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Searching for Hades in Archaic Greek Literature

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Searching for Hades in Archaic Greek Literature

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ABSTRACT

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No single volume of mythological or philological research exists for Hades. In the one moment Hades appears in archaic Greek literature, speaking for only ten lines, Hermes stands nearby. Thus, to understand and journey to Hades is to reckon with Hermes' close presence. As I synthesize research by writers from several different disciplines, may some light be brought into the depths. May we analyze Hades' brief appearance in archaic Greek literature, examining how what I define as the "Hermetic" emits from his breath in the one moment he physically appears and speaks.

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To the absent and invisible ones.

To the ever-present.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

"I, the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus: and perhaps I might at last begin to give you, my friends, a little taste of this philosophy, in so far as I am permitted to."
(Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 200)

This paper addresses a glaring absence in the research on ancient Greek myth and religion. Simply stated, why has no philologist or mythologist written a single volume of research on Hades? Why do scholars continuously reject Hades, pushing him further into the abyss of Tartarus? Like Atlas holding the skies on his shoulders tirelessly, standing at the edge of earth and the world away from clear voices (*Theogony* 519-522), Hades has been assigned his lot. The god of the underworld holds a tremendous weight upon his shoulders, weight that obfuscates him resulting in critics focusing their discussion on other ancient Greek gods. In the words of Joseph Campbell in his magnum opus, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949):

> How teach again, however, what has been taught correctly and incorrectly learned a thousand times, throughout the millennia of mankind's prudent folly? That is the hero's ultimate difficult task. . . . How translate into terms of 'yes' and 'no' revelations that shatter into meaninglessness every attempt to define the pairs of opposites? How communicate to people who insist on the exclusive evidence of their senses the message of the all-generating void? (188-189)

In this paper, I intend to communicate what Hades' invisibility—a "message of the all-generating void"— may ultimately teach us about death deities, the landscapes other gods force them to inhabit, and a deities' invisibility. While Hades' absence from scholarship is a sign of critical neglect, it also suggests that mythologists and philologists have provided justification for his absence. In the words of Mephistopheles in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1806), people have a "distaste for dealing with the dead." For them, "a corpse . . . is just no dice, / In this way I

am like a cat with mice" (319; 321-322). Critics play around with Hades, but they never devote explicit time to discuss his presence in archaic Greek literature. Hades continues to hold the underworld upon his shoulders while a plethora of volumes are published on other gods: Hermes (*Hermes: Guide of Souls*), Dionysus (*Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*), Apollo (*Apollo: The Wind, the Spirit, and the God: Four Studies*), Athena (*Athene: Virgin and Mother in Greek Religion).*

Critics choose to safely hide behind Hades' epithet as the invisible one as justification for his invisibility. They think it is quite natural that he should not appear physically in the narrative of archaic Greek literature. In fact, in the only moment Hades appears in archaic Greek literature, he stands in close proximity with another deity: Hermes. Thus, we must attempt to illuminate Hades while another is always present. At times, one may even feel his presence when he is not physically present in the narrative; such a case exists in Odysseus' conjuring of Hades' realm, a conjuring of shadowy, flickering souls to appear before him. Indeed, Hades' invisibility stands out in archaic Greek literature as does his absence from scholarship.[1] It is not entirely folly that critics have neglected him; "the powers of the abyss are not to be challenged lightly" (Campbell 175). Nevertheless, his presence has been "taught correctly and incorrectly learned a thousand times." As moderns, we should be made uncomfortable by Hades. What he represents, exemplifies, and how scholars have neglected him should give us pause. We should confront him with caution; we may only challenge him lightly; we may only ask for a whisper of his essence; we may only be a Hadean obstetrician for a moment when attempting to gaze at the abyss.

[1] Here, I establish a distinction between "absence" and "invisibility." When talking about his neglect by classical mythologists and philologists, I will use the term "absence." When talking about the tendency of archaic Greek storytellers to reference him more than include his physical presence in their narratives, I will use the term "invisibility."

As many classical philologists and mythologists suggest, Hades as both god and place occupies a state of in-betweenness, a space of formlessness. However, Hades still has a noticeable presence whenever he appears or is referenced in archaic Greek literature.[2] According to James Hillman, trained Jungian analyst and psychologist, "Hades is not an absence, but a hidden presence—even an invisible fullness" (28). To be invisibly full implies feeling as if Hades is always nearby without actually ever seeing or hearing him. Three titanic mythologists and philologists of the last two centuries, Walter Burkert, Karl Kerenyi, and Walter Otto, omit discussion of Hades in favor of other gods. Thus, they recognize him while not seeking him directly. In Walter Burkert's *Greek Religion* (1985), he includes Hades only within chapters on cults and worshippers of the dead. Hades never receives his own discussion. Burkert, like all other critics and archaic Greek literature, delegates the importance of discussing Hades as only being in close proximity with other deities. Similarly, Karl Kerenyi and Walter Otto confine discussion of Hades to his association with Hermes and Persephone. The critical choice by scholars to associate Hades with other deities is not necessarily bad, but it leads to the inevitability in classical scholarship of only understanding Hades in association with other deities or other aspects of religion and myth. Encapsulating Hades' invisible fullness, Karl Kerenyi writes in *The Gods of the Greeks* (1951):

> An ancient vase painting shows the three brothers as three rulers of the world, with the emblems of their power: Zeus with his lightning, Poseidon with the trident, Hades with his head turned back to front. This last was he who might not be looked upon, the

[2] One example of this—although I do not delve into it in the paper—is fragment 15 by Herakleitos. In the fragment, Herakleitos postulates that Hades and Dionysus are the same. While this paper does not take a stance on this opinion, it is another important instance of Hades being referenced alongside another deity and not physically appearing.

> dreadful god of death, who caused all living things to disappear, who made them invisible. (231)[3]

When approaching Hades today, we may only recognize him with his back turned to us; we may only recognize the god on the vase as Hades when we can rule out who the other deities are; we may ourselves then begin to illuminate his invisibility.

To avoid pushing Hades further into Tartarus, thus chaining the god of the dead to his throne of solitude, I must first clarify what primary sources I will use to conjure an image of Hades. Hades begins to appear more in Athenian drama, particularly Athenian and Theban tragedies; however, this paper only seeks to analyze archaic, as opposed to Attic, works: Hesiod's *Theogony*, the Homeric epics, and the *Homeric Hymns* to Hermes and Demeter. Because ancient Greece extends from the 8th century B.C. into the classical period, this project fixes itself on the literature of the earlier stage: archaic Greece, 8th century B.C. until the second Persian invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. In a way, searching for Hades in archaic Greek literature positions itself like Nietzsche's preference for the archaic philosophers over the Athenian. While classical writers and philosophers did not taint perception of Hades, they included him more in the physical presence of their narratives. Furthermore, on my search for Hades in the Homeric epics, *The Odyssey* bears more fruit than *The Iliad*. It is a world where death is just as traumatic and violent as it is in *The Iliad*; however, Odysseus makes physical contact with the underworld, bridging the gap between waking life and that which lies below. In *The Iliad*, no hero can handle death; thus, there is no bridge established like that in *The Odyssey*. Through limiting this paper's

[3] In *The Gods of the Greeks*, Kerenyi does not include a footnote or description of where this vase comes from. Additionally, I am not able to find the vase on any database housing ancient Greek vase art. Thus, all I may do here is take Kerenyi at his word.

primary sources, I will be delivering a portrait of Hades encompassed only within the oldest literature of ancient Greece.

Because archaic Greek storytellers often merely refer to Hades rather than include his physical presence in their narratives, and because of the trend scholarship has taken regarding Hades, we must rely on other gods, deities, and heroes in Greek mythology—especially Hermes—to lead us toward understanding Hades. Hermes—an exemplar of playfulness—may guide us to Hades because of his dualistic nature. He spends time in the underworld, traverses the earth, and frequently reenters Olympus, where his cosmic playfulness permeates into all spheres of existence. While I will have much more to say about Hermes as trickster later in this essay, Hermes' role as *psychopompos*—his ability to continuously travel between both worlds, his ability to funnel souls of the dead into the underworld—provides the necessary conditions for a conjuring of Hades, for him to appear in archaic Greek literature, although briefly. We may only hear Hades' voice in close proximity with Hermes' absurd laughter. Critics often focus on other deities neglecting to examine or define Hades. Nevertheless, referencing other deities does not need to result in a neglect of Hades. As I will argue in this paper, we may understand Hades' brief appearance in archaic Greek literature best by following Hermes.

Although the primary sources are limited in this paper, secondary sources will be wide and far-reaching. Using research and writing by several mythologists is my subject as well as philosophy, psychology, geology and anthropology, particularly works by Friedrich Nietzsche and Albert Camus, Carl Jung and James Hillman, Robert Macfarlane and Timothy Morton, and David-Lewis Williams' work on shamanism and cave art. Through analyzing and synthesizing how these authors in their own way approach and discuss the philosophical, psychological, and literal abyss, we may attribute greater weight to Hades' absence and invisibility and question his

neglect by philologists and mythologists during the past two hundred years. Thus, I aim for a synthetic, multifaceted approach. According to Sigmund Freud, "The riddles of the universe reveal themselves only slowly to our investigation; there are many questions to which science today can give no answer" (40). While science or myth when studied singularly cannot provide answers, building a bridge between the humanities and the sciences may offer new answers.

Because this paper proposes approaching archaic Greek literature as a multifaceted synthesis of wide-ranging scholarship, several translators and editions of archaic Greek literature could suit my thesis well. However, I must make a note of why I use Emily Wilson's translation of *The Odyssey* in this project. Emily Wilson, more than any other translator of archaic Greek literature, takes time to discuss the intimate relation between not only Athena and Odysseus, but Hermes and Odysseus in her introduction. She writes, "Hermes has a certain elusive quality, appearing and disappearing at will; he is, like Odysseus himself, a trickster. In the (post-Odyssean) 'Homeric Hymn to Hermes,' this clever, deceitful thief acquires an epithet often used of Odysseus himself—polytropos, 'much-turning'" (34). Athena is certainly the most important deity in the work, constantly guiding Odysseus' entire family through the difficulty and hardship they face. Nevertheless, if Athena holds Odysseus' hand at all moments in the narrative, Hermes also always glides closely behind. When Odysseus reassures Alcinous that his daughter, Nausicaa, did not betray custom, *ξενία* (rules of hospitality), by not guiding Odysseus to the king herself, Wilson translates a piece of Odysseus' reassurance as "We humans on this earth / are apt to be suspicious" (*VII* 306-307). Here, and elsewhere, Wilson approaches her translation of *The Odyssey* understanding the close connection between Hermes and Odysseus. Frequently reminding readers of Odysseus' connection with tact and trickery throughout the translation, she shows that Hermes is just as much of a guide to Odysseus as Athena.

Moreover, in *The Dream and the Underworld* (1979), Hillman argues that while his discussion often involves abstract concepts such as consciousness, his discussion centers itself "always as a precise image" (134). Conjuring Hillman's maxim for this paper, abstract solutions will be found in "precise images" rather than purely rational arguments and research. As Friedrich Nietzsche suggests in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) (as presented in the epigraph to this section), I, in turn, seek to peruse the dark and cryptic underworld, hoping to finally hear Hades' voice, to become an initiate and disciple looking for a taste of Hades' words and philosophy. In a way, this paper fashions itself as an underworld conjuring—a *νέκυια*—where unlike Odysseus in *The Odyssey* I hope to not only reveal Tiresias or Chiron as Circe instructs, but Hades himself. One must gaze into the abyss to gaze at Hades, and one must, according to Carl Jung, meaningfully descend to restore "the whole man." Robert Macfarlane discovers in his experiences journeying through the "underland" and reflecting upon the hero's descent in epic poetry across the world that "[D]arkness might be a medium of vision, and descent may be a movement towards revelation rather than deprivation" (17). Macfarlane's journey, like Odysseus and other heroes in mythology, is conceived and undertaken at a literal level. Thus, Macfarlane sees himself like Odysseus; he sees his journey travelling into the abyss as just as literal as mythological.

While Hades cannot be brought into the light, into the world that contains the other gods and deities in Greek mythology, we may finally, in so far as we are permitted, enter into his darkness in order to feel his presence. We must bring the light with us into the depths. "For that I must descend into the depths: just as you do in the evening when you go down behind the sea and still bring light to the underworld, you overrich star" (Nietzsche 9). And for a short ten lines in archaic Greek literature, composed by an anonymous storyteller who grasped the ritualistic

importance in ancient storytelling of the hero's descent, we finally hear his voice, a voice not as sinister as we may previously expect. Thus I begin going-under.[4]

[4] See Zarathustra's refrain in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

CHAPTER 2. A BEGINNING NOTE ON HADES: THE ABSENT AND INVISIBLE GOD

"Hades never takes an active part in the Homeric imagination. He receives the souls that come down. Mildness, says Kerenyi, is his characteristic trait."
(James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, 114)

Hades stands as the invisible god of the Greek pantheon—the one who guards the deep and dark underworld. As previously stated, most archaic Greek storytellers often refer to Hades while not including his physical presence in the narrative. In this way, he becomes a god of passivity and the nocturnal, a god of depths, shadows, and secrets (27), according to Hillman in *The Dream and the Underworld*. His name in ancient Greek literature most often appears as *Ἀδης* frequently with an epithet that reasserts our understanding of his invisible, formless essence. A few of his epithets include "implacable Hades," "unyielding Hades," "dreaded Hades," and "Hades of the underworld." In fact, some scholars researching the etymology of his name even think it descends from the Proto-Indo-European word *weid*, or *weyd*, meaning "to see," implying a name associated with the inverse—not being seen, or thus invisible. Furthermore, one of Hades' most known attributes and contributions to mythology is his cap (*kunéē*) of invisibility, which he seems to share with several other Greek deities, importantly Hermes. In fact, as Hillman argues, "Evidently the explicit image of connection between Hermes and Hades (announced in the Homeric 'Hymn to Hermes') is the headdress" (29). Homer also refers to Hades' cap of invisibility in digressions that do not factor significantly into the narrative. In the *Iliad*, Homer says, "[T]his man murderous Ares was stripping; but Athena / put on the cap of Hades, so that massive Ares would not see her" (*V* 844-845). Here, we learn two things: first, the cap of invisibility, although used by other deities, belongs to Hades; second, even Homer, like mythologists and philologists long after him, cannot think of Hades without including other deities' presence into the narrative. In this way, Homer's digressions that focus

on the cap of invisibility merely serve as musings thrown into the void to develop Hades' elusive, convoluted nature.

