

Chapter one

Overview and Methodology

Introduction

This thesis deals with the connection between two fields of interest which were both popular in antiquity and which are both still widely studied: mythology and psychagogy. The myth of Demeter and Persephone is used as the myth to study this connection, while the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* is analysed as the basic but not exclusive text to develop a possible psychagogic model of mythological analysis for personal development. In the modern world this psychagogic aspect is represented by a Jungian template where the extended archetype of the mother goddess can be seen to represent aspects of the personal and spiritual development of women in particular. The problem which is explored in the thesis is whether the analysis of an ancient myth by means of its underlying *motifemes* or mythological events offers a useful model to the contemporary psychagogue.

In both professional and popular literature, the connection between mythology and its use for psychagogic work and personal growth has been very prominent in recent years. Many books are written on specific myths, and how they could be used for this purpose. There are numerous examples of very successful collections, and it is clear that the application is possible.¹ In these works, the writer mostly compares aspects of his or her own psychotherapeutic experience with what the myth seems to say.² In this study, an effort will be made to formulate a more structured approach, which can be used in addition to that of combining therapeutic experience and mythological themes. The proposed methodology is called a psycho-mythological approach, and will be explained in some detail in chapter one.

The myth under discussion deals with an ancient goddess, and so the question arises how Demeter relates to the theory of a universal, golden age of matriarchy and peace, which many believe preceded the historical phase of the Greek and Roman civilisations of antiquity.³ Chapter two will focus on the interpretation of mythology, particularly during the last century and a half, and on the emergence and an assessment of the above theme. As the story of Demeter and Persephone can be said to be essentially a woman's myth,⁴ an overview of feminist theory will also be given, with an indication of how the feminist model can be used in the analysis of this myth.

Because the Jungian concept of the archetype is seen as a key conduit in the process of creating psychological meaning from mythological material,⁵ a third chapter will be devoted to it. In chapter four the full text of the relatively short hymn will be given as well as some background history of the text, to provide a context for the analysis. This will be followed, in chapter five, by an attempt to apply the methodology described in

¹ See the discussion on p. 23.

² See for instance the work of Von Franz (1993) and Larsen (1990).

³ See the discussion on p.18.

⁴ See p. 54.

⁵ See the discussion on p.25.

chapter one, and then by a short chapter containing a general discussion and conclusions.

What is mythology?

Before proceeding, the question of what mythology is will be addressed. The renewed interest in mythology in our time emphasises the timeless allure of the great stories which are associated with and reflect the beliefs of all cultures. Current archaeological, linguistic, genetic and historical research also paved the way for a deeper and broader understanding of our classical heritage, and of the ways in which different cultures influenced each other (Cavalli-Sforza, 2001; Sykes, 2001; Jones, 2001).

When the great myths of the Graeco-Roman world came into being, they expressed an integrated way of seeing the world, in which scientific explanation, philosophical questioning and spirituality were all intertwined in the story. These in turn had a considerable influence on the world view of many religions, and thus on the lives of countless generations of people.

So how can mythology be defined? The Collins dictionary has the following definition:

A story about superhuman beings of an earlier age taken by preliterate society to be a true account, usually of how natural phenomena, social customs, etc. came into existence (Collins English dictionary, 1994:1033).

Walter Burkert, as quoted by Bremner, described myth as “a traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance” (Bremner, 1987:1), while Morford and Lenardon say the following:

A classical myth is a story that, through its classical form, has attained a kind of immortality because its inherent archetypal beauty, profundity and power have inspired rewarding and meaningful renewal and transformation by successive generations (1991:23).

In the following section an overview will be given of some of the most prominent views on what mythology is. Because I discuss a Greek myth, I shall focus on Greek mythology, but not exclusively so. Then I shall briefly discuss how mythology has been understood and interpreted over time. This will be related to possible ways of interpreting the *Hymn to Demeter*.

1. The **nature myth theory** maintains that mythology is firstly a reaction to the overwhelming forces of nature. Birth and death, day and night, sun and moon evoke a response of awe and fear in vulnerable human beings, and this inspires the construction of stories in which the natural phenomenon is allegorised. The scholar who particularly popularised the idea of myth as an allegory of a process in nature was F Max Müller, who will be discussed in the following section (Csapo, 2005:19–21). There is an obvious element of validity in this theory, and it is likely that at least some elements of

for instance the *Odyssey* could be interpreted as allegory⁶ (Dowden, 1992:25). The way in which Müller and others however stretched it to fit every possible situation has been heavily criticised.

2. The question whether or not the development of myth is closely related to **ritual** or not, is still extensively debated. Harris and Platzner describe a ritual as

a religious or quasi-religious ceremony in which a prescribed series of actions - accompanied by the repetition of traditional phrases – are scrupulously observed (1995:32).

The so-called Cambridge school (Csapo, 2005:31), which will also be discussed later, believed that ancient religious rituals had been closely associated with the development of myths. This school has largely been discredited in academic debate, but the question of the relationship between myth and ritual has not been concluded yet. As classicists and cultural anthropologists increasingly co-operate, this is subject to ongoing investigation. This theme will again be picked up later in this chapter.

3. Related to the idea of ritual is the question whether classical myths served to convey **religious ideas**. They clearly did, but in a different way from the tradition of the Ancient Near East or from the Christian tradition (Dowden, 1992:22). These are not scriptures or moral guidelines; in fact, several ancient Greek writers wished that the Olympians might have set a better example.

4. The notion that myths might be a reservoir of **forgotten history** was first raised by Euhemerus of Messene in his *Hiera Anagraphē*, written c 300 B.C. This fictional travel story told about his visit to an island, Panchaia, in the Indian Ocean. Here he discovered a text that referred to the gods as ancient, mortal kings, who were subsequently deified (Harris and Platzner, 1995:30). Although this idea made an impact on some Hellenistic philosophers, Euhemerism or myths as forgotten history has never been a serious theory on mythology.

Closely related is the notion of myth as **actual history**. This was the view held by most Greeks in antiquity, and the stories of the heroes combined with genealogies often portrayed local prehistory. There was no doubt that the world had come into being when the first generation of gods ruled, and that humankind appeared in the world after Zeus had slayed his ancestors. Prominent rulers, into the Roman age, had their genealogies drawn up in order to connect them directly to the gods.

The view of myth as history is still widespread in our time, for instance in the belief that biblical stories such as the creation of Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, and Jonah in the belly of the whale constitute a historical account. Another interesting example raised by Dowden is the way in which Schliemann's discoveries provoked a very concrete interpretation of the myth of the Trojan war, and of Agamemnon's Mycenae. Although there might have been historical places, characters and events

⁶ allegory: a story or picture in which the apparent meaning of the characters and events is used to symbolize a deeper moral or spiritual meaning (Collins English Dictionary, 1994:40).

which inspired the myths, the form they have taken is almost definitely unhistorical, according to Dowden (1992:24).

5. Malinowski, the Polish anthropologist, first raised the notion that myths are probably **charters** in which the myth provides the rationale for the continued observance of an accepted custom or ritual. Hesiod's story about how Prometheus tricked Zeus into accepting bones and fat as sacrifice, while humans got the best meat, might be an example of myth as a charter (Harris and Platzner, 1995:32).

6. The view of mythology as **aetiology** covers the somewhat simplistic interpretation of myths as the products of pre-scientific and primitive minds wondering about the origin of things, but also a more sophisticated understanding of myths as stories which seek an explanation for the human condition. Although many myths, such as the story about the way in which Prometheus secured the use of fire for humanity, could be seen as aetiological, most cannot, and this cannot therefore serve as a general theory of mythology (Harris and Platzner, 1995:33).

7. The popular American writer on mythology, Joseph Campbell, has made a synthesis of many of the myths of the world, and sees a fourfold function for mythology. Firstly, it has a **religious function**, a mystical function, which is the function of "reconciling consciousness to the preconditions of its own existence - that is, aligning waking consciousness to the *mysterium tremendum* of this universe, *as it is*" (Campbell, 2001:2, 3). This association of mythology and religion is not unusual, and the fact that Campbell assigns it first importance is very different from the definition of Burkert above: a traditional tale, which is in the second place of collective significance. It is however not necessarily religion in the institutionalised sense, but an experience in which the symbols of the mythology speak deeply to each person. Campbell also integrated the psychology of Jung into this understanding of the role of myth, in that the mystical experience is an inner process, in which the religious symbolism addresses each individual in terms of his or her own psychological reality.

The second function is **interpretive**, to present an explanatory framework of the universe, as for instance the law "As above, so below" of antiquity. This creates the worldview of the age. The third function deals with the validation and support of a **specific moral order**, as in the case of initiation rituals, and therefore fulfils a sociological function (Campbell, 2001:3-5). The fourth function is to provide **guideposts to the individual** for the different life stages which await him or her - "to help persons grasp the unfolding of life with integrity" (Campbell, 2001:5). This would be the psychological function of myth, and an example of this might be the experience of the Mysteries at Eleusis, which would obviously also have been a spiritual experience.

It is also mainly Campbell's last function which this study addresses, in that it proposes to read myth not only as story, but as a story which has been shaped by ancient worldviews and perceptions. While these can obviously not be entirely valid in the modern world, the archetypal nature of the story seems to express deep and timeless aspects of nature, which unfold in human life in any era. If the myths had been used, as Campbell maintains above, to teach an attitude of respect and integrity to the "unfolding of life," that element could possibly be transferable across time. If one uses

myths in this way, they can obviously not be read literally, but have to be looked at symbolically.

On the whole the role of mythology in the life of the individual or society could therefore be a comprehensive and rich one.

In summary, the myths articulated in a specific culture can be said to express the shared ideas of that culture (Dowden, 1992:8). In the case of Greece it was done by the poets and storytellers of the Mycenaean and of the Dark Ages (Nilsson, 1932). These myths form an “evolving intertext”, as every story is a part of every other story, and together they constitute a coherent mythological system (Dowden, 1992:8). This would not apply to fables and folktales, which would be teaching stories or tales devised for entertainment, but which would normally not form part of such an intertext.

The myth of Demeter and Persephone not only deals with one of the central themes of all time, the cyclic nature of the seasons and also of all life and death, but is also a central part of the larger mythological text of ancient Greece, and it weaves in and out of numerous other stories.

A possible methodology for reading mythology as a text which might be used for personal development will now be discussed.

A methodology for analysing myth for personal growth

The methodology which is suggested as one way to analyse myth for personal growth is based on the basic method of dream analysis developed by Freud and later by Jung, as there could be said to be similar assumptions in the analysis of dreams and myths. These are, amongst other things, that both are dramatic and symbolic renditions, and not in the first place products of reason. Rather than to use the different elements of the storyline in the myth, it is furthermore suggested that use can be made of the notion of *motifemes*, which derives from the work of Vladimir Propp (Propp, 1968), and which seem to be the “building blocks” which were used for storytelling in antiquity, as will be discussed below. The essential *motifemes* or constituent themes of the hymn will be identified, and these will be used in the analysis of the myth, as one would do a dream analysis with the discrete images and sequences of a dream. Rather than personal associations, cultural and mythological amplification will be done, following the method developed by Jung. Then the question will be asked whether these *motifemes* correlate with the major archetypes depicted in the story, and the ways in which the myth might be used for personal development will be discussed. The term *psycho-mythological analysis* is created to express this approach.

Subsequently an amplification of the *motifemes* in the *Hymn to Demeter* will be undertaken.

The methodology introduced above, and the theories on which it relies, will now be explained in more detail.

Freud and Jung's dream analysis

In order to be able to analyse a myth as one would analyse a dream of many layers - not as a literary or historical document, but as a residue of archetypal material which would have meaning because it deals with recurrent, universal and timeless psychological and spiritual themes, and in the case of myth has often survived millennia of retelling – I shall first examine the essential process of dream analysis. Then I shall attempt to transfer this method to psycho-mythological analysis.

Freud described how he “stumbled” on dream analysis. Although the scientific wisdom of his time was that dreams were nonsense, there was nevertheless a widely held popular belief that dreams could be interpreted, either symbolically, as Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, or as if deciphering a code by consulting fixed meanings of symbols in a dream book. Neither of these two methods could really be tested, and so he rejected them. In his work with Breuer he nevertheless came to understand that the unravelling and understanding of symptoms also eventually could lead to their removal. It was a short step from there to use dream symbols as a particular key to the understanding and healing of symptoms (Freud, 1976:169–175, originally published 1899).

In 1901 he published a slim volume called *On Dreams*, in which he described his methodology – one which still, by and large, serves as the model for modern dream analysis. His understanding is that key themes which the unconscious wants to convey to the dreamer are displaced onto projected images, and thus symbolised. In this process there could be condensation of the material, into highly compact images that carry complex meanings. The images are then dramatised, and the dramatic sequences are fit into a total composition, which can sometimes be coherent, and at other times can seem totally random and confusing until analysed. The key processes are thus **displacement, condensation, dramatisation and composition** (Freud, 1952).

The analysis of the dream then involves the undoing of the above process. Each dream image or symbol is identified, and by means of the dreamer's free associations with that image the key meanings are extracted. At this stage they are simply listed, as different associations may apply. The associations lead to a range of new images, and these new images then construct the “real” story. Condensation, displacement, dramatisation and composition are thus reversed. With this seemingly simple process, Freud revolutionised psychology and psychiatry.

Whereas Freud, however, saw dreams mainly as wish-fulfilment and largely based on sexual and other forms of repression, Jung went further. He saw the dream as a “spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation of the unconscious” (Jung, 1974:49). Rather than to only use the dreamer's free associations, he furthermore devised a method called *amplification*, in which the analyst and the dreamer bring a range of associations to bear on the content of the dream, mostly from their knowledge of legends and myths, as well as of symbols and related images which might help them to understand the significance of the material better (Jacobi, 1968:84 - 86).

The notion of amplification is a highly developed form of analogy in which the content or story of an already known myth, fairy tale or ritualistic practice is used to elucidate or ‘make ample’ what might be but a clinical fragment – a single word or dream image or bodily sensation (Samuels, 1985:11).

Jung also noticed the presence of a numinous quality in some dreams, and describes examples of cases where the healing took place when he identified spiritual needs (Jung, 1989:277. 278).

The result of this approach is that Jung’s work was termed “forward-looking” (Samuels, 1985:12), in the sense that it prepared the person for his or her future development, and facilitated this development, rather than to only deal with the trauma of the past. Jungian dream work is therefore an invitation to explore one’s own inner depths, rather than to only deal with symptoms or problems. It nevertheless also remains true that dealing with one’s personal pain is the gateway for the entrance of the archetypes (Jacobi, 1968:81, 82).

From Freud and Jung, therefore, comes the understanding of how to analyse dreams.

Motifemes and the work of Propp

In 1927 Vladimir Propp published a work in which he had analysed the morphology of Russian folktales. Working with a sample of 100 folktales⁷ he listed the essential **functions** of the *dramatis personae*, by writing down every single function or action in the stories, and cancelling out those that overlapped. He listed the final 31 functions, with subheadings, which describe the “Quest” type folktale. Some of these functions are: I: The hero leaves home. II: An interdict is addressed to the hero, III: The interdict is violated, IV: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance, to XII: The hero is tested, XVIII The villain is defeated, and the last one: XXXI: The hero is married and ascends the throne (Propp, 1968:25–65).

Burkert formulated an abbreviated sequence of functions for the quest type tale:

1. The hero or a family member leaves home
8. The hero has some lack or desire
9. He is told to go somewhere
10. and agrees
11. He leaves home
- 12 and encounters someone who puts him to a test.
14. He receives a gift or magical aid.
16. He meets an adversary
- 17 and is harmed
- 18 but is victorious
- 19 and the initial lack is put right.
20. He begins the homeward journey,
- 21 is pursued,

⁷ A folktale can be seen as a tale or legend originating among a specific people and typically becoming part of an oral tradition (Collins English Dictionary, 1994:598).

- 22 but is saved.
23. He returns home without being recognised.
24. There is a wicked impostor,
25. a test,
26. and final success.
27. The hero is recognised,
28. the impostor is punished,
- 31 and the hero is married and becomes king (Burkert, 1996:58).

Propp also formulated a number of observations on how functions act in folktales:

1. Functions, or units of plot action, serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale, not the characters
2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited
3. The sequence of functions is always identical
4. All fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure (Propp, 1968:21 – 23).

This book was only published in English in 1958, and the idea that folktales and myths could have been written according to set functions was then investigated in other cultures by a range of researchers. Alan Dundes, whose work is quoted by Burkert, successfully examined the functions of tales among the Amerindians, and using Propp's schema, introduced the term *motifemes*, instead of functions. He also worked with four more general sequences:

- Lack – lack liquidated
- Task – task accomplished
- Deceit – deception
- Interdiction – violation – consequence – attempted escape (Burkert, 1979:6).



Other writers to use this methodology in Greek mythology were *inter alia* Greimas, Bremond and Burkert. The latter analyses the mothers of important heroes, Callisto, mother of Arcas, Auge, mother of Telephus, Danaë, mother of Perseus, Io, mother of Epaphus, Tyro, mother of Pelias and Neleus, Melanippe, mother of Boeotus and Aeolus, and Antiope, mother of Zethus and Amphion. He identifies five functions or *motifemes*, common to all of these stories (Burkert, 1979:5–7). He finds that these functions “suspiciously reproduce the *Odyssey*”, and also the story of Lot in the Old Testament (Burkert, 1996:203). Other myths that follow the pattern closely are Hercules, and the Argonauts (Burkert, 1996: 59, 60). When the functions interplay with context, characters, motives and design, one has a story or myth which is specific, effective, and often unforgettable. Burkert calls this the crystallization of a tale (Burkert, 1996:18).

Bruce Loudon identifies similar functions in the *Odyssey*, without reference to Propp's work or to *motifemes* (Louden, 1999: 1-30).⁸

⁸ See pp. 65 and 66.

Burkert also tries to identify the *motifemes* in myths where there had been cross-transmission from one culture to another, such as the tales of Kumarbi in the Hittite language, and Cronos in Greek mythology. It works, but not completely, and he comes to the following conclusion:

The result then would be that there are superstructures, effective and important narrative structures, which are broken apart in a process of cross-cultural transmission, but that the basic structure of the action patterns may transcend language barriers and provide communication and understanding over a wide range of adjacent civilisations and periods (Burkert, 1996:22).

He adds that the themes in myths are different from those in folktales in that they deal with greater issues, such as sex and procreation, and the problem of how to handle the dead, which again overlaps with the sacrificial pattern of killing and restoration (Burkert, 1996:6). He makes the following comment:

Probably this would be the place to start an inquiry into the unconscious dynamics of the psyche, which are situated somewhere between biology and language, and which no doubt are involved in understanding and retelling tales (Burkert, 1996:17).

After having worked with *motifemes* extensively, and having studied the work of others using the methodology, Burkert concludes that Propp's method has proved workable in the hands of different scholars. "His theorems seem to hold true: a tale is a sequence of *motifemes*" (Burkert, 1996:10). This insight gives us a new way of looking at ancient myths and tales, in that it shows, as it were, an underlying layer of "building blocks".

Assuming that this is so, the *motifemes* of a myth could be listed in the same way a dreamer would list the different dream motifs or sequences in a dream.

Developing a methodology for psycho-mythological analysis

If one accepts the assumption that dreams and myths are related, and that both are expressions of images which do not refer directly to an objective reality, but rather to a world where it is *as if* things happen in a certain way, and where the meaning of the material may be a hidden one, one would be justified in experimenting with a method which is proven in the case of dream analysis to understand more of what might be hidden within myths. It is important to point out that this would obviously not be the only way or the most important way of interpreting myth, but an experimental effort to see whether a deeper layer of the teaching function of mythology might emerge from this analysis. Although it is therefore not a positivistic, linear approach, it might bring new insights to light.

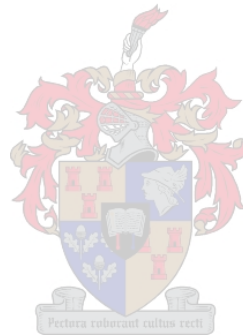
In adapting the methodology of dream analysis for mythological analysis, the following steps are suggested:

- As dream motifs are listed, so the *motifemes* in the myth will be identified.
- As free association and amplification is done on each dream motif, so the *motifemes* will be amplified from mythological and literary sources.

- As the possible meaning of the dream is revealed from the secondary process, another level of the meaning of the myth might emerge from the amplification.
- A final step would be to ask whether the new focal points in the myth correspond with any recognisable archetypes, and what the use of that may be in the analysis and interpretation of the myth.

In chapter four the *Hymn to Demeter* will be divided into *motifemes*, which will then be used for analysis and amplification.

Individual myths might nevertheless have their own history, as might the motifs they carry, and reviewing this smaller history within the larger whole may amplify our understanding of mythology. The way in which different generations have understood and interpreted particular myths has also become a part of the “intertext” (Dowden, 1992:8) of mythology, and therefore important to our understanding. As this has become particularly pertinent when working with a goddess from antiquity, chapter two will be devoted to how mythology has been interpreted over time, and especially during the last century and a half.



Chapter two

How mythology has been interpreted over time

I shall trace, in broad lines, the understanding and interpretation of mythology in ancient Greece, and pick up the thread again at the end of the 17th century in Europe, emphasising the development of ideas leading to our own time. This will show how a line of interpretation of mythology during the last one hundred and fifty years led to certain conclusions on a matriarchal phase in prehistory, which again influenced popular interpretations of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*.

An overview will also be given of the development of feminist theory, and some of the insights gained in this process will be applied to the analysis of the hymn.

How the Greeks viewed their myths

Throughout antiquity most Greek citizens adhered to their religious practices and beliefs, brought sacrifices, performed rituals, and attended festivals when the time came to do so. This was part of an extensive value system that required respect for ancestors, the dead, and the gods, who guaranteed that social order would prevail. Religious observance was thus an accepted and seldom questioned social practice, which gave meaning and direction to the lives of many (Sissa & Detienne, 2000:169). The relationship between Greeks and their gods was also an eminently practical relationship, where reward by the gods was expected if all requirements had been fulfilled.

The influence of **Socrates** and **Plato** was important in regard to how most other civilisations would eventually view mythology and religion. Socrates thought that there were good and bad myths, and considered most Greek myths worthy of rejection, because of “misrepresenting the nature of gods and heroes, like a portrait painter whose portraits bear no resemblance to their originals” (Lee, 1987:132). In devising his ideal republic, Plato particularly criticised the creation myths and the violence practised by the gods (Lee, 1987:133).

For most Greeks though, and the Romans after them, the myths which were given added importance by their use in festivals, art, drama, poetry, and general belief systems, remained the frame through which they viewed the world (Dowden, 1992:52,53).

Modern interpretations of mythology

When Christianity became dominant in Europe, classical philosophy to a large extent still influenced and shaped theological debates. Mythology as such, however, was suppressed as idolatry until the onset of the Renaissance. Particularly in Italy, the new era signified not so much a period of free thinking, as one in which the authority of the church was replaced by that of classical Greece (Russel, 1979:483). The art of the period expresses the way in which the stories and myths of ancient Greece and Rome

burst to the surface, but even so it was not a period during which an effort was made to objectively assess the nature of mythology and its influence on humankind.

During the late 17th and early 18th century, the period of the Enlightenment, myth was seen in one of three ways: the orthodox Christian way, as pagan fables; the deist way, as reflecting a primitive, natural, monotheistic religion; and the rationalist way, as primitive, erroneous and foolish explanations of the world (Feldman & Richardson, 1972:3). The exceptions were the poets, such as Pope, and the monumental Italian writer, **Giambattista Vico**, who was so far ahead of his time that he was only properly understood much later.

Vico made an effort to write a broad base for the new science which was emerging in his day, as in the work of Bacon, Descartes and Galileo, and the key to that base was a rational analysis of myth. Working during the period in which he did, one of Vico's outstanding achievements was that he shifted from thinking of myth as caused immanently. His insight is quoted by Feldman and Richardson:

It is not satanic daemons, wicked priests, or confusing natural events that cause myths to appear, but the deepset nature of man himself (Feldman & Richardson, 1972:51,52).

This seminal insight prepared the way for the study of myth as, amongst other things, a storehouse of psychological and archetypal material.

Vico died in 1744. The following decades, until 1800, witnessed a gradual change from the classical period, based on rationality, to the romantic era, in which myth played a crucial, if not a leading role. As the whole of the romantic interpretation of myth is however not pertinent to this discussion, the thread will be picked up with the work of **Bachofen** (1815-1887). He wrote on his perceptions of an earlier prehistoric age, when he thought the role of “the Mother” had had greater weight than it had during the classical period of antiquity. As his work seems to have been one of the main sources of the universal “Mother Goddess” theory, it will be summarised briefly.

