

A Sexless Circe: Tension and Torsion in Adapting the *Odyssey* for Children

In her article “Classics for Cool Kids,” Sheila Murnaghan wrestles with the thorny relationship that classical scholarship has often had with the children’s literature that grows out of it. This paper re-examines that problem through the lens of translation, both by looking at two children’s translations of the *Odyssey*, and by outlining their relative places in the literary polysystem. The first, published in 1906, is Alfred J. Church’s, *The Odyssey for Boys and Girls*; the second is Rosemary Sutcliff’s 1995 novel *The Wanderings of Odysseus: The Story of The Odyssey*. In the interim 100 years the relationship between classical literature and education as a whole shifted dramatically, as did attitudes and mores surrounding the writing, translation, and adaptation of such literature for children. In response to pressure from parents, publishers, and educators, translators have shifted how they adapt classical literature into stories for children, which in turn has shifted the attitudes that those children adopt towards the literature. Some shifts in relationship are easily understandable--the desexualizing of Circe’s relationship with Odysseus, for example. A comparative look at such pressures is required to understand the way that classical literature is being translated and read today, as well as an exploration of the underlying forces at work in order to examine the impression that classical literature today gives to its young readers.

Church’s volume, translated in the heyday of classical education by a career classicist, is tinged with the expectation that its young readers will one day be able to read the *Odyssey* in its original Greek. In contrast, Sutcliff’s version of the story, based on her childhood love of the *Odyssey*, transforms the poem into a vivid adventure story. Where Church’s translation gives asides about ancient culture and reference material in the form of maps of the ancient world,

Sutcliff's plays on the adventure and excitement of Odysseus' journeys. Church keeps Homer's expansive network of people and places as well as much of the narrative complexity, and Sutcliff plays up the descriptive aspects of his language in order to appeal to the imagination of children. The contrasts between these two speak to large cultural shifts surrounding the translation and adaptation of classical literature for children, including changes in stylistic norms, fewer expectations for their future relationships with Classics, and an increased response to the perceived needs or desires that children have for their literature. Ultimately, this paper will examine how both versions shift Homer's *Odyssey* into a new position in the literary polysystem and the forces at work in both the source and the target culture which allow this to happen.

Bibliography

Murnaghan, Sheila. "Classics for Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children." *The Classical World*, vol. 104, no. 3, SPRING 2011, pp. 339-353.