Because Hades' presence in archaic Greek literature always relies on close proximity to other deities, several gods eventually wear this helm of Hades including Hermes. While invisibility in ancient Greek literature grants power to its wearer, it also allows deities to "conceal their true nature to perpetuate evil" (Doniger 850). In archaic Greek literature, when storytellers mention the cap of invisibility, it is hard to say if they do so with "evil" purpose. However, its use does allow the ability for gods—for a moment—to exist like Hades, as a shadow and force of invisibility. Earlier in Wendy Doniger's "Invisibility and Sexual Violence in Indo-European Mythology," she posits that regardless of how ancient storytellers treat invisibility, its use "often shades off into masquerade and shape-shifting, as shadows, doubles, reflections, or camouflage hide the one true self from the observer or confuse the object of the gaze with the background or with another person" (847). It certainly makes sense that the myths surrounding Hades, the invisible god, intertwine him intimately with the cap of invisibility. However, what remains curious is that archaic Greek literature compulsively mentions his connection with the cap while we never see him actually wearing it. Hesiod's *Theogony* mentions Hades but not his cap of invisibility. Furthermore, in the *Hymn to Demeter*, when he abducts Persephone, forcefully taking her into the underworld, the poet makes no mention of the cap. In fact, Persephone is the one in the poem who is silenced:

> Against her will he seized her and on his golden chariot
> carried her away as she wailed; and she raised a shrill cry,
> calling upon father Kronides, the highest and the best.
> None of the immortals or of mortal men heard

her voice . . . (*Hymn to Demeter* 19-23)

While it is not difficult to imagine why Hades is implicated with this magical cap, it remains mysterious why archaic Greek storytellers did not feel the need to have Hades don the cap in narrative. As the invisible god in the Greek pantheon, Hades, while implicated, does not need to put it because he is always invisible. The other deities use it to conceal and perpetuate evil; however, Hades constantly obfuscates others' gaze. He is in the background, even if he is with another deity.

Hades as death deity occupies a special place in archaic Greek literature. While death deities certainly metamorphosize depending on the storytelling and ritualistic need of different cultures and different regional and social contexts, the classification of the death deity in mythology universally refers to a ruler over the dead rather than a deity who determines the time and moment of a person's passing. In this way, the death deity, rather than maintaining a significant role in the pantheon, serves more as a figurehead, more as a passive agent that protects rather than acts. One must wonder why these archaic storytellers—the archaic gatekeepers of religion—continuously gravitated toward putting a passive deity in the underworld. Why would they even consider this facade as important in their storytelling tradition and religion?

One may find an answer when turning toward anthropological research concerning the beginning of cities and the priestly class. Campbell labels the beginning of the priestly class with the Sumerians, the civilization thought to have the first cities in history, as a "science of a new order of humanity, which had never before appeared in the history of mankind" (146). Deriving inspiration from celestial bodies that the Sumerians observed and labelled, the priestly class brought with it the beginnings of the calendar, the art of writing, kingship as a divine right, and

mathematics. Additionally, the beginning of the temple, or the ziggurat in Sumer, hierarchically organized the life of the city, "where everyone played his role according to the rules of a celestially inspired divine game" (Campbell 148). As we know today more than ever, city life breeds comfort as well as distraction, order as well as more chaos. One exists paradoxically in the urban center. Nietzsche asserts this paradoxical, complicated reality of prehistories in *On Genealogy of Morals* (1887) when writing about priests and the beginning of cities:

> For with the priests everything becomes more dangerous, not only cures and remedies, but also arrogance, revenge, acuteness, profligacy, love, lust to rule, virtue, disease—but it is only fair to add that it was on the soil of this essentially dangerous form of human existence, the priestly form, that man first became an interesting animal, that only here did the human soul in a higher sense acquire depth and become evil—and these are the two basic respects in which man has hitherto been superior to other beasts! (33)

According to Nietzsche, the priestly class brings with its genesis paradox and uncertainty; it is the beginning of a form of human existence that is interesting although sinister. Like Emily Doniger's theory with the cap of invisibility, Nietzsche agrees that masking and pretending are evil. Pretense, masquerading, and illusions thus began to proliferate, leading to a place where a death deity could be more of a figurehead god than maintain any semblance of control or power. Without the priestly class, Hades' invisibility in archaic Greek literature would more than likely not have been possible.

Freud, inheriting the theories and works of Nietzsche, spent several years attempting to understand how humanity psychologically evolved to "civilize." Freud, in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), commenting on the relationship between the beginning of civilization and the priestly class, considers the development of the priestly class as the most significant development

in the psychology of civilization. He writes, “No mention has yet been made of what is perhaps the most important item in the psychical inventory of a civilization. This consists in its religious ideas in the widest sense in other words (which will be justified later) in its illusions” (17). While this paper will not enter in the moral quandary about urbanization or its justification as an illusion, the birth of the priestly class, or complications that followed, the priestly class, like Hades, maintains the façade of order. In ancient and prehistoric civilizations even more than today, priests as conduits of religious experience, those who held the power, controlled the public. Perhaps these prehistoric priests, like Hades, served as figureheads to prevent a kind of cosmic doom we, as moderns, could never comprehend or reconceive in modern terms. While these prehistoric and ancient priests certainly occupied an active place in their society, their role may closely resemble Hades’: a role of passivity that maintains a façade of control.

Sumerian civilization inspired the other great cities that followed its birth: Dynastic Egypt, Crete, the Indus River valley civilizations, and Shang Dynasty China. Thus, archetypal deities, societal rituals, and thought about life after death and the underworld flow from each civilization into the other. Thus, no new civilization’s myths and rituals arise independently. Campbell comments on this idea in *Primitive Mythology* (1959): “[T]hen it can be said without exaggeration that all the high civilizations of the world are to be thought of as the limbs of one great tree, whose root is in heaven” (149). While some death deities in other ancient and prehistoric religions played a more prominent role than Hades, religions that strongly influenced mythmakers of the Mycenean and archaic Greek pantheon, the role of the death deity more than likely appears in part from the same source—the priestly class, from the same root in heaven. Anthropologists and archeologists for centuries have realized that species more than 200,000 years ago were burying their dead, displaying not only a long history of species reconciling with

death, but also a comparatively shorter period in history where mythmakers conceived of pantheons containing death deities. In an interview between Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers (1988), they converse:

> MOYERS: When do you think humans first discovered death?
>
> CAMPBELL: They first discovered death when they were first humans, because they died. (89)

Not long after this in the conversation, Campbell begins to postulate why these forebearers of Homo sapiens buried their dead. He says, "[W]e do know that burials always involve the idea of the continued life beyond the visible one, of a plane of being that is behind the visible plane, and that is somehow supportive of the visible one to which we have to relate. I would say that is the basic theme of all mythology—that there is an invisible plane supporting the visible one" (90). Thus, while we will never know what catalyzed the Neanderthals eons ago to bury their dead, we may juxtapose these prehistoric death cults with the beginning of priestly, organized, urbanite, temple worship and religion. If mythology's basis is recognizing the "invisible plane supporting the visible one," then death deities take this one step further. In a way, by Hades existing in the underworld not taking an active part in archaic Greek imagination, religion, or ritual, he is like a ziggurat priest. He may have a function, but his main job is not to act. His main role provides control and order, although it may be a façade.

Regardless of how the influence of other religions traveled and affected the Greek deities, it remains clear that several other religions influenced the Greek pantheon, and thus the perception of Hades as an invisible presence. Ruth Ilsley Hicks in her article "Egyptian Elements in Greek Mythology" writes, "Within the heterogenous body of Greek mythology, incorporating myths, legends, and folk tales, there are elements which seem to be non-Greek. These are

derived from Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Syria, or Egypt" (90). To briefly examine just Egyptian mythology, Anubis, ancient Egypt's earliest god of the underworld, appears like Hades as an invisible death deity. He stands as one of the most ancient and depicted gods in the Egyptian pantheon, but he plays almost no part in ancient Egypt's body of storytelling. He certainly maintained a prominent and important role like Hades while still not appearing often in the ancient Egyptian imagination. Furthermore, both death deities are associated with dogs, where artists and storytellers often depict Anubis with a canine head or form depending on the artist while one of Hades' recurring characteristics in ancient Greek mythology is his connection with Cerberus, the guardian dog of the underworld. In Brian C. Muraresku's fabulous book *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with no Name* (2020), (which will factor significantly in Chapter 2), he briefly describes Cerberus:

> In Ancient Greece, dogs were also associated with the afterlife, where they marked the three distinct phases of the immortal journey: 'the passage from life to death,' 'the time spent in the Underworld,' and 'the return to life as a spirit.' The most famous hellhound was Cerberus, the three-headed dog who belonged to Hecate . . . the mother of Circe and patron goddess of witchcraft. (138)

Several Egyptologists believe that Anubis' connection with canines stems from the practice in predynastic Egypt of burying bodies in shallow graves, where dogs would scavenge these graves and uncover bodies. Moreover, in prehistoric Greece, what changes more than anything else from the time of the Minoans to the ancient Greeks is the ritual of burial. In primitive cultures, like those that inhabited Crete before the Minoans, evidence suggests that "Burial rites seem to have been very simple during the Cretan Neolithic times. The dead were not cremated but laid out in caves or rock shelter. . . . Similar burials in caves continued during the first Early Minoan

period" (Hutchinson 228). However, the notion of the dead and afterlife was becoming more complex during the Mycenean era, where "the dead body was interred, not cremated: the ghost was thought to survive, and must be strictly imprisoned, in the tomb" (Page 23). By the time we arrive at ancient Greek literature and Homer depicting burial in the *Iliad*, Denys Page writes:

> [T]he *Iliad* itself preserves the memory of the older custom in the Twenty-third Book, where the funeral rites of Patroclus are described: the slaughter of victims, the cutting of locks of hair, the pouring of wine and honey . . . all presuppose the idea that the spirit of the dead needs and demands refreshment and respect. (23)

While it is curious that Anubis and Hades are connected with canines, it remains even more curious that these two death deities—more similar than any other death deities in ancient religion—maintain such an invisible force in their separate cults of worship. In this way, a clear distinction of classification develops with Hades and Anubis in comparison to other death deities in other ancient mythologies. Hades and Anubis, unlike other death deities, are even more absent; thus, they are invisible death deities.

Hades' ability to maintain such a strong presence while being continuously invisible confounds scholarship on ancient Greek myth and religion, where one remembers Albert Camus' maxim that "[E]verything contributes to spreading confusion" (8). One could take a logical—although simplistic—approach as to why ancient Greek writers barely permit Hades' physical presence into narrative: storytellers feared writing about the god of the dead in general, and they only brought him up when the narrative required a notice of his presence in the background. However, assuming that the ancient Greeks greatly feared Hades and thus did not bring him physically into the presence of the narrative seems like a simple and understated conclusion to deduce not only from this passage but all ancient Greek literature. If this were true, would it not

make more sense that Homer would not mention the dreaded god at all? Additionally, "Western" anxiety about the inevitability of death does not encapsulate the archaic or prehistoric Greek world well. Far before and far after the ancient Greek world, in the worship of primitive, ancient, and classical societies, the cult of the dead played an enormous ritualistic role. Regarding the cult of the dead in "primitive" Cretan religion, R.W. Hutchinson writes, "All peoples have some rites associated with the burial or disposal of the dead, but their views on the possibility and nature of any after-life vary extremely" (228).

Curiously, while scholars have extensively studied the ritualistic role that death and burial maintained from the time of the Minoans down to the ancient Greeks, Hades, or an archetype of Hades, does not explicitly appear in the Mycenean or Minoan pantheon of gods. Because all people are concerned with the inevitability of death, especially in mythos and religion, one would expect Hades, or a previous archetype of Hades, to figure in a civilization's religion and cult of worship. For Hades to not appear at all—the god so associated with the underworld his name morphed to also describe its physical landscape—it remains perplexing to say the least. Walter Burkert in *Greek Religion* writes of Hades' name encapsulating both god and place, "Whether the House of Ais was the name which carried some meaning such as the House of Invisibility remains a matter of dispute" (196). Hades might simply encapsulate "the other," the essence of what we cannot know but we desire above all else to seek. Does our knowledge of Hades suffer because, as Hesiod says, "Often a whole community suffers in consequence of a bad man who does wrong and contrives evil" (*Works and Days* 241-243)? Perhaps, but it is curious that he was misunderstood by the ancient Greeks just as much as interpreters and critics today.

Because Hades is a god of invisibility, it makes logical sense that he would in turn fulfill the criteria needed for ancient Greece's death deity. However, one must wonder if Hades' essence of invisibility follows his designation as god of the underworld, or does his role as death deity follow the essence storytellers prescribed for him? Was Hades the god of the underworld first, or was he the god of invisibility first? The answer does not particularly matter. If he represents the most absent Greek deity, he should reside in the underworld, and because storytellers designate him as the death deity, it makes sense that he would be absent. Regardless of which came first—his designation as invisible or as ruler of the underworld, in the same way Hades maintains a level of invisibility, so does his realm, the underworld, contain winding, flowing rivers hard to describe, where the shadowy, formless souls of the dead are guided by another: Chiron. Hades, like the fluttering, shadow-like souls in the underworld, the eidola, maintains a formlessness hard to describe. Burkert categorizes the souls in the underworld as "image[s] reflected in a mirror which can be seen, though not always clearly, but cannot be grasped" (195). Furthermore, Hades, in many ways an eidolon himself, resembles well the duplicitous nature of the word for soul, *πνεῦμα*, as also breath. As one breathes air into the wind, so do the souls in the underworld live in a state of fluttering and flickering, which we see manifest more often in the narrative when Hermes is in proximity with these shadow-souls. According to Burkert, "[O]nly when there is a question of life and death is there any question of psyche" (195), where we take for granted one's soul and question of psyche, breath itself.[5] Of course, the confusing nature of both the setting of the underworld and its deity could be the very catalyst for classical writers later to eventually call the underworld itself Hades (*Ἀϊδες*), "the unseen." Regardless of the reason classical writers started using Hades' name itself to signify the

[5] Walter Burkert states, "Psyche means breath just as *psychein* is the verb to breathe; arrested breathing is the simplest outward sign of death" (195).

underworld, his association with the underworld, like Hades with the cap of invisibility, is another instance of the inability to grasp Hades singularly. He may only be known via metonymy, or through association.

