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**MYTHIC IMAGES IN CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN'S
*ORMOND***

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A feminist reading of Charles Brockden Brown can be traced as far back as Margaret Fuller's remark that "it increases our own interest in Brown that a prophet in this respect of a better era, he has usually placed his thinking royal mind in the body of a woman ...a conclusive proof that the term feminine is not a synonym for weak" (Fuller 63). Though in a more recent article Fritz Fleischman admits that *Ormond* is a novel about "sexual politics," he gives a cursory treatment at best to these issues in the novel (Fleischman 33). The Demeter/Kore myth provides a useful framework for exploring feminist issues in *Ormond*. Ormond's abduction and attempted rape of Constantia corresponds in mythology to Hades' abduction and rape of Persephone. The rape trauma thus portrayed disrupts the green world. Sophia assumes the role of Demeter in the novel in overcoming the disturbance and rescuing her friend. According to Annis Pratt in *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, "the ritual of following the road that Demeter took in her grief and triumph creates a transformation or rebirth of the personality in the participant...the transformational power derived from the relationship of women to each other" (Pratt 171). The reuniting of daughter with mother in the Demeter myth is portrayed in *Ormond* in the transformation of the heroine's personality through the matriarchal figure of Sophia. Constantia's personality is reborn or transformed through contact with Sophia who assumes the dominant or controlling voice in the novel. Sophia makes herself a locus of power through assimilating maternal roles. As in the Demeter/Kore materials the mother and daughter goddesses mingle identities: "The succeeding three days were spent in a state of dizziness and intoxication. The ordinary functions of nature were lost amidst the impetuositities of a master passion" (*Ormond* 207). What has been described as the "unhealthy aspects" of the Sophia/Constantia relationship (Ringe 60) can be explained in a more positive light as a reenactment of the Demeter/Kore myth.

The Demeter/Kore archetype as a controlling motif in *Ormond* argues for unity and coherence in the novel and provides new insight into the interaction between the major characters—Constantia, Sophia and Ormond. Because Jean Bolen's *Goddesses in Every Woman* deals with the Demeter/Kore archetype as it appears in classical mythology and in modern theories of personality development, it seems particularly

relevant for discussing this archetypal pattern in *Ormond*. Jean Bolen describes Persephone as “the most formless and indistinct of the seven goddesses...as characterized by a lack of direction...” (GEW 215). As Bolen explains, Persephone the Kore, or “nameless maiden,” is the stage of life when a woman is young, uncertain and full of possibilities (GEW 204). Constantia’s youth is suggested in the depiction of her as one whose “sphere of observation had been narrow...” (Ormond 62-63). Constantia’s Persephone-like lack of direction is implied in the portrayal of her as one whose “perceptions were vague and obscure” (Ormond 149). Craig, who had worked for her father and betrayed him, describes her as a dreamer: “Just the dreamer she ever was!...One would think she’d learned something of the world by this time” (Ormond 80). Her youth and formlessness are intimated in the comments on her defect in regard to religion: “All opinions in her mind were mutable...” (Ormond 149). Martinette comments on Constantia’s sheltered life and inexperience as she describes her as one who “grew and flourished like a frail mimosa, in the spot where destiny had planted you” (Ormond 160) and “You [Constantia] sitting all your life in peaceful corners, can scarcely imagine that variety of hardship and turmoil which attends a female who lives in a camp” (Ormond 167). Constantia, whose ideas respecting revolutions and wars were “indefinite and vague,” “could not but derive humiliation from comparing her own slender acquirements with those of her companion [Martinette]” (Ormond 158). Constantia is formless and indistinct like Persephone in “her disconnected situation” (Ormond 191). She has “no social ties...to hold her to America” (Ormond 175).

