CHAPTER 5

Who Are You?: Mythic Narrative and Identity in the "Orphic" Gold Tablets

RADCLIFFE E. EDMONDS

I am parched with thirst and I perish.
But give me to drink from the ever-flowing spring on the right, by the cypress.
"Who are you? Where are you from?"
I am the son of Earth and starry Heaven!

"Who are you?" ask the unnamed guardians, as the deceased begs for the water of Memory. "Where are you from?" From the discovery of the first gold lamellae in the nineteenth century to the most recent discoveries, scholars have asked much the same questions about the tablets themselves: Who are the people who chose to have these enigmatic scraps of gold foil buried with them in their graves? Where do these texts come from? How can we reconstruct the religious context of these mysterious texts?

Studies of the tablets have often sought to answer the "Who are you?" question by asking "Where are you from?"—trying to find the source of some of the elements that appear in the tablet texts in other recognizable contexts. Some scholars have concentrated on the deities involved—Mnemosyne, Persephone, or Dionysus—but all these deities appear in a variety of contexts. Since eschatology is one of the favored typologies for historians of religions, others have compared the eschatology revealed in the tablets to label them as Orphic and Bacchic, Egyptian and Pythagorean, or even Eleusinian. The texts, however, are frustratingly vague about the eschatological rewards imagined for the deceased. From Dietrich to West to the most recent study by Merkelbach,² scholars have sought to construct a stemma of influence that limits the use of these mythic elements to certain contexts, like errors passed down in a manuscript tradition, rather than accepting them as options within a larger mythic tradition that a poet,
religious specialist, philosopher, or any other bricoleur could employ in a wide variety of contexts within Greek culture.

Whereas some editors of the tablets' texts tended to seek the Urtext behind the variants, be it an "Orphic" katabasis poem or a Pythagorean Book of the Dead, other scholars have sought the origins of the texts in ritual, trying to reconstruct a lost ritual context. Graf has examined the tablets from a ritual perspective, concluding that an initiatory context is more likely than a funerary one, and recent studies by Riedweg and Calame have examined the texts of the tablets from a semiotic or narratological perspective, trying to identify the ritual contexts in which the words might have been uttered. All these approaches concentrate on discovering where the tablets' texts are from, seeking the source of the text as the answer to its identity. Rather than trying to place the scene enunciated in the tablets within a hypothetical ritual or to trace the verses back to a lost canonical text, I think it better to focus instead upon the narrative created by the verses, examining how this narrative structure can help us figure out who and what these tablets are.

I argue that analyzing the gold tablets as narratives of a journey to the underworld brings out significant contrasts with other tellings of the journey, contrasts that show what social and religious ideas were most important to the creators of the tablets. A narrative, particularly a mythic narrative that draws on a rich tradition of familiar elements and patterns, can convey more information in compact form about where a text came from and who produced it than a non-narrative text. Not only are the traditional elements evocative of associations beyond their simple meaning, but their deployment and elaboration within the structure of the narrative can also convey meaning to the audience. In contrast to gold tablets that are simply blank or contain only the name of the deceased or a dedication "To Persephone and Plouton," some of these tablets evoke a narrative; they present a piece of the story of the deceased's journey to the underworld and her encounter with the powers there. The verses present a sequence of actions by a character (the deceased) who interacts with other characters in a determined temporal setting. To be sure, the story on the tablets is evocative rather than exhaustive; it presents a brief glimpse of the action rather than an elaborated whole. Nevertheless, the basic narrative sequence is clear and familiar: the deceased leaves the world of the living and journeys to the realm of the dead.

In this chapter, I analyze the relative importance of structural components of the narrative: the obstacle the deceased faces, the solution that allows her to bypass the obstacle, and the result she obtains. I also compare the selection of certain traditional mythic elements for these components.
to the selections made in other myths of the journey to the underworld. The results of this analysis can provide a better answer to the question “Who are you?” than any hypotheses based on the search for the origins of the text. The tablets articulate the identity of the deceased as someone who stands out from the mainstream of society, marked by her special qualifications of divine lineage and religious purity. Such a concern with religious purity and the rejection of normal means of identification within human society, such as family, city, or occupation, locates the deceased within the countercultural religious currents that provided an alternative to normal polis religion.

A narrative “dramatizes values,” showing through the course of its tale what, from the perspective of the narrator, is important or good and what is useless or bad. The dramatized values presented by a narrative can help the scholar understand the religious and social context in which the narrative was created. Both the general story patterns and the individual elements or motifs within them may carry resonances and complex associations for the tale’s audience, especially a tale that is part of a mythic tradition, like the journey to the underworld. Moreover, both the selection and deployment of particular elements and the emphasis on or elaboration of certain sections of the narrative indicate the creator’s ideas in the narrative. This is not to say that the tablets without narratives may not have come from precisely the same religious contexts as the ones that evoke a narrative, merely that these tablets do not provide enough information for us to tell whence they came. Even a partial narrative can convey more meaning to its audience than a label, especially when the narrative pattern is as familiar as a journey to the underworld.

A journey to the underworld is a passage from one location to another, but that does not necessarily make it a rite of passage, much less an initiation ritual. While any tale of a journey could be divided up according to van Gennep’s schema of separation, liminality, and re-aggregation, his analytic tool for making sense of rituals of passage is not necessarily the one best suited for understanding a narrative. The traditional elements employed may be the same, but the structure of a narrative is different from that of a ritual. To be sure, a ritual can include the recitation of a narrative, but it is unnecessary to imagine a ritual context in which a narrative is being performed and then to analyze the hypothetical ritual. To glean the information about the context that is embedded within the structure of the narrative (even if that narrative should actually happen to have been recounted during a ritual), a narrative analysis is most useful.

My analysis of these tablets considers three crucial aspects of the narratives in the tablets: the obstacle that the deceased faces in her journey
to the underworld, the solution provided by the tablet that enables her to overcome or bypass the obstacle, and the result that the deceased hopes to obtain. While this strategy draws on the analysis of structural elements similar to Propp's morphemes, I suggest that a simpler division of the narrative into a complex of obstacle, solution, and result proves more fruitful than Propp's elaborate schema devised for the specifics of the Russian folktale, which Scalera McClointock has employed to analyze the tablet. It should be stressed that this complex of obstacle-solution-result is not, in itself, a traditional story pattern whose meaning I am attempting to determine. Rather, the obstacle-solution-result complex serves as an analytic tool for breaking the narrative up into manageable pieces, for carving it up at the joints of the narrative action, the better to see how the creator of the narrative has constructed the story. In my analysis, I shall look first at the specific choices of traditional elements the creator of the narrative has selected for each of these structural components, and then at the emphasis within the structure on one component or another. The selection of particular elements shows the specific ideas important to the creator of the tablet, whereas the choice to elaborate on certain sections while abbreviating others reflects their relative importance. As a representative example of this kind of analysis, I shall examine the particular details in the tablets A1, A2, and A3 from Thuria, although I shall make some reference to the other "Orphic" tablets as well.

The selection of a particular traditional motif to fill the slot within a structure that is itself familiar from the mythic tradition determines the focus and meaning of any given telling of a traditional tale. One vital aspect missing from Scalera McClointock's (and indeed from Propp's) morphological approach is the comparison of the particular texts with structurally similar narratives, noting the substitution of morphemes within the structure. The significance of an individual text is to be found precisely in such selection and substitution of morphemes. The choices of the obstacle the deceased must overcome, the solution that permits her to overcome that obstacle successfully, and the result she obtains, all provide information about the religious ideas of those who composed the narrative on the tablets, that is, they help answer the questions of who they were and where they were from.

