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CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture
ISSN 1481-4374
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Volume 22 | (2020) Issue 4 Article 8

"No Roses, White nor Red, Glow Here": The Motif of the Garden in Two Proserpine Poems by A. Swinburne and D. Greenwell

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Recommended Citation

Salcedo González, Cristina. ""No Roses, White nor Red, Glow Here": The Motif of the Garden in Two Proserpine Poems by A. Swinburne and D. Greenwell." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 22.4 (2020): <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3308>

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CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>
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Volume 22 Issue 4 (December 2020) Article 8
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<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss4/8>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 22.4 (2020)**
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol22/iss4/>

Abstract: In this article, I discuss Algernon Swinburne's and Dora Greenwell's engagement with the myth of Proserpine through an analysis of the motif of the garden, which takes central stage in both accounts. The examination will illustrate how the authors' outlined images of the garden challenge the dominant representation of the motif within Western literary tradition, offering a re-interpretation of the myth as social commentary.

Cristina SALCEDO GONZÁLEZ

"No Roses, White nor Red, Glow Here": The Motif of the Garden in Two Proserpine Poems by A. Swinburne and D. Greenwell

Writers of all epochs and backgrounds have felt attracted to the myth of Proserpine/Persephone, one of the oldest of all Greek myths, and a story which incarnates universal concepts about life, death, and rebirth. Goethe, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Thomas Hardy, H.D. or Rita Dove are but a few of those who have reworked the myth so that it resonated with their specific concerns. While the responses to this story have been numerous and variable (Frenzel 35), it is in the nineteenth century that a literary cult around the figure of Proserpine emerges (Louis, *Rises*; Radford, "Making"). In this context, the recreations of Algernon Swinburne ("The Garden of Proserpine," 1866) and Dora Greenwell ("The Garden of Proserpine," 1869) are of great relevance, as they depart from the dominant tendency regarding the reading of Proserpine. Besides, both authors respond to this tradition similarly by making the motif of the garden central to their refigurations, which suggests that an exploration of such motif happens to be essential for the understanding of their particular engagement with the myth. Accordingly, in this essay I will study Swinburne's and Greenwell's accounts of the classical myth by means of analyzing the manner in which they employ the garden motif. More specifically, the first part, intended as a contextualization for the later analyses of the poems, will be devoted (a) to offering a brief overview of the reception of the figure of Proserpine throughout the nineteenth century and (b) to introducing the dominant representations of the garden within Western literary tradition. The second part will be aimed at critically examining the selected poems, an examination which will eventually illustrate that two different social uses of the myth are put at work by drawing on the same literary strategy: Swinburne's garden emphasizes the urge to come to terms with the idea of death, whereas Greenwell's garden brings to light the fatal effects of Proserpine's abduction. Ultimately, this essay seeks to provide fresh perspectives on two poems that, as will be shown in due course, contribute to furthering the nineteenth-century artistic cult around the figure of Proserpine.

The story of Proserpine survives in several classical accounts, each of which offers a slightly different version. In his celebrated *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Pierre Grimal provides a comprehensive account of the main classical authors who have narrated the Proserpine myth; these are: Homer, Hesiod, the unknown author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Bacchylides, Ovid, Claudian, Virgil and Apollodorus (Grimal 425). As presented in the ancient sources, Proserpine, daughter of Zeus, the chief god, and the harvest goddess Demeter, is worshiped alongside her mother in the Eleusinian Mysteries. In her youth, as the Goddess of Spring's bounty, she is titled *Kore*, "the corn maiden," but once she is abducted by Pluto, the Lord of the Underworld (also known as *Hades*), she becomes the Goddess of the Dead, and is mostly referred to as *Proserpine*. Duality is central to the figure of Proserpine: on the one hand, she plays a role as the winter Goddess of the Underworld and as the Springtime goddess of Rebirth, eternally traversing and inhabiting two radically-opposed realms; on the other hand, she is the feminine counterpart to both her husband and her mother. It is precisely Proserpine's dual nature—Kore and Proserpine, the goddess of Springtime and the goddess of the Dead, daughter and wife, innocence and wisdom—that makes her such a powerful goddess, full of meaning and potential growth. In this vein, the late-Victorian classics scholar Jane Ellen Harrison asserted that Kore's power resides in her being a deity of all the things that existed, exist and will exist: Proserpine is a divinity of life, death and rebirth (Harrison 46). Drawn to the goddess's potential for meaning, numerous writers, ancient and modern alike, set to exploit the latent capabilities that a figure such as Proserpine could offer.

