



A WOMAN'S WITHDRAWAL

A Gendered Analysis of Demeter's Withdrawal in
the Homeric Hymn to Demeter

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Introduction

Although the theory that the author of the Homeric Hymns was Homer has been disproved for quite some time now, the similarities of diction, style, and themes between Homer's epics and the Homeric hymns still remain remarkable. These similarities speak of a poetic method that heavily colours literature from the Archaic period, and while his authorship might be denied, comparing the two sets of texts still proves to have its merits. A great difference is, however, found in the way deities are depicted by Homer and especially in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter: while gods play around with the fates and feelings of mortals in Homer's world, Demeter uniquely shows a lot of pain, grief and emotional growth in the hymn dedicated to her that is more reminiscent of Homer's heroes than his gods. The strongest parallel therefore is probably between Homer's Achilles and the character of Demeter in the Homeric hymn to Demeter: both lose someone dear to them, after which they withdraw from their respective communities and force the one who took their beloved from them to give them back, as well as additional recompense. This is no mere coincidence. Roberto Nickel and Cora Angier Sowa have identified that such character arcs are story patterns that have surfaced throughout ancient Mediterranean mythological texts (Nickel 60, Sowa 48). A great difference between Demeter and Achilles however can be pointed out as well; while Achilles is a mortal hero in the middle of a war, Demeter is a woman, and a deity at that, and both these parts of her character affect the myth greatly. The goal of this essay is to demonstrate the specific views of gender relations that can be found in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, and to demonstrate how the use of specific story patterns as well as focalization affect these gender relations. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* utilizes two different viewpoints, one that supports Zeus' decisions throughout the hymn and one that praises Demeter for rising above his decisions, and this friction is not resolved at the end of the hymn; Demeter wins the fight, yet Zeus' actions are still deemed legitimate. Therefore, both can be adequately supported with textual evidence from the hymn. This essay will prove through the application of the theory of focalization that a more holistic reading of the text is required to fully understand the scope of Demeter's plight, and both her status as a woman and as a deity cannot be ignored in favour of the other, because the use of the withdrawal story pattern affects the way Demeter's gendered viewpoint is focalized. The friction that can be found in the hymn will be illustrated by the following analyses: an exploration of the theory on story patterns and how story patterns make up a significant part of the composition of the hymn; additionally, an analysis of other Homeric texts, middle-eastern myths and other adaptations of the rape of Persephone, and how more can be said about the specific literary choices made in the composition of the Homeric hymn through these comparisons. This will be accompanied by an analysis of the text that underlines the cultural values, gender relations and character motives through focalization in

the text; the last one is paired with an exploration of authority and τιμή, and how these themes influence the plot and the actions of the characters.

Closing the Rift

First, however, it is wise to take a look at the academic debate that concentrates on the hymn to Demeter and why its gendered nature is such cause for conflict. In her article “Ritual Death, Patriarchal Violence, and Female Relationships in the Hymns to Demeter and Inanna”, Marcia W. D-S. Dobson sees a clear (although not absolute) distinction between philological, historical academic scholarship and feminist academic scholarship on the hymn, and describes them accordingly:

‘Classicists and Near Eastern scholars ask about origins. In general, they provide "objective" cultural, linguistic and historical information about both the texts and the worlds those texts represent. Many of them seek to be minimalist in their theoretical methodology. Only fairly recently have classicists begun to accept comparative anthropological, mythological, and literary theoretical approaches as valid. Feminists, on the other hand, tend to use classical sources and scholarship as a medium for social, spiritual, psychological, and political inquiries and transformations of a Western patriarchy that began with these very sources. I do not mean to imply that there are no feminist classical philologists. However, our critical methodologies often conflict, and we deal with these conflicts constantly.’ (Dobson, 42)

The ‘traditionalist’ side, as Dobson calls it, is then not exactly traditional but rather less interested in applying modern ideologies to the hymn. This does not necessarily mean that one side does analyse the gendered nature of the text and the other does not: rather, it means that both focus on different aspects of, for example, Demeter’s character, which leaves a rift between the conflicting sides of the debate that is rarely crossed and is arguing two different things: while scholars that Dobson identifies as ‘feminists’ argue both sides, they do prefer to discuss Demeter in the role of a suffering mother on a psychological basis, and Demeter in the role of powerful fertility goddess when theorizing about the idea of the Mother Goddess in ancient Greek religion. Especially when discussing the historical Eleusian Mysteries and their depiction in the hymn, Demeter in the role of powerful fertility goddess is often preferred by the ‘traditionalists’, who mostly look for the origins of the cult in the hymn. Methodology then, according to Dobson, coincides with stance in the academic debate. What is often noticeable about these stances is that there is a focus on either Demeter’s identity as a goddess or as a woman, and rarely on how these two coincide; she is either an almighty deity who installs mystery rites and causes famines despite the expressed expectations of her peers in the text, or she is a suffering woman who is vulnerable in her position, whose daughter is snatched away in a violent manner. Both sentiments, that of mother and goddess, can be found in the hymn, but to

properly debate on the complete gendered nature of the hymn and its place in a patriarchal context, one cannot simply prioritize one over the other. Nuance and a more holistic analysis are needed.

