

TAKING PERSEPHONE: THE RHETORIC OF CONSENT IN RACHEL SMYTHE'S
WEBTOON *LORE OLYMPUS* (2018)

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ABSTRACT

Lore Olympus is a webtoon that reimagines the taking of Persephone in an animated, comic style. In this paper, I discuss the rhetoric of consent through a visual analysis using the intersecting fields of classical reception, feminist rhetoric, and digital humanities. I use two versions of the taking of Persephone for my analysis: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and "The Homeric Hymn to Demeter." My analysis is split into two parts, with the first being a visual analysis of 4 panels of the webtoon, focusing on how each depicts the rhetoric of consent. The second part of my analysis is focused on the rhetorical devices within the text that serves as visual metaphors to symbolize layered meaning to readers. My findings suggest that *Lore Olympus* does not allow its female characters agency in removing the aspect of consent using concepts such as voyeurism and class systems to strip female characters of their agency.

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CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGIES

Racheal Smythe published the first episode of her webtoon, *Lore Olympus*, in 2018. Since then, she has added 2 seasons, with a third on the way, and has developed a dedicated following who wait for weekly episodes to be published. Her webtoon has held the title of “most popular webtoon” since June of 2022 and her episodes have been adapted into 3 graphic novels, with a fourth on its way. The success of this webtoon lies not only in the reimagining of the gods and goddesses of Olympus but in the visual storytelling. Smythe breathes new life into classical stories by creating versions of characters in classical mythology that are relatable to readers. Readers see Persephone as a young woman trying to find her place in the world and Hades as the CEO of the Underworld. However, even minor characters have their own stories and inclusion within this contemporary retelling such as Daphne as an influencer and Echo as an assistant to Hera. Smythe appears to draw heavily on Ovid’s version of the taking of Persephone in his *Metamorphosis*, using the storyline of Aphrodite and Eros to set Persephone and Hades’ story in action. She also includes other stories from Ovid such as the stories of Daphne and Apollo, and Cupid and Psyche, which help to tie the main plot together.

In 2019, advertisements for *Lore Olympus* were appearing across social media. The quickly rising-to-popularity webtoon is based on Greek mythology, specifically around a romanticized relationship between Hades and Persephone. The contrasting color schemes of the bright pink Persephone and electric blue Hades and the intriguing idea of a visual representation of a modern retelling of the taking of Persephone are attention-grabbing. While this webtoon is fun to read and engaging, it seems that much of the retelling was focusing on toxic relationships and normalizing abusive behavior towards women.¹

It also appears that fans have a lot to say about this series, taking to public forums such as Reddit to air their praises or grievances. One of the first oppositional responses was written by an anonymous poster and they brought up many of the issues that create a less empowered reading of the webtoon. The user deleted their account during the process of receiving over 82 mostly critical comments. However, their original post is still available, in which they state, “Rachel tried to give Persephone the freedom to choose her own partner, but stripped away her freedom to her own body. (“My genuine criticism for Lore Olympus, aka I have a death wish: r/Lore_Olympus”)” This user states that

¹ See Zuckerberg’s *Not All Dead White Men* for her argument on misogyny in classics in the digital age.

Persephone is often given clothing that she is expected to wear. Persephone is visibly giving signs of discomfort in this clothing, such as tugging her dress down or trying to add coverage to a too-low or too-short outfit. The author of this post continues to discuss how Hades is an active participant in the sexualization of Persephone, often alluding to her looks, with a focus on her chest and bottom in frames that are focused on his perspective. This user also brought up the concept of using sexual assault as a way to move the storyline forward within the *Lore Olympus* world.

While not all of this user's opinions and frustrations with the webtoon are sound, such as their apparent issue with the timeline of the story, as Greek and Roman mythology is notorious for having a convoluted and untraceable timeline, and their belief in one universal truth for each story within Greek mythology, much of what they brought up is relevant within this retelling. Not surprisingly, the responses that this post received were overwhelmingly negative, some going as far as bullying this user in defense of these fictional characters. One user suggested that the original poster was putting "the worst possible spin on every action," while another suggested in regards to the original poster's reference to the sexualization of Persephone's character, that "If you think it's sexualizing, then you are the one doing the sexualization." With this being said, the goal of this paper is to analyze how the visual and verbal rhetorical elements seen in *Lore Olympus* depict the idea of consent in relation to the Greek myth of the abduction of Persephone.

This project is at the intersection of three fields: digital humanities, feminist rhetoric, and classical reception. The analysis of feminist rhetoric and consent in *Lore Olympus* will be based on the following descriptions of each field. Digital humanities examine the intersection between the humanities and digital technologies. The field of digital humanities is growing rapidly and new ways to teach and display information are being developed in this field. Feminist rhetoric focuses on persuasive communication that can come in the form of social, cultural, and political inequalities focused on women and marginalized groups. And classical reception examines how information from the classical world informs contemporary content. My project will take all three aspects into account, using digital humanities to examine a relatively new digital reading format in the form of Webtoons, feminist rhetoric to examine how the text communicates inequality within gender, and classical reception to discuss the adaption of classical texts within this webtoon.

The field of digital humanities operates at the intersection of computing and the humanities. Spiro argues that, “The values of the digital humanities represent a convergence of several sets of values, including those of the humanities; libraries, museums, and cultural heritage organizations; and networked culture.”² When discussing the role of digital humanities in English departments, Kirschenbaum says, “The digital humanities today is about a scholarship (and a pedagogy) that is publicly visible in ways to which we are generally unaccustomed, a scholarship and pedagogy that are bound up with infrastructure in ways that are deeper and more explicit than we are generally accustomed to, a scholarship and pedagogy that are collaborative and depend on networks of people and that live an active, 24-7 life online.”³

This analysis will analyze Webtoons specifically and how they function within digital humanities. Webtoons are a more recent form of digital comics that present in a vertical scroll style. Webtoons had their start in 2003 and 2005 by Korea’s top two search engine companies but didn’t gain traction in terms of readership until around 2014, with *Lore Olympus* being created shortly after in 2018 as per Webtoon’s history (“About WEBTOON | WEBTOON”) (Shim et al. 836). While webtoons were created and based in Korean culture, they do not directly draw on manga or more westernized comics in their creation, “Both sites quickly enabled digital comics readers and general internet users beyond Korea’s borders to become familiar with the unique webtoon format, which is to be distinguished from Japanese manga (and their lack of color), as well as the digital content published by Marvel Comics, DC Comics and ComiXology (including its ‘guided-view’ style). (Shim et al. 836)” These “Webtoons” are created to be read on a phone or other mobile device screen and are read top to bottom instead of the more typical left to right, modifying the comic book for newer technology (Shim et al. 836). They can be accompanied by music and often have large areas of blank space that replace the typical gutters that would be seen in a graphic novel format. Each webtoon is created in episodes that take approximately 5 minutes to read. While there are multiple webtoon platforms, such as the two original platforms created by the most popular search engine companies in Korea, *Lore Olympus* is published on Line webtoon. Using webtoons

² See Lisa Spiro’s “‘This Is Why We Fight’: Defining the Values of the Digital Humanities” for information about defining a set of values for the field of digital humanities.

³ See Matthew Kirschenbaum’s “What is Digital Humanities and What’s It Doing in English Departments” for his argument about digital humanities relevance in departments of English and its relevance in scholarship and pedagogy.

as a way to connect classical reception to the digital world is effective, as webtoons are beginning to reach a larger audience, and creating a contemporary spin on a classical myth can make it more relevant and relatable to the audience. Theisen states in his book chapter entitled “Declassicizing the Classical in Japanese Comics” that, “One rarely sees a strict retelling of a myth or some story with either historical or mythological significance retold for its own sake. The material is nearly always adapted to some other purpose for which there is often little concern over the degree to which it may distort or rewrite the ‘original.’ (62)”

The definition of rhetoric that I will be using for the analysis comes from Jay Dolmage’s *Disability Rhetoric*. His definition suggests that rhetoric is, “the strategic study of the circulation of power through communication.(3)”⁴ My analysis focuses on the bodies of women within *Lore Olympus* and how they are, as Johnson says, “people—not objects. (40)”⁵ On this same note, Dolmage adds to his definition of rhetoric, saying, “The physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. (39)”

Using Dolmage’s definition of rhetoric and Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny’s idea of embodiment, I will be looking at the rhetoric of consent within this analysis. They say, “To think about rhetoric, we must think about bodies. (39)” Consent here connects to embodiment and the portrayal of bodies within *Lore Olympus*, as Johnson argues. Many of the panels analyzed in this paper show women’s bodies being viewed as objects instead of as people. These panels communicate information and meaning ascribed to these images through the bodies of the women depicted.

According to Gitlin, consent is difficult to define.⁶ Gitlin argues that the standard “no means no” was the normal way to understand consent for many years, but factors such as coercion could prevent victims from stopping unwanted advances which has created a need for reevaluation and construction of a new definition. He argues that there are many factors, such as mental and emotional conditions, age, disabilities, and authority positions that can result in different definitions of consent (38). He also suggests that “the absence of ‘no’ isn’t the same thing as consent (38).” Popova elaborates on this definition by

⁴ See more from Dolmage’s version of rhetoric in *Disability Studies*.

⁵ Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny’s argument on feminist rhetoric and bodies carrying meaning can be found in *Embodiment: Embodying Feminist Rhetorics*.

⁶ See Gitlin’s book *Sexual Consent* for more on the changing definition of consent and consent in popular culture.

saying, “For consent to be valid, it also needs to be continuous. In other words, you are allowed to change. This means regularly checking in with them to make sure they are happy, enjoying what you are doing, and continuing to consent. (46)”⁷ Gitlin discusses how consent is portrayed in popular culture noting that, “Lack of consent is valorized within popular culture to the point that sexual assault has become a spectator sport and creepshot entertainment on social media. (50)” Popova also comments on how consent is portrayed in popular culture. She says, “We may be seeing some improvements in the representation of sex and consent in popular culture, but there are other ways in which it remains problematic. (122)” One of these issues she includes is the desexualizing and hypersexualizing of marginalized people in popular culture (Popova 122). Consent and autonomy are also linked, as self-governing is necessary to consent. Oshana discusses what makes a person autonomous, saying, “My position is that a person is autonomous when she has (1) the ability to superintend those of her decisions, activities, and personal associations that are central to human agency, (2) the warrant to do so, and (3) the power to act on that ability. (152)”⁸

This analysis relies heavily on the use of feminist rhetoric for this analysis. One of the most prominent ideas of feminist rhetoric is reclaiming the voices of women. Royster and Kirsch argue that many scholars, such as Glenn, have been producing scholarship in the field of feminist rhetoric that challenge the Westernized patriarchal values such as a focus on public domains usually dominated by men versus counter public domains, men as rhetorical subjects, and “attention focused on power elites such as class, race, and gender. (Kirsch and Royster 641)”⁹ In challenging these values, Royster and Kirsch say, “We begin with feminist rhetorical practices that focus on women—both as scholars and rhetorical subjects. (643)” They also stress the importance of, “rescue, recover, and (re)inscription” within the study of feminist rhetoric. (42)”¹⁰

⁷ See *Sexual Consent* for Popova’s argument about what makes sexual interactions consensual and what violates that consent.

