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The Motif of Persephone in Sarah J. Mass’ *A Court of Thorns and Roses Series*¹

Abstract: The Myth of Demeter and Kore is universally known. Over the years, various authors used the myth in their own retellings of the story. In these new versions the myth either possesses the same or similar message as the original myth, or offers a completely separate interpretation that would fit the modern world more. One of said versions is the book series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas. The goal of this paper is to prove the universal nature of the myth, but also to demonstrate how the story of Persephone is depicted in fantasy in Mass’ series of novels. To do so, the most important aspects of the Myth of Demeter and Kore will be presented. Then the paper will touch upon certain interpretations of the myth and its characters. Finally, the main characters from the book series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* will be examined and compared to the figures of Kore, Persephone, Demeter, and Hades.

Keywords: mythology, Demeter and Kore, universalism, retelling, Sarah J. Mass

1. Introduction

In *Potęga mitu*, Joseph Campbell discusses the universality of myths in the contemporary world, noting that they remain prevalent due to their numerous references to human relationships and the nature of those relationships. The purpose of myths is no longer to explain the world, but they still are the source of the rituals. Human existence is a series of such rituals: transitioning from childhood to adulthood, from an unmarried state to a married one, joining the military, or presidential inauguration (Campbell/Flowers 2013: 32–33). Campbell argues that myths belonging to different cultures describe similar or identical issues. Humanity possesses the same capability

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to understand myths as the people from ancient times and modern myths include the same themes (Campbell/Flowers 2013: 71, 49).

Similarly, Don Cupitt argues that myths are universal: “We can add that myth-making is a primal and universal function of the human mind as it seeks a more-or-less unified vision of the cosmic order, the social order, and the meaning of the individual’s life” (Cupitt 1982: 29). In the modern world, myths may be understood at two levels. First, at a historical level, they are the carriers of memories belonging to cultures from various periods. Second, at a contemporary level, myths offer a representation of the ideology followed by modern-day people (Ceglarska 2018: 350). Considering myths as the guardians of values², they lose their symbolic meaning (Malinowski 1948: 199), and instead provide their receivers with life wisdom (Campbell/Flowers 2013: 29). Further, myths may be viewed as a type of speech, particularly becoming a message sent by someone and received by another³ (Barthes 1973: 107, 113).

There exist various typologies of myths. Laurence Coupe describes the main types of myths, being the fertility myth, creation myth, deliverance myth, and hero myth (Coupe 2009: 3). On the other hand, George Schöpflin analyses myths from a different perspective and thus he classifies myths differently. He discusses many more types: myths of territory, myths of redemption and suffering, myths of unjust treatment, myths of election, myths of military valour, myths of rebirth and renewal, myths of foundation, myths of ethnogenesis and antiquity, and myths of kinship and shared descent (Schöpflin 1997: 28–34). According to Schöpflin, myths are used by nations and are connected with a community’s foundation and ideals. They allow humans to create their identity as a person, but also as a part of a larger community (Schöpflin 1997: 35).

As regards literature and cultural studies, myth either becomes synonymous with “ideology”, or “fantasy” (Coupe 2009: 1). Myth and literature study may be approached in a twofold manner. In an Essentialist approach, literature becomes a vessel for mythology. The Structuralist⁴ viewpoint discusses both literature and myth and their narrative form (Gould 1979: 726).

² Myths do not only possess the ability to enforce the values of a community, but also may be used as a manipulation tactic. The topic of creating myths in the criminal sphere is particularly interesting. See: Robinson (2000). Similarly, the power of myths may be utilized in politics to manipulate the crowd. See: Ceglarska (2018), Schöpflin (1997).

³ Myths appear as a message sent to someone with a specific purpose in mind, for example, to influence people in marketing. See: Czeremski (2020).

⁴ See: Levi-Strauss (1955).

Content creators use certain mythical motifs in their projects to explain specific aspects of the presented world, to introduce certain interpretations, to deepen the meanings of their works, or simply for entertainment purposes. Sarah J. Mass' *A Court of Thorns and Roses* utilizes the Myth of Demeter and Kore for the same reasons. Each of the main characters has characteristics of mythological figures, which allows the reader to interpret the text differently. Other themes present in the series of the novels also refer to the Myth of Demeter and Kore, and even though they may slightly differ from the original myth, the message remains the same.