Bachofen identified two main periods in prehistory – that of the hunters and then the agricultural era. During the first, primitive stage, women were seen to have been objects of lust, with no understanding of the relationship between intercourse and conception. He named this the “*hetaerist-Aphroditic*” stage. In raising her young, woman here learnt to extend care to society, and became the depository of all culture. He believed or intuited that the underlying principle for this whole period had been that of “mother right”, and therefore women would have had a dominant role in family structure, as well as probably in rituals of magic and religion.

As agriculture led to a more settled lifestyle, the “*matrimonial-Demetrian*” phase followed, where women were still subject to the greater physical power of men, but were identified with a higher social order. Force and sex were still the foundation of the system, but now with the desire for children. Because the connection between intercourse and progeny had been made, this also became a part of the essential, underlying religious idea of that time: that the earth would bring forth and produce

grain and fruit after the winter season, as the mother and her spouse would do, and the religious symbol to best reflect this was thought to have been the goddess.

In his last big work, *The Myth of Tanaquil*, Bachofen traced the way in which he believed the Asians and Etruscans had brought the myth of the Great Mother to Italy and to the Romans. He believed that this myth was then instrumental in transforming the role of women in Roman times to the matronly one known to us (Campbell, 1997:67-89).

In his discussion of the work of Bachofen, Campbell quotes Bachofen's description of his own methodology:

There are two roads to knowledge – the longer, slower, more arduous road of rational combination and the shorter path of the imagination, traversed with the force and swiftness of electricity. Aroused by direct contact with the ancient remains, the imagination grasps the truth at one stroke, without intermediary links. The knowledge acquired in this second way is infinitely more living and colourful than the products of the understanding (Campbell, 1997:68).

Although many renowned researchers would today admit to sometimes following intuitive leads, the “longer, slower, more arduous path” can only be avoided at great risk. In justice to Bachofen it is important to mention that he did extensive and copious research on the customs he believed to be at the root of the universal social law of mother right, and that some of this might even have been useful to Frazer. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that his conclusions were correct, and as generations of scholars and writers relied and built on them, to a greater or lesser extent, he influenced popular thinking into our own time.

Sir James Frazer was, like Bachofen, inspired by the anthropological studies of his time. While Bachofen identified the role of the mother as the central theme in all mythology, Frazer was gripped by the myth of the sacrificed god. The *Zeitgeist* of the age, characterised by increasing disillusionment with the absolute authority of the church, probably contributed to the growth of this model of interpretation.

The Cambridge myth-ritual school: comparative mythology

There were two seminal books which influenced the emergence of this school. One was *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, by **W. Robertson Smith**, which appeared in 1889, and which emphasised the ritual aspect of religion and particularly the ritual of the sacramental communal meal when the dead god is eaten and thereby symbolically resurrected (Csapo, 2005:31).

The second, *The Golden Bough* by **G J Frazer**, was first published in 1890. This is a rich and varied source of ritual customs throughout the world. Frazer's work is anthropological, and partly a response to the wide range of anthropological and mythological material which emerged from the different colonies at that time. It also reflects the need to present the European and British civilisation as vastly more advanced than those cultures which were being discovered, which were interpreted, along Darwinian lines, as at an inferior evolutionary stage (Csapo, 2005:31).

Frazer's methodology consisted of four steps. The first is the finding of a particular problem: a myth, a rite, or anything which seems contradictory. Then one gathers as many examples of this myth or rite from as many cultures as possible. The third step is to try to find a generalising explanation for the phenomenon, one which will often appear from the material, and then the general explanation is applied to all the examples. In this way the researcher works his or her way back to an "original" or Ur-myth, which diffused to all the areas where the subsequent myths were found, and gave rise to the myriad forms of the same story (Csapo, 2005:33,57).

As an example of the methodology, we shall look at the first story in the *Golden Bough*. Frazer starts his account with the story of the priest of Diana at Nemi, who could only be a runaway slave, who slayed his predecessor, and who then awaited the next runaway slave who would slay and replace him in turn. The first step in the analysis is to identify the myth as an older form, standing out in the polished Italian society of its day "like a primaeval rock rising from a smooth-shaven lawn" (Frazer quoted in Csapo, 2005:38). The first example of such a myth is the story of how the image of Artemis was taken to the shrine in the forest by Orestes, and how Artemis then demanded a human sacrifice. Subsequently Hippolytos, the young lover of Artemis, was returned to life, and the nymph Egeria received him as consort (Csapo, 2005:38).⁹ Frazer then turns again to the priest of Nemi, also called "the king of the wood", and examines the rich evidence for belief in tree-spirits. European customs are linked to this, and the belief formulated that ancient sacred marriages between the king of the wood and a female tree-spirit served to promote fertility, and that in turn was based on the primal form of the myth, the marriage between the king of the wood and Artemis or Diana. He then deduces from the complementary material:

Possibly in prehistoric times the kings themselves played the part of the god and were slain and dismembered in that character (Frazer, 1987:378).

This is supported by the myths of Adonis, Attis, Osiris and Dionysos. Frazer finally undertakes a similar process for the golden bough, which grew in the sacred grove. This he links by means of the same method to the European mistletoe (Csapo, 2005:36 – 43).

In later editions Frazer introduced a theoretical framework for how humankind had developed over time, namely that "primitive man" operated mainly through magic, then religion became the framework, and subsequently, in modern times, science (Dowden, 1992:27).

Although Frazer's work achieved a certain general popularity, it has at present been almost completely discredited in the scientific community because of the sweeping assumptions which characterise almost every part of it. The problem for us is that some of his material might well have been useful. The task which remains is to sift the wheat from the chaff, which can only be done by examining each myth in its own context and on its own terms, and then new patterns might emerge.

⁹ Numerous questions are left hanging in the air at this point (Csapo, 2005:38).

Frazer's importance is however most evident in the influence he had at Cambridge, to which he was attached for a period. Gilbert Murray, F M Cornford, A B Cook and more particularly Jane Harrison, used his work to expand on the idea that ritual is an important key to understanding mythology and religion, and that the methodology would primarily be a comparative one. Her *Prolegomena to the study of Greek religion* remains a work which is studied and discussed after a century (Harrison, 1908). Although the basic assumptions of this school as a whole have now been rejected, Dowden cautions about Jane Harrison's work:

It is increasingly recognised that seeds for later work, however spurned, lay here (1992:28).

Dowden himself, in *Death and the maiden*, (1989) explored the theme of girls' initiation rites in ancient Greece, by analysing the myth of Iphigeneia, while Burkert looked at a series of rituals in *Homo necans* (1972, English edition in 1983), and Bremmer studied scapegoat rituals in ancient Greece (Bremmer, 2000:271-293), to name only a few examples of more recent research into ritual and myth.

The Cambridge myth-ritual school provided the framework for the subsequent interpretation of mythology which deals with "the Goddess", as will be described in the following section.

The use and interpretation of the myth of the Mother Goddess

During recent decades a so-called Goddess movement emerged, *inter alia* within certain feminist groups, which reads the archeological history of the ancient world in such a way that they postulate an age of near-universal peace which reigned during the "matriarchal period", and which would have ended with the invasion of the war-like Aryans or other similar "patriarchal" groups between five and six millennia ago (Stone, 1976:20).¹⁰ During this matriarchal time the goddess would have been the supreme deity and egalitarian, pacifist values would have had a profound impact on ancient society, which, according to Gimbutas, would have been "matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, earth-and-sea-bound" (Tringham & Conkey, 1998:23). Female deities from many ancient cultures represent surviving aspects of this goddess (Goodison & Morris, 1998:6). Some authors use this "history" as a vision of what society could become in future (Stone, 1976:236).

The belief in a golden, matriarchal age underlies the work of many prominent Jungians, such as Anne Baring (Baring & Cashford, 1991), Julian David (David, 2005), and others. It is surprisingly widespread – in fact, many regard it as beyond question. How did this come about, and how can we assess it?

Based on the work of the Cambridge myth-ritual school discussed above, by the post World War 1 period there was a mould in existence for the analysis: the Great Goddess and the Dying God-son (Goodison & Morris, 1998:7). Strengthened by Freud's work on the Oedipus complex, this template gained near-absolute validity, and new

¹⁰ This view is not held by all feminists.

archeological findings from Greece, Malta and Northern Europe were all interpreted within this framework.

Jung's work on the mother archetype inspired Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother: an analysis of the archetype*, which appeared in 1955. In this work, Neumann did an exhaustive study of goddess figures in various ancient cultures, and on ways in which these reflect psychological archetypal realities (Neumann, 1972, first published 1955).

Shortly afterwards, in 1959, E O James published *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*. He similarly gives a wide-ranging account of the role and function of the goddess in the ancient world, concentrating however on actual finds and their interpretation. He describes, for instance, the findings at Hattussas in Anatolia, where the oldest Hittite settlement was discovered. In the great rock-sanctuary at Hattussas the Yazilikaya reliefs depict, amongst other figures, the goddess Hepatu, consort of the weather god Teshub, riding a lioness or panther, and wearing a full-sleeved dress with a pleated skirt. She is named in the hieroglyphic script. Her hair is braided and she wears a tiara, while her left hand holds a long staff. Behind her in the procession is a smaller figure of a beardless youth with a pigtail, also riding a lioness or a panther, and wearing a short tunic, upturned shoes and a conical fluted hat. He then interprets these figures as the Mother Goddess and the Young God, her son (James, 1959:85–87).

Both these books had an enormous influence on the fields of archeology and Jungian psychology, as well as on other related disciplines.

When Mellaart's excavations at Catalhöyük were published in 1967, and Marija Gimbutas' *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* in 1974, they built on this idea of an overarching great goddess religion in antiquity. In a later work by Gimbutas she states:

Evidence... shows that the Old European social structure was matrilineal, with the succession to the throne and inheritance passing through the female line. The society was organised around a theocratic, democratic temple community guided by a highly respected priestess and her brother (or uncle); a council of women served as a governing body. In all of Old Europe, there is no evidence for the Indo-European type of patriarchal chieftainate (Gimbutas & Dexter, 1999:125)

She continues to show how these social structures influenced Minoan and Mycenaean Greece, and points out how they were changed during the development of Greek history, causing the progressive "mutation" of the Greek goddesses during the period of the new Indo-European patriarchy (Gimbutas & Dexter, 1999:154–155).

Already in 1968, however, archeologists Peter Ucko and Andrew Fleming independently expressed concern that such massive assumptions were made from such flimsy evidence, a critique which has been steadily added to in recent years, by amongst others Bailey, Biehl and Billington and Green (Goodison & Morris, 1998:8, 196-199). Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris point out that one of the characteristics of this battle is that neither side speaks to the other and so the debate is not being resolved. The archeologists and classicists write the followers of Mellaert and

Gimbutas off as misguided and misinformed, and hardly worth responding to, while the latter find the former overly positivistic.

There seems to be little controversy about the fact that throughout the ancient world there were myths about a **goddess and her consort/son**, who dies and enters the underworld. Examples are the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi, and as we saw in the extract from the work of James above, these figures were also present in Hittite mythology. The theme was equally present in Phoenician mythology, where first Hay-Tau, and then Mot and Aleyn serve as the precursors for Adonis, the beautiful young god who was later incorporated into Greek mythology and who was locked into a casket and placed in Persephone's care in the underworld by Aphrodite. When she reclaimed him, Persephone had opened the casket and refused to give up the young god. Zeus then determined that he had to spend half a year in each domain – the upper and lower worlds (Guirand, 1959:75–81). Hippolytus is another example of the dying god, although his relationship to Phaedra is somewhat different to the other examples discussed here. In the story of Demeter and Persephone it is the daughter who enters the underworld. Apart from the Eleusinian Mysteries, the myth is also used for the Thesmophoria, which is clearly a fertility ritual for women. Osiris, furthermore, is an underworld god in Egyptian myth, while Isis is the Egyptian “great goddess”.

In addition to the template discussed above, the theme of the **withdrawal of the deity and the cessation of fruitfulness in the world for a period** is a similar theme which occurs in various ancient mythologies. Telepinus is a Hittite god who goes missing, and with him all fire, growth and progress disappears. The gods search all over for him – the Sun god sends his eagle, and the Storm god tries his strength. In the end he is brought back with the aid of Kamrusepas, a goddess of magic, who sends a bee to sting him, and the major part of the text on Telepinus deals with prayers, incantations and rituals to bring about his return and contain his anger (Burkert, 1979:123-125). Along similar lines, the story of “Black Demeter” at Phigaleia deals with the rage and withdrawal of Demeter when she was raped by Poseidon, or when Persephone was abducted by Hades. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, the goddess withdraws in anger until Persephone is restored.

The similarity to the Telepinus myth, even the basic identity of the two, is evident and has long been noticed (Burkert, 1979:126).

Mannhardt and Frazer collected many myths of a corn mother or a corn maiden from all over the world, but only two dubious versions where they appear together (Burkert, 1979:139). In one version of the story both Demeter and Persephone go to the underworld, and they also return together (Richardson, 1974:259). Similarly, in the so-called Sicilian terra-cotta statuettes both mother and daughter retreat and must be called back (Burkert, 1979:139).

In the Babylonian myth of Tammuz, Ishtar goes to the underworld to seek Tammuz. The reproductive forces in the world all cease to operate, and the whole world is faced with extinction, until a messenger of Ea brings Ishtar back. The Egyptian goddess Tefnut likewise withdraws from the people, to the desert, and becomes a lioness or cat, causing the end of all life-producing forces. Thoth convinces her to return. In the Ugaritic myth of Baal and Mot, Baal's withdrawal causes the end of all productivity

and universal barrenness. The sun goddesses, Anat and Shapash, go into the earth to bring him back, and well-being returns (Richardson, 1974:258–9, Burkert, 1979:126).

It can therefore be postulated that the myths exist to substantiate the theme of the goddess and the dying consort/son, and also the theme of the withdrawing god whose absence causes famine and catastrophe, and who therefore has to be induced to return. In many myths these two themes also overlap. The *Hymn to Demeter* uses both themes, but with the variation that the daughter of the goddess is abducted to the underworld.

The next question is whether the great goddess of the above myths was the overarching deity of the ancient world until about five millennia ago, and whether this had an influence on the organisation of society in the Ancient Near East and in Europe.

Because the work of James Mellaert at Catalhöyük is one of the sources which has been used to substantiate the idea of a universal matriarchal age, it might be a good starting point. After reviewing the findings at that site, both in the 1960's and the 1990's, Lynn Meskell maintains that there is no clear evidence supporting the conclusions that Mellaert, and consequently Gimbutas, came to.

As part of a gynocentric agenda, female figurines and imagery have been considered largely to the exclusion of male and sexless examples: this selection shaping the vision of a single, omnipresent female deity (Meskell, 1998:53).

She comes to the following conclusion:

There is no evidence to support the notion of matriarchy, let alone the presence of a universally worshipped 'Mother Goddess' at Catalhöyük... So the desire to elevate Catalhöyük can be seen as the search for a utopian model, which doubly serves as an explanative story, and a template for change (Meskell, 1998:62).

In examining the role of ancient goddesses in Egypt, Hassan comes to the same conclusion. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the status of women in Predynastic Egypt was probably equal to that of men (Hassan, 1998:106-112).

In their review of evidence from the Minoan world, Goodison and Morris once again reach the conclusion that there is insufficient evidence to support the idea of one all-important Great Goddess (Goodison & Morris, 1998:117).

Mary Voyatzis looks at the evidence concerning Greek goddesses, and uses the case study of the sanctuary of Athena at Tegea in the Peloponnese. Her conclusions support those of the previous studies – no evidence is found of one overall goddess, but elements of ritual, cult and iconography seem to have survived from the Bronze-age throughout Greece (Voyatzis, 1998:135).

As can be seen from the above studies brought together in the volume edited by Goodison and Morris, it is clear that the idea of a *single* goddess in antiquity is in all likelihood a fiction, and its application to other fields of study therefore false. The evidence rather seems to point to the extensive presence of many goddesses in a wide variety of settings, and to a range of very different cultural contexts and expressions,

many of which have not been satisfactorily interpreted yet. The task at hand therefore seems to be to disaggregate the various elements of the “goddess”, and to describe the great variety of manifestations in as much detail and with as much attention to context as possible.

Feminist Approaches

Following on the ideas of Bachofen, Frazer, Jane Harrison, and later the archaeological work of Mellaert and Marija Gimbutas, some feminists based their critique of the patriarchy in modern society and their belief in the possibility of a more equitable society in future on the idea of a long-gone, peaceful, matriarchal world. (This is only one aspect of some schools of western feminist thought.¹¹) For this reason, and in order to be able to do a feminist reading of the *Hymn to Demeter* without basing it on material which cannot be substantiated, a brief overview of current feminist approaches will be given.

During the last two or three decades a number of strains of radical social criticism have dominated the humanities, amongst them feminist theory, theories of race, and post-colonialism, to mention a few. The goal of these criticisms is broadly to reverse the social and often economic exclusion of these groups, and to equalise rights and opportunities. These criticisms, however, are not “schools of thought with independent methodologies or hermeneutic theories”, but use different theories in an eclectic approach (Csapo, 2005:277).

“Feminist theory” therefore relies on a range of theoretical approaches, which enables feminists to borrow broadly, but which is also a disadvantage in that it can be very fragmentary. The theories which have been used most extensively have been social theories, including structuralist theories, but also psychological theories such as psychoanalysis. Two important theories identified by Csapo which have been used recently are firstly poststructuralist theory, under which he includes Derrida and Foucault, and Marxist theory (Csapo, 2005:277).

The biological school would be an example of an early structuralist-functionalist theory. Wilber, for instance, expresses the belief that patriarchy is rooted in the physical differences between men and women. The biology of men is dominated by the hormone testosterone, which creates high libido and aggression, while the biology of women is based on the hormone oxytocin. This hormone is essentially relational, and predisposes the woman to deal with other people, particularly children, in a caring way. This makes for very real differences between men and women.

Even the more radical feminists now champion the notion that there are, generally speaking, very strong differences between male and female value spheres – that is, in both sex and gender. Men tend toward hyper individuality, stressing autonomy, rights, justice, and agency, and women tend toward a more relational awareness, with emphasis on communion, care, responsibility and relationship. Men tend to stress autonomy and fear relationship, women tend to stress relationship and fear autonomy (Wilber, 2001:2).

¹¹ There are other feminist traditions apart from the western, but these are outside the scope of this thesis.

He sees this as the field of evolutionary psychology, which is an emerging and fast-growing discipline.

Feminists see this line of thinking as conservative, however, and argue that it is impossible to separate biology's effect on human behaviour from social and economic influences. This is an interesting debate, and there is probably validity in both arguments – there are likely to be both biological as well as social reasons why men and women are different.

Wilber adds to this that the challenge before us is to learn to understand these differences better, and then to learn to value them equally, and not to allow them to be used against women. Interestingly, and convincingly, he sees patriarchy as a system which served both men and women in the past, and to which both groups of necessity contributed.

It appears there were certain inescapable circumstances that made the “patriarchy” an unavoidable arrangement for an important part of human development, and we are just now reaching the point where that arrangement is no longer necessary, so that we can begin, in certain fundamental ways, to “deconstruct” the patriarchy, or more charitably balance the books between the male and female value spheres. But this is not the undoing of a brutal state of affairs that could easily have been otherwise; it is rather the outgrowing of a state of affairs no longer necessary (Wilber, 2001:6).

With reference to Wilber's point above, it is difficult to assess the situation of women in antiquity according to modern, feminist assumptions and insights, precisely because of the “inescapable circumstances” which might have led to people of each sex taking on certain roles, and our inability to understand the details of history as it happened in a particular context.

The criticism of conservatism also applies to Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Although his ideas about women were eventually overtaken by more advanced thinking in the development of psychoanalytical theory, they were extremely influential in shaping attitudes over a long period, and were used by opponents to feminism as a “scientific” foundation for inequality. Besides seeing a girl's main psychological development as centred on her “penis envy” and castration fear, he saw women as “a kind of ideological appendix to his theory of normal (= male) psychological development” (Csapo, 2005:130). The same applied to a lesser extent to Jung, as will be discussed later.

As a reaction to the biological school, the “constructivist” approach developed, “currently the most dominant, fully articulated, and extreme of the sociological schools” (Csapo, 2005:163). They are particularly interested in how language and social attitudes construct reality within specific cultural contexts, and would examine the ways in which the notion of the superiority of the male influenced generations of women to take on an inferior role in society. A serious methodological problem with this approach is its determinism – the fact that the behaviour of women is seen to have been determined by social expectations, and that women are then projected as passive,

powerless victims of this system (Csapo, 2005:163). There is thus a lack of a good and functional theory of agency, or in other words, what did women actively do about this?

A valuable and important contribution to feminist theory within this framework is the work of Deborah Tannen, who examines discourse theory and the frameworks within which thinking and formulation take place. Because of the fact that humans approach communication within a frame of expectations, these frames tend to become “static scripts”, for instance gender attitudes would “frame” a discussion between a man and a woman on driving a car, cooking a meal, resolving a conflict, or whatever else they are discussing (Tannen, 1993:15).

Marxism offered feminists a way to engage with underlying attitudes and ideologies that made the practical implementation of their ideals a difficult process. Like Marxists, feminists also realised that political change does not always mean real change in the lives of people, and the work of Antonio Gramsci particularly opened up ways to understand and address the formation of social ideologies.

Abandoning the strict materialism of Engels and Lenin, the dominant strain of current Marxist cultural theory recognises that social ideologies are important, perhaps the most important sites of social struggle, and as such can be changed by human agency for the benefit of humanity. In other words, Marxism offered just what structuralism seemed to deny the struggle for social justice (Csapo, 2005:285).

A problem with Marxism remains its lack of a specific theory of women’s oppression, apart from the effects of Capitalism (Jagger & Rothenberg, 1993:119). This led to the development of radical feminism, which does away with the classist approach of the Marxists. A major part of this theory is centred on a critique on the appropriation of the bodies and sexuality of women by society, as in the work of Monique Wittig. The association of western feminism with lesbianism might also derive from this approach (Jagger & Rothenberg, 1993:121).

Applying the concept of frameworks discussed above to the field of women, girls and psychotherapy, Carol Gilligan has done interesting and award-winning work. She finds in all her work that girls are deeply relational, knowing and understanding how relationships function, but also understanding that they cannot remain true to their younger and honest voices *and* fit into society. They therefore often make inner shifts, and by late adolescence they acquire a social persona which disguises rather than reveals their deep inner lives. While the seven and eight-year-olds tell what they feel, and openly respond to what is happening in relationships, the older girls might believe that you have to share your feelings, but they nevertheless become ambiguous about it, and withdraw their honest selves. This is also a response to the messages they hear:

“Cover up,” girls are told as they reach adolescence, daily, in innumerable ways. Cover your body, cover your feelings, cover your relationships, cover your knowing, cover your voice, and perhaps above all, cover desire. And the wall that keeps memory from seeping through these covers may well be the wall with the sign which labels body, feelings, relationships, knowing, voice and desire as bad (Gilligan, 1991:22, 23).

This has important implications for therapy and life skills development:

[T]he relationship crisis which girls experience as they approach adolescence...poses an impasse in psychological development, a place where for the sake of relationship...one must take oneself out of relationship. Because this separation of self from relationship is psychologically untenable and also essentially confusing, ...this division must be resisted and some compromise arrived at (Gilligan, 1991:23).

Gilligan's work could be associated with the biological approach, and would therefore probably not be sanctioned by radical feminists. It however carries the conviction of work based on extensive and thorough fieldwork, and is written in a straight, non-ideological way, which I find refreshing and convincing.

Her work with young girls and the way in which they suppress their own vitality in order to fit into society has a direct bearing on our analysis of Persephone in chapter five. Young adolescent girls, as we shall see, are almost inevitably abducted into a phase of their lives where their own vitality must be suppressed in order for them to fit into the space allowed by society for coming-of-age girls.

In the structuralist, psychological or "constructivist" approaches discussed above, women are therefore often not depicted as strong, independent people who can think and act in their own best interest, and in the interest of society as a whole. The Gramscian Marxist model discussed, as well as Carol Gilligan's work with young girls, has shown how social and psychological factors cause women's experiences of inadequacy, or their being cast as incompetent. A substantial feminist literature has thus exposed some of the ways in which society casts women in a certain role, usually an inferior one and often one in which she is used for what she can bring into the situation. This increased awareness is slowly bringing about change, also within women themselves.

As with modern women, the important issue in analysing the situation of Demeter and Persephone is to keep asking the questions: what were the societal and cultural constraints they were facing as women in their time? How did they respond to these? Were they completely free to be themselves and to act in their own interest, as well as in the interest of others as they perceived it? These and other questions will be addressed in the analysis.

