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LITERATURE

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Mothers and Daughters: An Exploratory Look into Dora Greenwell's Revisions of Persephone

Abstract. The Greek myth about Persephone remains a powerful narrative of mother-daughter symbiosis and their connection functions as one of the fundamental themes in the literature of the nineteenth century. Few researchers have addressed the problem of representing Persephone in Victorian poetry, focusing on the importance of myth in cultural criticism and the intersection of feminism and revisionism. The following article explores how the mid-Victorian revisions of Persephone serve as a tool of recognition of the challenges that marriage may pose for feminine ties. I specifically concentrate on two poems by the English poet Dora Greenwell "The Garden of Proserpine" (1869) and "Demeter and Cora" (1876). Taking into account psychological studies on familial bonds as well as the psychoanalytic and archetypical reading of the mother-daughter interactions, I offer a detailed investigation of Greenwell's works that discuss "the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation" (Hirsch 1989, 20). Greenwell reworks the myth of Demeter and Persephone to reflect upon the ever-changing relationship between mothers and daughters as well as to investigate the moment of individual maturation of a married daughter.

Keywords: Victorian poetry; mother-daughter relationship; Persephone; revisionism; nineteenth century; Dora Greenwell

1. Introduction

The nineteenth-century British sensibility is no stranger to Homeric influences. As Aubrey De Vere writes in the introduction to his collection of poems *The Search after Proserpine*, "Of all the beautiful fictions of Greek Mythology there are few more ex-

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quisite than the story of Proserpine, and none deeper in symbolic meaning" (1845, 5). Persephone's identity is shaped by rites of passage that she encounters: assault, marriage with Hades, and finally her own motherhood. The Greek myth about Demeter and Persephone, even for the present-day reader, remains a powerful narrative of love, separation, and death.

According to the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter, the goddess of fertility and fruitfulness, was one of Zeus's sisters and one of the first generations of Olympian deities. Her status as a mother of Earth was encoded even in her name – the Greek word for mother was *meter*. As the myth goes, Persephone (or Proserpina in the Roman tradition), the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, was cunningly abducted by Hades as she was gathering flowers by a stream. Unable to find her daughter, Demeter was overcome by grief, and as a result, the crops on Earth failed and famine struck. Zeus intervened and commanded Hades to return Persephone to her mother. Unfortunately, she had eaten a pomegranate seed, which was considered the food of the dead. Ultimately, she could spend only six months each year with her mother, and the other six months with Hades. The story of Demeter and Persephone is primarily related to the cosmogony of seasons; yet it also reveals more anthropological or even psychological implications. The myth serves not only as an example of the natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth but also as a narrative on feminine rites of passage and specifically about the mother-daughter bond that encounters formidable obstacles.

In fact, *Hymn to Demeter* may be summarised in one statement – the mother's bereavement of a lost daughter. Adrienne Rich argues that significance of the relationship between mother and daughter goes unnoticed and "never acted on the stage" (1976, 237–238), making the attachment between the women very intimate and secretive. More importantly, the breach between Demeter and Persephone is not driven by "the daughter's rebellion against the mother, nor the mother's rejection of the daughter" (Rich 1976, 240). Instead, the intervention of an outsider, specifically a man, completely subverts the bond and this is what makes the separation tragic but crucial for their experience.

The connection between mother and daughter functioned as one of the fundamental themes in the literature of the Victorian period.[1] As demonstrated in Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, the narratives on mothers and daughters were fraught with numerous contradictions, problems, and perils.[2] The exemplary cases of such a trope in nineteenth-century poetry are two poems by Dora Greenwell: "The Garden of Pro-

[1] In "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America" Carroll Smith-Rosenberg concentrates on the importance of female emotional bonding, taking into account letters, diaries, and the cultural patterns of female friendships. What is more, in her book *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter argues that female writers of the nineteenth century would look for mothers-patrons to guide them in the world of literary production.

