Hymn to Demeter against the background of the earlier Homeric epics, as well as the other long Homeric hymns to Apollo, Aphrodite, and Hermes. As we shall see below, the *Hymn* adopts themes and story patterns found in earlier epic and in the other hymns—and to some extent in early Greek lyric as well. It is typical in its insertion of one story or mythical digression within another, and in its effort to praise the powers of the deity or deities it celebrates. What is special to this hymn, however, is not so much the juxtaposition of divine and human narratives—for the separation of divine and mortal existence is central to early epic—as the prolonged and intimate encounter between divinity and humankind and the emphasis on the cosmic importance of encounters between female figures, both divine and mortal.

The *Hymn*, like many of the hymns, is an aetiological poem; that is, it explains how Demeter and Persephone came to have the honors that they have in the universe and how the Mysteries were founded. My interpretation of the *Hymn* revolves around the obvious, but often underrated, assumption that the entire *Hymn* is ingeniously structured to prepare for the founding of the Mysteries (closely accompanied by the return of fertility to the earth). I shall emphasize the multiple ways in which the Mysteries are the result of a unique and complex intersection between mortals and immortals and examine the role that female experience plays in modifying forever the relations between divinity and humankind. My interpretation stresses the ways that the *Hymn* itself illuminates for its audience, in explaining how the cult began, what the Mysteries mean for those who were fortunate enough to be initiated into them.[15]

The "Theology" of the Mysteries

Greek religion had no formal theology, no priestly class of interpreters of an authoritative divine scripture. Greeks experienced religion through ritual and myth, and the myths (and, though sometimes more slowly, the rituals) were endlessly changed and reimagined for every generation by its artists and poets. The *Hymn to Demeter* closes with a promise to initiates in the Mysteries that they will experience a different lot in life and death. If we knew more of what happened in the Mysteries, we would still be left with the problem of interpreting the meaning of the rites performed, because such exegesis almost certainly played little role in these as in other Greek rituals. Similarly, myths such as that told in the *Hymn to Demeter* derived their meaning from the narrative itself, from their relation to ritual, and from their similarity to closely related myths. The reader or hearer of the

[15] For other interpretations that are optimistic about what the *Hymn* can reveal about the significance of the cult, see esp. Alderink 1982:esp. 6, and Parker 1991.

Helene Foley, The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays, Priceton 1994

narrative is left to fill in what we experience as the gaps and to explain the religious significance of the story in the context of his/her knowledge of other and sometimes conflicting narratives about gods, humans, and the relation between the two. This does not mean that we cannot understand to some degree what kind of contribution the *Hymn*, its myth, and the Mysteries made to the experience of Greek worshipers. But we have to approach the problem from a different direction than we would in the case of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, religions that grew to have a powerful exegetical tradition.[16] Hence I shall begin by trying to locate the *Hymn* and its unique representation of the relation of life and death through a series of comparisons between the *Hymn* and other early Greek and Near Eastern narratives that share similar themes and story patterns. If this approach is sometimes frustrating to the reader unfamiliar with these other texts, it is necessary, because the ancient hearer of the *Hymn* would be responding to the poem out of a rich experience of other poetry on which the *Hymn*'s composer(s) relied in creating its narrative.

Early Greek views of death as expressed in poetry varied according to genre, class, and context. In the Homeric epics and in much of early Greek lyric, poetry that seems frequently to have been composed at least initially for aristocratic patrons, the soul becomes after death a flitting shade in a dark and gloomy world below with neither the strength nor the consciousness of the living person. Faced with this miserable experience after death, the Homeric warrior or the Pindaric aristocrat[17] strives to make the best of his time in the world of light; he attempts to counter death by the production of brilliant children and the celebration of his immortal deeds in epic or lyric poetry. Yet even this fame can offer but a fragile consolation to the shade in the world below. The shade of Achilleus, the greatest hero of the Trojan War, confesses to Odysseus in Book 11 (489–91) of the *Odyssey* that he would rather be a lowly itinerant laborer in the world above than a famous king among the dead. Only those few lucky heroes, like Menelaos in *Odyssey 4* (563–69), who escape Hades for Elysion or the Isles of the Blest, acquire anything like a satisfactory lot in the world beyond. In Elysion Menelaos, who has acquired his fortunate afterlife through his marriage to Zeus's daughter Helen, will encounter the easiest existence possible for mortals: no snow, no rain, and the cooling breeze of the West Wind.

In most of early Greek poetry, the gifts of the gods to humankind are at best mixed. In *Iliad* 24 (525–33), we are told that Zeus bestows gifts to humankind from two jars; the lucky mortals receive a mixture of goods and bads, and the unlucky ones receive an unmitigated portion of disaster. As

[16] To some extent, Greek myths themselves could be said to constitute an exegetical tradition, in so far as they attempt to explain religious beliefs and practices and their origins.

[17] Pindar's poems also contain passages that use language and imagery borrowed from the Mysteries.

both the daughters and wife of Keleos make clear to the disguised Demeter in the *Hymn* (147–48, 216–17), humans cannot refuse the divine gifts that often prove to be deceptive and destructive to them; their only choice is to endure them. In the early Greek cosmological poetry of Hesiod, men are condemned to mortality by the acceptance of the most treacherous and enticing of all gifts: woman. Similarly, the human sacrificial portion, bestowed on mortals by the god Prometheus, permits them to eat all the best parts of the sacrificial animal but condemns them to mortality, because they no longer share food with the gods.[18] Gods may favor mortals, but their favor can be lost by a failure to recognize or honor the gods and their will in a proper fashion. Jealous and often fickle, the gods allow humans moments of glory and even of contact with the divine but then withdraw with equal speed and unpredictability from those who are fated to err or die. Despite their seeming resemblance to humankind, the Greek gods exist in a world apart, living forever and free to violate most of the limits of human existence. The Greek view of divinity was built on this fundamental separation of humans and gods, on mortals' constant wish to be godlike and their tragic failure to achieve this dangerous goal.

The Eleusinian Mysteries—like other Greek mystery cults—inaugurated for humankind a different lot and experience of divinity than what we find in Homeric epic.[19] The irrevocable separation between the world of immortals and mortals still holds, and the *Hymn* does not make clear how or to what degree the goddesses will modify human life and afterlife. The pessimism of the somber central episode, in which Demophoön loses immortality, is balanced by the joyful reunion between the goddesses and the new role created for Persephone in the order of the universe. Certainly the happiness that Demeter and Persephone promised to initiates in the Mysteries is a uniquely straightforward and reliable divine gift.[20] Initiates can count on the experience of the beneficent divinities with whom they are united in secret rites and can afford to ignore the struggle for "immortality in song" so central to Homer and archaic lyric; nor do they need to be aristocrats to mitigate their lots in life and death. Every initiate—and at least by the classical period (480–323 B.C.E.) initiation was open to all who spoke Greek and whose hands were pure of human blood, including women and slaves—could expect a better afterlife than that offered to the uninitiated. Later evidence suggests that initiates won the opportunity to taste many of the joys of a blessed afterlife that were once confined to those fortunate aristocrats who reached Elysion.[21]

[18] Vernant 1980:45–77.

[19] The alternate view of the afterlife offered by various mystery cults probably goes back to a very early date. What is significant about the *Hymn* is that it attempts to incorporate into epic tradition religious views that may originally have been alien to it.

[20] Although even in this case the gift confirms human mortality (see Scarpi 1976:96–97).

[21] See the essay on "The Eleusinian Mysteries," this volume, for ancient testimony on the benefits that they offered. For more pessimistic readings of what the Mysteries promise in the *Hymn* (rather than at later periods), see Chirassi-Columbo 1975 and Parker 1991. The Orphic fragments promise to initiates consciousness—a drink from the stream of Mnemosyne (Memory)—and a place among heroes (see Zuntz 1971:335–40). If the Mysteries did indeed make comparable promises (see Diogenes Laertios *Vitae philosophorum* 6.39 for the suggestion that the initiates lived in the Isles of the Blest), the parallel between the Eleusinian afterlife and the afterlife of privileged epic heroes would be even closer.

In Homer the Olympian gods sometimes feel pity for mortals, but they generally have no wish to share their earthly experience beyond a brief encounter. The Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* stresses the humiliation that gods may undergo even in their fleeting sexual passions for mortals. Gods—particularly the gods who appear in tragedy, like Artemis in the closing scene of Euripides' *Hippolytos* or Apollo at the opening of Euripides' *Alkestis*—normally refuse close encounters with mortal suffering and death. Even those divinities who become more extensively embroiled in mortal existence are often powerless to transform it. Despite her suffering and all her efforts to intervene for him, the goddess Thetis is helpless to change the fate of her beloved son Achilleus in the *Iliad*. Apollo rewards Admetos with an escape from death in return for his hospitable treatment during the time he was forced by Zeus to serve Admetos as a shepherd: but only if Admetos can find another to die for him (the story is told in Euripides' *Alkestis*). Often, as when Apollo and Poseidon build the walls of Troy, the entrance of divinity into the mortal sphere ultimately has ambivalent results for humanity. Among those divinities who become deeply engaged in human existence, Demeter and Persephone have an unusually sustained encounter with mortality that leads them to establish a permanent and beneficial modification of the relation between divinity and humankind.[22]

In Hesiod's seventh-century B.C.E. cosmological poem the *Theogony*, the gods—like God in the Old Testament when he drives Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden—create marriage, sacrifice, and agriculture as a barrier between humans and gods and a mark of the human fall into mortality.[23] The gods of Homer and Hesiod are not limited by these mortal institutions. They can mate and create children without marriage and can commit incest; they eat the immortal foods nectar and ambrosia, not the meat that humans sacrifice to the gods; they have no need to work the land in order to live. In the Demeter/Persephone myth, by contrast, divinity becomes embroiled in a struggle over the very human issues of marriage, sacrifice, agriculture, and death. Demeter, initially trapped in a painful ignorance and powerlessness characteristic of the human condition, disguises herself as an aged and mourning woman, laments, and refuses to eat, just as Achilleus laments and refuses to eat when mourning Patroklos in the *Iliad*. Persephone, too, longs

[22] Dionysos is another god who has extended encounters with mortals and mitigates mortal existence with his gifts.

[23] See Vernant 1980:130–67.

for her mother and does not eat in the underworld. When Demeter and Persephone finally eat, the daughter eats a pomegranate seed, the mother drinks a *kykeôn*, a drink of grain, water, and herbs—mortal rather than immortal food. Persephone's eating of the seed that appears to bleed symbolizes her commitment to her marriage and the world below. Demeter's *kykeôn* also links her with the life of bread eaters on earth. The drink is associated with a primitive stage of human life, for the grain is uncooked and mixed with water rather than wine, the drink of civilized human (if not divine) existence.

When Demeter becomes a nurse to the mortal child Demophoön at Eleusis, the poem links the love of the mortal mother Metaneira for her only son with that of the goddess for her only daughter. Similarly, the language of the poem associates the daughters of Keleos and Demeter's response to them with the goddess' relation to her own daughter Persephone.[24] Demeter even laughs at human jokes and develops a fondness for the mortal maid Iambe, who is able to share them with her. A goddess, she ironically receives (although she does not accept) from mortals advice on how to endure the lot given by the gods. The *Hymn* is unique in archaic Greek poetry for the degree of humanization its gods experience, and precisely this humanization results in the establishment of the Mysteries at the end of the poem. Demeter's role of nurse to a mortal seems, for example, to have been renewed in the adoption of the initiates by the goddesses, and initiates imitated the experience of Demeter in the course of the rites.

Gods cannot die and normally do not experience the limitations imposed by mortal marriage.[25] But Persephone's marriage with Hades, who lives in a world inaccessible to mortals and immortals alike, forces Demeter and her daughter to encounter and even be permanently marked by the sufferings and limits imposed on humankind. Once linked in an uninterrupted companionship, the goddesses are forced to separate for one-third of each year when Persephone descends to the gloomy realm of her spouse.