Although the *Hymn to Demeter* is set during a period of history when it seems as if a patriarchal worldview was gaining force in Greece (Suter, 2002:23), Demeter acts with the self-confidence and assurance of a mature female. She can therefore, to some extent, be a role model for modern women. This point will be taken up again in chapter four.

Finally, the psychological interpretation of mythology will be briefly reviewed, as seen by two key psychologists, namely Freud and Jung.

Freud, Jung, and the interpretation of mythology

Modern psychologists have paid attention to the similarities between myths and dreams. The combination of the ordinary with the fantastic in both has led to the assumption that myths, like dreams, arise from the subconscious layers of the human psyche (Shelburne, 1988:35,36,49). Moreover, the fact that countless mythological themes recur in so many mythologies all over the world, has strengthened the assumption that diffusion could scarcely have been responsible for all of these.

Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology and particularly of psychoanalysis, was the first to give special attention to the unconscious and the subconscious mind in humans. He took great pains to do this in as scientific a way as possible, and devised a model of the psyche which consisted of the id, the ego and the superego. These are superimposed on one another like a mechanical model, with the ego forming the central, conscious part. The id is the bottom layer, consisting of all repressed material, while the superego is situated at the top, and acts as a conscience. The ego has to keep the balance between the desires and needs which arise from the id, and the control which the superego insists on. As wishes can often not be fulfilled because of this process, they are repressed, and find expression through dreams (Freud, 1976:200). Dream motifs are symbolised and dramatised.¹² Dream analysis is the process of decoding these elements and relating them to the life situation of the dreamer.

Freud furthermore noticed that many of his male patients dreamt of having intercourse with their mothers, and came to the conclusion that a myth such as that of Oedipus expressed in the first place a deep, universal intrapersonal issue (Freud, 1976:522). In the preface to the third edition of his book on dream interpretation he prophesies that future editions, if they should be needed, will take more cognisance of i.a. myth and folklore (Freud, 1976:50). Dowden quotes his views from a later work, *Totem and Taboo*, where he writes on how this could be done:

It seems quite possible to apply the psychoanalytic views derived from dreams to products of ethnic imagination such as myths and fairy tales...[Psychoanalytic study] cannot accept as the first impulse to the construction of myths a theoretical craving for finding an explanation of natural phenomena or for accounting for cult observances and usage's which have become unintelligible. It looks for that impulse in the same psychological 'complexes', in the same emotional trends which it has discovered at the base of dreams and symptoms (Freud quoted in Dowden, 1992:30).

The Freudian psychoanalyst would thus approach a myth in a different way from the classical scholar. It would be approached as an expression of a cultural identity of a group of people (or of all human beings) which might give expression to the same emotional and psychological complexes and neuroses an individual psyche would. The obvious questions are then: who would you analyse, if there is no particular psyche, and who would do it? Dowden remarks that neither classicists nor psychoanalysts are qualified to do so, as each has too little knowledge and understanding of the other's

¹² See chapter 1.

field. Moreover, he admits that many classicists have a bias against new ideas, such as this one (Dowden, 1992:30).

The work of **Carl Gustav Jung**, founder of Analytical Psychology, built on that of Freud. One of his major disagreements with Freud was however about the nature of the unconscious. In his view, it is not so much a space for suppressed sexual and other urges, as an as yet undiscovered source of growth, and of personal and spiritual development. He moreover postulated that a part of the unconscious is timeless, and comes to us instinctively, as other aspects of our development do. He termed this the collective unconscious.

He furthermore identified and named the *archetypes*, which are thought to express themselves mainly through myth.

The myth, then, is the end product of a conscious elaboration of an original unconscious content that often involves the effort of many generations of storytellers (Shelburne, 1988:49).

The work of Jung, therefore, is closely linked to the world of myth, and most essentially through the concept of the archetype.

Discussion and conclusions

In chapter two the influential myth-ritual school of Cambridge and its precedents, Bachofen and Frazer, were briefly reviewed in order to be able to assess the validity of the interpretation of the *Hymn to Demeter* as a possible example of a late form of an earlier myth of a universal Mother Goddess. The work done by the researchers in the volume edited by Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris however seems to be quite conclusive on the issue – there does not seem to be supporting evidence for the presence of a universal, war-free, matriarchal age in prehistory or in antiquity.

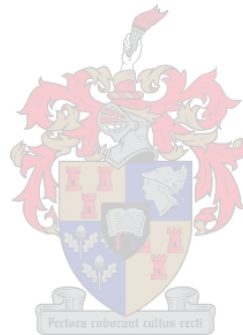
We have seen, however, how the interpretation of the mythology of the Mother Goddess over a period of about one hundred and fifty years has gone largely unchallenged until fairly recently. Within the feminist movement, many writers assumed that this view represented actual history, and moreover a hopeful vision that that which had once been can be again.

Reaching back to this reading of prehistory has been a source of rich and rewarding exploration for many women. While the newest research now shows that it does not represent a correct reading of actual history, our future does not depend on our reading of an idealized past. By seeing the ancient goddesses as archetypal energies within ourselves, we are able to use the stories to maximum effect, without fantasizing about history. This kind of interpretation has been done very successfully by people such as Marie-Louise von Franz (1993), Marion Woodman (1992), Jean Shinoda Bolen (1984, 1989), Clarissa Pinkola Estès (1992), and Stephen Larsen (1990).

What is stated above about Frazer and the need to disaggregate and contextualise the various examples he uses, also applies, in broad terms, to the material on the goddesses of antiquity. Understanding each goddess in her own context might offer new and

unexpected insights, and there might also be parallels between the goddesses which are more nuanced than to simply see all as the different faces of one goddess (Goodison & Morris, 1998:19).

Returning to the question at the beginning of the chapter one on the nature of mythology, my own preference is for the more encompassing definition by Morford and Lenardon,¹³ which recognises that we do not only deal with a tale or tales, but with a worldview and philosophy, which guided people through the difficult experiences of a lifetime. Greek mythology was Greek religion, as was the case in Egypt, the ancient Near East and India. This definition recognises the archetypal essence which renders the story timeless, and which contains elements of constant renewal and transformation. This will be the theme of the next chapter.



¹³ See p. 2.

Chapter three

Myth and archetype

Introduction

In this chapter the concept “archetype” will be examined, as it is used as the central tool for the psychagogical or psychological analysis of mythology. This will then enable the reader to evaluate whether each of the *motifemes* in chapter four has an archetypal core, and therefore whether the proposed methodology works.

We return here to the question asked in chapter one: what is the role of myth in our time? Is there a way in which myth can provide an in-depth experience for modern or post-modern people, in the way in which the Eleusinian Mysteries did in antiquity? In order to investigate this, we shall examine the idea that there might be two levels at which myth might be understood: the level of the story, told within a specific cultural context, and a more elementary, deeper level, in which universal, intercultural themes could be recognised. The second way would be the level of the archetype, which is only recognisable in projection, and the source of this level would therefore be the human psyche. For this reason we shall look at the use of myth in modern psychology, and particularly in the Jungian and Post-Jungian school.

Jung devised and popularised the term archetype, and in its popular form it is usually read as *an original pattern* (Collins English dictionary, 1995:78), or primordial image. To this can be added, by way of definition, that it is universal, inborn, and a formal element of the psyche, located in the collective unconscious (Shelburne, 1988:63). It is important to have some understanding of how that “primordial image” can be observed inside the psyche of the individual, and therefore Jung’s description of how he conceptualised the term will be discussed in some depth. This inner manifestation of archetypes can however not really be separated from how they manifest in mythology, as they will most often bear the face of a mythological or semi-mythological figure. This is therefore a theme in which the classical and psychological perspectives both have to be present.

Plato’s theory that there had been original *Ideas*, held in the minds of the gods even before creation, and which precede experience, is often quoted as a first theory of archetypes (Samuels, 1985:23). Plato tells a parable to illustrate this. The mortals in the story are tied down in a cave with their backs to the light, so they have virtually no contact with the real world, except for the reflected shadows they see on the wall of their cave. One day one of them is freed, reluctantly, and only then does he gradually become aware of the real world (Lee, 1987:317–325). This parable can obviously, as a highly evocative symbolic image, be read in many ways. As a precursor theory to the study of archetypes, it could be read as signifying that there is another layer of reality, otherwise unknown to us, consisting of ideas, and that these ideas form the reality of our existence, as much as or even more than the outer reality we experience.

Jung on the collective unconscious and archetypes

The notion of an "invisible" reality which shapes our daily lives has gripped thinkers of all time. Jung addressed the question of the use of myth and archetype at length. His ideas will now be examined, as well as the way in which they were popularised by Joseph Campbell.

Edinger, a prominent Jungian writer, puts it like this:

From the point of view of depth psychology, the gods stand for the archetypes, the basic patterns within the human psyche that exist independent of personal experience. They are the templates on which individual life is formed. Mythologically, these external patterns are thought of as gods, existing in a special place apart from ordinary human experience (Edinger, 1994: 19).

In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* Jung writes that the West has essentially lost its central mythology, that of medieval Christianity, through the Reformation with its depletion of symbolism, and through the increasing secularisation which followed. While a complex and cohesive "mythology" or world-view unconsciously facilitated the psychic development of medieval people, and of people in antiquity, modern western men and women have all but lost this particular psychological containment, with disastrous psychological results. Once one no longer has this containment, one has to experience the symbolic encounter directly and personally. This is a totally different process, because it is conscious, and not without psychological danger (Jung, 1968:12f).

The spiritual depletion which has resulted from secularisation has led to a large-scale spiritual and psychological *impasse* in Western culture. Human beings seem to have the possibility and need for a deep symbolic and spiritual life, as becomes clear when the dreams or *active imagination* impressions of modern men and women are analysed.¹⁴ Modern dream and fantasy images are often closely linked to ancient symbolism, even when the subject has had no previous exposure to this material, and Jung hypothesized that there must be a collective unconscious, which "contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution born anew in the brain structure of every individual" (Jung quoted in Jacobi, 1968:35).

My thesis, then, is as follows: in addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents (Jung, 1968:43).

¹⁴ Active imagination is a method Jung devised where the subject will be prompted to further imagine a dream sequence, and will see spontaneous visual fantasy images.

The archetype therefore cannot be studied in an individual as itself, but only in a secondary form such as a projection onto others, a dream image, a work of art, a vision or spontaneous visual image, or in a myth. In contrast to the personal psyche, the content of the collective unconscious is more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals (Shelburne, 1988:29).

Individual consciousness is only the flower and the fruit of a season, sprung from the perennial rhizome beneath the earth (Jung quoted in Shelburne, 1988:29).

Jung considered the idea of the collective unconscious central to his work. When he was asked at the end of his life which myth or central idea had made his life meaningful, he answered without hesitation that it was the collective unconscious (Walker, 1995:9).

From the theory of the collective unconscious follows the concept of **archetypes**. The archetypes are the content of the collective unconscious, and its manifestation in the world. This idea of the primordial image which transcends the personal sphere has become one of Jung's best known theories. When these primordial images are brought to consciousness in the individual, they contain the seeds of a deeply personal psycho-spiritual development, which Jung named individuation.

Jacobi maintains that it is not difficult to identify the contents of the collective sphere:

Mythological themes, symbols rooted in the universal history of mankind, or reactions of extreme intensity always indicate the participation of the deepest strata. These motifs and symbols exert a determining influence on psychic life as a whole; they have a dominant functional character and an extremely high energy charge (Jacobi, 1968:39).

An archetype which evokes a response in an individual, in the kind of symbolism which attracts the person's attention, can take hold of that individual in a very profound way, creating a feeling of "being deeply moved" (Jacobi, 1968:40-42).

We have already spoken about the various levels of consciousness, but for the sake of clarity they will be briefly reviewed here. The preconscious (introduced by Freud) represents the frontier of the personal unconscious, while the subconscious (Dessoir's term) is the psychic terrain between consciousness and the unconscious. Both these terms fall into Jung's personal unconscious. The deepest level of consciousness is the collective unconscious (Jacobi, 1968:31). All of these levels form a continuum and flow into each other, so that they can be identified but not separated.

Jung believed that there are only a few archetypes, for they correspond to "the number of typical and fundamental experiences" which humankind has had since primordial times (Jacobi, 1968:47). They are the same in all cultures, and they recur in all mythologies, fairy tales, religious traditions and mystery traditions. Examples are the shadow, the transpersonal guide, the anima or animus (the first for men and the second for women); then as spiritual guide the Wise Old Man or the Great Mother (again the

first for men and the second for women); the divine child, the self, rebirth, the trickster, hero, and spirit (Jung, 1969:19f).

In every single individual psyche they can awaken to new life, exert their magic power, and condense into a kind of 'individual mythology', which presents an impressive parallel to the great traditional mythologies of all peoples and epochs, concretizing as it were their origin, essence, and meaning, and throwing new light on them. Thus for Jung the archetypes taken as a whole represent the sum of the latent possibilities of the human psyche - a vast store of ancestral knowledge about the profound relations between God, man, and cosmos. To open up this store in one's own psyche, to awaken it to new life and integrate it with consciousness, means nothing less than to save the individual from his isolation and gather him into the eternal cosmic process (Jacobi, 1968:48, 49).

The individual psycho-spiritual work described by Jung entails a journey undertaken with a guide. The fact that Freud and Jung were medically trained psychiatrists, however, probably predisposed and oversensitised their psychological model to the dangers of mental breakdown in the individual. Hillman also holds this view that the concept of personal development in our culture is overshadowed by the medical model, and says that the fact that Freud used Greek mythology as an expression of the western unconscious has left us with a psychology which is problem-based :

Father-murder, wars of generations, unsolved incest longings and incestuous entanglements in both relationships and ideas, the distortion of the feminine in the Jocasta mold, the anima as an intellectual riddle with a monster's body, and destruction everywhere - suicide, blight and sterility, hanging, blinding, - descending to future generations. Is this our myth? If it is, then how can we go from it to "psychological creativity"? (Hillman, 1972:17).

Hillman then argues for a myth which draws us forward, into developing the best and strongest parts of ourselves, in a creative way (Hillman, 1972:17) – a good description of the psychagogic approach.

There is little doubt that people in the 21st century are freer in their relationship to the unconscious than had been the case at the time of Freud and Jung, probably largely thanks to them. This opens up the possibility of archetypal work on a much larger scale than was previously possible, not only for therapeutic reasons, but for the exploration of the depths of the psyche, and for the rewards which can be reaped in this process. This, essentially, is the process of psychagogy.

Jung, gender and race

A major problem in Jungian theory and the way it is applied lies in the attitude towards women. It is an androcentric theory, or one which presents an "unconscious assumption of the male point of view as the normative and results in naming the world out of male perspective" (Wehr, 1988:4). The most harmful example, from the perspective of women, is the way in which women are exclusively equated with Eros, or the feeling function, while men are associated with Logos, or thought. A woman represents the "home base" for the man, who ventures, intellectually and otherwise, into the world. A

woman who undertakes strongly independent intellectual or other work is often described as “animus possessed”. The strong words he uses to describe women with intellectual views smacks of unconscious projection, which is what many feminists nowadays criticise him of. The following quotation from *Two essays on Analytical Psychology* illustrates the point:

In intellectual women the animus encourages a critical disputatiousness and would-be highbrowism, which, however, consists essentially in harping on some irrelevant weak point and nonsensically making it the main one. Or a perfectly lucid discussion gets tangled up in the most maddening way through the introduction of a quite different and if possible, perverse point of view. Without knowing it, such women are solely intent upon exasperating the man and are, in consequence, the more completely at the mercy of the animus. “Unfortunately, I am always right”, one of these creatures once confessed to me (Jung quoted in Wehr, 1988:120).

Although the identification of the transpersonal archetypes (the *anima* and animus) has undisputed value in psycho-analysis, they pose problems as they stand. Even during Jung’s lifetime, but more so recently, western society’s reflection on gender roles has brought about change in these roles, and whereas Jung described a man with a strong connection to his feelings as “moody”, emotional connectedness in men has become common and highly sanctioned. Likewise, women have entered most professions previously considered male dominion, and women intellectuals are respected the world over, except in highly patriarchal settings. Nevertheless, because of the enduring androcentric orientation of society as a whole, women might still find it difficult to be themselves, and to simultaneously take account of society’s formulation of what femininity is, as articulated by Jung and others. An American feminist Jungian analyst comments:

I have yet to encounter an adult woman who did not evaluate herself in some highly convincing way as uniquely deficient or inadequate (Young-Eisendrath quoted in Wehr, 1988:17).

The feminist critique of the animus theory and of the description of anima as the soul of *man* is valid, and necessitates a reformulation of these theories. This obviously does not imply that Jung was solely responsible for the problems caused by a patriarchal psychology, but that his own androcentric views, which were typical of his time, caused some harm and have to be re-assessed.

This critique of Jung does not imply that women are not relational and emotional in their interaction with the world. Most probably are, as we have seen in the work of Gilligan discussed in chapter one (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 1991). It does mean, however, that women should not be pre-cast into ways of being, but should be free to develop the whole range of their personal attributes, in the same way that men should be able to do so. The same applies to some of Jung’s formulations on race – he often spoke of Africa as the pre-conscious continent, and considered that black figures in a dream relate to the “primitive” (Jung, 1961:302) - not unusual for his time, but equally in need of reformulation.

In summary, there are therefore a number of functions which mythology fulfills in Jung's perception:

1. **Revealing the unconscious**
Because the unconscious reveals itself only indirectly, the person who wants to get to know that part of herself, needs an intermediary. "Myth succeeds as an intermediary when the conscious, literal meaning of a myth suggests another, symbolic meaning, which for Jung is the psychological one" (Segal, 1998:85).
2. **Encountering the unconscious**
Myth also helps human beings to open up to the unconscious, if they are prepared to allow themselves to experience aspects of the myth.
3. **Making life meaningful**
By helping a person's inner world to come alive, myth also helps the individual to be happier in the outer world.
4. **Abetting therapy**
By means of mythic amplification to the dream symbols experienced by a person in therapy, the therapy is greatly enhanced (Segal, 1998:85-97).
5. **Providing models for behaviour**
The stories of heroes, saints or other figures in myth serve as teaching tools or "archetypes of behaviour", signifying: *do thus*, or: *do not do as this person does* (Segal, 1998:99).

Thus, as Freud opened the door to the unconscious, so Jung introduced the idea of a forward-looking psychology, of which the purpose is to integrate the personality, and to grow to as much wholeness as possible. In the second half of life (normally after the age of thirty-five) most people start on an inward journey, essentially discovering their own deepest nature and their spirituality, and at a deeper level preparing for death. This quest, if entered into fully, brings the person into contact with his/her own personal unconscious and shadow, but also with the archetypes of the collective unconscious, which is why all inner work follows broadly the same archetypal pattern.

What remains is to explore the use Campbell made of Jung's work, and to look at the ways in which this material may be useful in working with myth – or the way in which myth may be useful in psychagogy.

Joseph Campbell's popularisation of mythology and of Jung

Campbell wrote a number of well-known books, such as *The hero with a thousand faces*, and the four volume series *The masks of God*, in which he explored the mythology of primitive peoples, of the Occident, the Orient, and then the creative mythology of our time. He is, however, perhaps best known for his televised appearances with Bill Moyers and other presenters towards the end of his life on the function of mythology in our time. These immensely popular programmes made mythology, but also the Jungian interpretation of mythology, accessible to an unexpectedly wide range of people (Gulick in Noel, 1990:29). Robert Segal, a classicist, calls him 'the most famous and in some circles the most esteemed living writer on myth' (Segal, 1987:ix). Campbell died shortly after the videos had been recorded, in October 1987, but his popularity has increased steadily, especially after the posthumous publication of the text of one of the video series, *The power of myth*.

In this book, the first question asked of Campbell is: So why should I be interested in myth? and he answers that the interviewer does not need mythology, and is probably living a good life without it. He then continues to say:

But you may find that, with a proper introduction, mythology will catch you. And so, what can it do for you if it does catch you? . . . With the loss of [Greek and Latin and biblical literature], we've really lost something because we don't have a comparable literature to take its place. These bits of information from ancient times, which have to do with the themes that have supported human life, built civilisations, and informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage, and if you don't know what the guide-signs are along the way, you have to work it out yourself. But once this subject catches you, there is such a feeling, from one or another of these traditions, of information of a deep, life-vivifying sort that you don't want to give it up (Campbell, 1988:1-2).

Why was he so successful in popularising the psychological and symbolic interpretation of myth? He writes extremely well, and is a storyteller *per excellence*. Noel quotes Underwood as saying that another reason is that although he worked hard at *de-mystifying* religion and mythology, his arguments do not lead to *disenchantment*, but to the opposite (Noel, 1990:14). He seems to walk straight into the spiritual vacuum which many modern people experience. His work is inspiring, and creates bridges between the current situation and the long line of western history.

Campbell believes that myths and rituals, supported by symbols and metaphors, give humans access to a dimension of experience that underlies the normal, perceptual world. Thereby we enjoy entry to an otherwise unconscious stratum of our own being . . . By dwelling in the mythical worldview we gain the power to adjust to the demands of life in general and to pass safely through the special thresholds of life established by our society in particular (Gulick quoted in Noel, 1990:33).

Although Campbell, in the broad sweep of history which he analyses, sometimes misrepresents the myths, such as in his loyalty to the Cambridge myth-ritual school, he makes connections which few others seem able to do, because of the breadth of his reading and the depth of his insight.

Can mythology be read through an archetypal lens?

Having formulated his theory on the collective unconscious and the archetypes, Jung found that mythology was a natural extension to his work as psychotherapist. Mythology served him to "draw helpful parallels and enlightening comparisons" (Jung Collected Works, vol 8 para.38, in Samuels, 1985:198). Jung continues:

It is absolutely necessary to supply these phantastic images that rise up so strange and threatening to the mind's eye with some kind of context so as to make them more intelligible. Experience has shown that the best way to do this

is by way of comparative mythological material (Jung quoted in Samuels, 1985:198).

He thus used myths to help a person to take an objective position towards sometimes threatening unconscious material – what happened to Osiris or to Odysseus is also happening to me. He called this method, of comparing archetypal material to various related myths, *amplification* (Walker, 1995:93).

Campbell, as was shown above, used myths extensively for teaching, as in the example of the Amerindian myth “The two who came to the father.” This is an initiation myth for young men going to war, which prepares them for death – physical or psychological death – and rebirth. This was used by Navaho elders to prepare young men on the Navaho Reservation when they were drafted into the American Army at the onset of the Second World War, and has much potential to be used for general psychological work, as it contains the themes of a typical inner journey (Campbell, 1990:35).

For Hillman, myth is a central concept in his work, which is not only therapeutic, but helping people to reclaim the lost world of soul.

Soul-making is also described as imaging, that is, seeing or hearing by means of an imagining which sees through an event to its image. Imaging means releasing events from their literal understanding into a *mythical appreciation* (Hillman, 1983:27). (My emphasis.)

Edward Edinger, another very well-known Jungian writer, has moreover written a work in which some of the characteristics of Greek mythological figures are directly applied to the inner development of modern men and women, and called it *The eternal drama: the inner meaning of Greek Mythology* (1994). Of Demeter, the subject of this study, he says for instance:

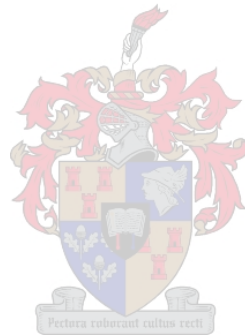
She is the embodiment of the nourishing mother, an image well known to psychotherapists. In clinical practice, the nourishing mother is a double image...Any woman who is powerfully identified with Demeter and has a compulsive need to nourish, turns into the devouring mother. If she insists on feeding and caretaking, whether it is needed or not, the offspring remains infantile and its potential for growth is injured (Edinger, 1994:41, 42).

From the above it seems clear that, within the Jungian school of thought, it is accepted and understood that mythological material which survived the centuries or millennia, have done so because of the archetypal images embedded in the stories, which make them equally relevant to us. Jung also stated that the unconscious way in which myths developed is what makes them useful to us. If they had been carefully thought out, like a modern novel, they would not have contained the natural projections which make them relevant for studying universal patterns and archetypes (Jung, 1968: 6, 7).

Schopenhauer says, moreover, that upon seeing the mythic image, one says *tut tvam asi*, as the Tibetans do, with the realisation: *This art thou* (in Feldman and Richardson, 1972:362). The myth, with its symbolism, thus leads one to recognise: I am this.

As a Mother Goddess, Demeter acts as an archetype. For women, she could represent the Wise Woman of maturity, with her cornucopia of abundance.¹⁵

In the next chapter the complete text of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* will be given, as well as a brief history of the text. This will serve as an introduction to the amplification of the themes from the hymn in chapter five.



