

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter

By Devon Harlow & Jody Valentine

[Download Slides](#) | [Download Activities](#)

Introduction

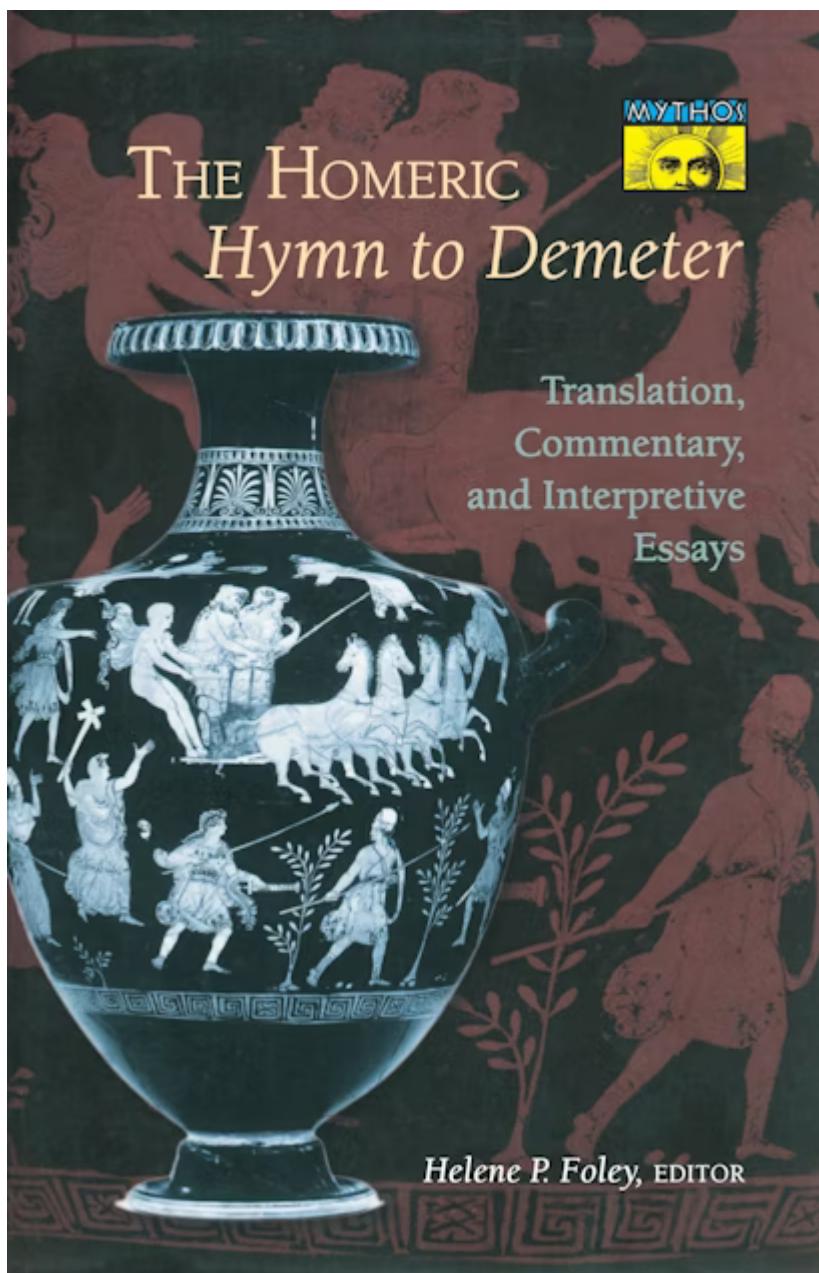
This module centers *the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as a literary text. We offer suggestions here for how to draw on the *HHD* for discussions about gender, family, and social practices in the archaic Greek world. We also share some possibilities for inviting students into imaginative engagement with the ritual context of the text.

The Homeric Hymn to Demeter may be unfamiliar in style for first-time readers, but is an approachable and compelling poem with rich symbolism and a clear, coherent narrative arc. The poem offers opportunities to study ancient Greek familial structures, marriage practices, and the Mediterranean agricultural season. It powerfully represents the mother-daughter relationship between Demeter and Persephone and shows several other Olympian divinities in action.



This module centers *the Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as a literary text. We offer suggestions here for how to draw on the *HHD* for discussions about gender, family, and social practices in the archaic Greek world. We also share some possibilities for inviting students into imaginative engagement with the ritual context of the text.

For further elaboration of the Eleusinian Mysteries and their connection with this poem, please see the [Eleusis Module <<add hyperlink>>].



Primary Sources:

We recommend Helene Foley's edited text and translation, which is available on **JSTOR** and in a **paperback print edition**:

Foley, Helene. 1994. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Secondary Sources:

Chandore, Allaire Brisbane. 1976. "The Attic Festivals of Demeter and Their Relation to the Agricultural Year." Ph.D., United States — Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania.

[https://www.proquest.com/docview/302816215/citation/DB188CC214FE4812PQ/1.](https://www.proquest.com/docview/302816215/citation/DB188CC214FE4812PQ/1)

Foley, Helene. 1994. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Foley, Helene P. 1994a. "Commentary on the Homeric Hymn to Demeter." In *The Homeric "Hymn to Demeter,"* edited by Helene P. Foley, STU-Student edition, 28-64. Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays. Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fgxdk.6>.