As previously stated, Hades' place in mythological criticism stands as not only a force of invisibility, more specifically an invisible fullness, but a force of neglect, and so has scholarship and interpretation of the underworld been neglectful. While ancient storytellers compulsively create narratives of heroes traveling to the underworld, we, as modern interpreters, usually simplify the importance of these episodes. Nevertheless, it a crucial moment in the hero's quest, or monomyth, a moment of rebirth and baptism for the hero; this moment and the underworld itself in archaic Greek literature—particularly the Greek epics—is grossly misunderstood.

Hillman seeks a psychological understanding of Hades and the underworld through defining and prioritizing the soul above all else (as do all followers of Archetypal Psychology). Prioritizing the psychological aspect over the mythological,[6] Hillman argues that the underworld itself may be interpreted and realized as purely psychological, as a reservoir of the dream-world. He writes, "The underworld is a realm of only psyche, a purely psychical world . . . [U]nderworld is the mythological style of describing a psychological cosmos" (46). As someone trained in Jungian analysis and dream interpretation, it makes perfect sense why Hillman would see clear parallels between the Hellenic underworld and the dreamscape. Both contain the very stuff of the soul: shadows and darkness.[7] The underworld—as morbidly dramatic as it may seem—does contain an essence of play, masking, and absurdity that is analogous with dreams.[8]

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[6] James Hillman writes, "Mythology is a psychology of antiquity. Psychology is a mythology of modernity" (23).
[7] "Shadow is the very stuff of the soul, the interior darkness that pulls downward out of life and keeps one in relentless connection with the underworld" (Hillman 56).
[8] James Hillman tells, "That the dream is like a shadow play, a mask, [that] further connects it with the underworld" (103).

Hillman posits that "[D]reams belong to the underworld and its Gods" (2). Unlike Hillman, this paper refuses to see Hades and the underworld as purely psychological, and instead worthy also of philosophical, mythological, and aesthetic analysis. Hades is not a figment of our imagination because we cannot see or understand him.

Moreover, Hillman earlier in the book details Freud's theory of the unconscious as a means to postulate that the underworld itself could be the id, like Homer's underworld, cut off from waking-life, or the external world (19). Taking this theory a step further, Hades himself, rather than the underworld, could allegorically represent the unconscious when analyzing his designation by Zeus (and perhaps also Poseidon) to rule the underworld. In some versions of the myth, Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades draw lots; however, in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the first appearance of this story, the tale is extremely brief. Devoting very few lines to the subject, Hesiod composes, "When the blessed gods had completed their work and settled the matter of privileges with the Titans by force, then on Earth's advice they urged that Olympian Zeus the wide-seeing should be king and lord of the immortals. And he allotted them privileges satisfactorily" (*Theogony* 880-885). Whether the three gods draw lots or Zeus picks Hades as god of the underworld does not matter. The fact remains that Hades is subjected in either instance to a decision completely out of his control. Zeus, in this sense, allegorically stands as the ego by separating himself and repressing Hades, the id or unconscious. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud details two kinds of unconscious material. He writes, "We see, however, that we have two kinds of unconscious—the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious" (5). Hopefully, using this analogy, Hades stands as the first kind of unconscious material rather than the latter, "the one

which is latent but capable of becoming conscious." Although he may actually be hidden or simply concealed and relegated to the fringes by critics, he may exist and be known.

To briefly discuss two moments in archaic Greek literature where storytellers reference Hades and do not include him physically in the narrative, Hesiod devotes a significant amount of time—over 100 lines—to describe Hades' realm as a place of domestic entrapment. This choice by Hesiod makes sense in light of Hades' presence in archaic Greek literature; storytellers relegate him not only to the fringes of the text itself, but inside a place of privacy. As a domestic space, the underworld, according to Hesiod, contains echoing and terrifying sounds (*Theogony* 767). The house, or space itself, houses the immortal goddess Styx, who also forms one of the underworld's main rivers, a river "that flows through a rugged region" (*Theogony* 805-806). Furthermore, in the war of the titans and the gods, Zeus subjugates the unfaithful gods to the underworld itself, where Hesiod includes a crucial detail in our understanding of Hades: "Hades was trembling, lord of the dead below, and so were the Titans down in Tartarus with Kronos in their midst, at the incessant clamor and the fearful fighting" (*Theogony* 849-852). Hesiod expresses several understated characteristics here about Hades—points that appear between the lines. First, Hades does not seem to take part in the war of gods and titans although some critics assume he does even though it is not detailed. Also, Hesiod groups Hades' fear of Zeus' power as a reaction similar to the titans. Lastly, in the same way Hades does not partake in the Trojan War, he does not take part even in this war while it occurs in his domain. While all the gods and titans fight vengefully, Hades sits in his domestic palace, hearing the screams from outside not able to leave his throne. In fact, this passage from *Theogony* sounds and functions similar to an episodic aside Homer delivers in the *Iliad*. When the gods themselves join fighting in the Trojan

War alongside their heroes, the earth itself underneath them splits open, revealing hell. As Burkert says, "[W]hat is under the earth remains loathsome" (196). The epic poem states:

> Hades below, lord of the dead beneath the earth, in terror
> leapt wailing from his throne in fear that
> Poseidon, shaker of the earth, would split the earth above him,
> And reveal his house to mortal men and the immortal gods
> in all its moldering horror, which even the gods abhor. (*XX* 61-65)

When reading the *Iliad*, it is difficult not to assume that at the height of the war, when even the gods are participating, the god of the dead is not going to show his face. In both instances, Hades trembles in fear at the power exhibited by the other gods; however, it seems to be more than just their power. Hades appears to also tremble at the damage they cause, where he resides in a domestic space completely removed from the battlefield in both instances. Hesiod immediately follows his description of Hades quaking in the underworld with an extra detail: "[A]nd so were the Titans" (*Theogony* 851). After the war of the titans and gods, as we know, Zeus sentences several of the titans to eternal punishment in the underworld in the same way Zeus relegates Hades later after the war to the underworld, whether the three of them draw lots or not. Perhaps, Hades trembles in fear because he anticipates what must happen to them all. They will all reside in the underworld, in the abyss, for eternity together. To modern readers, this punishment to the titans often seems cruel. To recognize Hades as being punished like the titans, we may even begin to feel sympathy for his invisibility in archaic Greek literature, a sympathy that compels us to seek his realm further to grasp his presence.

CHAPTER 3. HADES' INVISIBILITY IN BOOK XI OF THE ODYSSEY: SYTHESIZING AND REDEFINING MYTHOLOGICAL TERMS, UNDERLAND VS. UNDERWORLD

"The underland keeps its secrets well."

(Robert Macfarlane, *Underland*, 11)

In Neolithic caves stretching into an unimaginable past, 30,000 years ago, people journeyed with ritualistic purposes. They sought that which could not be found in waking life. They sought the secrets of the night. The secrets of the past lie hidden in the dark. In this way, Odysseus, like a cave artist, paints a vivid picture for his listeners where although he is standing on the shore of a beach in Book XI of *The Odyssey* to conjure the dead, his setting resembles that of a neolithic cave. David Lewis-Williams, a scholar of shamanistic practices and cave art, writes in *The Shamans of Prehistory: Trance and Magic in the Painted Caves* (1996): "Descent is also sometimes part of a shamanic initiation. . . . As soon as he has entered a cave, it is said to close behind him. In the darkness of the cave, he has visions" (27). When Odysseus meets the souls of the underworld, he certainly experiences visions. He speaks to these dead souls; however, they travel necessarily into a different space entirely to commune with him. Moreover, it is clear that they must be summoned through ritual. The souls of the dead may be conjured up to Odysseus through this ritual, but Hades may not.

Hillman recognizes the illusory, slippery nature of what we call the underworld writing, "When using the word underworld, it is imperative to keep in mind a distinction made by some classicists. This distinction is of great psychological importance, because it frees the psychic realm from nature" (35). To provide an explanation for Hades not appearing to Odysseus, I will develop a distinction between what I am calling the underland and underworld. To clearly differentiate and define the underland and underworld, one may also contend with mythological

notions of descent: *κατάβασις* (katabasis), simply to "go down", and *νέκυια* (nekyia), an underworld "conjuring." Jung writes of the *νέκυια*, which he labels the night sea-journey: "[T]he Nekyia is no aimless or destructive fall into the abyss, but a meaningful katabasis . . . its object the restoration of the whole man" (118). Thus, to Jung, the nekyia occurs when the traveler is fully aware of his quest. Heroes often in ancient and classical mythology fall into underworld journeys and visits involuntarily, which Jung would more than likely label as katabasis. While the descent is always a meaningful moment in the hero's quest, the hero does not always understand its full implications—its full possibility of rebirth. Jungian analysis—analytical psychology—still calls for the nekyia as a kind of katabasis, although it is a more "meaningful" descent. Additionally, Jung sees the nekyia as "descend[ing] into the belly of the monster" (131) while katabasis is "a journey to hell and 'death'" (156). To Jung, the metaphor is interchangeable. Both are psychological phenomena.

Hillman in his work *The Dream and the Underworld* provides more parameters concerning Jung's theories of psychological descent:

> The descent to the underworld can be distinguished from the night-sea journey of the hero in many ways. We have already noticed the main distinction: the hero returns from the night sea-journey in better shape for the tasks of life, whereas the nekyia takes the soul to a depth for its own sake so that there is no 'return.' The night sea-journey is further marked by building interior heat, whereas the nekyia goes below that pressured containment, that tempering in the fires of passion, to a zone of utter coldness. (168)

Hillman agrees with Jung that the nekyia seems like a more psychological descent. While storytellers like Homer with *The Odyssey* still fashion the nekyia in their stories to contain a descent into a physically imaginable landscape, Hillman still argues for its function in myth and

ritual to be psychological. With nekyia, there can be no return because the descent occurs within oneself. Often, heroes acquire a token of their katabasis descent that serves as a boon. With nekyia, if there is a boon, it is the understanding that there will be "no return." In the hero's "zone of utter coldness," the experience preserves itself, like a prehistoric body contained within a large sheet of ice. To Hillman, the nekyia is certainly more psychological than the "katabastic" descent; however, and more importantly, it is a frigid experience often associated with ice.

In this paper, I treat the underland as a reachable space. It is a physical location that one may descent into, a belly of the monster that one may traverse, a more mature descent than the katabasis, a place of frigidity rather than extreme heat. It is a physical entrance into another world, and while one's descent into the underland is just as psychological as katabasis, it is so in a different manner. Therefore, I label the nekyia as a descent into the underland, and we see a perfect example of a hero descending into the underland through nekyia in Book XI of *The Odyssey*. Before Odysseus "descends," he must contend with Circe's magical prowess, where she turns Odysseus' men into swine. In *The Immortality Key*, Brian Muraresku writes of Circe: "Widely feared and respected for her encyclopedic knowledge of plants and herbs, the goddess Circe gets a leading role in the oldest surviving work of Western literature. . . . Circe drugs the hero's men and turns them into pigs, so she can have her way with Odysseus" (63). Here, Odysseus rescues his men from the clutches of Circe ultimately so they (Odysseus and his men) may learn how to travel to the underland, a place physically possible to reach. Nevertheless, the poem provides a deep mythological understanding of Circe as not only a witch and sorceress, but botanist and—as scholars for the past few decades have mentioned—knowledgeable about psychedelic properties. It seems likely that the nekyia descent, and Odysseus here in Book XI, can be further understood as not only psychological, but psychedelic. Regardless, he is having an

ecstatic vision, or "frenzied altered state of consciousness" (22) as David Lewis-Williams would suggest. While it may seem ridiculous to describe Odysseus in the guise of a psychedelic pilgrim, according to David Lewis-Williams, "[I]t [shamanism] is an all-embracing way of life and thought" (22). Thus, Odysseus, like other mythological heroes who descend, engages in behavior like that of a neolithic cave artist, like that of a shaman.

When Circe magically changes Odysseus' men into swine, the poem tells us about the exchange:

> She led them in,
>
> sat them on chairs, and blended them a potion
>
> of barley, cheese, and golden honey, mixed
>
> with Pramnian wine. She added potent drugs
>
> to make them totally forget their home. (*X* 234-238)

Given the supernatural and magical nature of other parts of the story, Homer could have simply told us that she changed them into pigs with her magic wand, neglecting to tell readers the exact ingredients of her potion's concoction. Instead, he provides us a rich a detail: a recipe of psychedelic potency. "[T]hese weren't just any old 'herbs' that Circe plucked from her garden . . . [she] gave the unfortunate [companions of Odysseus] who landed at her home the *kykeon*, a wine-based mixture in which goat cheese, barley, flour, and honey were dissolved . . ." (Muraresku 277). Previously in his work, Muraresku elaborates on this mixture, pointing out the unique use of barley in the recipe, an ingredient purposefully included to make the mixture contain the "evil drugs" (pharmaka lugra / φάπμακα λύγρ'). In *The Road to Eleusis* (1978), an incredible work of scholarship written by a supergroup of psychedelic adventurers, R. Gordon

Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl A. P. Ruck, they study barley's connection with the holy site at Eleusis, a key setting in the *Hymn to Demeter*. While I will have more to say about this hymn later in this essay, it is important that the use of barley appears at several moments in the limited amount of literature we have of archaic Greece. "Barley and not mint is the revelation at Eleusis, and it is to it that we must look for the sacred drug" (Ruck 56). Therefore, Circe, rather than being a mere obstacle to Odysseus, serves a greater function. After Odysseus beats Circe at her own game, she instructs him how to reach the underland. She serves as his guide. She serves as his shaman. While anthropologists often view shamans as guides to the underworld, here, in the narrative, Circe instructs Odysseus' passage instead into the underland. In this way, the shamanic character in myth may fulfill two functions: guide to both underland and underworld.

