Updating the Politics of Experience: Angela Carter’s Translation of Charles Perrault’s “Le Petit Chaperon rouge”

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Electronic version
URL: http://palimpsestes.revues.org/205
DOI: 10.4000/palimpsestes.205
ISSN: 2109-943X

Electronic reference

This text was automatically generated on 26 September 2017.

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Updating the Politics of Experience: Angela Carter’s Translation of Charles Perrault’s “Le Petit Chaperon rouge”

Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère

“The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency.”

1 Reflecting on the impact of the feminist movement on her life and work, the British writer Angela Carter (1940-1992) declared in “Notes from the Front Line” (1983): “It has been of immense importance to me personally and I would regard myself as a feminist writer, because I’m a feminist in everything else and one can’t compartmentalize these things in one’s life” (Carter, 1998a [1983]: 37). Carter was also alert to the role of the gendered reader, and in the same essay she encouraged “the reader to construct her own fiction for herself from the elements of my fictions” (ibid.: 37, emphasis mine). She memorably added:

Reading is just as creative an activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode. (Ibid.: 37, emphasis mine)

2 This article will aim to demonstrate that Carter’s view of creation as stemming from the dynamic interplay of reading and writing was intimately connected to (and perhaps even originated in) her experience as a translator, and that her literary practice was centrally concerned with and shaped by questions of gender1.

3 When Carter was commissioned to translate Charles Perrault’s tales into English for Victor Gollancz in 1976, she discovered that “Each century tends to create or re-create fairy tales after its own taste” (Carter in Perrault, 1977: 17). This idea was to have a crucial influence on her work, which derived a new energy from revisiting the cultural
and literary past in the wake of the feminist movement’s second wave. Since the reader is a potential author who can tease new meanings out of old texts, the act of translation, seen as a form of rewriting, becomes a bold gesture of re-invention from a woman’s perspective and in a different socio-historical context.

Carter’s work as a translator, a heretofore neglected aspect of her literary production, sheds light on her view of the interrelationship between reading, translating, and (re)writing as continuous and inseparable activities, and reflects a coherent aesthetic and pragmatic project. Carter’s rediscovery of Perrault’s contes led to the publication of two volumes of translated tales beside _The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories_, Carter’s own “book of stories about fairy stories” (Carter, 1998a [1983]: 38). The first one, _The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault_, with etchings by Martin Ware, was published in 1977. A subsequent edition illustrated by Michael Foreman, _Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales_, which includes a translation of “La Belle et la bête” and “Le Prince chéri”, came out in 1982.

According to Jack Zipes, these activities were carried out more or less simultaneously: “As she began her work on Perrault, [Carter] also started writing her own original stories that formed the basis of _The Bloody Chamber_” (Zipes, 2008: ix). While the critical consensus represents Carter’s relation to Perrault in terms of a subversive appropriation of his work, an analysis of her translations shows that they were rather a means to develop a complex and productive dialogue with Perrault (Heidmann and Adam, 2007).

A comparative analysis of 17th century texts shows that Perrault’s “Le Petit Chaperon rouge” is centrally concerned with gender issues, although this dimension has often been misunderstood in the critical reception of the tale. In his preface to the _Contes en vers_ (1695), Perrault explicitly defines his own project against the fables of the Ancients. In contrast to the tale of Psyche that is only designed to entertain, his contes all contain a “morale utile” (not to be taken at face value) which makes them better suited for storytelling: “Je prétends même que mes fables méritent mieux d’être racontées que la plupart des contes anciens” (Lang, 1888: 78). As Heidmann has persuasively demonstrated in a recent article (2009), when read as an intertextual response to the _Psyche fabella_, the modern moral with which Perrault had proposed to endow the ancient tale becomes clear. “Le Petit Chaperon rouge” teaches a cruel but useful lesson. It wryly comments on the failure of mothers and grandmothers to caution their daughters against the threat represented by seducers, embodied in the story as a deceitful wolf. Heidmann observes that the comparison that Perrault’s educated readers would no doubt spontaneously make between the ancient _fabella_ and the story of “Le Petit Chaperon rouge” highlights the responsibility of the mother in the girl’s tragic fate. The mother leaves her daughter in ignorance of the presence of sexual predators, especially those inevitably attracted by a girl going out alone and wearing a _small_ and brightly coloured _chaperon_ which sets off her youthful beauty, instead of a _grand chaperon_ (i.e. a chaperone) who would have protected her honour and her life. The pun would not have escaped Perrault’s contemporary readers.