Though partly forgotten during the medieval period and the Renaissance, the myth of Proserpine gains relevance in the Romantic era and, mostly, in the nineteenth century when we witness the reappraisal of the ancient story and the subsequent literary development of Proserpine (Frenzel 35). In fact, as a direct consequence of the productive fictionalization to which the myth is subjected, an artistic cult around the figure of the goddess emerges (Louis, *Rises* ix). Throughout this century, diverse and often opposed readings of the Proserpine story flourish: while some authors present Proserpine as a symbol of death (e.g. A. Swinburne), others, in trying to counterbalance this representation, depict her as a symbol of Christian hope for resurrection (e.g. A. Tennyson); whereas some authors portray Proserpine as the newly awakened Queen in full charge of the Underworld (D.H. Lawrence); others render her in a more pessimistic light, as a victim or doomed woman (e.g. T. Hardy). However plural the reimaginations of Proserpine might be, one thing is clear: her story becomes a recurrent subject matter throughout the English nineteenth-century creative literature.

Constitutive components of the literary dialogue that is forged around the myth of Proserpine are two late nineteenth-century recreations by Swinburne and Greenwell. Out of the myriad versions of the mythical story that I could have chosen, the selection of these particular poems is driven by two reasons: first, Swinburne and Greenwell depart from the dominant interpretation of the myth, their contributions being material evidence of the rich dialogue that surrounds the figure of Proserpine during the nineteenth century; second, they both make the garden motif central to their rewritings. The fact that the mentioned elements—the Proserpine myth and the garden—are both referred to in the title of the poems makes the (double) connection even more explicit. An exploration of the garden motif thus emerges as an advantageous way of approaching Swinburne's and Greenwell's particular engagements with the myth. Having, but briefly, introduced the myth that these authors recreate, it is now necessary to allude to the second element Swinburne and Greenwell draw attention to in their poems: the garden.

Gardens possess a long and direct relationship to symbolism and mythology. The image of the garden as established in the European collective imaginary comes primarily from two sources: the Greek and Roman tradition and the Christian tradition (Aguirre 101). The concept of the garden was already well known in the Greek world, attested above all in relation to the gods and the sacred (Aguirre 97). Roughly, the mythological garden of antiquity presents the following characteristics: (i) a place of supernatural beauty, the garden gives rise to admiration in anyone who contemplates it; (ii) a place of permanent and exceptional fertility: it has abundant and varied flowers and trees; (iii) the exquisite aromas: an idea of beauty transmitted through the senses; (iv) a suitable place for love and pleasure (erotic connotations); (v) the resemblance to paradise (Aguirre 100). Better described as related to the idea of the marvelous or the enchanted, the essential elements of such gardens are: one or several trees, a green, flowering meadow, a fountain or stream, unusual vegetation, and birds singing. All in all, the mythical garden is a pleasant space. The best known and representative garden in Greek mythology is the Garden of the Hesperides, a distant paradise where golden apples grow, a place of a supernatural nature, linked to immortality (Biedermann 34; Aguirre 97). Classical literature is replete with examples of such mythical gardens: for instance, in Homer (the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*), gardens are of an extraordinary, enchanted and unusual character (Aguirre 98); further, they are linked to divine places where love encounters between the gods occur (97).

The Christian tradition has similarly helped to shape the image of the garden. In *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, Jean Cooper explores the Biblical association of the garden with the original, unspoiled place of earthly paradise, created by God as a safe enclosure for Eden and Eve: "The Gardener is the Creator and in the center of the garden grows the life-giving Tree, fruit, or flower, the reward of him who finds the center. The garden is also the symbol of the soul and the qualities cultivated in it and of tamed and ordered nature. Enclosed gardens are the feminine, protective principle; they also represent virginity" (54). Taking the cue from both the classical and the Christian representations of the garden, later writers in the fields of philosophy, psychology or literature continue to develop this motif. As an example, drawing on the classical and Christian notions of the garden as a pristine, safe space, Jung notes that a garden is a place where nature is subdued, ordered, selected and enclosed (114). Hence it is a symbol of the consciousness as opposed to the forest, which is a symbol of the unconscious (171). Leonard Lutwack expands on Jung's distinction between the garden and the forest: a forest symbolizes "unruly sexuality" while a garden represents a certain passive state. In this same vein, the garden is constructed by later writers as a place of harmony and relaxation, a place in which one becomes grounded and a place of civilized nature, corresponding to a "civilised inner life" (Lutwack 96-7). Most of all, the garden becomes the archetypal image of the soul, of innocence and of happiness (Protas et al.). Having offered an overview of the prevailing conception of the garden within Western literary tradition, in what follows, I will move on to the scrutiny of the authors' use of such motif; considerable attention will also be payed to the manner in which Proserpine is portrayed as part of the garden. Ultimately, a critical comparison between the authors' outlined images of the garden and the long-established Western notion will be offered.

