

Rose Blanche, Rosa Weiss, Rosa Blanca: A comparative view of a controversial picture book.

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Emer O'Sullivan

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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Rose Blanche, Rosa Weiss, Rosa Blanca:

A Comparative View of a Controversial Picture Book

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Published in Switzerland, the USA, and Britain in 1985, *Rose Blanche*, Roberto Innocenti's controversial and prize-winning picture book about a young German girl's experience of the Second World War and the Holocaust, has been translated into at least ten different languages. It has remained in print in the United States since publication, and a paperback edition of the British translation was issued by Red Fox in 2004, testifying to the ongoing topicality of Innocenti's story. Its cultural importance was further documented in a recent (2004) article by Susan Stan in *Children's Literature in Education* about the initial chequered publication of *Rose Blanche*. Using an English-language translation by a colleague, Stan also explored some of the differences between the texts of the German, American, and British editions of the picture book.

This essay, based on a lecture given at CLISS 2003, addresses the international reception of *Rose Blanche* and asks how it is bound to such factors as the role of the target culture in the Second World War and its engagement with the subject of the Holocaust. After a brief analysis of Roberto Innocenti and Christoph Gallaz's original Italian/Swiss visual and verbal text *Rose Blanche*, I first review its international reception and translation before moving on to examine the French, American, English, German, Spanish, and Italian versions to question how cultural differences are inscribed into these, even though the pictorial narrations are identical. Close textual analysis of the opening page of the different translations is followed by a discussion of the implied readers of the translations which asks how the texts reflect the cultures' desire or need to tell the story differently. **[End Page 152]**

Rose Blanche: The Original Version by Innocenti and Gallaz

Conceived and illustrated by the Italian artist Roberto Innocenti¹ with a French text by the Swiss journalist and author Christophe Gallaz, *Rose Blanche* tells of the final phase of the Second World War in a small town in eastern Germany from the perspective of a nine-year-old girl. Set between autumn 1944 and May 1945, it starts with celebratory flag-waving euphoria and ends with destruction, retreat, and the advent of the liberating Red Army. Rose is confronted with the awful truth of the Holocaust after she sees a young boy try unsuccessfully to escape from a lorry. Following it, she discovers a concentration camp in the woods outside the town. She displays instinctive compassion and civil disobedience by sneaking food to the emaciated Jewish child prisoners. In the confusion of the retreat, Rose is killed by a stray bullet. The final page of the book shows spring returning to the forest.

The pictures are composed in a hyper-realistic style obsessed with detail. Red-brick buildings fill most of the pages, creating the claustrophobic confines of the town scenes; grey lorries with blind windows and tanks with soldiers in grey uniforms move from left to right across the page, toward the Eastern Front, until the reversal of the final retreat. Contrasting with the dark, warm color of the bricks is the green hue of the scenes at the edge of the concentration camp; juxtaposing the loud celebrations in the town is the silence of the prisoners. The portrayal of Rose just before her death has visual associations with pictures of Christ: her eyes are downcast, one hand lightly touching her heart, and the other placing a small blue flower in remembrance onto the barbed wire.

The picture on the cover, identical on the hardback editions in all languages, shows Rose framed by the window of a red-brick house, which is used as a mirroring device. In it we see the final movement of soldiers to the front. She is captured here in her prime role as innocent witness who sees, but is not seen. We are looking at her...



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