⁸ Marina Oshana discusses autonomy and its intersection with feminism in her chapter “A Commitment to Autonomy Is a Commitment to Feminism” in the book *Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender*.

⁹ See Royster and Kirsch’s “Feminist Rhetorical Practices: In Search of Excellence” for their argument on feminist rhetoric that challenges Westernized traditions and moving beyond the three R’s, rescue, recovery and (re)inscription.

¹⁰ See Royster and Kirsch’s “Feminist Rhetorical Studies as a Robust Interdisciplinary Framework” for more on feminist rhetoric and its intersection with gender, class, and race.

For my work, I will be examining Persephone's voice within *Lore Olympus*, taking into account her voice in both "The Homeric Hymn to Demeter" and *Metamorphosis*. However, to understand feminist rhetoric, it is important to understand the use of feminism within the field. Many argue against using the "wave" narrative altogether as the lines between each can become blurry (Evan and Chamberlain 396). Feminist rhetoric focuses on persuasive communication in the forms of inequalities focused on women and marginalized groups will. In the introduction to *Homer's Daughters*, Cox and Theodorakopoulos say, in relation to the uses of feminism in each of the essays within the book in relation to characters from Greek antiquity, "The waves of feminism that are the undercurrents of the writers of the book crash against each other and merge, reminding us to be cautious of overly rigid time-frames and pigeon-holes. (18)" Similarly, in my analysis, the waves of feminism often merge and connect throughout the narrative and this analysis.¹¹ Because of this, I will be using language that is focused on choice feminism and body positivity instead of the use of the wave theory.

In her book, *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*, Cheryl Glenn states, "For the past twenty-five hundred years in Western culture, the ideal woman has been disciplined by cultural codes that require a close mouth (silence) a closed body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement)" (1).¹² This idea of "closed mouths" and "closed bodies" will be used when analyzing the rhetorical content of *Lore Olympus*, specifically through the idea of "fertility goddesses" like Persephone, who are often married or consumed by a god for their power. Yet, these goddesses aren't often portrayed as powerful on their own and are often at the disposal of the gods to use and abuse this power.

Classical reception focuses on how the stories from the classical world inform modes of media today. While *Lore Olympus* is a contemporary rendition of an ancient story, it does fall back on an earlier mode of storytelling as can be seen by the "Heracles Papyrus" (Nisbet 27). While webtoons are a digital vertical scroll-type medium, they do share similarities with this early scroll, such as the ability to move a story forward with the use of pictures accompanied by text. In some ways, the use of the webtoons format

¹¹ See *Homer's Daughters: Women's Responses to Homer in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*, edited by Cox and Theodorakopoulos for feminism and trauma narratives within Greek antiquity.

¹² Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance* discusses how women have been excluded from the rhetoric tradition. Glenn focuses on figures such as Sappho and Aspasia to regender the history of rhetoric.

combined with a retelling of a classical myth refers back to a rare type of storytelling that appears to have been used within Roman society, though the earliest extant versions of the myth of the taking of Persephone do predate this still.¹³

Interestingly, some fragments of writing have similar characteristics to comics that date back to the mid-third century or earlier, as suggested by some of the bilingual features in the text that suggest it dates back to the Roman era (Nisbet 27). This scroll uses *grulloi*, which according to Gideon Nisbet, are, “humorous cartoons, drawn in black ink and with fading traces of original coloration in green and two shades of yellow” (Nisbet 28). Nisbet also explains that a *grullos* accompanies text to explain it in this specific example of the Heracles papyrus that was created on papyrus in a scroll format. Interestingly, Smythe’s *Lore Olympus* has many of the same characteristics that these *grulloi* have. Both Smythe’s work and this papyrus scroll have pictures accompanying text that are not simply meant to clarify or support a text, as many pictures were used for in classical times, but also used to move a story forward. Both also allow the reader to learn new information from the illustrations and not rely fully on the text to do the narrative work.

For this analysis, two of the earlier extant versions of the taking of Persephone will be used to draw off of in terms of the narrative storyline. The first is “The Homeric Hymn to Demeter”, which tells the story of the abduction of Persephone but also follows Demeter on her journey to reunite with her daughter. “The Homeric Hymn to Demeter” provides a relatively straightforward telling of Persephone’s abduction which happens predominantly towards the beginning of the story, with the rest of the story following Demeter’s pursuit to find and reunite with her daughter. This version tells the story of Persephone’s abduction through the idea that Zeus allowed Hades to marry Persephone. Demeter was distraught at the loss of her daughter, not knowing where she went, and searched for her, abandoning her job as the goddess of the harvest. Eventually, seeing the trouble that Persephone’s absence had caused, Zeus allowed Persephone to spend 9 months of the year with her mother and 3 with Hades. This text also depicts the idea of consent in terms of Demeter and Persephone. While Zeus allowed Hades to marry Persephone, which was within his right at the time as king of the gods, and Persephone’s father,

¹³ Nisbet’s chapter entitled “An Ancient Greek Graphic Novel: P.Oxy. XXII 2331” in the book *Classics and Comics*, shows an example of an ancient scroll with drawing to depict the written content.

Persephone, and Demeter both were clearly upset with this. There was no discussion about Persephone marrying Hades and Demeter was not told where her daughter was. Throughout this reading, both Persephone and Demeter make their discomfort and unhappiness known more than once, clearly suggesting that consent was not given by either goddess.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* will also be used when discussing the narrative elements of the *Lore Olympus* retelling of the taking of Persephone, as Smythe seems to draw heavily on Ovid's versions of classical Greek myth. In the retelling of the abduction of Persephone through *The Metamorphoses*, readers are introduced to a retelling of the story with more characters who also seem to have more agency. Aphrodite and Eros are the instigators of Hades' abduction of Persephone, which Smythe uses as a plot line in her contemporary retelling. Ovid also introduces Cyane, a Sicilian Nymph who attempts to stop Hades from abducting Persephone. This moment is important as it is one of the examples within this reading where other female-presenting characters acknowledge that Hades' abduction of Persephone is wrong and attempt to stop him. It is because of Cyane that Demeter eventually discovers where her daughter has been taken. It appears that many of Smythe's retellings of subplots such as her retelling of Cupid and Psyche and Daphne and Apollo come from Ovid's versions. Zeus also asks Demeter for consent to marry their daughter to Hades after he has already allowed him to kidnap her, which will open an interesting avenue for the discussion of consent, both from Demeter and Persephone.

One of the main differences in both of these versions of the taking of Persephone and *Lore Olympus* is the tension between abduction and a consensual relationship. In the two classical versions of this story, Persephone has little to no input in the choice to live in the underworld and become Hades' wife. In *Lore Olympus*, however, she and Hades begin a consensual relationship, a relationship that has many problematic aspects but is consensual nonetheless. However, Persephone does encounter many situations, both with Hades and other characters, where Persephone's consent is not taken into consideration. One trope that all of these stories have in common is Persephone's action of eating the pomegranate. However, some scholars argue that Persephone had agency in making this decision in the classical versions of the story, just as she does in parts of *Lore Olympus*.

In her journal article, "Embodying Persephone's Desire: Authentic movement and underworld transformation," Nelson discusses Persephone's agency using *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as her

primary source.¹⁴ She discusses the idea of rape within a patriarchal system where women were considered property and she discusses the tradition of bride abduction during this time. She also discusses the pomegranate and how Persephone's approach to eating the Pomegranate changes the story. If she ate the Pomegranate and chose to stay in the underworld of her own accord, she has agency and is taking hold of her future. If she was forced to eat the pomegranate, she falls back into the victim role. Most importantly, however, Nelson discusses the idea of agency in Persephone's rise to Queen of the underworld. She says, "without agency, the transformation simply is not complete (Nelson 10). *Lore Olympus* takes a similar approach to Persephone's choice to eat the pomegranate as Nelson does. Persephone chooses to eat the Pomegranate, becoming queen of the underworld, on her own accord.

For this webtoons analysis, I will be conducting a multimodal analysis utilizing methodologies from comic analysis, an art historical approach, and an analysis of vertical scroll style media to analyze the visual elements. I will be pulling strongly from Scott McCloud's work in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* where he helps readers develop their visual literacy and introduces concepts such as gutters, color theory, framing, and placement in the analysis of comics. I will combine this approach with an art history approach for analyzing comics. Sommerland and Wictorin discuss this approach, saying, "research on comics and graphic novels is slowly expanding among art historians. (4).¹⁵ They also make the interesting observation that, "in libraries, comics are almost always classified and sorted under literature rather than art. (4)" This suggests that traditionally, comics have been linked more closely with its narrative elements than with the idea that they are art. They argue that an art history approach, "offers a vocabulary to describe images and methods to analyze them. (Sommerland and Wictorin 2)" To analyze the difference between comic analysis and webtoons, I will also take into account the digital format of webtoons and the scroll-type medium that is meant to be read on a screen and read vertically instead of horizontally.

Sommerland and Wictorin discuss two major modes for analyzing comics from an art history perspective, saying, "In the field of comics research, two main approaches can be discerned: either in

¹⁴ Nelson argues through a close reading of *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* through a psychoanalytic perspective, that Persephone had some agency in choosing her life as Queen of the Underworld.

¹⁵ Sommerland and Wictorin provide a solid background of an art history approach and its use in analyzing comics in their article, "Writing Comics into Art History and Art History into Comics Research."

terms of visual/verbal textualities or in relation to social/popular cultural forms. (1)” This analysis will primarily be focusing on the visual/verbal textualities aspect. Sommerland and Wictorin also create some suggestions for performing an art-history analysis on comics, suggesting that, “...more tools are needed to describe and analyze the images, what is shown inside the panels. Aspects such as material, technique, colour, form, line/perspective, degree of abstraction, balance, order, movement, proportions, patterns, rhythm, that is, the basic elements of art-historical formal analysis, are needed as well as knowledge about how images have been constructed and read in different historical and contemporary contexts. (2)” They also draw attention to the fact that using research methods from different disciplines and applying these to the art history approach to comics is important since comics have intermedial structures (Sommerland and Wictorin 2). Though the combination of art history analysis and comics is a relatively new field, Sommerland and Wictorin point out that there are several scholars who have been working within this field, such as David Kunzel who used a traditional style of art history methodology considering time, place, author, and artist, when analyzing his work, and Aby Warburg, who, “studies the relation between images and juxtaposed them in order to define them and to find new unexpected paths to their patterns and possible meanings in his *Mnemosyne Atlas*. (2)”

First, I will examine 4 panels from different parts of the narrative sequence, all of which depict a character’s discomfort or hypersexualization by other characters in some way. 3 of these images focus primarily on Persephone while one image focuses on Minthe, the nymph who, within the world of *Lore Olympus*, Hades has a relationship with prior to Persephone. This addition is important to my analysis as it discusses the use of a class system within *Lore Olympus* and also discusses Hades’ pattern of having relationships with women who work for him, causing a power balance that eliminates the ability for consent. I will analyze these using both the written and visual aspects that are provided for each panel including but not limited to color theory, framing, and narrative elements. The digital format in which this is drawn, specifically the digital scroll method where images are meant to be read from top to bottom as the reader scrolls downward will also be considered in this analysis.

