



The limits of our language are the limits of our world.

— Ludwig Wittengstein



# Silence and Knowing

As the philosopher and neuroscientist Iain McGilchrist said in an interview in 2021:

‘When [you] read a poem ... you can feel it in your musculature ... it changes your breathing ... it has enormous effects on you physiologically that have deep, deep meaning. That’s why things can’t just be paraphrased ...’

Poems show us that relationships between sounds create meaning, and determine every song – Earth’s ecology in microcosm.

In evolution, in art, and in the course of human life, listening will always go before singing, and exceed it.

— Faith Lawrence, “The Listening Gift”



*Richard Jackson*

## **SILENCES**

*The world is made of water.  
—Parmenides*

I can barely remember, now, that **unwritten poem** in which you suddenly appeared, and which disappeared the way your Mohawk fathers disappeared from the valley I lived in once. **I have only these words that seem as if they climbed up from the bottom of a dry well.** There are so many things we don't hear: the hawk's talon piercing the skull of the meadow vole, the moon scratched by a branch of the hackberry, the cicada emerging from its cocoon in this false Spring. I am told that when I was young I watched a butcher push his hand down the throat of a lamb's carcass and pull out its heart. Can you imagine a silence so desperate to be heard? You said once we should be able to hear the language of fish, that everything comes to us on rivers of wind. John, the news has come that your own bones are turning into water, and I look out to the birds that have come to the railing and can't even remember their names. Just there, an early lily is trying to hold the morning's rain in the mirror of its petal.

Where I live now, someone has cut away acres of trees, and the words for what they meant no longer exist. I am wearing the choker of bone you left for me. I don't know what that unwritten poem should have said, though I remember the image of coffins they have found in the desert, shaped to take the place of those bodies that have dissolved into air, and of the Antarctic ice sheet that is floating towards the sea across invisible, submerged lakes. Last week, the cranes arrived, as they do each year, at the Cherokee campsite on the Hiawassee. When they rose in groups to settle for the night by the river, their necks leaned into the sunset as if they were in a rush to leave their bodies behind. **It is this way with everything we try to say. We want to grasp the heart, to hear what is beyond our hearing, but have only these words that disappear like mist from the tip of a wave, or the phosphorous trail a swimmer leaves in the sea.**

*for John Anderson*



**Course**  
**Introduction**

How to *Read* a Poem (Level 1)

1. Read it (four times)
2. Enjoy it (or not)
3. Come to class (mandatory)

How to *Interrogate* a Poem (Level 2)

1. Who is speaking? To whom?
2. What is the situation?
3. What is the speaker's attitude?
4. What is the message?



## How to *Vivisect* a Poem (Level 3)

1. Consider the **title** (subject, tone, genre, promise).
2. What is your initial impression of the **subject**?
3. What is the **author's attitude** toward the subject?
4. What is the **basic situation**?  
(speaker / auditor / circumstances / setting / subject / story)
5. Is there a **comparison** or an **analogy**?
6. Does it **appeal** to your intellect? emotions? reason?
7. Does it contain **allusion(s)**?
8. How does it achieve **sound** and **rhythm**?



## More Vivisection (It's not dead yet.)

9. Is it **divided**?
10. Does it have a recognizable **form** and **genre**?  
If so, what are your **expectations** of each?
11. Pay special attention to **verbs** and any **unusual words**.
12. What is the **mood** created by the poem? Does it vary?
13. Is the language predominantly **concrete** or **abstract**?
14. Are there **word patterns**?
15. Does it contain **figurative language**?
16. **So what?** What does it **say**? What is its **purpose**?



**And if you want to do Ph.D. - level analysis:**

**[All of the above, and...]**

- 17. Read some or all of the poet's other literary works.**
- 18. Research her biography and the critical reception of her work.**
- 19. Survey the artistic and cultural milieu in which she wrote.**
- 20. Try to find a job teaching this stuff!**



# Another Approach

[cambridgecoaching.com](http://cambridgecoaching.com)

- Author/Poet **Narrator/Persona** v. Focalized voices
- The **narrator/persona** was made deliberately to fulfill a **function**.
- Poems make **sounds**, and those sounds have significance.
  - Does the sound change in the poem? Where?
  - Does the sound complement or contradict the tone of the poem's actual content?
- Find the **volta**.
  - What does it mean?
  - What does it “do” to the reader? How does it change his/her reading of the poem?



If You Really Want to Get Into the Weeds of Poetics:

*The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics* (2012)

*Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory* (Penguin, 2013)

*The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism* (1994)



# All Poems: Quick Writes

## Before Discussion:

1. Did the poem engage you? Why / why not?
2. Any difficulties?
3. Favorite word / phrase / line(s)?



# All Poems: Quick Writes

## After Discussion:

1. Did discussion deepen your understanding of the poem?
2. Any unanswered or new questions?
3. Was the poet's adaptation of the myth successful?
4. Any change in your evaluation of the poem and/or poet?



# Mythos / Logos / Truth / Falsehood, Woven by Grace

eh thaumata polla, kai pou ti kai broton phatis

huper ton alathay logon

dedaidalmenoi pseudesee poikilois exapatonti muthoi.

Charis deh, haper hapanta teukay maylika thnatois,

epipheroisa teeman kai apiston emaysato piston

emmenai to pollakis.

— Pindar, “Olympian Ode 1”

**These lines from Pindar's ode are translated on the following slide:**



# Epigraph to Greek Myths: A New Retelling

by Charlotte Higgins (2021)

**Yes! marvels are many, stories  
starting from mortals somehow  
stretch truth to deception  
woven cunningly on the loom of lies.**

Pindar, "Olympian Ode I." 28-32

tr. F. J. Nisetich

# Shimon Edelman, “Reality Is in the Eye of the Beholder”

Things are not as they are seen, nor are they otherwise.  
—”Lañkāvatāra Sūtra”

**There is a philosophical tradition out there that holds this — the essential emptiness of all things — to be an ultimate truth in its own right; indeed, the only ultimate truth. Some find this notion liberating — the religious tradition that is built around that philosophy holds this to be the only liberating notion.**

**Others, like the reluctant hero of Ursula Le Guin’s “The Lathe of Heaven,” find it hard:**

**There is a bird in a poem by T. S. Eliot who says that mankind cannot bear very much reality; but the bird is mistaken. A man can endure the entire weight of the universe for eighty years. It is unreality that he cannot bear. But now that we have seen it, bear it we must.**

