Annotated Bibliography: The Myth of Persephone


Myth:


This myth appears in Greek and Roman mythology. As the maiden Persephone picks flowers in her mother’s garden, she sees a beautiful narcissus flower. When she wanders to the edge
of the garden to pick the flower, the god of the Underworld (Hades) abducts her and whisks her away in a gold chariot. Persephone’s mother Demeter, who is the goddess of grain and the harvest, mourns for her daughter. She journeys to the Underworld and is able to make a bargain with Hades. Persephone will return to earth for the spring and summer months but will live with Hades as goddess of the Underworld during the fall and winter. This myth provides an explanation for how and why the seasons change.

Short Story:


This short story by Joyce Carol Oates takes place during the summer, and 15-year-old Connie spends much of her time lounging around the house, going out with friends, and meeting boys. One night a strange guy makes a threatening gesture to her in the parking lot of a local drive-in restaurant. She thinks nothing of it until one Sunday afternoon, when the rest of her family attends a barbecue at an aunt's house, leaving her home alone. The strange guy pulls up in her driveway in a gold-colored car, accompanied by a friend. The driver introduces himself as Arnold Friend and asks Connie to join him for a ride. During the course of their conversation, Connie realizes that Arnold is a threat. Arnold’s language becomes more sexually explicit and violent, and he threatens to harm her family if she calls the police. Connie makes a last-ditch effort to call the police, but panics and is unable to make the call. In the end, she leaves the house and joins Arnold. The story becomes a kind of coming-of-age dreamscape where evil (or Hades) arrives to corrupts the innocence (or Persephone). Death escorts the woman away from her childhood self, just as the maiden Kore becomes the Queen of the Underworld.
Song:

The song "Magic Man" was written by Heart's lead singer Ann Wilson, describing her new boyfriend and manager, Michael Fisher. Michael Fisher was also the brother of lead guitarist's Roger Fisher, who was dating Ann's sister Nancy. The girls' mother did not approve of the relationships, hence lines such as, "Come on home girl, it's too soon to lose my baby, my girl should be at home." In the song, the girls respond with "Try to understand, mama, he's a Magic Man." The song can be interpreted as an allegory for the Persephone/Hades myth because Hades lured Persephone away from her grieving mother, Demeter.

Television Series:


This British television series starred Karl Howman as the mysterious Mulberry, a man who appears at the household of a cantankerous spinster, Miss Farnaby, and applies for a position as her manservant. Miss Farnaby's other staff, Bert and Alice Finch, are immediately suspicious, as the position for which Mulberry applies had not yet been advertised. Their suspicions are well placed. Mulberry is not all he seems; in fact, he is an apprentice Grim Reaper who has been dispatched to the house to escort Miss Farnaby to the next world. Surprisingly for a Grim Reaper, Mulberry has a sentimental, even comical side, with a love of life and laughter that moves him to dedicate himself to ensuring that the sullen Miss Farnaby's last days on Earth are happy, using his role as servant to put his plans into motion. Mulberry's sensitivity and interest in Miss Farnaby's well-being do not sit well with Mulberry's father, a fully fledged Grim Reaper with no interest in human emotions. He appears in most episodes as a mysterious figure (billed as "The Stranger") in a black hat and dark clothes,
urging Mulberry to get on with the job. In one episode, we learn the source of Mulberry's love of life: his mother is actually Springtime. The device of Mulberry's father being Death and mother being Springtime is loosely borrowed from Greek mythology. However, in Greek mythology, Hades and Persephone never have any children. Because of the program's cancellation, viewers never find out which parent eventually wins Mulberry's heart and mind.

Painting:

Of all Rossetti's depictions, *Proserpine* perhaps most strongly conveys Rossetti's infatuation with her archetypal 'Pre-Raphaelite' looks; rich, raven hair and long, elegant neck, and his ideals of spiritual love, nurtured by his constant reading of Dante. Proserpine (Persephone) had been imprisoned in Pluto's (Hades') underground realm for tasting the forbidden pomegranate. On *Prosepine*, Rossetti wrote: “She is represented in a gloomy corridor of her palace, with the fatal fruit in her hand. As she passes, a gleam strikes on the wall behind her from some inlet suddenly opened, and admitting for a moment the sight of the upper world; and she glances furtively towards it, immersed in thought. The incense-burner stands beside her as the attribute of a goddess. The ivy branch in the background may be taken as a symbol of clinging memory.”

**Psycho-Social Connections:**


While picking flowers, a young woman is abducted away from the familiar world of her mother to the ghostly underworld of Hades. This splitting of Mother and Daughter is the crux of the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, a tale that holds as much meaning for us today as it did in ancient times. The story of how Demeter's daughter becomes Persephone, Queen of the Dead, and is ransomed back from death by her mother depicts profound psychological transformations. Writing from the perspectives of Jungian psychology and goddess spirituality, Kathie Carlson examines the deep reverberations of this myth in both ancient religion and the inner lives and relationships of contemporary men and women. Included in her discussion are: The Mother-Daughter archetype as feminine self, Hades as shadow in men and animus in women, the plight of women who "live the myth backwards," and the mystery path of Demeter.