¹⁵ See Jung on the Great Mother archetype, p. 28.

Chapter four

The Hymn to Demeter

Introduction

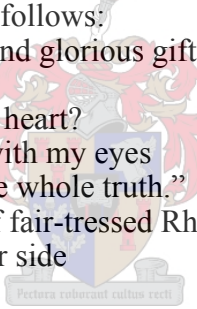
The *Hymn to Demeter* is a popular Homeric hymn, not only because it serves as aetiology for the origin of the seasons, but also because it deals with an intimate family situation which most people can relate to. The poet has a flair for conveying dramatic action, and writes a captivating tale in beautiful style. It also captures the essence of a Mother Goddess with roots in a pre-Olympian time, and the way in which she survived into the Olympian age. Maybe most importantly, it served as charter for the Eleusinian Mysteries, arguably the most important spiritual ritual of antiquity.

In this chapter, the full text of the hymn is given, and subsequently I shall briefly describe the history and background of the hymn, so that it can be understood and analysed within a context.

The hymn

For the text of the hymn Helene Foley's translation will be used

Demeter I begin to sing, the fair-tressed awesome goddess, 1
herself and her slim-ankled daughter whom Aidoneus
seized; Zeus, heavy-thundering and mighty-voiced, gave her,
without the consent of Demeter of the bright fruit and golden sword,
as she played with the deep-breasted daughters of Ocean, 5
plucking flowers in the lush meadow — roses, crocuses,
and lovely violets, irises and hyacinth and the narcissus,
which Earth grew as a snare for the flower-faced maiden
in order to gratify by Zeus's design the Host-to-Many,
a flower wondrous and bright, awesome for all to see, 10
for the immortals above and for mortals below.
From its root a hundredfold bloom sprang up and smelled
so sweet that the whole vast heaven above
and the whole earth laughed, and the salty swell of the sea.
The girl marveled and stretched out both hands at once 15
to take the lovely toy. The earth with its wide ways yawned
over the Nysian plain; the lord Host-to-Many rose up on her
with his immortal horses, the celebrated son of Kronos;
he snatched the unwilling maid into his golden chariot
and led her off lamenting. She screamed with a shrill voice, 20
calling on her father, the son of Kronos highest and best.
Not one of the immortals or of humankind
heard her voice, nor the olives bright with fruit,
except the daughter of Persaios; tender of heart
she heard it from her cave, Hekate of the delicate veil. 25
And lord Helios, brilliant son of Hyperion, heard
the maid calling her father the son of Kronos. But he sat apart
from the gods, aloof in a temple ringing with prayers,
and received choice offerings from humankind.

Against her will Hades took her by the design of Zeus 30
 with his immortal horses — her father’s brother,
 Commander- and Host-to-Many, the many-named son of Kronos.
 So long as the goddess gazed on earth and starry heaven,
 on the sea flowing strong and full of fish,
 and on the beams of the sun, she still hoped 35
 to see her dear mother and the race of immortal gods.
 For so long hope charmed her strong mind despite her distress.
 The mountain peaks and the depths of the sea echoed
 in response to her divine voice, and her goddess mother heard.
 Sharp grief seized her heart, and she tore the veil 40
 on her ambrosial hair with her own hands.
 She cast a dark cloak on her shoulders
 and sped like a bird over dry land and sea,
 searching. No one was willing to tell her the truth,
 not one of the gods or mortals; 45
 no bird of omen came to her as truthful messenger.
 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. 50
 But when the tenth Dawn came shining on her,
 Hekate met her, holding a torch in her hands,
 to give her a message. She spoke as follows:
 “Divine Demeter, giver of seasons and glorious gifts,
 who of the immortals or mortal men 55
 seized Persephone and grieved your heart?
 For I heard a voice but did not see with my eyes
 who he was. To you I tell at once the whole truth.”
 Thus Hekate spoke. The daughter of fair-tressed Rheia
 said not a word, but rushed off at her side 60
 holding torches ablaze in her hands. 

They came to Helios, observer of gods and mortals,
 and stood before his horses. The most august goddess spoke:
 “Helios, respect me as a god does a goddess, if ever 65
 with word or deed I pleased your heart and spirit.
 The daughter I bore, a sweet offshoot noble in form—
 I heard her voice throbbing through the barren air
 as if she were suffering violence. But I did not see her with my eyes.
 With your rays you look down through the bright air
 on the whole of the earth and the sea. 70
 Tell me the truth about my child. Have you somewhere
 seen who of gods or mortal men took her
 by force from me against her will and went away?”
 Thus she spoke and the son of Hyperion replied:
 “Daughter of fair-tressed Rheia, mighty Demeter, 75
 you will know the truth. For I greatly revere and pity you
 grieving for your slim-ankled daughter. No other
 of the gods was to blame but cloud-gathering Zeus,
 who gave her to Hades his brother to be called
 his fertile wife. With his horses Hades 80
 snatched her screaming into the misty gloom.

But, Goddess, give up for good your great lamentation.
 You must not nurse in vain insatiable anger.
 Among the gods Aidoneus is not an unsuitable bridegroom,
 Commander-to-Many and Zeus's own brother of the same stock. 85
 As for honor, he got his third at the world's first division
 and dwells with those whose rule has fallen to his lot."
 He spoke and called to his horses. At his rebuke
 they bore the swift chariot lightly, like long-winged birds.
 A more terrible and brutal grief seized the heart 90
 of Demeter, angry now at the son of Kronos with his dark clouds.
 Withdrawing from the assembly of the gods and high Olympus,
 she went among the cities and fertile fields of men,
 disguising her beauty for a long time. No one of men
 nor deep-girt women recognized her when they looked, 95
 until she came to the house of skillful Keleos,
 the man then ruler of fragrant Eleusis.
 There she sat near the road, grief in her heart,
 where citizens drew water from the Maiden's Well
 in the shade—an olive bush had grown overhead— 100
 like a very old woman cut off from childbearing
 and the gifts of garland-loving Aphrodite.
 Such are the nurses to children of law-giving kings
 and the keepers of stores in their echoing halls.
 The daughters of Keleos, son of Eleusis, saw her 105
 as they came to fetch water easy-to-draw and bring it
 in bronze vessels to their dear father's halls.
 Like four goddesses they were in the flower of youth,
 Kallidikê, Kleisidikê, fair Demo, and Kallithoê,
 who was the eldest of them all. 110
 They did not know her—gods are hard for mortals to recognize.
 Standing near her, they spoke winged words.
 "Who are you, old woman, of those born long ago?
 From where? Why have you left the city and do not
 draw near its homes? Women are there in the shadowy halls, 115
 of your age as well as others born younger,
 who would care for you both in word and in deed."
 They spoke, and the most august goddess replied:
 "Dear children, whoever of womankind you are,
 greetings. I will tell you my tale. For it is not wrong 120
 to tell you the truth now you ask.
 Doso's my name, which my honored mother gave me.
 On the broad back of the sea I have come now from Crete,
 by no wish of my own. By force and necessity pirate men
 led me off against my desire. Then they 125
 put into Thorikos in their swift ship, where
 the women stepped all together onto the mainland,
 and the men made a meal by the stern of the ship.
 My heart did not crave a heartwarming dinner,
 but racing in secret across the dark mainland 130
 I escaped from my arrogant masters, lest
 they should sell me, as yet unbought, for a price overseas.
 Then wandering I came here and know not at all

what land this is and who lives here.
 But may all the gods who dwell on Olympus 135
 give you husbands to marry and children to bear,
 such as parents wish for. Now pity me, maidens,
 and tell me, dear children, with eager goodwill,
 whose house I might come to, a man's
 or a woman's, there to do for them gladly
 such tasks as are done by an elderly woman. 140
 I could nurse well a newborn child, embracing it
 in my arms, or watch over a house. I could
 spread out the master's bed in a recess
 of the well-built chamber and teach women their work."
 So spoke the goddess. To her replied at once Kallidikê, 145
 a maiden unwed, in beauty the best of Keleos' daughters.
 Good mother, we mortals are forced, though it hurt us,
 to bear the gifts of the gods; for they are far stronger.
 To you I shall explain these things clearly and name
 the men to whom great power and honor belong here, 150
 who are first of the people and protect with their counsels
 and straight judgments the high walls of the city.
 There is Triptolemos subtle in mind and Dioklos,
 Polyxenos and Eumolpos the blameless,
 Dolichos and our own lordly father. 155
 And all these have wives to manage their households.
 Of these not one at first sight would scorn
 your appearance and turn you away from their homes.
 They will receive you, for you are indeed godlike.
 But if you wish, wait here, until we come to the house 160
 of our father and tell Metaneira our deep-girt mother
 all these things straight through, in case she might bid
 you come to our house and not search after others'.
 For her only son is now nursed in our well-built hall,
 a late-born child, much prayed for and cherished. 165
 If you might raise him to the threshold of youth,
 any woman who saw you would feel envy at once,
 such rewards for his rearing our mother will give you."
 Thus they spoke and she nodded her head. The girls
 carried proudly bright jars filled with water and 170
 swiftly they reached the great house of their father.
 At once to their mother they told what they saw and heard.
 She bade them go quickly to offer a boundless wage.
 Just as hinds or heifers in the season of spring
 bound through the meadow sated with fodder, 175
 so they, lifting the folds of their shimmering robes,
 darted down the hollow wagon-track, and their hair
 danced on their shoulders like a crocus blossom.
 They found the famed goddess near the road
 just where they had left her. Then to the house 180
 of their father they led her. She, grieved in her heart,
 walked behind with veiled head. And her dark robe
 swirled round the slender feet of the goddess.
 They soon reached the house of god-cherished Keleos,

and went through the portico to the place where 185
 their regal mother sat by the pillar of the close-fitted roof,
 holding on her lap the child, her young offshoot. To her
 they raced. But the goddess stepped on the threshold. Her head
 reached the roof and she filled the doorway with divine light.
 Reverence, awe, and pale fear seized Metaneira. 190
 She gave up her chair and bade the goddess sit down.
 But Demeter, bringer of seasons and giver of rich gifts,
 did not wish to be seated on the shining seat.
 She waited resistant, her lovely eyes cast down,
 until knowing Iambe set out a well-built stool 195
 for her and cast over it a silvery fleece.
 Seated there, the goddess drew the veil before her face.
 For a long time she sat voiceless with grief on the stool
 and responded to no one with word or gesture.
 Unsmiling, tasting neither food nor drink, 200
 she sat wasting with desire for her deep-girt daughter,
 until knowing Iambe jested with her and
 mocking with many a joke moved the holy goddess
 to smile and laugh and keep a gracious heart—
 Iambe, who later pleased her moods as well. 205
 Metaneira offered a cup filled with honey-sweet wine,
 but Demeter refused it. It was not right, she said,
 for her to drink red wine; then she bid them mix barley
 and water with soft mint and give her to drink.
 Metaneira made and gave the drink to the goddess as she bid. 210
 Almighty Deo received it for the sake of the rite.
 Well-girt Metaneira spoke first among them:
 “Hail, lady, for I suppose your parents are not lowborn,
 but noble. Your eyes are marked by modesty 215
 and grace, even as those of justice-dealing kings.
 We mortals are forced, though it may hurt us, to bear
 the gifts of the gods. For the yoke lies on our necks.
 But now you have come here, all that’s mine will be yours.
 Raise this child for me, whom the gods provided
 late-born and unexpected, much-prayed for by me. 220
 If you raise him and he comes to the threshold of youth,
 any woman who saw you would feel envy at once,
 such rewards for his rearing would I give you.”
 Rich-crowned Demeter addressed her in turn:
 “Hail also to you, lady, may the gods give you blessings. 225
 Gladly will I embrace the child as you bid me.
 I will raise him, nor do I expect a spell or the Undercutter
 to harm him through the negligence of his nurse.
 For I know a charm more cutting than the Woodcutter;
 I know a strong safeguard against baneful bewitching.” 230
 So speaking, she took the child to her fragrant breast
 with her divine hands. And his mother was glad at heart.
 Thus the splendid son of skillful Keleos, Demophoön,
 whom well-girt Metaneira bore, she nursed
 in the great halls. And he grew like a divinity, 235
 eating no food nor sucking [at a mother’s breast];

[For daily well-crowned divine] Demeter anointed
 him with ambrosia like one born from a god
 and breathed sweetly on him, held close to her breast.
 At night, she would bury him like a brand in the fire's might,
 unknown to his own parents. And great was their wonder 240
 as he grew miraculously fast; he was like the gods.
 She would have made him ageless and immortal,
 if well-girt Metaneira had not in her folly
 kept watch at night from her fragrant chamber
 and spied. But she shrieked and struck both thighs 245
 in fear for her child, much misled in her mind,
 and in her grief she spoke winged words.
 "Demophoön, my child, the stranger buries you
 deep in the fire, causing me woe and bitter cares."
 Thus she spoke lamenting. The great goddess heard her. 250
 In anger at her, bright-crowned Demeter snatched
 from the flames with immortal hands the dear child
 Metaneira had borne beyond hope in the halls and,
 raging terribly at heart, cast him away from herself to the ground.
 At the same time she addressed well-girt Metaneira: 255
 "Mortals are ignorant and foolish, unable to foresee
 destiny, the good and the bad coming on them.
 You are incurably misled by your folly.
 Let the god's oath, the implacable water of Styx, be witness,
 I would have made your child immortal and ageless 260
 forever; I would have given him unfailing honor.
 But now he cannot escape death and the death spirits.
 Yet unfailing honor will forever be his, because
 he lay on my knees and slept in my arms.
 In due time as the years come round for him, 265
 the sons of Eleusis will continue year after year
 to wage war and dread combat against each other.
 For I am honored Demeter, the greatest
 source of help and joy to mortals and immortals.
 But now let all the people build me a great temple 270
 with an altar beneath, under the sheer wall
 of the city on the rising hill above Kallichoron.
 I myself will lay down the rites so that hereafter
 performing due rites you may propitiate my spirit."
 Thus speaking, the goddess changed her size and appearance, 275
 thrusting off old age. Beauty breathed about her and
 from her sweet robes a delicious fragrance spread;
 a light beamed far out from the goddess's immortal skin,
 and her golden hair flowed over her shoulders.
 The well-built house flooded with radiance like lightning. 280
 She left the halls. At once Metaneira's knees buckled.
 For a long time she remained voiceless, forgetting
 to pick up her dear only son from the floor.
 But his sisters heard his pitiful voice and
 leapt from their well-spread beds. Then one took 285
 the child in her arms and laid him to her breast.
 Another lit the fire; a third rushed on delicate feet

to rouse her mother from her fragrant chamber.
 Gathering about the gasping child, they bathed and
 embraced him lovingly. Yet his heart was not comforted, 290
 for lesser nurses and handmaids held him now.
 All night they tried to appease the dread goddess,
 shaking with fear. But when dawn appeared,
 they explained to wide-ruling Keleos exactly
 what the bright-crowned goddess Demeter commanded. 295
 Then he called to assembly his innumerable people
 and bid them build for fair-tressed Demeter
 a rich temple and an altar on the rising hill.
 Attentive to his speech, they obeyed at once and did
 as he prescribed. It grew as the goddess decreed. 300
 But once they finished and ceased their toil,
 each went off home. Then golden-haired Demeter
 remained sitting apart from all the immortals,
 wasting with desire for her deep-girt daughter.
 For mortals she ordained a terrible and brutal year 305
 on the deeply fertile earth. The ground released
 no seed, for bright-crowned Demeter kept it buried.
 In vain the oxen dragged many curved plows down
 the furrows. In vain much white barley fell on the earth.
 She would have destroyed the whole mortal race 310
 by cruel famine and stolen the glorious honor of gifts
 and sacrifices from those having homes on Olympus,
 if Zeus had not seen and pondered their plight in his heart.
 First he roused golden-winged Iris to summon
 fair-tressed Demeter, so lovely in form. 315
 Zeus spoke and Iris obeying the dark-clouded
 son of Kronos, raced swiftly between heaven and earth.
 She came to the citadel of fragrant Eleusis
 and found in her temple dark-robed Demeter.
 Addressing her, she spoke winged words: 320
 "Demeter, Zeus, the father, with his unfailing knowledge
 bids you rejoin the tribes of immortal gods.
 Go and let Zeus's word not remain unfulfilled."
 Thus she implored, but Demeter's heart was unmoved.
 Then the father sent in turn all the blessed immortals; 325
 one by one they kept coming and pleading
 and offered her many glorious gifts and whatever
 honors she might choose among the immortal gods.
 Yet not one could bend the mind and thought
 of the raging goddess, who harshly spurned their pleas. 330
 Never, she said, would she mount up to fragrant
 Olympus nor release the seed from the earth,
 until she saw with her eyes her own fair-faced child.
 When Zeus, heavy-thundering and mighty-voiced,
 heard this, he sent down the Slayer of Argos to Erebus 335
 with his golden staff to wheedle Hades with soft words
 and lead back holy Persephone from the misty gloom
 into the light to join the gods so that her mother
 might see her with her eyes and desist from anger.

Hermes did not disobey. At once he left Olympus's height 340
and plunged swiftly into the depths of the earth.
He met lord Hades inside his dwelling,
reclining on a bed with his shy spouse, strongly reluctant
through desire for her mother. [Still she, Demeter,
was brooding on revenge for the deeds of the blessed gods]. 345
The strong Slayer of Argos stood near and spoke:
"Dark-haired Hades, ruler of the dead, Father Zeus
bids me lead noble Persephone up from Erebus
to join us, so that her mother might see her with her eyes
and cease from anger and dread wrath against the gods. 350
For she is devising a great scheme to destroy
the helpless race of mortals born on earth,
burying the seed beneath the ground and obliterating
divine honors. Her anger is terrible, nor does she go
among the gods but sits aloof in her fragrant temple, 355
keeping to the rocky citadel of Eleusis."
Thus he spoke and Aidoneus, lord of the dead, smiled
with his brows, nor disobeyed king Zeus's commands.
At once he urged thoughtful Persephone:
"Go, Persephone, to the side of your dark-robed mother, 360
keeping the spirit and temper in your breast benign.
Do not be so sad and angry beyond the rest;
in no way among immortals will I be an unsuitable spouse,
myself a brother of father Zeus. And when you are there,
you will have power over all that lives and moves, 365
and you will possess the greatest honors among the gods.
There will be punishment forevermore for those wrongdoers
who fail to appease your power with sacrifices,
performing proper rites and making due offerings."
Thus he spoke and thoughtful Persephone rejoiced. 370
Eagerly she leapt up for joy. But he gave her to eat
a honey-sweet pomegranate seed, stealthily passing it
around her, lest she once more stay forever
by the side of revered Demeter of the dark robe.
Then Aidoneus commander-to-many yoked 375
his divine horses before the golden chariot.
She mounted the chariot and at her side the strong
Slayer of Argos took the reins and whip in his hands
and dashed from the halls. The horses flew eagerly;
swiftly they completed the long journey; not sea nor 380
river waters, not grassy glens nor mountain peaks
slowed the speed of the immortal horses,
slicing the deep air as they flew above these places.
He brought them to a halt where rich-crowned Demeter
waited before the fragrant temple. With one look she darted 385
like a maenad down a mountain shaded with woods.
On her side Persephone, [seeing] her mother's [radiant face],
[left chariot and horses,] and leapt down to run
[and fall on her neck in passionate embrace].
[While holding her dear child in her arms], her [heart 390
suddenly sensed a trick. Fearful, she] drew back

from [her embrace and at once inquired:]
 “My child, tell me, you [did not taste] food [while below?]
 Speak out [and hide nothing, so we both may know.] 395
 [For if not], ascending [from miserable Hades],
 you will dwell with me and your father, the
 dark-clouded [son of Kronos], honored by all the gods.
 But if [you tasted food], returning beneath [the earth,]
 you will stay a third part of the seasons [each year],
 but two parts with myself and the other immortals. 400
 When the earth blooms in spring with all kinds
 of sweet flowers, then from the misty dark you will
 rise again, a great marvel to gods and mortal men.
 By what guile did the mighty Host-to-Many deceive you?”
 Then radiant Persephone replied to her in turn: 405
 “I will tell you the whole truth exactly, Mother.
 The Slayer of Argos came to bring fortunate news
 from my father, the son of Kronos, and the other gods
 and lead me from Erebos so that seeing me with your eyes
 you would desist from your anger and dread wrath 410
 at the gods. Then I leapt up for joy, but he stealthily
 put in my mouth a food honey-sweet, a pomegranate seed,
 and compelled me against my will and by force to taste it.
 For the rest—how seizing me by the shrewd plan of my father,
 Kronos’s son, he carried me off into the earth’s depths— 415
 I shall tell and elaborate all that you ask.
 We were all in the beautiful meadow—
 Leukippé; Phaino; Elektra; and Ianthê;
 Melitê; Iachê; Rhodeia; and Kallirhoê;
 Melibosis; Tychê; and flower-faced Okyrhoê; 420
 Khryseis; Ianeira; Akastê; Admetê;
 Rhodopê; Plouto; and lovely Kalypso;
 Styx; Ourania; and fair Galaxaura; Pallas,
 rouser of battles; and Artemis, sender of arrows—
 playing and picking lovely flowers with our hands, 425
 soft crocus mixed with irises and hyacinth,
 rosebuds and lilies, a marvel to see, and the
 narcissus that wide earth bore like a crocus.
 As I joyously plucked it, the ground gaped from beneath,
 and the mighty lord, Host-to-Many, rose from it 430
 and carried me off beneath the earth in his golden chariot
 much against my will. And I cried out at the top of my voice.
 I speak the whole truth, though I grieve to tell it.”
 Then all day long, their minds at one, they soothed
 each other’s heart and soul in many ways, 435
 embracing fondly, and their spirits abandoned grief,
 as they gave and received joy between them.
 Hekate of the delicate veil drew near them
 and often caressed the daughter of holy Demeter;
 from that time this lady served her as chief attendant. 440
 To them Zeus, heavy-thundering and mighty-voiced,
 sent as mediator fair-tressed Rheia to summon
 dark-robed Demeter to the tribes of gods; he promised

to give her what honors she might choose among the gods.
 He agreed his daughter would spend one-third 445
 of the revolving year in the misty dark and two-thirds
 with her mother and the other immortals.
 So he spoke and the goddess did not disobey his commands.
 She darted swiftly down the peaks of Olympus
 and arrived where the Rarian plain, once life-giving 450
 udder of earth, now giving no life at all, stretched idle
 and utterly leafless. For the white barley was hidden
 by the designs of lovely-ankled Demeter. Yet as spring came on,
 the fields would soon ripple with long ears of grain;
 and the rich furrows would grow heavy on the ground 455
 with grain to be tied with bands into sheaves.
 There she first alighted from the barren air.
 Mother and daughter were glad to see each other
 and rejoiced at heart. Rheia of the delicate veil then said:
 "Come, child, Zeus, heavy-thundering and mighty-voiced, 460
 summons you to rejoin the tribes of the gods;
 he has offered to give what honors you choose among them.
 He agreed that his daughter would spend one-third
 of the revolving year in the misty dark, and two-thirds 465
 with her mother and the other immortals.
 He guaranteed it would be so with a nod of his head.
 So come, my child, obey me; do not rage overmuch
 and forever at the dark-clouded son of Kronos.
 Now make the grain grow fertile for humankind,"
 So Rheia spoke, and rich-crowned Demeter did not disobey. 470
 At once she sent forth fruit from the fertile fields
 and the whole wide earth burgeoned with leaves
 and flowers. She went to the kings who administer law,
 Triptolemos and Diokles, driver of horses, mighty
 Eumolpos and Keleos, leader of the people, and revealed 475
 the conduct of her rites and taught her Mysteries to all of them,
 holy rites that are not to be transgressed, nor pried into, 478
 nor divulged. For a great awe of the gods stops the voice.
 Blessed is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites, 480
 but the uninitiate who has no share in them never
 has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness.
 When the great goddess had founded all her rites,
 the goddesses left for Olympus and the assembly of the other gods.
 There they dwell by Zeus delighting-in-thunder, inspiring 485
 awe and reverence. Highly blessed is the mortal
 on earth whom they graciously favor with love.
 For soon they will send to the hearth of his great house
 Ploutos, the god giving abundance to mortals.
 But come, you goddesses, dwelling in the town of 490
 fragrant Eleusis, and seagirt Paros, and rocky Antron,
 revered Deo, mighty giver of seasons and glorious gifts,
 you and your very fair daughter Persephone,
 for my song grant gladly a living that warms the heart.
 And I shall remember you and a new song as well. 495
 (Foley, 1994: 2 – 26).