**<https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/reality-is-in-the-eye-of-the-beholder/>**



# A well-known poet, just down the road from us: H.W. Longfellow

## from “The Spirit of Poetry”

And here, amid

The silent majesty of these deep woods,  
*Its presence shall uplift thy thoughts from earth,*  
As to the sunshine and the pure, bright air  
Their tops the green trees lift. Hence *gifted bards*  
Have ever loved the calm and quiet shades.  
For them there was an eloquent voice in all  
The sylvan pomp of woods, the golden sun,  
The flowers, the leaves, the river on its way,  
Blue skies, and silver clouds, and gentle winds,  
The swelling upland, where the sidelong sun  
Aslant the wooded slope, at evening, goes,  
Groves, through whose broken roof the sky looks in,  
Mountain, and shattered cliff, and sunnyvale,  
The distant lake, fountains, and mighty trees,  
*In many a lazy syllable, repeating*  
*Their old poetic legends to the wind.*  
And this is the sweet spirit, that doth fill  
The world; and, in these wayward days of youth,  
My busy fancy oft embodies it,

As *a bright image of the light and beauty*  
*That dwell in nature; of the heavenly forms*  
*We worship in our dreams,* and the soft hues  
That stain the wild bird’s wing and flush the clouds  
When the sun sets. Within her tender eye  
The heaven of April, with its changing light,  
And when it wears the blue of May, is hung,  
And on her lip the rich, red rose. Her hair  
Is like the summer tresses of the trees,  
When twilight makes them brown, and on her cheek  
Blushes the richness of an autumn sky,  
With ever-shifting beauty. Then her breath,  
It is so like the gentle air of Spring,  
As, from the morning’s dewy flowers, it comes  
Full of their fragrance, that *it is a joy*  
*To have it round us, and her silver voice*  
*Is the rich music of a summer bird,*  
*Heard in the still night, with its passionate cadence.*

# Poetry

by

Don Paterson

**In the same way that the mindless diamond keeps one spark of the planet's early fires trapped forever in its net of ice, it's not love's later heat that poetry holds, but the atom of the love that drew it forth from the silence: so if the bright coal of his love begins to smolder, the poet hears his voice suddenly forced, like a bar-room singer's—boastful with his own huge feeling, or drowned by violins; but if it yields a steadier light, he knows the pure verse, when it finally comes, will sound like a mountain spring, anonymous and serene.**

**Beneath the blue oblivious sky, the water sings of nothing, not your name, not mine.**



## A New Poet

Finding a new poet  
is like finding a new wildflower  
out in the woods. You don't see

its name in the flower books, and  
nobody you tell believes  
in its odd color or the way

its leaves grow in splayed rows  
down the whole length of the page. In fact  
the very page smells of spilled

red wine and the mustiness of the sea  
on a foggy day—the odor of truth  
and of lying.

And the words are so familiar,  
so strangely new, words  
you almost wrote yourself, if only

in your dreams there had been a pencil  
or a pen or even a paintbrush,  
if only there had been a flower.

—Linda Pastan

# Ars Poetica

A poem should be palpable and mute  
As a globed fruit,

Dumb  
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone  
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless  
As the flight of birds.

\*

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs,

Leaving, as the moon releases  
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,  
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time  
As the moon climbs.

\*

A poem should be equal to:  
Not true.

For all the history of grief  
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love  
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea—

A poem should not mean  
But be.

— Archibald MacLeish



## You, Andrew Marvell

- Archibald MacLeish

And here face down beneath the sun  
And here upon earth's noonward height  
To feel the always coming on  
The always rising of the night:

To feel creep up the curving east  
The earthy chill of dusk and slow  
Upon those under lands the vast  
And ever climbing shadow grow

And strange at Ecbatan the trees  
Take leaf by leaf the evening strange  
The flooding dark about their knees  
The mountains over Persia change

And now at Kermanshah the gate  
Dark empty and the withered grass  
And through the twilight now the late  
Few travelers in the westward pass

And Baghdad darken and the bridge  
Across the silent river gone  
And through Arabia the edge  
Of evening widen and steal on

And deepen on Palmyra's street  
The wheel rut in the ruined stone  
And Lebanon fade out and Crete  
High through the clouds and overblown

And over Sicily the air  
Still flashing with the landward gulls  
And loom and slowly disappear  
The sails above the shadowy hulls

And Spain go under and the shore  
Of Africa the gilded sand  
And evening vanish and no more  
The low pale light across that land

Nor now the long light on the sea:

And here face downward in the sun  
To feel how swift how secretly  
The shadow of the night comes on ...

# ARS POETICA ON LAVA

So much depends...

—William Carlos Williams

The night I picked my way  
across the lava slicked by rain  
in the moonless dark, all past  
and future sliced away  
like bread. Nothing existed  
but the blade of my held breath  
and the flashlight probing  
the black and roiling rock  
for a safe place to place  
a sneaker down. One shoe  
after the other, disembodied  
from the feet they were tied to,  
with orders to swing out, land,  
grip, and pass me on.

Two hours it took to cross  
that stretch of Stygian black,  
having no thought but the need  
to prevail, upright. Now I know  
what it means to balance  
a writer's life. Each footfall,  
each stopping point, a fulcrum  
around which the body teeters  
and sways: a high-wire act  
demanding concentration—  
the chattering mind delivered up  
blank as cardboard with a pinhole,  
dependent, in the pit-dark, upon one  
thin thread of dazzle coming through.

— Alice Friman



***The New York Times***

25 October 2024

# A Poem Hitches a Ride on a Rocket, to Infinity and Beyond

NASA and the U.S. Poet Laureate may not be obvious collaborators, but a Jupiter-bound mission helped them find common ground.

