:

When *Das Mutterrecht* was first published, the city of Troy had not yet been excavated, and little, if anything, was known of the ancient Mediterranean world apart from what was recorded in the standard classical sources. Fully aware that such texts as the Homeric epics were not written as histories in the strictest sense, he nevertheless accepted these mythological accounts as a reliable reservoir of actual history. (266)

Also, there has been a contest between matriarchy supporters and patriarchal supporters (Bamberger 264). Bachofen's understanding of matriarchy goes beyond social and political. In fact, for Bachofen, matriarchy involved religion. Bachofen considered that the development of humanity went through three stages. The first stage was hetairism, which was represented by sexual promiscuity, women were victimised by men, and children did not know their fathers. Also, "tellurism" characterised this stage and the goddess Aphrodite (Ellenberger 219-220). The second stage was a matriarchy, where women were the founders of the family and agriculture. Women also exerted social and political power. The role of the mother was regarded highly. Also, as Henri-Frédéric Ellenberger clarifies:

Matriarchy was also a materialistic civilization that praised education of the body above education of the intellect and where practical values prevailed and found their expression in the development of agriculture and the building of huge town walls. Its highest divinity was the goddess Demeter (Ceres). Among its symbolic features were the primacy of night. Time was computed according to the number of nights, battles were fought, counsel was given, justice was rendered, and cults were held during the night. Other features included primacy of the moon, the earth, the dead; preference was given to sisters over brothers; to the last-born over the older children; finally the preference for the left side over the right side. (220)

The third stage is patriarchy, which Bachofen considered “a progress toward a higher stage of civilization” (Ellenberger 220). Then, Ellenberger explains:

The cult of Dionysus, which had been an episode in the struggle between hetairism and matriarchy, occurred as a rebellion of women against patriarchy. The Dionysian system favored the fine arts, but in contrast to the chaste discipline that prevailed in Demeteric matriarchy, it brought forth moral corruption, and, under the pretense of emancipating women, it actually led them to be exploited by men. It was a system favored by tyrants. (220)

After the establishment of patriarchy, matriarchy was practically forgotten. Yet matriarchy remained in mythology. The myths of Orestes, and Oedipus, represent the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy. Indeed, when Bachofen addresses patriarchy, he perceives it as the opposite of matriarchy. Also, interestingly “Bachofen considered the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy as progress toward a higher stage of civilization (a point that has often been ignored or obscured by his later followers, especially third wave feminists)” (Stroup 21). One of the authors that adopted Bachofen’s understanding of matriarchy was Jane Harrison, whose unearthing of the Greek underworld overlapped, as Robert Mark Stroup puts it:

Freud’s discovery of the unconscious which he so often visualized as an underworld. The historical tendency to divert attention from the submerged, chthonic level of Greek religion is uncannily similar to how our psyches do their utmost to avoid the contents of the unconscious. Both realms, mythological and psychological, are perceived as underground, feared, unseen. Freud taught us that when the unconscious is allowed to speak, it will yield an unexpected wealth of healing. Likewise, Harrison showed that the partially submerged world of chthonic deities, rituals, mysteries, and myths, re-emerged in the Greek world during the sixth and fifth centuries in response to needs that were insufficiently addressed by the dominant Olympian religion, creating a late flourishing in Greek religion with the rise of Orphism and the mystery cults, forms that led by various paths into early Christianity. (369)

Although both Freud and Jung used mythology in their psychological and psychoanalytical theories, it is relevant to point out how psychology and psychoanalysis can also explain mythology, making both mythology and psychology intertwined. Hence, Graves carries indeed

the influence of various authors, each enriching his writing. As such, his interest in matrilineal societies is perceived in his work *The White Goddess*, and *The Greek Myths* serves as an example of Graves' fondness for poetry, mythology, psychology, and matriarchy, providing a version of the Demeter and Persephone myth that merges Homeric and Ovidian traits.

3.6.1. D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths*

Ingri (1904-1980) and Edgar Parin (1898-1986) D'Aulaire met in Germany, where the latter was from. They were married in Norway, Ingri's country, and then moved to Paris. Edgar had a trolley accident and decided to use the insurance money to start a new life across the Atlantic. Later his wife joined him. They met a librarian at the New York Public Library that gave them the idea of using their talents to make books for children (Laskow). They first published the *Book of Greek Myths* in 1962, but before writing about Greek myths they wrote about George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Pocahontas, Benjamin Franklin, Buffalo Bill, and Christopher Columbus (Laskow).

D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* presents a version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone that puts emphasis on the mother-daughter bond between Demeter and Persephone.³⁵

She was the daughter of Demeter, goddess of the harvest, and her mother loved her so dearly she could not bear to have her out of her sight. When Demeter sat on her golden throne, her daughter was always on her lap; when she went down to earth to look after her trees and fields, she took Persephone. (58)

Hades fell in love with Persephone but he knew Demeter would not approve of getting separated from her daughter so he decided to abduct Persephone when she was in the meadow gathering flowers. No specific flower traps Persephone in D'Aulaires' version when Hades seizes Persephone, and Persephone's cries for help are not addressed to any of the parents, differing from the Homeric and Ovidian versions. Also, D'Aulaires' version gives an account of what happens in the underworld right after the abduction as Hades "led weeping Persephone in, seated

³⁵ See D'Aulaires 58-63.

her beside him on a throne of black marble, and decked her with gold and precious stones. But the jewels brought her no joy” (58-59). Furthermore, something found in D’Aulaires’ version of the myth that does not appear in the Homeric nor the Ovidian versions is the description of the underworld. Moreover, unlike previous versions this time it is the gardener of the underworld the one that offers pomegranates to Persephone, who refuses to eat them. Meanwhile Demeter was searching for her daughter on earth and “all nature grieved with her” (60). Even though the gods begged Demeter to restore vegetation, she refused until she had found Persephone. When disguised as an old woman, Demeter returned to the meadow “where Persephone had vanished and asked the sun if he had seen what had happened, but he said no, dark clouds had hidden his face that day” (60). Later she found Triptolemus, who “told her that his brother, a swineherd, had seen his pigs disappear into the ground and had heard the frightened screams of a girl” (60). Then, she understood what had happened and approached Zeus requesting to restore her daughter. Since “Zeus could not let the world perish” (62) he sent Hermes to the underworld to bring Persephone back. However, echoing Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the gardener of Hades noticed how a few kernels of a pomegranate were missing since Persephone had eaten them. This made Hades smile as he knew that Persephone would have to come back to him since she ate in the underworld. Thus, Zeus “ruled that Persephone had to return to Hades and spend one month in the underworld for each seed she had eaten” (62). Hence, whenever Persephone was in the underworld there was winter on earth but Demeter did not want humanity to starve in winter so:

She lent her chariot, laden with grain, to Triptolemus, the youth who had helped her to find her lost daughter. She told him to scatter her golden grain over the world and teach men how to sow it in spring and reap it in fall and store it away for the long months when again the earth was barren and cold. (62)

3.6.2. Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology*

Edith Hamilton (1867-1963), born in Germany to American parents, was an American educator and author. Among the different awards that Hamilton received we find the National Achievement Award in 1951, then, in 1957 she obtained the Golden Cross of the Order of Benefaction, and the next year she received the Women’s National Book Association (*Edith*

Hamilton - Biography and Literary Works of Edith Hamilton). Some of her most remarkable works are *The Greek Way* (1930), *The Prophets of Israel* (1936), *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (1942), *Witness to the Truth: Christ and His Interpreters* (1948), *Spokesmen for God* (1949), *The Echo of Greece* (1957), *The Ever Present Past* (1964).

Edith Hamilton provides in her book *Mythology* a version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone that is quite faithful to the Homeric account of this myth.³⁶ She starts her version of the myth with an introduction of the main events of this tale:

Demeter had an only daughter, Persephone (in Latin Proserpine), the maiden of the spring. She lost her and in her terrible grief she withheld her gifts from the earth, which turned into a frozen desert. The green and flowering land was icebound and lifeless because Persephone had disappeared. (57)

Then, Hamilton introduces how Hades abducts Persephone “when, enticed by the wondrous bloom of the narcissus, she strayed too far from her companions” (57). Similarly to the Homeric tale, the narcissus flower is once more the one that traps Persephone. However, unlike the Homeric and the Ovidian versions Persephone does not explicitly cry for her father's nor her mother's help, she only cries. Mimicking the Homeric source: “Nine days Demeter wandered, and all that time she would not taste of ambrosia or put sweet nectar to her lips” (57). However, this time Hekate does not approach Demeter, it is Demeter herself who approaches the Sun and learns the truth about her daughter. Then, Demeter leaves Olympus and disguises herself among humanity. Similar to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter meets Metaneira's daughters and they take her to their house. Hamilton's version of this myth does not concentrate on dialogues and details. As such, we quickly learn that: “Demeter nursed Demophoön, the son that Metaneira had borne to wise Celeus. And the child grew like a young god, for daily Demeter anointed him with ambrosia and at night she would place him in the red heart of the fire. Her purpose was to give him immortal youth” (58). Metaneira mistrusted the goddess the same way she had done in the Homeric version, and this led to Demeter isolating herself in a temple she ordered them to build for her. She isolated herself there from the Olympians, grieving her daughter's loss. Then,

³⁶ See Hamilton 57-64.

she buried the seed under the ground, putting humanity's existence at stake. Thus, Zeus “sent the gods to Demeter, one after another, to try to turn her from her anger, but she listened to none of them” (61). Therefore, Zeus sends Hermes to the underworld to bring Persephone back. Hades let Persephone go after making her eat a pomegranate seed that would make her stay part of the year with him. After the two goddesses got reunited, Demeter restored vegetation, “she went to the princes of Eleusis who had built her temple and she chose one, Triptolemus, to be her ambassador to men, instructing them how to sow the corn” (63), and taught her mysteries.

CHAPTER FOUR: RITA DOVE'S *MOTHER LOVE*

The following chapter provides a general introduction to Rita Dove and her writings while paying special attention to her book of poetry, *Mother Love*. Then, the main topics found in *Mother Love* will be regarded from a Reception Studies perspective addressing persecution, motherhood, sexuality, abduction and rape, and grief which will be subsequently divided into shock, denial, anger, guilt, pain, and sorrow, and release and resolution. After that, narcissism and trauma will be explored from a Psychoanalytic perspective, subsequently exploring Vulnerability Studies while contemplating gender and shared vulnerability, dependency, emotions, embodiment, victimhood, resistance, and resilience.

4.1. Introduction

Rita Dove was born in Akron, Ohio, August 28, 1952.³⁷ She grew up being an outstanding student and a prominent reader with a mother who was a housekeeper and a father who was a chemist. Being the eldest of four children, she graduated from Miami University in Ohio and later studied in Germany at the University of Tübingen in West. Then, she earned an MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. At the University of Iowa, she met Fred Viebahn, a German writer who became her husband. After teaching at Arizona State University and the University of Virginia, Rita Dove became a leading voice at every academic level. She has addressed Greek mythology in her writings, alluding to, for instance, the *Homeric Hymns*.³⁸ She is widely appreciated for her volume of poetry *Thomas and Beulah*, written in homage to her maternal grandparents and winner of the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Dove has produced a large body of work, especially poetry. She has published eleven books of poetry, a play, a song cycle, a collection of essays, a collection of short stories, and a novel which are *Ten Poems* (1977), *The Only Dark Spot in the Sky* (1980), *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), *Mandolin* (1982), *Museum* (1983), *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), *The Other Side of the House* (1988), *Grace Notes* (1989), *Lady Freedom among Us* (1993), *Selected Poems* (1993), *Mother Love* (1995), *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*

³⁷ Foundation, Poetry. Rita Dove. Rita Dove. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/rita-dove> [accessed 08/06/2022].

³⁸ See Cook and Tatum 311.

(1999), *American Smooth* (2004), *Sonata Mulattica* (2009). *Fifth Sunday* (short stories) (1985), *Through the Ivory Gate* (novel) (1992), *The Darker Face of the Earth* (1994/1996), *The Poet's World* (poem and essays) (1995), *Seven for Luck* (song cycle with lyrics by Dove and music by John Williams) (2000), *Playlist for the Apocalypse* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2021).

She was the author of the weekly “Poet’s Choice” column for the Washington Post from 2000 to 2002, but prior to that, she served as poet laureate from 1993 to 1995, a time during which she was working on *Mother Love*, published in 1995. *Mother Love* has inspired different opinions, for instance, Justin Quinn considers that “*Mother Love* makes poor reading. The appropriation of Greek myth is not groundbreaking in itself and the uses to which Dove puts it hardly glitter with inventiveness” (76). A different perspective would be that of Pat Righelato, who acknowledges the contemporaneity of Dove’s reception of the myth of Demeter in *Mother Love* (171).

Despite the wide variety of viewpoints, what cannot be denied is the massive attention this book of poetry has caught. *Mother Love* is mainly inspired by the myth of Demeter and Persephone and by Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922) —Rilke’s last poetic cycle written in German (Martinec 95).³⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was a prominent Austrian poet and novelist, who is widely recognised. Dove acknowledges the impact Rilke had on her book of poetry *Mother Love*. Indeed, it was because of Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus* that Dove had chosen the myth of Demeter (Bellin 23) and started writing sonnets (Pereira, *Into a Light* 92). As such, Dove states in her preface to *Mother Love*:

Sonnets seemed the proper mode for most of this work—and not only in homage and as counterpoint to Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Much has been said about the many ways to “violate” the sonnet in the service of American speech or modern love or whatever; I will simply say that I like how the sonnet comforts even while its prim borders (but what a pretty fence!) are stultifying; one is constantly bumping up against Order. The Demeter/Persephone cycle of betrayal and regeneration is ideally suited for this form since all three—mother-goddess, daughter-consort and poet—are struggling to sing in their chains.

³⁹ See Keyes 176-7; S. Morris 159; Cook and Tatum 312.

As Dove remarks, the sonnet suits *Mother Love*, not only because of Rilke's impact on her book of poetry but also because of the myth of Demeter and Persephone per se. Rilke influenced Dove at a cultural and poetic level. As Tait clarifies:

in a German context, as they were immigrants, one permanent (Rilke) and the other temporary (Dove during her Fulbright stay and subsequent stays). Also, Rilke had to dismantle gender constructs in his own way after his mother decided to dress him in girls' dresses and name him Rene Maria in an effort to resurrect his dead baby sister. From this personal war to WWI, he returned and wrote Sonnets in an unprecedented creative fury. Similar to Dove, he went to a pink realm, survived, and wrote through it. (360)

The similarities between these two authors keep piling up. As such, Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* are filled with meadows and fields, springs and winters, and even death and life. Dove's book of poems presents thirty-five sonnets⁴⁰ addressing the mother-daughter relationships through generations,⁴¹ delivering a mixture of contemporary African American and European life making us remember how Hades took Persephone away from her mother's love. Also, Tracey Lorraine Walters points out how "Dove examines the dynamics of Black motherhood and the relationship between Black mothers and daughters in the 1980s" (13). Moreover, based on a few interviews,⁴² Veronica Leigh House asserts that Dove merges her African-American heritage and Western-centred education while ascertaining universality (200). As such, alluding to writing, Dove herself notes in an interview: "I want to be true to the task. And because I'm black and because I'm female and because I'm the age that I am at this particular time on this earth, certain aspects of my environment and my society are going to come through in the work" (Dungy 1036). Furthermore, Dove's thoughts become transparent as she acknowledges the ongoing prejudice because of the lack of historical familiarity (Rowell 704). As Walters explains:

Writers like Dove recognize the shared traits between classical literary conventions and African American literary devices. Dove explains that the call-and-response convention used in the African oral tradition (a lead orator poses a statement that is responded to or affirmed by an

⁴⁰ See Burt for a detailed view of the sonnet in Dove's *Mother Love* and in Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*.

⁴¹ See Lofgren.

⁴² House also points out the anxiety Dove feels "at being perceived specifically as a black writer" (200).

audience) operates in much the same way as a Greek chorus who explains and responds to actions in the narrative. (13)

Likewise, Dove's poetry is also characterised by the political, putting her interest not only in the gendered outlook and the African American experience but also in class disparities (Murray 14). Therefore, the African-American traits present in every single of Dove's narratives become undeniable. For instance, in *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), the poem "Belinda's Petition" starts:

To the honorable Senate and House
of Representatives of this Country,
new born: I am Belinda, an African,
since the age of twelve a Slave.
I will not take too much of your Time,
but to plead and place my pitiable Life
unto the Fathers of this Nation. (1- 7)

Here, Dove gives voice to a female African slave, revindicating her power over her own story yet reflecting her oppression and cry for help. In this same book of poetry, the poem "David Walker" (1785-1830) starts as follows:

Free to travel, he still couldn't be shown how lucky
he was: They strip and beat and drag us about
like rattlesnakes. Home on Brattle Street, he took in the sign
on the door of the slop shop. All day at the counter—
white caps, ale-stained pea coats. Compass needles,
eloquent as tuning forks, shivered, pointing north.
Evenings, the ceiling fan sputtered like a second pulse.
Oh Heaven! I am full!! I can hardly move my pen!!!

On the faith of an eye-wink, pamphlets were stuffed
into trouser pockets. Pamphlets transported
in the coat linings of itinerant seamen, jackets

ringwormed with salt traded drunkenly to pursers
in the Carolinas, pamphlets ripped out, read aloud:
Men of colour, who are also of sense.
Outrage. Incredulity. Uproar in state legislatures. (1-15)

Dove reflects in these verses the tension of racial oppression through a frustrated narrator that feels mistreated. After that, we change the setting to one of various difficulties. These lines also reflect the inability of privileged people to accept that black men are not so different from them. These verses reveal the cruelty with which Africans were treated and the impact of finding freedom after slavery.⁴³

As for autobiography, *Mother Love* tells, in different settings and versions, the story of Persephone, therefore, “by devoting an entire book, rather than an individual poem within a larger collection, to a single myth, she gains the ability to explore these themes in greater detail and from different perspectives” (Morrison 76). Indeed, Dove merges the personal and the historical constantly in her writings, and that is because she believes both have always been connected as she notes in an interview:

I think they both have something to do, a lot to do, with being female and being black. From as early as I can remember, I always felt that there was a world going on with lots of “historical” events going on, and that my viewpoint was not a direct one, but I was looking at it from the side. (Pereira, *Into a Light* 75)

Also, Dove does not only blend personal and historical. Instead, she understands that her “personal history is only one personal history” (Pereira, *Into a Light* 76). Dove is inclined to easily mimic other authors’ voices. Therefore, she chooses to deliberately stick to her own voice by trying to avoid reading other authors while working on her writings (Pereira, *Into a Light* 80). However, the presence of mythology in *Mother Love* could suggest otherwise.

⁴³ Also, the poems “The Transport of Slaves from Maryland to Mississippi,” “Pamela,” or the touching black speech in “The Slave’s Critique of Practical Reason” in this same book of poetry keep strongly contemplating slavery.

Mother Love gives the original myth a contemporary tone that addresses, in general, the concerns of mothers. This sense of motherhood could be related to the fact that Dove has a daughter, too.⁴⁴ Moreover, Dove states, in an interview with Pereira, “the mother-daughter poems in *Mother Love* were both a product of my life, obviously, with a daughter growing up, but also the fact that I had been reading Rilke’s *Sonnets of Orpheus* — I suddenly started writing sonnets” (*Into a Light* 92). Autobiography is pervasively present in Dove’s narratives. As such, for instance, in “Ripont” in *American Smooth* (2004), Dove talks about her German husband and her daughter:

Early fall in the fields a slow day’s drive south
of Paris French birds singing frenchly enough
though we didn’t know their names in any language—
not even the German of my husband
reared in a village like the one we were passing
in our rusty orange BMW baby daughter
crowing from the backseat her plastic shell
strapped over the cracked upholstery (1-8)

Moreover, many of the settings in her writings seem to be locations Dove is familiar with. Some of the places are Munich and Vienna in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), Norway in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), Venice in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), Chicago in *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), Manhattan in *Grace Notes* (1989), Ohio in *Thomas and Beulah* (1986) and *American Smooth* (2004), Mexico in *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), Tennessee in *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), Virginia in *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), Arizona in *American Smooth* (2004), India in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999), but France is the most popular setting, Montparnasse appears in *American Smooth* (2004), and Paris in multiple of her poems such as in some of *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), *Grace Notes* (1989), and in *American Smooth* (2004).

⁴⁴ In an interview with Helene Foley, Dove remembers how her daughter entered her mother’s office while she was working and pointed out how Dove was writing about her, which made Dove realise it was true. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ms37MNRZy1Q> [accessed 30/03/2023].

As a woman, Dove enjoys writing about female concerns in general. For instance, she writes about the female period on various occasions. In *Grace Notes* (1989), in the poem “After reading *Mickey in the Night Kitchen* for the Third Time Before Bed” embedded with autobiography, we read:

Every month she wants
to know where it hurts
and what the wrinkled string means
between my legs. *This is good blood*
I say, but that's wrong, too.
How to tell her that it's what makes us—
black mother, cream child.
That we're in the pink
and the pink's in us. (17-25)

Here we perceive a child's curiosity while in *Mother Love*, in “Nature's Itinerary,” the topic of debate is the same, but this time, there is a much more mature discussion:

Irene says it's the altitude
that makes my period late;
this time, though, it's eluded
me entirely. I shouldn't worry (I'm medically regulated)
—but hell, I brought these thirty sanitary pads
all the way from Köln to Mexico, prepared
for more than metaphorical bloodletting among the glad rags
of the Festival Internacional de Poesia,
and I forbid
my body to be so cavalier. (1-10)

Aside from exploring autobiographical and African-American themes,⁴⁵ Dove has also been inspired by mythological themes, which can be seen, for instance, in her play *The Darker Face*

⁴⁵ See Cruz; Pareira 2002; Pareira 2003; Walters 133-72; Mitchell and Taylor; Pareira 2013: 149-50; Kalai Nathiyal and Sankar.

of the Earth (1994/1996), addressing Oedipus. Dove recalls, in an interview with Pereira, how people would ask her why she did not follow the myth in her play, thinking back she said she did not follow it exactly because she did not “want it to be a kind of checklist against a Greek myth” (*Into a Light* 73). Concerning Dove’s foreword to *Mother Love*, “An Intact World,” Righelato points out the influence of Rilke and the myth of Orpheus: “the myths are thus intertwined and, in its expression of violation and loss, *Mother Love* both resists and allows the figure of Orpheus as a lyric poet. In the patterning of contemporary voices, the notes of elegiac sweetness, of nature’s thrum, are the Orphic trace” (143). Righelato also remarks that “in Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*, the poet draws on a myth of masculine desire and loss. *Mother Love* is a feminine and feminist “counterpoint.” These complementary perspectives fashion different versions of love yet also differing versions of creativity” (147). However, Rilke’s influence on Dove is not recent and she quotes him in *Grace Notes* (1989) in the poem “Ozone.”

A year prior to the publication of *Mother Love*, Dove got *The Darker Face of the Earth* published, a verse-play where she contemplates the Oedipal incestual conflict addressing the mother-son relationship from African American lenses (Steffen 122). This motif of incest is present, rather unconsciously,⁴⁶ in multiple of her writings, such as *Fifth Sunday* (1985), *Through the Ivory Gate* (1987), and even in *The Darker Face of the Earth* (1994/1996). Then in *Mother Love*, we are presented once more with an incestual relationship when addressing Persephone and Hades.

Another interesting point about Dove’s narrative concerning *Mother Love* is that among the literary settings found in Dove’s poetry, we find, on multiple occasions, a meadow. As such, in part IV of *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), a meadow appears in the poem entitled “First Kiss,”⁴⁷ then in *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), in part II entitled “Canary in Bloom,” the poems “Promises,”⁴⁸ and “Motherhood.”⁴⁹ In *American Smooth* (2004), “Blues in Half-Tones, ¾

⁴⁶ Pereira, *Into a Light* 89-90.

⁴⁷ “And it was almost a boy who undid / the double sadness I’d sealed away. / He built a house in a meadow / no one stopped to admire, // and wore wrong clothes. Nothing / seemed to get in his way. / I promised him anything / if he would go. He smiled // and left. How / to re-create his motives, / irretrievable // as a gasp? Where else / to find him, counter-rising / in me, almost a boy (...)” (1-14).

⁴⁸ “Beneath the airborne bouquet / was a meadow of virgins / urging *Be water, be light*. / A deep breath, and she plunged / through sunbeams and kisses, / rice drumming / the both of them blind” (20-26).

⁴⁹ “Finally they get to the countryside; / Thomas has it in a sling. / He’s strewing rice along the road / while the trees chitter with tiny birds. / In the meadow to their right three men / are playing rough with a white wolf. (...)” (7-12).

Time” the poem “The Seven Veils of Salomé,” in *Herodias, in the Doorway*.⁵⁰ This meadow is of utmost importance to the ancient myth of Persephone and Demeter and also in *Mother Love* as it appears in “Statistic: The Witness,” “Afield,” and “Demeter, Waiting.”

Also, there are many languages present in her writings because of Dove’s knowledge of various languages. Some of the languages are Latin expressions such as “memento mei” in *Grace Notes* (1989), “sine qua non” in *American Smooth* (2004), or “sic itur ad astra” also in *American Smooth*. The Spanish word “perejil” appears in *Museum* (1983), and in this same book of poetry, we find “mi madle, mi amol en muelte” to emphasize the speaker’s inability to pronounce “r.” Then, in *American Smooth* we read “yo vengo aquí / para cantar / la rumba / de mi adoración.” French is much more present in her writings. For instance, in *Thomas and Beulah* (1986), we find French words such as “cavaliere” and “Orangerie” or the word “dénouement” in *Grace Notes* (1989) or “tristesse” in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* (1999). The German words are prevalent, like “Frau” and “Barmherzigkeit” in *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), “Fräuleins” in *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), “Oma” in *Grace Notes*, “Herr Professor,” “natürlich,” “Götterdämmerung” or “Kaffee mit Schlag” in *On the Bus with Rosa Parks*. In *Mother Love*, the languages that we find are French and German on different occasions giving an intercultural touch to the poems. Also, Dove’s poems are characteristic of the first-person speech italicization that constantly appears in her writings in general, most of the time when differentiating the different participants in dialogue or when writing in foreign languages.

Dove’s writings are characteristic of addressing family relationships, among which we encounter motherhood, sexuality and love, and the reality of being an African-American in different contexts. Embedded in her writings, we uncover the religious belief she grew up with and, therefore, the constant allusions to the Bible. In her poems, Dove often uses the first person, and “this speaking self is at times autobiographical and at other times expands into characters,

⁵⁰ “More than anything I ache to see her / so girlish. She steps languidly / into their midst as if onto a pooled expanse / of grass ... or as if she were herself / the meadow, unruffled green / ringed with lilies / instead of these red-rimmed eyes, / this wasteland soaked in smoke and pleasure. / Ignorant, she moves as if inventing / time—and the musicians scurry / to deliver a carpet of flutes / under her flawless heel” (1-12).

often grounded in mythology and history” (Murray 75). From Morris’ perspective, *Mother Love* “illustrates a powerful mother who uses her motherhood to resist tyranny” (S. Morris 152).

As for the structure of *Mother Love*, we can discern between the mythological source of information and the construction related to a sonnet. As such, in *Mother Love*, Steffen asserts: “Dove uses and recharges the sovereignty of two significant structures: the theme of myth and the form of the sonnet. Both are particularly suitable carriers for variety within repetition, and interplay of freedom and form” (138).

In the forward of her book of sonnets *Mother Love*, called “An Intact Word,” Dove defines sonnet as “little song,” for her, “the sonnet is a heile Welt, an intact world where everything is in sync, from the stars down to the tiniest mite on a blade of grass.” Over the years, sonnets have been a subject of interest not only for poets but also readers and publishers (Burt 1). Rita Dove is regarded as a writer who gives voice to the contemporary sonnet. Moreover, she integrates “a European-derived form with African American speech,” which marks “the contemporary African American sonnet” (Burt 6).

4.2. Reception studies in *Mother Love*

In a century where new ideas would have seemed hard to be found, the classical sources still find their way into the contemporary ones, each time presenting different views and reflecting another side of the same reality. Sometimes with just a little knowledge of the original classical text, authors bring back new versions of, for instance, mythology and history, creating or attempting to create a new tradition. Classical-related poems seem to give another perspective to both the source and its successor. Of the categories that Lorna Hardwick (2003) identifies,⁵¹ we perceive that Rita Dove uses mainly an appropriation of the classical myth of Demeter and Persephone in her book of poems *Mother Love*. Dove seems to be influenced by Homer, Ovid and Graves, whose version of the myth results from these classical sources. In *Mother Love*, Dove reclaims mythology while being motivated by her perception of it and her circumstances as the woman,

⁵¹ These categories are acculturation, adaptation, analogue, appropriation, authentic, correspondences, dialogue, equivalent, foreignization, hybrid, intervention, migration, refiguration, translation, transplant, and version.

the daughter, the mother, and the African-American writer that she is. *Mother Love* merges classical mythology and contemporary culture combining “narrative and symbolic unity” (Righelato 1-2). In her appropriation, Dove echoes women’s experiences in different contexts and circumstances, denouncing, this way, the injustice of such. Demeter and Persephone find themselves as mythological figures acting in a contemporary context filled with diverse situations. In fact, “*Mother Love* investigates the impulse and consequences of lament’s necessary identification with the dead and the affects of lament on the living body by tracking the pulse of grief in Dove’s re-casting of the Persephone/Demeter myth” (Geathers 197).

Proof of this classical material integrated into *Mother Love* is seen from the beginning to the end of this book of poetry. The “juicy spot in the written history” (12) found in “Heroes” reminds the reader of Hades’ promised honours to Persephone while abducted (*HDem.* 365-6).⁵² In “Party Dress for a First Born,” an allusion to the *Homeric Hymn* is implied when we read the lines “When I ran to my mother, waiting radiant/as a cornstalk at the edge of the field” (6-7) evoking to the moment Persephone got reunited with her mother (*HDem.* 384-6). One sonnet later, the Homeric narcissus (*HDem.* 7) is claimed in “Persephone Falling,” faithfully recalling the events that we read about in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* of the moment Persephone was taken away by Hades (*HDem.* 15-23). Then, “The Narcissus Flower” makes the same Homeric allusion, but this time it is Persephone who retells her own experience. Also, the word “mystery” (10) appears, perhaps making a slight allusion to the Mysteries. The “flowering meadow” (16) of “Statistic: The Witness” seems to refer to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (6), but this witness could not only be the Homeric Hekate but rather the Ovidian Cyane in the *Metamorphoses* who struggles to help Proserpina (*Met.* 5.413-424).

Even if in the *Fasti* Ceres takes care of Triptolemus, “Mother Love” certainly alludes much more to the *Homeric Hymn* and Graves’ version when Demeter took care of Demophoon. Again, following the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in Dove’s poem, the “bouquet of daughters” (14) refers to Metaneira’s daughters introduced in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (108-9). The “place fit for mourning” (3) in “Breakfast of Champions” might be the temple Demeter asked for when her anger was triggered by Metaneira (*HDem.* 270) and where she sat to mourn for her

⁵² As I elaborate later, I part from the understanding that Hades is the one plucking the poppy.

daughter (*HDem.* 302-4). “Persephone in Hell” is an extense sonnet that presents many allusions, one of them being the way Hades smiled with his brows (*HDem.* 367-8) when addressing the man’s almost smile (183-184). In the same way, that the Homeric source shows Hades’ talented speech (*HDem.* 359-69), in “Hades’ Pitch,” the man is good with words (6-7). Mixing an allusion to the narcissus and perhaps even to Hades’s golden chariot, “Wiring Home” introduces “golden narcissi” (14). Persephone’s Homeric reunification with Demeter is portrayed in the kiss we learn of in “The Bistro Styx” (13). In “Blue Days,” “Demeter, here’s another one for your basket/of mysteries” (13-4) alludes explicitly to Demeter’s Mysteries. “Demeter Mourning” could be suggesting different versions of the myth, but it is my opinion that the “laugh” (11) could be referring to the moment Iambe made Demeter laugh amid her pain (*HDem.* 202-4). Again a meadow (8) is mentioned in “Afield” and “Demeter, Waiting.” A subtle allusion to the *Homeric Hymn* is found in the olive branches (4) of “Lamentations,” reminding of the Homeric olives in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (23). The temple mentioned in “History” (11) is another subtle allusion to the Homeric version of the myth. As nothing marked the last whereabouts of Persephone in “Missing” (2-3), which implies that the allusion in this sonnet is the Homeric as such was the case in the *Homeric Hymn* but not in Ovid versions. The title “Demeter’s Prayer to Hades” refers directly to the *Homeric Hymn*, but the words Demeter addresses in this sonnet are not present in the ancient sources. In “Her Island,” “torched heaven” (13) could be referring to the torches Demeter held while looking for her daughter in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (48). A very appalling point is that of Therese Steffen, who declares:

Dove introduces and summarizes *ML* on non-personal absolute grounds. Her prologue “Heroes” could be the conclusion, her final poem (*ML* 77), as well the opening piece, with one distinction: while the first poem focuses on heroes and plot, the last one, which follows, presents site and poetic enspacement (132).

At the same time that some sonnets allude to the Homeric source, they also feature Ovidian characteristics. Such is the case, again, of “Heroes,” where the flower that is being plucked is a poppy as Ceres does in *Fasti* (4.531-548), but before that, it is Persephone’s companions who pluck different flowers among them poppies (*Fast.* 4.431-444). In a contemporary setting, “The Search” could be alluding to an Ovidian source since in this sonnet, Demeter is looking for her daughter, and the river (11) mentioned could be referring to Cyane in both *Metamorphoses* and

Fasti. When Demeter says her hair comes out “in clusters” (8-9) in “Protection,” it refers to the time Ceres tore her hair in the *Metamorphoses* (5.473). In “Persephone Abducted,” Persephone cries out for her mother, which is the case of *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 5.397, *Fast.* 4.448). “Grief: The Council” seems to resonate with the moment Demeter was grieving for her daughter in the *Homeric Hymn*, but in this sonnet, Demeter is once more called “greedy” (17) as it happened in the *Metamorphoses* (5.452). Furthermore, in “Persephone in Hell,” the seven parts and the “seven words of French” (12) remind the reader of the seven pomegranate seeds Proserpina ate (*Met.* 5.534-538), and in Graves’ version of the myth. “Hades’ Pitch” retells the desire that Pluto displays in *Metamorphoses* (5.395-396). “*Wiederkehr*” reminds the reader of the moment Proserpina reached for the pomegranate in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 5.534-538), the *Fasti* (*Fast.* 4. 607-8), and Graves’ version with the last lines “when the choice appeared, / I reached for it” (13-14). Again, the number seven (1) in “Political” could directly allude to Graves and the Ovidian versions. The fact that “This man did something ill advised, for good reason” (9) reminds the reader of the moment Jupiter Persephone’s as one resulting from love (*Met.* 5.509-529).

Other poems allude to the myth but do not display a particular characteristic of the different variants. For instance, in “Primer,” a girl recalls how she is chased home by other girls and saved by her mother. In these sonnets, the classical source is so embedded into the contemporary one that discerning the original source is difficult. Another example is “Golden Oldie,” where the poem mentions “a young girl dying to feel alive” (6), who could easily be Persephone. Also, in “Nature’s Itinerary,” we find a sexual allusion matched by the intrinsic sexual allusion in the Homeric text (*HDem.* 412-3), but that could only be one of many different possibilities. Even if the corset in “Sonnet in Primary Colors” could be related to *Metamorphoses* (5.470), there is no precise allusion to any of the ancient sources here. Although in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, we hear about the hope Persephone still has (35), apart from the hope that withers (1), there is no apparent explicit allusion to a specific ancient source in “Exit.” In “Lost Brilliance,” Persephone is in the underground (14), and even if a lake is mentioned (12), there is no allusion to a specific reference since only general allusions to the myth of Demeter and Persephone are made. “Teotihuacán” does not show any particular allusion to the mythic tale, nor do “Used” and “Rusks,” although this latter mentions “spring” (2).

As perceived above, the main elements taken from Ovid are the poppies, the seven seeds, and the setting. These elements result from a mixture of the Ovidian *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, coinciding with Graves, who blends these allusions in his *Greek Myths* (1960). Indeed, Dove is influenced by Ovid, but it is very reasonable to state that this influence comes through Graves, as the evidence suggests. Also, whether she alludes to Ovid, Graves, or both sources, we cannot deny that many elements in her narrative come from the Homeric source. Therefore, it is safe to state that Dove's reception of the ancient myth of Demeter and Persephone is quite enriched. Indeed, Reception Studies "cover performance, interpretation, appropriation, and the reappropriation and reuse of Greek tragedy at all times" (Kahane 844), and as Hartsock states, Dove "presents multiple versions of Demeter and Persephone across time and culture, each one self-defined by what she has seen" (33). Moreover, Christine A. Murray points out:

Dove's poems also liberally employ narrative, so are appealing not only for their many uses of lyric conventions, but also because the framework often involves a story or a story-telling perspective that tends to ground and set the stage for the various reading audience that will approach the poems. (17)

Furthermore, Dove's reception of the myth is presented through the lenses of African American traits. As Diana Victoria Cruz argues:

Dove does not tap into Greek myth or the sonnet form to transcend race. Rather, she encourages considerations of race by increasing the proximity of blackness and whiteness in the characters and situations of her poems. One of the effects of Dove's employment of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, for instance, is a poignant analogy between the pain of their separation and that of all mothers and daughters in the world, black mothers and daughters in particular. (149)

The structure of *Mother Love* is accurately addressed by Lofgren:

The volume's structure also struggles against an imposed order. We can extract a general coherence from its seven books. The first, containing a single poem, introduces us to the theme of

fragmentation, loss, and regeneration. Book II relates the central event, the abduction of Persephone; Book III traces her journey into the underworld, and Book IV (the volume's middle) describes Persephone's life with Hades. Book V initiates a movement upward, Persephone's emergence into motherhood and Demeter's (partial) reconciliation with her daughter and herself. In Book VI the process of blending is nearly complete, as Persephone becomes a Demeter and Demeter is conciliated with Hades. Book VII, which seems more transparently autobiographical, offers a reenactment of the journey just described, with a final uncovering of the volume's central truth. Although the seven sections describe a movement downward and then upward, retracing Persephone's own cyclical movement between earth and the underworld, the seven sections (one half of fourteen) also suggest that the journey is only half over, that we must appropriate the lessons garnered to our own life journeys. After all, the final section leaves us at its own nadir, without offering a way to retrace the labyrinthine journey. We must find our own way back to the surface, like Demeter and Persephone before us. (141)

Indeed, the structure that Dove uses in *Mother Love* is carefully selected. Every poem and each section address meaningful topics directly connected to the myth of Demeter and Persephone, for instance, loss, abduction, or regeneration. As such, this myth becomes perfect to also address autobiographical and contemporary matters.

4.2.1. Persecution

Persecution alludes to a form of harassment. In mythological tales, persecution is a frequent topic, as certain myths present “the persecution of a human by a god because of real or imagined injuries to that god” (Claassen 34). Some examples of persecution are found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where persecution is a recurrent theme.⁵³ Yet the tale of Proserpina only depicts an explicit allusion to persecution when addressing the way Arethusa is chased by Alpheus. Even if Pluto observes Proserpina as if she were his prey, there is no persecution because, by the time Pluto catches Proserpina, it is too late for her to run. By coincidence or not, Rita Dove presents this theme in some of her poems in *Mother Love*. One such poem is “Heroes,” where the speaker is chased by a lady. Each stanza in this poem adds to the evolution of the story using free verse and diction that addresses nature and persecution. The colons used

⁵³ See Tinkler; Matz.

in this poem serve to explain and intensify what follows “A flower in a weedy field: / make it a poppy” (1-2) shows the unimportance of the poppy as it could be any other flower, or the irony behind the relevance of it being a poppy.⁵⁴ In this case, the poppy carries with it a weight of different associations as it could be related to Koré, the “flower-faced maiden” (*HDem.* 8), or an interesting allusion to the owner of that poppy, which could be Demeter, who in Ovid’s *Fasti* was the one that picked poppies (*Fast.* 4.431-444). As Francisco Javier Carod-Artal explains:

In Classical Greece, the opium poppy was used for sacred and profane ends, and it had both medicinal and nutritional properties. Poppies were associated with the gods in Classical Greek mythology. The ancient Greeks associated fertility and abundance with the poppy, which in turn was associated with the goddess Demeter (...) Persephone (Kore) and Narcissus are also associated with the poppy. Persephone is often shown rising from the underworld with a motif of poppy heads and lily leaves. (33)

This encapsulates the true meaning of the poppy in “Heroes,” reinforcing my belief that this poppy is most likely Persephone. When addressing the poppy, there is a full stop that follows “You pick it” (2), intensifying the action of picking it. The fact that the narrator is addressing a “you” could be because they are talking to themselves. The speaker plucks a flower that could well be Persephone, and that poppy does not belong to them, as it belongs to someone else, in this case, I presume Demeter. The speaker feels sorry for the poppy as it begins to wilt, and ironically they ask for water from the owner of the poppy. The words “screaming” (7), “last” (7), and “miserable” (8) emphasise the importance of the poppy to the woman. Also, the lady’s screams mimic the ancient source when Demeter tore her veil after her daughter’s abduction. Then, the one that plucks the poppy, who I believe to be the narrator, and at the same time Hades, tries to apologise, but it is too late.⁵⁵ The “trinkets” and the “juicy spot in the written history” (12) could be the honours Zeus offered Demeter to restore vegetation after her daughter’s

⁵⁴ Morris argues that “make it a poppy” could allude to either the importance of the flower being a poppy or, on the contrary, any other type of flora, also, she adds that this flower in a Greek mythological context is connected to sleep and death (S. Morris 161). Also, see Steffen 132-133.

⁵⁵ Keyes makes an interesting point: “In “Heroes,” Dove speaks to Demeter, Persephone, herself, in overlapping discourse. She re-plays (and reminds Demeter and herself as mother of) the loss of innocence that is Persephone’s experience in the Demeter/Persephone myth, and the separation loss of the daughter, which all mothers experience as daughters themselves. To herself as poet, on the brink of a long sonnet sequence, and to Persephone on the brink of plucking the flower that will cause the ground to open under her, she says: this is how it happens” (150-151).

abduction in the original myth.⁵⁶ Assuming that the poppy is Persephone, after the poppy is plucked, there are no flowers left in the garden. Hence, an allusion to the moment Demeter stops vegetation from growing once her daughter is abducted. When offered “a juicy spot in the written history” (12), the narrator adds: “she wouldn’t live to read, anyway” (13), indicating that the woman is an old lady, which once more suggests that the woman is Demeter who disguised herself as an old lady in the ancient source. Until now, we perceive a “you” who does not mean to harm anyone and thinks plucking the flower will prevent it from dying. The moment Koré becomes Persephone, she owns the world of the dead, and therefore nothing can harm her as she is not only a goddess but also Hades’ wife, the Queen of the underworld. Dove adopts an empathic tone in this first poem, with the “fugitive” (20), who has to take along and not leave any clues. From my perspective, this refers, once more, to the moment Demeter was unsuccessfully looking for Persephone in the original myth but did not find any clue of her daughter’s whereabouts. Interestingly, this makes the story of Persephone’s life as the goddess of the underworld and as the one whose presence brings vegetation whenever she returns to her mother, starting with her abduction. The poem ends with a rhetorical question and an answer to that question:

(...) O why

did you pick that idiot flower?

Because it was the last one

and you knew

it was going to die. (24-28)

These last lines of the poem show the speaker’s justification to avoid remorse and regret for having plucked the flower. The choice of diction in this poem is well calculated as it escalates little by little representing persecution while filling this poem with allusions. Dove manages to tell the original tale from the fugitive’s perspective ending in pathetic persecution just because of trying to be the poppy’s hero. Morris remarks that:

⁵⁶ See Cook and Tatum 347-348.

“Heroes” also resonates with a poignant sub-theme of *Mother Love*: even seemingly innocent actions can have a spiral of dangerous consequences. Therefore, even the plucking of a uniquely beautiful flower can result in an expulsion from Paradise, like a prelapsarian Adam, or death, as it does for Persephone. “Heroes” also signals (wo)man’s insistence on “civilizing” nature, as seen in the protagonist’s attempt to place the stolen poppy in a jar. (S. Morris 161-162)

Although Morris makes a point, I believe that there is a symbolic meaning behind the fact that the speaker (Hades) asks the lady (Demeter) for a jar of water for the poppy (Persephone) since Demeter is the goddess of the harvest, and vegetation and the one that gives life to the seed. Thus, it is understandable that the speaker asks her to keep the poppy alive. As Morris puts it, even if “motherhood is seemingly absent from this piece, the poem’s emphasis on the intimate connections between innocence and death becomes a framing narrative for the rest of the volume” (S. Morris 162).

Another poem that introduces a different kind of persecution is “Primer,” where motherhood is explicit and plays this time a preeminent role. The narrator, who I consider to be Persephone, is running from some bullies. The strength of the diction of this poem is remarkable as the speaker states: “I was chased” (1) by “three skinny sisters” (2) who were trodding the speaker’s hill. These “three skinny sisters” could be a subtle reference to the Moirae—the three sisters Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos— also known as the three fates for directing the fate of mortals and immortals. This reinforces the understanding of Dove’s acquaintance with Greek mythology. Again, similarly to “Heroes,” the diction shows an escalation in the actions. Even if those girls are skinny, the narrator does not stand a chance and chooses to run away. The speaker’s mother saving her from her bullies does not make the speaker happy because it is a constant reminder of her vulnerability and inability to rely on her strength to cast aside those bullies. The speaker resents her mother even if she protects her due to the dependence that ties them together. The mother would do anything for her child, which is recurrent in *Mother Love*, where the mother’s love portrays different scenarios. However, the child feels resentful and states: “I took the long way home, swore / I’d show them all: I would grow up” (13-14). Even if Hades is absent, the theme of the fear that goes hand in hand with a chase is very present. I deem it very symbolic how “Primer” follows “Heroes,” showing that the characters will keep being the same, but the situations will slightly change. As Keyes aptly observes:

Part of the story unraveling out of “Heroes” is Persephone’s growing up, her coming of age sexually. In *Mother Love*, Persephone achieves the transition from stringbean, brainiac girlhood under protectorate of her “five-foot zero mother,” to separation from that mother to womanhood through her sexual liaison with Hades. (155)

Dove gives us a variety of ways to understand the myth of Demeter and Persephone. The way the speaker in “Primer,” differing from the original tale, wants to grow up foreshadows how Koré will become Persephone, going from maidenhood to adulthood, and not any womanhood, but the one that will allow her to rule the world of the dead as Hades’ wife.⁵⁷ Only in that scenario will Persephone be able to rely on her strength.

In “Heroes,” there was a yellow flower and a speaker who was chased, then in “Primer” a different speaker is once more chased, and after that, in “Wiring Home” the speaker advises to “keep moving” (3, 5) and we learn about some “golden narcissi” (14) at the end of the sonnet. Here, as Keyes remarks, “Persephone sends a missive to Demeter, describing her experiences in Paris—how she negotiates the streets of Paris” (165).⁵⁸ Although we do not perceive a desperate attempt to escape something in this free-verse sonnet, there is a hurry and the reality that Persephone returns from being with Hades, something she had longed for in “Primer” when faced with her helplessness. However, now the situation has changed as she understands the implications of womanhood. Thus, in haste, she goes back to her mother:

Lest the wolves loose their whistles
and shopkeepers inquire,

keep moving; though your knees flush
red as two chapped apples,

keep moving, head up,
past the beggar’s cold cup,

⁵⁷ See S. Morris 162.