Katz, Marilyn Arthur. 1994. "Politics and Pomegranates Revisited: An Interpretation of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter." In *The Homeric "Hymn to Demeter,"* edited by Helene P. Foley, STU-Student edition, 212-42. Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays. Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fgxdk.13>.

Lorde, Audre. 1981. "The Uses of Anger." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, October. <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/wsq/509>.

Ortner, Sherry B. 2005. "Is Female to Nature as Male Is To Culture?" In *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press.

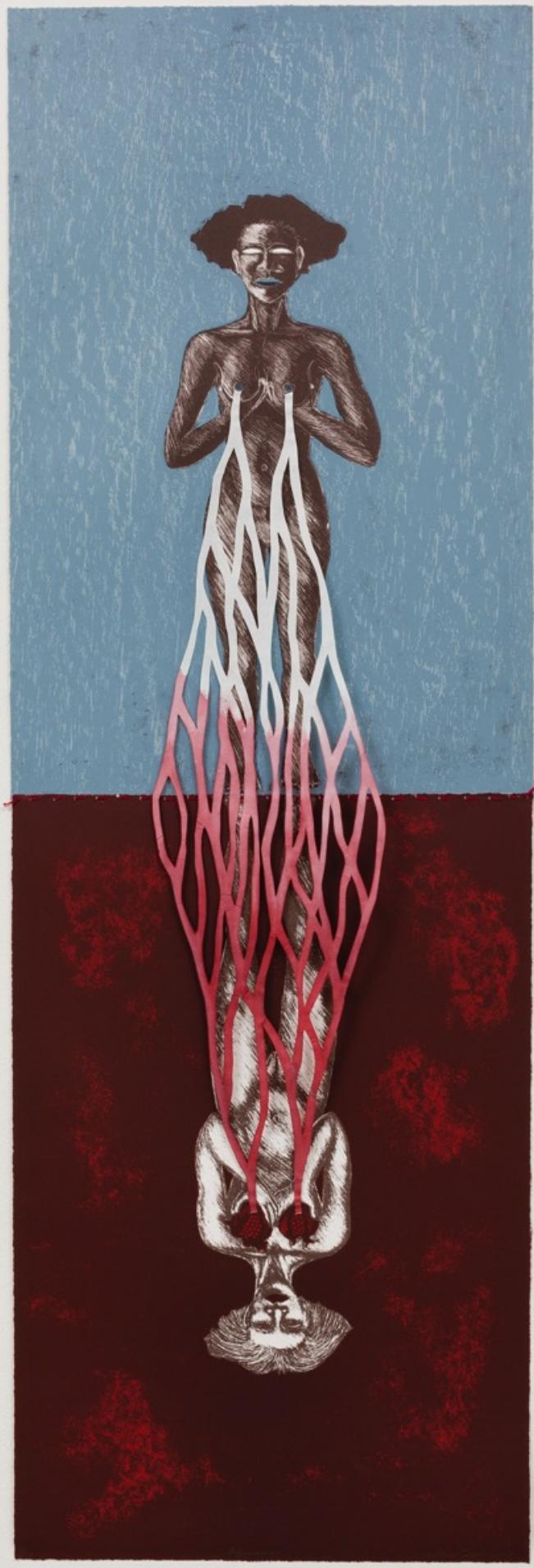
Resources:

Power-Point Presentations

To provide context for the *HHD*, here are two sets of slides with images from Eleusis: One, shorter, at [7 Slides](#), and one longer at [14 Slides](#).

Workshop

For robust student-centered discussion and engagement with the *HHD*, we developed this [Conceptual Workshop](#). For more info about this type of workshop, and a guide for creating your own, see Jody's Pressbook [Experimental Pedagogy](#) or Don FInkel's [Teaching With Your Mouth Shut](#).



Supplemental Materials:

Alison Saar's 2012 lithograph, *Equinox*, was created by the artist when her own daughter was leaving home for college.

The parallel that Saar makes between Demeter's loss of Persephone to marriage with Saar's separation from her daughter as she leaves for college resonates with the immediate experience of students and inspires them to connect with the poem and imagine their own creative responses to it.

This is a photograph of number 4/16 hand-sewn lithographs with collage on paper created by Saar at the Tamarind Institute in 2012 titled *Equinox*. It measures 48 1/4 x 16 1/16 in. (122.56 x 40.8 cm) in the permanent collection of the Pomona College Benton Museum of Art. Accession Number: P2015.3.1.

*I teach at Pomona College and have the privilege of bringing students into the museum's on-site storage to show them Saar's *Equinox* in person. I've also shown it as a slide in a large class. I invite students to study the lithograph closely and appreciate the materiality and image itself, noting Saar's use of indigo dye and how the diptych is stitched together, evoking craft practices (like quilting). In addition to interpreting how the piece refers to, and deviates from, the HHD, I also note its pro-Black feminism and evocative beauty. I personally love Saar's unapologetic foregrounding of breastmilk as a symbol of the embodied experience of motherhood. (Note that I am working on a publication on how Saar represents the HHD in this work.) I also suggest to students that the Homeric Hymn is a story available to them to reimagine and revitalize for themselves, in their own way and I give them a creative assignment that invites them to do just that.*

- JODY

Anasynthesis

Though centering the Roman era, this site provides a engaging 3-D model of the Telesterion and other elements of the site at Eleusis.

anasyntesis



In this way, a 3D reconstruction of this complex edifice fuels our perception of the scenery, because it offers actual viewpoints within an integral material structure, where anyone is free to place himself and try to unlock the Past.

