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## Some Functions of the Demophon Episode in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter \*

Nancy Felson Rubin - Harriet M. Deal

This study focuses on the functioning of the Demophon narrative, enclosed in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, within the larger narrative of Persephone's abduction and partial restoration. On a dramatic level the Demophon episode furthers the character development of Demeter, retards the resolution of the plot, and allows focus to fall first on Demeter, then on the reunion of Demeter with Persephone. The episode helps to develop and express certain values and beliefs pertaining to divinity and mortality, male and female experience, sexuality and virginity, fertility and infertility. Though much has been written about these values and beliefs as they are expressed in the *Hymn*, and to some extent about the effect of the Demophon episode on their expression, our focus on this narrative sheds new light on these issues <sup>1</sup>.

\* The authors would like to acknowledge the support of a Vice-President's Grant for Research (10-31-GR 005-001) from the University of Georgia for this research.

<sup>1</sup> Of particular use in our study were the following, hereafter cited by the last name of the author(s):

T.W. Allen, and W.R. Halliday, and E.E. Sikes, *The Homeric Hymns*, Oxford 1936<sup>2</sup>, a second edition of the 1904 text and commentary.

M. Arthur, 'Politics and Pomegranates: An Interpretation of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter', *Arethusa* 10.1, 1977, pp. 7-47.

F. Càssola, *Inni omerici*, Milano, 1975, pp. 23-36.

S. Eitrem, (i) 'Eleusinia—les mysteres et l'agriculture', *Symb. Osl.* 20, 1949, pp. 133-141.

—, (ii) 'Die eleusinischen Mysterien und das Synthema der Weihe', *Symb. Osl.* 37, 1961, pp. 72-81.

G.S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, Cambridge and Berkeley 1970.

Our method has been to compare the narrative sequence of events which constitutes the Demophon episode with the sequence surrounding Persephone. In each, the actions seen from the three main characters' points of view (the outsider/instigator, the mother/protector/obstructor, and the child/victim) are woven into a composite narrative syntagm. Through narrative analysis, we determine that the two composite syntagms form a paradigmatic set. The intervening Demophon narrative both parallels the primary Persephone narrative (a paradigmatic relation) and forms part of it (a syntagmatic relation). As we examine the narrative structure, we also note semantic elements shared by the two composite syntagms, particularly as they reinforce parallelisms that we had already detected in the narrative structure itself, or as they underscore significant differences<sup>2</sup>.

In each composite syntagm an outsider instigates action which separates a child from its mother. In each, the chain of events from this outsider's point of view proceeds as follows. A need (Hades' for a wife, Demeter's for a substitute child) leads to a request (Hades' to Zeus, Demeter's to the daughters of Celeus and to Metanira) which

N.J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Oxford 1974.

P. Scarpi, *L'Inno Omerico a Demeter (Elementi per una tipologia del mito)*, Firenze 1975.

J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs I*, Paris 1974.

For a thorough bibliography, including the standard works on Eleusinian cult and religion, see Richardson, pp. 86-92 and Scarpi, espec. pp. IX-X. Also Càssola is informative on the names of the two goddesses, the site at Eleusis, the Eleusinian mysteries and the afterlife, the date of composition for the *Hymn*, and its structure. However, his treatment of the Demophon episode differs from ours in that he views the episode as only juxtaposed with the Demeter/Persephone theme and as out of place from a narrative point of view (see esp. pp. 33-35).

<sup>2</sup> The terms paradigmatic and syntagmatic may by now be familiar to classicists: see the Spring 1977 issue of *Arethusa*, especially the discussions of J. Peradotto and T. Turner. The terms describe two types of relations between units in any system, those along a paradigmatic or selective axis (the classification of units according to similarities and contrasts) or along a syntagmatic or combinatorial axis (the combination of units drawn from different paradigmatic classes). It was C. Lèvi-Strauss who first developed the idea of placing two narrative syntagms in a paradigmatic relation in order to elicit meaning from a mythic text; see especially his statement of theory in *The Raw and the Cooked* (transl. J. and D. Weightman from 1964 Fr. orig., New York 1969), p. 307.

is then granted<sup>3</sup>. By a second procedure (Hades' violent abduction of Persephone, Demeter's subjection of Demophon to the fire) the outsider acquires some degree of control over the child. Interrupted (by a messenger from Zeus, by the child's mother), the outsider releases the child. This release coincides with an event (the "force-feeding" of the pomegranate seed<sup>4</sup>, the establishing of a role for Demophon in Demeter's rites)<sup>5</sup> that assures the outsider partial retention of the child.

