Miriam Riverlea, "Entry on: The Icarus Show by Sally Christie", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/925. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Sally Christie

The Icarus Show

United Kingdom (2016)

TAGS: Daedalus Icarus Labyrinth

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

General information	
Title of the work	The Icarus Show
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2016
First Edition Details	Sally Christie, *The Icarus Show*. Oxford: David Fickling, 2016, 265 pp.
ISBN	9781910200483
Genre	Novels, Teen fiction*
Target Audience	Young adults (Older children: Recommended for readers aged 8–12, though the confronting themes seem more appropriate to more mature teenage readers)
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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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

Sally Christie , b. 1964
(Author)

British children's author Sally Christie is the daughter of Philippa Pearce, who wrote the time-slip children's classic *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), which was awarded the Carnegie Medal. Christie's first job was with a children's publisher, and while working for the company she submitted a story under the pen name Syd Carter. After nearly three decades she returned to writing, publishing T*he Icarus Show* in 2016, and *Spirit*, a story about friendship and magic, in 2018.

She is not to be confused with another British based writer of the same name, who is responsible for *The Mistresses of Versailles Trilogy*.

Sources:

Bio at davidficklingbooks.com (accessed: December 9, 2019)

Nicholas Tucker, *Sally Christie, The Icarus Show: 'How to tackle bullies? You could just rise above them', book review*, independent.co.uk January 17, 2016 (accessed: December 9, 2019).

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Additional information

Summary

Alex Meadows has just started Year 7 at Lambourn High School. His best friend Phil has moved away, and he is also missing his elderly next door neighbour Maisy, who has had to move into an aged care facility following the death of her husband, Don. Alex's family have sold their house and moved next door into Maisy and Don's place, which has a bigger and better garden, and Alex is spending a lot of time in Don's shed, which abuts their old garden shed next door. Guided by his chosen motto 'Don't React', Alex is trying to fit in at school and avoid the attention of the class bully, Alan Tydman, and his sycophantic gang, Alan's Battalion. Kids give Alan money in return for lollies, but he gets to choose how many sweets go into the paper bag.

Alex discovers a mysterious note and a feather inside his schoolbag. It reads "**Coming soon! A boy is going to fly! Do you believe it? *Can* you believe it?? Will you be there???**" Subsequent notes reveal the time and place of this spectacle, November 2nd, at sunset at the motorway bridge. Obsessed with this tantalising yet seemingly unlikely notion, Alex gradually deduces that it is David Marsh, the boy who has moved in to his old house next door, who is responsible. Unlike Alex, David has tried to stand up to the bully Alan and has been branded with the insulting nickname David Bog, or Bogsy. The whole class is receiving the strange notes, and while most of them are merely curious, Alan seems enraged by them.

Alex sneaks into David's shed and discovers a set of half-built wings. They are magnificently crafted, and he is desperate to help with the project. Back at home he retrieves an old feather headdress with striking green parrot feathers that he made years ago and leaves it in the shed, forgetting that his name was written on it. Begrudgingly, David allows Alex to assist him, giving him the job of moistening the chewing gum that holds the feathers in place. As the wings are completed, the boys slowly become friends, though David remains remote and withdrawn. He reveals that his father has left, and that he blames himself. On Halloween Night, the boys join the younger children in going trick or treating around the neighbourhood. David, who is very tall, is a terrifying spectacle in the wings and a fearsome bird mask, and Alex, hastily dressed in a Frankenstein monster mask, reveals his own identity to try and calm those they visit. Their final stop is at the house of Alan Tydman, who pursues them through the streets, but they get away on their bikes.

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On November 2nd, David's birthday, and the day of the Icarus show, David provokes Alan into beating him up. Having now been accepted into the gang of bullies, Alex fails to support his friend. After school, he remorsefully trails David to the motorway where the class has gathered in anticipation. As sunset approaches, Alex follows David as they slip away from the group. They climb through a long concrete tunnel and scale the bridge. Meanwhile, in a pub, Titch, David's alcoholic father, gets an urgent call and races to the scene. One of the kids has brought their father, who is a policeman. High above the motorway, Bogsy unfurls the wings and instructs Alex to give him a push. Instead, Alex instinctually grabs hold of him, and the boys wrestle on the narrow ledge. After the damaged wings tumble through the air, Alex sits on David's chest as Titch manages to get his son's attention and talk him down.

Analysis

The Icarus myth is traditionally regarded as a cautionary tale promoting obedience and moderation, but *The Icarus Show*, like a number of other works for young adults, uses the myth to explore the emotional experiences of adolescent boys, in particular the complexities of the father-son relationship and the desire for freedom. With its school setting, first person narration, and representation of loneliness, trauma, and a fractured father-son relationship, *The Icarus Show* strongly recalls Paul Zindel's *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High* (1984), in which another boy becomes convinced he is Icarus, constructs a set of feathered wings and jumps off a roof. Unlike Jason, David survives his suicide attempt thanks to the intervention of his friend and the return of his father. In spite of this ostensibly happy ending, the scene on the overpass is highly confronting, and Nicholas Tucker's review of *The Icarus Show* in *The Independent* (see here, accessed: December 9, 2019) suggests that it would be useful to include the contact numbers for support agencies at the end of the book.

Alex is a naïve character who does not seem to fully grasp the seriousness of his friend's situation. Even when he knows all the details he remains enchanted by the idea of the spectacle of a boy with wings. When he brings Maisy to visit David in his shed, Alex is bewildered by the directness of their conversation. In spite of her age and confusion about the reality of her own life (at times she believes her husband is still alive), Maisy immediately understands that David

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is suicidal and needs help. She repeatedly counsels Alex to tell a teacher about what is happening, and is the one responsible for alerting David's mother, who in turn contacts his father. Alex's parents remain remote throughout the story. They seem disconnected from their son's life, and blunder through the process of telling him that Don's garden shed, which serves as Alex's sanctuary, needs to be demolished. The kit shed that they have chosen as a replacement, a ridiculous 'Shed 'n' Playhouse Under One Roof' complete with bright red heart-shaped shutters and a bonus teddy bear, suggests that they have not adjusted to Alex's maturation and his need for a space of his own.

Alex is influenced and inspired by his English teacher Mr Smith, who tells the class stories from the Greek myths as well as teaching them about clichés, rhetorical questions, and irony. His personable narration is peppered with references to the conventions of language and storytelling, alongside a series of intertextual references to *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Rabbit*, and other classics of children's literature. Alex longs for the neat and happy ending of Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, in which the "long lost dad came back to the family home, and went in through the door" (p. 224). The parallel with the return of David's father Titch is plain, but is undercut by the final chapter, enigmatically entitled "Guess Who", in which David seizes control of the narrative, and criticises Alex for making "it sound too cosy…like his railway book" (p. 265). Ultimately, Christie suggests, nothing is so clear or simple, but the story ends on an optimistic note, celebrating the friendship of the two young men and David's plans for the future.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Daedalus Icarus Labyrinth
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Boys Child's view Coming of age Death Depression Friendship Intertextuality Invention Isolation/loneliness Old age (Old people) Parents (and children) Peers Relationships School Students Suicide Teachers

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Further Reading

Review at kirkusreviews.com (accessed: December 9, 2019).

Tucker, Nicholas, Sally Christie, *The Icarus Show: 'How to tackle bullies? You could just rise above them', book review*, independent.co.uk, January 17, 2016 (accessed: December 9, 2019).

The Icarus Show by Sally Christie review – a tale of playground survival, theguardian.com (accessed: December 9, 2019).

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