[2] As Margot K. Louis notes, the classical myth of Persephone and Demeter functioned as a screen narrative to discuss women's experience of rape in the Victorian period. More on the use of classical myth in problematizing sexual issues see: Margot K. Louis *Persephone Rises, 1860–1927*.

serpine" (1869) and "Demeter and Cora" (1876). Although the imagery of Demeter/Persephone was relatively popular in nineteenth-century poetry, a close critical analysis of these works seems relatively scarce. Most researchers have investigated primarily the portrayal of Persephone through the use of contemporary historicist "mythic criticism" that seeks to evaluate how myth operated within the cultural contexts (Margot K. Louis's *Persephone Rises, 1860–1927. Mythography, Gender, and the Creation of a New Spirituality*) or by associating the Victorian feminist causes with mythmaking and revisionism (Andrew Radford's *The Lost Girls. Demeter-Persephone and the Literary Imagination, 1850–1930*). However, their approaches do not include a more individual take on Persephone, omitting aesthetic or psychoanalytic readings of the Goddess of the Underworld.

The following article explores how the revisions of Persephone in Dora Greenwell's poetry serve as a tool of recognition of the challenges that marriage may pose for family ties. Taking into consideration psychological studies on familial bonds as well as the psychoanalytic and archetypical interpretation of the mother-daughter relationship, I offer a detailed investigation of Greenwell's works that discuss "the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation" (Hirsch 1989, 20). Greenwell reworks the myth of Demeter and Persephone to reflect upon the ever-changing interactions between mothers and daughters as well as to investigate the moment of individual maturation of a married daughter.

2. Recognition of Mother/Daughter Narratives

A peculiar mother-daughter dynamics remains under considerable scrutiny in contemporary psychological research. The majority of the studies prove that the relation between mother and daughter stays incredibly intimate, lifelong, and developmentally important (Bojczyk et al. 2010, 453). With time, it gets even more complicated. As Fischer notes, "a daughter's marriage and motherhood increases her desire for closeness and continuity with her mother but also changes her status from adult-child to adult-adult and from role-complement to role-colleague" (1986, qtd in Bojczyk et al. 2010, 454). As lifespan research suggests, not only does the relationship itself undergo tremendous changes but also influences how mothers and daughters describe their bond. As Bojczyk concludes her analysis:

> when daughters are young adults and their mothers are middle-aged, the past – the daughter's childhood and the mother's earlier child-rearing – is revisited and reassessed by both generations. In this sense, our findings are consistent with Lewis's (1997) contention that childhood affects adulthood primarily through the prism of adult reconstructions and integrations of the past. Moreover, the mother-daughter relationship during these years remains an important, intimate bond. It continues to reflect the daughter's separation, autonomy, and independence against the backdrop of continuing closeness to and emotional support from mothers (2010, 473).

The complexity and ambivalence of the relation allow for various approaches: psychological, cultural, and literary ones. They include the feminist reading of the mother-daughter interactions (Flax 1978)[3]; a psychoanalytic one (Hirsch 1989, Chodorow 1989) or an eclectic mix of the literary, the cultural, and the personal (Rich 1976). In particular, Marianne Hirsch is interested in the relationship between motherhood and literary strategies within Western tradition, confronting them with Sigmund Freud's theories of psychosexual development formulated as the Oedipus Complex. While focusing on the literature of the nineteenth century, Hirsch points out that the core narrative for mother-daughter plots is that of Demeter and Persephone (1989, 5).

