

Persephone's Legacy: The Archetype of the Trauma Survivor on the Alchemical Journey to
Sovereignty

Ava Valentino

Trauma Center Trauma Sensitive Certification Program Final Project

February 24, 2025

Introduction

This paper explores the archetypal journey of healing and recovery from trauma through the lens of Persephone's story, elevating the survivor's journey to a mythic framework with Judith Herman's three-stage recovery model and trauma theory as guiding structures. This analysis draws from ancient Greek and Roman literature to reconstruct her narrative told mainly through multiple translations of texts in the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, the Homeric and Orphic versions of the *Hymn to Demeter* in addition to other classical texts which reference her, to examine Persephone's evolution in response to the trauma of her abduction. For the sake of clarity, though she is known in Roman mythology as Proserpine, she will be referred to as Persephone. Her narrative will be reconstructed for illustrative purposes as each section of this paper pertains to her archetypal journey.

Using mythology as a lens is not a new method of examining the meaning of lived experiences. Storytelling has long served as a way to make sense of suffering, weaving heroic narratives of loss, resilience, and growth. Myths, in particular, provide cosmological meaning, revealing the mysteries of existence through the trials of gods, mortals, and monsters alike. Through Persephone's presence in mythology, she is transmuted from her identity as the innocent, childlike Kore into the Queen of the Underworld through an inner, alchemical shift. How she responds to circumstances beyond her control reflects fortitude and resilience as she masters the Darkness she is forced to navigate by integrating the emerging dual aspects of herself. As an archetype for the trauma survivor, Persephone is an amalgam of human experiences and potential, not a case study for the complexities of the human psyche. The essential shift in her identity from victim to sovereign goddess serves as an allegory for the

trauma survivor's journey, reframing it as a sacred, transformative process which can serve to inspire us mere mortals.

Persephone's story begins as Kore, a name reflecting her innocence and unwritten potential. When the god of the Underworld, Hades, abducts her and claims her for his bride, she is initiated into the transformative process through trauma which is reflected in her new name: Persephone. As she endures her time in the cold, alien Chthonic realm, she masters the Darkness in herself and in her trauma, reflected in her ascension as Queen of the Underworld. She is given a reprieve when she returns to the surface world as the Goddess of Spring, forever changed and once again confronted with all she has lost when she learns she is forever bound to her Dark queendom. Her duality is highlighted and Persephone faces an eternity of Otherness in each world, cycling between them for part of every year. Through her encounters with death and Darkness, combined with her knowledge of renewal and Light, Persephone successfully integrates her duality when she translates it to sacred gnosis—knowledge of the soul's journey through life, death and rebirth, only learned through the pain of living it all.

In Kerényi's *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, the Eleusinian Mysteries are bound to Persephone and her mother Demeter, the Goddess of the Harvest. It was the longest standing and most fiercely guarded mystery cult of ancient Greece, and honored Persephone as the central figure of the sacred rites. Persephone is the embodiment of the very secret of the Mysteries. For fear of her incurring her wrath and as a gesture of great respect, initiates were not permitted to even utter her name. Persephone is often referred to as "arrhetos koura", which translates to "ethereal, ineffable maiden" capturing her Otherness, and is known as the Mystery Goddess (Kerényi, Eleusis, 1967).

Her transcendence from young maiden to Mystery Goddess is forged through her fortitude and grace, not as a result of the trauma she endures but through how she chooses to respond. Persephone's story is not one of mere survival, but of metamorphosis. As an archetype, she transcends psychology and analysis, she exists as a pattern of symbols in the shared collective unconscious which spans time and culture. Her non-linear path to healing offers a mythic blueprint for survivors to reclaim their identity, confront the darkness of their experiences, and emerge stronger. Through the lens of Judith Herman's three-stage recovery model, Persephone's narrative provides a numinous parallel through its use as a guiding metaphor for the survivor's ongoing process of healing, integration, and service to others.



Homage to the Mystery Goddess: The Abduction

In a lush, verdant meadow bathed in the golden light of Helios, Kore wandered amidst a sea of flowers, her laughter mingling with that of Artemis and Athena. Though no longer girls, the three maidens still reveled in their carefree days, braiding each other's hair and gathering blossoms as the sun warmed their skin.

Kore paused, her senses caught by a cool breeze carrying the intoxicating fragrance of the narcissus flower. Its allure was legendary, known to mesmerize men and mortals alike. Alone in a distant field, the flower called to her, its beauty too irresistible to ignore. Drawn like a magnet, Kore stepped away from her friends, eager to admire its radiant bloom.

