

VISITING THE UNDERGROUND

We're told that Persephone
had no choice but to return to Hades
every six months or so--
but she must have been able to negotiate,
after all, some winters are short,
others long.
Perhaps, she visited
for reasons other than
hierarchical compliance.
There may have been children
that bards, being men, forgot to mention,
or other less acceptable rationalizations.

Think of Aeneas, of Odysseus.
They merely journeyed down to seek advice--
happened to see a few relatives,
an old love--
gathered information and beat it out of there
faster than you could say
commitment.

The problem with the underground
is that it's interesting--
somehow familiar and alluring.
Persephone, up in her mother's green world
must have wondered how things were below.
How her husband's work progressed,
if he ever got new shoes,
whether he pined for her
or had replaced her with some new maiden.
The long term effects of pomegranate seeds
and the waters of Lethe probably blocked out
the memory of being snatched from above--
it's the only sensible explanation.

Yet, remember--
part of the year she became a queen--
one doesn't give power up easily.
On hard afternoons in the real world
a visit to the nether regions might almost
seem a return to sanctuary.
He ran Hades, after all;
Hades was not Hell.

Like Persephone,
I visit the underground--
the children most frequently bring me,
but I sometimes, forgetfully,

stumble back on my own,
looking for news of you.
After all, I loved you once,
and no legend contends that
the lord of the underworld was two-headed.

My mother claims that I am doomed,
that I am weak-willed,
and weak-willed women must serve indifferent men--
the children, the gods, decree it.
Not true.
I visit the underground
because I remember the Elysian fields
as well as I do Tartarus.
No. There's stronger truth yet.
I return to you
because I love the darkness.