This paper aims to discuss the myth in the book series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by an American author Sarah J. Maas. The analysis will focus on the first three books: *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (Maas 2015), *A Court of Mist and Fury* (Maas 2016), and *A Court of Wings and Ruin* (Maas 2017), as the story of the main character based on the figure of Persephone begins and concludes within these three.

2. Demeter and Kore

The Myth of Demeter and Kore is a commonly known one. Kore, while collecting flowers in the meadow, reaches for a narcissus. The ground opens and Hades, the Ruler of the Land of the Dead, emerges in his chariot led by black horses and kidnaps Kore, who subsequently becomes his wife. As Hades' wife, she is known as Persephone. Demeter, Kore's mother, falls into such despair over losing her child, that the world starts deteriorating – the ground gets cold and unable to produce any crops. To avoid the death of mankind, Hades is ordered to give Kore back. However, the girl has already eaten the pomegranate fruit, which forever ties her to the underworld. To resolve that problem, Kore is supposed to spend some time with her mother, and the rest of the year with her husband. Whenever Kore remains with Demeter, the land is in spring and summer, and whenever Kore leaves, autumn and winter represent Demeter's sadness. Thus, the myth explains the existence of four seasons and represents cyclicity.

There are, however, some disparities as regards specific details of this myth. The narcissus flower is the first aspect worth discussing. According to one version, the flower was put there by Zeus, who allowed Hades to take Kore as his bride (Kubiak 2013). The second possibility is that the flower was in that spot since the beginning, and Demeter actually warned her daughter not to pick it up as the flower is tied to the underworld (Markowska 2011: 27). The narcissus is an interesting choice as it offers certain interpretations. It may be a symbol for the eyes, considering the

fate that befell Narcissus (Rzymowska 2001: 58). From this perspective, Kore taking the flower symbolizes her gazing inside herself (Rzymowska 2001: 58). It further allows the girl to see what is invisible, in this particular instance, she can see Hades. Taking that into account, the act of Kore picking up the flower could be interpreted as her dying, considering that Hades could be a personification of death. Kore's death would be a literal but also metaphorical occurrence (Stawiszyński 2012: 245). In the less literal meaning, it would be the death of her innocence. Furthermore, the narcissus is known as the symbol of metamorphosis (Rzymowska 2001: 58). Kore will change into Persephone. Thus, that interpretation seems to be present as well. Last but not least, if the flower has been placed by Zeus for Kore to pick up, it becomes an accomplice in a larger ploy (Sosień 2010: 55), carrying the role of a deceiver.

Another important flower to mention is the poppy flower. Poppies symbolize death, more particularly the eternal sleep that people fall to after they die (Kuryłowicz 2012: 212). Considering their connection with the dead, it is no wonder that they are also tied to the image of Persephone, the lady of life and death (Kuryłowicz 2012: 210).

The second point of contention is Hades' infatuation with Kore. In some versions, he falls in love with Kore due to Venus' power. Venus orders Cupid to hit Hades with one of Cupid's arrows (Daifotis 2017: 8). There is also a possibility that Venus does not appear, and Hades' affection starts by itself after seeing Kore for the first time (Daifotis 2017: 8–9). In that particular instance, Hades is permitted by Zeus to kidnap Kore, thus putting Zeus as the one in power as regards Kore's fate (Daifotis 2017: 4).

Even though Kore eating the pomegranate is not a point of contention, it is important to mention its meaning. Pomegranate becomes the object of deceit, when Hades presents his wife with the fruit to tie her forever to the underworld (Kubiak 2013) and ensures that she will not be able to live with her mother. Considering that Persephone is tricked into eating the fruit, it also represents Hades' control over his wife and her life.

The figure of Hades is important, as he is the main perpetrator in the myth. His name is a reference to a word meaning "invisible" (Kubiak 2013). According to mythology, Hades can turn invisible; however, this could also be understood metaphorically as Hades is a personification of death itself (Kubiak 2013). Not only is death invisible in itself as no one knows what truly happens to someone after they die, but also a dead person becomes invisible as they disappear from the land of the living.

The myth may be divided into two parts: the “light” first part in which Kore plays on the meadow, and the second “dark” part which starts with her kidnapping and being forced to live in the underworld (Sosień 2010: 55). The clash of light and dark appears also in different ways. The light-innocent Kore picks up the narcissus flower, and through the kidnapping, she becomes Persephone, the dark Lady of Life and Death. She seems to connect two completely separate worlds (Bielawski 2010: 16).