The methodology of comparative literature, in my opinion, can close this rift in the academic debate when a holistic analysis on gender is needed. This field of research has proven to contribute nicely to debates on the Homeric hymns; Irene de Jong, herself a classicist, for example, admits that

‘when from the beginning of the twentieth century the modern philologies were born and started to develop their own models, classics suffered under the dialectics of progress; it did not feel the need to catch up with those developments of modern literary theory and became somewhat isolated and withdrawn within the confines of its own discipline.’ (de Jong, *Narratology and Classics; a Practical Guide*, 7)

while Dobson files the modern philologies with the ‘traditionalists’ under literary theory, and admits that it is a ‘fairly recent’ methodology of the ‘traditionalists’, scholarship on the epic nature of the hymn and its narratology has grown exponentially and contributed in its own way in recent years, and the benefit of applying theories from the field of comparative literature has been shown: literary analysis creates clarity on time, space, and perspective where mythological texts are often vague and ambiguous. De Jong herself has put great effort in applying current theories on focalization to the Homeric hymns and the Homeric epics, and especially asks these questions to take a closer look at the composition of oral texts; de Jong states that the theory of focalization can unite the opposing elements of formulaic speech and context- or plot specific text. While certain speech patterns and story patterns are used consistently apart from context, focalization demonstrates that it is more plot- and character specific than it seems, and that formulaic speech does not stand in the way of characterization (De Jong, "Narratology and Oral Poetry: The Case of Homer" 406-409). To properly acknowledge the role of the narrator is crucial when analysing these texts: as seen in the invocations of the hymns and epics, the narrator is extremely present throughout the texts and with, for example, the genre's particular use of indirect and direct speech to tell the story, scrutinizing focalization is crucial to discern whatever is being expressed by whom:

‘Focalization is arguably the most important new analytical tool that narratology has brought classics. The analysis of the focalizations in a given passage is usually complex, not least because of its inherent ambiguity (is it the focalizer or verbalizing narrator who is responsible for a certain word?), but always leads to the heart of the emotional or ideological force of that passage. (De Jong, *Narratology and Classics* 69)

In other words, analysing focalization can lead one to the core of the conflict in the hymn, and the implications that are made by both the narrator and the characters guide the narrative. They drive the emotional and cultural dynamics of the conflict between Zeus and Demeter.

Additional to the tool of focalization, de Jong identifies in her analysis of the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite something which she calls a type-scene: a sequence of occurrences that is typical for the situation they occur in. The type-scene in the hymn to Aphrodite she calls 'the seduction', and is likened to Hera's seduction of Zeus in the Iliad: type-scenes are similar patterns on the level of the plot that are strewn across the epic genre (de Jong, *Narratology and Classics* 142). Because such scenes fix and form the plot and dictate its results, yet still allow room for the specifics of the myth or story that they are applied to, it is necessary to take a closer look at how these typical components of the texts affect the theme of gender: as mentioned above, Demeter's character arc is more typical of male heroes like Achilles, and the application of this particular type-scene to a goddess like Demeter changes the way her myth unfolds in the hymn to the point of ambiguity, and frames her story around gender. De Jong's type-scenes can be likened to the aforementioned term Roberto Nickel uses in his article "The Wrath of Demeter: Story Pattern in the "Hymn to Demeter"": story patterns.

A Typical Tale

The story patterns that the hymn then most clearly utilizes are the Descent of the Fertility Goddess and the Withdrawal of the Hero. These are used to guide Demeter and Persephone's character arcs. Secondly, the character of Demophoön is a typical example of the story pattern of the Failed Immortalization. These names were given to these story patterns by Cora Sowa in *Traditional Themes and the Homeric Hymns*. The most famous example of the Withdrawal of the Hero pattern is found in the Iliad. Achilles' refusal to fight after Briseis has been taken follows the same pattern as Demeter's withdrawal from Olympus after she loses Persephone. In his article, Roberto Nickel cuts this particular story pattern up into several scenes that are found in almost every variation of the story pattern:

1. Dishonour: at the instigation of the leader of the community, the principal character is deprived of someone or something dear. This deprivation is coincident with a loss of honour, or τιμή.
2. Grief and Wrath: the offended party feels grief, then anger on account of his/her loss, which results in his/her withdrawal from the community.
3. Devastation: withdrawal causes devastation, as the community is deprived of an element essential to its survival.

4. Embassies are sent to bring the god or hero back. The ambassadors offer new τιμαί, which are rejected. The withdrawn character sets the conditions for return, namely the restoration of the τιμή that was taken away.

5. Return: reconciliation and return are effected by the restoration of the original τιμή and the acceptance of the new τιμαί. The successful ambassador is frequently female and someone to whom the withdrawn character is close. His/her return restores the community's well-being.' (Nickel 67)

This particular layout might first call to mind Achilles' heroic story arc in the *Iliad*, but it can be applied to Demeter just as well (Nickel 59): Kore is, in her eyes, unjustly taken from her, so she withdraws from the gods in the first part of the hymn (step 1-2); then the Demophoön episode occurs and is concluded before the rest of the withdrawal arc continues; Demeter then causes devastation by making the earth barren, and is offered honours as consolation (step 4). Rhea then fulfils the role of female ambassador (and as mother of Demeter can be imagined to be close to her) after which the earth is restored, the Mysteries are born, and the goddesses go back to Olympus (step 5). What we can conclude from this comparison is that, when stripped bare, Demeter's character arc, like Achilles', is one of a slighted protagonist. The importance of τιμή to the plot becomes apparent; the core of the conflict that makes Demeter withdraw is as much the grief for her daughter as her unjustly treated honour. This is reflected in the hymn: the word τιμή occurs a number of times, but mostly at the end of the hymn (*Dem.* 85, 132, 150, 261, 263, 268, 311, 328, 353, 366, 443, 461), when gods are sent to reconcile the goddess, and after she is reunited with Persephone. It is only mentioned once before the Demophoön episode, when Helios praises Hades by saying he had received sufficient honour when he was granted his share of the world (*Dem.* 85). While Demeter withdraws before the Demophoön episode, by this distribution of the word τιμή a thematic distinction is made where the part before the Demophoön episode focuses on Demeter's suffering and the part after focuses on her wrath; while phase 1 and 2 of Nickel's layout have been completed, Demeter's actions before coming to Eleusis are not yet linked to a loss of honour, merely to the loss of a loved one; in the first part of the hymn the narrator-focalizer colours her as a grieving mother, while the second part colours her as an angry and powerful goddess. In summary, the story pattern of the Withdrawal of the Hero as Nickel describes it can be applied to Demeter in the hymn, which gives the latter part of the hymn a focus and a focalization on the loss of τιμή that Demeter experiences.