**“Poetry is the language of mystery and the unknown.”**

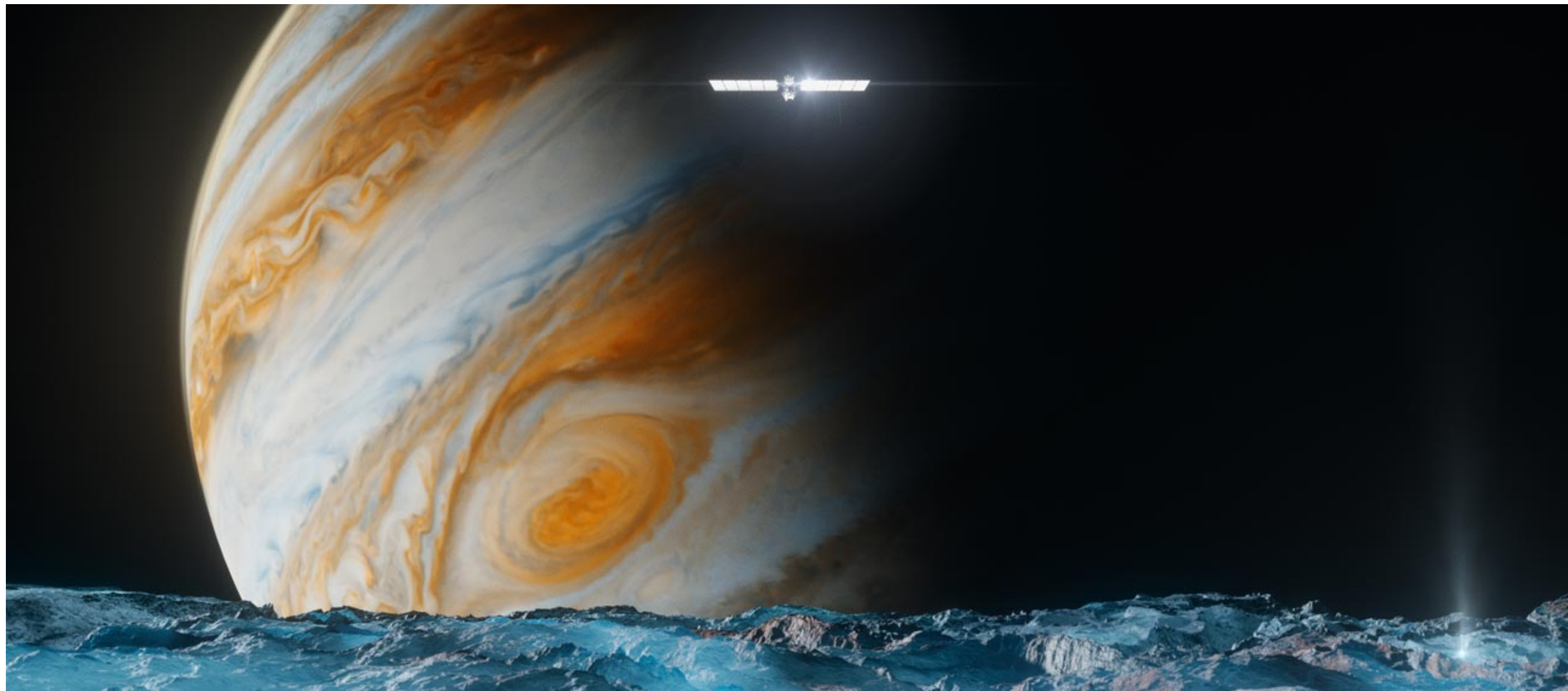
Ada Limón, Poet Laureate of the U.S.





# In Praise of Mystery

Ada Limón



Arching under the night sky inky  
with black expansiveness, we point  
to the planets we know, we

pin quick wishes on stars. From earth,  
we read the sky as if it is an unerring book  
of the universe, expert and evident.

Still, there are mysteries below our sky:  
the whale song, the songbird singing  
its call in the bough of a wind-shaken tree.

We are creatures of constant awe,  
curious at beauty, at leaf and blossom,  
at grief and pleasure, sun and shadow.

And it is not darkness that unites us,  
not the cold distance of space, but  
the offering of water, each drop of rain,

each rivulet, each pulse, each vein.  
O second moon, we, too, are made  
of water, of vast and beckoning seas.

We, too, are made of wonders, of great  
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,  
of a need to call out through the dark.



# Metamorphosis: Myth and Science

“The process strikes me as deeply mysterious, a kind of natural alchemy.

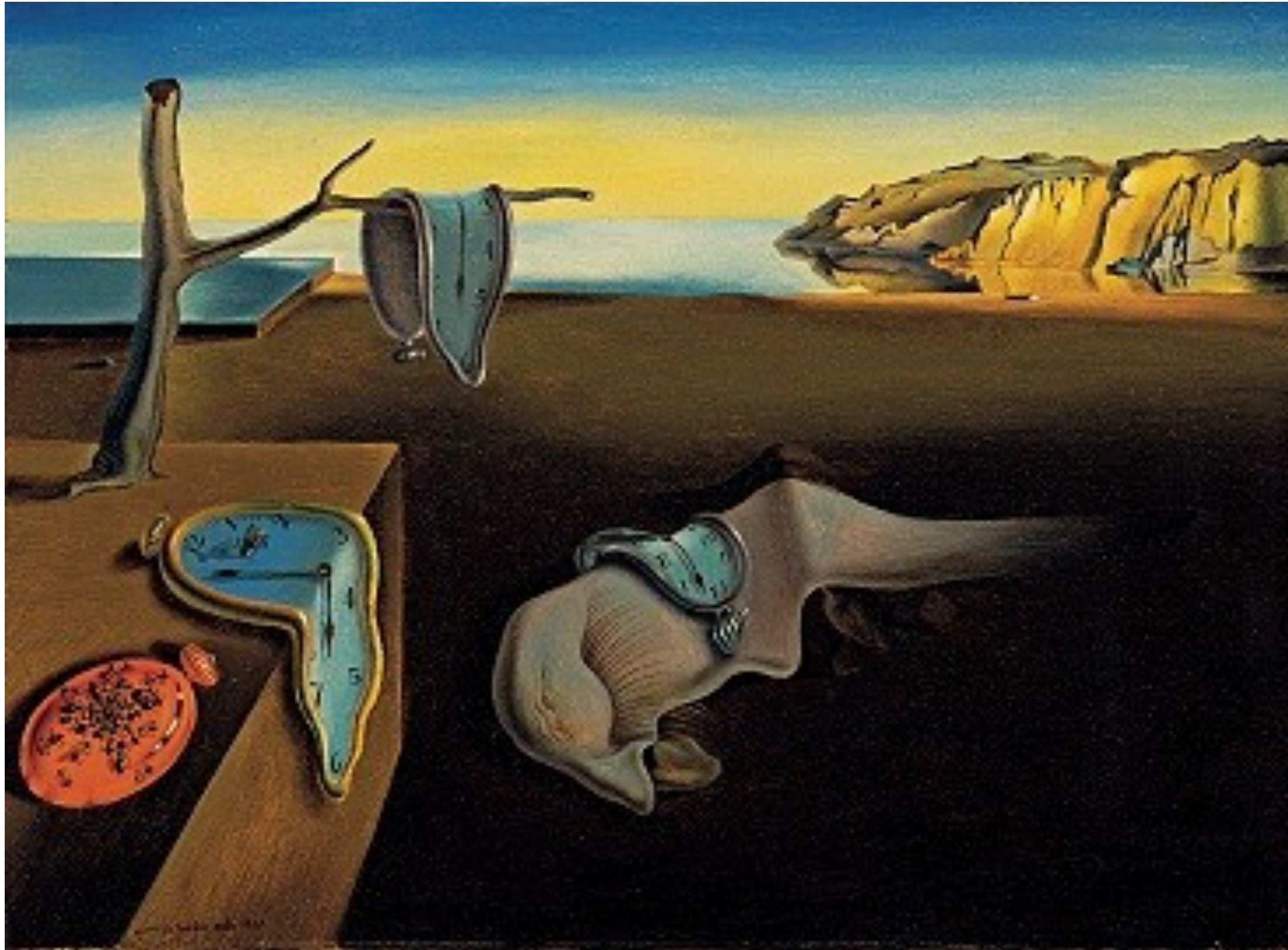
**Metamorphic** literally means ‘**after-formed**’, an apt description of these shape-shifting rocks. Prosaic mud reinvents itself as resplendent mica schist, dull limestones transubstantiate into milky marbles, sandstones are reincarnated as luminous quartzites – even though in their subterranean world there is no light to reveal their beautiful new guises. [...]

