

LOUISE GLÜCK'S «PERSEPHONE THE WANDERER» READ FROM A PSYCHOANALYTIC AND CLASSICAL RECEPTIONS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Louise Glück provides a compelling example of Classical Receptions in contemporary poetry. Hence, this paper aims at discussing Glück's psychoanalytic interpretation of the so-called *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and «Persephone the Wanderer», a poem pertaining to Glück's *Averno* (2006), attempting to demonstrate the appropriation of the myth of Demeter and Persephone from a psychoanalytic approach. After an introduction to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Foley, 1994), and Louise Glück and her poem «Persephone the Wanderer», I will compare the myth of Demeter and Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* with Glück's «Persephone the Wanderer». From a psychoanalytic perspective, Demeter's psychological state will be addressed while pointing out her motherhood and her grief, and then I will associate the concept of narcissism to both Demeter and Hades in Glück's poem and its impact on Persephone.

KEYWORDS: Louise Glück, Persephone and Demeter, Classical Receptions, psychoanalysis.

«PERSEPHONE THE WANDERER» DE LOUISE GLÜCK
LEÍDO DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA PSICOANALÍTICA Y DE RECEPCIONES CLÁSICAS

RESUMEN

Louise Glück proporciona un ejemplo convincente de Recepciones Clásicas en la poesía contemporánea. Por lo tanto, este artículo tiene como objetivo abordar la interpretación psicoanalítica de Glück del llamado *Himno homérico a Deméter* y «Persephone the Wanderer» («Perséfone la errante»), poema perteneciente al *Averno* de Glück (2006), que intenta demostrar la apropiación del mito de Deméter y Perséfone desde una perspectiva psicoanalítica. Después de una introducción al *Himno homérico a Deméter* (Foley, 1994), y a Louise Glück y su poema «Persephone the Wanderer», compararé el mito de Deméter y Perséfone en el *Himno homérico a Deméter* con «Persephone the Wanderer» de Glück. Desde una perspectiva psicoanalítica, se abordará el estado psicológico de Deméter señalando su maternidad y su duelo, y luego se asociará el concepto de narcisismo tanto a Deméter como a Hades en el poema de Glück y su impacto en Perséfone.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Louise Glück, Deméter y Perséfone, Recepciones Clásicas, psicoanálisis.

The appeal of the classical sources is such that texts like the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* keep finding their way into contemporary literature, and so can be seen in Louise Glück's book of poetry *Averno* (2006), where ancient mythology and current reality become one. Although the name *Averno* alludes to the Roman term which specifically refers to the entrance to the underworld, the use of the Greek names of Demeter and Persephone makes reference to the Hellenic roots of Glück's *Averno*.¹ Moreover, in an interview, the author explicitly cites D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* (1967) as her source of information about the myth in question (Gosmann, 2010: 220). Although this twentieth century version of the myth blends Homeric with Ovidian traits, the most pervasive one is the Homeric, therefore the choice of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in this paper.²

With *Averno*, Louise Glück succeeds in making the mythical characters Demeter and Persephone display different psychological behaviours. This analysis will only focus on the poem «Persephone the Wanderer» (I)³ where we find a range of complex poetic motifs related to death, marriage, motherhood, grief, and trauma, among many others that are present not only in this poem and Glück's book of poetry *Averno* but also in all her works of poetry. For the present study the motifs of motherhood and grief for the loss of a daughter are imperative as, although there are many ways of addressing them, Demeter and Persephone have a different perspective and a different view of the same events. While the former feels concerned and grieved, the latter feels controlled, lost, and split between two worlds that have decided her fate without taking her into consideration, and as a result, she has to give up her identity or the need to establish one.

1. HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* sings the story of how Persephone, while picking flowers, stretched her hands to pluck a narcissus and the earth opened.⁴ Hades, her uncle, took her away in his golden chariot while she was asking for help. For nine

¹ The work on this article has been sustained by the Research Group HUM-741. I wish to express my gratitude to Lucía Presentación Romero Mariscal and Susana Nicolás Román, who read an earlier draft of this article and encouraged me with illuminating support and critical advice, Charles Delattre, who has guided me, and Iman Farouk Mohamed El Bakary who was a source of inspiration for this paper. See De Vido, 2006. As per the literary resonances of the name *Averno* as a *topos* of the underworld which can be traced back to Vergil, see Hurst, 2022: 75.