When Circe instructs Odysseus that he must travel to the underland, she says, "Go to the house of Hades and the dreadful Persephone, and ask the Theban prophet, / the blind Tiresias, for his advice" (*X* 491-493). Circe's instruction does not specify whether Odysseus will even meet Hades; she merely says that he must travel to Hades' house and that he must do so by a water journey, hinting at the psychedelic as well as psychological nature of his descent. Carl A. P. Ruck writes, "Examples abound in Greek literature associating the water journey with transport to another world" (109). After Circe grants Odysseus knowledge on how he and his men must conjure up spirits, Odysseus muses: "But Circe, who can guide us on this journey? / No one before has ever sailed to Hades / by ship" (*X* 501-503). Here, Odysseus questions the confusing nature of his descent because the path to the underworld, to him, seems impossible. When asking Circe this question, he does not yet understand that the world he must step into requires a descent, a nekyia. After she instructs him and he sets sail, "fair wind" is blowing, where they reach "the limits of deep-flowing Ocean" (*XI* 12), contending with spirits rising around him and

"pale fear / [taking] hold of him" (*XI* 43-44). Indeed, this is an icy descent. He respects Circe's instruction after beaching his ship, where he digs a hole in the ground and sprinkles barley and makes a vow (*XI* 27-31). Because of the presence of barley in this mixture he must sprinkle into the ground, Odysseus holds a ritual.

When one approaches Odysseus' descent as "katabastic," as a descent into the underworld, one would reasonably infer that Hades would appear. And as we know, he does not appear. Odysseus seems to wander into the underland just as easily as he leaves, "with the help of oars, / and then *fair* wind" (*XI* 639-640). During the war of the titans and gods and during the Trojan War, Hades receives no fair wind to quiet the cry of war and pain; he must sit in his palace—in his domestic space—and listen to it all. Moreover, in Odysseus' interaction with Achilles, Achilles calculatedly chooses his words to express a poetic message concerning his time in the underworld and Hades himself. In his state of formlessness as a shadow, Achilles poetically retorts:

> I would prefer to be a workman,
>
> hired by a poor man on a peasant farm,
>
> than rule as king of all the dead. But come,
>
> tell me about my son. (*XXI* 489-492)

Achilles could have made the point that he does not wish to be in the underworld in simpler language, but he poignantly states that he would not want to even be Hades himself.[9] This could possibly connect with Circe's exclamation once Odysseus and his crew arrive back to the land of

[9] Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* playfully alters this statement by Achilles saying, "Rather would I be a day-labourer in the underworld and among the shades of time past! —Even the denizens of the underworld are plumper and fuller than you" (104).

the living: “This is amazing! You all went / alive to Hades—you will be twice-dead, / when other people only die one time” (*XXII* 21-23)! In this descent, Odysseus learns about the underworld while in the underland: he learns how he may reach Ithaca, how souls in the underworld (conjured into the underland) think, and how those who have been lost since his exile are faring after death. Adhering to my definitions contrasting the underland with the underworld, Hades does not appear in Book XI of *The Odyssey* because Odysseus is not in the underworld. He is in the underland.

Using these different classifications, underland and underworld, I am pulling from Robert Macfarlane’s research and personal experiences that he documents in his most recent book *Underland* (2019). Macfarlane, in *Underland*, explores the psychological, mythological, and geological nature of what lies below. Seeking to understand and personally experience the underland, he travels deep into the depths to grapple with the “worlds beneath our feet” (Macfarlane 11). Interestingly, he titles the book *Underland,* using the term synonymously with underworld and other synonyms describing a space of darkness that lies below us. As previously mentioned in this paper, Macfarlane surmises that his journeying into various abysses is a movement toward understanding a part of humanity that may seem counterintuitive. Like all heroes from mythology, Macfarlane attempts to bring back something from his visits—a kind of boon—that helps us to understand the depths, detailing his journeys in this book. Thus, he sees himself engaging in a quest like Odysseus, Enkidu, or Orpheus, traveling into the depths to bring to light an understanding of the unknown. As a scholar who clearly reveres Nature as a goddess, Macfarlane understands that one must never forget their glimpse into the abyss. One must never engage in its fixed stare lightly. Near the end of the book, he writes, “I am trying to hear this landscape’s undersong—the substrate sounds of a given place, the ambient murmur that goes

often unheard or at least unlistened-for" (375). While Macfarlane certainly does not center his research upon the archaic concept of Greece's death deity, nevertheless, he and I both desire the "murmur that goes often unheard." Hades undoubtedly represents this murmur, where Macfarlane instead of seeking Hades or a death deity seeks the underland itself—or underworld. Because Macfarlane sees himself in the same light as a mythic hero traveling into the underbelly of our natural landscape, he does not differentiate between the underworld and underland. And because Macfarlane relates to heroes from ancient mythology, he does not need to engage in redefining these terms since his book is both scholarly and personal. To Mafarlane, his visits are to the underland—also the underworld. The lines blur between mythological heroes and his own descents. His journey is just as mythological as Odysseus. While Macfarlane does bring up ancient Greek mythological notions of descent in *Underland* and provide a definition, he, even though he seems to view his journey as mythological by nature, does not label his descents as either.[10] While he would more than likely call his travels katabastic by nature, his book seems to conjure upon and question the state of our current ecosystem, to be "nekyiastic" at certain moments. Macfarlane's lack of clear definition does not complicate his scholarship or narrative, but as I previously suggest regarding Hades' absence in Book XI of *The Odyssey*, it does complicate what this paper proposes regarding the Greek underworld, its death deity, and the journey into the abyss.

In an interview between Macfarlane and Diane Ackerman, a poet, naturalist, and scholar, Macfarlane reveals the genesis of his descents. Desiring to grapple with "what the underland knew" (64), he calls his journeys and the underland itself "a subject that was both urgent and

[10] In *Underland*, Macfarlane writes, "Classical literature records numerous instances of what in Greek were known as the katabasis (a descent to the underland) and the nekyia (a questioning of ghosts, gods, or the dead about the earthly future" (16).

ancient, and so it proved to be" (64). Macfarlane shares in the interview that his decision to write and study the underland stemmed from four catastrophic, natural events that contained a level of "precarity and volatility, and of illumination and ignorance" (64). He lists these in the interview as "the Haitian earthquake in January, the Deepwater Horizon blowout in the Gulf of Mexico in April, followed a few days later by the explosion of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajokull, and then in August the trapping of thirty-tree Chilean miners deep in the San Jose gold and copper mine . . ." (63-64). Because "the underland keeps its secrets well," we often bury that which we desire to avoid the most: planetary waste, nuclear weaponry, secrets of our dark, shared past; thus, we ignore natural signs that tell of impending catastrophe and cataclysm. In *Underland*, Macfarlane writes, "Into the underworld we have long placed that which we fear and wish to lose, and that which we love and wish to save" (8). In the interview, Macfarlane describes his lifelong fascination with nature, often culminating in him ascending to high peaks in the mountains and exploring regions of the world often neglected. Describing *Underland* in general, he says:

> There are, perhaps, two leitmotifs at the heart of *Underland*: one is of the network, the web, and the other is of the opened hand or the handprint. The hand stencil is one of the earliest extant marks made and left by human beings—created by placing the palm against the rock . . . I take that gesture—the hand opened in greeting, in offer of help, in communication—to be a resonant sign, and modern as well as ancient versions of it are embedded through *Underland*. (67-68)

Underland, to Macfarlane, represents communion with the past, or what he calls "deep time."[11] In these caves and underground regions, he encounters nature, time, and the world as cyclical, a lesson that a study in mythology or observation of nature will deliver. "Life itself grows like a plant, reborn from death, the inevitable sojourn in the chthonic darkness; and the gods beneath and above the earth, both those whose privilege was eternally to die as well as they who lived forever, were joined in reconciliation" (Ruck 95). Macfarlane's descents into chthonic darkness ultimately help him to "die" and be "reborn," and this is noticeable when examining the style of Macfarlane's *Underland,* which I will briefly mention in a moment.

When physically descending into the earth's interior, the temperature drops dramatically. Macfarlane's visits to the underland always bring him into extremely frigid weather, where he is always in an icy, sinister ordeal. On one of his journeys, Macfarlane travels to the "Red Dancers" in Lofoten, Norway, a cave containing prehistoric art. At one moment during his travel, he describes his experience as both being both a physically and psychologically trying endeavor. He writes, "Winter has returned to the Lofotens when I reach them. Arctic gales have blown from the west for four days the previous week, stripping the windward slopes of loose snow, and dumping it in the east-facing gullies of the Wall as storm-slab. Avalanche risk has risen from low to moderate and is due to keep on rising" (258). During his quest, he begins repeating mantras to himself and imagining the landscape's reply: "Why are you here? Why are you here? Ask the rocks and the wind in reply" (262). Undoubtedly, this quest by Macfarlane—and several of his others—is just as much of a psychological quest to the underland as well as an experience he paints as mythological and poetic. When one encounters the underworld in prehistoric caves

[11] The philosophical concept of "deep time" is far older than Macfarlane's *Underland,* and the first use of the phrase itself appears in John McPhee's *Basin and Range* (1981).

containing cave art, one is standing in the underland. Here, a clear distinction bears fruit, where—as previously mentioned—the underland is literally and physically reachable. Indeed, it is psychological either way, whether one is descending as katabasis or nekyia into the underworld or underland. However, when one reaches what Timothy Morton in his seminal work *The Ecological Thought* (2010) calls "dark ecology," that which has been buried, one experiences the nekyia, a moment of more mature reckoning.

Macfarlane's appreciation and journey to various abysses pairs itself well with the work of Timothy Morton. Positing a new ecological phenomenon that he labels dark ecology, Morton—throughout his career—has attempted to recenter humanity's focus onto ecology, seeing the interconnected relation between the natural world, art, philosophy, literature, and culture.[12] Thus, like the present essay's multifaceted approach when searching for Hades, Morton views liberal arts and literary criticism as connected with an understanding, engagement, and communion (mental and physical) with the natural world. To Morton, like the underland and Macfarlane's perception of it, "[T]he ecological thought is also difficult because it brings to light aspects of our existence that have remained unconscious for a long time" (9).

To briefly touch on the style of Macfarlane's *Underland* and Morton's *The Ecological Thought,* it certainly does not appeal to all readers. To many, *Underland* seems like a stark departure from Macfarlane's previous scholarship, where he descends into intoxicated, poetic ramblings hard to decipher. Morton, like Macfarlane, treats the environment as an aesthetic. It is a space from which energies emanate; thus, the mythological way Morton treats the environment, like Macfarlane, often confuses readers. When reading environmental criticism

[12] In *The Ecological Thought*, Morton writes, "Ecological thinking is to do with art, philosophy, literature, music, and culture" (4).

today, even if *Underland* and *The Ecological Thought* do not strictly fit within this genre, readers more than likely expect the author to provide solutions for climate change. They expect answers and not more questions and musings. *Underland* and *The Ecological Thought* are books that fetishize asking questions. They attempt to create a mythological environmental context for the present rather than provide answers to scientific query. While the writing of both certainly holds an intoxicating effect, one cannot get caught up in deciphering what Macfarlane and Morton are attempting to propose. They propose nothing, and they do not intend to. However, one can use their research—as I attempt to do—to bring to light that which has been neglected and hidden: the environment and therefore the underworld. The underland as well as growing concern over climate crisis today warrant not only thinking about ecology; they require bringing into the light of day that which has remained unconscious for a long time. By understanding Morton's theory of dark ecology and synthesizing it with Macfarlane's explorations in *Underland*, we may in greater detail understand the unconsciousness of nature, the unconsciousness of the realm of Hades, and the unconsciousness of that which has been buried deep to never resurface.

Respecting that which flickers in the shadows, the quotidian dance of the twilight upon the horizon, and nature's underland remain at the heart of this project's search for Hades, and an understanding of dark ecology broadens our perspective of climate change in the same spirit as Macfarlane's *Underland*. Both theorize that the darkness of the natural landscape should be a leading contender in discourse of the natural world. Morton says that "The ecological thought is therefore full of shadows and twilights" (15), paralleling Macfarlane's idea that humanity may be defined, observed, and studied from our proclivity to create "planetary chaos" (68). Regardless of how deeply Hades may be buried, and how deep we may find him to be buried, he remains physically and mythologically fixed inside of dark ecology. Morton defines dark ecology:

> I explore the possibility of a new ecological aesthetics: dark ecology. Dark ecology puts hesitation, uncertainty, irony, and thoughtfulness back into ecological thinking. The form of dark ecology is that of noir film. The noir narrator begins investigating a supposedly external situation, from a supposedly neutral point of view, only to discover that she or he is implicated in it. (16-17)

To experience dark ecology, one must not only mentally wrestle with the current ecological disaster; one must experience despair when physically exploring that which lies underneath, often intentionally buried. Today, the effects of climate change proliferate everywhere we look, everywhere our minds wander.[13] And to find Hades, one must wander. Morton writes, "Is the ecological thought thinking about ecology? Yes and no. It is a thinking that is ecological, a contemplating that is a doing" (8-9). In this way, more than ever, it is a ripe moment in history to search for Hades. We exist in a moment when people are constantly attempting to deconstruct and reestablish perception of humanity as less anthropocentric, and while we have become more cautious about our own tendency to self-venerate, we often do not want to physically tread the path of the hero seeking the abyss, a mythologically analogous equivalence to engaging with dark ecology. Here, we may perceive a definite similarity between Macfarlane's journeys and those of mythological heroes. Macfarlane, like Odysseus and others, descends so that he may be reborn. He intentionally leaves the landscape surrounding him, moving to a foreign place of challenge, trial, and tribulation.

Building a bridge between the work of Macfarlane and Morton with reference to Jung and Hillman may seem whimsical given their vastly different approaches to the natural world.

[13] Morton writes, "Dark ecology oozes through despair. Being realistic is always refreshing. Depression is the most accurate way of experiencing the current ecological disaster. It's better than wishful thinking. Through dark ecology, we discover that ecology is everywhere our minds go" (95).