In her translation of Perrault’s “Le Petit Chaperon rouge”, Carter takes up but also updates the question of gender that the source tale raises as she addresses the younger readers who have become the primary audience of fairy tales since the 18th century (Zipes, 1983; Wanning Harries, 2001), but also (more indirectly) the grown women who pass on fairy tales to the next generation, including the translator herself.
When Angela Carter read Perrault’s tales in the original French edition, she rediscovered a genre that she associated with childhood from a radically new, adult, perspective. In an article entitled “The Better to Eat You With” (1976), she recorded her experience during the hot summer of that year as follows:

The notion of the fairy tale as a vehicle for moral instruction is not a fashionable one. I sweated out the heatwave browsing through Perrault’s Contes du temps passé on the pretext of improving my French. What an unexpected treat to find that in this great Ur-collection—whence sprang the Sleeping Beauty, Puss in Boots, Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Tom Thumb, all the heroes of pantomime—all these nursery tales are purposely dressed up as fables of the politics of experience. The seventeenth century regarded children, quite rightly, as apprentice adults. Charles Perrault, academician, folklorist, pedant, but clearly neither nutter nor regressive, takes a healthily abrasive attitude to his material. Cut the crap about richly nurturing the imagination. This world is all that is to the point. (Carter, 1998b [1976]: 452-453)

Carter enthuses on rediscovering Perrault’s tales, which she associates with the nursery and the modern canon of “Children’s Classics” (ibid.: 452). But in the course of her research into the fairy tale tradition, she would discover that the contes of the late 17th and early 18th centuries were highly elaborate texts written mostly by women for younger women (Wanning Harries, 2001). While the reputation of Perrault as an author for children and the editorial constraints of the illustrated book compelled Carter to downplay the tales’ textual and semantic complexity to make them amenable and accessible to a young audience, rewriting them in The Bloody Chamber would enable her to respond to their more adult aspects and, like her predecessors, to experiment with generic conventions more freely.

Unlike many translators and editors, Carter was aware of the importance of working from the original French text, and the “Select Bibliography” of The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault (1977) lists Barchilon’s critical edition of Perrault’s Tales of Mother Goose (1956), which includes a facsimile of the dedication manuscript of 1695, and Andrew Lang’s erudite Perrault’s Popular Tales (1888), which reproduces the 1697 edition of his Histoires ou contes du temps passé. Avec des Moralités (beside the Contes en vers).

A close examination of the prefaces and illustrations of Perrault’s early editions draws attention to the sophistication of his contes and offers fresh insights into their significance. Similarly, analyzing Carter’s translations in relation to the book in which they were originally published and taking the author’s response to Perrault’s tales into account calls into question easy critical assumptions about her translations as a mere subversion of the work of a canonical, white, male, and privileged author.

“Le Petit Chaperon rouge” has undoubtedly become one of the best-known fairy tales and it has been translated, adapted and retold innumerable times (Zipes, 1993). The canonical status of the story is reflected in The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, where the tale is placed in initial position. In keeping with the modern reception of fairy tales, the dust jacket of the book presents it as “a collection of fairy tales for children” (Carter in Perrault, 1977). Carter indeed saw her translation as a means to intervene in the field of modern children’s literature in English by going against the dominant trend promoting imagination and escapism in favour of the cautionary tale. In “The Better to Eat You With” (1976), she extolled Perrault as a writer who favoured reason, irony and realism in what she called his “little parables of experience” (Carter, 1998b [1976]: 17). For Carter,
cautionary tales and not imagination truly help children cope with the trials of life and the real enough dangers of the world. 