Let me expand on this last point. As Rudhardt (this volume) has made clear, Demeter cannot, as in some later versions, descend to Hades to bring back her daughter,[26] because in the *Hymn* Hades' realm is initially inaccessible to anyone, god or mortal, except the god Hermes, who conducts souls

[24] See the Commentary on lines 98–112, 145–68, and 169–89 for details.

[25] Rudhardt 1978, this volume. See further the section on "Marriage" below.

[26] See *Orphic Hymn* 41.5ff., where Demeter is called Antaia; Hyginus *Fabulae* 251, Scholiast P. on *Odyssey* 6.160a, Olympiodoros in Plato *Phaedo* 67c8–9 (= frag. 211 Kern), Scholia on Aristophanes *Ploutos* 431, Barcelona Papyrus Inventory No. 158–61. 62–65, and Servius on Vergil *Georgics* 1.39 (in this case, as perhaps in Philikos's version, Demeter descends because Persephone does not wish to return). At Ovid *Fasti* 4.611ff., Ceres asks to descend to the underworld once she learns that Proserpina has eaten the pomegranate seeds and cannot return. See also Claudian *De Raptu Proserpinae* 3.107ff. See further Harrison and Obbink 1986.

and messages to the lower world. The loss of Persephone is the closest that a divinity can come to experiencing the suffering of mortals when a loved one dies; though Persephone is immortal, she is as lost to her mother as any of the pitiful dead below. Demeter, like other divinities who lose their mortal children, is thus able to comprehend the pain suffered by humans who lose a child to death;[27] she moves from grief and a female helplessness in the face of necessities enforced by powerful male deities to joyous reunion and honor and power from Zeus and Hades. The Mysteries are a ritual reenactment of this experience. At the conclusion of the *Hymn*, Demeter gives her Mysteries to humanity on earth and Persephone opens a new path to the world below through her annual descent and ascent. Mortals now have an ear in the underworld, and the universe has a link between heaven, earth, and the world below. Hades becomes for the first time accessible to mortal prayers; we know in fact that the god received cult offerings almost exclusively as the husband of Persephone.[28] Similarly, Demeter, as a goddess of grain, is also ideally placed to mediate among the spheres of the universe; for the seeds over which she presides grow from and return to the darkness beneath the earth.[29]

The *Hymn to Demeter* is typical of Greek cosmological poetry, in that its outcome is predicated on the development of a new set of relations among divinities; yet its tone contrasts with that of the other hymns and even to some degree with that of the major Homeric epics, to underline the unique encounter of the goddesses with mortality. Jenny Clay points out that the major Homeric hymns begin at a time somewhere after the establishment of the universe and the reign of Zeus, but before the present order of the divine world has taken its final form, and end with the establishment of new honors for a divinity (or divinities) and thus a change in mortal (and immortal) experience of the universe.[30] Demeter at first tries and fails to challenge the traditional boundaries between humans and gods by attempting to immortalize the Eleusinian prince Demophoön. She ends by winning new honors (443–44, 461–62; the honors are presumably the Mysteries, though the poem does not specify this) in addition to her role as goddess of grain, and Persephone establishes for the first time a significant role for herself among the gods above and below. As in other hymns, the goddesses win a place for themselves—a more substantial position than before—by challenging the existing order.

Yet if the myth of Demeter and Persephone has fundamental similarities

[27] See Méautis 1959:56.

[28] Pausanias *Graeciae descriptio* 6.25.2 says that Hades' sole cult of his own was in Elis. See further Rudhardt 1978, this volume, and Saintillan 1986.

[29] Scarpi 1976:100 argues that Persephone mediates between Olympus and Hades, and Demeter between gods and mortals.

[30] Clay 1989. See also Rudhardt 1978 (this volume) on the cosmological bent of the poem.

to the other hymns in its cosmological emphasis, it also differs significantly. The hymns generally treat the divine incidents that they narrate with a light and often witty touch. In the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, the precocious baby god Hermes wins his prerogatives by mischievous and infectious trickery; the baby god Apollo miraculously slays a dragon at Delphi in the *Hymn to Apollo*; in the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, Zeus turns the goddess's own powers against her, by making her desire a mortal. Aphrodite's delicious seduction of the mortal Anchises follows almost immediately. Even in the Homeric epics, the battle among the gods in *Iliad* 21 makes a comic contrast with the bloody struggle on the earth below; and the quarrel among the gods in *Iliad* 1 is resolved in laughter, unlike the disastrous quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilleus in the same book. The more serious treatment of the gods in the *Odyssey* seems to reflect the constant divine engagement in the mortal affairs of this poem. In Homer the gods may occcasionally pity the deaths of mortals who are their children or their favorites. Yet on Olympus itself, there is no really serious issue but power, and all power struggles are ultimately resolved by Zeus's continuing supremacy.

In the *Hymn to Demeter*, however, we encounter gods who (like Thetis in the *Iliad*) themselves come as close to the human tragedy as divinities can. When Demeter questions Helios about the whereabouts of her daughter, the god expresses pity for the sufferings of the goddess (76). Later, the disguised Demeter asks for pity from the daughters of Keleos (137). Pity is, as Aristotle saw, one of the two emotional reactions produced by the tragic plot, and it is the result of human powerlessness and ignorance. Helios's gesture of pity could not define more clearly the unlikely position in which Demeter as a divinity finds herself in the *Hymn*.

The affinities between mortal and immortal experience in the poem are deepened as well by the many structural parallels created in the narrative between the divine story and Demeter's experience on earth; mortal life even serves as a paradigm for the divine, and the worlds of gods and humans are brought closer together in a promise of reliable exchange between them. As Rubin and Deal (this volume) point out, in both the divine story and in the incident at Eleusis on earth a divinity tries to appropriate a child from its ignorant mother. Zeus gives Persephone to Hades, and Demeter tries to immortalize Demophoön. Demeter and Metaneira do not accept the child's change of status. Each god finally fails to accomplish his or her aim, but the child remains partially in the sphere of the abductor. Each child receives new honors; each can find happiness only in unity with Demeter. Demophoön's bliss in the arms of the goddess perhaps prefigures the happiness of the initiate in the Mysteries; in any case he remains linked with the goddess through the cult she establishes in his honor. Persephone is seemingly appeased by the honors she receives from Hades below, but joyful only during the time she shares with her mother on earth and Olympus.

In a fashion typical of Homeric epic, the poem does not say what, if anything, Demeter learned by attempting and failing to subject ignorant mortals to an experience in certain respects comparable to what she has just undergone herself. Although Homeric gods are capable of feeling pity for mortals, the poem does not tell us whether she pities the child she nursed for his loss of immortality, although we know that she will establish honors for him because he has been nursed in her arms. The motives of Demeter, as a divinity, remain suitably mysterious. What we do know is that an act of extraordinary divine beneficence results from her experience. Initially angry at mortals for their foolish ignorance, Demeter turns after the recovery of Persephone to a nurturing relation to humans and offers them for the first time a different lot in life and death. Happiness in this world (dependent on Demeter's powers over the fertility of the earth and its grain) is linked to a different fate in the world beyond, and activities in the two modes of existence are associated in a new and complex way.

Thus, although the text never explicitly states that the Mysteries are a result of Demeter's encounter with mortals and mortality, the narrative structure and the parallels established between mortal and immortal existence in the language and narrative detail of the poem make this event the most plausible explanation of their foundation. This assumption explains the delay in bestowing the Mysteries until the final moments of the poem, which makes them appear to be the result of its events as a whole. From this perspective the return of Persephone is a mitigation of suffering and symbolic death on the divine level that is then matched by the same event on the mortal level; just as Demeter bestows honors on Demophoön because of the child's intimate connection with herself, the Mysteries are offered to mortals because of her stay in their realm.[31]

Furthermore, as the essay by Lord in this volume shows, the story of the wrath of Demeter and her journey to recover her daughter has remarkable similarities to the wrath of Achilleus in the *Iliad* and the homeward journey of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*.[32] From the historical point of view, the godlike

[31] The Mysteries are presumably also the honors that Zeus awards to Demeter when she returns to Olympus; but this does not preclude additional explanations for the particular nature of these honors.

[32] Lord's argument, which originated in a suggestion of Albert Lord's (1960:97, 121, 186–97), has since been enriched and supplemented by that of Sowa 1984. My own discussion borrows from all three and adds new elements. For Sowa, a number of important mythological story patterns intersect in the narrative of the *Hymn*: the marriage of the fertility goddess, withdrawal and return, the journey, rape, and divine epiphany. The withdrawal and return pattern (see esp. 95–96) includes withdrawal (often motivated by abduction) with destruction and possible revenge (98), visits by embassies, reconciliation, and the death of a substitute. The rape story pattern (122) overlaps. A young person is abducted from a parent; the parent grieves and searches for the child; the parent is informed of the truth and ultimately settles with the abductor.

Achilleus may have borrowed his story from his goddess mother Thetis,[33]
for both Greek and Near Eastern parallels suggest an origin in myths about
divinity for this particular story pattern. Yet in the case of both the *Iliad* and
the *Hymn to Demeter*, the plot pattern of wrath, withdrawal (including
destruction), and return (often including revenge) once again serves, like
the structure of the *Hymn* itself, to bring the world of gods and humans for a
brief time closer together.[34] The wrath (*mênis*) and grief (*achos*) of both hero
and goddess derive initially from the abduction of a woman (Briseis, Per-
sephone) who becomes the wife or spear bride of the abductor (Agamem-
non, Hades).[35] The withdrawal of hero and goddess then results in im-
mense losses for the Greeks or a destructive famine on earth; in Demeter's
case there are two withdrawals, one from heaven to Eleusis, the second to
her temple at Eleusis.[36] Both initially refuse embassies that try to persuade
them to abandon their wrath. Each finally agrees to return to play an appro-
priate and beneficial role in his or her community and wins new honors and
gifts. The return of each to the role of warrior or goddess is represented as an
uncanny revelation of extraordinary power and beauty.

Achilleus's wrath extends finally to both Greeks and Trojans; but at the
conclusion he is capable of pity even for Priam, the father of his greatest
enemy. Similarly, Demeter's wrath against Zeus is expanded to an anger
against the foolish mortals who blocked her plan to immortalize De-
mophoön; she will destroy humanity with her famine. Yet after the return of
Persephone, she founds the Mysteries for the benefit of humankind, for
whom she will now feel the bond of *philia* (love or friendship). Both goddess
and mortal suffer the permanent or partial loss of one dearest to themselves
(Patroklos, Persephone).[37] This loss, which does not seem to be an inevita-
ble aspect of the story pattern in the case of divinity, may serve to underline
Demeter's partial assimilation into a mortal context in the *Hymn*. Similarly,
Achilleus's wrath brings him both semantically and in action closer to god-
head; but ultimately, once he has chosen to reenter the battle to avenge
Patroklos, he wins fame only at the price of sealing his mortal doom. *Mênis*,

[33] For a discussion of the wrath of Thetis, see Slatkin 1986 and 1991.

[34] This comparison is not meant to conceal the complex variations in every version of a story
pattern. As Nagler 1974:ch. 5, stresses (see also Lord 1970:186–97), Achilleus complicates
the story pattern in the *Iliad*. In contrast to Demeter, who must reject the embassy from Zeus
because she has not won Persephone's return (324–33), Achilleus has less decisive reasons for
rejecting Agamemnon's embassy in *Iliad* 9. His return is delayed when Patroklos takes his
place; when he does reenter the battle, he is motivated by a second wrath toward Hektor,
against whom he wishes to take revenge for the killing of Patroklos.

[35] Nagy 1979:80–83 points out the semantic links between Demeter's cult title Achaia and
the name Achilleus, which both derive from *achos*.

[36] For the double withdrawal, see Sowa 1984:101.