Next, I will discuss the visually rhetorical choices that are incorporated into the story to move the narrative forward while also indicating consent and traumatic experiences. A few of these aspects are the interweaving, multicolored scrolls that intertwine throughout traumatic moments or memories within

different parts of the story, the use of the classical idea of the “evil eye” in specific areas, and the use of flowers during moments where Persephone is showing emotions. I also will discuss the brief, but poignant use of the Ancient Greek language in two specific parts of this text and the impact it has on the overall storyline.

With all of this in mind, the goal is to discuss how the visual and verbal rhetorical elements seen in *Lore Olympus* depict the idea of consent in relation to the Greek myth of the abduction of Persephone. I will do this by combining methodologies from McCloud’s methods for analyzing comics, an art-history approach, and an understanding of digital, scroll-type media to dissect 4 specific panels throughout the webtoon and analyze them in terms of feminist rhetoric, digital humanities, and classical reception. I will then discuss a few of the rhetorical elements that can be seen throughout the series, such as the interweaving scrolls and the use of the evil eye to encourage understanding in the reader.

CHAPTER 2: ANALYZING FOUR PANELS FROM *LORE OLYMPUS* THAT QUESTION THE RHETORIC OF CONSENT

Introduction:

Lore Olympus relies largely on the visual elements of the story to contribute to the narration, similar to a graphic novel or comic. Since Webtoons are animated stories similar to a graphic novels or comics, they are broken up into sequential episodes that read as chapters and tell a larger story. This sequential art sequence accompanied by limited text allows for a visual interpretation of this work. This connects with Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny's idea that rhetoric can be conveyed visually, saying, "*All bodies* do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function. (39)"

Lore Olympus, which possesses a predominantly female fan base, appears to animate characters in a way that objectifies women. There is a large focus on women's bodies, often focusing on the chest and hips. In many panels, when Hades and Persephone are interacting and the audience is prompted to see Persephone from Hades' perspective, the focus is on her chest. These panels are also accompanied by internal dialogue by Hades such as "internal moan" or phrases such as "She doesn't know what she does to me." In fact, one of the first panels that readers see after Hades and Persephone have met shows Hades' daydreaming about Persephone accompanied by the text, "I would pay you a salary to barge into every single aspect of my life." The correlating illustration shows a naked Persephone leaning against a fully-clothed Hades' back. This also serves as a form of foreshadowing, as Hades insists on paying Persephone a salary for her job as an intern in the Underworld, which typically is an unpaid position, simply to keep her in close proximity to him. These are several examples of the overstepping of both emotional and physical boundaries that can be seen in Hades and Persephone's relationship.

Since *Lore Olympus* is a 200+ episode Webtoon and it is not feasible to analyze every panel fully in this paper, I will choose specific panels to showcase the concepts of consent within this narrative. The first panel is an early example from episode 2 where the reader first sees Persephone uncomfortable in the clothing that she was asked to wear in order to fit in with the Olympians. The text that accompanies the image affirms the idea that she is uncomfortable and she has to be convinced to go to the party. The second panel depicts Persephone in a voyeuristic situation where the reader (and Hades) sees her in her underwear without her awareness or consent. One of the unique parts of this panel is the dehumanization

happening within the artwork, as Persephone's face is blocked, but her midsection is framed, drawing the reader's eyes to it. The third panel moves away from Persephone to look at how another character, Minthe, contributes to this narrative. In the panel, readers see Minthe working as a car showgirl to make enough money to pay for her rent. This image is important as it depicts the class difference between gods and nymphs as well as the sexualization of these characters and how, within the *Lore Olympus* world, this is considered normal. The last panel depicts Persephone after she has eaten the pomegranate and become queen of the underworld. This panel is different, as readers see Persephone portrayed as both powerful and seductive, which seems to correlate with choice feminism's idea of women as both sexual and powerful beings.

I will evaluate each of these panels visually and discuss what the stylistic choices for each of these panels communicate to the reader. I will also bring in feminist rhetoric and feminist theory to discuss each of these images and what these images are created to convey to the reader. Since this story is published in a digital scroll-type medium, I will also consider that these images are meant to be read vertically instead of the more traditional left to right which can change the reader experience.

A few of the specific stylistic choices I will be looking at include framing, color, and line art for each of these panels.¹⁶¹⁷ I will also be evaluating the use of words that surround the images to inform the analysis. Color will be another important aspect of this analysis, as every character within this narrative has an assigned color. Persephone is always shaded in a hot pink color and generally wears white, more traditional ancient Greek style clothing from the mortal realm which are often termed "relics" within the storyline. However, when she becomes Queen of the Underworld, there is a shift in her clothing choices and she begins to wear more black and her style draws from more modern fashion choices. Hades is always drawn in an electric blue color and tend to wear darker-colored clothing such as blacks and greys. His coloration is unique within the *Lore Olympus* world and seems to connect him to his father and grandfather, Cronos and Ouranos, who both have deeper, more galaxy-esq blue colors. This coloration can also be observed in Hades when he is in his "true form" as a god.

¹⁶ See McCloud's book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* for details on comic analysis, which includes framing, color, and positioning of figures within a comic.

¹⁷ See Sommerland and Wictorin's "Writing Comics into Art History and Art History into Comic Research."

Analysis:

The first panel is from episode 2 of *Lore Olympus*, which is very early on in the series. In this panel, we see Persephone wearing a very short open-back dress that she is trying to pull down to cover herself. Her word bubble shows her discomfort as she suddenly feels out of place upon entering the party in this dress that she feels uncomfortable in as she says, "I don't think I should have come to this party..." Prior to this panel, Persephone was dressed in a white peplos accompanied by a long, pink scarf. This outfit gave her much more coverage than the above outfit, but when she shows Artemis what she plans to wear, she tells her she is wearing a "relic" and offers to lend her a dress. This outfit is revealing, even compared to Artemis' choice, a long, purple dress (to match her typical purple coloring indicative of her relation to her brother, Apollo, and her father, Zeus). The open back on Persephone's dress and the short length both expose her. The addition of high-heeled shoes to replace her white, strappy sandals also add to the revealing nature of the short dress. The front of the dress also draws attention to her cleavage and the strapless style provides little covering for her shoulders. This dress is a more contemporary dress compared to what Persephone was wearing before, which does draw attention to the difference in time within the *Lore Olympus* world. Persephone spent her early life in the mortal realm with her mother, Demeter. The mortal realm appears to be set in the past with a more traditional Ancient Greek style of dress for the mortals and the gods and nymphs who live there. However, with the appearance of influencers, phones, and laptops, Olympus and the Underworld realms appear to take place in our current time, with the women wearing more contemporary style dresses, leggings, and crop tops. Hades traditionally dresses in suits while working and sweatpants while at home, which is appropriate for our current time period as well.

The framing of this image shows the left half of Persephone's body, accentuating her exposed back and the shortness of her dress.¹⁸ We see her pulling at the back of the dress, attempting to keep it down accompanied by the words "I don't think I should have come to this party..." Persephone appears to be feeling very out of place when just minutes before she was excited to go to this party in her original dress. While this dress is very different from the dress she originally planned on wearing, it is still white, which appears to be the dominant color Persephone wears prior to her transition to the queen of the

¹⁸ See Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* for details on comic analysis.

underworld. It is interesting that Artemis, who tends to wear variations of Purple, has a piece of clothing that works better with Persephone's aesthetic in her closet.

Interestingly, as Persephone's fashion does modernize and she chooses her own clothing, she often gravitates towards a 1940s style that is heavy on the use of peplum dresses. These dresses have loose, flowy fabric extending down from the waist to hip length, usually with a tight, fitted skirt underneath. A peplum is defined as, "a short flared, gathered, or pleated strip of fabric attached at the waist of a woman's jacket, dress, or blouse to create a hanging frill or flounce." by Oxford Languages dictionary. The dictionary also notes underneath this definition that, in Ancient Greece, a "peplum" referred to, "a woman's loose outer tunic or shawl." This peplum style comes from the Greek "πεπλος," a common garment worn by women in Ancient Greece.¹⁹ Scholars like Mireille Lee describe a peplos as, "an untailored rectangle of wool that is draped around the wearer and fastened at the shoulders with pins. (Lee 55)" Lee also says that this peplos can be worn "with or without an overfold. (55)" Fashion labels like Dior are still drawing inspiration from this style of dress today.²⁰ Persephone's peplos appears to be more modernized in the style of the Dior gowns modeled after the ancient Greek peplos which were looser and drapery. Lee says, "the heavy drapery envelops and conceals the 'lustful, irrational, immoderate' female body, effectively negating feminine sexuality. This suggestion of control is reinforced by girding (sometimes more than once on the same figure), which visually dissects the body into two regions: above and below the waist. (62)" This stylistic choice seems to call back to Persephone's time spent in the mortal realm and is a way for Smythe to incorporate an ancient clothing style in a contemporary way.

Choice feminism and body positivity would support Persephone's adventurous choice in clothing, as it supports the idea of women being both sexual beings and independent women. However, Persephone's insecurities about going out in this revealing outfit and the fact that she did not choose this outfit herself, suggest that Persephone is not wearing this willingly or is eager to conform. Instead, she would have been perfectly happy to have attended this party in her original "relic" dress and flat shoes which she appeared to be very comfortable in. Body positivity, which is more focused on personal preference would support Persephone's feelings of unease in this outfit and support her in her decision to

¹⁹ See Mireille Lee's book chapter entitled "Constru(ct)ing Gender in the Feminine Greek Peplos" from the book *The Clothed Body in the Ancient World* for more information on peplos.

²⁰ See Dior's 2022's Cruis Collection inspired by the Ancient Greek "peplos."

wear what she feels most comfortable in, as that would be an expression of her true self. It also seems as if there is an undermining of Persephone's agency here, not only in this instance, but in every instance where she is "dressed up" by other characters, such as Hades, Artemis, and Hecate. Druxes discusses this concept of female agency and physical presence, saying, "In a culture that emphasizes surfacity and constructs the woman's physical presence as largely ornamental, female roles appear limited to being a consumer, or worse, a mere accessory to, or object of, male consumption. (21)"²¹

Connecting this to the rhetoric of consent, Persephone's appeared more comfortable in the dress she had originally chosen to wear. While she did consent to wearing the dress that Artemis loaned her, it is clear from this panel that she is physically uncomfortable in the dress, as she tries to pull it down to cover more of her body. Her word bubble indicates that she is second-guessing her choice to come to the party, while the pulling down of the skirt suggests that she is regretting the outfit decision. As Persephone enters the party, she is objectified by many of the gods, which suggests that her apprehension was warranted. Persephone did not consent to being objectified.

This next image is from episode 42 and exemplifies the hypersexualization of Persephone within Lore Olympus and demonstrates the concept of voyeurism. In this part of the story, Persephone cleans herself up in Hades' bathroom after a traumatic run with the shades in the underworld. A curious Cerberus scratch at the door, popping it open for the reader, and Hades, to see an unaware Persephone in her underwear, a white thong complete with a garter belt, making it look more like lingerie than casual underwear. While she is entirely within her right to wear whatever she wants, the addition of these specific pieces seems deliberate and acts as a way to encourage readers to objectify her and make it obvious to readers that Hades is objectifying her as well. While Hades chastises himself for looking, there is still an element of voyeurism from the reading audience here. Persephone is only shown from the waist down, highlighting her legs, hips, and the little bit of clothing she is wearing.

