REVISING OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*: DRAMATIZING THE MYTHICAL IN MARY SHELLEY'S *PROSERPINE*

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ABSTRACT

This contribution intends to assess the web of intertextual references in Mary Shelley's drama *Proserpine* (1820), an early example of Romantic interest in revisionist mythology. The few critical efforts on the text focus on its transposition of the Ovidian narrative and its proto-feminist instances of mythical revisionism. Shelley's adaptation primarily concerns characterization, structure and intended audience. In light of Ostriker's (1980) suggestion that revisionist myth-making in women's literary production constitutes a significant reshaping of shared culture and personal identity, *Proserpine* generally reads as a tale of defiance against patriarchal violence. The thoroughness of the existing scholarship on its portrayal of gender performance calls for an evidence-based study of the text as a literary adaptation. With reference specifically to Ovid's episode of Proserpine's rape in the *Metamorphoses* 5.346 ff, I intend to assess Shelley's analogue in light of its performative component.

1. ADAPTING OVID FOR THE ROMANTIC AUDIENCE/READERSHIP

The rape of Proserpine and her mother's quest to bring her back met great fortune in the classical world[1]. Demeter and Persephone in

[1] In the *Fasti* Ovid advises his reader of the scarce novelty of the myth of Ceres and Proserpine (*Fast.* 4, 418). The first full occurrence is the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, while the most well known is in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*. The myth is attested in Homer: *Iliad* 14, 326; *Odyssey* 5, 125 ff.; 11, 217; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; Hesiod: *Theogony* 912-914; Diodorus Siculus: 5, 2 ff.; Cicero: *Against Verres* 6, 48, 106; *Orphic Hymn* 29, 2; Apollodorus:

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Greece, Ceres and Proserpine in Rome, Kore, later Pherrephatta in Attic and Damater in Dorian and Aeolic dialects, the two goddesses are featured – or mentioned – in literary works of antiquity and modernity. In her study on literary adaptation, Sanders (2016) offers a concise definition of rewritings:

> "Adaptation and appropriation are dependent on the literary canon for the provision of shared repository of storylines, themes, characters and ideas upon which their creative variations can be made. The spectator or reader must be able to participate in the play of similarity and difference between the original sources or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text, though an experience in and of itself of the adaptation need not to require this prior knowledge" (p. 57).

The process of adaptation consists in reworking pre-existent narrative matter by operating aesthetical and structural modifications to the text to offer some form of commentary on the source. In shaping an intertextual reference, the rewriting of a canonical precursor can be explicitly referred to as such within the text, it can present itself as a reinterpretation, or it can quote or paraphrase the original. In terms of content, adaptation is an amplificatory or reductive procedure engaged in expansion, contraction or interpolation of meaning. By focusing on characters or plot elements left unexplored in the source, or by telling a story from a different

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Bibliotheca 1, 5, 1 ff.; Lucan: *Civil Wars* 6, 698-700, 739-743; Ovid: *Fasti* 4, 419 ff.; *Metamorphoses* 5, 346 ff.; Hyginus: *Fabula* 146; Claudian: *On the Rape of Proserpine*; Nonnus of Panopolis: *Dionysiaca* 6, 1-154; Pausanias: 1, 14, 2; 37, 2; 3, 5, 2, 35, 4; 8, 15, 3; Conon: *Narrations* 15; Scholiast on Aristophanes' *The Knights* 785; Lactantius Placidus on Statius' *Thebaid* 5, 346 ff.; Scholiast on Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* 1590; Scholiast on Pausanias: 6, 1, 1 and 1, 38, 5; Scholiast on Hesiod's *Theogony* 914; Scholiast on Theocritus 2, 2; Servius on Virgil's *Georgics* 1, 39 (Foley 2013: 46; Graves 1960: 92; Grimal 1958: 362).

perspective, rewritings produce meaning in light of one's authorial vision (Sanders 2016: 23).

With the term 'analogue' Cartmell (1999: 24) understands a stand-alone cultural product which appears intelligible even without prior knowledge of the source; thus a certain degree of familiarity with the antecedents enriches the reading. Tracing intertextual relations between two or more narratives brings pleasure to the reader (Sanders 2016: 33), as reading adaptations extend the gratification connected to the memory of the first encounter with the text. Thus, adaptations reconstruct and revitalise past reading (or visual) experiences through recollection of the actual text or – as it often happens with classics – of a shared, circulated memory of the narrative. Romantic myth-making necessarily involved re-reading of canonical precursors, which were often (as in Pope, Dryden or Swift) adapted, sometimes distorted, to fit in a narrative where mythical references function as rhetorical devices, used to achieve variety in style and to flaunt erudition. Later English Romanticism slowly took parts with the catalogic rewritings of its antecedents, claiming universal validity for its archetypes by dramatising classical narratives. Mary Shelley belongs to that second generation of English Romantics whose poetic imagination was slowly reawakened by antiquity, which was revised in order to restore it (Koszul 1922: xiv).

The date of composition of *Proserpine* spans between the last week of April and the first week of May 1820[2]. In the manuscript addition to his *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Thomas Medwin recalls how Mary had "been writing some little dramas on classical subjects, one of which was the *Rape of Proserpine,* a very graceful composition" in

[2] Primary evidence is the entry in her journal: "Wednesday 3rd [Of May]. Write – finish Pxxxxxxe [Proserpine] – Read Livy & Robinson Crusoe – Spend the evening at Casa Silva" (for a critical edition, see Feldman – Scott-Kilvert 1995). The drama was first edited for publication in 1920 by A. Koszul, together with the unpublished mythological drama *Midas*.