[37] The sequence and causation of events make this particular parallel much looser. Achilleus
loses Patroklos in part because he withdrew, and Demeter withdraws because she has lost
Persephone. Demeter also partially recovers her daughter.

the Greek word for Achilleus's wrath, is generally used for divine wrath such
as that of Demeter (350, 410);[38] after Achilleus returns to battle against the
Trojans, his powers in battle become so nearly godlike that he actually
becomes embroiled in a battle with the river god Skamander. Demeter's
wrath brings her closer to mortality, but finally, with the famine, she uses her
divine powers to rescue her daughter at least partially from the world of the
dead. By bringing divinity closer to mortal suffering and mortals closer to
divine power, the story pattern of wrath, withdrawal, and return as it is
enacted in both the *Iliad* and the *Hymn* mixes worlds that the entire Greek
cosmos is designed to keep apart. When the world is reconstructed at the
return, it can never be quite the same.

Similarly, both the hero Odysseus in the *Odyssey* and Demeter undertake a
journey that brings them face-to-face with the world of death and with parts
of the universe to which they are strangers;[39] in other versions of the myth,
Demeter actually descends to Hades. The absence of both figures from their
proper sphere causes disruption and near-disaster. In the image that the
disguised Odysseus offers to Penelope in Book 19 (107–114), the rule of
the just king brings not only order but fertility to his land; Ithaka is para-
lyzed without Odysseus. Earth ultimately withers at the withdrawal of
Demeter and recovers its fertility and seasonal predictability after Per-
sephone's return. The motifs of recognition and revenge (or in Demeter's
case, threat of revenge) play an important role in both poems.[40] Odysseus
and Demeter each emerge from disguises as an old and powerless person
and tell lying Cretan tales (tales that nevertheless contain a good deal of
truth); both punish those who are inhospitable[41] and reward those who
instinctively treat them in accordance with their true identity. Indeed, the
role that Odysseus plays, of testing hospitality while in disguise, is a feature
far more typical of Greek myths about divinity.[42]

Both succeed in their goals and win new honors, but ultimately must

[38] Watkins 1977. Orphic frag. 48 adapted the first line of the *Iliad* to Demeter's story:
"Sing, Goddess, the wrath of Demeter . . ."

[39] Here I am adapting Sowa's 1984 model of the journey motif (212–13). In her model the
protagonist loses or lacks something and undertakes a search. The search often involves a sea
journey and a visit to the underworld. The protagonist encounters two helpers on the
journey—one female, one male (like Hekate and Helios in the *Hymn*). The protagonist's
absence during the journey has devastating results and a substitute "dies" for the protagonist.
Here the pattern overlaps with that of withdrawal and return. In Sowa's view this is fundamen-
tally a human story pattern, involving a confrontation with mortality.

[40] For the element of revenge in the journey motif, see Rose 1967 on the journey of
Telemachos in the *Odyssey*.

[41] In other versions of the myth, this aspect of Demeter's story receives greater emphasis
(see the Commentary on lines 90–97, 210, 253, and 371–73 for examples). In the *Hymn*
Metaneira's spying and her interruption of Demeter's attempt to immortalize Demophoön
provoke the goddess's wrath against the Eleusinians.

[42] See Sowa 1984:esp. 252 for examples from the *Odyssey*.

accommodate to new limitations. Demeter must accept her inability to immortalize humans and the partial loss of her daughter but expands her powers on earth by the establishment of the Mysteries. Odysseus, who loses both his mother and all of his men during his journey, makes his choice to return home to Ithaka on the basis of a knowledge of life and death inaccessible to the average mortal. He deliberately rejects immortality on Kalypso's island even though he has observed the miserable existence (or nonexistence) suffered by his companions at Troy in the world below. At the same time, he wins immortal fame not just for his role at Troy, but for his heroic journey and homecoming.

As is the case with the pattern of wrath, withdrawal, and return, the story pattern of the epic journey may have begun as a story about divinity. The first pattern naturally belongs to a deity with powers over fertility; the withdrawal of the Hittite storm god Telepinu is an earlier non-Greek example.[43] The second pattern, as is probable in the case of the *Iliad*, may have been transferred in Sumerian epic from the divine Ishtar/Inanna to the semi-divine hero Gilgamesh. The *Hymn to Demeter*, due to the later date of its composition, is apparently shaped by the two older Homeric epics[44] yet in other ways may represent an earlier stratum of myth. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are thus logically colored by the associations of their underlying story patterns with an immortal story, just as the *Hymn to Demeter* assimilates aspects of famous mortal stories that preceded it.[45] The epic journey, for both mortal and immortal protagonist, is then about coming to terms with death, the pain of loss, and mortal limits. When a divine figure like Demeter undertakes an epic journey or an angry withdrawal, she is drawn into the sphere of human tragedy by all the forceful associations that this narrative has already acquired through its enactment by mortal heroes in the Greek epic tradition.

Comparison of the *Hymn to Demeter* with similar myths in other Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures again reveals the special character of the confrontation with the world of death experienced by the *Hymn*'s divinities. The Sumerian goddess Inanna mentioned above descended into the underworld and returned to earth after "dying" in the world below. Dumuzi fails to prostrate himself before the returning goddess; he is seized by underworld monsters and dragged into the underworld, apparently as a substitute for the goddess.[46] The Egyptian goddess Isis lamented and sought her murdered husband Osiris in the world below. She finds Osiris and temporarily revives him to beget his avenger Horus; Horus destroys Seth, Osiris's killer. In an Ugaritic poem, Ba'al is killed by Mot. His sister Anath, a warrior goddess, kills Mot, grinds him up, and sows him in a field. Ba'al is returned to life. In the Akkadian myth of Nergal and Ereshkigal, the goddess of the underworld Ereshkigal tries to lure Nergal into the world of death.[47] Although Nergal is warned not to sleep with Ereshkigal nor to partake of food and drink in the world below, he does. Escaping once more to earth, he is finally forced to return and accept a role as ruler among the dead and consort of Ereshkigal.

The Christian story, too, tells of a divine son who lived, suffered, and died in mortal guise, thereby profoundly altering the relation of the worshiper to God the father. Unique among these similar stories, the Eleusinian cult bases its divine promises of a better life and afterlife to the worshiper on the sufferings and encounter with "mortal" experience of a divine *mother and daughter*.[48] In contrast to the Christian celebration of father and son, the initiates' path from fear and confusion to enlightenment was built on an encounter with the female experience of the two goddesses, and the happiness promised by the cult derives from a nurturing adoption by these divinities. It may not be accidental that Christianity's focus on the male was ultimately modified by the development of Mary's mediating role as suffering mother and by an emphasis in the high Middle Ages on the symbolic motherhood of Christ himself.[49]

Finally, both the *Hymn* and the Mysteries link mortal and immortal experience by exploiting initiatory patterns that traditionally mark stages of human experience. As van Gennep, Turner, and others have shown,[50] rites of initiation, including rites of initiation into religious mysteries, tend to take a similar form in many cultures. Initiates become temporarily detached from their regular environment and enter into a "liminal" experience in which the normal categories and hierarchies by which they define their world are sometimes terrifyingly blurred, transformed, or inverted. Finally, changed or renewed by this detachment from their cultural environment, they are reincorporated into it. The process is often described and experi-

[43] For discussion of the Near-Eastern parallels (see further below) with sources, see esp. Richardson 1974:258–59: Burkert 1979: ch. 6; and Sowa 1984:46ff.

[44] We do not know in what form the Homeric epics were transmitted or available to the composer(s) of this hymn at this date, but the *Hymn* reflects an awareness of the traditions out of which the two epics as we have them finally emerged.

[45] Epic often defines the brilliance of its heroes by associating them with divinity. My point here is simply that a story pattern shared by gods and humans is particularly likely to bring such associations with it.

[46] For translations of the texts of most of these myths, see Dalley 1989 and Pritchard 1969. For discussion, see Burkert 1983:263–64 and Sowa 1984:48. Burkert (264) cites Native American parallels.

[47] For a useful discussion of this myth in relation to the *Hymn* and the *Odyssey*, see Crane 1988:61–86.

[48] See Berg 1974.

[49] Bynum 1986 and 1991.

[50] van Gennep 1960 (1909) and Turner 1969. Among the many discussions of initiatory rites by classicists, see Brelich 1969, Sourvinou-Inwood 1988, or Dowden 1989.

enced as a symbolic death and rebirth. We can distinguish here between initiation rituals that involve biological transitions in the life of individuals (transitions to adulthood such as that of Persephone, or from life to death in burial) and those not specifically linked to biological transitions, like the Mysteries (although they help to prepare the initiate for death).[51] Myths such as that told in the *Hymn* often conflate the two kinds of rites, but they are experienced separately by participants.

To some extent, the structure of the *Hymn* itself is shaped by initiatory patterns in which the Eleusinian initiates shared to the degree that they imitated the experiences of the goddesses. As noted earlier, Persephone's experience of abduction, symbolic death, and rebirth into the upper world could be associated with the transition or initiation of women into marriage.[52] The myth's enforced separation of mother and daughter followed by reunion was celebrated in ancient cults special to women and seems to reflect, on the psychological level, the pattern of maturation common to mothers and daughters cross-culturally.

Demeter's withdrawal and return also resonate with initiatory patterns. Once she has recognized the loss of her daughter to the world of death, Demeter adopts a disguise and leaves the world of Olympus for the world of mortals. Her descent threatens to blur the division between the world of mortals and that of immortals. After readopting her divine form, she remains in the liminal space of her temple on earth, using her powers to destroy rather than renew fertility. Finally, she is reunited with her daughter, reincorporated into Olympus, and accepts new powers for herself and her daughter. Throughout the *Hymn*, however, Demeter never more than temporarily abandons her divinity, which shines through her mortal disguise, nor her role as nurse and mother; and it is this latter role that she preserves in taking the initiate under her divine protection in the Mysteries.

The Mysteries themselves are also colored by initiatory patterns. The rites involved a partial detachment from the central civic spaces and values of Greek culture and the deities who presided over them. They took the initiate into a territory not bounded by the hierarchical access to divine blessings generally encountered in household or in civic cults.[53] In civic cults (as well as in many other rites of initiation), the participants' status as male or female, slave or free, citizen or resident alien played a central role; such cults (or rites) firmly embedded the participants in particular social roles. The rites at Eleusis, unlike many other rites of initiation, were tied to no stage of the life

[51] See further Richardson 1974:17.

[52] Lincoln 1979 revives the theory of Jeanmaire 1939:69–79 and 98–305 that the Persephone myth reflects a scenario of female initiation. Scarpi 1976:109–38 discusses the myth in terms of traditions about rape-marriage.

[53] Osborne 1985:171, 176, 178, 187. Even the Eleusinian priests were largely not members of the local community by the classical period.

cycle (although initiates were with one exception adults) or aspect of civic life. As the initiates embarked on the procession from Athens to Eleusis, they entered a space that brought them closer to divine experience and to the endless world after death; they moved from fear and disorientation to joy and confidence. They were united by a common religious experience, not by locality or citizenship. Citizens prominent in ordinary life were mocked by a masked figure or figures en route. Women left their homes and put off at times their ordinary modesty of speech. The sacrifices presented to the other Olympian gods were made at temples open to the light where every aspect of the rite was clearly and visibly defined. In all-night dances and in the darkness of the Telesterion (the Hall of Initiation), the mystery initiates moved out of the time and the visual parameters by which they normally defined their world. To the degree that the initiates imitated the experiences of the goddesses, they shared in the reintegration of the divinities into the divine pantheon that closed the myth. In so doing the initiates developed a permanent relation to a more than human experience, not a reentry into the life of the city-state.[54] After initiation, initiates as a group were distinguished from noninitiates by a different lot in life.

