Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: The Dragonfly Pool by Eva Ibbotson ", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/495. Entry version as of October 30, 2026.

Eva Ibbotson

The Dragonfly Pool

United Kingdom (2008)

TAGS: Demeter Persephone





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Dragonfly Pool
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, United States, Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2008
First Edition Details	Eva Ibbotson, *The Dragonfly Pool*. London: Macmillan children's Books, 2009. Illustrated by Kevin Hawkes, 384 pp.
ISBN	9781447265658
Genre	Romance fiction, Teen fiction*
Target Audience	Children (Older children (11–13))
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Eva Ibbotson , 1925 - 2010
(Author)

Eva Ibbotson was born in Vienna, the daughter of Bertold Paul Wisner, a physician and infertility specialist, and Anna Wilhemene Gueyper, a novelist and playwright. They were non-practising Jews who were forced to flee to London prior to World War II. Ibbotson was raised in London, and studied physiology at Cambridge University, where she met her husband, Alan Ibbotson, an ecologist. She wrote romantic novels, television scripts, and children's books, and was most renowned for the last. Her work was often shortlisted for major literary awards, including the Carnegie Medal, the Romance Novelists' Association, the Smarties Prize, the Whitbread Children's Book Award, and more. Her novels are distinctive for a nostalgia for pre-war Viennese and Austrian culture, by an interest in arts and culture, and by an intertextual interweaving of myth, literature and history.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Additional information

Summary

Motherless Talitha (Tally) is raised by her overworked doctor father and his adoring sisters in London, when she is offered a place at Delderton Hall School, a free-thinking school in Devon (and a version of her own school, Dartington Hall). There, she makes friends with the other students (such as Julia who pines for her absent film-star mother, and who hides her own acting talent), and teachers (Clemmy who poses for Modernist painters; Matteo a naturalist with a hidden past). When Tally goes with Julia to see her mother in a movie, she is more taken by the newsreel about Bergania, a Ruritanian kingdom that is holding out against the march of the Nazis, its noble king, and its prince, whose face is hidden beneath the plumes on his helmet. An opportunity arises to visit Bergania for a folk-dance festival, and Tally drives the school to participate, creating with her friends a folk-dance based on the Helston Furry. She meets the prince, Karil, at the Dragonfly Pool, a magical natural space where he goes to forget his obligations. Events tip over into melodrama when Nazi plotters assassinate the king. The Deldertonians arrange Karil's escape to England. Once there, he is separated from his friends, living miserably in exile in a London house with his relatives who plot to marry him to his unpleasant cousin, Carlotta. Carlotta is intercepting messages between Karil, Tally and the other Deldertonians, before they are reunited, and Karil joins Delderton.In the final act, the Deldertonians put on a play of the myth of Persephone, in which Julia reveals her acting talent by playing Demeter, who she notes is the true hero of the myth: a mother who will stop at nothing to rescue her abducted daughter. In devising the play, Tally discovers a love for Ancient Greek that will become her career. Karil relinquishes the crown and trains to become a doctor; Matteo is elected Prime Minister of Bergania. The old order gives way to the new.

Analysis

The symbolism of the dragonfly pool, as a *locus amoenus* in which reflection on higher values is possible, is important in this loose historical novel about the shifts in order from a pre-war monarchy to a post-war democracy, which values nature and culture. The use of the Persephone myth in the final act enables a reflection on the changes in seasons (natural, social, historical) that are part of the plot (the rescue of Karil from a shadowy existence walled up in the old institution of the monarchy is one strand; another is the shift from pre-

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	war to wartime to post-war culture in 'Bergania' and in Britain. A further reflection is on the power of nature to survive human interference, and also to heal. Clemmy comments on the Ancient Greeks' love of nature – of their mountains, of their plants, and animals, and encourages the play to reflect those aspects.Similarly, the myth of Demeter and Persephone emphasizes a mother's love (in contrast to Julia's relationship with her movie-star mother), and the power of love to overcome challenges. In its interweaving of myth, romance and historical fiction, *The Dragonfly Pool* is a sentimental but intelligent romance of community, like most of Ibbotson's novels.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Demeter Persephone
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Diaspora Intellect Intertextuality Romance School War

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