From the point of view of the bereft mother the narrative chain follows the same sequence, with specific events varying slightly. In the outsider's request for her child the mother is not fully informed—either not consulted at all in Demeter's case or duped by disguise and deceit in Metanira's<sup>6</sup>. Each mother remains ignorant of the violent or apparently violent<sup>7</sup> act committed by the outsider upon her child. Each, discovering this act, believes the child has been or will be annihilated at the hands of the stranger. Grief and anger lead each to obstruct a divine plan (Demeter, the will of Zeus; Metanira, the plan of Demeter). This interference eventually causes the outsider to return, or promise to return, the child (Demeter voluntarily, Hades under constraint). Each mother then partially yields to the outsider

<sup>3</sup> According to Scarpi (pp. 78ff and 140ff), for the request to be granted it is important that Demeter be assimilated into the human sphere and that she become an "inhabitant" (as opposed to an outsider or stranger) of the Eleusinian community.

<sup>4</sup> Force is particularly emphasized in Persephone's retelling of this event, although Richardson (*ad Dem.* 413) notes that Persephone may "‘protest too much’ in self defense".

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Richardson (*ad Dem.* 265-267) for a discussion of the rites instituted in Demeter's honor, and p. 27 for a discussion of the possible identification of the young male child worshipped in Eleusinian mysteries with Demophon; see also p. 235.

<sup>6</sup> Richardson (*ad Dem.* 188-211) comments on Metanira's failure to recognize the significance of Demeter's epiphany when the goddess first enters Metanira's house. Similarly, Scarpi (pp. 180-181) distinguishes Metanira's initial intuition of Demeter's divinity from her later full and precise realization upon Demeter's oral revelation of her identity.

<sup>7</sup> Persephone's abduction is explicitly violent; the apparent violence of Demophon's nightly experience is underscored by the fact that in several versions of the myth Demophon actually dies; see Richardson, p. 247, and Arthur, p. 26, for references to such versions and Kirk, p. 196, for interesting comments on the simultaneously destructive and cathartic aspects of fire.

(Demeter by a resigned acceptance of Persephone's intermittent residence with Hades, Metanira by a silent and awed acceptance of Demophon's ritual bond with Demeter).

From the child's viewpoint the narrative chain begins with the transfer to the control of an outsider. Subsequent exposure to a violent or apparently violent act alters the child's ontological state: Persephone's abduction to the underworld symbolizes death, and Demophon's subjection to fire is part of an immortalizing process<sup>8</sup>. Honors and powers follow (for Persephone as Hades' wife and queen of the dead, for Demophon as part of Demeter's immortal rather than his mother's mortal realm). This absorption into the realm of the "other" is abruptly arrested by an intrusion causing each outsider to relinquish the child. The release is not total, however, since each child retains a partial bond with the outsider. Thus the final outcome is a compromise: Persephone is restored to Demeter two thirds of the year, but remains the honored wife of Hades and queen of the dead for one third; Demophon, though no longer the nursling of Demeter and no longer potentially immortal, is joined to the goddess through rites and the games instituted in his honor<sup>9</sup>.

The two composite syntagms are sufficiently parallel at a concrete level to warrant their placement in a paradigmatic set. The abstract sequence for both is: *desire, request, granting of request, violent procedure, possession of child, obstruction, outcome of obstruction, con-*

<sup>8</sup> The fire ritual forms only one part of the immortalization ceremony; other steps as listed by Richardson (p. 365) include anointing the infant with ambrosia, breathing on him with divine breath, and holding him on a goddess' lap. Many have debated whether this immortalizing process is also an adoption ceremony: for the arguments see Richardson (*ad Dem.* 231-255) and Vernant, p. 133 and note 31, who both note the similarities between the festival of the Amphidromy and the events surrounding Demophon. For similar adoption (or socialization, acculturation) practices in other cultures, as well as in this *Hymn*, see Scarpi, pp. 182ff.

<sup>9</sup> See Scarpi (p. 78) for a discussion of the intermediary and privileged position of Demophon as a result of his contact with the goddess and of his refusal, upon separation from Demeter, of solace from his mortal mother and sisters. Scarpi sees Demophon as mediating not only the human/divine opposition, but also the opposition raw/burnt (pp. 215-218). He states that Demeter is not solely responsible for Demophon's intermediary position in that, although she initiates his movement from "raw" to "cooked", it is Metanira who impedes his passage from 'cooked' to "burnt". Therefore Demeter and Metanira share another parallel role in the *Hymn*.

