

Opponent's report on B.A. thesis by
Dominika Kecsová

“Persephone the Wanderer:” Myth in the Poetry of Contemporary American Women Poets

In her interesting, well-structured and richly researched thesis, Dominika Kecsová examines the Persephone myth in relation to its appearance in the poetry of Louise Glück, Rita Dove, Jorie Graham, and A.E. Stallings. The thesis explicates the sources of the Persephone myth, highlights the myth's appearance in recent poetry and fiction, and backs up close readings of the poems with the judicious use of secondary resources to make insightful observations about these four poets and their use of myth within a larger framework of anglophone literature.

The thesis contains an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion and a rich bibliography. The chapters include “Sources of the Persephone Myth” and “Myth in the [*sic*] 20th century poetry,” as well as four chapters which focus on one collection from each poet: Louise Glück's *Averno*, Rita Dove's *Mother Love*, Jorie Graham's *The End of Beauty*, and A.E. Stallings's *Archaic Smile*. Each of the chapters is admirably written and structured, combining line-by-line commentary on the poems with strong quotations from a variety of critics and theorists. The poets are usefully situated in the general discourse before their work is more closely juxtaposed in the conclusion of the thesis. Overall, this is a strong work which shows a grasp of the poetry under consideration as well as the larger landscape of twentieth century literature. The chapters are clearly structured and as a whole the thesis follows a rewarding, logically structured argument.

The second chapter, with less than two pages, feels somewhat cursory though accurate and relevant to the thesis. Perhaps it could have been included in the first chapter. There are a few minor typos and errors, including the title of the second chapter, which should be “Myth in 20th Century Poetry.” In that chapter, on page six, footnote 17 appears in a different font. But these minor errors do not detract from the quality of the thesis.

For the sake of discussion, I have several questions to pose.

- 1) What is it about the Persephone myth that has made it such a rich subject for these poets and others?
- 2) You mention that it wasn't until the 20th century that female poets attempted, or were able, to reclaim the Persephone myth as territory for poetry. Are there external causes that encouraged this reclamation to happen at this particular time?
- 3) As you note, the style of each poet's articulation of the Persephone myth varies, from Graham's “gazes” to Stallings's regular rhymes and Dove's narrative juxtapositions. How does each particular style influence the way the myth is explored or expressed, and the way readers perceive it?

In light of the foregoing, I hereby recommend the mark of 1 (výborně) for this thesis work.

Stephan B. Delbos, MFA, PhD
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