As she neared the flower, her fingers outstretched to brush against its delicate petals, the meadow fell silent. A sharp crack shattered the stillness. Before she could react, the earth beneath her trembled, splitting open with a force that seemed to tear the very fabric of the world. From the chasm, a golden chariot emerged, drawn by horses that leapt like shadows. In an instant, Hades, the lord of the underworld, seized Kore by the waist, pulling her effortlessly into the chariot.

Her scream echoed through the meadow, her voice pleading for her father, for anyone to stop this terrible theft. But no one came.

Helios, high above in his chariot, turned his gaze toward the cry that pierced the heavens, while Hekate, deep within her cave, felt the tremor of the event. But it was too late. As the horses surged into the abyss, vanishing into the darkened earth, Kore's fate was sealed. The world swallowed all traces of her, leaving only the echo of her screams in the void. From that

moment, she was no longer Kore, the maiden of spring, but Persephone, the queen of the underworld, her destiny entwined with the shadows forever.

The Descent

Persephone's relevance begins when her trauma occurs. Before she is abducted our protagonist is called Kore—a term used in Ancient Greek to describe a nondescript young woman. Nameless and full of potential, this marriageable woman is the daughter of the god Zeus and goddess Demeter, both belonging to the elite who preside over the world atop Mount Olympus and yet she is without an identity until something happens to her.

This is where the trauma survivor's journey differs from that of the Hero's or Heroine's. Their stories begin with an average protagonist who eventually must answer the call to adventure, on which they are transformed. There will be a mentor and guide, monsters to slay with swords and wit, and though there is darkness before there is victory—it is one night: The Dark Night of the Soul. For the trauma survivor, it is not just one dark night. Enduring trauma, especially complex trauma, means surviving in a mind, body and soul that is haunted. Perhaps there is continuity in the broader life of a survivor which will offer the opportunity to live out their own Hero's Journey but, first a different journey must take place: the journey to recovery.



A Haunting

Trauma is not a mythic experience—it is human. The traumatic event itself is typically sudden, unexpected, and far outside the survivor's control. It severs an individual from their sense of self and understanding of the world and corrupts their own narrative. The mind and body are forced into survival mode where instinctive reactions take over. Comfort and predictability form the backdrop against which trauma stands in sharp contrast. Life becomes solely about responding to the immediate threat.

However trauma is also a physiological experience. When a threat occurs, the body engages the fight, flight or freeze response, a concept first developed by Walter B. Cannon in his research on homeostasis and the sympathetic-adrenal medulla system (Cannon, 1932). This physiological response prepares the body to react to danger by increasing alertness and energy.

The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) redirects the body's resources to prioritize survival, increasing heart rate, respiration, and other functions necessary for immediate action. After the danger has passed, the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS) works to calm the body and return it to equilibrium.

Trauma is that threat to safety, so the SNS becomes activated and can remain heightened long after the threat is over. If the nervous system is hyper-aroused then the body and mind may react to regular, unthreatening stimuli disproportionately. According to research associated with survivors of interpersonal violence, implicit memory appears to play a substantial role in post traumatic stress symptoms. Findings suggest that because "Objectively neutral stimuli may take on a threatening hue, creating a broad range of triggers," the nervous system believes it is encountering trauma when implicit memory calls up a memory of it (Minshew & D'Andrea, 2015, p. 68). The dissonance between what is happening and what the mind is reliving through memory causes mood swings, nightmares, difficulty handling average levels of stress and trouble sleeping (Levine, 1997, pp. 146-150). Clinicians identify these confusing reactions as symptoms of post-traumatic stress, where implicit memory responds as if the threat is present, triggered by sights, sounds, or scents that evoke memories of the trauma.

The term complex trauma emerged to address prolonged, chronic exposure to the trauma of enduring life in environments defined by constant fear and instability. Unlike acute trauma, which stems from a single disruptive event, complex trauma arises from sustained exposure to power imbalances within relationships, systems, or institutions. A hallmark of complex trauma is power hoarding—one person becomes stripped of their own agency, power and autonomy while learning to navigate an arbitrary landscape full of unpredictable landmines. This is seen in

political terrorism, childhood abuse and neglect, and relational abuse within primary relationships. Perpetrators of this kind of abuse often hoard resources like love, money, food and anything else the survivor might need in order to exert control over that individual. The constant powerlessness and threat of danger lead to self-fragmentation, hopelessness, chronic pain and health conditions in adulthood, and recreating cycles of abuse through self harm (Emerson 2012, p. 62).

