

An Unexpected Epiphany: Hades in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*

This paper examines the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and its narrative complexities to argue that Hades performs an erotic epiphany in the opening of the *Hymn* which follows, or perhaps prototypes, the standard erotic pursuit (e.g., Europa, Tithonos, Ganymede). Hades' abduction of Persephone is the catalyst which sets the entire narrative in motion and allows each of the gods in the *Hymn* to fully manifest their own powers under Zeus' rule. In opposition to traditional interpretations, the beginning of the *Hymn* shows that Hades is not characterized differently than the traditional "Olympians," despite his role as Lord of the Underworld. The upper and lower realms were intertwined in the Greek mindset. If in fact, as Jenny Strauss Clay (2006, 207) has argued, the *Hymn* follows the tradition of Hesiod, then Zeus' facilitation of a marriage between Hades and Persephone becomes logical as it continues Zeus' incorporation of the Underworld into his rule.

Hades' epiphany characterizes him more like the Olympians than is usually recognized. This similarity is emphasized through the narratological parallels between Hades' and Demeter's epiphanies. The difficulty here lies in defining divine epiphanies; there have been many definitions proposed over the years, and each one favors one central aspect over others. In response, my paper combines other scholars' theories to consider epiphany with a more comprehensive approach. I see four key features of an epiphany: a power dynamic, divine purpose, delayed epiphany, and the epiphanic moment. By defining these features in more detail, I then explain how Hades' actions can be categorized as an epiphany with erotic intention.

The power dynamic is essential in any epiphany, as it is the prime example of a god exploiting the weaknesses of mortals. In the beginning of the *Hymn*, Persephone has not yet

achieved her divine *τιμή*, so she is cast in a naïve and childlike role; thus, Hades is more powerful than Persephone during this scene. Hades' intentions move the epiphany into the realm of *eros*, as he plans to make Persephone his wife. It is a standard feature of erotic pursuits and abductions to take place in a meadow (Richardson 1974, 140; Foley 1994, 33-4), as such locations are closely linked with the sexual maturation of girls (Sourvinou-Inwood 1991, 65-8). The delayed epiphany, or what Turkeltaub (2003, 37-8) calls the "Hint of Divinity," is uniquely employed here, as Hades' physical appearance is described only in line 347 as being dark- or blue-haired, *κvanoχαῖτα*. In place of Hades' description, the author instead focuses on the divine nature of the narcissus: it has 100 heads (*ἑκατὸν κάρα*, 12), it has a lovely scent (*κηώδης τ' ὀσμῆ*), and it is described as *σέβας*, an object inspiring reverential awe. By making the epiphanic moment not explicit in the *Hymn*, the poet subverts the audience's expectations by describing the narcissus instead of Hades. The epiphanic moment is marked by the motifs of revelation and recognition; Hades appears only to Persephone, and it is implied that she recognizes her abductor and his intentions, though it is not part of the narrative. The climax of the epiphanic moment continues the reversal by having Hades reveal and recognize Persephone's new *τιμή* as his wife instead of revealing his own identity and motivations.

By acknowledging Hades' epiphany, we gain a more complete view and a deeper understanding of the Underworld. The idea that the upper and lower realms were fully distinct from one another distracts from the complexity of the relations between them. In Hesiod, we see just how accessible the Underworld was for the gods. Zeus himself descends to the Underworld twice: first to liberate the Cyclopes, then the Hundred-Handers, and brings them both "back up to the light once again" (626). This acceptance and incorporation of the Underworld is what sets Zeus' reign apart from his predecessors'. Thus, his consent to the marriage of Persephone to

Hades continues his recognition of the power, influence, and importance the Underworld has in the cosmos. When the epiphany of Hades is accepted, it allows for a greater understanding of the potential motivation behind the characters' actions in the poem.

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