

A Comparative Study between Tennyson's *Demeter and Persephone* and Kizer's *Persephone Pauses*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the adaptation of Demeter and Persephone's myth by two poets Alfred Tennyson and Carolyn Kizer. The poems are approached from a feminist point of view. The paper is divided into three sections, the first reviews the theoretical parts concerning mythology and feminism, the second presents the application of the feminist theories on Tennyson's poem, the third sets forth a similar application of the feminist theories on Kizer's poem. The study aims to provide answers to crucial questions of the differences between the poets' interpretations, portrayals of Demeter and her daughter Persephone, and the myth's reinvented themes, as well as their depictions as heroines. The study has arrived to some outcomes; first, Tennyson's poem describes

motherhood in Demeter's actions, while Kizer's poem highlights womanhood in Persephone's individuation. Second, Tennyson's version contemplates on social problems, whereas Kizer's version explores woman's psychological states. Third, both the poets have constructed their poems as dramatic monologue to give the rightful voice to their heroines.

Keywords: Feminism, women's psychology, Demeter and Persephone, Alfred Tennyson, Persephone Pauses, Carolyn Kizer

Introduction

Greek and Roman mythology is a source of infinite artistic themes and creations that inspire artists, sculptures and writers from all over the world. They find in myth and fables incredible imagination, scraps of passion and a touch of humanity, from which they can relate to their human experience and morality. One of these timeless myths is the story of Demeter, the Earth Goddess, and her daughter Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld. Persephone was abducted by Hades to the Underworld, her disappearance caused Demeter anguish and despair. Demeter empowered by her maternal love, revolted against the Olympian gods until she regained her daughter from the abyss of Hades' world. Sarah Pomeroy noted that "goddesses are archetypal images of human females, as envisioned by males"; therefore, the myth reveals the nature of male-female relationship in a patriarchal society, where a female is denied her powers

and subjected to the male's wishes and desires to avoid his curses and punishment (8). The discrimination between genders in myths assures that a female is treated as an object owned by a male and deemed, in some cases, as a part of political treaty, in which the female (Persephone) is "used as a bridge in a new alliance" between two houses (Zeus and Hades) without her or her mother being consulted (Pomeroy 19).

Poets have embraced such a story and composed from its essence legendary epics and memorial narrative poems. Their adaptations of the myth have generated diversity in themes and points of view, as in *Demeter and Persephone* by the Victorian poet Alfred Tennyson, written in 1889, as well in *Persephone Pauses* by the American poetess Carolyn Kizer, written in 1961. Both the poets have interpreted the myth differently to serve certain themes and moral perspectives. Tennyson's poem is narrated by Demeter, as she tells about her hardship and agony over her loss of Persephone and what she had done in pursuit of her child. Kizer's poem, on the other hand, is narrated by Persephone, demonstrating her life in the Underworld and her relation to Hades, whom she abhors and pities. The poems complement each other to a certain extent, because each poem separately voices one of the goddesses' feelings and reflects upon her journey. Putting Demeter's side of the story in Tennyson's poem parallel to Persephone's side of the story in Kizer's poem results in a comprehensive vision of their experience.

Both the poems, if compared from a feminist point of view, explores the portrayals and themes of *Demeter and Persephone's* myth. There are critical questions concerning the poets' perspectives on the subject matter of the myth, the symbolic significance of the myth and the social implications of their adaptations. A feminist study focuses on three main aspects; differences, power, and female experience. The study of the differences mainly examines the social perception of each gender and gender's potentials, as either a writer or a character (Dobie 113). Regarding the study of power between sexes, feminists assume that economic system is at the root of the unequal relationship and thus attacks both economic and social exploitation of women (Dobie 115). In the female experience, feminists call for recognizing women's ability that goes beyond the traditional binary oppositions of active / passive, intellectual / emotional and others (Dobie 117). Recent feminist studies scrutinized mythology, particularly Gods and Goddesses relationships and powers, in relation to patriarchal authority over women. Andrew Radford has discussed how goddesses are resembled as inferior to gods, and in some versions of the myth, the goddesses appear irrational and emotional, which tune the stereotypical binary between both genders. (51) All these elements will outline the discussion in this study.

I: Mythology and Feminism

Two conceptual pillars, mythology and feminism, govern the theoretical frame of this study. The study of both the poems requires a deep understanding of the myth and a detailed examination of the adaptation process and the feminist views and interests.

Mythology is an interdisciplinary field; it is partly literary, and mostly historical and cultural. Myth, as a literary discourse, is defined by Chris Baldick as "a kind of a story or rudimentary narrative sequence, normally traditional and anonymous, through which a given culture ratifies its social customs or accounts for the origin of human and natural phenomena, usually in supernatural or boldly imaginative terms" (143). Myth's significance lies in providing an explanation of a worldly phenomenon that is beyond rational justifications, giving reasons for social and cultural customs, and demonstrating deeper truth and symbolism (Abrams 170). Lévi-Strauss, in his study of mythology and mythology structure as an anthropologist, explained that a wide view amongst scholars places myth as an expression of fundamental feelings common to all human beings such as love, revenge, hate, or as an explanation of unfathomable incidents such as the beginning of life/world (429). Lévi-Strauss expressed his disagreement in looking at myth as a reflection of "social structure and social relations" because its very nature is conflicting (429).

Myth, as a term, has various applications that requires reader's attention. It may refer to the irrational views or invented stories by authors, described as (mythical), whereas the pertaining views with myth are described as (mythic). The 19th century philologist and myth scholar F. Max Müller sets the distinction between mythical and mythic, to give precision to the discussion on myth/mythology appropriately (Reeves, "Myth Theory and Criticism").

Many readers confuse myth with legend, and the difference between them is determined by the protagonist; when the protagonist is a human being rather than a supernatural being, the story then is regarded a legend (Abrams 170). Myth revolves around supernatural beings as gods and demigods that are mostly worshipped and regarded as religious figures, for instance Demeter, who is worshipped religiously in a temple to bliss the earth with fruitful plants and corps. Myth is as old as religion that is why we find in mythic stories a religious tone and similar structure to religious narratives. Therefore, one may regard Greek mythology as a version of religion.