An Upward Spiral

Trauma expert Dr. Judith Herman emphasizes the devastating psychological toll complex trauma takes on survivors in her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. She observes that “while patients with simple post traumatic stress disorder fear they may be losing their minds, patients with the complex disorder often feel they have lost themselves” (p. 228). This fragmentation of self and disconnection from the body are central to the experience of complex trauma, reflecting the lasting impact of sustained exposure to trauma. Herman suggests there is a three stage model for recovery centered on safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection. This roadmap offers a pathway to the ongoing, layered process of healing that involves revisiting past traumas and gradually shifting from unpredictable danger to reliable safety, from dissociated trauma to acknowledged memory, and from stigmatized isolation to restored social connection.

Recovery from complex trauma, according to Herman, is not a linear journey but cyclical as survivors revisit an issue and continue to integrate their trauma, explained as an upward spiral (Herman, 1992, p. 224). This metaphor captures the ongoing, layered process of healing that involves revisiting past traumas and shifting from unpredictable danger to safety, dissociated

trauma to acknowledged memory, and from isolation to restored social connection. Herman's model can serve as three waypoints of a broader journey. She describes these stages of recovery as "a convenient fiction, not to be taken too literally" (Herman, 1992, p. 223), perhaps opening the doors to a symbolic overview of how these stages lend to a mythic perspective of transformation. Though Persephone's archetypal energy does not make for a case study, the broad themes of transformation we encounter through Persephone's narrative can illustrate trauma recovery as a sacred journey toward transcendence, or for the survivor—a meaningful life filled with possibility.

The first Stage of Herman's recovery model is about establishing safety through regaining control. Once that is achieved the trauma itself can be acknowledged and confronted. It is the moment of realization that the Darkness can be dispelled. In Stage Two, the process of facing what has happened can precede mourning the loss of their former self and the potential they once had. And finally, Stage Three is about learning to be with the self and others in emotionally healthy ways. Healing doesn't exist in isolation, it is through reconnection that the recovery journey can begin to solidify. The following sections will explore Persephone's myth as she regains control as a victim and begins to integrate the changes that occur within herself on her path to becoming a sovereign Goddess, Queen and the Keeper of sacred mysteries through the lens of Herman's three stages of healing.

Stage One as Death: Ad Inferno



Homage to the Mystery Goddess: My Name is Persephone

The garden of the underworld was quiet, save for the distant rustle of leaves, a subtle whisper of life amidst the dead soil. Ascalaphus, a creature of the shadows, wandered through the dusky glade. His expression was sour, a perpetual scowl carved into his face, like someone who had never known the warmth of the sun. His presence seemed to blend into the gloom of the underworld, a part of it, resentful and cold.

His eyes flickered across the garden, his gaze eventually settling on a woman who stood in the center. She was a vision of grace amidst the eerie stillness, her every movement imbued with subtly. She reached her delicate hand towards the dusky red fruit hanging from the tree's velvety branches.

Ascalaphus' eyes narrowed. He watched as she plucked the pomegranate from the tree and brought it to her nose. It was a moment of perfect stillness as she inhaled its fragrance. A soft sound escaped from his throat—a noise, too loud for the silence, a breath caught in his chest.

The ethereal woman paused. Her eyes lifted, meeting his gaze. There was a moment of recognition, a brief flicker of understanding in her pale eyes, but no fear. She stood tall and regal, her presence undeniable, the weight of her decision now clear.

"It's The maiden from the surface world," Ascalaphus murmured under his breath, his voice almost incredulous. But as the woman met his gaze, the weight of her new identity settled upon him. "Who are you?" he demanded, his voice like a screech of an owl.

Her unwavering gaze held his and with a quiet power emanating from her as she stood in the garden of death. And then, with a voice soft but resolute, she spoke:

"My name is Persephone," she said, her voice ringing out like music among the alien foliage of the subterranean garden.