⁵⁸ Also see Cook and Tatum 361.

past fires banked under chestnuts
and the trumpeting kiosk's

tales of odyssey and heartbreak
until, turning a corner, you stand

staring: ambushed
by a window of canaries

bright as a thousand
golden narcissi. (1-14)

I consider that these verses, combining repetition (“keep moving”) and simile (“...though your knees flush / red as two chapped apples”) demonstrate how Persephone is addressing herself and showing the escalation of her rush to get to her mother. However, it could also be the narrator (perhaps the author herself), the one addressing Persephone and telling her to hurry to her mother. Either way, the last six lines encapsulate the odyssey and the hardships of those who Persephone crosses in her path, but mainly her difficulties as she comes from being with Hades. Also, “turning a corner” resonates with the poetic turn, the line break, and the volta, but the phrase is in the middle of the poetic line, not the end, which leads to “stand / staring,” which is at the line break of poetic movement. We have movement and stasis: tension. Persephone remembers the narcissus and the flowers that witnessed her abduction in the ancient myth, which shows that she was by Hades' side. Indeed, mimicking persecution that resonates with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dove presents in “Heroes” a chase set in motion by a poppy. In this poem, every little action has a consequence. Then, “Primer” shows a much more intense chase, and later “Wiring Home” enhances once more the feeling of haste that resonates with the other poems.

4.2.2. Motherhood

Motherhood, whether “the healthy developmental outcome for women” (Alizade 23) or something at times desired or accepted, others feared or denied, “cherished as a privilege or

stigmatized as a biblical curse, motherhood has a capital influence on women's lives" (Benedetti 3), it touches each mother with a unique experience. There is always a sense of duty attached to every motherhood experience. The similarities of the obligations mothers share stem from expectation:

Mothers are expected to provide physical care, nurturance, and love, and to socialize and educate children. While maternal expectations vary according to nation and class, mothers are assessed by their society's standards, and their children are the measure of their success or failure. A mother's ability to meet expectation is often contingent upon factors beyond her control—physical or mental illness, competing obligations, poverty, death, her own family history—nevertheless, mothers remain subject to societal definition, expectation, and assessment. (Florescu 9)

Hence, motherhood becomes a role shaped around responsibilities embraced differently by each mother. Motherhood was presented as a "fairy tale" by regarding a good mother as someone devoted, selfless, and self-sacrificing (Ross 83), but "we now see a turning of the tides as the mental health literature has begun to conceptualize pregnancy, childbirth, and new motherhood as risk factors with the potential to negatively affect women's mental health" (Ross 83). Perhaps these negative mental health issues attached to motherhood could be related to the fact that some assert that "motherhood and mothering are not *natural* for women but that they are historically, culturally and socially constructed" (Silva 1). Motherhood is indeed a prominent theme in *Mother Love* because, as the title suggests, this book explores motherhood from diverse angles. Thus, motherhood holds different essences. On the one hand, in "Primer," we are introduced to a child that rejects her mother's protection because of the implication of being protected by someone else. On the other hand, in this same poem, the mother's sense of safety is such that she does not care about who she has to face to defend her child. However, even if the child does not want to accept her mother's shielding, she knows that it is because of her mother that she survived, as she states:

(...) I survived
their shoves across the schoolyard
because of my five-foot-zero mother drove up
in her Caddie to shake them down to size. (8-11)

In one syntactic structure and only one stanza, Dove induces the reader to picture the extent of worry the speaker's mother undergoes as she takes matters into her own hands and defends her child. Dove gives a myth a contemporary tone to the extent that it is no longer recognizable. Dove is here substituting the ancient chariot that refers to Persephone's abduction with the Caddie that saves her, at least in this poem, from a fatal fate. The Caddie connects the ancient source and the African American caddies. Here, we can perceive the power of Demeter as a protective mother, and we can also understand the pride of the child who is reminded of how she is incapable of protecting herself because of her mother's help. It is her motherly instinct, the one that drives the speaker's mother to save her child without thinking about it twice, even if she has to endure her daughter's resentment because of it, as the child states: "Nothing could get me into that car. / I took the long way home, swore / I'd show them all: I would grow up" (12-14). The child wants to show the bullies how she will become strong and her mother that she is no longer a child, implying that she does not need to be saved. This side of motherhood is also present in "Persephone, Falling" when the mother gives the child instructions because of her fear of losing her child to the abductor:

(Remember: go straight to school.
This is important, stop fooling around!
Don't answer to strangers. Stick
with your playmates. Keep your eyes down.)
This is how easily the pit
opens. This is how one foot sinks into the ground. (9-14)

This speech is the vivid image of fear in the eyes of a mother who wishes nothing but her child's safety.⁵⁹ This sestet reflects, with a volta, a shift from contemporary to ancient mythology, when Persephone was taken by Hades the moment she plucked the narcissus. Demeter's motherly concern is presented when she attempts to avoid her daughter's abduction showing the dangers of the "pit" (13), which alludes to the underworld, thus showing the thorough choice of diction. Then, in "Party Dress for a First Born," the mother-daughter relationship is once more deeply

⁵⁹ This motherly fear for the child is a sentiment Dove felt herself identified with through her thought of not being able to protect her baby. See <https://literary-arts.org/archive/rita-dove/> [accessed 13/04/2023].

tackled, but in a very different context. This time the mother is seen as a safe place and yet someone to whom the child's secrets cannot be revealed. In only two stanzas, we grasp different aspects of the way the speaker thinks and her relationship with her mother. I believe that the narrator is Persephone, and that Dove makes a slight allusion to the field where Demeter got reunited with her daughter as the speaker states: "When I ran to my mother, waiting radiant / as a cornstalk at the edge of the field, / nothing else mattered: the world stood still" (6-8). Once more, we have movement and stasis with the appearance of "ran" along with "still," which adds tension to these lines.

As she looks back in time, the child seems eager to meet her mother, and all of a sudden, there is a change in the theme as the following stanza comes back to the present:

Tonight men stride like elegant scissors across the lawn
to the women arrayed there, petals waiting to loosen.
When I step out, disguised in your blushing skin,
they will nudge each other to get a peek
and I will smile, all the while wishing them dead.
Mother's calling. Stand up: it will be our secret. (9-14)

In this poem, as Hartsock puts it, Persephone:

compares the radiance of her mother, the goddess of grain and crop, to one of her own symbols, the cornstalk, and an understood touch punctuates the memory, as we imagine the mother picking her child up. Persephone still embraces her role as daughter, and although she is just becoming aware of men's attention towards her, she does not want it. (133)

There is a remarkable sexual connotation in the assimilation of men and "scissors" (9), which matches Ovid's erotic writings.⁶⁰ This resonates with "Primer" where "wolves loose their whistles" (1) as in sexual advances towards women as predators, and here the language has shifted to "women" as "petals" that "loosen." Similarly, in "Primer" the "knees flush" (3) represent the rejection of sexual advances. Demeter does not want Persephone to approach

⁶⁰ See Morrison 53. Also see Hartsock 134.

sexuality so that she does not become a woman. The secrecy attached to their involvement with men is what indicates that this encounter is something her mother would not accept. This side of motherhood remains contemporary, yet the utmost expression of mother love is seen in “The Search,” where Demeter desperately looks for Persephone everywhere as she is “blown apart by loss” (1). This depicts the great sense of pain that Demeter, as a mother, has to cope with facing her daughter’s loss. The image of the mother here is that of one deeply concerned with her daughter’s safety. This is corroborated in “Persephone Abducted,” where, following Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Persephone unsuccessfully asks for her mother’s help:

She cried out for Mama, who did not
hear. She left with a wild eye thrown back,
she left with curses, rage
that withered her features to a hag’s
No one can tell a mother how to act:
there are no laws when the laws are broken, no names
To call upon. Some say there’s nourishment for pain, (1-7)

These lines enhance Persephone’s desperate attempt to reach her mother’s help through her cries. Dove uses repetition (“she left”) and assimilation (“to a hag’s”) to prove Persephone’s hopeless situation. Dove employs once more colons in her syntactic structures to give further descriptions of the situation. Demeter is full of rage because of her daughter’s abduction, and this wrath results from her motherly instinct. Furthermore, “Grief: The Council” is a reflection of the grief that Demeter undergoes because of her sense of motherhood. She cannot move on after her daughter’s abduction because of the pain that she is feeling, and the narrator advises her to live her life:

I told her: enough is enough.
Get a hold on yourself, take a lover,
help some other unfortunate child.

to abdicate
to let the garden go to seed

Yes it's a tragedy, a low-down shame,
but you still got your own life to live. Meanwhile,
ain't nothing we can do but be discreet
and wait. She brightened up a bit, then.
I thought of those blurred snapshots framed
on milk cartons, a new pair each week. (1-11)

Dove changes her writing style in this poem, using italics to give voice to the ancient source and then returns to the contemporary setting or alternates the voices of a council and Demeter.⁶¹ The pictures on the milk cartons allude to Persephone's abduction as it was there where the images of the children were shown when they went missing at the end of the twentieth century, while also making reference to motherhood as in breast-milk at feeding. The narrator advises Demeter to overcome the grief she feels for her daughter's loss, be it with a lover or another child, which foreshadows what will take place in "Mother Love," where Demeter takes care of Demophon. Also, as House points out, "Demeter abandoned her duties, so the mother lets herself go, no longer attending to the physical "requirements" of her community" (202). Demeter's behaviour in "Grief: The Council" ends up being perceived as "pathetic" (15). Thus, she is compared to "a dog with a chicken bone too greedy to care / if it stick in his gullet and choke him sure" (17-18) because her sorrow represents a danger to everyone. Moreover, "Demeter's protest and that of her community place *Mother Love* in the trajectory of black women's writing that foregrounds protest as an integral part of motherhood" (S. Morris 163). "Mother Love" then expresses the importance of mothering by mixing irony and reality to transmit the complexity of being a mother:

Who can forget the attitude of mothering?
Toss me a baby and without bothering
to blink I'll catch her, sling him on a hip.
Any woman knows the remedy for grief
in being needed: duty bugles and we'll
climb out of exhaustion every time,

⁶¹ See Keyes 159; Steffen 133; Cook and Tatum 353-354; Hartsock 75.

bare the nipple or tuck in the sheet,
 heat milk and hum at bedside until
they can dress themselves and rise, primed
 for Love or Glory –those one-way mirrors
girls peer into as their fledgling heroes slip
 through, storming the smoky battlefield. (1-12)

This twelve-line stanza, which represents one of the stanzas of a double sonnet, encapsulates the hardships of the role attributed to a mother as the narrator ironically alludes to the easiness of the role of a mother who, without struggling, handles a baby's needs and not by chance making the word mothering and bothering rhyme.⁶² When addressing "the attitude of mothering" (1), Morris aptly underscores that this "signals mothering as an act, a way of creating behavior that is not natural but instead rooted in social practices" (S. Morris 164). Then, the following lines explain the terms "mothering" (1) and "bothering" (2), showing us the struggles mothers have to go through when "duty bugles" (5). We also see how the word "Love" (10) refers to a girl's fate, referring to marriage, and "Glory" (10) to a boy's fate, meaning to be glorious in war. Once more, this poem also consolidates the contemporary with the ancient trying to bring the ancient myth closer to the present reality. Concerning these lines, Steffen remarks:

Then the primary narcissistic [*sic*] identification of a child with his or her mother is replaced by a teenager's narcissistic [*sic*] identification with a "fledgling hero." The image of the mirror and its function as idealizing exaltation brings the poem back to Persephone's abduction and mirrors a mortal mother's sense of duty against Demeter's mythic or, rather grotesque, dimension of coping. (134)

The first stanza of "Mother Love" represents a general idea of the conception of mothering, while the second one goes back to the ancient source and retells how Demeter took care of Demophon when she was grieving for her daughter:

So when this kind woman approached at the urging
 of her bouquet of daughters,
(one for each of the world's corners,

⁶² See Steffen 134; S. Morris 164.

one for each of the wind to scatter!)
and offered up her only male child for nursing
(a smattering of flesh, noisy and ordinary),
I put aside the lavish trousseau of the mourner
for the daintier comfort of pity:
I decided to save him. Each night
I laid him on the smoldering embers,
sealing his juices in slowly so he might
be cured to perfection. Oh, I know it
looked damning: at the hearth a muttering crone
bent over a baby sizzling on a spit
as neat as a Virginia ham. Poor human—
to scream like that, to make me remember. (13-28)

In this second stanza, there is a comma in line 14, after bouquet of daughters, referring to Metaneira's daughters and their resemblance to flowers. This alludes to how Persephone was picking flowers when she was abducted. Like Metaneira's daughters, Persephone was also compared to flowers. Then, later, there is an emphasis on the word scatter by using an exclamation mark. This word is quite emblematic as it foresees the possible fate of these daughters, perhaps remembering her daughter Persephone who is in one of the world's corners. Demeter, as a narrator, might be implying that these flowerlike girls will suffer the same fate as her daughter did. When alluding to Metaneira's child, Demeter talks about him as if he were "a smattering of flesh, noisy and ordinary" (18). Here she is using grotesque language to address a human child that for her, as a goddess, is just a piece of flesh. As such, Wheeler clarifies:

Demeter's mothering is too powerful for the child's health. The contradictions of poetic influence are similar: too utter an acceptance of mother-love is destructive; unless Persephone really does leave home, her relationship with the mother will have no public meaning, just as a younger poet can only honor her influences by escaping them. (L. Wheeler 112)

Demeter acknowledges the pain of losing her daughter and shows how she is trying to replace Persephone with a child, "who cannot be taken away and who will enjoy the privileges of masculinity" (Doherty 25). When she acknowledges her decision of trying to save this child, she

establishes that she has the power to save him from mortality, curing him to perfection. In line 27, our attention is drawn to the words Virginia ham, a very grotesque simile that compares the ham to the child. Then, in the last line, there is a comma between “to scream like that,” and “to make me remember.” This last line reminds us of what led the goddess to go to Eleusis and nurse a child, she had just lost her daughter, and the scream she introduces refers to Persephone’s helpless cry. I posit that these screams could be alluding to the traditional source when Persephone was crying for help. As such, Dove herself uses the verb scream in “Statistic: The Witness.” However, Dove could also be referring to her own *Mother Love*: in “Heroes,” the opening poem of this book of poetry, an old lady screams when the last flower of her garden is plucked. I posit that this old lady is Demeter, and the flower is Persephone. Thus, this latter understanding reinforces how all the poems in *Mother Love* interact, and the scream could be either Persephone’s, Demeter’s, or both. Cook and Tatum consider that:

the poem recovers a glimmer of maternal sentiment—perhaps—in those final two lines. But the image of Demophoön sizzling away like a Virginia ham makes it hard to return to this part of the Hymn with a straight face. What was once a mysterious moment in the Hymn to Demeter now reads like a recipe from yet another authorial cookbook. *Mastering the Art of Olympian Cooking?* (357)

Dove unites a human and a goddess because of their shared motherhood allowing the reader to regard motherhood as universal. Something that reminds the reader of this universality is the despair and grief a mother has to endure on multiple occasions because of her child.⁶³ Such feelings are present in the diction of “Breakfast of Champions,” where we discern the struggles of a desperate mother who wants “to find a place fit for mourning” (3). This poem describes a sensitive scene represented by a high control of syntax and diction, while making it hard to determine what is mythical and what is contemporary, and emphasising the universality of motherhood. Also, “Persephone in Hell” exhibits the concern of mothers:

Mother worried. Mother with her frilly ideals
gave me money to call home every day,

⁶³ Also, Wheeler makes a point worth mentioning: “The nurturing, self-sacrificing mother of the first stanza yields to the second stanza’s bad mother or witch, who cures a baby on a spit, killing him to preserve him” (L. Wheeler 111).

but she couldn't know what I was feeling;
I was doing what she didn't need to know.
I was doing everything and feeling nothing. (48-52)

Once more, secrecy governs the mother-daughter relationship, and the motherly figure is represented as someone who cares deeply about the child and therefore worries about, in this case, the dangers a girl can encounter. A mother's concern is constantly emphasised in Dove's *Mother Love* as she is worried about her child's life choices, which can further be seen in "The Bistro Styx":

"How's business?" I asked, and hazarded
a motherly smile to keep from crying out:
Are you content to conduct your life
as a cliché and, what's worse,

an anachronism, the brooding artist's demimonde?
Near the rue Princesse they had opened
a gallery cum souvenir shop which featured
fuzzy off-color Monets next to his acrylics, no doubt, (15-22)

Using colloquial diction, the narrator addresses her daughter, whose behaviour seems rather unpleasant to her eyes. Thus, as Morris points out, "The formerly pitiful Demeter, a lost mother so consumed by her grief that she could not eat or sleep, is gone. In her place is a cynical, urbane woman who is disheartened to see her daughter consumed by a codependent relationship" (S. Morris 168). Demeter displays the image, from Persephone's perspective, of an overprotective mother. Demeter's concern in this poem is due to the fear of Persephone wanting to stay with Hades, as she states:

"But are you happy?" Fearing, I whispered it
quickly. "What? You know, Mother"—

she bit into the starry rose of a fig—
"one really should try the fruit here."

I've lost her, I thought, and called for the bill. (67-71)

The only thing that Dove's Demeter is concerned about is her daughter's happiness, just like any mother does. The mother's thoughts are emphasised as they are written in italics, revealing her understanding of how she no longer holds any control over her daughter as she is no longer a child. As Morrison explains:

After spending the first half of the book physically distant from one another, Demeter and Persephone are at last reunited only to spend their meeting speaking past one another. Persephone either does not hear or does not care to answer Demeter's question. Instead, she remains fixated on the fruit. Within the context of the myth, it is poignant that the line "one really should try the fruit here" marks the moment that Demeter realizes she has lost her daughter. (72)

As I see it, there are two ways of interpreting this poem. On the one hand, the fear in Demeter's question and the avoidance in Persephone's way of handling that query might indicate Persephone's regret of becoming Hades' wife. Persephone knows she should have followed her motherly advice, but it is too late. Hence, she is either too proud to express her disappointment or incapable of concerning her mother. On the other hand, when mentioning the fruit, Persephone's actions could be interpreted as a product of an addiction that does not allow Persephone to concentrate on her conversations with her mother and only on the fruit and Hades.⁶⁴ The myth of Demeter and Persephone successfully tackles various motherly concerns. Although we have already perceived many instances where Demeter's interests are highlighted, the pivotal moment is Persephone's abduction as it is when Demeter started mourning her daughter's loss, as seen in "Demeter Mourning":

Nothing can console me. You may bring silk
to make skin sigh, dispense yellow roses
in the manner of ripened dignitaries.
You can tell me repeatedly
I am unbearable (and I know this):
still, nothing turns the gold to corn,

⁶⁴ See Morrison 71-72.

nothing is sweet to the tooth crushing in.

I'll not ask for the impossible;
one learns to walk by walking.
In time I'll forget this empty brimming,
I may laugh again at
a bird, perhaps, chucking the nest—
but it will not be happiness,
for I have known that. (1-14)

Through a multiplicity of adjectives and the repetitive reinforcement of the pronoun “I,” Dove achieves to emphasise Demeter’s feelings. This sonnet represents a contemporary monologue that encapsulates Demeter’s motherly pain and how she refused to join the other Olympian deities after Zeus sent them one by one to summon her (*HDem.* 313-30).⁶⁵ Here we notice how Demeter presents a high level of self-consciousness as she understands her distress is seen by those attempting to console her. She comprehends the impossibility of resuming her life as if nothing. This narrative is the utmost expression of motherhood. Here, Demeter is presented as a mother unable to move on after her child is taken from her. Differently yet in the same line of motherhood, in “Exit,” the narrator is talking to a girl whose mother told her “what it took to be a woman in this life” (14). In Persephone’s case, it is through her union with the world of the dead that she becomes a woman, which is what concerns Demeter. This reflects the struggles a concerned mother has to go through, as also seen in “Lamentations”:

Listen: empty yet full, silken
air and brute tongue,
they are saying:
*To refuse to be born is one thing
but once you are here,
you'd do well to stop crying
and suck the good milk in.* (8-14)

⁶⁵ See Cook and Tatum 367.

The title of this sonnet holds a deep biblical association. “Lamentations” resonates with the people of Jerusalem who were captured. I argue that the city of Jerusalem plays the role of a mother, and Babylon is the one that takes her citizens. Dove successfully finds a parallelism between the biblical story and the mythical tale. Jerusalem and Demeter share a motherly role, and the people of Jerusalem and Persephone are the children. The narrative lines of “Lamentations” carry a slightly bitter tone that reflects the adversity of being born since babies start life with a cry of lament, almost seeming as if they reluctantly start life. Here there is a connection with “Demeter Mourning,” where she says, “I am unbearable” (5). Of course, women “bear” children, and in this poem, here, there is a refusal to be born. Indeed, there is a mother-child relationship during the moment of “bearing” and “birthing” that the child wants to break by refusing to be born. Furthermore, the milk cartons that once represented the missing children resonate with the mother's desperate tone when asking the child to stop crying and to suck the milk in. Then “History” reflects the challenge of giving birth to a child:

Everything's a metaphor, some wise
guy said, and his woman nodded, wisely.
Why was this such a discovery
to him? Why did history
happen only on the outside?
She'd watched an embryo track an arc
across her swollen belly from the inside
and knew she'd best
think *knee*, not *tumor or burrowing mole*, lest
it emerge a monster. Each craving marks
the soul: splashed white upon a temple the dish
of ice cream, coveted, broken in a wink,
or the pickle duplicated just behind the ear. *Every wish
will find its symbol*, the woman thinks. (1-14)

The woman presented in this poem is experiencing motherhood and feels outraged at the perception that history only occurs outside the body when it is inside that life takes place. The diction, punctuation, and use of italics shape this sonnet, allowing us to picture the history that

takes place inside the female body during pregnancy. Cook and Tatum make an interesting point, ““History” says, it’s in the mistaken notion that history is something that takes place apart from the interior life. A woman’s experience in having a child seems to contradict this easy division” (369). Then the changes a body endures after birth are further reflected in “Used”:

The conspiracy’s to make us thin. Size threes
are all the rage, and skirts ballooning above twinkling knees
are every man-child’s preadolescent dream.
Tabula rasa. No slate’s that clean—

we’ve earned the navels sunk in grief
when the last child emptied us of their brief
interior light. Our muscles say We have been used. (1-7)

On the one hand, in this sonnet, we see how women are expected to respect certain beauty standards, yet the narrator appears thwarted because of the physical and psychological traces of giving birth, therefore, feeling used. As such Hartsock asserts, “revisionary mode allows its female narrators to both embrace and critique the gifts and demands of motherhood, especially in terms of its corporeal marks and effects which much classical literature completely eschews” (135). The succeeding lines further the same conception:

Have you ever tried silk sheets? I did,
persuaded by postnatal dread
and a Macy’s clerk to bargain for more zip.
We couldn’t hang on, slipped
to the floor and by morning the quilts
had slid off, too. Enough of guilt—
It’s hard work staying cool. (8-14)

These verses encapsulate the distress of the after-effects left on the body once the baby is born. The first half of this sonnet indicates society’s cruel expectations when coping with the female body. However, these lines show the speaker’s determination to overcome her bodily struggles of

becoming a mother. Keyes has well explained how the word “ ‘cool’ signals the release of the speaker’s entanglement. It’s hard work staying cool enough, detached enough from the culture’s standards, to love the ‘used’ elements of one’s female body. Opting for it is the speaker’s release and the sonnet’s resolution” (169). Another trait of motherhood is also that of wisdom, as seen in “Rusks”:

I got tired of tearing myself down.
Let someone else have
the throne of blues for a while,
let someone else suffer mosquitoes.
As my mama always said: half a happiness is better
than none at goddam all. (8-14)

The image of the mother is that of someone that understands better life and therefore represents wisdom. Morris has rightfully argued that:

Here, both Persephone and Demeter come full circle. The former rejects her previous arrogance in the face of the mother’s wisdom. In fact, Persephone embraces her mother’s practical, albeit cynical, logic (“half a happiness is better / than none at goddam all”) as a way to counter the dissatisfaction she faces in her own life. (S. Morris 171)

When faced with adversities, Persephone has nowhere but her mother to turn to for advice. Since her mother is not with her, her only choice is to return to her memories. Then, “Her Island” is where we perceive the mother’s concern about losing her child:

Through sunlight into flowers
she walked, and was pulled down.
A simple story, a mother’s deepest
dread—that her child could drown
in sweetness. (141-145)

I believe this last poem reinforces that Persephone's abduction is inevitable, which resonates with the "three skinny sisters" (2) in "Primer." These bullies want to direct Persephone's fate. Back then, Demeter could save her daughter, but now Dove shows that the abduction was only postponed, nothing more. Therefore, Demeter's pain is unavoidable.

Dove shows different sides of motherhood in *Mother Love*. "Primer" presents motherly protection enhanced in "Persephone, Falling," where Demeter attempts to avoid her daughter's abduction. Then, "Party Dress for a First Born" tackles a mother-daughter relationship filled with safety contrasted with secrecy. Later, "The Search" shows the mother's concern as she cannot find her child. This resonates with her daughter's cry for help in "Persephone Abducted." As a result, "Grief: The Council" and "Demeter Mourning" show the mother's grief for the loss of her daughter, along with "Breakfast of Champions," where Demeter looks for a place to mourn her loss. Then, "Mother Love" shows the hardships of being a mother. "Persephone in Hell" and "The Bistro Styx" present the worries of a mother about her child's choices. "Lamentations" ponders about a mother's concerns while childbirth is tackled in "History" and "Used." Hence, motherhood is presented in *Mother Love* in the form of different behaviours that link the poems and provide a clear understanding of motherhood.

4.2.3. Sexuality

Certain literary works promote sexuality as something esoteric that occurs to girls (Christian-Smith 30, qtd. in Matthews 71). This encourages the view that sexuality is something advantageous that girls should be proud of experiencing, which resonates with a passive female behaviour and an active male conduct. Indeed, sexuality is the one that often separates childhood from adulthood (Matthews 69). Thus, sexuality and the discovery of intimacy are paramount in some of Dove's writings. In *Mother Love*, sexuality implies the initiation into the world of adults. Interestingly, the setting of "Party Dress for a First Born" is a bed, which is doubtfully a random choice of diction:

Headless girl so ill at ease on the bed.

I know, if you could, what you're thinking of:

nothing. I used to think that, too,
whenever I sat down to a full plate
or unwittingly stepped on an ant.
When I ran to my mother, waiting radiant
as a cornstalk at the edge of the field,
nothing else mattered: the world stood still. (1-8)

In these lines, Keyes points out how, Persephone, “on the brink of sexual awakening, in that liminal state of curiosity, burgeoning desire, and concomitant repulsion, she recalls in the opening octave of this Petrarchan form sonnet the earlier comfort and safety of her mother’s presence” (155) later on adding how “Persephone is simultaneously drawn to the safety of childhood, and to the “horror” of sexual awakening, lying on the bed “thinking of:/nothing,” as if that could stave off what is imminent” (156). Her sexual awakening in the bed makes her uncomfortable, wishing she could think of nothing. This resonates with the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, where Hades is “reclining on a bed with his shy spouse” (343). Differently from Dove’s poem, in the ancient source, we did not know what was in Persephone’s mind. Dove, therefore, seems to be filling a gap and taking her time to explain Persephone’s sexual awakening. What we can also perceive in “Party Dress for a First Born” is a sense of aggression in the sexual initiation as the speaker states:

Tonight men stride like elegant scissors across the lawn
to the women arrayed there, petals waiting to loosen.
When I step out, disguised in your blushing skin,
they will nudge each other to get a peek
and I will smile, all the while wishing them dead.
Mother’s calling. Stand up: it will be our secret. (9-14)

Sexuality inspires secrecy and discomfort in the young speaker.⁶⁶ Dove assimilates the men to “elegant scissors” (9) in a simile and metaphorically alludes to women as “petals waiting to loosen” (10), which gives a sense of ancient mythology, as Persephone and Keleos’ daughters

⁶⁶ Unlike my understanding of this poem, Morris believes that this sonnet along with “Primer,” “not only outline Persephone’s childhood but also her persistent yearning to “grow up,” a yearning that leads her away from [sic] her mother and towards Hades” (S. Morris 162).

were themselves compared to flowers.⁶⁷ However, even if she wishes these men dead, the smile indicates that she sees sexuality as something inevitable and part of growing up. As such, Hartsock asserts that:

Again, her lines resonate ironically, since Hades is not exactly dead himself but king of the dead. Persephone situates herself between childhood and sexual maturation, and shows her preference and loyalty to the former through touch, in reaching towards a maternal radiance rather than a male erotic threat she imagines as scissors. (134)

Then, in “Golden Oldie,” the speaker longs to love and experience a relationship:

I made it home early, only to get
stalled in the driveway, swaying
at the wheel like a blind pianist caught in a tune
meant for more than two hands playing. (1-4)

These lines serve as a metaphorical association between falling in love and playing piano. Being in a relationship and playing “a tune / meant for more than two hands playing” (3-4) requires two people. Then, the following verses give more details of the actual situation:

The words were easy, crooned
by a young girl dying to feel alive, to discover
a pain majestic enough
to live by. I turned the air-conditioning off,

leaned back to float on a film of sweat,
and listened to her sentiment:

Baby, where did our love go?—a lament

I greedily took in

⁶⁷ Unlike my perspective, Morrison associates the imagery of the flowers to Ovid’s version by stating that “Comparing women to “petals waiting to loosen” brings to mind Ovid’s abduction scene, in which, when Persephone has torn her clothing while being seized, “the collected flowers fall from her loosened tunic” (“conlecti flores tunicis cecidere remissis”)” (53). Nevertheless, Morrison makes a preeminent point when pointing out that “The association of flowers with innocence, and especially with the endangered innocence of vulnerable girls and boys in fields and groves, has a long history in ancient poetry” (53).

without a clue who my lover
might be, or where to start looking. (5-14)

I believe that the “young girl” (6) is Persephone, who is “dying to feel alive” (6). Here, Dove plays with the verbs “dying” and “living,” which reflect Persephone’s dual life when coping with two realities. Another expression of this duality is depicted when Persephone turns the air conditioning off, hinting at winter (the time she spends with Hades). Yet, a verse later, she “leaned back to float on a film of sweat” (9) because of the summer warmth (when she is under Demeter’s care). Then, the line “*Baby, where did our love go?*” —which is likely lifted from the song of the same name by The Supremes— is so ambiguous that we do not know whether Persephone addresses Hades or Demeter because she is split between earth and the underworld. Cook and Tatum point out that:

This image beautifully captures Persephone’s longing for an as yet unknown lover, and with a characteristically knowing figure from music. She has the tune but cannot see it, and it’s a song it takes two to sing. (...) The mother/daughter romance has shifted to a different register, so that Persephone will be lost the way every daughter is lost to a mother, not by the mother’s search, but by the daughter’s, for a lover. (357-358)

Unlike this perspective, Keyes observes that this poem reflects how “the twentieth century mother figure sits in her car in her driveway, listening to a tune of the radio”⁶⁸ going “back to her own Persephone experiences, her own pull toward sexual awakening” (161).

Then, in “Persephone in Hell”, Persephone, who was “not quite twenty” (1), goes to “the City of Lights” (2) as Paris is the city of love and Hell, which is where Persephone becomes Hades’ wife, could be associated with Paris. Thus, I believe that Paris is Persephone’s Hell. In the French city, the contemporary Persephone is “experimenting with a new sexuality and a new language, bored with her mother’s worry, charmed to drink Chartreuse with Satan at the Centre Pompidou. The tale of abduction is suddenly inverted into a narrative of adolescent struggle for independence” (L. Wheeler 1996: 107). Persephone only knows “seven words of French” (12),

⁶⁸ This is associated with Demeter’s Caddie in “Primer.”

alluding directly to the seven pomegranate seeds Persephone willingly eats in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (5.534-538), initiating her in the world of sexuality, which also resonates with the seven parts of the poem "Persephone in Hell." In this poem, Persephone is the main speaker. Interestingly, she informs the readers of the presence of other girls: "There were five of us, five girls" (27). I find this statement quite relatable to the moment Persephone tells Demeter her version of the events in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (413-432). I see this as an attempt to instruct the readers and her mother, who later appears in the poem, her version of the events, downplaying her sexual awakening. This is reinforced in later lines:

*It's an old drama, waiting.
One grows into it,
enough to fill the boredom...
it's a treacherous fit.*

Mother worried. Mother with her frilly ideals
gave me money to call home every day,
but she couldn't know what I was feeling;
I was doing what she didn't need to know.
I was doing everything and feeling nothing. (44-52)

Demeter also acquires a voice in this poem. Her speech appears in italics, reinforcing the time she waits for her daughter. Also, these lines depict Persephone's awareness of her mother's concern. She knows that her sexual initiation worries her mother. However, Demeter, even if she disapproves of her daughter's behaviour, wants her "to call home every day" (49) because she understands that despite everything, Persephone is her daughter. Meanwhile, Persephone is rebelliously doing what her mother does not want her to do. Thus, she does not need to know. Here, "Dove's Persephone invites readers to empathize with a daughter not trying to get back to, but trying to get away and establish independence from, her mother" (Hartsock 130). Nevertheless, stating that she "was doing everything and feeling nothing" (52) implies that her sexual experience might be disappointing. Persephone craves to discover the adult world, where she can do everything she wants and discover the world of sexual life. This is incompatible with her role as a daughter since her mother does not want her to grow up. Therefore, resulting in a

conflict between a rebellious child and a caring mother. A few verses later, Persephone's curiosity is much more explicit:

There was love, of course. Mostly boys:
a flat-faced engineering student from Missouri,
a Texan flaunting his teaspoon of Cherokee blood.

I waited for afterwards—their pale eyelids, foreheads
thrown back so the rapture could evaporate.
I don't believe I was suffering. I was curious,
mainly:
How would each one smell, how many ways could
he do it?
I was drowning in flowers. (67-76)

Persephone does not believe she suffered because she understands sexuality as a natural step in her life. She comprehends that despite Demeter's rejection of her daughter's initiation into the sexual world, sexuality is inevitable. As such, Morris points out that:⁶⁹

This Persephone is drowning in flowers she has picked to be her life—mostly men she beds out of curiosity— and feels her mother cannot understand her circumstances. Here, Persephone dismisses her mother's narrative as outmoded and irrelevant. Persephone's choice to disregard her mother's advice fits into the overall theme of women's collusion with patriarchy. (S. Morris 166-167)

However, Demeter does not accept that her daughter is having a good time, which results in her asking: "*are you having a good time? / are you having a time at all?*" (96-97) referring to the poem "Protection," which alludes to what Demeter tries to achieve, namely, to protect her child from men. A few verses later, Demeter states: "*This is how the pit opens*" (128) and then "*This is how one foot / sinks into the ground*" (140-141), hinting at "Persephone, Falling," which

⁶⁹ The flowers mentioned here could also be a subtle reference to *Les Fleurs du Mal* by Charles Baudelaire, which explores, among other things, the duality of human nature.

recollects the merging of the ancient abduction and a current warning from a concerned mother. At the same time, Hades is bored and wants a distraction:

I need a *divertissement*:
The next one through that gate,
woman or boy, will get
the full-court press of my *ennui*. (153-156)

Using a combination of English and French diction and changing the letter font, Hades seems self-centred and selfish to the point of using someone else for his pleasure. Demeter has been warning Persephone about men like him. Hades is ready to take advantage of someone, but he has not chosen his prey yet:

let me get my rules straight.
Should I count them as singular
plural, like popcorn?
Or can I wait for one person
to separate from the crowd.
chin lifted for courage, as if to place
her brave, lost countenance
under my care . . .

Contact. (161-168)

Hades feels overwhelmed by the different people that he could use as a source of entertainment.⁷⁰ He does not know what to do, thus, pondering about what would be the best move to get what he wants. He does not want to miss his chance, so he takes his time to decide on the right move. As Keyes indicates, “Persephone seeks out Hades in this section, as he seeks her. This story of sexual awakening is not about rupture alone, it is about ‘Contact’ (V, 30) and Persephone’s sexual desire” (162). Once Hades’ sexual intentions are clear, Persephone reappears in the following part of the poem:

⁷⁰ See Murray 103-105.

After the wind, this air
imploded down my throat,
a hot, rank syrup swirled with smoke
from a hundred cigarettes.
Soft chatter roaring French nothings.
I don't belong here.

She doesn't belong, that's certain.
Leather skirt's slipped
a bit: sweet. No gloves? American,
because she wears black badly.
I'd like to see her in chartreuse,
walking around like a living
after-dinner drink. (170-182)

Persephone is trying to introduce herself to a world unknown to her. Hades notices how Persephone does not fit this place, which catches his attention. Hence, he starts observing and analysing her. He also sees her as befitting his intentions. Similarly, Persephone is also intrigued by him:

He inclines his head, rather massive,
like a cynical parrot. Almost a smile.

"Puis-je vous offrir mes services!"

Sotto voce, his inquiry
curls down to lick my hand.
Standard nicety, probably,
but my French could not stand up
to meet it.

"Or myself, if you are looking."

I whisper this, I'm sure she doesn't understand. (183-192)

Persephone reads Hades based on his body language and facial expressions. She knows that Hades is self-centred because she perceives it from his behaviour. Hades talks to her in French to impress her, but she cannot reply as her French cannot be compared to his. Hades' intentions become evident as he purposefully offers himself. She does not hear him:

“Pardon me?”

“Excuse, I thought you were French.
You are looking for someone?”

“Yes. I’m...sure he’s here somewhere.”

Here you are.

“I hope he won’t let himself
be found too soon. A drink?”

He’s gone and back, as easily as smoke,
in each hand a slim glass
alive with a brilliant lime.

“What time is it?”

she blurts,
shrinking from the glass.
“*A minuit*. Midnight.
The zero hour,
you call it?” (193-208)

Hades knows that Persephone is not from France, but to keep chatting, he appears to fake to have assumed she was French. Furthermore, to make sure she is alone, he asks whether she is looking for someone. Indeed, she is looking for a “he,” and she thinks she has found him. Both are looking for the same thing. Nevertheless, unlike the ancient myth, this time, Hades is not Persephone’s first male interest, instead, he is just one of many.

Again the dark smile.

“Some call it that.”

“Chartreuse,” I say, holding out a glass,
“is a tint not to be found *au naturel*
in all of France, except in bottles
and certain days at the Côte d'Azur
when sun performs on ocean what
we call *un mirage*, a—”

“trick of light.” I take the glass,

lift it to meet his. (209-218)

Persephone keeps reading Hades matching his own reading of her. They both see each other for who they are. Hades' dark smile fits his mythical role as the god of darkness, which proves Dove's calculation of diction. When their glasses meet each other, we perceive a metaphor that associates the glasses with their bodies, foreshadowing their sexual intentions. Then, Demeter appears once more, but this time her speech is no longer in italics:

if I whispered to the moon

I am waiting

if I whispered to the olive

you are on the way

which would hear me?

I am listening

the garden gone

the seed in darkness

the city around me

I am waiting

it was cold I entered

you rise into my arms

I entered for warmth

I part the green sheaths

a part of me had been waiting
 already in this cold longing
 who has lost me?
 be still, mother whispers
 and let sorrow travel
 be still she whispers
 and light will enter

I part the brown field
 and you are sinking
 through heat the whispers
 through whispers the sighing
 through sighing the darkness

I am waiting
 you are on your way (219-246)

The last part of “Persephone in Hell” completes the seven Ovidian pomegranate seeds and merges ancient and contemporary contexts. The moon is related to Hekate and, therefore, to Demeter, as she is the first one to support Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Then, the olive reminds us of Demeter’s power over vegetation. Persephone wishes to reach her mother, which could question the sexual awakening that appeared clear until this point. Persephone seems to be in two minds. She is in this situation because of her sexual agency, but the closer she gets to Hades, the more she questions this situation. Also, she explains her thoughts to us from beginning to end. She remembers the ancient garden, and Demeter remarks that the seed is in darkness, which metaphorically addresses Persephone, who is also buried underground. Demeter keeps waiting for Persephone, who discloses what drives her toward Hades: warmth, namely, that of another body. While Demeter keeps waiting to hold Persephone in his arms, she keeps coping with the duality of her feelings, split between Demeter and Hades. Once she is with Hades, she keeps remembering her mother because she is aware of her disapproval, hence her guilt while with Hades. Persephone is caught between her mother’s light and Hades’ darkness.

Then, Dove addresses how Hades lures Persephone because of her curiosity to know what love is in “Hades’ Pitch.” Dove’s chosen title of “Hades’ Pitch” foreshadows the role of

Hades' subsequent speech in the poem and the role this plays. Murray goes a step further and explains the role of Dove's chosen diction in the title:

Ultimately the poem is about fusing and pitching of voice in a gendered way, but with specific attention to how this might occur in space. Thus, "pitch" in terms of focus on persuasive means (rhetorical [*sic*] argumentation: Hades attempting to seduce Persephone by proposing to touch her intimately, and "pitch" as in spatial context: environmental space suddenly sent off kilter. (114)

However, Murray adds that "it is important to note yet another meaning of the title term, 'pitch,' which is to say that Hades has been effectively pitched out of space and rhetorical consideration (in every meaning of the infinitives, 'to consider,' or 'to be considerate,' as well)" (114-115). Pitch also means the resin from wood, which burns strongly, and it was used to hold together ancient Greek ships, perhaps in crossing the Styx. It holds everything together, as in argument. This time, Hades' speech is written in italics, and the rest of the lines are written in the third person.

*If I could just touch your ankle, he whispers, there
on the inside, above the bone—leans closer,
breath of lime and peppers—I know I could
make love to you. (1-4)*

Hades' words match his intentions of persuading and seducing Persephone found in "Persephone in Hell." His words are efficient as he captivates the girl: "she considers / this, secretly thrilled, though she wasn't quite / sure what he meant" (4-6). Hades is endeavouring to seduce Persephone, who is still innocent. He whispers, attempting to lure Persephone as he gets so close to her that she can feel his breath. Hades' speech is very calculated.⁷¹ Then the poem goes on highlighting Hades' persuasive skills:

(...) He was good
with words, words that went straight to the liver.
Was she falling for him out of sheer boredom—

⁷¹ See Hartsock 131.

cooped up in this anything-but-humble dive, stone
gargoyles leering and brocade drapes licked with fire?
Her ankle burns where he described it. She sighs
just as her mother aboveground stumbles, is caught
by the fetlock—bereft in an instant—
while the Great Man drives home his desire. (6-14)

Indeed, Hades tries to seduce Persephone and awaken her sexual desire, which seems to be working because she is intrigued. The fact that “he was good / with words, words that went straight to the liver” (6-7) refers to Hades’ manipulative ways. Also, his words went to the liver because emotions are stored in the liver,⁷² as believed by ancient Greeks (House 202). Then, Persephone finds herself isolated in the underworld and, thus, bored. Hades isolated her from her mother to have complete control over her, and he succeeded as Persephone seems to be about to fall in love with his words. The fact that “her ankle burns where he described it” (11) first alludes to her presence in the underworld as everything surrounding Persephone at this point is burning, and secondly, to sexual desire. She is starting to feel for Hades. Differently from Persephone, Demeter cannot continue with her life once her daughter is taken to the underworld.

Then, the Great Man could be an epithet hinting at Poseidon and at Demeter’s not so well known rape (Hartsock 100). However, “the Great Man” could also be alluding, perhaps even in a mocking way, to Hades (Morrison 71). Differently, Murray goes a step further and ponders about the choice of words, pointing out how the speaker does not state “the great god,” which would be very common for Homer and Virgil. Instead, it says “Great Man,” which is “correlative to the male-centered voice of ancient epic. Epic redux: the woman-as-bearer-and-as-maker version—this is a subversively counter reactionary voice” (113). Either way, it becomes clear that this poem is divided into three parts. The first part is Hades’ speech, then Persephone’s emotions, and then Demeter is addressed. Therefore, Hartsock’s interpretation might be the closest to reality. As such, if we were to consider “the Great Man” Poseidon, that would emphasise Demeter’s struggle while looking for her daughter. Dove’s poems are filled with implicit references to endless Greek practices and mythology, as “only a reader familiar with the

⁷² See Chen and Chen for more information about the ancient understanding and implication of the liver.

Greek belief that emotions are stored in the liver (as opposed to the heart) would understand this allusion to the ancient source material” (House 202).

After “Persephone in Hell” and “Hades’ pitch” comes “*Wiederkehr*,” where Persephone feels used:

He only wanted me for happiness:
to walk in air
and not think so much,
to watch the smile
begun in his eyes
end on the lips
his eyes caressed. (1- 7)

The title itself bears an allusion to Persephone’s return. This poem seems a continuation of “Hades’ Pitch,” but this time, curiosity vanishes as Persephone faces reality. She is the narrator of this sonnet, and she descriptively uses diction, allowing a perception of detail:

He merely hoped, in darkness, to smell
rain; and though he saw how still
I sat to hold the rain untouched
inside me, he never asked
if I would stay. Which is why,
when the choice appeared,
I reached for it. (8-14)

These last lines and the title reflect how Persephone chooses her mother as much as she chooses sexual desire.⁷³ Here Persephone is “confessing to herself why she stayed with the man who has seduced her” (Cook and Tatum 361). Lofgren points out how “at least Persephone’s newfound freedom to choose avails her of a simultaneous sense of autonomy and harmony with another. She learns that separation can lead to growth as well as to pain” (136). As Keyes remarks, “The choice Persephone has made in “*Wiederkehr*” is not a return from the Underworld, but rather a

⁷³ See Keyes 164.

returning of her attention to her mother, who comes to Paris hoping to persuade Persephone to come home” (165). As I see it, Persephone understands that her mother truly cares about her and that her stay does not make much of a difference to Hades. Thus, she understands that sexual pleasure is momentary and that her mother’s love is the one that lasts. As Steffen rightfully points out, “*Wiederkehr*” “foregrounds this liminal state between a mother and a lover who ultimately rejects her” (130). Then, in “Nature’s Itinerary,” it is straightforwardly addressed:

Taking the pill is like using a safety net
but then, beforehand, having a beer—
a man’s invention to numb us so we
can’t tell which way the next wind’s blowing. (11-14)

This contemporary speech illustrates the evolution of sexuality throughout the sonnets. Using modern and colloquial diction, Persephone tackles a different side of sexuality. Dove keeps including the weather in her poems, so we do not forget about Demeter. In *Mother Love*, sexuality becomes an essential topic, mainly because it is sexuality the one that makes Persephone an adult. Unlike the ancient sources, Dove’s Persephone is intrigued by sexuality as it happens in “Golden Oldie,” where the speaker longs for love. Also, in “Persephone in Hell” sexuality is viewed as something inescapable. This is enhanced by Hades’ ways of seducing Persephone in “Persephone in Hell” and “Hades’ Pitch.”

4.2.4. Abduction and rape

Rape has been regarded differently over the years. The term “rape” that we know today as a matter attached to an unwilling sexual act was not always considered like this:

Historically, rape was viewed as a sexual act done by a man to a woman as a way of claiming property or as part of a legal right to the woman’s body. Women in this context were considered passive participants in rape, which was somehow a natural aspect of their social existence. With the rise of psychoanalytic theory, social attitudes began to change as rape was interpreted as a sexual act deeply implicated in the unconscious mind. More than simply a sexual act done to

women, psychoanalysis asserted that rape is something women desire, a sort of masochism that they seek and enjoy at an unconscious level. (Kowalewski-Wallace 475)

However, this notion of rape was adapted in 1975 “when the publication of Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* raised the general public’s consciousness about the history of rape and the injury it inflicts on the victim, that rape became identified as a crime of violence” (Kowalewski-Wallace 476). As such, the representation of rape in literature reflects the change the perception of rape has acquired.