3. Various interpretations of the myth

The myth offers further interpretations when its retellings are taken into account. In some versions, Demeter is no longer the worrying mother, desperately searching for her child. Instead, she becomes an overbearing parent, who forces Persephone to return. The part *Persephone the Wanderer* in Louis Glück's *Averno* depicts Demeter in such a way. The kidnapping of Kore becomes the moment the girl dies, and her coming back to Demeter is a temporary resurrection. However, Persephone is no longer Kore, the girl Demeter knew. She connects two worlds⁵, and the constant transitioning between them does not allow the girl to get used to either and thus makes her feel alien in both (Daifotis 2017: 22). Persephone also further comments that she was her mother's “prisoner” (Glück 2006: line 62).

Donald Michael Thomas also presents a version of Persephone who does not want to leave and go back to her mother. She asks “Father, must I go?” (Thomas 1967: line 11), which signifies her unwillingness to spend time with her mother and leaving her husband.

A similar discontent with Demeter is evident in Urbanowski's interpretation of Helena Mniszek's *Pluto i Persefona*. Persephone is a self-sufficient individual who struggles against her domineering mother. Rather than being a victim of abduction, Persephone believes Hades to be her soul mate, which she further proves by refusing to go back to Olimp when told to do so (Urbanowski 2010: 83, 86).

Two poems by Alicia Elsbeth Stallings provide yet another version of the myth. In *Persephone Writes a Letter to Her Mother*, Stallings gives Persephone her voice, which is rather unusual, as even the original myth is more about Demeter than the main victim. She is getting used to life in the underworld, as she does not write

⁵ Literature oftentimes reaches for the theme of Persephone's two sides. Generally, such works emphasize that the girl must consciously match her behaviour to the role she is playing at the moment. This particular motif is visible in Sito's *Siedem sonetów do Persefony* (1960).

about being sad (Stallings 1997: line 14). She is rather bored with the unchanging underworld and the fact that she is being left alone by her husband, which seems to disappoint her. On the one hand, she calls Hades “a kind, kind master” (Stallings 1997: line 55), which depicts Hades’ dominance and authority over Persephone. On the other hand, his kindness is represented through the distance he creates between himself and his wife. Persephone further writes that Hades “asks nothing of us, nothing, nothing at all” (Stallings 1997: line 56). The repetition points once again to Persephone being disappointed and bored with being left by herself. Moreover, using “us” to refer to herself, also proves the dual nature of Persephone. She is Persephone, but she is also Kore.

The second poem, *Hades Welcomes His Bride*, is told from Hades’ perspective. Persephone once again loses her ability to speak, as Hades is the only one who hears her voice and answers her, without letting the reader know what she has said. He appears to have good intentions by painting the ceiling in their room with an evening sky or creating a throne befitting a queen. At the same time, Persephone is filled with fear. She asks about a “stark shape crouching in the corner” (Stallings 1999: line 33). The choice of words already points to her being scared or at least concerned. After hearing that it is their bed, Persephone starts to tremble (Stallings 1999: line 35). She is certainly unwilling to become Hades’ wife. The end of the poem is also important as it points to Persephone being in between the state of life and death (Stallings 1999: line 36).

Glück’s *The Myth of Devotion* from *Averno* depicts Hades as a person in love. He recreates the image of the land above (Glück 2006: lines 1–4) and does so for many years (Glück 2006: lines 16–18), before even kidnapping Kore, so she can feel more comfortable when she will have to live in the underworld (Glück 2006: lines 11–12). When he wonders about the name of the new place, he first considers “The Garden” but then changes his mind to “Persephone’s girlhood” (Glück 2006: lines 37–40). He already knows she will have to change to be with him, as he uses the name Persephone while naming the new place. He further realizes that taking the girl with him will bring suffering to her as he is unable to say that he loves her, and instead just says “you’re dead, nothing can hurt you” (Glück 2006: lines 43–46). He becomes selfish in his desire to take Kore, but he seems to hold some kind of love towards the girl as he cares for her wellbeing.

The motif of a garden appears in other versions as well. Particularly J.M. Rymkiewicz’s idea of “Persephone’s Garden”. It is not a garden filled with life and flowers but instead it is destroyed and dead (Urbanowski 2010: 90).