Carter’s translation modernizes the original text to make it accessible to young readers. While the paragraph divisions facilitate reading by a child, the use of racy dialogue and emphatic punctuation also anticipates its oral delivery by an adult. The possibility arises that Carter is therefore simultaneously addressing an older and more experienced female reader, and this awareness of a double audience may have been influenced by her vivid childhood memory of hearing the story of Little Red Riding Hood from her grandmother “in almost Perrault’s very words”. In her preface to The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, she fondly recalls:

She liked, especially, to pounce on me, roaring, in personation of the wolf’s pounce in “Red Riding Hood” at the end of the story, although she could not have known that Perrault himself suggests this acting-out of the story to the narrator in a note in the margin of the manuscript. (Carter in Perrault, 1977: 13)

When she translates the tale, Carter then seeks to give an effect of orality and presence that anticipates its performance and fosters identification with the heroine, but also suggests playful if disquieting confusions between the grandmother (as storyteller) and the wolf. The complication of clear-cut oppositions and well-defined roles allowed by impersonation draws attention to the situation presented in the tale itself, whereby a mother and a grandmother demonstrate their inadequacy to protect the child they supposedly love so much. The ambivalent role played by parental figures is thus enacted in the scene of storytelling which underlies Carter’s text, and further reinforced by Martin Ware’s full-page, black-and-white illustration on p. 27 of The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, which depicts two moments as variations on the same situation: in the top etching, the inside of the grandmother’s house is represented, with the old lady sitting in bed with a nightcap, nightgown and staring ahead, while the head of the wolf, framed by the open window, is seen in profile, looking ahead. Below, the head and shoulders of the wolf are now in the foreground, in the grandmother’s place (in the same posture and wearing the nightcap, but no nightgown), while the head of the heroine (light-haired, age uncertain, with her hood on) is visible through the window, looking in, seemingly at the wolf, or the reader. The possibilities opened up by role-switching, substitutions and conflated identities would become a central strategy in The Bloody Chamber.

Unlike Perrault, who merely adopted a posture of childlike simplicity, orality and naïveté in his contes while in fact addressing sophisticated adult readers (Barchilon, 1975), Carter primarily translates for children and therefore simplifies the text of the tale. The association of fairy tales with childhood notably reflects the reception of Perrault’s tales, the pressure of Grimm’s Kinder- und Hausmärchen, and the influence of folkloristic studies arguing for the popular origins of the genre. The palimpsest-like quality of the modern fairy tale becomes noticeable in the translation, coloured as it is by memories of Grimm’s “Rotkäppchen”: in the opening sentence, Perrault’s petite fille de village is conveyed by deep in the heart of the country, there lived a pretty little girl (Perrault, 1977: 23), which immediately evokes the imagery and folk setting of Grimm’s tales. Likewise, the shift from capitalization in Perrault, which suggests personification and double meaning, as in compère le Loup (a clear reference to La Fontaine’s fables), to a mere wolf in Carter’s text further contributes to the naturalization of the story which already characterized Grimm’s Märchen.
Carter expressed her admiration for the economy and force of Perrault’s tale both in the Preface to *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* and in “The Better to Eat You With”:

> And what a craftsman Perrault was! “Little Red Riding Hood” is a classic of narrative form. The plot arises from the interaction of the wolf and his hunger, and the child and her ingenuity. The suspense springs from our knowledge of the predatoriness of wolves and our perception of Red Riding Hood’s ignorance of it. No child reared on these austere and consummately constructed narrative forms is going to be easily fobbed off with slipshod stream-of-consciousness techniques, or overheated poetic diction. (Carter, 1998b [1976]: 454)