The framing of this image directs the reader to Persephone's midsection, focusing on her hips and upper thighs.²² The way this image is drawn, Cerberus creates a frame for this central part of the

²¹ See Helga Druxes *Resisting Bodies: The Negotiation of Female Agency in Twentieth-Century Women's fiction* or her argument on transaction, exchange, and female agency.

²² See Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* for details on comic analysis, which includes framing, color, and positioning of figures within a comic.

image using his head, chest, and paw in tandem with the doorframe. The use of dark colors surrounding the border of the picture draws the reader's eye to the pop of bright pink from the cracked door, but the bright white color of Persephone's clothing is where the focus is. It is also interesting that Persephone's face is not visible in this drawing, which adds an effect of depersonalization. The narrative elements that follow compound this panel.

Persephone steps out of the bathroom wearing a curve-hugging white dress with a keyhole neckline. Upon seeing her, Hades' reaction is written above the panel as "internal moaning." This is reiterated one more time as Hades starts to sweat. While this can be interpreted as nervousness on Hades' part, the phrasing of his thought and the focus on the look of her body indicate a sexual connotation to this exchange. It is clear that Persephone feels uncomfortable in this situation, asking him if her hair is frizzy and moving her hand to her hair to check, as she attempts to figure out why Hades is reacting this way.

Snyder's "fun, feminine, and sex-positive" concept would encourage Persephone's body positivity in her decision to wear what makes her feel best, regardless of the sexual overtones of her decisions.²³ However, the fact that, in this specific panel, Persephone does not have the awareness of being observed, she also does not have the agency to allow, or not allow, both the reader and Hades to view her in this sexual light. #MeToo movement is an example of a movement that focused on holding those who have sexually assaulted others or hypersexualized them, specifically men, accountable for their actions.²⁴ The removal of agency here as well as the hypersexualization by Hades and the reader would be looked down upon by choice feminists, as Persephone is not aware of the situation and cannot act on her feelings about it.

In terms of consent, voyeurism involves viewing someone intensely, often sexually without their knowledge, which means they are unable to consent. Elizabeth Gough discusses this concept, saying, "When using the term "voyeurism," I do not limit myself to its psychoanalytic meaning of obtaining erotic gratification by secretly observing sexual objects or acts. Following the English literary tradition, I also

²³ See Claire Snyder's journal article "What is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay" for more elaboration on her definition of third-wave feminism.

²⁴ See Rampton's "Four Waves of Feminism" for more information on fourth-wave feminism.

include any kind of intense, hidden or distant spying or gazing. (93)²⁵ Readers see Persephone in a position where she is being objectified without her knowledge, thus, she is unable to consent.

Persephone, who is not fully dressed in the bathroom, here is not only viewed by readers but also by Hades. Though he does acknowledge that looking at her undressed without her consent is wrong, the way this panel is depicted encourages readers to objectify Persephone as well. According to Gough's argument, even if the sexual nature of the voyeurism present in this panel were removed, the fact that there is still a focus on looking at Persephone's body without her consent still falls into the voyeurism category. However, the fact that Persephone is specifically animated in her underwear with her face obscured and the focus on her body, this panel does suggest a sexual nature in terms of voyeurism.

In episode 149, readers get a peek into another character's back story. Minthe is a nymph who was in a relationship with Hades before he began dating Persephone. They had a turbulent relationship that ended with Minthe physically abusing Hades. However, her backstory gives readers a better sense of what roles nymphs play in the *Lore Olympus* Olympian society and is an example of the class system that is present within this story.

In episode 149, readers can see Minthe working as a car showgirl, wearing a very revealing crop top with the words "Olympus Full Throttle" and bottoms that resemble underwear more than shorts. She is also wearing a hat and heels. As readers can see by her face, she is not excited about this job. However, she needs it to pay the rent for her apartment as she does not currently have a stable job. When Hades arrives with his brother, Zeus, and Poseidon. Zeus objectifies Minthe immediately, asking who this "leggy vision" is. Zeus comments that Hades is "a little grumpy" and tells Minthe to help him cheer him up. He plucks the hat off Minthe's head and forces it onto Hades. Minthe looks confused and dejected as Zeus and Poseidon laugh at her expense. In the next frame, after they leave, Minthe is left questioning "What just happened."

One of the interesting aspects of this specific episode is that it introduces the reader to the general place that nymphs have in Olympian society. The reader also meets Thetis, one of Poseidon's assistants with whom he is also having an affair. We see her intentionally undermine another nymph who

²⁵ See Gough's argument on voyeurism in "Vision and Division: Voyeurism in the Works of Isabel Allende."

also works for Zeus, getting her sent home early. Minthe and Thetis become strong friends over the course of this webtoon, but this appears to be their first meeting and is very telling about where Nymphs stand in the class system. While Hades is not directly involved in the objectification of Minthe in this episode, Zeus is. He treats Minthe like an object when he plucks the hat from her head and forces her to be involved in cheering Hades up. Minthe's emotions range from frustration, anger, humiliation, and sadness in this scene. Zeus clearly has no issue objectifying nymphs and treating them as lower-class citizens. The name of the center where this event is being held also clues readers into Zeus' power and authority. The Thunderbolt Convention Center implies that this center is either named after Zeus or he owns it as King of Olympus.

From these interactions, we can see that nymphs occupy lower positions in Olympian society, such as assistants, models, influences, and in one scene that takes place at a strip club, strippers. In most situations, excluding Hera and Echo, nymphs are the assistants to strong, powerful gods in leadership positions and they are either actively involved in a relationship with them (in the case of Hades and Minthe) or having an affair with them (in the case of Zeus and Thetis.) There are no known situations within this webtoon where a nymph occupies any position of power or authority. These nymphs are also mostly drawn with the same style of body. They are generally tall and lean, and often portrayed as manipulative. However, I would question if they are truly manipulative in most cases or if they are firmly placed in a lower-class system where they can only "rise" by close association with a high-ranking god. Popova discusses this concept by saying, "Particularly when it come to the representation of marginalized groups and body types, popular culture frequently continues to rely on harmful tropes and constructs marginalized subjects as either desexualized or hypersexualized... (122)"²⁶ However, not all nymphs are suggested to be manipulative. In some instances, such as the nymphs who work for Demeter, nymphs are portrayed as kind, loving, and friendly.

It can also be noted that nymphs do not look the same as gods or goddesses, as they are very easily identifiable by their long, pointy ears. This combined with their work in lower-ranking jobs suggests

²⁶ See Popova's *Sexual Consent* for full argument on hypersexualization and desexualization of marginalized people.

that there is a comparison that can be made between race and class within this webtoon.²⁷ It is clear that nymphs are not given the same respect that gods receive, and they are not on the same level as goddesses. After Hera realizes that there is a budding relationship between Hades and Persephone, she makes a comment about Persephone losing Hades to a nymph, which suggests that nymphs hold less social power than goddesses. When Hades and Minthe make their relationship official, there is also pushback on this relationship, which may explain some of Minthe's hesitation to continue a relationship with Hades. Nymphs are also often used in the work force. During Persephone's time in the mortal realm, she grew up among the nymphs who helped her mother.

This brings in an interesting look into office politics. To continue the storyline from above, Minthe is told that she will not receive payment for her day's work, as she was unable to return the hat that was part of the costume. She is infuriated as she is in desperate need of the money she spent all day working for, allowing herself to be objectified in the process. She confronts Hades, who immediately recognizes her as an underworld river nymph and nicknames her "tadpole." In the context of this conversation, this also seems demeaning as he is degrading her to the status of an immature amphibian. After a short conversation, he fires his current assistant, who appears to also be a nymph, and hires Minthe in her place. She mentions that she still needs the money that she was supposed to receive to pay her rent. Hades leaves the office with her and essentially buys her the apartment that she is living in. They then begin an on-and-off relationship. This relationship has a strong power imbalance, as Hades is not only Minthe's boss and boyfriend but also the ruler of the underworld. Minthe, as an underworld nymph has very little agency within the relationship. Interestingly, she is eventually fired for her mistreatment of Persephone, and her violence toward Hades.

However, we also see Hades give preferential treatment to Persephone during her time working as an intern in the Underworld. He goes against Persephone's wishes of being treated like every other intern and pays her a salary so that she can pay off her student fees, allowing her more freedom. Gitlin

²⁷ See Jean Ait Belkhir and Bernice McNair Barnett's work entitled "Race, Gender and Class Intersectionality" where they draw from scholars working in different subfields who discuss race, gender, and class to provide a broad overview of this field.

addresses the dynamic between power imbalances and consent, saying, “Consent cannot be present when there is a power imbalance. (92)”²⁸

Royster and Kirsch as well as Rampton would fight against the construct of this class system that has been created within the *Lore Olympus* world. As Rampton says, “They speak in terms of intersectionality whereby women’s suppression can only fully be understood in a context of the marginalization of other groups and genders —feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along with racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and sexual orientation (no “ism” to go with that). (7)”

Royster and Kirsch discuss this concept in terms of feminist rhetoric as they detail how gender and race are connected to class, stating, “The core idea that we are using for eliteness is tied to systems of power, prestige, and privilege in relation to others. (51)”²⁹ They assert that, in Westernized cultures, white males who “acquire sociopolitical privilege and authority” have more inherent “eliteness.” (51) However, among the groups who are “found lacking,” such as women, those who are not wealthy, people of color, and those from non-European origins, are lesser privileged groups (51). They argue that there are different levels of privilege within this system, such as people of color from different genders and different levels of privilege (51). They sum this up by saying, “The implication is that in rhetorical enterprises status matters in ways that are comparable to gender and race. (51)” This demonstrates what is happening in the *Lore Olympus* universe. The gods are clearly the most privileged, acquiring the position of the “white males” in Royster and Kirsch’s study. The goddesses are not less powerful physically; however, they are often not taken as seriously as the gods. Hera, while very powerful, is held back by her relationship with Zeus and Demeter seems to have to work harder than her male counterparts to succeed in the business world. Nymphs, however, are always female and always positioned in jobs that would hold less power than those of goddesses, showing how these concepts work together.

The concept of consent here comes back to the concept of agency. First, in this panel, Minthe is working as a car-show girl and is being objectified by several of the gods. She does not consent to this

²⁸ See Gitlin’s *Sexual Consent* for further reading on his argument about sexual consent and power imbalances.

²⁹ See Royster and Kirsch’s “Feminist Rhetorical Studies as a Robust Interdisciplinary Framework” for more on how feminist rhetoric intersects with race, class, and gender.

and readers can see her emotions ranging from anger, frustration, and sadness in the short episode. However, she needs the money to pay her rent and she is aware that the gods are more powerful in terms of social class, so she is unable to speak up. Later on, Minthe is also in an unequal workplace relationship with Hades. He is her boss and has more power than her, both in society and in the workplace. Because of this dynamic, according to Gitlin, she is unable to consent. Gatlin says, "Consent cannot be present when there is a power imbalance. (92)" In both Minthe's work life as a car show girl and in her role as Hades' secretary, there is an imbalance of power. Thus, she is unable to consent to any form of sexual relationship with him.

