



A review of
**Fairy Tales Transformed?
Twenty-First-Century
Adaptations and the
Politics of Wonder**
and

**Reading, Translating,
Rewriting: Angela Carter's
Translational Poetics**

Sadhana Naithani



These two books have more than their publisher and year of publication in common: they are major contributions to the study of the role of wonder and magic in postmodern storytelling. Cristina Bacchilega's *Fairy Tales Transformed? Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder* is a brilliant study of multi-medial forms of fairy tales and storytelling post Angela Carter. Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère's *Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics* is a highly nuanced analysis of the multi-medial translations of fairy tales by Angela Carter. Their subject matters are different but interlinked in such a manner that they individually and together enrich the academic context of literary, fairy-tale and folklore scholarship.

Fairy Tales Transformed? is radical in its choice of materials studied and analysed, methodologies applied and conclusions drawn. Bacchilega's straightforward style opens the preface with two questions: 'How and to what uses are the fairy tales being adapted in the twenty-first century?' and 'What are the stakes, and for whom, of adapting fairy tales in the twenty-first century?' (ix). To answer these two questions Bacchilega uncovers the complexities in the multi-medial web of reading, hearing, seeing and perceiving fairy tales

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by creative authors, advertising agencies, comics, films and other forms of expression. Once this web becomes visible we become aware of the spaces this web touches upon or hangs in balance from – the geopolitics of wonder. From shop windows to activist feminist storytelling, Bacchilega puts several contemporary aspects of popular and activist aesthetics in a perspective that is amazing in its clarity, given that they are too close to our time to be influenced by success or failure yet. Bacchilega is swimming in the same current that she is objectively analysing.

In the introduction Bacchilega lays out her premises on the conviction that it is not only within academic circles that iconic fairy tale texts are reviewed, re-analysed, deconstructed and reconstructed time and again, but also in popular culture the iconic texts are constantly revisited, reconstructed, re-circulated and therefore, re-contextualised by many actors. The famous fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm or the *Arabian Nights* are freely adapted for advertisements, cartoons, comics, literature and films. These are not only different expressions, but also expressions of different political ideologies and diverse stakeholders.

Chapter 1 focuses on what the author calls 'activist responses', fairy tales adapted by self-conscious writers for purposes very different from those of the Brothers Grimm or later European authors. The literary authors and their works discussed here are Nalo Hopkinson's *Skin Folk* (2001), Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (1997, 1999) and Dan Taulapapa McMullin's intermedial *Sinalela* narratives. Hopkinson is of 'Taino/Arawak and Afro-Caribbean descent' (38), Donoghue is Irish and Irish-Canadian and Dan Taulapapa McMullin's writing is influenced by Samoan traditions. Bacchilega shows that issues of adaptations are not textual, but intertextual and co-textual, as several texts from completely different sources come together to create an adaptation stemming from cultural consciousness and ideological concerns very different from those of the original tales. So when Nalo Hopkinson adapts the Red Riding Hood story, her adaptation itself is part of a larger web in which several European fairy tales have become naturalised in other locales, and thus the adaptation is influenced by that relationship, by awareness of Angela Carter's adaptations, by political, cultural and gender issues as perceived by the new writer and certainly by Taino narratives.

In Chapter 2 Bacchilega discusses 'reading in fairy tale films' through analysis of *Enchanted* (2007) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), and sees in them successful attempts at 'decommodifying' fairy-tale magic. Bacchilega analyses the French film *Bluebeard* (2009) and a South Korean *Hansel and Gretel* (2007) to show them as successful attempts at decommodifying the gendered child. In Chapter 3 Bacchilega revisits *Enchanted* and *Pan's Labyrinth* to show how fairy tales are remixed, as these films do not depend on a single fairy-tale plot but combine several, often highlighting the generic elements of the fairy tale and situating them in yet another narrative that is not a fairy tale. This remixing creates new genres and new ways of adapting fairy tales.

In Chapter 4 Bacchilega discusses the contemporary translations and adaptations of *Arabian Nights* in American television series, comics and other popular media, and opens up yet more issues surrounding adaptations of fairy tales as the web of *Arabian Nights* in popular media adds the dimension of transcultural fairy tales.

In the concluding chapter Bacchilega connects all the various texts in a history of the fairy tale 'in relation to a politics of inequality'. She argues that the element of wonder and magic as developed by the fairy-tale genre continues to play an empowering and liberating role for those who need it.

Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère's *Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics* is a study of the translations of fairy tales undertaken by Angela Carter at different points of her life as a creative writer. Hennard does not study the translations for the sake of understanding translation practices, but to show how Carter read the fairy tales before translating them, how the act of translation led to other forms of expression and how it also influenced her novels. She sees Carter's work 'through the prism of translation' (301). Carter translated Charles Perrault's fairy tales at the beginning of her career as an author, but continued to revisit the stories she deeply engaged with in later editions and other forms of retelling, such as radio plays. The deep influence of the tales remained visible in her novels and Hennard shows that in these works translation becomes a mental process of constant reworking of fairy tales and their symbolic communication.

After an introduction on Carter's French connections, Chapter 1 recounts the short history of Perrault's fairy tales since Carter's translation of them in 1977. The following chapters go story by story – Little Red Riding Hood, Bluebeard, Puss in Boots, The Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella – and show in as minute detail as possible Carter's relationship with these stories over long periods of time and across different media of expression. Each chapter takes one story and discusses Carter's translation for children, editions in collaboration with illustrator Martin Ware, radio plays, adaptations for adult readers, and Carter's reflections on these in other writings. Hennard's method lets one see the process of translation as ever-evolving in the mind of the creative writer and how the translation changes as the author grows in time. Significant changes appear when Carter's translations are published along with illustrations. The latter becomes yet another act of translation which is not separate from the verbal text when the composite influence on the reader is considered. Illustrations change the narrative and influence Carter too, finding reflection in her works. When Carter rewrote the tales for radio plays, she played with sounds and they create yet another translation of the story.

Hennard's perspective on translation goes far beyond the act of converting meaning from one language to another at a fixed point of time, but sees translation rather as a constant process of reading and re-reading, perceiving and representing. She discusses issues of ideologies alongside the process of translation, taking into consideration feminist criticism

of fairy tales as sexist and showing Carter's unique stance on gender issues in fairy tales. Carter's relationship with these stories is a complex one and is analysed here at various levels. Hennard highlights the way Carter weaves herself into the texts, and her interpretation of Carter's loyalty to Perrault's texts as well as to her own convictions as a feminist author defies simplistic critique.

Both these works have Angela Carter at their base. Hennard studies lesser-known writings of Carter – the translations; for Bacchilega Carter is a point of departure from where she moves to other literary fairy tales by authors of diverse geopolitical locations. Hennard's study is that of the literary fairy tale in the last quarter of the 20th century, Bacchilega's that of the first decade of the 21st century. Together they cover a very wide and significant spectrum: fairy tales in English language literatures. Hennard enhances our understanding of Angela Carter and of translation; Bacchilega opens the subject to study new authors, films, advertisement, television and other popular media, and sensitises us to the constantly transforming role of the fairy tale in our contemporary world.

Fairy Tales Transformed? Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder is an important work for scholars and graduate students of literature, folklore, cultural anthropology and postcolonial studies. Its analytical paradigm is relevant beyond the geographical areas under consideration in the book. *Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics* will recharge studies on Angela Carter and make a very important contribution to the emerging field of literary-translation studies. For scholars and graduate students of literature and gender studies this book is a significant contribution.

Author: Cristina Bacchilega.

Fairy Tales Transformed? Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder.

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Author: Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère.

Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics.

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