Persephone fulfils the role of the fertility goddess in the story pattern of The Descent of the Fertility Goddess. Sowa defines this pattern in the Homeric hymn by comparing it to a much older

myth that makes use of the theme, the Sumerian story of Inanna's descent to the underworld. The basic ingredients of this theme, as occurring in both the hymn and this older myth, are the descent of the goddess, which causes devastation on earth, after which embassies are involved in retrieving her from the underworld and the earth is restored (Sowa 48). The Inanna myth describes the Descent of the Fertility Goddess thusly: Inanna wishes to go to her sister Ereshkigal, who reigns over the Sumerian Underworld. However, her sister makes Ishtar leave behind a part of her clothing at each of the twelve gates, and in the end she appears naked and vulnerable before her sister, and she is turned into a corpse and hung on a hook. However, Inanna has made sure that, on the occasion that she does not return, messengers are sent to several gods to free her. The god Enki, in the end, makes sure she escapes, but the Underworld demands someone stay in her stead. Her lover/husband, Dumuzid, who is found not in mourning but living lavishly, is forced to replace her. Noteworthy is that Inanna's descent, even though her motives are vague, is voluntary, that she takes on a temporary 'death' by being turned into a corpse, and that she too is initially forced to stay forever. In some versions Dumuzid's sister pities him and offers to share his sentence, a theme we see in Persephone's temporary stay, in the myth of the Dioscuri, and the myth of Adonis. However, of the Greek 'temporary death stories' only Persephone's descent (as she is directly linked to the cycle of agriculture through her mother) has been popularized in later adaptations to influence the coming and going of the seasons (C. Scott Littleton, 100-103).

An overlap between the two story patterns now mentioned can be noted: both the descent and withdrawal story patterns have devastation, a disaster for the community, as an integral part of the pattern. The descent is directly linked to the devastation of barrenness and famine, while withdrawal causes death in battle and almost losing a war in the *Iliad*, and in the *Homeric Hymn to the Pythian Apollo* it is linked to the destruction that monsters cause (*Hom. Hymn Ap.* 355). Both story patterns also involve a system of messengers between the gods, although in the hymn they are supposed to mollify Demeter as opposed to Inanna's embassies, who are employed by the goddess to convince the other gods to come save her. Another difference that Sowa brings to attention is that the story pattern usually applies to a singular goddess, while in the Homeric hymn the story has been built around two goddesses, who both fulfil actions that used to belong to one fertility goddess archetype. Dobson also sees Inanna's sister Ereshkigal as a Persephone-type, while Inanna then is the 'Demeter' of the story (Dobson 50). That this story pattern focuses so heavily on the connection between fertility and death, and features a temporary barrenness of the earth, adds a gravity to the archetype of the fertility goddess, whose powers and presence are directly linked to human survival. This is taken one step further in the hymn, where Demeter's wrath first causes human beings to starve, which in turn deprives the gods of their sacrifices (*Dem* 310-314).

These two themes, the Withdrawal and Descent, are heavily linked together, as one causes the other in the hymn: Persephone's descent causes Demeter's withdrawal. As mentioned above, both the descent and withdrawal can cause devastation, albeit in different ways. In the Homeric hymn to Demeter, while a descent is present, it is the withdrawal that ultimately causes devastation. Together, the story patterns form an overarching plot in which a third myth, the Demophoön episode, appears, and it is therefore not unreasonable to assume that this middle part has been inserted at a later time in the process of the composition. Demeter's attempt to immortalize Demophoön once more mirrors the Iliad: it is reminiscent of Thetis' attempt to make Achilles immortal by dipping him into the water of the Styx. Of note is that in the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius, Achilles too is dipped in the fire instead of the water of the Styx (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* IV.869-872). The building blocks of this theme are the following: a goddess or the (divine) mother of a hero tries to make the hero immortal, usually by submerging the hero, yet fails because of a flaw in the plan. Sheila Murnaghan, in her article "Maternity and Mortality in Homeric Poetry", links Achilles and Demophoön to Meleager, another slighted hero, whose survival by birth was ensured by taking something *out of* the fire, and whose death was brought about by submerging his lifeline into the fire, in an inversion of the usual method of immortalization (Murnaghan 248). The most important part of this story pattern is that the attempt to make a mortal immortal always fails: the mortality of humankind is underlined by the fact that no one manages to escape it. In fact, in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, the goddess, despite her desires, does not even try, simply because she knows of other failed attempts, and recalls the story of Eos and Tithonus (*Aphr.* 219-238). Murnaghan sees a connection to τιμή, because all of these heroes, while they fail to achieve immortality during their lives, are still explicitly said to have received great honours during their lifetime (Murnaghan 246): Demeter comments on the ignorance of humankind, yet grants Demophoön undying honour because he at least has lain on her lap and slept in her arms (*Dem.* 260-264). In this way, the Demophoön episode does not exactly affect the withdrawal or descent story patterns but does link the withdrawal and Demophoön episode by its similarities with the stories surrounding the character of Achilles and once more bringing τιμή into the story. In summary, the hymn to Demeter uses three distinctive story patterns to guide Demeter's, Persephone's and Demophoön's character arcs, which connect because of the themes of devastation and τιμή. These story patterns are called the Withdrawal, Descent and Failed Immortalization.