Their stories are genuinely epic: the journey of a rock like our Wisconsin schist from the surface to the centre of a mountain belt and back echoes the narrative arc of **katabasis** and **anabasis** in Greek myth: the protagonist’s descent into the Underworld, the tribulations experienced there, and the eventual return, with hard-won wisdom, to the land of the living.”

— **Marcia Biornerud, “Roaming Rocks” (2024)**



## The Persistence of Memory



**Mythos** [Greek]:

word, speech, story, fable

“Psychologists now regard myths as

**permanent but unacknowledged**

**psychical attitudes and forces.”**

“The Greeks have the greatest store of clear, memorable, and beautiful myths.

Far from being dead, **they are still alive and fertile in our mind.”**

— Gilbert Highet, The Classical Tradition



# Chief Primary Sources for Greek Mythology

**Homer: *Iliad, Odyssey***

***Homeric Hymns***

**Hesiod: *Theogony, Works and Days***

**Herodotus: *Histories***

**Greek lyric poets**

**Athenian dramatists**

# Classical Sources (cont.)

**Vergil: *Aeneid***

**Ovid: *Metamorphoses; Heroides; Fasti***

**Plutarch: *Lives; Greek Questions***

**Apuleius: *The Golden Ass***

**Pausanias: *Guide to Greece***

**Apollodorus: *Epitome***



## Useful Secondary Sources

Campbell, Joseph. **The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology.**

Graves, Robert. **The Greek Myths.**

Higgins, Charlotte. **Greek Myths: A Retelling.**

Hightet, Gilbert. **The Classical Tradition.**

***The Oxford Classical Dictionary.***

***The Oxford Companion to World Mythology.***

## Useful Online Sources

Theoi Texts Library [<https://www.theoi.com/Library.html>]

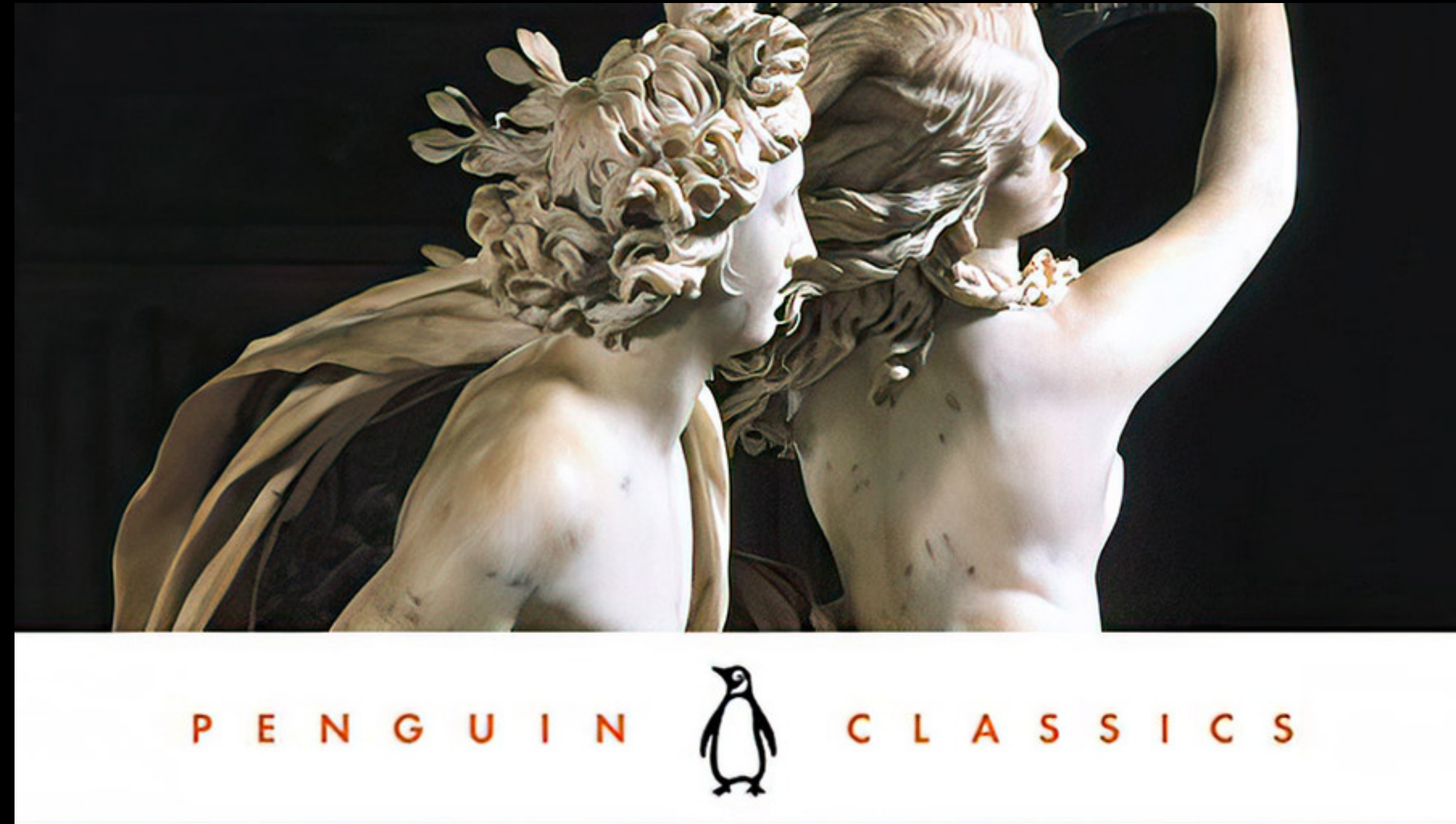
Encyclopedia of Mythology [<https://mythopedia.com/>]