Many critics consider mythology, which is the system of inherited stories of ancient origins, a flexible form in which the stories are narrated in many ways. Hans Blumerberg's *Work on Myth* (1979) highlighted two important features of myth. First, myth is part of human history that helps people coping with "inexorability of given reality". Second,

myth is better conceived as a work of “ongoing nature and ever-changing process” recorded in oral and written forms of narrative (qut.in Abrams 171). In a myth such as *Demeter and Persephone's*, the two features are applicable. The story is used to justify winter, which beyond the rational explanation is seen back then as a result of the goddess's wrath, and the mythic story is told in many ways with slight differences in some details.

Myth-criticism is concerned with literary interpretation of mythic patterns and structures found in literary works. This critical study of myth is interested in the narrative features—plot, characters, and themes (structure and symbolism)—which connects it to ancient myths and religions (Baldick 144). Jacques Barzun, a cultural historian, pointed out that “what links myth with literature is the imagination” (qut.in Basunia 11). There is no prescribed method of studying or critically analyzing a myth. Collective approaches and various perspectives are applied in interpreting a myth, such as history, philosophy, archeology and other sciences. Some of these approaches study myth as part of a culture or part of a man's character, such as in Jung's concept of archetype or Frye's circle of mythos. Charles Eric Reeves stated in his study that “myth criticism designates as the convergence of several methods and forms of inquiry about the complex relations between literature and myth” (“Myth Theory and Criticism”).

It is ultimately significant to understand the nature of Greek gods and goddesses, in order to analyze a myth representation or adaptation in a literary work. On this subject, Mark Morford and Robert Lenardon have demonstrated in their study of Greek mythology that all gods and goddesses are generally depicted as humans in form and character. Although they act like humans, very often their appearance and their actions are idealized to some extent. Their beauty is beyond that of ordinary mortals, their passions are more grand and intense, their sentiments are more praiseworthy and touching, and they can embody and impose the loftiest moral values in the universe (128). Humans find their ideas and lives reflected ideally in these mythic stories because these gods can mirror the physical and spiritual weaknesses of their human counterparts, they can be lame and deformed or vain, petty and insincere, they can steal, lie and cheat (Morford, and Lenardon 128). Like human beings, there are distinctions and hierarchies between gods and goddesses, and their power and influence on others are determined accordingly. The deities of the upper air or the upper world—the Olympians—are superior to those of the realm below on earth known as Chthonian (Morford, and Lenardon 128). Gods, like humans, eat and drink, but their food is known as ambrosia and their wine is nectar. They are worshiped in temples and honored with statues, propitiated by sacrifices and invoked by prayers. Morford, and Lenardon pointed out that “Gods are seldom omnipotent, except possibly for Zeus”, though Zeus might

be a subject to fate or the fates, and they are distinguished from humans by their immortality (128). The hierarchy between gods and goddesses is viewed as the hierarchy or patriarchy between men and women, as Zeus represented as the sovereign deity, the king, father and lord for both gods and mortals. "Yet, this monotheism and patriarchy are severely tested by other divinities, especially goddesses;...Demeter, angry at the rape of her daughter Persephone, forces Zeus and gods to come to her terms" (Morford, and Lenardon 130).

All these historical and religious details of Greek mythology are taken into account in the adaptation of their stories, in order to give authenticity and value to the literary piece. To understand these requirements, it is mandatory to explain the process of adaptation. When a work is called an adaptation, its overt relationship to other works is openly announced, this is why adaptation studies are often comparative studies (Hutcheon 6). Adaptation is repetition, but without replication; to adapt is to adjust, to alter, to make suitable. The word adaptation refers to the process and the product, the transcoding can involve a shift of medium (a poem to film) or genre (epic to novel) or a change of frame and therefore context; telling the same story from a different point of view, which can create manifestly a different interpretation, such as in the adaptation of *Demeter and Persephone*, in which the myth can be narrated from the side of the mother or daughter (Hutcheon 8).

A work of adaptation is characterized by three important features. First, a transposition of a particular work into another, as in the myth that is formed into a poem. Second, the act of adaptation always involves two processes; re-interpretation and then re-creation that is why the slight changes are found in adaptation of the myth of *Demeter and Persephone* between the two poets, they tend to emphasize their views and address different themes. Third, the adaptation is a form of intertextuality; an engagement with the adapted work, especially in certain names, references, or statements (Hutcheon 7-8). Between the two poems, Tennyson used more intertextuality in his poem with various names and references attached to the myth such as Eleusis, Enna, Aidoneus, nectar and ambrosia, than Kizer. Kizer's version focuses on a psychological level, where a character's development is processed and an inner-conflict is resolved by redefining womanhood, with less attention given to the mythic details. The study of adaptation and its process reveals what to adapt and how to adapt in literature. The poems discussed in this paper adapted the characters and the plot of the myth to set up distinctive form of dramatic monologue to bring forth unprecedented themes like the social and psychological effects of domestic abuse, daughter's independence from her mother, and the gap between the parents' and children's generations.

Under the umbrella of mythology's studies and criticism, feminist critics participated in analyzing, explaining, and criticizing the myth's norm, structure and relevance to

culture and social perspectives. What makes feminism interested in mythology is the fact that most what feminism fights for or against is related to mythology in one way or another, such as patriarchy and women's roles. In order to present a solid argument about feminism and mythology, it is important to give a brief historical background about feminism and what it stands for. Feminism refers to two ideologies; a social movement and a literary theory of criticism. Feminism is generally defined as "a range of theories and political agendas that aim to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women due to sex and gender as well as class, race, ethnicity, nationality, or other forms of social exclusion" (*Feminist Dictionary*, 4). Feminism as a social movement is founded by the belief "in the social, economic, and political equality of sexes" (Burkett, "Feminism"). It is a worldwide movement for the recognition of women's social and cultural roles and achievements, as well as their economic and political rights. Feminism, as a theory of literary criticism, has no exclusive definition; it is defined by many feminist theorists and critics according to their views and approaches. Defining the theory of feminism "threatens to simplify what is, in stubborn, perhaps ineradicable way, complex" (Rooney 1). However, the literary theory of feminism is not separable from the ideals of feminist movement, much of feminist literary criticism "interrelated with the movement by political feminists for social, legal, cultural freedom and equality" (Abrams 88).

