Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Ovid for Fun, vol. 1: The Labyrinth of the Minotaur, Daedalus and Icarus [Ovidio per Gioco, 1: Il labirinto del Minotauro, Dedalo e Icaro] by Celina Elmi, Valentina Orlando", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/811. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Celina Elmi , Valentina Orlando

Ovid for Fun, vol. 1: The Labyrinth of the Minotaur, Daedalus and Icarus [Ovidio per Gioco, 1: Il labirinto del Minotauro, Dedalo e Icaro]

Italy (2012)

TAGS: Ariadne Bacchus Daedalus Icarus Labyrinth Minos Minotaur Theseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Ovid for Fun, vol. 1: The Labyrinth of the Minotaur, Daedalus and Icarus [Ovidio per Gioco, 1: Il labirinto del Minotauro, Dedalo e Icaro]
Country of the First Edition	Italy
Country/countries of popularity	Italy
Original Language	Italian
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Valentina Orlando, *Ovidio per gioco*, vol. 1: *Il labirinto del Minotauro, Dedalo e Icaro* (*Le Novelle della Cipolla* series). Federighi Editori, 2012, 48 pp.
ISBN	9788889159545
Genre	Adaptations, Illustrated works, Myths
Target Audience	Children
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Celina Elmi (Illustrator)

Celina Elmi is an Italian illustrator and graphic designer; she has a degree in Culture and Fashion styling (Università di Lettere e Filosofia). In 2014, along with three more female artists, she formed a collective, “Le Vanvere”, which organizes events and exhibitions. She also organizes various workshops.

Sources:

Personal website (accessed: March 7, 2019).

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Valentina Orlando (Author)

Valentina Orlando is an Italian author of children books, for example *Dante for Fun*, *The Decameron / Calandrino and the Stolen Pork: Costanza and Martuccio*. These are renditions of classical literature for young readership.

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Additional information

Translation

English: *Ovid for Fun. The Labyrinth of the Minotaur. Deadalus and Icarus*, vol. 1, trans. Lesley Burgon and Enid Burgon. Federighi Editori, 2012, 48 pp.

Summary

At the beginning of the book, there is an index of characters with accompanying pictures and a short description. This book focuses on the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and on Daedalus' escape from Crete with his son, Icarus.

With the story of Daedalus and Icarus, the author begins her narrative with a lesser-known part of the myth, with Daedalus, who is envious of his nephew Acale's talent, pushes him off a cliff. Athena intervenes and turns the boy into a partridge. Daedalus is exiled to Crete for this act and later, in his attempt to flee from Minos, he creates wings for Icarus and for himself. The reference to Ovid is made at the back cover, where he is referred to as the author of these myths.

Analysis

This series aims to present the mythological stories in an accessible and readable way.

As noted in the entry for the previous book in the series (*The Iliad: Homer for Fun*), these abridged and illustrated books aim at making the ancient myths accessible to various readers, young as well as older. The illustrations are an important part of the narrative and are used to help telling the stories.

Thus the stories in this book focus on specific episodes, rather than covering all of Theseus' adventures. The author may have wished to introduce more known stories narrated by Ovid thus Theseus and Icarus were chosen. Although these stories does not share the same moral, yet they both complete each other and relate to the labyrinth. Perhaps the story of Theseus is known to young Italian children who study it at school and therefore this story may have greater appeal than others. The book publisher, Federighi editori appears to be aiming at children, parents, librarians and educators. Hence we may assume that these books are perhaps meant to accompany lessons on

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mythology in class and perhaps even English lessons in Italian schools. This specific series of stories is described on the publisher's website (accessed: June 01, 2022) as "Le Novelle della Cipolla – Who said that the classics are difficult? In this series the great classics of literature are told to children in simple language and amusing illustrations. To know and reflect while having fun!". Thus it appears that various stories were chosen in order to introduce the classical myths to young readers. The stories that were selected, therefore, were perhaps deemed more interesting to children by the author and editors.

While the story is aimed at younger readership, it does relate, rather graphically, the birth of the Minotaur, with the language accommodating the story to a younger audience: Pasiphaë, as part of Poseidon's punishment "lusted" for the white bull and "from this bizarre union between the queen and the beast, a ghastly creature was born." (p. 10).

Theseus arrives in Crete as the prince of Athens, and he is portrayed as a brave hero with whom Ariadne immediately falls in love. Although the book's focus is the heroic act of Theseus, it cannot ignore his betrayal of Ariadne, even if it is not overly stressed: "when Ariadne awoke the following morning, she found herself alone. Theseus was no longer by her side. For reasons which are still unknown, the young Athenian had abandoned her." The story of Theseus presents various challenges to children's authors, especially to those who are interested in presenting Theseus as an impeccable hero. In this book, the author did not wish to emphasize Theseus' wrong conduct and she chose to leave this matter obscured. The author provides a happy ending for Ariadne by including the Dionysian solution of the story and Ariadne becoming immortal, which also reduces the blame on Theseus.

The focus is on Theseus as hero and the author wishes to present his character positively. Therefore she deliberately does not include episodes which show Theseus in a bad light. This explains why the death of Aegeus (due to Theseus' negligence to change his sails) is not mentioned in the narrative as well.

In the second narrative, that of Daedalus and Icarus, the author chooses a more didactic tone. It is emphasized that Icarus carelessly played with the wings, unaware of the future. This note is meant to

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amplify the drama of the coming tragedy.

After Icarus falls, Daedalus curses his invention and buries his son on a small island. When he sits on the shore, lonely, a partridge approaches him and Daedalus asks it “why do you seem to mock my misfortune?” (p. 46). Yet he then understands that this was his nephew, Acale, who came to remind Daedalus of his past horrid act. Unlike Theseus, Daedalus is presented as a flawed character. The difference between the two could be that Theseus is referred to as a hero and Daedalus as a vain creator. While the author tried to obscure the abandonment of Ariadne, she could not ignore the death of Icarus which forms the heart of the story.

However, even Daedalus finds forgiveness for his past crimes. In an ending remark, the author notes that a traveler once saw him living in peace far away. Daedalus was punished for taking a life (Acale) by losing his own son and thus he received a suitable punishment for his crime (although poor Icarus paid dearly for his father’s sin). This is a more somber story that the tale of Theseus, which seems a bit more like a fairy tale, and hence in one book the author offers two very different tales from Greek mythology, one more fantastic and heroic and the other dealing with pain, loss and vanity. These stories therefore show the richness of the Greek myth as relating different narratives. If this series is indeed aimed also at educators, then these two stories can be used by teachers to explain concepts of heroism and loss to their students.

Yet it was important for the author to finish the story of Daedalus with a suitable conclusion as well and perhaps allude to Christian concepts of forgiveness and acceptance. This ending provides a satisfying and optimistic conclusion, which leaves the young readers with a sense of closure and comfort.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Ariadne Bacchus Daedalus Icarus Labyrinth Minos Minotaur Theseus

Adventure Death Love Parents (and children) Punishment

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Transformation

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