According to Bolen “Prior to her abduction, Persephone was a child-woman, unaware of her sexual attractiveness and her beauty” (GEW 201). Constantia in her celibate state remains a child-woman in the novel, unaware of her sexual attractiveness and her beauty, though she has suitors. As Bolen explains, “as long as she is psychologically the Kore, her sexuality is unawakened,” and “...she lack[s] a sense of herself as a sensual or sexual woman” (GEW 202). This lack of a sense of herself as a sensual or sexual woman is apparent in Constantia’s attitude toward marriage. As Bolen explains, “as long as a woman’s attitudes are those of Persephone the Kore, she will...resist marriage because she sees it from the archetypal perspective of the maiden for whom the model of marriage is death. From the standpoint of Persephone, marriage was an abduction by Hades, the death bringer. This view of marriage and husband was quite different from Hera’s contrasting model of marriage as fulfillment...” (GEW 216).

Constantia follows the pattern of Persephone in resisting marriage: "Marriage included vows of irrevocable affection and obedience. It was a contract to endure for life. To form this connection in extreme youth, before time had unfolded and modelled the character of the parties, was, in her opinion, a proof of pernicious and opprobrious temerity. Not to perceive the propriety of delay in the case, or to be regardless of the motives that would enjoin upon a deliberate procedure, furnished an unanswerable objection to any man's pretensions" (*Ormond* 18), and "She had no design of entering into marriage in less than seven years from this period" (*Ormond* 19). When her suitor rejects her after the loss of her father's fortune, she remains emotionally neutral: "Not a single hope, relative to her own condition, had been frustrated....This change in her condition she treated lightly and retained her cheerfulness unimpaired" (*Ormond* 19). When the decent Balfour rescues her from ruffians and offers her marriage, she rejects the proposal despite her dire economic straits, concluding that "so far from possessing property, she herself would become the property of another" (*Ormond* 69).

According to Bolen, "if Persephone provides the structure of the personality it predisposes a woman not to act but to be acted upon by others—to be compliant in action and passive in attitude" (*GEW* 199). As Bolen explains, "sometimes the father is the dominating and intrusive parent who fosters the dependent daughter" (*GEW* 200). Constantia appears in the novel as a compliant daughter who is influenced in her tastes, interests and values to a great degree by the views and interests of her father: "The education of Constantia had been regulated by the peculiar views of her father, who sought to make her, not alluring and voluptuous, but eloquent and wise. He therefore limited her studies to Latin and English. Instead of familiarizing her with the amorous effusions of Petrarcha and Racine, he made her thoroughly conversant with Tacitus and Milton. Instead of making her a practical musician or pencilist, he conducted her to the school of Newton and Hartley, unveiled to her the mathematical properties of light and sound, taught her as a metaphysician and anatomist, the structure and power of the senses and discussed with her the principles and progress of human society" (*Ormond* 27). The influence of the father is apparent as well in her lack of religion: "This defect in her character she owed to her father's system of education. Mr. Dudley was an adherent to what he conceived to be true religion. No man was more passionate in his eulogy of his own form of devotion and belief, or in his invective against atheistical dogmas; but he reflected that religion assumed many forms, only one of which is salutary or true, and that

truth in this respect is incompatible with infantile and premature instruction. To this subject it was requisite to apply the force of a mature and unfettered understanding. For this end he labored to lead away the juvenile reflections of Constantia from religious topics, to detain them in the paths of history and eloquence—to accustom her to the accuracy of geometrical deduction, and to the views of those evils that have flowed in all ages from mistaken piety” (*Ormond* 148).

According to Bolen, “his [the father’s] overcontrolling attitude may also be deceptive, covering a too-close emotional attachment to his daughter” (*GEW* 200). During her father’s lifetime Constantia has an extremely close emotional relationship with him: “He [her father] never reflected on his relation to her without rapture” (*Ormond* 144). Hence she remains somewhat insulated in the patriarchal circle: “It may be asked if a woman of this character did not attract the notice of the world. Her station no less than her modes of thinking excluded her from the concourse of the opulent and gay. She kept herself in privacy; her engagements confined to her own fireside and her neighbors enjoyed no means of penetrating through that obscurity in which she wrapped herself...it so happened that her hours were for a long period, enlivened by no companion but her father and her faithful Lucy” (*Ormond* 65).