² Although I will be addressing the *Hymn to Demeter* as the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, it is generally accepted that it was not written by Homer as the author is unknown.

³ In *Averno*, Louise Glück entitled two of her poems «Persephone the Wanderer» but this research concentrates mainly on the first version of this poem while mentioning now and then the second version.

⁴ I will be following Helene P. Foley's (1994) translation of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

days, Demeter, her mother, roamed the earth looking for her, tearing her veil, holding torches, and not tasting ambrosia, drinking, or bathing. On the tenth day, Hekate approached Demeter to tell her that, although she did not see anything, she did hear something. Therefore, she took the grieving mother in front of Helios, who had indeed seen what had happened. He told Demeter how Zeus, Persephone's father, was the one to blame as he was the one that gave his daughter to his brother Hades in marriage without Demeter's consent. Nevertheless, he also said that the god of the underworld was no unsuitable husband, which made the goddess grieve much (*HDem* ll. 1-91).

Demeter then withdrew from Olympus and disguised herself among humanity. While disguised, she met Keleos' daughters who took her to their palace so that she could nurse their little brother Demophon. Once at Keleos and Metaneira's palace, she nursed the child and treated him like divinity. While trying to immortalise him by burying him inside the fire, Metaneira was spying on the goddess out of mistrust. This mistrust triggered Demeter's anger, who snatched the child from the flames and stopped the immortalisation process. Then, the goddess asked for a temple in her honour, where she isolated herself in pain for her lost daughter and buried the seed under the ground, putting the life of humanity at stake and with them their gifts and sacrifices to the gods and goddesses (*HDem* ll. 92-312).

Zeus tried to summon Demeter but did not succeed, so he had no choice but to send Hermes to the underworld to bring Persephone back. Hermes addressed Hades and told him what Zeus had ordered, and Hades did not disobey. Nevertheless, before letting Persephone leave, he told her about the honours that she would acquire as his wife and put a pomegranate seed into her mouth. Persephone got reunited with her mother, but as a result of eating in the underworld, Zeus decided she would spend one third of the year with Hades and two thirds with her mother. Then Zeus sends Rhea to ask Demeter to restore the vegetation and she does not disobey. Finally, Demeter teaches her rites to the kings who administered the law (*HDem* ll. 313-489). These were the Eleusinian Mysteries, which were specifically dedicated to Persephone and Demeter. They celebrated life, death, and rebirth, and promised the initiates a better life after death (Roisman, 2011: 186). Thus, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* explains how Koré (a maiden) becomes Persephone (the goddess of the underworld), the honours that she receives after the abduction, and the creation of the Eleusinian Mysteries (Harris, 2018: 29).

As Foley aptly puts it, «the *Hymn* offers a female version of the heroic quest that plays a central role in Mediterranean and Near Eastern epic» (1994: 80). Similarly, in Louise Glück's creative appropriation of this *Hymn*, the female heroic quest plays a pivotal role. However, much to our surprise, this quest will not be undertaken by Demeter but by her daughter Persephone.

2. LOUISE GLÜCK'S «PERSEPHONE THE WANDERER» (I): APPROACHING THE POEM

Louise Glück is an American author of thirteen books of poetry, two of literary criticism, and one work of fiction. She is now well known for winning, among other