A brief history of the text

Very little is known about the origin of the text of this hymn, but the history of the text is very interesting, and worth mentioning briefly. Most of the Homeric hymns were extinct in medieval Europe, except for a handful of ancient papyri. During the Renaissance, however, a renewed awareness of ancient Greek civilisation emerged. Giovanni Aurispa, who had been responsible for bringing many of the ancient Greek manuscripts from the East to Italy, wrote in 1424 that he possessed a manuscript which contained the Homeric hymns. This might have been the source for the modern version of the hymns, which was first published in Florence in 1488 with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but without the hymn to Demeter (Richardson, 2003: xxiv). The *Hymn to Demeter* survived in an amazing way. A single mutilated medieval manuscript was discovered in a Russian stable amongst the animals in 1777 by Christian Friedrich Matthaei – the now celebrated Mosquensis (M) manuscript. It is now in Leiden, and was dated by the watermarks to the early 15th century (Richardson, 1974:65).

The material in this hymn was probably based on much older oral poetry. Nilsson argues that Greek mythology originated during the Minoan civilisation and was transferred from there to the Mycenaeans (Nilsson, 1932:21). As was seen above, Gimbutas argued that the Minoans were again influenced by what she called Old Europe, and that Demeter and Persephone are derivatives of the Neolithic pregnant vegetation goddesses (Gimbutas & Dexter, 1999:160) – a point which Nilsson agrees with in terms of Kore (Nilsson, 1932:75).

Charles Penglase, with the benefit of much more recent research, makes a convincing case for the likely oral transmission of the myth of Inanna/Dumuzi from Mesopotamia to late-Mycenaean Greece.¹⁶ Because of the large number of parallels between the myths of Inanna and that of Demeter and Persephone, he believes that it was a late rather than an early diffusion (Penglase, 1994:130, 146–147).

The main parallels between the stories lie in the journeys undertaken by the gods, which are in both cases the central structure of the myth. In detail the story of Damu is much closer to that of Persephone than that of Inanna, but in all three the myths the god or goddess descends to the netherworld. Both Persephone and Damu go unwillingly, while Inanna undertakes the journey deliberately in order to gain power over the lower world and to unite life in the upper and nether worlds. In the myth of Inanna the plot is not explicitly linked to the maintenance of fertility in nature, but in the myths of Damu, Persephone and the story of Ishtar, the Assirian-Babylonian version of the myth of Inanna, it is.

Another common theme between the Damu and Persephone myths is the journey of the mother goddess to find her child who has been carried off to the underworld, the eventual return of the lost child and the return of fertility and fruitfulness to the earth. There are, moreover, similarities in the mother's search – no-one can tell her where her child is, she searches desperately, she is unwashed, and at a certain point the truth is revealed (Penglase, 1994:131). Helios is consulted by Demeter, while Duttur also

¹⁶ The myths of Inanna and Dumuzi as well as that of Damu are discussed in some detail in chapter five.

consults the sun god. Finally, both take food in the lower world before their return (Penglase 1994:134, 136).

Burkert also compares the myth of Demeter and Persephone with the Hittite myth of Telepinu or Telepinus, and finds “very striking” parallels (Burkert, 1979:125).

It therefore seems likely that the myth of Demeter and Persephone must have developed from that of Dumuzi or Damu and Inanna, and has possibly also been influenced by that of Telepinu, although the storyline was completely reworked and the later story is a more coherent one, devised for a Greek audience. Because of the probable historical connection, the Sumerian and Hittite myths will occasionally, where it brings a new emphasis to the material, be incorporated into the discussion of the hymn in chapter five.

It is generally accepted that the *Hymn to Demeter* itself, like the other longer Homeric hymns (those to Apollo, Hermes and Aphrodite), belongs to the archaic period. The use of formulaic language and other stylistic evidence seem to suggest that the hymn was composed later than the *Theogony* and probably with an awareness of this work (Richardson, 1974:3-10). The exact date of its composition is not certain. Richardson, based on a detailed contextual analysis, maintains that one can safely assign a *terminus ante* of the mid sixth century B. C. (Richardson, 1974:5-7), while Suter says that 600 B.C. is currently generally accepted as the approximate date for the composition (Suter, 2002:10).

In the hymn, the relationship between Demeter and Persephone is that of mother and daughter, and that will be the relationship on which the analysis will be based. Not everyone sees their relationship as that, however. Jane Harrison saw both Demeter and Persephone as two forms of the same person:

It is important to note that the two forms of the Earth or Corn-goddess are not Mother and *Daughter*, but Mother and Maiden, Demeter and Kore. They are, in fact, merely the older and younger form of the same person; hence their easy confusion. The figures of Mother and *Daughter* are mythological rather than theological, i.e. they arise from the story-telling instinct (Harrison, 1908:274).

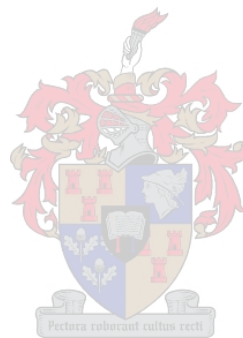
The second point of Harrison’s reading will be incorporated into our analysis, namely that Persephone is the Earth goddess, while Demeter is the Corn-goddess (or the wheat goddess). The archetypal forms, according to Harrison’s reading, are therefore Mother (Demeter) and Maiden (Kore), Earth goddess and Underworld goddess.

Suter also does not agree with the mother-daughter relationship. She does an analysis of the position of the two goddesses during the archaic and classical age in Greece. She argues that Persephone was the older goddess, and that she had to be included in the new Olympian theology, but in a subdued form – and therefore becomes the daughter. She maintains that neither in the *Iliad* nor in the *Odyssey* is any mention made of a connection between Demeter and Persephone – Persephone is in fact in both poems treated as the awesome goddess of the Underworld (Suter, 2002:122-124). This is also the position taken by Zuntz, in his study of Persephone as the older goddess in Sicily

and Malta (Zuntz, 1971). Although there might well be some validity to this position, it is beyond the scope of the hymn and therefore of the analysis in chapter five.

In summary, what we can be reasonably certain of is that it seems as if the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* was composed from oral versions of the myth, strongly influenced by the Sumerian myths of Inanna and Dumuzi (possibly in written form), and possibly also by the Hittite myth of Telepinu. It was moreover deliberately linked to the Eleusinian Mysteries. It could also have been an effort to express the shift in power from the older religious forms to the new Olympian patriarchy, and even, maybe, from one form of goddess worship to another.

In the next chapter, the method set out in chapter one will be applied to the hymn.



Chapter five

A psycho-mythological analysis of the *Hymn to Demeter*

Introduction

In this chapter the methodology which was set out in chapter one will be applied to the *Hymn to Demeter*. Firstly a number of possible *motifemes* will be identified, using Burkert's suggestion of comparing the hymn to other stories with similar *motifemes*, and then each of these will be discussed. As this hymn is written in a highly sophisticated style, the possible meaning will often be evident from the way in which the text has been composed. Use will also be made of the insights of experienced psychotherapists who have written on this or similar material.

In addition to this level of analysis, the method of *amplification* will be used, as it was developed by Jung, and as discussed in chapter one. This will entail a clarification of meaning by comparing it to other similar mythological and literary material.

Lastly, the question will be asked whether the main themes which emerge from this discussion are archetypal in nature or not. As this will not be easy to define, one can maybe rephrase the question more simply, by asking whether these themes appear to be profound and universal in nature.

The *motifemes* in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*

A list of possible functions or *motifemes* in this poem is given below. This list is obviously subject to change and debate, as it is based on a personal reading of the underlying structure of the poem. In determining the *motifemes* of a myth, Burkert discusses the difficulty of knowing how and where to separate two different *motifemes*. He advises that a set of parallel tales with alternative and variant functions might give the researcher the opportunity to find the turning points and 'joints' (Burkert, 1979:10, 11). Ways in which such parallel tales have been used will be shown, as for instance in consulting the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi, or that of Telepinu, in order to understand the *motifemes* in that of Demeter and Persephone better.

The list of *motifemes* could be:

1. The abduction/ abduction as initiation (lines 1 – 21)
2. Journey to the underworld (30 – 39)
3. The controlling, absent father (27 – 30; 313 – 317; 325; 441 – 448)
4. The mother's search for her daughter (39 – 91)
5. The witnesses: Hecate and the Sun (22 – 26; 51 – 89)
6. The story-in-the-story: The goddess withdraws to Eleusis (92 – 302)
7. The withdrawal and return of the life-giving force (302 – 473)
8. The hieros gamos (371 – 374)
9. Mother/maiden reunification (385 – 440)
10. Gifts to humanity: The Mysteries and the gift of Ploutos (473 – 489)

The parallel functions in the Sumerian myths of Inanna and Dumuzi, of Damu and Duttur, and in the Hittite myth of Telepinu,¹⁷ in all of which some similar *motifemes* occur, could be:

1. Inanna undertook the journey deliberately, to unite the upper and lower worlds, and the abduction therefore does not apply to her. Telepinu, however, disappeared and all life with him (Guirand, 1959:84). So did Damu, possibly another name for Dumuzi (Penglase, 1994:31).
2. Inanna's journey to the underworld, although willingly undertaken, led to her gradual loss of power as she entered the seven gates of the underworld, and to her eventual death (Jackson, 1994:284). Damu similarly entered the underworld and became a ghost. (Penglase, 1994).
3. The god Enlil, Lord of the Air, and like Zeus master of humankind's fate (Guirand, 1959:55), refused to help Inanna's servant, Ninshibur, to restore her to the upper world.
4. When all life ceased because of Telepinu's absence, the weather-god, his father, explained that Telepinu had been angry and had disappeared. All the gods searched for him, without success (Guirand, 1959:84). Likewise, Duttur searched for Damu, together with his sister Geshtin, also in the underworld (Penglase, 1994:31-35).
5. The sun acted as witness to Telepinu's disappearance (Penglase, 1994:134).
6. The story-in-the-story is absent in the Sumerian and Hittite myths.
7. Both Telepinu and Inanna, as well as Dumuzi at a later stage, withdrew for a period and then re-appeared. While Damu was gone, it was feared that if he did not return, all fertility would cease and the river would not flood its banks (Penglase, 1994:35).
8. The *hieros gamos* is absent in the two Sumerian myths, except that Inanna, in a different love poem, prepared to show herself in all her naked beauty to Enki during the springtime (David, 2005).
9. There is no particular re-unification of gods in the Sumerian myths, although the tablet breaks off before the end of the poem on Inanna and Dumuzi (Jackson, 1994:285), and it might be that reunification might have followed.
10. Inanna's descent, presumably, brought about the gift of the unification of the upper and the lower worlds, as that is what she set out to achieve.

Amplification of the *motifemes*

In essence, the hymn speaks of the different aspects of the female personality – the mother and daughter, as well as of other accompanying figures – Hekate, the chthonic goddess, Rhea, the grandmother of Persephone, and Gaia, the earth mother. The emphasis will be on the relationship between these female figures in a woman's life, particularly on that of mother and daughter, and on these goddesses as a reflection of different aspects of a woman's inner and outer life. The psychological journey which will be examined is one that men and women undertake.

¹⁷ As discussed in chapter four, Penglase links the Sumerian hymns of Inanna and Dumuzi and that of Damu and Duttur (Penglase, 1994: 31 – 38), and Burkert is convinced that the Demeter and Persephone myth is connected to the Hittite story of Telepinu (Burkert, 1979:125).

The hymn will also be examined in the light of new insights from the fields of feminism and women's studies. The question is whether it might give some pointers to the essential relationship between women, particularly between mother and daughter, and on the development and nature of the feminine, or whether it is so overlaid with patriarchal assumptions that the material is not reliable for our time. Does the passivity of Persephone, and the fact that she is largely a recipient or victim of the arrangements between Zeus and Hades, express the deepest nature of the feminine? Does it express some aspects of the feminine, at some developmental stages? What does it say about a modern woman of whatever age? These and other questions will be examined in the light of amplifications from mythology, creative literature, anthropology and other sources.

1. **The abduction/ abduction as initiation**

In the hymn Persephone is abducted into marriage, in the underworld. She is taken, but she picks the flower herself. The event is plotted without her awareness, and she is its victim – “he snatched the unwilling maid ... and led her off lamenting” (Foley, 1994:2)- but nevertheless she reaches out to the narcissus with its “hundredfold bloom” of tiny flowers. The image asks us to consider this complexity – the young woman is a victim of the abduction, and yet, on some level, she participates.

The abduction will be looked at here as both an inevitable movement to the next phase of life, and a kidnapping into a phase of difficulty. In either, in Jungian terms, the psyche seems to collaborate, as if the progression into a next phase is necessary.

The young girl, perhaps fourteen or fifteen years old, as Greek brides usually were, is emotionally and mentally completely absorbed in her play with her female friends in a beautiful meadow, where they are picking flowers. She is not with her mother, but emotionally her mother still frames her whole existence. Into this idyllic scene intrudes the unexpected – she picks a beautiful narcissus, grown as a trap by Gaea. In this abduction of the young feminine into her expected role in the world ruled by men, the Earth Mother can be said to collude with the males – as older women often guard the rules of the tribe and of society more stringently than anybody else, making individualism almost impossible for the young girl.

The earth opens up, to reveal the chariot of Hades. Foley says that it is difficult to find an appropriate English word to translate Hades's act of violence. It is uncertain whether it had been a rape, although it has often been interpreted that way (Burkert, 1983:259). Foley herself uses the words *seized* for *hêrpaksen*, *snatched* for *harpaksas*, and *suffering violence* for *biazomenês* (Foley, 1994:32). Persephone resists, she screams, and she disappears.

Persephone's loud scream is probably instinctive, but also signifies that she is taken without her consent (Foley, 1994:36). She intends to summon help – that of her father, or of her mother. Penglase says that her scream parallels that of Geshtinanna in the Sumerian story when she realises Dumuzi has been taken to the underworld.

Geshtinanna let screams draw near unto heaven,
draw near unto the netherworld,

the sum of screams cover like a cloth the base of heaven,
veiled it like a linen sheet (Penglase, 1994:141).

Penglase describes this as “the same cosmic scream associated with the death or disappearance of the child to the netherworld” (Penglase, 1994:141). As such, it fills the hearer with empathetic horror, as more than anything else, the scream expresses for us what the young girl feels – terror, as if confronted with death.

When we next see her, long afterwards, she sits quietly next to Hades in his palace, longing for her mother. The initial shock has worn off, and she has presumably withdrawn inside herself, waiting for help from the outside world, and feeling despondent.

In the Xhosa culture, as in many traditional cultures, the Tembu people have an initiation rite for young women which occurs shortly after their first menstruation, which seems to capture the essence of the transition required of young women. The girls are called *I-Ntonjane*, after the chrysalis of the stick insect, which rests in a little grass mat at the end of the larval stage of the caterpillar. In the grass mat it waits in its cocoon until the new caterpillar emerges. As the girls and the women collect firewood, they are careful not to harm the ntonjane, which carry great mystical power.

The young girl is placed in seclusion in a hut behind a grass mat and she has to spend a month there, completely on her own. Her initiation is an inner, quiet process, during which she may only speak in the language used for speech with the ancestors; a time to reflect on what lies ahead – separation from her mother, being a bride, becoming a wife and mother (Broster, 1976:39–50). It could be that this reflects the real nature of the transition for young girls – having to reflect on their sexual awakening, on the coming intrusion into their bodies, and on the life that will grow there.

The fact that Persephone is trapped by a hundred-headed narcissus is rich with nuance. Narcissus, who died because he could not tear himself away from his own reflection, is a clear image of the young adolescent, completely engrossed in his- or herself. The fascination with the self is partly necessary at this stage, in order to facilitate the movement of the identity from childhood into young adulthood. On the other hand the narcissistic phase could immobilise the young, and the abduction by the lord of the dark might be what is required to create growth.

Another aspect of the narcissus is that it was considered an aphrodisiac in antiquity, as were the other bulbous flowers which grew on the meadow (Foley, 1994:34). This reinforces the theme of the sexual awakening of the young maiden in the hymn. Foley suggests that lush meadows in Greek myth are liminal spaces, associated with young maidens’ transition to sexuality and fertility, but also with the underworld, with Elysion and with the Isles of the Blest. The Nysian plain suggests a meadow in the region of *Okeanos*, that is the ends of the earth (Foley, 1994:33-36). The young girl is already moving out of the protective zone of home and mother, unconsciously exploring nature’s beauty and fertility when she succumbs to the temptation of the narcissus.

This is the first level of meaning which emerges from the image of Persephone picking the narcissus – a young girl, still unprepared for what lies ahead, and yet eagerly

reaching out with “both hands at once” (Foley, 1994:2) to her new life as she reaches to the flower, not suspecting that horror will follow. She is partly still child, but has to, and partly wants to, move to the next phase of her life.

In this process the narcissus could be said to act as a taboo, but one which she is unaware of. As Pandora should not have opened the box and Eve should not have tasted the fruit, this younger woman may not both pick and enjoy the flower and stay the same. While Eve and Pandora, two mythological figures where there had clearly been a level of cross-transmission, were held responsible for the behaviour of all women in many cultures into our own time, Persephone’s act of picking the narcissus is more a reflection of an inevitable phase the young girl has to reach if she is not to stagnate.

The whole of Persephone’s story in the hymn casts her in a very passive role. In more traditional cultures the young woman was bound to become a bride, and thus left home in her mid-teens to join another household. In modern western society she has to take the step of separating from her home herself. In both cases, this is a phase in which the young female can undergo the experience with a degree of passivity and acceptance. In feminist terminology, as well as in psychagogic terms, the degree to which she takes a step herself, picks the flower herself, will enable her, at a later stage, to recover her own will and ability to act from her own volition.

The very presence of a taboo indicates to the reader that there is an important issue at stake. In each of the stories cited above, the issue hidden by the taboo is that of consciousness, and the transgression leads to the first hesitant step in that direction. It is interesting that while knowledge is portrayed as a male domain in classical culture, consciousness, at least on the symbolic level, is associated with female activity in the above stories.¹⁸ The female then also has to bear the blame for transgressing into the divine realm in this process, and bringing humankind to the fall.

This is similar to the trend in many fairy tales which include a taboo. In the story of Bluebeard, written by Perrault in 1697, and possibly based on older oral tales, there are many features similar to the story of Hades and Persephone. The young woman enters the marriage willingly, although she originally mistrusts the blue beard of her dark lord. The taboo comes in the form of a key, which she is not to use. Her inquisitiveness prompts her to knowledge, and danger. The fairy tale is designed to teach obedience:

In ‘Bluebeard’, the initial weight of the story swings the listener or reader’s sympathies towards the husband who instructs his young wife, and presents his request for her obedience as reasonable, and the terror she experiences when she realizes her fate as a suitable punishment, a warning against trespass (Warner, 1994:243).

Another variant of the story is that of *Allerleirauh*, or *Donkeyskin*. In this variation the dark man is the father himself, who wants to marry the young girl, and who causes her to take on the disguise of an animal, bedecking herself with animal skin and running

¹⁸ Julian David, Jungian analyst, describes consciousness as a feeling, rather than an intellectual product (David, 2005).

away. Once again the young girl has to learn to rely on her own resources and to become animal-like for a while before she can return to her former royal life – an image of what a girl or a woman has to do psychologically as she sets out on her journey towards consciousness (Woodman, 1992). One might say that Persephone possibly acted in a somewhat similar way, by withdrawing into herself as she sat on the couch in her new home, thinking about and longing for her mother.

The above suggests the inevitability and also the dangers of the transition into womanhood which awaits the young girl. All the great transitional life stages are dangerous, to some extent, but the particular difficulties of this passage seem to lie in the interruption of the relationship of trust with the mother, the introduction of the male partner and of sexual activity, the potentially violent nature of the experience, the physical move away from the mother's home to that of the husband or into the world, prospective motherhood, and the dangers of childbirth (Warner, 1994:264).

In addition there was, and is, the possible loss of the young self, so full of confidence, and the transition into socially acceptable womanhood. Mary Pipher quotes the classic study of psychologist I K Broverman in the U S in this regard. Male and female participants in the study described healthy men and healthy adults as being active, independent and logical. Healthy women, however, were described as passive, dependent and illogical.

In fact, it was impossible to score as both a healthy adult and a healthy woman (Pipher, 1994:39).

Pipher calls our modern western society “girl-destroying” (Pipher, 1994:44). Despite the fact that this has already changed immensely over the last decades, young Persephone or Ophelia, as Pipher calls her main character, is in grave danger of abandoning her vitality for the sake of being accepted by the group.

This is also in accordance with the findings of Gilligan,¹⁹ whose work brought to the surface the fact that even in our time, young girls come to a stage where they know quite clearly what they think and feel about themselves and the world around them, but cannot act on that knowledge or speak about it, because of the kind of behaviour they think is expected of them. Older women also recognise that this happened to them long ago, and that during the Persephone phase of their lives doors closed, sometimes permanently (Gilligan, 1991:5–31).

Burkert insists that the myth of Demeter and Persephone recalls older rituals of maiden sacrifice. He argues that the abduction into the underworld is literally death, and death in order to achieve some reprieve or guarantee of success at something like war, as in the myth of Iphigenia. The same mother's hunt and wild fury is present in Demeter, Burkert argues, as we saw in Clytemnestra (Burkert, 1983:264).

On an inner level the abduction is an experience as if of death, of the discontinuity of the previous phase of life with that of the future, of the immature young girl being captivated by the narcissus, her own beautiful and manifoldly unfolding nature. In

¹⁹ See chapter 1, p. 17.

picking it, she becomes forced to accept serious responsibilities. In this transition her own nature plays along with mother Earth, nature, in creating the conditions which will create the trap and temptation. Whether it is an actual rape or not, she might well experience it as such. She will lose control over her own body and being, her being-sufficient-to-herself.

The Kore, the maiden, probably has to undergo the abduction partly in order to separate from the relationship with the mother, which might not facilitate her becoming herself. It therefore points to the necessity of breaking out of the mode of comfort and safety, not just for the young boy who has to venture out, but equally for the young girl who has to develop her own identity.

It is nevertheless significant that the girl's journey is more passive than that of the boy – she is done to, and does not initiate any of the actions in the story herself. She is acted upon, and it seems that this might be a necessary element of the young woman's journey – to receptively undergo that which comes her way. This also means that later stages of development should be assumed, for if she gets stuck in this mode, she never leads her own life.

Although the story clearly refers to the young maiden at the onset of maturity, in archetypal terms this abduction can happen to both men and women at any age. This particular story is nevertheless told from a feminine perspective, and will be predominantly analysed as it relates to the female psyche. Jung sees this myth largely as a women's myth, with a very strong feminine influence (Jung, 1982:145).

In Jungian terms, the abduction can therefore be seen as a powerful process initiated by the psyche in order to evoke an inner response in an individual, to an inner issue, or to a social, cultural problem. The dark lord of the underworld intrudes, and acts as predator. Hades is neither evil nor the cause of death, but he is a sinister presence, who is dreaded because of his association with the dead in the underworld.

Hades has a grim and pitiless personality, his implacability reflecting the harsh natural law that condemns all living things to death (Harris and Platzner, 2004:190).

This harsh force appears in the psyche in order to bring about a change:

The dark man in women's dreams appears when an initiation – a psychic change from one level of knowing and behaviour to another more mature and more energetic level of knowledge and action – is imminent (Estès, 1992:67).

When a woman first sees the dark force in herself, she is usually filled with terror, because his nature reflects the law of death, and she has come face-to-face with death itself. If this force is suppressed or drugged out of existence, she loses an aspect of herself or of her culture which carries immense potential vitality. Her work is therefore rather to get to know him and to come to terms with him, integrating his power into herself, without succumbing to his terms (Estès, 1992:71).

The image of having been captured or abducted, especially during the adolescent years, but equally at any other age, rings remarkably true for many people. Most people can identify with Persephone, who at a certain point had no control over a vital decision which affected her for the rest of her life. For different people the trigger event may be different, but the sense of being taken against your will into an underground period is known to many. Estès also found this a common theme:

I have come to sense over the years of working with “capture” and “theft of treasure” tales, and from analysing many men and women, that there is in the individuation processes of almost everyone at least a one-time and significant theft (Estès, 1992:263).

The predator, the lord of death, sets a trap in order to abduct Persephone. The trap functions almost like a taboo, which requires an active response from the young female. When she responds and picks the flower, this acts like a death experience, tumbling the young woman or the young aspect of the feminine psyche into an unexpected and resisted landscape of death – an essential step if the resurrection is to be experienced later.

As a psychological and life experience, this initiation could come as a “call to adventure” (Campbell, 1949:49), where the initiate, like Inanna, has the ability and the time to consider, accept or reject, strategise and play with possibilities; or it might come as an abduction by the dark god, Hades, in which case the young girl struggles, but is taken nevertheless.