In these tablets, the obstacle is always a confrontation with the goddess "Pherephoneia," the Queen of the Underworld. The deceased has an audience with the dread queen as a suppliant or petitioner seeking the favor of the ruler; the encounter is not a hostile confrontation, nor even a judgment and trial. The obstacle that challenges this traveler is not some
physical barrier that literally obstructs the journey, like the river Ocean that Odysseus must cross, or even the river Styx that blocks the journey of Patroklos. The deceased in these tablets is not at a loss for which path to take or in danger of losing her way in the darkness of Hades, as she is in some of the longer tablets of the B series, nor is she confronted with the crossroads that appears in some of the Platonic myths. Other barriers, the traveler could face might be walls or gates that block her progress, or the guardians posted at these barriers. In other stories, the guardians that bar the way range from doorkeepers or ferrymen to horrific monsters like Cerberus or Empousa. By contrast, the deceased in the Thurii tablets goes straight to the ruler of the underworld herself, unchecked by any threatening watchdogs or other barriers.

The deceased arrives as a supplicant to a presumably favorable ruler, not as a prisoner coming to judgment, where the past deeds of the deceased are weighed by special judges who lay down sentences of appropriate punishment or reward. Instead, like Orpheus before Persephone or like Odysseus coming as a supplicant to Arête in Phaenissia, the deceased must win the favor of the ruler of the realm in which she finds herself. Thus, the obstacle is Persephone as the queen of the underworld, a goddess who in Magna Grecia appears as the supreme power in the realm of the dead, a figure with kourotrophic aspects as goddess of marriage and children, a deity who is very different from the more familiar Kore of the Eleusinian mysteries.

The type of solution is, obviously, linked to the particular choice of obstacle in the narrative. To overcome the physical barriers of distance or bodies of water, some sort of magical means of crossing otherwise un-crossable distances must be supplied, be it the golden cup of the sun for Herakles or simply Odysseus’ normal ship with a divinely aided wind. A monstrous guardian must often be fought and conquered, whereas a doorkeeper or ferrymen may be paid off or placated. If, as in the tablets, the obstacle is the need to win the favor of the goddess Persephone, heroically violent solutions appropriate to taming Cerberus will not work, and the deceased in the tablets has no need of an arduous journey to Hades, having come by the swift passage of death. We may note that even Herakles is sometimes depicted as relying not on his famous strength, but on the favor with Persephone that his initiation at Eleusis brings. Likewise, the deceased in the tablets relies on special qualifications to win favor with the queen of the underworld. Her solution to the obstacle is the proclamation of her identity, which fills the majority of the lines on these tablets from Thurii. The declaration of identity is similarly the most prominent
feature on the Pelinna tablets and the B tablets, although the longer B tablets do include another obstacle, the choice of paths, which occupies some of the narrative.

The statement of identity, this formula of self-definition so central to the gold tablets, is composed of a number of important elements, each of which provides information for modern scholars seeking to understand the people who created the tablets. Our example of the A tablets contains claims both to ritual purity and to divine lineage, self-identifications that set the deceased in opposition to the ordinary ways of defining identity, such as familial descent and heroic action. The Pelinna tablets, however, claim only special ritual status, whereas the B tablets concentrate wholly on the claim to divine lineage.

"Pure I come from the pure," claims the deceased in tablets A1–3. Not only has the deceased herself attained purity, but she comes from a lineage that is also pure. In tablets A2 and A3, the deceased further claims to have paid the penalty for unjust deeds. This line does not, as some scholars continue to argue, refer to the supposed "original sin" of the Orphics, the murder of Dionysos Zagreus by the Titans, since this idea of "original sin" was, in fact, fabricated by turn-of-the-century scholarship in the wake of the discovery of the Thracian tablets. Rather, as the ancient evidence shows, these unjust deeds could have been committed either by the deceased herself or by some of her ancestors, since the anxiety about bad things happening to good people because of unknown crimes perpetrated by one's ancestors recurs in ancient Greek thought from the tragedies of Aeschylus to the History of Herodotus and beyond. Ritual purification could be found from a number of sources to wipe away these stains, and the deceased on the tablets claims to have successfully atoned for any misdeeds.

The claim to have been struck by lightning may also be a claim to a special sanctification by the purifying bolt of Zeus. While the lightning bolt could be a punishment for wrongdoers like the Titans and Typhon, heroes such as Asclepius, Herakles, and even Semele were also punished for the unjust deeds of their mortal life and raised to divine status by the lightning strike. The traditional tales of all of these heroes provide a model for those undergoing the same process of heroization, a purification through the fire of the lightning bolt, which simultaneously strip them of their mortal impurities and translate them to the realm of the immortals. Thus, the claim, on A2 and A3, to have paid the penalty for unjust deeds may be a further explanation of the claim, on all three tablets, to have been mastered by Fate and the lightning bolt.
These claims—to have paid the penalty, to have been struck by lightning, and to come pure from the pure—all show a concern with purity characteristic of the religious movements that arose as a counter-culture to the mainstream polis life and religion. The claim, then, to have come from the pure seems most likely to refer not to the actual parentage of the deceased, but to her ritual predecessors. The ritual genealogy thus replaces the polis-centered family lines as the efficacy of the purification becomes more important for determining one's place in the cosmos than the ordinary distinctions of gender, family, clan, or polis. The claim to superior status by these groups, on the grounds of the purity of their life, served to compensate for their dissatisfaction with their status within the social order.

In the Thurii tablets, the deceased indeed claims genealogical connection with Persephone herself, with the race of the gods: "For I also claim that I am of your blessed race." Such a claim by a mortal when addressing Persephone is unlikely to be a reference to a myth of human descent from the Titans, which indeed would be counterproductive in the situation. Rather, like the claim to be a child of Earth and starry Heaven on the B tablets, it indicates that the deceased considers herself a part of the family of the gods, a member of the divine community. This kind of self-identification stakes a claim that transcends the genealogical claims of her contemporary political world; it employs the familiar mythic element of descent from some divine ancestor, not to support the prestige of an aristocratic family in the competitions within the locative order of the polis, but rather to recall a mythical communion of gods and mortals like that of the Hesiodic golden race. The deceased in the tablet does not identify herself as so-and-so, daughter of so-and-so, that is, as a part of one of the lineages that define the places of all the ordinary people in the human world, but rather as part of a divine order that transcends the vicissitudes of mortal life.

The Thurii tablets proclaim that the deceased is pure and of the race of the gods. This concern with genealogy and identity shows the mode of protest adopted by the creators of these A tablets, a rejection to some degree of the socio-political hierarchy of the polis centered on the aristocratic families. The composers of the gold tablets employ the language of myth, drawing on a variety of mythical elements familiar from the tradition to communicate the important facets of the deceased's identity. The solution offered to the obstacle of the confrontation with Persephone in these tablets is a self-identification composed of claims that identify the deceased as an extraordinary person, one who not only is ritually pure, but
who also stands in a special relation with the gods, a relation that enables her to status and treatment in the afterlife far beyond that of her position in the mundane world of the living.

