

The “trial of the century” in ancient Greece . . .

In Defense of Hades

by SARAH-SCOTT BRETT

Your Honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, honored guests, the plaintiff would lead you to believe that my client, Hades, is a cruel, evil god, who stole a young woman from her innocent existence and caused much trauma. Such is the nasty, untruthful picture painted by the overprotective mother of a bored young goddess. From extensive research, thorough investigation, and in-depth interviews with innumerable gods, humans, and other assorted beings, I have discovered the truth.

Let me begin at the beginning. After the Titanic Wars led by Zeus and his two brothers, there was much organizing to do. The brothers (Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades) decided to draw lots to decide who got what realm. You see, ladies and gentlemen, none of them wanted the underworld! None of them. So, when it was over and Hades was stuck with it, there was no possibility of compromise. As a matter of fact, Hades begged, lit-

erally begged Zeus to allow him to change to a nomadic reign, one that would allow him to roam and be the god of travelers, and to give the underworld to one of his yet-to-be-born sons. But Zeus, the ruler of all, decided that he would rather exile his brother than one of his own sons.

Now, I want to stop here a minute to make an important point: Up until that time, Hades was a young, kind god who loved the sun more than Persephone ever has or ever will. Yet he was deprived of his greatest love and sent to live under the purple sun of Tartarus. How would that affect you? Hades was turned into a hardened god, yet inside he still grieves for the great loss he suffered because of his brother Zeus's pride.

Zeus, in response to his brother's pleading, unfeelingly said, "Be content. Though now you have no people in your kingdom, in time it shall be well peopled. All who live shall in the end come your way. You have, moreover, in your keeping, all the vast wealth that lies hidden in the earth. You shall be the god of wealth; you shall be Pluto, the wealthy one!" (Herzberg, Max. *Myths and their Meaning*. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., pp. 152-153). Be content. Easy for the lord of the universe to say.

Imagine Hades's delight when he sees a young maiden sitting under a tree, trying to keep dry in a thunderstorm. His hard heart melts as he hears her wishing for a place where it never rains, never hails, and essentially is the perfect paradise. And he knows just the place for her—the Elysian Fields! This is where the blest go, those who have never sinned. "Here fell not hail or rain or any snow nor ever winds blew loudly" (Herzberg, p. 182).

Cautiously stepping closer, careful not to reveal his

presence, he finds that it is Persephone, the daughter of his sister, Demeter. At first he thinks he ought not go to her because Demeter, whether she admits it or not, has a terrible temper. But poor Persephone looks so bored and wet and unhappy. So Hades approaches and says hello and tells her who he is and what he's thinking. At first she is a bit frightened, backing off and feeling wary. But then she stops and thinks, Why not? I'm not going to get an opportunity like this again, and I'm not going to be ruler or queen of anything else, so why not? Now, we're used to the child inheriting his parents' things, whether it's money, land, or realm, but these are immortals. Her mother will not die. We're not talking about the daughter of a queen who will someday be a queen, in either the same or a different kingdom. This child will not get anything because she won't inherit anything. She won't be given anything by Zeus and the other gods because she was born last. There's nothing left!

Hades and Persephone talk for a long while, and in the end they decide that Hades should talk to Zeus about it. Hades tries to talk Persephone into talking with her mother, too, but no, Demeter would never understand; she thinks her daughter should be happy the way she is, a girl eternally caught between childhood and adulthood. And who wouldn't be happy as the adored baby of Mt. Olympus? She gets to roam the planet, playing in field, forest, stream, and ocean, making daisy chains, flower-crowns, and other such things. If they did go to Demeter she would probably say that Hades had talked her into it, that it was just a phase that she would grow out of. Then she would proceed to lock Persephone up in their palace for a long while until she was satis-

fied there would be no more talk of her dear brother. Agreeing that it would be futile, Hades and Persephone decide to meet again in two weeks.

Meanwhile, Hades goes to Zeus, saying that he wishes to marry Persephone, and who happens to be outside the door, eavesdropping, but Demeter! She thinks that this is some plot to make her beautiful Persephone as cold as he seems to be. This makes her so scared and so furious that she bursts into the room and screams that if Zeus allows this she will personally make known to Hera all fifteen of his last flings. What can the poor god say? Zeus tells Demeter to calm down, that maybe Persephone and Hades had actually fallen in love. Demeter then shrieks that if they had been together, which she was certain they hadn't, she would make sure they never were again. And with that, she stalks out.

Two weeks pass and Hades meets a crushed Persephone, whose mother had come home raving about the nerve of Hades and warning her daughter to avoid him at all times. Hades, while listing the possibilities, mentions that they could elope. Persephone jumps up from the rock on which she has been sitting and throws her arms around his neck, saying that they would deal with her mother after they were married. A scene then takes place that could have come straight from a movie. The two climb into Hades's chariot and go riding off into the sunset until the earth opens and swallows them in.

Upon their arrival at the gate to Hades, Hades announces that they will be going on a grand tour. Furthermore, he states that he refuses to be called Hades any longer, that from now on he wants to be called by one

of his other names, either Pluto or Dis. Persephone decides on Pluto, then insists on him calling her Core, the pet name given to her by Zeus and her mother. They ride down the long passageway laughing, a sound rarely heard either in that hall or from Pluto's lips.