In modern literature, there has been an attempt to portray women's characters, who have been devalued by patriarchal system. Feminist writers and critics concentrate their efforts on giving female characters their voice and rightful position. Feminist criticism comprises of various theories and approaches concerned with the literary work and its authors. The study of the two poems from a feminist point of view focuses on three main critical standpoints. First, the author's influence on the depiction of the female characters; discussing Tennyson's influence as a male poet and a conservative Victorian man in depicting Demeter and her daughter, and Kizer's as a female poetess and a feminist in recreating Persephone. Second, the portrayal of the female characters, mainly *Demeter and Persephone*, with regards to the stereotypical views of females as weak, sensitive, and irrational, the Madwoman in the Attic thesis will be rewarding in this traditional analysis. Third, the social position and role of the female characters, Demeter as a wife, mother and Goddess, as well as Persephone as a daughter, wife, and Goddess, in the patriarchal culture of Greek mythology. The premises of feminist critics and writers towards myths are investigating the patriarchal system, and goddess's roles. Feminist authors, as well, have reinvented themes and extended the roles and influence of Goddesses, to draw unconventional portrayals of female's potentials. The feminist revision of myths represents the symbolism of myths and casts light on the neglected components in

mythology regarding Gods-Goddesses relationships and positions (Kay 10).

II. Feminist Reading of Tennyson's *Demeter and Persephone*

Alfred Lord Tennyson was born in 1809 to a middle class family in Lincolnshire. His parents cared for his education and religious upbringing. He was affected by his mother's passion and love of art and literature, and his father's—a clergyman—talent in writing poems. In his early years, Tennyson showed his poetic talent by composing some poems. He discovered his style through imitating famous poets such as John Keats, Percy Shelly, and Lord Byron. His studies in Trinity College and Cambridge the original composition of Greek and Latin verses, history, and natural science (Lang 12) polished his poetic skills and sense. One of Tennyson's greatest accomplishments was when he held a position as the poet laureate for Queen Victoria in 1850 until his death in 1892, in which he made the laureateship significant and effective through his patriotic poems and odes. Eventually, he became one of the most influential poets of the Victorian age. Harold Bloom, a well-known American critic, described Tennyson by saying that he "possessed the verbal exuberance of an absolute poetic genius" and his power of imagination is shown "uncompromisingly" (6-7).

The question left for critics and literary scholars to verify is the category of his style. Between Classicism and

Romanticism, Tennyson's wit has blended between different views to come up with variety and modern compositions. The Classical influence on Tennyson's poetry is seen in his imitation of the great classics masters, his admiration and praise of their ideas and forms, intellect and beauty, added grace and dignity to his works, an old charm of wisdom and passion. While the Romantic influence is seen in Tennyson's "desire and his power to see clearly and describe with lucid accuracy things as they appear, both in human life and in nature" (Brooke 488).

In addition to the poet's style and literary views, the poet's gender and ideology are considered fundamental in the feminist reading. Feminist theorists and critics have argumentative opinions about the Victorian literary authors, concerning their representations of female characters. Melissa Buron says that the feminine voice in the Victorian literature is either overshadowed or undermined by the presence of the male author's words and scenarios ("The Feminine Voice"). Unlike other female narrative poems, Tennyson voices his female character, Demeter, not only by the necessity of the dramatic monologue composition, but also for authentic creation. However, feminist readers are aware that Demeter's voice is restricted into two roles, as a mother and as a goddess. This restriction is conducted by the male author—Tennyson's interest and ideology. Tennyson, as a Victorian man, wrote for a conservative and patriarchal society, which believes in the father's authority as the master of the house, as well as women's needs for care and

protection by a man. Feminist analysts regarded the father figure as the heart of patriarchy; in the myth that Tennyson adapted, Zeus practiced his patriarchal authority by approving Hades's marriage to Persephone. Nevertheless, Tennyson condemned Zeus's action through Demeter's lamentation. In the Victorian history, the woman is identified as a wife, a mother, and a daughter, and in each she has her own duties and position. Antony Harrison asserted that motherhood—with all its related function—is highly celebrated in the Victorian literature, for it was regarded "the most valuable and natural component of woman's mission" (64). Demeter for the Victorian reader is a visage of maternal love, which Harrison pointed out, is constructed "as the apex of feminine purity and as unattainable model for all other human relationships" (64).

Feminist critics believe that the literary productions of a male author reflect his misogynistic and oppressive attitude and ideology on women. In this matter, Tennyson's writing poses a conflicting statement, as some feminist critiques often focus on the role of myths in perpetuating patriarchy and reveal the misogyny embedded in traditional mythological stories, while Christine Gallant proposes that "in his treatment of Greek mythology, Tennyson seems to develop the feminine, sensuous side of the myth more than he does the Olympian" (155). Tennyson had a fascination with classical goddesses, which persisted until his composition of *Demeter and Persephone*, giving the mother goddess a

mesmerizing quality suiting her classical and symbolic figure. Tennyson projects the subjective and feminine side of his own nature in his version of Demeter. He shows sympathy with the classical feminine experience that surpasses human's experience and expound nobility. He seems to allude to this strain of Greek religion, and at the same time seeks the "feminine attitude of passivity toward experience and cycle of time", which made goddesses more distinctive and active than the Olympian gods (Gallant 156).