The directness of Perrault’s tales contributes to their effectiveness, characterized by “a style marked by concision of narrative (there is not an ounce of flab on any story)” (Carter in Perrault, 1977: 17). This correspondence of style to plot (including its abrupt denouement) becomes a central source of experiment in the rewritings. The metaphor of “flab” used by Carter in connection to Perrault’s writing is suggestive of possibilities (the little red ridinghood-like text consumed by the wolf-like reader, the association of the “lean and mean” style with the wolf, etc.) that she will explore in the many retellings of the story that compose “The Company of Wolves”, where the narrative voice, identifying itself with the wolves, uses a baroque style in the frame narrative to lure and catch the reader, who is cast in the role of the prey and addressed as “you”. As she establishes an analogy between the famous story and the relationship between the narrator and the (feminized) reader, Carter suggests a relationship between the wolf’s smooth tongue and the seductions of literary language, which can be related to the stylistic excess of “The Bloody Chamber” as playing with the idea of the perverse seductions of art (Hennard Dutheil, 2006).

In the embedded tales of “The Company of Wolves”, Carter proposes alternatives to the basic plot and familiar configuration of characters when the grandmother, who happens to be a werewolf in disguise, is neutralized by her bold and armed granddaughter, or alternately (depending on how we read the tale) the grandmother is cast in the role of a witch and victimized by her granddaughter who seeks to appropriate her belongings; in what is perhaps the most memorable variation on the familiar story (which inspired Neil Jordan’s fantasy-horror film *The Company of Wolves* in 1984), the daughter knowingly plays up to the wolf’s seduction game and the story concludes with a last image of her sleeping peacefully in his arms. These new and thought-provoking combinations and complications of the constitutive elements of the tale (including its textual and metatextual dimensions) aim to delight her (adult) readers but also to develop their skills to survive in a harsh and cruel world, and their ability to interpret its deceptive, ambiguous signs.

Adapting this idea to the needs and capacities of children, Carter, who admired Perrault’s tales for being “told with a great deal of literary art but it is the kind that conceals art” (Carter in Perrault, 1977: 15), uses short sentences and avoids subordination in her translation to convey a more straightforward message. She opts for active verbs (for dynamic movement) instead of present participles, as in *Un jour sa mère, ayant cuit et fait des galettes, lui dit* which becomes *One day, her mother baked some cakes on the griddle and said to Little Red Riding Hood* (ibid.: 23). Similarly, she resorts to strong contrastive conjunctions to clarify meaning and mimic the oppositional logic which she sees at work in the tale. She also takes pains to provide explanations to the young reader, especially when the famous chaperon is introduced: *This good woman made her a red hood like the ones that fine ladies wear when they go riding* (ibid.: 23, emphasis mine). The translator feels the need to
gloss the characteristic piece of clothing by which the girl is known to bridge the historical gap, but as she does so, she also stresses the difference of social class between the “peasant girl” that she assumes the heroine to be (in the light of Grimm’s tale), and the striking sartorial feature that makes her so conspicuous: this “disguise” (a key theme in the tale), which her irresponsible grandmother has made for her (a gift turning into a curse, as it were), masks her origins and flags her beauty, and this will bring about her downfall. Another problem of course is that the girl is ignorant of danger and of wolves in particular. While in Perrault, *la pauvre enfant […] ne savait pas qu’il est dangereux de s’arrêter à écouter un Loup*, in Carter’s translation the danger is of a different order: *The poor child did not know how dangerous it is to chatter away to wolves* (ibid.: 24, emphasis mine), and this anticipates the gist of the commonsensical moral, i.e. *Don’t talk to strangers*. To reinforce this, Carter adds to the description of the girl playing in the wood that she was late *because she dawdled along* (a word with negative connotations of idleness and laziness). Retrospectively, then, the girl is punished for posturing as a lady (the *chaperon* was a headdress that was a clear class marker), and Carter’s introduction of a grim detail about the wolf’s devouring of young ladies, *elegant red riding hoods and all* reinforces this point in the Moral. Another possible interpretation of Carter’s Moral is that social class and class markers are no protection against wolves, unless it simply warns girls against the dangers of dressing up as grown women.