In the Demeter/Kore myth, according to Bolen, Persephone is associated with symbols of fertility—grain and corn (*GEW* 197). Constantia like Persephone takes on these associations in the novel as she assumes the role of provider of food and sustenance for her family with a substance based on Indian meal during the plague. Her father’s story of a Benedictine who survived a plague by restricting his diet to water and pollenta leads Constantia to a creative solution to the problem of how to survive the plague: “These facts now occurred to Constantia’s reflections with new vividness and led to interesting consequences. Pollenta and hasty pudding or samp, are preparations of the same substance—a substance which she needed not the experience of others to convince her was no less grateful then nutritive. Indian meal was procurable at ninety cents per bushel. By recollecting former experiments, she knew that this quantity, with no accompaniment but salt, would supply wholesome and plentiful food for four months to one person....Three persons were now to be supplied with food, and this supply could be furnished during four months, at the trivial expense of three dollars....Infallible security was thus provided against hunger. This was the only care that was urgent and immediate. While they had food and were exempt from disease, they could live, and were not without their portion of comfort” (*Ormond* 46).

In classical mythology Demeter was worshipped as a mother goddess, specifically as a mother of the maiden Persephone. The Sophia/Constantia relationship in *Ormond* reenacts the Demeter/Kore archetype as Sophia assumes the maternal role in relation to Constantia who "worships" her as a "mother goddess" or Madonna. The reader is told that the picture Constantia possesses of Sophia is a source of idolatry: "Its power over her sensations was similar to that possessed by a beautiful Madonna over the heart of a juvenile enthusiast. It was the mother of the only devotion which her education had taught her to consider as beneficial or true" (*Ormond* 61). As Bolen points out, although other goddesses such as Hera and Aphrodite were also mothers, her daughter was Demeter's most significant relationship (*GEW* 17). Sophia informs the reader that despite her recent marriage "it was my inflexible purpose to live and die with her [Constantia]" (*Ormond* 191). For the Demeter woman, according to Bolen, "marriage in itself is not an overriding priority" (*GEW* 184). As Bolen explains, "when Demeter is the strongest element in a woman's personality, her sexuality is usually not very important" (*GEW* 183). Though Sophia has recently married Courtland, because of her separation from Constantia everything looks bleak and barren to her; the world is devoid of meaning. Sophia assumes the role of Demeter in becoming a personification of the grieving mother who searches in vain over the earth for Persephone/Constantia when they are separated: "there passed not a day or an hour in which the image of Constantia was not recalled," and "(t)he destiny of Constantia was uppermost in my thoughts" (*Ormond* 189, 190). Money is valued in that it will enable her to reunite with Constantia: "There is scarcely any good so dear to a rational being as competence...but this acquisition was valuable chiefly as it enabled me to reunite my fate to that of Constantia" (*Ormond* 190). As in the Demeter/Kore myth, the grieving mother Sophia is ultimately reunited with her eternally maiden daughter Constantia and ceases being depressed: "To look and to talk to each other afforded enchanting occupation for every moment. I would not part from her side, but ate slept, walked and mused and read, with my arm locked in hers, and with her breath fanning my cheek" (*Ormond* 207) and "Henceforth, the stream of our existence was to mix; we were to act and to think in common..." (*Ormond* 208).

