



A review of
**Mother Goose
Refigured**

Ruth B. Bottigheimer

Christine A. Jones's *Mother Goose Refigured* presents her new translation of Perrault's 1697 *Histoire, ou Contes du Temps passé*. With an ample introduction and an annotated bibliography of French and English editions of *Histoires, ou Contes*, this concentrated compendium serves beginning students and advanced researchers alike.

The impulse for Jones's translation project lay in her sense that Perrault's distinctive lighthearted irony had not made its way into existing English translations of his tales. Her rendering of the wedding scene of 'Beauty in the Sleeping Wood'¹ shows how Jones's translation nudges forward the meaning of Perrault's subtly nuanced language:

Right after dinner and without delay, the family chaplain married them in the chapel of the château and the maid of honor opened the bed curtains. They hardly slept. (112)

Jones's words highlight the couple's eager haste ('right [my emphasis] after supper') to sanctify ('chaplain married them') and consummate ('opened the bed [my emphasis] curtains') their physical union ('they [my emphasis] hardly slept'). The few words of Jones's spare translation, which specify that the maid of honor was opening *bed* curtains and not window draperies, mirror the sexual urgency of Perrault's sly telling, in which two young people resort to the castle's almoner (an low-level ecclesiastic who could also perform liturgical services) to allow them achieve physical intimacy:

& après soupé sans perdre de temps, le grand Aumonier les maria dans la Chapelle du Chateau, & la Dame-d'honneur leur tira le rideau: ils dormirent peu, la Princesse n'en avoir pas grand besoin ... (29-30)

Robert Samber's 1729 translation laid the foundation for later English translators:

... and after supper, without losing any time, the Lord Almoner married them in the chapel of the castle, and the chief lady of honour drew the curtains; they slept very little; the Princess had no occasion ... (cited from Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 114)

Samber's version, which minimises the haphazard legitimisation of the couple's wedding by elevating the almoner to the nobility ('Lord Almoner'), left a hint of the young people's lustiness in place by saying that the princess had no *occasion* to sleep. Worded in this manner, 'had no occasion' could easily be explained to child listeners and readers as the result of her 100-year slumber, rather than as a lack of opportunity for sleep brought about by the presence of the Prince in their shared bed after the quick ceremony, as adults would undoubtedly understand Samber's word choice.

In 1921 A. E. Johnson published 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' in *Old-Time Stories told by Master Charles Perrault*:

... A little later, when supper was over, the chaplain married them in the castle chapel, and in due course, attended by the courtiers in waiting, they retired to rest. They slept but little, however. The princess, indeed, had not much need of sleep ... (15-16)

Johnson's carefully chaste rendering erases haste ('in due course'), emphasises protocol ('attended by the courtiers in waiting'), and foregrounds a bed's unsexual uses ('retired to rest').

Subtle word shifts can slip past without particular notice being paid. Taken together, however, they communicate an author's or translator's sense of a story. And those senses differ greatly from one another, not only in this small section of 'Sleeping Beauty' but throughout the eight classic tales of Jones's new translation.

Perrault's tales occupy the middle third of *Mother Goose Refigured* (107-63). The illuminating annotated bibliography of Perrault's tales in French, English, and Dutch that follows (165-205) efficiently details the piratings of Perrault's Paris 1697 edition that boosted European knowledge of his *Histoires*.²

The 'Introduction' preceding Jones's translation (1-63) doubly visualises the tales' all-important dedicatee, Princess Elisabeth Charlotte. The 'Mademoiselle' to whom Perrault also dedicated first his 1695 manuscript copy of the *Histoires* is pictured in a conventional court portrait, sweetly smiling, *decolletée*, with (perhaps jeweled) flowers in her *faux déhâillée*

hairdressing. In a second image, a printed fashion plate, she is elaborately coifed and decorously buttoned up (in a dress created from a fabric that connotes orientalist design).

Contextualising Perrault's tales within 1690s Paris storytelling, Jones alludes to the fairyland fictions of contemporary *conteuses* like Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy and Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier. She then reviews the differing scholarly directions of three Perrault biographers – folkloristic (Marc Soriano), literary (Jacques Barshilon), and in terms of Eliade's civilising process (Jack Zipes). Jones's own biographic sketch includes a revisionary account of Perrault's education; his important, but less often cited, years as royal historiographer; his rise to national prominence as Colbert's deputy; and the better known later years of his life as a leading Academician.

When Perrault began rewriting popular plots, his first work was his stylistically elaborate *Griselidis*. With its Italian Boccaccian plot re-rendered misogynistically in Latin by Petrarch and taken into popular print all over Europe, Perrault turned its relatively simple *bibliothèque bleue* prose into stylistically elegant verse that Jones discusses closely (53-63).

'Notes on Edition, Translation, and Interpretations' (64-102) is not a bibliographic essay, as its title suggests, but an account of publishing practices that had an impact on the availability and appearance of Perrault's *Histoires, ou Contes*. These include Amsterdam piratings and an important Amsterdam re-ordering of the tales that put Perrault's newly composed 'Red Riding Hood' in first place instead of the much older, Basile-derived 'Sleeping Beauty'. Jones argues persuasively that this shifted the public's understanding of the nature of the Perrault collection. This section's book history approach modernises the entire treatment and thinking about Perrault's tales, as do Jones's expansive and extensive learned notes.

With stories whose translation will bring pleasure to the general reader and with an introduction whose depth will instruct both beginning and learned readers, *Mother Goose Refigured* deserves a place on literary bookshelves everywhere.

Author: Christine A. Jones.

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Notes

1. In 'The Significance of Translation' Jones herself chooses 'Red Riding Hood' as her text for comparative translations, using Robert Samber, A. E. Johnson (139-41). Christine A. Jones, 'The Significance of Translation', in *New Approaches to Teaching Folk and Fairy Tales*, eds Christa C. Jones and Claudia Schwabe (Logan UT: Utah State University Press, 2016), 133-46.
2. It should be noted that 'new' printing was often a commercially inspired ruse meant to suggest that a book was selling briskly. On closer inspection, this often turns out not to be the case. The proof lies in fingerprinting a book. This process shows definitively whether a newly dated and released imprint is actually new or whether a bookseller-publisher has simply inserted a newly dated title page into unbound books lying unsold on his shelf. In its simplest form, fingerprinting links a set fascicle number such as A2/ij with the letters printed directly above it. This simple procedure determines which 'new' editions are actually new printings (and thus an indicator of steady or even brisk sales) and which 'new' editions are, instead, a repackaging of unsold books (and thus evidence of just the opposite, lagging sales).