Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: I Am a Minotaur by Anthony McGowan", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Miriam Riverlea. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1242. Entry version as of November 19, 2026.

Anthony McGowan

I Am a Minotaur

United Kingdom (2021)

TAGS: Ariadne Labyrinth Minotaur Theseus

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

General information	
Title of the work	I Am a Minotaur
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Australia, United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2021
First Edition Details	Anthony McGowan, *I Am the Minotaur*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, 131 pp.
ISBN	9780198494874
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Children (10–14 years)
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Creators

Anthony McGowan by Tonymac1965, 2012. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: February 2, 2022).

Anthony McGowan , b. 1965
(Author)

Anthony McGowan is a British writer of children's, young adults', adults' fiction and nonfiction. He was born in Manchester, and grew up near Leeds. He studied Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at Manchester University (BA 1996; MPhil 1990), and completed his doctorate at the Open University in 1996 (*The sublime machine: conceptions of masculine beauty 1750–1850*). He worked as a civil servant for some years, while writing novels. His works include novels in the "Willard Price" adventure series, non-fiction works on cricket and philosophy, fiction for adults (*Stag Hunt*; *Mortal Coil*), and humorous adventure stories for children: the "Project X" series (e.g. *Hamster Rampage* (2009); *Ballerina of Doom* (2010) ...), the "Bare Bum Gang" series (2008-2009); as well as serious fiction for young adults, e.g. "The Truth of Things" series (*Brock,* 2013, *Pike,* 2015, *Rook*, 2017, and *Lark* 2019). He lives in West Hampstead and is married to the novelist Rebecca Campbell. They have two children.

Sources:

en.wikipedia.org (accessed: February 2, 2022),

booksforkeeps.co.uk (accessed: June 23, 2021),

anthonymcgowan.com (accessed: June 23, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

I Am the Minotaur is a children's novel about Matthew (also known as Stinky Mog), his struggles with isolation and bullying at school, and his worries about his mother who is suffering from depression and addiction. Because of his mother's problems, Matthew is a young carer, trying to look after his mother and himself, and having difficulties with nutrition and hygiene. He becomes isolated at school when children pick on him for his appearance and smell. Referring to himself as the Minotaur, after a classroom session on Greek Mythology, Matthew feels that he has become a monster – not because of anything intrinsic to himself, but because he is viewed like this by the other children. An isolated outsider, he observes the social layers of the school (though his observations are filtered through his sadness and loneliness), falling in love with Ari (Ariadne), one of a group he names the "golden four," for their air of glamour and confidence. On her birthday, he writes a poem to her, expressing his feelings, and slips it into her locker:

"Ariadne, your hero will desert you

On some far-distant shore.

The one whose love was true

Was not Theseus, but the Minotaur." (p. 29)

When the bicycle that Ari's father gives her is stolen, Matthew decides to come to her rescue, stealing it back from the original thieves, and returning it to Ari at school. Ari's friends from the "golden four" accuse him of stealing it, and a fight ensues, but Matthew is rescued by a group of "book nerds," whom he has reluctantly spent time with while hiding out at the library. Meanwhile, his mother has been seeing a new doctor, who has noticed her addiction to prescription antidepressants and has helped her to seek different forms of therapy. Life improves for both Matthew and his mother: they are still poor and still struggle. Matthew becomes friends with Ari, and also with the "book nerds," whose valiant support of him during the fight, he truly admires. The novel ends with Matthew, a Minotaur no longer, integrated into school life, with a circle of friends and a happier life at home.

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Analysis

I am the Minotaur connects the emotional core of the Minotaur myth with the ideas of social difference, isolation, bullying, and depression. Matthew identifies with the Minotaur: "I always felt sorry for the Minotaur. He was trapped in the Labyrinth. He didn't choose to be a monster. Who does?" (p. 18) and sees that the idea of monstrosity is imposed on the creature: "The Minotaur only became a monster because he was hated" (p. 97). He sees a similarity to his own situation – ostracised because of his appearance, and trapped in an identity that was chosen for him. Occasionally, Matthew, distraught that he may have been seen putting the poem in Ariadne's locker (making himself visible to potential further bullying), goes to the school's boiler-room basement, where he sobs, howls, and gnashes his teeth (pp. 39, 98).

If there is a Theseus figure in this novel, it might be Ariadne's glamorous friend Simon, who dislikes Mog and tries to attack him when he believes he has stolen her bike. But for the most part, Mog carries the idea of Theseus around in his head – in the form of shame and repression and his belief that he is monstrous. Falling in love with Ariadne, however, gives him the emotional resilience to start to leave the labyrinth, and take the actions that make him visible, and sympathetic, to his classmates. Some of the story draws on conventional ideas about "popularity" in school stories: Matthew's identification of the different groups in the school – sporty types, arty types, golden types, and the type he looks down on, "book nerds," the children who hang out in the library and accept him for who he is. Mrs Sunda, the librarian, passes him books that help him think about bravery – including *Watership Down*, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, and *The Eagle of the Ninth*, all novels that involve epic action on the part of humble heroes who nevertheless save the day. Overall, then, *I Am the Minotaur* is one of a number of novels that connect Classical myth to the emotional journey facing young people.

The novel is part of Oxford University Press's children's publishing series, which has developed a "super-readable rollercoaster" series, in association with the Scottish publisher, Barrington Stoke, which focuses on stories that are easily readable by children with different reading skills and abilities. Its font, for instance, is readable by dyslexic children. Background notes and reading questions conclude the novel: the notes provide simple information about the Minotaur

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	myth, as well as topics such as child carers, poverty, neglect, bullying, depression, gangs, and information about the books Matthew reads. Simple questions invite children to think about issues in the book, such as wanting to be a hero, what to do if you feel pressured to do something wrong. The final question asks: "Matthew sees himself as a monster, like the Minotaur. Are monsters born? Or are they made by the way people treat them?" (p. 129).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ariadne Labyrinth Minotaur Theseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Bullying* Depression Family Siblings
Further Reading	Hale, Elizabeth, "Facing the Minotaur in the Australian Labyrinth: Politics and the Personal in Requiem for a Beast", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2020, 157–174. Rejter, Dorota, Hanna Paulouskaya and Angelina Gerus, "*It Never Hurts to Keep Looking for Sunshine:* The Motif of Depression in Works for Children and Youth Inspired by Classical Antiquity", *Clotho* 2.2 (2020): 127–154.

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