prestigious literary awards, the 2020 Nobel Prize for Literature.⁵ Her poetry does not present a set metre, nor a rhyme scheme and she tends to write with a quotidian diction (Užgiris, 2020: 90-91). Not only is the influence of the classical tradition still very present in contemporary literature, but also in Glück's poetry, where a connection between ancient and contemporary topics is established.⁶ Indeed, this perfectly applies to her book of poetry *Averno*, where the ancient myth is consolidated with the contemporary reality as the captivating story of Demeter and Persephone allows us to do. Although there are different versions of this myth, I consider the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, which is the most ancient literary source associated with this myth, to be indirectly the most inspiring source of Glück's *Averno*. I believe this is demonstrated in Glück's choice of diction throughout the poems in *Averno* when alluding to the Demeter and Persephone myth. For starters, in «Persephone the Wanderer» (I), the feeling of shame Demeter induces in her child is similarly addressed in the *Homeric Hymn* where Persephone tells her version of the events to her mother (*HDem* ll. 406-33). This speech could be interpreted as a subtle attempt to regain her mother's trust. Then, «A Myth of Innocence» explains how «The girl who disappears from the pool / will never return. A woman will return, / looking for the girl she was» (Glück, 2006: 50, l. 23-25), which is a direct allusion to how Koré becomes Persephone. Furthermore, in «A Myth of Devotion», just as it happened in the Homeric version (*HDem* l. 343), we learn of a «bed» (Glück, 2006: 58, l. 4) Hades added to the world he created for Persephone. Later, in «Persephone the Wanderer» (II), we read: «the dead are mysteries» (Glück, 2006: 73, l. 8) which subtly alludes to the Eleusinian Mysteries Demeter establishes at the end of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Also, in all these poems, Glück uses Greek names to address the characters of the ancient myth.

This study will address the first version of «Persephone the Wanderer» where diction is imperative as the word choice is calculated. Moreover, this diction presents a contrast between Persephone's life on earth, her transition to the underworld, and her life in the underworld. The stanzas hint at either before, during, or after Persephone's abduction. Most stanzas end with a powerful word such as «human behaviour», «harm», «negative creation», «virgin», «modern girls», «Persephone», «Hawthorne», «casuality», «conflict», «hell», «die», «safety», «meat», «life», «earth», and «god». Each of these endings reminds us of what Persephone endures. Many of these words oppose one another, which gives power to the diction.

Time has a special sense in this poem as it refers to different key moments in Persephone's fate, and at the end, there is a sense of future when the narrator addresses the reader. Although some of the verses are short, they are still strong and

⁵ For a general overview of Glück's biography and works, see <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2020/gluck/biographical/> [accessed 17/03/2022].

⁶ Cf., for example, Glück's *The Triumph of Achilles* (1985), *Meadowland* (1996), *Vita Nova* (1999). See Morris, 2006.

meaningful, each ending with a powerful statement referring directly or indirectly to Persephone. The use of a range of words that have a melancholic tone, such as «harm», «negative creation», «hell», or «rape», evokes the Homeric narrative of the myth of Demeter and Persephone.⁷ Other words are associated with nature, such as «meadow», «daisies», «fecundity», «earth», or «field», once more echoing the Homeric account.⁸ Also, some words speak volumes of the psychoanalytic approach of the contemporary poet regarding the ancient myth, namely «dilemma», «ego», «superego», or «id». The names «Persephone», «Demeter», and «Hades» allude directly to the mythical source. While using the myth of Demeter and Persephone, Glück finds the perfect excuse to allegorically address disturbing realities about human nature, such as the «unconscious harm» we do; also, gender and society's concerns, such as how «modern girls» are «drugged, violated against [their] will» (Glück, 2006: 16, l. 16); how marriage changes, mainly, the bride's life, who even after she returns to her first home she is «stained with red juice» (Glück, 2006: 16, l. 22) resulting from the shame of having lost virginity. The poem also tackles the emotions of both the mother, at the beginning of the poem, and the daughter in the rest of the stanzas. Some powerful and recurrent words are «earth», «home», and «hell», which echoes with the noun in the title «wanderer», as Persephone wanders between earth and underworld. Also, a very powerful word in the diction is «sex» which is the one that causes the transition from childhood to adulthood, from earth to underworld, thus, the one causing the sense of wandering. This poem is a poetic example that results from the mixture of high and middle diction, as when using psychoanalytic terms and neutral expressions. Glück proves to be clear yet, at times, ironic when addressing, for instance, the way scholars debate Persephone's abduction.