The mid-Victorian period (1848-70) was punctuated by an increasing debate about religious belief. By 1848 the Church of England had evolved into three major divisions: the Evangelical or Low Church, the Broad Church and the High Church. The rise of the Nonconformist conscience—which stressed a strict Puritan code of morality—and of the High Church adherents ("Oxford movement" or "Tractarianism") was particularly relevant for my discussion of how gardens were imagined (Greenblatt 1025-26). The surge of rigid spirituality propelled by both the Evangelical influences and the Oxford Movement was contested by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and other related movements, for example, Utilitarianism, which challenged the literal truth of the Bible, questioning the most basic tenets of the established faiths. Philosophers also joined the discussion, and ontological questions, such as

whether there was a spiritual or physical resurrection after death, started to be prominently discussed (Louis, "Proserpine" 313). In this context, after the publication in the 1860s of Arthur Schopenhauer's postulations on the impossibility of immortality and on the necessity to accept death as a beautiful end, the debate took centre stage, permeating all layers of society. In fact, for the first time, a substantial number of public personalities straightforwardly declared that they held no religious beliefs: the mid-Victorian crisis of faith was a reality which could not be eluded.

British poet and confessed pagan Algernon Swinburne perceived this general religious doubting and decided to take public action through the rhetoric of his poetry; more specifically, adhering to the philosophical notions of Schopenhauer—whose ideas he had read about in an 1863 French account of Schopenhauer's work published in the *Saturday Review* (Louis, *Rises* 57)—Swinburne set to fuel the debate by composing one of the most controversial and notorious poems of the *fin-de-siècle*, i.e. "The Garden of Proserpine" (henceforth, "The Garden") (in *Poems and Ballads*, 1866). Most critics found such poem, together with "Hymn to Proserpine" (also published in *Poems and Ballads*), both indecent and blasphemous, and amid this outcry, the publishing house decided to withdraw the book from publication. That Swinburne was so widely and clamorously condemned by contemporary readers is only testimony to the fact that his production was saying something (and indeed much) about the mid-Victorian crisis of faith. A paradigmatic example of the poet's use of classical myth to comment on typically Victorian issues, Swinburne's "The Garden" reappraises the Proserpine myth in order to bring forward ideas related to mutability and mortality, explore the relevance of pagan myth to Christianity and convey his own criticism towards Victorian spiritual attitudes (Morgan 192; McSweeney 672).

In "The Garden of Proserpine" (Swinburne, *The Collected* 169-172) Swinburne's speaker straightforwardly sets the tone and mood by alluding to the motif around which the entire poem pivots, i.e. the garden: "Here, where the world is quiet; / Here, where all trouble seems / Dead winds' and spent waves' riot / In doubtful dreams of dreams;" (169). Contrasting with such idyllic calmness is the tempestuous realm of the living, of which the lyric voice is explicitly weary: "I am tired of tears and laughter, / And men that laugh and weep; / Of what may come hereafter" (169). Having proclaimed his apathy for the "days and hours", the "desires and dreams and powers" (169), the speaker candidly looks forward to that "sleepy world of streams" (169) where a numbing serenity presides over. In an extended metaphor of death as placid sleep, the speaker confesses his eagerness for the cessation of life's preoccupations and vicissitudes: I am "weary" of "everything but sleep" (169). These two opening stanzas further reinforce the speaker's weariness by way of making use of consecutive rhymes—e.g. "quiet" (A) and "riot" (A) (169); "laughter" (A) and "hereafter" (B); "seems" (B), "dreams" (B), and "streams" (B) (169); "weep" (B), "reap" (B), and "sleep" (B); "growing" (C), "sowing" (C), and "mowing" (C) (169); "hours" (C), "flowers" (C), and "powers" (C) (169). As can be noticed, all of the stanzas (octave stanzas of eight lines each) have the same internal patterns of rhymes; and the rhyme scheme, a trimeter, with the pattern ABABCCCB, provides the poem with the desired sense of lethargy and, even, exhaustion. Ultimately, alliteration—"Here, where the world is quiet; / Here, where all trouble seems / Dead winds' and spent waves' riot / In doubtful dreams of dreams; (169)—similarly works to convey the weariness of the "I."

