Nadia Wheatley

Melting Point

Australia (1994)

TAGS: Crete Daedalus Icarus Latin (Language) Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Ovid





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General information	
Title of the work	Melting Point
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1994
First Edition Details	Nadia Wheatley, "Melting Point", [in:] *The Night Tolkien Died*. Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 1994, 207–238.
ISBN	009182947X
Genre	Alternative histories (Fiction), Fiction, Mythological fiction, Short stories
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com
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Creators



Nadia Wheatley by Crico, 2015. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International (accessed: December 15, 2021).

Nadia Wheatley , b. 1949
(Author)

Nadia Wheatley was born in Sydney in 1949. She has written extensively for children and young adults, in addition to her work as an historian, researcher and biographer. She began to write seriously during the 1970s whilst living in Crete and on the Peloponnese. Many of her works explore Australia's multicultural identity. *My Place* (1988), illustrated by Donna Rawlins, traces a Sydney house back in time in decade-long intervals to before the time of white settlement, charting the changes and continuities of the site. Her most recent publication, *Australians All* (2014), charts the history of Australia from the Ice Age to then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations, through the perspective of young people.

The short story anthology *The Night Tolkien Died*, in which "Melting Point" features, was recognised as an Honour Book by the Children's Book Council of Australia in 1995. In addition to the numerous awards her books have received, Wheatley's contribution to children's literature was honoured with a nomination for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing in 2014.

In recent years, Wheatley has worked with an Aboriginal community in the Western Desert of the Northern Territory to develop Indigenous teaching resources. *Playground – Stories from Country and from Inside the Heart* (2011) is a compilation of autobiographical stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a focus on the themes of childhood and education.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Contact (accessed: January 11, 2017).

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Additional information

Summary

Melting Point is the story of Xenia Hadzithakis, a seventeen-year-old Greek Australian girl living in Sydney, Australia. Xenia is a rebel, in constant conflict with her traditional Yaya over her style of dress, her forthright behaviour, even the fact that she is studying Latin at school rather than ancient or modern Greek. After a terrible argument with her grandmother, she finds solace in the classroom translating Ovid's version of the story of Icarus' flight and fall from Book Eight of the *Metamorphoses*. After working through Ovid's topographical descriptions, she comes to understand her Yaya's love of her Cretan homeland, and links her grandmother's homesickness with that of both Daedalus and Ovid, writing the *Metamorphoses* while exiled to Tomis. Xenia herself identifies with Icarus as a teenager struggling against the limitations set by his elders and is reduced to tears by Ovid's account of his death.

Ultimately, Xenia and her Yaya reconcile over a sumptuous feast of Greek food which they devour on the school principal's private lawn and together escape the school grounds to catch the Manly Ferry across Sydney Harbour. They make plans to travel to Greece together, with Xenia insisting she will not modify her dress or behaviour to appease her family's conservative expectations. As they sail out through the Heads, Xenia realises that "as all the oceans of the world ultimately join together, some of the water here in Sydney Harbour could once have been in that very sea where Icarus fell." (p. 237) The story's conclusion elides the distance between past and present, myth and reality, Greece and Australia, to highlight the enduring relevance of this myth.

Analysis

The text is a retelling of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, but the contemporary frame narrative gives it a dramatically different focus to other versions which tend to represent the myth as a cautionary tale about the necessity of moderation (such as Jane Yolen's *Wings* (1997) or Saviour Pirotta's *The boy who flew too close to the sun* in *The Orchard Book of First (Greek Myths* (2003)).

As well as a story about Australia's multicultural identity (the title alludes to the 'melting pot' assimilation policies endorsed by the governments of many countries, including Australia), Wheatley's work

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provides a critique of the reception of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, tracing its journey from a Greek paramythi to its codification in Latin literature, and through the critical tradition of Oxbridge commentaries and cribs to its manifestation as a text for study in a sunny Sydney classroom. It explores how a two-thousand-year-old story from the other side of the globe has relevance in the contemporary Australian culture, with its own history of immigration.

The text features an epigraph detailing a dictionary entry for the term "translation". The three definitions supplied to highlight the linguistic, metamorphic, and theological contexts for the term. This opening foreshadows moments in which the act of textual translation is represented, with passages of Ovid's Latin laid out alongside their English equivalents. The reader translates the text alongside Xenia, sharing her discovery of the irony of employing a Latin text to access Greek culture. As Icarus and his father take to the air, Wheatley's writing becomes more experimental, using concrete poetry to depict the shape of their flight path and Icarus' fall. The shapes of the printed text encourage the reader to reflect upon the ways in which a story is packaged, and the impact of the written word as a conveyor of both meaning and image.

Melting Point is a unique and complex retelling of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, and an important text for the study of the reception of myth itself.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Crete Daedalus Icarus Latin (Language) Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Ovid
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Diaspora Family Homesickness Multiculturalism Old age (Old people) Past Relationships School Storytelling Students Teachers
Further Reading	Bunbury, Rhonda, "Old Neighbours, New Visions, at a Melting Point?"

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in Maureen Nimon, ed., *Old Neighbours, New Visions*, Adelaide: Centre for Children's Literature, University of South Australia, 1997, 59–70.

Bunbury, Rhonda, "Culture Clash Across Generations: An Interview with Nadia Wheatley", transcript of Interview on CD: *Diverse Identities: Interviews*, Melbourne: Learning Services, Deakin University, 2004.

Masson, Sophie,Elizabeth Hale, "Mosaic and Cornucopia: Fairy Tale and Myth in Contemporary Young Adult Fantasy", *Bookbird* 54.3 (2016): 44–53.

Riverlea, Miriam, "*Icarus is Seventeen, like me*: Reworking Myth in Young Adult Fiction", *Melbourne Historical Journal* 40.2 (2012): 26–44. Available at theamphoraissue.files.wordpress.com (accessed January 12, 2017).

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