Macfarlane's treatment of the underland as well as Morton's theory of dark ecology are totally against the idea that Hades and the underworld are psychological. While Morton and Macfarlane do treat the ecology as an aesthetic, they treat it as an aesthetic that we must physically and literally commune with. To Morton, dark ecology is just as reachable as Macfarlane's journeys into the underland. Nevertheless, this tension between the way Macfarlane and Morton treat the environment in comparison with Jung and Hillman is fruitful. Macfarlane and Morton certainly do not view the environment as void of psychological quality. They instead take for granted that the descent into the underland and dark ecology is psychological by nature; however, their works' journey into the abyss, because it treats the environment as an aesthetic, is also an experiment in poetics. One may understand the environment and the journey to the underworld as psychological and a metaphor for the artist. To Macfarlane and Morton, labelling the underworld as only psychological limits its scope of possibility. Macfarlane and Morton, insatiably curious, display through their work that they disdain limitation. In this way, reflecting on the work of Jung, Hillman, Macfarlane, and Morton, Odysseus' descent cannot be treated just as psychological. It must have the quality of being both a literal and metaphorical descent of the artist as well as a psychological event.

Including now a discussion of Campbell in relation with Macfarlane, Morton, Jung, and Hillman, readers can once again encounter a fruitful tension. Macfarlane's journeys into the underland ultimately help him develop an ecocenter of his own existence and relationship with the natural world; Morton's theory of dark ecology vehemently rejects individualism, praising the continuous, living and breathing natural world; however, Campbell's monomyth, presented in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* is an incredibly individualistic approach to human psychology. In this way, Campbell, unsurprisingly, aligns well with the more individualistic (and

psychological) approach of Jung and Hillman. In fact, Campbell finishes his opus thus: “It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe’s great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair” (337). To Campbell, the hero—individual—must serve his society, and the practicality of the monomyth resides in moments when the hero—all of us according to Campbell—is in the “silence of his personal despair.” Confronting dark ecology and the environmental world today is one of personal despair, and while Macfarlane and Morton would more than likely argue that one should not feel personal despair regarding the natural world, an individualistic conception of our relationship with nature, despair and neglect unite the work of Macfarlane, Morton, and Campbell.

A journey to the underland is a nekyia by nature—a journey that is physically possible. Campbell reinforces this distinction—whether he consciously means to or not in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*—when he calls the descent stage of the hero into the underworld in his monomyth “The Belly of the Whale.” Although still psychological by nature, Campbell describes this descent as “[A] transit into a sphere of rebirth . . . symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (74). Now, why would Campbell not call this stage in his monomyth simply “The Underworld Journey?” The images that Campbell conjures here—a womb, the belly of a sea monster—suggest a kind of frigidity. It is because he, like Jung, Hillman, and Macfarlane, perceives the icy layer of the underland. The underland is abysmal, but like the underworld it is no abyss.

Adhering to my definitions, Hades may only appear when a hero traverses past the underland into the underworld, when a hero descends as katabasis, not nekyia. In archaic Greek

literature, Odysseus is the only mortal who descends into the underland, and no mortal hero descends into the underworld. However, Hermes does, and once Hermes descends, we finally hear Hades. Now, an understanding of Hermes is of necessary importance so he may guide us to Hades. May he lead us playfully.

CHAPTER 4. A BEGINNING NOTE ON HERMES: TRICKSTER, PSYCHOPOMPOS, COMEDIC ABSURDITY

"They like to look, so let them see a lot."

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, 90)

When one gazes at Hades, the abyss stares back. On the other hand, when one gazes at Hermes, one sees too much. Hermes walks in the light of the day as well as in the dead of night, loving to look into the face of all who sleep.[14] If Hades is the invisible god in the Greek pantheon, Hermes stands as the opposite; he is ever-present, always nearby, always crossing boundaries.[15] Karl Kerenyi's search for Hermes in his book *Hermes: Guide of Souls* (1944) stands as an intimate body of research, a moment where Kerenyi saw too much, a moment where Hermes let Kerenyi see too much. It appears when reading the work that Kerenyi clings to Hermes as his center, as his understanding of the world and ancient Greek myth and ritual, as his axis mundi. At one moment in the text, Kerenyi describes Hermes:

> He [Hermes] is most likely the same dark depth of being from which we all originate. Perhaps for this reason Hermes can so convincingly hover before us, lead us on our ways, show us golden treasures in everyone through the split-second timing which is the spirit of finding and thieving—all of this because he creates the reality out of us, or more properly through us, just as one fetches water not so much out of a well as through the well from the much deeper regions of the earth. (51)

[14] "[F]or he was used to walking at night and loved looking into the face of all that sleeps" (Nietzsche 20).
[15] "The most uncanny of the boundaries which Hermes crosses is the boundary between the living and the dead" (Burkert 157).

To Kerenyi, Hermes is the source of life and the world itself.[16] He is light and carefree,[17] a giver of good gifts and tidings,[18] the god of the dream world,[19] and ultimately the god of laughter and life.[20] He makes sense as well as laughs in the face of those who think they themselves make sense. In this way, Hermes is paradox.

Hermes is a force we must frequently return to and reconcile with, but he is also a force of discomfort and chaos, stemming from the role he fulfills as the trickster. Like Odysseus, Kerenyi could not escape Hermes always residing nearby. Hermes continued to lead Kerenyi "on his way," creating and showing him a reality that to Kerenyi could not be separated from Hermes' essence. To Kerenyi, Hermes' nature represents "a dark depth of being from which we all originate;" thus, a place we must frequently return for sustenance and survival; ritualistically, a place of meditation. Nevertheless, Hermes is no god of perpetual safety; Hermes is no Psalmist Yahweh to which he may "cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler (Psalms 91.4). According to Jung in his famous essay on the trickster "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure" (1956), the trickster himself represents a collectively archetypal shadow figure, "an epitome of all the inferior traits of character in individuals" (209). Because Jung attempts in his essay to provide a universal definition for the trickster, he at several moments mentions Hermes, but he does not limit his discussion only to Hermes. Because Jung attempts to provide a universal definition, his essay ends up containing

[16] "Hermes, the source of his own world, was traced back to the source of life itself" (Kerenyi 66).
[17] "In the myth of the cattle theft Hermes' nature appears at its lightest and most carefree, but not without deeper resonances" (Burkert 156).
[18] Walter Burkert writes, "Hermes is a giver of the good" (158).
[19] Mark Holland states, "For instance, it is Hermes who symbolically conducts our nightly transition to the dream world" (88).
[20] "When the laughter gains the upper hand, it is a sign that the god is getting 'worn out,' not of disbelief" (Kerenyi 187).

extended and even contradictory poetic musings on the trickster as well as more literal definitions that are reductive when taken literally.

Campbell, in *Primitive Mythology*, realizes the reductive quality of Jung's argument regarding the trickster while also embracing some of the parameters Jung provides. He writes, "In the paleolithic sphere from which this figure [trickster] derives, he was the archetype of the hero, the giver of all great boons—the fire-bringer and the teacher of mankind" (274). Later in the work, Campbell writes that "It is hardly proper to call such a figure a god, or even to think of him as supernatural. He is a super-shaman" (275). Here, he is directly reflecting Jung's theory that the trickster is like "[T]he character of the shaman and medicine-man, for he, too, often plays malicious jokes on people" (196). Moreover, Jung poetically expands later: "He is a forerunner of the savior, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He [trickster] is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness" (203). So, the trickster is heroic on occasion, a psychological archetype of heroes, shamans, gods, and mankind itself, and he is both "subhuman" and "superhuman," reflecting his role as embodied paradox. Jung clearly limits the trickster at certain points in his essay as a primitive figure in a rudimentary state, and Hermes certainly appears in archaic Greek literature in a primitive way adhering to Jung's definition.[21] However, Jung also exalts the trickster when proclaiming his unconsciousness. To Jung, the psychological nature of the trickster is his redeeming factor, and his analysis ultimately hinges on his use of the verb "play." The trickster "plays malicious jokes on people."

[21] "Considering the crude primitivity of the trickster cycle, it would not be surprising if one saw in this myth simply the reflection of an earlier, rudimentary stage of consciousness, which is what the trickster obviously seems to be" (Jung 201).

In Jung's "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," he establishes a direct comparison between tricksters and clowns, seeing in them qualities of a coherent psychological archetype. He writes, "[T]he trickster has been a source of amusement right down to civilized times, where he can still be recognized in the carnival figures of Pulcinella and the clown" (204). Here, Jung interprets the clown as a more modernized trickster. He sees the clown as recognizably "tricksterish." While tricksters and clowns both must exist in a state of playfulness—inspired by their psychological energies, their playfulness leads to a different comedic effect and outcome. The purpose of the clown's trickery and playfulness should lead others to laughter at the clown. Therefore, the clown is the source of the laughter, where his self-deprecation—often the result of primitivity—emphasizes the superiority of his crowd. The trickster, on the other hand, uses trickery and playfulness to redirect laughter into the heart of his viewers. In this way, the trickster's playfulness does not lead his audience to self-exoneration. The trickster humbles while the clown exalts. The trickster inspires meditation while the clown inspires only a moment of comedic relief in the present. In this way, the psychological energies both the trickster and clown inspire are a kind of descent. Because of the tricksters' ability to inspire a deeper level of psychological reflection, an encounter with the trickster is an icy experience, like the nekyia, whereas the clown inspires grotesque, out-of-place laughter, a moment of redness of face, a moment of heat, a katabasis.

Hermes represents—among many things—the god of laughter and life. And because he also holds the role of ancient Greece's *psychopompos*, a role I will analyze and discuss later, Hermes maintains the psychological energies possible to connect laughter with descent. The icy experience that the trickster inspires—the nekyia—leads to a moment of laughter, a moment of

noise to resound down in the abyss. With Hermes, or the trickster, as our guide, we may laugh in the abyss, in the realm of Hades.

While one travels to the carnival to meet the clown, the trickster brings the burlesque carnival with them. “In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in sacred and magical rites, in man’s religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise” (Jung 200). Thus, in this light, it is not surprising that the energies of trickster figures should make us uncomfortable today while parts of the clown’s representation—absent from mythology—may provide momentary comfort. We attempt to forget the trickster—even though he remains permanently fixed within our unconsciousness—because he brings discomfort. Jung writes, “The so-called civilized man has forgotten the trickster. He remembers him only figuratively and metaphorically, when, irritated by his own ineptitude, he speaks of fate playing tricks on him or of things being bewitched” (206). The trickster, along with bringing discomfort, also brings our “irritation” and “ineptitude.” The trickster grants insight while the clown offers a moment of madness. The trickster interacts with others, so they may learn to question rather than exclaim. Furthermore, the trickster—thus Hermes—fixes the gaze of his audience inward rather than on himself. Therefore, while the clown and trickster both represent and embody psychological energies as well as an association with the carnivalesque, the trickster inspires unconsciousness. Because Kerenyi’s approach of Hermes is influenced by Jung and psychoanalysis, tricksters, the underworld, and thus the search for Hades itself falls back on psychology and the notion of the unconscious.

For the purpose of this paper, I will now develop another important distinction: the trickster and the Hermetic trickster. In narrative, the trickster eventually must depart from the

story abruptly while the Hermetic trickster stays until the end. Here, we have an ever-present trickster and a trickster who may only act tricksterish for a time. To see this distinction, we may briefly examine Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Fool in *Lear* and Puck in *Dream*—both tricksters in their respective stories—fit my classification. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Lear descends into ineptitude in part because of his conversation with his fool, where the fool continuously points Lear to what he disdains the most: his lack of control of both his daughters and his own mental state. The Fool's constant closeness to Lear allows his trickery to influence Lear's descent into madness, where his degeneration is one of reason. He loses the ability to perceive clearly and have a rational reference point. Because Lear descends into madness and becomes a source of amusement, he transforms from king to clown. The Fool acts as a trickster, a man who likes to see his chaos, and through The Fool's tricksterish behavior Lear descends. In the second half of *Lear,* The Fool starkly disappears from the narrative, and we clearly see The Fool as a trickster—not a Hermetic trickster. Puck in *A Midsummer's Night Dream* is also a trickster, a character whose presence proliferates unconsciousness wherever he travels. Like The Fool, Puck, throughout the play, makes and causes significant error, he transforms others, and he often distracts others. However, at the end of the play, he restores a semblance of order through his unconsciousness that intoxicates the audience and all other characters in the play. While both are playful, Puck remains, and his unconsciousness spreads further than The Fool's influence in *Lear*. The Fool is a trickster, but he is not a Hermetic trickster like Puck.

My classification of the Hermetic trickster is not based on the philosophical system of Hermeticism. The "Hermetic" trickster is not from the philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus. The definition I propose instead only refers to specific kind of tricksters in mythology. Unlike the

trickster, the Hermetic trickster must always appear at the end of the narrative like Hermes in Book XXIV of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*—like Puck. The Hermetic trickster, although craving chaos like the trickster, acts more as a cosmic puppet-master. Resolution must arrive at the end of the story inspired by the Hermetic trickster. The trickster plays with people as pawns while the Hermetic trickster maneuvers others as if they are queens. The trickster is a conniver and manipulator, but the Hermetic trickster is cunning and more tricksterish. Furthermore, the Hermetic trickster exemplifies *μετίς* (cunning and wisdom), a philosophical concept that in classical Greece became embodied with Odysseus, more than the trickster. I will have more to say about *μετίς* in the next chapter, and how readers of *The Odyssey* for millennia have misunderstood this concept, attributing it solely to come from Athena. Through this analysis, we may in greater detail understand the intoxicating influence of the Hermetic trickster. Indeed, the only way for Hades to speak ten lines in archaic Greek literature is through the Hermetic influence.

It is not surprising that the energy of trickster figures in mythology should make us feel uncomfortable today. The trickster is a precipice that brings humanity into a deep plunge downward. As Friedrich Nietzsche writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), "Not the height: the precipice is terrifying! The precipice, where the glance plunges downward and the hand reaches upward. There the heart is made dizzy by its double will" (123). Studying, understanding, and communing with the trickster reveals humanity's theatricality. As we have progressed further into a technologically advanced world of rampant modernization, we have learned to suspend any disbelief in ourselves. The "Western" world has a tendency to anthropomorphically venerate our own intellectualism and superiority to past civilizations. How could we possibly laugh at ourselves? How could we possibly allow the trickster to inspire reflection, for us to

psychologically reside inside of the carnivalesque? The trickster helps us suspend our disbelief and descend into a world of chaos they intentionally create. Indeed, the trickster is rational, but they do not have to tidy up the chaos they leave behind for us to understand; they just like to see their work, to work on us. Avoiding an understanding of tricksters, we may never wrestle with our hypocrisy, inviting in the potential for paradox and thus understanding. Nevertheless, Hermes, while certainly fitting the definition, criteria, and actions of the trickster figure in archaic Greek literature, also transcends this definition because of his role as also *psychopompos*.[22] By understanding his duplicitous role and embodiment of the Hermetic, we may approach his comedic absurdity.

