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Justine Fontes , Ron Fontes , Steve Kurth , Barbara Schulz

Demeter and Persephone. Spring Held Hostage

United States (2007)

TAGS: Aetiology Afterlife Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Athena Bacchus Cerberus Charon Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Eleusinian Mysteries Erinyes Furies Gods Hades Hecate Hera Hermes Katabasis Medusa Minos Persephone Underworld Zeus



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Creators



Justine Fontes (Author)

Justine Fontes is prolific writer from the USA. Justine received a BA degree in English Literature New York University, before beginning work in publishing. Justine met her husband when they were both working at *Little Golden Books*. They began writing together, and have published over five hundred children's books. Their titles are varied, including many retelling of myth, history, and other traditional stories, such as *How the Zebra Got Its Stripes* (Golden Books, 2002); *Abraham Lincoln: Lawyer, Leader, Legend* (DK Publishing, Children, 2009); and *Star Wars, Episode 1: Anakin's Pit Droid* (LucasBooks for Young Readers, 2000). To the Graphic Universe Graphic *Myths and Legends* series, which features Greco-Roman and other myths, they have contributed titles including *Trojan Horse. The Fall of Troy* (2007); *Demeter and Persephone. Spring Held Hostage* (2007), and *Sunjata: Warrior King of Mali. A West African Legend* (2009).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Ron Fontes (Author)

Ron Fontes is prolific writer from the USA. Ron met his wife when they were both working at *Little Golden Books*. They began writing together, and have published over five hundred children's books. Their titles are varied, including many retelling of myth, history, and other traditional stories, such as *How the Zebra Got Its Stripes* (Golden Books, 2002); *Abraham Lincoln: Lawyer, Leader, Legend* (DK Publishing, Children, 2009); and *Star Wars, Episode 1: Anakin's Pit Droid* (LucasBooks for Young Readers, 2000). To the Graphic Universe Graphic *Myths and Legends* series, which features Greco-Roman and other myths, they have contributed titles including *Trojan Horse. The Fall of Troy* (2007); *Demeter and Persephone. Spring Held Hostage*

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(2007), and *Sunjata: Warrior King of Mali. A West African Legend* (2009).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Steve Kurth (Illustrator)

Kurth is an American artist of various comic books. He has worked on *Iron Man, X-Men*, *Transformers*, *Green Arrow*, and *The Walking Dead*, for Marvel Comics, IDW Publishing, Image Comics, and Skybound Entertainment. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin and holds a B.A. in fine arts and illustration.

Source:

Profile at the comicvine.gamespot.com (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com and Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Barbara Schulz (Illustrator)

Schulz is a professional comic artist. She is also a professor of comic art at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, MA, and lecturer at Minneapolis College of Art and Design, where she helped to establish and now runs the comic art degree programme. She has been working

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professionally in comics since 1991. Schulz created comic book art for DC, Dark Horse, Image, and Devils Due comics as well as illustrating numerous graphic novels.

Sources:

Profile at the mcad.edu (accessed: March 8, 2018).

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Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com, and Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

The myth of Demeter and Persephone is retold here to familiarise young people with the myth and with ancient Greek culture more broadly. The myth provides an aeitiology for the seasons. Persephone is abducted by Hades, god of the Underworld. Persephone's mother, the goddess Demeter, searches for her. Demeter mourns her daughter when it transpires that she has been taken to the Underworld, causing harvests to fail and plants to die. A compromise is reached in which Persephone splits her time between the surface and the Underworld, causing the pattern of the seasons.

Chapters:

- *A Winterless World*
- *The Dark Domain*
- *A Worried Mother*
- *The Seeds of Change*
- *The Pomegranate Problem*

Analysis

Dress and architecture place the events of this graphic novel in antiquity. The novel opens with a pastoral scene in which Demeter and Persephone appear before some blonde and grateful humans, who are thanking Demeter for the fertility of the earth.

Focus then turns to Hades, a brooding, long-haired, grey-skinned figure, who is treated sympathetically: he was given an unfair deal in the division of sky, seas, and underworld; he rules wisely; he is isolated and lonely. Zeus grants Hades Persephone; Zeus considers asking or telling Persephone and Demeter but decides to back out of the bother.