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the summer of 1820[3]. *Proserpine* is a textbook case of Ovidian analogue, Shelley having read the *Metamorphoses* a week prior to completing *Proserpine* (Feldman 1995). At the turn of the century, Ovid's version of the myth became extremely dear to Romantic poets across Europe[4]. The tale deploys the quintessential Romantic plot: "An act of oppression by a formidable tyrant (Hades) severs the child from maternal nature, but the relationship is restored by nature's power" (Louis 2009: 34)[5]. In crafting an analogue to the *Metamorphoses* Shelley draws directly from the Ovidian text and sets to correct the flaws she sees in its representation of Proserpine. Shelley updates the myth for her contemporary audience, orienting her narrative towards a female public: a female perspective on the tale intentionally diverts her focus away from the sexual violence and sets it on the interactions between the female characters. Proserpine's and Ceres' primary concern is not that of the violated virginity, but the wish to reunite after a forceful separation caused by an overbearing male agent. Broadly speaking, Shelley closely follows the unfolding of the Ovidian narrative while voicing the identity of otherwise silent female characters and silencing the two male figures of power. Crafting an analogue to classical narratives obviously entails a relocation of

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[3] Medwin also makes mention of Percy's contribution to the text, "the exquisite fable of Arethusa and the Invocation to Ceres" (Clemit 2004). Mary Shelley included the lyric in her edition of his *Poetical Works* (1839) among the "Poems written in 1820", having already specified "Pisa, 1820" on *Arethusa* in her edition of P. Shelley's *Posthumous Poems* (1824). Mary Shelley published first a truncated version of *Proserpine* in the *Winter's Wreath* (1832)

[4] Ovid's narrative inspired great personalities of the time, among whom Goethe and Schiller, who wrote respectively the *Proserpina* in 1777 or the *Klage des Ceres* in 1796 (Felgentreu 2010: 260).

[5] Those British Romantics who engaged in revising the myth embraced such interpretation; an example is Bryan Waller Procter's *Rape of Proserpine* (1820), published the same year as Shelley's drama. In his version rape is romanticized to the extent of establishing a correspondence between sexual violence and sexual awakening. Proserpine reacts ambivalently to Pluto's seductions, verbally manifesting her attraction to him but then suppressing her desire; her rejection brings the god, a sinister Byronic hero, to take her by force (Hexter 2010: 594).

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content in a new language and cultural scenario as well as its transfer within the paradigm of a new genre. The purpose of this work[6] is to discuss in depth the elements of continuity and innovation in *Proserpine* with respect to its source, bearing in mind Sanders' (2016: 7) admonishment to steer away from uncompromising criteria of fidelity and infidelity in the adapting process, opting for a reading in terms of creative effort.

2. VOICING SILENCES AND SILENCING VOICES

Percy Shelley intended his *Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love* (1818) to be Mary's instruction on the Athenian way of life. Together with slavery, the greatest cultural failure of the Greek civilization was its valuing man over women by custom and law. Percy observes how Athenians granted the male sex[7] the highest cultural refinement, while the intellectual education of women was to very little extent superior to that of slaves and savages[8]. Mary endorsed her husband's criticism and extended it

[6] The relatively few studies on the play focus on the ideological implications of Shelley's rewriting. Gubar (1989) offers a preliminary study of Shelley and gender, reading the myth revision as symptomatic of Shelley's longing for an ancient world order in which so-called feminine qualities were cherished over masculine rationality and control. In her most recent contribution on *Proserpine*, Carlson (2007) discusses in particular Richardson (1993) and Cox (1996) and proposes again a series of remarks made in her previous study (1999) on the play. Also see Shima (1998), Caretti (2001), Clemit (2004), Louis (2009) and Weber (2007). I consider Pascoe's (2006) overview on the play the most complete and balanced contribution so far.

[7] Percy Shelley employs the term sex to indicate what contemporary scholarship addresses as gender.

[8] The larger classical tradition constructed on the Aristotelian view of the feminine: by observing unfertilized birds, Aristotle asserts that sperm only vehicles the rational soul, and the male instills life in the passive element of the female (Horowitz 1976: 194). In *Moralia* 48, 145e, Plutarch proposes again the

to Ovid, to whom she explicitly refers as an interpreter of heathen mythology (Richardson 1993: 127-128). Such critical relation to classical representation of gender performance in the antiquity explains Shelley's engendering of the myth. In this perspective, her chief deviations from Ovid's narrative concern the characters: the act of voicing silent characters in the original, specifically Proserpine; the identification of otherwise unnamed female characters; the absence of male characters of power on the page/stage or their substitution with a female equivalent counterpart. Shelley crafts a script with only female characters[9], eliminating Jove and Pluto from the scene and substituting Hermes with Iris, his female counterpart.

In *Proserpine*, the series of events leading to the aetiology of the change of seasons unfold in parallel to the original. The first act opens with the separation of Proserpine and Ceres, who warns her daughter and her companions, Ino and Eunoe, not to wander off. The two nymphs leave Proserpine unguarded to pluck more flowers, and fail to find her upon their return. Ceres, desperate and enraged, declares she won't rest until she finds her daughter. In the second act Arethusa tells Ceres of Pluto's abduction of her daughter. The goddess invokes Jove to ask for help, and Iris appears to relate his response: Proserpine can return to the Upper Air provided that she has not eaten food of the Underworld. Ascalaphus, a shadow of Hell, exposes Proserpine. Ceres and the nymphs decide to stay in the Underworld with Proserpine if she is not to leave, and swear to bring with them the fecundity of the earth. Iris brings a message from Jove, who cannot let the goddess deprive the earth of their fruit and gives his consent to Proserpine's return for six months a year.

