Susan Deacy, "Entry on: Daedalus and Icarus & Orpheus and Eurydice by Marcia Dorothy Williams", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/666. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Marcia Dorothy Williams

Daedalus and Icarus & Orpheus and Eurydice

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: Athena Athens Crete Daedalus Eurydice Hades Icarus Metamorphosis Minos Minotaur Orpheus Persephone Talos (Perdix) Theseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Daedalus and Icarus & Orpheus and Eurydice
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Marcia Dorothy Williams, *Daedalus and Icarus & Orpheus and Eurydice*. Greek Myths Readers. London: Walker Books, 2017, 64 pp.
ISBN	9781406371567
Genre	Adaptations
Target Audience	Children (esp. of primary school age)
Author of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

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Creators



Marcia Dorothy Williams , b. 1945
(Author, Illustrator)

Marcia Williams is a British author and illustrator. As a young child, she lived in several different countries with her mother (a writer), her stepfather (a diplomat) and her nanny. She was then sent to the UK where she attended several boarding schools. After working at several jobs, including as an interior designer and a nursery school teacher, she studied art at Richmond upon Thames College in Twickenham, London. She later went on to do an MA in Children's Literature at the University of Surrey, Roehampton in London. Williams is the author-illustrator of a number of books for children on mythological, historical and biblical topics including a number of retellings of classical myths and retellings of works of Shakespeare and Dickens. She began retelling classical myths to entertain her son when he was young. She continues to find out what entertains her young readers via regular visits to schools. She has won several awards including the UKLA Children's Book Award and The English 4–11 Picture Book Award.

According to the *Brief Biographies* entry on Williams, her 'mother, also a writer, had a passion for books, and when the two were together she would often read her daughter excerpts from classics and mythology. "I found Marcel Proust and the Greek myths a little hard going," the author recalled. "I was delighted, therefore, to discover later that many of these stories were exciting and amusing. I think this is why I enjoy making classic tales accessible to young children."'

Sources:

marciawilliams.co.uk (accessed: January 22, 2019).

walker.co.uk (accessed: January 1, 2019).

biography.jrank.org (accessed: January 1, 2019).

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Bio prepared by Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

This short book contains two stories previously published in a longer collection by the same author. Like other books in the same series, the main body of the book is taken up with one story, while around a third of the book comprises a shorter retelling.

The first story, Daedalus and Icarus, is told in a series of short chapters. Daedalus is presented as a craftsman renowned for his skills who boasts about his achievements. When his nephew, Talos, turns out to be a craftsman whose skills exceed those of Daedalus, Daedalus pushes his nephew off a tall building in Athens. Thanks to an intervention from Athene, the body of Talos crashes to the ground, but his soul is transformed into a partridge. Daedalus escapes to Crete along with his son, Icarus. Here, his creations for his new patron, king Minos, include the labyrinth, constructed to hide the Minotaur. When Theseus kills the Minotaur, Daedalus and Icarus are imprisoned in the labyrinth until they escape with wings fabricated by Daedalus. When Icarus flies too close to the sun, the wax keeping the feathers of his wings together melts and he crashes to the ground. When a partridge lands near the grave of Icarus, Daedalus realises that the gods have punished him for killing Talos.

The book then turns to another skilled practitioner, the poet-musician Orpheus. When his wife, the tree nymph Eurydice, dies after being bitten by a snake, the grief-stricken Orpheus pursues her to the underworld, charms Hades and Persephone with his music and is permitted to lead Eurydice back to earth. He is told not to look back at his wife until he gets out of Hades. But he does look back. Eurydice's ghost returns to Hades.

Analysis

Like others of Marcia Williams' retellings of classical myths for children, the two stories here introduce readers to stories where unpleasant things happen. In the first, the jealous Daedalus tries to kill his nephew, the exceptionally-talented Talos. In one respect, he succeeds when Talos' body crashes to the ground. But Williams combines one version of the myth, where Daedalus murders his nephew, with another, whereby Athene saves Talos by turning him into a partridge. Here, the body hits the ground and thus Daedalus believes himself guilty of murder but, introducing a mind/soul split

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that looks more Christian than ancient Greek, the spirit is turned into a bird. Later on, another young man, Icarus, falls to earth and does actually die. Williams, thus, introduces a causal link the to story of Daedalus, who suffers the loss of his son in divine retribution for killing another young man.

In the next story, too, there are two deaths, depending on how one reads the final fate of Eurydice. Firstly, she dies from a snake bite; secondly, her ghost returns to the underworld just when Orpheus has nearly brought her back. In both stories, the dead person is mourned by the surviving person whose actions contribute to the circumstances of their loss. Williams here reflects the recurrent view in ancient Greek mythology, namely that it is impossible to cheat death; one can only *almost* succeed.

For all their focus on arrogant individuals and such serious themes as death, loss and grief, the tone remains light-hearted, both in the text and in the comic-book style illustrations. Classical myth as presented here deals with difficult topics but via a light-hearted touch.

The book includes episodes not elaborated upon here, notably Theseus's killing of the Minotaur. If readers want to follow up, they will need to do it on their own initiative since a guide to further reading is not included. Indeed, while the book is presented comparably to Williams other retellings, there is nothing in the book to indicate that it is part of a series.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Athens Crete Daedalus Eurydice Hades Icarus Metamorphosis Minos Minotaur Orpheus Persephone Talos (Perdix) Theseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Animals Character traits Conflict Death Emotions Humour Invention Journeys Loss Love Murder Parents (and children) Punishment Relationships Soul Success and failure Violence

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Addenda

First published in *Greek Myths for Young Children,* London: Walker, 1991.

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