Although the myth appears woman-centred, in her analysis of motherhood and daughterhood[4] Hirsch notes that the Demeter/Persephone plot is propelled by Hades. His intervention as the male figure into the strictly female ties disrupts the bond between mother and daughter (Hirsch 1989, 5). However, what Hirsch points out is that only when Hades abducts Persephone can she reach maturity, and therefore the role of Demeter as a life guide fades (1989, 5). In the myth, the loss is presented as unavoidable, an essential element of natural growth which, more importantly, is cyclical. That is to say, if time remains cyclical, then the reunion of mother and daughter seems inevitable too (Hirsch 1989, 7). Still, the relationship does not resemble the initial one. Hirsch demonstrates that "the notion of the resolution," (1989, 35) as presented in the myth, escapes the conventional meaning. Persephone, at the end of the myth:

> is both alive and dead, both young and old, both above and below earth. She lives both symbiotically united with her mother and ineluctably distant from her. Her allegiance is split between mother and husband, her posture is dual. The repeated cycle relies neither on murder nor on reconciliation" (Hirsch 1989, 35).

Although the mother-daughter relationship is influenced by the presence of a man, it is never completely damaged. On the one hand, ancient Greek celebrations focus on Persephone's reunion with her mother; yet, eating the pomegranate seed highlights the connection with her husband. Consequently, Persephone's attachment constantly fluctuates between her mother and her husband offering no final resolution.

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[3] Jane Flax provides an interesting take on the struggle between mothers and daughters by taking into account their own autonomy and identity. Based on her experience as a psychoanalytic therapist, Flax develops her argument by linking feminism, narrative history, criticism of patriarchy, and Freud's approach. More in: Jane Flax "The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and Within Feminism".

[4] In *The Mother/Daughter Plot. Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Hirsch explores how the plots on mothers and daughters have been neglected in psychoanalytic readings, offering a neat confrontation with Freud's theories on psychosexual development and their presence in literature. Hirsch provides a compelling examination of how early feminist discourses struggled with writing about motherhood, particularly maternity.

What resonates in the psychoanalytic discussion is the daughter's resentment towards her mother since "it is that they [mothers] carry their own guilt and self-hatred over into their daughters' experience" (Rich 1976, 244). A contemporary reading, as represented by Rich, decidedly diverges from the early archetypical concepts such as 'the Terrible Mother,' coined by Erich Neumann, the student of Carl Jung. As Jung claims in his "Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype" 'Terrible Mothers' are similar to Demeter, who:

> compels the gods by her stubborn persistence to grant her the right of possession over her daughter. (…) women of this type, though continually living for others are, as a matter of fact, unable to make any real sacrifice. Driven by ruthless will to power and a fanatical insistence on their own maternal rights, they often succeed in annihilating not only their own personality but also the personal lives of their children (1954, 22).

In *The Great Mother: The Analysis of the Archetype*, Neumann also differentiates between the Great Mother, a nurturing figure, and the Terrible Mother – the embodiment of death and destruction:

> For this woman who generates life and all living things on earth is the same who takes them back into herself, who pursues her victims and captures them with snare and net. Disease, hunger, hardship, war (…), are her helpers, and among all peoples the goddesses of war and the hunt express man's experience of life as a female exacting blood. This Terrible Mother is the hungry earth, which devours its own children and fattens on their corpses; it is the tiger and the vulture (1955, 149).[5]

In other words, the portrayal of motherhood, as theorised by Jung and Neumann, is heavily based on archetypical juxtaposition within the individual. Both Jung and Neumann emphasise that one figure, in this case, a mother, can be both nurturing and oppressive; a positive influence on a daughter's life as well as the harbinger of destruction.

[5] Neumann's theories have been criticised for their religious aura. In the article "Erich Neumann: Theorist of the Great Mother" Camille Paglia defends Neumann's framework, especially its use in feminist criticism: "Principal reasons for this [exluding Jungian approaches to feminism] include Jung's religious orientation (his father was a Protestant minister) and his passion for nature. British and American academic feminists took up French Freud via the pretentiously convoluted Lacan instead. But Jung belongs in any humanities program that claims to be teaching "theory": his archetypes constitute the universal tropes and basic structures of epic, drama, folklore, and fairy tale. Erich Neumann's work, above all, assimilates or smoothly dovetails with major literature and art. Poststructuralism, on the other hand, which is predicated on the Francocentric linguistics of Fernand de Saussure, can claim success only with self-reflexive literature – that is, writing that is self-referential or self-canceling in the ironic modernist way. Poststructuralism has nothing useful to say about the great religious and mythological themes that have dominated the history of world art" (2006, 7–8).