Father Zeus

As was stated above, the withdrawal story pattern links Demeter and Persephone's myth to a loss τιμή by making her conflict not just about the loss of her daughter. By analysing the different viewpoints of the characters in the hymn, the focalization demonstrates this to the reader. For

example, Zeus' patriarchal authority over Kore is immediately established in the prooemium of the hymn. While the external narrator explicitly states that it is Demeter and her daughter he sings of, they both take on a passive role within their own prologue:

'Demeter with her lovely hair,
Revered goddess, I begin to sing of her,
And her daughter with the slender ankles,
Whom Aidoneus seized, and loud-thundering,
Far-seeing Zeus gave her away.' (*Hom. Hym. Dem.* 1-3)

Additionally, both Demeter and Persephone are introduced with epithets that comment solely on their beauty, 'with her lovely hair' and 'with the slender ankles', instead of commenting on their incredible power, like 'loud-thundering, far-seeing' Zeus is. While elsewhere in the hymn epithets not commenting on their appearance are surely used, it is remarkable that this is how the goddesses are introduced. Meanwhile, when Persephone is most prominently mentioned in the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, she is introduced with the epithets 'awesome Persephone' or 'dread Persephone' (*Od.* X. 491-494, *Il.* IX.457, IX. 569). In these instances, Persephone is clearly already linked to the underworld; she is mentioned alongside Hades when in the *Iliad* Althea prays for Meleager's death, and in the *Odyssey* she is mentioned more often than her husband when Odysseus is in the land of the dead. In the Hymn, the name Persephone is used by Hekate for the first time, after the rape occurs, most likely to suggest her sudden transformation from daughter to wife (*Dem.* 56). This gives us a clear idea of Persephone's depiction; the narrator implies that her power comes from her position as Hades' consort in the epics. This depiction already sets the tone for the rest of the hymn: while Kore is Demeter's daughter, it is Zeus who decides her fate, and while Hades' actions are coloured as violent, Zeus' are not; while Aidoneus seizes, Zeus gives away.

Consequently, Zeus and Hades' actions follow each other several times throughout the first part of the hymn: in verse 9, Aidoneus' trap is described as the will of Zeus and in verse 30-32 Hades' 'rape' is directly and explicitly called Zeus' design. While this entire scene is riddled with words that suggest violence on Aidoneus' part and grief on Kore's part ('sprang upon her', 'caught hold of her', 'took her away, weeping', 'she screamed', 'she resisted', *Dem.* 17-30), the few times Zeus is mentioned focus on his aloofness when it comes to Kore's cries for her father (*Dem.* 27-28). His decision is not explicitly questioned; merely the violent way in which his decision is executed by Hades is commented upon. One could even state that while Hades is clearly connected to the violent act, Zeus is only told by the narrator-focalizer to have made the match. Important to notice in the

first few scenes is that the external narrator verbalizes most of the action and describes the rape in his words; it is clearly his view of what sets the plot in motion, and his judgement is focalized here. Step one of Nickel's Withdrawal layout has been fulfilled: at the instigation of the leader of the community, Zeus, Persephone has been taken away from her mother, which takes away part of Demeter's τιμή.

In the aftermath, no one wants to tell Demeter what happened: 'But no one wanted to tell her the truth, neither the gods nor human beings' (*Dem.* 44-45). Before Demeter encounters Hekate, she apparently meets others who know of her daughter's fate, as the external narrator explicitly mentions these witnesses didn't *want* to tell the goddess, implying that they did *know*. The most probable conclusion is that these witnesses did not want to oppose Zeus, or dared not speak of the Underworld. Demeter then encounters Hekate, who has heard Persephone's screams but did not see the rape occur. In her greeting of Demeter and her recalling of the event, Hekate does obviously show an awareness of the occurred struggle, as she mentions both violence and sorrow in one breath (*Dem.* 54-58). It seems obvious, because she gives the audience and Demeter her interpretation of Persephone's screams of all things, but it also means that she focalizes the theme of violence against women from her own standpoint as a woman. Hekate gives Demeter no new information, so the pair travel on together until they reach Helios. We now come to a key moment in the hymn: step two of Nickel's withdrawal structure, feeling wrath and withdrawing, is fulfilled once Demeter finds out where her daughter is. Helios gives an account of the rape of Persephone, but he also gives Demeter some advice:

""And Hades carried her off on his horses
And let her down into the realm of dusk
And darkness, screaming loudly.
But, goddess, cease your mighty weeping.
You must not nurse this rage,
Which is so vain, so unsatiable.
He is not unworthy as a son-in-law among the gods,
Aidoneus, Ruler of Many,
Your own brother and your own blood.
Also he received his share of honour

When in the beginning the threefold division was made,

And he became lord of those with whom he lives.” (Dem. 82-87)