The Power in a Name

Persephone's narrative shows the innocent Kore transformed into Persephone, a Queen and Goddess, through suffering. Her initial descent is not just an external journey but an internal one—a breaking down of her previous identity and a destruction of the old self. The name Persephone, meaning "Bringer of Destruction" (Hillman, 1997, p. 102), reflects this transformation, signifying that destruction is a necessary process for rebuilding and self-creation. This name underscores the shedding of the old self and the emergence of a new, empowered identity. Conversely, the name she began with, Kore, is associated with innocence. In fact C.G. Jung created an archetype defined by an inability to differentiate from one's mother, thus remaining bound to a state of unnatural childlike innocence which he calls *The Kore* (Jung 2014, p. 182). Examining the meaning attached to each name offers insight into the transmutation of a young woman, poised on the precipice of Becoming, who must confront her own suffering and decide whether or not she will fight. Judith Herman notes that "The traumatized person is often relieved simply to learn the true name of her condition" (Herman, 1992, p. 227) which can be seen as Persephone identifying and naming what has changed. Through this act of autonomy she takes the first step toward reclaiming control and thus constructing a sense of safety in a foreign world and new life.

This declaration of her new identity serves as an allegorical illustration of Persephone's choice to reclaim control over who she is in the wake of her trauma. By asserting her identity, she begins to cultivate her own sense of safety, which becomes the foundation for

her initiation into deep wisdom, the shedding of her maidenhood, and the beginning of her healing journey. Patriarchal interpretations of the myth suggest that Kore's union with Hades grants her the name Persephone and her identity as a woman. Feminist theories frame this shift through the lens of violation, arguing that she is forced into womanhood. However, through the perspective of trauma theory, Persephone's self-realization is not defined by what happens to her, but by how she chooses to respond. It is in her autonomy, in the solitude of suffering and darkness, that she actively shapes who she is becoming.

Homage to the Mystery Goddess: Queen of All that Lives and Moves

“Persephone, I always know to find you here among the gardens when you are lost to me.” Hades’ sonorous voice sent an involuntary shiver down Persephone’s spine, it held the eerie stillness of a long-deserted quarry.

“You have banished me to this oublie, where every part of myself has been lost to the unending darkness. I wish to be near that which lives.” She placed a hand on the soft bark of the pomegranate tree.

“Do foster in your heart a gentle temper for me, and do not let the constant dusk of this realm make you wretched.”

“Gentle?” Persephone risked a glance in his direction. “It is not of my will, Lord Hades, to be in this union with you.”

“I am the eldest son of Cronus and ruler of this vast and fearsome Netherworld, one of the Three Great Realms. I will not be an unworthy husband to you.”

“Please, I wish to return...if my father knew-”

“Your father.” His eyes were dark and fathomless as he caught Persephone’s gaze. “It was your father, Zeus—my own brother—who consented to this marriage. It was he who bade Gaia place that irresistible narcissus in that lone meadow, so you would wander away from the watchful eyes of your protesting mother, so you would be alone... so I could take you.”

Persephone placed her hand to her chest and lowered her chin. “This land of eternal night is to be my fate.”

“Yes, and I honor you as my Queen.” A smile threatened to mangle Hades’ face.

“Not your Queen.” She said before lifting her chin and declaring “If I am to forever belong to this place of deathlessness, I shall be Queen of all that lives and moves.”

“As Queen of the Underworld all mortals and immortals alike who fail to honor you—who neglect the sacred rites and offerings—will feel the full force of your vengeance, for all eternity.”

After holding his stare for a moment, an agreement reached and promised, Persephone looked away, aware that gazing too long into the abyss of his eyes would only lead to her own madness.

“This is the fruit of your Queendom,” Hades said of the fruit still cradled in her hand. When he reached for it, Persephone could feel the chill of skin as he gently took the pomegranate from her. As he peeled the leathery skin he said “The seeds hold the honey-sweet nectar of this realm. Have a taste, my Queen.”

When he held the little jewels up to her lips, each seed glittered like rubies beneath the light of her eyes.

Not Your Queen

So far, Persephone remains a passive victim of the whims of great gods who control her world and life. Like all trauma survivors, she never had a choice and her will was never going to supersede that of her perpetrators: her father, her mother, her husband. She is now confined to a place she does not belong to, where dead things thrive and souls toil in eternal night.

Persephone's liminality begins to form. She no longer belongs to the Light now that she knows the Darkness, and her descent into the Underworld is entirely unnatural—not initiated by death or a heroic quest. The survivor knows liminality as well, because complex trauma is unnatural for the mind, body, and soul. Through an alchemical transformation, the recovery journey shifts the very essence of the survivor from victimhood.

While she cannot leave the Underworld—much like a survivor cannot escape the persistent symptoms of post-traumatic stress—Persephone still has the power to shape her environment and choose how to respond to her circumstances. In this way, her ascent to becoming Queen of what lives in the land of death, link to a survivor's choice to embark on the journey of recovery and thus learn how to gain mastery over their trauma.