The result, the afterlife in the underworld to which the deceased claims to be entitled, is, however, never spelled out in great detail, and the eschatological indications vary even within the Thurii tablets. Tablets A 2 and A 3 ask Persephone to send the deceased to the seats of the blessed, a locale where those who have been made pure and holy dwell apart from the unpurified. Tablet A 1, however, makes no reference to a place, but rather proclaims the apotheosis of the deceased: a god you shall be instead of a mortal. Before this transformation, the deceased claims, she has fled from the circle of wearying heavy grief to reach the desired crown and pass beneath the bosom of Persephone herself. This process could be either an escape from the grievous circle of mortal life or an escape from a cycle of reincarnations, but, in either case, the line represents a rejection of the importance of earthly life in comparison to the afterlife, whether that earthly life is envisaged as occurring once only or multiple times before the individual can escape from it. The end results seem to be the desired crown and the bosom of Persephone, although the significance of the latter has been much debated. Persephone here seems to be imagined in a kourothrophic role, receiving the deceased like a newborn to her bosom, and the mysterious line, "A kid I fall into milk," may signify that the deceased is thought to suckle at the breasts of Persephone as part of her rebirth into divine status, just as Herakles suckled at the breast of Hera. The tablet, in any case, does not make clear whether the deceased's welcome by Persephone into the new status of divinity is a permanent escape from the circle of grief or merely a respite. All of these eschatological motifs appear in a variety of other contexts in the mythic tradition, and the details of the results are insufficient to use the eschatology implied in the tablets to pinpoint any particular religious context, be it Pythagorean (because of the hints of reincarnation) or Eleusinian or "Orphic."

The very uncertainty of the eschatological vision in the tablets is indicative of the emphasis in the tablets on the solution rather than the result of the encounter. This focus on the solution stands in contrast to other tellings of the journey to the underworld. Particularly in a medium, gold leaf, in which every extra word included takes up space that is literally valuable, the choice to expand upon one section rather than another is significant. The structure and elaboration of the narratives themselves can convey information about the context of production, and the focus in all the tablets is not upon the obstacle the deceased faces or the result she obtains, but rather upon the solution by which she overcomes the obstacle.
Some texts elaborate the result, the heavenly pleasures or hellish torments that the traveler to the underworld experiences. While a few myths of the journey to the otherworld describe the delights awaiting the worthy, more often the gruesome tortures in store for all the wicked dominate narratives that describe the life in the afterlife. Often these otherworldly torments or bliss are compensatory for the failure of justice in this world, although Plato, in particular, sometimes has more complex purposes in mind. In any case, such an emphasis on the result signals the cosmological or theological interests of the creator of the text, who wants to illustrate the nature of the cosmos and the powers that rule it by this juxtaposition of a description of the otherworld with the familiar world of the audience of the text.

Other texts focus on the obstacle, how horrible or mighty it is and how great the power or effort needed to overcome it. A description of the obstacle creates suspense in the plot of the story, building the narrative tension to be released by the hero’s successful solution. With each gruesome detail about Cerberus, the question arises, will even Herakles be able to handle the beast? And then, when he does wrestle the beast down, his heroic status is even more greatly magnified. Such a telling sets the ground for a solution that involves heroic, clever, or courageous action on the part of the protagonist, an effort or activity commensurate with the magnitude of the obstacle.

By contrast, a tale that puts little emphasis on the obstacle creates no suspense about the outcome of the protagonist’s confrontation with the obstacle. The conclusion to the narrative is foregone; the only point of interest is in the precise details of the solution that brought it about. The narrative evoked in the tablets focuses upon the declaration of identity, whether that self-definition is the “pure I come from the pure” of the A tablets or the “I am the child of Earth and starry Heaven” of the B series. The guardians in the B tablets are nameless and featureless, and even Persephone in the A tablets is invoked with a minimum of epithets, in contrast to other hymns and prayers. In the shorter B tablets, the obstacle is indicated only by the questions: “Who are you? Where are you from?” No suspense arises, because the whole point of the narrative is that the deceased will have no trouble overcoming the obstacle. She need do nothing beyond proclaim her identity; she is defined by her own statements, not by her actions within the plot.

Because this definition of identity is a self-definition, it highlights all the more clearly what the deceased considers important in life: not aristocratic lineage but divine lineage, not heroic action but ritual purity. The deceased need not boast of her achievements in the competitive excel-
lences, the aretai by which the hero might win kleos apthitont, immortal glory, in overcoming dreadful obstacles. She relies instead on the virtues of justice and purity to link her to immortality; these are the qualities that distinguish her from others. Moreover, it is the contrast itself, not the result of that contrast, that occupies her attention. Whereas Plato refers to those who contrast their own afterlife of everlasting drunkenness with those who will lie wretchedly in the filth, the tablets make such an eschatological vision secondary to the essential contrast of identity: what will happen to the deceased in the afterlife is less important than who they are. The qualities of the deceased—ritual purity, divine lineages—are, after all, truly important, more important than the marks of status that might normally be recorded in a grave—family name, profession, etc. Of course, all these ways of defining oneself are meaningful not only after death, but during life as well, so the claim to superiority is just as valid in this life as in the next, even if the exceptional qualities are not given the recognition and reward by mainstream society that they deserve.

The observation that distinguishing herself from others, both in life and after, is of prime importance to the deceased helps us characterize the nature of the religious group that produced the tablets, even if the evidence is insufficient to allow us to specify which of the various religious cults we know about might have produced the tablets. The chorus of initiates in Euripides’ Cretaeus proclaim their purity in similar ways, and the bebacchemens at Cumae, who claim that it is not right that any but they be buried in the cemetery, seem to have a similar emphasis on their difference from others, in contrast, for example, to what we know of ritual maenadic cult (although the fact that the woman at Pelinna was buried with a statuette of a maenad indicates the complexities involved). If we think of Theseus’ condemnation of Hippolytus in Euripides, I think we may see a parallel case of a type who hold themselves apart from the mainstream of society, not necessarily by physical separation, but by a superior attitude and disdain for the ways of the ordinary. Like Hippolytus, they make a claim to special purity and special connections with the gods that have priority over the normal connections of family and society. Theseus associates such folk with Orpheus, and the orphikos bios and orphoetelestai are linked in our sources with extraordinary purity, out of the ordinary in either a positive or a negative sense.

An association with Orpheus indicated no specific doctrine or eschatology; rather, I would argue, it was a way for the ancient Greeks to label the extraordinary in the religious tradition, from the prestigious Eleusinian mysteries to innovative cosmologies to the itinerant charlatans who took advantage of the superstitious. Whether or not the people who pro-
duced the gold tablets claimed any authority from Orpheus, the tablets themselves may have been seen as "Orphic" in such terms. Such a label must be used with caution in modern scholarship, however, since (like the word "magic") the word "Orphic" has suffered much abuse in the past century, being used to evoke a particular set of doctrines of original sin and redemption that have little to do with ancient Greek religion and a great deal to do with the debates over the origins of Christian doctrine among historians of religions. With cautionary quotes, however, the term "Orphic" may be used to indicate the nature of religious cults such as those that produced the gold tablets, groups to whom the difference between themselves and the common herd was of primary importance, who emphasized their ritual purity and special divine connections over other qualifications more valued by the mainstream society. These "Orphic," then, whatever they may have called themselves—hoin katharoi, the pure, or asterioi, the children of Earth and starry Heaven—left traces in the narratives evoked by the gold tablets of what their most important religious ideas were.

The specific choices of obstacle, solution, and result in the mythic narrative provide information about the particular nature of the religious group that produced each tablet. The scattered hints of eschatology, however, remain secondary to the importance of self-definition, and the various types of tablet all offer different results that await the deceased. The A tablets and the Pelinna tablets all have confrontation with Persephone as the obstacle, whereas the B tablets have guardians, but the basic type of obstacle is nevertheless the same. Still, the preeminence of Persephone in the Thurii tablets stands in contrast to the important role of Dionysos Bacchios in the Pelinna tablets, and to the absence of either in the B tablets. Although the solutions in the tablets are all types of self-definition, the contrast between the Pelinna tablets' focus on the ritual experience (Bacchios has set you free) and the B tablets' emphasis on the divine lineage no doubt reflects differences in the specific religious contexts that produced these different sets of tablets. The differing answers in the tablets to the question "Who are you?" posed by the underworld power can help us, as modern scholars, reconstruct who they were.