4. Persephone in the *ACOTAR* series

A Court of Thorns and Roses series is the second series by Sarah J. Maas. The first book was published by Bloomsbury USA Children's in 2015. Currently, the series consists of five books, and the next parts are already announced. The author is known for her retellings of fairy tales, folk tales, and myths⁶. Sarah J. Maas mentioned that the idea for the story first appeared while listening to *Princess Mononoke* soundtrack⁷. The series has been successful in the literary market and received positive reviews⁸.

First, it is necessary to classify the series as a genre. *A Court of Thorns and Roses* belongs to the fantasy genre. However, the creation of a universal definition of fantasy provokes discussion in the academic community⁹. It is much simpler to introduce a list of characteristics that would be constitutive of fantasy¹⁰. Most importantly, fantasy blurs the boundaries of reality and creates a separate world, usually governed by a new set of rules (Niziołek 2005: 276). These worlds are populated by supernatural beings, characters with magical abilities, and ordinary people (Ryzhchenko 2018: 3). Oftentimes, in stories belonging to the fantasy genre, there appear magic artefacts (Ryzhchenko 2018: 5) such as wands, swords, or common objects that possess magical powers. Most often, the main goal of a fantasy story is for the main characters to defeat evil, or to destroy something that is a threat to the world. To accomplish this feat, the characters have to embark on a physical and psychological journey (Ryzhchenko 2018: 3). There are several subtypes of fantasy, which include *urban fantasy*, *fairy tale fantasy*, *western and Slavic fantasy*, *dark fantasy*¹¹,

⁶ The first series by this author *The Throne of Glass* includes references to such stories as *Cinderella*, or *Little Red Riding Hood*.

⁷ See: "Sarah J Maas on the inspiration for A Court of Thorns and Roses" (2014).

⁸ See: HannahLoveBook (2015).

⁹ Several theories on fantasy are discussed by M. Niziołek. The researcher studies the theories of such academics as Tzvetan Todorov, Louis Vax, Joel Malrieu, or Roger Caillos. See: Niziołek (2005).

¹⁰ However, some academics take a different approach to analyzing fantasy. Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston, for example, rather focus on what does not belong to the genre of fantasy. See: Laetz/Johnston (2008).

¹¹ In the case of *urban fantasy*, the events usually take place in a world or city based on our real one. However, the city is not only the place for the story to unfold but also a sort of a portal that connects magic and ordinariness (Mannolini-Winwood 2008: 36). *Fairy tale fantasy* usually refers to folk tales and pagan beliefs (Stepnowska 2017: 12). These tend to include adult content and do not have to end happily (Łaszkiwicz 2017: 62). In the *Slavic fantasy* the story is usually based on a myth or legend, whereas in the *western fantasy* it is not obligatory, since the world in the story is usually completely fictional and created by the author (Ryzhchenko 2018: 2). *Dark fantasy* is aimed at adults, as it contains violent content and is generally more explicit when it comes to intimate scenes (Laetz/Johnston 2008: 169).

*young adult fantasy*¹², or Farah–Mendlesohn’s division¹³. *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series belongs to the *young adult fantasy* genre.

In the series *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, the reader follows the story of Feyre, a young girl from a poor family, trying to ensure her family’s survival. During one of her hunting excursions, she comes across a large wolf that she kills. That same day, an enraged man, whose name is Tamlin, of the fae¹⁴ species bursts into Feyre’s home. It turns out that the killed wolf was a transformed fae. As a punishment for the murder, Feyre has to go with Tamlin, who is the High Lord of the Spring Court, to the land of the fae¹⁵. During her stay at the Spring Court, Feyre and Tamlin fall in love, which forces Tamlin to free Feyre to keep her safe. She, however, comes back and saves Tamlin and the Spring Court from the curse that bounds them. To do so, Feyre has to sacrifice her own life but is then resurrected as a fae. *A Court of Mist and Fury* presents Feyre’s struggles with mental health after her fight to free Tamlin in the first book. It further discusses her trying to adapt to the new existence as a fae. In this story, she is taken by Rhysand, the High Lord of the Night Court, who teaches her about the fae world and warns her of an approaching war. When Tamlin traps Feyre in the Spring Court to keep her safe, the girl has a mental breakdown and decides to leave the Spring Court and Tamlin forever. Throughout the story, Feyre learns more about Rhysand, his companions, and herself. It is also revealed that Feyre and Rhysand are mates. In other words, their fates are forever intertwined, and this has been decided by a higher power of the universe the characters live in. In the end, Tamlin forces Feyre to leave Rhysand and return to the Spring Court with him – his stubbornness leading to Feyre’s sisters also becoming fae. *A Court of Wings and Ruin* describes Feyre’s return to the Night Court, her sisters’ struggles with becoming fae, Feyre’s gradual acceptance

