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Rewriting the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice for young readers.

Analysis of an example in German

Classical mythology has always been actual in modern children's literature thanks to a great variety of rewritings of ancient myths produced over time and in different cultures (Janka/Stierstorfer 2017). Along the classical reception studies, different and partly controversial approaches and attitudes emerge concerning the text aims in adapting ancient myths for young readers, especially with regard to their educational impact and their cultural, social and political significance. This becomes particularly evident by taking into account the role of children's literature throughout the period of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). While in the 1960s classical myths were regarded as a key instrument for education and indoctrination and adapted in order to strengthen the socialist development of children and society, there were also cases of writers who, years later, turned to the rewriting of classical myths in children's literature to subliminally transmit critical views upon the authoritarian political and social system of the GDR, avoiding censorship (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2016). Against this background, my analysis is focused on an example of rewriting of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in a German text addressing young readers, published in the GDR. More specifically, I will examine such rewriting project implemented in relation to the recipients, considering also its underlying intentionality and retelling strategies, in line with the concept of rewriting by Lefevere (1992) and Nergaard (2005), in its broad sense of manipulation of the source text aimed at adapting it into a different context that intertwines with the specific expectations of the recipient as well as with the reflections of Zumthor (1972) and Bryant (2002) on textual movement. Indeed rewriting is here considered as an intertextual practice of a dialogical and dynamic nature aimed at bringing the source text back to life, opening it up from time to time to new hermeneutic possibilities.

Keywords: children's literature and censorship, children's literature in the GDR, educational role of children's literature, strategies of rewriting, reception of ancient myths in texts for young readers.

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Daniela Sorrentino received her PhD in Linguistics of Modern Languages (German) at the University of Pisa in 2008 and is currently Associate Professor in German Language and Translation at the Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici of the University of Calabria. Her main research interests concern academic writing, writing didactics in German as a foreign language from a multilingual perspective, strategies of translation, rewriting and transfer of knowledge in texts for children and young readers, the study of university didactic communication in Italy and Germany.