

Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth, *Translation under State Control: Books for Young People in the German Democratic Republic*

(Routledge, 2009), pp.276

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In this study of children's literature, Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth analyses how the socialist rule of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) shaped translations of English children's literature into German between 1961 and 1989, when institutionalised censorship marked a new phase in the state's control of the arts. The argument it presents is that children's literature was revised in order to guide readers' interpretation of literary texts in translation according to the politically-correct ideology. Thomson-Wohlgemuth demonstrates that children's literature in the GDR was not considered to be a 'lower' form of literature with lesser value. Instead, as compared to the ideologically-approved literary genres such as social realism, historical fiction or adventure literature, it operated as a recognised and ultimately important form of cultural production. However, children's literature in translation had to instill socialist ideas into young minds and thus to continue to build an anti-capitalist future. In this sense, Thomson-Wohlgemuth's study examines how socialism not only acknowledged the importance of what children read, but also attempted to lift children's literature to the same level as adult literature. Consequently, children's literature became a means of education employed to explain existing social conditions and to teach the politically dominant socialist ideology. Within literary communities of readers, emphasis was placed on communicating the 'correct' truths to the next generation of socialist party members who, one day, would become its leaders. This new dimension to children's literature in the GDR involved authors, publishers, readers, and, formally, the Party and its ideology. Thus, this informed study provides an analysis of cultural policies in the GDR and examines how the state imposed censorship upon publishers via government control.

Scholars, such as Zohar Shavit, argue that children's literature occupies a lower status within the social system. However, Thomson-Wohlgemuth delves into the subject matter of children's literature from a separate political view, by dealing with the publication expectations of GDR readers, translators, editors and publishers (1). The chapters range from the historical context of children's literature to East German publishers' accountability for producing reading material for young readers according to socialist imperatives, through the influence of political files performed by government officials to case studies of censored authors. Re-editing 'capitalist' literature in translation and how the reader was to accept the written material usually depended on

the East German publishers' cultural power which enabled publishing houses not only to make the books acceptable for publication inside the GDR, but also to abide by government standards. With regard to translations, Thomson-Wohlgemuth remarks upon the importance of paratexts in making these particular works available on the literary market. She writes, "referring particularly to classics (which in those days represented the main source of translated literature, in particular for children's literature), it was contended that, under the new social conditions, classic works required a new interpretation and that they, therefore, needed to be lifted above their traditional interpretations" (198). The study evidences this claim by outlining archived records which show that the use of prefaces and afterwords were 'updated' by the government in order to ideologically convert the meaning of the books into socialist forms which mainly addressed a youth audience. The message to the child reader had to be clear and informative, arguing for the ideals of the GDR.

Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth shows that the SED ideology was influential in the GDR publishing industry via government authority. The idea was to instill the basic form of socialist thought into youth readers so that children's literature in East German translation inspired party-line thought and behaviour. Thus, English-based literature brought into the socialist republic had to be explained by translators, publishers and editors, so that it supported the governmental ideology. The aim of children's literature in translation was not to entertain, but to educate the beliefs of both children and youths in line with those of the socialist state. Thomson-Wohlgemuth focuses on how East German publishers collaborated with the government in order to inspire the ideas of the socialist culture in youth literature. More broadly, the book gives readers an edge in understanding the socialist movement in pre-1990 East Germany and underlines the importance placed on children's literature by GDR political bodies. Advocating the significance of youth literature within an ideologically-shaped cultural context, Thomson-Wohlgemuth's informed study advocates a deeper understanding of translation under state control, and thus will be of interest to both historians and children's literature scholars.