¹² *Young adult fantasy* is generally aimed at people who barely came of age, and a few years after that. It is, however, read by people of an older age group as well (Calek et al. 2017: 116).

¹³ Farah Mendlesohn lists four different types of fantasy, based on the relationship of the main character with the world in the story. For a more extensive discussion of that particular topic, see: Trębicki (2014).

¹⁴ In the story, fae are a species similar to humans in appearance, however, with pointier ears. They are known as cruel and manipulative creatures that play with human lives for entertainment. Fae generally live much longer than humans, are faster, stronger, and are able to use magic abilities. They live in their own territories, separated from the human world by a wall.

¹⁵ The world depicted in the story is known as Prythian. It is divided into seven courts, ruled by High Lords. Four of the courts refer to seasons – Spring Court, Summer Court, Autumn Court, Winter Court. The other three correspond to the time of day – Dawn Court, Day Court, and Night Court.

of her change, and the preparations for the war. The story ends with Feyre finally accepting that she is both human and fae, and Tamlin letting Feyre leave.

Before examining Feyre, who certainly provides an interesting image of Persephone, it is necessary to discuss Feyre's two sisters as each of them represents a different version of Kore/Persephone and the journey to self-acceptance.

Elaine is an evident depiction of Kore. She is delicate, feminine, timid, and kind. She also has a connection to flowers and a garden, in general, as she does have a hobby of gardening. Considering her peaceful and timid nature, Elaine needs a protector, her Demeter. This role is taken by the third sister, Nesta. After going through a metamorphosis, which in the book is represented by the transition from a human to a fae, Elaine falls into a deep depression. She does not sleep, eat, or leave her room, and cries constantly (Maas 2017: 153). She is supposed to be a depiction of Kore only, and thus she cannot mentally change and grow up into the new role of Persephone. Interestingly, the colour white, which the depressed Elaine is wearing, is not associated with innocence. Feyre describes white, the lack of colour, as a depiction of death (Maas 2017: 155). It represents Kore's death or the death of her innocence.

The image of Elaine's mind seems to be a representation of Rymkiewicz's garden: "The gates to her mind... Solid iron, covered in vines of flowers – or it would have been. The blossoms were all sealed, sleeping buds tucked into tangles of leaves and thorns" (Maas 2017: 521). Her mind is portrayed as an unattended garden filled with flowers that could bloom but are unable to do so, most likely due to the depressed state of the character. The image of the abandoned garden symbolizes Kore's death, as well as the death of her innocence and happiness. One of the characters finally realizes that for Elaine to "bloom" again, she needs bright sun and a piece of land to plant a garden. Her only role is to be Kore, and since Elaine is thrown forcefully into another world and body, she is incapable of growing into her new role of Persephone.

Nesta as the protector of Elaine has some semblance of Demeter in her character. In the series, however, she holds the role of Persephone. She also goes through a metamorphosis, a change from a human into a fae, yet she manages to fit into her new role quickly. Moreover, as a human, she is already different, she cannot fit in with the rest of her kind (Maas 2015: 253). However, as a fae, she is more relaxed than ever during her human life (Maas 2017: 151). It seems as if Nesta is a representation of Persephone even before being "kidnapped" and for that reason, her change into a fae is much smoother. Nesta also has a connection to death. After the change into a fae she receives, or rather steals, some kind of ancient

power that is not fully described in the novel. However, the characters know that this new power makes Nesta a personification or reinterpretation of Death (Maas 2017: 243). This strengthens the idea that Nesta represents Persephone as a ruler of the land of the dead.