In the amplification of the theme of Persephone’s abduction, the theme of the taboo emerged more clearly by being compared to the myths of Pandora and Eve as well as the fairy tale of Bluebeard. These tales show that the taboo has to be overridden in order for the necessary movement to occur, and that greater consciousness may be achieved in the process, albeit in a very difficult manner. The fairy tale *Allerleirauh* as well as the accounts of the traditional initiation ceremonies of young girls among the Tembu likewise bring to the fore the withdrawal into an inner space which seems to characterise the coming-of-age transition of young girls of the age of Persephone.

2. The Journey to the Underworld

Persephone’s journey to the underworld carries historical and mythological meaning, and can also be interpreted as a symbolic description of the descent into an underworld of the mind and soul. Both these possibilities will be explored, and similar themes in other myths will be briefly reviewed to see whether they add to our understanding.

The *katabasis* or descent to the underworld is an ancient theme. It most likely developed in relation to the ability of humans to **reflect on death**, which was seen from Mesopotamian times, and perhaps even earlier than that, as a descent to the chthonic level under the earth. Deeply interlinked with this awareness of mortality was an awareness of humankind’s dependence on the bounty of nature for its survival, and of the need to co-operate with the **natural cycles of the seasonal year**.

As Persephone travels away from the Nysian field in the chariot of Hades, she can still see the earth, the sea, the fish, and she hopes that her mother will hear her cry, which echoes from the mountain peaks and from the sea. Demeter does hear, but cannot find her. Soon Persephone disappears into the depths, where Hades takes her to his palace as its new mistress. She is swept away, with no time to prepare, and no wish to be in this underworld palace as the wife of her father's dark brother.

Although the poem only mentions her longing for her mother, we can imagine many other emotions and thoughts going through her mind. She probably misses the sun and the fields, and her friends, the goddesses and nymphs she spent her time with. She has been abducted by a man who promises her his kingdom, and she must start to think about what it would be like to be the queen of the underworld and wife of Hades, an older man. We do not know whether the marriage was consummated at this stage, but she would have thought about the possibility, and as a protected young girl that would possibly have filled her with dread. Amidst all, she knows that her mother will search for her, and she waits.

The descent as a symbol of the psyche's journey to the underworld

Symbolically, in Jungian terms, the journey into the underworld can be seen as a psychological experience, not always of a voluntary nature. It could happen as an initiation into the next life phase, as Persephone was initiated into young womanhood. It could also happen at midlife or retirement, or when the psyche is confronted with something that has to be assimilated. It could signify a period of deep and absorbing emotional and psychological distress. It could merely be a phase of inward reflection and intense dream work. But it will invariably be a period of reflection for the individual, of rejection of the way some things were previously seen, and most often a radical transformation of one's approach to life.

This journey has often been written about, but mostly in symbolic terms, as for instance in Dante's work *The Divine Comedy*. In the first part, *The Inferno*, he starts his account of his journey to the underworld with the well-known words:

When I had journeyed half of our life's way,
I found myself within a shadowed forest,
For I had lost the path (Mandelbaum, 1980:3).

The **landscape** is also different from that of the world above. Odysseus reached Hades by sailing northwards across the River of Ocean, earth's last known boundary. The underworld is further bounded by five rivers – Styx (Abhorrent) is Hades's principal stream, named for a river goddess; Acheron (Distress) is another river which all souls have to cross. Cocytus (Lament) and Phlegethon (Fire flaming) are the next two, and the last one, Lethe, was named later by Plato, as the river of unmindfulness or forgetfulness – having crossed it one forgot everything from one's lifetime. Between the rivers lies a foggy, desolate waste, a landscape of utter hopelessness (Harris and Platzner, 2004:285 – 286).

The entrance to the Sumerian underworld is the palace Ganzir, situated in the Zagros mountains to the northeast of Sumeria. From the description of Inanna's descent, it

seems as if the way to the Sumerian underworld was constructed like a ziggurat, with a staircase containing seven gates or doors. Moreover, the Sumerians believed that there was an axis leading upward from the underworld, through the earth and leading into heaven, where the gods live. It is not unlikely that the Greek idea of the underworld could have been taken over, to some extent, from the Sumerian, as there had been extensive diffusion of mythological and cultural material in the early first millennium B.C., beginning probably in the 9th century B.C. (Penglase, 1994:241).

The rivers in the underworld mirror the landscape of Paradise, as described in Genesis 2:11–14, a landscape influenced by Mesopotamian mythology. One river which originated in Eden branched out into four rivers: the Pison, the Gihon, the Tigris and the Euphrates. As above, so below. In Paradise the Tree of Life stands in the centre of the garden, as it is depicted in numerous works of art.

Edinger tells an old Jewish legend that further explains the Eden landscape:

In paradise there stands the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, the latter forming a hedge about the former. Only he who has cleared a path for himself through the tree of knowledge can come close to the tree of life that is so huge that it could take a man five hundred years to traverse a distance equal to the diameter of the trunk, and no less vast is the space shaded by its crown of branches. From beneath flows the water that irrigates the whole earth, parting thence into four streams, the Ganges, the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates (Edinger, 1992:20).

A landscape therefore emerges which has been read allegorically or symbolically as a reflection of the inner world, by medieval artists, alchemists and Jungian psychologists. The four rivers represent the boundary, while the tree is situated at the centre, representing the “centre” of the personality. In the story above the task is to gain “knowledge”, in the Bible “knowledge of good and evil”, before the centre and the tree of life can be reached.

As the inner journey through the underworld progresses, the person on it often begins to dream of and create mandalas, as a pre-figuration of the integration which is occurring inside him- or herself (Jung, 1974:64). These are a combination of the circle and the square, the one within the other, and reflect the landscape described above – the four rivers forming the square, and the circumference of the tree being a circle.

However it happens, the journey to the underworld is a venture into a different world - everything which was familiar and comfortable has been left behind, and as Persephone screamed violently when she saw the last of the mountains and the stars, so the initiate realises with shock and fear that the landscape is dull, heavy with dark mist, and devoid of the joy of everyday sunshine. The lack of light is also reflected in the appearance of the dead – literally shades, who cannot be touched as they do not exist, as Odysseus discovered when he tried three times to embrace his mother in the underworld. Separated from loved ones in the world above and trapped in a desolate landscape, the mood of the person in the underworld can change to one of dejection, depression, dullness. She is filled with sadness and despondence, and her creativity has disappeared. There may be a sense of hopelessness.

During this process, the ego, which is the centre of the conscious will, the part of ourselves which plans and wants to stay in control of our lives, gradually relinquishes that control, and a higher aspect of the personality, the self, moves to the centre. This happens as the opposites within oneself are acknowledged, and with that awareness comes individuation and the appearance of the self (Edinger, 1992:40; Jung, 1974:64-66). The self is seen by Jung as an archetype, and one does not become the self, but stands in relationship to it, as if to a higher presence within oneself. When this has happened, it is as if the ego is no longer completely in control, but defers, at least sometimes, to the self. This process was termed the creation of the ego-self axis by Edinger (1992: 37–42). The psyche can then move along this axis. (This is a highly complex process which has been oversimplified here.) The more conscious, mature person is then no longer entirely ego-driven, although this is not a once-and-for-all process, but an ongoing one. This also seems to be at the heart of many mystical and religious traditions.

When psychologically interpreted as a midlife or post-midlife experience, the journey to the underworld could therefore possibly be seen as the creation of the axis between ego and self. As Inanna enters the axis between the upper and lower worlds at the palace Ganzir, in order to gain power over both worlds, uniting them under her reign, and as Persephone's abduction leads to the same purpose, making her a goddess on Olympus as well as in Hades, so the initiate is preparing a route for her- or himself, that she or he will be able to travel on afterwards. There is no awareness of this possibility at the onset of the journey, though – nor of the fact that the landscape of the underworld prefigures the mandala of paradise, with four surrounding rivers to each. It becomes, at a deeply symbolic level, the journey to the centre of the psyche, with the centre, “itself virtually unknowable - act[ing] like a magnet on the disparate materials and processes of the unconscious and gradually captur[ing] them as in a crystal lattice” (Jung, 1974:291).



Jung continues:

If the process is allowed to take its course... then the central symbol, constantly renewing itself, will steadily and consistently force its way through the apparent chaos of the personal psyche and its dramatic entanglements... Often one has the impression that the personal psyche is running around this central point like a shy animal, at once fascinated and frightened, always in flight, and yet steadily drawing nearer (Jung, 1974:291–292).

If well contained this phase could lead to the re-emergence of Persephone from Hades and the re-establishment of the natural cycles of life and growth. What made a difference to Persephone in the underworld was the fact that she remained connected to her mother, and that she relied, at some level, on the knowledge that something would happen. When Hermes found her, she was seated on a bed with Hades, but unwilling to be there, and uninvolved with Hades. She hadn't eaten or truly made herself at home.

This can be read as a vital part of the psychagogic process. Being held and contained in thought by someone who cares is a certain way to find one's path out of the netherworld. Equally, one can position an inner part of oneself in the upper world,

searching and watching and plotting like Demeter. The work the psyche does at this time, while waiting in the half-dark, is often pre-verbal.

Here the amplification of similar myths may be helpful to clarify the process of the descent into the underworld. Hercules was sent to Hades to perform the last of his labours: kidnapping Cerberus - an ultimate test of courage and willpower. Odysseus was sent there by Circe to get advice about how to get home, but also as a test of his courage and endurance. Dionysus searched for his mother, Semele, and Orpheus for his wife. Psyche had to fetch a casket for Aphrodite in order to regain her husband, Eros. All of them needed courage to attempt the journey, and endurance to complete it.

If the journey is endured, in the way that Persephone, Odysseus or Psyche endured it, as a trial, and if the initiate is able to look Hades in the face, in the eyes, confronting an image of her own mortality and of death which looms in the shadows of the landscape, a breakthrough can occur. The gifted Jungian analyst Clarissa Pinkola Estès writes:

Much of our knowledge of the Life/Death/Life nature is contaminated by our fear of death. Therefore our ability to move with the cycles of the Life/Death/Life nature is quite frail. These forces do not “do something” to us. They are not thieves who rob us of the things we cherish. This nature is not a hit-and-run driver who smashes what we value.

No, the Life/Death/Life forces are part of our own nature, an inner authority that knows the steps, knows the dance of Life and Death. It is composed of the parts of ourselves who know when something can, should, and must be born and when it must die. It is a deep teacher if we can only learn its tempo (Estès, 1992:136).

If Jane Harrison's idea is accepted that Demeter was the goddess whose function of seeding the earth and allowing things to grow lies **in** the earth, while Persephone's role as goddess of the dead was a function **under** the earth (Harrison, 1908:271-276), for the inner work we are discussing, this could mean that the archetypal qualities of Demeter could be the energy to consider if a woman is working with the natural cycles of her life. Persephone, who developed the ability to enter and emerge from the underworld, could provide the archetypal energy to deal with the deeper journey towards the self, and the forging of the ego-self axis.

When the breakthrough comes, the ego-self axis suddenly breaks into conscious view (Edinger, 1992:69). But we are running ahead, for this happens to Persephone only when Hermes arrives and she sees the chariot and the way out. However, because she stayed her time, she will also be able to reap the first fruits of this harvest. Estès says that the gains for someone who has endured this trial will include a fierce resolve to live consciously, knowing what is happening to one, without denial; it will show the initiate what it is that is really important in her life; it will bring about the determination in the initiate to create her own freedom, psychically or otherwise, and it will create the ability that Persephone developed, of being able to mediate between both worlds, the upper and the lower - to travel in and out along the access route that was forged (Estès, 1992:263).

The way in which the journey to the underworld symbolises the inner psychological journey in Jungian terms, and also the task all human beings face of preparing for death, was dealt with here. In her role of conducting souls about, which she shares with Hermes, and in her emergence from the underworld for a part of the year, Persephone develops the ability to function in different spheres, and to move between them.

3. The controlling but absent father

In the hymn Zeus arranges the marriage by abduction of his daughter with his brother, Hades. This arrangement is made between the two men, with no consultation with either mother or daughter. Zeus acts as patriarch, absolute ruler on Olympus and on earth, and definitely within his own household.

Even if he had consulted Demeter or Persephone, it is unlikely that he would have changed his mind if they had spoken out against the plan. In the Iliad, when Hera guessed that Thetis, the mother of Achilles, had influenced Zeus to let the battle go against the Akhaians, she confronted him. He first tried to be conciliatory, but when she persisted in favour of the Greeks, he said:

“But there is not one thing you can do about it,
only estrange yourself still more from me –
all the more gall for you. If what you say
is true, you may be sure it pleases me.
And now you just sit down, be still, obey me,
or else not all the gods upon Olympos
can help in the least when I approach your chair
to lay my inexorable hands upon you.”
At this the wide-eyed lady Hera feared him,
and sat quite still, and bent her will to his (Harris and Platzner, 1995:266-267).

This reflects the way in which the true patriarch operates. He might try other ways, for the sake of peace, but in the final analysis his word is absolute law and he defends his power with violence, if need be. Because he wields absolute power, not “all the gods upon Olympos” (Harris & Platzner, 1995:267) would resist his will, once it has been expressed.

Zeus is not a bad father in Greek mythology. Homer describes him as ‘benevolent and gentle as a father’ (in Kast, 1997:121). Towards Apollo and Hermes he acts with care and solicitude; to Athene he is a caring and supportive parent. They are an extension of his realm and of his power, and he takes care of them. When Persephone realises that she is being taken, she cries to Zeus, expecting his protection, but he has seen to it that he is out of earshot. He has made a strategic arrangement with his brother, presumably intending to unite the upper and lower worlds in marriage, and this agreement is his honour; he will not renege on it. He therefore absents himself for most of the time Persephone is away, until he can no longer do so.

In her study on how different archetypes could be reflected in the personality of men, Jungian analyst Jean Shinoda Bolen writes:

For the Zeus archetype, whose primary meaning comes through establishing a realm, marriage is also a means through which alliances are made and power is consolidated... Patriarchal marriages in all cultures are alliances between families, in which property and progeny are the main concern (Bolen, 1989: 53).

The young girl or woman with an absent father has important psychological work to do for herself in her maturity. She has to activate within herself the energy of being in the outside world, as a competent, well organised and independent person, taking on tasks which she wants to undertake in a balanced and measured way. To the extent that her father had been available to her she would have gained these skills unconsciously. To the extent that he was absent she will have to work at them. In Jungian terms she has to develop a well-functioning animus, but not be driven by it.

Moreover, if she spent her youth in a patriarchal family or society, she would maybe, like Hera above, “sit quite still, and fear him, and bend her will to his” (Foley, 1994:267).

She will also find it easier to act in her own interest if she had had a mother who gave her what she needed when she needed it – which leads us to an examination of the role of Demeter in the life of Persephone.

4. The mother’s search for her daughter

In this *motifeme* the hymn moves beyond the use of archaic stock themes and achieves a depth of emotion and character description which elevates it to the level of the timeless and universal literature of all ages. (See lines 33–50 on p. 36.)

The poet, rather than telling us about Demeter’s rage and pain, shows us her anguish. She tears her veil, puts on a dark mantle and shoots out, not wasting a moment. We can identify with the urgency she feels – perhaps she is still in time, perhaps she can still rescue her daughter. As her search continues, she gradually realises that she might not be successful, but she does not give up, does not stop for food or drink or rest. And all the while she grieves, for she already misses the softness of her child’s body under her hands, already knows that she might not see her again. She is in agony because she can imagine the suffering of her daughter, and knows that Persephone is pining for her and for the assistance she would have been able to give had she been with her.

When she realises what has happened, after speaking to Hekate and Helios on the tenth day, she makes up her mind not to give up or give in until she has her daughter back. Persephone likewise sits in a depression in the underworld, thinking about her mother. What does this say to us about the quality of Demeter’s mothering?

We could probably say that Demeter’s mothering comes across as wonderfully good mothering, and that the bond she has made with her daughter might be the strongest bond in both their lives. It is the bond that keeps Persephone hoping and waiting, for she knows that her mother will act. She also knows her mother is powerful, and can use her power.

There is, however, also a shadow side to the intensity of this mother-daughter bond. A number of experienced psycho-analysts tell us that if this were a human relationship, there might have been a danger that the daughter would not have developed her own identity, her own thoughts, and her own decision-making ability (Kast, 1997:61; Edinger, 1994:42; Bolen, 1984:190).

Estès says that the young woman, or the woman of any age who has to discover her own self-reliance, has to accept that the “ever-watchful, hovering, protective psychic mother” is not the guide she needs in order to grow and find herself.

While we always retain a core of her warmth, this natural psychic transition leaves us on our own in a world that is not motherly to us (Estès, 1992:81).

Using the knowledge we have about Demeter and a modern psycho-analytical approach, Downing sketches an intriguing and slightly absurd scenario: Demeter bore a child, with Zeus the philanderer as father. Because he was philandering all over creation, and was moreover married to someone else, she raised Persephone almost as a single mother, and gave her her all. She probably needed to do this for her own sake too, to make up for the childhood she never had, as Cronos devoured her and her siblings until they were rescued by Zeus (Downing, 1994:140). And now that the time has come for the father to re-enter the scene in order to arrange a marriage for Persephone, Demeter has to let go and release her daughter, a difficult task for her under any circumstances. But it happens without any preparation and in a violent way and she is in anguish. When she discovers that Zeus arranged it, she is enraged. She cannot challenge him outright, but she can withhold growth and fertility, forcing his hand.

This scenario illustrates what Ann Suter calls “a general effort in the Archaic age (800-500 B.C.E.) to organize divinities under the Pan Hellenic, patriarchal rule of Zeus on Olympos” (Suter, 2002:23). Inanna, the Sumerian goddess, could act in terms of her own will, her own intentions, and face the consequences of her own actions. Demeter is constrained by the will of Zeus, although she has power over life and death, an important card that she now plays.

So Demeter, whose name means *mother* and possibly *corn mother* (although the meaning of the De is not certain) is in the first place nurturer and caregiver. As archetypal mother her relationship with especially with her daughter who shares her functions, is very important (Harrison, 1908:263 – 272). She is also the outstanding example in Greek mythology of a mother with a close relationship with her daughter, and it is difficult to find other myths to compare this relationship to.

The mother/daughter relationship is extremely complex, however it configures. Between most mothers and daughters there are elements of deep love, competition, anger, loyalty, dependence and interdependence. Most women, and many men as well, can ask the question whether you ever really come to a place of balance and peace in your relationship with your mother. At the same time this relationship is responsible for so much of one’s ability to be caring, giving, relational, enduring; for the formation and development of ego-strength, for the joy you are able to feel about your life.

The determination of Demeter to fight for her daughter is seen by Adrienne Rich, American poet, as an “enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture” (Downing, 1994:115). It is the sustained commitment of a mother who puts her daughter above all else, and whose love renders the miracle of the return of Persephone from the dead. It is also an encouragement for mothers to honour this relationship and deep, primary bond from one generation to the next.

5. The witnesses: Hekate and Helios

Hekate

Why would there be witnesses to the abduction of Persephone? Richardson tells us that it is customary in mythology and folktales to approach the sun, the moon and the stars for information (1974:156). At a time when all of nature was deified and had a numinous function, it would have made excellent sense to consult the light-bearing deities. This is linked to augury, asking “those who know” what is really happening - the talent Hermes wanted from Apollo in exchange for his shepherd’s pipe, and which Hekate also became associated with, probably long before the precocious baby Hermes was born. So, as moon goddess, she appears as first witness.

In order to understand her role, we have to know more about her.

On the morning of the tenth day after Demeter’s search started, Hekate appears to her. She has waited nine days after having heard Persephone cry. As goddess of the underworld and unconscious realm she might have sensed that Demeter needed to undertake the search for Persephone herself first, that this period of moving around to find the truth was somehow necessary. Although it is a shining dawn, she holds a torch, as if she has just come from a cave. She reports what she heard, the same cry Demeter had heard, and joins Demeter in her search.


Pectora tabulant oculus caeli

Hekate is usually associated with the chthonic and “uncanny” aspects of the underworld goddesses. She seems to have come from Caria in Asia Minor to Greece (Richardson, 1974:155), and as such she is thought to be associated with older forms of goddess worship. Some of her characteristics as underworld goddess are that she is three-headed and can look in three directions. On an engraved gem from Rome, depicted in Neumann’s *The Great Mother*, she appears as a crowned three-headed goddess, with three pairs of hands, holding a pair of daggers, a pair of lashes, and a set of torches. She is flanked by a pair of open-mouthed serpents (Neumann, 1972:169). The dagger, the lash and the torch, together with the key, are her attributes. Cirlot describes her as an aspect of the “Terrible Mother” and a “devourer of men” (Cirlot, 1962:143).

Hekate is also the goddess of the three-way crossroads. At these crossroads there would often have been a column or statue of the goddess with three heads, called the triple Hekates. She was said to send demons to earth at night to torment men, and to visit and haunt crossroads, tombs and crime scenes. On the eve of full moon offerings would be left at her statues to propitiate her. She was said to travel from the underworld with a retinue of infernal dogs – enough to ensure that visitors avoided three-way crossroads after dark! She was, however, also a giver of wisdom, riches and victory. She watched

over the flocks and presided over navigation. In the underworld she was called Prytania of the dead or *Invincible Queen*. She presided over purifications and expiations, and was goddess of enchantments and magic charms (Guirand, 1959:165, 166).

Hekate was also the moon goddess. Richardson says that this association with Hekate as moon goddess only appears with certainty in the Hellenic period but Foley maintains nevertheless that her appearance from a cave suggests such associations even at this time (Richardson, 1974:156; Foley, 1994:39). As moon goddess she is part of a trilogy of goddesses: Selene in heaven, Artemis on earth and Hekate in the underworld.

In the hymn her chthonic characteristics are not evident, and she appears a “healthy, independent and open-minded goddess” (West in Richardson, 1974:155). Nevertheless, the readers or listeners in antiquity would have known who she was, and would have experienced awe in her presence.

As moon-goddess, she might suggest, in Jungian terms, the importance of “walking into the shadow”, or that the journey might venture into parts of the psyche that are uncomfortable to look into. This engagement is however essential (Jacobi, 1968:109) and the shadow is often the first archetype encountered on the inward journey – as Demeter meets Hekate first.

Like the communication between Demeter and Hekate, this encounter is at a deeper level than the verbal and rational. If the meeting with Hekate does not take place, Helios can dominate the experience with rationalisation, and the deeper gains of the journey could be lost. However, Helios brings a balance into the situation, and he must be met as well.

Helios

Demeter flies off to the Sun, her paternal and maternal uncle, because he sees everything and will be able to tell her what had happened. For the first nine days she flew around mindlessly, stopping for nothing, frantically searching for her daughter. Then, on the tenth day – ten being a symbol of completion – Hekate knows that it is time to initiate the next stage, and acts as a mediator to bring Demeter to the insight that it is appropriate to now gain access to all the known facts. The time spent in chaos has not brought Demeter any closer to a solution, but it has cleared her mind. She needs to speak to Helios.

Helios was the son of the Titan Hyperion, son of Gaia and Uranos, by his sister Theia or by Euryphaessa. In Greece the cult of Helios was very ancient and was practised throughout the country, but especially at Rhodos, an island which was sacred to him. Here his huge, thirty meter high image stood astride the harbour walls, the work of the sculptor Chares and one of the wonders of the ancient world.

Every morning Helios was said to rise from a swamp in the East, formed by the river-ocean which girdles the earth, in the far-off land of the Ethiopians. The Horae then harnessed his horses to his golden chariot, made by Hephaestos. The nine horses were dazzling white and breathed flame. He reached the mid-point of heaven by midday, and then descended towards the west, where he plunged into the ocean. A barge with his

family on awaited him there, and they sailed back overnight to the east, while he slept. The following day he was ready to undertake the next journey, which he, untiringly, never missed (Guirand, 1959:139).

Helios is said to have owned property on earth, and the famous cattle which were such a temptation to Odysseus's men. His love life was however less fortunate than his work record, which is there for everyone to see. Because he saw everything, he informed Hephaestus of the relationship between his wife, Aphrodite, with Ares, the god of war. Aphrodite avenged herself by causing him to fall in love with Leucothea, daughter of the king of Babylon. He took the disguise of her mother's image to approach her, but her sister, Clytie, told her father, and his beloved was buried alive. Helios tried in vain to restore her to life with his rays. In the end, he instead turned her into a shrub.

He also loved the nymph Anaxibia, who however fled and whom he could not find again. He rose into the sky at Anatiolus, meaning Ascension, possibly trying to trace her, however did not manage to. He furthermore had numerous wives and children (Guirand, 1959:142).

In the Sumerian hymn the pattern of consulting the Sun god also exists (Penglase, 1994:134), thus creating another link with the more ancient poem.