3. THE HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER AND «PERSEPHONE THE WANDERER»

Glück's first explicit allusion to the myth of Demeter and Persephone in *Averno* can be found in her first version of the poem «Persephone the Wanderer». After the title itself, the very first lines run like this:

In the first version, Persephone
is taken from her mother
and the goddess of the earth
punishes the earth—... (Glück, 2006: 16, ll. 1-4).

⁷ See *HDem* ll. 310-2 for «harm»; ll. 307-10 for «negative creation»; ll. 341-72 for «hell»; and ll. 404-13 for implicit «rape».

⁸ See *HDem* l. 7 for «meadow»; ll. 6-7 for the motif of flowers; l. 469 for «fecundity»; ll. 14-16 for «earth»; and l. 471 for «field».



A few verses later there is another allusion to the ancient source:

Persephone's initial
sojourn in hell continues to be
pawed over by scholars who dispute
the sensations of the virgin:

did she cooperate in her rape,
or was she drugged, violated against her will,
as happens so often to modern girls. (Glück, 2006: 16, ll. 11-17).

In these lines, Glück ironically refers to the fact that many scholars have addressed Persephone's abduction in countless contemporary studies debating whether she did or did not cooperate in her rape. Glück uses the appalling verb «pawed» to criticise the brutal insensitivity with which scholars and academics sometimes analyse highly sensitive texts. It is as if, instead of passing their hands through the pages of the poem, they put their paws on them. In a typically postmodernist way, Glück seems to be mocking scholars, who try to go through the written words to find a plausible explanation as to whether Persephone was abducted or not. Even if some contemporary authors⁹ have alluded to Persephone's abduction as a violation or a sexualised kidnapping, the Homeric version is far more subtle than that, implicitly suggesting such sexual violence against the maiden goddess through the powerful image of Hades making Persephone swallow the pomegranate seed against her will (*HDem* ll. 411-3).

Later, as if Glück were alluding to the situation Hermes found when he went to the underworld to bring Persephone back (*HDem* ll. 343-4), we find Persephone also «...lying in the bed of Hades» (Glück, 2006: 18, l. 51), as his wife. Moreover, Glück encourages us to read the «tale», as she puts it, «as an argument between the mother and the lover—» where «the daughter is just meat» (Glück, 2006: 19, ll. 86-87) as none of them genuinely cares about Persephone, all they want is to own her.

The word «hymn» introduces a song of praise sung for a god or goddess (Rayor, 2004: 4), here Glück devotes two verses to remind us of what the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is, a «Song of the earth, / song of the mythic vision of eternal life—» (Glück, 2006: 19, ll. 95-96), a song sang to Demeter. Also, the last two lines of this poem invoke again the myth when she asks the reader «What will you do, / when it is your turn in the field with the god?» (Glück, 2006: 19, ll. 100-101).

Nevertheless, following a postmodern strategy, Glück knows that the characters of this story are just that: characters, and she asks the reader to treat them as such. Glück is using metafiction or self-conscious fiction, explicitly addressing how fiction works within the poem. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is being used here as a way

⁹ See Richardson, 2011: 54-55; Arthur, 1977; Foley, 1994: 32; Burket, 1983: 262.

to address certain topics and situations, dilemmas even. Glück warns the reader not to like anyone as «The characters are not people. / They are aspects of a dilemma or conflict» (Glück, 2006: 17, ll. 33-36).

4. 'HUMANITY' OF DEMETER: MOTHERHOOD AND GRIEF

The title «Persephone the Wanderer» surprisingly highlights the fact that *Persephone* (my emphasis) wanders. Indeed, the poet will later focus on Persephone's wandering between the earth and the underworld. Yet, it is her mother Demeter who, to any reader acquainted with the «tale», as Glück says, or the myth of the two goddesses, actually wanders the earth in search of her daughter.¹⁰ Another stunning element in Glück's poetical appropriation of this myth is that we see the goddess as a human, not a divine, person. Glück emphasises the humanity of Demeter, which is particularly explicit in her reaction, since she vengefully punishes the earth because of the loss of her daughter, which is:

consistent with what we know of human behavior,

that human beings take profound satisfaction
in doing harm, particularly
unconscious harm:

we call this
negative creation. (Glück, 2006: 16, ll. 5-10).