Many mythologists and philologists have difficulty reconciling with Hermes' dichotomous role in ancient Greece. In fact, in Western mythology, Hermes stands as the only god who maintains both of these attributes. So, he is not just a trickster who stays firmly fixed in waking life. He brings others to stay in a state of reflection through his ability to act in a primitive way, often making mistakes. He is not just a Hermetic trickster who acts as a cosmic puppet-master, moving and influencing people around him to lack control. He also travels into the underworld and abyss, into dark ecology, guiding souls into the realm of Hades. Thus, he is both of life and of the underworld, of the light and of the dark. Hermes guiding the souls into the underworld, because he is a trickster, must in essence be playful. Hermes' journeying must always be playful, never solemn. In *The Ecological Thought*, Morton briefly comments on the trickster's connection with dark ecology:

The Trickster teaches us that subjectivity is an inescapable part of reality. Even if we are

[22] "The most dramatic transition of all is death. Here we find Hermes in the role of *psychopompos*, literally the 'spirit who shows the way,' or Guide of Souls to the underworld" (Holland 85).

> alone in the 'wilderness,' we are not alone. Our examination of the uncanny should demonstrate this. What is scary about being lost in a forest of tree upon tree, or lost in a city of street upon street, is catching a glimpse of yourself, from the point of view of the trees. It is the feeling of being watched, of being accompanied. And what are you seeing? What is seeing you? We can identify only a shadowy darkness. The dark openness gazes at us. We aren't exactly seeing ourselves in a mirror. We're seeing ourselves as the void that looks back at us, as if we looked in the mirror and saw a hooded figure, and underneath the hood was nothing. The uncanny path in the forest and the city goes round and round in circles. (82-83)

Here, Morton discusses the tricksters' presence in dark ecology as one that inspires fear and inevitable reflection. Hermes is the "shadowy darkness," the "void that looks back at us." He is the "hooded figure" even though according to Kerenyi he is life-energy. The Hermetic trickster might also require the trickster to be the *psychopompos*. The Hermetic trickster, thus, must be duplicitous.

Examining Jungian psychology, what makes Hermes able to occupy both the light and dark side of existence is the large shadow he casts and maintains. Everywhere Hermes travels, he brings the night with him.[23] According to Kerenyi, "[O]ne does not find all the Hermetic characteristics in Night. Something essential is missing" (50). As only *psychopompos*, Hermes could not achieve the same depth of meaning that Kerenyi extrapolates in *Hermes: Guide of Souls.* By synthesizing Jung, Kerenyi, and Morton, we may then approach Hermes' paradoxical nature. As a representation of paradox and in-betweenness, we can now begin to examine how

[23] "We need not take special pains to point out that the darkest aspect of Hermes appears with the coming of night" (Kerenyi 22).

Hermes' absurdity manifests itself in archaic Greek literature because of his role as trickster and *psychopompos*. Considering his nature as both dark and light, his presence in archaic and ancient Greek literature shows the thin thread between life and death itself in mythology. Because of Hermes' duplicity, roles that when approached together are almost inconceivable become absurd; they become Hermetic. By Hermetic here, I synthesize Hermes as embodying the trickster, my definition of Hermeticism, and role as *psychopompos*. Hermes' comedic absurdity must then be paradoxical and in a state of in-betweenness. Thus, the Hermetic trickster refers to Hermes' absurd role in archaic Greek myth and ritual as well as the way archaic storytellers present him in their literature.

The absurd must be our guide, and Hermes embodies and represents absurdity just as much as a comedic force for readers of archaic Greek literature. In this way, I label Hermes' presence in archaic Greek literature as one of comedic absurdity. He does not just guide souls into the underworld. His very nature and presence in ancient Greek literature guide us to obscurity and paradox. "How many nowadays understand what the absurd is, how many live in such a way as to have renounced or gained everything, how many are even simply honest enough to know what they are and what they can and cannot do" (Kierkegaard 127)? In *Fear and Trembling* (1843), Søren Kierkegaard chooses to describe what the absurd is not rather than describing what it is: "The absurd is not one distinction among others embraced by understanding. It is not the same as the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen" (75). He continues for several lines after this without giving a clear example partly because he finds absurdity to be fully exemplified in Abraham, an archetype he categorizes as the "knight of faith." He views Abraham in *Genesis* as an unknowable and unrelatable paradox, and his understanding of Abraham leads him to understand—rather than define—the absurd. Therefore,

Kierkegaard creates a classification—the knight of faith—so that he may avoid clearly defining the absurd. He discusses the absurd as being embodied rather than defined.

Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) treats the absurd in a similar and paradoxical way; however, he expands the definition. He perceives the absurd as being embodied in several characters and heroes in literature and mythology; however, he also hints that the absurd can become personified in a deity, echoing a maxim by Aristotle that the birth of absurdity in stories and life resides within the storyteller as a "veiled force."[24] Camus writes, "Thus the absurd becomes god (in the broadest meaning of the word) and that inability to understand becomes the existence that illuminates everything" (33). Camus additionally expands Kierkegaard's definition of the absurd by paralleling comedy and the absurd; they are "two sons of the same earth" (122). Hermes contains these two sons. He is comedic absurdity because of his dichotomy as trickster and *psychopompos*. Additionally, he represents comedic absurdity because of the way ancient Greek storytellers include his presence in their narratives. His Hermetic quality proliferates. Therefore, Hermes perfectly fits the "Camusian" definition for the absurd, or more appropriately labeled comedic absurdity.

Furthermore, as absurd god, one could also categorize Hermes as a Kierkegaardian knight of faith. "The knight of faith, on the other hand, is the paradox, he is the individual, absolutely nothing but the individual, without connections and complications" (Kierkegaard 107). Hermes—although he fits the definition for the knight of faith well—maintains many connections, including Hades. We continuously contemplate Hades while lacking the words to describe what we know, but Hermes' paradoxical and duplicitous nature—his ability to travel

[24] Aristotle states, "As it is, the absurdity is veiled by the poetic charm with which the poet invests it" (97).

between the world of the living and the world of the dead while being a trickster in both spaces—provides us with the opportunity to peruse the underworld and locate Hades' presence.[25] In the same way Camus postulates that to accept absurdism is to imagine Sisyphus happy,[26] we must imagine Hades as glad to meet our demands, glad to accept our biases and judgement while we seek his presence.

In an illuminating moment in archaic Greek literature on understanding Hermes, Demodocus recounts to the court the story of Hephaestus trapping Aphrodite and Ares while they were secretly trying to make love. As all the gods are standing nearby watching Aphrodite and Ares struggle, Demodocus tells a beautiful, yet comedic, aside:

> Apollo, son of Zeus, then said to Hermes,
>
> 'Hermes my brother, would you like to sleep
>
> with golden Aphrodite, in her bed,
>
> even weighted down by mighty chains?'
>
> And Hermes the sharp-eyed messenger replied, 'Ah, brother,
>
> Apollo lord of archery: if only!
>
> I would be bound three times as tight or more
>
> and let you gods and all your wives look on,
>
> if only I could sleep with Aphrodite.' (*VIII* 333-341)

[25] "Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it" (Camus 54).
[26] Albert Camus writes, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (123).

As may be expected, immediately after this joke, "[L]aughter rose among the deathless gods" (*VIII* 343), where one can imagine Hermes reveling in his ability to bring lightness into this scene. This story by Demodocus breaks up the tension of his previous story and the one that follows, where Odysseus weeps considering the subject matter: the Trojan War. When recounting this tale, Homer includes the detail that "So sang the famous bard. Odysseus / with his strong hands picked up his heavy cloak . . . He was ashamed to let them see him cry" (*VIII* 84-85; 87). This next tale of Hermes' absurdity breaks up the tension. It shows Hermes acting theatrically, where he brings disorder and more chaos into the narrative, pushing the limits of what is allowed or permitted for a god.[27] While it is easy to imagine gods laughing at humanity, especially in ancient Greek mythology, it is more difficult to imagine gods laughing at gods. Nevertheless, this is not the only moment in the Homeric epics where gods laugh at gods. In *The Iliad*, there is a digression where the gods laugh at Hephaestus:

> So he spoke and Hera, goddess of the white arms, smiled
>
> and smiling accepted the cup from her son's hand.
>
> Then to all the other gods, serving to the right,
>
> He poured sweet nectar like wine, drawing from a mixed bowl;
>
> and unquenchable laughter broke out among the blessed gods
>
> as they watched Hephaestus bustling through the halls. (*I* 595-600)

[27] "Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster. His function is an archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology, of the tales told about him, is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted" (Kerenyi 185).

One remembers Nietzsche's famous maxim: "Gods are fond of mockery: it seems they cannot refrain from laughter even when sacraments are in progress" (199). In moments like these, the energies of Hermes, because he is the god of laughter, proliferate even though *The Iliad* does not mention his presence directly. Hermes' sacrament is confusion itself, the sacrament of absurdism. Hermes' jokes—and jokes from others that lead to uncontrollable laughter—constitute more than comedy or just making others laugh; they usually contain absurdity. Hermes laughs so that others may also laugh in the face of jokes containing no relevant purpose. Hermes laughs in the face of representative nothingness, which these moments in the Homeric Epics display well.

In the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes,* we see the storyteller deliver a scene comparable to Demodocus' story of Hermes, where we discover several interesting aspects of Hermes not explicitly expressed in the Greek epics or Hesiod's *Theogony*. Hermes lives in a state of playing;[28] he satisfies his appetites immediately;[29] he is the first to give humanity fire—representing a commonality between tricksters across all cultures;[30] and his lying—part of his darker nature—makes even Zeus, his father, laugh with joy.[31] While all these descriptions perfectly fit his essence as comedic trickster, he once again transcends these limitations at one moment in the story, devolving into absurdism. In the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes,* the storyteller says, "And then mighty Argeiphontes [Hermes] pondered in himself / and, as he was lifted in Apollon's arms, sent forth an omen, / a hardy effort of the belly and a wreckless messenger"

[28] The storyteller of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* composes, "Thus he spoke and with both hands he raised it up / and ran back into his abode, carrying the lovely toy" (39-40).
[29] "[A]nd then craving for meat / he leaped from the fragrant dwelling and went forth scouting, pondering some bold wile in his mind, such as men / who are bandits pursue when dark night falls" (64-67).
[30] "For Hermes was the first to give us fire from fire-sticks. / He gathered many dry sticks and made a thick / and sturdy pile in a sunken pit; and the flame shone afar" (111-113).
[31] The storyteller says, "Zeus laughed out loud when he saw the mischievous child / denying so well and so adroitly any connection with the cattle" (389-390).

(294-296). The strangeness of this moment in the *Hymn* makes it absurd:[32] the fact that Apollo can do nothing to punish this child of Zeus, the reality that Hermes until the end of the *Hymn* continues to deny his possession of Apollo's cattle even though he knows Apollo has evidence against his claims, the precision of the storyteller to call Hermes breaking wind an "omen" and "wreckless messenger." How must we reconcile with this narrative? In a way, we critically cannot. It is unexplainable although laughable in the same way as Puck's conclusion in *Dream*. Hermes never explains himself. He may never explain himself. He simply experiences and approaches life in an absurd way.[33] He, as the Hermetic trickster, cannot stop his playfulness. While the trickster and Hermetic trickster both influence the narrative in an absurd way, the Hermetic trickster is more playful. He plays simply because he can. And through his playfulness, we hear Hades.

[32] Albert Camus writes, "Just one thing: that denseness and the strangeness of the world is the absurd" (14).
[33] "For the absurd man it is not a matter of explaining and solving, but of experiencing and describing" (Camus 94).

CHAPTER 5. EXAMINING THE INTOXICATING HERMETIC INFLUENCE: HERMES, ODYSSEUS, HADES

"You love fiction / and tricks so deeply, you refuse to stop / even in your own land. Yes, both of us / are smart."

(Homer, *The Odyssey*, *XIII*, 295-298)

As previously stated, Athena guides and instructs Odysseus at every point in his journey, and she, like Hermes, appears at the beginning and end of the narrative, although Athena holds a more active presence in *The Odyssey*. In fact, Athena is the reason for Hermes appearing early in the narrative. Begging Zeus to free Odysseus from Calypso's Island, she says:

. . . [W]e must send our messenger,

Hermes the giant-slayer. He must swoop

Down to Ogygia right away and tell

the beautiful Calypso we have formed

a firm decision that Odysseus

has waited long enough. He must go home. (*I* 83-88)

At the end of *The Odyssey*, Hermes' role as *psychopompos* enters center stage in the narrative, where he guides the souls of the suitors into the underworld. Because Odysseus' nekyia is a journey into the *underland*, Book XXIV is the only glimpse we have of the *underworld* in the Greek epics. As Agamemnon and Achilles converse in the underworld, Hermes glides by leading the souls, and we observe the Hermetic influence permeating from waking life into the depths of the underworld. In a final couplet, Homer notes: "So they spoke together, / standing in Hades, hidden in the earth" (*XXIV* 204-205). In the brief glimpse we get of the abyss, we see that

storytelling and concern with what happens above still matter to the souls of the underworld. They converse to pass the time as a continuation of their colloquy in *The Iliad*, and that is all they may do while standing in Hades' domain. In this way, ironically, they, although invisible and formless essences in the underworld, still represent a more active force than Hades himself. We hear even from the souls of the underworld more than Hades. We hear from those subservient and bound to Hades while Hades hides in the background of the narrative.