The third stanza is devoted to describing more in detail the place from where Swinburne's mouthpiece is speaking: "Here life has death for neighbour, / And far from eye or ear / Wan waves and wet winds labour, / Weak ships and spirits steer;" (Swinburne, *Collected* 169). Already from this description can the reader tell that this place belongs to the realm of the Dead. Further, in this otherworldly garden, there is "No growth of moor or coppice," and "No heather-flower or vine," or "leaf" ever "blooms or blushes" (170); only "bloomless buds of poppies, / Green grapes of Proserpine, / Pale beds of blowing rushes" (170) do sprout here. As the reader is told, the whole garden is colorless except in those areas where Proserpine has crushed the grapes "For dead men deadly wine" (170). From this follows that, first, only the color red can ever be appreciated in Proserpine's garden and, second, the goddess seems to be in full charge of the process of death, given that she accomplishes her deadly tasks very easily, as one would crush grapes to make wine.

The garden's main characteristics are barrenness, murkiness and lethargy. And this is to an extent achieved by Swinburne's deployment of a very specific and highly evocative array of terms (e.g. *bloomless*, *fruitless*, *wan*, *pale*, *slumber*, *cloud*, *mist*, *darkness*, etc.), which have the cumulative effect of creating the looked-for atmosphere. Stanza five further reinforces such conception of the garden as an undisturbed, eerie space by making explicit reference to the beings who populate it: "Pale, without name or number, / In fruitless fields of corn, / They bow themselves and slumber / All night till light is born;" (*Collected* 170). These "belated" (170) souls are in a permanent state of sleep, and their behavior is accordingly mechanical and predictable, which suggests that they are not emotionally or intellectually involved in their own actions. Most of all, no emotion can disturb the profound calmness that has invaded

them: they can neither "wake with wings in heaven, / Nor weep for pains in hell;" (170). They have transcended, once and for all, the Manichean conception of reality that lies at the heart of Christian theology.

Having addressed the peculiarities of the garden, the speaker sets out to express his main preoccupations, namely that the only thing that truly exists is change, and that death is a constitutive part of the life cycle: "To-day will die to-morrow; / Time stoops to no man's lure;" (Swinburne, *Collected* 171). Swinburne's speaker understands that change is an integral part of the natural world and its cyclic change—cyclic as the seasons and, in sum, as the passage of time—and is ultimately reconciled to this meaningless, largely nihilistic, ephemeral world (McSweeney 672): "Though one were strong as seven, / He too with death shall dwell, / (…) / Though one were fair as roses, / His beauty clouds and closes;" (Swinburne, *Collected* 170). In this regard, stanza eleven contains the strongest rebuke of the Christian doctrine of immortality: "That no life lives for ever; / That dead men rise up never; / That even the weariest river / Winds somewhere safe to sea" (171). Not only does the poet (through his mouthpiece) reject the notion of immortality, but he also fashions death as desirable and hence as something to which one should look forward: Swinburne's deadly garden offers a sense of harmony, calm and oblivion that only truly exists in this realm of nothingness. And this is precisely what the speaker seems to have attained: "Then star nor sun shall waken, / Nor any change of light: / Nor sound of waters shaken, / Nor any sound or sight: / Only the sleep eternal / In an eternal night" (172). In this sense, as the poet himself crystallizes in his *Notes on Poems and Reviews* (1866), the garden symbolizes "the brief total pause of passion and thought after tempestuous pleasures when the spirit, without fear or hope of good things or evil, hungers and thirsts only after the perfect sleep" (*Notes* 24). For Swinburne, only when the finitude of human existence is accepted can internal peace be achieved. Death is, under this light, a desirable and a privileged state, as it allows humans to completely abandon the emotions and thoughts (good and evil) that disturb the spirit.