As we know, Demeter is blinded by her anger against the kidnap of her daughter.¹¹ As such, it is Demeter's wounded motherhood the one that lets her display all this wrath, since losing her daughter is what triggers this reaction.¹² Like many a human being, Demeter selfishly wants everyone to taste her sorrow. Her potential destruction of humankind through famine is conspicuously referred to in the poem with a remarkable lithote verging on the oxymoron, namely «negative creation». The goddess of nature and life behaves in a way unfitting to a deity, acting more like an insensible human creature. Yet the juncture «negative creation» still evokes the idea of the power of the pagan goddess, used in negative terms, to destroy rather than to create, and still creating negatively, that is, creating havoc. Nevertheless, even if Persephone goes back to her mother what happened to her will not change, it is a fact that after her abduction she will always have to go back to Hades as his wife because of the pomegranate seed she ate in the underworld:

¹⁰ See Frankel, 2016: 45-46.

¹¹ According to Hurst (2012: 185), Glück «reduces the goddess Demeter to a jealous woman».

¹² See Morales Ortiz, 2007: 136.



As is well known, the return of the beloved
does not correct
the loss of the beloved: Persephone

returns home
stained with red juice like
a character in Hawthorne– (Glück, 2006: 16, ll. 18-23).

Nothing will go back to how it was, Persephone's return home does not erase the facts: she is stained in a certain way, and so will her mother see her, no matter how much love she has for her daughter, she sees her as someone else, a woman rather than the child she wanted back. Indeed, Persephone returns to her mother stained with the redness of the pomegranate seed that made her a woman leaving childhood behind.¹³ Once she goes back to her mother she is no longer the same as she understands what being in a relationship is, she knows what desires are, and she has lost her innocence.¹⁴ Nothing will be the same again for neither of them, but Persephone is the one paying for that price, the price of *change*, unaccepted growth:

I am not certain I will
keep this word: is earth
“home” to Persephone? Is she at home, conceivably,
in the bed of the god? Is she
at home nowhere? Is she
a born wanderer, in other words
an existential
replica of her own mother, less
hamstrung by ideas of casuality? (Glück, 2006: 17, ll. 24-32).

Persephone does indeed become a wanderer, there is nowhere that she can call home, neither Demeter nor Hades seem to be a safe place for her, when she

¹³ There is a contrast between the whiteness of the snow and the redness of the stain that is also the blood that implies the loss of maidenhood, the loss of virginity. This could be associated with the fact that the pomegranate is associated with blood, and marriage, see Richardson, 1974: 276. Readers should be reminded of the fact that, before her being kidnapped by Hades, Persephone is referred to as a child, a young girl, *i.e.* Koré. See Foley (1994: 39).

¹⁴ Persephone's lack of innocence is also suggested in «A Myth of Innocence» which is also a poem pertaining to Glück's *Averno* and, in my view, the contemporary author conveys here ideas reminiscent from the Homeric subtext. Indeed, Persephone's erotic awakening is also addressed by Suter (2002: 22, 41), who suggests that Persephone stretches her hands to unplug the narcissus because of her readiness to get married and that her interesting retelling of the events to her mother tries to downplay the fact that she is ready to get married. In a similar vein, Daifotis (2017: 19) also views in Glück's *Averno* Persephone's willingness to go with Hades.

goes back to her mother she is no longer at home, her mother knows that she is no longer a child, as so does Persephone herself. When she is with Hades, she knows that being in his bed is only temporary. As someone with their luggage still packed, Persephone does not have a place to settle. Wherever she goes she is not at home. However, Demeter is the same as well: she is a wanderer. Because of her daughter, she wanders the earth looking for her, and because of her absence, she makes winter appear. Thus, winter is the way Demeter expresses her grief but:

You must ask yourself:
where is it snowing?

White of forgetfulness,
of desecration– (Glück, 2006: 17, ll. 42-45).

Demeter might be trying to forget her pain but she is buried in her grief. Demeter's reaction to her daughter's loss was that of someone who had nothing to lose. She had to make a judgement call and she decided to starve humanity until her daughter was brought back to her. This is yet another reference to the classical source Glück is using as inspiration (*HDem* ll. 305-11). That is all she could do to try and get herself back to how things used to be before Persephone was taken away from her. Nevertheless, no broken relationship can be completely fixed.