Notes

1. Gold Tablet from Crete (B4): δίψαμι ἀδός ἐγώ καὶ ἀπόλλυμι· ἀλλὰ παῖς(μ) μοι κράνας αἰειρω ἐπὶ δεξα, τῇ κυφάριζος. Τις δὲ ἐξ τῶν δὲ ἀπομνικύρια ἁμι καὶ ἰρανα ἀνερδέντος.
4. In addition to the twenty tablets with sizable inscriptions, a number of other tablets have been found, either uninscribed or with a line or two containing the name of the deceased and a salutation to the powers of the underworld. Cf. the Pella tablet inscribed with the lines Φεραφόνη Ποσείδην μόστης εὐσεβῆς, and another that simply has the name of the deceased, Φολοξέα. The discovery of fifteen other graves with tablets in the mouths of the deceased has been announced, but the tablets have not been published. At Aigion, three tablets have been found inscribed Δέκλανος μώστας Φολον μώστας and, simply, μώστας. In Macedonian Methone, a tablet was found in the mouth of the deceased, inscribed with her name, Φολομάγα. See Dickie 1995. Guarducci 1965b mentions another tablet found in Crete, (Πλούτος καὶ Θεό)οποίει γάρ. Riedweg 1998 mentions a few other tablets, some of which are silver, rather than gold. The Phaistos gold tablet is a more difficult case, since some of the lines could be read as a narrative: Εὖ θεός λαμπόντας ἀπό τοῦ γὰρ ὥστε γάρ. “Enter the sacred meadow; for the initiate is without penalty.” The narrative elements these two lines offer, however, yield little information in comparison with the narratives evoked by the other tablets.

5. For an expanded version of this discussion, see ch. 2 of Edmonds 2004, from which I have distilled the bulk of this analysis.


7. See Scalera McClintock 1991. Such a morphological approach seems useful, but I think that Propp’s sequence itself is not necessary. Scalera McClintock’s Proppian morphology is, not surprisingly, better suited to Propp’s folktales than to the tablet texts. Although function D (the hero is tested or interrogated) could be seen as present in all the texts (explicitly in the B tablets, implicitly in A and P), the acquisition of a magical object (F or Z) only occurs in the B’s. Moreover, the transference between kingdoms (G or R) is the final result of the tablets’ narrative, instead of an instrumental step along the way. Rather than selecting a few of Propp’s wonder-tale elements, one may identify more generally useful categories of elements, basic components of a tale of the journey to the underworld.

8. Cf. Plato’s Phaedrus 250e. While Dundes’ or Greimas’ bipartite structures could likewise be considered analytic tools that divide the tale into the problem and the resolution of the problem (cf. the use of Greimas in Riedweg 1998), I find that separating the solution to the problem from the final result provides a more comprehensive understanding of the teller’s manipulations of the mythic elements. I use the somewhat awkward term “creator of the narrative” because it is by no means certain, or even likely, that the individual who composed the verses is the same as the one who inscribed the verses on any given tablet. Moreover, in the light of the kind of scribal errors found on many of the tablets, it is quite likely that often the inscriber had no idea of the nature of the text he was inscribing. To further complicate matters, we cannot tell if the person who decided to have the text inscribed was the deceased herself or merely a helpful relative. We are left with the possibility that the deceased had no knowledge of what was put in her grave, but that some relative went to a local craftsman and asked for “one of those Orphic amulets,” which the craftsman copied from a perhaps illegible template. Nevertheless, we can draw conclusions about the person who created the narrative that was eventually inscribed; and the variations between tablets, particularly in the A series, suggest that the content was significant enough that the tablets were crafted for individuals (although A3 is probably just a copy of A2).
9. The water barrier takes various forms in the Greek tradition. The river that Odysseus must cross to reach the realm of the dead is the “river” Ocean (Od. 10.508, 11.11-19), while in the Iliad, Patroklos complains that he cannot cross the river Styx until his body is buried:

θάπτε μὲ ὅτι τάχυτα πόλας Ἀδαιο περῆσον.
τιμὲ μὲ εὔροσις ψυχήν εἰδωλα καμότον, οὐδὲ μὲ πω μίσωσθαι ὑπὲρ ποταμοῦ ἐώσιν,
ἄλλ' αὐτός ἀλάσημαι ἀν' εὔροσις Ἀδαιὸ δί̄.
καὶ μοι δὸς τὴν χεῖρ- ἀλαλόρομαι, οὐ γὰρ ἐγ' αὐτὸς
νίσῃμαι ἐξ Ἀδαιο, ἐπὴ μὲ πυρὸς λελάχητε. II. 23.70-76 (trans. Lattimore)

Bury me as quickly as may be, let me pass through the gates of Hades. The souls, the images of dead men, hold me at a distance, and will not let me cross the river and mingle among them, but I wander as I am by Hades’ house of the wide gates. And I call upon you in sorrow, give me your hand; no longer shall I come back from death, once you give me my rite of burning.

In Iliad 8.369, Athena mentions how she helped Herakles cross the river Styx to get the hellhound.

10. As early as Hesiod, dangerous guardians appear at the gates of the house of Hades:

...ἀμήχανος, οὐ τι φατεόν
Κέρβερον ἀμαρτητην, Ἀδαιον καιρα χαλκέωσων,
πεντηκοντάκεφαλον, ἐνάκηθα τε
κρατερόν τε. . . .
...δενός δε κράσων προπαραθεὶς εὐλάβων
νυμφαίης τέχνην δε κακήν ἔχων εἰ πιὸν ἱοντας
σαινε ὑμοι ὀφθαλμοὶ τε και ὕπατον αὐτοτρόπουν,
εὔκληθε δ' οὐκ αὐτοί ἵππον, ἀλλὰ δοκεέων
ἐστιν, οὐ κελάθησαι πλεύνων εκποτεθήντα ἱοντα
ληθοῦ τ' Ἀδαιο και ἱππην Περσεφονῆς. (Theog. 310-312, 769-774)

A monster not to be overcome and that may not be described, Cerberus who eats raw flesh, the brazen-voiced hound of Hades, fifty-headed, relentless and strong. . . A fearful hound guards the house in front, pitiless, and he has a cruel trick. On those who go in he fawns with his tail and both his ears, but sufferers them not to go back out again, but keeps watch and devours whomever he catches going out of the gates of strong Hades and awful Persephone.

The monstrous figure of Cerberus, three-headed watchdog of Hades, appears regularly in the Apulian vase underworld scenes. Cf. Empousa (whose very name signals her impeding role) in Aristophanes Frogs 289-304, or the gorgon that Odysseus fears in Homer’s Nekyia, Od. 11.633-635.