Tennyson's *Demeter and Persephone* is a dramatic monologue that consists of one hundred and fifty-three lines, divided into seven stanzas, in each part the setting may change as the story is narrated. The dramatic monologue has the following features; first, a single speaker, who is not the poet, utters the speech that makes up the whole of the poem, in a specific situation at a critical moment. Second, the speaker interacts with one or more people where the auditor's presence and reaction are important to assess the discourse of the single speaker. Third, the poet's formulation of what the lyric speaker says—and reveals to the reader—is principally controlled by the speaker's temperament and character (Abrams 70). Tennyson is one of the Victorian "inaugurators" of this type of poetry, Edward Hirsch stated (181). He, and other Victorian poets, expressed their poetic talent and wit in improving and polishing their writing of dramatic monologues. It has a special status in the Victorian poetry because it "exploits the problematic

nature of the speaking subject", and one of its advantages is "to offer an opportunity either to escape or to explore problems of gender" (Mermin 31). The singularity of Demeter in this poem voices only her feelings and reflects her thoughts and judgements, which is the core principle of feminism, as Melissa Buron claimed that the feminist poem describes a female figure solely in terms of her personality, not in relation to the presence or absence of a male figure ("The Feminine Voice"). The main discussion for this feminist reading is Tennyson's representation and construction of Demeter's personality. The poet's characterization of Demeter is circled around her role as a mother, demonstrating her maternal-love to her daughter, and then her role as a goddess, explaining her religious bond to humans and her duties to sponsor them to live on earth.

The poem is a glorification of motherhood through the story of Demeter. A theme that Tennyson was fond of and wished to expound, and Demeter's passion for her lost daughter is resembled as the noblest exposition of it. Demeter's monologue is directed to her daughter, Persephone, at the moment of their reunion. Through her maternal eyes, Demeter viewed her child as a bird, weak and frail. Christine Gallant claims that Persephone is viewed as "immature and inexperienced" in the opening lines of the poem (158). Demeter pictures her daughter as "a climate-changing bird" that travelled through darkness with no guidance, until it "falls on" earth at first sight of dawn's light (Tennyson 1-2). Between the darkness of

night and the light of day, Demeter depicts symbolically the contrast between the dimly lifeless nature of the Underworld and the vigorous lively nature of the surface of earth. Persephone was "led upward", which draws to the reader's mind a resurrection from death. She was led by "the God of ghosts and dreams", Demeter hints how Persephone was controlled and overpowered by Hades (Tennyson 5). She was brought "dazed and dumb" as a result of passing between two different states from darkness to light, and from death to life (Tennyson 6). Demeter's encounter with her child refreshes her memories, as she hopes her daughter will recover the day "When here thy hands let fall the gather'd flower,/ Might break thro' clouded memories once again" (Tennyson 9-10). Persephone's return marks the coming of spring and joy, when a nightingale saw her, it "flash'd into a frolic of song/ And welcome" (Tennyson 12-13). Demeter describes it as "A sudden nightingale" which suggests that earth was lifeless and birds almost unexpected around at dawn (Tennyson 11). Light, joy and life are restored, and a gleam of light casts away Persephone's gloominess, "That shadow of a likeness to the king/ Of shadows, thy dark mate" (Tennyson 16-17). Demeter identifies her child as "Queen of the dead no more-my child", refuting her wrongful identity as Queen of the Underworld (Tennyson 18). The identity is fundamental for her being as a goddess and as a child of Earth goddess. Through Demeter's eyes only, readers see the transformation of the world on earth and on Persephone, the sun "Burst from a swimming

fleece of winter gray," and draped the earth with warmth and light (Tennyson 19-20).

The second stanza explains how restoring Persephone is a miracle that no "Gods or men beheld/ The Life that had descended re-arise," (Tennyson 29-30). Demeter justifies this miraculous incident by describing the underworld and its inhabitants through her child's "imperial, disimpassion'd eyes" that shocked Demeter who had seen the darkness of Hades's world and the frightening fiery river of fire, Phlegethon (Tennyson 23-24). Demeter was fighting to save Persephone from this ruthless fate by her maternal power, "So mighty was the mother's childless cry,/ A cry that rang thro' Hades, Earth, and Heaven !" (Tennyson 32-33). Her resolution made wonders and brought her child from the abyss of hell.

In the third stanza, Demeter projects a scene of contradictions in the field of Enna, where life was exterminated after Persephone's disappearance, and now "once more ablaze/ With flowers that brighten as thy footstep falls," except for one spot "thro' which the car/ Of dark Aïdoneus rising rapt thee hence.", a mark that represents her psychological trauma unhealed (Tennyson 35-39). Though Demeter has her daughter in her arms, she feels "the deathless heart of motherhood/ Within [her] shudder," as she reminisces the godless events, where "The shrilly whinnings of the team of Hell,/ Ascending, pierce the glad and songful air," (Tennyson 41-45). Nevertheless, Demeter emphasizes their identities as

goddesses of nature, life and of earth, for the moment Persephone's foot has touched the ground, "all the space/ Of blank earth-baldness clothes itself afresh," and replaced with such scene every previous sad event (Tennyson 48-49).

The fourth stanza spotlights on Demeter's role as a mother, addressing Persephone with a tale of her endless endeavors to find her, describing her psychological state and actions. Without her child, Demeter "envied human wives, and nested birds,/Yea, the cubb'd lioness", which reflects how terrible and merciless it is to deprive a mother from her child, and her natural needs (Tennyson 53-54). For feminists, this is one of many issues women have suffered from under the patriarchal dominance. Patriarchy gives the right to the father or a male guardian to determine the child's future, because he is more qualified by his strength and wisdom than the mother. Tennyson, as a Victorian poet, had his concerns about the society's norms and must have felt the urge to fulfill his duty as a social critic through his poem. On her sufferings, Demeter contemplated on her nursing of other children through her journey searching for Persephone, she gave her "breast to ailing infants in the night," helping a mother "To find her sick one whole" (Tennyson 56-58). Though Demeter was preoccupied with searching for her child, she, with infinite tenderness "console[s] all the troubled mothers of the world", and that is the loveliest form of motherhood, Stopford Brooke pointed out (141). Acting as a compassionate mother mirrors her angelic