According to Bolen, the Demeter woman "may be possessive of her Persephone if she fears that she may lose her...she may foster dependence and exclusiveness..." (*GEW* 181). Sophia fosters dependence and exclusiveness in relation to Constantia, which leads to a

stage in which Constantia becomes Persephone the pawn, the object to be possessed in a power struggle between Ormond, who appears in the novel as an archetypal Hades figure, and her Demeter “mother” Sophia. Sophia in her role as Demeter is appalled by the attentions of Ormond to Constantia. She expresses strong disapproval of his personality, character and background. Sophia regards Ormond, the “competitor in her affections” for Constantia with “aversion and fear”: “I could not but harbor aversion to a scheme which should tend to sever me from Constantia, or to give me a competitor in her affections. Besides this, the properties of Ormond were of too mysterious a nature to make him worthy of acceptance. Little more was known concerning him than what he himself had disclosed to the Dudleys, but this knowledge would suffice to invalidate his claims” (*Ormond* 208). Sophia perceives Ormond as a potential adversary in her relationship with her Persephone daughter Constantia: “It was not difficult to exhibit, in their true light, the enormous errors of this man, and the danger of prolonging their discourse. Her assent to accompany me to England was readily obtained” (*Ormond* 209). In her adversarial role with Ormond, Sophia is determined “to put an end to the views and expectations of Ormond...” (*Ormond* 210), and “I had always believed the character and machinations of Ormond to be worthy of caution and fear” (*Ormond* 217).

Ormond assumes the role of Hades in the novel most dramatically by abducting and attempting to rape Constantia. From his earliest appearance in the novel, however, Ormond assumes the archetypal personality pattern of Hades. According to Bolen, Hades was also called the “rich one” and his realm was a source of underground wealth (*Gods in Every Man* 104). Ormond’s power is associated with his ill-gotten riches which he bestows on Constantia and her father: “It was to him that she was indebted for her father’s restoration to sight, and to whom both owed, essentially, though indirectly, their present affluence” (*Ormond* 146). In classical mythology, as Bolen explains, Hades was noted for his invisibility as well as his wealth: “the god wore a cap of invisibility and thus was an unseen presence” (*GEM* 111). Ormond becomes “invisible,” that is, an unseen presence, in much of the novel through the disguises he assumes: “There was a method of gaining access to families and marking them in their unguarded attitudes, more easy and effectual than any other; it required least preparation and cost least pains; the disguise, also, was of the most impenetrable kind” (*Ormond* 110) “...he had frequently swept his own chimney, without the knowledge of his own servants. It was likewise true, though

equally incredible, that he had played at romps with his scullion, and listened with patience to a thousand slanders on his own character" (*Ormond* 111). "...(B)y this mode Ormond had effectively concealed himself" (*Ormond* 112). Ormond's "invisibility" empowers him by giving him access to the privacy of others. Because of his "invisibility" he is able to intrude as an "unseen presence" or a secret witness between Sophia and Constantia: "Her interviews and conversations with me took place at seasons of general repose, when all doors were fast and avenues shut, in the midst of silence and in the bosom of retirement. The theme of our discourse was commonly, too sacred for any ears but our own; disclosures were of too intimate and delicate a nature for any but a female audience; they were too injurious to the fame and peace of Ormond for him to be admitted to partake of them; yet his words implied a full acquaintance with recent events and with purposes and deliberations shrouded, as we imagined, in impenetrable secrecy" (*Ormond* 212). Ormond's skill and dexterity in imitating the voice and gesture of others "enabled him to gain access, as if by supernatural means, to the privacy of others and baffle their profoundest contrivances to hide themselves from his view. It flattered him with something like omniscience" (*Ormond* 96), and "(i)t arose from these circumstances that no one was more impenetrable than Ormond, though no one's character seemed more easily discerned" (*Ormond* 96).

In addition to Hades' reputation for riches and invisibility he is known as a recluse: "Hades...is naturally detached and more at home in the underworld than the outer world" (*GEM* 117). Ormond typifies the archetypal Hades in his seclusion: "To the vulgar eye, therefore, he appeared a man of speculation and seclusion, and was equally inscrutable in his real and assumed characters. In his real, his intents were too lofty and comprehensive as well as too assiduously shrouded for them to scan" (*Ormond* 96). Bolen describes "a pure Hades" as "a loner who lives in his own inner world" (*GEM* 116). Ormond reenacts this archetypal personality pattern in his aloofness from any familial or social ties. The archetypal Hades, according to Bolen, is "cut off from the realm of emotions" (*GEM* 119). Though Ormond contrives through devious machinations to possess Constantia, he is not involved with her emotionally.