The last image is from episode 206 and is one of the images within this series that shows Persephone as having agency and autonomy. This image depicts Persephone, who has just eaten the pomegranate so that she could become Queen of the Underworld and protect those she cares about after she has transformed to "titan size" and holds the power to defeat Kronos. This image shows Persephone wearing a color that we do not see her wear much up until this point; black. She transforms not only her body, but her clothing, going from wearing a large white fur jacket to this black dress with a plunging neckline, black gloves, and large, black earrings. Her hair is long, which usually means that she is in some sort of chaotic state and feeling strong emotions, and her eyes are red which indicates that her powers are activated. We see Persephone's red eyes in a few other parts of the story such as when she commits her act of wrath and at the trial where she was punished for her act of wrath, but she does not generally have the same control over her power in those examples as she does after eating the pomegranate. She is also wearing a rendition of the crown that is typically associated with Persephone in contemporary images. The lighting coming off her illuminated weapon is shining on the right side of her face and cutting across her body, causing there to be soft light to fall across her face and body.

All of these conditions create a very empowered version of Persephone. In this rendition of the story, Persephone was not tricked or forced to eat the pomegranate. She chose to. While she made this choice under challenging circumstances, she still had the agency to choose her own path.

Persephone is in a position of empowerment here.³⁰ She is not only physically in power in terms of being capable of fighting Kronos and saving the underworld, rising to the position of Queen of the Underworld, and having a strong romantic relationship with the King of the Underworld, but she is also harnessing her sexual identity as well. This is one of the first panels where readers can see Persephone in a revealing outfit, showing a lot of cleavage in a dress that hugs her body while also noting that she is powerful in more ways than suggested by her body. Readers know that Persephone has the power to defeat Kronos and save the Underworld. The outfit choice and sexualization that is happening here is simply a gateway for conveying her power through body positivity and choice feminism. This idea of being able to be both sexual and independent is a concept that Rampton discusses this as well in relation to feminism saying that this “. . .was the readoption by young feminists of the very lip-stick, high-heels, and cleavage proudly exposed by low-cut necklines that the first two phases of the movement identified with male oppression. (4)

As this scene plays out, Persephone effortlessly defeats Kronos and wins this battle while also showing compassion to the physical embodiment of Tartarus who asks if Persephone will come to visit him again after she calls him back to obtain Kronos. We see he act with empathy and kindness in this as she replies, “of course” while placing her hand on Tartarus.

This Persephone is very different from the previously disempowered version seen in earlier panels. One of the main differences is her revealing outfit is chosen by her, unlike the first panel. She portrays herself this way during this battle scene to depict herself as powerful and in control. In the past, she was always asked or forced to wear clothing that she did not feel confident in, resulting in an undermining of her confidence.

Consent also comes into play here in terms of the storyline. Unlike earlier versions of the story of the taking of Persephone, *Lore Olympus* Persephone willingly chooses to eat the Pomegranate. She has not been kidnapped, forced, or raped in the direct process of eating the Pomegranate, creating a situation where the choice to do so is solely her own. Because of this, the act of eating the Pomegranate and becoming Queen of the Underworld is consensual.

³⁰ See Rampton’s “Four Waves of Feminism” and Snyder’s “What is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay.”

Conclusion:

While each of these panels presents a different aspect of the illustrations within *Lore Olympus*, they all serve to communicate ideologies to the reader. The first frame where Persephone is visibly uncomfortable in the clothing that she was told to wear, as seen by her hand yanking the dress down and the word bubble where she indicates her second-guessing if she would like to attend the party, suggests that Persephone's agency is being undermined at this moment. Just a few panels before, Persephone appeared excited about attending the party in one of her own dresses and her flat sandals. Only upon changing after Artemis suggests it does she appear to be uncomfortable. The second image is a strong example of voyeurism and how Hades' is viewing Persephone, but also how the audience is being asked to partake in this voyeuristic aspect in this specific scene. The framing of the panel combined with the dark coloration and Persephone's bright skin draws the reader to her hips and thighs, while her face is blocked from view, creating a dehumanizing effect. The third image shows Minthe looking dejected in a crop top and tiny bottoms that she was asked to wear when she worked as a car girl. This image has larger societal implications as it gives readers a stronger understanding of the class system within this story. Nymphs are viewed as below gods and goddesses and are often seen working in roles such as secretaries, models, influencers, or exotic dancers. It seems their identity is often tied to their looks and their bodies are the only thing that encourages interaction with the gods. Interestingly, Minthe's story also helps readers gauge how Hades interacts with his employees, offering preferential treatment to Minthe and Persephone, both of whom he has been romantically involved with. This suggests a lack of boundaries on his part and also sets up a power dynamic within these relationships, specifically his and Minthe's, as she is considered part of a lower class than he is. The fourth and final image depicts an empowered Persephone after she has eaten the pomegranate and become Queen of the Underworld. While she is wearing a revealing dress, she appears comfortable in it which suggests her empowerment and strength as a woman. Persephone is encouraged to embrace her sexuality and exude strength this way.

In terms of consent, each of these specific panels presents a different way in which readers can view the concept of consent in this webtoon. All of these panels focus on embodiment. This circles back to Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny's discussion of bodies, such as, "The physical body carries

meaning through discourse about or by a body (39)” and the demanding of, “ethical reading of bodies and recognition of bodies as *people*-not objects. (40)” The first panel focuses on Persephone’s discomfort in the clothing she has been asked to wear and the discomfort she experiences before walking into the party, knowing that she would most likely be objectified. The power imbalance between her, a minor goddess at this point, and the gods also suggest that she is unable to consent to any sexualization she may undergo. The second panel depicts an instance of voyeurism in the webtoon. Voyeurism is nonconsensual by nature, as the person being viewed is unaware, thus unable to consent. The third panel gives readers a look into the class system. As Minthe is a nymph, she is considered to be of a lower class than the gods and, as her job in this particular panel is focused on her body, she is unable to refute the objectification that comes with it. However, her clear discomfort suggests an inability to consent. This also circles back to the idea of consent being unable to be given when there is a power imbalance, such as the imbalance between nymphs, lower-class citizens, and gods, the highest-class citizens in this webtoon. The last panel shows a more empowered Persephone who, unlike earlier versions, is fully capable of making the choice in eating the pomegranate, which shows that she is capable of consent in this situation. In earlier renditions, she was raped, kidnapped, and forced to eat the pomegranate. Smythe creates a dynamic where Persephone is allowed to make this choice on her own, suggesting that she consents to this new role as Queen of the Underworld.

This also relates to Royster and Kirsch’s three R’s of “Rescue, recovery, and reinscription.(9)” As this webtoon is based on the taking of Persephone, which traditionally does not grant Persephone much agency, as she is a victim of her circumstances, creating this more contemporary retelling where Persephone is granted the agency in making her own decision to become Queen of the Underworld is a way to reinscribe this story and create a version of Persephone who not only has more of a story than earlier versions give her but also is a way of giving her a strong, protagonist roll in which she makes her own decisions.

CHAPTER 3: RHETORICAL DEVICES

Introduction:

Since Webtoons are a form of visual digital media, they rely heavily on visual elements to move the narrative forward. While much of the plot is dictated through the sequential panels and the textual elements, there are several recurrent elements within this webtoon that help move the narrative forward and signal to the reader a deeper meaning to the panels. *Lore Olympus* has a wide array of these features, such as Persephone's flowers that appear in her hair as she experiences different moods and the fact that her hair grows as she experiences uncomfortable emotions and feels out of control.

This chapter will take a look at four specific recurrent elements that move the narrative forward. These three devices are the use of scrolls, often in a variety of colors, to depict trauma, the use of the "evil eye" in several panels, the use of flowers to show Persephone's emotions, and the limited but pointed use of the ancient Greek language in several panels. These elements all serve as consistent rhetorical elements that help anchor the plot line. For instance, if one of the scrolls is seen in a specific panel, the reader understands that this is either a traumatic moment for the character or the experience is triggering a traumatic memory for the character. Each of these devices is instrumental in connecting the narrative together and creating a cohesive and complex story arch.

I argue that these four different rhetorical devices act as visual metaphors within the text. In his text *Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphors to Idioms*, Sam Glucksberg defines metaphor in two ways, "The two major senses of the term are captured in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1996). The first sense identifies metaphor as a type of language: a figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable; an instance of this is metaphorical expression.' The second sense identifies metaphor as a form of conceptual representation: 'A thing considered as representative of some other (usually abstract) thing: a symbol.'⁽⁴⁾³¹ By this definition, the rhetorical devices found in this chapter serve as metaphors, primarily of the symbolic variety, or as the representation of the abstract concepts that they represent.

³¹ See Glucksberg's *Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphors to Idioms* for more on metaphors.

Scrolls:

The scrolls in *Lore Olympus* are often seen as readers scroll from top to bottom of an episode. I theorize that these scrolls depict trauma, with the different colors symbolizing different types of traumas. Peterson, in an article about literary trauma theory, discusses Cathy Caruth's first-wave literary trauma theory definition of trauma, which states that, "trauma is an experience so intensely painful that the mind is unable to process it normally. (334)"³² This trauma can be seen visually through the presentation of these scrolls and indicate to the reader that a character, usually Persephone, is experiencing a traumatic event or a memory of a traumatic event.

The first instance where readers encounter these scroll devices appears in episode 22. Persephone accidentally cuts her hand after slipping with a knife while doing dishes. Apollo attempts to help her clean up the wound. A closer look at the frame shows Persephone's gold blood (all the gods bleed gold) with black scrolls protruding from the top and bottom of her hand. The fact that this is the first time that the scroll device is used in this webtoon and that it is directly connected to Persephone's pain begins to give this device its meaning. During and after Persephone is raped by Apollo, these scroll devices become more prominent as a rhetorical device, as Persephone's emotional pain increases. While this image shows an instance where Persephone is in physical pain, the scrolls are more typically seen when Persephone is working through trauma or triggered. Natalie Riccio defines trauma as, "an overstimulating and overwhelming event, such as physical, sexual, cognitive, and emotional abuse, which leads to dissociated states (Riccio 1)."

While the style of the scrolls remains consistently the same, always weaving up or down a panel as the reader scrolls downward, the color of the scroll changes. There are at least three different colors for these scrolls, all with different implied meanings. These colors are black, purple, and white. I argue that the black scrolls are closely connected with more general traumatic memories, while the purple scrolls suggest trauma directly related to Persephone's traumatic sexual assault by Apollo. The white scrolls are not seen quite as often, but they depict healing.

³² Peterson indicates that Caruth is one of the leaders in her field in first wave literary trauma theory and draws considerably on her theories in his article "Speak, Trauma: Towards a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory." Peterson's argument, however, suggests that there is a need to revise these first wave ideas as the science of trauma continues to change and offers a critique of scholars in the field such as Caruth and van der Kolk.