Thus, Elaine is Kore, Nesta is Persephone, and the protagonist, Feyre, is both. She is the ultimate depiction of the myth and growing from one role to another, and yet keeping pieces of both, and accepting that duality. Feyre is not, however, a stereotypical Kore like Elaine. Instead, Feyre seems to be a feminist reimaging of Kore. She has a connection to nature as she is used to being in a forest with animals. Still, there is murder present all around. Feyre goes to the forest, to nature, to hunt and kill. She is not a timid, delicate Kore who may be kidnapped, but a strong-willed young woman who will have to go on a journey to grow. She has to search for herself, and for who she wants to be when her role as a sole protector of the family is gone. She is youthful and her innocence is visible in this search for purpose, and growing into a new, more responsible role.

The wolf that Feyre kills becomes the narcissus of the story. This is the interpretation of the flower as a deceiver and an accomplice of a higher authority. The wolf appears in front of Feyre as a ploy to force her hand into murdering him, so she could be taken into the land of the fae (Maas 2015: 283). Furthermore Kore, by plucking the narcissus flower, breaks a taboo. Demeter forbids her daughter to touch the flower, but Kore does not listen and thus has to suffer the consequences of her act by being kidnapped by Hades. Feyre also breaks a taboo by murdering a living being. On top of that, Feyre consciously decides to use an ash arrow (Maas 2015: 5), which is an effective weapon against the fae. This proves that Feyre must have realized at some point that the animal in front of her is not a mere wolf, but a fae in disguise¹⁶. At that point, Feyre is blinded by pure hatred towards the fae. She acts under the influence of her emotions, just as Kore becomes enthralled with the narcissus flower to the point of ignoring her mother's warning. This is the start of Feyre's slow metamorphosis, because that event leads to the main character literally dying and being brought back to life into the new body of a fae (Maas 2015: 407). Just like Kore transitions into Persephone, Feyre transitions into a fae, and it all starts with picking up the narcissus flower or killing the wolf.

Furthermore, the symbolism of an eye is also present in the story. It signifies gazing deeply into oneself such as in some of the interpretations of the narcissus

¹⁶ The motif of metamorphosis, which is strongly associated with the narcissus flower, is also visible in the literal transformation of the fae into a wolf.

in the Myth of Demeter and Kore. In the series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* it is the eye of the tattoo that Feyre receives after entering a contract with Rhysand, the High Lord of the Night Court: "I rubbed my left forearm and hand, the entirety of which was now covered in swirls and whorls of black ink. Even my fingers weren't spared, and a large eye was tattooed in the center of my palm. It was feline, and its slitted pupil stared right back at me" (Maas 2015: 335). It is not only a part of a contract, but it possesses a much stronger magic which ties Feyre to the High Lord of the Night Court¹⁷, similarly as the pomegranate fruit in the myth. Feyre, however, hides it at some point (Maas 2016: 39), seemingly unable to accept the connection to the High Lord.

That eye symbol represents the fact that Rhysand fulfils the role of the mythological Hades in the series. Due to the contract between Feyre and the High Lord, the main character is given the power to see what is invisible to others, meaning Rhysand's hidden city, as well as the man's true character. Rhysand's strong association with the eye symbol and Hades indicates that Feyre at some point in the story will leave Tamlin and get closer to Rhysand, just as Kore leaves Demeter and becomes Hades' partner.

At first, after the change into a fae, Feyre seems to follow the path of Elaine. She also falls into depression, but this mental state has a different source than in Elaine's case. Whereas Elaine desires to go back to her state as Kore, Feyre after the transition tries to become strictly Persephone and forget her life as Kore. Feyre realizes that she does not fit into any of the worlds: the human one nor the fae one, but forgets that in reality she belongs to both. Finally, Feyre grows up into her role of Persephone. It is not, however, a sudden change as in the original myth. Instead, it is a slow process to grow up and take the new role of Persephone that merges two separate worlds. In the story, an item appears that forces Feyre to look deeper into herself and accept the duality of her existence. It is the mirror of Ouroboros, which Feyre must obtain in *A Court of Wings and Fury*. The experience of looking into the mirror is a difficult challenge for Feyre: "How I had cowered and raged and wept. How I had vomited and screamed, and clawed at the mirror. Slammed my fists into it. And then curled up, trembling at every horrific and cruel and selfish thing I'd beheld within that monster – within me. But I kept watching. I did not turn from it" (Maas 2017: 564). However, her growth is visible in that part, as she decides

¹⁷ Rhysand and Feyre from that point on hold a mental connection that allows Rhysand to know what Feyre is doing (Maas 2016: 47).

to look into the mirror and accept her whole self¹⁸. She comes to terms with this duality of Kore-Persephone¹⁹, as she states: “My name is Feyre Archeron²⁰. I was once human – and now I am Fae. I call both worlds my home” (Maas 2017: 676).