Subsequently, in stanza seven, the speaker introduces the deity who is in charge of the garden, namely Proserpine: "Pale, beyond porch and portal, / Crowned with calm leaves, she stands / Who gathers all things mortal / With cold immortal hands; (Swinburne, *Collected* 170). From this description, it is clear that Proserpine's vitality is gone for good; indeed, there is a sense of passivity and lethargy in the depiction offered: her face is devoid of color; the leaves that crown her are calm; her hands, cold, and her lips, languid. Following Radford's reflections, Swinburne fashions a Proserpine as the antithesis to the fecund and sensual Venus (*Lost* 61), that is, as an ungraspable entity, a goddess "whose outlines dissolve in an enticing, willed haze" (62). In addition, if we consider Proserpine in relation to the garden, it could be argued that the goddess has adopted the idiosyncrasies of the place she inhabits: just like the garden, she is cold, detached and ascetic. At this point, it should be mentioned that despite her remoteness and aloofness (or maybe because of them), everyone fears her (deities and humans alike), her sovereignty over the dead being by all recognized: Love "fears to greet her" (Swinburne, *Collected* 171), and so do "men that mix and meet her / From many times and lands" (171).

The following stanza further underpins what the reader already intuits: that Proserpine has entirely internalized her role as Queen of the Underworld, and that she is in total command of Death: "She waits for each and other, / She waits for all men born; / Forgets the earth her mother, / The life of fruits and corn. / And spring and seed and swallow" (Swinburne, *Collected* 171). What is more, the goddess is emotionally removed from "the life of fruits and corn" (171), that is, from the life she led prior to her abduction. She is portrayed as a daughter who "forgets the earth her mother" (171) and who is estranged from its cyclical rhythms (Louis, "Proserpine" 341): as the speaker reveals, "spring and seed and swallow", that is, the elements for which she used to be responsible, "Take wing for her and follow / (…) / And flowers are put to scorn" (Swinburne, *Collected* 171). Proserpine appears to have voluntarily rejected her other role as Goddess of Spring in favor of her new function as Goddess of Death. Moreover, in all her calmness and sweetness, Proserpine appears to be celebrating the finality of death, as she welcomes the dead to her serene and peaceful realm (Louis, "Proserpine" 333). This is, of course, the poet's own take on the myth: the Christian idea of immortality being (on Swinburne's own belief system) fictitious, it becomes imperative to come to terms with the notion that the only reality is change, and that death is simply another instance of mutability's power. In this context, Proserpine's role is central: she evinces that change is inevitable and that death should be accepted as a beautiful end.

On the whole, Swinburne achieves to present death as a positive condition, thus challenging Christian teleology. The poet does so by fashioning the garden not as a terrible place, but as a space that offers many advantages, i.e. forgetfulness, peace, tranquility, and by depicting the goddess in charge of the garden not as a dreadful deity but as a divinity who makes possible that restfulness in the garden be attained. Ultimately, Swinburne's specific deployment of the motif of the garden and the figure of

Proserpine is directed at proposing a *fin–de-siècle* nihilistic vision of life after death, one that allows him to ponder over a specifically nineteenth-century concern.

Swinburne's poem stimulated responses such as Dora Greenwell's "The Garden of Proserpine" (in *Carmina Crucis*, 1869), published three years after Swinburne's. Moving away from the philosophical tradition apropos the reappraisal of the Proserpine myth, Greenwell's poem emphasizes the myth as capturing the emotional realities of the female experience: it is, above all, a gendered response to Swinburne's "The Garden," one established as a direct corollary of the emerging feminist ideas about the social relationship between the sexes. In the period from 1861 to 1891 various Swiss, British, American, and German scholars delineated concepts that shed a new light on the status of women, the nature of marriage and the mother and daughter bond. In 1861, for instance, J. J. Bachofen published *Das Mutterrecht*, the first book in modern times to advocate for a matriarchal state of society. Drawing on Bachofen's notions, Friedrich Engels presented the creation of the "pairing family" and looked forward to "the emancipation of women", which would be accomplished, he argued, when "the monogamous family" is no longer "the industrial unit of society" (90). In the same vein, British philosopher John Stuart Mill stated in his revolutionary *The Subjection of Women* that "the legal subordination of one sex to another—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement" (1). Ultimately, the British law was also changing—the Offences against the Person Act attempted to consolidate previous legislation on a range of sexual crimes against women—and issues such as marital rape, consent, and contraception started to be profusely discussed (Hasday 1440).