At the beginning of the epic, Athena begins the movement of narrative, and Hermes is the expression of this movement. At the end of the epic, Hermes begins the movement of the souls into the underworld, and Homer grants Athena the final action. Thus, early, we see the poem framing both Athena and Hermes as Odysseus' guides back to Ithaca. Odysseus loves to appear in disguise and lie to others. This part of his nature is not Hermetic at all and certainly from Athena. Athena rarely appears in her own form, and when she does it is made clear that only some may see her: "[T]he gods are not / equally visible to everyone" (*XVI* 160-161). In contrast with Athena, Hermes never appears in disguise. Hermes cannot appear in disguise because he may not lie; he tells the truth too blankly. He penetrates to the heart of his ideas quickly, leaving others to take time to process what he just conveyed. One can imagine Athena speaking slowly and calmly, and Hermes speaking too loudly and quickly for any room he inhabits. Hermes views life as a joke to laugh at and a paradox to illuminate, and this quality extends into his role as messenger and herald of the gods. In archaic Greek literature, Zeus often sends Hermes to do his bidding, and Hermes in *The Odyssey* is constantly in motion. While it may seem like he willingly departs from Zeus' bidding to help Odysseus, he does so because that is his designation. It is always a fixed command. "Dear Hermes, / you are my messenger. Go tell the goddess / our *fixed* intention . . ." (*IV* 28-29). Ironically, Hermes never has a "fixed intention;" he

must always act in Zeus' favor; however, Zeus always takes pleasure in Hermes' absurdity and his defiance doing anything in the most direct way possible. We examined one instance of this previously in the *Hymn to Hermes*.

Odysseus acts like Athena often, where she is always by his side so Odysseus can observe how she handles situations. However, Odysseus does not only model his behavior and nature after Athena from observation; Homer makes it clear in the narrative that heroes can be granted godlike essence. The first instance of this occurs early in *The Odyssey* when Telemachus watches Athena glide away. He realizes that he was speaking to a god, and the narrative says, "Watching her go, he knew / she was a god. Then godlike, he went off / to meet the suitors" (*I* 323-325). Here and throughout the rest of the narrative, we see Athena stand by and aid Odysseus' entire family. She provides comfort and sleep to Penelope in her most distraught moments, she herself catalyzes Telemachus' search for his father, and she pleads with Zeus to free Odysseus from Calypso's Island. Without Athena, Odysseus could have never returned home, Telemachus would have been murdered by the suitors years before, and Penelope would not have held on to the hope that her husband would return. Therefore, through Athena's actions, we see her show an empathy for humanity that we do not get from Hermes. Hermes does not feel sympathy for Odysseus' exile or the suitors wreaking havoc in Ithaca. Hermes aids Odysseus simply for his own amusement. Athena genuinely desires for Odysseus to return home. In contrast, Hermes plays with Odysseus in order for Odysseus to make mistakes and thus learn from them. And at the end of *The Odyssey,* Odysseus, although in some ways a more mature hero, still acts as a Hermetic trickster. We perceive Hermes' comedic absurdity as intoxicating because Odysseus loves "tricks so deeply [he] refuses to stop even in [his] own land."

Nevertheless, Odysseus acts Hermetic far before he reaches home, putting his crew in jeopardy often from his rashness and lack of self-control.

While Odysseus is not as amusing as Hermes, an embodiment of comedic absurdity, he often acts in a chaotic way almost as if he cannot control himself. *Μετίς*, meaning both cunning and wisdom, a characteristic that the classical world thought of as highly admirable and noble and intertwined with Odysseus, is more complicated than people previously suspected. Readers of *The Odyssey* for millennia have thought of this quality as one of the prime characteristics of Greek heroism, and because Athena stands by Odysseus so often people interpret this attribute as coming solely from Athena. Critics often project too much of Athena's energies and characteristics onto Odysseus and therefore neglect Hermes. Emily Wilson's title of Chapter XIII in her *The Odyssey* translation, "Two Tricksters," is one of these instances. Chapter XIII certainly represents a key moment in the text: Odysseus has finally returned to Ithaca, and once Athena appears to him he decides—as he often does—to lie about his identity. Because Athena also lies about her identity, I can only suspect this drives Wilson to title this chapter "Two Tricksters." However, no trickery is happening here. They are certainly lying, but one feels when reading this section that they are lying simply because they can. They could never trick each other. To title this chapter "Two Tricksters" spreads confusion of what Hermes and Athena exemplify and the energies they proliferate in archaic Greek literature. Hermes will always be the trickster—the Hermetic trickster—in archaic and ancient Greek literature, and while Athena lies and disguises herself often, she does not represent a trickster. Titling Athena as a trickster, as Wilson does, disregards a vast amount of mythological criticism.

When we examine Odysseus and his complications, Odysseus embodying *μετίς* becomes more complicated to understand. Odysseus represents the full definition of the term; he is both at

moments cunning and in others wise. At times, he appears soft-spoken and collected. However, he frequently makes decisions that seem to completely contradict his nature as a masterful strategist. Therefore, his abilities do not only come from Athena, but also Hermes. Thus, a question arises. Did the ancient and classical Greeks have a different perception of what is heroic than we, or did they somehow ascribe too much of Athena's essence to Odysseus and neglect the Hermetic? Because *μετίς* represents a synthesis of both being wise and cunning, it is not necessarily an attribute that solely reflects Athena well. Hermes is far more cunning than wise; Athena is far wiser than she is cunning. When Athena lies in *The Odyssey*, she does so not to trick; she lies so she can delay revealing truth to Odysseus and others. When Hermes appears, he tricks not for truth to be immediately revealed; he tricks simply because he can. While Odysseus is often wise, he is also often careless, conniving, and playful to a fault. One can imagine Athena adhering to the words of Saint Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* (397 A.D.): "And it is one of the distinctive features of good intellects not to love words, but the truth in words" (145). While Athena loves "the truth in words," Hermes simply loves words, particularly the words that come out of his own mouth. Regardless, Odysseus must be seen as equally Hermetic and "Athenic."

Odysseus' name itself actually reinforces a more ambiguous reading of the concept of *μετίς*. When Ino offers Odysseus aid, she says: "Poor man! Why does enraged Poseidon / create an odyssey of pain for you" (*V* 339-340)? "Odyssey" here comes from the ancient Greek verb *ὀδύσσομαι* and thus also Odysseus' name. The verb can mean several things: "detested one," "journey of the detested one," or "wrathful one." While one could assume that the name could simply refer to Odysseus' fate to be an exile and his struggle to return home, Homer provides readers with another clue to understand Odysseus' naming. When Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus' scar as she is bathing him, the narrative cuts back far in time regarding Odysseus as a

young man and even baby. Homer recounts the story of Odysseus hunting with his maternal grandfather Autolycus—Autolycus is the father of Anticlea, Odysseus' mother. In some sources, Autolycus' father is actually Hermes:

> He [Odysseus] went there [hunting]
>
> with his maternal cousins and grandfather,
>
> noble Autolycus, who was the best
>
> of all mankind at telling lies and stealing.
>
> Hermes gave him this talent to reward him
>
> for burning many offerings to him. (*XIX* 395-400)

The Hermetic influence clearly runs deep in Odysseus' line. Additionally, Odysseus' main epithet, πολύμητις ("many minded" or "of many counsels"), seems directly related with Hermes' classification as πολύτροπος ("much turned" or "much travelled"). While *The Odyssey* shows Athena standing by Odysseus' entire family including Laertes at the end of the story, Hermes' influence extends back further. Autolycus is even responsible for naming Odysseus:

> He [Autolycus] told the parents, 'Name him this. I am
>
> disliked by many, all across the world,
>
> and I dislike them back. So name the child
>
> Odysseus.'" (*XIX* 406-409)

Odysseus' name, deriving from *ὀδύσσομαι*, in this context does not appear connected with his fate. It appears connected to Hermes' love of Odysseus' grandfather. Indeed, Odysseus' name

itself comes from Hermes' intoxicating influence. Fate certainly plays a part, but not in the way most expect. Odysseus was fated to be Hermetic by his maternal grandfather's godlike, Hermetic essence.

Two strong examples of Odysseus acting irrationally and acting more like Hermes than Athena exist in *The Odyssey*, although I will examine the second example of Odysseus acting like a Hermetic trickster later in this chapter. The first example occurs in Book IX when Odysseus devises a plan to escape Polyphemus' cave. When Homer notes that "My crew / stood firm: some god was breathing courage in us" (*IX* 360-361), we may recognize this godlike essence as coming from Athena. Odysseus concocts multiple steps in his deceitful plan: he gives Polyphemus nectar of the gods so he may attack him while the cyclops is drunk, lies to him about his name, then instructs his men to tie themselves up "beneath their [Polyphemus' sheep] wooly bellies" (*IX* 445). Only Athena could have inspired Odysseus to devise such a masterful plan. The men successfully escape returning to the ship, and then we see Odysseus' nature as the Hermetic trickster emerge:

> Hey, you, Cyclops! Idiot!
>
> The crew trapped in your cave did not belong
>
> to some poor weakling. Well, you had it coming!
>
> You had no shame at eating your own guests!
>
> So Zeus and other gods have paid you back. (*IX* 474-478)

In *The Odyssey*, we rarely see Odysseus speak in exclamation. More often than not, he speaks like Athena: calm, collected, and resolved. However, here, against the pleas of his crew begging

him to stop, he cannot contain himself. Here, he does not act like a hero. He acts Hermetic, and the Hermetic should never be viewed as heroic. The trickster, although he may be the archetype of the hero, remains fixed outside the sphere of being heroic. When Odysseus is lying in bed awake the night before the slaughter, he reflects on his experience with Polyphemus and his crew telling himself:

> Be strong, my heart. You were
>
> hounded by worse the day the Cyclops ate
>
> your strong companions. But you kept your nerve,
>
> till cunning saved you from the cave; you thought
>
> that you would die there. (*XX* 19-23)

When hurling insults at Polyphemus, putting his crew in jeopardy, Odysseus' heart is anything but "strong." Additionally, he certainly does not keep his "nerve." Wisdom saves Odysseus, but his cunning—inherited through him being a Hermetic trickster—makes his crew's escape nearly impossible.

Because Hermes is often playful, he is also often careless. When Zeus orders him to travel to Calypso's Island and tell Calypso that she must set Odysseus free, he appears to leave in a rude manner. Calypso pleads with Hermes:

> So, now, you male gods are upset with me
>
> for living with a man. A man I saved!
>
> (. . .)

[N]o other god can change the will of Zeus.

So let him go, if that is Zeus' order,

Across the barren sea. I will not give

an escort for this trip across the water. (*V* 129-130; 138-141)

After this provocative speech by Calypso, after Hermes lets himself into her home and quickly tells her what Zeus commands, Hermes quickly retorts, "'Then send him now, avoid the wrath / of Zeus, do not engage him, or one day / his rage will hurt you.' With these words, he vanished" (*V* 146-148). While Calypso's speech is beautiful and extended, Hermes is terse and careless. Homer devotes more lines to describe how Hermes enters Calypso's house than his actual conversation with Calypso, where we must focus on how Hermes enters a domestic space. "He gazed around in wonder / and joy, at sights to please even a god" (*V* 73-74). Then, Calypso instructs him to sit "upon a gleaming glittering chair" (*V* 86). It is difficult to imagine Hermes as stationary even though he exists in a state of in-betweenness. In the beginning of Hermes' conversation with Calypso, his speech is longer. However, it is still careless as he comments that "Zeus ordered me to come—I did not want to. / Who would desire to cross such an expanse / of endless salty sea" (*V* 99-101)? Like Hermes in this episode, we often see Odysseus act in a careless way, often ignoring the advice of the gods and trusting his misguided instincts. He waits to use Ino's immortal veil to help him survive from drowning until the last moment. Furthermore, he ignores Circe's advice that he should not bear arms when confronting Scylla. Athena would never forget this kind of advice; she is too wise to forget. But Hermes certainly would, and Odysseus often acts in a forgetful way reminding one of Hermes.

After Hermes leaves Calypso's Island and Calypso walks to tell Odysseus Zeus' bidding, Homer provides an interesting detail. When we see Odysseus for the first time in *The Odyssey*, he walks inside with Calypso and sits in the same chair that Hermes previously sat in. "The chair that Hermes had been sitting on / was empty now; Odysseus sat there" (*V* 195-196). While I do not intend to suggest that Odysseus is a Hermetic trickster simply because he sits in the same chair as Hermes, it is a fascinating detail that is included in the story, a detail that grounds us early in meeting Odysseus to understand him as Hermetic in the narrative. Odysseus physically meets Hermes later in the epic, and this is the first and only instance of a kind of communion between Hermes and Odysseus.

Hermes appears to Odysseus only one time in *The Odyssey* even though readers feel his intoxicating, Hermetic influence throughout the narrative's entirety. In Book X, as I previously discussed in Chapter 2, Odysseus tricks Circe, having her agree to reverse her magic so Odysseus' crew can transform back into men from swine. The only reason Odysseus learns what he must do is through Hermes' instruction before he enters Circe's hut. Because Circe later instructs Odysseus how to travel to the underworld and complete his "return," considering the hero's journey, Hermes instructs Odysseus at the most important moment in his quest home. Recounting his story to The Phaeacians, Odysseus describes first meeting Hermes:

> . . . I had almost
>
> Reached the great house of the enchantress Circe,
>
> when I met Hermes, carrying his wand
>
> of gold. He seemed an adolescent boy,
>
> the cutest age, when beards first start to grow. (*X* 272-276)

Hermes may appear in several guises—young, old, bearded, clean-shaven—but he may only appear as different forms of himself in archaic Greek literature. He may not appear in disguise like Athena. Furthermore, as a force of divine playfulness, it makes sense why Hermes would appear to Odysseus for the first and only time in the epic in the guise of an adolescent. Adolescence implies a lack of maturity, an embrace of futility, and inexperience with the world. Although Hermes is certainly experienced, mature in some respects, and holds a prominent role in ancient Greek myth and ritual, he chooses to paradoxically put aside those representations when appearing to Odysseus, a man whom he more than likely sees as a kindred spirit, as a Hermetic trickster. After Hermes questions Odysseus why he is alone and he let his men be turned into swine, he offers him help: "But I can help you. / Here, take this antidote to keep you safe / when you go into Circe's house" (*X* 285-287). After providing Odysseus with several other instructions, Homer makes it seem as if Odysseus does not have the chance to respond before Hermes departs, similar to Hermes meeting with Calypso earlier in the narrative. Here, we can assume that Hermes' godlike essence rubs off on Odysseus even though Homer does not mention it. Hermes certainly helps, but what he provides Odysseus is not wisdom. It is cunning, and the trickery entailed is silly by nature. Odysseus must take a concoction Hermes fashioned for him, not knowing why or what it contains; Odysseus must pretend that he is going to kill Circe; then, Odysseus must sleep with Circe, but before he removes his clothes Odysseus must make Circe in her already compromised state swear an oath that she will not "unman" him (*X* 301). In this meeting, Hermes plays with Odysseus. He appears abruptly, speaks quickly, and leaves without waiting for a reply. When Athena appears to Odysseus, she takes time to reassure him and provide him with guidance beyond his current situation. Hermes must know that for Odysseus to return home he must conjure up the souls from the underworld, but he does not mention this

reality to him. He lets Odysseus ensue chaos on Calypso's Island to ultimately learn himself what he must do. Thus, he gives Odysseus parameters, but he does not provide Odysseus with instruction beyond his current situation; he plays with him, although for a moment.