The picture we have of Helios at this stage is therefore of a sky god who is very dedicated to his function, which always remains the same. He is reliable but not innovative, and is not really successful at relationships. Helios's is the voice of patriarchal logic, of institutionalised wisdom, and although he represents the insights of society, he refuses to enter into the individual case, though he expresses sympathy and pity. We are therefore not entirely surprised by the discussion between him and Demeter.

Helios starts off by admitting that he had seen all – Persephone was abducted by her uncle, Hades. But, he continues, why be so distressed? It is a good match – and he goes on to emphasise the patriarchal arguments – this is a good alliance, he has a kingdom of his own, is related by blood, accept it. Of Hades' more sinister side, and of his kingdom's darkness, he doesn't speak (Foley, 1994:40).

Demeter however sees right through his arguments, and now, with the certain knowledge that Zeus was responsible for this abduction, she goes from depression to anger:

A more terrible and brutal grief seized the heart of Demeter,
angry now at the son of Kronos with his dark clouds (Foley, 1994:6).

Her anger enables her to take a dramatic decision – she will withdraw her bounty from gods and men, and will not relent until her daughter is returned to her.

In inner work, depression often hides anger, and can become that anger turned against oneself. Once the anger is experienced and expressed, not necessarily against the other, one can find direction, and often new energy.

Allowing oneself to be taught by one's rage, thereby transforming it, disperses it. One's energy returns to use in other areas, especially the area of creativity (Estès, 1992:352).

In Jungian language, Helios can be said to represent reason; the function of looking down on a given situation and casting light onto it. To some extent this is the opposite of what Hekate offers, but as essential. Although Jung emphasises the important role of reason in inner work, he also makes the point repeatedly that reason has many limits, and does not explain everything (Shelburne, 1988:112).

Demeter's anger and pain first lead her to the world of humans – in fact to Eleusis, not far from Athens.

6. The story-in-the-story: Demeter at Eleusis

Structural elements

An interruption of the *motifemes* of the hymn occurs at this stage. A different movement is introduced, away from the deep archetypal themes related to the abduction to and return from the underworld, which follow one another up to this point. The poet has a different task here, and the themes which were to a large extent taken over from the Sumerian myth of Inanna, or from other myths based on similar *motifemes* as the Sumerian story, are now interrupted in order to tell a story within the story which will act as charter for the Eleusinian Mysteries. This conclusion is supported by the fact that there is no similar interruption in the Sumerian myth of Damu where the mother starts to look for and finds the child immediately upon discovering that he has been taken to the underworld (Penglase, 1994:150).

Another interesting aspect of the Eleusis story is that it structurally and verbally shows remarkable parallels to the *Odyssey*, which suggests that the author may have used the *Odyssey* in writing this part of the hymn. Richardson remarks on the close similarities between Demeter's "false tale" and those of Odysseus, and also on some verbal parallels between the *Hymn to Demeter* and *The Odyssey* (Richardson, 1974:180). He then concludes that this suggests "that the poet of the *Hymn* may have had this part of the *Odyssey* in mind" (Richardson, 1974:180).

If Richardson is right, and the poet of the *Hymn to Demeter* had indeed based some material on the *Odyssey*, it opens up the possibility that the poet might have actually used some of the *motifemes* of the *Odyssey* in composing the part of the story which is situated at Eleusis, and for which he could not use the received or traditional *motifemes*, as he wanted to say something new about the connection of the *Hymn* to the Mysteries. I might not have reached a valid conclusion here, but the evidence is interesting enough to consider.

In a recent study on the structure of the *Odyssey*, Bruce Loudon did a thematic analysis in which he identified a series of eight *motifemes*, although he does not use the term nor refers to the work of Propp. It is particularly interesting that the themes repeat three times, in the encounter of Odysseus with Circe, with Nausicaa and with Penelope.

Together, the three-fold repetition makes up the structure of the whole of the *Odyssey*, with an intermezzo in the middle:

- A1: Ithaca: book 1 – 4 (Penelope)
- B1: Skheria, book 9 – 11.332 (Nausicaa)
- C1: Aiaia, book 9 – 11 (Circe)
- Intermezzo: Underworld
- C2: Aiaia: book 11.383 – 12
- B2: Skheria: book 13.1–187a
- A2: Ithaca: book 13.187b-24

The functions or *motifemes* are:

1. Odysseus, as earlier prophesied, arrives at an island, disoriented and ignorant of his location (Aiaia, Skheria, Ithaca)
2. A divine helper advises him how to approach a powerful female figure who controls access to the next phase of his homecoming and points out difficulties regarding a band of young men
3. His identity is secret (as approach to the feminine is perilous.) Odysseus reaches her, a figure initially suspicious, distant, even hostile. Later there are sexual overtures.
4. The female imposes a test on him, whereupon Odysseus passes the test and gets access to the next phase of his journey. The understanding is made manifest in a bath, and he is offered marriage or sexual union.
5. However, conflict arises between Odysseus and the band of young men, who abuse Odysseus and violate divine interdiction.
6. The leader of the band has the parallel name of Eury –
7. The band's consequent death, earlier prophesied, is demanded by a wrathful god.
8. A divine consultation limits the extent of the death and destruction (Louden, 1999:1-30).

Although Demeter's functions or actions in the Eleusis story are not exactly similar, there is a similarity in the pattern, for instance:

1. Demeter arrives at Eleusis, depressed and angry
2. Four young human helpers advise her how to approach a powerful female figure who might be helpful to her
3. Her identity is secret
4. Demeter imposes a test – she will grant Demophoön immortality, but this should also remain secret
5. The divine interdict is violated and conflict arises
6. Demophoön's death, although inevitable in other versions of the myth, is averted in the hymn.

There is therefore a possibility that the author of the poem could have used the *Odyssey* as a guide to a series of *motifemes* which he could transform into a story which served his purpose, namely to introduce the Eleusinian Mysteries into the poem in a coded language. Because of the difference in the story line, the human and divine actions are reversed in the first two functions, with Demeter being the “human” suppliant while the

young women are “like goddesses.” From the fourth action onwards there is a freer use of the pattern.

This might be an answer to Penglase: “The question raised is where the material in this section could have come from, since the events do not parallel those found in the myths of either Inanna and Dumuzi/Damu or of any other deity” (Penglase, 1994:150). He explores the possibility of it being influenced by the myth of Isis and Osiris, but maintains that it is clearly not the source – the myth of Demeter is earlier than that of Isis and Osiris.

If the Eleusis story were based on the *motifemes* in the *Odyssey*, it would emphasise the extent to which *motifemes* were used in the composition of literary works in antiquity.

The Eleusis story as a charter for the Mysteries

It seems certain that the Eleusis story was written as a kind of code, in which various aspects of the Mysteries are introduced within the story line. These will be discussed below.

An interesting thesis is that of Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood that the Eleusinian cult acquired an eschatological and mysteric component in the early 6th century B.C. as a result of historical occurrences at that time, and that the shift was

from an acceptance of a familiar (hateful but not frightening) death, to the appearance of attitudes of greater anxiety and a more individual acceptance of one’s death, conducive to the creation of eschatologies involving a happy afterlife and above all, of reassuring religious responses, of which the Mysteries is an important instance (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003:28).

If this is so, this shift might not have been unrelated to the composing of the hymn. However that may be, the poet took care to link the secret ritual elements of the Mysteries into the hymn in the Eleusis story. Kerényi suggests that the ritual tasks of the *mystae* imitated the goddesses as far as this was possible (Kerényi, 1967:33). Furthermore, some of the ritualistic aspects described below are also thought to have referred to the Thesmophoria, such as the jests of Iambe and others.

Demeter’s disguise

The disguise of a god or goddess is a familiar theme in epic. Hera disguised herself as a priestess in Aeschylus, and as an old nurse in Ovid and other later sources. When Odysseus wakes up and sees Nausicaa on Skheria, he addresses her as if she were a goddess in disguise, and asks for help. When he meets Athena on Ithaca, he supplicates her -“as a god”- and “is double-bluffed, since she is one” (Richardson, 1974:179,180, 182). In the examples of Hera above, the similarity is even closer, as she also disguises herself as an old woman.

Demeter’s disguise as a barren, post-menopausal woman is ironic in a goddess who has power over all growth, and resonates with the famine she is about to cause (Foley,

1994:41). She extends the disguise by offering a false story about her Cretan past, and how she was sold into slavery, but escaped.

It is however not clear that “disguise” was a theme in the Mysteries. A more direct connotation is probably the awareness the disguise of Demeter would have created in people attending the Mysteries that the god or goddess could be present in an unexpected form anywhere. This would have created the possibility for an experience of epiphany at any time, and would thus have opened the *mystae*²⁰ up to a different level of spiritual and psychological experience.

The Maiden’s Well or *Parthenion*

The maiden’s well has clear connotations of young female sexuality, and the historical wells in ancient towns where young women collected water were usually outside the town walls, so that these often became the setting for seduction, abductions, for secret meetings, and for love. On many ancient water urns such scenes are depicted (Foley, 1994:41).

For weddings water was often drawn from special springs and wells, and the Maiden’s Well in the hymn was probably a well with such special associations. It therefore links the daughters of Celeus to Persephone. Furthermore, drawing water from a well and carrying it in a water urn was also a feature of the cults of Demeter and Persephone (Foley, 1994:41).

In later versions of the myth Demeter is seated beside the *Kallichoron* well (well of beautiful dances) or by the *Agelastos Petra* (the rock without laughter). The *Parthenion* has not been discovered, but might be the same as the *Kallichoron*, which still exists (Richardson, 1974:180; Foley, 1994:42).

The *Agelastos Petra* lies to the right of the Sacred Road, and can still be seen today. It is situated inside a rock overhang, and a deeper cave which opens downward suggests the reason for the dedication of the place to the god of the underworld and for the little sheltered temple of Pluto (Kerenyi, 1967:38, Clinton, 1992: 24, 37). The landscape itself is said to have a numinous quality, and it is small wonder that from earliest antiquity it was seen as sacred. Particularly the belief that the cave sheltered an entrance to the underworld might have contributed to the development of the cult of the two goddesses.

The *Kallichoron* well in its present form has been in existence since archaic times, and the margin around it was built in the sixth century (Kerenyi, 1967:71). The ritual probably began with the *mystae* dancing around the well. That would have been a joyous occasion, postulates Clinton, with them anticipating the reunion of mother and daughter. Directly afterwards they would have entered the cave, where a figure representing Demeter would have been seated on the “rock without laughter”, and they would have been struck by her sorrow. They would now have entered the area where the earth opens up to the underworld, and the fear of that space would have added to the emotions experienced (Clinton, 1992:28f).

²⁰ The *mystae* were new initiates who attended the Mysteries for the first time.

The *mystae* at a certain point joined in the search for Persephone, and searched in the dark. Although there were some female attendants with torches, it was only when Persephone presumably appeared that great light filled the space – a great fire which could be seen from far away as well as the light of torches being thrown. These accounts are however fragmentary and unreliable, and we do not really know what happened. The one thing which is generally agreed on is that the closing ceremony was concluded with the exhibition of an oar of wheat.

The ritual therefore probably aimed to create an experience of chaos and disorientation in the initiate, by recreating the emotional and psychological experience of Demeter and Persephone's suffering. This is related to the emotional journey to the underworld, discussed in an earlier section.

Demeter's arrival at the house of Celeus conforms to another typical schema of *Journey and Visit*, a sequence identified by Arend, according to Richardson:

1. Journey: Demeter's sorrow
2. Arrival: she goes through the portico
3. Situation: the girls join their mother
4. 4.1: Visitor stands in doorway: the epiphany
4.2: Reaction of host(ess): Metaneira is amazed
4.3: She rises
4.4: Takes by hand: omitted
4.5: Leads in: omitted
4.6: Offers seat: she rejects the seat, accepts the stool with silver fleece
4.7 & 4.8: Offer of food and drink. Refusal of wine, accepts cyceon.
5. Conversation (Richardson, 1974:205).

The epiphany experienced by Metaneira mirrors that of the initiate. It is associated with the supernatural stature of the goddess, with divine radiance which she exudes, and with the awe, amazement and terror experienced by the onlookers. Like the initiate, Metaneira does not realise who it is she sees, until much later. In the situation the initiate experiences terror and amazement in the initial stages, and later great light or illumination. Throughout there is an emphasis on just looking and seeing – the awe the person experiences prevents him or her from speaking (Richardson, 1974:208, 209).

The maidens running towards Demeter

The beautiful scene where the maidens run towards the seated, mourning goddess in her dark cloak, simultaneously introduces a freer literary style than that of the earlier epic poetry. This excerpt is quoted in Boer's translation:

And like deer, like calves in the season of Spring
who leap in the meadow when they're glutted with food,
they ran out on the hollow road,
lifting first the folds of their lovely gowns
and around their shoulders their hair, like crocus bloom, shot out (Boer,
1970:106).

This scene probably also anticipated the ritual dancing mentioned above, which could have been led by the priestesses, of whom the daughters of Celeus were the prototypes. Their flowing robes and free-flowing hair are probably features of the cult, and the initiates are thought to have worn white clothes, in contrast to the dark robes of Demeter (Richardson, 1974:201). Foley says that the female initiates ended their procession with all-night dancing, and that the torch-lit search for Persephone may have been part of the proceedings (Foley, 1994:46).

The stool with the silver fleece

From illustrations of initiations like that of Hercules, we know that the *mystae* sat on a stool covered by the white fleece of a ram. On the Lovatelli urn Hercules's stool was covered by his lion skin; in other reliefs he sits on a ram's fleece, and it is assumed that the lion skin was introduced to identify Hercules. The fleece used by him is the sacred fleece of a ram sacrificed to Zeus *Meilichios* (Richardson, 1974:212).

Although the exact meaning of the fleece in this context is not known, the fleece has a long history in Greek mythology. The Golden Fleece was obtained by Jason with the help of Medea and the other Argonauts. It became the symbol to the Greeks of the protection of the gods.

The silver fleece might have had connotations of divine protection too, but while gold is the colour of the sun, silver is the moon colour – it could therefore have an association with the moon as the feminine. While the golden fleece gave the heroes of Greece protection, the silver fleece is sat on, apparently while the initiate is veiled, and about to see and experience the life and death secrets of the goddesses.

One can imagine the role of the fleece in ancient Greece. It was protection against winter cold, a source of wool and clothing, and an everyday comfort. The silver fleece is therefore a grounded symbol, of and from nature, and of the goddess who provides the bounty of nature.

The sequence, parallelism and repetition of Demeter's behaviour emphasises the ritual nature of her actions: her sitting-down, her sorrow, her silence, her refusal of food followed by acceptance. The ritual is also specifically referred to in line 211: *for the sake of the rite* (Richardson, 1974:211).

The veil

The veil is a symbol of bereavement (Foley, 1994:37), and has been into our own time. When Demeter draws the veil over her face, she retreats into an inner world, where she is locked into her own sorrow for her daughter. Metaneira, her daughters and servants feel helpless. The goddess is in a space where she sees something they do not, and also has access to knowledge they do not share.

The veil also refers to the rites at Eleusis (Foley, 1994:45).

The fast: purification

Demeter accepts no food or drink. Since Persephone disappeared she has fasted, and it is a sign of her unwillingness to live as if nothing has happened, or to continue with her ordinary life.

For the initiate the fast becomes a withdrawal from everyday life. The fast was not a complete one, but abstinence from meat and wine for a period, probably the nine days of Demeter's search.²¹ It signals that ordinary life has come to a standstill, and there is a purification in anticipation of the revelation of the Mysteries. Fasting also contributes to a heightened awareness, which will enable the initiate to fully experience the revelations which are to follow.

Apart from the fast, the initial purification of initiate in the sea at Athens was also a crucial part of the process. Harrison says: "The gist of it all is purification", and quotes Clement:

Not unreasonably among Greeks in their mysteries do ceremonies of purification hold the initial place (in Harrison, 1908:154).

The jests of Iambe

Iambe is the eponym of the iambic rhythm. The rhythm in the hymn, especially in line 204, imitates the way in which Demeter reluctantly relents:

"...knowing Iambe jested with her and
mocking with many a joke moved the holy goddess
to smile and laugh and keep a gracious heart" (Foley, 1994:12).

At this time, the Iambic poetic tradition was associated with ritual obscenity and/or insult, giving us a clue as to what she probably said. Iambe's jokes gradually penetrate Demeter's wall of sorrow, and initially reluctantly, later more openly, as the rhythm of the Greek text imitates, Demeter smiles, laughs, and returns to life (Richardson, 1974:213, 215, Foley, 1994:45).

In the ritual, these obscene and insulting jokes are a part of the procession between Athens and Eleusis. At the bridge over the Kephistos River people along the road address these jokes to the initiates as they pass, and particularly to those who are of a higher social standing. Some of these jokes would most likely have been in iambics (Dillon, 1997:65, Richardson, 1974:214).

The barley drink

Demeter refuses wine, but accepts a barley potion, again clearly related to the rite. The grain which the *kykeon* was made of was partially, not fully pounded, and not baked, but just mixed with water and pennyroyal or mint. The drink is therefore associated

²¹ No wine was consumed during the period of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

with a primitive stage of human life, and “links her with the life of bread eaters on earth” (Foley, 1994:88).

Pennyroyal has medicinal qualities, and is above all a women’s remedy. It could be used as a contraceptive and an abortifacient, and in birthing and nursing the newborn. It is unlikely that there would be any truth in the theory that the *kykeon* had a hallucinatory effect – “indeed, the mild and medicinal quality of the drink may explain its suitability for breaking a fast” (Foley, 1994:47).

So, the *mystae* also broke their fast with the *kykeon*, probably soon after their arrival in Eleusis, although it is uncertain when exactly (Dillon, 1997:66).

Caring for Demophoön

The fact that Demeter undertook to care for Demophoön, and made an effort to immortalise him which failed, is a difficult part of the hymn to analyse. It is unrelated to any other known myth, and its relation to the teaching in the Mysteries or to the ritual is unclear.

To some extent the goddess becomes more human in this section, and the reader can see her compensating for the loss of her immortal daughter by taking Demophoön as her own and making an effort to give him immortality. Also, Metaneira was not consulted, in the same way that Zeus did not take Demeter’s wishes into account when he arranged Persephone’s marriage. Metaneira’s reaction is a poignant cry:

“Demophoön, my child, the stranger buries you
Deep in the fire, causing me woe and bitter cares” (Foley, 1994:14).

Foley says that in the final analysis “narratological considerations are most important here. Demophoön’s story serves above all in the Hymn to motivate the foundation of the Mysteries (because Demeter has failed to immortalize a mortal) and to stress the tragic inevitability of the mortal lot” (Foley, 1994:114).

Dramatically, this episode also adds to the development of the story, and gives the author an opportunity to develop the character of Demeter.

In conclusion, the visit to Eleusis is used ingeniously to link not only the various ritual elements associated with the Mysteries to the story, without giving away any information to those who did not have it before, but also the great overarching themes of the myth as a whole: that the goddess will see to the ongoing cycles and fertility of nature, and that she will also guide the human pilgrim in his or her confrontation with their own mortality.

7. Withdrawal and return

After Demeter’s outbreak against the “folly” of Metaneira, she demands that the citizens of Eleusis build her a temple. They do so, and she withdraws to it, away from Olympus. The story now continues where it broke off when Demeter reached Eleusis.

She is furious with Zeus, and causes the earth to be infertile. This situation endures until Zeus, through Hermes, arranges the return of Persephone, and she

sent forth fruit from the fertile fields
and the whole wide earth burgeoned with leaves
and flowers (Foley, 1994:26).

The withdrawal and return *motifeme*, which was referred to under the *journey to the underworld*, is the central theme and can thus be said to be the central *motifeme* of the hymn. It is the carrier for the two key themes of the myth: the cyclic patterns in nature, and the death and resurrection theme.

This was, in all probability, a core theme in the development of religious thought in pre-historic times and in early antiquity. The continuation through time of the themes of birth and death, through the cyclic patterns in nature, was one of the key conclusions reached by Frazer in his analysis of fertility myths. It has been much debated due to the methodology he followed in his study *The Golden Bough*.²² Although his comparative method is no longer credible, it does not mean that his original material was invalid. The large number of myths found the world over on the Corn-mother (or Wheat Mother) probably indicate that she was an important deity in pre-historic and early historical times, who was associated with the seasonal cycles of wheat and other grains (Frazer, 1987:431–447).

Suter quotes Mircea Eliade in this regard:

Eleusinian initiation descends directly from an agricultural ritual centred around the death and resurrection of a divinity controlling the fertility of the fields (Suter, 2002:78).

As it manifests in the story of Inanna and Dumuzi, the withdrawal stories deal with the way in which the unknown underground existence is opened up and accessed by the goddess of light, of heaven and earth, of love and procreation, growth and new life. Her sister, Ereshkigal, is pregnant in the underworld, and life also comes forth from there. Nevertheless, Inanna conceives the ambition or ideal to spread her power to the lower world as well. She manages this, as we have seen, but has to send a substitute, in fact two substitutes through the intervention of Geshtinanna, for parts of the year. She thus initiates a yearly cyclic experience, which is the same cycle as that of the grain. In this story the theme of death and resurrection, the underworld experience, also seems closely linked to the fertility theme.

In the story of Demeter and Persephone, these functions have been separated to some extent.²³ Suter also makes the point that while the two goddesses and their functions had been clearly distinguished in cult and iconography; “in myth they have become confounded” (Suter, 2002:141).

²² See chapter two

²³ See the discussion on p. 59.

Persephone then becomes the goddess who undertakes the initial role of Inanna – opening up the realm of death and resurrection to humans, whilst also taking on the role of Dumuzi – the returning seed.

When these stories originated, they dealt with the reality of survival in a harsh and often punitive environment. The regular harvest was essential, as world food aid was a few millennia away and starvation was the only alternative. The rites which were practised therefore had to ensure, as best they could, that the goddesses who were responsible for growth and food were appeased and supported in their life-producing roles. Exactly how this happened, we do not know - despite all the speculation - and a festival like the Thesmophoria is probably a last vestige of older customs, which can give us some clues as to how it could have been.

In the Thesmophoria, a Greek women's festival, a procession was held on the first day. The second day was a fast in which women rested on beds made of plants on the ground, to imitate "the ancient way of life." Then meat from sacrificed pigs was placed in gullies filled with snakes, pinecones and cakes baked into phallic forms. On the third day after it had been interred,²⁴ purified women were lowered into the pit to retrieve the material. They were said to have clapped and shouted as they descended to scare away the snakes. The rotten meat was then mixed with the seeds for the next year's crop, which was about to be planted (Foley, 1994:72, 73).

We can therefore imagine that women in ancient society, who were primarily responsible for the growing of the grains and even probably for the care of young livestock, and certainly for producing sons and daughters, felt an intimate bond with the goddess who ensured fertility in all of nature. When things went wrong, it would be thought wise to win back her favours.

Within this worldview the sky god is far away, but the mother goddess is ingrained into the chores of daily life. When a spiritual tradition emerges from this awareness, it is grounded in the earth. The spirituality of the earth cycles is linked to some ancient symbols: the dung beetle, which turns the rejected dung of other animals into something precious; the snake, shedding its skin to remind all of the possibility of constant renewal; the horns of the bull and the horns of the new moon, signalling the same new life.

In Jungian terms, this is also the central theme of all inner work – to journey, as it were, into the inner world in order to do whatever work is necessary for the particular individual, and then to return and to put that into use in the outer world. If the archetypal reality is seen as the possible source of ideas and of myths, it might be that the universal inner journey could have been an inspiration for this myth when it slowly evolved in antiquity, although there is no way in which this could be substantiated.

8. *Hieros Gamos* – the Sacred Marriage

Persephone and Hades receive a visitor: Hermes, sent by Zeus:

²⁴ Also the day on which Inanna was resurrected from the dead.

He met lord Hades inside his dwelling,
reclining on a bed with his shy spouse, strongly reluctant
through desire for her mother (Foley, 1994:18, 20).

Hermes tells them of Demeter's anger, and of the near ruin she has brought on gods and humans. Hades smiles, and urges her to go to her mother, promising her "the greatest honour among the gods" when she returns. She jumps up joyfully – we assume because she is going to her mother, but maybe also because of the threefold honours she has been promised as queen of Hades – honours on earth, in heaven, and in the world below (Foley, 1994:55).

But he gave her to eat
a honey-sweet pomegranate seed, stealthily passing it
around her, lest she once more stay forever
by the side of revered Demeter of the dark robe (Foley, 1974:20).