The Opening Lines of Book 1,

Read Aloud:

The Creation  
of the Universe



OVID  
METAMORPHOSES

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=aaplw&ei=utf-8&p=how+do+you+pronounce+'metamorphoses'+in+Latin#id=6&vid=f5f6ae2df79b7d4014a4c382b4f87641&action=view>



If, for whatever reason, you cannot or choose not to attend the next five weeks' classes, this may be all you need to know about Greek mythology:





Our Planets Are Named  
After the Latinized Forms  
of the Greek Gods

<https://youtu.be/XrfWsl7X3GU>

<https://youtu.be/l sic2Z2e2xs>

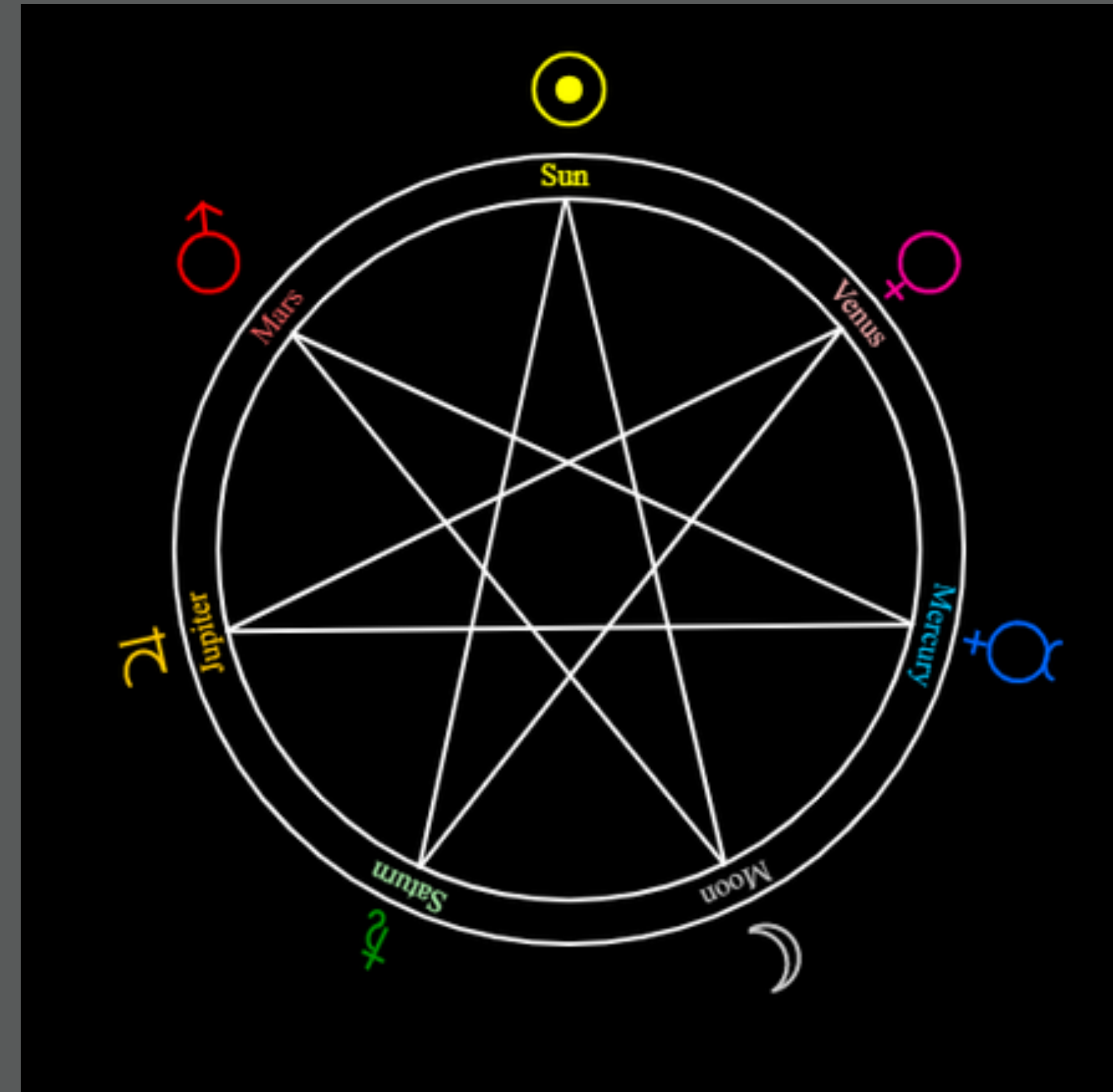




Romance languages preserve  
their day-names from Greek mythology;

English, not so much: only 'Saturday';

the rest are from Norse mythology.





## Poems to Read for Week 1:

“Persephone Leaving” by **Mary Jo Bang** (pp. 141 - 142)

“Orpheus and Eurydice in Spain” by **Alice Friman** (pp. 7 - 9)



# Demeter and Persephone:

## Rape and Return





## Parental Advisory:

The myths and artworks based on them may contain acts of violence, including (but not limited to) rape.

Viewer discretion is recommended.