“Persephone, Falling” bears a striking similarity with the Homeric version of the myth, as once more, the flower that traps Persephone is the narcissus, which is used as a distraction to lure her. This poem is composed of two stanzas. As suggested by the title of the poem, the first part serves as an allusion to the original myth:

One narcissus among the ordinary beautiful
flowers, one unlike all the others! She pulled,
stooped to pull harder—
when, sprung out of the earth
on his glittering terrible
carriage, he claimed his due.
It is finished. No one heard her.
No one! She had strayed from the herd. (1-8)

Among the different flowers, the narcissus is no ordinary flower. Its beauty was what caught Persephone’s attention in the ancient myth and once again here in “Persephone, Falling.” Persephone not only pulled, but she “stooped to pull harder” (3),⁷⁴ which reinforces her agency and her role in her own abduction.⁷⁵ Then, just as it happened in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, the earth opened, and Hades carries Persephone away, this time in “his glittering terrible / carriage” (5-6). Dove plays with different adjectives, firstly, the “glittering” alludes to the beauty of the narcissus that catches Persephone's attention and therefore results in her kidnapping, and

⁷⁴ On the relation between this poem, the narcissus flower, Persephone, and her self-love see Murray 91.

⁷⁵ See S. Morris 162.

then, terrible refers to the abduction. Then, addressing the ancient sources, Persephone is separated from her female companions when she is abducted. Hence, Snider pays special attention to the herd, which “in this instance, is most definitely primal, like that of an animal pack, but points at a community of women. Persephone is protected in her natural state, so long as she stays within her female community” (3). Later, in the lines that follow Dove reimagines the myth and drives the ancient abduction to a contemporary kidnapping or even a rape.⁷⁶ Dove points out a few realities in the second part is a contemporary equation to the ancient story:

(Remember: go straight to school.
This is important, stop fooling around!
Don't answer to strangers. Stick
With your playmates. Keep your eyes down.) (9-12)

These lines match the worries of a mother, who desperately attempts to avoid her child's kidnapping by asking the child to “go straight to school” (9), to “stop fooling around” (10), not to “answer to strangers” (11), to stick with their playmates, and to “keep” their “eyes open” (12). These verses express the way this mother tries to protect her child at any cost by telling her what she should do. Due to Persephone's agency in the first half of this poem, Demeter addresses her contemporary child, bearing that in mind.

Interestingly “Persephone, Falling” is followed by “The Search.” While the former depicts the moment Persephone was abducted, the latter represents Demeter's desperate attempt to find her daughter, which is quite symbolic after the mother's last warnings in “Persephone, Falling.”

Blown apart by loss, she let herself go—
wandered the neighborhood hatless, breasts
swinging under a ratty sweater, crusted
mascara blackening her gaze. It was a shame,
the wives whispered, to carry on so.
To them, wearing foam curlers arraigned

⁷⁶ See Pereira, *Rita Dove's Cosmopolitanism* 144; Cook and Tatum 349.

like piglets to market was almost debonair,
but an uncombed head?– not to be trusted. (1-8)

As a result of Persephone's abduction, Demeter is "blown apart by loss" (1), and, similarly to the ancient myth, Demeter starts desperately wandering the earth, looking for her daughter. As Wheeler asserts, "bewildered and furious at her daughter's disappearance, her mourning perceived by neighbors as antisocially intense. The bereaved mother rehearses the anxious warnings issued by suburban parents to ward off strangers, prevent abusers" (L. Wheeler 107). Dove's thorough description of Demeter's condition when wandering the neighbourhood emphasises the seriousness of the situation. Demeter does not care about her physical appearance since what concerns her is her daughter. Ironically, Demeter does not receive the compassion and empathy of the women of her neighbourhood. Instead, they judge her and mistrust her. To borrow the words of Hartsock:

The other women of the poem interpret the rape as taking her "down to size" and "serving her right" for her transgressions; Dove deftly points out through this indirect narration that it is not only men who need to learn to empathize with women subjected to physical violence. In shifting the phrase from "taking her down to size" to "pulling her down to size," the wives highlight the physical violence even as they dehumanize her by calling her an animal. (98)

The fact that these women are called "wives," and not just women, suggests their importance lies solely in their connection to men, tying their relevance to them. Thus, we should consider the possibility of their attitude as irrelevant. As such, these women do not appear in ancient sources. Only young girls and men play a relevant role in the different versions of the Demeter and Persephone myth, aside from Metaneira, whose role is much more that of a mother than a wife. After addressing these wives' reaction to Demeter's pain, Dove contemplates that of the men:

The men watched more closely, tantalized
by so much indifference. Winter came early and still
she frequented the path by the river until
one with murmurous eyes pulled her down to size.
Sniffed Mrs. Franklin, ruling matron, to the rest:

Serves her right, the old mare. (9-14)

Demeter's desperation catches the men's interest, who decide to watch closer, which is preeminent as it foreshadows how "one with murmurous eyes pulled her down to size" (12). As such, Kalai Nathiyal and Sankar point out:

Rita Dove strategically focuses in this poem; it's about the modern vision of Demeter's predicament after the missing of her daughter. In the myth, she leaves Olympus and wonders. Her brother Poseidon, god of the sea and water, lusts after her, she later escapes in the form of mare to hide her identity, but he takes equine shape form of a bull and seduces her. (28)

After Demeter's conceivable rape, there is still no compassion toward her which hints at how humanity deserves winter, matching Demeter's misery. Also, Dove creates a parallelism between Demeter and Persephone, showing how Demeter and Persephone are the only ones that can comprehend each other. Everyone else ignores the pain of rape and the separation from a loved one.

Then in "The Narcissus Flower" we are introduced to Persephone's perception of the events as she says:

I remember my foot in its frivolous slipper,
a frightened bird...not the earth unzipped

but the way I could see my own fingers and hear
myself scream as the blossom incinerated. (1-4)

The choice of diction seems calculated as "foot," "frivolous" (1), "frightened" (2), "fingers" (3) and the word flower in the title play the role of a very symbolic alliteration. Also, through this diction, we can follow step by step the moments previous to the abduction. Also, through this diction, we can follow step by step the moments previous to the abduction. Persephone associates her own movement in the meadow with that of a frightened bird. The way she metaphorically alludes to the opening of the earth with the unthinkable instant "the earth

unzipped” (2). Later, Persephone gives the bodily experience. She focuses on how her body receives sensory information while being abducted. She could feel seeing her fingers and hearing herself scream. The way “the blossom incinerated” (4) is meaningful because she was compared to a flower in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and being the daughter of the goddess of vegetation makes her association with a blossom much more remarkable.⁷⁷ Similarly to the metaphorical incineration of the flower due to winter, Persephone descends into the world of the dead. Then, she adds:

And though nothing could chasten
the plunge, this man
adamant as a knife easing into

the humblest crevice, I found myself at
the center of a calm so pure, it was hate. (5-9)

Once she falls inside the earth, she understands the hardship of leaving the underworld. Her abduction cannot be undone. Dove keeps playing with different adjectives. As such, the simile that associates Hades with an adamant knife enhances his role as the violator and Persephone’s part as his victim when he eases into “the humblest crevice” (8), alluding to the moment Persephone was raped. Accordingly, Persephone experiences hate after the violation, elucidating her rape.

The mystery is, you can eat fear
before fear eats you,

you can live beyond dying–
and become a queen
whom nothing surprises. (10-14)

After that, Dove uses the word “mystery” (10) as a direct allusion to the Eleusinian mysteries Demeter established after restoring vegetation. The enigma here is how Persephone overcomes

⁷⁷ See Hartsock 78-79.

her rape and the fear attached to being abducted and violated by the god of the underworld. Once in the world of the dead, she notices she is still alive and is the queen of that kingdom. She assumes the power she has acquired because of the abduction and understands her new role as the queen of the underworld.

Then, in “Persephone Abducted” we learn that Persephone cried for help in a desperate attempt to stop the abduction. This poem is divided into two stanzas: a septet, and a sestet. However, thematically, it is split into four different parts. The first one addressing how Persephone was not heard:

She cried out for Mama, who did not
hear. She left with a wild eye thrown back,
she left with curses, rage
that withered her features to a hag’s. (1-4)

The punctuation of this sonnet determines the different topics addressed in this poem. These four lines allude to Persephone’s abduction and how, as it happened in the Ovidian versions, Persephone unsuccessfully cries for her mother’s help. After this, Persephone gives up and transforms her helplessness into a rage, assimilating “her features to a hag’s” (4).

No one can tell a mother how to act:
there are no laws when laws are broken, no names
to call upon. Some say there’s nourishment for pain,

and call it Philosophy. (5-8)

Meanwhile, Demeter feels pain for her daughter’s disappearance, and Dove is asking for compassion and understanding with Demeter’s motherly concern for her daughter. The “nourishment for pain” (7) is explained with a metaphor alluding to how birds like the vulture and the hawk feed themselves off the pain of other animals, mostly those that are unable to fly: “That’s for the birds, vulture and hawk, / the large ones who praise / the miracle of flight because they use it so diligently” (9-11). These lines represent the third thematic part, and the fourth

would be the last two lines that return to the original abduction: “She left us singing in the field, oblivious / to all but the ache of our own bent backs” (12-13), connecting the first part of the poem and the last one in a cycle. As such, Cruz indicates:

the collective pain of the “us” who, with “the ache of [their] own bent backs,” are in “the field” epitomizes the ways in which the grief of gods and slaves overlap. Rather than abandoning the realities associated with race for classical myth. Dove employs both to intensify our appreciation of each. (155)

“Persephone Abducted” is closely related to “Statistic: The Witness,” where the impact of abduction is presented on a witness. The screams of Persephone’s kidnapping represent a trauma for the witness of her abduction.⁷⁸ Dove uses repetition to enhance the way the speaker relives in her head the traumatic events:

No matter where I turn, she is there
screaming. No matter how
I run, pause to catch a breath—
until I am the one screaming
as the drone of an engine overtakes
the afternoon. (1-6)

In the ancient sources, the only witness that stands out is Cyane, who, in the Ovidian *Metamorphoses*, tried to prevent Persephone from being abducted.⁷⁹ Here the narrator seems to be a contemporary witness to a kidnapping and tells herself:

I know I should stop looking, do
as my mother says—turn my head
to the wall and tell Jesus— but
I keep remembering things,
clearer and smaller: his watch,

⁷⁸ I will devote a different section of this dissertation to addressing trauma in *Mother Love*.

⁷⁹ This perspective is shared by Morrison (58-62), but Hartsock (76-78) considers that Persephone’s playmates are here the witnesses of the abduction.

his wrist, the two ashen ovals
etched on her upturned sandals. (7-13)

By seeing the impact of the abduction on the witness, we grasp its effect on the victim. The witness still hopes to find the abducted girl as she walks the “faithless earth” (14):

Now I must walk this faithless earth
which cannot readjust an abyss
into flowering meadow.
I will walk until I reach
green oblivion... then
I will lie down in its kindness,
in the bottomless lull of her arms. (14-20)

Contrastingly, in “Lost Brilliance,” Persephone reflects upon her own abduction when she first goes back to an old memory of hers:

I miss that corridor drenched in shadow,
sweat of centuries steeped into stone.
After the plunge, after my shrieks
diminished and his oars sighed
up to the smoking shore,
the bulwark’s gray pallor soothed me.
Even the columns seemed kind, their murky sheen
like the lustrous skin of a roving eye. (1-8)

Interestingly, Dove challenges the traditional story, and this time Persephone feels nostalgia when thinking about her abduction. She misses the “that corridor drenched in shadow” (1) that matches the darkness that is assumed of the underworld. It is almost as if Persephone were belittling the kidnapping by calling it a “plunge” (3). This time, when describing the abduction, there is no sentiment of horror attached to it as we had perceived in “Statistic: The Witness.” Persephone’s understanding of the events shows the fear she first felt, and how that sentiment faded away as was getting closer to the world she would rule. Persephone even personifies the

columns alluding to them as “kind” (7). This erases the brutality attached to her initial “shrieks” (3). Persephone goes further with her description of the underworld:

I used to stand at the top of the stair
where the carpet flung down
its extravagant heart. Flames
teased the lake into glimmering licks.
I could pretend to be above the earth
rather than underground: a Venetian
palazzo or misty chalet tucked into
an Alp, that mixture of comfort
and gloom... nothing was simpler (9-17)

Persephone is starting to understand the purpose of her abduction and her role as the goddess of the underworld. Dove keeps using personifications in this poem when attributing a heart to the carpet and describing how the “flames / teased the lake” (11-12). Standing on the top and pretending “to be above the earth” (13) give her power. She is no longer the girl that was abducted; she is a woman now. Also, with a slightly ironic tone, we are introduced to how “nothing was simple / to imagine” (17-18) than a mixture of comfort and gloom, yet it perfectly encapsulates Persephone’s mixed feelings about her abduction. Then, Persephone continues:

(...) But it was more difficult
each evening to descend: all that marble
flayed with the red plush of privilege
I traveled on, slow nautilus
unwinding in terrified splendor
to where he knew to meet me—
my consort, my match,
though much older and sadder. (18-25)

The description, each time more specific, continues with an allusion to the god of the underworld, the one Persephone sees as her “match” (24): Hades. This verse ends with a line that describes Hades as aged and downcast. The former adjective indicates Hades’ mature age, and

the latter the fact that he resides in the world of darkness. Persephone gave up her desire to go back to her mother:

In time, I lost the capacity
for resolve. It was as if
I had been traveling all these years
without a body,
until his hands found me—
and then there was just
the two of us forever:
one who wounded,
and one who served. (26-34)

These lines capture Persephone's reality before Hades and after Hades. The way the diction is put together seems to make us view the feeling of solitude Persephone experienced before Hades found her. Persephone apprehends she had been empty, until Hades found her. Here, she is no longer attached to her mother. She comprehends the uselessness of her initial cries and her inevitable fate as the goddess of the underworld. However, she also understands that she was abducted as she associates Hades with the wounding and herself with the one serving. "Lost Brilliance" presents the addiction Persephone develops towards Hades, and how she embraces her role as the goddess of the dead. Then, using low diction and coherent syntactic structures, in "Political,"⁸⁰ we not only read about a humanised Hades, who abducts Persephone but also about the hope Demeter has of finding her daughter untouched and still a child:

There was a man spent seven years in hell's circles—
no moon or starlight, shadows singing
their way to slaughter. We give him honorary status.
There's a way to study freedom but few have found

⁸⁰ This poem was dedicated to Breyten Breytenback, and the reason is, as Dove states herself in an interview with Pereira: "With dedicating "Political" to him, that occurred after, I think, the first time I met him, in Mexico, and as I was working through those poems about mothers and daughters. I remembered a description from his memoirs, his *Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, when he talks about the black political prisoners singing as someone's being led to execution, and that really was powerful. I was trying to get into the sense of Demeter going down into hell and what's going to sustain you if your daughter is going down into hell. That image came back up to me" (*Into a Light* 81-82).

it; you must talk yourself to death and then beyond,
destroy time, then refashion it. Even Demeter keeps digging
towards that darkest miracle,
the hope of finding her child unmolested. (1-8)

Dove is playing in her appropriation of the ancient myth once more, with the symbolic number seven that constantly infers the Ovidian seven seeds Persephone ate in the underworld.⁸¹ Then, the speaker clarifies the hell where Hades spent seven years and alludes to his imperative role as god of the darkness. Using a riddle, Dove explains the path that leads to freedom, which few have found, among them Demeter. She is unable to step into the darkness with her daughter. The only hope that remains is to find her daughter unmolested. Subsequently, the speaker states:

This man did something ill advised, for good reason.
(I mean he went about it wrong.)
And paid in shit, the world is shit and shit
can make us grown. It is becoming the season
she was taken from us. Our wail starts up
of its own accord, is mistaken for song. (9-14)

In colloquial diction and with small syntactic structures, we learn about the sympathy towards Demeter while rejecting Hades' behaviour. Yet, at the same time, Hades' actions seem to be "for good reason" (9). As a result of Persephone's abduction, the world had to pay for Hades' actions with the appearance of winter. Interestingly, this sonnet starts with an understanding tone toward a man who "spent seven years in hell's circles" (1), and who "did something ill advised" (9). Then, the speaker feels empathy for Demeter, who "keeps digging / towards that darkest miracle" (6-7). Nonetheless, the real victims are the ones caught amid this dispute over Persephone, those whose "wail starts up / of its own accord, is mistaken for song" (13-14). Then, in "Demeter, Waiting," Demeter feels that, at times, there must be strictness with children to discipline them. Thus, Demeter shows a side of mothering and questions how, for instance, the Christian philosophers would question this way of mothering.

⁸¹ See Booth 128.

No. Who can bear it. Only someone
who hates herself, who believes
to pull a hand back from a daughter's cheek
is to put love into her pocket—
like one of those ashen Christian
philosophers, or a war-bound soldier. (1-6)

The feelings that Demeter experiences as a result of her daughter's abduction are further shown, as she states:

She is gone again and I will not bear
it, I will drag my grief through a winter
of my own making and refuse
any meadow that recycles itself into
hope. Shit on the cicadas, dry meteor
flash, finicky butterflies! I will wail and thrash
until the whole goddamned golden panorama freezes
over. Then I will sit down to wait for her. Yes. (7-14)

As Morrison remarks, "Dove's bereaved narrator seems to know that the separation is temporary—she is waiting, not grieving, because she knows that Persephone will return—but even so, she "will not bear it" (73). This time we learn about Demeter's experience from herself as she explores her emotions. Persephone is tucked away in a special place in her mother's heart. Hence, every year Demeter is reminded of her loss. She feels an utter void filled with pain because of her daughter's absence, and this pain gives place to the rage she displays when freezing the fields to match her feelings while waiting for her daughter's return. As such, Geathers points out, "Demeter's grief is a winter, a hunger, and a time of shortage. What is interesting is how Demeter is constructed as a figure of mastery within the realm of emotion, and the emotional power of this woman has very real juridical and physical consequences. At the apex of her grief, Demeter refuses all hope. She assimilates everything to the state that Persephone is in—death" (201).

In “Missing,” Persephone is given a clear voice when she retells her own version of the events as it happened the time, she told her mother her own story in the Homeric version: “I am the daughter who went out with the girls, / never checked back in and nothing marked my “last / known whereabouts,” not a single glistening petal” (1-3). Persephone, differently from her mother, seems to have come to terms with her abduction:

Horror is partial; it keeps you going. A lost
child is a fact hardening around its absence,
a knot in the breast purring *Touch, and I will*

come true. I was “returned,” I watched her
watch as I babbled *It could have been worse....*
Who can tell
what penetrates? Pity is the brutal
discipline. Now I understand she can never
die, just as nothing can bring me back—

I am the one who comes and goes;
I am the footfall that hovers. (4-14)

Persephone sympathises with her mother’s pain and the constant hope for the child’s return. Then, when Persephone addresses her return, she understands that she will only be restored temporarily. However, Persephone assimilates that this situation could be worse if she were to stay permanently in the underworld. Thus, being temporarily returned seems a relief. With her descent into the underworld, she penetrates the earth to become the goddess of the dead. She assimilates her role as the goddess of the underworld and her mother’s role as the goddess of the harvest and vegetation. Nevertheless, she also knows that must travel between both worlds. Persephone is “the footfall that hovers” (14), the footfall that never falls. Depending on how we read this line, the “footfall” is the sound heard by the woman as the abuser approaches. It is the prolonged and terrifying listening for the footfall that causes the anguish. Listening, waiting for it to fall, but it hovers, ever-present, but never landing, until it does. So, these lines are not only about the loss of the child but also about the sexual abuse of that child. As such, Hartsock points

out how Persephone “indicates a psychological split in her identity before and after she was returned, just as Persephone is eventually assigned a split identity between daughter and wife” (96-97). Then, once more, we jump to Demeter’s perspective as nothing can surpass the emotions encapsulated in “Demeter’s prayer to Hades,” where Demeter asks Hades to feel empathy and understand her as a mother:

This alone is what I wish for you: knowledge.

To understand each desire and its edge,
to know we are responsible for the lives
we change. No faith comes without cost,
no one believes without dying.

Now for the first time
the trail you have planted,
what ground opened to waste,
though you dreamed a wealth
of flowers.

There are no curses, only mirrors
hold up to the souls of gods and mortals.
And so I give up this fate, too.
Believe in yourself,
go ahead—see where it gets you. (1-15)

Demeter is asking for compassion and understanding.⁸² Indeed, as Lofgren remarks, here “Demeter wryly cautions him that his attempts at wholeness with Persephone will at times lead to disappointment for him as it has for her” (137). In this poem, we see the repercussion of Persephone’s abduction and the hope Demeter eventually loses as she finds herself addressing Hades in a cry for empathy for what the abduction meant to her. In this poem, Dove calculates her choice of punctuation. For starters, in the first line, there is a caesura, where the colon emphasises the word “knowledge,” which is followed by a full stop. Then, the following two lines start with a repetition of the infinitive form, following a pattern in the speech. The same happens with lines four and five, where there is a repetition of “no.” Dove’s pauses with her

⁸² Lofgren 141.

commas are far from random. She aims at making the readers reflect upon Demeter's words. As Demeter states, "There are no curses, only mirrors" (11), indicating the consequences tied to the actions of mortals and immortals. Then, the poem ends with low diction reflected in the colloquial assertion: "see where it gets you" (15).

"Her Island," the last poem of *Mother Love*, once again evokes the events taking place in the abduction:

Through sunlight into flowers
she walked, and was pulled down.
A simple story, a mother's deepest
dread—that her child could drown
in sweetness. (141-145)

These lines encapsulate the main points of Persephone's abduction, when she was in the meadow and was carried off by Hades, resulting in Demeter's loss of her child. Then comes the confusion about the whereabouts of the chariot that took Persephone:

Where the chariot went under
no one can fathom. Water keeps its horrors
while Sky proclaims his, hangs them
in stars Only Earth—wild
mother we can never leave (even now
we've leaned against her, heads bowed
against the heat)—knows
no story's ever finished, it just goes
on, unnoticed in the dark that's all
around us: blazed stones, the ground closed. (146-155)

These lines show that no place can be considered safe: "Water keeps its horrors / while Sky proclaims his" (147-148). To bring Persephone back from the depths of the underworld, Demeter buries the seed under the ground, making humanity beg her to restore vegetation. However, even

if Persephone is brought back to her mother, their story has no end, as she will always return to Hades while Demeter makes winter appear in an eternal cycle. Indeed, as is the case of the ancient sources, Dove uses abduction as the one to set the whole story in motion. In *Mother Love*, the kidnapping reveals some of the most relevant sides of motherhood, along with the struggles the child has to endure.

4.2.5. Grief

Mourning the loss of a loved one is always hard, but, borrowing Gorer's "the most distressing and long-lasting of all griefs, it would seem, is that for the loss of a grown child. In such a case it seems to be literally true, and not a figure of speech, that the parents never get over it" (106). Such seems to be Demeter's case: she does not get over her daughter's loss, even if Persephone does not die, her descent to the underworld is, in her mother's eyes, a sort of death. The concept of grief is of utmost pertinence in the myth of Demeter and Persephone but is especially relevant in *Mother Love*. From James W. Williams' (48-49) perspective, there are six stages of grief. The first one is shock, then comes denial, after that anger, then guilt followed by pain and sorrow, and finally release and resolution.

4.2.5.1. Shock

For Williams, shock is how our mind tries to protect us from "overwhelming pain" (48). I believe that shock is present in *Mother Love* starting with the first poem. The lady whose poppy in "Heroes" was plucked started screaming in stupefaction. From my perspective, this lady represents Demeter when she realises that her daughter has disappeared. In the ancient source, the surprise was present but not as enhanced as in Dove's "Heroes," where all the characters metaphorically represent and replicate the traditional story.

In "The Search," we perceive a further reflection of Demeter's shock after her daughter's abduction as she is "Blown apart by loss" (1). Demeter does not know what to do because of her bewilderment. As such, every subsequent move can demonstrate it as she "wandered the neighborhood hatless, breasts / swinging under a ratty sweater, crusted / mascara blackening her

gaze. It was a shame” (2-4). Then, in “Persephone Abducted,” the speaker empathises with Demeter’s actions after she learns of her daughter’s abduction: “No one can tell a mother how to act” (5). Another instance of shock is the one Cyane witnesses in “Statistic: The Witness.” Here, Cyane remains in stupefaction after Persephone’s abduction:

No matter where I turn, she is there
screaming. No matter how
I run, pause to catch a breath—
until I am the one screaming
as the drone of an engine overtakes
the afternoon. (1-6)

Cyane’s shock is similar to Demeter. None knows what to do or where to go after the kidnapping. Demeter’s bafflement can be observed in “Grief: The Council,” where she is in a hopeless state because of her daughter’s abduction. Then, in “Breakfast for Champions,” Demeter, who is still puzzled because of her daughter’s abduction, finds a place “fit for mourning” (3). Nonetheless, more shocking than the abduction are Persephone’s life choices in “Persephone in Hell”:

*It’s an old drama, waiting.
One grows into it,
enough to fill the boredom...
it’s a treacherous fit.*

Mother worried. Mother with her frilly ideals
gave me money to call home every day,
but she couldn’t know what I was feeling;
I was doing what she didn’t need to know.
I was doing everything and feeling nothing.

*corn in the husk
vine unfurling*

Autumn soured. Little lace-up boots
appeared on the heels of shopkeepers
while their clientele sported snappier versions;
black parabolas of balcony grills
echoed in their three-inch heels.

my dove my snail (44-60)

Dove makes a clear distinction between Demeter's and Persephone's speeches. By italicising Demeter's words and separating them from Persephone's, we notice the physical and emotional distance between mother and daughter in this poem. Persephone is well aware of her mother's disapproval of her behaviour, but she also knows that she will be there waiting for her whenever she returns to her. Demeter is puzzled, but she does not give up on her daughter. Then, in "The Bistro Styx," the mother is having a conversation with her daughter, and she understands that her child is no longer the same:

"But are you happy?" Fearing, I whispered it
quickly. "What? You know, Mother"—

she bit into the starry rose of a fig—
"one really should try the fruit here."

I've lost her, I thought, and called for the bill. (67-71)

This time, even if there is a distinction between Demeter's words and thoughts and Persephone's speech, the main narrator is Demeter, trying to get her daughter back. Demeter's shock because of her daughter's abduction is enhanced when she understands that her child is no longer the same. She comprehends that no matter what she does now, she will not bring back the child that Persephone once was.

4.2.5.2. Denial

Denial is the way the mind tries to protect us from reality (Williams 49). Demeter's attempt to nurse Metaneira's child seems nothing but a mere attempt to deny her daughter's abduction. The fact that she is trying to replace her daughter with this child indicates that she wants to deny the pain and what happened. This is slightly addressed in "Grief: The Council," where Demeter is asked "take a lover, / help some other unfortunate child" (2-3). Here, Demeter is implicitly told to deny the abduction and her pain, replacing her daughter with a lover or a child. Then, "Mother Love" reflects how taking care of someone else's child makes her forget her daughter:

I put aside the lavish trousseau of the mourner
for the daintier comfort of pity:
I decided to save him. Each night
I laid him on the smoldering embers,
sealing his juices in slowly so he might
be cured to perfection. Oh, I know it
looked damning: at the hearth a muttering crone
bent over a baby sizzling on a spit
as neat as a Virginia ham. Poor human—
to scream like that, to make me remember. (19-28)

In an attempt to disregard her pain and her daughter's abduction, Demeter uses pity as an excuse to attempt to replace her daughter with Metaneira's child. The diction and tone here are very clear: Demeter understands her role as a goddess and her power over the earth. She knows she can save this child, and she also comprehends her superiority. To my mind, despite her contempt towards this child, she agrees to nurse him because of her need to replace her daughter, and, as a result, to deny the abduction. However, when the child screams, Demeter returns to reality, where her daughter is abducted. Another instance that shows Demeter's denial when coping with her daughter's kidnapping is found in "Breakfast for Champions." This time, Demeter attempts to deny and forget her daughter's abduction in a contemporary manner, as she declares: "I'll dive into a grateful martini tonight" (5), while at the same time announcing "but for now, here's weather to match / my condition" (7-8). Also, another further demonstration of Demeter's

rejection of her daughter's abduction is the way in "Political" she does not accept that her daughter will not return to her. In this poem, Demeter does not want to assimilate that she lost her daughter. She refuses to accept her daughter's abduction and, thus, "keeps digging / towards that darkest miracle, / the hope of finding her child unmolested" (6-8).

4.2.5.3. Anger

Anger represents starting to grieve in earnest (Williams 49). Differently from classical sources where the focus is Demeter's wrath, *Mother Love* presents a few examples where Persephone also shows anger. An example is "Party Dress for a First Born," where Persephone wishes the men dead. Then, in "The Narcissus Flower," she finds herself at "the center of a calm so pure, it was hate" (9). Also, Persephone's anger is furthered in the first lines of "Persephone Abducted":

She cried out for Mama, who did not
hear. She left with a wild eye thrown back,
she left with curses, rage
that withered her features to a hag's.
No one can tell a mother how to act:
there are no laws when laws are broken, no names
to call upon. Some say there's nourishment for pain, (1-7)

First, she asks for help, hopeless and desperate for her mother to hear her, then enraged by the situation she finds herself in, Persephone does not leave until she puts up an emotional fight. We cannot help but compare this fragment with the Ovidian version, where again Persephone or Proserpina also asks for her mother's help:

(so hurried was his love). The terrified goddess cried out
in mournful tone both to her mother and to her companions, but more often
to her mother, and, when she had torn her clothing down from its upper hem,
the flowers she had gathered fell from her loosened tunic.
(And so great was the innocence of her girlish years
that this loss too moved the virgin's grief.) (*Met.* 5.396-401)

In both attempts, Persephone fails to reach her mother with her cry for help. Nevertheless, there is a contrast between Dove's version and the Ovidian one. Even if both lead to the same outcome, the former depicts an infuriated girl whose rage is provoked by her abductor, while the latter shows a fragile maiden in pain.

Although Persephone displays anger in "Persephone Abducted" as she leaves "with a wild eye thrown back" (2), resulting from her frustration while trying to call her mother, Demeter's anger is much more emphasised. Demeter's ultimate expression of anger is when she stops vegetation from growing and makes humanity pay for her daughter's loss. Also, Demeter's anger proves her helplessness. For Demeter, anger results from her susceptibility to facing her daughter's abduction. Helplessness is among the causes of anger. Thus, Demeter's anger stems from her vulnerability when facing her daughter's kidnapping. Following my understanding that the old lady in "Heroes" is Demeter, the flower is Persephone, and the one plucking the flower is Hades, I submit that Demeter is outraged as Hades "plucked the last poppy / in her miserable garden, the one / that gave her the strength every morning" (7-9). However, "It's too late for apologies" (10). Hence, Demeter's anger cannot be calmed. Then, in "Primer," Demeter acts angrily towards her daughter's bullies as she "drove up / in her Caddie to shake them down to size" (10-11). Dove creates a contemporary scenario where Demeter can defend her daughter. Demeter's anger can also be seen in "Demeter's prayer to Hades," where she warns Hades of the consequences of each action, as "There are no curses— only mirrors" (11).

4.2.5.4. Guilt

Guilt results from the impossibility of preventing loss (Williams 49). Guilt is implicit in "Persephone Falling." In this poem, following the retelling of Persephone's abduction, a contemporary mother tells her child:

(Remember: go straight to school.
This is important, stop fooling around!
Don't answer to strangers. Stick
with your playmates. Keep your eyes down.)

This is how easily the pit
opens. This is how one foot sinks into the ground. (9-14)

This appears to be something Demeter would have wished to tell her daughter to prevent her kidnapping. In “Demeter, Waiting,” we are presented with Demeter’s feelings toward herself:

No. Who can bear it. Only someone
who hates herself, who believes
to pull a hand back from a daughter’s cheek
is to put love into her pocket—
like one of those ashen Christian
philosophers, or a war-bound soldier. (1-6)

Demeter’s sentiments resonate with someone feeling guilty. It appears that she regrets not having done anything to prevent her daughter's disappearance. The diction indicates that her emotions fit her painful circumstances. Nevertheless, a more distinct instance of guilt is found in “Statistic: The Witness,” where Cyane expresses multiple feelings, among them remorse:

No matter where I turn, she is there
screaming. No matter how
I run, pause to catch a breath—
until I am the one screaming
as the drone of an engine overtakes
the afternoon. (1-6)

Wherever Cyane goes, she cannot escape the events that keep reappearing in her mind. Demeter and Cyane share the guilt resulting from the frustration of not being able to avoid Persephone’s abduction.

4.2.5.5. Pain and sorrow

Pain, as Williams asserts, “is the hardest and most frightening part of the grieving process, because by then, you are fully aware of what has happened and you are forced to face reality” (49). In “The Search,” Demeter expresses her deep pain and sorrow:

Blown apart by loss, she let herself go--
wandered the neighborhood hatless, breasts
swinging under a ratty sweater, crusted
mascara blackening her gaze. It was a shame,
the wives whispered, to carry on so.
To them, wearing foam curlers arraigned
like piglets to market was almost debonair,
but an uncombed head? —not to be trusted. (1-8)

The diction here is well-calculated. Firstly, the poem starts with “Blown apart by loss” (1), encapsulating how Demeter is destroyed by her daughter’s kidnapping. Then, she becomes careless about her appearance, yet she does not mind how people see her because her only concern is her daughter. Her physical appearance reflects her sorrowful inner state. Instead of being understood, she is judged, and her pain is not considered. Also, the piglets allude to the pig sacrifice in Demeter’s honour during her festivals.⁸³ In “Persephone Abducted,” Demeter’s pain is once more enhanced: “No one can tell a mother how to act: / there are no laws when laws are broken, no names / to call upon. Some say there's nourishment for pain” (5-7). Demeter is aware that her pain might look hard to comprehend by many, yet she knows that her actions fit the pain attached to losing a child. The only thing that is left for her is to grieve her daughter’s loss. Then, in “Grief: The Council,” the narrator tries to console Demeter telling her to get a hold on herself and to forget her daughter taking a lover (2). Here Steffen argues that “Demeter may win the sympathy of mortals but doubtless the contempt of immortals” (133). Demeter isolates herself in a “drafty old house alone” (22) just as she did when isolating herself in the temple in the

⁸³ See House 202; Kalai Nathiyal and Sankar 29.

Homeric source. Also, Walters remarks that the community of women present in this poem assist and comment on the events mimicking a Greek chorus (157).

At the end of “Mother Love,” Demeter is reminded of her pain after nursing Metaneira’s child. Her sorrow is triggered after attempting to replace her daughter with another child, showing the impossibility of overcoming the great grief of losing a child. Then, “Breakfast of Champions,” enhances Demeter’s pain when the mourner states: “Finally, overcast skies. I’ve crossed a hemisphere, / worked my way through petals and sunlight / to find a place fit for mourning” (1-3). In the same way that in the Homeric source Demeter isolated herself from humanity to mourn her daughter’s loss after failing to immortalise Metaneira’s child, here Demeter seeks a place where she can peacefully mourn Persephone. This time, however, Dove’s Demeter expresses in a contemporary manner: “I’ll dive into a grateful martini tonight” (5), matching Demeter’s desire to evade her reality.

Demeter stumbles aboveground in “Hades’ Pitch” while looking for her daughter. Then, in “The Bistro Styx,” in a contemporary setting, she is deeply pained as she understands that she cannot bring her daughter back:

“But are you happy?” Fearing, I whispered it
quickly. “What? You know, Mother”—

she bit into the starry rose of a fig—
“one really should try the fruit here.”

I’ve lost her, I thought, and called for the bill. (67-71)

Dove transmits in the tone and diction the sorrow that Demeter experiences as she cannot bring back the child she once lost. Thus, in “Demeter Mourning,” nothing can console Demeter (1). Again, in “Demeter, Waiting,” Demeter’s pain for her daughter’s loss is very present as she states:

She is gone again and I will not bear
it, I will drag my grief through a winter

of my own making and refuse
any meadow that recycles itself into
hope. (...) (7-11)

Demeter declares here that winter is the ultimate expression of her pain. Demeter declares here that winter is the ultimate expression of her pain, avoiding anything that will give her hope. As such, Geathers explains, “Not only is Demeter forced to relive the pain of the separation from her daughter, but she is also forced to relive the original crime and injustice of her daughter’s kidnapping” (200). Then, “Demeter’s prayer to Hades” is characterized by its painful tone as Demeter requests Hades’ understanding. Instead of attacking Hades, Demeter asks for his empathy as she wishes for him “knowledge” (1), which enhances her pain and sorrow.

4.2.5.6. Release and resolution

In the stage of release and resolution, we “start accepting the reality and getting ready to let go” (Williams 49). In “Primer,” the mother does for the daughter what Demeter could not do for Persephone, namely to protect her from her kidnapping. In “Grief: The Council”, when Demeter is mourning for her daughter’s loss, she is being asked to let go and live her life, resolving as “the italicized passages are a reminder of Demeter’s neglected duties as goddess of agriculture” (Righelato 152). Then, “Missing” serves as a reminder that “Horror is partial; it keeps you going” (4).⁸⁴ Furthermore, Demeter gets used to waiting becomes “*an old drama*” (44), as seen in “Persephone in Hell.” In the second half of “Breakfast of Champions,” there is a slight foreshadowing of resolution as “it’s a brand new morning” (12). However, the only way for the mother and daughter to get a resolution would be to get reunited again. That is what can be seen in “Party Dress for a First Born” as Persephone retells the way she went to meet her mother: “When I ran to my mother, waiting radiant / as a cornstalk at the edge of the field, / nothing else mattered: the world stood still” (6-8).

⁸⁴ Lofgren states that: “In a pivotal moment Persephone (or is it Demeter?) realizes that “Horror is partial; it keeps you going” (“Missing”). Turning suffering to one's own advantage, transmuting vulnerability into strength, is the task all three face” (138).

4.3. Psychoanalysis in *Mother Love*

4.3.1. Narcissism

Narcissism is characterised by entitlement and a lack of empathy, stemming from a sense of obsession with one's reflection. This understanding originates in the ancient tale of Narcissus, who fell in love with his reflection (*Met.* 3.339-510). As Hazel Robinson and Victoria Graham Fuller remark:

The behaviour and psychological states covered by the term “narcissism”, represent a spectrum of intensity and pathology. At one end lies the normal solipsism of infancy and early childhood and the self-absorption natural in bereavement. At the other extreme lies the loss of contact with external reality associated with psychosis, and the dangerous inability to empathise of the psychopathic personality. Between these two extremes lie the narcissistic disorders that are in some way disabling, but amenable to psychotherapeutic treatments. (31)

Indeed, narcissists' behaviours vary (Miller et al.) but share patterns (N. Brown). When it comes to narcissistic mothers, they are selfish rulers who are always right and interfere in their children's lives; they also use blame to control their children (Määttä and Uusiautti).

All the poems composing *Mother Love* share the same theme. Every single one of them adds to the understanding of motherly love, even if, in many of them, the focus is someone else, namely the child. Thus, I submit that all the poems shaping *Mother Love* should be treated in correlation to the central theme while associating them with the myth of Demeter and Persephone and narcissism. Although authors such as Lofgren (1996) and Steffen (2001) have not neglected the correlation of narcissism and Demeter, both only address her general narcissistic sense of motherhood or associate it with one specific poem, specifically, the poem sharing the name of this book of poetry: “Mother Love.” Nonetheless, I argue that Demeter's narcissistic motherhood is slightly introduced every time she appears in *Mother Love*. As such, in “Heroes,” the woman on the porch whose flower has been plucked is outraged. The lady's screaming depicts her rage as she realises the “last poppy / in her miserable garden” (7-8), which “gave her the strength every morning / to rise” (9-10), is taken. The fact that, without this flower, her life lacks meaning indicates the narcissistic bond she has established with it. Once her

narcissistic supply, namely the poppy, disappears, the woman is left without a purpose. Even if she is not the one that takes her own life, she is struck, indicating that now that the poppy is gone, her life is meaningless. Thus, her role is no longer relevant. Also, it is emblematic that this is the opening poem of *Mother Love*, which serves as a parallel that conditions the subsequent mother-daughter relationship in the following sonnet. “Primer” depicts the strength of a mother’s care who does not think about it twice before she defends what is hers. Yet, this seems suffocating to the daughter, who does not appreciate her mother’s protection. As she says: “I’d show them all: I would grow up” (14), she transmits how she wants to cut the strong codependency bond with her mother. This distance the daughter wants to have from her mother is further seen when the speaker of “Party Dress for a First Born” says: “Mother’s calling. Stand up: it will be our secret” (14). As such, the emotional gap Persephone wants to establish results from the drowning mother-daughter relationship. Then, in “Persephone, Falling,” though understandable, a mother tells her child:

(Remember: go straight to school.
This is important, stop fooling around!
Don’t answer to strangers. Stick
with your playmates. Keep your eyes down.) (9-12)

This warning comes after we are introduced to the mythical events where Persephone is carried away after she plucked the narcissus. Even if the contemporary warnings seem to stem from an understandable position, the mother seems to put pressure on the child for the kidnapping. She appears to blame her daughter. Therefore, I submit that this motherly concern hides an intense sentiment of narcissistic condemnation and shame projected on the child. Then, in “The Search,” Demeter’s attitude towards her daughter’s loss is quite understandable. However, her hysterical reaction also matches how a narcissistic mother would react when losing her narcissistic supply. Without Persephone, Demeter loses her identity. Consequently, she does not know what to do now that her daughter is no longer with her. Persephone gave her an identity, but now she is “Blown apart by loss” (1). After that, in “Protection,” the speaker, who I consider Demeter, addresses Persephone by asking: “Are you having a good time? / Are you having a time at all?” (1-2). Demeter does not want to accept her daughter’s loss. She cannot assimilate that

Persephone can exist aside from her. Demeter's narcissistic selfishness is presented in "Grief: The Council," where she stops vegetation from growing following the ancient script. As such, Steffen explains: "Demeter's narcissistic grief and neglect of duty, which interrupts the regenerative-procreative cycle, affect the welfare of the community and illustrates the conflict between personal and official obligations" (133). Similarly, I deem that this vision is also present in "Breakfast of Champions," where Demeter declares: "here's weather to match / my condition" (7-8). To borrow the words of Lofgren:

Demeter should neither try to freeze life into an eternal spring to keep her daughter with her forever nor nurture an endless winter of grief. Her insistence on grief suggests a greater preoccupation with her own fate than with Persephone's. She becomes narcissistic, not nurturing, as the narcissus flower that crops up repeatedly in the volume reminds us. (140)

After "Grief: The Council" comes "Mother Love," where Demeter reveals her narcissistic motherhood. It is in this poem that we perceive a narcissistic mother-child bond:

Who can forget the attitude of mothering?
Toss me a baby and without bothering
to blink I'll catch her, sling him on a hip.
Any woman knows the remedy for grief
in being needed: duty bugles and we'll
climb out of exhaustion every time,
bare the nipple or tuck in the sheet,
heat milk and hum at bedside until
they can dress themselves and rise, primed
for Love or Glory –those one-way mirrors
girls peer into as their fledgling heroes slip
through, storming the smoky battlefield. (1-12)

Dove's calculation when rhyming "mothering" (1) with "bothering" (2) exposes Demeter's narcissistic ways. Also, she states: "Any woman knows the remedy for grief / in being needed (...)" (4-5), explicitly indicating the narcissists' need for a narcissistic supply. Also, as Steffen examines:

Then the primary narcissistic [*sic*] identification of a child with his or her mother is replaced by a teenager's narcissistic [*sic*] identification with a "fledgling hero." The image of the mirror and its function as idealizing exaltation brings the poem back to Persephone's abduction and mirrors a mortal mother's sense of duty against Demeter's mythic or, rather grotesque, dimension of coping. (134)

The first twelve lines explain that mothering is an exhausting job. Yet, the last sixteen lines show the inability of this mother to give up what she deems to be exhausting, which proves the imperativeness of a child in her life. This consolidates the idea that her daughter Persephone was her first narcissistic supply, yet, as she is taken to the underworld, Demeter feels as if part of her identity as a mother vanished with her daughter's abduction. Therefore, she tries to replace her with another child, but this time, a male child. The gender of the child plays a preeminent role for Demeter because, as a boy, he will more likely experience the oedipal complex. Demeter describes the child as "a smattering of flesh, noisy and ordinary" (18), that is to say an asset to get a narcissistic supply to continue with her motherly role. Now that Demeter found the chance to return to being a mother, she puts aside "the lavish trousseau of the mourner" (19). Then she explains the process she followed to attempt to immortalise him:

I decided to save him. Each night
I laid him on the smoldering embers,
sealing his juices in slowly so he might
be cured to perfection. Oh, I know it
looked damning: at the hearth a muttering crone
bent over a baby sizzling on a spit
as neat as a Virginia ham. Poor human—
to scream like that, to make me remember. (21-28)

As she describes this human child, she uses derogatory diction by treating him like a piece of meat whose juices she seals. The fact that she regards him as an asset reinforces the consideration of her narcissist agenda. When the child screams, Demeter remembers her first narcissistic supply, Persephone. "Demeter Mourning" serves as an example of the depression that

follows when a narcissist loses their narcissistic supply. As such, Demeter states: “Nothing can console me” (1) and announces the impossibility of reaching happiness once the object that gave her joy is no longer present. Demeter does not find purpose in her life now that Persephone is gone because her daughter was the one that conditioned her role as a mother. The power that she once had over Persephone and the meaning her daughter gave to her existence have vanished. Likewise, in “Demeter, Waiting,” Demeter gives us more details about how Persephone’s loss affected her:

She is gone again and I will not bear
it, I will drag my grief through a winter
of my own making and refuse
any meadow that recycles itself into
hope. Shit on the cicadas, dry meteor
flash, finicky butterflies! I will wail and thrash
until the whole goddamned golden panorama freezes
over. Then I will sit down to wait for her. Yes. (7-14)

Demeter will make a winter matching her depressed mood, which again matches the state of a narcissist the moment they lose their narcissistic supply, considering Freud’s (1917) understanding. Moreover, Demeter’s depressed state also correlates with the study by Blatt and Zuroff (1992) of the two major forms of depression, more precisely, dependent depression. Indeed, Demeter’s main concern is her daughter’s loss and almost abandonment for marrying the god of the underworld.

