

The Wise Maiden: Narrative Time and the Epithets of Persephone
in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter

There is much about the role of Persephone that we may learn by a close analysis of her epithets and modifiers in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Although Persephone as a character does not take a leading role in the narrative, still her epithets and actions play an important part in both the goddess and her mother acquiring their divine privileges. The epithets of the *Hymns* have garnered some attention in scholarship, but scholarly study of epithets has largely focused on the Homeric epics. Scholars have previously considered epithets of objects, places, and people in their analyses of Homeric texts. In his commentary on the *Hymn*, Richardson includes a section in his introduction on the use of formulae, in which he makes two important points: [1] he notes that there are no doublets in the epithets of Persephone, which he determines “points to a genuine system,” and [2] he suggests that the poet of the Hymn may have created a new formula in order to refer to Zeus (Richardson 1974: 47-9). In his chapter on time in the *Homeric Hymns*, Nünlist gives an explanation of the narrative perspective employed by the poet of the *Hymn to Demeter*. He states that the narration of the *Hymn to Demeter* is subsequent singulative narration alone; that is, “the narrator recounts once what happened once in the past” (Nünlist 2007: 53), and refers to moments during which the privileges of Persephone are described by characters as being proleptic, or out of the scope of the fabula (Nünlist 2007: 61). He, however, does not take into account the epithets of the goddess in relation to the time of the narrative. Additionally, Vivante excludes the *Hymns* from his analysis altogether, and rightly so because they have been dated by many as being significantly later than the epics (Janko 1982; Garner 2005: 388). However, the *Hymn to Demeter* is an archaic poem with many similarities to the epic poems, therefore Vivante’s method is relevant to an analysis of the *Hymn* because, as Richardson

notes, many of the epithets used in the Hymn are variations on Homeric formulae (Richardson 1974: 46-52). There has been no comparative study of Persephone's epithets as they relate to the general Homeric corpus.

I propose that the epithets of Persephone function as an indicator of the character of the goddess beyond the scope of the narrative. Her future role as Hades' wife and queen of the underworld are referred to proleptically by the narrator at crucial moments within the narrative. Of particular interest to this analysis are the epithets: δαίφρων ("wise" 359) and περίφρων ("wise" 370). These terms relate to their narrative context in an odd way: Persephone is described as "wise" in line 370, at the same time Hades has the intention to deceive someone (perhaps Persephone), as indicated by the term λάθρη ("with a trick") in line 372. The epithet, περίφρων, reaches beyond its narrative context and extends beyond the story of the *Hymn*. I will first take into account the various epithets of Persephone represented in the *Hymn*. Then, I will compare the epithets that I consider to be referring to a time beyond the narrative context by discussing representations of women in epic contexts to whom the term περίφρων is applied, particularly Eurykleia and Penelope. I will conclude with a detailed analysis of the primary scene (357-74) in which the epithets of Persephone are pointing to a future time, past the ending of the present narrative.

Working Bibliography

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