3. Transformative Nature of Marriage in Dora Greenwell's "Demeter and Cora"

Dora Greenwell (1821–1882), the English poet who engaged mainly in religious literature, also addresses a psychologically perplexing mother-daughter relationship and the transformative nature of marriage. Greenwell does not centre her narrative on the mother's perspective of loss. Instead, she allows Persephone to reflect and ponder upon her individual awareness of a woman in the liminal state between innocence and experience, leaving home and embarking on the journey of self-recognition. "Demeter and Cora" (1876), from *Camera Obscura* collection, demonstrates the moment of the breakdown of their bond. Greenwell's portrayal of Demeter may, to some extent, resemble the image of a restrictive mother who does not allow her daughter to mature. Therefore, initially, Persephone's voice is silenced by her mother.

In "Demeter and Cora" Greenwell explores a more uncomfortable link between mothers and daughters by constructing a dialogue between them. Symptomatically, Persephone is still named Cora, which means *maiden*, thus placing the narrative at the threshold of transforming the naïve girl into an experienced woman. The poem starts with the conversation after Demeter's strenuous search for her child. Demeter's thoughts reach Cora in Hades, but Cora cannot be heard:

> "Speak, daughter, speak; art speaking now?"
> "Seek, mother, seek; art seeking thou
> Thy dear-loved Cora?" Daughter sweet,
> I bend unto the earth my ear
> To catch the sound of coming feet;
> I listen long, but only hear
> The deep, dark waters running clear (Greenwell "Demeter and Persephone," ll. 1–7).

Although the beginning is marked by the image of love between mother and daughter, there are traces of limitations that would be imposed on Persephone. After the initial warm welcome, Persephone tells Demeter that she should fulfil her destiny primarily as the Queen of the Underworld:

> Well
> Or ill I know not; I through fate
> Queen of a wide unmeasured tomb
> Know not if it be love or hate
> That holds me fast, but I am bound
> For ever! What if I am found
> Of thee, my mother, still the bars
> Are round me (ll. 12–18).

Here, Persephone mentions that her freedom is somehow restricted, not only by Hades but also by her mother. What is more, Demeter points out to Persephone the perils of marriage, suggesting that it is an inherently confining institution:

> Daughter, tell,
> Doth thy dark lord, the King of Hell,
> Still love thee?" " Oh, too well, too well
> He loves! he binds with unwrought chain (ll. 22–25).

Linda K. Hughes argues that the poem serves as an example of the domestication of the Greek myth that reveals the "common Victorian experience of mothers' loss, including that of daughters leaving home to marry" as well as "the critique of marriage and the daughterly submission recommended by Sarah Stickney Ellis in *Daughters of England* (1845)"[6] (2010, 42–43). In other words, the predicament of Persephone who was forced into marriage mirrored that of the girls in the Victorian period.

Nevertheless, the fate of Persephone should not be reduced only to the image of a damsel in distress. In the second part of the poem, Greenwell signals that although Persephone was confined, with that came a deeper knowledge and understanding of herself. Thus, one sees the reversal of the roles – Persephone seems more conscious of her maturation in comparison with Demeter. The use of past forms of the verb – "I was thy daughter Cora" (l. 28) as well as mentioning the daffodil, the symbol of revival, rebirth, joy and hope (Kirkby 2011) – signifies that transformation from innocent Cora to Persephone is inevitable. Although she acknowledges her longing for Enna, she accepts her fate as the Queen of Hades.