“Lamentations” demonstrates the harshness of motherhood that is only concerned with the motherly role per se and disregards the child:

*To refuse to be born is one thing—
but once you are here,
you’d do well to stop crying
and suck the good milk in. (11-14)*

Here, in my view, the child must be kept alive to sustain the motherly role of the caregiver, nothing else matters. Likewise, these words resonate with Demeter's speech in "Mother Love," where there is narcissistic insensibility when addressing the child. A narcissistic behaviour neglected in previous studies is the one Hades inspires. I posit that Hades' narcissistic intentions are present in "Persephone in Hell," where Hades appears looking for a narcissistic supply:

I need a *divertissement*:
The next one through that gate,
woman or boy, will get
the full-court press of my ennui. (153-156)

Combining English and French diction, these lines depict Hades' selfish intentions. He only seeks entertainment which conditions his ability to genuinely care for the "woman or boy" (155) that will serve as his narcissistic supply. The way he assimilates, with a simile, people to "popcorn" (163) indicates how he reduces them to objects. Hades seeks a supply that will fill his needs, namely "Contact" (169). As he makes a move on Persephone, he says "*Puis-je vous offrir mes services?*" (185) and whispers "*Or myself, if you are looking*" (191), elucidating, at least to the reader, his intentions. To get Persephone he uses his charm and art of seduction. Among the narcissistic characteristics that Hades reflects are how, firstly, he sees Persephone as his prey as he does not see her as an equal but rather an inferior being, an object even. Then, he attempts to manipulate her with his charm as he fakes to have thought she was French (194) yet his previous thoughts indicate otherwise, as he establishes that she is American (178). Also, he thinks "I'd like to see her in chartreuse, / walking around like a living / after-dinner drink" (180-182), formulating the submission he expects from her, as he later tells her:

"Chartreuse," I say, holding out a glass,
"is a tint not to be found *au naturel*
in all of France, except in bottles
and certain days at the Côte d'Azur
when sun performs on ocean what
we call *un mirage*, a—" (211-216)

This seemingly innocent explanation is not random. He introduces the information to her beforehand to achieve a manipulative tactic, that we could consider harmless, yet in this case, he intends to settle the ground for future manipulation. Then, the poem that follows “Persephone in Hell” and the one that introduces part IV of this book of poetry is “Hades’ Pitch,” where Hades’ narcissistic and manipulative tactics are further enhanced:

*If I could just touch your ankle, he whispers, there
on the inside, above the bone—leans closer,
breath of lime and peppers—I know I could
make love to you. (1-4)*

Hades sets a basic and easy condition: he only wants to touch Persephone’s ankle. He needs to gain her trust to break the boundaries between them. In addition, he says this while whispering endeavouring to seduce her. As the verses progress, Hades’ urges escalate. He calculates his words and truly introduces his intentions little by little. Thus, it is this caution that demonstrates his meticulousness. Consequently, Persephone puts her guard down and begins to fall for his charm, as “She considers / this, secretly thrilled, though she wasn’t quite / sure what he meant” (4-6). The way Persephone does not fully comprehend Hades’ words, and, thus, intentions, resonates with her still innocence and sets a before and after. Hades’ language skills are the ones that serve here as primary manipulative means, as “He was good / with words” (6-7). The following poem, “*Wiederkehr*,” concentrates on Persephone’s perspective. Here, once more, Hades’ narcissistic behaviour is now recognized by Persephone already in the first verse, as she declares: “He only wanted me for happiness” (1). Persephone, who until this moment seemed to ignore Hades’ intentions, becomes aware of Hades’ narcissism. She overtly describes the codependency bond that unites them while reminding us how he can replace his narcissistic supply, as Persephone acknowledges: “he never asked / if I would stay” (11-12). Then, in “Afield,” this codependency is much more enhanced:

I’ve walked there, too: he can’t give
you up, so you give in until you can’t live
without him. Like these blossoms, white sores
burst upon earth’s ignorant flesh, at first sight

everything is innocence—
then it's itch, scratch, putrescence. (9-14)

The speaker is addressing a girl who is deeply attached to a man. Hades cannot give her up, indicating that he needs her to fill his needs and the void inside him. Through the empathic tone of the speaker, we learn how Hades cannot give Persephone up, implying the battle of power between him and Demeter over Persephone. As a result, he creates a codependency bond so the girl cannot live without him. What unites them is an addictive infatuation that little has to do with love. Then, this relationship is associated with flowers through a simile, the personification of the earth, and a metaphor. These last lines depict Hades' toxicity, who represents the "itch, scratch, putrescence" (14). Also, the blossoms that Persephone recollected represent "white sores" (9) as they are a reminder of the pain of the earth, or otherwise said, Demeter's sorrow as she ignores Persephone's whereabouts. "Lost Brilliance" reveals the consequences of the narcissistic codependency bond created between Persephone and Hades. I consider that this poem reflects the results of Hades taking Persephone's energy and will to live. Persephone expresses the comfort that the underworld gave her:

I miss that corridor drenched in shadow,
sweat of centuries steeped into stone.
After the plunge, after my shrieks
diminished and his oars sighed
up to the smoking shore,
the bulwark's gray pallor soothed me.
Even the columns seemed kind, their murky sheen
like the lustrous skin of a roving eye. (1- 8)

The initial alliteration throughout the second line resonates with the previous and following words starting with "s." Dove alternates two different sound rhymes, firstly those starting with the sound /ʃ/: "shadow" (1), "shrieks" (3), "shore" (5), and "sheen" (7); and those with the sound /s/: "stone" (2), "sighed" (4), "soothed" (6), and "skin" (8). All of this gives this stanza a sense of unity. Here, Persephone minimises the abduction by alluding to it as "the plunge" (3), which is key to the understanding of Persephone in this poem. It becomes clear that Persephone

mistakenly sees Hades as her only source of love and her memories of the underworld reflect the trauma bond:

I used to stand at the top of the stair
where the carpet flung down
its extravagant heart. Flames
teased the lake into glimmering licks.
I could pretend to be above the earth
rather than underground: (9-14)

Persephone acknowledges the power that the underworld has given her. She now believes that her role as the goddess of the underworld is greater than her mother's on earth. However, admitting that Hades is "much older and sadder" (25) enhances how Hades needs Persephone as his narcissistic supply. "The Bistro Styx" Demeter feels the need to put an act for fear of definitely losing her daughter, or, as previously mentioned, her narcissistic supply:

"How's business?" I asked, and hazarded
a motherly smile to keep from crying out:
Are you content to conduct your life
as a cliché and, what's worse,

an anachronism, the brooding artist's demimonde? (15-19)

Demeter's calculated show portrays an attempt to gain Persephone back through a wilful psychological battle against Hades, who is the one that puts her motherly role at stake. A few verses later Demeter asks Persephone:

"But are you happy?" Fearing, I whispered it
quickly. "What? You know, Mother"—

she bit into the starry rose of a fig—

"one really should try the fruit here."

I've lost her, I thought, and called for the bill. (67-71)

Demeter does not care about the answer. She is only seeking a rift in Persephone's trust for Hades. Also, "Political" enhances Hades and Demeter's battle of power over Persephone as "Demeter keeps digging / towards that darkest miracle, / the hope of finding her child unmolested" (6-8) after Hades deprives her of Persephone.

There are two kinds of narcissism in *Mother Love*. On the one hand, Demeter's narcissistic motherhood makes her see Persephone as hers. As such, when Persephone is abducted, Demeter feels that she has lost her narcissistic supply as her life lacks meaning without her daughter. As a result, she uses her narcissistic selfishness to punish the earth for her loss. On the other hand, Hades' narcissism is reflected in his manipulative tactics and how Persephone understands that she has been used in "*Wiederkehr*."

4.3.2. Trauma

Traumas are wounds caused by different events,⁸⁵ such as sexual abuse or bullying, to which people react differently (Heidarizadeh 789). Rita Dove addresses different kinds of traumas, among them the ones attached to being African-American or that of slavery (Ahmad Bhat and Ahmad Pandith). *Mother Love* as a unit holds a very strong motherly lesson intertwined with different traumatic events concerning those affected by the abduction. As Kalai Nathiyal and Sankar remark, "Rita Dove written [*sic*] the poem in the sonnet forms to analyze the relationship between mother and daughter traumas with the modern day mother in the society struggling to save their daughters from evils" (28). I believe that this is certainly applicable to *Mother Love* as a whole. In "Heroes," the lady is shocked as she sees her last poppy yanked, since I consider this lady Demeter, the poppy Persephone, and the one plucking the flower Hades, I correlate this poem with "Persephone, Falling," where the contemporary Demeter tells her child to be careful right after we learn of the ancient abduction. The mother is so traumatised that she is reliving the same episode over and over again. "Persephone, Falling" explicitly addresses the relevance of the narcissus as it is the one that unravels the main events in the tale, which becomes irreplaceable. As such, Schullo aptly observes:

⁸⁵ On trauma narratives see Onega and Ganteau.

Although the narcissus is the object that has separated mother and daughter, it will also unify them through further identification. Dove explores a unifying principle of trauma in which Demeter identifies so closely with her daughter's abduction that she projects parallel abductions into every landscape. Further, Persephone and Demeter develop a symbiotic relationship by which both will emerge individuated by loss, yet unified through a traumatic experience. (34)

Subsequently, "The Search" exhibits the impact of her daughter's loss. In this poem, we see Demeter's emotional response to her daughter's loss as she wanders the "neighborhood hatless, breasts / swinging under a ratty sweater, crusted / mascara blackening her gaze" (2-4). We see Demeter's further reaction as a result of the traumatic event in "Grief: The Council," where the goddess is reluctant to move on. This poem reflects the impact of Persephone's abduction on Demeter. As Tait puts it: "In 'Grief: The Council,' Dove uses the body to testify to what the Black mother's tongue cannot: 'I keep remembering.' She posits Black Demeter's traumatic testimony of entrapping, static loss in the mouths of the council of Black mothers who attempt to console her" (361). Those surrounding Demeter tell her to overcome this traumatic experience by replacing her lost daughter with a lover or helping another "unfortunate child" (3). Although initially Demeter brightened up, she continued with her pain, ignoring the advice, isolating herself in a "drafty old house alone" (22). Similarly, in "Breakfast of Champions" she states: "Finally, overcast skies. I've crossed a hemisphere, / worked my way through petals and sunlight / to find a place fit for mourning," (1-3). The diction and syntactic structure of these lines depict Demeter's struggle to discover a spot where she could peacefully grieve her daughter's loss.

In "Mother Love," Demeter tries unsuccessfully to replace her daughter with another child, yet this child's scream represents a sense of memory, which, following Reese's (2021) understanding, is charged with emotions associated with a personal experience, namely Persephone's cry when abducted. The cry triggers Demeter's traumatic experience of losing her child to abduction. Then, "Political" acknowledges Hades' actions as "something ill advised" (9). He abducted Persephone, which traumatises both Demeter and Persephone. As such, in "The Narcissus Flower," Persephone remembers trauma:

I remember my foot in its frivolous slipper,

A frightened bird... not the earth unzipped

but the way I could see my own fingers and hear
myself scream as the blossom incinerated. (1-4)

There is a slight line between this remembrance and a flashback. Without a wider context, it becomes hard to determine if Persephone has flashbacks resulting from the abduction. However, were we to consider this memory as such, this would be a demonstration of trauma. Even if there is ambiguity and no sense of clarity as to whether this is or not a flashback, the scream (4) will constantly trigger, in *Mother Love*, the memory of the abduction of both Persephone and Demeter. Also, as Schullo aptly puts it, “Persephone’s loss of chastity, or incineration of innocence, is not the fairytale story of Cinderella but rather a traumatic experience that has left gaps in her memory. Hades’ zipper parallels how the “earth unzipped” ” (32). As such, this scream becomes a cry in “Persephone Abducted,” which reinforces the impact of the abduction on Persephone who “left with curses, rage / that withered her features to a hag’s” (3-4). Also, there is a correlation between Persephone’s trauma and Demeter’s as Persephone’s features become that of a hag, and Demeter, from my perspective, is the old lady in “Heroes” as she disguised herself as an old woman in the ancient tale. I posit that this hints at the similarity between Persephone’s and Demeter’s trauma. Moreover, in Schullo’s eyes:

Demeter is immediately traumatized by Persephone’s absence. Although in “Protection” Demeter is once comforted by the transitional object of imagining Persephone’s baby curls in the garden in her absence, in “Persephone Abducted” Demeter’s immediate rage and graying of her hair become symbolic of her traumatic loss of a source of comfort and unification. (36)

To my mind, Demeter’s trauma stems from the absence of Persephone —her narcissistic supply. Then, “Lost Brilliance” sheds light on Persephone’s psychological state who physically and metaphorically goes back and forth, travelling from the earth to the underworld and vice versa, as she states:

In time, I lost the capacity
for resolve. It was as if

I had been traveling all these years
without a body,
until his hands found me—
and then there was just
the two of us forever:
one who wounded,
and one who served. (26-34)

Sadness and anxiety shape these lines. Persephone succeeds in expressing her feelings of numbness. Also, emotional exhaustion is present as Persephone metaphorically describes her inner state. Then, Hades appears to represent a turn of events. He plays the role of a saviour yet is, at the same time, the source of the trauma as she associates him with the “one who wounded” (33). Indeed, Demeter’s and Persephone’s traumas are constantly depicted throughout *Mother Love*, yet there is a poem that focuses on the trauma of the witness that sees Persephone being carried away. This witness keeps thinking about the abduction, unable to move on —“Statistic: The Witness”:

No matter where I turn, she is there
screaming. No matter how
I run, pause to catch a breath—
until I am the one screaming
as the drone of an engine overtakes
the afternoon. (1-6)

These lines encapsulate the speaker’s trauma. Everywhere the witness goes reminds her of Persephone’s kidnapping. She can still see the abduction in her imagination because of the trauma that she is unable to overcome. These verses represent a metaphorical inability to surmount the trauma. Here, borrowing Hartsock’s words, “Dove introduces the modern concept of post-traumatic stress” (76). Although she is advised by her mother to stop looking for the abducted girl, she keeps remembering what had happened. Everything seems to come back to her, each time “clearer and smaller” (11). Yet she still hopes for a day when these memories will fade away:

I know I should stop looking, do
as my mother says—turn my head
to the wall and tell Jesus—but
I keep remembering things,
clearer and smaller: his watch,
his wrist, the two ashen ovals
etched on her upturned sandals. (7-13)

Dove keeps giving this witness a preeminent role with the recurrence of the pronoun “I” throughout the poem. At the same time, Dove acknowledges the relevance of the main characters of the story —Persephone and Hades. They are the ones the witness keeps remembering. As such, Morrison points out:

In “Statistic: The Witness,” one of Persephone’s companions continues to be haunted by the abduction that she witnessed, forever changed by a secondhand trauma. Demeter’s worries and warnings to Persephone in flashbacks suggest that experience has made her all too aware of what terrible things could befall her daughter. (80)

In “Persephone in Hell,” Dove associates this poem with other poems in *Mother Love*. I submit that this is a way not only to treat *Mother Love* as a unit but also to emphasise Persephone’s traumas with flashbacks that return to her mother as she tells her, “*are you having a good time / are you having a time at all*” (96-97, emphasis in the original) or “*This is how one foot / sinks into the ground*” (140-141, emphasis in the original). As Lofgren soberly puts it, “Dove allows Persephone to tell her side of the story. As the myth suggests, she finds the initial separation from her mother traumatic” (136). Yet, “Afield” reflects a lost Persephone, desperate to reach Hades. Hartsock points out that this poem “contains a much more nefarious version of Persephone’s connection to Hades, depicting her with a psychologically unhealthy desire to return to her abuser” (132). Through calculated diction, Dove starts to make us imagine the coldness of the situation with a place “where crows dip to their kill” (1). Persephone is now wandering the earth in hopes of reaching Hades. She wants the earth to open to go back to him:

Out where crows dip to their kill
under the clouds' languid white oars
she wanders, hands pocketed, hair combed tight
so she won't feel the breeze quickening—
as if she were trying to get back to him,
find the breach in the green
that would let her slip through,
then tug meadow over the wound like a sheet. (1-8)

Dove sets a dramatic tone as she describes the terrain transmitting danger. Persephone “wanders” (2) the earth mimicking her mother’s wandering in the ancient tale. However, I am inclined to propose that Persephone’s wandering here denotes both her physical state and her psychological condition. I also consider that these verses predict the coming of winter and coldness, matching the time that Persephone will spend with Hades. Her hands are pocketed and there is a breeze, while she is looking for “the breach in the green” (6), indicating that the vegetation is still present or simply addressing the way she is being deceitful to her mother who represents the greenness that she wants to break to reach Hades, who is on the other side. Hence, she seems to go through an intense internal battle in silence. As such, Hartsock adds that “the earth represents her violated virginity, and in a misguided attempt to heal from her violation, she seeks repetition of it. The gesture of pulling a sheet over oneself resonates with a familiar post-trauma image of a woman curled up in a ball” (132). As I see it, there is a trauma bond between Persephone and Hades. Firstly, in “Persephone in Hell,” Hades seduces Persephone, and in “*Wiederkehr*,” she realises that he does not care about her. However, here in “Afield,” she wants to return to Hades because of the intermittent narcissistic reinforcement that makes her addicted to him. To avoid Persephone feeling misunderstood and lost, the speaker empathises with her and states:

I've walked there, too: he can't give
you up, so you give in until you can't live
without him. Like these blossoms, white sores
burst upon earth's ignorant flesh, at first sight
everything is innocence—
then it's itch, scratch, putrescence. (9-14)

Through understanding, the speaker approaches the girl giving her advice. The diction escalates in intensity and the personification “earth’s ignorant flesh” (12) helps with the intensity of the subsequent choice of diction, namely “innocence” (13) and “putrescence” (14). The speaker is trying to explain to Persephone how she is unhealthily addicted to Hades, who selfishly does not want to give her up. The speaker also warns Persephone of Hades’ hidden false intentions. The way “innocence” (13) and “putrescence” (14) rhyme reinforces the way Hades hides the latter with the former. *Mother Love*, as a whole, is filled with traumatic instances that derive from a violent event. This is perceived mainly in Demeter and Persephone. Yet, Persephone also shares a toxic bond with Hades.

4. 4. Vulnerability in *Mother Love*

Vulnerability is undeniably present throughout *Mother Love*, expressed through different relationships. As such, Dove herself acknowledges the relevance of vulnerability in an interview:

I hadn’t anticipated the vulnerability of being a mother; the vulnerability of accepting that there are things you can’t do anything about in life: that you can’t protect another person completely: that in fact when you were the daughter, you didn’t want to be protected. The feeling of exposure and helplessness is something I was trying to explore in this book. But I learned that the mother can still be strong through all this conflict as well. that she can still turn around and stare Hades down, so to speak, and say, You didn’t think about the consequences. (Kirkpatrick 37, qtd. in Steffen 130)

Thus, it becomes evident that shared vulnerability, vulnerability associated with women, dependency, vulnerability associated with emotions, the vulnerability attached to the body, victimhood, resistance, and resilience are very present in Dove’s *Mother Love*. This is due to the different range of topics addressed in this book of poetry as it tackles the mother-daughter relationship, abduction, sexuality, and the emotions related to grief. As Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, and Davis (471) had stated (qtd. in Asad et al. 226): vulnerability “involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone’s life and livelihood are put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event in nature or society,” thus, bearing this definition in mind, I will address the vulnerability in Rita Dove’s poems.

4.4.1. Gender and shared vulnerability

Although some consider vulnerability universal (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice”), others concentrate on the helplessness of certain people, among them women. As such, “everyday discourse paints women as vulnerable and men as potentially dangerous. This may lead women to see themselves as vulnerable to violence and may lead men to see themselves as relatively invulnerable, fostering gender differences in fear” (Hollander 85).⁸⁶ Indeed, language has a lot to do with this perception as “people themselves construct women’s vulnerability and men’s dangerousness through everyday talk about violence and danger. These mundane conversations identify women as inherently open to attack and men as inherently able to both protect themselves from danger and menace others” (Hollander 106).

Following Kellezi and Reicher’s (2014) understanding of women’s psychological vulnerability, woman’s vulnerability fits this conceptualization in “Heroes.” In this poem, the flower seems on the verge of death, the lady appears miserable without the flower, and the one that picked the flower becomes a fugitive. They are all vulnerable, but their vulnerability stems from something different, coinciding with the universal sense of vulnerability Fineman (2008; 2017; 2019) addressed. Furthermore, referring to *Mother Love* in general and “Demeter’s prayer to Hades” in particular, Hartsock states:

Dove’s collection *Mother Love* works towards demonstrating several kinds of “wishes for knowledge” within the embodied perspectives of its female characters, not the least of which is summarized above: that men who employ force might understand the physical and psychic experience of the women against whom they wield it. (93)

I consider that this echoes what takes place in “Heroes.” In this poem, there is a male plucker and two females: the flower and the lady. These last ones are subjected to the male's force, who comprehends the impact of his actions only when too late. “Heroes” is then followed by “Primer,” where the bullying of a child is tackled. Here, there is a correlation between the initial

⁸⁶ See Gordon and Riger.

vulnerable flower and the girl who is being “chased home” (1). Similarly, in “Persephone, Falling,” Dove discusses children’s vulnerability in our society when addressing a contemporary child in the second part of this poem. There is no distinction of gender in the second part of “Persephone, Falling” because both a female and a male child have to cope with the same degree of vulnerability. Thus, following Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay (2016), vulnerability is not restricted to one particular gender. As such, Murray states:

in both the myth and Dove’s poem, Persephone is young, more a girl than a woman, which poses another complication: youth is understood as androgynous, a state of being not yet confined to either male or female, but sharing characteristics of both. It is also a state of naive vulnerability. (92)

As I view it, all children share is the degree of helplessness thus, borrowing once more Murray’s words: “if Persephone had been a boy, then she might have undergone the same fate” (92). This is because both genders of children can be easily manipulated and abused. “Persephone, Falling” starts with the myth of Persephone and the moment she plucks the narcissus that unravels the abduction. Yet, although we could assume that the contemporary Demeter is talking to Persephone, in a similar vein, the second stanza could be applied to both genders of children or adolescents. Indeed, “adolescence is a period of risk for vulnerability conditions, especially when we speak of adolescents within contexts of social inequality” (Couto et al. 2). Nevertheless, the way Dove addresses vulnerability in “Persephone, Falling” seems to be blaming the child or adolescent for their helplessness. They are told to stop fooling around to avoid putting themselves in a risky situation. The speaker proceeds to order the child not to answer strangers, to avoid a vulnerable position, which Virokannas, Liuski, and Kuronen (2018) would associate with victimhood. Moreover, the speaker asks the child to stick to their playmates and keep their eyes down, suggesting that the child is partly to blame for their vulnerability. The first half of the poem contemplates Persephone’s vulnerability much more specifically which leads us to the fact that “women are at risk of becoming involved in abusive relationships as a consequence of socializing within a patriarchal social structure that institutionalizes male domination and female subjugation” (Lloyd, qtd. in Few and Rosen 265). Indeed, violence against women takes place in almost a universal context (Kabeer 5) but these last lines of “Persephone, Falling” could be read

as a message to the vulnerable contemporary Persephone child as if she were responsible for her vulnerability suggesting Demeter as the narrative voice of this second stanza as she forgets in her speech that vulnerability is not a choice (Brown, *Power of Vulnerability* 37). Nevertheless, the second stanza's speech could also be proof of the narrator's vulnerability toward this situation. Yet, Demeter is also vulnerable as she is blind to her daughter's whereabouts which might be why she addresses Persephone with these last six lines of peculiar advice, making us consider Persephone's possible fear of her mother.

As Virokannas, Liuski, and Kuronen state, "there are strong cultural and moral expectations regarding adequate womanhood and motherhood, which influence the ways women are seen as service users" (5).⁸⁷ This sheds light on Demeter's motherly role and the complexity of her words in "Persephone, Falling." For Demeter, to correctly fulfil her role as a mother, she has to protect her child from harm. If she fails, her role as a good mother will be questioned. Indeed, vulnerability is related to "old age, widowhood, widowerhood, motherhood, fatherhood, victimhood, transgenderism, poverty and marginalisation" (Virokannas et al. 6).⁸⁸ "The Search" starts with "blown apart by loss, she let herself go" (1), which shows a desperate woman grieving due to her loss. This statement also depicts a woman's vulnerability because of her pain, and this helplessness makes her wander around the neighbourhood, openly displaying her grief to the world. As we see in the poem, Demeter's grief makes her blind to her own appearance, which exposes her in front of the neighbourhood:

Blown apart by loss, she let herself go—
wandered the neighborhood hatless, breasts
swinging under a ratty sweater, crusted
mascara blackening her gaze. It was a shame,
the wives whispered, to carry on so.
To them, wearing foam curlers arraigned
like piglets to market was almost debonair,
but an uncombed head?—not to be trusted. (1-8)

⁸⁷ See Smith; Lavee.

⁸⁸ See Devault et al.; Few-Demo and Arditti; Van de Walle.

These lines reveal Demeter's defencelessness in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* when she was looking for her daughter carrying torches, forgetting to eat and drink, and being helpless and worried about her child. Similarly, in "The Search," emphasis is given to Demeter's hopelessness and exposed position. This sonnet shows the vulnerability of a mother looking in the neighbourhood for her daughter. She is vulnerable because of the situation and because of people, such as "the wives" (5) who whispered to carry on so, as well as "the men" (9). And then we see a clear presence of vulnerability:

she frequented the path by the river until
one with murmurous eyes pulled her down to size.
Sniffed Mrs. Franklin, ruling matron, to the rest:
Serves her right, the old mare. (11-14)

These lines depict a victim of abuse and the reaction of a patriarchal society to that abuse. This sonnet illustrates Demeter's pain as she lost her daughter after Hades took her to the underworld. This poem shows us the power and, at the same time, the helplessness of a mother's love and her pain when her child is missing. Thus, Demeter's vulnerability stems from her condition as a woman and a mother desperate to find her child. Then, in "Protection," we find another account of motherhood as this poem starts with a meaningful repetition: "Are you having a good time? / Are you having a time at all?" (1-2). These first lines enhance how, as a mother, Demeter tries to understand her daughter's emotional state. Although these lines seem innocent, it is the repetition of them in "Persephone in Hell" (96-97) but with an affirmative tone. The unification of these two poems through the recurrence of these lines gives *Mother Love* a sense of a unit and enables the reader to better understand these poems. Demeter keeps being reminded of her daughter as she states: "Everywhere in the garden I see the slim vine / of your neck, the stubborn baby curls..." (2-4) merging mythology and African-American traits. As such, Hartsock points out:

Her culturally unacceptable hair (...) matches Demeter's famously excessive grief, yet Dove has deftly embodied Demeter's disruptive emotions by giving her hair that does not conform to contemporary "white" definitions of beauty. The common expectation that "good" hair should "hang and shine" resonates with the hope expressed in the *Hymn* and elsewhere in *Mother Love*

that Demeter should cease her grieving and let the earth thrive again: a hope Demeter repeatedly rejects. (74)

The lines seem to focus on the hair, enhancing the relevance of the speaker's ethnicity. Then we concentrate on the mother.

I know I'm not saying this right.
"Good" hair has no body
in this country; like trained ivy,
it hangs and shines. Mine comes out

in clusters. Is there such
a thing as a warning? (...) (5-10)

In this poem, as Walters aptly puts it, "Demeter tries to resign herself to the fact that Persephone has disappeared, but she is constantly reminded of her" (157). This is reflected in the way "the snail has lost its home" (12), metaphorically reflecting Persephone's separation from her mother. As such, as constantly seen in *Mother Love*, Dove gives an African American touch when addressing the hair of the speaker, as Cook and Tatum aptly observe:

"Protection" and "The Narcissus Flower" juxtapose mother's and daughter's voices, the one with a racially inflected turn of phrase that speaks of hair: white people's hair ("Good' hair has no body / in this country; like trained ivy, / it hangs and shines") and black people's ("Mine comes out / in clusters"). (Cook and Tatum 350)

In fact, in "The Narcissus Flower," we discern how Dove reimagines the first lines of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, similar to "Persephone, Falling." In both sonnets, we grasp Persephone's vulnerability as a child. The way Persephone's abduction is described allows the understanding of her helplessness. This sonnet is devoted to the narcissus emphasising its role in the kidnapping. Differently from other poems addressing the narcissus, the narrator is Persephone, who explains how she felt when she plucked the flower. Matching Ovid's two versions of the myth, Persephone, in this sonnet, cries for her mother's help. In this poem,

Demeter's act of stopping grain from growing as a result of her wrath suggests unfair treatment toward humanity. Yet, "no one can tell a mother how to act" (l. 5), which urges us to empathise with Demeter. As this study illustrates, Demeter's vulnerability is caused by both her loss and her wrath leading to humanity's defencelessness because of her anger. Moreover, in this sonnet, Dove also plays with vulnerable historical moments, reminding the reader of the time of American slavery (Cook and Tatum 351).

Then, "Statistic: The Witness," "Grief: The Council," "Mother Love," and "Breakfast of Champions" present different female characters who are vulnerable to their traumas, be it for being a witness to kidnapping or because they lost someone as a result of the abduction. In "Statistic: The Witness," the speaker is someone that, as suggested by the title, witnessed someone's abduction:

No matter where I turn, she is there
screaming. No matter how

I run, pause to catch a breath—
until I am the one screaming
as the drone of an engine overtakes
the afternoon. (1-6)

In the second stanza, we perceive the witness' trauma. What happened cannot be forgotten. If we turn back to the mythical source, the ones that witnessed Persephone's abduction are Helios and Cyane. Cook and Tatum (351) believe the former to be the witness addressed in this sonnet, who heard Persephone but did not try to help her. Nonetheless, we know from Dove herself that the witness in her poem is the Ovidian Cyane (Holmes). Indeed, Cyane tried to help Proserpine, and "Statistic: The Witness" serves as a reminder of that. Dove is inviting the reader to the mythical scene for a better understanding of what Persephone went through. As Morrison states in "Statistic: The Witness," "there is a sense of community trauma here: violation and transformation are not exclusively individual phenomena, but rather the violation of one vulnerable young girl can change the life of another" (61), adding that:

Although Dove mentions neither Cyane nor Arethusa by name, “Statistic: The Witness” illustrates her Ovidian emphasis on the relationships between women aside from Demeter and Persephone, and especially on the ways in which trauma can be communal. Like Cyane turned to water, this unnamed witness is forever changed by her secondhand experience of her friend’s violation. (Morrison 62)

This conjoint trauma demonstrates their psychological vulnerability, following, once more, Kellezi and Reicher’s (491-504) understanding of female psychological vulnerability. Also, in “Grief: The Council,” we find this psychological vulnerability reflected in a mother torn because of her daughter’s loss. In “Grief: The Council,” this vulnerability is proven by how the narrator talks to the grieving woman. This poem alternates the voice of Demeter’s friends and her own thoughts.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the way this vulnerability is addressed in the sonnet reminds us of a non-victimizing manner of referring to a wounded mother by the way the narrator addresses Demeter with grotesque language and a harsh tone, even comparing her to “a dog with a chicken bone too greedy to care” (17). Something similar takes place in “Mother Love.” The first part of this sonnet, as Steffen points out, “depicts a mortal mother’s call to duty in casual language” (134). Then, the second part brings us back to the moment Demeter nursed Metaneira’s child until she gave up her attempt to immortalise him. The voice of “Mother Love” is Demeter, who uses humour and a grotesque tone to address the reader (Cook and Tatum 356). One of the things that makes this poem special, as Cook and Tatum state, is that it “takes up what may be the most vivid moment in the Hymn” (355) after Persephone’s abduction. This resonates with the verses of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* that allude to the moment Demeter nursed Demophon striving to make the mortal child an immortal one owing to making him take the place of her lost daughter. Demeter had failed to immortalise him because of Metaneira’s mistrust and fear for her child, which enhances his vulnerability. Most importantly, we have to remember that Metaneira is also a mother, just as much as Demeter. Therefore, they both share psychological vulnerability as they are concerned with their children’s welfare. Also, Demeter’s psychological vulnerability is further implied when she hears the child’s cry, as she states, “to scream like that, to make me remember” (28). Furthermore, Steffen sees in this poem “deadly traits of cruel overprotection” (135), which correlates with Kellezi and Reicher’s understanding that women are

⁸⁹ See Hartsock 75

psychologically more vulnerable than men while suggesting at the same time that vulnerability is not inherent of the female psyche (491-504). This kind of vulnerability could be seen in both Demeter and Metaneira, the former because she loses her daughter and ignores what Hades might be doing to Persephone in the underworld, and the latter fears losing her much prayed-for son because she does not understand what the goddess is doing to her child. Jordan considers that “vulnerability defines our humanity” (239, qtd. in Virokannas et al. 8), which could be associated with Demophon’s vulnerability as a human child.

4.4.2. Dependency

The term dependency describes a bond that consists of relying on something or someone. This “is most evident when we are infants and children, but while we may be more or less reliant on care at any given stage, dependency is present in some form and to some degree throughout our lives” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice” 360). Dependency can be divided into inevitable dependency and derivative dependency (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice” 360). The former stems from our embodiment as we need physical and emotional care (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice” 360), while the latter term “captures (...) fact that those who care for others are then rendered reliant or dependent on access to sufficient material, institutional, and physical resources in order to accomplish that care successfully” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice” 361).

In “Heroes,” the lady’s vulnerability derives from, following Fineman’s (“Vulnerability and Social Justice”) perception, her dependency, as she gives the poppy a high role in her existence:

The woman on the porch starts

screaming: you’ve plucked the last poppy
in her miserable garden, the one
that gave her the strength every morning

to rise! It’s too late for apologies

though you go through the motions, offering
trinkets and a juicy spot in the written history (6-12)

What demonstrates the dependency bond is how the lady screams when she realises her flower has been plucked. These lines show, through the escalation of the actions, the intensity of the dependency bond perceived in the lady's reaction. This sense of dependency is what makes both the flower and the lady vulnerable, as the flower needs someone to keep it alive, and the lady attributes the flower to the meaning of her life. Another instance of dependency is found in "Primer" where a speaker despises the dependency bond with her mother as it reminds her of her vulnerability. She knows that without her mother she would not have been able to escape her bullies, but, at the same time, her mother is herself a reminder of her vulnerability. Then, the dependency between mother and child is furthered in "Party Dress for a First Born," where the speaker overtly transmits the attachment she has to her mother: "When I ran to my mother, waiting radiant / as a cornstalk at the edge of the field, / nothing else mattered: the world stood still" (6-8). She seems overwhelmed by life, and the only thought that allows her to carry on is her desire to meet her mother, with whom she holds a great emotional dependency bond.

Furthermore, "Persephone, Falling" shows how a mother desperately warns her child and tells her to come straight home after school, presenting the massive dependency bond they have. Then, "The Search" presents an intensification of the dependency there is between Demeter and her daughter Persephone as the mother is "blown apart by loss" (1) because of her daughter's absence. The same happens in "Grief: The Council," where Demeter is encouraged to give up that dependency as she is advised to move on. What makes Demeter vulnerable is, among other things, the bond that she has with Persephone. This dependency bond is mutual as "Mama" (1) is what Persephone cries in "Persephone Abducted" when she finds herself at risk. As she finds herself in danger, she thinks of her mother. Moreover, this mother-daughter dependency relationship is clearly shown in "Mother Love," where the feeling of mothering is explained. In this poem, mothering is associated with "duty" (5) because the child depends on the mother for physical and emotional care. Thus, mothering becomes an obligation as mothers have to:

climb out of exhaustion every time,
bare the nipple or tuck in the sheet,

heat milk and hum at bedside until
they can dress themselves and rise, (...) (6-9)

These verses reflect Fineman's understanding of "inevitable dependency" ("Vulnerability and Social Justice" 360), reinforcing the relevance of this care without which children would not survive. This idea is enhanced in "Lamentations" where birth is shown as an act of dependency, having to need the presence of the mother for the child to survive:

*To refuse to be born is one thing
but once you are here,
you'd do well to stop crying
and suck the good milk in. (italics in the original, 11-14)*

The child's refusal to be born also serves as a sign of resisting dependency and therefore rejecting vulnerability. All these poems that contemplate the dependency bond that children have with their mothers, as I mentioned above, exemplify what Fineman addresses as inevitable dependency, which on the one hand, stems from the embodiment, and on the other, from the emotional care from others ("Vulnerability and Social Justice" 360). Both Demeter and Persephone are dependent because of their embodiment,⁹⁰ and because of the emotional care.⁹¹

Unlike the mother-daughter bond, in "Hades' Pitch," Persephone starts to get attached to Hades and thus serves as an introduction to another kind of dependency. This is further developed in "Afield":

I've walked there, too: he can't give
you up, so you give in until you can't live
without him. Like these blossoms, white sores
burst upon earth's ignorant flesh, at first sight
everything is innocence—
then it's itch, scratch, putrescence. (9-14)

⁹⁰ The idea of embodiment is further explained in 4.4.4.

⁹¹ The idea of emotions is further explained in 4.4.3.

With the speaker's words depicting empathy for Persephone, we learn about the bond that has been created between Hades and her. Then, the simile enhances the metaphorical association that explains Persephone's situation when taken by the god of the underworld is reflected in the way all she finds in him is "itch, scratch, putrescence" (14). Yet, it becomes clear that the dependency becomes co-dependency as the speaker addresses her own experience of not being able to live without someone else.⁹² This dependency is much more psychological than physical.

Similarly, in "Lost Brilliance," the dependency Persephone established towards Hades is once more addressed:

In time, I lost the capacity
for resolve. It was as if
I had been traveling all these years
without a body,
until his hands found me—
and then there was just
the two of us forever:
one who wounded,
and one who served. (26-34)

Persephone finds in Hades someone who saved her, and after getting together, they no longer could live without each other, establishing a long-lasting dependency. She understands that the co-dependency that attaches her to Hades does not benefit her as she states that one performed the act of wounding and the other that of serving. Also, it seems that she is replacing the dependency on her mother with that of Hades. As such, Lofgren points out:

What should mitigate the inevitable frictions in any relationship, Dove cautions throughout the volume, is a sense of self-sufficiency. Demeter must learn to get along without Persephone, and Persephone's journey to Hades cannot simply be a journey toward the other, toward Hades, for such a journey would merely replace dependence on the mother with dependence on Hades. She

⁹² See Hunt 9.

risks making mistakes similar to those of her mother, who attempts to find a reason for life in Persephone instead of in herself. (137-138)

Indeed, I consider that this is what takes place in *Mother Love*. As the poems evolve, we perceive the strength of the mother-daughter dependency bond. However, there is an emphasis on how Demeter views her daughter, namely the one giving meaning to her motherly role. Before and during the abduction, Persephone shows her attachment to her mother. Yet, after the kidnapping, she is no longer the girl she used to be, as she switches the bond with her mother to a new one with Hades. However, the latter is presented as an addiction, demonstrating how this co-dependency stems from trauma bond and narcissism.⁹³

4.4.3. Emotions

We deem basic emotions:⁹⁴ “happiness, anger, disgust, fear, sadness, and surprise” (Plamper and Tribe 301),⁹⁵ four of them being negative (Parrott). Then we find the self-conscious emotions such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, or pride,⁹⁶ associated with emotional vulnerability, e.g. pride (Tugade et al. 19). Depending on the situation we find ourselves in we experience different types of emotions. As such, when we feel vulnerable and are hurting we experience grief, despair, or sadness (Brown, *Atlas of the Heart*).

Part of what Fineman has established as “inevitable dependency” (“Vulnerability and Social Justice” 360) is due to emotional care. Mothers care for their children, and this care is the one that makes the children emotionally dependent. As such, in “Primer,” this care is shown in how the mother defends her daughter from her bullies. However, this is not the only instance of emotional vulnerability we perceive. As such, the speaker in “Primer” shows anger because of her inability to embrace her vulnerability. She understands that her mother comes to her rescue because of her fragility and inability to defend herself from the bullies. Then, in “Persephone, Falling,” the second half of this sonnet depicts the concern of a mother for her child:

⁹³ See Symington. Trauma and narcissism have been explained in 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

⁹⁴ On emotions see James.

⁹⁵ Also see Ekman; Carrera.

⁹⁶ See Robins et al..

(Remember: go straight to school.
This is important, stop fooling around!
Don't answer to strangers. Stick
with your playmates. Keep your eyes down.) (9-12)

Using an imperative mood to shape short and direct statements, Dove plays with punctuation and syntactic structures to transmit the seriousness of the situation. These lines reflect a mother's worry, concern, and love for her child. Then, "The Search" further manifests this love, but when the child is already in danger. The desperate attempt of the mother to restore her daughter serves as proof of her care for her child, and the grief she displays in "The Search" demonstrates it, as she is "Blown apart by loss (...)" (1). Then, "Grief: The Council" reflects the pain and concern of a mother unable to move on because of her daughter's loss. "The Search" and "Grief: The Council" show the massive grief Demeter has to cope with after her daughter's loss as she looks for her daughter. Then, in "Breakfast of Champions," Demeter seeks "to find a place fit for mourning" (3), yet nothing can console her in "Demeter Mourning":

Nothing can console me. You may bring silk
to make skin sigh, dispense yellow roses
in the manner of ripened dignitaries.
You can tell me repeatedly
I am unbearable (and I know this):
still, nothing turns the gold to corn,
nothing is sweet to the tooth crushing in. (1-7)

Demeter's emotional vulnerability is reflected in her desolation. She declares her inability to overcome her daughter's loss. Also, another vivid example of a mother's care for her child is perceived in "Mother Love," where some sides of the role of motherhood are shown, yet it is the last verse: "to scream like that, to make me remember" (28), that concerns us as it serves as a reminder of Persephone's abduction. The fact that Metaneira's child triggers the memories of the goddess with his cry indicates that she never stopped caring about her daughter, as she was only distracting herself with the care of another child attempting to replace her daughter.

Unlike motherhood, yet in the same line of emotional vulnerability, the woman we read of in “Heroes” cares deeply for the picked flower and, therefore, the subsequent anger felt after the stranger unplucked the bloom. Indeed, because the lady cares for the flower, she feels wrathful once she understands the flower is taken from her. In fact, following Brown’s (2012a, 2012b) understanding, feelings are associated with weakness. However, anger is one of the few emotions we do not see as weak, yet, interestingly, this emotion is a mere façade that hides other sentiments. In “Heroes,” the woman’s anger is what shows the dimension of her vulnerability as she starts “screaming: you’ve plucked the last poppy / in her miserable garden, the one / that gave her the strength every morning” (7-9). Also, even if this wrath reflects the lady’s helplessness, I argue her camouflaged vulnerability in connection with anger. As Brené Brown explains:

Vulnerability isn’t good or bad: It’s not what we call a dark emotion, nor is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness. To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living. (*Daring Greatly* 36)

Hence, vulnerability is attached to emotions. Another instance of anger is seen in “Party Dress for a First Born,” where the speaker seems to bottle a deep anger towards men:

Tonight men stride like elegant scissors across the lawn
to the women arrayed there, petals waiting to loosen.
When I step out, disguised in your blushing skin,
they will nudge each other to get a peek
and I will smile, all the while wishing them dead. (9-13)

While describing the men as elegant, the speaker still points out their aggressiveness by comparing them to scissors. This aggressiveness, perceived in the speaker’s tone and diction, is addressed toward the women, who are associated with petals, something fragile. These comparisons stage the last verse, where the speaker states that she secretly wishes those men dead, establishing her hate. Similarly, in “The Narcissus Flower,” Persephone feels hate as she

finds herself at “the center of a calm so pure” (9). Also, in “Persephone Abducted,” Persephone shows her rage:

She cried out for Mama, who did not
hear. She left with a wild eye thrown back,
she left with curses, rage
that withered her features to a hag’s.
No one can tell a mother how to act:
there are no laws when laws are broken, no names
to call upon. Some say there’s nourishment for pain, (1-7)

The first four verses reflect the deep wrath Persephone felt when abducted. Using simple syntactic structures and diction, the narrator associates Persephone’s features with those of a ‘hag’, making a meaningful and powerful assimilation.

Then, in “Statistic: The Witness,” we read about different emotions. This time we learn about the guilt of an abduction witness, which, following Brown’s perception (*Daring Greatly* 65), carries a positive influence. “Statistic: The Witness” represents a guilty self-talk monologue where the speaker is overwhelmed by her emotions:

No matter where I turn, she is there
screaming. No matter how
I run, pause to catch a breath—
until I am the one screaming
as the drone of an engine overtakes
the afternoon. (1-6)

The tone in these lines depicts the speaker’s remorse. She is reliving the abduction as reflected in her constant state of anxiety. The repetition of “screaming” in the second and fourth lines enhances the impact of Persephone’s cries on the witness, resulting in the latter’s vulnerability.

Matching the guilt of the witness of abduction, we find the pain of the mother's victim in "Demeter's Prayer to Hades." In this poem, the tone with which Demeter addresses Hades is filled with pain as she asks him to bear in mind that "we are responsible for the lives / we change" (3-4). Demeter is emotionally going through her daughter's abduction as she tells Hades:

I see clearly the trail you planted,
what ground opened to waste,
though you dreamed a wealth
of flowers. (7-10)

These lines represent a desperate attempt to open Hades' eyes and make him see what he has done, explaining the consequences of his actions as she further states that "there are no curses—only mirrors" (11) for both gods and mortals. This implies the reflection of our actions in the world, independently of mortality and immortality.

4.4.4. Embodiment

Magdalena Harris' understands the body "as a lived experiencing agent, located in a substantive web of connections" (1697). Also, as Chris Shilling points out:

From its gendered, robotic, governmental and exchange values, to name but four of these emphases, the body slips and slides, metamorphosing in terms of its meaning and status. Indeed, at a time when scientific and technological interventions into the body have increased our capacity to alter its appearances and capacities to unprecedented levels, body matters have perhaps become more contested than ever before. (11)

Thus, the body is perceived as vulnerable (Butler, *Precarious Life*). Fineman understands that "as embodied beings, we are universally and individually constantly susceptible to change in our well being" ("Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality" 142), which encapsulates the vulnerability the bullied child is experiencing as her well-being is at stake in "Primer," which introduces the physical fragility of a girl who is being bullied as she knows her "body was no big deal" (5). The

speaker points out that those chasing her were “three skinny sisters” (2), but this did not stop them from bullying her. The narrator understands that, although skinny, those sisters would not give up on mistreating her as they were uniting forces to make themselves less vulnerable than her. Then, “The Narcissus Flower” presents a detailed body experience of the moment Persephone is abducted as she states:

I remember my foot in its frivolous slipper,
A frightened bird... not the earth unzipped

but the way I could see my own fingers and hear
myself scream as the blossom incinerated. (1-4)

The emphasis on the body while describing Persephone’s abduction adds to the tragic kidnapping. Also, as stated above, the embodiment represents part of what Fineman addresses as inevitable dependency (2019). Embodied beings need to be safe, as such, children need their parents’ protection to preserve their bodies. As seen in Persephone’s abduction, Demeter is unable to protect her daughter's body. However, in “Primer,” Demeter succeeds in defending her daughter from her bullies. Then, in “Mother Love,” we perceive the vulnerability of a child’s body and Demeter’s attempt to make him invulnerable.⁹⁷ This attempt to care for this child and immortalise him serves both as a distraction from Demeter’s pain for her daughter’s loss and as a way to do for this child what she could not do for her daughter, which is guarding her against harm:

I put aside the lavish trousseau of the mourner
for the daintier comfort of pity:
I decided to save him. Each night
I laid him on the smoldering embers,
sealing his juices in slowly so he might
be cured to perfection. (19-24)

⁹⁷ This attempt to make the child invulnerable is mentioned by Dove herself in an interview with Holmes (2022).

The diction in these lines highlights the speaker, who remarks on her presence with a constant “I.” Here, Demeter decides to stop mourning for her daughter to concentrate on caring for this new child. She understands that she has lost the chance to save her daughter, so she decides to care for Metaneira’s child by saving him from mortality and curing him to perfection.

Then, “Nature’s Itinerary” represents the vulnerability attached to a female’s body as she has to cope with her period and sexuality. Then, “Used” furthers this idea of female vulnerability attached to her body:

The conspiracy’s to make us thin. Size threes
are all the rage, and skirts ballooning above twinkling knees
are every man-child’s preadolescent dream.
Tabula rasa. No slate’s that clean—

we’ve earned the navels sunk in grief
when the last child emptied us of their brief
interior light. Our muscles say We have been used. (1-7)

These verses reflect a reality that society still envisages. In the first stanza, the female body is influenced by the pressures of society to make it a certain way, thus, outlining its vulnerability. Then we learn of part of the female struggles related to her body in the following verses while addressing how a female has to give birth and then the emptiness that comes subsequently.

4.4.5. Victimhood

Although victimhood refers to the state of being a victim,⁹⁸ “victimhood as a concept and practice can be fluid and open to interpretation” (Moussa 15). In “Heroes,” the woman whose poppy is plucked becomes victimised not only because the one that plucks her flower deprives her of the joy that the poppy gave her but also when the speaker strikes her and “she hits / her head on a white boulder” (14-15). This fits Chakrabarti and Garland’s (2012) discourse on

⁹⁸ On victimhood and vulnerability see Ganteau and Onega.

vulnerability and crime. Then, “Primer” shows a girl victimised by her bullies, as she remembers how she “was chased home” (1).