20 In *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, Carter celebrates Perrault’s “healthily abrasive attitude to his material” (ibid.: 453) by noting how:

> Especially in the moral tags at the end of each tale he seems concerned in turning the fairy tales into little parables of experience from which children can learn, without half the pain that Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood endured, the way of the world and how to come to no harm in it. The book is intended for children but these children seen as apprentice adults and the succinct brutality of the traditional tale is modified by the application of rationality. The wolf consumes Red Riding Hood; what else can you expect if you talk to strange men, comments Perrault briskly. Let’s not bother our heads with the mysteries of sado-masochistic attraction. We must learn to cope with the world before we can interpret it. (ibid.: 17-18)

21 Because she wishes to foreground Perrault’s “scheme of good sense” in her translation, Carter plays down the implications of the vignette as well as those of the sexual comedy of the bed scene, which become explicit in Perrault’s Moral. The wolf’s *envie de la manger* shifts from ambiguous desire to the imperative of hunger in *[he] wanted to eat her* (ibid.: 23); similarly, the wolf’s motives for eating the grandmother are placed before the scene itself in order to ascribe the “devouring” of the old woman to literal hunger. More importantly, Carter redefines the cautioning message in the Moral so as to make the sexual dimension of the threat fully understandable to adult reader only.

22 Likewise, the horror of the tale is attenuated when Perrault’s *et la dévora* and *et la mangea* are conveyed by *and gobbled her up* (ibid.: 26), and *gobbled her up, too* (ibid.: 28)11. This choice of verb is another echo of Grimm’s tale (where the equivalent verb *verschlucken* anticipates the happy ending when the two women are rescued from the wolf’s belly, unharmed because they have been swallowed up *whole*) which may result from Carter’s wish to attenuate the bloodiness and horror of devouring in what had become a bed-time story for children.

23 By couching the story in a familiar style, basic vocabulary and repetitions, simple syntax and “blunt and succinct manner” (Zipes, 2008: xxii), Carter’s translation reflects modern
conceptions of the genre which owe a lot to Grimm’s idea of the folktale, but these choices also self-consciously reflect Carter’s understanding of the practical purport of Perrault’s tale. In her turn, the translator seeks to convey a message of worldly wisdom which could be summarized as follows: modern, talkative and spoilt girls whose taste for pretty but inappropriate clothes is encouraged by mothers and grandmothers are at risk because they live in ignorance of the dangerous desires of cynical (i.e. etymologically, like dogs, and therefore wolf-like) predators. Little Red Riding Hood lives with her mother and grandmother whose adoration and pride in the girl’s beauty unwittingly end up causing her death. The wolf exploits this when he cunningly dresses up as a woman to lure the child into the bed, and to the reader’s surprise the girl does not see the difference, so unaware is she of the existence of wolves.

The most revealing aspect of the translated tale, however, is undoubtedly the Moral, which reflects the translator’s understanding of the story and “social and literary project” (Simon, 1996: 7). Carter made sure to translate Perrault’s Morals which, as she had noticed, “put the tales into the worldly context of late 17th century France and the court of the Sun King” (quoted on the dust jacket). And she goes on to modernise their message as follows:

**Moral**

- Children, especially pretty, nicely brought-up young ladies, ought never to talk to strangers; if they are foolish enough to do so, they should not be surprised if some greedy wolf consumes them, elegant red riding hoods and all.

Now, there are real wolves, with hairy pelts and enormous teeth; but also wolves who seem perfectly charming, sweet-natured and obliging, who pursue young girls *in the street* and pay them the most flattering attentions. Unfortunately, these smooth-tongued, smooth-pelted wolves are the most dangerous beasts of all. (Perrault, 1977: 28, emphasis mine)

Carter shifts from verse to prose, and her style is deliberately prosaic, matter-of-fact and even brutal in its directness, and she gives a humorous touch to the grim ending typical of English humour. Carter’s message is also resolutely cautionary, with a touch of moralizing, in keeping with the British tradition of the fairy tale. By addressing children and especially young ladies whom she refers to as foolish, Carter transforms the meaning of the tale into a typical 20th century warning which reflects changing concerns and perceptions of the danger faced by children in the modern world. Her *Little Red Riding Hood* thus conveys a clear, straightforward warning to young girls too concerned with clothes and eager to chat with strangers, and another to mothers who fail to educate their daughters in the dangers of the world and also grandmothers whose pride in their (grand)daughters’ beauty is shown to have disastrous consequences.