*cession, final outcome.* Certain semantic features confirm this paradigmatic relation. Such features include verbal echoes, symbols, actions, metaphors, and descriptive terms, especially when they occur at the same point or step in the parallel syntagm.

At *desire* both Hades and Demeter have a legitimate kinship relationship that is unfilled<sup>10</sup>. At *request* and *granting* of request both outsiders are immortals whose power greatly exceeds that of mother and child combined. In Demeter's case this is emphasized (in spite of her disguise and seeming dependence on Metanira) by her first epiphany. Both outsiders intend a protective relationship with the child. Both mothers remain ignorant, either of the request itself (Demeter) or of its true nature and implications (Metanira). In neither case is the child consulted. In both the child has an almost symbiotic relation to its mother<sup>11</sup>. Both children are designated *θάλος* "flower" (in 66 Persephone is the *γλυκερόν θάλος* of Demeter; in 187 Demophon is the *νέον θάλος* of Metanira).

At *violent procedure* secrecy and deceit surround both acts. That no one except Helios has witnessed the abduction, and no one except Helios and Hecate has heard Persephone's cries<sup>12</sup>, parallels the secrecy with which Demeter "keeps hiding" baby Demophon in the fire—at night, in secret from his parents (239-40: *νύκτας δὲ κρύπτεσκε . . . λάθρα φίλων γονέων*). This use of *κρύπτεσκε* for Demophon also corresponds semantically to Persephone's descent under the earth (431, *ὑπὸ γαῖαν*) and into darkness (80)<sup>13</sup>. Both mothers view the outsider's

<sup>10</sup> The Roman author Claudian (4th C. A.D.), as Arthur points out (note 20), seems particularly aware of Hades' legitimate need for a wife on the grounds that "he alone was unwed and had long wasted the years in childless state". (Loeb Classical Library transl.).

<sup>11</sup> Demophon as first presented is an infant on his mother's lap, and thus obviously depends on his mother. Persephone's virginity, with its connotations of a "state of childlike innocence and bliss" (see Arthur, p. 12 and note 21), indicates a like dependence on her mother.

<sup>12</sup> Scarpi distinguishes two methods of obtaining knowledge: visual and oral. He finds that the oppositions optic/oral-aural constitute two codes dominant in the *Hymn* and functioning to convey various meanings about mortality/immortality.

<sup>13</sup> These are some examples of a whole class of words in the *Hymn* involving secrecy/manifestation, darkness/light, deceit/honesty. When Demeter is described as hiding the seed of grain under the earth (353: *σπέρμ' ὑπὸ γῆς κρύπτουσα*), her act of withholding grain verbally echoes both her hiding

*secret procedure* and *possession of child* as a form of death. Both initially react to the perceived loss in a helpless, ineffectual manner (Demeter by wandering everywhere in search of information about Persephone and by withdrawing from the company of gods; Metanira by lamenting). Both mourn, Demeter for her lost Persephone, Metanira in fear for Demophon's life (246, *δελσας*)<sup>14</sup>. Demeter's mourning ritual, elaborated several times (40ff, 90ff, 200ff, and 304), includes such gestures of grief as tearing her headdress, refusing food and other comforts, wearing dark mourning clothes, wailing, etc.<sup>15</sup>. For Metanira, mourning is suggested by the use of words commonly associated with grief or anguish over the dead<sup>16</sup>, and also by her gesture of beating her thighs, which —although not a formal mourn-

Demophon in the fire and Hades' secretly abducting Persephone. This class of words also applies to rituals connected with the Eleusinian mysteries; for a thorough review of the scholarship on the relations between the *Hymn* and the Mysteries, see Richardson, pp. 12-30 and 310ff; cf. also Eitrem, i and ii; L.R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, vol. 3, Oxford 1907; G.E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, Princeton 1961; M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*, vol. 1, Munich 1941; L. Deubner, *Attische Feste*, Hildesheim 1962; repr. 1934 ed.; and Càssola, espec. pp. 35-36 ('Bibliografia').

<sup>14</sup> Kirk, p. 196, comments that mortal interveners such as Metanira frequently perceive fire in which a child is placed as destructive.

<sup>15</sup> On Demeter's mourning gestures see Richardson, *ad Dem.* 47 and p. 216; on mourning gestures in general, see *RE*, s.v. 'Trauerkleidung'.