A very disturbing catalogue of sexual violence is available at:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

[List of rape victims from ancient history and mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_rape_victims_from_ancient_history_and_mythology)



**Our Poem on This Theme:**

**Mary Jo Bang, “Persephone Leaving”**

**pp. 141 - 142**



# Chief Classical Sources for Demeter Myths

**Homeric Hymns: “To Demeter”**

**Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book 5, lines 450 - 563)**

**Ovid, *Fasti* (Book 4, lines 417 - 620)**

**Best Secondary Source (in English)**

**Graves, Robert. *The Greek Myths*.**

**(Hammondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1955).**



# Orphic Legend

In Crete, Demeter hid Persephone in a cave; told Zeus where to find her;  
he coupled with her in the form of a giant snake;  
she gave birth to Dionysus, who was torn to death and resurrected.

## Vergil's *Aeneid*, Book VI

The **Golden Bough** was offered up to Proserpina, *Iunoni infernae*  
[Juno of the Dead], "as her beauty's due." The Cumaean Sibyl tells Aeneas  
"Proserpina will keep / Her chastity safe at home behind her uncle's doors."



# Gold Ring from Knossos, Crete

(C. 1450 BCE)



**Great Mother  
Of Crete  
("Lady of the  
Labyrinth")**

**Earth Mother, Dancing Women, Blossoming Plants**



# Proserpine

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

(1874)