The experience of Persephone also manifests itself in setting the boundaries between herself and her mother. When Demeter presumptuously asks questions whether Persephone loves Hades, Persephone rebukes:

> Now, too bold
> Thy question, mother; this be told,
> I leave him not for love, for gold,
> One lot we share, one life we know.
> The Lord is he of wealth and rest,
> As well as king of death and pain; (ll. 37–42).

As suggested in the passage, Persephone as if scolds Demeter for excessive intrusion into her marriage, despite its inhibiting nature, which is hinted at in line 43 – "He folds

[6] Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Daughters of England* is an early Victorian text that provided advice for young women, especially concerning their character and morality. Stickney Ellis contends that women (wives, mothers, and daughters) should behave in such a way that they are role models for men. Thus, they would contribute to the development of society.

me to a kingly breast." Persephone's bond with Aides (Hades), though unbreakable, resembles a love-hate relationship (l. 15), marked by Hades's extremely possessive tendencies (l. 25). Strangely enough, Persephone cannot fully describe her marriage with Hades, admitting that "I leave him not for love, for gold,/One lot we share, one life we know" (ll. 24–25).

Interestingly, this breach of communication between mother and daughter goes even further. Margot K. Louis states that "there are hints that this marriage includes, or perhaps was originally based on, the illegitimate but fascinating sensuality of sexual fall" (2009, 52). Indeed, the marks of Persephone's fascination with sensuality and creative powers are particularly present in the description of the garden:

> Yet, let me hear thee speak,
> And tell me of that garden rare,
> And of thy flowers, dark, fiery, sweet,
> That never breathe the upper air."
> "Oh, mother, they are fair, are fair;
> Large-leaved are they, large-blossomed, frail,
> And beautiful. No vexing gale
> Comes ever nigh them; fed with fire
> They kindle in a torch-light flame
> Half ecstasy, half tender shame
> Of bloom that must so soon expire (ll. 64–74).

As the passage indicates, the garden that Persephone tends in the Underworld is a mixture of conflicting features that emulates the position of Persephone as a liminal woman. On the one hand, the flowers are sweet, beautiful, and they do not need special treatment; yet their flourishing is connected with a sense of "tender shame" (l. 73), recalling the fallen women narratives, much beloved by the Victorians (Louis 2009, 54). Therefore, the recognition of blooming brings both a sense of ecstasy and fluster in discovering her sexuality. In addition, Greenwell signals that Demeter's and Cora's modes of sensuality strongly vary. As Margot K. Louis rightly points out:

> The unnatural stillness of Cora's torchlit flowers, stirred by no "vexing gale," suggests an indoor eroticism fiercely devoted to the moment of desire, whereas the primrose and lilac imply that in Demeter's world, a healthy sensuality is free and spontaneous and includes periods of "coolness" – desire returns seasonally, at its own pace (2009, 53).

While "Demeter and Persephone" was, for most of the poem, mother-centred, "The Garden of Proserpine," mirrors the experience of Proserpine as a consort, a wife, and the Queen of the Underworld, emphasising not the mother's sense of loss but Persephone's impressions after the separation.

4. Recognition of Femininity in "The Garden of Proserpine"

Contrary to "Demeter and Cora" which describes the crumbling but necessary transition in the relationship between mother and daughter, "The Garden of Proserpine" examines Persephone's discovery of her own sensuality. Here, Greenwell decides not only to contemplate a growing general melancholy usually associated with Proserpine but also to present a wistful and confusing recollection of her fate (Louis 1999, 328). Primarily, the poem attempts to confront uncomfortable, but also pleasurable feelings of desire, ecstasy, and sensuality. This juxtaposition of cherishing one's own femininity and the fear of it is represented on two levels: by applying flower and colour codes, as well as the language of funeral and death.