Aristotelian assumption that women need man's assistance to acquire a disciplined intellect. For further reference, see Fonseca (2013: 75).

[9] The only male character in the play is Ascalaphus, who disrupts the union of the female community portrayed in the drama. The character serves the purpose to defend gender hierarchy: "He is almighty! who shall set the bounds / To his high will?" (vv. 624-625) (Purington 1999: 398).

In the *Metamorphoses*, the cluster of words apt to characterize Proserpine belongs to the semantic field of childhood and childish behaviour[10]. The audience first hears of her as she *ludit* (v. 5, 392), as she plucks flowers with *puellari studio* (v. 5, 393). As Dis seizes the girl, *tantaque simplicitas puerilibus adfuit annis: / haec quoque virgineum movit iactura dolorem* (v. 5, 400-401): in her lack of preparation for events outside the protected environment of childhood, Proserpine fails to understand the extent of the danger she is in and suffers for the loss of her flowers as much as for her abduction.

Such is not the case in *Proserpine*. In the play, the characters also refer to her as child[11]: "lovely child" (v. 17), "child of Heaven" (v. 301; 499), "much-loved child" (v. 310), "lost child" (v. 342), "fairest child of heaven"[12] (v. 361), and "child of light" (v. 544; 554)[13]. Nevertheless, this Proserpine is not as unprepared and naive: the

[10] The myth of Persephone's abduction is the only of her myths which entails her representation as naive maid. Her lack of autonomy is a trait that disappears in her representations as queen of the Underworld. Queen Persephone has left the reign of girlhood to enter womanhood, as exemplified by the myth in which she takes Adonis, entrusted to her by Aphrodite, as her lover. She often mediates between the requests of those who come to the Underworld and the sternness of her husband, as in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. She is extremely merciful: her Homeric epithets are *agaue*, venerable, and *apaine*, awesome (Burkert 1985: 159). She especially welcomes in her realm Heracles due to his initiation to the Eleusinian Mysteries (Edmonds III 2003: 190).

[11] Poignantly, the term 'child' occurs 24 times to refer to Proserpine, while the less affectionate 'daughter', which bears no age connotation, only 6 times.

[12] Shelley displays a lack of consistency in using the capitol letter for the word *Heaven(s).* The term occurs as *heaven* 7 times and as *Heaven* 8 times.

[13] I quote the text, indicating the page, from *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley. Electronic Edition*, Volume 2, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, InteLex Corporation, 2004, vol. 2, edited by Nora Crook with Pamela Clemit. Such edition is based on the facsimile edition by Charles E. Robinson in the Bodleian MS Shelley adds, available in Bennett, B.T. (1992), *Mary Shelley's Plays and her Translation of the Cenci Story*, in *Bodleian MSS. Shelley adds. d. 2 and adds. e. 13*, New York and London, Garland Publishing, pp. 22-153. Crook's edition presents substantive variants from *Proserpine* (1831) in the appendix.

goddess asks her mother for the tale of Syringe and Daphne, both mythical figures who relinquish their human form in their flight from male perpetrators of sexual violence. Ceres delegates the tasks to the nymphs; as Ceres leaves, Ino decides to "repeat the tale which most I loved; / Which tells how the lily-crowned Arethusa, [...] quitted her native Greece / Flying the liquid God Alpheus" (vv. 92-95). She manifests her enjoyment for Ino's tale, as the nymph "beguiled an hour / with poesy that might make pause to list / the nightingale in her sweet evening song" (vv. 189-191). On the episode of Alpheus' pursuit and rape of Arethusa[14], Carlson (1999: 360) builds her argument on Proserpine's desire of transport, of being "beguile[d]"; listening to the myth causes her to deal prematurely with sexual realities. By asking to hear once again the tales of Syringe, Daphne and Arethusa, Proserpine shows familiarity with those tales of sexual violence. Caretti (2000: 199) observes that the image of Alpheus chasing Arethusa "As an eagle pursuing / a dove to its ruin" (vv. 150-151) projects images of rapacious male desire into the protected realm of childhood. Her sexual awareness presents the reader with a different Proserpine from the Ovidian antecedent. Rather than from childhood, Shelley stages the goddess' transition from adolescence to adulthood.

By showing what Proserpine has lost and providing the character with a background story, Shelley enhances the dramatic force of *Proserpine* through the acknowledgment of the goddess' doom. Caretti (2001: 198) rightfully points out how Shelley, in crafting Proserpine, created a whole new character for her play, a woman with

[14] Carlson (2007: 181) compares the telling of the episode in the *Metamorphosis* (vv. 5, 572-641) with Ino's song (by P.B. Shelley) in *Proserpine* (vv. 82-181): "In Ovid, Arethusa describes her rape to mother Ceres only after Ceres has learned of and accepts Proserpine's fate. Arethusa also dwells on the chase, not its end in rape, in fact stopping at the point where Diana cleaves the earth to facilitate her escape. In Shelley, Ino sings Arethusa's song to Proserpine immediately after Ceres departs to host Jove's dinner party […], and she details both pursuit and aftermath" without showing any enjoyment for the encounter. To Carlson, the hearing of the tale is eroticized.