Variants of the Myth and the Importance of the Version in the *Hymn to Demeter*

The *Hymn to Demeter* represents the earliest extant version of a myth that appears with many variants in later Greek and Roman literature and art. As was stressed in the last section, even on religious issues of the utmost importance there were no stable versions of a Greek or Roman myth. The poets who composed the Homeric hymns, as representatives of a long tradition of oral poetry, reshaped myths to suit various occasions and audiences; the same was true of later artists in a literate tradition. As we shall see, all versions of the Demeter/Persephone myth explain the origins of various human institutions and of a modified relation between gods and humans, and between heaven, earth, and the underworld. Some later versions apparently motivate the cycle of nature itself: Persephone is associated with the planted seed and absent while it is in the ground.[55] Precisely because poetry

[54] The polis of course supported the Mysteries, but unlike rites of initiation into adulthood, such as those for girls at Brauron, the Mysteries did not aim to incorporate the initiand into a specific social role or social group.

[55] For these views, which are often thought to be Stoic influenced, see Cornutus 28, Cicero *De natura deorum* 2.66, the scholiast on Hesiod *Theogony* 912, Tzetzes on Hesiod, *Works and Days* 32, Cleanthes fr. 547 cited in Plutarch *Moralia* 377d, Varro cited in Augustine *City of God* 7.20, and the scholiast on Aristophanes *Wasps* 1429. For this controversial issue, see the Commentary on lines 401–3.

played such a central religious and cultural role in early Greek society, ancient poets could assume their audience's knowledge of mythical variants and played on this awareness in shaping their own interpretations. We would misread any ancient poem if we did not bring this knowledge to bear on our own analysis of it. The composer or composers of our hymn almost certainly knew important variations on the myth and chose to emphasize or suppress certain aspects of the story to create a particular interpretation.[56] This will be my assumption.

Yet we must go further than simply attempting to distinguish on the basis of later variants the tradition that lies behind the *Hymn to Demeter*. Virtually all interpreters of the *Hymn* have used their knowledge of these variants in interpreting the *Hymn* and in defining its unusual achievement. Knowing something of these alternate versions helps considerably to illuminate aspects of the narrative that are not explicitly motivated and have thus puzzled interpreters of the poem. Let me give a series of examples of what I mean by puzzling features of the text that can be better understood in the light of the later tradition.[57] I shall offer examples first, then possible explanations.

1) In contrast to the expectations of many modern readers, the narrative pattern of the *Hymn* does not link Persephone's descent and ascent explicitly with the cycle of the agricultural year or use the myth to explain the origin of the seasons. Demeter plays the famine as her last card in her conflict with Zeus, and she is from the first moment of the poem already the "bringer of seasons."[58] In the *Hymn* Persephone's return precedes the coming of spring, rather than explicitly causing it or coinciding with it. Demeter predicts that Persephone will in the future reappear annually with the spring flowers. This may indicate a promise of regularity in the seasonal cycle; yet we are not told when Persephone will depart each year for the world below.[59] Seasonal motifs thus serve in the *Hymn* to enhance other more important themes, rather than acquiring a central importance. Yet the *Hymn*'s own promise of a better life on earth must depend on Demeter's powers over agriculture, and

[56] The case for this assumption has been well made in different ways by Richardson 1974:9, 17, 85, and notes on 450ff. and 470ff.; Clay 1989:205–6, 224–25, 231, and 259; and Parker 1991:5. Richardson stresses the *Hymn*'s probable awareness of the alternative version in which agriculture is founded by Demeter and its compromise between local tradition and epic. Detailed examples can be found in the Commentary on lines 5–14 and 450–56.

[57] On these puzzling features of the text, see esp. Richardson 1974 and Clay 1989 passim and Cassolà 1975:33–35. In the nineteenth century, a number of scholars felt that these problematic aspects of the narrative were the result of interpolation.

[58] Burkert 1983:262 argues, in part due to the difficulty of linking myth and cult with the seasonal cycle, that this element of the myth may have been a later and secondary accretion (the famine is apparently missing from Orphic accounts). Clay 1989:255, on the other hand, sees the seasonal motif as one of the oldest elements in the myth. I believe (with Richardson 1974:15) that the two motifs are inextricable (although they can be deployed in various ways) and that priority cannot be established.

[59] See Rudhardt 1978 (this volume).

the poem deploys and alludes to seasonal motifs.[60] The restoration of fertility is closely linked with the bestowal of the Mysteries and the coming of Ploutos to the homes of the initiated. Precisely because the eschatology of the Mysteries and the agricultural motif remain inextricable, the narrative seems to raise rather than resolve the question of their interrelation.

It makes sense to assume, then, that the *Hymn* deliberately deemphasizes but relies on its audience's familiarity with versions of the myth in which seasonal and agricultural motifs play a more central role. Although explaining the founding of the Mysteries is always a major point, many versions of the myth other than the *Hymn*, including Attic/Eleusinian ones, do in fact describe the origins of agriculture. In the *Hymn* agriculture already exists on earth, and humans are living in established cities with all the major features of human culture in place: agriculture, sacrifice, and marriage.[61] Yet when the alternative version begins, mortals have not yet learned from the goddess of grain Demeter to cultivate the land. They live at the mercy of nature, foraging for roots, acorns, and berries. After Demeter loses Persephone, she learns of her daughter's whereabouts not as in the *Hymn* from the gods Helios and Hekate, but from mortals, who are then rewarded with agriculture and/or Mysteries. Many regions in Greece and Italy claimed in their local versions of the myth to have aided Demeter in her search and to have been rewarded for their good deeds; both Athens and Sicily claimed to be the first place to have received agriculture from the goddess.

The Attic/Eleusinian version of this myth is preserved for us in fragmentary form in Orphic versions of the myth.[62] As the orator Isokrates says (*Panegyrikos* 28), Demeter founded the Mysteries "in gratitude for benefits only initiates may hear." In this version, certain (usually rustic) inhabitants of Eleusis witness the rape;[63] Demeter rewards them for their information and their hospitality. She teaches the Eleusinian Triptolemos the miraculous

[60] See the Commentary on lines 5–14, 23, 66, 98–112, 153ff. and 401–3 for further examples.

[61] The leaders (*basileis*) at Eleusis are described as "administering the law" (*themistopoloi*, 473). Rudhardt 1978 (this volume) argues that there may as yet be no seasons on earth.

[62] On the eclectic collection of works attributed to Orpheus, Mousaios, and Eumolpos, see Malten 1909, Graf 1974, West 1983, and Richardson 1974:77–86. Orphic versions of the myth probably reflect early Eleusinian tradition (Richardson 1974:85) in a more concrete fashion (e.g., more details pertain to local ritual) than in the epicizing *Hymn*, although the *Hymn* itself was probably included at one time in this corpus. For a summary of major features of the Orphic myth, see the section on "The Influence of the *Hymn to Demeter* and Its Myth." Malten proposed to date an "Orphic" version of the myth to the mid-sixth century when a circle of "Orphic" poets may have gathered at the court of Peisistratos. Graf 1974:151–81 more cautiously argues for dating an Orphic poem that included the mission of Triptolemos (to distribute Demeter's gift of agriculture) to 469–405 B.C.E. The visual evidence cited below makes clear, however, that the myth would in this case have been well known in Athens before the Orphic poems were.

[63] Keleos, whose name means "woodpecker," would have fit into such a scenario. In the rustic versions like Orphic Frag. 52, Triptolemos is a cowherd, Eumolpos a shepherd, and

gift of agriculture, and Triptolemos, who was often envisioned in art as flying through the world on the goddess's chariot, teaches agriculture to the rest of humankind. He plows the earth for the first time on the Rarian plain near Eleusis. Thus Athens and Eleusis could claim to be the source of two of the greatest benefits of the gods to humankind: agriculture and the Mysteries. Not surprisingly, Athens exploited this myth to make claims to leadership among the Greeks—in particular, a claim to be the Mother City of the Ionians. This Attic/Eleusinian variant on the myth—particularly the role of Triptolemos—could have been developed in the mid-sixth century, after the probable date of the composition of the *Hymn*. It is at this time that we can document the growth of Athenian interest in the Mysteries and the first artistic representations of Triptolemos.[64] Yet the many variations on these aspects of the story would seem to confirm their importance in the mythic tradition from an early date. Moreover, the motif of hospitality, which plays a pivotal role in all other versions of the Demeter story and is, as discussed earlier, a central and expected part of epic journeys and returns, plays a surprisingly minimal role in the encounter with the Eleusinians in the *Hymn*.[65] If the composer(s) of the *Hymn* knew this important and common Eleusinian version of the myth, then, the choice to ignore it and present an alternative version is significant.

2) In other versions Demeter gives mortals the Mysteries (and/or agriculture) at once as a reward for their information, their hospitality, or both. In the *Hymn* Demeter does not, as she promised (273), instruct the Eleusinians in her rites until well after the founding of her temple (476). In fact, Demeter's cult at Eleusis seems at first (despite hints to the contrary) to have been founded only to propitiate the angry goddess, not to open new opportunities for humankind.[66]

3) Whereas in most other versions of the story, Demeter descends to earth explicitly to search for her daughter, the *Hymn* makes the witnesses of the

Eubouleus a swineherd. The inhabitants of Eleusis, who also include Baubo and Dysaules, are said to be autochthonous (earthborn). For other versions of the myth where the witnesses are mortals, see Richardson 1974 on lines 75ff. and 96.

[64] See Shapiro 1989:67–83. Artistic representations of Triptolemos date from ca. 540. There are hints in the sources that in some locations the Thesmophoria, one of the oldest and most widespread rituals of Demeter in Greece, staged a version of the myth in which agriculture was not yet established (the women camped out in primitive tents, "imitated the ancient way of life" [Diodorus Siculus *Bibliotheca* 5.4.7], and at least at Eretria, they cured their meat in the sun rather than roasting it [Plutarch, *Moralia* 298b–c]). If so, Demeter's gift of agriculture was likely to have been an early element in the myth.

[65] See the Commentary on lines 90–97, 210, 253, 371–73 for discussion of this motif in the poem and examples of incidents relating to hospitality in other versions. Because the Mysteries are not represented in this poem as the direct result of human hospitality, the motif naturally becomes less explicit.

[66] See Richardson 1974:81 and 174.

rape divine rather than human. Because Demeter knows from Helios where Persephone is and has no way of reaching her, she is left without a stated motive for her journey to earth. Instead, we are told that Demeter is angry at Zeus (91), although the poem never makes explicit how the journey to earth articulates that anger.

4) Demeter's precise motive for nursing and attempting to immortalize the baby Demophoön is similarly left unstated. In many later versions of the myth, Demeter never loses sight for a moment of her goal of rescuing Persephone. Yet in the *Hymn* Demeter, during her time on earth, is temporarily distracted from her pursuit of Persephone by the Demophoön incident.

One might argue that myths and traditional oral narratives consistently have what modern readers would perceive to be gaps in motivation. Oral narratives are often more interested in results than motives: that is, Demeter goes to earth simply because her cult is there and the poem aims to explain its origin.[67] In addition, ellipses in this particular narrative may be motivated in part by the secrecy and the nature of the rites at Eleusis—that is, the *Hymn* may revolve around a series of enacted symbolic moments. The story pattern of wrath, withdrawal, and return that underlines the poem itself generates such powerful expectations for the act of withdrawal to another realm or for revenge (a possible motive for the Demophoön episode discussed below) that no explanation may be needed. At the same time, the probable existence of other versions of the myth that did offer a clearly motivated transition at these points in the story (the Orphic versions may reflect a tradition earlier than the *Hymn*) could shape audience reaction and expectation even in the case of a traditional oral narrative.[68] Furthermore, the initiates' search for Persephone at Eleusis was, at least at a later date, so fundamental a part of the Mysteries that the virtual disappearance of the human dimension to that effort in the *Hymn* might be surprising to any audience that included initiates.

Why would the *Hymn* ignore or suppress important Attic/Eleusinian versions of the story, presuming they were already part of the tradition, in favor of its own interpretation? Why are some parts of its story apparently unmotivated? There are three possible lines of explanation deriving from the historical context in which the *Hymn* may have been composed, from the traditions of Panhellenic poetry (poetry composed, like the Homeric hymns and the Homeric epics, for a broad Greek audience, rather than a

[67] On this point, see Parker 1991:11.

