Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word and Music by Matt Ottley", peer-reviewed by Miriam Riverlea and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/126. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

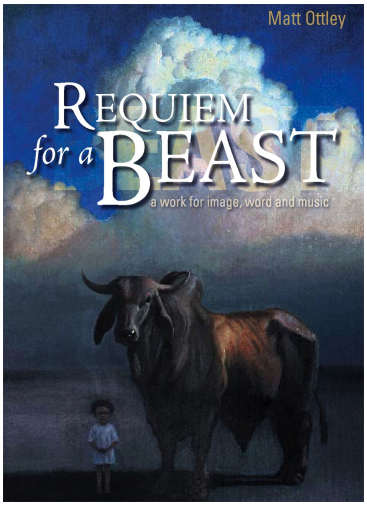
Matt Ottley

Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word and Music

Australia (2007)

TAGS: Ariadne Labyrinth Minotaur Theseus





Courtesy of Hachette Australia, publisher.

General information	
Title of the work	Requiem for a Beast: A Work for Image, Word and Music
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2007
First Edition Details	Matt Ottley, *Requiem for a Beast*. Sydney: Hachette Livre Australia, 2007, 90 pp.
ISBN	9780734407962
Awards	2008 - Children's Book Council of Australia Illustrated Book Award
Genre	Fiction, Graphic novels, Novels
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Creators



Matt Ottley , b. 1965

Matt Ottley was born in 1962 in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. His father was an engineer, his mother a landscape artist. They emigrated to Australia in 1974. Ottley received training in fine arts from the Julian Ashton School of Fine Arts (graduated 1982), and a BA in music composition from the University of Wollongong, New South Wales (1986). He worked for many years as a stockman in the Australian Outback, before returning to study.

An accomplished flamenco guitarist, Matt Ottley is a multi modal artist and writer working across the fields of music, visual arts and literature. He has won multiple awards for his picture books which are created for both children and adults. His picture books include subtextual themes, enabling multiple layers and meanings.

Source:

Official website (accessed: June 26, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

In *Requiem for a Beast*, an unnamed Australian teenager is preparing to take part in an outback cattle muster. As he rides his horse towards the cattle, he sees an unusually large Brahmin bull. This bull has evaded muster for many years, and the boy challenges it. He chases it into a ravine, where it falls and fatally injures itself. The boy is forced to slaughter it, in order to put it out of its misery.

As he is in this situation, he experiences several flashbacks to important moments in his life. These include his childhood in an unnamed suburb. When he was a child, his father took him to a museum, where he saw an exhibit about the Minotaur that has haunted him ever since. At another time, his father reveals that he and a group of friends were responsible for the death of a young Aboriginal man when they chased him across a bridge in his car. His father has suffered guilt and shame ever since. The boy is traumatised by this story, and in his mind, the image of the Minotaur and his father's shame become symbolically linked. He becomes a rebellious teenager, getting involved in drugs and petty crime. When he goes to the outback to work as a stockman, he is drawn into a village hall, where an elderly Aboriginal woman is speaking about the history of the European settlement, or invasion, of Australia. A victim of what is known as the "stolen generation," as a child, she had been removed from her family and raised according to governmental standards. Greatly affected by her story, the boy associates her with Ariadne, holding a narrative thread of acknowledgement and redemption through which he can navigate the labyrinth of his emotions. Further layers and echoes connect with iconic figures from Australian settler history, such as the outlaw "bushranger," Ned Kelly, who made himself a rudimentary metal helmet that has since become in Australia an iconic symbol of masculine rebellion and lawlessness.

The book is highly visual, told through a mixture of the graphic novel, wordless sets of images, and also more traditional prose narratives. Accompanying it is a classical requiem, composed by Ottley as a companion piece.

Requiem for a Beast evokes many dominant issues in Australian culture: masculinity, adolescence, families, the shameful past of the European settlement of Australia, the situation of the Australian Aborigines, and the treatment of animals in Australian outback

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culture. The relation of the boy to the beast is clearly ritualistic: a coming-of-age narrative around which the other issues appear. The symbolic use of the Minotaur and the Theseus story is interwoven into the story of the boy's (and Australia's) coming of age.

Analysis

Requiem for a Beast represents an interweaving of the myths of Theseus, the Minotaur, and Ariadne, into the myths and legends of Australian settlement. The symbolic use of the Minotaur as representing shame, guilt, and other repressed emotions is noteworthy. So too is the representation of the old Aboriginal woman (sometimes also depicted as a little girl) as an Ariadne, offering the boy the stories that provide a thread out of his shame, guilt, and powerlessness. Only by listening to the Aboriginal experience, an experience usually related through the story, Ottley indicates, can the boy find his way through trauma. This book is written during a period in recent Australian history known as the "culture wars," in which the role of White Australians in oppressing the Aboriginals came under intense scrutiny. In this period of debate, past wrongs were acknowledged, such as the Stolen Generation, leading up to the "Apology to the Stolen Generation," issued by then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd (known as "Sorry Day.")

Erica Hateley questions the incorporation of the canonical Western image of the Minotaur, Theseus, and Ariadne, asking why it was necessary to import these rituals into so Australian a text. On the other hand, the use of canonical material offers a readily-readable short-hand for the issues of masculinity, coming-of-age, hero's journey, aspects of the text.

Requiem for a Beast won the Children's Book Council of Australia Illustrated Book Award for 2008. This was controversial, not because of the political elements of the book, but because the book includes swear-words as part of the story. Many critics mistakenly thought this book was a picture book, aimed at young readers; however, it fits much more comfortably into the category of young adult fiction, especially given its confronting subject matter.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs,

Ariadne Labyrinth Minotaur Theseus

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Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Coming of age History Identity Masculinity Nation
Further Reading	Hale, Elizabeth, "Friday essay: Feminist Medusas and outback Minotaurs – why myth is big in children's books", *The Conversation* (2016), available at theconversation.com (accessed: August 2, 2018). Hateley, Erica, "*Requiem for a Beast*: A Case Study in Controversy", [at:] The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2014 Official Conference Proceedings 2014, eprints.qut.edu.au (accessed: August 2, 2018).

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