



Article
scientifique

Compte rendu de
livre

2015

Published
version

Open
Access

This is the published version of the publication, made available in accordance with the publisher's policy.

[Review of:] Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, Martine (2013). Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press

Riggs, Ashley

How to cite

RIGGS, Ashley. [Review of:] Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, Martine (2013). Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. In: *Parallèles*, 2015, n° 27/1, p. 171–174.

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:82402>

Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, Martine (2013). *Reading, translating, rewriting: Angela Carter's translational poetics*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press. ISBN 978-0-8143-3634-2. USD 29.95.

This study explores the connections between Angela Carter's translation of Charles Perrault's seventeenth-century *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des Moralités* (1697) for children, *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (1977), and her famous collection of fairy-tale rewritings for adults, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Drawing on close contrapuntal readings of Carter's translation and rewritings, fairytale scholarship, the wealth of critical work available on Carter and the Carter archive in the British Library, Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère provides a thoroughly researched "key" (to cite the Bluebeard motif) to the abundant literary, artistic and cultural references that give Carter's writings, and particularly her *Bloody Chamber*, their density and complexity. Hennard carefully traces the links among Carter's active, critical reading of fairy-tale literature, her unconventional and thought-provoking translation and (re)writing practices, the genealogy of the fairy tale, and other literary genres and artistic media. Moreover, her research is highly innovative in that it demonstrates that Carter's translation, which has received little scholarly attention until now, was the catalyst for her famous collection of fairy-tale rewritings.

Hennard documents the impact on Carter's work of such disparate sources as the folk- and fairy-tale traditions, nineteenth-century literature, visual culture, iconographic tradition, surrealism, symbolism, structuralism, decadence, feminism and modern psychology. Like Carter, readers of the study will discover new facts and alternative visions of the fairy tale by returning to the classic texts rather than allowing their interpretations to be filtered through bowdlerized children's versions and, especially, Disney. Hennard also maintains that rather than "subverting" Perrault's tales, as most critical analysis of Carter suggests, the author was really aligning herself with Perrault's *own* modernizing, socially critical, pedagogical, and even proto-feminist project, thereby "reclaiming" his tales for contemporary literature and values.

What we have to ask here, though, is what the text brings to translation studies. Purists might balk at Hennard's claim that not only Carter's French-English translations of Perrault for children, but also her fairy-tale-inspired, English-language fiction for adults – "she translated not just other people's works, but also her own" (p. 300) – are translations, through a very broad definition of the phenomenon. However, Hennard specifically "extend[s] the meaning of translation to encompass the various forms of creative transposition identified by Roman Jakobson in 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation'" (p. 5; Jakobson, 1959) – intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic – and goes on to demonstrate how Carter's work combines all three types. According to Hennard, the division between translation and (re)writing is simply another example of the kinds of conventional oppositions – human/animal, good/evil, nature/culture, angel/harlot, but also source/target, original/copy, fidelity/betrayal, and so on – that abound in translation studies as in literature and culture, and that Carter's work relentlessly interrogates.

Hennard's perspective is also founded on the "cultural turn" of the 1990s in translation studies, which raised the profile of the translator by promoting awareness of her role as mediator in cultural interactions. Hennard's creed and the prism through which she analyzes her corpus is Bassnett's contention (2006, p. 174) that "It is absurd to see translation as anything other than a creative literary activity, for translators are all the time engaging with texts first as readers and then as rewriters, as recreators of that text in another language." However, Hennard refers twice to the "creative turn" (pp. 3, 4), even in a section title, and *then* cites the "cultural turn" (p. 6), insinuating their interchangeability without explaining why both terms are included. This is a detail, however, and only momentarily jarring.

In her Introduction, after grounding her investigation in this "creative turn", Hennard underlines the importance for her approach of conceptualizing translation as productive difference (after Derrida, Venuti) and of Liliane Louvel's (2002) focus on the reciprocal influence between text and image as a kind of translational process – a relevant perspective given the illustrated fairy-tale translations in question as well as Carter's use of and constant references to different media. This chapter also highlights Carter's appreciation of Perrault's tales as practical, educational texts which taught their audiences about real life and pushed them to be active readers.