To be clear, when Persephone accepts her role as queen, it is not an act of submission or passive acceptance. Rather, she is demonstrating mastery over her own response to what has happened. In Stage One, this is the moment the survivor feels safe enough to make the choice to seek help. Rather than fall victim to unhealthy coping mechanisms like substance abuse or self-harm, the survivor chooses healing. Becoming queen is not a form of embracing her trauma as a source of deviant power as we might see when victims of abuse go on to abuse others or themselves. Instead, it represents a choice to transcend her fear and reclaim mastery over her

narrative just as the survivor envisions mastery over their own post traumatic stress. Her new title, like her new name, symbolizes the power she reclaims. By accepting her position as Queen of the Underworld on her terms, Persephone asserts dominion over the Underworld, a space that once served to diminish her. This assertion signals a transmutation from victimhood to self-mastery, which the survivor aspires to throughout, after, and beyond their recovery journey.

Stage Two as Rebirth: *Vita ex Mortem*



Homage to the Mystery Goddess: Truthful, Painful

Guided by Hermes, who had escorted Persephone from the depths of the Underworld to the surface, Persephone felt the weight of the earth lifting as she emerged from darkness. She tilted her face toward the sky, savoring the first ray of golden sunlight in over a year. The wind carried the scent of fertile yet barren earth, both familiar and alien all at once. Suddenly, a figure appeared racing towards her over the ridge. It was her mother, sprinting down the slope in an unfamiliar black cloak with her wild golden hair streaking behind her.

“Daughter!” Demeter cried, arms outstretched. Persephone ran toward her, a sob bubbling up in her chest as the familiar comfort of her mother’s arms enveloped her.

“My sweet girl, you’re home.” Demeter kissed Persephone’s forehead and cupped her face in her hands as she searched for the girl she once knew “You have become as white as frost, and your hair—it is so pale!” Persephone peeled her mother’s hands off of her cheeks and took a step away from her mother.

“It is so. I have changed.” She said.

“Well, tell me everything, my love!” Demeter’s eyes were still roaming over the unrecognizable version of her daughter.

“What happened...was painful.” Persephone took another step away.

“You must tell me!” Demeter said, her eyes growing in size.

“I will tell you.” Persephone waited until her mother nodded to begin speaking “I was in the meadow with Athena and Artemis not far from where you were. I was admiring the vivid flowers...but, it was when I spied a narcissus more beautiful than any I’d ever seen that I found myself alone. When I reached for it, the ground suddenly split open.” Persephone said as angled

her body away from her mother. “The world spun when Hades abducted me, and though I screamed for help no one rescued me. In the darkness of the Underworld the shadows were my teachers and the shades were my servants.”

“You are here now, my child, you are safe.” Demeter whispered, gripping her daughter’s hands wincing at their chill.

“I am safe in every realm, mother.” She released Demeter’s hands and took a step towards the edge of the cliff. “Within me knowledge for which I have no words has been planted by the seeds of the pomegranate fruit. I have tasted death, and now, again I live.”

“But, Kore!” Demeter rushed towards her daughter who did not look to her mother. “Kore is gone.” Her gaze slithered to meet Demeter’s “I am Persephone, Queen of the Underworld and Bringer of Destruction.”

To Remember is to Mourn

When Persephone ascends into the warmth and familiarity of the surface world, she is a changed Being. After spending a year in the Darkness, its muted light drains the color from her once rosy cheeks and copper hair—these physical changes reflect her inner transformation. It is through the factual retelling of her trauma that Persephone has the opportunity to make sense of the events which cause her drastic change, a process which proves therapeutic in Stage Two of the recovery journey. In Herman’s book *Trauma and Recovery*, she states that the act of recounting the events provides a context within which the trauma’s meaning can be understood (p. 256). She no longer sees herself merely as the result of her suffering, but as someone who shapes the path forward. This shift in perspective marks an important part of Stage Two where

she confronts the painful but necessary process of remembrance and mourning. Persephone must grieve what she loses in the Darkness and acknowledge the depth of her pain because “Only through mourning everything that she has lost can the patient discover her indestructible inner life.” (p. 274).

Persephone’s alchemical process begins as her essence fluctuates into something Other. The contrast between her new existence in the realm of death and suffering and the very nature of her Being creates an estrangement from herself—a marked change Herman observed in survivors of complex trauma. This shift marks the beginning of Persephone’s liminality, where she no longer belongs to the Light, having intimately known the Darkness. *Otherness*, being not of the world in which it is, begins to define her. Since she is not initiated by death nor chooses to travel to the Underworld on a heroic quest, her descent is entirely unnatural. The survivor knows liminality as well, because complex trauma is unnatural for the mind, body, and soul.