Such writings in the diverse fields of philosophy, literature and politics encouraged a gender-centered reading of various myths, and, in particular, of the Proserpine myth, as it exposed not only the dynamics of rape but also the violent foundation of patriarchal marriage. In the words of literary critic Louis, Proserpine is "a dynamic figure that may illuminate women discovering their oppression and potential power" (*Rises* 43). Similarly, Susan Gubar views Proserpine as nothing less than "the central mythic figure for women" (302). And, in fact, numerous Late-Victorian women saw in the mythic figure of Proserpine the perfect vehicle for analyzing the issues which could not be explicitly discussed in Victorian literature (Louis, *Rises* 50).

To be sure, women's responses to the tale were consistently different from those provided by their male counterparts. Indeed, in line with Louis' reflections, such receptions were "instrumental in opening a sharp gender gap within the tradition of Victorian poems about the Proserpine myth" (*Rises* 55). Rather than focusing on the theological or philosophical implications of Proserpine's narrative, they explored the human dimensions of the story, critically interrogating the nature of sexual oppression, the significance of female experience and the value of bonds between women (Parkins 172; Blackford 39). And they did so by bestowing subjectivity upon a goddess who was given little or none by Swinburne ("Hymn to Proserpine" and "The Garden of Proserpine", in *Collected*), Tennyson ("Persephone and Demeter," 1889, in *The Poems of Tennyson*), George Meredith ("Love in the Valley," 1878, in *Poems of George Meredith*) or Rossetti ("Proserpine," 1874, in *Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*), among others (Louis, *Rises* 73). Jean Ingelow ("Persephone," 1862, in *Complete Poems of Jean Ingelow*), Mathilde Blind ("The New Proserpine," 1895, in *Birds of Passage*) and Dora Greenwell ("The Garden of Proserpine," 1869, in *Carmina Crucis*) are but a few of those women writers who resorted to the myth of Proserpine to explore gender and sexual issues, thus inscribing themselves into an alternative—eminently female—tradition.

Dora Greenwell's "The Garden of Proserpine" (*Carmina* 3-4) is a first-person poem spoken in the voice of Proserpine herself, who is reflecting upon her newly found situation in the realm of the Dead. Proserpine's monologue starts off by wistfully alluding to the place which she now inhabits as Queen of the Underworld. The goddess makes clear that she has grown accustomed to the sort of flowers that grow in this Underworld garden, flowers traditionally associated with the dead and the Underworld: "AMARANTH and asphodel, / Methinks I know ye well" (Greenwell, *Carmina* 3). Contrasting with these flowers, Proserpine establishes the "frail wind-swept flower" in the "dim Green woods" (3), a covert allusion to her mother's upper-world garden. As the goddess subsequently confesses, while this natural landscape remained "unseen by him", the lord of the Dead, she loved it best; however, once he noticed it and entered it by force, her situation changed for good, and now such garden must pass "beloved in vain!" (Greenwell, *Carmina* 3). She is not in the upper world anymore to contemplate its natural charms, as her attachment to the earth and the natural cycles has been severed by an external presence: Pluto.

Having alluded briefly to her previous life, Proserpine shifts the focus towards the "here and now": "Here blooms each flower whose leaf / Or petal hints at grief / And bears a mystic sign, a crimson stain;" (Greenwell, *Carmina* 3). As the goddess unambiguously voices, the garden shows the signs of the violent act of rape: on the one hand, it is materially marked, i.e. the leaves are red-colored; on the other, it points at the psychological consequences the deed has produced on Proserpine, i.e. the petals are

grieving. The garden she has come to inhabit thus bears the continual stain of what Pluto has done to her, permanently reminding the goddess of the violent abduction, and hence making her relive the pain it induced upon her. In relation to the latter, one could suggest that the garden is the (natural) embodiment of the goddess herself, and, more specifically, of her state of mind. Indeed, Greenwell seems to be making use of the garden to reflect upon what happens to women's bodies and minds when they are abducted. In this sense, the female-body-as-garden is but a metaphor Greenwell employs to bring to the reader's mind the tragic effects (both physical and psychological) of Pluto's actions.