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willpower, thus updating, to some extent, the mythical occurrences in the classical world. In Ovid, Proserpine is an object of trade in the hand of greater powers: Venus uses her to extend her dominion on the Tartarus and to implicitly assert her power over Diana's and Athena's exemplary display of virginal virtue (vv. 5, 370-377); Dis seizes her for *properatus amor*, a result of Cupid's arrow (v. 5, 396); Proserpine becomes the object of contention between her mother and her aggressor, and the higher power of their brother Jove is set to deliberate on his own daughter's fate, which is ultimately put in the hands of the Parcae (v. 5, 532). Proserpine fails to express directly her dread (or her acceptance of her fate), which Arethusa later describes to her mother (vv. 5, 504-508). Ovid's character has no line, and is completely silent, except for her cry for help, as she calls *et matrem et comites, sed matrem saepius* (v. 5, 397)[15]. In her first draft Shelley grants her Proserpine 134 lines, in which she mainly interacts with the nymphs Eunoe and Ino[16]. She expresses curiosity and interest for myth telling ("And [...] tell once again / The combat of the Titans and the Gods", vv. 5-6; "And, Ino, sweet, [...] / Repeat in verses sweet the tale which says / How great Prometheus from Apollo's car / Stole heaven's fire [...] / Or the more pleasing tale of Aphrodite", vv. 61-

[15] Shelley mimics the passage in the second act, in which Arethusa tells Ceres: "I saw the King of Hell in his black car, / And in his arms he bore your fairest child, / Fair as the moon encircled by the night, – / But that she strove, and cast her arms aloft, / and cried, 'My Mother!'" (vv. 451-455).

[16] The active participation of Cyane and Arethusa within the tale appears to be an Ovidian invention. To Zissos (1999: 98) Calliope employs a specific strategy to gain the favour of the judges, the nymphs Pierides in order to win the contest, that is, ascribing to the nymphs a prominent role in the narrative. While in the *Hymn to Demeter*, in Claudian's *De Raptu Proserpinae* and in Ovid's *Fasti* the nymphs are assigned no lines, in the *Metamorphoses* their prominence is made evident in the extent of their direct speeches. The nymphs speak 90 lines, while gods and mortals together only 34. Despite the suppression of Cyane's character, Shelley preserves Ovid's innovation in her play, where Arethusas's role is made more prominent and, the unnamed companions of Proserpine at in the opening of the myth are identified as Ino and Eunoe. The nymphs speak 300 lines.

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66), fear ("Ah, linger yet awhile! A fearful dream / Spread terror o'er my yester-night's repose. / Its memory haunts me now. [...] but if I should be hurled, Thee absent, to the dark Tartarian gulph, / Nor ever visit earth and the again!", vv. 30-36), despair ("Oh! can immortals weep? / And can a Goddess die as mortals do, / Or live & reign where it is death to be?", vv. 584-586).

In both versions of the myth Proserpine expresses her wish to leave the Underworld to return to her mother. In the *Metamorphoses*, Cyane describes to Ceres the anguish of Proserpine, but also her pride as queen of the Underworld: *illa quidem tristis neque adhuc interrita vultu, / sed regina tamen, sed opaci maxima mundi, / sed tamen inferni pollens matrona tyranni* (vv. 5, 506). There is no corresponding recount in *Proserpine*, yet the goddess herself, after ascending the earth, provides her mother and the nymphs with a dark description of her stay in the Underworld. I do not agree with Carlson's (1999) reading of the drama as Proserpine's attempt to get away from her mother's surveillance. To Carlson, Proserpine eats the pomegranate to prolongue the pleasure of the freedom she found in the Tartarus (p. 358; p. 360). Captivating as it is, an interpretation in this direction seems to discard any textual instance of Proserpine's wish to reunite with her mother. Proserpine's initial request to Ceres to stay, which Carlson explains as a way to link "the presence of the mother to her absence" (p. 356), finds its textual counterpart in the second act. As the two goddesses embrace under the watch of the Shades of Hell, Proserpine utters: "Then I again behold thee, Mother dear" (v. 517), and then "I am for ever thine, oh, Mother!" (v. 549). The goddess tells her mother and the nymphs how she has escaped "from hateful Tartarus, / The abode of furies and all loathed shapes / That thronged around me, making hell more black" (vv. 520-522). Proserpine defines herself as "The rescued daughter of your emperor [...] returning from the night / Of her abhorred abode" and, after Ascalaphus reveals her infraction, as "hapless Proserpine, lost to herself / When she quits you for gloomy Tartarus" (vv. 587-588). After Jove deliberates on Proserpine's fate, Mary Shelley polarizes the

happiness connected to the earth and her mother, and the sadness associated with the Underworld: "Six months with thee, / Each moment freighted with an age of love: / And the six short months in saddest Tartarus / Shall pass in dreams of swift returning joy" (vv. 655-658). Even if the repetition of the verbs *wander* and *stray* were "giving some indication of why this daughter is not eager to cling to her mother's side" (Carlson, 1999: 358), textual indications of the girl's wish to return to the upper air seem to outnumber the latter.

Shelley verbalizes Proserpine's attempt of escaping the Underworld through deception with a lie. In Ovid *ieiunia virgo / solverat*, as, unaware of the consequences, Proserpine bites a *pomum* and eats seven seeds (vv. 534-535). Jove inquiries about whether the girl ate any Tartarian food but Proserpine does not answer. Ascalaphus alone has seen the deed and *indicio reditum crudelis ademit* (v. 542). In Shelley's transposition, Iris communicates Jove's decree and, in fear that Proserpine is no "child of light" no longer, asks her if she has lost her "attribute of Heaven / by such Tartarian food as must forever / Condemn thee to be Queen of Hell and Night" (vv. 553-547). Proserpine lies, by explicitly denying her infraction: "No, Iris, no, – I still am pure as thee: / Offspring of light and air, I have no stain / Of Hell" (vv. 548-550). As in Ovid, Ascalaphus exposes the now Queen of the Underworld to question the legitimacy of her return to earth: "Proserpine, call to mind your walk last eve, / When as you wandered in Elysian groves, [...] you plucked its [*sic*] fruit, / You ate of a pomegranate's seeds" (vv. 560-571). Even if in both cases the goddess fails to trick her oppressor, in Shelley's drama Proserpine actively defies a higher power to rescue herself with speech: words become tools of resolution.