Symbolically, the pomegranate represents forbidden knowledge and the potential for regeneration. With it comes destruction of ignorance, and for Persephone, this marks her awakening to the deepest mysteries of existence—gnosis, or sacred knowledge. In the Underworld the pomegranate is the sole living thing among death, the vivid red hue of its nectar is like lifeblood in the dusky realm. Its seeds represent the alchemy of decay. When dead matter like a seed merges with soil, it is nourished by the nutrients in soil which allows new life to emerge from death. Persephone is the generative source through which the pomegranate seeds can offer gnosis of the elusive mysteries of regeneration. Through Kore’s death, Persephone is reborn into what the Eleusinian mystery school calls the Mystery Goddess because she now embodies the full cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Stage Three as Life: Ex Tenebrae in Solem



Homage to the Mystery Goddess: Walking Between Worlds

Demeter began to wail as she faced the reality that her daughter would never be returned to her; Persephone would always belong to the Underworld. Her piercing cries were momentarily overwhelmed by the thunder crack preceding Zeus's arrival. Persephone turned her back as her mother began to plead to Zeus for Persephone's full restoration so she could return to her former state and spend eternity in the light with Demeter.

An ancient presence appeared beside her when the witch Hekate made herself visible. Hekate's eyes, filled with untold wisdom, watched her patiently as though she was reading Persephone's thoughts.

"Child, I can see the glimmer of knowing within you."

Persephone's heart stirred with a mixture of grief and understanding.
"You have become the bridge between realms. You belong nowhere but you are of everywhere." Hekate said.

Persephone's eyes sparkled as possibilities glowed from within before the thundering voice of Zeus commanded everyone's attention.

"Daughter, you may rise each year from the Underworld where you shall sit among your kin upon the highest peak of Mount Olympus. But you will return to your throne next to your husband Hades for one third of each year. This is my decree, it shall be so!"

Demeter, who had fallen silent, now stood with awe in her eyes. Her gaze softened as she looked at her daughter, no longer pleading for her return but seeing the Queen she had become. Without reaching out for her, Demeter approached Persephone and spoke.

“Persephone, when you are below the ground with Hades, I shall mourn your absence and the earth will be cold and barren, just as my heart will be. But when you return, the Earth will bloom and the sun will shine with the joy I shall feel at your presence.” She turned to the wise woman “Hekate, it is by your wisdom and strength I sought and found my daughter. I am forever grateful for your counsel.” Demeter lifted her hands to each side, an invitation to Hekate and Persephone. “Together we hold the knowledge of all that was, is and will be. I am the Mother, the giver of life, who nourishes with love that sustains. I give of myself to bring life, and in my arms, all things grow.” Her gaze remained straight ahead as she looked to present.

Persephone turned to her mother and took her hand “I am both life and death, bound to neither, yet connected to all. I carry the secret of the turning wheel, the one who descends and ascends, forever changed by both realms. My knowledge is the mystery between what is seen and what is hidden.” Her body turned to one side as she looked upon the vast land, the future stretching before her with infinite possibilities.

Hekate flanked Demeter on her other side and accepted her hand “I walk between worlds, guiding those who seek to understand the thresholds of life and death. I am the keeper of the liminal spaces, where transformation occurs, and wisdom is birthed in darkness.” Her gaze drifted toward the past, reflecting on all that has happened and the sacred patterns held within history.

Together the three women stood as one, three bodies facing in different directions holding all dimensions held within the Divine Feminine.

Arrhetos Koura

Seasons, as we understand scientifically, are caused by the Earth's tilt on its axis. However, ancient Greeks had a different explanation. They believed seeds possessed mystical powers, able to regenerate life. Greek farmers would plant seeds, sending them to Persephone in the Underworld, where she gave them life in the dark. When she returned to the surface, crops grew, and the sun shone brighter. As the seasons change, Persephone returns to Hades, and the Earth mourns her absence. In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Demeter, the giver of life, halts the growth of crops in mourning for her daughter. Thus, Spring symbolizes Persephone's return, Summer represents her and Demeter's joy, while Autumn and Winter embody the sorrow of her departure and sojourn in the Underworld.