[68] For example, in Orphic frag. 49:101ff. Demeter asks who raped Persephone for the first time at the end of the Demophoön episode. In this version there is no need to account for her apparent loss of interest in Persephone, because she only now discovers the truth. See the section on "The Influence of the *Hymn to Demeter*" for a partial reconstruction of an Orphic version of the myth.

local one), and from thematic considerations. The first two lines of explanation are developed in the Appendix to this essay because they involve material not directly related to a literary interpretation of the *Hymn* as well as complex scholarly controversy.

Thematic reasons for selection of the *Hymn* from among available traditions and/or change of the myth have already been suggested in the previous section. The *Hymn* makes the Mysteries not merely the result of favors granted by human witnesses to the goddess, but of the entire set of experiences of the two goddesses and of the final compromise that reordered the universe and made the Mysteries possible.[69] Humans do not earn the Mysteries in the *Hymn*'s version; they are foolish and ignorant, though well-meaning in their treatment of strangers, guests, and suppliants. The Mysteries are founded because deities shared for a time a version of the mortal lot and Demeter was reunited with Persephone—hence the delay in establishing the Mysteries until that reunion has taken place and its ramifications are made clear.[70] The *Hymn* cannot tell us what happens in the secret rites; but it can make its audience understand why the Mysteries offer the particular benefits that they do. The poem, above all by its structure, suggests that, although mortals will never understand divinity, and divinity can never be more than partially and temporarily humanized, it was the profound and unique convergence of the two worlds that produced the Mysteries.

The *Hymn*, then, ignores the origin of agriculture and downplays the theme of hospitality and the origin or regularizing of the seasons to concentrate on the founding of the Mysteries; and it may tell us a good deal more about the fundamental meaning of the Mysteries than our ignorance of the final secret rites may lead us to think. The convergence in the narrative of Persephone's return, the renewed fertility of the earth, and the bestowal of the Mysteries hints at some connection between the blessings of the rites and the earth's cycle.[71] Yet because the famine motif is not closely linked to the disappearance and appearance of Persephone, the *Hymn* can emphasize a psychological interpretation of the origin of the Mysteries—the Mysteries are a product of divine suffering and of the convergence of divine and human experience. The gap between Demeter's initial and final establishment of her rites may also serve a related purpose. At first she inspires awe and terror; finally, she offers happiness. This takes the Eleusinians through two phases of initiation into the rites that may parallel the transition from *mystês* to *epoptês*.[72]

[69] Clinton 1986:48 sees the closing reference to the founding of the Mysteries as tacked on to the narrative, whereas I argue that the entire poem aims at this climax.

[70] See Rudhardt 1978 (this volume), Clay 1989:243, and Parker 1991:13.

[71] Parker 1991:12–13.

[72] Ibid.:13. See in addition the treatment of the theme of sight and hearing discussed in the Commentary on lines 17, 51–89, 281–83, and 292–304.

Furthermore, by placing the Demophoön episode before the famine, the poem sets the stage for the Mysteries by demonstrating the impossibility of immortalizing humans and of breaking down the fundamental barriers between gods and mortals.[73] The lack of motivation for the Demophoön episode is precisely what gives it its power to resonate with the role of the initiate in the Mysteries; the aura of mystery partially detaches the episode from a concrete place in the narrative and permits it to suggest a far broader set of implications. Moreover, the story, by not allowing Demophoön to die at once, as he does in other versions, and by domesticating Persephone's epic role as the dread goddess of the dead (which receives brief and inexplicit recognition at lines 364–69), prepares more effectively for the beneficence to humankind that the reunited pair of divinities display at the conclusion of the poem. All details of the story are thus apparently shaped to make the Mysteries the outcome of Demeter's and Persephone's contact with mortality. By emphasizing the psychological dimensions of the story for all humankind, the poem develops a theological and cosmological profundity that all other extant versions of the myth seem to lack.

Female Experience in the *Hymn to Demeter*

Scholars have argued, on the basis of the ubiquity and antiquity of Demeter's rite of the Thesmophoria in Greece, that the special emphasis on female experience in the *Hymn* represented the earliest and essential core of the myth and of the rituals developed in association with it. Some scholars even went so far as to suggest that the Mysteries had originally been, as in the case of many other important and early cults of Demeter, exclusive to women.[74] This is unprovable speculation, and we certainly have no historical example of a cult previously exclusive to women becoming open to participants of both sexes. Yet it remains possible that if all-female cults of Demeter such as the Thesmophoria antedated the Mysteries, or coexisted with them from an early date, the nature of these cults and their myths could have influenced mythmaking at Eleusis. In focussing so closely on the experience of mother and daughter and on Demeter's stay among mortal women, the *Hymn*

[73] Bianchi 1964, Rudhardt 1978 (this volume), and Chirassi-Columbo 1975:205. For detailed discussion of the Demophoön episode, see the section below on "Gender Conflict."

[74] Thomson 1972:119–23 makes this suggestion on the basis of the antiquity and possible Egyptian origins of the Thesmophoria (thought to be the oldest cult of Demeter in Greece—see Herodotos 2.171) and even of the Mysteries. See also Allen and Sikes 1904:292 and Kerényi 1967a: 80. Harrison 1903:ch. 4 argues that the Mysteries developed out of the more "primitive" Thesmophoria, Haloa, and other all-female rituals of Demeter. Although the belief of such scholars in a pre-Greek and pre-Olympian Mediterranean religion that emphasized the worship of a mother goddess has been much contested, it is not impossible (though it is unprovable) that the earliest cults of Demeter in Greece were exclusive to women.

shows relatively little interest in aspects of the cult and the myth that related, at least in classical times, more explicitly to men: the role of Triptolemos and the origin of agriculture and the male priests of the cult. In other versions of the myth, men also played an important role in Demeter's search for her daughter and in the hospitality accorded the goddess on earth.[75]

We have already seen how Demeter's female quest both resembles and differs from that of male heroes like Achilleus and Odysseus. Both sexes pursue honor and status, but in Demeter's case the recovery of her lost daughter plays an emphatically central role. The female quest is defined by issues relating to marriage and fertility, the male quest by war and kingship. The male quest ends with an acceptance of mortality mitigated by fame, the female quest with a cyclical reunion and separation that also mitigates "death." The next four sections look more closely at the poem's emphasis on female experience and consider how this relates to the mythical founding of the Mysteries in the poem.

Marriage

As noted earlier, the Demeter/Persephone myth became in some instances a paradigm in Greek art and literature for human marriage as a rite of initiation; in marriage the bride could be thought to undergo a symbolic death before a symbolic rebirth and reincorporation into a new household as wife and mother. Just as Zeus in essence "sacrifices" his daughter to the world of death in the *Hymn*, the sacrifice of the daughter by the father is a myth of female initiation in other contexts as well.[76] Attic girls participating in the cult of Artemis at Brauron were probably initiated into adulthood and marriage with the story of Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia at Aulis and other closely related myths.[77] In these related myths, a substitution was made and an animal died for the girl, who goes on to maturity and marriage. In other initiatory myths, the girl, like Helen (by Theseus), the Leukippides (by the Dioscuroi), or Oreithyia (by Boreas) is abducted before marriage. Like these myths, the *Hymn* partially undoes the consequences of abduction and "death" for Demeter's daughter Korê in the world above, but it also sacrifices her to the world below as wife of Hades.

By emphasizing in contrast to these other closely related myths the irrevocable and painful consequences of the abduction, the *Hymn* reveals the problematic side of marriage for the bride and develops its narrative on the

[75] In the Orphic tradition, to give an Attic/Eleusinian alternative, Eubouleus and Triptolemos were the lucky informers (Frag. 51K = Pausanias *Graeciae descriptio* 1.14.3).

[76] See Burkert 1983:262 on Persephone's rape by Hades as the father's sacrifice of a maiden.

[77] Iphigeneia had her own cult at Brauron. For the related myths, see Sale 1975, Henrichs 1981, Lloyd-Jones 1983, Sourvinou-Inwood 1988, and Dowden 1989.

divine level as a conflict between genders. Demeter, Hekate, and Persephone are aligned on one side; Zeus, Helios, and Hades on the other.[78] Indeed, one ancient source later than the *Hymn* notes that marriage is repugnant to Demeter because of the loss of her daughter.[79] In this respect the *Hymn* contrasts with the major Homeric epics and resembles, in a manner to be discussed shortly, many later Greek dramas or Hesiod's cosmological poem the *Theogony*.

In the *Hymn* Zeus attempts to impose on Persephone a form of marriage new to Olympus, the divine equivalent of a mortal institution familiar in Homer: in modern terms we would categorize it as patriarchal and virilocal exogamy (a marriage between members of two different social groups arranged by the father of the bride in which the bride resides with her husband). Although in the *Hymn* marriage already exists among mortals on earth, the institution was not always the general rule among the gods.[80] Rape, incest, and promiscuity are perhaps the dominant modes of procreation among divinities in the early phases of the universe during which the majority of gods were born and acquired their powers. Zeus and Demeter, a brother and sister, produced Persephone in precisely this fashion. Although Zeus and Hera (also a brother and sister) and other gods are represented as married, especially once the rule of Zeus over the cosmos has been established, divine marriage, if it functions with any consistency, did not function as earthly marriage does.

Indeed, divine existence is partly defined in epic by the gods' ability to break the rules of human society and avoid the consequences that would have occurred in a mortal context. Mortal marriage in epic entailed an exchange of gifts by the bride's guardian and her spouse-to-be used for the benefit of one or both participating families and a formal ceremony followed by cohabitation in one household and carefully regulated sexual engagement for the purpose of producing legitimate heirs for the husband's lineage.[81] Inheritance and sexual fidelity could not and did not ever play the

[78] It should be noted, however, that Gaia assists Zeus, and Rheia mediates between Zeus and her daughter. The gender conflict here is not as marked or as explicitly emphasized as it is in later tragedy.

[79] Servius on *Aeneid* 4.58. Farnell 1909:3.80–82 and 101–3 notes the rare connection between Demeter and marriage (as opposed to fertility) in mainland Greek cults. By contrast, heroines are linked in cult with all family members except their mothers. Cults of former mortals, then, do not celebrate a relationship that interferes with the woman's primary adult social role, that of married mother.

[80] Rudhardt 1978 (this volume) argues that what makes this divine marriage unique and unacceptable to the two goddesses is Persephone's inaccessibility in the underworld and the separation it occasions. I accept this important point, but I wish to expand on its implictions by formulating it in a different fashion.

[81] Even in the variety of Homeric marriage where the groom would, as in the case of Odysseus with Nausikäa, have lived in the bride's community, Odysseus was to receive wealth and a house where he could take his bride and produce heirs.

same role among immortal beings, whose need to procreate or to regulate procreation did not match that of mortals. In the early phases of Hesiod's cosmology, genealogies can be, in contrast to human ones, represented as matrilineal; children can gain an honored place in the universe as children of the mother and a product of desire.[82] The structure of the universe remained stable precisely because Zeus did not father a male heir who could replace him.

In contrast to mortal marriages, neither divine marriages nor rapes required the same kind of change of residence to which the mortal bride was often subject; nor did they require loss of independence on the part of the female Olympian, who continued to exercise her own perogatives in the sphere allotted to her. In other words, because Olympian gods live as one community, their marriages are in essence endogamous (between insiders) and do not require the separation of the daughter from her natal family. Olympian goddesses may be said in Homer or Hesiod to reside in the homes of their spouses. Aphrodite, for example, is said in *Odyssey* 8 to commit adultery with Ares in the house of Hephaistos, who has paid her father gifts (318, *hedna*) for the bride. But epic frequently treats these residences largely as a place for sleeping (see *Iliad* 1. 605–11),[83] and the regular presence of Olympian goddesses at the assembly of Zeus indicates that a separate residence in no way isolates them from the divine community or inevitably subordinates them to their husbands. Hence Aphrodite, for example, arrives home *from the presence of Zeus* to find Ares awaiting her (8.289–91).