Ceres first appears in the *Metamorphoses* after Proserpine's abduction, *pavida* (v. 438), in search of her daughter night and day: *illam non udis veniens Aurora capillis / cessantem vidit, non Hesperus* (vv. 440-441); Ceres' search for Proserpine continues for 30 lines. Shelley once again expands the action, as Ceres' sense of danger quickly escalates into fear: "Where is my daughter? Have I ought to

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dread? / Where does she stray? […] I fear my child is lost" (vv. 334-335); "Alas! My boding heart, – I dread the worst." (v. 350); "She is immortal, – yet unusual fear / Runs through my veins" (vv. 353-354). In the *Metamorphoses* Ceres' reaction to the loss of her daughter entails all the actions associated with the cultural mourning ritual of antiquity[17], such as laments, chest beating and the violent pulling of hair[18]. Shelley's Ceres is a much more defiant character, who refuses to yield to Jove's omnipotence as the "tyrant of the Gods" (v. 594) (Purington 1999: 398). Shelley excludes Jove from the play: he is granted no direct speech, nor does the god ever appear on stage. Also Pluto, whose appearance in Ovid is limited to Proserpine's abduction, never walks the stage. Rather than rush to Olympus as in the *Metamorphoses* (vv. 5, 511-512), Ceres evokes Jove from her flowery plain to plea for her case. Richardson remarks that the character refuses to accept Proserpine's fate, as Jove orders her to, and responds to the decree with a threat: "Restore my child, or let all heaven sink, / and the fair world be chaos once again!" (vv. 470-471). If in the *Metamorphoses* Jupiter's mercy brings the plot to resolution, in Shelley Ceres' ultimatum corners Jove: "If she departs / I will descend with her – the Earth shall lose/its proud fertility and Erebus / Shall bear my gifts throughout th' unchanging year. / Valued till now by

[17] On the connection between hair-pulling and trauma in cultural and psychiatric terms, cf. Lewis (2013). The introductory section on hair pulling as a cultural mourning ritual specifically focuses on the act as expression of grief in the antique while offering relevant bibliographical indications regarding its iconography.

[18] *Quam simul agnovit, tamquam tunc denique raptam / scisset, inornatos laniavit dive capillos / et repetita suis percussit pectora palmis* (5, 471-473). Hinds (1987: 85-86) suggests that Ovid makes an allusion to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*: "in each case the goddess, perceiving an indication of Persephone's plight […], expresses her grief by tearing in one case the veil on her hair and in the other her hair itself. The *Hymn's* mention of the fact that she does this with her own hands is transferred in the *Metamorphoses* to a second violent action on the next line", the chest beating. Mary Shelley discontinues the act of hair pulling and chest beating, most likely with the intention to update the externalization of grief in the character according to mourning practices of the time. See Schor (1994).

thee, tyrant of Gods!" (vv. 589-595). Not only does Ceres attack Jove verbally, but also threatens to deprive the earth of its fruit: condemning the earth to famine will eventually bring Jove's subject to stop worshipping him, thus condemning him to oblivion. Here Shelley hints at the spread tradition according to which Jove allows Proserpine lo leave (even if temporarily) the Underworld out of fear of losing the offers of mortals. With Ceres' verbalization of a threat left unspoken in Ovid, speech is, once again, a means of resolution.

3. RESTORING THE *METAMORPHOSES*

The most striking instance of alteration in *Proserpine* with respect to the Ovidian narrative is the relocation of the internal audience. The fifth book of the *Metamorphoses* presents a complex layering of narrative within narrative[19], as the poet incorporates the tale of Proserpine in the outer frame of the singing contest between the nine daughters of Piereus and the Muses. Before reporting the rape of Proserpine (vv. 5, 385-424), Calliope introduces Ceres as the divinity of agriculture (vv. 341-345), offers a description of Sicily (vv. 5, 346-361), motivates Dis' presence on the upper air [20] (vv. 5, 359- 363) and

[19]For an introduction to this book, see the edition by Rosati (2009). The myths are put together while connected thought the main theme of the metamorphosis with a catalogue structure. The poet chains a set of old and new mythological episodes in the formal structure of the epos. Modelling its structure on the Alexandrine catalogue, with the distinctive use of the *ecphrasis*, Ovid foresees as main advantage that of allowing to graft genres and the variety of topic and style and the variety of the short tale. The presence of frames and the unbalanced length of the tales provides the poem with an asymmetrical structure, which manifests the Ovidian taste for asymmetry, and aids the overall impression of abundance (Von Albrecht 1998: 764).