Stage Three represents the survivor's journey toward finding meaning beyond trauma. Looking to Persephone and myth to help make the unexplained more comprehensible, we witness her true legacy take shape. As explored earlier through the symbolism of the pomegranate seeds, Persephone gains access to the deepest secrets held in life's cycles. She transcends her trauma recovery journey and the identities she adopts to survive it, becoming the Mystery Goddess of Eleusis. Written of as the "arrhetos koura" in what exists from the Eleusinian mystery school's texts, Persephone's identity is alluded to through calling her the ethereal maiden or Mystery Goddess because her wrath was so fearsome no one dared to disrespect her, as the mystery and secret keeper (Kerényi, Eleusis, 1967). As the embodiment of the very mysteries that are only found on the thresholds of life and death, Persephone becomes a bridge between both worlds. In *Man and His Symbols*, Jung observed the unique duality of the Eleusinian Mysteries, noting that the rites were not only for initiates seeking life, but "it was also

used as a preparation for death, as if death also required an initiatory rite of passage of the same kind" (Jung, 2012, p. 148).

Herman's words resonate as nearly mythic when she speaks of the survivor's mission: "While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others" (Herman, 1992, p. 303). Persephone's gift was passed down through generations via secretive rites in the Eleusinian mystery school. Its legacy continues to offer initiates the secrets of life and death to this day, since its inception in Ancient Greece.

The Triple Goddess

For the purposes of archetypal exploration, Persephone as the trauma survivor has been examined as a sovereign being. However, her legacy is woven alongside others. The Eleusinian Mysteries are not hers alone; she is worshipped alongside Demeter and Hekate, who each embody distinct and unique qualities of the life cycle. Persephone, once the innocent maiden, stands at the threshold of life and womanhood. Hekate, the wise woman or Crone, holds dominion over liminality, guiding souls through transitions of life, death, and rebirth. Demeter, the nurturing Mother, represents the cycles of growth and nourishment in between. Together, the three became the emblematic Triple Goddess—composed of the Maiden, the Crone, and the Mother. Depicted as a goddess with three faces, usually looking in different directions to represent the past, present, and future. The Triple Goddess honors the sacred number three—an alchemical number, where two parts combine to create something greater. Through Herman's three stages, we see the integration of the survivor's journey, with the third stage focusing on learning to be in relationship with others.

Persephone transcends her trauma, evolving from an oppressed daughter and Hade's conquest into the powerful Mystery Goddess. Alongside Demeter and Hekate, she governs the gnosis of the Divine Feminine. Through them, Persephone finds her survivor mission in the Eleusinian Rites, serving as a "guiding link between the everyday world and the mysteries of the Underworld," with ceremonies built around "principles of catharsis, retrieval, and rebirth" (Brannan, 2023, p. 63). From the trauma of her abduction to the Underworld, where she rose to become Queen, to her eventual return as the Goddess of Spring, Persephone learns to integrate the dual aspects of her being and becomes the Mystery Goddess. Through this role, Persephone uses her own suffering to guide others, helping them navigate their own traumas as they approach the thresholds of their own deaths and rebirths. Her legacy, woven into the fabric of ancient rites, remains a symbol of transcendence, showing that from the deepest pain can arise sacred wisdom and mastery. Persephone's story, both a myth and a model, teaches us that the journey through trauma is not just one of survival, but one of transformation—becoming something greater through the full cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Homage to the Mystery Goddess: Epilogue

The initiate's body ached and her stomach twisted with hunger. It had been 9 days of fasting, and grueling rituals to cleanse, purify and prepare for this moment. With each step towards the darkness, her limbs seemed to grow heavier, as though her bones were turning to stone. Her head whipped from side to side as slithering sounds seemed to surround her.

"This is the moment of passage," The Priestess, draped in robes of purple, whispered, though her voice echoed in the vastness of the temple "Do not turn away."

The initiate nodded her head, creating disturbing shadows among the light cast by the flame of countless flickering candles. She couldn't recall how many steps she had taken but she noticed the Priestess was no longer by her side and the darkness into which she was moving was growing closer.

A bell tolled, low and resonant, causing her to freeze in her tracks. As the air around her stirred and chilled, all the candles were extinguished leaving her to be swallowed by darkness. She listened to her own shallow breath in the ensuing silence until she heard a rustle. Her head whipped in the direction of the sound to see a figure, glowing an otherworldly silver, moving towards her. Fascinated and awed, the initiate could only watch in stunned silence.

"Seeker, are you prepared to bear the knowledge you desire?" The melodic sound of the Mystery Goddess's voice, unlike any other she had heard from a mortal, moved through the initiate's very soul like ecstasy.