<sup>16</sup> Especially suggestive of mourning are: *κῶκυσεν*, 245 "shriek" (< Cocytus, River of Wailing in the Underworld; cf. espec. Thetis' shriek when she learns of Patroclus' death Σ 37 as a prelude to Achilles'); *γῶον καὶ κήδεα λυγρὰ*, 249, "wailing and mournful cares" (cf. E 156, where this formula expresses the grief which the slaying of two sons will cause their father Phainops; *γῶος* is usually tearful; a prominent meaning for *κῆδος* is "anxiety, grief, espec. for the dead"-LSJ, s.v. 2b). Other echoes occur in Σ 22 and Ω 93f, 640.

Important too is the verbal echo in the *Hymn* itself, 82, when Demeter is asked by Helios to cease her *μέγαν γῶον*. On *γῶος* as a magical mourning used to call up the dead, see J. de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass. - London 1975), p. 13. The mourning of both Demeter for Persephone and Metanira for Demophon results in the ultimate release of each child from apparent death. It may well be that in these two contexts of the *Hymn*, mourning has some magical efficacy. Cf. the magical effect of Metanira's intrusion itself on Demeter's ritual, as pointed out below (note 24). This magical efficacy might explain why Demeter goes into mourning several times in the course of her search for Persephone: by doing so, according to mythic logic, she might actually bring about Persephone's return from the dead. Such logic underlying her actions may be valid even though the word *γῶος* only appears



ing gesture— is suggestive of similar self-abusive mourning acts. Moreover, Helios rebukes Demeter for excessive and vain grief (82, *κατάπαυε μέγαν γόον*, “cease your great lament”), and later Demeter rebukes Metanira and all mortals for vain grief and ignorance (256ff) <sup>17</sup>. Though the two mothers obstruct an outsider in different ways, in both cases the outcome of obstruction for child/victim is a second ontological change whereby Persephone returns to the upper world (light, immortality), and Demophon, deprived of light and immortality, returns to a mortal state. In the interval between this change and the revelation of the partial bond remaining between outsider and child, there is scant time for either mother to react to what appears to be the unconditional return of her child.

At *concession* the outsider retains a partial bond with the child. Persephone’s swallowing of the pomegranate seed renders permanent her ties with Hades and hence simultaneously with cyclic death and seasonal fertility <sup>18</sup>. Demophon, because of prior contact with Demeter, will continue a bond with her (as she explains to Metanira in 263-4) and hence with some form of immortality (undying honor). In each case, the permanent bond with an outsider resulted from eating or receiving nurture. Moreover, the violence or force of Persephone’s

once for Demeter (v. 82), and even though she may be quite unaware of the efficacy of her lamentation.

<sup>17</sup> Both interactions (Helios’ with Demeter and Demeter’s with Metanira) offer important revelations and end each mother’s ignorance. See Scarpi, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> The many possible meanings of the pomegranate seed have been extensively discussed; see Allen and Halliday, pp. 160-170 and Richardson, p. 276. It is interesting to note that —although Persephone’s eating of the pomegranate seed and her plucking of the narcissus are very similar (cf. Arthur, p. 29, Allen and Halliday, p. 130, and Richardson, p. 152 on the associations between the narcissus and the underworld)— they do not produce the same effect on Demeter. She did not accept the consequences of her daughter’s plucking of the narcissus, nor did she view Persephone’s catabasis and abduction as irreversible; but she clearly does accept the consequences of the swallowing of the pomegranate seed and the irreversibility both of Persephone’s bond with Hades and of a cyclic life/death, fertility/infertility pattern which results from that bond.

It is likely that Persephone is bound to the underworld and cyclic death in part by the act of eating in the realm of the dead. Her bond with mortality then comes through eating; similarly, a return to grain-eating status characterizes Demophon’s resumption of mortality. On the symbolic meanings of eating and not eating, and of kinds of food and their relation to mortality and immortality, see Scarpi, espec. pp. 77ff.



swallowing (413, ἀκουσαν δὲ βίη με προσηνάγκασσε πάσασθαι, “against my will by force he made me eat”) may parallel Demeter’s angry abandonment of Demophon to the ground<sup>19</sup>, while Persephone’s general claim to be helpless corresponds to Demophon’s literal helplessness as an infant. At *final outcome*, when each outsider proclaims honors for the child (τιμὰς μεγίστας for Persephone in 366, τιμὴ for Demophon in 263), both the young goddess and the young hero are honored with annual, perpetual rites. Further, Persephone has reached maturity through her marriage to Hades, and, while Demophon does not explicitly reach manhood in the course of the *Hymn*, Demeter’s tacit acceptance of the responsibility to raise him to “a measure of manhood” in 166 (ἥβης μέτρον) implies his eventual maturity<sup>20</sup>.