Immediately prior to her abduction, Persephone is called 'greedy' for picking so many flowers. She is then knowingly disobedient in walking off alone to gather new flower. Hades thinks, *taking her may be wrong, but I will have my queen!*

Hades acts as a considerate host, showing Persephone around and introducing her to famous shades. This also introduces the reader to many ideas about the Greek Underworld, including: the judgement of shades, punishment of the most wicked, the Furies' role in

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maintaining justice among the living, and the origin of dreams (false and prophetic). The reader learns early on through Persephone's thoughts that those who eat or drink cannot leave. She also notes the disparity between being called an "honored guest" and being 'dragged here like a sack of olives.'

Persephone quickly responds to Hades' overtures; her thoughts include: *He really cares what I think; I should be furious with Hades. But his touch is gentle, and I do not see evil in his eyes, only sadness*. Hades continues to be represented sympathetically: *If only she could want to be my queen; I hope she can be happy here.*

Demeter is represented less sympathetically. Zeus tells her to 'be reasonable"; he refers to the need to end *this foolish strike* and the other gods concur, with Aphrodite referring to the need *to talk some sense into her*. Aphrodite, Hera, and Hermes all refer to how "stubborn" Demeter is; Apollo also speaks of the need *to shine the light of reason on [Demeter's] troubled mind*. By the time Hermes arrives to recall Persephone, Persephone has *almost forgotten how frightening it was to be grabbed against my will*; she speaks of *our love* and how Demeter cannot change the fact that she is *a woman now*. She knowingly eats the pomegranate, which Hades presents to her while down on one knee, like a modern marriage proposal. This is a contrast to most traditions, in which Hades tricks Persephone. Rhea convinces Demeter that it is "fair" for Persephone to split her time between realms.

The novel also includes Demeter's visit to Eleusis and the origin of the sanctuary and Eleusinian Mysteries. The story ends with a return to humans thanking Demeter for the harvest and Demeter sharing agricultural secrets with Demophon. Demeter now feels 'bad for causing people so much sorrow' and, 'like all wise mothers', accepts 'sharing her daughter with a husband'.

This myth has abduction as one of its central components and the novel includes many features familiar from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and yet the sympathetic depiction of Hades, the rapidity with which Persephone falls in love with Hades (in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 340–345, Persephone is still reluctant to be with Hades when Hermes arrives), and the broadly hostile depiction of Demeter's negative response to the abduction might all be regarded by modern readers as contributing to rape culture. Demeter's response is communally condemned as a selfish over-reaction, rather than

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concern for her daughter, something that creates a hostile impression of speaking out against sexual violence. Meanwhile, the reader is encouraged to empathise with Hades' designs on Persephone, normalising possessive, objectifying behaviour. This is furthered by the depiction of Persephone rapidly falling for Hades, which expresses the idea that rape is a route into romance and that rape or kidnap victims 'come around' to 'appreciating' their aggressor. As this book is intended for a young audience still finding their way through relationships and sexuality, some may regard this as a problematic depiction of social dynamics, endorsing and therefore encouraging unhealthy behaviours. This is a difficult myth to present to a young audience, as by all accounts Hades does take Persephone away, making that a fundamental element of the myth; nonetheless, it was a particular choice by the authors to represent this as a love story. This decision may have been made in order to soften the harshness of the storyline, making it more suited to a young readership (i.e. Persephone is abducted but finds love and 'becomes a woman' living happily ever after), but it is arguable that the opposite effect is achieved, making the narrative less rather than more suitable for young readers.

In terms of visual characterisation, almost all of the gods are depicted as blonde or ginger (Hades, black hair; Hera and Rhea, brown, are the exceptions). Although Greek names are typically used, Dionysus is featured here as 'Bacchus'; he is represented as somewhat foolish and podgy, more like a Roman Bacchus than Greek Dionysus. Charon is a grey-skinned hunched old man with a demon/skull-like head and long, dark, hooded cloak. The Furies are depicted leaping like superheroes, each with a different weapon, all with snakes for hair in the manner traditionally associated with Medusa.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aetiology Afterlife Aphrodite Apollo Architecture Athena Bacchus Cerberus Charon Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Eleusinian Mysteries Erinyes Furies Gods Hades Hecate Hera Hermes Katabasis Medusa Minos Persephone Underworld Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Adversity Authority Child, children Coming of age Death Family Gender expectations/construction Justice Love Morality Parents (and children) Rape Sexuality Teenagers

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Further Reading

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Addenda

Historical Consultant: David Mulroy, University of Wisconsen.

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