The initiate blinked, for that was all she could make her body do in assent. Illuminated by the glow of pale skin, a golden chalice appeared in the hand of the Mystery Goddess. Within, sparkling like jewels, were red pomegranate seeds.

“First you must taste.”

The initiate, trembling and nearly delirious, lifted her hands.

References

Apuleius. (1951, 1979). *The transformations of Lucius, otherwise known as The Golden Ass* (R. Graves, Trans.).

Athanassakes, A. N., Wolkow, B. M., Athanassakis, A. N., & Athanassakes, A. N. (2013). *The Orphic hymns*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Brannen, C. (2023). *Entering Hekate's cave: The journey through darkness to wholeness*. Weiser Books, an imprint of Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC.

Emerson, D. (2015). *Trauma-sensitive yoga in therapy: Bringing the body into treatment* (1st ed.). W.W. Norton & Company.

Emerson, D., Hopper, E., Levine, P. A., Cope, S., & Van der Kolk, B. A. (2012). *Overcoming trauma through yoga: Reclaiming your body*. North Atlantic Books.

Foley, H. P., & Homer (Eds.). (1999). *The Homeric hymn to Demeter: Translation, commentary, and interpretive essays*. Princeton University Press.

Herman, J. L. (2022). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – from domestic abuse to political terror* (4th trade paperback ed.). Basic Books.

Hillman, J. (1997). *The myth of analysis: Three essays in archetypal psychology*. Northwestern University Press.

Jung, C. G., Adler, G., & Hull, R. F. C. (2014). *Collected works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9 (Part 1)*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400850969>

Jung, C. G., Read, H., Hull, R. F. C., Jung, C. G., & Jung, C. G. (2010). *Psychology and alchemy* (1st paperback ed., reprint). Routledge.

Kerényi, K., & Manheim, R. (1967). *Eleusis: Archetypal image of mother and daughter*. Princeton University Press.

Levine, P. A. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma: The innate capacity to transform overwhelming experiences*. North Atlantic Books.

Mandelbaum, A. (1995). *The metamorphoses of Ovid* (1st ed.). HarperCollins Publishers.

Nguyen-Feng, V. N., Morrisette, J., Lewis-Dmello, A., Michel, H., Anders, D., Wagner, C., & Clark, C. J. (2019). Trauma-sensitive yoga as an adjunctive mental health treatment for survivors of intimate partner violence: A qualitative examination. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 6(1), 27–43. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000177>

Journal Articles

Clark, C. J., Lewis-Dmello, A., Anders, D., Parsons, A., Nguyen-Feng, V., Henn, L., & Emerson, D. (2014). Trauma-sensitive yoga as an adjunct mental health treatment in group therapy for survivors of domestic violence: A feasibility study. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 20(3), 152–158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2014.04.003>

Dietrich, K. M., Strumbel, N. M., Baumann, A. M., & Nguyen-Feng, V. N. (2024). Experiences with one-to-one trauma center trauma-sensitive yoga sessions: Consensual qualitative research. *International Journal of Yoga Therapy*, 34(2024), Article 14. <https://doi.org/10.17761/2024-D-23-00091>

Minshew, R., & D'Andrea, W. (2015). Implicit and explicit memory in survivors of chronic interpersonal violence. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 7(1), 67–75. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036787>

Appendix A

Figures

Figure 1

Sotheby's. (2007). *Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May* by John William Waterhouse [Oil on canvas]. In *19th Century European Art* (Lot 182). Sotheby's. Retrieved from <https://www.sothbys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2007/19th-century-european-art-n08303/lot.182.html>

Figure 2

Rubens, P. P., & workshop. (1636–1637). *The Rape of Proserpina* [Oil on canvas]. Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain. <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-rape-of-proserpine/39af660c-ad0d-4da6-acbc-5e2a1741fb8d>

Figure 3

Rossetti, D. G. (1874). *Proserpine* [Oil on canvas]. Tate. Presented by W. Graham Robertson, 1940. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rossetti-proserpine-n05064>

Figure 4

Leighton, F. L. (ca. 1890–91). *The Return of Persephone* [Oil on canvas]. Leeds Art Gallery, Leeds Museums & Galleries. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/847023>

Figure 5

Law, S. P.-M. (2020). *The High Priestess* [Tarot card]. Shadowscapes Tarot. <https://www.shadowscapes.com/Tarot/cards.php?suit=0&card=2>