representation according to the feminist's view. Demeter is idealized as a caring female figure for her empathy towards agonized mother and devotion to her daughter and the children of the world. She explored the face of the earth, she "stared from every eagle-peak,/ [she] thridded the black heart of all the woods,[and she] peer'd thro' tomb and cave," (Tennyson 68-70). While looking everywhere for Persephone, humans were chanting and praying to Demeter, who could not hear but her inner cry as "the desolate Mother" (Tennyson 73). Demeter was aware of humans' sufferings without her, as she noticed their abandoned houses engulfed by the jungle, the serpent wrapped up their "broken shaft", and the scorpion creeping over their "naked skulls", and she "grieved for man thro' all [her] grief for [Persephone]," (Tennyson 75-78). Throughout this hard journey, Demeter never ceased to wonder about the forces controlling the world, the fate she and her daughter were destined to, and all was sum up by the "three gray heads" saying "There is a fate beyond us" (Tennyson 86-87). A fate that surpasses the power and wisdom of the Greek gods, and even controls them.

The following stanza reveals how Demeter finds out about her daughter's abduction, and her reaction. In her desperation and hopelessness, the god of dreams—who could be also the fate beyond the gods' control—took the shape of Persephone and came to inform Demeter that:

The Bright one in the highest

*Is brother of the Dark one in the lowest,
And Bright and Dark have sworn that I, the child
Of thee, the great Earth-Mother, thee, the Power
That lifts her buried life from gloom to bloom,
Should be for ever and for evermore
The Bride of Darkness. (Tennyson 94-100)*

The brotherhood of Bright and Dark refers to Zeus, the king of Heaven, and Hades, the king of Hell, and their agreement on betrothing Persephone, a bride to Hades. Tennyson has rendered Demeter's dream into symbols to imitate the human's experience in dreams, as well as to create an archetype of good and evil in the patriarchal society. His archetype will be applicable for any society, at any time, where men (good and evil) victimize women and devalue them. Zeus's and Hades's action against *Demeter and Persephone* shows how they marginalize Demeter's position as Persephone's mother by not involving her in this decisive moment of their life, and how they devoice Persephone from making her own choice. Such action could be done by other men, especially in a patriarchal society. Tennyson wrote this poem upon the time the feminist movement in London had gained a recognition and won some of their battles for their rights such as sharing custody of children (1839), women's right to own property (1859), and women's right to vote (1880). Tennyson's poem might be an interpretation of his opinion on supporting women's rights.

The sixth stanza revolves around Demeter's reaction at the gods' conspiracy against her and her child. Demeter expressed her rage and disgust at what the gods had done to her, and used her resources and power to retaliate for their aggression. Their conspiracy is an act of oppression, for they expect Demeter to surrender and accept the reality of their scheme as her fate. They never anticipate the possibility of Demeter's rejection of their subjection, and her fight for autonomy. Demeter rebels against the Olympian gods, by, first, refraining to "mingle with their feasts ; to me/ Their nectar smack'd of hemlock on the lips,/ Their rich ambrosia tasted aconite" (Tennyson 103-6). Then Demeter decided to abandon her duties as earth goddess, stopped sending her blessings "thro' olive-yard and vine/ And golden grain, my gift to helpless man" (Tennyson 110-11). Demeter's grief and anger twist life forces into destructive forces, where "Rain-rotten died the wheat, the barley-spears/ Were hollow husk'd, the leaf fell, and the sun,/ Pale at my grief, drew down before his time/ Sickening, and Aetna kept her winter snow" (Tennyson 112-15). This rebellious attitude of Demeter can be analyzed by the principles of the Madwoman thesis regarding women's demonic actions, which is studied by the American feminists. The madwoman thesis discusses two projections of women in English literature, of either the angel in the house, or the madwoman in the attic. The angel in the house is defined by Virginia Woolf to be intensely sympathetic, immensely charming, and utterly unselfish, she excels in the difficult arts of family life, and

she sacrifices herself daily (257). On the other hand, the madwoman in the attic is a demonic presentation. Contrary to the angel's nature, she is ugly, selfish, demanding authority, and sacrificing others to gain her goals. However, this categorization of women is unrealistic and inconsistent, the madwoman—for the feminists—seeks the power of “self-articulation”, and she rejects the submissive silence of domesticity, and refuses to be objectified (Gilbert and Gubar 79). Demeter's riot has its impact on Zeus, who “glancing from his height/ On earth a fruitless fallow” missed the humans' sacrifices, their praise and prayers to him, and was forced to solve this futile situation (Tennyson 117-18). Consequently, Zeus ordered Hades to return Persephone to her mother “For nine white moons of each whole year” and to remain with Hades “Three dark ones in the shadow” as a result of her eating pomegranate seeds (Tennyson 121-22).

Tennyson appears to be realistic in demonstrating the double nature of human beings having good and evil within them, and how one's definition of either is changeable. Demeter, unlike most of the Victorian protagonists, is both angel in the house and madwoman in the attic. Demeter is the angel in the house for she is a charming goddess, sympathetic with human's sufferings as she expresses how she “grieved for man thro' all my grief for thee”, excels in fulfilling her duties as a mother and a goddess “the reaper in the gleam of dawn/ Will see me by the landmark far away,/ Blessing his field”, and self-sacrificing to her daughter as she explained in the fourth

stanza (Tennyson 123-26). Nevertheless, to the Greek patriarchal mythology, Demeter's rebellious actions are of the madwoman. In order to obtain her daughter, Demeter boycotts the Olympian feasts, revokes her duties as earth goddess, and casts a harsh winter on earth. Humans paid the price of this godly conflict, and suffered hardship, which makes Demeter in the traditional sense destructive and unfair. However, the Madwoman thesis confirmed that maternity is somehow central to the idea of madwoman, what Demeter had endured and done later on is a justification for her need "to mother and be mothered" (Gilbert and Gubar, xxii).