At this point we would like to mention an interesting triple parallelism that is sustained throughout the poem and is hard to pinpoint to any specific step in the syntagm. This is the parallelism between Persephone, the narcissus, and Demophon. As mentioned above, both Persephone and Demophon are called θαλέα: this designation would seem to put them in the same set as the literal flower in the *Hymn*, the narcissus<sup>21</sup>. The narcissus is offered as a temptation to Persephone, and her plucking of it precipitates her abduction, as well as proleptically symbolizing it<sup>22</sup>. The narcissus gleams, and so

<sup>19</sup> For ἀπὸ ἔο θῆκε cf. M 205 ἀπὸ ἔθεν ἦκε and the more violent version in Ap. Rh. iv 674: τὸν μὲν ἄρ’ ἀρπάγδην χαμάδις βάλε κεκληγῶτα.

<sup>20</sup> Another view of this promise is that it indicates a fear (prominent in early societies) of infantile mortality; see Scarpi, p. 160. See as well his comments (*ibid.*) on the formulaic language in this promise.

<sup>21</sup> The narcissus as a deceptive and enticing literal flower contrasts with the nondeceptive spring flowers that will bloom whenever Persephone reemerges annually from the underworld (401-403) as a great marvel to men and gods. The seasonal return of the flowers and of the fruit (καρπός) first occurs by the assent of Demeter (470-472), but thereafter automatically, as a direct consequence of Persephone’s swallowing the seed and of Demeter’s acknowledging its power.

<sup>22</sup> Persephone’s symbolic loss of immortality is depicted at three moments: her plucking of the narcissus, her descent to the underworld, and her eating of the pomegranate seed. The plucking of the narcissus anticipates but is not synchronic with her loss of virginity and her “death”. Scarpi (p. 49) sees the narcissus as a symbol of both sensuality and morality. He traces its etymology to ναρκᾶω, “to grow stiff or numb” (LSJ), and hence connects it with death. In contrast to Persephone, Demophon’s loss of immortality occurs in one abrupt

does Demophon (the flower is γανόωντα, “made bright,” in 10, and Demophon glows “like a torch” in 239). Demophon, like the narcissus, is born unexpectedly and grows miraculously; for him, as for the narcissus, splendid growth inspires wonder (the narcissus is θαυμαστόν and a σέβας ἰδέσθαι in 10 and later in Persephone’s retelling; Demophon is a μέγα θαῦμα in 240). These semantic parallels strengthen an already felt connection between the two figurative θαλέα, Demophon and Persephone, and the one literal flower, the narcissus.

All three “flowers” also undergo a change from wondrous life to “death”: Persephone begins as a goddess playing joyfully among companions in the field, and becomes queen of the dead; Demophon, at Demeter’s rejection, loses his immortality and returns to a mortal state; the narcissus too will presumably die and lose its wondrous gleam after Persephone has plucked it.

These semantic correspondences reinforce the paradigmatic relation between the two composite syntagms at corresponding steps in each narrative. But distinctions and discrepancies are present as well, breaking the analogies even as they are being established and disturbing the neatness of the parallelisms. Some of the discrepancies are not exact opposites, but qualitative differences. At several places, semantic features are inverted: what is positive for a character in one tale may be negative for the corresponding character in the other at a comparable step. Further, the same state may occur at different but chiasmatically related points in the two narrative syntagms.

Consider first Persephone and Demophon. *At violent procedure* where Hades makes Persephone reside in the dark underworld, Demeter offers Demophon light and immortality. As they move in opposite directions—Persephone into darkness and mortality, but on a *golden* chariot, Demophon into light and immortality, but *hidden* by Demeter in the fire<sup>23</sup>—the young girl screams and exhibits a need and longing for her mother, while the infant offers no resistance and shows no such need. She grieves and mourns; he does not.

event, when Demeter separates him from the fire and abandons him to the ground.

<sup>23</sup> The paradox of combining catabasis with a golden chariot and a fire ritual with the verb “to hide” was pointed out to us by Charles Segal. On the possible connection between the color gold and the underworld, see Richardson, p. 152.

