

Classical Fairy Tales and Contemporary Greek Literature. The case of Sophia Paraschou

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Abstract

In Sophia Paraschou's text *Even the Bad People Have a Soul too* the villains of fairy tales, spurred by the bad wolf, attempt in a conference, to rid themselves of the accusation of being and representing evil people. The text gives the opportunity for further investigation into the theoretical issues of literature. Initially, we observe a feature of the 1970s, where there is a strong attitude of reversing opinions in familiar texts of conventional children's literature. The stories of the heroes constitute narratives which imprint the subjectivity of fictional characters, in an attempt to dispose of the stereotypes and the racist behavior attached to them and to the authors of fairy tales. The announcements in the conference (made by one of Cinderella's sisters in *Cinderella's Syndrome*, by Cinderella's step-mother in *Beauty Anxiety* and by Rubelstinskin in *The Curse of Differential*) depict fundamental issues of conventional children's literature. However, these announcements made by fictional characters, bring up issues on the theory of literature. Therefore, the views formulated here refer to skepticism regarding the source of the meaning or the power of the participants in the literary text (fictional characters, narrator and author). This skepticism, as to who is in charge, revolves around the literary characters and the author, whose "death" does not necessarily mean the "death" of the fairy tale or of any fictional characters. The whole discussion balances between the theory, which gives priority to the author's biography and the historical and social frame in which the author lived, while text-centered theories and the theory of the aesthetics and of the reading response, although projected, they are not opted for in the end. The whole discussion among the fairy tale heroes, who request that fairy tales be written again and the recorders of tales or authors of post-fictional texts with the intervention of readers, brought to light the power of conventional literature against innovation, although they were led to this decision by the intervention of readers, hence the reader's role as a meaning-giver of the text is indirectly indicated.

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Brief introduction to Greek children's literature

Before we proceed to our subject, we consider necessary a brief report on Greek children's literature so that the not Greek reader may form a general image. Although, in the beginning of the 20th century there were important writers, like Penelope Delta, Greek children's literature

begins to flourish after the World War II, when its usual topics are replenished. Especially after the fall of dictatorship in 1974, didacticism is abandoned and in parallel to the old issues (family, nature, fatherland, religion) new ones begin to interest the writers, who belong either to the Women's Literary Association established in 1963, or to the Cycle of Greek Children's Book, a branch of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) and established in 1969. Such issues are ecology, urbanisation, technology, peace, energy, social pathogenesis (drugs, violence), fantasy and science fiction, immigration, AIDS, multiculturalism, the coexistence of national conscience with the global identity. Very recently certain books for children made their appearance that are differentiated in terms of content from several of the books published until this day due to their particularly close relationship with the Greek as well as the European folkloric culture. These are novels with literary characters from well-known fairy tales of Perrault, Grimms και Andersen or novels with stories inspired by the Greek folklore (fairies, lamias, etc) or fantastic texts with several of their elements referring to texts written by Lewis Carroll or C.S.Carroll. Although these texts are few, we believe that under the influence of these authors (mostly due to the adaptation for the cinema of plays pertaining to the global children's and youth literature) it is very likely that a new trend is established or a new era dawns. At all events, the Greek ideals that are lately harmonised with global conscience, mostly in science fiction, are distinct in all books for children and young people without any trace of didacticism. It is characteristic that horror texts are totally absent, possibly because they are incompatible with the Greek temperament.

In terms of literary genres, all types are cultivated contrary to the non-literary genres to which it appears that Greek writers attempt to give a new identity. Biography as well as informational books are not purely (clearly) biographies or books of knowledge because in both cases the element of literature is abundant; however, it does not predominate over the elements of biography or of knowledge that the writer aims to furnish to the children or teenagers. Consequently, it is a mixed genre with a view to keep children's book from becoming boring by simply providing knowledge. Although all styles of children's poetry (traditional, expressionistic and modern) are cultivated, poetry does not have the same range as prose nor is it read much. But even in terms of studies, as regards poetry there are fewer studies available.

In terms of creators, soon enough the situation will be as follows: with respect to the sex, women – writers are more than men; with respect to the preference of literary genre, none of the writers is specialised in only one literary genre, with the exception of Spyros Tsiros, who is the only one writing exclusively stories for children. In addition, none of the writers is specialised in only one subject; no one writes only texts with ecological content, historic texts or science fiction. In our opinion this is one of the reasons why it is hard for Greek children's literature to compete qualitatively with other literatures with tradition in this area of specialisation either with respect to the literary genre or to the issues treated. Moreover, during the last years, writers adopt more elaborated narrative methods and more complex plot models. In addition, there appears the diarial and epistolary genre, for which our opinion is that though considered as extraliterary genre in Anglo-Saxon bibliography (Porter 1984, Nikolajeva 1988, McGallum 1999), in the way it is used in Greek children's literature, it has aesthetic and structural function, fosters history, promotes action, provides informative material and represents a stylistic differentiation in not purely diary or epistolary texts. Therefore, we totally disagree with the scholars who believe that this novel of epistolary type belongs to extraliterary genres in terms of aesthetic as well as in terms of literary and pedagogical function and we consider epistolary genre in Greek children's literature to be clearly literary. Obviously, we do not refer to letters exchanged between writers (or to the diary they keep) and having a different target and function (personal views on various issues are exchanged, events are discussed, critical comments are set forth on their or others'