The final stanza of Tennyson's poem summarizes in form and content the poet's views and modern structure. Demeter expressed her acceptance of Zeus's compromising, and remarked with mixed feelings her own commentary on the outcome of their situation. She was, after all, "ill-content/ With them, who still are highest", because of their superiority over her and other earth gods and goddesses that usually leads to dispute and injustice (Tennyson 128). Demeter questioned "Those gray heads,/ What meant they by their (Fate beyond the Fates)" their traditions and social rules that appeared to her unreasonable are bestowed upon them by undefined fate (Tennyson 129-130). Through this line, Tennyson indirectly infuses the role of social critic, who must question and reason the way the world is. Tennyson's characterization of Demeter as an active female figure interferes with the traditional passivity of female characters in most of the

Victorian literature. She foresees the future gods, hopefully, to be "younger kindlier Gods" who as she tells "To quench, not hurl the thunderbolt, to stay,/ Not spread the plague, the famine; Gods indeed,/ To send the noon into the night and break/ The sunless halls of Hades into Heaven" (Tennyson 131-36). Her question of fate draws Demeter nearer to humanity, to be "humanized in her realization that there is a larger fate that the gods can neither control nor understand" (Markley 465). Her prophecy explores the humanity's suffering at the hands of irresponsible gods, and provides the solution by having kindlier, passionate gods. Tennyson, throughout the poem, proposes the need of change in a period of "materialism, industrialism, and strong patriarchalism there was a little place for the feminine principle with its complementary wisdom" (Gallant 160).

III: Feminist Reading of Kizer's *Persephone Pauses*

Carolyn Kizer (1925-2014) is an American poet, feminist, and translator, who lived a long profitable life in the fields of academia and social domain. She was interested in poetry from an early age, and identified herself as a romantic, modernist, orientalist, and most importantly as a feminist poet. She dedicated her poetic works to women's issues and for celebrating feminist principles. She had gotten many awards and honorees for her spectacular poetic genius, her book *YIN* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1985, and she received awards from the National

Academy, the Poetry Society of America and the Theodore Roethke Foundation. She described her works and achievements as a recognition for “generations of women who selflessly served men—fathers, sons and lovers—until their loss enabled these women to blossom as artists themselves” (Kizer 6).

Persephone Pauses was published within a poetic collection entitled *The Ungrateful Garden* in 1961. In her book, Kizer conducted a historical and mythic revision of female figures, studying the stereotypical portrait of women and responded to each with an infuriated passion. Her poetry tackles feminist issues, it takes aim at the patriarchal culture that shapes women's minds and bodies, and how consequently underestimates women's lives and literary achievements. Robert Phillips, a critic of feminist poetry, claimed that some female poets—Kizer one of them—tend to “disguise” her own feelings by naming them after figures in Greek mythology (75). In this case, a reader can look at Persephone as a resemblance of Kizer's feelings and views, and may take her (Persephone's) voice as Kizer's own in some verses. As a poet and person, Kizer had been much more confessional, dealing with her personal problems with “unusual frankness” (Phillips 75). Kizer resorts to ancient myths and archetypal patterns for some reasons, first, because she is “biographical” as Robert Phillips indicated (76). Moreover, she was influenced by her studies of Greek in college under the supervision of Joseph Campbell, who introduced Kizer to “bypass accepted versions of myth, versions usually made

by males to enforce the male point of view, and to go back to the originals" (Phillips 76). Another reason Kizer employs myth could be psychological, to ratify some social customs and human behaviors, probing deeper truths behind our collective attitudes towards fundamental matters of life, death, partnering, and existence (Phillips 76).

Feminist poetry emerged in America during the second wave of feminism between 1960s and 1980s, and was characterized by its "articulated motives and commitments of women's writing and reading as women" (Hirsch 231). Kizer sought to set an example, for other poetesses, creatively by means of "recapturing, rebuilding, retrieving, remembering, or inventing if necessary, women's dismembered or disremembered knowledge of empowerment; the knowledge of being self not other, author not mirror, subject not object" (Johnson 99). She used the traditional narratives and views against itself, by questioning its basics and roots and proposing alternative interpretations, as in her poem *Persephone Pauses*.

It is essential for the study of Persephone to clear out certain points concerning her character and role. Persephone is regarded, according to many feminists, to be a symbol of individuation, a representation of woman's struggle for independence, and the ideology of separate identity from one's mother. The myth taken from the *Homeric Hymn* is told from Demeter's perspective, Priscilla Hobbs emphasizes that her story reflects "the pain from

her separation" and much attention is directed towards Demeter's reunion with her daughter ("Queen of Individuation"). However, Hobbs questions where Persephone's perspective of the story lies on, and suggests that "Persephone's half of the story is as much compelling as that of her mother's because her myth is one of individuation for young women and, in the broader sense, as a myth for exploring the shadow" ("Queen of Individuation"). The concept of individuation is coined by Carl Jung, an infamous psychoanalyst, who defined individuation as "the process of forming and specializing the individual nature; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a differentiated being from the general collective psychology", in another word, one undergoes a process of developing his or her personality (561). From this point, Kizer and other modern writers have expanded the idea of what Persephone possibly might narrate, for most of them modern Persephone is "faced with similar growing pains in the need to leave [her] mother" (Hobbs, "Queen of Individuation").

Kizer's *Persephone Pauses* is constructed as a dramatic monologue of sixty lines and divided into six uneven parts. Kizer's mono speaker is Persephone and conceived throughout the poem as her heroine. The poem is not formed in a classical shape, the language is prosaic and the lines run on as free verse, a form developed in modern poetry. To Kizer, "narrative and plot play a role in her work" Alfred Corn remarked (31). Thus, Kizer never intended only to bring forth another classical version of

the myth, but to modernize the narrative by revising it, and reshape it to the modern audience. The poetess relies on her reader's imagination to picture visual images and create a scenario in their minds' eyes.