11. The first references to the actual process of judgment come in Pindar’s second Olympian, where the “wicked souls straightaway pay the penalty and some judge beneath the earth judges the crimes committed in this realm of Zeus, having
delivered the strict account in accord with the harsh order of things" (οὗτός ἀπόλλυμι φρένες ποινάς ἔτεισαν, τά δ' ἐν τῷ Ἀδώνι ἄρχοντα κατὰ γάς δικαίως τις ἐξ ὑπῆρξε λόγον φράσσας ἀνάγκας; Pindar O. 2.57–60). Although the judge is unspecified in Pindar, Aeschylus makes Hades the judge of mortals when they come to his realm: "Hades calls men to reckoning there under the ground" (μέγας γὰρ Ἀδώνι ἐστὶν ἐβοῦλος βροτῶν ἐνερήθε χθόνος Eum. 273–274). In the *Suppliants*, this judge is referred to as κάθε δικαίως τ᾽ ἀμπλακημαθ᾽, ὡς λόγος, Ζεὺς ἄλλος ἐν καμίνιν ιστάτας δίκας, "Another Zeus among the dead [who] works out their final punishment" (Supp. 230–231; all translations by Lattimore). Although facing the judges plays a small part of the soul's journey to the underworld in the *Phaedo* (107d–114d) and the *Republic* (614b–621d), Plato elaborates the description of judges in the *Gorgias* myth (523a–527a).


“Queen Arete,” he exclaimed, “daughter of great Rhektor, in my distress I humbly pray you, as also your husband and these your guests (whom may heaven prosper with long life and happiness, and may they leave their possessions to their children, and all the honors conferred upon them by the state), to help me home to my own country, as soon as possible, for I have been long in trouble and away from my friends.”

13. As Sourvinou-Inwood notes, “Persephone’s personality at Locri includes some of the aspects which characterize her Panhellenic personality, but without the close association with Demeter. Moreover, it contains some other functions not associated with her elsewhere: she presided over the world of women, with special reference to the protection of marriage and the rearing of children, that is of those female activities that were most important for the life of the polis” (Sourvinou-Inwood 1997: 145–188, 180). Cf. T. Price (1978: 172), who sees the *pinalikes* with Persephone and an infant in a basket as dedications by mothers for Persephone’s protection of their children. Cf. also Musti (1984: 71–72) on the relations between the Panhellenic aspects of Persephone and her personae at Eleusis and in Magna Graecia: “Abbiamo insomma nell’ insieme 1) un complesso di credenze sull’olotethoma; 2) aspetti di religiosità agraria; 3) motivi ierogamici, tutti presenti in questa ‘massa’ di nozioni e rappresentazione religiosa; questa ‘massa’ assume tuttavia un’assialità diversa nei diversi luoghi, per ciò che attiene al contenuto ed alla funzione stessa dell’espressione religiosa. Ad Eleusi prevalgono in definitiva gli aspetti della religiosità agraria, accanto ad esigenze di purificazione individuale attinenti a speranze ultraterrene (z–2); a Locri prevale Persefone (ce l’ha ribadito, da un lato, ed anche approfondito, dall’altro, Torelli nella sua rela-
zione al convegno 1976 su Locri) e l’aspetto della ierogamia, fortemente simbolico dell’istituto storico e sociale del matrimonio local (1–3); nei testi orfici prevale la prospettiva dell’oltretomba (1).

14. Herakles, not being the sailor that Odysseus is, crosses the Ocean to the otherworld of Geryon by commandeering the golden cup of the sun (Stesichorus 185 PMG; Pheræcydes FGrH 1.18; cf. Athenaeus 11.469e, 470c, 781d; Eustathius Od. 1652a.23).

15. Cf. Elpenor’s journey, swifter than Odysseus’ ship in Od. 11.57–98. In Aristophanes’ Frogs, Dionysos and Herakles joke about routes to the underworld. Herakles and Dionysos play with the descriptions of methods of self-slaughter, using different metaphors of travel (πνευματα); thus, the way of hanging is stiffening (πνευματα); taking hemlock—ground by mortar and pestle—is a well-beaten shortcut (ἀρταιος ζύντομος τετραμελης), but too cold and numbing (ψυχαν γε και δυσχειμερον), while jumping off a building is a short, quick, downhill path (ταχειαν και καταγειν). All these suggested routes are rejected by Dionysos, who wants a path neither too warm nor too cold (μητε θερμωτα χειμωνως), but the traditional journey that Herakles took.

16. Herakles’ journey is alluded to in many sources, beginning with Homer, but the earliest full telling of a story survives is not found until Apollodorus 2.5.12; cf. Il. 8.367–368; Od. 11.623–626; Bacch. 5.56–79; Eur. Hf 23, 1277; Pindar fr. 2.49a SM; Pausanias 2.31.6, 2.35.10, 3.18.11, 3.35.5, 5.2.6.7, 9.34.5; Diod. Sic. 4.25.1, 4.26.1. Cerberus is Herakles’ objective in his journey to the halls of Hades, and, in many versions, Herakles must fight to get the dog. The Iliad’s references (5.395ff.) to the fight at the gates of Hades, in which Herakles wounds himself, allude to this episode, as do a number of vase illustrations showing conflict between Herakles and Hades and/or Cerberus (LIMC 3.7). Herakles 2555, 2559, 2566, 2567, 2570, 2581–2582, 2584, 2586, 2605, 2608. In some versions, Herakles undergoes initiation in the Eleusinian mysteries before he descends, and Herakles’ mention in Euripides’ Herakles (610ff.) implies that his task was aided by his initiation. (Cf. Plut. Thes. 33; Diod. Sic. 4.14.2, 225ff.; Schol. on Aristoph. Plutus 845; Apollodorus 2.5.12. According to the pseudo-Platonic Axiochus [371e], both Dionysos and Herakles were initiated before their descents.) Boardman (1975: 3–10) suggests that the shift in the mode of telling is due to the introduction of Herakles as the archetypal initiate at Eleusis in the Lesser Mysteries and lists a number of vase illustrations (cf. LIMC, s.v Herakles 2554–2558, 2562, 2574, 2592, 2599, 2600, 2602, 2607).

17. See the arguments in Edmonds 1999 and 2008b for a full discussion.

18. Solon assures the wicked that even if they do not pay for their crimes in their lifetime, their descendants will pay (ἀνατελει ξαφανειας να παθαις τοις μετα της ανομον, fr. 1.31). While the affliction of an entire family line for such crimes as murder and perjury goes back to Homer and Hesiod, the tales of the punishment of an entire family as retribution for the murder of a family member, incest, or cannibalism become a favorite subject in tragedy: Solon fr. 1.31, cf. esp. 25–35. For hereditary punishment of perjury, see II. 4.160–162, cf. 3.300ff.; Hesiod WD 282–285. For affliction of whole families, see II. 6.200–205; Od. 20.66–78; cf. Od. 11.436. In tragedy, see Aesch. Sept. 653–655, 699–701, 720–793; Ag. 1090–1097, 1138–1197, 1299, 1338–1342, 1460, 1468–1488, 1497–1512, 1565–1576, 1600–1602; Soph. El. 504–515; Ant. 583–603; OC 367–370, 964–985, 1299; Eur.
El. 699–746, 1306ff.; IT 186–202, 987–988; Or. 811–818, 985–1012, 1546–1548; Phoen. 379–382, 867–888, 1556–1559, 1592–1594, 1611. See further Parker 1983: 191–206. Some of these crimes, such as oathbreaking and wronging a guest-friend or a parent, were depicted in the tradition as bringing forth Erinyes upon the wrongdoer, to torment him in life or after death (cf., e.g., Aesch. Eum. 269–275; Homer II. 19.259). Nor is the family curse, as a result of which each member must pay for the misled of an ancestor, confined to tragedy; this mythical idea was employed in practical politics as well. The prominent Athenian noble family of the Alcaemoneids, which boasted such members as Cleisthenes and Pericles, contended constantly with their political enemies about the stain that the murder of Cylon had left upon their family (cf. Hdt. 5.70–72; Thuc. 1.126–127).