The role of Demeter in the story is fulfilled by Tamlin, the High Lord of the Spring Court. He is the one who takes Feyre to the fae realm (Maas 2015: 37), who sends the wolf, or metaphorically, plants the narcissus in her way, and who becomes Feyre’s love interest in the first book²¹. Naturally, Tamlin’s connection to spring and to a court that is filled with gardens and flowers, which remains in a constant, yet artificial, state of bloom, signifies him being the depiction of Demeter. However, the unnatural condition of the court indicates that there is something more hidden deeper under the pompous permanent spring.

Tamlin is not, however, the Demeter who is a loving mother. Tamlin is first and foremost a protector of his realm²², the tradition, and Feyre. Furthermore, he is a protector who forces his shelter onto those who may be unwilling. He makes Feyre his prisoner (Maas 2016: 123–124) to ensure her safety, not realizing that this

¹⁸ Similarly, the theme of self-acceptance appears in the first volume of the series, *A Court of Thorns and Roses*. All of the residents of the Spring Court have masks on their faces, hiding their image. Feyre is the only person in the Spring Court who does not wear a mask. This could symbolize the deceiving nature of the fae, and Feyre being the sincere one who does not hide her distaste towards the much stronger species. However, after Tamlin tries to shape Feyre into the person he needs her to be, Feyre’s honest nature and self-acceptance are destroyed, forcing the protagonist to once again go through the journey towards accepting what she has become.

¹⁹ The theme of accepting oneself is connected with the motif of obtaining unity, which is evident throughout the series. This motif appears in various side plots, such as Jurian receiving a new body, assembling the Cauldron, or finding two parts of a book in *A Court of Mist and Fury*. It looks as if Sarah J. Maas uses these smaller plot points to emphasize the journey that Feyre goes through, unifying two separate worlds.

²⁰ Feyre’s surname also is a reference to the myth, or more so to the land of the dead that Hades rules over, as one of the rivers of the underworld is called the “Acheront” (Markowska 2011: 62).

²¹ From another point of view, Feyre and Tamlin’s love story can be read in the context of the Beauty and the Beast archetype. Tamlin, as a shapeshifter turns into a beast, takes Feyre to his Spring Court to atone for the crime she has committed. His Court and all the inhabitants of his domain are cursed, and the only thing that can break the spell is Feyre’s love for Tamlin. The main theme in Beauty and the Beast is to love someone despite their appearance. A similar theme appears in *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, in which Feyre cannot see Tamlin’s face because it is covered by a mask. Tamlin’s aggressiveness, impulsiveness and desire for control also fit the typical image of the Beast. Furthermore, as in the well-known story, at the end Tamlin returns Feyre’s freedom so that she can return to her family home, where she is supposed to be safe (Maas 2015: 244).

²² There exists a belief that Kore was Demeter’s mirror image, or even the same person (Kubiak 2013). Similarly, it seems that Feyre and Tamlin are alike. An example of a characteristic that connects the two characters is their need to protect their loved ones at any cost. Most likely, it is this similarity that causes Feyre to become so attached to Tamlin at first. The excitement of finding a person with similar values is what makes Feyre ignore the first signs of Tamlin’s possessiveness and aggression.

prison of care and safety is not something Feyre wants or needs. Tamlin to a great extent matches the depiction of Demeter that appears in Glück's *Averno*, Thomas' *Pomegranate* or Mniszek's *Pluto i Persefona*, the image of an overprotective mother who wants to retrieve her child not out of love but out of possessiveness, and a mother's need to control her child. Noticing and understanding the comparison between Tamlin and Demeter is an immediate signal to the reader that the love story between him and Feyre will not be successful or happy. At some point in the story, there has to be a Hades that will come for his Persephone.