Helios not only gives Demeter real cause to rebel, since he is the one who delivers to her the violence of Hades' actions, but also immediately shoots down her anger. One can hardly say whether the hymn passes judgement on either Demeter's or Hades' actions. Yet this small speech tells Demeter to quit while she is ahead; her withdrawal has not happened yet and the hymn itself already provides the reader (or, of course, listener) a counter argument for her cause. Why include this warning? It is not foreshadowing, not a prophecy that proves to be fateful; Demeter does succeed. But what Helios explicitly does is that he calls into question Demeter's rage by looking at Persephone's newly acquired spouse: he doubts whether Demeter should feel wrath because the husband that was chosen is so honourable, has received so many τιμαί (Dem. 85). Helios asserts the patriarchal marriage system that both Zeus and Hades enact. He links this directly to the vanity of Demeter's rage in his argument; the latter has no reason to exist because of the former. A mother's refusal to accept her daughter's marriage is unacceptable when there is nothing wrong with the groom. Of course, this entire dynamic is still placed within a divine environment and it is a conflict between almighty gods that is being played out, so whether this holds any water is debatable, but Helios specifically using the groom for his argument does suggest this. As mentioned before, in the part before the Demophoön episode the narrator focuses less on the τιμή part of the withdrawal and focalizes more the sentiment that a dear one is lost, bringing into play the gendered aspect of Demeter's predicament more than her loss or gaining of power, which is more heavily underlined by her causing devastation after the Demophoön episode, and therefore also after Helios has spoken these warning words.

While Helios does not mention Zeus directly in his admonition, he does point at Zeus before that when he tells Demeter who is to blame (Dem. 78). The sequence that his entire speech gives therefore is: Zeus chose Hades as Persephone's husband; Demeter should therefore not be opposed to what has happened; because Hades is a good choice for a son-in-law. Helios indirectly acknowledges Zeus' higher authority on Persephone's marriage. The hymn itself establishes a cultural value, namely the patriarchal authority of the father (Zeus) when it comes to the child's (Kore's) fate, which is acknowledged by the narrator first and backed up by a character within the narrative of the hymn second. In summary, the focalization in especially the first part of the hymn shows through the narrator's and Helios' text that while the patriarchal violence of the rape is acknowledged, it is also immediately justified.

However, Demeter still does exactly that which Helios disapproves of: she withdraws in her rage and grief. For all intents and purposes Demeter's withdrawal could be seen as a transgression: the cultural values and Zeus' patriarchal authority, that are established in the text, are ignored by her and she demands to rise above them. Up until this point in the hymn, Zeus' plan has been approved by everyone but Demeter (while Hekate acknowledges the violence and sorrow, she does not pass concrete judgement). Helios acknowledges the fact that a groom with many τιμαί gives Demeter herself more τιμή, yet Demeter sees, according to the convention of the withdrawal story pattern, the rape and consequential marriage as a loss of τιμή. This is made clear by the transition from the Helios scene to the subsequent withdrawal: Helios leaves the stage immediately after his monologue, and immediately after Demeter withdraws (*Dem.* 88-97). Additionally, she greets Helios by asking him to not bring her shame and then to ask if he knows where her daughter is: Demeter herself introduces honour and a lack of it into the conversation (*Dem.* 64-68). From that point on in the hymn, after the Helios scene, her actions are not depicted as a transgression, but as a legitimate protest. The text of the hymn, and especially the focalization of the external narrator, shows a sudden change in focalization: the text supports the cultural values that Zeus embodies and enacts, yet also supports Demeter in her withdrawal and consequential victory and return. A sudden change in focalization is the result.

Queen Demeter

This latter support, namely that the text does not view Demeter's withdrawal negatively, can mostly be taken from the part right after the Demophoön episode. After Demeter meets with Helios she withdraws quite literally from the company of the gods (*Dem.* 92) and once more sets to wandering the earth. However, Demeter actively causing devastation to the land and forcing famine onto humans and gods alike does not occur until after the Demophoön episode. The first part of her withdrawal does not further the withdrawal story pattern; it merely brings the Eleusinian Mysteries into the hymn, giving it an aetiological theme that describes the origins of a deity's main cult, as can be found in many of the Homeric hymns. While the actual Mysteries are introduced after Demeter gets Persephone back, the Demophoön episode ends in the people of Eleusis building a temple for Demeter to fully withdraw in:

‘But golden-haired Demeter sat there,

Far away from all the blessed gods

She stayed there, wasting with longing

For her deep-breasted daughter.

And she made a most terrible and cruel year

For human beings on the deeply nourishing earth.

The earth did not send up seed,

For rich-crowned Demeter kept it hidden.' (*Dem.* 302-307)

Her withdrawal has two stages: she withdraws from the company of gods and, after humans have failed her too, she actively sets out to disrupt order by refusing to perform (note that this does not occur in the Iliad: Achilles' withdrawal is fully passive and causes the devastation in and of itself, as his inaction means defeat for the Greeks). Demeter then has a passive way of withdrawing and an active way of withdrawing: she hides first, then willingly withholds the seed from sprouting. Additionally, she does not restore the land when her daughter is returned to her; only when the more permanent solution of Persephone's temporary stay in the underworld and additional honours from Zeus for Demeter have been confirmed by Rhea, does Demeter let the crops grow again (*Dem.* 460-473). This active quality of her withdrawal shows that her divine powers are the deciding factor in the fight.