Greenwell resorts to the horticultural imagery and flower symbolism that Victorians were obsessed with. The garden, to some extent, resembles that of Algernon Swinburne's depiction in "The Garden of Proserpine" (1866). What distinguishes Greenwell's garden from its representation in Swinburne is a close link of Persephone's experience with particular flowers; not necessarily the evocation of an aesthetic impression as it is done in Swinburne's verse. As the title suggests, the description of a luscious garden dominates the poem, listing flowers that shimmer in different colours and shades. However, this vision is destroyed at the very end of the poem. Since the image of the garden is filtered through Persephone, the pleasant sensation and sheer beauty of this "fair and desolate place" (Greenwell "The Garden of Proserpine," l. 19) are tainted by confusion and even gloom.

The first symptom of this conflicting anxiety and excitement can be traced to the hidden messages conveyed in the choice of plants. The poem begins with two visually attractive flowers: amaranth and asphodel. Looking at their symbolic features, one may notice dark underlying characteristics as both of these flowers imply immortality and eternal regret (Kirkby 2011). In addition, the garden is full of roses, commonly used as the expression of love, but here deployed in a sardonic manner. As the speaking persona claims "no roses, white nor red/Glow here" (l. 13–14), indicating that love is not easily achievable for her – neither a passionate one characterised by red roses nor a pure and innocent one illustrated by the white ones. Thus, the love Persephone feels is devoid of its basic elements, leaving her in an emotionally liminal state.

Additionally, the speaker mentions poppies, a classical flower in literary and cultural history. It has long been a symbol of death and eternal slumber, associated with stepping into an oblivious or even a narcotic state. Therefore, referring to poppies heavy with seeds implies that Persephone's needs, "anguish, ecstasy, and wild desire" (l. 16) are muted and sombre. It seems that Persephone is aware of a serious clash between the uneasy feelings that have been aroused in her. Her sensations are, on the one hand, asleep, and on the other hand, rapturous. As the passage suggests, "yet here joy comes not" (l. 21), Persephone does not feel happy in her allegedly lush garden but bears the internal conflict with a baffling calmness.

Yet another flower that appears in the poem is the narcissus[7]. On the surface, it might be a direct reference to the mythological Narcissus, but Greenwell plays with this connection. Traditionally, narcissi would represent a selfish personality, fixated on oneself and treating others with contempt and disdain. As the speaking persona comments, "here walks the Queen with steadfast eyes unwet with white Narcissus garlanded, that still/dreams of fair Enna's sunlit mead" (l. 23–24). Indeed, these verses display a different facet of Proserpine – the one who endlessly pursues love that is ultimately unattainable. Another mark of Proserpine's hopeless effort is indicated by the use of a daffodil, mainly signifying unrequited affection and uncertainty. However, this symbol can be interpreted in different terms: apart from the negative connotations, daffodils also epitomise new beginnings in life (Ferber 2007, 50). The world of frightful feelings may undermine Persephone's inclinations, but, in fact, it opens up a new world of euphoric, albeit fleeting, sensual pleasures. As Persephone puts it, "yet here joy comes not, but the exquisite/brief thrill of rapture in a pang that dies" (l. 21–22).

Persephone's blooming sexuality and the recognition of fate are also hinted at by the presence of tuberose (l. 10), one of the most sensual white flowers, which has "an underlying animalic character" (Maxwell 2017, 184). Indeed, tuberose's symbolism strongly coincides with body, death, and sexual pleasure. As Catherine Maxwell points out, tuberose was considered the symbol of intoxicating voluptuousness due to its heady, narcotic, and overwhelming fragrance (2017, 183). What is more, it evokes not only the olfactory sensation but also possesses luminescent qualities as it is a flower that is the most attractive at night (Maxwell 2017, 184). By mentioning "the tuberose/ In its swift fading glows/And lights within its heart a funeral pyre" (ll. 10–12), Greenwell seems to parallel Persephone's experience of a newly discovered sensuality that, potentially, could be transgressive or even dangerous. That is to say, Persephone, as compared to tuberose, embodies blossoming eroticism as well as the narcotic properties of love that may be overpowering for an inexperienced woman.