Carter’s modern Moral, vigorously expressed through a commonplace imperative, situates the action in an urban environment, a mistranslation of Perrault’s *ruelles* which designated the space between the bed and the wall in 17th century French. While for Perrault the danger lay in the bedchamber where high society women used to receive their guests, for Carter it has shifted to the open space of the modern city where wandering children are at risk. In this sense, Carter’s translation anticipates Sarah Moon’s powerful series of black-and-white photographs illustrating Perrault’s *Le Petit*
Chaperon rouge (Éditions Grasset, 1986), where the “wolf” who hunts down the girl cruises the streets of a city in his luxurious black car. In spite of these differences, however, Perrault and Carter both use fairy tales as cautionary stories that carry practical, useful and empowering knowledge distinct from conventional morality, and as a modern genre par excellence, they are (re)made to reflect ever-changing realities and concerns.

Carter saw herself as a pragmatic, wry but sympathetic fairy godmother. In her Foreword to The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, she shrewdly observes that

Even Perrault’s specifically magical beings, the Lilac Fairy, Cinderella’s godmother and the guests at the Sleeping Beauty’s christening, have rather less the air of supernatural beings derived from pagan legend about them than that of women of independent means who’ve done quite well for themselves, one way and another, and are prepared to help along a little sister who finds herself in difficulties, personages as worldly-wise and self-confident as Mae West. (Carter in Perrault, 1977: 18-19)

The posture of the worldly-wise woman, or fairy godmother (with a touch of the anticonformist sorceress) was one that Carter herself liked to adopt on occasion, with her long, flowing hair and unconventional wisdom. Upon her untimely death, Salman Rushdie referred to her as the “high sorceress” and “benevolent witch queen” of English literature, and Margaret Atwood confided to the Guardian (June 4th, 2005) that “The amazing thing about her, for me, was that someone who looked so much like the Fairy Godmother should actually be so much like the Fairy Godmother”.

This playful pose, however, should not be mistaken for an uncritical endorsement of gendered stereotypes, but is rather an homage to the power of storytelling which Carter saw as a domestic (and mostly feminine) art. In “Notes from the Front Line”, Carter presented her work as a critique of myth which she saw, after Barthes, as a form of discourse encoding conservative values and patriarchal interests:

I believe that all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I’m in the demythologising business. I’m interested in myths—though I’m much more interested in folklore—just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree. (Carter, 1998a [1983]: 38)

After Perrault, Carter opposed to dominant myths, or rather mythologies in Barthes’s sense of the term, a vision of art seen as a vehicle for practical wisdom, primarily if not exclusively addressed to women. Carter thus borrowed from Perrault the idea of the tale as a carrier of a “morale utile” adapted to her own time, public and concerns.

In “The Better to Eat You With”, Carter saw the specificity of Perrault’s tales as lying in the disappearance of fantasy in favour of the cautionary tale. Sharing with Perrault a strong belief in the usefulness of art, and of the tale as a carrier of practical knowledge, Carter wrote in The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History, on which she was also working at the time:

Fine art, that exists for itself alone, is art in a final state of impotence. If nobody, including the artist, acknowledges art as a means of knowing the world, then art is relegated to a kind of rumpus room of the mind and the irresponsibility of the artist and the irrelevance of art to actual living becomes part and parcel of the practice of art. (Carter, 1979b: 13)

Some feminist critics have objected to Carter’s use of the fairy tale in The Bloody Chamber, arguing that they merely reproduce the narrative structures and patriarchal models which they see as inherent in classic tales. In the 1980s, Patricia Dunker accused the author of falling into “the infernal trap inherent in the fairy tale” which Carter rewrites
“within the strait-jacket of their original structures” (Dunker, 1984: 6). Kay Stone also rejected fairy tales as inherently sexist on the (questionable) grounds that they offer “narrow and damaging role-models for young readers” (Stone, 1985: 229). But this is to ignore the sexual politics of the classic texts as well as their reworking in Carter’s translations and her own stories, thereby confirming the validity of Carter’s idea of “intellectual development” through the active reading of old texts. Carter’s two-fold response to Perrault thus confirms the transmission of unofficial, empowering, as well as entertaining knowledge through fairy tales from the 17th century to the present day.