19. Along with the idea of paying for an ancestor's crimes naturally comes the idea of somehow evading the penalty. Herodotus' myth of the fall of Croesus (Hdt. 1.90–91) is fascinating in this regard: Croesus is doomed to fall, despite his many sacrifices to Apollo, because his ancestor Gyges murdered King Candaules and took his throne and his wife. When Croesus rebukes Apollo for ingratitude, Apollo informs him that his sacrifices were not ignored, but rather procured for him a three-year delay of the inevitable downfall. The Orpheioteles described in Plato's Rep. 364c–365a; Phaedrus 254d e, 265b). Damascus refers to the role of Dionysos Lusios and his rites in freeing an individual from the penalty of crimes committed by ancestors (OF 232). Plato's Orpheioteles and the practices of Theophrastus' Superstitious Man indicate that individuals and whole cities tried to relieve their anxieties about the misdeeds of their forebears (Theoph. Char. 16.12).

20. As Rohde states in his appendix, "Consecration of Persons Struck by Lightning" (1925: 581–583). "In many legends death by lightning makes the victim holy and raises him to godlike (everlasting) life." Herakles: Diod. Sic. 4.38.4–5. Semele: Pind. O. 2.27; Diod. Sic. 5.111; Charax ap. Anon. de Incend. 16, p. 325.5ff West; Arist. Arg. Ind. philol. Imag. 1.14; Nonnus Dionysiaca 8.409ff. Asclepius: Hesiod h. 169 Rz.; Lucian, DD 13. Cf. also figures such as Erechtheus, Kepaneus, and Amphithaurus. The sacredizing effect of lightning may be seen from later testimonies in the reverence for the lightning-struck tombs of Lycurgus and Euripides in Plut. Lyce. 4.4 and Pliny's report that the thunderbolting of the statues of Olympic victor Eurynome indicated his heroic status (NH 7.12). Although Kingsley (1995: 237 n. 24) indeed suggests that Herakles was the figure to whom the deceased in the Thess tablet was assimilated, as Seaford (1986) and other have argued with regard to the Titans, I would rather argue that Herakles, Semele, Asclepius, and others served more as analogies for the individual than as a specific model.

21. Cf. Graf (1991: 96) and Zuntz (1971: 336), who see the claim on A2 and A3 to have paid the penalty as representing a different level of incorporation than that of A1, which proclaims the deceased's transformation into a god. This claim is itself sufficient evidence for the idea that the result expected in A1 differs from that expected in A2 and A3, and I'm not sure that the claim to have paid the penalty necessarily supports it.

22. Cf. Redfield 1992: 107b: "Thus is projected on a cosmic scale the Orphic withdrawal from society; religion is not intended to show us our location in the
social order, but rather to rescue us from it. The alternative to mediation is salvation.... A claim to personal immortality is a political act; it is a claim to personal value as against the evaluations of this world, and as such sets one against the powers of this world." Purification rituals that had formerly been performed only in abnormal moments of crisis became a normal practice for those who defined their lives outside the normal order of the society. Cf. Sabbatucci 1979: 68: "La catarsi orfica potrebbe non voler risolvere una crisi occasionale, ma risolvere piuttosto la crisi esistenziale; non purificare da una follia episodica, ma purificare il vivere profano, inteso come una lunga follia, eccetera eccetera... Onde la catarsi diventerebbe propriamente una iniziazione alla nuova vita, l’orphikos bios." Burkert (1982) has shown the distinction between the craftsmen who were brought in as specialists in time of crisis and the members of the religious sect, who scrutinized the practices of the specialists in their protests against the normal order. It is of course impossible to tell if those buried with the tablets were themselves members of a group that lived such an orphikos bios or merely were buried with an amulet indicative of such a worldview.

23. Such dissatisfaction need not be that of lower-class or disfranchised members of a society; indeed, it seems more likely, considering the historical parallels, to imagine that the resentful are members of the elite who are losing in competition with their peers. As J. Z. Smith notes in his discussion of magic (Smith 1996: 19), resentment of any kind triggers the language of alterity, whether it be accusations of witchcraft or claims to arcane power. "Any form of resentment, for real or imagined reasons..., may trigger a language of alienating displacement of which the accusation of magic is just one possibility in any given culture’s rich vocabulary of alterity."

24. As Depew notes of ὑπότασσαι (1997: 254): "The verb denotes an interactive process of guiding another in assessing one’s status and thus one’s due. The purpose is not to ‘boast’ or ‘declare’ something about one’s past, but to make a claim on someone in the present, whether in terms of an actual request or of recognition and acknowledgement of status." Depew, drawing on the researches of Adkins and Muellner, describes the epic uses of the verb. "When Homeric heroes ὑπότασσαν what they are doing is asserting their identity and their value in the society they inhabit, and by means of this assertion creating a context in which the claim they are making on another member of that society will be appropriate and compelling." Cf. Adkins 1969; Muellner 1976.

25. Cf. the arguments of Zuntz 1971: 341, which have never been refuted. Unfortunately, just as Comparetö immediately associated the line ποιναν δ’ ἄνωτερον ἔργον ἐγένετο ὑμῖν ὄνωαν in Α2 and Α3 with the murder of Zagreus by the Titans, so, too, he linked the παῖς εἴμαι τοῦ Ὀδυσσείου ἄντερον ζωῆς to his story of the supposed Orphic doctrine of original sin (Comparetö 1882: 116): "The Titanic origin of the soul is here explicitly confirmed; it is well known that the Titans were the sons of Uranos and Gaia." Before Comparetö, the only discovered tablet of the B series, B1 from Petelia, was thought to be associated with the Trophonius oracle, and Mnemosyne, not the deceased, was thought to be the child of Earth and starry Heaven, as indeed she is in Hesiod (Theog. 135). Cf. Goettling 1843: 8. Since Comparetö’s time, however, the increase in the number of tablets that make no reference to lightning or paying a penalty (twelve new tablets) seems to indicate that the death by lightning is a unique feature of the context that produced
the tablets of Timpone Piccolo, rather than a feature of the doctrine underlying all the tablets but simply abbreviated out of B1, which happened to have an explicit identification of the Titans in the reference to the child of Earth and starry Heaven. A1, A2, and A3 are the only tablets that make any reference to lightning, and only A2 and A3 mention a punishment for unjust deeds.

26. At WD 120, Hesiod's golden race live blissful lives, "dear to the blessed gods," before the split with the gods: φιλοι μακάρεσσι θεοίσι. The claim to be treated as a member of the divine family recalls as well the ideal of the time before the separation of mortals and immortals: "For there once were common feasts and councils of immortal gods and mortal men together," ξυναὶ γὰρ τὰς δαίμονοι ἔσχα, ξυναὶ δὲ θεῶνοι ἀθάνατοι θεοίσι καταβάτησι τ᾽ ἀνθρώπων (Iliad II. 1.6–7 Merkelbach-West, Thesaurus 555ff. Cf. also the feasting of Tantalus and Disen with the gods for other tales of the disruption of primordial unity. The deceased employs this mythic motif in a claim of descent that supplants the ties of the human, mundane, and civic genos with those of a divine, otherworldly, and primordial genos. Sábato-Cucchi describes the claim to be part of the divine genos that descends from Earth and Heaven as a way of rejecting the political hierarchy that depends on the human families (1975: 44–53): "Il fatto che il defunto si proclami 'figlio di Urano e di Gaia,' se non stabilisce la realtà storica contestuale di una identificazione del 'genetico' col 'mondano,' è probativa soltanto della rinuncia da parte del defunto al genos determinato dai suoi genitori reali." As Sábato-Cucchi explains the mystic's point of view, the human condition is unreal in comparison with the reality represented by the divine condition, because the life of a human is ephemeral, while that of a god is eternal. The genos, however, represents the human reality that transcends the brief mortal lifespan and provides a permanent framework within which the individual can define herself for the entirety of her life. If, however, one rejects this framework and the hierarchies into which it is tied, the divine genos and the ideal world of the gods provide a substitute framework within which the individual can define herself.