Nonetheless, Persephone's baffling but joyful feelings as a woman are overshadowed by the sense of imminent doom, hanging between love and grief, life and death. There are several expressions in the poem that imply that death continuously accompanies Proserpine. For example, "petal hints at grief" (l. 7), "and lights within its heart a funeral pyre" (l. 12) and "mourns for the fresh, ungather's daffodil" (l. 26) render a sense of decay and gradual despondency about the change of life. As Margot K. Louis comments, "'The Garden of Proserpine' is primarily concerned with the feminine experience of how marriage changes a woman and how the bond between mother and daughter is transformed forever" (1999, 328). Greenwell revisits Proserpine's garden as the expression of a mourning process where women need to come to terms with the dissolution of strictly female bonds, especially after getting married (Louis 1999, 328).

[7] In Greek mythology, narcissi are associated with death since they grow along the river Styx in Hades and are often given as funeral flowers (Kandeler, Ullrich 2009, 353).

Proserpine hangs in the state of unresolved in-betweenness since she confronts a wide array of emotions without fully cherishing them. She mourns her past and childlike naivety, yet she notices a grown-up, sensual or even ecstatic side of herself.

The intricacies of Persephone's character are also reflected in the diverse colour scheme of the poem. The symbolism of colours adds a gripping layer of aesthetic sensation – the most prominent hues being green, red, and gold. The garden blooms with different and evocative colours. The beginning of the poem is defined by green. Typically, it stands for naivety, youth, rejuvenation, vitality, and spring (Ferber 2007, 101). In that sense, the use of green envisages Cora, a young innocent girl before transitioning and assuming her role as Persephone. In the eyes of the protagonist, green depicts her past peaceful life, spent with her mother. Through the use of this colour, the poem illustrates how Persephone feels nostalgic while looking back at her innocent youth. However, her unfailingly ecstatic anticipation of the encounter with Pluto shows Proserpine's more mature side.

Mourning her passing purity, Persephone recalls a wealth of red imagery. As John Gage remarks, red is one of the most symbolic colours in Indo-European cultures (1999, 110) that signifies blood and, by extension, life. In addition, there are several instances in the poem where red represents the main dimension of femininity, namely the transformation from a girl to a woman and the discovery of sensual desire. The first aspect appears in line eight where the speaking persona, looking at the flowers, sees them as "bearing a mystic sign, a crimson stain" (l. 8). This may refer to women's experience of menstruation and how incomprehensible it can be for a young girl. Essentially, red serves as the colour of a feminine rite of passage from a child to a woman. It is also traditionally a colour of love (Ferber 2007, 169). Paradoxically, the poem hints at the conflict Persephone needs to resolve within herself. On the one hand, the lusciousness of her garden, its vibrancy, and a wide array of vivid colours could indicate the eternal beauty it evokes. On the other hand, the blend of uneasiness and sensuality appears superficial and empty since Persephone feels trapped in the Garden of the Underworld, as she says "all this place is desolate and fair" (l. 19). In this case, red does not symbolise love for the place, but a wave of underlying anger and unreleased passion that is awakening inside Persephone.

Another colour that reappears in the text is gold, ("asphodel" (l. 1) and "the golden rod with fire" (l. 9)), the colour of immortality, divinity, and excellence. Ferber notes that gold has a particular status not only in classical literature but also in biblical texts "since its purity and beauty gave it [a] divine status" (2007, 99). All these historical and symbolic readings indicate the status of Persephone as the Queen of the Underworld. She is immortal, therefore she cannot escape her predicament and she only experiences the moments of pleasure that quickly expire. Greenwell portrays Proserpine as divine because of her ancestry, but also as humanly complicated with her "steadfast eyes unwet" (l. 23), positioning her between rapture and despondency. She stands for excellence since she refuses to resist her destiny as Queen. Despite missing her mother and the sunlight of earth, she accepts her situation.