[20] Hades rarely ascends the upper air, usually to attend some pressing business, as in this case, or to satisfy his lust. For example, Hades' attempt to seduce the nymph Minth is stopped by the intervention of a jealous Persephone, who tears

explains the origin of his enamourment (vv. 5, 364-384). For her *Proserpine* Shelley opts for an incipit *in medias res*: Proserpine begs her mother to stay, as Ceres is bound to leave for the Olympus, where she is awaited to serve food[21]. *The song of Arethusa*, Percy's contribution to the play, anticipates the upcoming rape of Proserpine[22], which happens off stage[23]. Ino informs the audience/reader the goddess is nowhere to be found, and together with Eunoe, after some disbelief, persists in her research for the following 96 lines. In the *Metamorphoses* rape dominates the tale: Arethusa tells her story to Ceres within the larger context of Calliope's song, being herself a victim of attempted rape, who tells Athena of the rape of Proserpine (Rosati 2002: 272). In *Proserpine* the abduction takes place after 267 lines and the already mentioned myth telling intentionally dilutes the narration in order to build up dramatic anticipation[24]. Shelley's play,

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the nymph into pieces and the turns her into mint; in similar circumstances, Persephone turns the nymph Leuce into a white poplar (Graves 1960: 121-123).

[21] Carlson (1999: 357) claims that "the play opens with separation, the surprising explanation for which establishes her mother phallic desire: Ceres leaves Proserpine Jove "commands" and "no one will eat till I dispense the food". Carlson associates Ceres' hurry to serve her brother Jove to their sexual history, as Ceres bore Jove Proserpine. Carlson offers *verbatim* the same interpretation in her larger study (2007) on *Proserpine, Mathilda* and trauma in Shelley's own mourning process. Nevertheless, I fail to see any sexual implication in the passage, where Shelley simply transfers to Ceres the tasks traditionally associated to Hebe, as in e.g. Hom. *Il.* 4, 2 (Laurens 1988), or to Ganymedes, as in Hom. *Il.* 20, 232 ff. and (Sölch 2008).

[22] Caretti (2001: 200) observes how this "poem within the play", integral part of Mary's original design of the dramatic structure, "performs not a psychological, but a dramaturgic function". Mary Shelley removes the lyric in 1832 for publication in *The Winter's Wreath*, since she had already printed it as Percy's work.

[23] Most contributions on *Proserpine* investigate on Shelley's decision not to display the rape. Mazzara (2003: 41) argues that being young girls the intended audience of the closet drama would motivate the shift of focus on the struggle between Ceres and Jove rather than on the rape.

[24] Caretti (2001: 202) observes how the separation between Ceres and Proserpine, instead of the rape, triggers the plot: "For Mary, the unfaltering scenery of the

observes Pascoe (2006: 186) leaves the nymphs and the reader/ audience in a state of anxious uncertainty as to why Proserpine cannot be found. Shima (1998) observes that Shelley employs a typically Gothic ploy in procrastinating the depiction of the rape, thus having the reader fearing for Proserpine's fate: "the 'grotesque submission' to Pluto is to a degree more effectively conveyed by 'silence' than by any eloquent description" (p. 59).

The generic shift from epic poem to closet drama allows Shelley to enhance the dramatic force of the myth through dialogue. The peculiarity of the closet drama as a genre lies in the fact that its dramatic potential is not tied to a successful stage performance. In the Romantic period, the independence from performers and staging attracted both male and female writers, who would create complex dramatic dialogues, which often investigated consciousness and self-identity (Posttlewait 2010: 282). Despite the generic assumption that Romanticism was a highly "undramatic" age, most writers ascribed to English Romanticism showed interest in dramatic literature, often writing dramas of their own: Wordsworth and Keats wished to write for the stage, Coledrige's *Remorse* was a great success, Scott translated Goethe and wished to stage his own play in London (Nuss 2012: 5). Mary converts a piece that was meant to be read or recited, such as the elegy, into a genre with the same modality of performance but different structural features. Richardson (1993: 126) highlights the virtual absence of soliloquies in *Proserpine*, a central Romantic device for representing isolated subjectivity, as in dramatic poems like Lord Byron's *Manfred* (1817) and Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). Male poets "invented their own formal and generic strategies for evading […] the 'monological' character of the single-voiced

plain is the theatre of a drama of separation, loss and reunion of which Ceres and Proserpine are the protagonists. Everything else that happens in the drama is not directly visible, takes place elsewhere, relegated off-stage, and is only learnt about […]. For Mary the myth does not centre on the rape scene, but on its dramatic effect first on the guardian nymphs, then in a crescendo on the mother who, unaware, returns in the evening to re-embrace her daughter".

lyric": a "mental theatre" which combines lyric and dramatic modes into the lyrical drama (p. 125). Despite the lack of soliloquies in *Proserpine*, Shelley emphasizes characterization over plot, a distinctive feature of male mental drama. The majority of the dramatic verse in *Proserpine* is other directed[25]: Mary Shelley stages subjectivity through dialogue, as the characters' descriptions of others' emotional reactions or of their own emotional state. Shelley crafts her narrative on dialogic exchanges between characters, diverting from her source: in Ovid the tale is told in a third person narrative (Shima 1998: 55). Ceres describes Proserpine's body language after Ascalaphus revelation: "Sweet Proserpine, my child, look upon me. / You shrink; your trembling form & pallid cheeks / Would make his words seem true which are most false confirms" (vv. 574-576). The audience/reader learns of Ceres reaction to Jove's ultimate verdict on Proserpine's fate from the girl's direct speech: "Dear Mother, let me kiss that tear which steals / Down your pale cheek altered by care and grief" (vv. 652-653): the dialogue between characters completes the few stage directions in the text focused on enhancing dramatic force in absence of physical performance[26].

[25] The non-dialogic parts of the tale are other directed as well: one is the tale of Arethusa Ino tells Proserpine, the other a prayer. Both Shelley's lyrics, in the *Song of Proserpine, While Gathering Flowers in the Plain of Enna* (1820), Proserpine invokes Mother Earth to bestow her divine influence on her as she does with flowers and leaves. See Charlesworth Gelpi (1992).