27. The resonance of each of these elements is lost if they are all read as referring to a single myth of original sin inherited from the Titans, especially since this myth was not created until more than two millennia after the tablets were composed. See Edmonds 1999. 28. It is tempting, given the prominence of lightning in these particular tablets, to speculate that the seats of the blessed here may be the Elysian Field, since some commentators drew the connection between the Elysian Field, Ἑλυσίων πεδίου, and a field that had been struck by lightning, ἐνθλόσων πεδίου. Cf. Burkert 1987. Hesychius, for example, defines Ἑλυσίων: Elysion—a land or plain that has been struck by lightning. Such places are not to be walked upon, and are called ἐνθλόσια. Εκεκερησομένων χώρων ἤ πεδίων: τὰ δὲ τιμώτα εἰσιν ἔρατα, καλέσθαι δὲ καὶ ἐνθλόσια. Putkewich 1969, however, argues that the association with lightning is a late etymologizing upon a word that originally meant "meadowy field." Cf. also Geline 1988: 227–229.

29. This circle has most often been interpreted as a cycle of rebirths undergone by the soul in the process of metempsychosis, but it may also be seen as a term for the burdens of a single lifetime. Casadio has no doubts (1991: 135): "Che nella laminetta più lunga e meglio conservata delle tre proveniente dal 'Timpone piccolo' sia fatto espresso accenno al dogma della metempsicosi nessuno l'ha mai du-
bital." Aristotle uses the phrase κύκλος τάς ἀνθρώπων πράγματα to refer to human life rather than to transmigration (Phys. 4.14.233b24; Prob. 17.3.916a25). Cf. Herodotus 1.107.2, simply meaning the affairs of human life in its cyclical patterns. On this interpretation, the deceased has escaped from the toils and trammels of mortal life and looks forward to a blissful and apparently endless afterlife. However, the Neoplatonists Simplicius and Proclus, in discussing the cycle of births, κύκλος γενέσεως, attribute to Orpheus a prayer in the rites of Dionysus and Kore for relief from the cycle of evils: ἐκ τῶν διώνων καὶ τῆς Κορην τελευτῶν τοιχίν εὐδυνα ἔχοντας Κύκλοι τ' αὖ ἀλήθει καὶ ἀνατενοῦσαι κακότητος (Proclus in Pl. Tim. 42.c4, v. 350 = Of. 22.91 cf. Of. 230 Simplicius in Arist. De Caelo 2.1). The debate over the presence of reincarnation is beyond the scope of this paper, but the fundamental discussions are Long 1948; Zuntz 1971; and Cassiope 1991. For further discussion, see Edmonds 2004.

30. Kingsley argues that these images should be taken as referring to the deceased sitting at the breasts of Persephone (1937: 267–268): "The individual in question makes straight for the breasts of Persephone, queen of the underworld, just like an infant to the breast of its nurse or mother. Ultimately, only prejudice and preconception can justify failing to see in this and the other statements on the gold plates the use of a consistent, coherent, and starkly simple imagery: a new birth, making straight for the maternal breast, rushing for milk." The prejudice and preconception to which Kingsley refers is, of course, that of Zuntz, who reacted with outrage to the suggestion of Dieterich, "Lepidissimse sane dicitur et haedulum nunc domus, edissa ad materiam lactae ubera et Dionysius ministrum et mystarum, nunc et ipsum deum, qui ovit, ut iloc Φεστερεανοίας, adiisse ad beatae vitae prata lactae" (Dieterich 1937: 37). Despite his own suggestion that the imagery is that of an infant and mother, Zuntz rejects Dieterich’s suggestion, most probably because Dieterich included the identification of the deceased with Dionysus as a kid, an "Orphic" idea intolerable to Zuntz’s interpretation of the tablets as purely Pythagorean: "The speaker is standing before the chthonian Goddess. Is he, the renatus, rushing to suck the milk of immortality from her lacta ubera? This idea, though quite proper with Egyptian devotees of Isis, makes him shudder who has the slightest notion of Persephone, the goddess of the dead" (Zuntz 1971: 114). Suckled like a newborn infant, the deceased is, in effect, transformed into or adopted as the child of Persephone. This interpretation gains credence with the parallel of the adoption of Herakles by Hera, which is sometimes depicted, especially in Etruscan and South Italian art, as a ritual suckling. Cf. Pausannias 9.25.2; Diod. Sic. 4.9.6–7. Jourdain-Annaquin notes that this scene has been "accepter par les historiens comme le symbole de l’adoption d’Héraclès par la déesse... le symbole de la ‘naissance’ du héros, renaissance à un monde différent: celui des dieux auquel il accède grâce à cette Mère divine" (Jourdain-Annaquin 1989: 408). Not only does the ritual suckling signify Herakles’ adoption by his stepmother, Hera, but the adoption into the family of the goddess itself signifies Herakles’ apotheosis. Just as with the motif of lightning as a mode of apotheosis, we may have here a motif used in the story of the apotheosis of Herakles used to describe the fate of the deceased in the tablets. As with the lighting, this mythic reference need not imply Herakles as an explicit model, but rather that the traditional mythic motif of being suckled by a goddess signified the process of apotheosis, particularly in southern Italy, and that the story of Herakles was one
of the most prominent appearances of this idea in the mythic tradition. Δέσποινας β' ὧδ' κόλπων ἐδώκαν χρυσάνθες βασιλείας may signify, in the language of myth, the process by which the deceased, newly born into a different life, is adopted as Persephone’s own and transformed from mortal to immortal, ὥσπερ δ' ἔστω ἀντὶ βροτοῦ. Ultimately, one must conclude with Guthrie, “Ancient sources provide no parallels which will throw a direct light on this, and the opinions of scholars make rather amusing reading” (Guthrie 1935 [1952 ed.]: 178).

31. In a fragment of a dirge, Findar describes the blissful afterlife of those in the Isles, including their recreations (Pind. fr. 130; cf. Pind. O. 2.71–72). Plato’s Phaedo describes the heavenly realm for pure spirits (111b1–c1). A few of the souls headed for realms above go beyond the surface of the earth into indescribable realms of purity and dwell there entirely freed from bodies (114c1–d1). This realm, like the realm above the heavens in the Phaedrus, is so far beyond mortal experience that “of that place beyond the heavens none of our earthly poets has sung, and none shall sing worthily” (τὸν δὲ ὑπερωρώλιν τόπον οὐδεὶς σάμας παρὰ τῶν τῆς θυμάς οὐδὲ ποτε ὄνημες κατ’ ἄξιος Phaedrus 2.47–53). By contrast, the impure must suffer in rivers of fire and mud (Phd. 114.4–61, cf. 112e–113c). Plutarch’s imagery is even more vivid.