As they reach the Styx, the first of the five rivers which mark the boundaries of Hades, they hear Cerberus barking. Persephone is frightened of the large, three-headed dog with a dragon's tail, but Pluto just laughs and says that he has given Ares the right to pet him, feed him, and throw stars for him to fetch and so Persephone should not be afraid.

Charon, the miserly old ferryman who takes dead folk across the Styx, grumbles when he sees the new queen because he knows it's just going to mean more free rides across for gods and goddesses, which will cut down on the number of people he gets across, thereby lowering the amount of oboli he gets. Pluto and Persephone ride across and Persephone comments on the dreadful color and odor of the river. Now she understands why an oath taken on this river by a god is never broken.

They pass the other four rivers: Lethe, the River of Forgetfulness; Acheron, the River of Woe; Phlegethon, the river that flows fire instead of water; and Cocytus, the River of Wailing. Persephone is beginning to have her doubts about living in this place for eternity, but she keeps silent, hoping that Pluto will show her something that will make it worthwhile. Pluto turns to her and tells her to close her eyes because they are approaching the palace. He leads her to the middle of its courtyard and tells her to open her eyes. She looks around and tries not to look too dismayed, but Pluto

can sense something anyway. It's a dark, gloomy place surrounded by foreboding dark trees; close by stretch meadows of asphodel, the lily of the dead. Persephone turns to him and says, "Are these the flowers you were speaking of?" Quickly Pluto answers, "No, of course not. Those are in Elysium; you'll see them later. Now let me show you to your room."

They walk to a beautiful suite where Persephone can see three women standing behind a curtain. Pluto announces that he has three servants to wait upon her. They step out from behind the curtain and Persephone gasps in horror. They are winged maidens with serpents twined in their hair and blood dripping from their eyes. Pluto sees her response and says that if she doesn't want them, they can go back to what they did before she came: pursuing those who escape punishment for the crimes they committed and bothering them with all the horrors of a guilty conscience. Persephone quietly says that she would rather have her attendant from the surface, so Pluto dismisses the trio and goes to search for three gentleladies willing to wait on his queen.

Persephone looks out only one window, having express orders not to look out the others. She sees people standing around, listless and blank. "That is the Field of Asphodel," she hears a voice say from behind her. She spins around and finds herself facing a mysterious Titaness. "I am Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft and sorcery. I managed to retain power after Zeus fought against Cronus. I send ghosts up to haunt the living. You were looking at the place where people are sent to wait for nothing, after they are judged, if they are found to be neither good nor bad. They are just dead.

I expect I will be seeing more of you.” And on that cheery note, she disappears.

Just then, Hades returns with the earthside attendants. “Here they are, queens all three, I think. You’ll be waited on royally. Now let’s go see the paradise I promised you.”

They walk out through the suite to a small courtyard. Surprisingly, it is bright and flowers are growing, and there is a fountain in the middle spouting clear water. Persephone starts to say how much she loves it, but Pluto cuts her off: “You think this is all? Go through the gate.”

She does, and finds everything he had described to her—orchards of beautiful fruit, sports, dancing, singing—an endless bliss, just as he had promised her! Even warriors are resting, “their armor rusting, their chariots unused” (Herzberg, p. 182).

Endlessly she played here, dancing and singing along with the others, feasting and napping beneath the purple sun and shining stars. The only time she was torn away from this was when Hades requested her presence at a judgment or some other gathering. She sat upon her throne next to him, sometimes playing with the keys to the underworld or Pluto’s magic staff, other times examining the writing on his trident or making crowns out of cypress branches. A few times she asked if she, too, could wear his cap of darkness, but the answer was always no. She wished she could be outside playing with the new friends she had made.

It was at one of these judgment sessions that Hermes found her. He came down and saw her bored; it seemed to him that she must always be so! Hermes demanded that in the name of Zeus, she be returned to her mother.

The gardener overheard this, and, as just that day he had seen her eating out of a pomegranate, he leapt in and shrieked, "She has eaten at least six seeds. The law of the underworld is that she must stay."

By this time Persephone was crying because she would have to leave her happy life and go back to the boring existence she had led, doing the same things every day and avoiding mortals. Hermes took this as a sign that she was afraid she would have to stay and was troubled, for he knew that she must remain if they were to uphold the laws.

Persephone prepared to visit her mother and tell her the truth. But when she and Hades actually arrived, Demeter ran out, grabbed her, and pulled her away; then she started screaming at Hades! What could poor Persephone do? To tell the truth now would be like exiling herself from her mother, which she didn't want to do.

So now the judgment is up to you. We know from the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, how Orpheus convinced Pluto to let Eurydice go; it should be clear to us now that Pluto is not there to punish the dead. Said Museus, "Or bid the sound of Orpheus sing/Such notes as warbled to the string/Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek/And made Hell grant what love did seek" (Herzberg, p. 187).

My client is not so cruel as to take a mother from her daughter, or, in this case, a daughter from her mother. All we ask is that, for each of the six seeds that the gardener saw Persephone eat, one month in Hades be granted her. The other six months may be spent with her mother. Thus will the laws above and the laws below be equally upheld, and the causes of both justice and love served.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sarah-Scott Brett lives in Durham, North Carolina, and attends Riverside High School. A lover of "anything involving water," she takes special pleasure in stream-walking in the mountains. Computer role-playing, reading, and acting are also important to her. She hopes to one day study drama in England.