While it is no doubt tempting to argue that Carter’s translations seek to contest the cultural authority and alleged conservatism of Perrault’s contes, a careful analysis of these texts in context reveals a common intention to caution and empower young women. Carter’s work does not so much retrieve the female victims trapped in the belly of a masculine fairy tradition as bear witness to the semantic richness, topicality, and emancipatory potential of the old tales by engaging with their social critique, sexual subtext, and progressive gender politics, all things that have been forgotten in the course of time, and neglected by the dominant cultural and critical reception.

Carter’s life-long interest in the fairy tale partly stemmed from a recognition of the extraordinary potential of the genre to carry out poetic and artistic experiments, and it also reflected an awareness of its crucial social role in shaping a sense of self and understanding of the world from an early age. But Carter was not so much breaking away from Perrault as following his plea for a modern literature as she transposed his “project of worldly instruction” (Carter, 1998b [1976]: 453) in the late 20th century. What emerges from a comparative reading of Perrault’s and Carter’s texts is a similar project to protect women against (masculine) harm. Carter’s translation, then, is best viewed as the pursuit of Perrault’s effort to rework ancient stories in order to make them meaningful to the present and adapted to a new public. As she noted herself, considering the fairy tale as a “vehicle of moral instruction” (which is not the same thing as being moralistic) was not a very fashionable position at the time she was translating Perrault’s tales, but Carter strongly believed in the social responsibility of the artist, as a feminist but also as a woman who, like her predecessor, showed an interest in children and believed in the art of storytelling as both purposeful and pleasurable.

Reading into the contes a hard-nosed and facetious wisdom not unlike her own, Carter concludes her Foreword to The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault as follows:

From the work of this humane, tolerant and kind-hearted Frenchman, children can learn enlightened self-interest from Puss; resourcefulness and courage from Hop o’ my Thumb; the advantages of patronage from Cinderella; the benefits of long engagements from the Sleeping Beauty; the dangers of heedlessness from Red Riding Hood; and gain much pleasure besides. (Carter in Perrault, 1977: 19)
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NOTES

1. This article results from a rich collaboration with Ute Heidmann in the context of the CLE (University of Lausanne), and follows up on her “Text Linguistics and Comparative Literature: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Written Tales. Angela Carter’s Translations of Perrault” (2007), co-authored with Jean-Michel Adam.

2. For a useful survey of feminist studies of fairy tales from the 1970s to the 1990s, see D. Haase, 2004.

3. For the sake of convenience and clarity, references are made to the first edition of Carter’s translations only; a comparison of the two books would foreground significant differences (paratext, artwork, format etc.).

4. Two variations on Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont’s “La Belle et la Bête” are included in The Bloody Chamber, entitled “The Courtship of Mr Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride”.

5. In this sense, Carter’s extension of translation into a new writing project was not unlike Barbara Godard’s decision to write a translation diary “to explore the interdiscursive production of meaning that is translation […]. Both re/writings came together: the essay on the process and the translation itself” (quoted in Simon, 1996: 23).

6. Carter’s rewritings are best understood in counterpoint to her translations, but this interesting form of internal dialogue cannot be treated here because of space constraints. Suffice to say that the self-conscious reinvention of Perrault’s conte in “Little Red Riding Hood” lays the ground for several variations in The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories, notably “The Werewolf”, “The Company of Wolves”, and “Wolf-Alice”.