In "The Garden of Proserpine" Greenwell regards Persephone as a goddess, filled with conflicting desires. She is an oddly elusive but gripping character since she is mindful of her internal confusion regarding life in the Underworld and her own liminality as a young woman and a goddess. She reflects on her desolation admitting that she usually feels lonely or even miserable but simultaneously recognises the brief moments of sensual desire and euphoria she encounters. As Greenwell's speaker admits:

> Here ever warm and fragrant is the air,
> And all this place is desolate and fair,
> Made by a King and meet for Love's delight;
> Yet here joy comes not, but the exquisite
> Brief thrill of rapture in a pang that dies (l. 18–22).

This sensuality consistently resonates throughout the poem through the use of rich shades and colours. Furthermore, the continuous association of Proserpine with narcotic slumber and the "Keys of death and sleep,/Of anguish, ecstasy, and wild desire" (l. 15–16) reveals "the soul's hunger for physical experience" (Radford 2007, 65).

The intertwining of sensuality and appealing imagery is symptomatic of the growing aestheticism in Victorian poetry from the 1860s onward. Poets like Greenwell created sensuously rich, almost synesthetic works that take advantage of the visuality of language. The use of words and phrases that denote numerous colours, shades, sounds, and tactile sensations represents a new way of perceiving and producing art that radically changed Victorian poetry. Greenwell's idea of aesthetics converges with a vision of womanhood that is infused with internal conflict between different desires and aspirations.

5. Conclusion

In his essay "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" (1895)[8], Water Pater attempted to prove the exceptional character of the myth about Demeter and Persephone:

> In effect, such a conception of Greek art and poetry leaves in the central expressions of Greek culture none but negative qualities; and the legend of Demeter and Persephone, perhaps the most popular of all Greek legends, is sufficient to show that the "worship of sorrow" was not without its function in Greek religion; their legend is a legend made by and for sorrow-

[8] Walter Pater's fascination with the Greeks manifests itself in his numerous publications on myths and their influence on aesthetic notions in nineteenth-century Britain. From 1875, Pater had been working on multiple treatises on Greek mythology, including "A Study of Dionysus" (1876). In 1875, Pater delivered a lecture called "Demeter and Persephone" which was subsequently revised into "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone," published posthumously in *Greek Studies* (1895).

> ful, wistful, anxious people; while the most important artistic monuments of that legend sufficiently prove that the Romantic spirit was really at work in the minds of Greek artists, extracting by a kind of subtle alchemy, a beauty, not without the elements of tranquillity, of dignity and order, out of a matter, at first sight painful and strange (1895, 111).

As Pater suggests, the presence of loss and grief in mythology was unprecedented but necessary. Although the Greeks saw their religion as the religion of joy and happiness, sorrow still played an essential role in the creation of identity. Similarly to the Greeks, the Victorians also needed their own myth "made by and for sorrowful, wistful, anxious people" (Pater 1895, 111).

Dora Greenwell's rendition of Persephone is centred on the complexity and ambiguities of the mother-daughter relationship. She does not attempt to resolve this issue; rather she aims at providing an intimate account of the troubled mother-daughter bond as well as the ultimate separation of the daughter. In *Carmina Crucis* and *Camera Obscura*, Greenwell, with tenderness and precision, shows the vulnerability of motherhood and the fear of losing a daughter to the perils of maturation and individuation.[9] In her poetical revisions, Greenwell points out that the rapport between women is marked not by sweetness but rather by uncertainty. Greenwell, in a subtle way, observes the transition of Persephone from naivety to knowledge. Therefore, her portrayal serves as a compelling example of how young women at the threshold of change can navigate the final separation from their mothers. Ultimately, Persephone's narrative signals the need to recognise a woman's own experience and approach it not with paralyzing fear, but with full acceptance of confusion.

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[9] Individuation understood as "the development of a range of characteristics, skills and personality traits which are uniquely one's own" (Flax 1987, 172).

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