MARTINE HENNARD DUTHEIL DE LA ROCHÈRE

CINDERELLA’S METAMORPHOSES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF PERRAULT’S TALES

Abstract: This comparative analysis of two translations of Charles Perrault’s “Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre” shows how the French conte was adapted for children in England at different moments and reflects different projects. Robert Samber’s “Cinderilla: or, The Little Glass Slipper,” published in Histories, or Tales of Past Times. With Morals (1729), is known as the first English translation of the tale. More recently, Angela Carter’s retranslation “Cinderella: or, The Little Glass Slipper,” published in The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault (1977), pays homage to Samber but also modernises the tale to carry a more emancipatory message. While Samber’s translation reflects the working conditions of Grub Street writers and acculturation of Perrault’s fairy tale in Protestant England, Carter gives it a feminist twist as she turns it into a “fable of the politics of experience.” She would later rewrite it as “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost” (1987), this time using Manheim’s English translation of the Grimms’ “Aschenputtel” as a starting point.

Keywords: Charles Perrault, Cinderella, translation, Robert Samber, Angela Carter

Ainsi une traduction n’est-elle qu’un moment d’un texte en mouvement. Elle est même l’image qu’il n’est jamais fini. Elle ne saurait l’immobiliser. ¹
(Meschonnic 1999: 342)

This comparative study of two translations of “Cendrillon ou La Petite Pantoufle de Verre,” from Charles Perrault’s famous collection, Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé (1697), shows how the tale has been redirected

¹ “Thus, a translation is an instant of a text in movement, even an image that it is never over. It cannot be brought to a standstill.” (my translation – C.M.L.).
towards a younger audience in England via two very different projects. “Cinderella: or, The Little Glass Slipper,” published by Robert Samber in *Histories, or Tales of Past Times* in 1729, is usually seen as the first English translation of the tale. More recently, Angela Carter’s “Cinderella: or, The Little Glass Slipper” in *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977) deliberately modernizes the text. The first translation bears witness to the material conditions and the cultural context of the Grub Street translators, while the second reflects the educational project and feminist sensibility of its author in the 20th century (Johnson 1828: 496–497). Additionally, this translation is Carter’s first step towards a rewriting of the tale entitled “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost” (Carter 1987a). This shows a continuity between Carter’s work as a translator and her creative literary work and even, as I argue in *Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter’s Translational Poetics*, a dynamic interplay. My analysis will show how Carter’s (re)translation responds to both Perrault and Samber as it gives the Cinderella tale and its moral a new relevance and freshness.

Charles Sorel highlighted the necessity of retranslation as early as the 17th century: “c’est le privilège de la traduction de pouvoir être réitérée dans tous les siècles, pour refaire les livres selon la mode qui court” (Sorel 1664). The expression *according to the fashion of the time* is particularly suited to Perrault’s tales, which have been translated and adapted over and over through the centuries. Furthermore, the tale illustrates this versatility through Cinderella’s character, whose identity, disguised under a derisive moniker, remains mysterious and elusive. It is the dress (and accessory to magic) that makes her either a princess or a servant, as suggested in the title of Perrault’s tale, “Cinderella; or, the little glass slipper.” To borrow Henri Meschonnic’s suggestive phrase, Cinderella becomes a figure of the text in motion, whose true nature (mobile, multiple and constantly reinvented) is

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2 “The name of a street in London much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called grubstreet.” The edition of Samber’s translation used in this article is Barchilon and Pettit 1960.

3 This article corresponds with other articles on Angela Carter’s translations, specifically *Bluebeard* (2009), *Little Red Riding Hood* (2009), and *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* (2010). See: Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère 2013.

4 “It is the privilege of translation to be repeated every century in order to make books according to the fashion of the time.”

of Carter’s translations for children, entitled *Sleeping Beauty and Other Favourite Fairy Tales* (1982), was published, this time in a larger format with colour illustrations by Michael Foreman (ed. and trans. by A. Carter). Whereas the 1977 edition was deliberately set against the commercial “Disneyfied” version of the tales, the second one is more conventional in its editorial choices. The title renders the tales more anonymous, for children wishing to read their “favourite fairy tales” (including two stories by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, translated as “Beauty and the Beast” and “Sweetheart”). The editorial strategies now aimed to establish the book’s popularity by building on Carter’s fame and Michael Foreman’s reputation as an illustrator of children’s books. The recent double reprint of *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* in paperback by Penguin, with an introduction by Jack Zipes, but without Martin Ware’s illustrations, marks a new development in the reception of Perrault’s tales in English. The first, *Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and Other Classic Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (Penguin Classics), replicates the traditional imagery of the fairy tale on the cover with a classic, tasteful illustration of *Little Red Riding Hood* among the poppies by John Hassal. The second borrows the title of the first edition, *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, and plays on a more risqué iconography consistent with Carter’s sexually explicit and mannerist fairy tale rewritings in *The Bloody Chamber*. The photograph evokes an emancipated Cinderella, wearing strass-covered Dior slippers on a dirt or oil stained foot (Carter 2008). This work, entitled “Stepping Up” (2005), skilfully transposes the fairy tale into the present day while paying homage to the stories for adults that made Angela Carter famous. These simultaneous re-editions of Carter’s translations of Perrault with two different covers and for two different target audiences enlighten us on the reception of Perrault’s Cinderella as a children’s story or, filtered through Carter’s bold retellings, as a contemporary Cinderella rising to fame.

**trans. Célia Méhou-Loko**

**Bibliography**