5. HADES' AND DEMETER'S NARCISSISM AND ITS IMPACT ON PERSEPHONE

Parental love is a reborn narcissism (Freud, 1914: 91), and so is seen in Glück's rewriting of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, where she presents Demeter's motherhood as a childish and possessive one. As it happens in Glück's «Persephone the Wanderer» (II) where:

Glück shows the difficulty the young woman has with the idea of a maternal and body-focused femininity. Either the young woman desires to maintain her non-maternal, pre-adolescent self, and struggles against her mother, who represents that restrictive, female-gendered body identity onto her; or the young mother develops a narcissism with and abjection of her own body as it becomes the space wherein a child develops (Cooke, 2017: 27).

Nevertheless, I submit that these ideas are first introduced in «Persephone the Wanderer» (I) where Persephone wanders between two worlds. In each of them, someone, either her mother or her husband, awaits for her and makes her responsible for their joy or sadness, mostly her mother, who indeed sees her as an extension of herself. As a grieving mother, Demeter shuts down her daughter's identity, not allowing her to develop her own separate self. Hades does the same as he seems a sort of hope to Persephone when she attempts to escape her mother's control, but



she feels deceived as she finds herself with a controlling lover.¹⁵ Indeed, as Iman El Bakary asserts, «loss of identity, and the tragic silencing of the mind demanded by the narcissistic lover are among the most recurrent themes in women's writing» (2019: 135). As such, the mother's pain stems from her physical separation from her daughter, who is no longer in her body nor on earth, «which, being Demeter's godly domain, acts as an extension and representation of her own body» (Cooke, 2017: 34). The control that Demeter holds over Persephone and the earth is the one that forms her sense of self. In that regard, both depend upon Demeter and are conditioned by her.

As such, neither Demeter nor Hades care about what Persephone feels:

She is lying in the bed of Hades.
What is in her mind?
Is she afraid? Has something
blotted out the idea
of mind? (Glück, 2006:18, ll. 51-55).

That she is Hades' wife, and she is in his bed is a fact, but what nobody knows is what Persephone is thinking, how she is feeling. Her mother is looking for her to bring her back to her, and her husband wants her, but we do not know of Persephone's feelings and thoughts.¹⁶ Her passiveness represents her lack of identity. Even if she is not dead, she behaves like someone who is indeed dead, victimised because of others' control. Persephone seems to know the power of her mother and what she is capable of:

She does know the earth
is run by mothers, this much
is certain. She also knows
she is not what is called
a girl any longer. Regarding
incarceration, she believes

she has been a prisoner since she has been a daughter. (Glück, 2006: 18, ll. 56-62).

Now, imprisoned in Hades' underworld she does not perceive any difference as she was always a prisoner of her mother. The only thing that changed is the cage, as a daughter she was her mother's and now as a wife she is her husband's. She belongs

¹⁵«A Myth of Innocence» reinforces this idea. In this poem, Persephone wishes to escape the body her mother controls and embraces the god of the dead. Yet, once she becomes his wife, she is confused and wonders whether Hades is the answer to her prayer as she comprehends that he is similar to her mother.

¹⁶ This is shown in her passivity and lack of agency, see Fletcher, 2019: 42.

to someone a part of the year and to someone else the other remaining part. In fact, «The terrible reunions in store for her / will take up the rest of her life» (Glück, 2006: 18, ll. 63-64) as she will always have to get reunited with both Hades and Demeter in an endless cycle. She will always be uncomfortable, part of the year with one and the other remaining part with the other. She is doomed and definitely «forced to live in the underworld and to confront her dual life» (Yit Mun, 2008: 7). Furthermore, «When the passion for expiation / is chronic, fierce, you do not choose / the way you live. You do not live; / you are not allowed to die» (Glück, 2006: 18, ll. 65-68).

