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## The Translations of H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales in the European Literary Scene

### I. Introduction

**H**.C. ANDERSEN'S FAIRY TALES have been since their creation one of the most read literary work through the world. Their situation on the literary scene(s) of Europe depends on different variables whose combination is, in some cases, characteristic of this quite uncharacteristic work. It has seemed interesting to study the matter in the light of Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory applied to translation. In order to propose an overview of the translation of H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales throughout Europe, a representative selection of cases had to be made; however, these representative cases have their own peculiarities and this paper does not pretend to be fully exhaustive.

### II. H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales in Denmark: the Genesis

H.C Andersen's Fairy Tales have remained, until now, an extraordinary enigma, a matter of discussions, theses, analyses, papers: each of them being an attempt to penetrate the mystery of such an apparently simple work. The Danish writer has literally created a popular culture, by himself. And one successful not only in Denmark, but all over the world, from Africa to Japan, from America to Siberia: a success which has never faded from the creation of his Fairy Tales. The way these fairy tales find their place into the literary polysystems is different in each case, but the result is always the same: they are adopted by different cultures as being part of them, without further discussion, as it will be shown later. How many French children really know that H.C. Andersen was Danish, not French? The Fairy Tales seem to coincide perfectly with the constraints of each culture and the requirements of each readership, as if there was a place

QUENTEL Gilles, «The Translations of H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales in the European Literary Scenes», *RiLUne*, n. 4, 2006, p. 87-99.

allotted to them before their creation, e.g. a slot or a position (Toury 1995: p. 207) in the target culture that this work would inevitably fill.

Nevertheless, the problem remains since these tales do not seem to fill any slot: as we will see later, there was no objective need for this kind of literature, neither at the time when the Tales were written, nor today. It is still possible to invoke an unconscious desire on the part of the readership, but there is objectively no trace of such a need. The case is rather uncommon insofar as no readership in any European country should have ever needed translated literature of a kind which has always been there: tales are a heritage of every literary culture. They generally have unknown origins: they are the outcome of millennial oral literature, and therefore represent the very foundations of many literary polysystems.

H.C. Andersen (1805-1875) almost completely invented his Fairy Tales in 1835: even if they seem to, they have no real roots in any folksongs or popular stories, not even in Denmark<sup>1</sup> (Asbjørnsen and Moe had already begun in 1830 the same gathering work the Grimm brothers did in Germany). There is no equivalent to such a phenomenon in the world. Another confusing point is the original language this work was written in. Generally, and this is still the case today, notwithstanding the increasing amount of translators available for each language, a work written in English is clearly more likely to have a big readership than one written in Danish.

Last but not least, the Danish cultural context of the 1830s when the tales were written was rather hostile to such a literary production: even Andersen himself did not really want to write fairy tales but a major romantic novel. As he himself confessed (in a letter to Henriette Hanck from March 1836), there was no way to become a famous writer with fairy tales. Even when the success actually came, he never changed his mind, and regretted all his life not to have been able to write a novel which would gain him the admiration of the literary world.

### **III. Fairytales in the European Polysystem**

As we will see, the way Andersen's Fairy Tales are considered in different European countries varies greatly. Thus, we will rather consider the situation of Andersen's Fairy Tales in some European cultures and assume the existence of a European literary scene (e.g. interactions between local polysystems, which can occur through the medium of translation) (Even-Zohar 1990: p. 50).

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<sup>1</sup> See Gravier 1970: p. 19.

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Fairy tales and folk tales may be one of the most interesting way to study this literary scene, since their set of themes is encountered in most European literary traditions: Marouckla is the Slavic equivalent of Cinderella, and even if the tale is famous in its Perrault's version of 1697, there are approximately 340 versions of a tale featuring the same set of characters throughout Europe (cf. Roalfe 1893, Rustin 1995). This is the case of most famous fairy tales as we know them today.

When Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm wrote their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* in 1812, they had previously made an ethnographic work by compiling stories from 40 different popular sources. Like Perrault, the Grimm Brothers contributed to the «literary tales» genre drawing the interest of the intelligentsia for such stories (correlated with the romantic curiosity toward paganism and local cultures). There had always been a niche in every European polysystem for such literary works, since they may be the oldest literary works ever conceived. But this raises two questions: 1- was/is there a need for translated fairy tales? 2- Was there a need for a completely new set of tales without any root in popular culture?