Kizer sets her poem's scenario when the time of Persephone's return to the Underworld arrived. Persephone has received a letter and described the moment when she held it up and noticed "The lengthened shadow of [her] hand", which reflects upon her other life and destiny in Hades's world (Kizer 1). She points out that this letter is "from a friend", this mysterious unknown person casts suspense over the reader's mind, yet she gives a relief that it was from a friend (Kizer 2). Persephone reveals the letter's content, it "Tells time: the sun descends again" the unknown sender has identified Persephone as "the sun" in a way that represents her as Demeter's daughter, and supposedly an earth goddess (Kizer 3). At the same time, "the sun" is indicating her fate to descend to the Underworld, as the sun is fated by natural orders to sunset at the end of the day. Identity and fate are overlapping in one line, which leaves the reader's own judgment to pass and interpret it either ways. Persephone expresses her feelings on the days she had spent with her mother, she believes that "So long, so late the light has shone. /Since rising, we have shone with ease:" ease from the darkness of the world of shadow, and that ease is "Perhaps not happiness, but still/ A certain comfort from the trees", as Persephone conceived it (Kizer 4-7). From the natural landscapes around her,

Persephone finds solitude and consolation, these trees have a time on Autumn when their "crests of leaves droop down in tiers,/ Their warm trunks veiled by aspen hair," as they undergo into a transformation process, every part of the trees decline "Their honeyed limbs, the loosened earth/ About the roots; while flowers recline/In dusty gardens, rest on weeds," (Kizer 8-12). All these signs mark "a passing year", thus Persephone is aware of the passing of time, and not in need for a reminder (Kizer 13). She can see time's touch on the surroundings, and as much as a human is aware of time's changings. All creatures are either growing or declining, Persephone considers her fate to be natural and not bestowed on her by another force. It is natural for her to grow up different from her mother, to have her own personality, and to chart her own future. Kizer aimed to lend youngsters an advice that every generation must evolve naturally.

The second stanza casts light on Persephone's inner conflict. She confidently accepts her destiny and straightly says "So be it!" to herself first and to her listener, claiming her independence and ability to face up the consequences of her actions (Kizer 14). In her return to Hades' world, Persephone expects her train to be "plucked by spikes of summer grass" referring to her mother's power, but "No clutch of summer holds me here" (Kizer 15-16). She reminisces the time when she was kidnapped and taken to the Underworld, she confirms "I've gone before" to the spot where she was abducted and "I glance to my accustomed glass," the glass of innocence and purity,

when she was playing at "The shallow pond, but films of slime/ Waver across it, suck the verge/ Where blunted marsh frond cuts the air" (Kizer 17-21). Persephone's visual description of Hades' emergence from the bottom of the pond to take her reflects her inner-self as she was looking at her image on the face of water getting blurred before he appeared, and her conflict on deciding whether to run away from this unfamiliar creature or to stay and accept his intrusion. She is disturbed, and as she "stare[s], the slime divides/ Like curtains of old green velour", revealing to her something or someone that amuses her like a show behind a curtain amuses an audience (Kizer 22-23).

In the third stanza, Persephone provides a closer look at her inner conflict. In her mind's eye, Persephone's senses were blurred, and she "gazes" into her reflection on the surface of the pond, her reflection is "Still veiled in foam" as if she cannot identify herself (Kizer 24-25). On the other side, "the grim/ Tragedian", Hades "Draws near my shade" like any male advances to a female (Kizer 26-27). Their meeting is "In motions formal and austere,/ We circle, measure, heel to hem" not fearful, nor forceful (Kizer 28-29). Persephone depicts in her narration that Hades did not kidnap her, but in fact has seduced her, for he "proffers me an iron plate/ Of seedy fruit, to match my mouth" (Kizer 30-31). Persephone has a choice to accept or decline his offer, and that marks the moment of transformation for her identity and for the rest of her life. This is Kizer's fairly significant remark on women's life and

choices, to her, every woman has powers and weaknesses that are exploited by their male counterparts. A woman is empowered by her intelligence, her economical resources, and her position or role in the society. Women are oppressed by undermining one of their powerful qualities, and controlled by restricting their activities within the private sphere. Hades seduces Persephone to come with him because she was not yet aware of her potentials under her mother's care. She was young, naïve and curious. Hades would take Persephone to his world where she has no powers or resources, and can be controlled easily in a foreign place. In this case, Persephone falls a victim of domestic abuse, where a peculiar role—Queen of the Dead—is imposed upon her and expected to fulfill her duties.

The fourth stanza renders the impact of Persephone's choice to eat the seeds of pomegranate. Traditionally, the red seeds are the sign of Persephone's loss of virginity by Hades (Kay 139). However, Kizer reconstructed it to be a symbol of Persephone's choice to become a woman. In the myth, the seeds chained Persephone to the Underworld and guaranteed to Hades her return to him. However, Kizer's interpretation changes this idea to reflect women's choices and their consequences on their lives, by picturing the incident on earth not under the ground, which means in Persephone's territory and within her limits of control, and by twisting the act of kidnapping into seducing. The seeds are to Kizer a symbolic cause for what will come forth, as much as any cause that might alter

one's life. After eating the seedy fruit, Persephone has felt her "form encased in some dark stuff" transforming into her new identity as the Queen of the shadow, and Hades convinced by his authority upon her as her husband, "He has bedizened, keeps me hid/ Save for that quivering oval," where his throne is (Kizer 32-34). She abhors him and wishes to be "away from him/ And that excitement of his taste" (Kizer 35-36). Nevertheless, Persephone feels his sadness for "He suffers, from my flesh withdrawn", her absence inflicts pain on his heart and that reflects his need for her (Kizer 37).