The black scrolls seem to appear mainly when a character is in pain, both emotional or physical, or a type of traumatic memory is triggered. These scrolls are the most commonly seen and tend to swirl across the screen as the reader scrolls downward, enveloping the panels and often creating a sense of “floating”. An example of this can be seen in episode 161, titled “Tether”, when Persephone is talking to her therapist, Chiron.

When Persephone begins to relate the events of her sexual assault, these black scrolls begin to weave throughout the panel. At one point, Persephone is shown to be having what appears to be a dissociative episode, where readers can see Persephone laying on the therapist’s couch talking about the events but also walking away from the couch in the same outfit she wore the night she was raped.³³ Riccio describes dissociation as, “a reaction to stressful situations, (42)” and says, “Dissociation is a universal reaction to overwhelming trauma/stress and its symptoms are similar worldwide. (43)” These black scrolls are seen in two different parts of the narrative where Persephone appears to be dissociating; the episode where she is raped and the episode where she is talking to her therapist about her trauma. Because of this, I theorize that the black scrolls show multifaceted pain or trauma, such as physical pain, multi-layered emotional pain, and pain from past traumatic events. For instance, the title of this episode implies that Persephone is struggling to move past this event, as she feels that she is constantly tied to the events that happened and that they define her relationships, future plans, and her thoughts.

While the black scrolls seem to depict more broad and layered trauma, the Purple scroll seems to be more closely connected to Persephone’s trauma directly involving Apollo. Once again, in episode 161, readers see the scrolls change from black when she is discussing her trauma more broadly, to purple when she is specifically discussing her connection to Apollo. While Apollo rapes Persephone in episode 24, the scrolls are black and intertwine with Persephone’s complex thoughts and emotions about what is happening. She questions if she wants this act to happen, questions if she wants to become a part of The Goddess of Eternal Maidenhood (TGOEM), and what she wants for her future. These thoughts are not directly focused on Apollo, though he is the catalyst for their emergence. Because of this, the scrolls appear black instead of purple, as they do in Persephone’s therapy appointment. These purple scrolls are used much less often than the black scrolls.

³³ See Riccio’s definition of dissociation in her journal article “Trauma and Dissociation.”

Persephone also appears to be exhibiting a freeze response in this episode, which leads her to dissociate to the greenhouse she dreamed of in episode 6. Ricci describes what happens in this freeze state, saying, “In the freeze state, one is going through the process of trauma. In order to survive the ordeal, one has to imprison the mind and the body, a shutting down; trauma is freezing and then dissociating or splitting. (45)” During this scene in episode 24, readers also see Persephone dissociate again. During this time, she is overwhelmed by the sexual assault she is facing and retreats to a greenhouse in her mind. Readers get a peek into her internal monologue here with text positioned under the panel saying, “I’m going to stay here where it’s safe until he’s finished.” This dissociation is once again tied to the black scrolls. In episode 6, Persephone dreams about this greenhouse. In her dream, Demeter locks her inside, claiming that “When you are in here, no one can hurt you.” This could be the reason that Persephone’s mind chose this spot for her dissociative episode. While her dream suggested that Demeter was trying to confine Persephone and keep her from living her life, she was also trying to protect her. Persephone recognizes that in this moment of extreme vulnerability and retreats to this place in her mind where no one can reach her, thus, keeping her safe.

It’s also interesting to note that Persephone’s hair not only resembles these scrolls but also grows when she is experiencing strong emotions, generally negative emotions. Episode 24 shows readers Persephone with short hair, but as she is raped, her hair grows longer and longer. Readers can see this same thing happen in the first few episodes of *Lore Olympus* when Persephone is drugged and ends up at Hades’ place. In fact, one of the first instances where readers encounter Persephone’s long hair, it appears to weave across the screen in a similar fashion to the scrolls.

White scrolls are the least common color used in *Lore Olympus*. Readers can see an example of the white scrolls in episode 183 when Persephone weaves a tapestry that resembles a tree, connecting multiple scrolls together. They all connect, symbolizing that her traumas all connect to create her “trauma tree.” This is an example of the use of white scrolls, which, in this context, may represent the slow healing of her trauma. As Persephone works to piece the scrolls together and discovers how they are all interconnected, she begins to heal herself as well. Haaken states, “The dissociation model asserts that traumatic memory is preserved in split-off ego formations and emerges over time in a fragmentary reexperiencing of the trauma, often through self-hypnotic trance states, flash-backs, or fluctuating identity

states.³⁴ These “split off ego formations” are represented by the pieces of the scrolls that Persephone is connecting, allowing the fragmented reexperiencing to become a fuller picture of the trauma she has experienced. In the image, it is easy to see that Persephone is experiencing strong emotions while piecing this together. The white color may symbolize purity, healing, or letting go of the trauma while the connection of the scrolls suggests that Persephone is realizing that her traumas are all connected and that healing will be an entangled process.

Ancient Greek and Roman societies used scrolls as a way to preserve information. (Haslam 142) They were primarily used as record-keeping devices to help keep accounts organized and earlier scrolls were generally written on papyrus with parchment replacing papyrus later on. (Haslam 143) For example, *The Iliad* was recorded on a set of papyrus scrolls up until the time of the Roman Empire. (Haslam 143) The scrolls in *Lore Olympus* serve a similar purpose. They are used to signal to the reader that something of importance is happening, such as a traumatic event, a triggering moment, or a traumatic memory being brought to light. They are sharing information with the reader, helping to organize the traumatic events that have happened or are being triggered, and reminding readers of a part of the story that happened earlier. These scrolls often intertwine around the subject, most often Persephone and the different colors signal to the reader what particular trauma the current triggering event is recalling.

While the use of scrolls to depict trauma calls back to the ancient practice of writing on papyrus or parchment scrolls to preserve information, these scrolls were often read from top to bottom, similar to how webtoons are read. According to Harold Orlans, “The computer screen functions like a scroll that unrolls down instead of sideways.”³⁵ In this way, Smythe is not only referencing the use of ancient scrolls through her visual animations depicted in *Lore Olympus* panels but these scrolls may also be referenced in the way that this webtoon is read.

Interestingly, the “Heracles Papyrus” is an example of a scroll that depicts graphics similar to that of a comic (Marshall and Kovacs 27). While webtoons are a digital vertical scroll-type medium, they do share similarities with this early scroll, such as the ability to move a story forward with the use of pictures

³⁴ See Haaken’s argument on feminist approaches to trauma and abuse in her journal article entitled “The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire: Feminist Approaches to Sexual Abuse and Psychic Trauma.” This quote specifically is also drive from the works of van der Kolk (1987) and Spiegel (1990).

³⁵ See Orlan’s writing entitled “Potpourri” where he argues that ancient scrolls and screens have similar formats.

accompanied by text. In some ways, the use of the webtoons format combined with a retelling of a classical myth refers back to a rare type of storytelling that appears to have been used within Roman society, though the earliest extant versions of the myth of the taking of Persephone do predate this still.

These fragments of writing have similar characteristics to comics that date back to the mid-third century or earlier, as suggested by some of the bilingual features in the text that suggest it dates back to the Roman era (Marshall and Kovacs 27). This scroll uses *grulloi*, which according to Gideon Nisbet, are, “humorous cartoons, drawn in black ink and with fading traces of original coloration in green and two shades of yellow” (Marshall and Kovacs 28).³⁶ Nisbet also explains that a grullo accompanies text to explain it in this specific example of the Heracles papyrus that was created on papyrus in a scroll format. Interestingly, Smythe’s *Lore Olympus* has many of the same characteristics that these *grulloi* have. Both Smythe’s work and this papyrus scroll have pictures accompanying text that are not simply meant to clarify or support a text, as many pictures were used for in classical times, but also used to move a story forward. Both also allow the reader to learn new information from the illustrations and not rely fully on the text to do the narrative work.

In terms of consent, these scrolls help readers understand when Persephone is having traumatic flashbacks or when she is experiencing trauma. Trauma by nature is often non-consensual. Using these scrolls as a symbol for her trauma allows the reader to understand how previous traumas are impacting her current storyline, as they appear when she is having flashbacks, dissociating, and when she is experiencing new traumas.

Evil Eye:

The evil eye was a common concept in many cultures, including the ancient Greeks³⁷. Elworthy describes the evil eye saying, “It was firmly believed by all the ancients that some malignant influence darted from the eyes of envious or angry persons, and so infected the air as to penetrate and corrupt the bodies of both living creatures and inanimate objects. (8)” Likewise, Berger describes the evil eye as, “a superstition that a particular person may cast a malicious gaze which will destroy or harm or inflict bad luck on someone toward whom they are either openly or even unknowingly envious. (785)” He likens the

³⁶ See Gideon Nisbet’s work in *Classics and Comics*

³⁷ See Elworthy’s *The Evil Eye (1895)* Berger’s *The Evil Eye: A Cautious Look (2013)* for a list of cultures that make illusions to the evil eye in their literature.

evil eye to the common idiom “knock on wood” as a superstition to prevent negative events from happening. (Berger 785)³⁸

The effects of the evil eye are generally negative. Elworthy says, “It has also been fully believed, both in ancient and modern times, that many persons by the glance of their eye have been caused injurious effects without their consent and even against their will... (8)” Both Berger and Elworthy suggest that the evil eye relates strongly with the emotion of envy, however, Berger connects this envy with hierarchy³⁹.

The evil eye is depicted strategically throughout *Lore Olympus*. One example is in episode 164 when Hades is telling Persephone about the cons of being involved with him. We see multiple evil eye symbols stretching all the way down for several scrolling motions, with Persephone’s pink color mixed with Hades’ blue and black. If we connect this with the general meaning that both Elworthy and Berger discuss, which would be bad luck or misfortune to those who are experiencing the gaze, this is an act of foreshadowing. The evil eye here acts as a symbol to signify to the readers that something ominous is connected with this pomegranate tree. As the story progresses there are several ways that this may have been fulfilled. Persephone does end up eating from the pomegranate tree and becoming Queen of the Underworld. This has positive and negative repercussions, as it causes more tension in her relationship with her mother and keeps her from her job as the goddess of Spring, but causes her to gain a more powerful role, increasing her status, and allowing her to continue a relationship with Hades. It also may be foreshadowing the coming battle with Kronos, which is what causes Persephone to eat the pomegranate in the first place.

The second example is in episode 205 when Kronos is released from Hades’ body and is preparing to fight Persephone. Moments before the battle, one of Kronos’ eyes can be seen through a slit in the door, as Persephone ponders what to do. This example seems to connect with Berger’s theory of envy being connected to hierarchy. While Kronos does not seem picky in terms of whose bodies he takes over, as at this point in the story, he has multiple gods and goddesses under his control, the fact that

³⁸ Berger argues that there is a connection between “knock on wood” and warding off the evil eye, as trees were often revered as sacred.

³⁹ See Berger’s argument for the relationship between hierarchy and envy on page 786 of *The Evil Eye: A Cautious Look* (2013)

Persephone not only is not under his control but also released Hades' body from his control and holds the power of a fertility goddess who refuses to fall for his tricks and willingly marry him makes him envious. He intends to take her power and use it to add to his own. Up until this point, Kronos has been known to hold more power than any single god or goddess, so Persephone's ability to battle and win against Kronos increases her hierarchical ranking and lowers Kronos'.