Nickel, additionally, acknowledges another important aspect of Demeter's withdrawal through divine powers; she succeeds in her particular domain and uses her specific set of powers to cause devastation not only for mortals but deities as well. He sees this as crucial to the withdrawal pattern; only fertility deities, because of the overlap in devastation, are able to carry out a withdrawal story pattern on a divine level (66-67). He recounts a second withdrawal by Demeter, when she is raped by Poseidon (another act that can be seen as patriarchal violence) and bears the horse Areion, in which she once again causes a famine (Nickel 70). However, of the higher authority of Zeus Nickel merely says:

'For Persephone's marriage has been arranged by two gods whose τιμαί are greater than her own: Zeus, the king of the gods, and Hades who received a third of the universe as his τιμή. Demeter's anger, however, will not be in vain; her τιμή too must be taken into consideration. Zeus has failed to do so, but, in the end, he will be forced to make up for this offense.' (Nickel 76)

Nickel never once questions why exactly Demeter's τιμή must be taken into account, but does illustrate the fact that her status as a fertility goddess matters to the use of the withdrawal story pattern. In my opinion, one rather calls for the other; It is possible to take Demeter's τιμή into consideration because she, as a fertility goddess, has a way to take away τιμή from the gods by stopping mortals from sacrificing. This evidently does not necessarily mean that Demeter's τιμή has

to be taken into consideration because of her status in the divine hierarchy, which is a distinction that needs to be made.

What especially becomes noteworthy is that the story pattern of the withdrawal, as applied to the myth, causes much of the friction; the pattern demands for Demeter to act assertively and distinguish her place among the gods, despite all odds being against her. It is not unreasonable to assume that this is because the idea of τιμή carries a masculine tone. Demeter's identity as both a woman and a deity are in conflict with the very notion of what the withdrawal theme entails and demands of the text: a loss of τιμή and the additional feelings of shame and, especially in Demeter's case, suffering, hardly seem proper for Homer's anthropomorphic, yet elevated gods. Women add to a man's τιμή; apart from the main conflict where the loss of Briseis is a loss of τιμή, Achilles and other heroes are offered women constantly in addition to material wealth, alongside Briseis in book IX for example (//. IX.128-129). A fight for autonomy, or higher authority over a family member, creates a conflict that challenges the family hierarchy ('family' and 'hierarchy' being unavoidably intertwined in the Greek polytheistic pantheon).

The Impact of Withdrawing

To fully understand how much the story pattern of the withdrawal affects the depiction of the myth, a comparison to Ovid is useful: one can see how the ambiguity of the withdrawal in the hymn is bypassed by Ovid when he adapts the myth to suit his universal theme of shapeshifting in his *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's adaptation of the myth poses a great contrast to the thematic build-up of the Homeric Hymn. While the Roman author replaces the Demophoön episode with a story about a rude young boy who gets turned into a lizard (*Met.* V.438-V.461), Ovid also consciously makes this intermission in the Proserpina/Persephone myth occur *before* the revelation of Proserpina's location. Ovid therefore merges Demeter's/Ceres' two periods of wandering the earth, and makes the goal of this journey solely the search for her daughter: the devastation Ceres causes in Ovid's adaptation, while a deliberate action and a result of her rage, is only directed at the inhabitants of Sicily, where Ovid places the myth, and not at any gods, as Ceres so far only knows that her daughter has disappeared on this particular island. Her strike, as far as it occurs, is reduced to one island and mortals only: the withdrawal is written out of the story (*Met.* V.471-486). In other words, this small narratological edit changes the tone of the myth so much that the connection to the Hero's Withdrawal is almost completely lost. The character of Helios was written out as well, and was replaced by a nymph, Arethusa, who herself was chased by a god, and so has more in common with Ceres and Proserpina's side of the story (*Met.* V.572-641). The revelation of Proserpina's fate is immediately followed by Ceres going up to Olympus and confronting Jupiter/Zeus herself, which

stands in stark contrast with her withdrawal in the hymn. The one who eventually questions Ceres' rage is Jupiter himself: by shifting this part of the dialogue (that heavily mirrors Helios' monologue in the hymn) of the tale from Helios to Jupiter omits the general consensus of this questioning.

The emphasis on the cultural significance of Helios' opinion that is evident when both male gods supported it in the hymn (*Met.* V.509-532) is therefore lost as well. These obvious changes to the narrative, which despite all this still mirror the general setup of the Homeric Hymn, work out the ambiguity that is encountered in the hymn because of the withdrawal: Demeter only wanders aimlessly because she is searching for her daughter, her wrath is not questioned as soon as she expresses it and, when it is, it is questioned by the one who caused it. Ovid lets the conflict play out on a personal level between father and mother, while the inclusion of Helios' dialogue in the hymn admits a cultural struggle. The question that remains is whether these changes were made by Ovid to 'fix' the hymn's 'inconsistencies', to make the character of Demeter more demure and motherly, or whether they were simply made to fit Ovid's agenda of metamorphoses and almost comically brief retellings of the myths; Arethusa's backstory incorporates a metamorphosis into the story, as does the story of the boy who was turned into a lizard, and Demeter confronting Zeus directly plays out like a custody battle.

Demeter vs. Zeus

In the hymn however, we are left with a withdrawal that comes in two separate stages, and the messengers who try to persuade the Hero, step four in Nickel's description of the pattern, enter the stage in verse 314-333. When Demeter's demands are met and Persephone is about to return with Hermes, Hades speaks for the first time in the hymn:

"Go now, Persephone, to your mother,

In her dark-blue cloak and go with a kind heart.