# Persephone

Thomas Hart Benton

1938 - 1939





**Terracotta  
tablet**

**Calabria**

**6th century BCE**



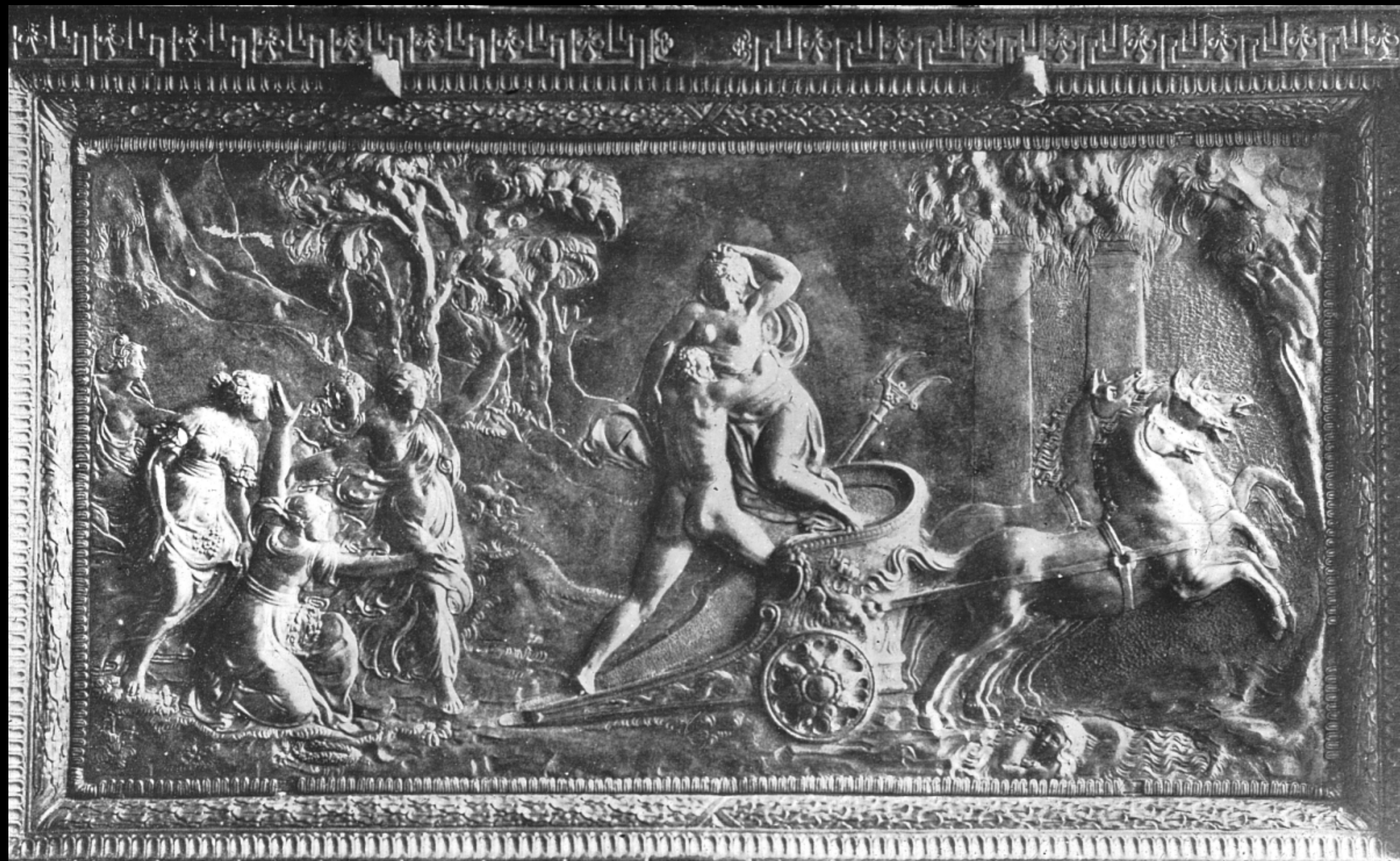
**(Below):**

**Hades with  
His Horsemen,  
Abducting Persephone**

**C. 340 BCE**







Italian Renaissance Relief





**Persephone and Hades**

**(c. 430 BCE)**





**Persephone and Hades  
Enthroned**

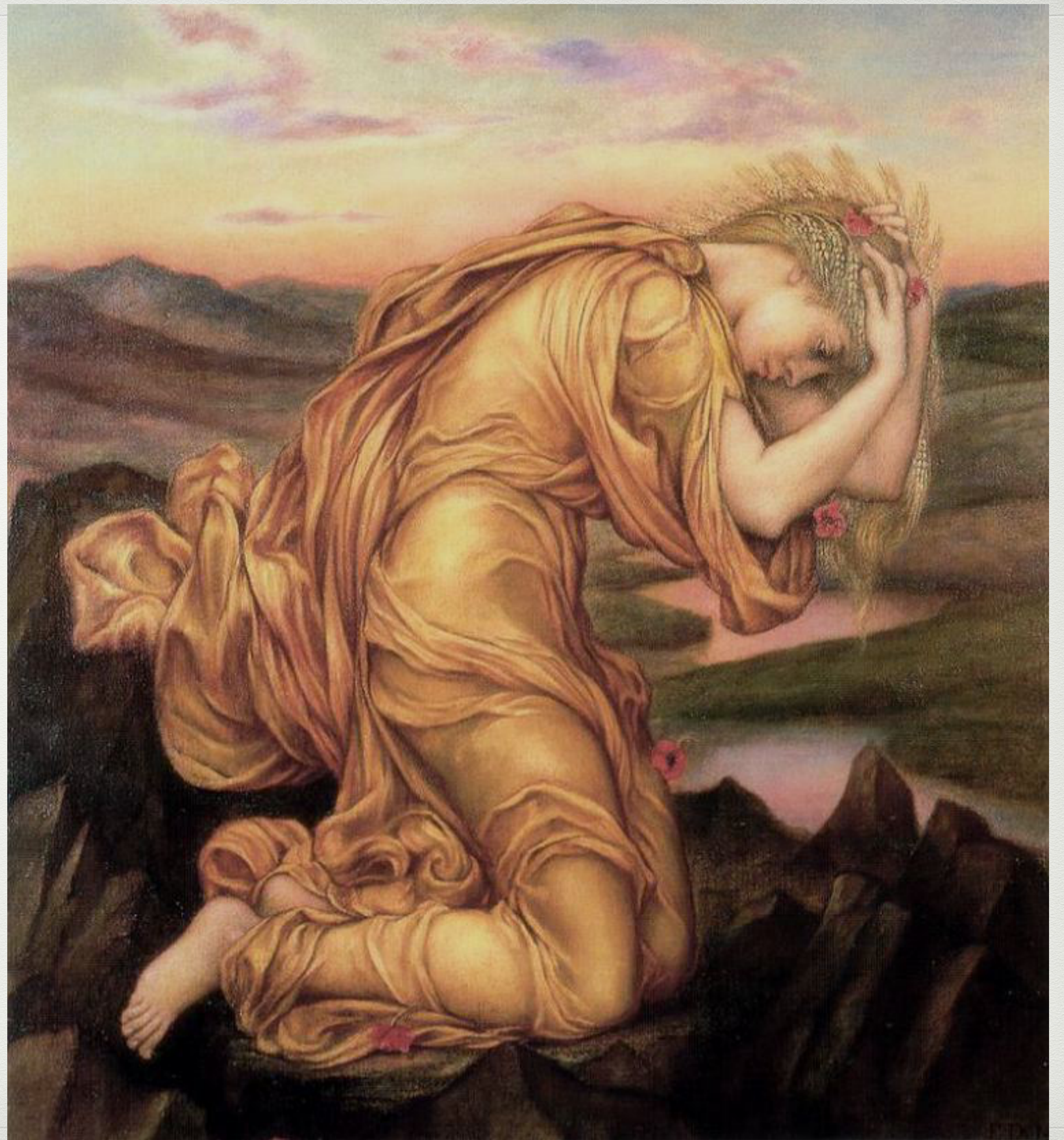
**(c. 500 - 450 BCE)**



# Demeter Mourning for Persephone

Evelyn De Morgan

(1855 - 1919)







**Persephone Emerging  
from the Underworld,  
Accompanied by  
Hermes and Hecate;  
Demeter Awaits Her.**

**Attic Red-Figure Vase**

**(c. 440 BCE)**





# The Return of Persephone

Frederic Leighton

(1830 - 1896)



**Demeter and Persephone  
with  
Triptolemus**

fragment of the

**Great Eleusinian Mystery Relief**

**Roman (27 BCE - 14 CE)**





# Modern Literary Works

**Goethe, *Proserpina* (melodrama) 1778**

**Mary Shelley, *Proserpina* (a feminist play for children) 1820**

**Swinburne, “The Garden of Proserpina” (1866)**

**Tennyson, “Demeter and Persephone” (1889)**

**Cavafi, “Interruption” (1901)**



# Interruption

C. P. Cavafy

We interrupt the work of the gods,  
bustling and inexperienced beings of the moment.  
In the palaces of Phthia and Eleusis,  
Demeter and Thetis start notable works  
amid high flames and dense smoke. But  
always Metaneira rushes from her royal  
rooms, disheveled and terrified,  
and always Peleus is fearful and interferes.

tr. Rae Dalven



## Homer's *Odyssey*, Book XI:

In the Underworld, Odysseus prays to “mighty Hades” (*iphthimō Aidē*) and to “dread Persephone” (*epainē Persephonaiē*); later, “august Persephone” (*agauē Persephoneia*), “holy Persephone” (*agnē Persephoneia*), and “Persephone, daughter of Zeus” (*Persephoneia Dios thugatēr*).



***Perséphone*** is a musical work (*mélodrame*) for speaker, solo singers, chorus, dancers and orchestra with music by **Igor Stravinsky** and a *libretto* by **André Gide**. (1934)

- *Perséphone ravie* (The Abduction of Persephone);
- *Perséphone aux enfers* (Persephone in the Underworld);
- *Perséphone renaissante* (Rebirth of Persephone).

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa\\_qpV4PA64](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa_qpV4PA64)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNWWdEVwVol>



## Feminist Perspective (Modern)

Persephone prefers queenship in Hell over daughterhood on Earth,  
her Dark Lord and Consort over her Mother on the farm

## Contrasting Male-Warrior Perspective (Ancient)

Achilles would rather be the slave of a peasant farmer on Earth  
than Lord over all the powerless Dead



# *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (c. 7th century BCE):

[Da-mater: 'barley mother']

[Persephone: 'bringer of destruction' / Korē: 'maiden']

## Three Translations

<https://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/demeter.html>

<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0138:hymn=2> (Loeb ed.)

<https://topostext.org/work/355> (2019 tr.)



# Demeter/Ceres: *Mater Deorum*

I, mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, first-born of the ages, highest of the gods, queen of the shades, first of those who dwell in heaven, representing in one shape all gods and goddesses.

My will controls the shining heights of heaven, the health-giving sea winds, and the mournful silences of hell;

the entire world worships my single godhead in a thousand shapes, with divers rites, and under many a different name.

The Phrygians, first-born of mankind,

call me the Pessinuntian Mother of the gods; the ancient Eleusinians, Actaeon **Ceres**;

and the Egyptians who excel in ancient learning, honour me

with the worship which is truly mine and call me by my true name: **Queen Isis**.

— Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (c.150 CE)



# A Detailed Survey of Persephone's Roles in Greek Mythology

The rape promotes the opening of a channel of communication between the upper world and the underworld, which until then had remained closed. As Hades' wife, Persephone presides over the passage from life to death; she rules the kingdom of the dead and the destinies of the [souls](#). Everyone will eventually come under her authority.