The answer to both questions is undoubtedly «yes», as proved by the huge success of these fairy tales. Answering the question «why» is far more intricate: roughly and merely, we could invoke the insatiable desire of fantasy expressed by the readers (as the recent success of *Harry Potter*, a set of novels originally meant for children, tends to demonstrate), but this is not the cause of the phenomenon. As Even-Zohar wrote:

It is clear that the very principles of selecting the works to be translated are determined by the situation governing the (home) polysystem: the texts are chosen according to their compatibility with the new approaches and the supposedly innovatory role they may assume within the target literature. (Even-Zohar 1990: p. 47)

As we will see, Andersen's Fairy Tales often blur the distinctions between central and peripheral positions and between literary categories. Thus, their adequacy to Even-Zohar's theory is rather difficult to establish firmly in this special case. As we have seen, there didn't seem to be a special need for such literature before the publication of the tales, neither today nor when the tales were written, nor any special compatibility since the translated tales are not linked to local traditions, although there probably is a compatibility with the general ideological context. At the time when they were written, the connection with the precepts of romanticism is obvious. A new desire for mythical stories inspired especially by the Celtic and the Scandinavian myths emerged then. But the literary interest for this fantasy world was not considered very seriously until Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954). More than isolate, the case is

exemplary: written by an Oxford scholar, specialist of Old English, *The Lord of the Rings* points out the shift within the polysystem, with «fantasy» literature gliding from peripheral to central position as academic circles proved more and more interested in studying such «popular» literature. These shifts were actually predicted by Even-Zohar (Even-Zohar 1990: p. 15).

Even in Italy, Buzzati's short stories are very close to fairy tales and confirm the fact that from the 40s the genre was no longer intended exclusively for children. It has also been the case for Andersen's tales: the situation of France seems representative of this trend, and the original title *Eventyr Fortalte for Børn* (Tales told for children) seems erroneous as Régis Boyer suggests in the preface to his French translation of the Tales:

[...] je reste convaincu que c'est à des fins utilitaires, [...], qu'il intitula *Contes racontés aux enfants son premier recueil et les quelques-uns qui suivirent*. (Boyer 1992: XLIX)

[...] I'm convinced that he titled his first book and some of the following ones «Tales Told for Children» for utilitarian purpose.

#### IV. The Tales into French

It is clear that the French cultural system is much more rigid than most other systems [...]. This [...] has caused French translated literature to assume an extremely peripheral position. (Even-Zohar 2004: p. 203)

As far as Andersen's Fairy Tales are concerned, the French situation seems, in some respects, characteristic of the old literatures of Europe (i.e. England, Spain, Italy, Germany, etc.) in the sense that it illustrates accurately the ambiguity of their position within such polysystems, and the part the translator plays in the determination of this position.

##### IV.1. The Adaptations

In this very case, one is confronted not only to translations but also to numerous adaptations for children. In the case of Melville's *Moby Dick*, the fact that some editors wished to cut out some long and metaphysically complex chapters or digressions about whaling is quite understandable, but to do so with Andersen's Fairy Tales is less understandable because the tales are short and supposedly meant for children. The reason of this need for adaptations could be explained by the fact that, as we have suggested in the previous chapter, Andersen's Fairy Tales find their places in two different niches of the polysystem: they can be either intended for adults or for children. And this is yet a rather rough explanation, since the borders

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between adult and children's literature are blurred today: a distinction which only fifteen years ago was quite clear, is not so any longer.

These adaptations are in fact meant for very young children who are unable or just able to read: Andersen's original tales were too, as far as the plots are concerned and not the style, but daily life in our wealthy countries is not what it was during the XIX century. One cannot see today a little girl dying on the icy ground in the middle of winter, and it is thus impossible in such adaptations to translate one of the Little Match-Seller's last sentences: «*Men i krogen ved huset sad i den kolde morgenstund den lille pige med røde kinder, med smil om munden – død, frosset ihjel den sidste aften I det gamle år*» (Andersen 1998, p.281) which H.P. Pauli literally translated (in 1872) with: «In the dawn of morning there lay the poor little one, with pale cheeks and smiling mouth, leaning against the wall; she had been frozen to death on the last evening of the year». Most Andersen's tales are sad. Moreover, several are sentimentally disturbing, as are those by Perrault or the Grimm brothers. Therefore, they cannot occupy their original niche in the polysystem without an adaptation which means cuts, attenuation of words and feelings. However, the very subtle poetry and the sadness they distil, still remain.

Another problem occurs with Andersen's references to religion which were required in his historical context (Lutheran reformism being very acute in Denmark at the time) but are not understandable by today's children. Moreover, the Christian references are not easily reconcilable with the pagan nature of the fairy tales. In fact, the pagan magic of the fairy tales challenges the Christian values: the fairy being originally a creature from pagan mythologies.