In the fifth stanza, Persephone faces her reality. She admits that "this unwilling touch of lust" in Hades prevents her from ignoring him, and he "Has moved some gentle part of me" which means her heart yields to his suffering (Kizer 38-39). Although she showcases aspects of the angel in the house, who puts her husband before herself, Persephone does not submit entirely to Hades' wishes. Persephone's nature and identity as Demeter's daughter has troubled her, for it is hard to be separated from her old-self. Her unconscious conjures to her a concealed desire during "That sleeps in solstice, wakes to dream", a dream where both her personalities as daughter of Earth Goddess and Queen of the Dead commingle into one whole identity, "Where streams of light and winter join" (Kizer 40-41). Dreams are the signs that expose what is buried in her mind and heart. She conflicts between the earth and the underground, the light and the shadow, her old self and her new self as

Queen of the shadow. This confusion triggers in Persephone the urge to fulfill all her desires. She suppresses her confusion in a belief that Hades knows her. Her vision has cleared as her "nerves dissolving in the gleam/ Of night's theatrical desire," she realized that she must give to gain and fight to win (Kizer 44-45). Looking upon Hades, Persephone perceives herself as a heroine, who embarks on a journey of self-discovery. To Persephone, her journey has reached a state where "As always, when antagonists/ Are cast into the sensual/ Abysses, from a failing will" (Kizer 46-48). She rises to achieve the outcome of her sacrifice, "This is my dolor, and my dower", the balance between her light and shadow resolves her inner conflict and strengthens herself to the end of her fate (Kizer 49).

The last stanza concludes the confusion and conflict between the past and the future for Persephone. She calls Hades "Come then, sweet Hell!/ To stir the grasses, rock the pool,/ And move the leaves before they fall" to take her to the shadow where she belongs as Queen of the shadow, embracing her other identity (Kizer 50-52). She has pondered at her life, accepted to fall into the darkness, and then she casts her letter as she hopes that the letter's wings will "bear/ It on to that high messenger/ Of sky, who lately dropped it here" referring to Zeus, whose patriarchal dominance has led her to Hades (Kizer 54-56). Persephone answers Zeus that his rule reminds her "That half my life is spent in light", and therefore she liberates herself and "cast my spirit to the air,/ But cast it.

Summertime, goodnight!" (Kizer 58-60). Robert Phillips comments on the last line that "Persephone suffers mighty falls, and accepts the fact that women can't win all battles" (78).

Kizer applied Jung's view of the shadow in her description of Persephone's journey to the Underworld. Jung believes that "[the shadow's] nature can in large measure be inferred from the contents of the personal unconscious", unlike the ego, which results from the collective unconscious (145). Persephone wanted to be free from her society's expectations. She accepts to be Hades's wife, which as well means she is embracing her inner-self. She assured that "No clutch of summer holds [her]" to be the next Earth Goddess (Kizer 16). The shadow is a state of the self that requires preparation and strong will to overcome personal challenges, because as Jung stated "no one can become conscious of the shadow without a considerable moral effort" (145). He clarified the nature of this moral effort by listing certain characteristics in the shadow-personality such as being emotional, obsessive, and having possessive quality (Jung 145). These qualities are seen in Persephone's character, she loves nature for she finds "a certain comfort from the trees", she is obsessed with searching for meanings in herself and around her, and she has a desire to control and possess as she calls "Come then, sweet Hell! I 'll name you once" (Kizer 7, 50). Persephone has been willing to find herself, she was looking, staring, and gazing, but her inner-self was "still veiled in foam" (Kizer 25). Hades' presence is regarded as

a trigger for her to search further. His strange intervention into her life is used as a tool for feminine self-discovery. He shows her a possibility beyond her horizon as an Earth Goddess.

Conclusion

This comparative study between Alfred Tennyson's *Demeter and Persephone*, and Carolyn Kizer's *Persephone Pauses* as adaptations of the Greek myth of *Demeter and Persephone* is intended to expose different interpretations, portrayals, and themes. The theoretical part of mythology and feminism explains the definition of their terms and aspects. Myth is viewed as an explanation of natural phenomenon such as winter, or justification of cultural rites and customs. Myth-criticism comprises of various theories and critical approaches to analyze literary interpretative structures, and mythic patterns. Feminism is part of the myth-criticism. It is interested in mythology for two main reasons: (1) the patriarchal system rooted in myths and (2) female figures' roles and potentials.

From the feminist perspective, Tennyson's *Demeter and Persephone* contrasts the perpetuating patriarchy and misogyny found in the myth. By constructing his poem as a dramatic monologue, Tennyson voices his heroine's feelings and opinions, giving her the qualities of being strong, active, and subjective female figure. Tennyson sympathizes with Demeter, and projects her as a symbol of maternal love and ideal model of motherhood. Her agony and suffering are the results of unfair patriarchal

system of Zeus and Hades. Tennyson condemns the patriarchy represented by the gods that restricts the authority to the father. The identity is a main theme in his poem, Demeter is identified as a mother first and as a goddess only second. Thus, upon her role, her actions are justified. Demeter used her powers and resources to regain her daughter from the clutches of hell. She is displayed as a madwoman from the Greek's perspective, whereas Tennyson renders her realistically as both angel in the house and madwoman in the attic. She is an angel by her very idealized characteristics as an earth goddess, and a madwoman in the attic by her rebellious actions against other gods for a noble reason. His poem is considered a social critique on women's, especially mothers', conditions as victims of the unjust patriarchal dominance.

Kizer's *Persephone Pauses* is a modern interpretation of the myth. She is interested in the neglected aspects of the myth, especially Persephone's side of the story. She introduces psychological views on the incident, as well as tackling feminist issues of identity and role. Through her heroine Persephone's descent to the Underworld, Kizer explains the process of individuation, borrowed from the psychoanalyst Carl Jung. The individuation uncovers the true personality of the goddess, and sets her on a journey of self-discovery, where she can make her own choices beyond the stereotypical or accustomed identifications. The psychological transformation of Persephone is observed in this dramatic monologue as she turns from

being the earth goddess into the Queen of the Dead. Persephone's self-recognition represents womanhood, as Kizer believes, and encourages women to define themselves by their own actions.

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