Another interesting example of the evil eye in this webtoon goes back to episode 6 during Persephone's dream of Demeter locking her in a greenhouse. After Persephone realizes that she is locked in the greenhouse and unable to get out, she sees begs Demeter to let her out. Demeter argues that she is doing this for her own good, as a way to protect her, saying, "When you're in here, no one can hurt you. No one!" While this is a dream, it seems to represent Persephone's struggles with her overprotective mother. Persephone does not understand all of Demeter's motives behind trying to protect her, such as her knowledge that Persephone is a fertility goddess and she has seen how both Rhea and Metis were used for their powers and the fact that Demeter is consistently portrayed as single, begging the question of how Persephone was conceived.⁴⁰ The fact that Demeter is so careful with her daughter's exposure to gods suggests that she may have had some trauma in her past. She also does not share her knowledge that Persephone is a fertility goddess with Persephone, leaving Persephone vulnerable and unable to protect herself from potential threats.

While this evil eye in the greenhouse suggests some form of malice, Persephone also retreats to this greenhouse in her mind as a source of comfort when she is dissociating, as seen earlier in this paper when discussing scrolls. This suggests that, while the greenhouse can be seen as Demeter's smothering of Persephone, Persephone also sees it as a safe space. She and Demeter have a strong bond in *Lore Olympus*, and Persephone does know that Demeter is a source of comfort for her should she need it.

This "evil eye" relates to consent in that the "evil" that happens is often other characters acting on malicious intent, such as Kronos in the battle scene or Demeter keeping Persephone hidden in an attempt to keep her safe, but essentially keeping Persephone from having meaningful and fulfilling

⁴⁰ In both the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" and *Metamorphosis*, Persephone is Zeus' daughter. However, In *Lore Olympus*, the question of who her father has not yet been presented. However, it is assumed that it is not Zues, as that would connect her in relation to Hades and *Lore Olympus* does try to remove the familial relationships form this story.

relationships with others. While not all instances of the evil eye suggest malice towards Persephone, this is how it is most often depicted. In the traditional representation of the evil eye, the person using the evil eye uses it as a way to ward off evil, suggesting that they do not consent to the evil actions or thoughts of others toward them. In *Lore Olympus*, it often clues readers in on the fact that a character thinks or intends to act on this ill will towards another character, once again non-consensually.

Persephone's Flowers:

Throughout the webtoon, Persephone's feelings are often communicated through the flowers she grows in the moment. When she grows flowers, they typically appear on her head and sometimes the head of the person she is reacting to. For example, if she is with Hades and suddenly feels excited or nervous, she may grow pink or blue flowers, both on her head and his. These flowers are connected to her powers as the goddess of spring and as a fertility goddess. The color of these flowers generally suggests a specific emotion or reflects the color of the person she is communicating with. For example, in episode 27, Persephone and Hades are talking. As she becomes flustered, blue flowers begin to bloom around her head. In other instances, the blue flowers can represent sadness. There are a few cases where Persephone grows green flowers, which, when combined with the content of the narrative, appear to be related to Persephone's jealousy.

The use of flowers to depict Persephone's mood connects with her powers. As the goddess of Spring, Persephone's powers were important for Spring growth. As myth states, after her abduction by Hades, her time was split between the underworld and on earth with her mother, though the time she spends in each place seems to vary depending on the version. Ovid states, "Now the goddess, the common divinity of two realms, spends half the months with her mother and with her husband, half. (Squillace 99)" The Homeric Hymn has a different take, saying in lines 460-465, "Come, my daughter; for far-seeing Zeus the loud-thunderer calls you to join the families of the gods, and has promised to give you what rights you please among the deathless gods, and has agreed that for a third part of the circling year your daughter shall go down to darkness and gloom, but for the two parts shall be with you and the other deathless gods: so has he declared it shall be and has bowed his head in token." This reading suggests a less equal division of time, with Persephone spending 4 months in the Underworld with Hades, and 8 months with her mother. This myth is generally thought to discuss the reasons that the earth has

seasons, as Persephone would help Demeter, goddess of the harvest, with replenishing the earth once Spring arrives. Regardless of the amount of time spent in the Underworld or with her mother, it is clear that Persephone's powers were directly connected to Spring growth, which often includes flowers.

Persephone also has a special connection to flowers, as the goddess of spring. It is with a flower that Hades captures her in the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter." The flower is described as "a thing of awe whether for deathless gods or mortal men to see: from its root grew a hundred blooms and it smelled most sweetly, so that all wide heaven above and the whole earth and the sea's salt swell laughed for joy." In *Metamorphoses*, much of her time is spent picking flowers and she is captured while she was gathering "violets or white lilies. (Squillace 95)" In both versions, there is a strong amount of imagery and emotion connected to Persephone's gathering of the flowers. Ovid says that, when Persephone was abducted and dropped the flowers she had been gathering, "and such was the innocence of girlish years, the loss of her flowers even at such a time aroused new grief. (Squillace 95)" Because of this connection between flowers and Persephone's emotions, the artistic decision to use flowers as a way to convey Persephone's inner emotional state is strongly rooted in the classical texts.

In both versions of this story, it is clear that Persephone does not have the agency to make her own choices. These choices are instead made for her by Zeus, Hades, and Demeter. In *Lore Olympus*, however, Persephone is granted more autonomy and readers can see Persephone taking an active role in creating the life she is living in. In both versions of the abduction of Persephone, it seems that one of the few things that Persephone did have control of was her interactions with flowers. She chose to pick certain flowers and she was capable of making flowers grow, which adds more support to the reasoning behind using flowers as a way to explain Persephone's feelings. While she does not have control over when the flowers grow, they do spring from her powers. Her power is connected to her autonomy, as she alone possesses it.

In both episodes 27 and 37, readers can see examples of Persephone's flowers and their connection to her emotions. In episode 27, Persephone is talking to Hades after her sexual assault. While they are still just friends in this particular part of the narrative, their conversation is highly flirtatious and invokes strong emotions in Persephone. Because of this, she can be seen with a blossoming blue flower

crown and blossoms hanging in the air as they bloom, depicting her chaotic emotional state relating to Hades.

Episode 37 shows Persephone's abilities to grow flowers, or in this case, vines, in relation to her emotional state. In this image, Persephone is confronting Apollo about her sexual assault. She is making it clear that she did not consent to the act and will not be participating in it with him again. He does not take this well and attempts to gaslight her into believing that it was consensual and that she enjoyed herself. She then learns that he figured out when her classes were so that he could pick her up, enraging her further. As she continues to become enraged, Persephone begins to grow red vines from her head, just as she does with the flower crowns. The color red indicates that this growth is coming from a place of anger. This is one of the lesser-seen types of plant growth Persephone exhibits during her emotional growth, yet it is one of the clearest in terms of message. Persephone's anger is palpable.

Persephone's flowers connect to her emotions, which are connected to her choices. When she is calm, happy, or excited, the flowers she grows depict these emotions. When she is angry, these flowers are often vine-like and red. These flowers help readers understand the emotions that Persephone is experiencing which relates to her consent. When she is angry at Apollo for raping her, readers can see the red vines on her head, indicating her rage. Rape, by definition, is a non-consensual sexual assault. Her red vines show the reader her feelings when interacting with Apollo after the rape. Her blue-colored flowers that often appear when she talks to Hades indicate her happiness and contentment with their relationship, suggesting that the interactions they have when these flowers are growing are more than likely consensual. Understanding Persephone's feelings can help readers understand her decision-making process, which helps readers understand consent.

Ancient Greek Language:

While Smythe does use Ancient Greek sparingly through this webtoon, there are certain instances where she adds dialogue that utilizes the language that the early versions of this myth were written in. The first instance in which she uses the Ancient Greek language is on Persephone's business card. It has multiple versions of her name starting with "Persephone" followed by "Περσεφονη," the Ancient Greek equivalent of her name, "Proserpina" which is the Roman version of "Persephone" and last, "Kore," meaning "girl" in Ancient Greek but was also what Persephone was called prior to becoming

a well-known goddess before her abduction. This seems like a simple nod to Persephone's many titles, excluding arguably her most famous, "Goddess of the Underworld." However, readers can conclude that this was intentionally omitted from the list as Persephone did not have this title at this point in the story.

The second instance of Ancient Greek being used in this story is found in episode 40. Persephone unintentionally enters Tartarus after being sent in the wrong direction by Minthe, Hades' jealous girlfriend. Persephone is attacked by the shades and does her best to fight them off by creating a forest where she can hide. Upon realizing where she is, Hades ventures into Tartarus to find her. Upon realizing that she is in trouble, says "Συγκαλεῖσθε" which translates to "call together" or "assemble." He is essentially calling the shades to gather together in one place as he searches for Persephone. He soon finds her being strangled by one of the shades. Snapping his fingers, he makes the shade let her go. During the discussion that follows, he says, "Εἰμί βασιλεύς ἀπαίσιος" suggesting that he is experiencing guilt for allowing Persephone to be put in harm's way. Persephone blames herself for the mistake to which Hades quickly assures her that it is not her fault. He says, "Εἰμί βασιλεύς ἀπαίσιος," which translates to "I am a terrible king." This is an important moment within this episode, as Hades' is beginning to realize his feelings for Persephone and his inability to protect her as she works in the underworld and is acknowledging that his power has limits. This is an important moment, as Hades often takes it upon himself to protect Persephone, as he sees her as weak and naive. However, Persephone ends up saving him and possesses more power than he has.

The next important moment where the Ancient Greek language is used is in episode 195. Prior to this, the uses of Ancient Greek have been sparse, such as in the names on the business card, or do not call back to other ancient Greek works, such as in the conversation between Hades and Persephone in Tartarus. However, in the next example, Persephone has been banished to the mortal realm and no gods or goddesses are allowed to go between Olympus or the Underworld to the mortal realm until Persephone learns how to do her mother, Demeter's, job and she passes inspection by Zeus. After another failed inspection, Persephone sees an injured Cerberus approaching and immediately bandages his wounds and comforts him. Knowing that Hades would not let anything happen to his dog, Persephone is extremely worried about him and decides that she needs to find a way to see him. Ignoring the rules,

she embarks on a κατάβασις, a journey into the underworld. Κατάβασις comes from the Ancient Greek “κατα” which means “down” and “βαινω” which means “go.”

While “Κατάβασις” describes the journey that Persephone is embarking on within the narrative, this word is well-known in other literary works. Examples of those who embarked on a Κατάβασις in Greek mythology are Zeus, Hercules, Orpheus, and Odysseys in works written by writers such as Homer and Hesiod.⁴¹ In *The Odyssey*, after Odysseus and his crew leave Circe’s island, they embark on a Κατάβασις; a descent into the underworld.⁴² This idea is also present in other Virgil’s *Aeneid*. However, the difference between these two works is that Odysseus’s κατάβασις involved bringing the shades to meet him, while Aeneas entered the underworld.

The most pertinent example of a κατάβασις for this analysis is that which happens in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. There are several examples of people who embarked on a κατάβασις within this work, such as Orpheus in his attempt to rescue Euridice and Hercules as he attempted to kidnap Cerberus. However, this work also discusses the κατάβασις that Persephone, herself, embarks on. However, Hades took Persephone after asking her father, Zeus, permission to marry her, making her an unwilling participant in this κατάβασις.