Thanks to her, [Tiresias](#) retains his reasoning ability in death, as we learn in the *Odyssey* ([10.491–495](#)). She sends the souls of the heroines to [Odysseus](#) and subsequently scatters them ([11.225–226](#), [385–386](#)). Hades and Persephone are connected with the [Erinyes](#) in their roles as avengers of the murders ([Hom. Il. 9.454–457](#), [568–572](#)). Persephone is not implacable, but listens to reasonable requests. [Sisyphus](#) persuades her to let him return to the upper world, to remind his wife that she should give him the proper funerary rites. Moved by [Alcestis](#)' abnegation, Persephone sends her back from death, as suggested by [Plato's Symposium](#) ([179b](#); [Apollod. Bibl. 1.9.15](#)), contradicting the canonical story of Alcestis' rescue by [Heracles](#).

As goddess of the underworld, Persephone also plays an important role in the katabaseis of [Theseus](#) and [Pirithous](#), [Heracles](#) and [Orpheus](#). Theseus aids Pirithous in his failed attempt to get Persephone as wife and their daring is punished with imprisonment in Hades (Hes. fr. 280 Merkelbach-West = Minyas fr. 7 Bernabé; [Diod. Sic. 4.63.4–5](#)). Persephone lets [Heracles](#) rescue Theseus and Pirithous and carry the dog [Cerberus](#) away to the upper world ([Diod. Sic. 4.26.1](#)). She saves [Menoites](#), the shepherd of Hades' cows, from being beaten by [Heracles](#) ([Apollod. Bibl. 2.5.12](#)). Persephone also gives back [Eurydice](#) to [Orpheus](#) thanks to his sweet lyre playing ([Moschus Ep. Bion. 3.123–124](#)), provided he did not look back when leading her up, a condition that the bard failed to meet.



# Influence of Hymn to Demeter and other Hymns on Ovid and later works:

The Roman poet [Ovid](#) made extensive use of the *Homeric Hymns*: his account of [Apollo and Daphne](#) in the *Metamorphoses*, published in 8 CE, references the *Hymn to Apollo*,<sup>[70]</sup> while other parts of the *Metamorphoses* make reference to the *Hymn to Demeter*, the *Hymn to Aphrodite* and the second *Hymn to Dionysus*.<sup>[71]</sup> Ovid's account of the [abduction of Persephone](#) in his *Fasti*, written and revised between 2 and around 14 CE, likewise references the *Hymn to Demeter*.<sup>[72]</sup> Ovid further makes use of the *Hymn to Aphrodite* in *Heroides* 16, in which [Paris](#) adapts a section of the hymn to convince [Helen](#) of his worthiness for her.<sup>[73]</sup> The *Odes* of Ovid's contemporary [Horace](#) also make use of the *Homeric Hymns*, particularly the five longer poems.<sup>[74]</sup> In the second century CE, the Greek-speaking authors [Lucian](#) and [Aelius Aristides](#) drew on the hymns: Aristides used them in his orations, while Lucian parodied them in his satirical *Dialogues of the Gods*.<sup>[75]</sup>

The rediscovery of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* in 1777 led to a resurgence of European interest in the hymns. In the arts, [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#) used the *Hymn to Demeter* as an inspiration for his 1778 melodrama *Proserpina*. Their [textual criticism](#) progressed considerably over the nineteenth century, particularly in German scholarship, though the text continued to present substantial difficulties into the twentieth. The *Homeric Hymns* were also influential on the English [Romantic poets](#) of the early nineteenth century, particularly [Leigh Hunt](#), [Thomas Love Peacock](#) and [Percy Bysshe Shelley](#). Later poets to adapt the hymns included [Alfred, Lord Tennyson](#), and [Constantine P. Cavafy](#). Their influence has also been traced in the works of [James Joyce](#), the film *Rear Window* by [Alfred Hitchcock](#), and the novel *Coraline* by [Neil Gaiman](#).

The 1889 poem "Demeter and Persephone" by [Alfred, Lord Tennyson](#), reinterprets the narrative of the *Hymn to Demeter* as an allegory for the coming of [Christ](#). (Wikipedia)



# Demeter

by Elizabeth Coatsworth

And hearing the complaints of the reapers,  
The Lady straightened her back above the sheaves,  
Wiping the sweat from her eyes,  
Towering live a golden pillar among them.

“Fools,” she said,  
“Are you not content with receiving the gift of grain  
That you must begrudge the flowers to Persephone?”

And then in their silence she spoke again:  
“You are blind with greed,” said she;  
“Is the wheat enough? Is it enough to live?  
Do you need nothing to fill your hearts?  
You forget,” said Demeter, “it is the songs you sing for joy of the flowers  
That strengthen your arms for the swing of the heavy scythes.”



**The Following Poems Come to Us  
Courtesy of our Beloved Professor,  
Dr. Barbara Snapp**



# Demeter

In your dream you met Demeter  
Splendid and severe, who said: Endure.  
Study the art of seeds,  
The nativity of caves.  
Dance your gay body to the poise of waves;  
Die out of the world to bring forth the obscure  
Into blisses, into needs.  
In all resources  
Belong to love. Bless,  
Join, fashion the deep forces.  
Asserting your nature, priceless and feminine.  
Peace, daughter. Find your true kin.  
Then you felt her kiss.

— Genevieve Taggard



# Demeter

Where I lived – winter and hard earth.  
I sat in my cold stone room  
choosing tough words, granite, flint,

to break the ice. My broken heart –  
I tried that, but it skimmed,  
flat, over the frozen lake.

She came from a long, long way,  
but I saw her at last, walking,  
my daughter, my girl, across the fields,

in bare feet, bringing all spring's flowers  
to her mother's house. I swear  
the air softened and warmed as she moved,

the blue sky smiling, none too soon,  
with the small shy mouth of a new moon.

— Carol Ann Duffy



## Demeter's Prayer to Hades

This alone is what I wish for you: knowledge.  
To understand each desire has an edge,  
to know we are responsible for the lives  
we change. No faith comes without cost,  
no one believes without dying.  
Now for the first time  
I see clearly the trail you planted,  
what ground opened to waste,  
though you dreamed a wealth  
of flowers.  
There are no curses—only mirrors  
held up to the souls of gods and mortals.  
And so I give up this fate, too.  
Believe in yourself,  
go ahead—see where it gets you.

— Rita Dove



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