### IV.2. The French Adaptations

In H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales' long list of adaptations into French, the first was published in 1861 (i.e. 13 years after the publication of the first translation of the Tales into French). It is not even called «adaptation», but «imitation». The big wave of adaptations occurs at the beginning of the 30s. Four of them were published in rapid succession: in 1930 by H. Giraud, in 1931 by G. Valléry, in 1932 by M. Reynier and in 1933 by C. Langlade. It should be thus logical to infer that from this date, H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales could no longer occupy the same niche in the polysystem they used to occupy, and that their genuine niche had shifted within the given polysystem toward a more teenager- or adult-oriented literature, thus leaving an empty spot in its former position within children's literature which had to be filled in with adaptations.

This assertion is both true and false: false because most previous “translations” were actually adaptations. The one completed by Etienne

Avenard and published in 1901 for example, exudes so much preciousness and affectation that it doesn't seem to match the original version at all. But true because probably the most successful translation of H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales ever completed, i.e. the one by David Soldi, was published in 1856, and still retains the same success as Marc Auchet points out:

*Den bedste oversættelse, der kom i Andersens levetid (uden tvivl en af de bedste på fransk), og som siden er blevet genoptrykt i utallige eksemplarer, var den som David Soldi udgav i 1856. (Auchet 1993: p. 244)*

The best translation published during Andersen's life (undoubtedly one of the best in French) and which has been reprinted countless times since then, is the one that David Soldi published in 1856.

Moreover, Soldi's translation is presently published in a paperback edition intended for any reader without distinction (Andersen 1970). But it all depends on the translator who himself determines in which niche his/her translation will lie, as we will now see.

### IV.3. The French Translations

Marc Auchet completed in 1987 a new translation of some selected tales: this translation was also published in paperback and addressed the same readership as Soldi's, i.e. children and adults without further distinction. Such a translation requires a skilful translator, capable of managing both kind of readers and Auchet is undoubtedly quite shrewd at this. Soldi's and Auchet's translations make it difficult to locate H.C. Andersen's fairy tales in a given slot of the polysystem. Actually, their very nature «*tout public*» blurs the distinctions, because the system already accommodated translations specifically meant for children (i.e. the above-mentioned adaptations) and translations meant for adults. This tends to indicate clearly that H.C. Andersen's work can occupy both positions: as children's literature at the periphery and as academically acknowledged literature in the centre of the polysystem.

As far as the latter category is concerned, two translations were completed into French. Being «serious» versions of the fairy tales, they adopted a more radically source-oriented translation strategy than the others (there is almost always a correlation between academic translations and source-oriented strategies, since the academic need for accuracy does not fit with strictly target-oriented translations). Besides, they are unabridged translations: all the tales are translated. The first translation of this kind was made by P.G. La Chesnais and published in 1937. The second one was completed by Régis Boyer in 1992 for the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. At present, there are no other complete translations of the Tales.

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The mere fact that Boyer's translation was published in the prestigious Pléiade collection is quite a good indicator of its potential readership, since these books are printed on India paper, contain a high number of pages and are rather expensive: clearly, not the kind of book one would let in the hands of a child. Even if a selection of these tales has been published in paperback, the general tone, very accurate and close to the original Danish text, does not allow any doubt regarding the readership they address. La Chesnais' translation is currently out of print, but its readership was intended to be roughly the same. This first complete translation of the Tales by the famous publisher Mercure de France suggests that the 30s were the decade when their central position has officially been acknowledged. From then on, the original and complete version of the tales has been meant for adults or teenagers. This is still not the case in Denmark, where they are meant for everybody.

At the peripheral position, i.e. children's literature to be specific, not only adaptations are to be found: Anne-Mathilde Paraf for example, in 1962 carried out a rather accurate translation of the Tales for Grund, a publisher generally devoted to children's literature. It is to be pointed out that H.C. Andersen's Tales have been at least as much translated into French as they have been adapted. This is not the case in most other European countries, where the proportion of adaptations is far higher (see Poland in the next section).

All in all, there are approximately 30 different translations of the Tales into French. It is to be pointed out that, as it is the case in other countries, some of these were translated from German, not from Danish (Schröter 1848, V. Caralp 1853 and J. Reuscher 1959 and possibly others, but the source is not always specified) which implies a second-hand translation. This gives an insight about the care one had for Fairy Tales and for the Danish language (among others) in the middle of the XIX century. If they have been translated from Danish as soon as 1856, this is mostly because the translator was Danish himself and had a perfect command of French. A stroke of luck: other countries like Spain did not have such opportunities...