This is one of the interesting choices that Smythe makes in terms of the narrative. In *Lore Olympus*, Persephone not only embarks on this κατάβασις alone but also without Zeus’ permission. There are some discrepancies in the story that do not align with Ovid’s version, such as Persephone not being Zeus’ daughter, which would explain why Smythe chose not to bring this aspect of the story in. However, Zeus specifically forbids her from leaving the mortal realm and Hades is not there to escort her to the underworld. She is embarking on this κατάβασις on her own, making her own decision.

Along with the use of Ancient Greek in this image, the image itself is visually interesting. It portrays an inverted Persephone moving towards a large entry in a stone labeled “Κατάβασις.” This wording is the only part of the image that appears upright. This inversion combined with the eerie, dark color scheme, and the bright electric-blue line that lights up the inverted sky all combine to create a sense

⁴¹ See *Round Trip to Hades in the Eastern Mediterranean* for arguments regarding κατάβασις in Ancient Greek myth.

⁴² See Catherine Malabou’s argument on Odysseus’ κατάβασις in her chapter titled “Odysseus’ Changed Soul: A Contemporary Reading of the Myth of Er” in the book *Contemporary Encounters with Ancient Metaphysics*

of omininity. Persephone's bright pink coloration contrasts with this darkness, though she is cloaked by a dark cloak. As a reader scrolls down while reading this panel, they will encounter the ground and Persephone's feet first.

In conclusion, these four rhetorical devices all help move the narrative forward and help the reader achieve a deeper reading of the webtoon. The scroll devices depict both physical and emotional pain and trauma and the color often represents what this pain or trauma is attached to, with black being a more broad, generalized, or interconnected trauma, purple being directly related to Persephone's rape, and white representing healing. They interweave among panels, sometimes for the majority of an episode if a character, namely Persephone, is having a particularly visceral reaction. The use of flowers to depict Persephone's emotions is a call back to her ancient powers, connecting her to her goddess of spring role. The use of the "evil eye" causes a heightened sense of fear in readers and foreshadows terrible events happening to Persephone. It may be that it is a manifestation of her pain or trauma. The use of the Ancient Greek language is also very poignant in this webtoon. Smythe adds Persephone and Hades' Ancient Greek and Roman names onto their business cards, as well as any possible alteration of their name or previous name, such as "Kore" for Persephone. Smythe also introduces the idea of a *κατάβασις* when Persephone descends to the Underworld. This concept can be seen in many classical texts, such as *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, and *Metamorphoses*. Not surprisingly, Persephone's own journey to the underworld in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is considered a *κατάβασις*, suggesting that Smythe used this reference to anchor her work in Ovid's retelling of the taking of Persephone.

All of these rhetorical devices work together to create depth and meaning within the illustration of this webtoon. Each one depicts specific ideas that serve to move the narration forward and help the reader to interpret each panel as they read and take in the visual aspects of the story. The scrolls help readers identify when a traumatic or painful act is occurring and what this act may be attached to. The evil eye is present in several scenes and suggests that something ominous, scary, or bad may be about to occur. This serves as foreshadowing for the reader. Persephone's flowers and vines serve to inform the reader of Persephone's innermost thoughts. While other forms of media rely more heavily on text for the narration or, in the case of video, facial expressions, which are both used in this webtoon to some extent, this webtoon uses subtle cues such as these flowers to inform the audience what Persephone is feeling.

The last rhetorical element that I have discussed here is the use of the Ancient Greek language. Smythe uses Ancient Greek sparingly but poignantly in *Lore Olympus*, especially in the example of the κατάβασις that Persephone embarks on.

In most Ancient Greek works, a κατάβασις is a consensual act. Most of the character chose to enter the Underworld to complete some part of their quests. In the case of Persephone's κατάβασις in both the "Homeric Hymn to Demeter" and *Metamorphosis*, her κατάβασις is non-consensual. However, in *Lore Olympus*, Smythe shows Persephone making this κατάβασις on her own accord, choosing to willingly enter the underworld to save Hades. This is an act of reclamation in her story, a reclaiming of her agency and the start to Persephone's empowerment. Persephone's κατάβασις is taken from a non-consensual act that is passively forced on her to a consensual act where she is willingly choosing to enter the underworld and become it's queen.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Since webtoons cannot be analyzed using the exact methodologies that comics can be analyzed, I have drawn from methodologies in analyzing comics, an art-history analysis, and applied these methodologies to a digital scroll-type medium. Through my analysis, I have demonstrated a multimodal methodology for analyzing webtoons using comic analysis, color theory, digital humanities, and art history. I have used concepts such as line art, color, and framing from comic analysis methodologies as these present similarly in a webtoon. However, since webtoons are read vertically, this does not fit the left-to-right reading typical with most graphic novels and comics. While some scholars, such as Orlan, discuss the vertical scroll style of a computer screen, which can be applied to phone and tablet screens as well, much of the analysis of the aspects that vertical scrolling effects can also be analyzed by the comic and art history approaches.⁴³ An example of this is the scrolls discussed in chapter 3 that weave down as readers scroll. This is unique to vertical scroll-style media as this cannot be achieved with a comic strip (read left to right) or a graphic novel with multiple panels read left to right. The art-history approach used here focuses on colors, lines, and images in specific panels which have allowed me to focus on a select few images that convey the issue of consent within this webtoon instead of analyzing every episode.

Chapters 2 and 3 connect to the rhetoric of consent in two different ways. Chapter 2 shows a visual analysis of 4 specific panels, connecting bodies to consent. Each panel shows a different aspect connected to consent, such as voyeurism, agency, class systems, and objectification. Chapter three showcase 4 different symbols as metaphor throughout *Lore Olympus*, which shows how these metaphorical symbols are used metaphorically within the webtoon to convey abstract concepts such as trauma. Both chapters, however, do show how consent is viewed within the *Lore Olympus* world, with Chapter 2 being more about embodiment and the use of bodies in relation to consent and Chapter 3 focusing more on how these metaphors suggest consent is or is not given when these visual metaphors appear.

⁴³ See Orlan's "Potpourri" for his brief analysis of similarities between ancient scrolls and computer screens.

The four panels that I chose to analyze for chapter three show different aspects of consent. Three of the panels show Persephone in different environments and one panel depicts Minthe and her lower-class status as a nymph in the *Lore Olympus* world. The first panel shows Persephone pulling down her dress and verbally expressing her discomfort in the clothing that Artemis dressed her in. This outfit is much more revealing than Persephone's previous outfit and she appears to feel uncomfortable in it, which brings up questions such as who is dressing Persephone and how much agency does she possess? The second image shows the concept of voyeurism through an image of Persephone in her underwear during a private moment in the bathroom. The framing of the image is created to draw the reader's focus to Persephone's body and it removes her face from the image, causing her to be dehumanized. The third image is of Minthe as a car show girl, working to pay her rent. She is humiliated and objectified by Hades' brothers who steal her hat, resulting in her loss of pay for the day. Through this image and the narrative, readers learn that Minthe becomes Hades' secretary and readers learn more about the role of nymphs in *Lore Olympus*, usually as having jobs such as secretaries or sex workers. Readers also see Hades' inappropriate work relationships through this frame and Minthe's story as well. The last frame shows Persephone's post-pomegranate transformation as she prepares to battle Kronos. While she is dressed in a revealing, low-cut dress, she appears empowered. It also can be noted that no one forced Persephone to wear this dress, it appears she chose it herself.

Chapter three focuses on the rhetorical devices that are used to move the narration forward in this webtoon. These include the scrolls that intertwine throughout the panels to depict trauma. The three main colors for these scrolls, with black being the most common, depict multilevel trauma. This trauma can be physical, such as a cut, or emotional, such as when Persephone is struggling with the aftermath of sexual assault, her fear of letting her mother down, and other such fears. This color can be used for other characters besides Persephone, though it is most often associated with her in scenes such as her rape and when she begins to process her trauma as she goes to therapy. It can also be noted that in several panels where these black scrolls are shown, Persephone appears to dissociate, helping readers make the connection between trauma and these scrolls.

The purple scrolls are attached to Persephone's feelings about Apollo and her sexual assault. Readers can see this concept brought up in therapy as well when Persephone begins to discuss how she feels tethered to Apollo and unable to break herself free from that trauma.

The white scrolls are the least-used color out of them all, mainly showing up when Persephone is facing her trauma and creating a woven tree out of these white scrolls. Interestingly, this tree highly resembles the tree she created in the underworld on tower four in episode 143.

The next rhetorical device that was analyzed was the use of the evil eye. This appears on multiple occasions within the text, such as in episode six, where Persephone dreams that Demeter gives her a greenhouse and uses it as a way to keep her locked up and away from harm. It can also be seen before Persephone's battle with Kronos and when Hades takes Persephone to see the pomegranate tree. The evil eye is used often as a sign of foreshadowing that something negative is about to happen or to show uncomfortable emotions, such as when Persephone feels trapped by her mother's overprotective nature.

The use of flowers as a way to show Persephone's emotions is the third rhetorical device and strongly correlates with her powers. As the goddess of Spring, Persephone is in charge of helping with Spring growth. This is also a connection to the earlier versions of the story, where Persephone is lured to the underworld with a flower⁴⁴ or she is out picking flowers when she is taken.⁴⁵ In *Lore Olympus*, Persephone grows flowers on or around her head when she is experiencing emotions. She grows blue flowers when talking to Hades, reflecting his blue coloration. She also grows red vines when talking to Apollo after her rape, symbolizing her anger.

The last element that was analyzed in this paper was the use of the ancient Greek language within this webtoon. I examined three different places where Smythe incorporates Ancient Greek into this webtoon, the first being on Persephone and Hades' business cards. Both of their cards have their multiple names and epithets that can be found to refer to them in both Greek and Roman mythology. Both cards include their Greek names, their Roman names, and, in Persephone's case, her name "Kore" prior to her becoming Persephone. The second instance of Ancient Greek is seen after Persephone's near-death

⁴⁴ See "The Homeric Hymn to Demeter" for this version of the story.

⁴⁵ See *The Metamorphosis* by Ovid for this rendition.

experience in the underworld where Hades rescues her. The last instance of the Ancient Greek language being used in *Lore Olympus* is arguably the most interesting. When Persephone realizes Hades is in trouble, she embarks on a “κατάβασις” into the Underworld to save him. This idea of a “κατάβασις” can be seen in classical works, such as *The Odyssey*.

While *Lore Olympus* is a contemporary version of the taking of Persephone that allows the female protagonist agency and autonomy in most instances, there are main areas that Smythe’s retelling that falls short of a truly empowered character, as supported by this paper. Some of these include the creation of a class system that places nymphs in a lower class and does not allow them as much upward mobility, the voyeurism that many characters such as Persephone experience, and the verbal comments that are made by gods, such as inflicting blame on female characters for male thoughts and feelings. All of these aspects suggest that, though Persephone has more agency in this contemporary version of the story through her ability to choose her own path in becoming queen of the underworld, these aspects keep her and other female characters from truly having autonomy and make consent difficult in many of these situations.

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