32. Cf. Adkins 1960 on the shift of values from competitive to cooperative excellences. In the mythic tradition, the first people to receive a blissful afterlife were those who had achieved mighty deeds. The heroes of Hesiod’s semi-divine fourth race go to the Isles of the Blessed as a result of their valiant deeds in the battles of epic (WD 167ff.). While Hesiod speaks in general terms, later authors named specific heroes worthy of an afterlife on the Blessed Isles. Not surprisingly, the two greatest Greek heroes of the Iliad, Achilles and Diomedes, are the earliest to be named (cf. Ibycus 291–Simonides 353, where the scholiast records that, in Ibycus and Simonides, Achilles goes to Elysium and is paired with Medea (of all people). Cf. Findar (Nem. 10.7), who mentions Diomedes, and Hellenikos (4F19), who puts the otherwise unknown Lykos, son of Poseidon, on the Blessed Isles. But heroic deeds worthy of a favorable afterlife need not be deeds of epic; a sixth-century drinking-song places Harmodios in the company of Diomedes and Achilles on the Blessed Isles: “Dear Harmodios, surely you have not perished. No, they say, you live in the blessed islands where Achilles the swift of foot, and I at the son, Diomedes, are said to have gone” (φιλήσταρ Ἀρμόδιος, οὐ τι πάν τάθηκας, νόμος β’ εν μακρίνοις σε φάσαν εἶναι, Ία περ ποδόκης Ἀχιλλῆς Τυδείδην τέ φααιν Δωμήδεα, Carm. Conv. 894 = Diehl 10 = Lattimore 1 (trans. Lattimore). The assassination of Hipparchus ranked, at least for some, with the epic heroism of Diomedes and Achilles, and such heroic deeds sufficed for admission to a better place after the mortal life was over.

33. In the Republic, Adeimantus refers to this symposium of the blessed, ὑσυμόπον τῶν ὅσιων, as the promise of eternal drunkenness held out by Musaeus and his son, “where, reclined on couches and crowned with wreaths, they entertain the time henceforth with wine, as if the fairest mead of virtue were an everlasting drunk” (καὶ Λιθόν γὰρ ἑτερώντας τὸ λόγῳ καὶ κατακλίναντας καὶ κυμάσαντος τῶν ὅσιων κατασκευάζαντος ἑπταφεραμένους ποιούσοι τὸν ἄξιον χρόνον ἐνδειχθή διάγειν μεθύσαντας, ἡγομένου κόλπων δρεπῆς μισθὸν μέθυναι αἰώνιον, Pl. Rep. 363c4–d2).

téknon Βῃρᾶτης καὶ τὸν μεγάλον / Ζηνός, ἀνάσσων Κρήτης ἐκατομποτικεῖοι-κυκλώματα γαῖς ναοῖς προσκύνησαν, οίς αὐθεντικῆς ἡμιθέσεως δοκίμασι στεγανοῦς / παρέγει. Ὑπόθεσθαι πελέκει καὶ ταυροδιῶν κόλπον κρατεῖ αὐτρικῆς ἀρμοῦ καταρρίσσου. Ἀγάναν δὲ βιον τῶν ἐπὶ σῶοι δίδοσ τοῦ χαλκοῦ μοίρας γενόμενης καὶ νυκτόπολον Ζαγρέως βρότων ταύτης ἄμοιφαγός διατάς τελείας μητρὸ τ' ὀρείφ δίδας ἀνασκονά / καὶ κοπρήστων βάρχισθα ἐκλάθην ὀσωθεῖ. πάλιν ὐπὸ  ἐξίσως εἶματα φεύγω γένεσιν τε βροτῶν καὶ νεκροθήκης εὖ ἐπὶ χρυσότομους τὴν τ' ἐμφάνισιν βρότων ἑδέσσαν περιόλειμαν. ("Son of the Phoenician princess, child of Tyrian Europa and great Zeus, ruler over hundred-fortressed Crete—here am I, come from the sanctuary of temples roofed with cut beam of our native wood, its true joints of cypress welded together with Chalybean axe and cement from the bull. Pure has my life been since the day when I became an initiate of Idaean Zeus and herdsman of night-wandering Zagreus, and having accomplished the raw feasts and ball torches aloft to the Mountain Mother, yea torches of the Kuretes, was raised to the holy estate and called Bakchos. Having all-white garments, I flee the breath of mortals and, not nearing the place of corpses, I guard myself against the eating of ensouled flesh.")

35. οὗ θεῶς ἐν τούτῳ κείσθαι ἰ ὑπὸ τοῦ βεβαγχωμένου. "It is not right that any be buried here if he has not been bacchic." As Durcan points out, the form of βεβαγχωμένου indicates that the initiate was not merely βάρθος during the limited period of a Dionysiac ritual, but that a permanent status is envisaged (1966: 237): "Il se fait βεβαγχωμένον grâce à la constance d'une vie ascétique, et non pas simplement bacchos dans l'exaltation éphémère de l'orie." A Dionysus cult in the polis provides a controlled and temporary disruption of the normal order, but to prolong this disruption throughout one’s life in a mystic religious group is to register a protest against the normal civic order. Cf. Sabatucci (1979: 51) on the role of Dionysus cult in the polis to reaffirm the order by a temporary suspension of it: “Pertanto tutte le manifestazioni culturali che sotto il segno di Dioniso realizzavano una temporanea rottura dell’ordine, vanno correttamente interpretate, almeno fino allo scoperta del contrario (il che può avvenire di volta in volta, caso per caso, e non mediante un giudizio di carattere generale) come espedienti rituali per rinnovare, restaurare, rafforzare l’ordine stesso, e non come tentativi di distruggere l’ordine vigente.” This function of Dionysus as the bringer of temporary disorder may, of course, be expanded by the mystical movements into a permanent disruption of the normal order.

36. Ἡπ. 946–957: σδ δὴ θεοῦν ὡς περισσότερον ἄνθρωπον ἐχόντας κακῶν ἀπειλητικοῦς / ὡς δὲ πιθοῦν τοὺς κακῶν κόμοις ἐνορία / θεοῦ προσευχὴς διαλέγειν φιλονόμον κακῶς, / ἦλθεν νυν οὕνεκα καὶ δὴ ἄνυχον βορᾶς / στίχοι καταλάβει Ὑπέρτοιον ἔχων / βάρχεια πολλῶν γραμμάτων τοῖς καπνοῦσι / ἐπέτει / ἐλληνικοῖς τοῖς δὲ ταῖς ἐνορίας ἐνορία / φεύγων προφονώ πᾶσι θερτοῦν γὰρ / σεμνοῖς θαλαμισσοί, ἀληθεία μηνανάμοινο, "Are you, then, the companion of the gods, as a man beyond the common? Are you the chaste one, untouched by evil? I will never be persuaded by your vaunting, never be so unintelligent as to impute folly to the gods. Continue then your confident boasting, take up a diet of greens and play the showman with your food, make Orpheus your lord and engage in mystic rites, holding the vaporings of many books in honor. For you have been found out. To all I give the warning: avoid men like this. For they make you their prey with their high-holy-sounding words while they contrive deeds of shame."

1991b: 106. "We call the eschatological passage in the Second Olympian 'Orphic' (although Pindar does not mention Orpheus) because that is our general—and necessarily vague—term for those aspects of Greek religion marked by concern for personal purity and personal immortality. Probably the Greeks themselves were vague about the category; Theseus assumes that since Hippolytus claims to be chaste (a claim not characteristic of the Orphics) he must also be a vegetarian and read Orphic books. All three would be tokens of a rejection of the world, and therefore mutually convertible."


39. Cf., e.g., the initiates in the fragment from Euripides Cretans (fr. 472 = Porph. De abst. 4.56), who never associate themselves with Orpheus, but who make a similar set of claims about themselves.