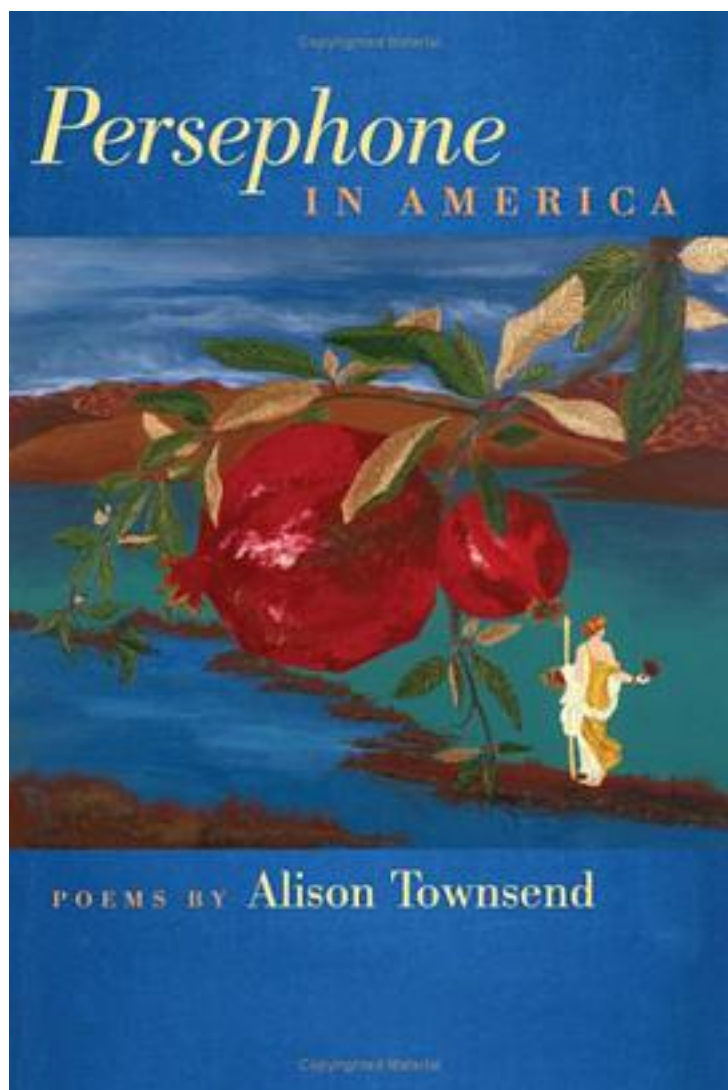


# Persephone in America



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著者:Townsend, Alison

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In "Persephone in America," Alison Townsend deftly weaves autobiography with myth in this reinvention of the tale of Demeter and Persephone as seen from the modern woman's perspective. Fraught with emotional honesty, this captivating collection of lyrical and narrative poems chronicles the struggles of the figurative Persephone in three parts--the abduction, descent to the underworld, and return. Townsend turns a shrewd eye to her own experiences, as well as to the lives of other women, to offer an unflinching yet deeply compassionate exploration of such themes as girlhood and the vulnerability of the motherless; the demons of depression, addiction, and abuse; as well as passion, aging, and celebration of the natural world. Although the poems traverse dark emotional territory at times, the picture that emerges ultimately is one of revelation and wisdom. "Persephone in America" is above all a journey of the soul, following the narrator as she explores what it means to be a woman in America, at times descending into darkness, only to emerge into redemption and realize "time's sweet and invincible secret--that everything repeats--and we watch it." Townsend's candid portrait of female loss and discovery seeks to illuminate the truths inherent in myth, and the awakenings that hide in our darkest moments. Persephone, Pretending (Madison, Wisconsin) When the news says that the girl who had been missing almost four days, only to be found in a marshy area at the edge of our medium-sized city, was faking it all along, I wondered what made her do it. I'd seen her face--bright smile, dark eyes--on a flier masking-taped to a pillar at the airport the week before, felt the involuntary frisson of the curious, then only fear at the thought of a girl "abducted" in this place once voted "America's most livable city." She must have wanted something she couldn't name, that good girl with good grades who looks like so many girls in my own classes, but who keeps changing her story. It happened here; no, it happened there; no, "I really just wanted to be alone." Then she turns her face away, tired of telling her tale, not sure what to make up next or where invention will take her. "Fictitious victimization disorder," "Time" magazine claims, but I wonder what else, imagining her in the marsh, cold, unrepentant, powerless, her mind gone muddy with lack of sleep, no way out of this lie she almost believes, or the lies ahead, nothing but memory of the rope, duct tape, cough medicine, and knife she bought at the PDQ with her own cash, wanting to be taken by someone so badly, she takes us, she does it to herself. ""

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