The rape of Persephone is integral to the Demeter/Kore myth. In classical mythology Hades desired Persephone and abducted the young maiden while she was gathering flowers in a meadow. Hades appeared in his chariot pulled by black powerful horses and seized the terrified

maiden, carrying her into the depths of the underworld. Ormond's attempted rape of Constantia at Perth Amboy reenacts the mythical rape of Persephone by Hades. The green meadow locale where the abduction of Persephone takes place is suggested in the "romantic retreat" of Perth Amboy which is restored to Constantia by the will of Helena. The landscape of "uncommon amplitude and beauty" of Perth Amboy is reminiscent of the green meadow locale of the abduction of Persephone while she was gathering flowers: "her [Constantia's] eyes rested for a moment on the variegated hues which were poured out upon the western sky and upon the scene of intermingled waters, copses and fields" (*Ormond* 222). Like Hades, Ormond intrudes on the harmony of the bucolic scene at full speed with his horse. Like Hades, Ormond is determined to exercise his power over his victim and to possess her by any means as was the fate of Persephone: "Constantia was to be obtained by any means" (*Ormond* 148). Like Hades, Ormond appears as the agent or harbinger of death: "...he now descended the stair, bearing a lifeless body in his arms..." (*Ormond* 229). In addition to bringing about the death of Craig, Ormond claims responsibility for the death of Constantia's father: "His death was a due and disinterested offering on the altar of your felicity and mine" (*Ormond* 231). In contrast to the outcome of the classical Demeter/Kore myth, Constantia averts the intended rape by killing Ormond. The murder of Ormond thrusts her into a psychological hell or underworld from which, as in the classical myth, she is ultimately rescued by Demeter/Sophia: "To restore wealth and equanimity to my friend; to repel the erroneous accusations of her conscience; to hinder her from musing, with eternal anguish, upon this catastrophe; to lay the spirit of secret upbraiding by which she was incessantly tormented, which bereft her of repose, empoisoned all her enjoyments, and menaced not only the subversion of her peace but the speedy destruction of her life, became my next employment" (*Ormond* 241). As in the situation of Demeter who is able to rescue and restore her daughter Persephone, Sophia performs a similar nurturing and creative role in relation to Constantia: "My counsels and remonstrances were not wholly inefficacious. They afforded me the prospect of her ultimate restoration to tranquillity. Meanwhile I called to my aid the influence of time and of a change of scene" (*Ormond* 241).

According to Pratt, the Demeter/Kore myth appeals to women because it "derive[s] from feminine materials alien to patriarchy" (171). As Carl G. Jung and C. Kerényi suggest, "the psychology of the Demeter cult has all the features of a matriarchal order of society where the man is an indispensable but on the whole disturbing factor" (Jung

and Kerenyi 177). In a patriarchal society many men claim that women's friendships are corrupted by competition for men. Brown shows in the relationship between Constantia and Sophia women drawn to each other's minds and not affected by jealousy over men. In presenting women in relation to each other Brown anticipates modern feminist writers. His perspective suggests that women have the same potential as men for meaningful relationships with each other. There is the friendship which Virginia Woolf writes about in *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf 144). Charles Brockden Brown, the first significant American novelist, deserves re-evaluation by the modern reader because long before the twentieth-century women writers he had presented women in relation to each other rather than to men. In *Ormond* the reader is caught up in the dramatization of a myth that goes against the patriarchal order of the society of the time. Brown's early work leads to the feminist perception that women have the same potential as men, the same autonomy.

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