Another example of victimhood in Dove’s *Mother Love* is perceived when she faithfully rewrites the moment Persephone plucks the narcissus, and the earth opens, giving place to her abduction in “Persephone, Falling” and presenting Persephone as a victim because of her own agency while plucking the flower as “(...) She pulled, / stooped to pull harder” (1-2), although this agency has been argued.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, even if agency is ambiguous in “Persephone, Falling,” its presence is explicitly perceived in “Persephone in Hell,” where we find an inexperienced Persephone who only knows “seven words of French” (12). Here, she uses these words in Paris/Hell to get food, alluding to her agency when willingly eating seven pomegranate seeds in the Ovidian version (Morrison 68-69). This possible agency could be used to downplay her role as a victim, yet crime cannot be ignored in “Persephone, Falling.” Indeed, agency becomes a way of coping with victimhood, as Alyson Cole puts it:

Victims do not lack agency in all circumstances – they can resist, rebel and retaliate – but they are not the primary actors in the context of their victimization. With the notable exception of self-inflicted injuries (what some criminologists term “victimless crimes”), victimization refers to being acted upon. (271)

Thus, despite agency, a victim is still acted upon. Then, “The Narcissus Flower” and “Missing” further explain Persephone’s abduction but this time from her own perspective, enhancing her role as a victim. In “The Narcissus Flower” Persephone looks back at what happened to her and remembers her fear. Then, as Hartsock points out, “in “Missing,” a voice who first identifies herself as the lost daughter soon indicates a psychological split in her identity before and after she was returned, just as Persephone is eventually assigned a split identity between daughter and wife” (96-97). This is what reflects the psychological trauma of a victim of a crime. Then, in “Persephone Abducted,” Persephone is once more victimised as we learn once more of her abduction and the way she cries for help while leaving with resentment. The same happens in

⁹⁹ See Snider 3-4 on “Persephone, Falling” and Persephone’s silencing and lack of agency.

“Statistic: The Witness,” where Persephone is victimised, once more, but this time we learn from her abduction through someone else’s eyes.

4.4.6. Resistance

Judith Butler understands that there are two types of resistance:¹⁰⁰ “first, as the resistance to vulnerability that characterizes that form of thinking that models itself on mastery; second, as a social and political form that is informed by vulnerability, and so not one of its opposites” (Butler, “Rethinking” 17). The former type is one that we find in Dove’s book of poetry. “Persephone, Falling” presents a mother implicitly asking her child for resistance as a way to cope with vulnerability:

(Remember: go straight to school.
This is important, stop fooling around!
Don’t answer to strangers. Stick
with your playmates. Keep your eyes down.)
This is how easily the pit
opens. This is how one foot sinks into the ground. (9-14)

This mother is very likely Demeter and she is assimilating her child to the narcissus flower Persephone had plucked at the beginning of the poem.¹⁰¹ This assimilation, as I see it, starts in “Heroes,” where I believe Hades is the narrator and the flower he plucks is Persephone, the one giving Demeter a reason to exist. This correlation stems from the fragility of Persephone and the narcissus flower. In “Persephone, Falling,” by asking the child how to act to prevent being victimised, the mother suggests a way to resist a kidnapping using passive resistance. Then, in “The Narcissus Flower,” Persephone hears herself scream. This cry represents a symbolic resistance both in the ancient source and this contemporary rewriting of the myth:

but the way I could see my own fingers and hear
myself scream as the blossom incinerated.

¹⁰⁰ For an example of motherhood and resistance see Nicolás Román.

¹⁰¹ On the assimilation of the child to the narcissus see Murray (91).

And though nothing could chasten
the plunge, this man
adamant as a knife easing into

the humblest crevice, I found myself at
the center of a calm so pure, it was hate. (3-9)

When Persephone is unable to resist her abduction, she finds herself miserable, which is reflected in how she experiences hate. Also, “Persephone Abducted” presents, once more, a picture of Persephone attempting to resist her abduction as she cries for help, when “She cried out for Mama, who did not / hear (...)” (1-2). The same happens in “Statistic: The Witness,” as the witness states:

No matter where I turn, she is there
screaming. No matter how
I run, pause to catch a breath—
until I am the one screaming
as the drone of an engine overtakes
the afternoon. (1-6)

Then, we learn from Persephone’s attempt to resist her abduction but this time from the witness of her kidnapping. Similarly, in the story of Persephone, we also grasp from her mother’s resistance which she displays by stopping vegetation from growing. Cruz establishes “the possible associations between the abduction of the daughter Persephone, the sorrow and resistance of the mother”:

Demeter, and the historical plight of black mothers and daughters should be obvious. Demeter, who is still expected to “produce” to meet the community’s agricultural needs, despite her inconsolable grief, mirrors the tribulations of virtually every slave mother who ever lived. The resistance of the mother, as well as her refusal to give up on her connection to her daughter, also evokes the grief, anger, frustration, and determination of black women in slavery. (150)

There is indeed a correlation between Persephone's abduction and Demeter's violent resistance as she wrathfully stops vegetation from growing. Demeter's resistance is seen in "Grief: The Council," where we deduce that Demeter has stopped vegetation from growing with the lines "*to abdicate / to let the garden go to seed*" (italics in the original, 4-5). Then, in "Demeter, Waiting," winter serves as an allusion to Demeter's resistance:

She is gone again and I will not bear
it, I will drag my grief through a winter
of my own making and refuse
any meadow that recycles itself into
hope. Shit on the cicadas, dry meteor
flash, finicky butterflies! I will wail and thrash
until the whole goddamned golden panorama freezes
over. Then I will sit down to wait for her. Yes. (7- 14)

This second part of "Demeter, Waiting" encapsulates Demeter's hopelessness. She acknowledges that winter is a product of her psychological state, and she refuses to restore vegetation because it reminds her of the times she was with her daughter.

4.4.7. Resilience

Resilience can be applied to different contexts, and it "refers to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity" (Herrman et al. 259). This concept differs from positive mental health as it alludes to the "relative resistance to environmental risk experiences, or the overcoming of stress or adversity" (Herrman et al. 262). Resilience can thus be regarded from different standpoints: from a gender perspective (Smyth and Sweetman) or concentrating on children's resilience (Stewart et al.).

Following Fineman's perception of resilience (2017; 2019), we can determine that the speaker in "Primer" wants to reach resilience as she states, "I'd show them all: I would grow up" (14). She wants to demonstrate her strength to her bullies and her mother. At this point, she fails to reach resilience, but she views herself as attaining it in the future. As a child, she understands

that her vulnerability has to do with being small and weak, thus, she believes that the only way to gain a sense of resilience would be growing up and becoming a woman.

Another instance of resilience is found in “The Narcissus Flower.” When Persephone decides to “eat fear” (10), she gives up any chance to feel sorry for herself because of the situation where she finds herself. By deciding to “live beyond dying” (12) “and become a queen / whom nothing surprises” (13-14), she reaches resilience when her abduction cannot be undone. She makes the most out of a hopeless situation. Even if in “The Narcissus Flower” Persephone seems to reach resilience, she shares her inability to attain it as it happens to her mother in “Missing,” where Persephone is “the one who comes and goes;” (13) and “the footfall that hovers” (14). As for Demeter, in “Grief: The Council,” she is being asked to reach resilience by taking a lover or caring for another child. Here, Demeter’s vulnerability leads to resilience in the two last lines of the sonnet: “*at last the earth cleared to the sea / at last composure*” (41-42). This could hint at how she accepts the fact that her daughter has to spend one-third of the year with Hades allowing her to stay with her the two other remaining thirds of the year. The cycle of the seasons could well be associated with her vulnerability and later resilience and with her that of the humanity that has to suffer the consequences of her anger and then be saved by her reunification with her daughter. Then, in “Mother Love,” we see a version of Demeter trying to overcome her grief as she states:

I put aside the lavish trousseau of the mourner
 for the daintier comfort of pity:
I decided to save him. Each night
 I laid him on the smoldering embers,
sealing his juices in slowly so he might
 be cured to perfection. Oh, I know it
looked damning: at the hearth a muttering crone
 bent over a baby sizzling on a spit
as neat as a Virginia ham. Poor human—
 to scream like that, to make me remember. (19-28)

The child's scream is the one reminding Demeter of her daughter's abduction, thus, preventing her from reaching resilience. In "Political," Demeter keeps digging "towards that darkest miracle, / the hope of finding her child unmolested" (7-8), which hinders her resilience. This also happens in "Demeter Waiting," where the proof of Demeter's inability to move on and reach resilience is reflected in the winter she makes appear.

CHAPTER FIVE: LOUISE GLÜCK'S *AVERNO*

This chapter introduces Louise Glück and her writings while paying special attention to her book of poetry, *Averno*. This introduction is followed by the main topics found in *Averno*, which are regarded from Reception Studies lenses and address death and marriage. Then, narcissism and trauma will be explored from a Psychoanalytic perspective, subsequently examining Vulnerability Studies while contemplating gender and shared vulnerability, dependency, emotions, embodiment, victimhood, resistance, and resilience.

5.1. Introduction

Louise Glück (1943-) was born in New York. She was brought up in Long Island in a household where her voice was not heard, leading her to choose silence. Moreover, her parents cared deeply about intellectual growth. Her mother was a strong-willed woman who, after fighting much, went to college at Wellesley. Also, her father's family had come from Hungary to America and opened a grocery store (Glück, *Proofs* 5). Despite her father's wish to become a writer, he ended up becoming a businessman (Glück, *Proofs* 6). She learned how to read at an early age thanks to her mother who also read to her. Furthermore, by the time she was three, she was already grounded in Greek myths (Glück, *Proofs* 7). When Glück was eighteen, instead of going to college, as she would have thought, she enrolled in Louise Adam's poetry workshop at Columbia (Glück, *Proofs* 13). She has taught at Columbia, the University of Iowa and Williams College (MacGowan 159). Louise Glück is an outstanding American poet who has written two books of criticism: *Proofs and Theories* (1994) and *American Originality* (2017); thirteen books of poetry: *Firstborn* (1968), *The House on Marshland* (1975), *Descending Figures* (1980), *The Triumph of Achilles* (1985), *Ararat* (1990), *The Wild Iris* (1992), *Meadowlands* (1996), *Vita Nova* (1999), *The Seven Ages* (2001), *Averno* (2006), *A Village Life* (2009), *Faithful and Virtuous Night* (2014), and *Winter Recipes from the Collective* (2021); and one fiction: *Marigold and Rose: A Fiction* (2022).

Glück has received many different awards, including the Guggenheim Fellowship for Creative Arts, US and Canada in 1975, the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1985 for The

Triumph of Achilles, then the Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry in 1992 for *Ararat*, the Pulitzer Prize in 1993 for *The Wild Iris*, the Lannan Literary Award for Poetry in 1999, the Ambassador Book Award for Poetry in 2000 for *Vita Nova* and 2007 for *Averno*, the National Book Critics the Bollingen Prize in 2001, the National Book Award in 2014 for *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, or the 2020 Nobel Prize for poetry, among others. She also became Poet Laureate of the United States from 2003 to 2004.

Glück's writing is characterised by having a depressed tone.¹⁰² This is partly due to the fact that she had to undergo many battles with herself because of her authoritarian mother and her will to establish her own identity when deciding to stop eating and therefore thinking she would gain a sense of control over her own body. She soon realised she was wrong as she suffered from anorexia nervosa (Glück, *Proofs* 10-11).¹⁰³ Moreover, as Yezzi asserts, "beginning with *Firstborn*, Glück has gazed unblinkingly and distastefully on the corporeal" (107). Also, Glück states that her writings are a product of her sadness, as whenever she is happy she undergoes a period of silence where she stops writing. As such, she says, "I began analysis imperiled not by happiness but by despair; in the years when that was most acute, I was wholly silent, on the page and in the world" (Glück, *American* 184). Also, "the real threat (...) is happiness which, by removing active unrest, sabotages creative life" (Glück, *American* 184). Therefore, writing seems to be a therapy where this author expresses her inner thoughts, concerns, and personal experiences, camouflaging them with mythology, psychoanalysis, and theology. However, as Piotr Zazula puts it, "though not a religious poet in a traditional sense, Glück has been for decades consistently addressing broadly-conceived spiritual matters with a recurrent theme of the individual's abortive attempts to establish contact with a detached and inaccessible deity" (159). Furthermore, as Sarah Wyman remarks, "whereas Glück explores gendered power dynamics throughout her poetry, she generally eschews overt political engagement with intersectional topics" (142). Additionally, Glück considers that "poetry survives because it haunts and it haunts because it is simultaneously utterly clear and deeply mysterious; because it cannot be entirely accounted for, it cannot be exhausted" (Glück, *American* 162).

¹⁰² See Clark 87-88.

¹⁰³ See Sewell; Vembar.

Fitting with her melancholic tone, we find in her writing echoes of prominent names such as William Shakespeare, William Blake, William Butler Yeats, John Keats, T. S. Eliot (Glück, *Proofs* 7) Rainer Maria Rilke (Glück, *Proofs* 21) Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, or Robert Lowell (Brahic 10). Reading Eliot made Glück feel the presence of the abyss (Glück, *Proofs* 21), and the fact that Eliot's speakers cannot speak or cannot be heard (Glück, *Proofs* 22) seems to be reflected in her poetry. However, she warns us that we can only perceive the echoes of the authors we have read (Glück, *American* 69). William Blake has influenced Glück in the way she repeats multiple of the titles of her poetry.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Blake, as Hurst points out, "repeats titles to accentuate contrasting perspectives on the same figure («The Chimney Sweeper») or scene («Holy Thursday») in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794)" (2022: 82).

Indeed, Rainer Maria Rilke has deeply influenced Louise Glück. As such, Rilke's melancholic writing could be assimilated into the gloom we find in Glück's poetry. Rilke concentrates on questions related to life and death, which is matched by Glück, who addresses similar subjects through her writings. Also, both developed an interest in mythology and similar myths, namely the myth of Orpheus found in Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* and Glück's *Vita Nova*.

Glück's wish to become a poet started in her early teens (Glück, *Proofs* 16), writing, so far, thirteen books of poetry even though at times she has to cope with long periods of silence where she does not write. One of the things she desired the most was to get a poem to be memorable (Glück, *Proofs* 17). Throughout Glück's writing, we find a similarity in motifs.¹⁰⁵ Life and death, earth, the mysteries of the soul and the body, the self, vegetation, and dreams seem to be the persistent motives we find in her poetry. Also, we perceive a sense of autobiography, theology, psychoanalysis, and, last but not least, the influence of classical mythology. Motifs such as death and the battle between the soul and the body, nature, earth, and many others are present in the story of Demeter and Persephone. Therefore, at times the use of this myth in her *Averno* seems, partly, an excuse to link poems like "October" and "Prism." Not only that, Glück gives Demeter, Persephone, and Hades a new range of traits absent in the

¹⁰⁴ E.g., "Persephone the Wanderer" appears twice in *Averno*.

¹⁰⁵ See D. Morris; Gray 305 for motifs in Glück's writing.

earliest ancient source of this myth. Demeter, along with Hades, acquires, in Glück's *Averno*, narcissistic traits. The main reason might not only be the way Glück perceives the myth, but also her interest in this psychoanalytic topic found over and over in the preceding poetry she wrote before *Averno*. Having existential thoughts about our place in the world, what we came here for, and what awaits us after death are very common. Indeed, Louise Glück appears to have had these thoughts for many years; she published her first book of poetry in 1968 and the latest one in 2021, thirteen books of poetry that recurrently address some of the same themes related to life and death.

The motifs that remind us of the autobiographical influence on Glück's writing are predominant. She writes about authoritarian parents, a dead sister, the battle against her sister for her mother's love, and another sister with whom she addressed different dilemmas, anorexia, or even the death of a father.¹⁰⁶ Consciously or unconsciously addressing her personal life only enriches her poetry, and she does not see any wrong in doing so, as she writes in her poem "Summer Night" pertaining to *The Seven Ages* (2001): "Why not? Why not? Why should my poems not imitate my life? / Whose lesson is not the apotheosis but the pattern, whose meaning / is not in the gesture but in the inertia, the reverie" (12-14).

Glück's *Firstborn* was rejected at least twenty-eight times before being published (Cole 97). This book of poetry is highly influenced by Sylvia Plath,¹⁰⁷ as she follows her "confessional" style.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, as Robert Baker remarks, Glück reflects on her personal experiences in her writings as she writes about:

the sorrows of family (the family of her childhood as well as the family of her adulthood), the costs of a longing for independence lived primarily as a stance of opposition, or the tension between a longing for independence and a longing for relationship, and an intuition that the core of human experience is loss, grief, and death. (131)

Throughout her whole poetry, we sense some similarities between these two authors, not only in motifs but also in diction and tone. For instance, in *Firstborn*, the diction serves as a constant

¹⁰⁶ See Glück, *Proofs*.

¹⁰⁷ See Harrison; Logan 200.

¹⁰⁸ See MacGowan 159.

reminder of motherhood, death, nature, marriage, and family relationships in general. However, the influence of Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, and Robert Lowell seems much more predominant in this first work, along with Shakespeare and mythic characters such as Venus and Andromeda. Then, seven years later, *The House On Marshland* is highly characterised for its biblical allusions while also referring to mythological motifs. In this book of poetry, Glück first alludes to the myth of Demeter and Persephone with her poem “Pomegranate.” In *The House On Marshland*, “For My Mother” starts: “It was better when we were / together in one body” (1-2), resonating with “Persephone the Wanderer” (II) when Demeter asks Persephone “what are you doing outside my body?” (58) as:

the daughter’s body
doesn’t exist, except
as a branch of the mother’s body
that needs to be
reattached any cost. (61-65)

The narcissistic mother who wants to keep authority over her daughter reminds us of the suffocating control Glück experienced in her childhood and subsequently reflected in her writing with the help of her psychoanalytic understanding. In *The Wild Iris*, this narcissistic perception is furthered when the narrator states in “Midsummer”:

You were not intended
to be unique. You were
my embodiment, all diversity

not what you think you see
searching the bright sky over the field,
your incidental souls
fixed like telescopes on some
enlargement of yourselves—

Why would I make you if I meant
to limit myself

to the ascendant sign,
the star, the fire, the fury? (18-29)

This expresses the power of creating life and the narcissistic link between the creator and the creation. This is further seen in “Early Darkness,” where the narrator states:

Never forget you are my children.
You are not suffering because you touched each other
but because you were born,
because you required life
separate from me. (17-21)

In Glück’s writing, this narcissistic attachment can be divine,¹⁰⁹ as it is the case of the previous lines or even human as seen in other books of poetry. For instance, in *Descending Figures*, Glück transmits once more the idea of the mother’s body as the safest place for the child in “Pietà,” where the mother knows that the child wants to remain inside her body since he has no father. Also, “Glück emphasizes the vulnerable physical body of the child and the ambivalence of maternity through the emotional detachment and physical separation of the mother from her child” (D. Morris 146), which I deem started with her autobiographical experience as a daughter and then continued as a mother. “Pietà” reflects hardships tied to being Jesus’ mother as she knew that the moment she gave birth to him, he would no longer be safe. Nevertheless, even if this poem has biblical resonances, I consider that Glück empathises with Mary as, by the time she wrote this book of poetry, she had given birth to a boy who also had one parent.¹¹⁰ I also consider that this is reflected in *Averno* by merging the divine narcissistic sense of creating life and the human when attributing human traits to a goddess. In “Lamentations,” in *Descending Figures*, the position of parenthood is clear: “they understood they were the mother and father, / there was no authority above them” (38-39). This resonates with “Prism” in *Averno* as it addresses the authority tied to the parental role. *The Triumph of Achilles*, once more, displays biblical and mythological resonances alluding to Jesus and the *Iliad*.

¹⁰⁹ See Gregerson; Gordon.

¹¹⁰ See Glück, “The Nobel Prize.”

Interestingly, one of the themes found in every single book of poetry Glück has written are the concepts of love and marriage. Glück presents us with characters who constantly need to give up part of who they are for someone else's sake, mainly women. Also, she addresses the love that curses us because we will always love someone we will lose. In *The Triumph of Achilles*, there is a poem that explains the reason. In "From the Japanese," we read: "Why love what you will lose? / There is nothing else to love" (77-78). One way or another, Glück's characters have to face the loss of a loved one which most of the time comes through death. This is seen in *Ararat*, where the family has to cope with the loss of the husband/father. The pain that loving implies is easily perceived in "First Memory":

in childhood, I thought
that pain meant
I was not loved.
It meant I loved. (1-9)

Also, in *Meadowlands*, where the *Odyssey* and the theme of marriage lead the narrative,¹¹¹ grief is an expression of love as found in "Departure," as the speaker asks, "*How can I know you love me / unless I see you grieve over me?*" (26-27). This view of love is remarkably present in *Averno*, where Demeter grieves for her daughter's loss while blaming her at the same time for her abduction, as I see it, in a desperate attempt to gain her narcissistic supply back. However, I submit that this perception is implicitly suggested in Demeter's behaviour and Persephone's reaction. Yet, implicitly or not, there is no doubt Glück understands and refers to narcissism as seen, for instance, in *Meadowlands*, in "Parable of the Swans":

On a small lake off
the map of the world, two
swans lived. As swans,
they spent eighty percent of the day studying
themselves in the attentive water and
twenty percent ministering to the beloved
other. Thus

¹¹¹ See MacGowan 160; Felson and Slatkin 114.

their fame as lovers stems
chiefly from narcissism, which leaves
so little leisure for
more general cruising. (1-11)

As perceived in these lines and seen in every single book of poetry Louise Glück has written, parent-children relationships in general, and love relationships, in particular, seem to be characterised by the narcissistic mirroring of a self into the other, making it impossible to distinguish where one starts and the other ends. From my perspective, in Glück's writings, we see how lovers seem to be reinforcing the idea of giving up part of who we are for someone else's sake. Then, in *Vita Nova*, where divorce and Orpheus play a preeminent role, in "Lute Song," we read:

Valiantly reconstructed
(out of terror and pain)
and then overwhelmingly beautiful;

restoring, ultimately,
not Eurydice, the lamented one,
but the ardent
spirit of Orpheus, made present

not as a human being, rather
as pure soul rendered
detached, immortal,
through deflected narcissism. (3-13)

These melancholic lines unite mythology and psychoanalysis. They link the myth of Orpheus, meaningfully related to that of Demeter and Persephone, and explicitly introduce psychoanalytic terminology, such as that of narcissism. Then, in *The Seven Ages*, in "The Empty Glass," narcissism becomes "moral" and, thus, an advantage:

Was it the sea? Responding, maybe,

to celestial force? To be safe,
I prayed. I tried to be a better person.
Soon it seemed to me that what began as terror
and matured into moral narcissism
might have become in fact
actual human growth. Maybe
this is what my friends meant, taking my hand,
telling me they understood
the abuse, the incredible shit I accepted,
implying (so I once thought) I was a little sick
to give so much for so little.
Whereas they meant I was *good* (clasping my hand intensely)—
good friend and person, not a creature of pathos. (14-27)

The speaker realises she is praised and treated well after overcoming abuse instead of being pitied or blamed.¹¹² The constant interest Glück has in narcissism stems from the role psychoanalysis has in her life as something that caught her attention for many years and so is reflected in her poetry. Among the psychoanalytical influences seen in Glück's poetry, we find, for starters, Freud with precisely his idea of narcissism; the differentiation of the id, the ego, and the superego; the realities that dreams reflect; trauma; and sexuality, among other ideas. An explicit example of Freud's influence on Glück is reflected in *Winter Recipes From the Collective*:

The sun was setting.
Ah, the torch, she said.
It has gone out, I believe.
Our best hope is that it's flickering,
fort/da, fort/da, like little Ernst
throwing his toy over the side of his crib
and then pulling it back. It's too bad,
she said, there are no children here.
We could learn from them, as Freud did. (14-22)

¹¹² See Radke on narcissism in Glück's writing.

Glück's knowledge of psychoanalysis merges with mythology, representing her earliest readings (Glück, *American* 55). Mythology holds very high value to Glück as she constantly alludes to it in her writings. Glück demonstrates that the rules of life, death, and love apply to all of us independently of our outer circumstances. At times Glück seems to be writing from a female perspective. However, in some poems, the speaker is more likely to be a male speaker, playing in her favour as everyone can identify themselves with the different dilemmas encountered in her poetry. Although there is much light and hope in her writings, at first glance, her poetry might look gloomy, depressive, and even anxious. As such, she contemplates topics with passion, leaving the readers with a taste of different of her own emotions. Although each of her poems presents a variety of influences and conveys a range of different ideas, all of them have much in common, as reflected in the recurrence of certain expressions, motifs, and even tone.

5.2. Reception Studies in *Averno*

An instance of Reception Studies concerned with the relationship between the source text and the new work (Hardwick 4) is *Averno*, which presents echoes of different sources, namely the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* through D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Poetry* (1962). Glück receives the myth of Demeter through D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Poetry*, which presents both Homeric and Ovidian traits, much known by Glück.¹¹³ The Greek resonances of the names of Demeter, Persephone, and Hades reflect the Homeric influence. Yet, the title *Averno* infers the Roman term that refers to the entrance to the underworld.¹¹⁴ Also, since Graves' version merges both Homeric and Ovidian tales, we can perceive the influence of Graves in D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Poetry* and, thus, in Glück. Glück's appropriation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone shows to be an original reworking of, for instance, the role of motherhood found in the original source. Glück finds a way to reimagine the myth and contextualise it in the current context. The story of Demeter and Persephone is received by Glück, making explicit allusions to the source and then providing a remarkable view of the same events making them fit our contemporary reality. As Gosmann puts it:

¹¹³ See Glück, *American* 8-22.

¹¹⁴ See Azcuy 109; Hurst 75.

The structure of *Averno* is inspired by Persephone's cyclical experience of life and death. The book is organized as a half-cycle, starting out from the world of the living, leading into and traversing the underworld, and ending with the announcement of Persephone's rebirth and return to the earth. It is framed by two poems that are both called "Persephone the Wanderer" and that can be understood as gateways marking the entrance into the underworld and the exit from it. (147)

Gosmann rightfully explains the correlation between the title, the content as a whole, and its link to the mythic tale with Persephone's cyclical experience when swinging between Demeter and Hades, life and death. When Persephone is abducted, Demeter follows the ancient mythical script and roams the earth in grief in "Persephone the Wanderer" (II), and "punishes the earth" (4) in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I). Since Demeter is the goddess of the earth and the mother-goddess, she is well known for creating. However, when in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I) Demeter "punishes the earth" (4) her behaviour resonates with that of "human behaviour" (l. 5), Which ends up being called "negative creation" (10) referring to Demeter's original role as a creator, and her destructiveness after her daughter's abduction. Then, in this same poem, Persephone returns to her mother with shame because she is no longer a child:

(...) Persephone

returns home

stained with red juice like

a character in Hawthorne— (20-23)

Here, by associating Persephone with Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, Persephone is regarded as adulterous in her mother's eyes because of the abduction. This slightly resonates with the Homeric tale, when Persephone tells her version of the events to her mother, there seems to be a desperate attempt to regain her mother's trust after the abduction, alluding to her female companions one by one, emphasising that her version of the events is the whole truth and conveniently forgetting Hades' speech (*HDem.* 406-433). Indeed, Hades had mentioned the honours Persephone would acquire as his wife, which matches Hades' entitlement

in “A Myth of Devotion” as he constantly justifies the abduction by assuming that everyone wants love.

In “Persephone the Wanderer” (I), Persephone’s abduction remains a mystery, and so does what happens to her once in the underworld. However, unlike the ancient tale where very little is known about about Persephone’s feelings and what Hades was thinking when he abducted her, Glück fills a gap in the original myth by presenting Persephone’s perspective in “A Myth of Innocence” and Hades’ version of the events in “A Myth of Devotion.”

In “A Myth of Innocence,” although we perceive a Persephone that is quite different from the ancient myth as she feels suffocated by her mother’s control, we learn that “the girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was” (23-25), matching the moment Koré becomes Persephone in the Homeric myth. Moreover, in “A Myth of Devotion,” the name Hades chooses to give to the new place created for Persephone is “*Persephone’s Girlhood*” (40), encapsulating once more what he takes from her: her girlhood, making her become Persephone, the goddess of the underworld. Then, the bed Hades added to the world he built for Persephone resonates with the one that appears in the *Homeric Hymn*. Furthermore, even if in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Pluto does not wait years to abduct Proserpina, he watches her and then carries her away, just as Hades does in “A Myth of Devotion” in a stalking-like manner.

As accurately stated in “Persephone the Wanderer” (II) and similarly to the ancient tale, Persephone is “... going to know, really, // only two adults: death and her mother” (28-29). Glück’s choice of the myth of Demeter and Persephone for *Averno* seems far from random. She has indeed received this myth from a very personal perspective. She was herself controlled by a mother who had lost another daughter. This control was so suffocating that Glück decided to stop from eating to gain a sense of power over her own body.¹¹⁵ However, little did she know how quick this would backfire at her as she developed anorexia nervosa:

¹¹⁵ On eating disorders see Davis 75-78.

what I had thought of as an act of will, an act I was perfectly capable of controlling, of terminating, was not that; I realized that I had no control over this behavior at all. (...) I understood that at some point I was going to die. (...) I didn't want to die. Even then, dying seemed a pathetic metaphor for establishing a separation between myself and my mother. (Glück, *Proofs* 11)

This controlling motherly feeling is certainly reflected in “Persephone the Wanderer” (II):

(...) Her mother
is like a figure at a bus stop,
an audience for the bus's arrival. Before that,
she was the bus, a temporary
home or convenience. Persephone, protected,
stares out the window of the chariot. (18-23)

Glück selects the myth of Demeter and Persephone in *Averno* for a personal reason. These lines make us ponder about the authoritarian motherhood she had to contend with herself. Here, Demeter was the bus that had full control over her daughter but now that she has to share her daughter with Hades she is reduced to a “figure at a bus stop” (19). This understanding of the ancient myth does not match the ancient sources but it offers an innovative and personal appropriation of the myth. The same poem ponders further about the control Demeter has on Persephone as “the daughter's body / doesn't exist, except / as a branch of the mother's body” (64-66). Although this does not correlate with the ancient source, these two goddesses keep being associated and even treated as one.

In spite of the differences between the ancient sources and Glück's reception of this myth, similarly to the ancient tales, just as Zeus/Jupiter had decided Persephone's fate after she broke her fast —willingly or unwillingly— in the underworld, “Persephone the Wanderer” (II) remarks: “if Zeus will get her back, / winter will end. // Winter will end, spring will return” (73-75).

5.2.1. Motherhood

Motherhood is regarded and experienced differently by each mother. Indeed, “the concept of motherhood is ever-changing, historically variable, both in its meaning and content, as well as in the identities and experiences to which it refers and generates” (Blasco Herranz and Serrano-Niza 14). The first poem in *Averno* that emphasises motherhood is “Persephone the Wanderer” (I), where, being the goddess of the harvest, Demeter punishes the earth mimicking the ancient *Homeric Hymn*, as the Earth was the one that had created the narcissus to trap Persephone. Furthermore, Demeter also blamed the land of Sicily for her daughter’s abduction. She seems to hold a massive grudge against the earth she rules and from where her daughter was taken. Nonetheless, in Glück’s appropriation of the myth, even if her Demeter also punishes the earth, she is explicitly compared to a human being which lowers her role as a goddess:

In the first version, Persephone
is taken from her mother
and the goddess of the earth
punishes the earth—this is
consistent with what we know of human behavior,

that human beings take profound satisfaction
in doing harm, particularly
unconscious harm:

we may call this
negative creation. (1-10)

The fact that Persephone “is taken from her mother” (2) foreshadows how her life is not hers but of Demeter. The concept of motherhood for Glück is a very narcissistic one. For Glück, when it comes to love, be it motherly or erotic love, the loved object is attached to the one that loves them. They either no longer own their lives or have never owned them. This is exactly what happens to Persephone, whose mother has always perceived her as an extension of herself and not as an individual being. However, this is the way Demeter conveys her motherly love. She has

not learned to express it differently. She understands that Persephone was once in her body, and now that she is no longer inside of her, she is incapable of giving up that bond that united them once. The role of the mother is to produce, and here as we are addressing the mother goddess, there is a much deeper emphasis on the fact that she is not creating, but rather destroying as a product of her wrathful care for her daughter. Also, Demeter is assimilated into a human mother as her behaviour matches that of a human being. Motherhood appears to be what both goddesses and women share. There is a lot of symbolic meaning behind the fact that the last words we read in the tenth verse are “negative creation.” Here we see how the emptiness Demeter experiences as a mother that loses her child to abduction evokes powerful destructive emotions. Indeed, the speaker devotes the first ten lines to address the role of motherhood and the universality of this sentiment. As Schroeder remarks, in this poem “the speaker comments on the process of re-telling a myth, utilizing techniques that proliferate in many of Glück’s mythic poems: the speaker continually asks questions and challenges authority” (11). Indeed, Demeter’s authority as a mother is questioned. Moreover, interestingly, Demeter’s maternal care changes once Persephone goes back to her. Demeter notices that her child is no longer the same. Her motherly love changes, which stands ironic yet depicts the way feelings change:

As is well known, the return of the beloved
does not correct
the loss of the beloved: Persephone

returns home
stained with red juice like
a character in Hawthorne— (18-23)

These lines hold a strong message, using simple diction filled with allusions. When Demeter, as a mother, realises that her child has become a woman and that she is no longer the child she was grieving for, she treats Persephone as the one responsible for her own abduction by making her feel guilt and shame.¹¹⁶ The moment Persephone perceives her mother’s hostility, she understands that she is in an even worse situation now that she is back on earth. At first, her mother’s love suffocated her because of her overprotectiveness, and now she uses shame to

¹¹⁶ These emotions are further explained in 5.4.3. *Emotions*.

express her resentment. Demeter considers that her daughter's abduction has left a scar on her, initially resulting in her wrath on the earth and then in her anger toward her own child. There is no room for forgiveness when the scar is opened each year when Persephone returns with Hades. Home is the place where we feel safe and at ease. Persephone does not have that because her mother remains resentful even when Persephone is back on earth. Demeter seems to be looking for someone to blame. First, she blames the earth where the abduction occurs, and then she blames Persephone, who she does not consider the real victim. Demeter, as a mother, deems herself to be a victim when she is deprived of her daughter, but when this latter returns to her side, she sees in her a woman and not the child she had lost:

I am not certain I will
keep this word: is earth
"home" to Persephone? Is she at home, conceivably,
in the bed of the god? Is she
at home nowhere? Is she
a born wanderer, in other words
an existential
replica of her own mother, less
hamstrung by ideas of causality? (24-32)

The constancy of different questions repeating the third person subject "she" throughout these verses incites debate and encourages empathy toward Persephone. Here "Glück raises questions concerning the ramifications of physical love" (El Bakary 129). Mentioning Hades' bed emphasises the reasons Demeter resents Persephone, who spends part of the year in the underworld with the god of the underworld which Demeter cannot reach. Not knowing what takes place in the underworld when her daughter is with Hades makes Demeter consider that Persephone is betraying her. Also, Demeter deems that Persephone is not respecting her role as a daughter by omitting her, by choice or not, from her life for part of the year. Again, the verb "born" alludes to Persephone's role as a daughter and Demeter's role as a mother. Just like her mother, Persephone is bound to wander. Nevertheless, they will wander for different reasons. Demeter's sense of motherhood is the one that will push her to roam the earth in search of her daughter, and Persephone's abduction is the one that will make her wander between the earth and

the underworld. Demeter resents her daughter because she deems her daughter “is having sex in hell” (47). She understands that Persephone is no longer the child she once was. Instead, Demeter sees her daughter as a woman with full knowledge of sexual desire and, thus, the sentiment of shame she drives her daughter to experience. Persephone becoming a woman threatens Demeter’s role as a mother, and therefore she makes Persephone feel guilt for her kidnapping. Also, Persephone is held responsible for the appearance of winter (48-50). Yet it is her mother the one that chooses to stop vegetation from growing with winter. Persephone appears constantly blamed, but this seems a mere tactic to justify Demeter’s attitude when pushing Persephone to feel shame. Persephone’s understanding of motherhood is that of authority. She sees in her mother a goddess that rules the earth depending on her mood. When Demeter grieves for her daughter’s loss, she makes the earth pay for her pain:

She does know the earth
is run by mothers, this much
is certain. She also knows
she is not what is called
a girl any longer. Regarding
incarceration, she believes

she has been a prisoner since she has been a daughter. (56-62)

The repetition of the pronoun “she” keeps giving Persephone the main role in her story in Glück’s revisiting of the myth. The grammatical structures in these verses are calculated as Glück combines the present simple, present passive voice, and present perfect, meaningfully depicting the reality in which Persephone finds herself. As such, what motherhood represents for Persephone is control. She understands her condition as a daughter as a suffocating one. Furthermore, as El Bakary remarks, “instead of rejoicing at the moment of reunion with her mother, Glück portrays it as a burden which Persephone has to endure” (133). When she goes back to her mother, she feels uncomfortable and unsafe. Persephone knows that with her mother, she does not have any freedom and much less after becoming Hades’ wife.

The terrible reunions in store for her

will take up the rest of her life.
When the passion for expiation
is chronic, fierce, you do not choose
the way you live. You do not live;
you are not allowed to die.

You drift between earth and death
which seem, finally,
strangely alike. (63-71)

Persephone understands that returning to her mother on earth is the same as staying with her husband in the underworld. Both restrict her liberty and do not allow her to develop independence. Then we read, “White of forgetfulness, / white of safety—” (75-76) where the whiteness alludes to the snow of the winter Demeter creates, which is also the time that Persephone spends in the underworld away from her controlling mother. Here, as El Bakary points out, Glück echoes “the notion of winter/death as a safe haven of forgetfulness for the inhabitants of Eliot’s Waste Land” (138). Ironically, the winter, which symbolises Demeter’s grief, represents at the same time the only time Persephone is safe from her mother. On the other hand, Demeter is the one that gave life to Persephone and therefore denotes life for her daughter. On the other hand, Hades represents death for Persephone:

They say
there is a rift in the human soul
which was not constructed to belong
entirely to life. Earth

asks us to deny this rift, a threat
disguised as suggestion—
as we have seen
in the tale of Persephone
which should be read

as an argument between the mother and the lover—

the daughter is just meat. (77-87)

As Hurst points out, “Demeter stands for the earth and life, Hades for death, and Persephone inclines towards death: «They say / there is a rift in the human soul / which was not constructed to belong / entirely to life»” (82). As the goddess of the underworld, she does not belong entirely to the earth. However, her mother does not want to share her with the god of the dead. The same happens with the earth, where giving us life is asking us to deny death. Therefore, Persephone is nothing more than an object used by her mother and her husband to fulfil their respective roles. The former is the goddess of the harvest, and the latter is the god of the underworld. Also, without Persephone, Demeter cannot implement motherhood. Indeed, when Persephone descends to the underworld, she can no longer sing the songs that represent life on earth and that address her mother:

When death confronts her, she has never seen
the meadow without the daisies.
Suddenly she is no longer
singing her maidenly songs
about her mother’s
beauty and fecundity. Where
the rift is, the break is. (88-94)

Persephone struggles by trying not to fall into the rift that will worsen her relationship with her mother: “My soul / shattered with the strain / of trying to belong to earth—” (97-99). Persephone is trying to fix the mother-daughter bond by trying to belong to earth after seeing how Demeter treats her when once more united. This authoritarian motherhood is furthered in “Prism,” where we learn of the “mother’s formula” (22) repeated by the speaker’s sister. As Spann explains, in this poem, Glück’s “scope has widened from a focus on intimate, psychological exploration to include social critique” (181). As such, here, motherhood concentrates on the desire that the mother has for her daughters to follow her path: “ ‘You girls,’ my mother said, ‘should marry / someone like your father’ ” (31-32). The relevance of love and marriage for the mother in “Prism” comes from the importance of having daughters that will become wives and mothers

following her example. Therefore, the imperativeness of explaining what love is from an early age. Then, in “Fugue,” motherhood is represented through a metaphor inside a dream:

I had a dream: my mother fell out of a tree.
After she fell, the tree died:
it had outlived its function.
My mother was unharmed — her arrows disappeared, her wings
turned to arms. Fire creature: Sagittarius. She finds herself in —

a suburban garden. It is coming back to me. (21-26)

In a simulating a therapy session (G. Brown 72), the narrator’s subconscious reveals what motherhood represents for the speaker as she dreams of her mother falling from a tree. In my view, this metaphor addresses the role of motherhood as the mother has to care for her child until this child no longer needs the dependency bond established through physical and emotional care. Once the mother has fulfilled her role, she is no longer needed since the child no longer needs her. Therefore, in the speaker’s dream, once her mother falls out of the tree, she is unharmed, becoming independent. Then, in “A Myth of Innocence,” we find the suffocation of motherhood as the child is still attached to the mother as if it were a tree. When Persephone goes to the pool to regard herself, she sees a “horrible mantle / of daughterliness still clinging to her” (5-6). Here Persephone is desperate to gain independence by becoming a woman herself. Thus, as she laments the control of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest who controls everything surrounding Persephone and therefore reminds her daughter of her constant authority, she prays for a change:

everything in nature is in some way her relative.
I am never alone, she thinks,
turning the thought into a prayer.
Then death appears, like the answer to a prayer. (9-12)

After Persephone prays for a change, death appears. Yet, since she is a goddess, she cannot die, thus, the change implies marriage with the god of the dead:

No one understands anymore
how beautiful he was. But Persephone remembers.
Also that he embraced her, right there,
with her uncle watching. She remembers
sunlight flashing on his bare arms. (13-17)

To escape her mother's control, Persephone embraces Hades to become a woman and leave childhood behind, and indeed, "The girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was" (23-25). As Frankel points out, Persephone is "seeking an escape from a life so close to her mother that she has no identity of her own. As such, she finds herself lost in love for the dark god, one who promises her a refuge out of sight of her family" (43). Persephone cannot undo her marriage with Hades nor the fact that she is no longer a maiden. However, she will never change her condition as a daughter. Demeter and Persephone will always be tied because of their mother-daughter bond. In "Blue Rotunda," motherhood represents a problem that needs to be solved:

*Blue sky, blue ice,
street like a frozen river*

you're talking
about my life
she said

•

except
she said
you have to fix it

in the right order
not touching the father
until you solve the mother (57-67)

The relevance of the motherly role is acknowledged as the speaker addresses the importance of her mother in her life. This seems a metaphorical way to contemplate the dilemma of the course

of life when struggling between what one wants and what their parents, mainly the mother, want for her child. Then, in “Persephone the Wanderer” (II), we perceive the grief of a mother concerned with the loss of her daughter:

In the second version, Persephone
is dead. She dies, her mother grieves—
problems of sexuality need not
trouble us here.

Compulsively, in grief, Demeter
circles the earth. We don't expect to know
what Persephone is doing.
She is dead, the dead are mysteries. (1-8)

The distance between mother and daughter shows that the only time Persephone is protected from motherly control is when she is apart from her mother. Since what Persephone is doing is a mystery to her mother, Demeter is enraged, as she grows resentment toward Persephone. Demeter is reluctant to give up her role as a mother and wants to regain control over her child:

We have here
a mother and a cipher: this is
accurate to the experience
of the mother as

she looks into the infant's face. She thinks:
I remember when you didn't exist. The infant
is puzzled: later, the child's opinion is
she has always existed, just as

her mother had always existed
in her present form. Her mother
is like a figure at a bus stop,
an audience for the bus's arrival. Before that,

she was the bus, a temporary
home or convenience. Persephone, protected,
stares out of the window of the chariot. (9-23)

Demeter, a mother, and Persephone, a cipher, a mystery her mother cannot solve. As the verses progress, the controlling motherly bond between Demeter and Persephone is strengthened as the mother regards her child as her belonging since she came out of her body. As such, Demeter is metaphorically associated with a bus. The latter carries passengers the same way a mother bore her baby inside of her. Now, Demeter feels her motherly role is being put at stake as she is reduced to an audience waiting for the bus's arrival. Sadly for Demeter, the only time Persephone is protected is in the chariot, where she is neither with her mother nor her husband.

5.2.2. Life

Although seemingly simple, the term life is quite complex, and so is reflected in Li Jianhui's 2019 study that reflects on the definition of life. However, one thing is clear: life implies existence. Life in *Averno* is constantly contrasted with death. As such, in "The Night Migrations," we grasp what it implies to live:

This is the moment when you see again
the red berries of the mountain ash
and in the dark sky
the birds' night migrations. (1-4)

These four lines are shaped through low diction, explaining how life appears to be filled with certain luxuries, such as seeing nature's beauty. However, life is not only about the pleasures the living enjoy while alive. It also implies the terror and suffering, and cold that the living beings have to endure, as noticed in "October," where the speaker wonders:

Is it winter again, is it cold again,
didn't Frank just slip on the ice,
didn't he heal, weren't the spring seeds planted

didn't the night end,
didn't the melting ice
flood the narrow gutters

wasn't my body
rescued, wasn't it safe

didn't the scar form, invisible
above the injury

terror and cold,
didn't they just end, wasn't the back garden
harrowed and planted— (1-13)

These verses are characterised by multiple repetitions of the past auxiliaries in the negative form “didn't” and “wasn't,” suggesting a disbelief tone. By enhancing the effect of winter, the season the plants and vegetation die, we learn of the relevance of life. Thus, these lines address, on the one hand, the implications of being alive as life combines the moments of utmost coldness and, on the other hand, those of restoration of the vegetation. Life appears to imply the combination of both realities as perceived in these lines. The speaker keeps remembering the combination of both realities: “I remember how the earth felt, red and dense, / in stiff rows, weren't the seeds planted, / didn't vines climb the south wall” (14-16). The safety of the earth is encapsulated in the life of vegetation:

didn't the night end, wasn't the earth
safe when it was planted

didn't we plant the seeds,
weren't we necessary to the earth,

the vines, were they harvested? (24-28)

Like previous verses, repetition remains present in these lines. The message conveyed in these verses reflects that life seems a privilege for all living beings, which also includes the earth itself:

Once more, the sun rises as it rose in summer;
bounty, balm after violence.
Balm after the leaves have changed, after the fields
have been harvested and turned. (51-54)

Life merges the two opposites of everything, the night and the day, the bareness of the winter and the planted spring seeds, coldness and warmth. Yet, even if life combines both extremes of reality, being alive seems unreal, and therefore the disbelief of the speaker:

Tell me this is the future,
I won't believe you.
Tell me I'm living,
I won't believe you. (55-58)

The speaker reflects distrust (Kočan Šalamon 104), but one thing is clear, all living beings are influenced by the two extremes found in life: "Sunrise. A film of moisture / on each living thing. Pools of cold light / formed in the gutters" (65-67). The joys of life differ from some to others. Thus, the narrator states: "What others found in art, / I found in nature. What others found / in human love, I found in nature" (71-73). There is a wide variety of joyful elements in life, and each can choose a different one. Furthermore, the combination of extremes causes life to be both good and bad:

Winter was over. In the thawed dirt,
bits of green were showing.

Come to me, said the world. I was standing
in my wool coat at a kind of bright portal—
I can finally say
long ago; it gives me considerable pleasure. Beauty

the healer, the teacher—

death cannot harm me
more than you have harmed me,
my beloved life. (75-84)

The diction depicts the transition from winter to spring. Also, the speaker acquires a profound sense of calm attached to a beauty that the speaker finds healing. Yet, at the same time, life combines beauty and harm. Death cannot hurt the speaker more than life has since life presents the two extremes of reality. However, life is not only human beings' concern, but it is also the concern of the earth, and to emphasise the importance of life for the earth, the latter is personified:

My friend the earth is bitter; I think
sunlight has failed her.
Bitter or weary, it is hard to say.

Between herself and the sun,
something has ended.
She wants, now, to be left alone;
I think we must give up
turning to her for affirmation.