So lord Hades has a strategy to force her return – probably a magic trick which involves passing the seed around her and himself and thus binding her to him (Foley, 1994:56.) In any event, the fact that she takes a pomegranate seed from him and eats it, should be guarantee enough of her return to Hades – in many myths a meal with the dead means that one has to stay with them (Richardson, 1974:276,277). As aphrodisiac, the pomegranate might also serve to suggest that Hades could have tried to give Persephone the seed as a form of seduction (Foley, 1994:57).

When she eats the pomegranate seed, therefore, Persephone commits herself to her return and thus to her marriage and her new status as queen of the underworld. In the preceding passage she is for the first time described as "thoughtful" (line 359), possibly signifying her maturation (Foley, 1994:57). She tells her mother that she was deceived into eating the seed, but we are not completely certain – there is an undertone of her taking on a new role, with dignity and a measure of joy.

The pomegranate seed is the perfect symbol for Persephone's situation (Foley, 1994:57). On the one hand the seed symbolises her own fertility as a young wife, and her moving into an active and participatory relationship with her husband, while shortly before she has been sitting passively. It has the connotation of the consummation of a sexual relationship – we do not know whether the consummation has happened by the time Hermes comes for her, but if it has, it would have been lacking in real commitment, as her focus was still on her longing for her mother. Now, as she leaves to be joyfully reunited with Demeter, she also seems more ready for a full union with her husband.

The second way in which the symbol of the pomegranate works well is that it suggests blood and death, the images which will be present in her life as underworld goddess in future (Foley, 1974:57).

The festival of the *hieros gamos*

As the father and mother on Olympus, the marriage of Zeus and Hera is considered a prototype of the sacred marriage. Some versions describe this as a formal marriage

ceremony with guests, but the much more popular versions are of Zeus being aroused by Hera in an irresistible way. They then make love in a beautiful setting, like the meadow described in Iliad 14, which immediately broke out in a carpet of flowers. Because of the potency of the lovers, all of nature responded. This is moreover a secret event, and usually highly romanticised (Blundell & Williamson, 1998:16).

The festival of the *hieros gamos* seems to have been held locally in different areas, and consisted of, as Eliade says, people doing what the gods do. The primary deity was Hera, and in the first half of the fifth century B.C. a calendar entry on sacrifices made at the festival refers to Zeus as *Zeus Heraios* – the consort of Hera. It was celebrated in the month *Gamelion*, our January, and seems to have been a major festival. It might, from documentary sources, have been celebrated at least partly at home, and might have involved lovemaking between married couples. There seems to have been emphasis on women in this festival, although men obviously also participated (Blundell & Williamson, 1998:19).

The reference to *Zeus Heraios* might simply have meant that Hera was the primary deity in this festival, or it might have referred back to a time when Hera had been a strong and primary deity, and not just the nagging and jealous wife of Zeus (Suter, 2002:103). Casting her into this second mode was a strong strategy for subordination of women in marriage, as there is very little power in that role, and it is guaranteed to evoke irritation and impatience in men. It is likely that the title did refer back to an older and more powerful form of Hera, as

[t]he *hieros gamos* dates from an early stratum of religion and has reasonably been interpreted as the Greek development of the seasonal coupling of an earth goddess and her male consort. The earth goddess's realm included the space both under and in the earth as the place to which dead animals and vegetation went to await rebirth; in this undifferentiated space, the queen awaited her yearly consort to go about the business of assuring the next year's crops and human and animal offspring (Suter, 2002:101).

This places the *hieros gamos* within the *withdrawal and return* theme, which culminates in the celebration of the sacred marriage. Here the purpose of the sexual act is procreation as the most vital aspect of the survival of human and other life on earth.

The *hieros gamos* has been used by Jung and others to symbolise the conjunction of the opposites in the mature personality, which has done the previous work required – the journey to the underworld, the raising of unconscious material to consciousness, the endurance of the pain of having these previously suppressed and opposite tendencies in the personality, and the deep work with those issues and how they manifest in one's own life and personal complexes. Edinger images the cross as a symbol of the holding of these opposites within the ego – a task so difficult that it might at times seem like a crucifixion. When the breakthrough happens, and the ego-self axis is formed, the way is prepared for the conjunction of the opposite tendencies in the personality within one's conscious awareness (Edinger, 1972:37 - 42).

The “opposites” are usually the opposite tendencies of a central archetype – “Archetypes are always bipolar and any archetype is intimately bound to its opposite, which is simply its other face” (Hodson, 2004:5).²⁵

In terms of human marriage, the *hieros gamos* could be a dangerous concept – few marriages can live up to the claim of divine design! It is comforting to realise that the Greek gods were also imperfect, with personal idiosyncrasies, and ruled by larger-than-life archetypes. Hodson, a Jungian analyst, says that the essential work to be done in marriage is to withdraw the often unconscious expectation of the other person becoming the other half of our dominant archetype – thereby leaving us half a person (Hodson, 2004:9).²⁶

So we come back, as before, to the inner journey of individuation. In psychagogy, this is where the *hieros gamos* really takes place, with the opposites reconciled and the self present. It is again important to say that this is not, for most people, a single experience, but a process and a way of becoming. It is often conveyed in medieval art, with Adam and Eve holding each other’s hands, the centre of the garden symbolically between them.

9.Mother/maiden reunification

The poet describes this heart-warming scene in detail:

He brought [the immortal horses] to a halt where rich-crowned Demeter
waited before the fragrant temple. With one look she darted
like a maenad down a mountain shaded with woods.
On her side, Persephone, seeing her mother’s radiant face,
left chariot and horses, and leapt down to run
and fall on her neck in passionate embrace (Foley, 1994:22).

Pectora roburant cultus ceceli

Demeter draws back after a while to enquire about whether Persephone has eaten anything in the underworld, and to warn her that if she has, she has to return there for a third of each year. Persephone tells her how it happened, and one can imagine them sitting around, talking, maybe lying together under a tree or on a couch.

Then all day long, their minds at one, they soothed
each other’s heart and soul in many ways,
embracing fondly, and their spirits abandoned grief,
and they gave and received joy between them (Foley, 1994:24).

²⁵ Suppressed material in the Jungian model, contrary to the Freudian, does not necessarily mean “socially unacceptable”, although it often is, but could mean any suppressed material – it could be the best part of the person which has been suppressed and is out of reach. An example of this could be qualities of personal strength which a woman might suppress because it is thought unacceptable in her world to exhibit them.

²⁶ This expectation of marriage as a state of perfection and completion is deeply ingrained in most people. Hodson quotes a marriage therapist who says that her main work is bereavement counselling of people who have had to say farewell to that expectation (Hodson, 2004: 9).

They are joined by Hekate, who often caresses Persephone, and later by grandmother Rhea, a messenger from Zeus but also a very welcome visitor in her own right.

Between the four of them they have come from all the ends of creation – Rhea from Olympus, although she was previously from earth, Demeter from earth, Hekate from the underworld, and Persephone from all three. They represent not only three generations; they also represent all regions and different kinds of power.

Their power can be seen in the ways in which each exercises choice. Demeter uses her power to gain back what she dearly wanted – her daughter. Rhea accepts the power of Zeus and acts as his ambassador, but also chooses to be an ambassador for the revival of life on earth. Hekate chooses to gently accompany Persephone as a supportive presence, giving her nevertheless of her own underworld power,²⁷ and Persephone chooses to come back to life and to live the life that she has – one of moving between worlds and now having new responsibilities as queen of Hades.

Within a feminist analysis, the important question to ask is: do the goddesses have their own identity, or is it subsumed within a larger whole? This is answered in the above paragraph, where it becomes clear that, even within the patriarchy, each of the women can define herself. For each of them this comes at a price, though. Demeter could not demand to have her daughter back outright, but had to use the power she had, that of creating life and fertility. Rhea acted as the ambassador of Zeus, rather than just as the grandmother of Persephone and the mother of Demeter. Hekate lives a shadow-life in caves, and Persephone had to wait until help arrived from outside Hades. Nevertheless, they each chose to take the power that was available to them to address the situation of Persephone's abduction.

The interaction between the women of different generations in the hymn can be seen as a reflection of human relationships between mothers and daughters, if read in Jungian terms. In order to connect to our own strength, we have to re-connect to our mothers, and in doing that, we open the way for our re-connection with our daughters. The rebuilding of relationships can sometimes happen face to face, and sometimes in our own inner space. In healing our relationship with our mothers, Annis Pratt has some practical advice:

My data... suggest to me a dialectical process in which we as daughters must bring to consciousness the full range of both our mothers' victimization and their hidden powers and qualities. This is a quest in which we must acknowledge and repudiate their patriarchal fetters, then absorb without letting it destroy us their rage against these limitations and, finally, assimilate into our personalities their positive qualities. The outcome is to negate, absorb, and transcend our mothers' personal lives in order to become new and separate personalities empowered by locating ourselves within the generations of women in our families (Pratt, 1994:152).

²⁷ In Greek mythology, says Christine Downing, nightmares, and thus the confrontation with the unconscious, come from Hekate (Downing, 1994:234).

Working with women on re-connecting the generational line is powerful and exciting work. If this is done within a Jungian framework, the task of mothering can to some extent be modelled on the relationship between Demeter and Persephone. As modern Demeters, what can women do for their daughters? The hymn suggests that women can protect their daughters with their love. They could also teach their daughters to lead their own lives, as the following Demeter and Persephone poem, *The Crux* by Alma Luz Villanueva, depicts (Villanueva, 1994:123, 124).

1

Girl-child and amazon,
who I raised in the image
of She-who-I –couldn't –name,
but dreamt and knew when
your body slid out of mine;
daughter. Loving you, I loved
myself – badly, exquisitely,
We clung, we fought, we separated;

You to the world of men,
and I in exile. I journeyed
to the Earth and back, seeking
you in the iris, stone, the seemingly

dead bulb; and finally, I
had to let you go, forget you,
the features of my daughter,
until my own features became

clear, distinct: separate.
Myself. Woman. And I will
die alone, and so will you.
The rose never tires of blooming.



2

She-who-I-couldn't-name
comes to me in dreams
as I walk with dark-skinned
women. She is huge and

I can't take her all in;
a belt of rainbow snakes encircles
her waist, gift of sun and storm.
Between us, daughter, lies a virgin land

where sun and moon rule,
equally; and in our loving
the land appears, vividly –
its mountains, deserts, orchards,

and the waves of natural boundaries.
Now I love myself badly, exquisitely,
now I name the unnameable.
Now, I am your mother.

We will live and die separately,
each one virgin in her soul. The crux
of loving unsolved, but lived. The dream.
This wild rose belongs to no one.

But I offer it to you, anyway.

10. Gifts to humanity: The Mysteries and the gift of Ploutos

Having restored bounty and growth to the earth, Demeter goes to the kings of Eleusis and teaches them her Mysteries. What they are, the poet cannot say – “For a great awe of the gods stops the voice” (Foley, 1884:26). What he does tell us is that

Blessed is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites,
but the uninitiate who has no share in them never
has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness (Foley, 1994:26).

Many have speculated on the content of the Mysteries, using what literary comments or works of art have come down to us to try to work out what the revelations were that were given to the initiates. Kerényi quotes a number of people who wrote about it during antiquity. Pindar wrote:

Blessed is he who, after beholding this, enters upon the way beneath the earth;
he knows the end of life and its beginning given by Zeus (Kerényi, 1967:15),

and Cicero said of the Mysteries:

We have been given a reason not only to live in joy but also to die with better
hope (Kerényi, 1967:15).

We can therefore be reasonably certain that participation in the Mysteries promised happiness in this life, and the expectation of a blessed life after death. Initiates were seen as superior to others. An elaboration of lines 480–482 in the hymn, dealing with the reward the initiate will get in Hades compared to the uninitiated, led to the growth of a literature on life after death (Richardson, 1974:312).

Some of the known facts about the Eleusinian Mysteries are that they took place in the month of *Boedromion*, our September, before the ploughing and sowing season. Although the *mystai* (who came for their first initiation) and the *epoptai* (who participated again the following year) came for a spiritual initiation, this was not divorced from the seasonal rhythm of nature. The two themes therefore come together again.

Purification and sacrifice took place in Athens, and then the twenty-two kilometre walk was undertaken along the Sacred Way to Eleusis, lined with endless rows of graves and memorials to the dead (Clinton, 1992:73). This walk was led by a statue of Iakchos which was carried by pilgrims - a god who had lain in a thrice-ploughed field with Demeter, resulting in the birth of Ploutos, the god of wealth. The initiates chanted Iakchos, Iakchos” as they walked, and this could be heard from far away. They also carried myrtle branches, and had myrtle in their hair.²⁸

Upon arrival at Eleusis dancing took place, and understandably, the next day was a day of quiet and rest.

The night which followed this day of rest was the holy night or the Mystery Night, and the climax of the pilgrimage (Kerenyi, 1967:131). A main part of this experience was the enactment of a sacred drama, for which there is sufficient literary evidence, although its exact nature is unclear (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003:29, 30).

In the cave near the *Telesterion*, a natural setting exists for the enactment of the drama of the two goddesses. Inside is a deep well or pit with hewn steps, which does not seem to have ever been a water well. There is also a seat which could have been the “rock without laughter”. This sacred drama was enacted in an evocative environment, where the caves open out into deeper caverns, and the atmospheric quality of the setting would also have contributed to the experience of wonder.

It seems that there was a search for Persephone, which evoked the sadness and grief Demeter felt at the loss of her daughter. The *mystai* were probably veiled or somehow blindfolded so that they could not see. The search probably took place in the cave and the areas surrounding the *Telesterion*. However it happened, in this experience they felt confusion and terror; suffering which can be compared to a kind of death. Plutarch compares it to what he thinks the experience of dying would be like:

Then [at the point of death] it [the soul] suffers something like what those in the great initiations suffer. Hence even the word “dying” is like the word “to be initiated”, and the act [of dying] is like the act [of being initiated] (quoted in Clinton, 1992:85).

Sourvinou-Inwood says that this comparison with the moment of death is further elucidated by Plutarch when he says that at first there is wandering and walking in circles, and frightening marches through the darkness, shivering, quivering, sweating and amazement (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003:33).

At some point in the total darkness a figure with a torch suddenly appeared, maybe thought to represent an *Erinyes* or Hekate, contributing to the experience of actually

²⁸ Kerenyi suggests that the use of myrtle has its origin in the story of Dionysos, another form of Iakchos, who undertook the pilgrimage to Eleusis and the initiation in order to fetch his mother, Semele, back from Hades. Dionysos had three sacred plants: the vine, ivy and myrtle. In exchange for the myrtle, Hades gave his mother back to him (Kerenyi, 1967:64).

being in the underworld (Clinton, 1992:87). The blindfold could only have been partial at this stage, or must have been removed. Furthermore, Sourvinou-Inwood tells us that Gregory Nazianzos, an early Christian writer, compares the Mysteries to Christianity:

Nor have we any abduction of some maiden nor does Demeter wander, nor brings in besides Keleous and Triptolemos and Dragons, and some things she does while others she suffers (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003:29).

A deep gong, sounded by the *hierophant*, and summoning Persephone, probably added to the awesomeness of the experience.

Then, wonder replaced terror. The *mystai* would have been led to the *Telesterion*, where brilliant light suddenly lit up the darkness, presumably as the *epoptai* lit torches or a fire. This was the climactic moment for the new initiates. Moments later they would have seen the two goddesses entering, and would have observed their joyful reunification. A number of sources mention the throwing about of torches.

Sourvinou-Inwood argues that the sacred drama did not include the search, but was enacted after the conclusion of the search in the *Telesterion* (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003:46).

The drama represented the most terrible crisis imaginable, the crops' failure to grow, which threatened mankind's survival; but it also showed that the crisis was overcome and the present order established ... Demeter protects the crops and, correlatively, she receives worship through this cult she herself founded (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003:40).

However it happened, in the *Telesterion*, probably by the light of a fire and many torches, something was enacted. At some stage there was an announcement of the birth of a child, Brimos, to Brimo, which is thought to refer to the birth of Ploutos. This could only happen when Demeter was happy again – now she was ready to bestow bounty on all, together with her daughter. Ploutos is born at the moment when the new grain is promised, and personifies the abundant harvest which will come (Clinton, 1992:93). Then, maintains Clinton, there might have been images of the two goddesses lit up from within, as is suggested by a plaque found at Eleusis, with an image of Demeter surrounded by red rays emanating from her neck, ears and hair (Clinton, 1992:90). The ceremony seems to have ended in a silent scene, during which the hierophant held aloft an ear of wheat.

The last day of the Great Mysteries at Eleusis was the day of the *Plemochoi*, the *pourings of plenty*. Two unstable circular pots were set up, and emptied into the ground, maybe into a cleft in the earth. A mystical formula was recited as the vessels were emptied, possibly that reported by a Christian author: *Hye! Kye!* Another reported that *Hye* was cried first by the official while looking up, thereby intoning "Flow!" and invoking the "paternal origin"; then he looked down and cried *Kye* or "Conceive", addressing the "maternal origin" (Kerenyi, 1967:141). This seems to suggest an allusion to the primal father and mother, whose sexual union would ensure the fertility of the fields. As such it is also linked to the *hieros gamos* discussed above.

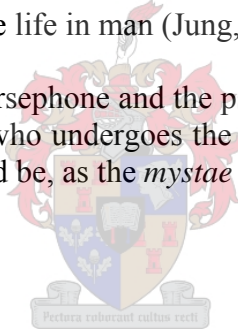
Because of the secrecy of the proceedings at the Mysteries, our best guesses are speculative, and it is impossible to capture what the experience would have been. It promises the gifts of Ploutos in this life, but the testimonies from antiquity quoted above give some indication that this was more than a quest for wealth. It seems to have been a major life experience for those who participated, which connected the individual to a way of giving meaning to life and death.

Likewise, the inner journey which was described above places the individual where he or she often does not initially wish to be, but where the transformation happens and where an awareness is brought about of the whole of the personality, in its conscious and unconscious aspects. “To build the wholeness of the personality is the task of the whole of life”, says Jolande Jacobi (1968:149). Thus Persephone, as well as the participant at the Mysteries at Eleusis or the 21st century man or woman doing the inner work described, is engaged in a process which will bring the gift of a new direction and meaning to life.

The gift of meaning can come through myth. In the words of Jung:

Meaninglessness inhibits fullness of life... Meaning makes a great many things endurable – perhaps everything. No science will ever replace myth, and a myth cannot be made out of science. For it is not that “God” is a myth, but that myth is the revelation of a divine life in man (Jung, 1961:373).

Both the myth of Demeter and Persephone and the psychagogue as represented by Jung therefore project that the person who undergoes the psychagogic journey through *inter alia* the exploration of myth, could be, as the *mystae* at Eleusis, a receiver of great gifts.



Chapter six

Conclusion

In the introduction the question was asked whether the *motifemes* identified in the hymn would be related to central archetypes in psychagogic experiences of people generally. In order to be able to address this question, key *motifemes* were identified in the *Hymn to Demeter*, and discussed in the context of the text, of the perceptions of key writers on the subject and in terms of the *amplification* of the *motifemes* from other mythological material and from literary and other sources.

Furthermore, chapter two was devoted to a review of the interpretation of mythology, particularly as it applies to the historical process which lead to the belief that all ancient goddesses such as Demeter were aspects of a universal matriarchal and peaceful era in prehistory. The need for a contextual approach to each individual myth, from which patterns could then flow, was evident from this discussion.

The key *motifemes* identified were the following:

- The abduction/ abduction as initiation (lines 1 – 21)
- Journey to the underworld (30 – 39)
- The controlling, absent father (27 – 30; 313 – 317; 325; 441 – 448)
- The mother's search for her daughter (39 – 91)
- The witnesses: Hecate and the Sun (22 – 26; 51 – 89)
- The withdrawal and return of the life-giving force (302 – 473)
- The hieros gamos (371 – 374)
- Mother/maiden reunification (385 – 440)
- Gifts to humanity: The Mysteries and the gift of Ploutos (473 – 489)

The part of the story which deals with Demeter's presence in Eleusis is omitted here, as that seems to have been included as aetiology for the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The themes above have the pattern of a cyclic experience. They correspond to the pattern identified by Campbell in his book *The hero with a thousand faces* (1949). The journey or the adventure is seen here as a cycle, which starts with the call to adventure, proceeds to the crossing of a threshold, which can happen by abduction, and then arrives at the opposite end of the starting point, where the purpose of the adventure emerges, such as the possibility of a sacred marriage. This is followed by rescue and flight, with a possible threshold struggle, and finally the person receives an elixir that will be of use to the world. Along the way are helpers and tests (Campbell, 1949:245). Although Campbell published this popular and award-winning book well before the publication in English of Propp's work, the idea of Propp's functions are imbedded in the cycle. While Propp saw the functions only as morphological units, however, Campbell sees the pattern mainly as an archetypal one, applicable to the individual psyche. "The mighty hero of extraordinary powers...is each of us" (1949:365).

The same conclusion is essentially reached in this study. The *motifemes* do not only deal with key themes in ancient religion, as demonstrated in the text, but the way in

which they are knit together in the hymn closely resembles the timeless inner journey, where the archetypes are encountered as living forces within the personality. This journey has best been described by Carl Jung, and his work therefore serves as template and theoretical foundation for much of it. In this process, the journey to the underworld can be read symbolically as an individuation journey, where an ego-self axis is prepared, which allows the person access to the underworld (or the unconscious, in Jungian terms). The outcomes would include a better integration of the personality (possibly the *hieros gamos*) and the ability to contribute in the world in a different way (maybe Persephone's new role as queen of Hades).

It can therefore be concluded that the *Hymn to Demeter*, apart from all its other functions, can be interpreted as an individuation myth, where the archetypes of the individuation process are embedded in the *motifemes* of the myth. It is then also feasible to use the suggested methodology of psycho-mythological analysis to interpret myths for psychagogic work, by connecting the *motifemes* of a myth to its constituent archetypes and using those as a basis for personal growth and development.

The myth of Demeter and Persephone, moreover, has special relevance for women. At a time when women are consciously striving to correct the influence of an extreme patriarchy on their lives, reflection on the deeper layers of reality can be valuable. Understanding the importance of the archetypes represented by Rhea, Demeter, Persephone and Hekate, and of the need to build them with awareness, creates a basis of power from which to be as strong as women can and want to be.

The archetypes which this poem deals with, and which are symbolically woven into the story line, deal with some of the essential experiences of humankind. The most powerful of these are maybe the two relationships in Persephone's life – that with her caring, protective mother, and that with the dark lord of the underworld who abducts her to his kingdom. Both are powerful archetypes, which have the ability to change the lives they encounter. How these relationships develop, and how they teach us about life and death, is the theme of this thesis.

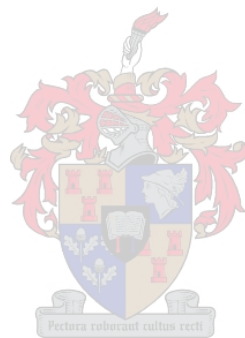
The numinous quality of the poem, which is justly popular, has much to do with the powerful and undaunted mother figure at the centre of it. The *mother* is one of the first and most influential archetypes. In reading the civilised poem of Demeter we miss what must have been the experience of those who celebrated her festivals – both the Mysteries and the Thesmophoria. The experience of the women who were let down pits in which snakes were sure to be waiting for them knew about the terror which is an aspect of this archetype, as did the initiates at Eleusis who searched for Persephone in the dark, unknown dangers around them. That is as much part of the archetypal essence of 'mother' as the loyalty and caring of Demeter. Somehow, the ritual must have brought about an encounter with this core human experience, with its double image of care and destruction.

Equally, Hades acquires a reasonable persona halfway through the story, and becomes an almost likeable bridegroom. But we have not forgotten that he violently abducted an unwilling young girl to the kingdom of death – another strong archetype within each of us.

These two archetypes are both concerned with key aspects in the development of both men and women. In the psychagogic process both have to be worked with as central and universal forces in personal development.

The conclusion is therefore that this work can be done, within ourselves. The way in which the story of the “Great Goddess” has come alive in our time shows the way in which people are drawn to the magnet of an archetype. A conclusion reached in this thesis is, however, that the work is better accomplished at the level of the archetype, and not as concrete and romanticized reality. Jung predicted that humankind’s inner boundaries will offer the next field of exploration, and offered some tools to initiate the process. Much still needs to be done to open this exploration route, but there is no doubt that there is much knowledge in ancient myths which can be helpful in this process, and that they constitute a source of constant renewal.

Jung’s psychology is well suited to such psychagogic explorations, and has become increasingly popular for this reason, as can be seen from the literature reviewed in this thesis. The work of the psychagogue and those that work with him or her is not an intellectual exercise, although meaning can be derived from it. It is, as the Mysteries were, a profound encounter with the forces of life and death, which always leads to rebirth.



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