Do not despair so excessively,

For I shall not be an unworthy husband

Among the deathless gods,

I who am brother to your father Zeus." (*Dem.* 360-364)

Hades almost repeats the exact words Helios used to justify Hades' actions towards Persephone. He himself, like Helios, asks a woman to cease her despair, because he is not unworthy as a spouse, and comments on his family relations to show his esteem. Yet again, the text connects Hades'

motivations and blamelessness to Zeus, although his will is not mentioned this time. This is the fifth and final time that the legitimacy of Zeus' schemes is acknowledged. In totality, there are four focalizers that legitimize his authority on Persephone's marriage: the external narrator himself in the prologue and when the rape occurs; Helios when he tells Demeter that her wrath is vain and insatiable; and Hades, who of course justifies his own actions and drags Zeus into it. It is remarkable that the narrator-focalizer first obviously sides with the two male gods and later on praises Demeter. Zeus himself never speaks directly in the hymn, and when his words are brought over by Iris in verse 321-323 he only asks Demeter to come back to Olympus, and does not comment any further on his or her actions, only asking her to 'not let the word of Zeus go unfulfilled' (*Dem.* 321-323). Of note is also that she explicitly calls the king of the gods *Father* Zeus in her attempt to call Persephone's mother to order.

While Hades and Zeus both have obvious reasons to support the violent kidnapping, Helios complies with Zeus' wishes without further comment and the narrator acknowledges his judgement despite recognizing the rape as violent. This affirms that either Zeus, in the hymn, is recognized as a higher authority than Demeter, or the role of the father in marriage is prioritized over the role of the mother's. These two passages make it clear that it is not just Hades and Zeus that Demeter opposes and it is a larger struggle than just a personal conflict; she is fighting for her own place in, if not a divine, then a cultural hierarchy. Her claim to her daughter is questioned by the same text that celebrates her victory and the return of her daughter to her at the end. Zeus has to admit his (partial) defeat in the words of his final messenger, Rhea:

"Come, my child,
Loud-thundering, far-seeing Zeus calls you
To come back to the tribes of gods,
And he has promised to give you honours,
Whatever you wish among the immortal gods.
He consented with a nod that for a third part
Of the circling year your daughter
Shall go down to the gloomy darkness,
But for the other two parts she shall be
With you and the other immortals." (*Dem.* 460-465)

Zeus consents; he gives in to Demeter's demands, *has to* give in to her demands, because the devastation she has caused by her withdrawal is too great a danger. Nickel smartly adds to this reasoning that Demeter stopping mortals from sacrificing to the gods lessens their τιμή, much like Zeus has taken away hers (Nickel 78). The compromise of Persephone's temporary stay with both spouse and mother only comes about because of the pomegranate seed; the intention beforehand was to send her back to her mother permanently (*Dem.* 334-339). In the above passage, Demeter is promised additional τιμαί to the return of her daughter; she has won the fight. This is a great contrast to the Iliad, where Agamemnon yields completely and promises additional gifts to Achilles as well, and recognizes that he has lost to Achilles (*Il.* IX. 114-161). Zeus on the other hand never admits his wrongdoing, he merely recognizes the danger that famine poses for the gods as well as mortals: the hymn states that everyone would have perished, had Zeus not noticed it and reflected on it in his heart (*Dem.* 313). The hymn ends with the goddesses leaving for Olympus with Rhea, after Demeter has revealed the Mysteries to the leaders of Eleusis, and the narrator praising the two goddesses for the gifts that they bestow upon the pious:

‘Now when the queen among goddesses
Had taught them everything,
She and her daughter went to Olympos,
To the company of the other gods.
And there they live beside thunder-loving Zeus,
These sacred and venerable goddesses.
And very blessed is the one
Of all the people on the earth whom they freely love.
Immediately they send Ploutos as a guest
To that one's great house,
He who gives abundance to mortals.

(...)
You give us glorious gifts,
you bring the seasons,
sovereign Deo,

you and your daughter,
the surpassingly beautiful Persephone,
be gracious to me, and for my song
grant me a life my heart loves. (*Dem.* 483-495)

The narrator addresses Demeter directly at the end of the hymn, and praises her for what the mysteries have brought to humankind, and all the gifts that humans receive from her. The results of the withdrawal have been beneficial to humankind, and very clearly is mentioned Demeter's place *beside* Zeus. Of course, a hymn about Demeter is the most likely to praise Demeter, but this idea will automatically bend the story to end in reverence of the goddess; the story is told in a very goal-oriented fashion: René Nünlist states in his collaboration with Irene de Jong, *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature : Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative* that 'their narratives form a steady flow, one event 'automatically' motivates the next, and the narrator's discretion leads to that well-known impression that 'the story appears to tell itself' (Nünlist and De Jong, 40). The hymn operates in a way that prioritizes the results of actions above their reasons or relevance before the result becomes clear. Because of the evident benefits of her withdrawal, it is good in the eyes of the narrator, and his focalization mirrors the shift that has been made. Like many hymns, this one ends with the narrator promising to 'remember' the deity and another song as well. To sum up, Demeter's viewpoint is focalized in a much more positive way in the part of the withdrawal story pattern that comes after the Demophoön episode: the focus of her wrath is much more on τιμή instead of on grief, and she causes devastation not only by withdrawing, but also by causing a disaster, the latter of which tips the scales in her favour: her powers over the survival of humankind, and only this, ensure her victory in the end: she gives Zeus an ultimatum he cannot ignore.