7. Lang’s book contains an “Introduction” on which Carter based her own “Foreword” to The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault, and abundant “Notes on the Several Tales by Perrault and Their Variants” that inspired several rewritings in The Bloody Chamber.


9. Unlike Michael Foreman, Martin Ware’s unconventional illustrations play up the “adult” content of the tales. There is nothing child-like about his illustrations of “Little Red Riding Hood”, which depict the heroine as a serious-looking (prepubescent?) girl. The strangely realistic (almost photograph-like) characters are placed on almost abstract backgrounds. The first full-page illustration of “Little Red Riding Hood” (25) represents a geometrical, flat, triangular ground with a small girl playing with butterflies; she is seen from a distance, and from behind, and in the
foreground a head of a wolfish dog looks in the opposite direction. As in all the other illustrations for the volume, the characters seem impassive and motionless, and the scene looks very still (see illustration p. 201).

10. The original title of Perrault’s conte is “Le Petit Chaperon rouge”. While Robert Samber keeps the article in the first English translation (1729), the girl’s characteristic feature has been crystallized into a proper name (and become an emblematic figure and social stereotype) by the time Carter retranslates the tale. We find the same process at work in the shift from Perrault’s “La Barbe bleue” to Samber’s “The Blue Beard” to Carter’s “Bluebeard” (Hennard Dutheil and Heidmann, 2009).

11. See Hennard Dutheil and Heidmann, 2009. In her “Bluebeard”, Carter similarly plays down both the horror and the subtle erotic implications of the tale, unlike the rewriting which develops it to the point of presenting the relationship between the Bluebeard figure and his bride as a sado-masochistic one in The Bloody Chamber.

12. Jack Zipes notes that Carter “turned all the verse morals at the end of each tale into prosaic folksy proverbs that often contradict what Perrault sought to communicate” (Zipes, 2008: xx). Whereas, as he aptly puts it, Carter’s morals adopt the tone and style of “prosaic folksy proverbs”, the translator is not so much “contradicting” her predecessor as modernizing his message and disambiguating it for a young audience.

13. Carter’s tone is reminiscent of Roald Dahl’s caustic humour, directed against voracious boys and spoilt and coquettish girls, and it anticipates the social satire that will become the hallmark of Dahl’s children’s books.

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ABSTRACTS

This article seeks to assess the importance of Angela Carter’s little-known work as a translator of Perrault’s tales in The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault (1977) through an examination of her “Little Red Riding Hood”. Carter is mostly famous today for The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories (1979), a collection of innovative and thought-provoking fairy-tale rewritings infused with feminist concerns, strategies and perspectives. Insofar as Carter was translating Perrault’s tales while writing her own “stories about fairy stories”, an analysis of her translations reveals them as part of an ongoing dialogue with the work of the French author. While Carter’s translations consciously update and adapt the material for children whom she seeks to sensitize to gender issues, she does not so much challenge the sexual politics of her source as recognize the emancipatory potential of Perrault’s contes as useful “fables of the politics of experience”.

Cet article vise à rendre compte de l’activité méconnue de traductrice déployée par l’auteure anglaise Angela Carter conjointement à son œuvre de fiction, et à en reconnaître l’importance dans sa trajectoire d’écrivain. Une analyse de « Little Red Riding Hood », publié dans The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault (1977), permet d’éclairer la poétique particulière qu’elle développera dans le recueil qui l’a rendue célèbre, The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories (1979), des « histoires sur des contes de fées » qui reflètent la perspective et les stratégies féministes de l’auteure. Carter a mené de front ses traductions et réécritures, envisagées ici comme deux formes du dialogue très riche et complexe qu’elle engage à cette période avec l’œuvre de Perrault, plutôt qu’une subversion de celui-ci. Ainsi, sa traduction modernise et simplifie le texte des contes pour de jeunes lecteurs qu’elle cherche à sensibiliser à des problématiques de genre, en leur révélant la
portée émancipatrice des contes de Perrault qu'elle envisage comme « des fables utiles sur la politque de l'expérience » plutôt qu'en contestant la politique sexuelle de sa source.

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