Rhysand, the High Lord of the Night Court, is the portrayal of Hades in the story. The Night Court is a representation of the underworld, a land that is unknown to the mortals, and in the case of *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series, to anyone apart from the Night Court's residents. Rhysand is compared to death (Maas 2016: 566), and it is Feyre who describes him as "cold and beautiful as death" (Maas 2016: 266). The fact that Feyre describes death as beautiful shows that she does not fear it, and consequently, she does not fear Rhysand. However, Rhysand is more so compared to darkness and shadows. He is associated with the idea of invisibility just like Hades. Rhysand can use shadows to hide in them, and his Night Court is generally not visited by the other fae, thus becoming a sort of a mystery. Rhysand additionally possesses the ability to enter people's minds and destroy them from within. He not only has an invisible ability to kill, but yet again, he is the personification of a silent, unexpected, and inescapable death. He is, however, the Hades who loves Persephone deeply and tries to bring back her autonomy and freedom and save her from Demeter. Rhysand becomes Feyre's saviour and follows her throughout her self-acceptance journey. It is the interpretation of the myth visible in Glück's or Mniszek's works.

Tamlin is the one who gives Feyre safety, and Rhysand gives her freedom. Feyre at some point in her life desires both of these things, however, as she changes and transitions from her role as Kore to her role as Persephone, the importance of said values also changes. As Kore, as a human, Feyre needs Tamlin's protection in a world that is unsafe for her. Nevertheless, after dying and becoming a fae, slowly growing into Persephone, Feyre needs freedom much more. Her maturing means that she needs Tamlin's protection to cease. Tamlin is not a villain in the story. Even though his actions are harmful to Feyre, they stem out of his love towards the character. On the other hand, Rhysand is not strictly good. Whenever it is inconvenient to Rhysand for Feyre to know something, such as the information about Feyre and him being mates, he will keep it to himself (Maas 2016: 493). He is not the villain in the story, but he is not the depiction of a perfect, loving Hades either. All characters have their positive and negative character traits.

There is also an object that possesses power over all the characters and their fates: a mythical Cauldron. It is the Cauldron that creates the “mating bond” between the characters, meaning connecting their fates forever. None of the characters can control who they are going to be bonded to. It is also impossible to break such a bond. It is still needed for the female counterpart to accept the bond in a traditional, some could say somewhat sexist, manner, mainly by preparing a dish for the male counterpart. However, the woman is the one in control of the fate of the bond, whether she will agree to it or not. This dish is a representation of the mythical pomegranate. Still, there is a difference as Feyre is not forced to eat the fruit. She is the one in control. It is Feyre who decides whether she agrees to the bond with Rhysand or not. Furthermore, the bond given to the characters by the Cauldron matches the idea of Hades being struck by Cupid’s arrow. Similarly, the fate of the characters that is decided by the Cauldron is an outside influence. Feyre’s choice in accepting the bond is a superficial one. The bond may be technically rejected but this rejection does not change anything. Moreover, even if Feyre decides to reject the bond, she still has to remain in Rhysand’s world, in the world of the fae. She is no longer human and thus she cannot go back to her human life, similarly as Kore cannot go back to being Kore after becoming Persephone. Feyre’s ability to choose is taken away from her when she crosses the border between the human world and the fae world for the first time.

5. Conclusion

There are several versions of the Myth of Demeter and Kore. Perhaps it is due to the lack of one agreed-upon narrative, the myth is still told and retold by various authors. It provides an opportunity for them to make their interpretations of the myth. The story of the myth is not completely closed and there are various unanswered questions such as Persephone’s stance throughout the events. However, the new adaptations of the myth allow for fresh interpretations of the well-known story. The authors do not only interpret the myth, but the myth gains newer and newer meanings, oftentimes depending on the ideology of the times.

In the case of *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, the addition of the Myth of Demeter and Kore, changes the theme of the whole series. It is no longer a simple love story. Instead, it becomes a story of maturing and searching for one’s place in the world. Tamlin becomes the Demeter who cannot agree to their child changing and growing up. Rhysand is the loving Hades who treats Persephone as his equal.

Elaine becomes the version of Kore that cannot mature into her role of Persephone and thus suffers greatly. Nesta is the Persephone that never was the stereotypical Kore. Finally, Feyre is the one that grows from being Kore to becoming Persephone, and yet has qualities of both. The main difference between the series and the myth is that the transition from Kore to Persephone is not rapid. It is a much slower process for Feyre.

This retelling of the myth provides new interpretations of the already-known story. Nonetheless, it also points out the universal nature of the original myth, the troubles the characters face, their relationships, and their behaviours. Hence, this proves the stance of Joseph Campbell towards myths and their prevalent nature in the modern world.

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