What can be taken away from this literary analysis so far is that a cultural system that gives the father the right to decide the fate of the daughter is established early on and repeated throughout the entire hymn, but that Demeter's withdrawal is also supported and justified throughout the hymn, praising Demeter as the protagonist and the victor at the end. This duality is never resolved in the hymn, making it a highly ambiguous text. It supports two separate belief systems, one that idealizes the patriarchal society despite its horrors and one that celebrates Demeter for her personal victory over a violent aspect of it. The academic feminist debate usually takes either one approach, seeing Demeter as a suffering woman or victorious goddess, and the former is usually applied without acknowledging the latter and vice versa. Additionally, when scholars try to oppose feminist readings of the text, the idea of Demeter as a powerful goddess is often prioritized.

Comparison and Composition

To try and reconcile the idea of τιμή and withdrawal with a goddess as is done in the hymn to Demeter, a comparison can be made to the goddess Hera in the hymn to the Pythian Apollo (Sowa 98). Hera, once more, has had enough of Zeus and his affairs. He has birthed a child, Athena, without her, and done better than she did when she birthed the lame Hephaistos (*Hom. Hym. Ap.* 311-317). Her status as his wife, therefore her τιμή, is attacked, and she withdraws from the company of the gods to live in her temples (*Ap.* 343-348), much like Demeter has (Nickel's step 1 and 2). She proceeds to try to accomplish what Zeus has done, and the monster Typhaon is the result, who causes devastation to humankind (*Ap.* 355). Hera's withdrawal makes it to step 3 of Nickel's layout, Devastation, but this devastation is not restored by her or her return to the community; giving birth to a monster shames her even more. In other words, Hera's withdrawal does not succeed; Zeus, the only one in the text who manages to birth a divine child on his own (*Ap.* 314), stays the most powerful (a god combining man and woman's ways of giving life is a symbol of omnipotence, according to Joseph Campbell (Campbell 155)). Of note is that Hera's story is cut off before her return is described; she births her monstrous child, and disappears from the stage (*Ap.* 355) to give way for Apollo slaying Python.

Nickel's final two phases, Embassies and Return in other words, are omitted. Not being met by embassies whatsoever shows a certain disapproval on the side of the community. Hera's τιμή is never officially restored, so the final phases of Nickel's layout cannot be mentioned. What we are left with then, are two Homeric hymns that apply the withdrawal story pattern to the myth of a goddess. Both goddesses go against Zeus and displays of Zeus' authority on divine children, creating a conflict that revolves around the position of divine mothers. In both, Zeus' claim is clearly acknowledged; Hera outright loses and sinks even further into shame, and Demeter's wrath is questioned at first sight. However, while Demeter's famine, her powers over the fertility of the land, creates the desired result, Hera is not so lucky and births a monster, while her domain is marriage and childbirth. This demonstrates once more the connection between fertility gods and the withdrawal story pattern, as mentioned above, and that Demeter's victory hinges on her ability to create famine. While, as demonstrated above, the friction between Demeter as a character and the withdrawal can be taken from the text, Hera's withdrawal underlines the friction by yet again siding with Zeus, and what he stands for as a male god. In both narratives, there is a certain ambiguity.

In the end, we are left with questions that particularly lead back to the composition of the hymn: what exactly was the process, and at what point were the story patterns formed or inserted? The myth, as explored by the comparison in Ovid, works just as well without a withdrawal in it, so

this story pattern must have seemed important or fashionable enough to include it when it was recorded. It can be assumed that the Demophoön episode is an insertion, as it does not have any direct impact on the rape myth but does play an important role. Yet it adds an assertiveness to Demeter's character and a significance to the plot, a notion of life-or-death that unites the descent of Persephone with the wrath of Demeter and asserts the struggle on a divine level at the latter part of the hymn.

Conclusion

The text of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter is a complex and multifaceted text that poses a view on gender that is not analysed easily. Applying the theory of focalization to the hymn demonstrates the conflicting nature of its tone and stance on the Zeus-Demeter conflict, as well as demonstrating the ambiguous way the external narrator handles the application of the withdrawal story pattern on Demeter's withdrawal: a distinction can be made between how the first half of the hymn treats Demeter's wrath as unjustified and how the second half justifies it. The first half of the hymn suggests that Zeus, despite the violent kidnapping, is right to decide on his daughter's fate, while the second half of the hymn largely focuses on the story pattern of the withdrawal and does not question its conclusion like it did in the Helios scene. Additionally, comparisons to other texts like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and its adaptation of the same myth and the *Homeric hymn to the Pythian Apollo*, the latter of which applies the withdrawal story pattern to the goddess Hera, raises questions about how the withdrawal story pattern can be applied to a goddess character instead of heroes like Achilles; Demeter's withdrawal is questioned because of her gender, yet her divine power over the fertility of the land gives her an exceptional trump card that decides the fight in her favour (the comparison to Hera's unsuccessful withdrawal underlines that notion). It can't be denied that the story pattern draws similarities between all these myths, nor can it be denied that it must have been applied for a reason during the composition process, yet it does raise more questions about both the composition process as well as gender- and familial relations in the Archaic period and how these are portrayed in mythological texts and might have been received by an ancient Greek audience; how can a violent kidnapping both be justified and condemned within the same text? How can a protagonist both suffer under the way τιμή affects gender relations, and triumph, and regain her τιμή through her divinity? An analysis that fully acknowledges both Demeter's portrayal of a suffering woman and Demeter's triumph through her divinity and what that entails might complicate one's stance on gender in the Homeric hymn to the goddess, yet does encompass all the nuance that can be found in the text.

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