Above the fields,
above the roofs of the village houses,
the brilliance that made all life possible
becomes the cold stars. (148-159)

Here the personified earth could very well be Demeter, who has become bitter after her daughter's abduction, "She wants, now, to be left alone" (153), and therefore she is no longer the one to be relied on for life. Thus, the relevance of life is expressed through Demeter's lifelessness. Then, in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I), life seems oppressive for Persephone, who

is under her mother's control. She cannot enjoy the pleasures of life, and death is denied to her because of her condition as a goddess. The closest she can escape life and her authoritarian mother is spending winter with the god of the underworld while earth suffers the consequences of Demeter's pain for losing her daughter:

When the passion for expiation
is chronic, fierce, you do not choose
the way you live. You do not live;
you are not allowed to die. (65-68)

As reflected in these verses, Persephone faces a duality in her life (Wong Yit Mun 7). She confronts the reality that she will neither be able to live the way she wants nor die. Thus, life becomes a curse just as much as death is. The battle between life and death is constant:

They say
there is a rift in the human soul
which was not constructed to belong
entirely to life. Earth

asks us to deny this rift, a threat
disguised as suggestion—
as we have seen
in the tale of Persephone
which should be read

as an argument between the mother and the lover—
the daughter is just meat. (77-87)

Living implies struggling between life and death. As long as there is life, there is also a risk of dying. However, the earth (once more personified) does not want to recognise that rift because the earth is only meaningful when life is present. This is expressed through the battle between Demeter and Hades over Persephone. Demeter represents the earth and the world of the living,

while Hades represents the underworld and the world of the dead, both fighting to gain control over Persephone, who “is just meat” (87), therefore:

When death confronts her, she has never seen
the meadow without the daisies.
Suddenly she is no longer
singing her maidenly songs
about her mother’s
beauty and fecundity. Where
the rift is, the break is. (88-94)

Here Persephone seems to metaphorically represent all living beings who dwell between life and death. Also, life for Persephone implies singing the maidenly songs for her mother, the goddess of vegetation, the one that is relied on by living beings.

In “Crater Lake,” good and evil battle and appear, metaphorically addressing life and death. Hence, the body is called good because, without life, it does not exist on earth. Automatically, death becomes evil because it implies the lack of life and, as a result, the absence of the body.

There was a war between good and evil.
We decided to call the body good.

That made death evil.
It turned the soul
against death completely. (1-5)

This makes the soul side with the body because without a body the soul has no vessel to live on earth. Thus, “the soul / wanted to side with the body” (7-8). Then, the connection between the soul and life is further addressed in “Echoes”:

This silence is my companion now.

I ask: *of what did my soul die?*
and the silence answers

if your soul died, whose life
are you living and
when did you become that person? (26-31)

In these verses, it becomes clear that the soul cannot live if it does not have a body. Hence, when stating that the soul died, it is implied that there is no longer a body. Nevertheless, the soul cannot be dead because it is present, so the only possible conclusion is that the soul has acquired another life, namely the body. Furthermore, as seen in “Averno,” the only possible death comes after the extinction of the spirit: “You die when your spirit dies. / Otherwise, you live” (1-2).

Also, life in “Landscape” conveys the effort humans and nature invest in the field. That itself represents life because both living worlds had to unite their endeavours. However, ironically, not much effort is required to destroy this creation of life:

In late autumn a young girl set fire to a field
of wheat. The autumn

had been very dry; the field
went up like tinder.

Afterward there was nothing left.
You walk through it, you see nothing.

There’s nothing to pick up, to smell.
The horses don’t understand it—

Where is the field, they seem to say.
The way you and I would say
where is home.

No one knows how to answer them.
There is nothing left;
you have to hope, for the farmer's sake,
the insurance will pay. (75-89)

These lines comprise simple diction, mixing simple and compound sentences. After describing the facts, the message conveyed in these verses becomes transparent: destroying is easier than creating, yet the impact of destruction is massive. This is, once more, the result of the combination of the two extremes found in life: nature, in this case, the field, and then the young girl and the match. "Her devastating action creates a kind of underworld above ground, a black and empty place which baffles the senses and renders nature alien" (Hurst 82). Nevertheless, even if this implies the farmer's loss, the earth does not seem bothered because it embraces both realities of life:

It is like losing a year of your life.
To what would you lose a year of your life?

Afterward, you go back to the old place—
all that remains is char: blackness and emptiness.

You think: how could I live here?

But it was different then,
even last summer. The earth behaved

as though nothing could go wrong with it.

One match was all it took.
But at the right time-it had to be the right time.

The field parched, dry—
the deadness in place already
so to speak. (90-102)

Although living beings, namely the farmer and the horses, will feel the consequences of destruction, the earth does not mind as it continues as if nothing had happened. Moreover, once more, the ease with which destruction takes place becomes shocking. The story of the girl that destroyed the farmer's field continues in "Averno":

The field was covered with snow, immaculate.
There wasn't a sign of what happened here.
You didn't know whether the farmer
had replanted or not.
Maybe he gave up and moved away.

The police didn't catch the girl.
After awhile they said she moved to some other country,
one where they don't have fields.

A disaster like this
leaves no mark on the earth.
And people like that — they think it gives them
a fresh start. (47-58)

Again, these lines also reflect how the earth continues with its path without being influenced by what happened. The farmer and what occurred no longer matters. What matters is the way the earth is unmoved because "A disaster like this / leaves no mark on the earth" (55-56). As such, "After the first winter, the field began to grow again" (136). The ideas reflected in "Landscape" and enhanced here:

Nature, it turns out, isn't like us;
it doesn't have a warehouse of memory.
The field doesn't become afraid of matches,
of young girls. It doesn't remember
furrows either. It gets killed off, it gets burned,
and a year later it's alive again

as though nothing unusual has occurred.

The farmer stares out the window.
Maybe in New Zealand, maybe somewhere else.
And he thinks: *my life is over*.
His life expressed itself in that field;
he doesn't believe anymore in making anything
out of earth. The earth, he thinks,
has overpowered me. (147-160)

The diction here continues to reflect the theme of nature by referring once more to the field that was destroyed. Nature and the field are constantly personified and metonymically associated with the earth. These verses convey once more the message that the earth is able to continue as if nothing while the farmer cannot. For the latter life has somehow ended as he identifies himself metaphorically with that field.

He remembers the day the field burned,
not, he thinks, by accident.
Something deep within him said: *I can live with this,*
I can fight it after awhile.

The terrible moment was the spring after his work was erased,
when he understood that the earth
didn't know how to mourn, that it would change instead.
And then go on existing without him. (161-168)

The impact of the field burning is such on the farmer, yet the earth is unbothered. Coming to terms with the earth's inability to mourn for the lost field seems hard to assimilate. Once more in "Landscape," even if the earth embraces every change included in life, humans do not:

In the silence of consciousness I asked myself:
why did I reject my life? And I answer
Die Erde überwältigt mich:

the earth defeats me. (134-137)

I believe this reasoning results from the wisdom of the earth that understands that life comprises two different extremes, but humans do not comprehend this reality. When caught between creation and destruction, they tend to reject their lives, unable to cope with obliteration. Something similar happens in “A Myth of Innocence,” where Persephone rejects life because of “the horrible mantle / of daughterliness still clinging to her” (5-6). Indeed, no matter how much goodness exists in life, she can only see her mother’s control and oppressive love.

Thus, “*I am never alone*, she thinks, / turning the thought into a prayer. / Then death appears, like the answer to a prayer” (10-12). Persephone prefers to embrace death over living a life that presents limitations. In “Averno,” we perceive the unsafety implied in living:

Some young girls ask me
if they’ll be safe near Averno —
they’re cold, they want to go south a little while.
And one says, like a joke, but not too far south —

I say, as safe as anywhere,
which makes them happy.
What it means is nothing is safe.

You get on a train, you disappear.
You write your name on the window, you disappear.

There are places like this everywhere,
places you enter as a young girl
from which you never return. (76-87)

Adding to the different realities encountered on the earth, we witness in Averno a sense of unsafety. The fact that not even the earth is considered safe enhances the danger of being near Averno. Glück puts special emphasis on the verb “disappear” by repeating it twice,

remembering, this way, certain dangers. This is exactly what happens to Persephone in “A Myth of Innocence,” as “The girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was” (23-25), alluding to the unsafety implied in being alive, because as long as we are alive, we can be harmed. Therefore, Persephone needs to embrace death, falsely hoping not to be harmed anymore. “Averno” also explains that the danger implied in life affects all living beings equally by mentioning once more the field the girl burned:

Like the field, the one that burned.
Afterward, the girl was gone.
Maybe she didn't exist,
we have no proof either way.

All we know is:
the field burned.
But we *saw* that.

So we have to believe in the girl,
in what she did. Otherwise
it's just forces we don't understand
ruling the earth. (88-98)

These lines reflect the need for the girl's role to explain what has happened, otherwise, the farmer would have to acknowledge that life combines two necessary realities: creation and destruction. The speaker knows that life is an enigma but acts as if not, which gives living beings a sense of power. Also, death contributes to making life a combination of two realities, but “*Is there any benefit in forcing upon oneself / the realization that one must die? / Is it possible to miss the opportunity of one's life?*” (128-130). Although life and death are linked, the persisting thought about death when alive can only add to one's misery in life. Then, in “Thrush”:

Someone like me doesn't escape. I think you sleep awhile,
then you descend into the terror of the next life
except

the soul is in some different form,
more or less conscious than it was before,
more or less covetous.

After many lives, maybe something changes.
I think in the end what you want
you'll be able to see—

Then you don't need anymore
to die and come back again. (11-21)

With a philosophical tone, we learn the reality of life after life and back to life on earth again, mimicking Persephone's eternal cycle when swinging between earth and the underworld. These verses convey the message that we each perceive life differently, as we all have distinct understandings of the meaning of life.

5.2.3. Death

Death implies the end of life, innate in the human condition and inevitable (Martí-García et al.). Death is one of the leading themes addressed in *Averno*. "Averno" stands as the first allusion to death as the entrance to the underworld in Roman terms.¹¹⁷ In "The Night Migrations," we see how the narrator feels sympathy for the dead ones, feeling even sorry for the things they are missing because of death:

This is the moment when you see again
the red berries of the mountain ash
and in the dark sky
the birds' night migrations.

It grieves me to think
the dead won't see them—

¹¹⁷ See de Vido. As per the literary resonances of the name Averno as a *topos* of the underworld which can be traced back both to Vergil and Dante, see D. Morris. Also, see Azcuy 109; Hurst 75.

these things we depend on,
they disappear. (1-8)

As Wong Yit Mun points out, we see how Glück “is preparing us for a re-imagining of death that is not something we should dread. It is difficult to imagine, but in *Averno*, the poet will prove that it is not impossible” (77). As such, the first stanza plays with colour and tone to help the reader picture what the dead ones in the second stanza are missing. This calculated description is possible thanks to the choice of diction and syntactic structure, which reflect the pain echoed in the speaker’s empathy for the dead. Even if death appears to be a curse at the beginning, later the narrator tries to see the bright side: “What will the soul do for solace then? / I tell myself maybe it won’t need / these pleasures anymore” (9-11). Here, the narrator wants to stop feeling compassion for the dead because “maybe just not being is simply enough, / hard as that is to imagine” (12-13). Glück’s writing allows us to empathise with the narrator, whose subjective approach toward death touches the reader and makes them wonder about the purpose behind existence itself. Glück coherently organises her poem in long syntactic structures, where there is a mixed diction as the poem per se presents low wording with terms with which we all are acquainted. However, the fact that she addresses a philosophical idea, namely, “maybe just not being is simply enough” (12), carries a slight Shakespearean allusion to Hamlet. Presenting similar written features, the poem that follows “The Night Migrations” is “October.”¹¹⁸ After Persephone’s abduction, winter expresses her descent into the world of the dead. Thus, in “October,” the narrator agonises because winter returned, reminding the endless cycle:

Is it winter again, is it cold again,
didn’t Frank just slip on the ice,
didn’t he heal, weren’t the spring seeds planted

didn’t the night end,
didn’t the melting ice
flood the narrow gutters

¹¹⁸ This poem had already been published two years prior to its republication as part of *Averno*, yet, since it fits the thematic narrative of the myth of Demeter and Persephone it will be addressed taking that into consideration.

wasn't my body
rescued, wasn't it safe

didn't the scar form, invisible
above the injury

terror and cold,
didn't they just end, wasn't the back garden
harrowed and planted— (1-13)

“October,” as Hurst remarks, “begins with disbelief that the seasons have passed so quickly, and with detached scrutiny of human suffering, healing and growth” (78). I concur with Daifotis, who points out that this poem “could be interpreted as narrated by both a contemporary narrator and/or Persephone” (17). Here, Persephone is condemned to replicate the same cycle again and again, and the repetition of “didn't” at the beginning of multiple verses reinforces this idea that is embedded in the different lines, aligning with the persistent rhetorical questions found in this poem. Also, the recurrence of “again” in the first line enhances the same idea. Plants, animals, and humans are condemned to suffer from the coldness resulting from Demeter's grief for her daughter's loss. This could allude to how Persephone feels because of the ongoing cycle. Winter represents the death of the seed while being, at the same time, the season of the year Persephone descends to the world of the dead. This continuous descent becomes an eternal torture for the one that had to descend and ascend, making death a cycle instead of an ending. The narrator says to have been silenced (21), and one of the things that could be implied by this silencing is death. Each of us has to go through a sort of winter in our lives, and that is what can be felt in Glück's “winter” as it is a recurrent motif in all her poetry. Descending to the underworld in winter, feeling death each year, and then summer comes as a temporary end to the narrator's agony, but it is too late as we cannot undo the pain of death, the aftermath of the disaster continues even after leaving the underworld:

Summer after summer has ended,
balm after violence:
it does me no good

to be good to me now;
violence has changed me. (29-33)

These verses are characterised by the repetition of diction. Here, in the same way we cannot fix broken glass, we cannot undo trauma. Indeed, trauma seems very present in Persephone, who cannot be the same after everything she goes through:

You hear this voice? This is my mind's voice;
you can't touch my body now.
It has changed once, it has hardened,
don't ask it to respond again. (39-42)

Writing these lines in the first person adds to the seriousness of the tone. For the narrator, there is no room for hope. She knows she is dead but she is not, and that is what leaves her hopelessly vulnerable:

Tell me this is the future,
I won't believe you.
Tell me I'm living,
I won't believe you. (55-58)

She knows she has no future, as there is no future for the hopeless and the lifeless. She understands she is not really alive, yet reflecting upon such a dilemma suggests that she is not dead. Worse than being dead is having to live but not being able to live: "death cannot harm me / more than you have harmed me, / my beloved life" (82-84). Death is not something to be afraid of as it is an ending, yet not being able to die and having to live in the world of the dead is something to fear. Persephone is not allowed to die even if she goes to the underworld. She lives with the dead, which is a greater curse. Moreover, going back to the upper world, which would supposedly be a relief, is a curse as well, and so is expressed in Glück's appropriation of the story of Demeter and Persephone. Each autumn, she is reminded that she is about to return to the underworld. As such, autumn plays as a trigger:

This is the light of autumn, not the light of spring.
The light of autumn: *you will not be spared.*

The songs have changed; the unspeakable
has entered them.

This is the light of autumn, not the light that says
I am reborn. (88-93)

Autumn becomes the main theme of these lines, as seen in the relevance of this season through the different repetitions and descriptions. Autumn represents for Persephone the end of life on earth and the beginning of the entrance of life into the underworld:

Maestoso, doloroso:

This is the light of autumn; it has turned on us.
Surely it is a privilege to approach the end
still believing in something. (112-115)

Autumn is a reminder of her sorrow. However, we perceive a glimpse of hope in the above-mentioned verses, but when a peak of hope is shown later on, it is taken away to emphasise the hopelessness of the narrator who is stuck:

as though it were the artist's
duty to create
hope, but out of what? what?

the word itself
false, a device to refute
perception— At the intersection,

ornamental lights of the season. (131-137)

The word hope itself seems a joke to the narrator as she knows there is no such thing for her. She does not want to feed herself with false hopes, and therefore she reduces the word to banality. From Demeter's perspective, Persephone entered the underworld when she was just a maiden not ready to reach adulthood. Moreover, here she has to enter the underworld not knowing what awaits her, alone, trying to convince herself of otherwise:

I was young here. Riding
the subway with my small book
as though to defend myself against

the same world:

you are not alone,
the poem said,
in the dark tunnel. (138-144)

This contemporary passage of the narrator through the tunnel reminds the reader of Persephone trying to face her fears. Another reminder of Persephone's descent to the underworld is the state of the earth left behind her: "From within the earth's / bitter disgrace, coldness and barrenness" (162-163). As seen in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I), "Persephone's initial / sojourn in hell..." (11-12) is no banality but from the narrator's perspective:

Persephone is having sex in hell.
Unlike the rest of us, she doesn't know
what winter is, only that
she is what causes it. (47-50)

Although Persephone certainly does not know what winter is, as she is in the underworld whenever winter occurs, being in hell gives her a hint of what a lifeless winter is. The narrator leaves us with many different existential questions with the affirmation that "there is a rift in the human soul / which was not constructed to belong / entirely to life..." (78-80) in an attempt to unravel the purpose of life itself. Even Persephone, who cannot die, is confronted with it:

When death confronts her, she has never seen
the meadow without the daisies.
Suddenly she is no longer
singing her maidenly songs
about her mother's
beauty and fecundity. Where
the rift is, the break is. (88-94)

Here Glück alludes directly to the myth of Demeter and Persephone, enabling those acquainted with the ancient tale to grasp these lines. Also, the last lines address the situation above-mentioned metaphorically. The narrator seems to be trying to open our eyes to the fact that we all experience an existential battle similar to Persephone: "My soul / shattered with the strain / of trying to belong to earth—" (97-99). As Afrah Mahdi Alwash puts it, Louise Glück:

has revealed and portrayed death as harshness, bleakness, gloominess, pain, and agonizing. There is no angle from which death can be adored and glorified. The way she has revealed the gruesome aspect of death makes the readers think about its power. In both poetry and prose, death has been and always will be an interesting and thrilling subject. It has remained a mystery for all time, and it always will. (993)

As such death remains something unknown. Trying to belong to earth while we know the existence of death. We want to keep belonging to earth as we know what life is, and we assume that death is the total opposite which frightens our souls. Diction in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I) is imperative when it comes to analysing syntax as it is diction that shapes syntax. Louise Glück coherently organises her poem in long syntactic structures. However, verses 44 and 45, "White of forgetfulness, / of desecration—" represent a sudden syntactical change that reoccurs in verses 75 and 76, "White of forgetfulness, / white of safety—" representing a dramatic change in the general syntactic structure. The formal tone of the syntax intends to raise the level of the diction. The recurrence of enjambment shows the way Glück masters syntax. For instance, the first nine lines are enjambed as we read:

In the first version, Persephone
is taken from her mother
and the goddess of the earth
punishes the earth—this is
consistent with what we know of human behavior,

that human beings take profound satisfaction
in doing harm, particularly
unconscious harm:

we may call this
negative creation. (1-10)

This first decastring is one sentence. In line ten, there is a stop that allows us to understand much better the way the poet has structuralized her poem with the following enjambment that goes from line 11 to line 17, where there is a slight change of topic in the verses. Each end-stopped line initiates another theme, for instance, while the first ten lines introduce the reader to the mythical events, the following seven lines redirect the myth to a contemporary association of Persephone with “modern girls.” Then, the following lines keep presenting enjambment until we reach line 32, where the question mark redirects the thematic while keeping the main topic. After line 32, the stops are much more frequent, and also the rhetorical questions, such as lines 42 and 43: “You must ask yourself: / where is it snowing?” or lines 52 to 55:

What is in her mind?
Is she afraid? Has something
blotted out the idea
of mind?

These questions consider Persephone’s situation and perspective attempting to empathise with her. This is also the case in lines 100 and 101: “What will you do, / when it is your turn in the field with the god?” Also, the strategic use of the passive voice and the alternation of present and past tense help the poet follow the poem as a “dilemma,” as Glück writes herself. Moreover, although the wording is both low and high, the accuracy of the syntactic choice gives the

impression of an elevated diction, as Freud is very present in Glück's writing when she addresses the ego, superego, and id.

As perceived in "Prism,"¹¹⁹ there is no answer to what the world is as "...The world / is in flux, therefore / unreadable..." (1-3), it is a mystery after all, as we do not know what death is and once we get to the end of the path, it is too late. However, we have this perception of death being "Darkness. Silence that annulled mortality" (79). In "Crater Lake," death is much more explained:

There was a war between good and evil.
We decided to call the body good.

That made death evil.
It turned the soul
against death completely. (1-5)

As long as we have a body, we are still alive. Therefore, having a body is good, the opposite would be not having a body and being dead. There seems to be a battle between the body and death, and the soul is stuck between both, vulnerable to death. If life is good, the conclusion that we get to is that death is evil, and the one that implies the death of the body, as seen in "Echoes," is the explicit presence of the soul:

Once I could imagine my soul
I could imagine my death.
When I imagined my death
my soul died. This
I remember clearly. (1-5)

¹¹⁹ This poem was published three years prior to its republication as part of *Averno* yet its thematic matches Persephone's tale, therefore its association to the myth as the whole book of poetry is united through that tale.

Once reached the state of being a soul, death comes as the body is left behind. Silence represents the nothingness found in death. As long as our heart beats, we are never going to experience complete silence, but once silence appears, then, death comes with it:

This silence is my companion now.

I ask: *of what did my soul die?*

and the silence answers

if your soul died, whose life

are you living and

when did you become that person? (26-31)

Nevertheless, another question arises, what if death is not total silence? What if, like Persephone, we are bound to live in the world of the dead and repeat an endless cycle? Such is the mystery of death. Then there is the question of purpose seen in “Fugue”: “I had a dream: my mother fell out of a tree. / After she fell, the tree died: / it had outlived its function” (21-23). As perceived in this dream, the question of what life is if there is death remains. The consolation of having a purpose in life, a “function,” would feel like a relief to those searching to find the meaning of life with death in it. There is also the implication that life cannot exist per se if it were not for the presence of death that gives life a role. Dreams, darkness, silence, and soul all of them are presented as associations with death:

In the dark, my soul said

I am your soul.

No one can see me; only you —

only you can see me. (50-53)

If no one can see them, then they do not live, and therefore the soul is unseen as it does not exist on earth but in the underworld, the world of souls, the world of the dead, after all. As the soul is not present, it does not have a body or a voice:

Why can't I cry out?

I should be writing *my hand is bleeding*,
feeling pain and terror — what
I felt in the dream, as a casualty of war. (57-60)

The self seems to be fighting a battle that associates death with a war that only the soul can feel:

Then my soul appeared. It said
just as no one can see me, no one
can see the blood.

Also: no one can see the harp.

Then it said
I can save you. Meaning
this is a test. (65-71)

However, instead of something we fear, death could also be what we should be seeking, the soul will only suffer as long as it is fighting death, and once death arrives, there should be no fear of torture.

I know what you want —
you want Orpheus, you want death.

Orpheus who said “Help me find Eurydice.”

Then the music began, the lament of the soul
watching the body vanish. (82-86)

Orpheus was more afraid of losing Eurydice than of dying. A fearless approach to death is the one that the narrator is implying. If reaching death is just temporary, as suggested in “The Evening Star,” then we are all living Persephone’s cycle, living, dying, and coming back to life:

in the evening sky
the first star seemed
to increase in brilliance
as the earth darkened

until at last it could grow no darker.
And the light, which was the light of death,
seemed to restore to earth (4-10)

Fear blinds us when thinking about death, but once it arrives, it is not necessarily that bad as we read in “Landscape”:

Listen: at the path’s end the man is calling out.
His voice has become very strange now,
the voice of a person calling to what he can’t see.

Over and over he calls out among the dark chestnut trees.
Until the animal responds
faintly, from a great distance,
as though this thing we fear
were not terrible. (20-27)

In these verses, the choice of verbs and diction is calculated as Glück uses verbs that allude to the senses. The repetition of the word “voice” and the verb “call” help emphasise the purpose of these lines, which is to diminish the pessimistic tone. Then, we learn how many paths on earth lead to death. We are so fragile that we can easily reach death:

Time passed, turning everything to ice.
Under the ice, the future stirred.
If you fell into it, you died.

It was a time

of waiting, of suspended action. (31-35)

However, the only thing that death means is steadiness. Even if we do not know what is ahead of us, what death implies, we do know that we only have “now”:

I lived in the present, which was
that part of the future you could see.
The past floated above my head,
like the sun and moon, visible but never reachable. (36-39)

As such, there is no death as long as there is time, as long as there is a “present.” Winter represents death. The time Persephone is in the underworld represents the death of the seed as well as coldness and silence:

Winter emptied the trees, filled them again with snow.
Because I couldn't feel, snow fell, the lake froze over.
Because I was afraid, I didn't move;
my breath was white, a description of silence. (44-47)

Acknowledging the existence of death makes time precious as it implies the lack of time on earth. Thus, we are asked: “To what would you lose a year of your life?” (91). Death is unwelcome when we want to live and are attached to life, but the moment we stop caring about remaining alive, death is not that easy to find:

I fell asleep in a river, I woke in a river,
of my mysterious
failure to die I can tell you
nothing, neither
who saved me nor for what cause— (103-107)

In prior writings, Glück made allusions to the Old and New Testaments, as seen, for instance, in *The House on Marshland* or *The Triumph of Achilles*.¹²⁰ In *Averno*, we still find the idea of resurrection that we could easily associate with Christianity but also with Persephone, who comes back from the world of the dead:

And I thought: if I am asked
to return here, I would like to come back
as a human being, and my horse

to remain himself. Otherwise
I would not know how to begin again. (169-173)

After descending to the world of the dead, Persephone resurrects as the goddess of the underworld since her marriage to Hades cannot be undone, nor can the fact that she has to spend time with her husband and with her mother. Therefore, Persephone follows the season cycle, the growth of the seed, and a sort of resurrection when coming back from the underworld to earth. In “A Myth of Innocence,” Persephone is so doomed and suffocated by her mother’s control that she finds death: “*I am never alone*, she thinks, / turning the thought into a prayer. / Then death appears, like the answer to a prayer” (10-12). Here, borrowing El Bakary’s words: “death is embraced, personified as Hades/ Pluto, the desired beloved” (131). Death here seems the only way to escape her mother’s abuse, yet she ignores the fact that, as a goddess, she cannot die. Once Persephone is in the underworld, we learn how Hades tricks her with a manipulation tactic not to let her see the sudden differences between the underworld and earth so that she does not find them as shocking as perceivable in “A Myth of Devotion”:

When Hades decided he loved this girl
he built for her a duplicate of earth,
everything the same, down to the meadow,
but with a bed added. (1-4)

¹²⁰ For example, in *The House on Marshland* the poem “The Murderess;” in *The Triumph of Achilles*, “Winter Mourning” or “A Parable”.

Indeed, this poem fills a gap in the original myth, where little is known about what takes place in the world of the dead. Here, Hades makes a replica of the earth in the underworld, yet he adds a bed reflecting his true intentions: making Persephone his wife.

Everything the same, including sunlight,
because it would be hard on a young girl
to go so quickly from bright light to utter darkness

Gradually, he thought, he'd introduce the night,
first as the shadows of fluttering leaves.
Then moon, then stars. Then no moon, no stars.
Let Persephone get used to it slowly.
In the end, he thought, she'd find it comforting. (5-12)

The following lines explain further what Hades includes in the underworld to trick Persephone into believing that death and life are equated. Ironically, for Persephone, both will always be the same because of Demeter and Hades, who want to control her. Also, as El Bakary rightfully puts it, "One wonders if these preparations are a part of the scheme of seduction of the innocent Persephone. It is significant that this desire to please the beloved is a "myth" of love, concealing the sombre truth of death" (130). Yet, eventually, Hades thinks about introducing the world of darkness, little by little. Since Hades has seen both worlds, he understands the immense difference that all of this implies for Persephone:

That's what he felt, the lord of darkness,
looking at the world he had
constructed for Persephone. It never crossed his mind
that there'd be no more smelling here,
certainly no more eating. (29-33)

In this poem, as Hurst points out, "The speaker notes that he fails to anticipate that Persephone's earthly appetites will not be satisfied by his creation, but suggests that this is a typical delusion for a lover and does not condemn his schemes. In the end, all that he can offer is death itself, the

absence of pain” (83). As such, Hades, “the lord of darkness” (29), appears to miss that his creation camouflages the truth. He ignores what Persephone wants and feels. He seems to trick her selfishly into believing that this new place is similar to earth, but this is the world of the dead. One thing is clear, no matter how much of a relief death can be, there is nothing worse than it:

A soft light rising above the level meadow,
behind the bed. He takes her in his arms.
He wants to say *I love you, nothing can hurt you*

but he thinks
this is a lie, so he says in the end
you're dead, nothing can hurt you
which seems to him
a more promising beginning, more true. (41-48)

As part of Hades’ justification of his actions, he tries to downplay the fact that he has deprived Persephone of the light of the earth. Therefore, he falsely assumes nothing can hurt Persephone now in the underworld. As such Wong Yit Mun points out that what Hades says is untrue “since Persephone does come back from the dead, and even if she might recall little from the experience (since death, in this story, deprives you of all of your senses), she will still remember being taken away against her will; she will still recall being raped” (84). Indeed, Hades chooses to ignore the abduction and the fake reality he presents to Persephone in an attempt to hide the true side of the world of the dead. Then, as said in “Averno,”¹²¹ “You die when your spirit dies. / Otherwise, you live.” (1-2), which is why Persephone does not really die. She cannot die as her spirit cannot banish. But even so, even if once death comes, there is no disappearance of the spirit, it is scary “to *be* alone, where no one hears you” (16), and then comes the idea of life as a dream, something unreal, a lie even, and thus death as a reality: “And I want to scream out / *you're all of you living in a dream.*” (27-28). Hence death is a new beginning, “It’s like some new life: / you have no stake in the outcome; / you know the outcome” (36-38). Whether death is silence, darkness, or a new life, or whether life is a dream, either way, the soul is a wanderer, just as

¹²¹ On a reading that relates this poem to 9/11 see Azcuy 105-117.

Persephone is as she wanders between earth and the underworld. Thus, humans fear the unknown: “On one side, the soul wanders. / On the other, human beings living in fear. / In between, the pit of disappearance.” (73-75). However, the fear of death is not understandable as life presents its risks too:

Some young girls ask me
if they’ll be safe near Averno —
they’re cold, they want to go south a little while.
And one says, like a joke, but not too far south —

I say, as safe as anywhere,
which makes them happy.
What it means is nothing is safe. (76-82)

These verses cover Persephone’s experience as the place where she got abducted was the world of the living and not that of the dead. They also encapsulate the curiosity of other girls, who wonder about Averno just as much as the reader following Persephone’s story. What the narrator does is open our eyes to the fact that:

You get on a train, you disappear.
You write your name on the window, you disappear.

There are places like this everywhere,
places you enter as a young girl
from which you never return. (83-87)

These lines express the ease with which we can disappear. As a result, death seems like something everyone can easily reach. However, thinking about death will not change the fact that we will die. Being afraid of it will not make life easier: “*Is there any benefit in forcing upon oneself / the realization that one must die? / Is it possible to miss the opportunity of one’s life?*” (italics in the original, 128-130). Although the mysteries of death remain unsolved to us, we

could guess that, after all, Persephone and nature are different from us. Perhaps resurrection only works for nature, and Persephone, as implied in these lines:

Nature, it turns out, isn't like us;
it doesn't have a warehouse of memory.
The field doesn't become afraid of matches,
of young girls. It doesn't remember
furrows either. It gets killed off, it gets burned,
and a year later it's alive again
as though nothing unusual has occurred. (147-153)

When nature emerges after a disaster, it does so as nature. When Persephone comes back from the underworld, she comes back as Persephone, but for us, it is different. This is sorrowful as we can lament the lack of nature, but nature will restore itself and go back to the way it used to be without even noticing what happened:

The terrible moment was the spring after his work was erased,
when he understood that the earth
didn't know how to mourn, that it would change instead.
And then go on existing without him. (165-168)

That is how different nature is from us. Although we encounter death, it is different for each of us, and this adds to the depths of the mystery of death. However, we do know that death leads to a different place, as seen in "Telescope":

There is a moment after you move your eye away
when you forget where you are
because you've been living, it seems,

somewhere else, in the silence of the night sky.
You've stopped being here in the world.
You're in a different place,
a place where human life has no meaning.

You're not a creature in body.
You exist as the stars exist,
participating in their stillness, their immensity. (1-10)

Through repetition of grammatical structures and choice of diction, the world and the sky are enhanced, aiming to understand this different place death takes us to. Death is equated with a sense of stillness that implies the absence of the body yet the presence of existence in a different place. Then, in "Thrush," death is presented as a process where like Persephone and nature, the narrator experiences an endless and tiresome cycle:

Someone like me doesn't escape. I think you sleep awhile,
then you descend into the terror of the next life
except

the soul is in some different form,
more or less conscious than it was before,
more or less covetous.

After many lives, maybe something changes.
I think in the end what you want
you'll be able to see—

Then you don't need anymore
to die and come back again. (11-21)

These verses use clear syntactic structures and low diction, enabling us to grasp the meaning while at the same time alluding to Persephone's tale. Like the myth, death is attained through descending to a terror, where the soul acquires a different state. Also, the last lines emphasise coming back to the earth after encountering death.

5.2.4. Marriage

Marriage refers to the coupling of two people and the basic message conveyed while alluding to marriage in *Averno* is that marriage could be interpreted as a trap, as something deceitful. We expect a reality once getting married, but we find out we were just tricked and misled. This understanding of marriage is the one that Glück shares and shows how she reinterprets the myth of Persephone. Her version of this story interprets Persephone's marriage as a trap in many ways, mainly as a false hope to escape her mother's control by ending up being controlled by her husband. Once married, Persephone understands that she is surrounded by darkness and that now she is not only a daughter but also a wife, finding herself engaged in an impossibility to satisfy both her mother's and her husband's needs sacrificing her own needs. The concept of marriage acquires a deeper meaning in *Averno* as the primary example of marriage in this book of poetry is mainly that of Persephone with Hades. It is therefore imperative to grasp the concept of love. The narrator in "October" alludes to love once as something banal, stating that:

What others found in art,
I found in nature. What others found
in human love, I found in nature.
Very simple. But there was no voice there. (70-73)

Seeing human love as unnecessary and considering that nature has it all alludes to the understanding that love is not what we all want. Nevertheless, this approach to love is only found once in *Averno*. Then, in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I), there are diverse interpretations of Persephone's marriage to Hades:

Persephone's initial
sojourn in hell continues to be
pawed over by scholars who dispute
the sensations of the virgin:

did she cooperate in her rape,
or was she drugged, violated against her will,

as happens so often now to modern girls. (11-17)

The speaker sows a seed in our mind to make us wonder what happened to Persephone and what others have been hypothesising about her. As Azcuay asserts, “Glück mocks the traditional male perception and misogynistic interpretations of the rape, the attempt to blame women for male violence” (“Louise Glück’s Irenic Poems” 118). One thing is clear, “Persephone is having sex in hell” (47). Marriage can be regarded from different perspectives. It might look like bliss to some parents who got married, had children, and were seen by society as “accomplished.” Thus, they wish the same for their children. Yet, even if some parents were not happily married, they still feel they have reached their aim. If the children behave differently from what their parents have ever had, then parents will prefer to think something is wrong with their child’s behaviour rather than consider a different approach. After all, children are, in the parents’ eyes, more prone to mistakes. Some parents will never acknowledge that what for some is bliss for others is torture. Even if the world is in constant change, people do not necessarily change, and neither do their ideas and so is seen in love, which is a topic that predominates “Prism”:

Who can say what the world is? The world
is in flux, therefore
unreadable, the winds shifting,
the great plates invisibly shifting and changing— (1-4)

These introductory verses to “Prism” encapsulate the debate of *Averno* as a whole, making us question what the world is, including life, death, and love. The heart is exposed when it is vulnerable, mainly because of love. Therefore, “the exposed heart constructs / a house” (7-8). And after constructing a house, the aim is to be its master and say: “I am a master here” (16). Thus, owning a place can only be reached by exposing the heart to love. The conception of love in this poem swings between two different definitions. On the one hand, “lightning” (18) hits the lover against their will. On the other hand, an “electric chair” (26) constantly tortures the lover. The conceptualization of love in “Prism” seems to go from mother to daughters as a heritage, yet these girls wanted to break that legacy and redefine love. Indeed, as Spann remarks, in this poem:

it is clear that the speaker's emotional impairment is a consequence of the ideas about marriage she has inherited from her mother. By not only providing this narrative but also exploring the causes and effects of her mother's indoctrination, the speaker is able to seek revenge by exposing and condemning the traditionally restrictive gender roles that are entailed by marriage. The social critique transforms the speaker's suffering into a figure for the emotional damage that sexism inflicts on women; the work thus gains the 'restorative power' that Glück envisions. (183-4)

By saying, "my sister said," (17) "repeating exactly / our mother's formula" (21-22), the speaker shows, firstly, that they had a choice while defining love. Then, her sister almost conforms to the thoughts conditioned on them. And finally, when they were children, they had redefined the conception of love attempting to reconceptualize their reality which meant leaving childhood behind them and thus reaching the age to "love." The fact that they discussed the topic since childhood implies their concern about the "formula" their mother had described. The girls are conditioned to undergo an identity transformation, resulting from marriage, just as their mother had to. Subsequently, we read:

Riddle:

Why was my mother happy?

Answer:

She married my father. (27-30)

As Chiasson explains, "riddles are especially important in "Prism", adding to its ambience of concealed or obscured meaning" (163). The riddle "why was my mother happy?" and its simultaneous answer: "she married my father," suggests that marriage was a purpose in life and that happiness could not be achieved otherwise. This riddle is almost a desperate attempt to understand reality. This was the example to follow to reach joy. Thus, marriage was a task that prompted codependency and the idea of finding the other half, which encouraged the thought that we are incapable of reaching happiness on our own. Nevertheless, we are talking about the mysteries of a riddle, and the narrator is the same girl who sees love as an "electric chair," although perhaps this riddle was told by her own mother.

“You girls,” my mother said, “should marry
someone like your father.”

That was one remark. Another was,
“There is no one like your father.” (31-34)

They received a task: to get married, and the main rule was to marry someone like their father. Indeed, this is a riddle by itself. This resonates with Freud’s understanding of the Oedipus complex, which explains children’s unconscious sexual desires for the parent of the opposite sex. By facing an impossibility, the narrator remembers an unattainable task. Following her parents’ example, and thus her mother’s advice, she finds herself with a man:

I’m in a bed. This man and I,
we are suspended in the strange calm
sex often induces. Most sex induces.
Longing, what is that? Desire, what is that? (56-59)

She does not understand the two feelings that overcome her, longing and desire, after having had sex with “this man,” as it happens after a summer storm. What now follows is silence, a “strange calm,” just as life is followed by death, marriage is seen as a sort of ending. Even if she is talking in the present, she keeps having flashbacks and returning to the past, remembering her parents: “When I was a child, I suffered from insomnia. / Summer nights, my parents permitted me to sit by the lake; / I took the dog for company” (73-75). This resonates with Averno: the crater lake representing the entrance to the underworld that gives name to Glück’s book of poetry, and Cerberus: the three-headed dog that guards the entrance to the underworld. The narrator’s parents “permitted” her “to sit by the lake” as a child. She was under the care of her parents but also under their control. Nevertheless, she got to choose to take her dog with her, which was not coherent from her parents’ perspective: “Did I say “suffered”? That was my parents’ way of explaining / tastes that seemed to them / inexplicable: better “suffered” than “preferred to live with the dog” ”(76-78). The speaker herself notices the relevance of the diction used by her parents to describe her behaviour. She does not want to be like them, and so is also seen when she ponders:

Darkness. Silence that annulled mortality.
The tethered boats rising and falling.
When the moon was full, I could sometimes read the girls' names
painted to the sides of the boats:
Ruth Ann, Sweet Izzy, Peggy My Darling—

They were going nowhere, those girls.
There was nothing to be learned from them. (79-85)

She is reluctant to follow their example, neither to be reduced to another name on the list nor to conform and be one of those that shared her parents' thoughts. She attempts to change the cycle using nonconformism as she says:

I spread my jacket in the damp sand,
The dog curled up beside me.
My parents couldn't see the life in my head;
when I wrote it down, they fixed the spelling. (86-89)

Nevertheless, her attempt to change the cycle is unsuccessful. As Zeus' determined the destiny of his daughter when he gave her as a wife to Hades in the Homeric version, the narrator here shows the impossibility of deciding her own fate as her parents would fix the spelling of her story, not allowing her to create her own life: "The assignment was to fall in love. / The details were up to you" (93-94). The task her parents gave her was to fall in love. It was her purpose, and reaching that aim was of utmost relevance. As said later, the author of the task "was female," which emphasises the pressure females undergo to get married so that they can be considered accomplished: "The assignment was to fall in love. / The author was female. / The ego had to be called the soul" (110-112). Thus, marriage, as understood in this poem, was compulsory for women. Hence, the pressure of getting married was put on women. Their task was to fall in love and to give the self to the lover. Regardless, sometimes they would not exactly follow the parents' path as "being struck by lightning was like being vaccinated" (105), "unless the shock wasn't deep enough. / Then you weren't vaccinated, you were addicted" (108-109). The addiction becomes real:

The man in bed was one of several men
to whom I gave my heart. The gift of the self,
that is without limit.

Without limit, though it recurs. (141-144)

These verses depict how one has to give up part of who they are for the sake of love. The “mother’s formula” consisted of believing “love” as a quick death of a part of the self as “being struck by lightning,” so suggested. What marriage implied, after all, was leaving childhood behind:

The implication was, it was necessary to abandon
childhood. The word “marry” was a signal.

You could also treat it as aesthetic advice;
the voice of the child was tiresome,
it had no lower register.

The word was a code, mysterious, like the Rosetta stone.

It was also a road sign, a warning.

You could take a few things with you like a dowry.

You could take the part of you that thought.

“Marry” meant you should keep that part quiet. (43-52)

Leaving childhood is set as a condition of getting married. As if marrying were something to be startled about, just like war, an emergency, or a situation that put the person involved at risk. Nevertheless, she was allowed to take, as if in a hurry, a few things with her, but the most relevant condition, the one that was related to leaving childhood behind, was shutting the self and keeping it quiet. The price of marriage was giving childhood up, and so was the price Persephone had to pay: she had to exchange girlhood for marriage, as both could not coexist. As El Bakary remarks, “Glück equates marriage with loss of identity” (133) and the silencing of the mind (134). Before we know it, “love” takes place, and the narrator is lying next to “this man”:

I’m in a bed. This man and I,

we are suspended in the strange calm
sex often induces. Most sex induces.
Longing, what is that? Desire, what is that? (56-59)

She is in a bed, lying next to a man, and love becomes calm. At the same time, Persephone is reclining on a bed as a shy wife with her husband, Hades (*HDem.* 342-3). What every parent wanted for their child was to get married. Marriage was a purpose, an “assignment.” Even Demeter, who lamented the loss of her daughter because she got married to Hades, was not against marriage. She seems to see marriage as something parents wish for their children by telling Keleos’ daughters, “but may all the gods who dwell on Olympus/ give you husbands to marry and children to bear, / such as parents wish for” (*HDem.* 135-7). From early childhood, they knew that was what was expected:

You grew up, you were struck by lightning.
When you opened your eyes, you were wired forever to your true love.

It only happened once. Then you were taken care of,
your story was finished. (101-104)

As soon as the purpose was fulfilled, the “story was finished.” Once Koré became Persephone, the queen of the underworld, the task was concluded. But in this union, one of the lovers had to give up their identity: “The beloved was identified / with the self in a narcissistic projection” (115-116). Just like the parents who controlled their children, knowing what was best for them, the partner will do the same, and this will be acceptable since the new adult knows this is how things are supposed to be, as learnt from her parents. Therefore, the identification “with the self in a narcissistic projection” (116) is accurate with the loss of the self and the association of marriage and a partial death. Marriage, after all, implies the death of the self. Although “certain endings were tragic” (120), they were acceptable, and “everything else was failure” (121) as it entailed not having an ending at all. Without her marriage with Hades, Persephone would not be the queen of the underworld. Their marriage is necessary, although seemingly tragic. Furthermore, being in love implied gifting the partner the self. That is to say, if Koré does not

give up childhood, she cannot become Persephone. Koré and Persephone cannot coexist.

The task the narrator was given could be reached using diverse roads, but even if there were different paths, there were not many endings. There only appears to be an ending: “There were too many roads, too many versions. / There were too many roads, not one path— // And at the end?” (125-127). Through the association of marriage with an end, Glück successfully links marriage with a sort of death where the lover’s mind is shut. She is vulnerable, giving up her initial identity to marriage, as two selves cannot coexist in the same way two objects cannot occupy the same place. As such, Glück depicts marriage as a trap, thus, rightfully associating what Persephone had to endure with what the narrator of “Prism” has to live. Nevertheless, in “Prism,” the narrator displays a set of different emotions and resorts to thinking and reasoning by remembering what her mother had said and what she thought. What can be seen in “Prism” is still present in our contemporary reality, where marriage is seen as almost a purpose and fulfilment. The irony behind all this is that if the purpose of life is marriage, and marriage equates to a loss of the self, then marriage in “Prism” is more like a trap than a purpose. Everything is reduced to the question of how the narrator sees herself. She is influenced by her parents’ way of conceiving reality, but she acquires her reality as well. Nevertheless, there is a hint of remorse for breaking or attempting to break her parents’ legacy. Looking multiple times at her past suggests that she does not feel at ease living her life the way she wants. The first-person narrator reveals the events of her life, alluding once and again to her past, almost seeking to find answers to her present or to convince herself of the righteousness of her choices. Thus, shifting her focus from her present to her past. Those memories seem to be buried in her mind like scars as they keep coming back to her in the form of flashbacks. Her internal dialogue appears to have as its main purpose the unconformity with the reality her parents, mostly her mother, try to impose on her. She affirms her standard when, instead of accepting her mother’s definition of love, she creates her own. Therefore, she establishes her own reality, and her sister is the only one that understands her as she is concerned with the same dilemma. Furthermore, in “Fugue,” we find ourselves reading about two sisters playing house. One of them plays the role of the husband, representing a household so that they can practise for the task assigned to them:

I was the man because I was taller.

My sister decided
when we should eat.
From time to time, she'd have a baby. (1-4)

As children, they had imagined their lives as married. One of the sisters would attribute herself the role of the husband and the other that of the wife, and they would act accordingly. Then, the speaker keeps reminding herself of how her childhood ended: “My childhood, closed to me forever, / turned gold like an autumn garden, / mulched with a thick layer of salt marsh hay” (37-39). And once more: “My childhood: closed to me. Or is it / under the mulch — fertile. // But very dark. Very hidden” (47-49). Again, as if leaving childhood behind implied death, marriage is seen, thus, as a sort of death too. The fact that Persephone willingly leaves childhood behind with a prayer in “A Myth on Innocence” could be interpreted as readiness to become a wife or willingness to leave her mother. However, once she becomes Hades’ wife, nothing will return to how things were. Once married and once living in the underworld surrounded by darkness, everything changes: “The girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was” (23-25). Persephone will not be able to return to being a girl again. Now she is a woman, and so shall she stay. Even if she emerges to the surface of the earth, she will remain the same: Persephone, the goddess of the underworld. After going to the underworld, she ponders about her situation:

All the different nouns—
she says them in rotation.
Death, husband, god, stranger.
Everything sounds so simple, so conventional.
I must have been, she thinks, a simple girl. (35-39)

Hades is her husband, but he is also the representation of death, a god, and, at the same time, a stranger to her. However, she wanted to stop being a daughter in “A Myth of Innocence,” she despises her condition as a daughter:

One summer she goes into the field as usual
stopping for a bit at the pool where she often

looks at herself, to see
if she detects any changes. She sees
the same person, the horrible mantle
of daughterliness still clinging to her. (1-6)

As the poem evolves, we perceive a change from the original tale. Differently from the ancient myth, Persephone does not go to the field to play and pick flowers. She stops by a pool and regards her unchanged image indicating her desire to change. Nevertheless, instead of seeing any changes, she sees herself as she is: Demeter's daughter, resonating with the Lacanian concept of the mirror and the Other, where Demeter would be the primary Other and would shape Persephone's identity through the mirror stage. The metaphorical and oxymoronic "horrible mantle of daughterliness" enlightens the reader to this contemporary Persephone's new sentiments. Therefore, I coincide with Frankel who points out how Persephone seeks "an escape from a life so close to her mother that she has no identity of her own. As such, she finds herself lost in love for the dark god, one who promises her a refuge out of sight of her family" (43). Persephone wishes to leave childhood behind, yet once married, she wonders whether she got what she really desired. She is torn between the thought she was abducted and the possibility that she was not. This confusion emerges from her disappointment after her marriage to Hades. She is uncertain of whether this was or not what she asked for:

She can't remember herself as that person
but she keeps thinking the pool will remember
and explain to her the meaning of her prayer
so she can understand
whether it was answered or not. (40-44)

She is so desperate for answers that she relies on the pool to determine if being with Hades is what she truly wanted. She understands that she wishes to escape her mother, but the outcome confuses her. As a result, freedom seems unreachable. She is not free as a daughter nor as a wife. In "Blue Rotunda," we see how once married, the speaker keeps remembering how she left childhood behind:

Cold light filling the room.