Persephone remains unchanged in the underworld, while Demophon, anointed with ambrosia (237) and stimulated by the presence of Demeter, grows miraculously. At *possession of child* Persephone dies symbolically, but Demophon is undergoing a symbolic purification and immortalization. At *obstruction* by the mother Persephone is joyful, Demophon insatiably angry: just as Persephone screamed at separation from her mother and now rejoices at the prospective reunion, so Demophon, who had not protested earlier when separated from his mortal mother, now cries incessantly. At *outcome of obstruction* Hades' "wry" or amused smile (357)<sup>24</sup> contrasts with Demeter's anger (251) and verbal abuse. Persephone's reemergence from the underworld symbolizes immortality but also epiphany; Demophon's abandonment to the ground and his separation from the fire's immortalizing power both mark his mortality<sup>25</sup>.

The two offspring participate in mortality and immortality, in darkness and light, in contact with and separation from the earth, in grief and joy at different but chiastically related points in their respective composite syntagms. Persephone's reemergence at *final outcome* also parallels Demophon's incipient immortalization at *violent procedure*. We recall that at *violent procedure* Demophon's growth inspired wonder (θαῦμα), while Persephone is a "wonder to behold" (θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι) at *final outcome*<sup>26</sup>. His final mortality is like her

<sup>24</sup> The exact meaning of this expression is much debated. LSJ cite this passage and Pind. *P.* 9, 38 (where Chiron smiles under his brows at Apollo's request to lay his famed hand on Cyrene) to exemplify the assertion that "the brow was also the seat of smiles and joys". The expression "smiled from under his brows" here suggests that Hades intended a deception.

<sup>25</sup> See note 7 above. Vernant, p. 158ff, comments on how the placement of a new-born directly on the earth during the Amphidromy rites signifies, *inter alia*, its mortality, and how direct contact with the earth, and with the powers that reside in it, especially the chthonian powers, signifies a connection with the realm of death. See also Scarpi (pp. 37-38) for the equation: placement on earth = "death".

<sup>26</sup> For Demophon, as for the marvelous narcissus, the potential to stir wonder (θαῦμα) is not enduring. Light and miraculous growth come to them from the immortal realm, out of the special grace of a goddess (Earth, Demeter). It is impossible that they should permanently retain these qualities, just as it is impossible for Demophon to be immortalized. On the latter impossibility, and what it implies about the nature of gods and men, see Richardson, pp. 194 and 234 and Kirk, pp. 192-193.

earlier symbolic mortality. His ultimate separation from fire and light and his contact with the earth are like her earlier descent into the dark earth. Persephone has moved from separation from Demeter to partial reunion, Demophon from union to partial separation. The chiasmic inversions serve to allow Demophon to recede into the background, once he has been granted his final compromise position vis-à-vis Demeter. They also bring the focus on Demeter as the source of joy. For both offspring the happier state is in the presence of Demeter.

At parallel points in the two composite syntagms Demeter and Metanira as mothers/obstructors differ in important and striking ways. One early difference is that, until she herself eye-witnesses his exposure to the fire, Metanira has no idea that she may be “losing” Demophon, whereas Demeter knows immediately upon hearing Persephone’s scream that her daughter has suffered some disaster, although she does not know exactly what has happened until Helios who witnesses everything informs her. Later on, when Demeter interferes with Hades’ possession of Persephone, she does so through an active plan, by suppressing the grain in the earth<sup>27</sup>. At this point, her power with respect even to other immortals is impressive. Metanira, on the other hand, has no exceptional power; she interferes in Demeter’s immortalizing of Demophon by accidentally and unintentionally breaking the taboo against witnessing a magic spell<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, Demeter does not confront the outsider directly, as Metanira does. Metanira screams in helplessness at what she regards as the stranger’s destruction of her son, while Demeter exerts power in a purposive manner. Once Demeter has withheld the grain, Zeus offers

<sup>27</sup> This hostile act, described in 306-307 (οὐδέ τι γαῖα/σπέρμ’ ἀνέει· κρύπτειν γὰρ ἐυστέφανος Δημήτηρ) and again by Hermes to Hades in 354, indicates Demeter’s exercise of her inherent power over the earth; hence it balances and perhaps neutralizes Gaia’s earlier deceitful growth of the narcissus and anticipates the blossoming of spring flowers at Persephone’s annual return (see note 16 above). The various appearances (emergences) and disappearances of “growths” alternate in the text: the narcissus appears and is plucked, Persephone disappears (being abducted), the grain and fruit disappear (by Demeter’s will), Persephone reappears, blossoms and grain reappear and will every spring with Persephone’s reemergence.

