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Modern Myth Imaginings and Contemporary Motherhood

Abstract

This thesis applies Adrienne Rich's theory of re-vision and Ellen Handler-Spitz idea of a cyclical mother-daughter bond to the analysis of contemporary poetic interpretations of Demeter and Persephone. Traditional readings of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* often center male authority and Demeter's grief, while Persephone's perspective and her relationship with Demeter is overlooked. Adrienne Rich describes the importance of re-reading male-centered stories to acknowledge the prejudices against women, as well as to give the women their own voice. Poets such as Rita Dove and A. E. Stallings provide this re-vision— by writing in Persephone and Demeter's perspectives, they are able to tell their own story rather than have it told to them. Additionally, in these poems, their relationship is developed further, and Persephone is no longer portrayed as the eternal maiden as many know her as. Persephone takes on a maternal role in A. E. Stallings' works, fulfilling Spitz's mother-daughter cycle. This cycle is also described in Ada Limón and Carmen Gimenez's poetry on motherhood, as they describe their experiences as women in an intergenerational cycle. Through close analysis of voice and imagery, this thesis argues that the separation of mothers and daughters is a path of growth rather than one of severance, and by enacting Rich's revision, Persephone and Demeter's story reveals the enduring cyclical bond that links women across generations.