

7-15-2013

## *Persephone Rising*

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### Recommended Citation

Leeper, Seth (2013) "*Persephone Rising*," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 2013: Iss. 35, Article 10.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol2013/iss35/10>

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*Persephone Rising*

# Persephone Rising

by

Seth Leeper

For the Uninitiated in the Rites of Eleusis

History tells us the lives of Demeter and Persephone are forever changed when Persephone is abducted by her uncle, Hades, from a field in broad daylight and taken to the underworld. Demeter, at first unaware, is devastated when her daughter disappears, and upon discovering her whereabouts, makes several pleas to Olympus to get her daughter back...

Demeter, a goddess of fertility and earthly replenishment, refuses to feed the earth until her daughter is returned to her side. When the pair is united again, however, it is discovered that Persephone consumed a pomegranate seed (some say four, six) while in the Underworld, and as a consequence, must spend part of the year with her uncle below the surface of the earth, and the other part above ground with her mother...

During the time Persephone resides in the depths of the earth, humans experience the cold and challenging Fall and Winter months, and enjoy the light and freshness of plentiful Spring and Summer when she resides with her mother on the surface...

## Disappearance, Week Five

I wear the rags of a common vagabond,  
weeping into layers of tattered cloth.  
Perched upon the fountain's edge I see

a young girl, she reminds me of you.  
Hair like sun-kissed wheat and barley,  
radiant maiden skin, milky in daylight.

She smiles at me, invites me to her home,  
I dwell here in discretion, keeping my  
rags wrapped close. By night I

nurture an infant son, encasing him  
in the flames of eternity. My task  
interrupted by his mother's outrage,

I rise to my full goddess height and  
cast the infant down. My grief unfolds  
in streaks of blinding light and heat,

I leave the mother shaking with knowledge.  
Remorse wears thick on her face, but I  
shall not return before the fires of Eleusis.

## Disappearance, Week Nine

Encircled by a field of dry barley,  
the ground chafes  
beneath my scabbed  
calloused feet.  
There is no one in sight.

I've come here to call for you, daughter,  
to peer down into the cracks  
between surface and bowels.

I dig into the earth,  
scraping away at dead soil,  
expelling worms,  
dislodging roots,  
uprooting lost stones.

Above and behind me  
fly innards of agriculture.

I scrape away dirt  
until my fingers bleed,  
nails break.

Breath short, persistent.

I dig, screaming your name,

hot tears,  
hot tears escape me.

## Disappearance, Week Seventeen

I can hear the cries of the hungry:  
  
the sobbing mother who can't feed  
her infant, sound of disappointed  
children going to bed with empty stomachs.

Before you were taken, daughter,  
we would have fed them together,  
brought them fresh soil, rich grains,  
crisp water. We would have celebrated

the rising sun with them, danced  
in the field, bloomed flowers with  
simple touch.

But there is no light inside me, daughter,  
just a vast hollowness, a bottomless well.

I see no joy, no glee to adorn. I feel  
no connection to the people, nor the land.

My life-giving womb is dead.

Not a seed will germ while I await  
our reunion. No desperate pleas,  
rotting carcasses of sacrifices, or

temples can pierce through the heavy  
clouds of grief. By now the

flames of sacrifice won't save anyone.

Endless distance sprawls  
between myself and the faithful.

## Hades Speaks

In my defense:

my rough words,  
aggressive manner,  
were the purest tributes  
I could offer you.  
Your beauty blinded me,  
the heat of it, thick on the air,  
heavy on the stone walls,  
doused the air in heady

coercive aromas. I never  
knew myself in your presence.

My hands would get away from me,  
I would forget myself.

I'd come to  
at the sound  
of your screaming,  
and by then  
it was too late.

I'd gone so far,  
come so close

to push you far away

## Persephone rising

You may never understand  
the blood red wounds

left on my psyche, my spirit,  
after my first time  
in the underworld.

You may never care to hear  
how I dissolved in your presence,

pacified by your brute strength  
and authority.

Enough time has passed, red wounds  
now blue; will stronger. The scars and bruises

scabbed and healed, cured by the delicious  
oxygen and fresh waters aboveground.

Potions and soothing remedies helped  
center my mind, calm my nerves. Experience  
taught me diplomacy on land and beneath it.

I am Queen now. I bestow mercy  
and vengeance in the same fist.

Time has eroded  
the lithe spring maiden

and left a fertility goddess  
of life and death.

I give and take away  
within the same breath,

and I denounce  
the unlawful, the forced-upon, the exploitive.

I denounce you, Husband,  
but for now

contempt offers comfort  
until history writes another page

for me to kill you in.