I know where we are
she said
that's the window
when I was a child

That's my first home, she said
that square box —
go ahead and laugh.

Like the inside of my head:
you can see out
but you can't go out — (85-95)

Evoking nostalgic feelings, the speaker goes back in her memories as she remembers her childhood. Interestingly, the speaker recalls that it was cold in the room when the events she recollects of her childhood took place. This could indicate the cold feelings attached to these memories. The place she remembers was her “first home,” implying the need to have another home after this one. Firstly, children live with their first family, namely the parents and siblings, and then they create their own family with a partner and children. This first home does not bring good memories as these last verses encapsulate her lack of freedom as she alludes to how her mind cannot broaden. Yet, from the male's perspective, everything looks different. In “A Myth of Devotion,” we learn of Hades' view:

When Hades decided he loved this girl
he built for her a duplicate of earth,
everything the same, down to the meadow,
but with a bed added. (1-4)

The choice of diction plays a major role in this poem as we learn that Hades “decided” to love Persephone, which hints at the fact that he does not truly love her. Also, in his head, Hades is a carrying husband. He knows the change from earth to the underworld is massive. Thus, he tries

to introduce the changes little by little, or, otherwise said, he is gaslighting Persephone, introducing one change at a time:

Gradually, he thought, he'd introduce the night,
first as the shadows of fluttering leaves.
Then moon, then stars. Then no moon, no stars.
Let Persephone get used to it slowly.
In the end, he thought, she'd find it comforting.

A replica of earth
except there was love here.
Doesn't everyone want love? (8-15)

This is the way he wished to make her believe she was not in the world of the dead. Hades does not want Persephone to associate marriage with darkness. Glück appears to have chosen the right myth to metaphorically address marriage as a trap. She enhances this understanding by showing Hades' calculative moves. As such, Hades constantly justifies the abduction by assuming that everyone wants love, and, as a result, marriage.

5.3. Psychoanalytic Studies in *Averno*

5.3.1. Narcissism

Narcissists tend to blame others and react badly to criticism. They are also characterised by their lack of empathy and their need for admiration, as they have a strong sense of entitlement (Smith and Robinson). Moreover, narcissists exploit and demean others without guilt. Among the different types of narcissists that Melinda Smith and Lawrence Robinson distinguish we find overt or grandiose narcissism, covert or vulnerable narcissism, communal narcissism, antagonistic narcissism, and malignant narcissism. Overt or grandiose narcissists “tend to be extroverted but also uncooperative, selfish, and overbearing” (Smith and Robinson). The covert or vulnerable kind is distinguished for being “extremely sensitive to criticism and suffer from low self-esteem. They can be defensive and passive-aggressive” (Smith and Robinson). Communal narcissists consider themselves selfless and altruistic, yet “their actions don't always

match their beliefs” (Smith and Robinson). Antagonistic narcissists are aggressive and hostile. Finally, “Malignant narcissism can be a more destructive form of the personality disorder. In addition to the typical signs of narcissism, a malignant narcissist might be aggressive, paranoid, or sadistic—taking joy in other people’s pain” (Smith and Robinson).

Throughout her writings, Glück has constantly addressed narcissism either implicitly or explicitly. This concept of narcissism is present in multiple of her poems such as “Parable of the Swans” in *Meadowlands* (1996), “Lute Song” in *Vita Nova* (1999), or “The Empty Glass” in *The Seven Ages* (2001). The idea that we find in *Averno* of narcissistic love, mainly that of the mother, could stem from Glück’s own experience of not being able to speak her mind in an attempt to establish her identity. As such, Glück herself states:

I was born into the worst possible family given this bias. I was born into an environment in which the right of any family member to complete the sentence of another was assumed. Like most of the people in that family, I had a strong desire to speak, but that desire was regularly frustrated: my sentences were, in being cut off, radically changed-transformed, not paraphrased. (*Proofs* 5)

As a result of this, “[her] response was silence” (Glück, *Proofs* 5). Similarly, Persephone is represented in *Averno* as silenced. Furthermore, Glück also states to have lived for the approval of her mother (Glück, *Proofs* 6), which resonates with Persephone. Nevertheless, differently from Persephone, Glück reflected on her own identity as she says:

I couldn’t say what I was, what I wanted, in any day to day, practical way. What I could say was *no*: the way I saw to separate myself, to establish a self with clear boundaries, was to oppose myself to the declared desire of others, utilizing their wills to give shape to my own. The conflict played itself out most fiercely with my mother. Insofar as I could tell, my mother only wavered when I began to refuse food, when I claimed, through implicit threat, ownership of my body, which was her great accomplishment. (*Proofs* 10)

Although Glück’s biography is not the main focus of this research, the fact that her personal experience is so relatable to her writing catches the reader’s attention. Therefore, it becomes necessary to be mentioned, as it gives us a better understanding of her writing. Demeter, the

goddess of the harvest, sees in Persephone a part of herself in a literal and figurative way. Therefore, death seems to Persephone the only way out, even Glück thought so, stating: “dying seemed a pathetic metaphor for establishing a separation between myself and my mother” (Glück, *Proofs* 11), even though she was addicted to her mother’s approval (Glück, *Proofs* 8). This leaves us with the perception that perhaps Glück finds in Persephone a way to reflect on her inner self. Persephone attempts to evade her mother, who has always been controlling, she wants to escape, and that seems to be only reachable through death, yet what she does is end up marrying Hades, which is also a metaphorical allusion to death as the one that Persephone marries is the god of the underworld. Yet, instead of escaping her mother’s abuse, she finds herself once more owned by someone else, this time, her husband. As such, Persephone’s helplessness stems from Demeter’s and Hades’ control over her and the dependency on Persephone that these two experiences, emanating from their narcissism. Indeed, in Glück’s *Averno*, we can appreciate much narcissistic behaviour. For instance, we could consider that Demeter is against her daughter’s marriage as she sees her as an extension of herself. As a result, that would imply that Demeter does not see Persephone as an independent individual with her own thoughts and feelings but rather as an object that belongs to her. For Freud, narcissists’ Ego dominates them, thus, neutralising the Id and the Superego, as seen in Glück’s “Persephone the Wanderer” (I):

Three parts: just as the soul is divided,
ego, superego, id. Likewise

the three levels of the known world,
a kind of diagram that separates
heaven from earth from hell. (37-41)

These verses are shaped around high diction and a metaphorical association between psychoanalysis and mythology. Also, the imagery found in “Persephone the Wanderer” (II) certainly plays along with the motifs found in this and the other poems, alluding to the myth of Demeter and Persephone. As seen in lines 16-18, “she has always existed, just as / her mother had always existed / in her present form.” This simile associates Persephone with Demeter

achieving the goal underscoring the mother-daughter similarities. In the same line, the poem continues assimilating Demeter to “a figure at a bus stop”:

(...) Her mother
is like a figure at a bus stop,
an audience for the bus’s arrival. Before that,
she was the bus, a temporary
home or convenience. Persephone, protected,
stares out of the window of the chariot. (18-23)

Addressing a bus and a chariot at the same time combines the contemporary and the ancient, merging myth and reality. Also, before being diminished to “a figure at a bus stop,” Demeter is said to have been the bus itself which corroborates how Persephone was once part of Demeter. Now, Demeter is reduced to a mere figure that awaits the bus she once was. Although being a sheer figure lowers Demeter’s authority, the personification of “the deep violence of the earth” (37), aside from attributing a human characteristic to the earth, serves as a reminder of the association of the earth to Demeter, enhancing her role as goddess of the vegetation. Then, Demeter is said to be “preparing her case; / like a politician” (47-48), alluding to how the goddess shares manipulative ways and thirst for power with a politician. Once more, Demeter is also assimilated to the destructive force of the war:

When a god grieves it means
destroying others (as in war)
while at the same time petitioning
to reverse agreements (as in war also) (69-72)

This encapsulates the strength of Demeter’s wrath, assimilating her behaviour to war. Then, in “Persephone the Wanderer” (I), the narrator develops the understanding of Persephone being “an existential / replica of her own mother” (30-31), an idea which is further explored in “Persephone the Wanderer” (II) the speaker:

We have here

a mother and a cipher: this is
accurate to the experience
of the mother as

she looks into the infant's face. She thinks:
I remember when you didn't exist. The infant
is puzzled: later, the child's opinion is
she has always existed, just as

her mother had always existed
in her present form. (9-18)

The speaker introduces the dilemma that will follow with the word "cipher," as this word encompasses the complex meaning of what both mother and infant think. On the one hand, the mother minimises the existence of her child by stating that there was a time this infant did not exist. Without the mother, the child does not count. On the other hand, the child does not share that opinion. The infant is confused and thinks that her existence cannot be tied to her mother as she knows she has always existed, just as her mother. Therefore, we grasp that Demeter as a mother does not accept that her daughter is no longer part of her body. She looks back melancholically, attempting to remember life before her daughter got out of her body, thus before her child stopped being part of her. She does not want Persephone to see herself as a whole, so she tells her there was a time she did not exist, indicating the regret Demeter is feeling for having given Persephone life, now that her child will spend part of that life with someone else. Demeter gets to the point where she remembers her daughter's birth as "unbearable" (52). She even regrets having given birth to Persephone as when her child was inside of her, she had full control over her:

What is she planning, seeking her daughter?
She is issuing
a warning whose implicit message is:
what are you doing outside my body? (56-59)

Demeter's anger is directed toward Persephone as she blames her for no longer being in her body. Then we go back to the question of existence:

You ask yourself:
why is the mother's body safe?

The answer is
this is the wrong question, since

the daughter's body
doesn't exist, except
as a branch of the the mother's body
that needs to be
reattached any cost. (60-68)

The daughter's existence is tied to that of her mother. Demeter does not accept that her daughter is no longer part of her. As she sees it, the only way she can have full control over her daughter is if Persephone goes back to being attached to her. Hence she wants to reattach her daughter to herself at any cost. As such, Cooke points out:

Glück shows the difficulty the young woman has with the idea of a maternal and body-focused femininity. Either the young woman desires to maintain her non-maternal, pre-adolescent self, and struggles against her mother, who represents that restrictive, female-gendered body identity onto her; or the young mother develops a narcissism with and abjection of her own body as it becomes the space wherein a child develops. (27)

Additionally, while Demeter narcissistically tries to reattach her daughter to her, Hades attempts to keep her with him. Persephone finds herself in the midst of a power struggle between her mother and her husband over her. Both of them want to own her:

her whole life is beginning—unfortunately,
it's going to be
a short life. She's going to know, really,

only two adults: death and her mother. (26-29)

The fact that she is going to know only Hades and Demeter indicates that her life will be owned by one of them for part of the year and the other for the other part of the year. The speaker uses a striking choice of diction to help the reader picture this situation:

Persephone
was used to death. Now over and over
her mother hauls her out again–

You must ask yourself:
are the flowers real? If

Persephone “returns” there will be
one of two reasons:

either she was not dead or
she is being used
to support a fiction– (81-90)

Persephone spends part of the year with Hades, and then, when she gets used to the world of the dead, Demeter “hauls her out again” (82). This choice of words implies Demeter’s resentment towards her daughter’s abduction. The verb “haul” is quite meaningful as it “means that it takes force to carry Persephone back from the underworld and, therefore, that she does not wish to do so” (Daifotis 22). As these verses depict, Persephone is being used. Part of the year, Hades exploits her to make her his wife, and the other part of the year, Demeter utilises her daughter to restore her role as a mother. Persephone ends up suffocated and approaches her father:

I think I can remember
being dead. Many times, in winter,
I approached Zeus. Tell me, I would ask him,
how can I endure the earth? (91-94)

She is beginning to conceive the fact that she is Hades' wife, and therefore she does not have the strength to cope with her mother's control. She is caught in the midst of two narcissists that want to own her. By seeing Persephone as an extension of herself and not as an individual being, Demeter presents highly narcissistic behaviour. Also, both Demeter and Hades rely on Persephone for narcissistic supply. Both of them need Persephone so that they can feel fulfilled and validated. This explains Demeter's desperate attempt to persuade Persephone that her existence as a daughter is tied to her mother, yet this reflects Demeter's fear of losing the daughter, who conditions her role as a mother. However, even if Persephone returns to her mother, this latter makes her feel ashamed. This shame reflects the abuse Persephone undergoes, as seen in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I):

As is well known, the return of the beloved
does not correct
the loss of the beloved: Persephone

returns home
stained with red juice like
a character in Hawthorne— (18-23)

Once Persephone returns to her mother, she senses hostility from Demeter after she gets married to Hades. Demeter does not consider the abduction, the only thing that matters to her is that her daughter is no longer beside her the whole year. Therefore, when Persephone comes back to her mother after leaving the underworld, Demeter still wants her daughter. She regards her daughter as part of her and, therefore, her property. Yet there is still loathing in the way she treats her daughter. Demeter's resentment towards her daughter shows a side of her narcissistic love. Demeter considers that Persephone is no longer the child she once lost: she is a woman now since she has been stained with the red juice of the pomegranate seed she ate in the underworld, symbolising the loss of her purity in her mother's eyes.¹²² Indeed, because of shame, Persephone will no longer feel at home anywhere:

I am not certain I will

¹²² See Daifotis 18.

keep this word: is earth
“home” to Persephone? Is she at home, conceivably,
in the bed of the god? Is she
at home nowhere? Is she
a born wanderer, in other words
an existential
replica of her own mother, less
hamstrung by ideas of causality? (24-32)

Persephone is left wondering where her place in the world is. She understands that she is split between earth and the underworld and that there is no real place for her. Neither the earth nor the underworld can be considered home. Therefore, she becomes a wanderer, assimilating herself to her mother since Demeter was the one who wandered the earth looking for her daughter.¹²³ As Frankel points out, Dido is the only female wanderer in classic myth, who “ironically kills herself because she is forbidden to wander and follow her love. Perhaps stifled Persephone would have shared Dido’s sad fate, torn between her birth place and the love of a man, until, despairing, she cast herself on a pyre and perished. Only departing saves her” (44). Then she aptly explains how “the Greek term for “wanderer,” *planētēs*, is the origin of the English word “planet.” Here indeed is Persephone, traveling round and round on her journey” (Frankel 44). Indeed, Persephone wanders between two narcissistic beings that use her for narcissistic supply, and her wishes are ignored:

You drift between earth and death
which seem, finally,
strangely alike. Scholars tell us

that there is no point in knowing what you want
when the forces contending over you
could kill you.

White of forgetfulness,
white of safety— (69-76)

¹²³ See Frankel 45-46.

Persephone understands there is no use in expressing what she wants since nobody will consider her. Even if Demeter and Hades seem to care for her, what they have for her is selfish love, or otherwise said, narcissistic love, which is the one that makes Demeter see Persephone as part of herself when she regards her as part of her body. Also, Hades does the same. As Persephone becomes the goddess of the underworld, she exists as part of Hades, the god of the dead. In “Prism,” the narrator retells how marriage implied: “You could take the part of you that thought. / “Marry” meant you should keep that part quiet” (51-52), which is what Persephone’s marriage to Hades meant, keeping her mind shut and accepting whatever plan he holds for her in the underworld and only serving as his narcissistic supply. Marriage signified that Hades and Persephone were one. Persephone becomes his reflection as an extension of himself:

The assignment was to fall in love.

The author was female.

The ego had to be called the soul.

The action took place in the body.

Stars represented everything else: dreams, the mind, etc.

The beloved was identified
with the self in a narcissistic projection.

The mind was the subplot. It went nattering on. (110-117)

In “Prism,” we explicitly see the process through which the female participant of this “assignment” (110) goes through, ending up being united to the beloved “in a narcissistic projection” (116). Interestingly, the assignment comes from the parents whose love, following Freud’s understanding, stems from a reborn narcissism (*On Narcissism* 91). In “Prism,” the narrator states: “my parents couldn’t see the life in my head; / when I wrote it down, they fixed the spelling” (88-89) which reflects the parents’ narcissistic control. If we apply this to Glück’s appropriation of the myth, we realise that Demeter vanishes her daughter’s identity to the point of suffocating her, pushing her to long for death. Indeed, as Cooke states:

The mother's pain and grief at the loss of her child is most especially drawn from the physical separation between the two. Yet this separation is not just from the mother's own body, but also from the earth, which, being Demeter's godly domain, acts as an extension and representation of her own body. (34)

Therefore, when Hades carries Persephone away, representing the hope to escape her mother's control, he snatches Persephone from the earth where Demeter rules. As a mother, she loses control over her daughter. Once Hades, as the representation of death, appears as the only change Persephone has to escape her mother's narcissistic control. Yet, Hades is also a narcissistic figure in Persephone's life as he controls her in the underworld. The narcissistic role Demeter has on earth as Persephone's mother matches Hades' role in the underworld as Persephone's husband. None of them cares for Persephone. They only want to control her, merely considering their own feelings. When she is with Hades, we do not know what she thinks, as seen in "Persephone the Wanderer" (I):

She is lying in the bed of Hades.
What is in her mind?
Is she afraid? Has something
blotted out the idea
of mind? (51-55)

The bed where Persephone is lying alludes to the sexual implications of marriage. Yet, as Persephone finds herself on that bed, her thoughts are a mystery to us. We do not know how she feels, which reflects how she is not used to expressing what she wants and thinks. Hence, while Demeter is grieving Persephone's loss and wants her back, Hades desires to keep Persephone in the underworld, but we do not know what Persephone wants. Both mother and husband only care about their own wishes. Therefore, not even the reader is allowed to know what Persephone is thinking.¹²⁴ As such, "there is no point in knowing what you want / when the forces contending over you / could kill you" (72-74). Even Persephone understands that there is no use in expressing what she wants. As much as she understands there is no escape from her role as Hades' wife, she also grasps the extent of her mother's power:

¹²⁴ This is shown in her passivity and lack of agency, see Fletcher 42.

She does know the earth
is run by mothers, this much
is certain. She also knows
she is not what is called
a girl any longer. Regarding
incarceration, she believes

she has been a prisoner since she has been a daughter. (56-62)

Persephone assimilates that her mother rules the earth, and now that she is no longer a girl since she is married to Hades, her fate as Demeter's daughter will be harsher. She was first incarcerated by the ruler of vegetation, and now by the ruler of the world of the dead:

When the passion for expiation
is chronic, fierce, you do not choose
the way you live. You do not live;
you are not allowed to die. (65-68)

Persephone did not choose to be Demeter's daughter nor to become Hades' wife. She did not pick her life, and death was denied to her. She drifts "between earth and death / which seem, finally, / strangely alike" (69-71) since both earth and underworld seem the same because of Demeter's and Hades' narcissistic love where Persephone "is just meat" (87). Part of the year she belongs to her mother and the other to her husband. She is owned, her existence is not hers, she has no choice, and none of those who claim to love her want to know what she wants. Being "just meat" is a very emblematic statement as only an abused being could feel like "meat". Persephone's soul is "shattered with the strain / of trying to belong to earth—" (98-99), trying to please her mother and be the girl she used to be. Even if the last question seems to be addressed to the reader, how would Demeter have replied if she were asked: "What will you do, / when it is your turn in the field with the god?" (100-101). This makes us consider the possibility that Demeter's entitlement and grandiose sense of self is the one that might have led her to challenge Zeus and stop the grain from growing, putting the life of humankind in danger. She might believe

herself special, corroborating her narcissism to the point of playing with humanity's fate. Her passive-aggressiveness is also shown when she decides to stop life from growing as a strike against what Zeus did to her. In "Persephone the Wanderer" (II), we see the dimensions of Demeter's anger:

When a god grieves it means
destroying others (as in war)
while at the same time petitioning
to reverse agreements (as in war also):

if Zeus will get her back,
winter will end. (69-74)

Actually, "the narcissist blames others for his behaviour, accuses them of provoking him into his temper tantrums and believes firmly that 'they' should be punished for their 'misbehaviour' " (Vaknin and Rangelovska 28) which matches Demeter's conduct. The way she explodes in anger shows her lack of self-control. She feels pain and blames others for her sorrow. Hades catches up to this goddess' behaviour. He thinks himself entitled to take whatever he wants whenever he wants it. He does not feel any empathy towards Persephone whatsoever, which is demonstrated in "A Myth of Devotion," where Hades justifies his action when assuming that everyone wants love. This lack of empathy makes him think, following Vaknin and Rangelovska's understanding (28-29), of others as mere instruments. To achieve his goal, Hades uses gaslighting as a manipulative tactic to trick Persephone, as perceived in "A Myth of Devotion":

When Hades decided he loved this girl
he built for her a duplicate of earth,
everything the same, down to the meadow,
but with a bed added.

Everything the same, including sunlight,
because it would be hard on a young girl
to go so quickly from bright light to utter darkness

Gradually, he thought, he'd introduce the night,
first as the shadows of fluttering leaves.
Then moon, then stars. Then no moon, no stars.
Let Persephone get used to it slowly.
In the end, he thought, she'd find it comforting. (1-12)

The first statement is that Hades “decided he loved” Persephone, which means he did not genuinely love her. Then, he duplicated earth, manipulating her reality to make her think she was still on earth, and little by little, he introduced the elements of darkness so that she would not notice the change. This act of gaslighting aims to play with Persephone’s mind. The fact that this new place has a bed alludes to the transformation Persephone undertakes when becoming Hades’ wife, Hades represents the transition from childhood to adulthood to her. He assumes she will end up finding the place comforting, but he does not care about what she is actually feeling, justifying his behaviour once and again: “A replica of earth / except there was love here. / Doesn’t everyone want love?” (13-15). However, manipulation is not the only thing that proves Hades’ narcissistic love towards Persephone. He has also been observing her for many years, which shows his calculation and stalker-like behaviour when targeting his niece:

He waited many years,
building a world, watching
Persephone in the meadow.
Persephone, a smeller, a taster.
If you have one appetite, he thought,
you have them all.

Doesn't everyone want to feel in the night
the beloved body, compass, polestar,
to hear the quiet breathing that says
I am alive, that means also
you are alive, because you hear me,
you are here with me. And when one turns,
the other turns— (16-28)

Once more, Hades is justifying his behaviour and adding his sexual desire to the equation. He does not consider Persephone, as he does not want to know what Persephone feels or what she thinks. These lines depict how Hades equated Persephone to a prey calculating the right moment to carry her away. He does not consider the consequences his actions will have on Persephone, who he traumatises. Glück brings the story of Demeter and Persephone to a contemporary level when alluding to the guilt, terror, and fear many victims of kidnapping and rape suffer nowadays. It is a fact in “A Myth of Innocence,” Persephone is confused and she questions her abduction because of her desire to escape her mother’s control. Interestingly, once Hades ponders on the name that he will give the new place, he considers “*The New Hell*” (38) first as if he knew that Persephone was feeling controlled and abused by her mother, thus, she was now in a new hell, a second hell for Persephone where this time the abuser was Hades. However, he ends up choosing “*Persephone’s Girlhood*” (40) as that is exactly what he takes from her. He is the reason she becomes a woman and the goddess of the underworld. Hades separated Persephone from her mother so that he could control her better. Once isolated, she was easier to manipulate. This behaviour shows how entitled and selfish he is as he only thinks about what he wants and ignores Persephone’s feelings. Maybe what he does to Persephone is a reflection of what he feels inside. He is the god of the underworld, after all. The narcissist, just like Hades, “feels betrayed, discriminated against and underprivileged because he believes that he is not being treated fairly, that he should get more than he does, and thus, with time, he comes to regard those around him as mere instruments of gratification” (Vaknin and Rangelovska 27). His lack of empathy and lack of consideration for the feelings of others, his arrogance, his fantasies of unlimited power, and using Persephone as a wretched means to reach his goals encapsulate his narcissistic traits. The same happens with Demeter, who is acting like a child in a very narcissistic way. She bursts into anger which is seen in “Persephone the Wanderer” (I):

In the first version, Persephone
is taken from her mother
and the goddess of the earth
punishes the earth—this is
consistent with what we know of human behavior,

that human beings take profound satisfaction
in doing harm, particularly
unconscious harm:

we may call this
negative creation. (1-10)

Thus, the depression and grief that Demeter suffers after the loss of her daughter might show us the pain and suffering that narcissists have to endure when they lose their narcissistic supply.

Persephone as a pure, naive, innocent girl and even as an empath, was the perfect target for narcissists. First, her mother saw her as an extension of herself and needed her, and then her uncle noticed the good in her and wanted to make her his wife. Persephone's codependence and that of both Demeter and Hades are very clear, and that codependence is the one that often characterises both empaths and narcissists. Persephone seems enslaved by the control of those who claim or are supposed to love her. Her mother's love for her is a love that does not let her breathe. Demeter sees Persephone as part of her, as one more asset of her body. Thus, her daughter is not allowed to develop her own personality. Demeter does not want her daughter to be free, as her daughter's freedom implies losing part of herself. The same happens with Hades: he wants Persephone, and, indeed, he takes her and makes the underworld her second "home." Because of that, Persephone is bound to be a wanderer, split between Demeter and Hades, bound to please both, leaving her identity in the process. She has two homes, but she feels homeless, and "when movements against homelessness emerge, the unacceptable character of that vulnerability (in the sense of exposure to harm) is made clear." (Butler et al. 13). Their narcissistic love makes her a mere object as both of them shut her thoughts and make her dead inside, after so much control and toxic love nothing is left inside of her, hope no longer exists in her.

A narcissist will always need a narcissistic supply. Without it, they will not feel alive. Therefore, a narcissist will be like a tree, and they see their narcissistic supply as their branches. This is very well explained in "Fugue":

I had a dream: my mother fell out of a tree.
After she fell, the tree died:
it had outlived its function.
My mother was unharmed— her arrows disappeared, her wings
turned to arms. Fire creature: Sagittarius. She finds herself in— (21-25)

These lines reflect the impact of losing a narcissistic supply of the narcissist. In this case, the tree is metaphorically associated with a narcissist. In an attempt to separate herself from the tree, Persephone asks for a change in “A Myth of Innocence” to stop being a daughter, which implies being something else:

One summer she goes into the field as usual
stopping for a bit at the pool where she often
looks at herself, to see
if she detects any changes. She sees
the same person, the horrible mantle
of daughterliness still clinging to her.

The sun seems, in the water, very close.
That’s my uncle spying again, she thinks—
everything in nature is in some way her relative.
I am never alone, she thinks,
turning the thought into a prayer.
Then death appears, like the answer to a prayer. (1-12)

After her prayer, she finds herself in the same situation. She is someone else’s property now, and trying to undo her prayer will not be possible: “The girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was” (23-25). Narcissism allows us to contemplate Demeter’s relationship with her child. The poem stages an implicit competition of power over Persephone between Demeter and Hades. Persephone becomes incapable of existing on her own, for herself, as her existence is always tied to her mother or husband. She is either a daughter or a wife. Demeter becomes the one that suffocates Persephone with her motherhood. Therefore, she initially thinks to have found in death an answer to her prayer. However, once

married to the god of the dead, Persephone feels trapped again, but now her situation has worsened as there is no escape. No other prayer will be able to get her out of that situation because there is nowhere left to go. Persephone is hopeless and vulnerable since she knows she will never achieve peace. Once Persephone's soul was dragged into the depths of darkness, there was no going back. As a result, Persephone's self is silenced by Demeter and Hades, who do not even need to compete for her love as they see her as their belonging. Therefore, she finds herself wondering whether her marriage to Hades was an answer to her prayer in "A Myth of Innocence":

She can't remember herself as that person
but she keeps thinking the pool will remember
and explain to her the meaning of her prayer
so she can understand
whether it was answered or not. (40-44)

The way she is suffocated makes her ask for that prayer, a prayer that she does not even remember. She wanted freedom, as seen in "Blue Rotunda," where the narrator states: "I am tired of having hands / she said / I want wings—" (1-3). This cry for hope yet hopeless feeling is enhanced in "Omens," where the narrator says:

I rode back: everything changed.
My soul in love was sad
and the moon on my left side
trailed me without hope. (5-8)

Deep inside, Persephone seems to have had hope of getting away from her mother's control, but instead, she got herself into another similar hopeless situation. Here Demeter is presented as an authoritarian mother whose daughter can only exist as a part of her. There is an impossibility of being separated from the mother: Persephone is silenced, and her identity is shattered. Persephone appears to be longing for Averno as the truth since, for someone controlled by narcissists, death seems more real than life. The poem as a whole emphasises Persephone's infatuation with death. Also, Averno appears in tune with her melancholic mood. Persephone is

torn between life and death, but she can never die. She dies partially because of Hades. There is a sense of vulnerability in love, having to give part of oneself for the sake of someone else. Persephone lives to please others, vulnerable. Averno is a trap, a hole where love makes her fall. In Glück's rewriting of the story of Demeter and Persephone, Demeter is no longer a victim but rather a victimiser just as much as Hades is.

5.3.2. Trauma

Emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse have a massive impact on childhood trauma (Lee et al. 124), but a traumatic event can be of any kind (Perrotta 1). As Cooke aptly puts it:

Glück's poems explore and illustrate the truth of the perilous journey a young woman takes as she grows up and becomes a woman of and beyond her body and mind. This difficult and traumatic journey places her in a deep identity crisis which threatens the loss of herself by being forced into a new identity. (35)

The speakers of *Averno* seem to share a sense of trauma stemming from life and death. This persistent trauma is seen from beginning to end, which can be demonstrated through various elements. For starters, some speakers seem confused and do not discern whether certain events took place or not. This confusion is part of what gives voice to trauma. In "October,"¹²⁵ for instance, the recurrence of "didn't" and "wasn't" indicates the speaker's confusion resulting from the trauma:

Is it winter again, is it cold again,
didn't Frank just slip on the ice,
didn't he heal, weren't the spring seeds planted

didn't the night end,
didn't the melting ice
flood the narrow gutters

¹²⁵ On a reading of this poem related to the myth of Demeter and Persephone, trauma, PTSD, and 9/11 see Azcuy 33-49.

wasn't my body
rescued, wasn't it safe

didn't the scar form, invisible
above the injury

terror and cold,
didn't they just end, wasn't the back garden
harrowed and planted— (1-13)

After going through a traumatic event, the speaker does not understand why there is still terror and cold for both her body and the earth. The speaker thought everything had ended, but when realising the worst is still going on, the previous traumatic event reemerges.

Summer after summer has ended,
balm after violence:
it does me no good
to be good to me now;
violence has changed me. (29-33)

The impact of trauma is reflected in the way violence changes the speaker. I concur with Wong Yit Mun, who asserts:

even the balm of summer can bring the speaker no peace; the speaker's body responds no longer to the relief that another season brings, given that winter is traumatic (and that winter will recur); trauma has become a part of the speaker's mind. (...) The ambiguity of the speaker also allows for the possibility that anyone who has been through such harrowing events as rape could be speaking here; it is a universal voice of terror here of someone uncertain of whether she would ever move on again from her traumatic experience. (79)

Although the traumatic event in question is very ambiguous, the speaker certainly seems to be referring to a devastating event such as rape. These lines seem to convey Persephone's cycle

from earth to the underworld. Also, “a part of the trauma-victim’s mind is living in an atemporal mode that does not allow the victim to move on completely from the difficult past; this past will always haunt her memory in the present” (Wong Yit Mun 79). The reason this takes place is because of the continuous physical and mental cycle. As such, even if the traumatic event ends, the speaker is so traumatised that she is unable to accept that the worst is already over, resulting in a state of hypervigilance:

Tell me this is the future,
I won’t believe you.
Tell me I’m living,
I won’t believe you. (55-58)

Another major sign of the ongoing trauma is the flashbacks to the past that the speakers in *Averno* display. In “Prism,” the speaker is constantly remembering what her parents and sister used to say regarding falling in love and marriage. This indicates the impact of those words in her mind and the trauma she has been carrying throughout the years, most likely for not following her parents’ steps. Also, this trauma is reflected in how she acknowledges the little power she had over her own life: “my parents couldn’t see the life in my head; / when I wrote it down, they fixed the spelling” (88-89). Then, in “Echoes,” the narrator goes back in her memories once more to the time she was younger, stating: “when I was still very young” (9). This is reinforced in “Fugue,” where childhood is remembered: “like a small bird sealed off from daylight: / that was my childhood” (74-75) which alludes to the hardness of her childhood. In “Blue Rotunda,” childhood is also recalled:

Cold light filling the room.

I know where we are
she said
that’s the window
when I was a child

That’s my first home, she said

that square box—
go ahead and laugh.

Like the inside of my head:
you can see out
but you can't go out— (85-95)

This apparently nostalgic event becomes a flashback to a traumatic event the moment the speaker refers to how she is stuck in her thoughts, unable to experience any freedom, which also implies the inability to overcome the traumatic event. Also, having untrustworthy thoughts that stem from doubt and second-guessing reinforces trauma. This is explicitly seen in “A Myth of Innocence,” where Persephone wonders whether she was or nor abducted:

She stands by the pool saying, from time to time,
I was abducted, but it sounds
wrong to her, nothing like what she felt.
Then she says, *I was not abducted*.
Then she says, *I offered myself, I wanted
to escape my body*. Even, sometimes,
I willed this. But ignorance
cannot will knowledge. Ignorance
wills something imagined, which it believes exists. (26-34)

Persephone has suffered such a traumatic experience that she no longer discerns what really happened, becoming an unreliable speaker. This is because she wanted to leave her mother, but once she is carried away by Hades and finds herself controlled and abused, she understands that she is reliving the same trauma. When Persephone finds herself in an eternal abusive cycle, she comprehends that perhaps she was indeed abducted. Indeed, as Daifotis explains, “Persephone’s natural internal response to saying out loud that she was abducted (thinking it sounds wrong) verifies Glück’s theory of Persephone’s self-implication in the events that transpire” (21). She finds herself stuck between her wish to escape her mother and the reality of being once more

abused. Now she is owned by her husband and mother, which makes her twice as traumatised as she once was. When she goes back to Hades, she is in the world of the dead and darkness, and when she returns to her mother, she knows she will never be seen like a child anymore as she is now a woman: “The girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was” (23-25). Facing the impossibility of pleasing both Demeter and Hades and feeling obliged to give her identity in the process, Persephone is owned by both her mother and her husband. The former makes Persephone worthless as she had to leave her childhood behind so she could become Hades’ wife, and the latter makes Persephone his wife against her will as what Persephone wanted was to escape her mother’s abuse but fell into Hades’ trap. For Demeter, in “Persephone the Wanderer” (I), “Persephone is having sex in hell” (47), which implies that her daughter Persephone is no longer the innocent child she used to be, she is no longer a virgin and therefore, for Demeter, Persephone is stained with the mark of shame.

Also, Persephone is a prisoner because of Hades, who selfishly takes her to the underworld depriving her of light, but “she has been a prisoner since she has been a daughter” (62). The only thing she sees when looking at herself in the pool in “A Myth of Innocence” is “the same person, the horrible mantle / of daughterliness still clinging to her” (5-6). Moreover, once Persephone has already been taken by Hades, and she returns to her mother, she not only feels the shame her mother induced her to feel but also the guilt of becoming a woman despite Demeter, which enhances Persephone’s trauma. Indeed, guilt and trauma are expressed in “Trush”:

But for me — I think the guilt I feel must mean
I haven’t lived well.

Someone like me doesn’t escape. I think you sleep awhile,
then you descend into the terror of the next life
Except

the soul is in some different form,
more or less conscious than it was before,

more or less covetous.

After many lives, maybe something changes.
I think in the end what you want
you'll be able to see—

Then you don't need anymore
to die and come back again. (9-21)

The speaker acknowledges her guilt and attributes it to her lack of quality of life. She also victimises herself by saying: “Someone like me doesn't escape...” (11), which is explained through the eternal cycle of swinging between life and death. She describes this cycle through the metaphor of sleeping and then descending into terror, where the soul takes another form. I consider that this matches Persephone's condition as a maiden on earth and the goddess of the underworld in the underworld. After so many cycles, Persephone becomes aware of the power of her inner self. She understands that she will see whatever she wants to see and that earth and the underworld will look from her perspective at how she feels about her mother on earth and her husband in the underworld.

Also, in “Averno,” we find the impact of a traumatic event on the speaker as some girls wonder about the safety of Averno:

Some young girls ask me
if they'll be safe near Averno —
they're cold, they want to go south a little while.
And one says, like a joke, but not too far south —

I say, as safe as anywhere,
which makes them happy.
What it means is nothing is safe.

You get on a train, you disappear.
You write your name on the window, you disappear.

There are places like this everywhere,
places you enter as a young girl
from which you never return. (76-87)

Interestingly the girls feel cold and want to get to a warmer place. Being close to Averno would imply getting to a warm place, but the question is whether the entrance to the underworld will be safe. The southern they go, the warmer it will be, but too south would be too dangerous, and they know it. The experienced speaker comprehends the similarities between the earth and the underworld. Thus, Averno is as safe as any other place. Then, the old tale is taken to a contemporary setting, substituting the ancient meadow for a train: “places you enter as a young girl / from which you never return” (86-87). The speaker is still traumatised because of what she has experienced. Then, she states: “The girls are happy, thinking of their vacation. / Don’t take a train, I say” (99-100). The trauma stems from her own experience and is triggered when the girls bring up the topic.

5.4. Vulnerability in *Averno*

5.4.1. Gender and shared vulnerability

Gender constructions affect the perception of vulnerability (Del Mar García-Calvente et al.). Women’s vulnerability stems from their likeliness to be subjected to sexual assaults and traumatic experiences where they are victimised (Wolfe and Kimerling; Cortina and Kubiak; Vallejo-Martín et al.). Furthermore, borrowing Mayron Estefan Cantillo-Lucua’s words, some would agree that “the feminine community is fragile and vulnerable to the deathly appearance of men” (210). Following Fineman’s (2017) understanding of a shared vulnerability, we could consider the vulnerability of Hades. As such, I believe that Hades’ vulnerability stems from his need for a companion. Indeed, “psychoanalytic feminists have remarked that the masculine positions are effectively built through a denial of their own vulnerability. This denial or disavowal requires one to forget one’s own vulnerability and project, displace, and localize it elsewhere” (Butler et al. 4). Hades seems to be unconsciously denying his vulnerability by projecting it onto Persephone who he succeeded in manipulating and tricking. His vulnerability is similar to that of Demeter, they depend on Persephone to feel power and control, if they do not

have that control they are empty, and they need her. Certainly, Hades and Demeter share narcissistic vulnerability, as understood by Brown (2012a). To give himself a fake sense of invulnerability, Hades needs to project that vulnerability elsewhere, “when vulnerability is projected onto another, it seems as if the first subject is fully divested of vulnerability, having expelled it externally onto the other” (Butler et al. 4). Hades cannot overcome his vulnerability as he is constantly denying it. He does not even recognise it.

Indeed, psychological vulnerability is also another side of helplessness. An example of it is found in “October,” where psychological vulnerability is shown through a depressing speech:

I no longer care
what sound it makes

when was I silenced, when did it first seem
pointless to describe that sound

what it sounds like can't change what it is— (19-23)

The speaker's way of giving up all hope stems from sadness and past sorrow. Similarly, Persephone's psychological vulnerability is seen in “Persephone the Wanderer” (I):

The terrible reunions in store for her
will take up the rest of her life.
When the passion for expiation
is chronic, fierce, you do not choose
the way you live. You do not live;
you are not allowed to die.

You drift between earth and death
which seem, finally,
strangely alike. Scholars tell us

that there is no point in knowing what you want

when the forces contending over you
could kill you.

White of forgetfulness,
white of safety— (63-76)

Persephone's terrible reunions with her mother will never end. The diction choice indicates the impact that these reunions have on Persephone, who considers getting reunited with her mother as terrible. Persephone has no choice over her life or death, which conditions her psychological state. Following Kellezi and Reicher's (2014), Persephone's psychological vulnerability comes from her role as a victim, in this case, mainly of her mother and then of her husband. In "A Myth of Innocence," Persephone is psychologically vulnerable, at first because of her mother's control and then because of her uncle's authority.

5.4.2. Dependency

We need to meet some needs throughout our lives. This is enhanced when we are children and require our caregiver's care. Indeed, as Weele, et al. have pointed out:

A caregiver meets a need that the care recipient cannot meet herself. It is in this sense that care implies dependency, and this dependency, as many authors have noted, is fundamental to the human condition itself, as all of us are dependent on others to survive and flourish, at least in some stages of life. (2)¹²⁶

However, this dependency bond can be applied to relationships of different natures. As such, in "October," dependency is addressed concerning the earth as the speaker wonders: "weren't we necessary to the earth" (27), realising that the earth does not need us, while we do need it. Our embodiment induces a dependency bond as we need the earth to keep that body. Then, in "Persephone the Wanderer," (I) we see the battle the human soul has to fight. The soul is stuck between life and death, yet the earth wants it to deny the dependency bond with death. The soul is represented by Persephone, who is stuck between Demeter and Hades. She is united to each of them with a similar dependency bond:

¹²⁶ See Butler, *Frames of War*; Engster; Fineman 2017, and 2019.

They say
there is a rift in the human soul
which was not constructed to belong
entirely to life. Earth

asks us to deny this rift, a threat
disguised as suggestion—
as we have seen
in the tale of Persephone
which should be read

as an argument between the mother and the lover—
the daughter is just meat. (77-87)

These verses establish a metaphorical association between Persephone and a soul. Both swing between the earth and the underworld. None of them are meant to entirely belong to life. However, the earth that is here personified does not want to acknowledge that rift. As a result, Persephone is equated to meat, split between the earth and the underworld. In “The Night Migrations,” the speaker understands that there is a dependency bond between those who are alive and the things we see in life, such as:

This is the moment when you see again
the red berries of the mountain ash
and in the dark sky
the birds’ night migrations. (1-4)

The speaker also understands that after dying, that dependency bond with life no longer exists:

It grieves me to think
the dead won’t see them—
these things we depend on,
they disappear. (5-8)

This reality saddens the speaker, who deeply empathises with the dead ones. This empathy matches the one Glück encourages us to feel throughout *Averno*. However, when the speaker thinks about it twice they conclude that perhaps this dependency bond with life will no longer matter after death as the soul will no longer need it:

What will the soul do for solace then?
I tell myself maybe it won't need
these pleasures anymore;
maybe just not being is simply enough,
hard as that is to imagine. (8-13)

Dependency is also found in “Persephone the Wanderer” (I). Demeter reinforces a strong mother-daughter dependency bond. She takes this dependency further and controls Persephone. The latter is completely vulnerable as she lacks independence. However, this is not the only codependent bond she undergoes. After being abducted by Hades, she experiences, once more, a dependency bond. When in the underworld, she cannot leave whenever she wants. She has to stay in the world of the dead against her will, which leaves her in a hopeless position. The death of the seed in winter can be well associated with Persephone’s partial death as she has to live in the underworld where no nature can coexist. However, unlike the death of the seed, even if she goes to the underworld, she is “not allowed to die” (68), therefore her death is only partial as there is no end to her torture as she drifts “between earth and death” (69). Persephone is stuck between two worlds, unable to go wherever she wants, her vulnerable position makes her completely codependent. Then, “A Myth of Innocence” is embedded in a metaphor that addresses the change Persephone undergoes when leaving childhood behind and welcoming maturity. Persephone here is well aware of her situation of being a child as whenever she looks at herself in the pool, “she sees / the same person, the horrible mantle / of daughterliness still clinging to her” (4-6). The negative tone found in “horrible” and “clinging” adds to Persephone's despair. The mantle of daughterliness plays a symbol of childhood and helplessness. In Persephone’s eyes, this is because she is a child whose mother’s control makes her vulnerable. However, “infancy and childhood should be understood as merely inevitable developmental stages in the life of the vulnerable subject, not as the occasion for the creation of distinct and diminished categories of state responsibility” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable

Inequality” 144). Therefore, this is a stage that not even Persephone, as a goddess, can escape. Another reminder of Persephone’s vulnerability implied in her condition as a daughter is that she is being spied on, and “everything in nature is in some way her relative” (9). Indeed, she is the daughter of the goddess of creation and whose domain is nature. The first time Persephone shows an explicit desire to flee her condition is when she acknowledges that she is never alone and subsequently turns this thought into a prayer. Initially, only death seems the way to escape the imminent vulnerability she is feeling, the death of a process allowing the beginning of another cycle: childhood must end so that adulthood can begin. “Then death appears, like the answer to a prayer” (12) which implies running from her vulnerable body to embrace a different cycle in her life. The reason Persephone wants to escape her condition of being a daughter and the protection and control that her mother has over her as a child as “our embodiment means that we are innately dependent on the provision of care by others when we are infants” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 142) which is what happens to Persephone. A change occurs at the pool when the god of the underworld carries Persephone away. However, this shift implies many vulnerabilities at different levels. Firstly, Persephone does not remember what happened, which is confusing for her as she knows she wanted to escape her childhood, but the new situation she welcomes confuses her as she seems again dependent on someone else. Although “physical or emotional dependence on others is particularly evident in infancy and childhood” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 145), Persephone’s new condition is still characterised by her dependence on someone else. Becoming a woman and a wife makes her depend on her husband, the god of the darkness, who also makes her vulnerable. Leaving childhood behind does not equate to leaving vulnerability, but Persephone only sees that once she goes from childhood to adulthood. Nevertheless, the transition to becoming Hades’ wife gives her a false sense of hope. As a matter of fact, “the girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was” (23-25). Although Persephone wants to escape her body, thinking that would make her leave her fragility behind, she forgets that she cannot embrace death as a goddess and that death is the beginning of another cycle for her.

Therefore, she finds herself double as vulnerable as she was before. Nonetheless, having her body controlled by Demeter and her soul by Hades is not her only concern since another

factor for her vulnerability is the fact that she is starting to doubt herself. She is second-guessing her decisions, and she, at this point, is unsure of what she wants. Her ignorance of whether she was or not abducted is the one that emotionally drains her, making her reach the false conclusion, yet in some way true, that she “*was not abducted*” (29) or that she “*willed this*” (32). We perceive a desperate tone when the only one able to remember what truly happened is the pool as:

She can't remember herself as that person
but she keeps thinking the pool will remember
and explain to her the meaning of her prayer
whether it was answered or not. (40-44)

This confusion plays along with the vulnerability that she feels once in the underworld. Death was supposed to save her from the vulnerability felt as Demeter's daughter. However, she becomes vulnerable because of her husband, which is enhanced by the nouns she says in rotation “*Death, husband, god, stranger*” (37).