Chapter 1 traces the editorial evolution of *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* from 1977 to 2013 and includes in-depth discussion of the cover illustrations of various editions. The chapters of analysis proper then follow this general format: 1) Discussion of the influences on Carter of Perrault, the Grimms and lesser-known folktales; 2) Analysis of Carter's translations, often in the light of earlier translations and critical, editorial and anthologizing efforts; and 3) Comprehensive examination of the interlinkages between Carter's translations and the corresponding adult-oriented rewritings included in *The Bloody Chamber*. Indeed, researching and translating Perrault inspired Carter to re-activate what she saw as latent material, including sexual content, which she could not include in texts for children but extracted to construct new versions, the result being a dialogue with critical writings, second-wave feminism and "the dominant representational modes at work in European culture" (p. 138).

Chapter 2, then, addresses Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon rouge", Carter's translation for children "Little Red Riding Hood", her radio play and screen play *The Company of Wolves*, and her three Red-Riding-Hood-inspired versions for adults. While her translation reflects the influences of both the Grimms and Perrault, her rewritings react against the Grimms' moralizing version, delve into the beast-human-desire dynamic and explore both the sexual subtext and the violence of prior versions, thereby reflecting the "bloodiness" evoked in the collection's title. Chapter 3 traces the evolution of the Bluebeard tale from "La Barbe bleue" to "Bluebeard" to "The Bloody Chamber", the opening and programmatic tale of Carter's eponymous collection. According to Hennard, these texts revolve around the repeated key word "cabinet" of Perrault's tale. They recast (female) curiosity as positive, while the rewriting also criticizes the often perverse and misogynistic symbolist and decadent representations of women in art. Chapter 4 examines "Le Chat botté", Carter's "Puss in Boots" for children, her radio play of the same name, and the *Bloody Chamber* version, "Puss-in-Boots". Carter's championing of the underdog (undercat?), her appreciation of irreverent humor, characters and art forms, and her musical knowledge are on full display here. Chapter 5 is devoted to "La Belle au bois dormant", "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" and "The Lady of the House of Love". Carter echoes Perrault's own critique of marriage, warning both child and adult readers that "marriage itself is no party" (Carter, 1998, p. 453) before exploring the Gothic mode in

her rewritings (“The Lady of the House of Love” and the radio play *Vampirella*). Chapter 6 highlights Carter’s discovery and use of the female fairy-tale tradition, with particular emphasis on Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont’s “Le Prince Chéri” and “La Belle et la Bête”. Carter’s translations characteristically modernize Beaumont’s tales, whereas her rewritings for adults, “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” and “The Tiger’s Bride”, take two very different approaches to the nature/culture, humanity/beastliness conflicts (p. 228) that run like an undercurrent through all versions of the tale. Chapter 7 focuses on “Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre”, “Cinderella: or, The Little Glass Slipper” and “Ashputtle or The Mother’s Ghost”. The tripartite rewriting, while not part of *The Bloody Chamber*, is a fascinating demonstration of Carter’s ambivalence toward both the fairy-tale genre and mother-daughter relationships. Moreover, here as in *The Bloody Chamber*, Carter continues to exhort readers to actively question the messages they receive through art, literature and culture, while also reflecting on her own legacy as she nears the untimely end of her life. The study ends with a (somewhat brief) Conclusion on the poetics and politics of translation as illustrated by this case study of Carter’s translation and writing practices, conducted in the “in-between” space (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38) that both divides and joins “languages, traditions and media” (Hennard, p. 299). It underscores the significance of Carter’s translation work as creative, formative and inspirational for her own literary practice and for English literature and culture in general.