Although sexual fidelity is not at stake in the *Hymn*, Kalypso's complaint at *Odyssey* 5.118–29, makes clear that there was more constraint on the unions of goddesses than on those of gods (although in her examples it was mortals who paid the price for the liaison with a goddess). Here she complains that the gods out of cruelty and jealousy do not tolerate the liaisons of goddesses and mortals. Artemis killed Dawn's lover Orion; and Zeus killed Demeter's lover Iasion with a thunderbolt. Yet the married Aphrodite continues to preside over love legitimate and illegitimate after her adultery; the adultery with Ares outrages Hephaistos, but the incident is quickly resolved by laughter and the promise of a fine from Ares. In the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, Zeus himself makes the goddess desire the mortal Anchises and

[82] On matrilinear genealogies in Hesiod, see West 1966:35and 39. The children of Night and Strife are, for example, born parthenogenically, and the children of Styx receive honors from Zeus as her children. The situation of Hekate is discussed below. Such emphasis on the mother does not occur in Homer or later myth, or even in the later phases of Hesiod's *Theogony*—once rule of Zeus is established, patriarchal principle takes over to a greater degree.

[83] Sometimes we see a divine couple pursuing their activities at home. Charis and Hephaistos are both at home when Thetis comes to ask Hephaistos to make a shield for Achilleus in *Iliad* 18. At the same time, epic also pictures goddesses retiring for periods in their temples on earth.

bear his child. Even when major goddesses, like Thetis, are married off to mortals in order to prevent the birth of a divine son who could rival Zeus, the goddess soon returns to her previous element. I should stress, however, that I am not taking into consideration here the marriages of lesser deities, such as Nymphs or Okeanids, whose unions might be imagined (their stories are too unimportant for detailed representation in archaic epic) to entail a more permanent move into another sphere at marriage.

Persephone's marriage with Hades might appear to perpetuate this Olympian endogamy, because it is a marriage to the father's (and mother's) brother. But the inaccessibility of Hades makes it geographically impossible for the marriage to function endogamously.[84] Thus Persephone is subjected to an extreme form of virilocal exogamy in which she is permanently denied access to her parents. As with other aspects of the *Hymn*, this marriage, in which the bride undergoes a symbolic death in the transition from one household to another, brings Persephone closer to human experience. For despite the mitigating conclusion of the *Hymn*, Demeter and Persephone remain forever marked by the encounter with mortal limits: death, marriage, the relentless cycle of the seasons (in cult the goddesses are worshiped for guaranteeing the regularity of the seasons, yet the seasons, insofar as they are linked to Persephone's appearance and disappearance, limit the mother/daughter relation as well).

The opening scene of the *Hymn* hints strongly at Persephone's readiness for sexuality, yet it chooses to envision her marriage as a deceptive and cruel trick foisted by violence on an idyllic mother/daughter relationship.[85] Zeus gives Persephone to Hades without the consent or knowledge of either mother or daughter—as may often have been the case in human society (as opposed to Nausikäa's utopian Phaiakia) at the time.[86] Helios then becomes Zeus's apologist, as the father of the bride keeps his distance from mother and daughter—and hence from the poem's audience—throughout the narrative. Hades needs a wife, and as her uncle and Zeus's brother, as well as a powerful god who can bestow honors on his wife, he is an appropri-

[84] Scarpi 1976:117, 125, 137 notes the endogamy of Olympus but incorrectly considers the marriage to Hades as part of that endogamy.

[85] Ibid.:209ff., following Nilsson, interprets the abduction in the light of Greek traditions concerning marriage by capture. Marriage by abduction survived as a practice in Sparta, but not, for example, in historical Athens. Nevertheless, the theme of abduction and pursuit of girls, possibly leading to marriage, was popular on Attic vases (see Sourvinou-Inwood 1991:58–98. The father of the girl sometimes appears on these vases, but the mother never does). Clay 1989:209.n.33 argues that the scenario does not fit, because Zeus himself plans the abduction. To the degree that the theme is present in the *Hymn*, Hades' marriage by abduction is replaced by an institution that gives a more important role to persuasion and to consent on the part of the bride and her mother.

[86] Zeus's ignoring of Demeter's and Persephone's views on the marriage is also understood by Scarpi 1976:119ff. to be characteristic of Athenian marriage arrangements.

ate husband for Persephone. Yet despite Helios's apology, Hades' abduction does not function as a legitimate marriage. The abduction includes elements in a normal marriage rite—an *engyê* or pledge of marriage between father and groom and the transfer of the bride by chariot to her new residence[87]—only to emphasize the abnormality of a marriage in which the bride, because she initially does not eat in the underworld, has not fully engaged in the final stage necessary to legitimate Athenian marriage at least, cohabitation (*synoikein*).[88]

In Attic marriage the bridal couple was showered with dried fruits and nuts (*katachysmata*) and presented with a basket of bread; the bride ate a quince (and probably a wedding cake made from sesame seeds) on arrival at the groom's house;[89] the bride's acceptance of food (*trophê*) was a form of acknowledging the groom's authority (*kyreia*) over her.[90] Another aspect of the standard marriage rite was the carrying of torches by the bride's mother; in the *Hymn* the bride's mother Demeter carries torches alone and after the event.[91] The abduction comes to resemble marriage more fully only at the point of the final compromise, when Persephone eats and Hades mitigates his original violence with persuasion—a promise of honors to his bride.[92] It is unclear whether Persephone has consummated her marriage—we find her in Hades' bed, an unwilling partner (343–44) still longing for her mother.

Before giving Persephone the pomegranate seed, Hades urges her not to remain depressed but to feel kindly toward him (360–62). Plutarch says that Solon decreed that Attic brides should eat quinces to keep their mouth and their speech sweet (*Moralia* 138D and 279F). The eating of the quince by the Attic bride may also have helped to awaken her desire.[93] As with

[87] See Scarpi 1976:111, 114, 120. In his discussion of the terms for "wife" used in the poem (120), and especially of *parakoitis* (343), which can also mean "concubine," Scarpi 1976:119 nevertheless admits to a certain ambiguity in Persephone's status.

[88] There is of course a danger of anachronism here, because we are not certain whether all these marriage-related elements played a role in archaic Greece as opposed to classical Greece.

[89] In Plutarch's *Life of Solon* 89C, the custom of having the bride eat a quince before the couple entered the bedchamber occurs in a passage where the institution of the heiress or *epiklêros* is under discussion, but at *Moralia* 138D and 279F no distinction is made about the bride's status. For the sesame-seed cake, see the scholiast on Aristophanes *Peace* 869. On the symbolic importance of the bride's eating food in her husband's house, see Erdmann 1934:259 and 320ff. and Sutton 1981:153–54.

[90] Sutton 1981:154.

[91] Clytemnestra at Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* 734–36 particularly stresses the importance, in her mind, of carrying the torch for her daughter's wedding.

[92] The possible implications of Persephone's new honors will be discussed below. Arthur 1977 (this volume) notes Hades' new use of persuasion in this scene.

[93] Faraone 1990:esp. 237–38. He argues that in the case of the *epiklêros*, the eating of an aphrodisiac may have helped to tame an exceptionally powerful bride (Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1161a). Apples or quinces were also linked with pomegranates as forbidden foods in cults of Demeter.

Solon's quince, Persephone's eating of the pomegranate seed may signal a shift to seduction, a careful preparation of the bride for sexuality rather than violence. Yet even here the language that Persephone uses to describe her final eating of the pomegranate seed echoes that used to describe the original abduction: "He stealthily put in my mouth a food honey-sweet, a pomegranate seed, and compelled me against my will and by force to eat it" (411–13). Thus, although from the male perspective Hades' abduction is entirely acceptable, the *Hymn* continues to stress the female resistance throughout.

The *Hymn* thus takes apart the benign cultural institution we see functioning apparently without tension on earth and shows the price paid by mother and daughter in accepting for the first time a marriage that requires a degree of separation and subordination to the male unfamiliar in the divine world. We witness an attempt to achieve a divine version of what Engels called "the world-historical defeat of the female sex." Yet by locating the myth within the context of a human world where marriage with all its variations is a fundamental aspect of the cultural system, the narrative makes the outcome—Persephone's inability to escape maturity and marriage—seem necessary and within limits desirable even for a divinity. Above all, without Hades Persephone would never have acquired her own *timai* or honors separate from those of her mother (although those she acquires from her mother reduce her subordination to her spouse). Nevertheless, the deflection of the challenge to exogamy onto the divine level may reveal as well historical or ideological tensions in the functioning of the institution of marriage in archaic Greek society.[94] (I shall return to this question in the section on "The *Hymn to Demeter* and the Polis.")

Later versions of the myth make Persephone considerably more enthusiastic about her divine husband; in one version she does not even wish to return to her mother.[95] Apuleius's second-century C.E. tale of Amor and Psyche in *The Golden Ass* offers another closely related myth about the struggles of a bride married off to a figure whom she believes to be linked to Death. In this case the mortal Psyche even becomes the active pursuer of the divine Amor (Eros), once she discovers his true identity. Psyche's sisters and Amor's mother Venus block her quest to regain Amor and attempt to destroy Psyche's marital bliss. The *Hymn*, by contrast, does not romanticize marriage. It shows that for mortals, like the daughters of Keleos, the best that could be wished for any young woman is marriage and children, and especially a male heir to propagate the family line. Goddesses, on the other hand, represent a different case altogether. They mature to an age appropriate to their function (they may choose to remain virgins) and do not need marriage to procreate—as Demeter herself did not. Nor do they normally need male protection against violence and rape, as Persephone does in her

[94] See Chirassi-Columbo 1975:200.

[95] See Servius on Vergil *Georgics* 1.39 and Lucan *Bellum Civile* 6.698ff. and 739ff.

call to Zeus in the *Hymn*. Rapes among divinities do not have the social consequences that they have on earth, because both male and female children, as the children of mothers, could acquire divine honors without the legitimacy conferred by marriage. Thus, although the marriage of Persephone and Hades cannot be undone, it is hardly surprising that Demeter attempts to reinstate Olympian endogamy.

As might be expected in the case of a goddess who is both eternal virgin (Korê) as well as wife of Hades,[96] the two goddesses finally refuse to be more than partially bound within the confines of the original patriarchal and virilocal exogamous marriage—that is, within a human form of marriage. A compromise takes place which locates all emotional satisfaction in the relation of mother and daughter, even though Persephone may be appeased by the honors she will receive as Hades' wife (or even be readied for sexuality by the eating of the pomegranate seed). Hades, forced by Demeter's famine and Zeus's command to relinquish his bride to her father, will no longer fully possess his wife. Unlike the mortal daughter, Persephone will spend more time with her natal family than with her spouse (in this her marriage more closely resembles the status quo for goddesses on Olympus, although her time is distributed more systematically). Nor does she in any extant version of the abduction myth (including the *Hymn*) explicitly fulfill the normal purpose of Greek marriage by producing a child with Hades (who does not, as eternal Lord of the Dead, need an offspring in any case). Persephone is known to have produced a child in later myth.[97] In the Orphic *Rhapsodies* (frag. 303 Kern), Zeus fathered Persephone's child Iakchos/Dionysos (see also Orphic hymn 29; Orphic frags. 58, 153, 195, and 303 Kern; and Nonnos *Dionysiaka* 6. 1–168). The Brimos said to be born to Brimo at the close of the rites at Eleusis is sometimes thought to be Persephone's son (the father's identity is also uncertain) but may also be the son of Demeter or even another goddess.[98] The child Ploutos, whom the god-

[96] See Orphic frag. 197 Kern.