<sup>28</sup> See Richardson, *ad Dem.* 244: “The original point was probably that magic could only be worked in secret”. See also Allen and Halliday, pp. 158-159, and, on violation of optic taboos and the appropriate punishment (real or metaphoric) blindness, see Scarpi, pp. 37ff.

her “whatever honors she would choose” (328), but Metanira is not treated with like deference by Demeter. Metanira’s and Demeter’s obstructions differ enormously in implication, since Demeter’s withdrawal has cosmic effects<sup>29</sup>, while Metanira’s intrusion in Demeter’s plan remains on a personal level: it directly affects only the fate of her own child, though it may well have symbolic implications for the whole of mankind<sup>30</sup>.

Further, Metanira’s obstruction causes Demeter to reveal herself with Metanira as a witness. Metanira has no comparable manifestation of power. And, while Metanira’s interference precipitated *Demeter’s* self-revelation, Demeter’s interference ultimately causes *Persephone* to emerge from darkness into light. Thus in the embedded tale the actual figure who moves from hidden to manifest is the outsider/intruder (Demeter), while in the main narrative it is the child/victim (Persephone).

The effect of these discrepancies is to disrupt the relationship between the two composite narrative syntagms. Because it is Demeter who reveals her divinity and power and undergoes a full epiphany, while Demophon is separated from immortality and light and his mother is dismissed as foolish and shortsighted, Demeter is brought into prominence.

This emphasis on Demeter, together with the evanescence of Demophon and Metanira, allows a more general focus on man and his relationship to the gods. With the inauguration of the mysteries the focus of the poem shifts from Demeter’s relationship with Demophon to her relationship with mankind as a whole, especially from her preoccupation with his mortality to a concern for the mortality of all humankind. Although Demeter after her encounter with Demophon and Metanira does not attempt to immortalize the human race, or individual members of it, she does introduce rites which promise the initiate blessedness and a happier portion (*αἰσα*) after death (480-2)<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> See Kirk, p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> For supportive evidence on Demophon as possibly symbolizing all mankind, see Richardson, *ad Dem.* 256-274 and 147f; also pp. 24 and 29.

<sup>31</sup> Discussion of what exactly is meant by blessedness and a happier portion after death is not essential for our interpretation: the literature on this subject

Demeter's withdrawal to the temple just built at her instruction marks her seclusion from both gods and men. She no longer chooses to sojourn among mortals, disguised as one of them, nor does she yet rejoin the Olympian realm<sup>32</sup>. At this point her longing for Persephone, submerged or unexpressed during the Demophon encounter, reappears (304: *πρόθυ*) and the main narrative line resumes. It is interesting that a similar longing is attributed to Persephone (344: *πρόθυ*) at approximately the same narrative moment, as she sits beside her husband in the underworld. The resumed narrative centers upon Demeter's relationship with the other gods and her attempt to reclaim Persephone. As the power shifts in favor of Demeter over Hades, Hades (like Demophon and Metanira earlier) recedes into the background. Literally and verbally, light falls upon the joyful reunion between divine mother and daughter.

The resolution of the Demophon episode not only refocuses attention on Demeter's relationship to the gods and her recovery of Persephone, but also, on a dramatic level, motivates significant changes in Demeter's character. For as her verbal abuse of Metanira indicates, Demeter has come to see that shortsighted and ineffectual interference in divine plans belongs to the realm of mankind and characterizes human folly. Her own initial and ineffectual withdrawal from the gods was in fact like Metanira's failure to recognize and accept divine gifts. But now Demeter has changed as a result of confrontations within the Demophon episode<sup>33</sup>. This change is marked by her resumption of divine form just as it is by her condemnation of mortal

is vast; see note 13 above, as well as Richardson, *ad Dem.* 480-482, 471f and 486f, and Càssola, pp. 30-31 ('Eleusi e la vita ultraterrena').