In addition to pain and grief, the garden is also associated with death, as the following lines make clear: "the tuberose, / In its swift fading glows / And lights within its heart a funeral pyre" (Greenwell, *Carmina* 3). The image of the tuberose is extremely powerful: the old Proserpine, the one attached to her mother, to innocence and the natural world, has died, and the garden and its elements are mourning that loss. With regard to the tuberose allusion, it is also of relevance to note that such plant is extremely rare (though it is now exported to other countries, it only grows in India); further, it is a plant of narcotic characteristics, that is, it has calming and thus soothing effects; at the same time, it clouds or even cancels reasoning abilities, perception and concentration, which explains why it tends to infuse attraction and repulsion at the same time (Biedermann 34). The fact that the tuberose grows in Proserpine's garden indicates that this place differs from what she usually finds in the upper world. The tuberose contains the promise of exciting and new experiences, but also of risk and uncertainty, and perhaps that is the reason why she is simultaneously attracted to and disgusted by the garden. Interestingly, the tuberose, which has phallic connotations, does glow, though it does so "in its swift fading" (Greenwell, *Carmina* 3), which implies briskness and vagueness. In this sense, I would suggest that the abrupt glowing of the tuberose might be referring to Pluto's abrupt (and violent) attempt at sexual intercourse. The glowing tuberose attracts and, at the same time, terrifies Proserpine, since it glows while it is fading, which suggests brusqueness, opacity, and, ultimately, danger. The subsequent allusion to the funeral pyre reinforces the idea that the tuberose might be lethal for the woman.

Relevantly, as the speaker informs us, apart from the tuberose, nothing else glows here: "No roses, white nor red, Glow here, the poppy's head / Droops drown'd in spells that keep / The keys of death and sleep, / (…) / Here ever on the turf green twilight lies; / Here ever warm and fragrant is the air," (Greenwell, *Carmina* 3-4). As it becomes patent, Greenwell's colorless and withered garden is touched by death and sleep. What is more, this place is distinctively eerie and unearthly: the dreamy and aural atmosphere, the everlasting twilight over the green turf and the "warm" and "fragrant" air contribute to highlighting the uncanny nature of the garden (3-4). Ultimately, this garden produces mixed feelings on Proserpine—"Of anguish, ecstasy, and wild desire;" (3)—who eventually voices her internal conundrum: "And all this place is desolate and fair" (4).

However attracted to this out-of-this-world garden Proserpine might feel, the goddess is certain about it being "Made by a King and meet for Love's delight;" (Greenwell, *Carmina* 4); she is therefore aware of the fact that the garden has been artificially constructed by Pluto to lure her into submitting to his suffocating and imprisoning love; most significantly, the goddess is cognizant of the notion that, despite all its magic and allure, "here joy comes not, but the exquisite / Brief thrill of rapture in a pang that dies" (4). Proserpine has come to understand that the pleasures the Underworld offers (in terms of sexual initiation or world-discovery) are short-lived, and are always accompanied by intense feelings of longing and regret: "Here walks a Queen with steadfast eyes unwet, / With white Narcissus garlanded, that still / Dreams of fair Enna's sunlit mead, and yet / Mourns for the fresh, ungather'd daffodil" (4). This newly born Queen has grown detached from emotion (cold, steadfast), permanently alienated from the space surrounding her. Greenwell's Proserpine, in spite of having been initiated into a different (beguiling) realm, mourns for what she has irredeemably lost—the connection with the earth, with her mother—and wishes she had not succumbed to Pluto, because, as it turns out, she has done precisely that.

In the concluding lines of the poem, Greenwell's mouthpiece looks back regretfully to her "fresh, ungather'd daffodil" (*Carmina* 4), yearning to recover lost virginity. Proserpine manifests "a chafing unease at how irreversible changes have taken effect, to which the speaker cannot be silently reconciled" (Louis, *Rises* 81). Greenwell's Proserpine is ultimately a sorrowing captive, forever dreaming of Enna (81).

To sum up, Greenwell's Proserpine's garden, in spite of its charm and magnetism, is a place devoid of joy and life; it is a place from which Proserpine cannot escape. Greenwell presents the reader with a prison-like garden, and a prisoner-like goddess, who cannot return to her beloved upper world. Forever in a state of regret and longing, Proserpine cannot move forward, and, in this sense, she remains bounded to the victim position in the world of the poem, a position which does not allow for personal growth or transcendence. Both the motif of the garden and the figure of the goddess ultimately work to

reinforce (and condemn) the terrible and unalterable consequences Pluto's deed have on Proserpine. And, in so doing, Greenwell is also bluntly commenting on men's attitudes towards (Victorian) women in general. Greenwell thus resorts to classical material as a springboard for the investigation of specific contemporary concerns, particularly for the exploration and exposure of pernicious Victorian sexual politics.