[26] To Pascoe (2006: 188) such intent is even more evident in her reworking instances for the publication in the *Winter Wreath*. In rewriting the most her earlier version of Ceres' departure scene, Shelley cuts 120 lines, especially from the story telling in act I, bearing in mind to enhance dramatic intensity with a theatrical imperative. Shelley adds Proserpine's thoughts on the pain of maternal abandonment, highlighting the self-dramatizing potential of this section.

4. "GATHERING FLOWERS": THE OTHER PROSERPINE(S)

Whether Shelley intended her play for a young or an adult audience, she certainly had an ideal educated reader in mind. Such intention is evident in the web of intertextual relations which holds the play together. It is necessary to remind the reader that Shelley does not make explicit reference to Ovid as her source, which is identifiable through the extra textual evidence of her journal. Aside from the adherence to the original plot, a close reading of the play displays a practice of rearranging elements of the Ovidian text within a reformed narrative. Shelley omits the Ovidian contextualization of *Proserpine* in Sicily, and with it the reference to the giant Typheus (vv. 346-358). Shelley manages to refer to Typheus at the end of act one, when Ceres is still in the dark about Proserpine's location: "I well might fear that-she had fallen a prey / To earth-born Typheus who might have arisen / And seized her as the fairest child of heaven, / That in his dreary caverns she lies bound". The goddess quickly realizes Typheus cannot be the abductor of her daughter, as "It is not so: All is as safe and calm / As when I left my child" (vv. 360-364). These few lines remind the Ovidian reader of the description of the giant sustaining the island on his shoulders and how his attempts to free himself cause earthquakes. An intertextual reference for its own sake, this passage plays no role in bringing the plot forward, nor to draw Ceres nearer to the truth: its function is purely dramatical, as it contrasts the goddess' illusion that her currents situation poses no threat to Proserpine. In this case tracing an intertextual relation between the source and the adaptation serves what Sanders (2016: 33) defines the purpose of the pleasure principle. Shelley intended her play for a cultivated readership that could single out literary references throughout the text[27]. It was customary for Percy to direct his writing to a selected audience, the "enlightened and refined", without wishing for the "vulgar" to read his writing. Percy's

[27] With the same goal, Shelley mentions in the first act a series of myths addressed in the first book of the *Metamorphoses*: Python (vv. 1, 438- 460), Daphne (vv. 1, 452-567) and Syringe (vv. 1, 689-720).

conception of his ideal readership results in elitism, as he intertwines his texts with terms and phrases in their original language[28]. In her edition of Percy's work, Mary Shelley subscribes to Shelley's elite poetics, as she argues that some of his poems require taste shared by few readers, minds which somehow resemble her husband's (Wolfson 1993: 43-44). Poetics of audience that distinguish between popular and elite is no peculiarity of the pair, but rather an example of conflicted Romantic attitude towards the contradictory role of poetry in society (p. 39). Mary Shelley's endorsement of Percy's stand on the matter results in poetry and fiction presenting literary echoes of both immediate and complex decoding.

The intertextual relations between the *Metamorphoses,* the myth of Proserpine, Shelley's homonymous play and her novel *Mathilda* (1820), Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (1308-1320) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) appear harder to disentangle. Caretti (2001: 205) detects in the Shadows of Hell a Dantesque echo. Aesculapius, an infernal river in Ovid, becomes a "shade of hell", a sort of Dantesque devil; the verses "There all is night! […] The air [is] windless, and all shapes are still" (vv. 529-540) call to mind the foul air of Dante's *Inferno*. The nymph Eunoe is a Shelleyan invention of Dantesque inspiration: the Eunoè is a river in the *Divine Comedy*, which Matelda first mentions in the *Purgatory*. The sight of Matelda evokes in *Dante agens*'s[29] imagination the purity of Proserpine before the abduction: "[…] Tu mi fai rimembrar dove e qual era / Proserpina nel tempo che perdette / La madre lei, ed ella primavera" (*Purg*. 28, 49-51)[30]. Percy

[28] In presenting *Epipsychidion* (1921) to his publisher, Percy specifically refers to Dante's *Vita Nova* (1294) as an example of literary work which is sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of educated readers, while remaining incomprehensible to the general public (Wolfson 1993: 43-44).

[29] For the state of the art on Dante's self representation in the *Comedy* and a discussion of Mazzoni's distinction between Dante-*auctor* and Dante-*agens*, see Ascoli (2008).

[30] I quote the text, indicating the canto and the lines, from Casini, T. – Barbi, S.A. – Momigliano, A., *Purgatorio XXVIII*, in Mazzoni, F. (ed.), *La Divina Commedia Purgatorio*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1973, pp. 395-416.

translated the opening 51 lines of the canto, interrupting the task right after the passage of Matilda gathering flowers[31] in the late autumn of 1820 (Koszul 1922: xii).

Mary rephrases Dante's description of Matelda in her novel *Mathilda*[32], written between November 1819 and February 1820, shortly before composing *Proserpine* (Pascoe 2006: 189). In editing Percy's *Song of Proserpine* for *The Winter Wreath*, Mary Shelley adds a stage direction which places Proserpine on the plain, where she sings as she gathers her flowers. In *Mathilda*, Matilda's identification with the character of Proserpine[33] while reading the *Purgatory* is explicit: "Often, when my wandering fancy brought by its various images now consolation and now aggravation of grief to my heart, I have compared myself to Proserpine who was gaily and heedlessly gathering flowers on the sweet plain of Enna, when the King of Hell snatched her away to the abodes of death and misery" (pp.19-20)[34]. Keach (1998: 66) pinpoints how the emphasis in Mathilda's identification with Proserpine superficially reads as an allusion to a predatory male figure. Carlson (2007) asserts that, as Shelley moved from *Mathilda* to *Proserpine*, her employment of the mythical figure changes with respect to representation of trauma[35]. In the drama,

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[31] Percy Shelley translated on paper those few lines after Mary wrote *Proserpine*. Nevertheless, critics agree on the fact that he might have suggested Mary to model her work after Dante's verses (Keach 1998: 71).