[97] Persephone is also called *kallipais*, producer of beautiful children, at Euripides *Orestes* 964, although it is not clear what specific implications this epithet has for herself. Orphic fragments 197 and 360 Kern and *Orphic Hymn* 70 have her produce with Hades the chthonic Eumenides. Elsewhere she mates with Zeus to produce the chthonic nymph Melinoë (*Orphic Hymn* 71), and Tritopatreus, Eubouleus, and Dionysos (Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.53). In Aeschylus fragment 228 Nauck², Hades is the father of Zagreus (the mother is unnamed). These obscure and probably later traditions are made more difficult to interpret, because Zeus is sometimes understood as having an incarnation in the world below closely identified with the lord of the dead himself. The absence of this theme could of course be due to its role in the most secret parts of the Mysteries. In Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*, Pluto wishes to marry because he is childless; but the poem is unfinished and thus leaves the question of offspring open.

[98] See Hippolytos *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 5.8. p. 96 and Clement *Protreptikos* 2.15.1, Likophron *Alexandria* 698 and the scholia, and possibly Apollonios Rhodios *Argonautika* 3.861–62.

desses will send to bestow blessings on earth in the *Hymn*, was generally thought to be the son of Demeter and Iasion, not of Persephone. Within the confines of the *Hymn*, then, it is through her relation to her parents and especially through her mother, not through her husband, that Persephone helps to guarantee fertility on earth. The poem stresses—although this could be for reasons of cult secrecy—the divine adoption of human nurslings, not the birth of an immortal child.

Most important, Demeter's resistance to Persephone's marriage gives it a pivotal place in the universe. A Persephone confined in an inaccessible underworld paradoxically reinforces the separation between the worlds above and below ruled, respectively, by her divine father and her husband, rather than joining them, as would normally be the case in marriage. Zeus's initial plan is barren and treated unsympathetically from the start.[99] The poem never indicates that Zeus planned the final outcome of the story but suggests that it was foisted on him. Events apparently do not go as Zeus expected and a new approach is required to resolve the crisis of the famine.[100] In a fashion unparalleled in epic, Demeter initially ignores the will of Zeus and refuses to abandon the famine. At 334ff. Zeus instructs Hermes to bring Persephone back. Hades then forestalls her permanent departure through trickery. The text gives no indiction that Zeus anticipated Hades' move.[101] If Zeus had planned the marriage to link Olympus to the underworld, there would have been no need for secrecy, nor for Demeter's initial ignorance and cruel separation from her daughter.

It is also Demeter's intervention that makes Persephone finally accessible to her parents as in a normal Olympian marriage, while Hades remains inaccessible in the world below; it is Demeter, not Zeus, who creates the Mysteries and transforms the relation of mortals to herself. A Persephone who is linked permanently through shared honors both to Hades and to her divine mother in the worlds of earth and Olympus can dynamically join the

[99] Rudhardt 1978 (this volume) argues effectively that the resolution of this poem depends on Persephone's return.

[100] This is one of the few important differences I have with the study of Jenny Clay 1989. Clay's interpretation gives all the initiative in the poem to an all-seeing Zeus, whereas the narrative stresses the role of Demeter and her challenge to Zeus. Zeus's plan would make more sense in versions where the underworld is penetrable. As Scarpi 1976:121 points out, Zeus, after being brought to accept a change in his initial plan by Demeter's famine, finally reappropriates his role as head of the family by ratifying his daughter's future. But the offer of new *timai* to Demeter is clearly a new concession, given in recompense to her, just as Tros was compensated with immortal horses for Zeus's rape of Ganymede.

[101] Zeus is not always omniscient in early Greek poetry. In order to distract him from the battlefield, Hera tricks Zeus into sleeping with her in *Iliad* 14. Although in Hesiod's *Theogony* Zeus is not fooled by Prometheus's sacrificial portions, Hyginus *Astronomy* 2.15, where Zeus is tricked, probably indicates an alternate tradition of great antiquity. Ann Suter, in a paper presented at the 1992 American Philological association meeting, documented Demeter's anomalous resistance to Zeus's will.

spheres of the universe and promise the Mysteries and their benefits to humankind. In the end Demeter and Persephone lose some autonomy and gain new powers (as the deities in the other hymns also gain greater powers than before); the "traffic in women" will never become a regular mode of Olympian diplomacy, and Demeter's rupture through her famine of the circulation of honors between gods and humans parallels her blocking of Zeus's free exchange of her daughter among male divinities.[102] Paradoxically then, the *Hymn* makes Persephone's marriage necessary and inevitable, while its conclusion turns on an important modification of the institution originally planned by Zeus.

Gender Conflict and the Cosmological Tradition

By emphasizing the problematic aspects of Persephone's marriage to Hades and by developing its narrative as a conflict between the sexes that ultimately threatens the organization of the cosmos through Demeter's famine, the *Hymn to Demeter* stands in contrast to the major Homeric epics and more closely resembles Hesiod's *Theogony*, later Attic drama, or classical Athenian myths of the Amazons, famed for their resistance to marriage. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, a poem that describes the birth of the universe and the emergence of a divine order, tensions among male and female divinities emerge in each generation of the descendants of the divine ancestors of the Olympian gods, Earth and Sky. At each stage, a male god tries to prevent and thus to control the birth of his children, largely to avoid being replaced by a male successor. The divine children are assisted in their struggle against the father by mothers and grandmothers, just as Gaia (Earth) assists Zeus in his plan in the *Hymn* (8–9). Zeus finally consolidates his power over the universe by swallowing his pregnant consort Metis; he gives birth to the female child Athena from his head but prevents the birth of the male child who would have usurped his power. Finally, Zeus distributes special honors to various (gods and) goddesses, thereby gaining their loyalty and the loyalty of their children. The "civilizing" of the divine realm thus entails a consolidation of male dominance and a male appropriation of the reproductive process. The *Theogony* as a whole demonstrates the superior diplomacy and physical power of male deities; but they require the powers and cooperation of female deities at every phase to succeed. As in the *Hymn*, goddesses retain a far wider range of powers and capacity for independent action than do their mortal counterparts.

102 Here I again disagree with Scarpi 1976, who argues (esp. 136–37) that the marriage of Korê sanctions the value of women as circulated within the endogamic system of Olympus—despite his awareness that the marriage joins and disjoins Olympus and Hades in a seasonal cycle. Furthermore, endogamy is designed to keep privileges circulating within a narrow group, whereas Demeter deliberately makes mortals beneficiaries in the final arrangement.

The cosmological process produced some acts of rebellion on the part of important female deities, who exploit their maternity to "pursue change and promote succession."[103] In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Earth produces Typhöeus who "would have ruled over gods and mortals" (837), a monster whom Zeus must defeat to maintain his rule. Jealous at the birth of Athena, Hera also tries to give birth by herself to a child who would challenge Zeus's supremacy; but she only bears either the lame god Hephaistos (*Theogony* 927–29) or the monster Typhaon (*Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 305–68). In slaying this beast, Apollo echoes his father's defeat of Typhöeus. In her anger at Zeus, Demeter defies the boundary between gods and mortals in trying to make the mortal Demophoön immortal. Is she also, like Hera, trying to produce an immortal male champion who will challenge Zeus?[104]

The poem gives no explanation for her action, and the mythological tradition offers no precedents that could help the *Hymn*'s original audience to interpret her act with any certainty. The closest precendents are as follows: 1) A goddess like Earth or Hera gives birth, in the latter case by parthenogenesis, to a divine challenger to Zeus and the challenge does not succeed; 2) A divine mother tries and fails to immortalize the child she bore by a mortal (Thetis's attempt to immortalize Achilleus is an example).[105] 3) A goddess immortalizes a mortal lover (Dawn has Tithonos immortalized and Kalypso offers immortality to Odysseus). None of these three scenarios fits. If Demeter as in the first scenario is attempting to provide a male challenger to Zeus, she, unlike her predecessors, surprisingly flees from the gods instead of rebelling directly against Zeus and turns to humanity to acquire a male offspring. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine that a child of entirely mortal heritage could, even when immortalized, challenge the mighty ruler of the universe. Even the immortalized Herakles did not. In a closely related case, Athena fails to immortalize her Attic foster child Erichthonios (another half-divine child whose father was Hephaistos) because his nurses, the daughters of Kekrops, peer into the box in which he is concealed. There is no question here of the child's becoming an equal of the Olympians. Attempts by goddesses to immortalize lovers[106] or children inevitably lead to disaster in Greek myth. In the case of lovers, Dawn forgets to ask for eternal youth for Tithonos, so that he ends up in a state of immortal senility and Odysseus has no interest in accepting Kalypso's offer. All three of these cosmological motifs in any case serve to prepare for failure more than success.

By concealing Demeter's motive for immortalizing Demophoön, the poem permits its audience to supply a range of possible motives for her

103 Clay 1989:13.

104 This is the view of Clay 1989:226. Another possibility is that Demeter is trying to retaliate by depriving Hades of a victim he is owed.

105 Medea, who also has divine aspects, similarly tries and fails to immortalize her children.

106 See Sowa 1984:ch. 2 for examples.

actions yet stresses the inaccessibility of divine motives and plans to mortals. The *Hymn* dwells not only on the disguised Demeter's power and her anger at Zeus, but on her suffering and her pleasure in mortal women and in her maternal role as a nurse. The text partially humanizes the goddess and suggestively juxtaposes her pain at the loss of her only child Persephone with the mortal mother Metaneira's fear that Demeter will destroy her only late-born son. Such parallelism invites the speculation that Demeter is trying to assuage her sense of emotional loss by appropriating Demophoön in order to replace her lost daughter with a male child who cannot, like a daughter, be taken from her by marriage.[107] Nevertheless, 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.[108] Like the Mysteries, the incident plays on the fear and bliss that the goddess can produce in mortals. Finally, Demeter's relation to Demophoön may offer an aetiology for the future relation between Demeter and the initiate. Demeter becomes both to Demophoön and to the initiate a symbolic nurse and mitigator of death (see the commentary on lines 231–55 for further discussion). The first initiates to the cult in this poem are male, and at least at a later period a male "child from the hearth" was initiated for the city. Yet in this version of the myth, it is only as an infant that a male can find a place in the private world of women, where Demeter engages directly with mortals.

By comparing the cosmological strategies used by Demeter and Zeus in this poem, we can see that the maternal politics of Demeter represent a genuine challenge to the patriarchal politics of Zeus in epic, at least insofar as Hesiod, the *Hymn to Demeter*, and to a lesser degree the Homeric poems represent them. In Hesiod's *Theogony* Zeus takes a formal approach to establishing his authority over the universe. Using force, polygamy, ingenuity, and the bait of honor, he prevents the birth of a male successor altogether; divides heaven, the sea, and the underworld among himself and his two powerful brothers; suppresses violent male gods of the earlier generations and distributes powers to all others; mates with goddesses to produce deities whose names suggest the arts of cultured life, and ensures the permanent separation of the worlds of humans and gods.[109] As a result of the Prometheus episode, humankind is forced to endure an existence radically separate from the gods, and Zeus establishes and makes every effort to maintain the boundaries between mortals and immortals. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, we are not told Zeus's motives for arranging Persephone's marriage directly; Helios, in defending Zeus, mentions only formal considerations—the suitability of so august a bridegroom (84–87). Yet the father, having overlooked both the emotional realities involved and the problematic status of the Olympian bride, is finally forced to modify his position in the goddesses' favor.

107 Clay 1989:225, in dismissing this alternative (suggested by Rudhardt 1978, Arthur 1977, and Rubin and Deal 1980, this volume) tends to underemphasize, in her concern with the cosmological themes of the poem, the poem's stress on the suffering and humanization of the goddess.

108 Parker 1991:10 suggests that this poem was the first to portray the episode as the origin of the Mysteries.

109 Zeus does in one sense make the divine world into one endogamous family in the *Theogony*, but his organization of the cosmos does not include Hades or mortals in this family.