The second strongest example in the epic of Odysseus acting as a Hermetic trickster is in the last book of the epic when Odysseus travels to see his father for the first time since his return to Ithaca. Under the guidance of Athena, Odysseus appears in disguise to all of those in Ithaca whom he cares for most deeply before his murder of the suitors: Telemachus, Eumaeus, Eurycleia, and Penelope. Odysseus reveals himself at different moments depending on the situation, and it is important to mention that he does not reveal himself to Penelope until after the massacre. In every other circumstance, he lets those he loves know that it is him at an opportune moment, tells them his plan, and asks for their aid. However, he leaves Penelope out. Even when he is speaking with Penelope and she is weeping before the massacre, "Odysseus / pitied his grieving wife inside his heart, / but kept his eyes quite still, without a flicker . . ." (*XIX* 212-214). Rather than Odysseus being heartless here, I can understand why he would wait to reveal himself to Penelope. Unlike Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Eurycleia, Penelope cannot aid him in his plan to murder the suitors. In this way, it is a wise choice for Odysseus to stall. Clearly, Athena's godlike essence is doing him a favor here. After the massacre, when he finally confronts Penelope, she is hesitant, and Telemachus quips back at his mother in anger for denying her husband's return until Odysseus can prove to her that it is him. However, tactful Odysseus replies, "You must allow your mother / to test me out; she will soon know me better" (*XXIII* 112-113). Before this, Penelope even speaks Odyssean: "[W]e have our ways to recognize each other, / through secret signs known only to us two" (*XXIII* 108-109). While Odysseus' proof to Penelope of his identity is him knowing about their bed since he built it himself, Penelope

implies that the "secret signs" she references are Odysseus' wily and tactful speech. All others must recognize Odysseus from his scar; Penelope may recognize Odysseus by his *μετίς*, by his nature as a Hermetic trickster. Thus, although it may bother readers that Odysseus does not reveal himself earlier to his wife, one can justify his hesitancy.

One may not justify Odysseus' hesitancy to reveal himself to his father, Laertes. Laertes painfully grieves his son's absence, and he continues to do so for a long time. He has been living like a beast out in the fields wearing rags, crying without any hope of his son's return. He has been holding a vigil for Odysseus for nearly two decades. Of all characters in the epic, I find Laertes to deserve the most sympathy. He represents a blameless character in *The Odyssey*, perhaps the only blameless character. When Odysseus is travelling to meet his father, he decides to appear in disguise. While this may seem overcautious considering Odysseus' prior massacre of the suitors, Odysseus makes it clear in the narrative that he fears uprising by the families of Ithaca who do not support his violent return, and this concern manifests itself at the end of the epic. However, what is not justified is how Odysseus decides he is going to appear to his father:

> He [Odysseus] thought it best to start
>
> by testing him with teasing and abuse.
>
> With this in mind, Odysseus approached him,
>
> as he was digging round the plant, head down.
>
> His famous son stood at his side . . ." (*XXIV* 240-244)

Why must Odysseus abuse his father by teasing him? Why must Odysseus call him an "unkempt, old man" (*XXIV* 251), making fun of his skin and clothing in the process? He does tell his father

that he can tell by his height and face that he seems a leader (*XXIV* 254-255), but his early reproach remains. While it bothers Odysseus to lie to Penelope, he experiences even sharper pain lying to his father. "Odysseus felt heart-wrenched to see his own / beloved father in this state; sharp pain / pierced through his nostrils" (*XXIV* 319-321). After this, he quickly reveals himself to Laertes. He cannot take it anymore. He cannot take his Hermetic nature. Odysseus' lie to Laertes about his identity in the beginning is wise; however, his reproach is careless. Odysseus cannot help but reproach his father because he carries the godlike energies of both Athena and Hermes. He cannot help but tease and play with Laertes. Like Odysseus yelling at Polyphemus foolishly, he foolishly reconvenes with his father, but Laertes forgives him quickly. He must forgive him quickly because another massacre is about to ensue in Ithaca.

The Odyssey ends in an absurd manner, and readers and critics for thousands of years have harbored contempt for how Homer employs *deus ex machina* at the end of the narrative when Athena as well as Zeus must interfere to stop bloodshed in Ithaca. Often, the storyteller employs this device in narrative to surprise the audience or achieve a happy or comedic ending. While one might think logically that modern readers would find fault with the employment of *deus ex machina*, even Aristophanes (446 B.C.-386 B.C.) and Aristarchus (310 B.C.-230 B.C.) thought the epic had a better ending earlier: Penelope and Odyssey going to bed together in Book XXIII. While this scene would make for an idyllic ending, it is not an ending that satisfactorily renders Odysseus' complexity. Like the critic James Armstrong in his article "The Marriage Song—Odyssey 23," I agree that "Aristarchus and Aristophanes are either mistaken or misunderstood. It is contrary to all reason and sentiment that either *the Iliad* or *the Odyssey* should close with a 'so they went to bed' finale" (39). The use of *deus ex machina* does not

necessarily make the ending absurd; instead, it is the circumstances of the ending that contribute to its absurdity.

The Odyssey ends with appearances and masking. Athena, still in disguise as Mentor, stops the war between Odysseus' side and the families and friends of the murdered suitors. One may not be fully convinced this conflict will not erupt later; however, the epic ends with peace, although the peace seems like it will be short-lived. Athena's godlike voice ends the war: "Ithacans! / Stop this destructive war; shed no more blood, / and go your separate ways, at once" (*XXIV* 532-534). Nevertheless, even in the presence of Athena, even in the presence of his most trusted ally, even in the presence of a command by the goddess of wisdom herself, Odysseus cannot immediately relent. After her command, Homer notes, "Unwavering Odysseus let out / a dreadful roar, then crouched and swooped upon them, / just like an eagle flying from above" (*XXIV* 537-539). Zeus must send a sign down to stop Odysseus, and after Athena lets Odysseus know that Zeus will be furious with him if he does not relent, he stops. Homer makes it clear that Odysseus is the only one in the conflict who continues even after Athena's command to stop. Odysseus may not stop; he is "unwavering" because he is a Hermetic trickster. The Hermetic trickster is always in motion; they may never stop. Therefore, even though Athena ends the narrative, the Hermetic influence remains in Odysseus' hesitancy. We feel Hermes even though the last moment we see him is guiding the suitors into the underworld. His energies remain in waking life far after he departs. Returning to Kerenyi's quote about Hermes, he creates "reality out of us, or more properly through us." In the final moments of the epic, we see Odysseus for who he really is; his reality is that of the Hermetic trickster. Readers encounter no easy moral when finishing the epic. Thus, the use of *deus ex machina* by Homer serves a purpose: we see clearly that Odysseus has learned nothing throughout his journey home to Ithaca. Rather than

Odysseus ending the story exemplifying ideal Homeric or ancient Greek heroism, it ends in paradox and confusion, and the absurdity of the ending reinforces our understanding of Odysseus as embodying both Athena and Hermes. In his final moments, Odysseus continues to act like a Hermetic trickster.

Now that I have established the relevancy of Hermes' intoxicating influence and what the Hermetic trickster represents, we arrive at Hades' appearance in archaic Greek literature. In the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, after Hades forcefully abducts Persephone into the underworld, at the pleas and request of Demeter, Zeus sends Hermes into the underworld to deliver his verdict to Hades. As messenger and herald for gods and men, it makes perfect sense why Zeus would send Hermes as his mouthpiece, where Hermes adopts his nocturnal aspect and speeds to the underworld.[34] In this scene, Hermes' mythological presence in the underworld seems to strongly influence Hades' decision and action in the *Hymn*. Hades, for a brief moment, acts in the guise of the Hermetic trickster. Zeus seeks "to win Hades over with gentle words" (336), choosing to send Hermes, his son paradoxically both skilled and unskilled in gentleness. As we have established, whenever Hermes appears, everything hidden must become manifest, and Hades himself, the most hidden reality and form in archaic Greek literature, finally appears. In the *Hymn*, Hades thus speaks:

> 'Persephone, go to your dark-robed mother,
>
> with a gentle spirit and temper in your breast,
>
> and in no way be more dispirited than the other gods.

[34] Walter Otto states, "It is the nocturnal aspect of his activity, the guidance along ways that are dark, that enables us to appreciate the connection of Hermes with the spirits of the dead, the realm of the dead and its gods" (117).

I shall not be an unfitting husband among the immortals,

as I am father Zeus' own brother. When you are here

you shall be mistress of everything which lives and moves;

your honors among the immortals shall be the greatest,

and those who wrong you shall always be punished,

if they do not propitiate your spirit with sacrifices,

performing sacred rites and making due offerings.' (360-369)

In just these ten lines of Hades speaking, he finally proves to readers that he may appear, and his brief appearance strikes a chord with the reader just as much as Persephone. He appears as speechmaker, rhetorically versed, and insightful, yet also conniving, lying, and ultimately untrustworthy. In the one moment we finally hear Hades, his words are a lie. Thus, nocturnal essences overflow in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* as Hades and Hermes sit side-by-side. Mythologically, we may only understand Hades here in light of Hermes being present, being nearby. As Hades tricks Persephone through his words and actions, we are reminded of Hermes. As he lies to her simply because he can, the essence of Hermes emits from Hades' breath. The one moment where Hades appears, he does not act singularly; he acts obscure. He acts Hermetic.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

> "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."
>
> (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 28)

Hermes' absurdity in archaic Greek literature stands as the only way for Hades to appear. Additionally, we may now understand his invisibility in *The Odyssey*: Odysseus steps into the underland and conjures the spirits of the underworld. Heroes in classical literature later travel to the underworld—like Orpheus—who physically meet Hades; however, archaic Greek literature—unconsciously or consciously—buries Hades deeper in the abyss through neglect. Perhaps this is because the archaic Greeks viewed their death deity as more of a representative presence in the underworld while later Greeks gave him a more active role in their myth and religion. Regardless, it remains curious how often storytellers mention him while keeping him in the background.

In mythological and psychological criticism, a strong tendency exists to bring terms and categories together. It is the goal of any comparative mythologist or comparative religious scholar to show more commonality than differences. However, by clearly differentiating between the underland and underworld, katabasis and nekyia, clowns and tricksters, and the trickster with the Hermetic trickster, Hades' invisibility begins to make sense. Although he permanently remains with his back turned to us, we may finally recognize Hades as the one on the vase who hides his face. I doubt Hades will ever be brought into the light. We may only continuously attempt to travel into the underworld, bringing light into the dark to illuminate the large shadow he casts. And a multifaceted, synthetic approach seems to grant the best opportunity to explore his presence in archaic Greek literature.

In archaic Greek literature and scholarship, Hades' absence and invisibility remain enveloped within his elusive nature. Additionally, Hermes, while being analogous to an unreliable narrator, serves as our best guide to learning about Hades' essence. In the *Hymn to Demeter,* we see the storyteller project the Hermetic onto Hades in the same manner as Odysseus. Although we hear Hades speak for ten lines in archaic Greek literature, one cannot help but still feel a silence from the abyss. I am willing to admit that the search for Hades is an absurd journey. It is a search where what one illuminates outside of archaic Greek literature far outshines any contribution to understanding ancient or archaic Greek myth and ritual. However, it cannot be a futile search with Hermes as one's guide. Kerenyi writes of studying the Greek pantheon, "For if we are to have success in reviving the God's image in its fullness, we must be prepared not only for what is immediately intelligible, but also for what is strangely uncanny" (5). Through the neglect by storytellers and classically trained mythologists and philologists to include and fix their gaze upon Hades, they created an abyss, one that cannot be crossed without a multifaceted justification, a synthetic approach of philosophy, psychology, mythology, philology, geology, and anthropology.

If Karl Kerenyi's *Hermes: Guide of Souls*, in a way, represents a love letter to Hermes, this paper does not position itself as a love letter to Hades. However, the Hermetic trickster is an enduring character. Although he often acts obscurely and absurdly, makes frequent mistakes, and ultimately only spreads chaos, the Hermetic trickster is thus in all of us. His role may often confuse, complicate, and frustrate readers and critics in archaic Greek literature, but we are drawn into his presence because his presence is identifiable and relatable. Like Hermes, we all exist to lie, cheat, steal, and thieve at the crossroads, and we always will. Nefariousness defines the Hermetic. And are we anything if not always acting nefariously?

This paper concludes with an uncanny image. In the same way we must imagine Sisyphus happy, we must laugh in the face of Hades, in the face of the abyss. We ourselves must act like Odysseus; we must act like a Hermetic trickster if we seek to bring light into the underworld. To find Hades, one must be careless, playful, and cunning because through Hermes' embodiment of these qualities that is the only reason Hades himself speaks in archaic Greek literature. As the epigraph to the introduction begins with *Beyond Good and Evil*, so will I conclude. Nietzsche writes, "And when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss gazes into you" (84).[35] In the same way Hades as abyss gazes into us, or through us, we may gaze *into* him with Hermes as the guide, or perhaps more properly *through* him. With Hermes leading, we may not only reach Hades; we must use inspiration we gain from Hermes' godhood—Hermes' absurdity, the Hermetic trickster—to laugh at Hades' invisibility. In an increasingly death-riddled world, to be a traveler on the path to Hades demands the Hermetic influence. Laughter demands a summoning.

[35] Nietzsche exemplifies a similar idea in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: "Is seeing not itself—seeing the abyss" (135)?

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