Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: Escape from Pompeii by Christina Balit", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/954. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Christina Balit

Escape from Pompeii

United Kingdom (2003)

TAGS: Eruption of Vesuvius Pompeii Vesuvius

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

General information	
Title of the work	Escape from Pompeii
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2003
First Edition Details	Christina Balit, *Escape from Pompeii*. London: Frances Lincoln, 2003, 32 pp.
ISBN	9781845070595
Genre	Fiction, Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children (6–9 year olds)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com
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Creators

Christina Balit , b. 1961
(Author, Illustrator)

Christina Balit was born in the UK, but spent most of her childhood in the Middle East. She studied at the Chelsea School of Art and Royal College of Art. Her distinctive style of illustrations is founded on the use of watercolours. Balit's work covers a range of mythological traditions including Greek, Roman, Biblical, and Babylonian. Regarding classical myth specifically, Balit has written *The Scarab's Secret, Atlantis: The Legend of a Lost City*, introduction by Geoffrey Ashe, Henry Holt (New York, NY), 2000 and *Escape from Pompeii*, Henry Holt (New York, NY), 2003. As well as illustrating James Riordan, *The Twelve Labors of Hercules*, Millbrook Press (Brookfield, CT), 1997. She has also illustrated books of fairy tale, the solar system and tales from the Bible. Christina is the winner of The English Association's 4–11 Award for the Best Children's Illustrated Book of 2001, Key Stage 2 Non Fiction Illustration Award in 2002 for *The Kingdom of the Sun* and UK Reading Association Award for *Ishtad & Tammuz* among other awards.

She says of her work "My need to make something from nothing is the reason my blood runs, and I need to keep it thick. I read somewhere that Jacques-Yves Cousteau said "If we didn't die, we would not appreciate life as we do. I don't fear dying, but I can't imagine how people live if they don't 'make' things." (Source here, accessed: August 7, 2018).

Sources:

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Additional information

Summary

The story follows young Tranio and Livia, and their happy life in Pompeii. However, one August day the land quakes and Vesuvius erupts. The children initially do not grasp the full danger of the situation, but soon they realize it and witness the damage. They run to the harbour and hide on a Greek cargo ship. When they wake up the ship is already sailing away from the city. The children are saved. The text is accompanied by colourful and large illustrations.

On the last page there is a brief account on the story of Pompeii and its discovery.

Analysis

The book is narrated from the children's point of view and therefore the young reader can more easily identify with them. Their carefree and happy lives at the beginning of the story would soon be contrasted with the city's ruin, hence amplifying the trauma. The more we see their daily activities in the flourishing city, such as going to the forum to watch the politicians, playing with bones, or visiting the theatre; the bigger the effect of its loss. The fact that the children manage to escape on their own, with no reference to family, weakens the trauma of the story, making it more suitable for the youthful readership.

The loss of the city is described without a reference to the loss of life until the last page. Only when the couple are older and walk upon the buried city it is noted that they said "farewell to those buried under the ash beneath their feet." In the illustration, we see layers of earth and then the houses and the people who seem almost to be sleeping. These bodies are not decaying, but are well dressed and appear normal people who are portrayed almost as if resting beneath the earth. The illustration hence carefully and delicately shows the great catastrophe, yet without being gory or scary.

Although the story seemingly has a happy ending, in that the heroes are safe, it does not end on a happy note, because of the scale of the disaster . The book tries to convey the great loss of the thousands who perished in the city and also show how their life was before the eruption. The protagonists were happy, regular children, like their readers, ad suddenly their world was torn apart. This book may therefore help explain to children that catastrophes happen, but that

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	one can cope with them and continue living. It is also stressed that although the children physically escape from Pompeii, it will always remain in their hearts. Tranio and Livia's silent hope and wonder whether "would anyone ever find their beloved Pompeii" happily came true and nowadays people can walk the uncovered street and pay tribute to the life that was so abruptly lost there.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Eruption of Vesuvius Pompeii Vesuvius
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Death Environment Family Loss

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