5.4.3. Emotions

Vulnerability and emotions are connected since the former uncovers the latter. Moreover, expressing vulnerability decreases angry feelings (Bond et al. 1094). In “Persephone the Wanderer” (I), we are first introduced to the strong emotions Demeter displays:

In the first version, Persephone
is taken from her mother
and the goddess of the earth
punishes the earth—this is
consistent with what we know of human behavior,

that human beings take profound satisfaction
in doing harm, particularly
unconscious harm:

we may call this
negative creation. (1-10)

Demeter's anger is triggered by her daughter's abduction. She shows her wrath neglecting her duties as a goddess of the harvest. The passivity of her aggressiveness results in the harming of humanity. However, "the return of the beloved / does not correct / the loss of the beloved" (18-20). Once Persephone gets to go back to her mother, Persephone feels once more vulnerable because of the shame that she carries. She "returns home / stained with red juice like / a character in Hawthorne" (21-23). This simile assimilates Persephone into an adulterous character in Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*.¹²⁷ In Persephone's case, her mother makes her shameful. She causes her daughter to understand that she is no longer the child she once was and drives her to feel adulterous, pushing her to question her own victimhood. As Brené Brown points out:

If shame is the universal fear of being unworthy of love and belonging, and if all people have an irreducible and innate need to experience love and belonging, it's easy to see why shame is often referred to as "the master emotion." We don't have to experience shame to be paralyzed by it—the fear of being perceived as unworthy is enough to force us to silence our stories. (*The Gifts of Imperfection* 53)

This matches Persephone's psychological state when coping with the shame her mother induces her to feel. As such, she feels unworthy of her mother's love. Indeed, this is Demeter's intention. She manipulates her daughter emotionally to make her feel guilty for the abduction. However, Brown does not stop her explanation there before letting us understand that there is a way to overcome shame, thus, she goes on:

And if we all have shame, the good news is that we're all capable of developing shame resilience. Shame resilience is the ability to recognize shame, to move through it constructively while maintaining worthiness and authenticity, and to ultimately develop more courage, compassion, and connection as a result of our experience. The first thing we need to understand about shame resilience is that the less we talk about shame, the more we have it. Shame needs three things to grow out of control in our lives: secrecy, silence, and judgment. (*The Gifts of Imperfection* 53)

¹²⁷ See Azcuy 126; Frankel 45.

Persephone cannot reach shame resilience for this very reason as she is silencing herself using secrecy, leading to a judgement of herself as well as her mother's judgement. This and the fact that Persephone "has been a prisoner since she has been a daughter" (62) show the everlasting sense of vulnerability that Persephone carries with her because of the psychological abuse she undergoes. Indeed, as Rick Ingram and Jennifer Ritter point out, "vulnerable individuals in general and, in particular, whether maternal or paternal factors, caring or overprotectiveness, or some combination of these dimensions are linked to reactive cognitive processing in depression vulnerability" (589). Then, in "Prism," we are introduced to the "exposed heart" (7), which is vulnerable because of emotions. This is later explained when equating falling in love to "being struck by lightning" (18). After that, an "electric chair" (26) is also associated with falling in love. Emotions are once more associated with marriage:

Riddle:

Why was my mother happy?

Answer:

She married my father. (27-30)

From these lines, we understand that happiness is conditioned by marriage, or so the speaker believes. Indeed, this understanding puts the speaker in a vulnerable spot. Because of love itself, in "Persephone the Wanderer" (II), we encounter the vulnerability of the caregiver. Nevertheless, Demeter does not want to accept her vulnerability, so she tries to project her feelings of helplessness onto Persephone as she tells her: "*I remember when you didn't exist*" (14). She seems to be ashamed of her vulnerability or she does not even want to consider herself vulnerable as "our rejection of vulnerability often stems from our associating it with dark emotions like fear, shame, grief, sadness, and disappointment—emotions that we don't want to discuss" (Brown, *Daring Greatly* 36) which is what Demeter does. She is grieving for her daughter because of the love she has for her. Following Brown's understanding, love is the one that exposes us and leaves us vulnerable (*Daring Greatly* 36). Demeter is emotionally exposed, and that is reflected in the way she acts. However, this love is very possessive. Now that her daughter is in the underworld with Hades, Demeter feels reduced to a mere audience as she is compared with a simile to a bus stop waiting for the bus's arrival while "before that / she was the

bus, a temporary / home or convenience” (20-22). When it comes to looking at narcissism from the lens of vulnerability, there is, as Brown explains: “the shame-based fear of being ordinary. (...) the fear of never feeling extraordinary enough to be noticed, to be lovable, to belong, or to cultivate a sense of purpose” (*Daring Greatly* 27). Demeter fears losing her place in Persephone’s life. In the beginning, she had full control over her daughter and, thus, felt secure, but now that she has to share the one she loves with someone else, she feels insecure. All of this blinds Demeter as she does not consider what Persephone is feeling as:

her whole life is beginning– unfortunately,
it’s going to be
a short life. She’s going to know, really,
only two adults: death and her mother. (26-29)

Then, Hades’ and Demeter’s lack of empathy towards Persephone enhances this latter’s vulnerability. Once more, Demeter’s grief appears expressed in the personification of “the deep violence of the earth” (37), metaphorically associating Demeter to the earth as well as “she has no wish / to continue as a source of life” (39-40). The fact that Demeter is completely giving up her role as the goddess of the vegetation shows how she is rejecting her vulnerability, which is clearly explained by Brown: “Vulnerability isn’t good or bad (...) Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness” (*Daring Greatly* 36). The way Demeter behaves suggests rejection towards her feelings and thus her vulnerability:

In grief, after the daughter dies,
the mother wanders the earth.
She is preparing her case;
like a politician
she remembers everything and admits
nothing. (45-50)

The way Demeter is assimilated into a politician with a simile indicates that she is as manipulating and calculating as a politician. To gain control over her daughter, she needs to cautiously prepare a case. To attain such a purpose, Demeter holds inside her heart a massive

grudge against her daughter, who she, sometimes more covertly than overtly, thinks is to blame for her own abduction. Moreover, Demeter remembers how unbearable her daughter's birth was, and a few lines later, she wonders what she is doing outside her body. Demeter knows that the moment she gave birth to her daughter, she lost most of the control she held over her, exposing her to the world that could take her away from her, and she regrets it. Demeter cannot conceive of seeing Persephone as an independent being separate from her:

the daughter's body
doesn't exist, except
as a branch of the mother's body
that needs to be
reattached at any cost (64-68)

Demeter needs Persephone to make her daughter feel helpless because of her insecurities. She once was the bus that carried Persephone, yet now she is only "an audience for the bus's arrival" (20). This is a constant reminder of the loss of power over her daughter. Demeter might not want to recognise her vulnerability to her daughter, but her actions show how frail she is when she wanders the earth and punishes it or even when she hauls her daughter each year from the underworld. The impact that all of this has on Persephone can be reflected in the query she asks Zeus: "how can I endure the earth?" (94).

Then, in "A Myth of Devotion," we find a title that addresses the fact that devotion is a myth and foreshadows the metaphorical association of this entire poem and being in a relationship. In this poem, Glück focuses on Hades' perspective of the facts, which differs from her other poems addressing the myth. The first allusion to the tale in question is found in the first verse when mentioning Hades' name. As seen in the first verse, "when Hades decided he loved this girl" (1), expresses a dominant and controlling tone as the verbs "decided" and "loved" in the same sentence imply obsession and control rather than genuine love. To express what he thinks is love, he decides to manipulate her when "he built for her a duplicate of earth, / everything the same, down to the meadow, / but with a bed added" (2-4), and then the repetition of "everything the same" (5) enhances the level of Hades' manipulation and control of the situation. This way of gaslighting Persephone by showing a fake image and, little by little,

introducing the events aims to confuse Persephone, make her question her reality, and control her. All of this is “because it would be hard on a young girl / to go so quickly from bright light to utter darkness” (6-7). Being young and a girl makes Persephone vulnerable to Hades’ manipulation as “emotional dependence” (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 145) is what characterises Persephone and makes her an easier target for Hades, who gradually introduces darkness in her life. The fact that “in the end, he thought, she’d find it comforting” (12) indicates the absence of care and consideration that he has for her feelings. The way he is constantly trying to justify his behaviour with rhetorical questions such as “doesn’t everyone want love?” (15) or “doesn’t everyone want to feel in the night / the beloved body” (22-23) shows his desperate attempt to hide his true self as someone manipulating and controlling. The questions he asks reveal how he is attempting to ignore Persephone’s feelings and blinding himself to the fact that she does not want to go with him. If he admitted the truth, meaning that Persephone is a pawn in his hands, he would acknowledge that he is taking advantage of her exposure. However, there seems to be a need for vulnerability, as Brown notes:

Our rejection of vulnerability often stems from our associating it with dark emotions like fear, shame, grief, sadness, and disappointment—emotions that we don’t want to discuss, even when they profoundly affect the way we live, love, work, and even lead. What most of us fail to understand and what took me a decade of research to learn is that vulnerability is also the cradle of the emotions and experiences that we crave. Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path. (*Daring Greatly* 36)

Therefore, vulnerability by itself is not an issue. However, not accepting it is a problem. Although we cannot determine whether Persephone is aware of her vulnerability, the fact that Hades takes advantage of this situation multiplies Persephone’s vulnerability. The lack of empathy that Hades displays shows that he is both self-centred and controlling as “it never crossed his mind / that there’d be no more smelling here, / certainly no more eating” (31-33). He does not consider the guilt, the terror, and the fear of love that Persephone might develop. Once more, this is justified as “these things he couldn’t imagine; no lover ever imagines them (35-36). Also, there is a correlation between the pondering that Hades does when thinking about the name

that he will give the new place that he created and the thorough calculation that takes place when he spies on Persephone and waits for years. Nonetheless, the names he thinks about when trying to find a suitable name for this new place are quite interesting. The first one is “*The New Hell*” (38), which recognises that Persephone is vulnerable in the underworld. Then he considers “*The Garden*” (38), which also refers to Persephone's abduction as the garden is where Hades stalked her for so long. Finally, he decides to call it: “*Persephone's Girlhood*” (39), reflecting on the moment Persephone was the most vulnerable and what Hades takes from Persephone. The fact that “he takes her in his arms” (42) shows the success of his manipulation and calculation, now he has complete control over her, and it is almost as if he owned her. Then, in “*Omens*,” we find once more the vulnerability associated with emotions such as love and sadness:

I rode back: everything changed.

My soul in love was sad
and the moon on my left side
trailed me without hope.

To such endless impressions
we poets give ourselves absolutely,
making, in silence, omen of mere event,
until the world reflects the deepest needs of the soul. (5-12)

5.4.4. Embodiment

As Butler remarks, “we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot preempt” (*Precairous Life* 29). Thus, our body becomes one of the main sources of our vulnerability. In “*October*,” there is an allusion to the fragility inferred in the embodiment as the speaker wonders: “wasn't my body / rescued, wasn't it safe” (7-8). Death implies a deep sense of vulnerability as we die because we possess a body. Therefore, this is what determines our mortality. Having a body vulnerable to death conditions us and makes us mortal. Furthermore, in “*Crater Lake*,” the body is also acknowledged as helpless to death. The soul needs the body for embodiment. Thus, the soul was against death:

There was a war between good and evil.
We decided to call the body good.

That made death evil.
It turned the soul
against death completely.

Like a foot soldier wanting
to serve a great warrior, the soul
wanted to side with the body.

It turned against the dark,
against the forms of death
it recognized. (1-11)

These lines encapsulate the conflict between death and the body and how the soul sides with the body because without it, the soul has no vessel. Therefore, death is understood as evil and the body as good because embodiment means life. Then, in “Echoes,” imagining the soul implies imagining death as the soul only appears when there is no body:

Once I could imagine my soul
I could imagine my death.
When I imagined my death
my soul died. This
I remember clearly.
My body persisted.
Not thrived, but persisted.
Why I do not know. (1-8)

Without embodiment, there is immunity to death as death has already occurred. Moreover, in “Fugue,” there is an emphasis on the way the soul needs the body to exist on earth:

I know what you want—

you want Orpheus, you want death.

Orpheus who said “Help me find Eurydice.”

Then the music began, the lament of the soul
watching the body vanish. (82-86)

The need for an embodiment for the soul to live on earth is reflected in a tale closely related to the myth of Demeter and Persephone, which is that of Orpheus who went to the underworld to bring Eurydice back yet failed to save her body and, as a result, her life. Also, in “Landscape,” the body is constantly vulnerable to death, as seen in: “Time passed, turning everything to ice. / Under the ice, the future stirred. / If you fell into it, you died” (31-33). In these lines, death is easy to attain. This conception of death is also present in “Blue Rotunda.” Then, the vulnerability attached to the body appears once more in “A Myth of Devotion,” following Fineman’s understanding, “there are two relevant forms of individual difference in a vulnerability approach—those that arise because we are *embodied* beings and those that arise because we are social beings *embedded* in social institutions and relationships” (“Vulnerability and Inevitable Inequality” 143). On the one hand, in this poem, we perceive the vulnerability attached to having a body that allows:

to hear the quiet breathing that says
I am alive, that means also
you are alive because you hear me. And when one turns,
the other turns— (24-28)

On the other hand, vulnerability is also found in the relationship implied here—a romantic relationship where affection is present. This also reminds the reader of Ovid’s version of this myth in his *Metamorphoses*, where the role of passion and love is imperative. Here Glück emphasises the presence of a bed in Hades’ world, which corroborates Hades’ intentions towards Persephone. This free verse poem barely presents any poetic devices. Yet, once more, there is a repetition found when Hades thinks about what he wants to tell Persephone, first thinking about: “*I love you, nothing can hurt you*” (43), but he decides to say: “*you’re dead, nothing can hurt*

you” (l. 46) because once dead we lose the vulnerability suggested in having a body since we lose our embodiment. Again, in “Persephone the Wanderer” (II), Demeter displays her overt sense of helplessness when she grieves for the loss of her daughter. Also, there is a much more enhanced focus on Demeter’s vulnerability than that of Persephone since Persephone is dead, and she lost part of her vulnerability as someone that is considered to be detached from her body:

Compulsively, in grief, Demeter
circles the earth. We don’t expect to know
what Persephone is doing.
She is dead, the dead are mysteries. (5-8)

What happens after the loss of the body, and death is supposed to be a mystery.

5.4.5. Victimhood

Victimhood refers to the condition of being a victim. As Bar-Tal, et al. have remarked:

There are many kinds of situations that can bring a person as an individual or as a member of a collective to have a sense of being a victim. It seems that victimhood describes some lasting psychological state of mind that involves beliefs, attitudes, emotions and behavioural tendencies. This results on the one hand from direct or indirect experience of victimization, and on the other hand from its maintenance in the personal repertoire. (231)

This is indeed reflected in *Averno* where we find different instances of victimhood. In “Persephone the Wanderer” (I), Persephone has to fight her own battle while finding herself in a “sojourn in hell” (12) where she might have been raped or violated, finding herself in a different kind of vulnerable position. Then, a few lines later, the speaker wonders about the extent of Persephone’s victimhood but asks whether she cooperated in her rape “or was she drugged, violated against her will, / as happens so often now to modern girls” (16-17). In fact, “victimhood, vulnerability and womanhood were often linked together” (Virokannas et al. 6), and Persephone seems to fit into all three categories. Glück draws our attention to the association of the sense of victimhood that Persephone undergoes in the underworld and the reality that many “modern girls” (17), as she puts it, have to go through by being raped, drugged, or

violated. With this association, Glück sheds light on the vulnerable position Persephone lives. At the same time, the reader asks to pay attention to the daily hopeless situations many girls like Persephone encounter. In this same poem, Persephone is addressed as “just meat” (87) since she is victimised by both her mother and her husband. Then, in “A Myth of Innocence,” the fact that Persephone looks at herself in the pool and sees “the same person, the horrible mantle / of daughterliness still clinging to her” (5-6) alludes to how Demeter oppresses her. Furthermore, as Daniel Rose explains:

When Persephone wishes for something more from her life, “death appears like an answer to her prayer” (Glück 532). This short phrase is key to unlocking another “split” in Glück’s writing: the way that she blurs lines between diametric subjects. She already likes to blur the line between Mythology and objective, modern problems, but she also likes to blur the lines between guilt, innocence, and victimhood for women. (2)

Additionally, the assimilation between Hades’ and Demeter’s control in “A Myth of Devotion” when stating “he built for her a duplicate of earth” (2) foreshadows how Persephone will also be victimised by Hades.

5.4.6. Resistance

Resistance refers to the act of declining to comply with something. This term is closely related to vulnerability. Indeed, as Butler puts it, “we are first vulnerable and then overcome that vulnerability, at least provisionally, through acts of resistance” (“Rethinking” 12). The way Demeter overtly displays her anger when she “punishes the earth” (3) in “Persephone the Wanderer” (I) expresses the deepness of her internal wound and explicitly shows her vulnerability to the world. Demeter is using resistance to overcome her vulnerability, but “vulnerability is not exactly overcome by resistance” (Butler, “Rethinking” 14). She might temporarily feel a sense of control when she stops vegetation from growing, but that does not imply her lack of vulnerability. This helplessness is the one that assimilates the goddess of the harvest to humans when her behaviour is:

consistent with what we know of human behavior

that human beings take profound satisfaction

in doing harm, particularly
unconscious harm” (5-8)

Glück humanises the goddess, which adds to her vulnerability. The oxymoronic expression “negative creation” (10) is an emphasis on the human behaviour that defines Demeter and her vulnerability in this poem as she seems to be able to control her anger and frustration while coping with her daughter’s loss. Also, “negative creation” plays a role in Demeter’s resistance as she decides to destroy vegetation. Demeter neglects her duty as the goddess of the underworld as a way to show resistance when coping with her daughter’s loss so that Zeus responds to her passive aggressiveness and subsequent wrath by bringing back her daughter.

5.4.7. Resilience

As Grafton et al. have explained, “resilience is an accessible inner strength or resource within the individual that enables a positive stress response that can be enhanced or supported by external resources” (700), which makes it accessible to everyone. In “October,” we are introduced to a change that takes place after a traumatic event. The speaker has changed after the violence. After surviving violence, the speaker is no longer the same:

Summer after summer has ended,
balm after violence:
it does me no good
to be good to me now;
violence has changed me. (29-33)

Then, later on, this idea is emphasised as the speaker explains the resilient change that took place:

You hear this voice? This is my mind’s voice;
you can’t touch my body now.
It has changed once, it has hardened,
don’t ask it to respond again. (39-42)

Then, assimilating the body to the “stripped fields” (48), the speaker explains the way violence has made them cold:

It does me no good; violence has changed me.
My body has grown cold like the stripped fields;
now there is only my mind, cautious and wary,
with the sense it is being tested. (47-50)

The way destruction has hardened the narrator in “October” implies overcoming pain and reaching an emotional resilience that proves how change cannot be escaped from:

It does me no good; violence has changed me.
My body has grown cold like the stripped fields;
now there is only my mind, cautious and wary,
with the sense it is being tested.

Once more, the sun rises as it rose in summer;
bounty, balm after violence.
Balm after the leaves have changed, after the fields
have been harvested and turned. (47-54)

This poem “is about change, sickness, loss and death” (El Bakary 139). Indeed, the speaker here has changed because of violence. Then, the cold body resonates with the violence and “the stripped fields” (48). Yet, “the sun rises” (51) despite everything.

I can finally say
long ago; it gives me considerable pleasure. Beauty

the healer, the teacher—

death cannot harm me
more than you have harmed me,
my beloved life. (79-84)

Once death occurs, the body loses its vulnerability, implying that being alive encourages helplessness. Then, in “Persephone the Wanderer” (I), where there is a sense of hopelessness that both mother and daughter share, and that is that of being wanderers, Persephone is “a replica of her own mother” (31) as she has to wander between earth and underworld the same way her mother roamed the earth looking for her. Also, the fact that Persephone has to “drift between earth and death” (69) expresses her codependency and helplessness because of her mother, who awaits her on earth and her husband in the underworld, making it impossible for her to reach any resilience as she is “just meat” (87) following the understanding that:

Resilience is not a naturally occurring and variable characteristic of an individual, nor is it achieved only by individual accomplishment and effort. Resilience is a product of social relationships and institutions. Human beings are not born resilient. Resilience is produced over time through social structures and societal conditions that individuals may be unable to control. (Fineman, “Vulnerability and Social Justice” 362-363)

Persephone does not have the time to reach resilience after each cycle of abuse derived from being restrained by Demeter and Hades. As such, once she is on earth, she is owned by her mother, and right after leaving the earth, she is controlled by her husband in the underworld.

CONCLUSIONS

Although many writers might have suited the purposes of the present thesis as far as the reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone is concerned, no other pair of authors who have both written books of poetry appropriating the myth of Demeter and Persephone or revealed the importance of motherhood in their works would have been better suited than Rita Dove and Louise Glück. In *Mother Love* and *Averno*, these two poets tackle various perennial mother-daughter situations, and achieve this by appropriating the myth of Demeter and Persephone and combining it with psychoanalysis, vulnerability and their own autobiographical experiences.

In Rita Dove's and Louise Glück's receptions of the myth of Demeter, ancient characters appear in various contemporary scenarios where the mother-daughter bond is strongly influenced by Dove's and Glück's own experiences as daughters and mothers. Although Dove's Persephone struggles at various levels, she is willing to grow and gain independence from her mother, and remains determined to empower herself as a woman. One example of this is her desire to understand her own sexuality. In a variety of scenarios, Persephone is depicted as eager to discover who she wants to be, and even when she is taken back to the ancient setting where she was raped, she uses this traumatic experience to become resilient. Dove's Demeter must learn to let her daughter enter the adult world alone. At first, she struggles with this as she cannot avoid protecting and being concerned for her daughter, but as Persephone becomes ever more resilient, Demeter must accept that her daughter has grown up and that she needs to let her go. Persephone becomes someone that Demeter no longer recognises, which worries her but there is nothing she can do. Dove's Demeter and Hades can be correlated with Glück's Demeter and Hades. Glück also explores Demeter's inability to accept her daughter's abduction and delineates her extremely coercive and abusive traits. Dove's Persephone wants to grow, and Hades manipulates this desire to obtain from her whatever he needs; similarly, Glück's Hades also exploits Persephone for his own ends. He knows that she is unhappy and therefore uses this to his advantage.

As demonstrated in this research, a line can be traced from the ancient Homeric and Ovidian sources to Graves and D'Aulaires and then to Dove's and Glück's receptions of the

myth of Demeter and Persephone. This thesis has examined the reception of this myth in both *Mother Love* and *Averno*, exploring their similarities with the sources, identifying the differences and elucidating the source of these distinctions, which is frequently none other than Dove's and Glück's own personal experiences. This thesis has also determined the impact of narcissism and trauma on Dove's and Glück's main characters and the role of vulnerability in *Mother Love* and *Averno*.

In *Mother Love*, Dove's reception of the Demeter/Persephone myth is influenced by her experience as a woman, an African-American writer, a daughter and a mother, and her appropriation of the myth combines several different versions. She seems to have been influenced by the Homeric and Ovidian versions as well as by Graves, whose rendering of the myth merges former versions. In her retelling, Dove depicts different female experiences, decrying several of the situations that women must contend with and condemning the unfairness of this. Dove's appropriation of the ancient myth resonates with several sources. She uses the Greek names of Demeter, Persephone and Hades, and follows the Homeric script when introducing the Demeter/Persephone myth by addressing a narcissus, a child she cares for—Demophon—or the mysteries. However, when she portrays Persephone crying for her mother's help, or introduces a poppy, her retelling resonates with the Ovidian version. Hence, she seems to be merging the Homeric and Ovidian renderings. Furthermore, in giving the mother-goddess a pivotal role in *Mother Love*, Dove reflects Graves's influence on her reception of the ancient myth. This suggests that this may have been the first version she read. In her retelling of the myth, Dove gives prominence to topics such as persecution, motherhood, sexuality, abduction, rape and grief. All these matters become emblematic as they acquire meaning when analysing Dove's appropriation of the Demeter/Persephone myth.

In *Averno*, Glück's reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone is influenced by her experience as a woman, a writer, a daughter and a single mother. Her reception of the ancient myth bears many similarities with the Homeric source and she also clearly receives the myth through D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths*, influenced by Graves. Glück's retelling of the Demeter/Persephone myth keeps the Greek names for the different divinities, and she also follows the ancient script when depicting Demeter's anger following her daughter's abduction.

However, in “A Myth of Innocence”, she departs from the ancient sources by depicting a Persephone who wishes to escape from her body in order to be freed from her mother’s abuse. This reception mirrors Glück’s personal experience with an authoritarian mother and her disappointment in marriage. Thus, Glück’s personal concerns are reflected in the various themes she addresses in *Averno*: life, death, motherhood and marriage.

Dove’s overprotective Demeter presents narcissistic traits, expressed through the control she exerts over Persephone. Demeter’s inability to live life after her daughter’s abduction reflects Demeter’s view of Persephone as a narcissistic supply, whose absence leads to the mother’s depression and inability to live life normally. Demeter’s life seems to lack meaning when Persephone is taken from her, because she has forged a narcissistic bond with her daughter, and the only way for her to regain control over her life is to acquire a new narcissistic supply. Thus, she tries to replace Persephone with another child—a child that she sees as a piece of meat—but as soon as she is deprived of this new supply, she descends once again into extreme sadness and grief. It therefore becomes clear that Demeter’s identity as a mother is contingent on Persephone. Hence, once the child is absent, the mother’s life becomes meaningless. Similarly, Dove’s Hades also presents narcissistic traits. Hades sees Persephone as a mere source of entertainment, and he does not treat her as an individual. He only considers his own desires and does not care about what Persephone wants. Hades requires Persephone to meet his needs, and is thus manipulative in his dealings with her in order to obtain what he wants, establishing a co-dependency bond with her that results in her trauma. Through the various mother-daughter relationships that Dove introduces, the reader observes a variety of the traumatic experiences that women encounter. Dove’s Demeter incessantly fights everything around her in hopes of saving her daughter, and trauma is therefore something she contends with continuously in *Mother Love*. Dove depicts Demeter’s trauma through shock, reliving the same traumatic event, reluctance to move on, and denial. Meanwhile, Persephone’s trauma is mainly expressed through flashbacks, as happens with Cyane, who witnesses her abduction and is unable to move on.

Narcissism has been a constant theme in Glück’s works. By combining autobiography, mythology and psychoanalysis in her retelling of the ancient Demeter/Persephone myth, Glück portrays Demeter as a narcissistic mother who views Persephone as a part—a mere

extension—of herself, and not as an independent being. This is reflected in the way Demeter is associated with a tree whose branch is her daughter. Persephone's desire to escape from her body in order to be freed from her mother's control further demonstrates Demeter's narcissistic attachment to her daughter. Later, when she is abducted by Hades, Persephone is dismayed to discover that Hades is similar to her mother: controlling and abusive. Hades also regards Persephone as a thing that he owns and not as an individual. Thus, both Demeter and Hades consider Persephone a piece of meat, neither of them cares about her and both of them need her as the narcissistic supply that endows them with an identity. Persephone's eventual fate is to exist as part of Demeter for some of the year and as part of Hades for the rest. The result for Persephone is trauma, another theme that Glück explores in *Averno*. Facing a dilemma, Glück's speaker mainly experiences trauma because of life and death, and this is reflected in confusion as to why and whether something happened, detachment from reality, reliving the traumatic event, flashbacks, guilt and victimisation. The main character experiencing such trauma is Persephone, which resonates with Glück's identification with this character and the way she projects her dilemmas and experiences onto her character.

In *Mother Love*, Dove reflects the vulnerability attached to the female sex and to which children—independently of their sex—are subjected. She portrays Persephone as vulnerable because she is female and a child. Demeter's vulnerability also stems from her condition as a female, but in addition from her condition as a mother desperate to find her child. Dove addresses feminist concerns as she depicts the reaction of patriarchal society to abuse. Another example of female vulnerability is related to women's psychological state. Dove shows this through the female witness of Persephone's abduction and rape, who is unable to overcome her trauma, and through the psychological state of concerned mothers—Demeter and Metaneira. Another aspect of vulnerability that Demeter echoes in *Mother Love* is linked to dependency. The bond of dependency is shown through the mother-daughter relationship, where the daughter needs physical and emotional care from the mother and the mother needs her daughter in order to maintain her identity as a mother. This is also related to the vulnerability attached to emotions. On the one hand, vulnerability is associated with the emotional care that derives from dependency, while on the other, emotional vulnerability is expressed through the way in which Demeter contends with her loss. In addition to the mother's grief and wrath at losing her

daughter, Dove also explores Persephone's emotional vulnerability as a victim of abduction and the witnesses' guilt after seeing the abduction. Another aspect of vulnerability is found in embodiment —also related to dependency— which foregrounds the fragility inherent in having a body. The fragility of Persephone's body is conveyed through her experience of being bullied and abducted. Victimhood is also reinforced throughout *Mother Love*, once more through Persephone's rape and consequent status as a victim of a crime. Resistance, too, is present as a resource with which to overcome vulnerability, for instance when Dove's Demeter wants Persephone to resist the abduction, yet Persephone fails to do so. However, she achieves resilience when she accepts her role as goddess of the underworld, empowering herself.

In *Averno*, Glück's reception of the myth of Demeter and Persephone also calls attention to the role of vulnerability. She draws parallels between Demeter's and Hades' vulnerability as they both depend on Persephone to fulfil their respective roles, and this shared co-dependency renders them helpless. Hades expresses this vulnerability by projecting it onto Persephone; however, Persephone is also vulnerable as she finds herself divided between earth and the underworld. Glück's *Averno* reflects upon the psychological vulnerability that Demeter, Hades and Persephone share. What these three characters have in common is a dependency bond, because the soul (a metaphorical reference to Persephone) depends on life (Demeter) and death (Hades). Later on, this is explicitly reflected in the Demeter/Persephone myth when Demeter reinforces a dependency bond with her daughter to prevent Persephone from gaining any kind of independence, thus enabling Demeter to acquire full control over her daughter. Furthermore, in an attempt to escape from this co-dependent bond with her mother, Persephone falls into the hands of an abductor who assumes the exact same role in the underworld, where Persephone is dependent on him and is once more denied the possibility of independence.

Emotions also play a very important role in Glück's retelling of the Demeter/Persephone myth. Demeter's anger when her daughter is abducted and the shame she induces in her daughter to make her feel guilty for her abduction reflect Demeter's emotional vulnerability. In addition, Persephone can no longer rely on her mother after the abduction and thus she too becomes emotionally vulnerable. On the one hand, Demeter is unable to acknowledge her own vulnerability and therefore projects it onto her child, while on the other, Persephone is unable to

overcome her emotional vulnerability, as when, for instance, she is unable to achieve shame resilience. Hades compounds Persephone's emotional vulnerability by not considering the different emotions she will feel after the abduction. His lack of empathy exacerbates Persephone's vulnerability. Embodiment is also something Glück reflects upon. We die because we are embodied beings. Thus, in *Averno*, having a body equals being alive, and dying implies losing the body. Although Persephone is a goddess and cannot die, whenever she descends to the underworld she is dead to her mother, who sees her as part of herself and her own body. Glück also reflects upon victimhood through the myth of Persephone, as she mentions contemporary young women who have been victims of crimes such as rape. Although Persephone does not resist her abduction in this contemporary version, Demeter shows resistance as she stops all plant life from growing. She uses resistance to contend with her vulnerability. Persephone is unable either to resist her abduction or to achieve any kind of resilience and is thus obliged to repeat the same cycle of abuse over and over again, alternating between the earth and the underworld.

Importantly, this research contributes a new perspective of Dove's and Glück's reception of the Demeter and Persephone myth. In contrast to Louise Glück, who explores the limitations of a goddess unable to escape from her body and thus plunged into an eternal state of vulnerability, Rita Dove examines the advantages of being goddess of the underworld and the empowerment that can emerge from vulnerability. However, in their receptions of the ancient myth, both authors depict a Persephone who seeks to become a woman through her own agency. In each of these contemporary versions, Persephone's desire to grow up renders her vulnerable to manipulation by Hades. Dove and Glück give voice to the three main characters of the ancient myth —Demeter, Persephone and Hades— and both care deeply about what Persephone wants and how she feels, prompting the two authors to empathise with this character. In addition, Dove and Glück understand that Demeter's and Hades' controlling behaviour and narcissism cause Persephone's trauma but nevertheless still recognise Demeter's trauma as well, and thus acknowledge Persephone's and Demeter's vulnerability, since both Dove and Glück are not only daughters but also mothers.

CONCLUSIONS

Bien que de nombreux écrivains aient pu répondre aux objectifs de la présente thèse en ce qui concerne la réception du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone, aucun autre couple d'auteurs ayant à la fois écrit des recueils de poésie s'appropriant le mythe de Déméter et Perséphone ou révélé l'importance de la maternité dans leurs œuvres aurait mieux convenu que Rita Dove et Louise Glück. Dans *Mother Love* et *Averno*, ces deux poètes abordent diverses situations pérennes mère-fille, et y parviennent en s'appropriant le mythe de Déméter et Perséphone et en le combinant avec la psychanalyse, la vulnérabilité et leurs propres expériences autobiographiques.

Dans les réceptions du mythe de Déméter par Rita Dove et Louise Glück, des personnages anciens apparaissent dans divers scénarios contemporains où le lien mère-fille est fortement influencé par les propres expériences de Dove et Glück en tant que filles et mères. Bien que Perséphone de Dove se débatait à différents niveaux, elle est prête à grandir et à gagner en indépendance vis-à-vis de sa mère, et reste déterminée à s'autonomiser en tant que femme. Un exemple de ceci est son désir de comprendre sa propre sexualité. Dans une variété de scénarios, Perséphone est décrite comme désireuse de découvrir qui elle veut être, et même lorsqu'elle est ramenée dans l'ancien cadre où elle a été violée, elle utilise cette expérience traumatisante pour devenir résiliente. Déméter de Dove doit apprendre à laisser sa fille entrer seule dans le monde des adultes. Au début, elle se débat avec cela car elle ne peut éviter de protéger et de s'inquiéter pour sa fille, mais à mesure que Perséphone devient de plus en plus résistante, Déméter doit accepter que sa fille a grandi et qu'elle doit la laisser partir. Perséphone devient quelqu'un que Déméter ne reconnaît plus, ce qui l'inquiète mais elle ne peut rien faire. Déméter et Hadès de Dove peuvent être corrélés avec Déméter et Hadès de Glück. Glück explore également l'incapacité de Déméter à accepter l'enlèvement de sa fille et délimite ses traits extrêmement coercitifs et abusifs. Perséphone de Dove veut grandir et Hadès manipule ce désir pour obtenir d'elle tout ce dont il a besoin; de même, Hadès de Glück exploite également Perséphone à ses propres fins. Il sait qu'elle est malheureuse et utilise donc cela à son avantage.

Comme démontré dans cette recherche, une ligne peut être tracée depuis les anciennes sources homériques et ovidiennes jusqu'à Graves, D'Aulaires et Hamilton, puis jusqu'aux

réceptions par Dove et Glück du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone. Cette thèse a examiné la réception de ce mythe à la fois chez *Mother Love* et chez *Averno*, en explorant leurs similitudes avec les sources, en identifiant les différences et en élucidant la source de ces distinctions, qui n'est souvent autre que les propres expériences personnelles de Dove et Glück. Cette thèse a également déterminé l'impact du narcissisme et du traumatisme sur les personnages principaux de Dove et Glück et le rôle de la vulnérabilité dans *Mother Love* et *Averno*.

Dans *Mother Love*, la réception par Dove du mythe Déméter/Perséphone est influencée par son expérience en tant que femme, écrivaine afro-américaine, fille et mère, et son appropriation du mythe combine plusieurs versions différentes. Elle semble avoir été influencée par les versions homérique et ovidienne ainsi que par Graves, dont le rendu du mythe fusionne les versions antérieures. Dans son récit, Dove dépeint différentes expériences féminines, décrivant plusieurs des situations auxquelles les femmes doivent faire face et condamnant l'injustice de cela. L'appropriation par Dove du mythe antique résonne avec plusieurs sources. Elle utilise les noms grecs de Déméter, Perséphone et Hadès, et suit l'écriture homérique lors de l'introduction du mythe Déméter/Perséphone en s'adressant à un narcisse, un enfant dont elle s'occupe —Démophon— ou les mystères. Cependant, lorsqu'elle dépeint Perséphone pleurant pour l'aide de sa mère, ou introduit un coquelicot, son récit résonne avec la version ovidienne. Par conséquent, elle semble fusionner les rendus homérique et ovidien. De plus, en donnant à la déesse-mère un rôle central dans *Mother Love*, Dove reflète l'influence de Graves sur sa réception du mythe antique. Cela suggère qu'il s'agit peut-être de la première version qu'elle a lue. Dans son récit du mythe, Dove met en évidence des sujets tels que la persécution, la maternité, la sexualité, l'enlèvement, le viol et le chagrin. Toutes ces questions deviennent emblématiques car elles acquièrent un sens lors de l'analyse de l'appropriation par Dove du mythe Déméter/Perséphone.

À *Averno*, la réception par Glück du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone est influencée par son expérience en tant que femme, écrivain, fille et mère célibataire. Sa réception du mythe antique présente de nombreuses similitudes avec la source homérique et elle reçoit également clairement le mythe à travers *Book of Greek Myths* de D'Aulaires, influencé par Graves. Le récit par Glück du mythe de Déméter/Perséphone conserve les noms grecs des différentes divinités, et

elle suit également l'ancienne écriture lorsqu'elle décrit la colère de Déméter suite à l'enlèvement de sa fille. Cependant, dans "A Myth of Innocence", elle s'écarte des sources anciennes en représentant une Perséphone qui souhaite s'échapper de son corps afin d'être libérée des abus de sa mère. Cette réception reflète l'expérience personnelle de Glück avec une mère autoritaire et sa déception dans le mariage. Ainsi, les préoccupations personnelles de Glück se reflètent dans les différents thèmes qu'elle aborde dans *Averno*: la vie, la mort, la maternité et le mariage.

La surprotectrice Déméter de Dove présente des traits narcissiques, exprimés par le contrôle qu'elle exerce sur Perséphone. L'incapacité de Déméter à vivre sa vie après l'enlèvement de sa fille reflète la vision de Déméter de Perséphone comme une source narcissique, dont l'absence conduit à la dépression de la mère et à l'incapacité de vivre normalement. La vie de Déméter semble manquer de sens lorsque Perséphone lui est enlevée, car elle a noué un lien narcissique avec sa fille, et le seul moyen pour elle de reprendre le contrôle de sa vie est d'acquérir une nouvelle source narcissique. Ainsi, elle essaie de remplacer Perséphone par un autre enfant —un enfant qu'elle considère comme un morceau de viande— mais dès qu'elle est privée de ce nouvel approvisionnement, elle retombe dans une tristesse et un chagrin extrêmes. Il devient donc clair que l'identité de Déméter en tant que mère dépend de Perséphone. Ainsi, une fois l'enfant absent, la vie de la mère n'a plus de sens. De même, Dove's Hadès présente également des traits narcissiques. Hadès considère Perséphone comme une simple source de divertissement et il ne la traite pas comme un individu. Il ne considère que ses propres désirs et ne se soucie pas de ce que veut Perséphone. Hadès a besoin de Perséphone pour répondre à ses besoins, et est donc manipulateur dans ses relations avec elle afin d'obtenir ce qu'il veut, établissant un lien de co-dépendance avec elle qui entraîne son traumatisme. À travers les différentes relations mère-fille introduites par Dove, le lecteur observe une variété d'expériences traumatisantes vécues par les femmes. Déméter de Dove combat sans cesse tout ce qui l'entoure dans l'espoir de sauver sa fille, et le traumatisme est donc quelque chose qu'elle affronte continuellement dans *Mother Love*. Dove dépeint le traumatisme de Déméter à travers le choc, revivant le même événement traumatisant, la réticence à passer à autre chose et le déni. Pendant ce temps, le traumatisme de Perséphone s'exprime principalement par des flashbacks,

comme c'est le cas avec Cyane, qui est témoin de son enlèvement et est incapable de passer à autre chose.

Le narcissisme a été un thème constant dans les œuvres de Glück. En combinant autobiographie, mythologie et psychanalyse dans son récit de l'ancien mythe Déméter/Perséphone, Glück dépeint Déméter comme une mère narcissique qui considère Perséphone comme une partie —une simple extension— d'elle-même, et non comme un être indépendant. Cela se reflète dans la façon dont Déméter est associée à un arbre dont la branche est sa fille. Le désir de Perséphone de s'échapper de son corps afin d'être libéré du contrôle de sa mère démontre encore l'attachement narcissique de Déméter à sa fille. Plus tard, lorsqu'elle est enlevée par Hadès, Perséphone est consternée de découvrir qu'Hadès est similaire à sa mère: contrôlante et abusive. Hadès considère également Perséphone comme une chose qui lui appartient et non comme un individu. Ainsi, Déméter et Hadès considèrent Perséphone comme un morceau de viande, aucun d'eux ne se soucie d'elle et tous deux ont besoin d'elle comme source narcissique qui leur confère une identité. Le destin de Perséphone est d'exister comme étant une part de Déméter pour une partie de l'année et en étant une part d'Hadès pour le reste de l'année. Le résultat pour Perséphone est le traumatisme, un autre thème que Glück explore dans *Averno*. Confronté à un dilemme, le locuteur de Glück vit principalement un traumatisme à cause de la vie et de la mort, et cela se reflète dans la confusion quant à savoir pourquoi et si quelque chose s'est passé, le détachement de la réalité, le fait de revivre l'événement traumatique, les flashbacks, la culpabilité et la victimisation. Le personnage principal qui subit un tel traumatisme est Perséphone, ce qui résonne avec l'identification de Glück avec ce personnage et la façon dont elle projette ses dilemmes et ses expériences sur son personnage.

Dans *Mother Love*, Dove reflète la vulnérabilité attachée au sexe féminin et à laquelle sont soumis les enfants, quel que soit leur sexe. Elle dépeint Perséphone comme vulnérable parce qu'elle est une femme et un enfant. La vulnérabilité de Déméter tient aussi à sa condition de femme, mais aussi à sa condition de mère désespérée de retrouver son enfant. Dove aborde les préoccupations féministes en décrivant la réaction de la société patriarcale face aux abus. Un autre exemple de vulnérabilité féminine est lié à l'état psychologique des femmes. Dove le montre à travers la femme témoin de l'enlèvement et du viol de Perséphone, qui est incapable de

surmonter son traumatisme, et à travers l'état psychologique des mères inquiètes —Déméter et Metaneira. Un autre aspect de la vulnérabilité auquel Déméter fait écho dans *Mother Love* est lié à la dépendance. Le lien de dépendance se manifeste à travers la relation mère-fille, où la fille a besoin de soins physiques et émotionnels de la part de la mère et la mère a besoin de sa fille pour maintenir son identité de mère. Ceci est également lié à la vulnérabilité attachée aux émotions. D'une part, la vulnérabilité est associée au soin émotionnel qui découle de la dépendance, tandis que d'autre part, la vulnérabilité émotionnelle s'exprime à travers la manière dont Déméter fait face à sa perte. En plus du chagrin et de la colère de la mère d'avoir perdu sa fille, Dove explore également la vulnérabilité émotionnelle de Perséphone en tant que victime d'enlèvement et la culpabilité des témoins après avoir vu l'enlèvement. Un autre aspect de la vulnérabilité se retrouve dans l'incarnation, également liée à la dépendance, qui met en avant la fragilité inhérente au fait d'avoir un corps. La fragilité du corps de Perséphone est transmise à travers son expérience d'intimidation et d'enlèvement. La victimisation est également renforcée tout au long de *Mother Love*, une fois de plus par le viol de Perséphone et son statut conséquent de victime d'un crime. La résistance est également présente comme une ressource permettant de surmonter la vulnérabilité, par exemple lorsque Déméter de Dove veut que Perséphone résiste à l'enlèvement, mais Perséphone ne le fait pas. Cependant, elle atteint la résilience lorsqu'elle accepte son rôle de déesse des enfers, en s'autonomisant.

Dans *Averno*, la réception par Glück du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone attire également l'attention sur le rôle de la vulnérabilité. Elle établit des parallèles entre la vulnérabilité de Déméter et celle d'Hadès, car ils dépendent tous deux de Perséphone pour remplir leurs rôles respectifs, et cette co-dépendance partagée les rend impuissants. Hadès exprime cette vulnérabilité en la projetant sur Perséphone; cependant, Perséphone est également vulnérable car elle se retrouve divisée entre la terre et les enfers. L'*Averno* de Glück réfléchit sur la vulnérabilité psychologique que partagent Déméter, Hadès et Perséphone. Ce que ces trois personnages ont en commun, c'est un lien de dépendance, car l'âme (référence métaphorique à Perséphone) dépend de la vie (Déméter) et de la mort (Hadès). Plus tard, cela se reflète explicitement dans le mythe Déméter/Perséphone lorsque Déméter renforce un lien de dépendance avec sa fille pour empêcher Perséphone d'acquérir une quelconque indépendance, permettant ainsi à Déméter d'acquérir un contrôle total sur sa fille. De plus, dans une tentative d'échapper à ce lien de

co-dépendance avec sa mère, Perséphone tombe entre les mains d'un ravisseur qui assume exactement le même rôle dans le monde souterrain, où Perséphone dépend de lui et se voit une fois de plus refuser la possibilité d'indépendance.

Les émotions jouent également un rôle très important dans le récit par Glück du mythe Déméter/Perséphone. La colère de Déméter lorsque sa fille est enlevée et la honte qu'elle induit chez sa fille pour la faire se sentir coupable de son enlèvement reflètent la vulnérabilité émotionnelle de Déméter. De plus, Perséphone ne peut plus compter sur sa mère après l'enlèvement et devient donc elle aussi émotionnellement vulnérable. D'une part, Déméter est incapable de reconnaître sa propre vulnérabilité et la projette donc sur son enfant, tandis que d'autre part, Perséphone est incapable de surmonter sa vulnérabilité émotionnelle, comme lorsque, par exemple, elle est incapable d'atteindre la résilience de la honte. Hadès aggrave la vulnérabilité émotionnelle de Perséphone en ne tenant pas compte des différentes émotions qu'elle ressentira après l'enlèvement. Son manque d'empathie exacerbe la vulnérabilité de Perséphone. L'incarnation est aussi quelque chose sur laquelle Glück réfléchit. Nous mourons parce que nous sommes des êtres incarnés. Ainsi, chez *Averno*, avoir un corps équivaut à être vivant, et mourir implique de perdre le corps. Bien que Perséphone soit une déesse et ne puisse pas mourir, chaque fois qu'elle descend aux enfers, elle est morte pour sa mère, qui la considère comme faisant partie d'elle-même et de son propre corps. Glück réfléchit également sur la victimisation à travers le mythe de Perséphone, en mentionnant les jeunes femmes contemporaines qui ont été victimes de crimes tels que le viol. Bien que Perséphone ne résiste pas à son enlèvement dans cette version contemporaine, Déméter fait preuve de résistance en empêchant toute croissance végétale. Elle utilise la résistance pour faire face à sa vulnérabilité. Perséphone est incapable de résister à son enlèvement ou d'atteindre une quelconque résilience et est donc obligée de répéter le même cycle d'abus encore et encore, alternant entre la terre et les enfers.

Notamment, cette recherche apporte une nouvelle perspective de la réception par Dove et Glück du mythe de Déméter et Perséphone. Contrairement à Louise Glück, qui explore les limites d'une déesse incapable de s'échapper de son corps et donc plongée dans un état éternel de vulnérabilité, Rita Dove examine les avantages d'être déesse des enfers et l'autonomisation qui

peut émerger de la vulnérabilité. Cependant, dans leurs réceptions du mythe antique, les deux auteurs dépeignent une Perséphone qui cherche à devenir une femme par sa propre agence. Dans chacune de ces versions contemporaines, le désir de Perséphone de grandir la rend vulnérable à la manipulation par Hadès. Dove et Glück donnent la parole aux trois personnages principaux de l'ancien mythe —Déméter, Perséphone et Hadès— et se soucient tous deux profondément de ce que Perséphone veut et de ce qu'elle ressent, incitant les deux auteurs à sympathiser avec ce personnage. De plus, Dove et Glück comprennent que le comportement de contrôle et le narcissisme de Déméter et d'Hadès causent le traumatisme de Perséphone, mais reconnaissent néanmoins également le traumatisme de Déméter, et reconnaissent ainsi la vulnérabilité de Perséphone et de Déméter, puisque Dove et Glück ne sont pas seulement des filles mais aussi des mères.

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