Hennard demonstrates that Carter’s translations simplify and modernize the language, emphasize direct dialogue, modernize the settings and personal/class relationships, attenuate the Grimms’ and Beaumont’s moralizing or religious undertones, remove Perrault’s ironic asides, ambiguities and adult humor, and soften frightening or grisly elements, as befits Carter’s contemporary child audience. The morals in particular become prosaic, straightforward, realistic and educational messages, updated in accordance with Carter’s materialist and feminist standpoint. Perhaps more intriguing, though, is Carter’s frequent retrieval of the very elements she toned down or removed in translation as a basis for developing darker, more complex, adult-centered plots and messages for her *Bloody Chamber*, which she was writing at the same time. Hennard’s careful analysis proves the “continuous and intricately related” (p. 2) nature of Carter’s translating and rewriting activities.

Moreover, Hennard’s exploration of artistic connections beyond the written is worthy of Carter’s own, whether summarizing scholarship on the representation of women in European art, analyzing the links among Martin Ware’s illustrations and fairy-tale tradition, *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* and *The Bloody Chamber*, or elucidating Carter’s manifold references to music, literature and visual art. The book includes reproductions of fairy-tale illustrations by Gustave Doré, Martin Ware and others; an etching by Félicien Rops; the cover of a comic book that inspired *Vampirella*; etc. Carter’s web of references also reflects her deliberate blurring of the distinction between “high” and “low” art and culture throughout her fiction.

I will add a couple of points of criticism which in no way detract from the informative and innovative nature of this study. First, there are some instances where translations of foreign-language quotes or passages are left out, and sometimes a full excerpt may be included in one language with only fragments of the corresponding translation. One could also argue for the systematic use of longer passages of tales and translations rather than the selection of very small units for translation commentary. This would have given more context to the observations and avoided the criticism often levelled at partial textual analysis that “you find what you look for.” Second, there are a number of instances of repetition of direct quotes,

phrases and full sentences, even at close intervals in the text. A couple of representative examples: multiple remarks on the Marquis' "visual power" and cruel subjection of his wife appear on p. 129 and then reappear verbatim on p. 137; notes 37 (p. 317) and 7 (p. 342) repeat content from the very pages to which they refer.

From the perspective of translation studies, this text remains very much a case study of Carter's relationship to translation and its influence on her thought and work. Nevertheless, the approach, while currently underutilized, could be applied to any writer-translator's activity (as long as sufficient critical and background information were available). Hennard forcefully and usefully reminds us that the writer-translator's encounters with past texts and other art forms will *invariably* shape her own artistic productions, in line with Bassnett's assertion that all translators approach texts "first as readers".

What was true for Carter in her triple experience of reading, translating and rewriting fairy tales will be true for the reader of this study: the text brings "an awareness of the agency of the translator as mediator and re-creator" (p. 3). It is logical that transformation be central here, as both the plots and the evolution of fairy tales themselves are defined by mutability and the potential for alternative versions. Case studies involving other genres will determine the utility of the translation-as-transformation paradigm for other texts and author-translators. Translation criticism in particular will benefit from more concerted efforts to document the literary and artistic awareness that shapes the literary translator's practice.

References

- Bassnett, S. (2006). Writing and translating. In S. Bassnett & P. Bush (Eds.), *The translator as writer* (pp. 173-183). London: Continuum.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Carter, A. (1979). *The bloody chamber and other stories*. London: Penguin.
- Carter, A. (1998). The better to eat you with. In *Shaking a leg: Collected journalism and writings* (pp. 451-455). London: Vintage.
- Jakobson, R. (1959). On linguistic aspects of translation. In R. A. Brower (Ed.), *On translation* (pp. 232-239). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Louvel, L. (2002). *Texte/Image: images à lire, textes à voir*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Perrault, C. (1697). *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités*. Paris: Barbin.
- Perrault, C. (1977). *The fairy tales of Charles Perrault*. (A. Carter, Trans.). London: Victor Gollancz.



Ashley Riggs
Faculty of Translation and Interpreting
University of Geneva
Ashley.Riggs@unige.ch