I concur with Azcu's view that «*Averno* relates Glück's human dilemma— in existential creation one holds the power to create both good and evil, war and peace» (2013: 107). Indeed, Persephone does not live nor is she allowed to die, even death is denied to her, there will never be an end to her pain and sorrow, and there is no escape.¹⁷ She will «...drift between earth and death / which seem, finally, / strangely alike...» (Glück, 2006: 18, 69-71). On earth she is her mother's daughter, with no identity of her own as her mother will control her; on the underworld she is her husband's wife, again, with no free will as she is controlled by him.¹⁸ In fact Persephone is not allowed to have her own opinion nor to speak her mind as «... there is no point in knowing what you want / when the forces contending over you / could kill you» (Glück, 2006: 18, ll. 72-74). Therefore, Persephone does not want nor need to know anymore what she wants, she is completely objectivised, she already lost herself so whatever she wants does not matter any longer. Knowing who she is and what she wants would bring her nothing as she cannot escape from her mother who awaits her on earth, nor her husband who does the same in the underworld. Therefore:

as we have seen
in the tale of Persephone
which should be read

as an argument between the mother and the lover—
the daughter is just meat. (Glück, 2006: 19, ll. 83-87).

Persephone is «loved»¹⁹ by a possessive mother and a possessive husband that control her, incarcerate her, own her, by shutting down her thoughts and making her identity disappear as she is *just meat* (my emphasis) to them. However, none of them sees it as it is, this is «love» for them. In Persephone's situation both her

¹⁷ According to Gosmann, «Persephone, Demeter, and Hades are in conflict with each other in the myth just as ego, superego, and id are in conflict with each other in the mind» (2010: 228).

¹⁸ See Hurst, 2012: 178.

¹⁹ This is between quotation marks as I believe there is no actual love coming from neither Demeter nor Hades. In «A Myth of Innocence» Persephone feels incarcerated and controlled by her mother, in the second version of «Persephone the Wanderer» she is a mere extension of her mother,



relationship with Demeter and her marriage to Hades are indeed a trap where she has fallen.²⁰

6. CONCLUSIONS

In Glück's creative appropriation of the ancient Greek myth, Persephone lacks freedom, being forced to comply with the willingness of both her mother and husband. They end up debilitating her with their possessiveness and control over, not only her body but also her mind. Persephone is unable to change her destiny, life in death is more tormenting than death itself.

The tremendous impact of the Homeric version of the myth of Demeter and Persephone on *Averno* is more than obvious, and even more so in the two poems called «Persephone the Wanderer» where the author encourages the reader to take another perspective of the events taking place in the former versions of the myth. Louise Glück scrutinises Demeter's and Persephone's personalities, making the reader consider the facts differently from the *Homeric Hymn*: what if Persephone did not want to go back to her mother? What if she did not want to go back to her husband either? And after all, what does Persephone want? This last question is disturbingly hard to answer as Persephone actually lacks agency, her thoughts are ignored, and she is owned, sometimes by her mother and others by her husband. Persephone finds herself trapped between two worlds that she is supposed to call home, swinging between two beings whose love is killing her alive. All of this makes Persephone indeed a wanderer. Glück's appropriation reinforces the psychological consequences of Persephone being trapped between mother and husband, offering a different version of the Demeter and Persephone myth. Therefore, following a psychoanalytic approach, I could explore the narcissism of both Demeter and Hades and its impact on Persephone. Indeed, Glück succeeds in depicting the possessive love that ties Persephone to her mother and her husband.

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in «Persephone the Wanderer» (i) Persephone is a replica of her mother, and in «A Myth of Devotion» Hades decides to love her and manipulates her as a proof of such a feeling, all this indicates that Persephone is objectivised and not loved. Moreover, Freud (1914: 76-85) states love as the cure to narcissism and both Demeter and Hades display narcissistic traits that encourage the thinking that what we conceptualise as genuine love is not present in neither Demeter nor Hades. Although I take issue with Dings' review of *Averno*, he has a point when addressing «the Glückian obsessions of self, complaint, anger, and clinical analysis of the human with the tools of myth» (2008: 72).

²⁰ For more appropriations of the Demeter and Persephone myth see Salcedo González, 2020: 36.

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