Wayne Harris , Margaret Wild

The House of Narcissus

Australia (2001)

TAGS: Narcissus





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General information	
Title of the work	The House of Narcissus
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2001
First Edition Details	Margaret Wild, Wayne Harris, *The House of Narcissus.* Sydney: ABC Books, 2001, 32 pp.
ISBN	9780733310492
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children (7–12)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Wayne Harris , b. 1956
(Illustrator)

Wayne Harris is an Australian illustrator who lives in Sydney. When he was seven, he was hospitalized for 18 months, and was unable to move except for his arms. He spent the time drawing, reading, and listening to the radio. For several years he was a singer, performing in jazz and rock bands, before training in design at Randall Technical College. He worked in bookshops, and took up illustration work, and has illustrated dozens of picture books published in Australia. He is art director of Walker Books Australia, and teaches continuing education at Sydney University's Centre for Continuing Education.

Sources:

Profile at magpies-net-au (accessed: March 25, 2020).

Interview at kids-bookreview.com (accessed: March 25, 2020).

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



Margaret Wild , b. 1948
(Author)

Margaret Wild was born in Eshowe, South Africa, in 1948. Her father was a bank manager, and the family moved frequently. She attended state schools in Johannesburg. She came to Australia in 1972. She studied at Australian National University in Canberra, and worked as a freelance writer and book editor in children's publishing. Since

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1984, she has published over 60 picture books, many of them award-winning, including *Let the Celebrations Begin* (1991, illustrated by Julie Vivas), which focuses on the release of Jewish prisoners from a Nazi concentration camp, and *Fox* (2000, illustrated by Ron Brooks), a fable-like story of friendship and betrayal. Wild's work is known for exploring difficult issues—on identity, trust, death, and fear. She lives in Sydney.

Sources:

Magpies: Talking about Books for Children, Author entry on Margaret Wild, magpies-net-au (accessed: March 25, 2020).

Profile at Wikipedia (accessed: March 25, 2020).

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

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Additional information

Summary

The House of Narcissus is a paranormal picture book about a beautiful house in a city of waterways that falls in love with its own reflection. Resenting the intrusion of people who live in it, who distract it from thinking about its own beauty, the house tries to drive them out, with bad smells, and cold. Sending a chandelier crashing to the ground, the house scars a small girl, and is left alone. It draws ever closer to its reflection, not noticing its loneliness. A cat moves in, and the house occasionally talks to it. One night, a boating festival covers the water, and the house cannot see its reflection. Without distraction, it realizes the harm it has caused, to itself and to others. It sees the crumbling plaster and stained floors, and worse, sees its "cold, unloving heart, its ugly pride, its emptiness," and it weeps. The cat quietly asks it "what is beauty?" In the morning, the house looks out into the world, rather than down at its reflection. It sees a gondolier, "a boy running across the water, light as a bird," and admires the boy's beauty. The cat informs the house the boy is the son of a woman with a scarred face (the girl harmed by the chandelier). The house tells the cat he would like to invite the boy and his mother in, if they can forgive him, and the cat goes to ask the boy. The book closes with an image of the boy, holding the cat in his arms, hearing his story.

Analysis

The House of Narcissus draws on the myth of Narcissus to reflect on the consequences of vanity and self-obsession. The house is a mansion in Renaissance Venice, opulent in its beauty, with rich paintings, marble, tapestries and gold fittings. Wayne Harris's rich illustrations use oil paints to capture a layered sense of opulence and richness, giving way to coldness and decay as the house turns in on itself. Extreme angles, show the story from different perspectives, in and around the house, adding to the sense of unease and sadness of this selfish house. Wild's work, always unusual and compelling, is additionally so in her exploration of the inanimate object, a house, possessed by negative emotions.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and

Narcissus

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Concepts

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Animals Gaining understanding Identity Isolation/loneliness Psychology Talking animals

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