All in all, the previous analyses have shown that both Swinburne and Greenwell draw on the same literary strategy (the motif of the garden), but employ it for different purposes: while Swinburne's garden draws attention to the necessity to accept death as a beautiful end, hence emphasizing the philosophical dimension of the Proserpine myth, Greenwell's garden brings to light the dreadful consequences of Proserpine's abduction, consequently highlighting gender and sexual issues. The point of divergence lies in the authors' distinctive focus regarding the Proserpine myth, which implies that, despite similarities of technique, the garden motif ultimately brings to light different matters. Above all, Swinburne and Greenwell, far from using the myth for explicative purposes or as a mode of escapism, employ it as a form of social commentary. And, in this, they depart from one of the dominant tendencies regarding the interpretation of the Proserpine myth in the nineteenth century; that is: the etiological reading developed by mythographers such as Vico, Tylor and Frazer, according to which the Demeter and Proserpine story constituted a nature myth serving to explain the origin of the seasons (numerous nineteenth-century authors attempting to reread the tale were highly influenced by such reading: P.B. Shelley's "Song of Proserpine While Gathering Flowers on the Plain of Enna" (1839), Aubrey de Vere's "The Search after Proserpine. A Masque" (1843), Annie Fields's *The Return of Persephone: A Dramatic Sketch* (1877), Oscar Wilde's "The Garden of Eros" (1881). Departing from such understanding of the myth, Swinburne's and Greenwell's recreations set to exploit the critical aspect of the ancient tale (i.e., religious exploration, on the one hand, and feminist vindication, on the other), challenging, in this manner, some of the long-sustained pillars of the Victorian society.

As regards to the treatment of the garden motif, Swinburne and Greenwell fashion two gardens which greatly differ from the traditional Western idea of the garden as a harmonious, civilized, flowering, and vivid space. On the one hand, these authors' gardens do not retain any of the characteristics of the mythical garden: first, they do not fit into the category of the "beautiful"; rather, they are extraneous, unearthly and alluring spaces; second, they are not bountiful and productive gardens, but infertile, and only very specific flowers can be found there (not trees or fruits); third, they are not idyllic, cheerful, pleasant gardens, but obscure, dreamy, hazy places not suitable for love or any satisfying emotion; lastly, they do not fit into the notion of paradisiacal gardens, reminding as they do of Underworld gardens. On the other hand, Swinburne's and Greenwell's gardens do not resemble the Christian idea of the garden as an earthly paradise appropriate for the cultivation of the self. These authors' gardens are neither classical nor Christian; more precisely, they seem to be proposing a different model, one that radically subverts the Western tradition of positive associations: they are developing the notion of an Underworld garden.

Ultimately, reigning over this space, Swinburne and Greenwell locate Proserpine, a cold, detached goddess who seems to have suffered a profound transformation upon losing the earth, her mother. In this respect, both poets focus on Proserpine's physical traits (she is wan, cold, steadfast), and on how these have become similar to the traits of the garden she inhabits. As occurred with the motif of the garden, these authors' Proserpine deviates from the goddess we usually find in accounts where she is a nature deity: a sweet, cheerful Proserpine, forever attached to her mother and the earth cycles. Such alternative depictions of the garden and the woman are consistent with the authors' desire to deviate from the etiological reading of the Proserpine story. Instead of drawing on the prevalent depiction of the garden and the goddess, they depart from it by presenting a different garden and a different Proserpine. And they do so in an attempt to offer their own version of the story, one that critically comments on the nineteenth-century English society.

To conclude, in this essay I have explored Swinburne's and Greenwell's unconventional rewritings of the Proserpine myth by way of analyzing the manner in which they employ the garden, a motif that takes central stage in both recreations. Regarding the uses these authors make of the garden, one conclusion has been reached: whilst Swinburne's barren garden draws attention to the necessity to accept death as a beautiful end, hence emphasizing the philosophical dimension of the Proserpine myth, Greenwell's infertile garden brings to light the dreadful consequences of Proserpine's abduction, thus highlighting gender and sexual issues. Thus, Swinburne and Greenwell, drawing on the same literary motif, offer two subversive interpretations of the Proserpine myth, which deviate from the nineteenth-century etiological reading of the story. Concerning the specific treatment of the motif, Swinburne and Greenwell depart from the dominant image in order to offer a non-traditional, non-

Western depiction of the garden, namely an Underworld garden. Above all, the analysis of the garden motif has deepened our understanding of Swinburne's and Greenwell's use of the Proserpine myth.

Note: The author wishes to thank Dr. Ana González-Rivas Fernández (Autonomous University of Madrid) for her encouragement and useful comments on the early stages of this article.

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