Demeter first tries to disrupt Zeus's universal order by making a mortal boy an immortal child and her own; then she goes on strike to win back her daughter. The altered relation between upper and lower worlds emerges as a result of her reunion with her daughter. Unlike Zeus, she is not concerned with the separation of spheres and the transcendence of mother/child bonds, but with a preservation of such bonds and a breaking down of divisions among spheres. Hades becomes linked through Persephone to the world above, and mortals become the symbolic nurslings of the goddesses. The goddesses' relation to initiates is described in the *Hymn* as one of a durable love of one friend or relative (*philos*) for another (487, *prophroneôs philôntai*). Demeter thus softens the boundaries between mortals and immortals that Zeus had consolidated and makes the universe more of a family by uniting its realms, whereas Zeus, by exiling his daughter to the world below, had made it less of one. Demeter's famine reveals that the gods are dependent on humans—for sacrifices—and her own temporary dependence on mortals is a theme of the poem. Furthermore, she throws a new light on the role of the earth in the relations of the cosmos. The divine brothers Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades divided heaven, sea, and underworld among themselves; they left the earth, the mortal sphere, as a territory to be shared among the gods (*Iliad* 15.187–93). Demeter, by demonstrating through her withdrawal her de facto power over that fourth sphere, brings the earth into a new and more beneficent relation to the powers above and below. The *Hymn* thus reinforces the female challenge that Demeter poses to Zeus's rule.

Recent studies have examined the possible differences between men and women as moral and social agents.[110] These studies argue that women more often than men define themselves relationally, and especially by their positions in a family group; when faced with difficult decisions, they are apt to take an approach consonant with their social and familial identities. Men, by contrast, tend to define themselves to a greater degree by bonds outside the

110 Gilligan 1982's views on the morality of care as opposed to the morality of justice have been much elaborated and criticized. For further bibliography, see Gilligan et al. 1988 and Kittay and Meyers 1987. Chodorow 1974 (this volume) served as a partial inspiration for Gilligan.

family and mature in relation to a peer group of other men. They are more likely to approach problems abstractly and formally, and male maturity involves greater detachment from the bonds of intimacy, first from the mother, and finally from the family. In the *Hymn* a similar contrast obtains in the strategies adopted by Zeus and Demeter. Zeus's approach is formal and aims to transcend mother/child bonds, whereas the beleaguered Demeter adopts the relational approach more generally characteristic of women (and the powerless).

The *Hymn*, then, repeats the pattern of sexual tensions among male and female deities found in Hesiod and prefigures the similar tensions that pervade Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.[111] The events of both the *Hymn* and the fifth-century trilogy are triggered by a violent male intrusion into the mother/child bond and the real or metaphorical sacrifice of the daughter Persephone or Iphigeneia;[112] both reach closure and compromise when offended female deities receive new honors in a universe dominated by Zeus. Yet whereas the Erinyes' jurisdiction is changed and circumscribed, Demeter's honors are amplified. Demeter's partial autonomy is represented in her ability to make Zeus capitulate and modify his plans, and in her reception of a *choice* of new honors from Zeus. This is unusual in Hesiod and the hymns. The longer Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* (5), for example, establishes new limits on Aphrodite's powers—the goddess, once she herself has been made to desire a mortal, will no longer be able to boast of her power over other divinities; Hermes must to some extent give way to Apollo in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*.

The cosmological strategies Demeter uses are not exclusive in Greek literature to the female (the *Odyssey* too, for example, reestablishes order in Ithaka by rebuilding familial bonds, both formally and emotionally, within the household of Odysseus) but are linked to the female in the *Hymn* through the contrast it develops between Zeus and Hades and Demeter as agents. Yet whereas the *Theogony* views female wrath and rebellion as dangerous and disruptive to the divine order and potentially devastating to humanity, the *Hymn to Demeter* emphasizes the creative and positive outcome of Demeter's nevertheless disruptive and dangerous wrath (to say nothing of her love).[113]

[111] See Zeitlin 1978 on the *Oresteia* and Arthur 1982 on the *Theogony*.

[112] For a discussion of the "female intruder" pattern in tragedy, in which a female figure steps out of her sphere and disrupts the social order in reaction to a male violation of her domestic interests, see Foley 1982. The *Hymn* is far more tolerant of Demeter's intrusion than tragedy is, however.

[113] Dirk Obbink suggests to me that in attempting to destroy humanity with her famine, Demeter temporarily echoes Zeus's own threats to exterminate humanity in various myths. Nevertheless, Demeter's challenge to patrilocal marriage and her withdrawal from her proper sphere among the gods ends in an acceptance of marriage and the establishment of a civic cult. In the Thesmophoria, women also left their homes, but to put the fertility of married women at the service of the city-state. Epithalamia (marriage songs) could also stress the bride's resistance to marriage and to departure from the mother (see Catullus 62) in the context of celebrating the rite.

Here Zeus, in being forced by Demeter to modify Persephone's and humanity's future, seems to play a role closer to the one that he plays in Aeschylus's later Prometheus trilogy, where the crude young Zeus, recently come to power, learns through his conflict with the Titan Prometheus that knowledge (the secret about the birth of a son who could replace Zeus that Prometheus learned from his mother) is as important as force and power in ruling the universe and begins to tolerate Prometheus's concern for humankind. (In Ovid *Metamorphoses* 5.341–43 Demeter is, like Prometheus, represented as a giver of cultivation and culture to humanity.) In a parallel fashion, the resolution of the *Hymn* also seems to sanction the right of the divine mother and daughter to be consulted and to consent to marriage.[114] In this case, the *Hymn* would be similar to Aeschylus's later Danaid trilogy, which emphasizes the importance of *peithô* (persuasion) in mitigating *bia* (violence) in marriage.[115]

The section on "The 'Theology' of the Mysteries" (above, this essay) stressed how the cult at Eleusis modified the divine-human relations that we find in the Homeric poems, which emphasized a bleak afterlife and the unwillingness of gods to soften the mortal lot except by promoting human fame and perpetuating the lineage of those they favor. In Hesiod, too, mortals are helpless victims of the struggles among the gods, and their world becomes at best a misleading imitation of the divine and at worst, in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, an Iron Age carrying humanity rapidly to doom. In the *Hymn*, by contrast, the goddesses' involvement in mortality cements through the Mysteries a permanent opportunity for a more intimate and reliable divine/human bond. It is not surprising, then, that the *Hymn to Demeter* also challenges the cosmological strategies of Zeus in the *Theogony* and modifies the perspective of the earlier poem on the role of gender in shaping the universe. The historian Herodotos tells us that "Hesiod and Homer . . . first composed a theogony for the Greeks and gave the gods their names and determined their honors and skills and described their forms" (2.53. 1–2). As Gregory Nagy has recently rephrased this achievement: "The Olympus of Hesiodic and Homeric poetry is a Panhellenic construct that elevates the gods beyond their localized attributes. . . . The evolution of most major gods from most major cities into the integrated

[114] This is argued by Ramnoux 1959:122.

[115] In this trilogy, forty-nine sisters kill their cousins, who forced them into marriage against their will. The fiftieth spares her spouse out of love and becomes an agent of reconciliation. The women ultimately move from Egypt to Argos, where they find more acceptable marriages. The Danaids were said by Herodotus (2.171) to have introduced the Thesmophoria from Egypt. Some scholars have argued that Aeschylus's trilogy ended with the institution of this festival. (See Garvie 1969:227)

family at Olympus amounts to a synthesis that is not just artistic but political in nature, comparable with the evolution of the Panhellenic games known as the Olympics."[116]

It seems likely that perspectives on the afterlife that differ from the authoritative cosmological tradition inaugurated by Hesiod and Homer (a tradition that virtually ignored Demeter and did not explicitly link the goddess with Persephone) were of great antiquity in Greece.[117] By incorporating the Eleusinian Mysteries into the Panhellenic epic tradition from a literary perspective, the *Hymn* also makes a bid to acquire a Panhellenic prestige for its alternative religious views and its once local rites.[118] At the same time the Mysteries were potentially antagonistic to the tradition established in epic; we know for example that the Orphics, whose myths and practices in certain respects conflicted with those of epic and the city-state, adopted them. Hence the *Hymn* only uneasily absorbs the cult and its myth into the Olympian cosmos.[119]

The Mother/Daughter Romance

In the *Hymn*, Demeter, once she no longer needs obscurity for her secret strategies with Demophoön, leaves behind the private world of women and demands public recognition from both men and gods. Mortals administer and participate in the Mysteries and can be adopted by the goddess. Nevertheless, the structure of the *Hymn* suggests strongly that the rites originate above all from the divine relation between mother and daughter, and it is presumbly the bliss encountered in Demeter's and Persephone's reunion that the mystery initiates shared at climactic moments of the rite. I have argued that structure and characterization in the poem emphasize the important connection between the psychological experience of the goddesses and the founding of the Mysteries. Similarly, the double withdrawal of the two goddesses, unusual in such myths, is reflected in the symbolic doubling of the goddesses in cult, poetry, and the fine arts (see Fig. 7), a doubling that also expresses their indivisible emotional bond. It is to this intense emotional bond between mother and daughter that I now wish to turn.

[116] Nagy 1982:48–49. See also Nagy 1990a:36–82. The same point was eloquently made by Rohde 1898:38–39.

[117] On the relation between the *Hymn*'s representation of reward and punishment in the underworld and that in the Homeric epics, see the Commentary on lines 364–69.

[118] In the *Hymn to Hermes*, Hermes also acquires his powers by challenging Apollo. I agree with Clay's 1989 view (see esp. 15) that the Homeric hymns fill the gap between theogonic poetry and epic, but not with her view of the authoritative role that Zeus plays in this transition. At least to some degree, the hymns aim to challenge and significantly modify earlier epic tradition.

[119] Here I partially disagree with Clay 1989:265.

There have been various psychoanalytic readings of the Demeter/Persephone myth. Jung and Kerényi, for example, studied the archetypes of the Mother/Maiden and the Divine Child. Contemporary feminists have not surprisingly found the *Hymn*'s depiction of the psychological relation between mother and daughter to be of compelling interest—in particular its unusual focus on the mother and its validation of her grief and anger. After a brief review of several earlier psychoanalytic readings, my own analysis will emphasize how contemporary sociological and psychoanalytic research on the mother/daughter relation can contribute to an interpretation of these aspects of the *Hymn*.

Jung considers Demeter and Persephone to be representative of the archetypes of mother and maiden—figures that operate in the unconscious of both individuals and societies (which have a collective unconscious) and emerge in dreams and myths. In attempting to make clear the rejuvenating effects that Demeter cults may have on the female psyche, Jung argues for a connection between the archetypal relation of mother and daughter and the mitigation of death promised by the Mysteries:

> Demeter and Kore, mother and daughter, extend the feminine consciousness both upwards and downwards. They add an "older and younger," "stronger and weaker" dimension to it and widen out the narrowly limited conscious mind bound in space and time, give it intimations of a greater and more comprehensive personality which has a share in the eternal course of things. . . . The psyche pre-existent to consciousness (e.g., in a child) participates in the maternal psyche on the one hand, while on the other it reaches across to the daughter psyche. We could therefore say that every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, and that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter. This participation and intermingling give rise to that peculiar uncertainty as regards *time*: a woman lives earlier as a mother, later as a daughter. The conscious experience of these ties produces the feeling that her life is spread out over generations—the first step towards the immediate experience and conviction of being outside time, which brings with it a feeling of *immortality*. The individual's life is elevated into a type, and becomes the archetype of woman's fate in general. This leads to a restoration or *apocatastasis* of the lives of her ancestors, who now, through the bridge of the momentary individual, pass down into generations of the future. An experience of this kind gives the individual a place and a meaning in the life of the generations, so that all unnecessary obstacles are cleared out of the way of the life-stream that is to flow through her. At the same time the individual is rescued from her isolation and restored to wholeness. All ritual preoccupation with archetypes ultimately has this aim and this result."[120]

[120] Jung 1967:162. What he says of mothers and daughters might equally be said of fathers and sons.

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In

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretative Essays. Princeton. pg 84-119.

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