<sup>32</sup> For a similar view, see Scarpi, p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> Demeter's other encounters during the Demophon episode also affect her development. For example, from observing Demophon's sisters, the daughters of Celeus and Metanira, she sees that young girls *can* enter womanhood with confidence. Her encounter with Celeus' daughters provides her with a model for her own relationship with her daughter. Unable to see any benefits or blessings in Persephone's marriage to Hades (despite Helios' assertion that Hades is no unworthy son-in-law) she can however comfortably and graciously wish the daughters of Celeus good husbands and children. They are similar to the unwed Persephone in age and manner and marriageability, but are mortals and not "blood" relations of Demeter. Hence Demeter is able to see them "objectively" in their readiness for an end to innocence, for entry into marriage and sexuality.



folly. Thus, again on the dramatic level, she is motivated to a fuller knowledge of her own power and of her own prerogatives vis-a-vis the other gods. She no longer pretends to be mortal, or seeks consolation through the “adoption” of a mortal child, but instead exercises the power (inherently hers as a fertility goddess) to oppose the actions of Zeus and Hades in an *effectual* manner. Further, she is able not only to exercise this power, but also eventually to know and accept its fated limits: that, although her power to suppress fertility wins release for Persephone, it cannot undo the effect of the pomegranate seed. Her ability to predict how Persephone, in consequence of swallowing the seed, will spend each year contrasts markedly with an earlier utter ignorance of the details of the abduction of her daughter. Her awareness and acceptance of the partial but irreversible bond which Persephone now has with Hades also contrasts with an earlier unwillingness either to acknowledge or to accept any bond between them.

Demeter’s new awareness of her own power and her new acceptance of its limits have at least two broad implications for the community of mankind<sup>34</sup>. First, her own return to immortal form and her acceptance of failure to immortalize Demophon clarify the division between the human and the divine. Demeter now realizes the nature of her divinity and the degree of her separation from that which prevents Demophon and all mortals from attaining either immortality or divine knowledge. Thus she abandons the effort to immortalize Demophon, aware of the impossibility of its success, yet uses her power as a goddess to establish rites which bring him undying honor, and other mortals a happier portion after death. This exercise of her power is contingent upon her awareness of its limits. Her acceptance of the difference between the divine and the mortal recalls Zeus’ resigned acceptance of his son Sarpedon’s mortality in II.419ff. What keeps Zeus from rescuing his son Sarpedon —and hence behaving like a shortsighted human father— is an awareness of the total picture

<sup>34</sup> The myth benefits both a community within the text (e.g., the Eleusians and the larger community of men and gods) and, by implication, a community of believers outside the text who encounter the *Hymn* and its events as part of their culture (e.g., the archaic Greek society). The present authors have treated this distinction between audiences (or beneficiaries) in connection with Lévi-Strauss’ “canonical formula” in a paper entitled ‘Many Meanings, one Formula, and the Myth of the Aloades’, *Semiotica* 29 1/2, 1980, pp. 39-52.



and of what will happen if he, of all the gods, starts acting like a human. Hera reminds Zeus of the cosmic chaos which such behavior will effect. In both the Sarpedon and the Demophon episodes a god comes to accept the limits of his or her power. In Demeter's case this acceptance receives even more emphatic expression later on in her acquiescence to Persephone's destiny.

A second implication of Demeter's new awareness and new acceptance is that it assures within the mythic narrative a dependable, permanent, cyclic fertility of crops. That this myth and others of its type address the issue of cyclic fertility is obvious and has been thoroughly discussed by others<sup>35</sup>. The return of Persephone in itself symbolizes the return of crops, though Demeter's actual restoration of the grain takes place a little later in the narrative. What is clear from our analysis is the contingency of this permanent cyclicity on Demeter's willingness to accept the binding power of the pomegranate seed. It is Demeter's acceptance of her daughter's intermittent residence in the underworld, as much as Hades' and Zeus' recognition of Demeter's prerogatives, that assures cosmic stability and predictability<sup>36</sup>. Because of it her power over grain is no longer ill-defined and easily threatened (e.g., by Hades and Gaia in collusion with Zeus) or exercised in an erratic manner (by Demeter herself). And since Demeter gains the pivotal awareness crucial to the resolution of this conflict through her confrontations in the Demophon episode, the centrality of that episode becomes quite clear.

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<sup>35</sup> See, among others, Richardson, pp. 12ff and 258ff and Kirk, pp. 197ff and 221ff for a discussion of similar myths from various cultures.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Scarpi, pp. 74-75, who, in a similar vein, points out that after Hades' intrusion into the purely feminine sphere of flower-picking, "the cosmic harmony—which has accompanied the scene of flower-picking, is broken, and such a fracture corresponds to total *akosmia*". (authors' transl.) However, Demeter's plan to regain Persephone, Persephone's ingestion of the pomegranate seed, and (in our view) Demeter's acceptance of the fruit's binding power, together establish a new cosmic order.