[32] For further insight in the intertextual links between the *Divine Comedy* and *Mathilda*, see Jacobus (1999).

[33] For a discussion of Matilda's identification with Proserpine, with reference to *Proserpine*, see Ready (2003).

[34] I quote the text from Clemit, P., *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley, Electronic Edition*, Volume 2, Virginia, InteLex Corporation, 2004.

[35] The place the drama occupies in Shelley's writing on death, loss and trauma is object of Carlson (2007) investigation of Shelley's mourning process. Carlson stresses how reading and writing was considered fundamental for the formation of individual and group identity for the three writers (pp. 98). As in *Mathilda* (1819), *The Journal of Sorrow* (1822) and *The Last Man* (1827), *Proserpine* consists of a literary disarticulation of trauma from tragedy. Matilda and Proserpine in particular represent a case of Shelley's tendency to revise grieving and sorrow

Proserpine's last word on her relegation to the Underworld entails acceptance rather than desperation[36] (p. 176). If Matilda feels cast into "the abodes of death and misery", Proserpine suggests her mother not to frame their separation as "misery", but as a "slight change / From our happy lot" (vv. 36-38).

Gubar (1979) detects a correspondence between *Proserpine* and *Paradise Lost*[37] when it comes to the trigger of the plot, the play being "a female version" of Milton's original work. In the original play, the "gold-ripe garder is lost not through any female sin, but because of the interference of a man" (p. 304). Percy intertwines in his translation of Dante a reference to Milton's Proserpine with the phrase "gathering flowers" (Keach 1998: 453). Ready (2003: 101) singles out Milton's reference to Proserpine gathering flowers "Not that fair field / Of Enna, where Proserpin gath'ring flow'rs / Herself a fairer Flow'r by

through writing. Carlson's work makes a point in tracing through her fictional and autobiographical writing a series of testimony of the therapeutic value writing had for Mary Shelley. Right after the death of her son William, Shelley describes her urge to "take up [her] pen", and let her thoughts flow, careful to stray away from "one [*sic*] subject that I must avoid": death. Mary Shelley writes in her diary how she would find consolation in writing – sometimes only temporarily: writing *Mathilda* would be sufficient to soothe her sorrow only momentarily. Even her characters are shown to process traumatic events of loss through writing: Matilda elaborates the attraction to her father and the mourning for his death by pouring out her anxiety through writing. Carlson defines Matilda's treatment of trauma as textual, as her writing (the novel is a fictional epistolary exchange) is intertwined with references to other texts.

[36] In this respect, Shelley mimics Ovid in Proserpine acceptance of becoming the Queen of the Underworld: *Vertitur extemplo facies et mentis et oris; / nam, modo quae poterat Diti quoque mesta videri, / laeta deae fronst est* (vv. 5, 568-570).

[37] Richardson (1993: 130) identifies an allusion to Milton's Satan ("The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n") in *Proserpine*: "INO: We will all leave the light and go with thee / In Hell thou shalt be girt by Heaven-born nymphs / Elysium shall be Enna, – thou'lt not mourn / Thy natal plain, which will have lost its worth / Having lost thee, its nursling and its Queen. ARET: I will sink down with thee; – my lily crown / Shall bloom in Erebus, portentous loss / To Earth, which by degrees will fade & fall In envy of our happier lot in Hell" (v. 599-607).

gloomy" (vv. 268-272)[38]. Ready (2003) argues that "The chiastic structure in Milton's lines ("gath'ring flow'rs," "flow'rs… gather'd") prefigures Shelley's network of reversals and displacements among daughter, father, and dead mother-wife"[39] (p. 102).

5. ANALOGUE, HOMAGE, MIMICRY

If a closer study of Mary Shelley's analogue to the *Metamorphoses* permits to evaluate the extent to which Shelley reinterpreted the canonical narrative of the myth, a thorough observation of Dante's and Milton's shadow on the text reveals the author's intention to craft a sophisticated piece of literature. Such sophistication primarily concerns the intricate web of literary homage which would bear relevance in the crossing field of Ovidian, Dantasque and Miltonian reception and Shelleyan studies, where Proserpine usually calls for attention in light of its relevance for the study of *Mathilda.* With the aim of proving Shelley's originality in revising the *Metamorphoses,* this study primarily bore evidence of a wise rearrangement of canonical echoes which are only visible to those readers who are well-versed in literary history. Ultimately, literary adaptations serve the purpose to revitalize the 'original' to give access to its content to new audiences. In giving a voice to otherwise silent characters, Shelley vitalizes details which the Ovidian sensitivity left in the shadow, thus crafting a cultural product prone to voice her concerns on engendered power structures to advocate for an inclusion in what was until then considered exclusive dominion of male writers, the mythical revisionism.

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[38] I quote the text, indicating the book and the lines, from Gordon, T. (ed.), *Paradise Lost: A Norton Critical Edition*, New York, Norton, 2005.

[39] For Ready these lines also "prefigure the mother's search for the daughter, which becomes in *Mathilda* the daughter's search for her lost father, her displaced mother, and her own identity as their daughter" (p. 102).

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