### **V. The Tales in Spanish, Polish and Norwegian**

If the French pattern is in some respects typical of the situation of H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales' translations in some old literary polysystems, slight differences remain depending on which literature one takes into consideration.

In the first place, the fact that the Tales are a translated work does not seem to affect their position within the polysystem, apparently in spite of Even-Zohar's statement:

The texts are chosen according to their compatibility with the new approaches and the supposedly innovatory role they may assume within the target literature. (Even-Zohar 2004: p. 200)

Being close to traditional popular culture, they are merely considered as a part of this culture without further consideration, and it seems likely that the adaptation process influenced in this by eliminating any alienating elements. The situation which may affect their position regarding the nature of translations is the case of second-hand translations: if few of them are to be found in French, and they are very old ones, this is not the case for the three literary scenes we are to examine now.

In Spanish, from 1878 (translation by Fernández Cuesta) on, the translations of the Tales are numerous: among others, J. Roca y Roca in 1885, Emma von Banaston in 1886 (first unabridged translation in Spanish), C. S. de Tejada in 1897 (*traducidos directamente del dinamarqués*, probably the first translation from Danish to Spanish). The second unabridged translation (*Cuentos Completos*) of the tales by Francisco Payarols (1959) is still based on the German translation: this may also be the case of Banaston's translation, as there is no further information regarding the original language in the book. The problem of finding a translator for distant (geographically and culturally) languages is yet more acute when minority languages are concerned, as we will see in the next chapter. If Banaston did not translate from Danish, which is unsure, Salvador Bordoy Luque and José Antonio Fernández Romero are apparently the first ones who translated the complete tales directly from Danish (1961).

The fact that most unabridged translations were made from previous German translation tends also to indicate the peripheral position of the Tales within the Spanish literary polysystem: it seems obvious that if they had been seen as a masterpiece, translation from the original text would have been considered earlier. However, the situation is changing nowadays: a rather recent unabridged translation of H.C. Andersen Fairy Tales in Spanish was made by Enrique Bernárdez (1989). This indicates that the Tales are indeed shifting from the periphery to the centre of the polysystem, as it was the case in France at approximately the same time (in the 90s). This confirms the idea according to which first-/second-hand translations and source-oriented academic translations are a clue of the place the Tales can occupy in the polysystem.

In Poland, H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales generally remain in the field of children's literature (peripheral): there are far less translations in Polish than in French or Spanish. Moreover, adaptations are far more frequent than translations, and several translations are from German (Stefania Beylin 1974, Agnieszka Kuligowska 1998) and they are still in print.

However, the recent translation from Danish by Bogusława Sochańska (2005), which is the first unabridged translation of the Tales into Polish, indicates that a shift toward a more central position has taken place. But it has to be pointed out that the present edition of the book (widely illustrated) suggests that it is, once again, meant for children. The causes of this situation are very difficult to explain and partly historical: but the proximity, both geographical and cultural, of Poland and Denmark will probably accelerate the move from now on.

In Norway the situation is even more intricate: first of all, the languages (Danish and Norwegian) are very close to each other and a translation is not required, since most Norwegians can read Danish without difficulty and vice-versa. However, the problem remains as far as children are concerned. Furthermore, there is not one official Norwegian language, but two standards (Bokmål and Nynorsk) and a wide variety of regional languages from Kristiansand to Honningsvåg. Thus, the complete tales are often available in the original Danish version, even if some Norwegian versions are to be found, but rather recent and mostly made for children. The nature of the Tales as a translated work is therefore very unsteady.

We shall remember that the historical relationships between Norway and Denmark have been very tight throughout the centuries. Briefly, it is of the furthestmost importance to know that Denmark has dominated Norway from 1600 until 1814, and that the kingdom acquired its independence from Sweden in 1905. A significant part of the Norwegian intelligentsia has, at least until the beginning of the XX century, considered Danish the language of the elite (Ibsen's and Hamsun's masterpieces were written in a language very close to Danish). The translation of Danish works into Norwegian (and especially into Nynorsk) can be considered as a sign of cultural independence, and the affirmation of the Norwegian culture as distinct from the Danish one: the "Nynorsk trend" initiated by Ivar Aasen in 1848 worked in this direction. Thus, the way a Norwegian reader considers H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales is probably affected by such cultural features, even if this seems to be less and less the case.

The connection between translation and national identity has to be taken into consideration: the Norwegian case is exemplary for the cultural relationship that a young and relatively little-populated state has toward an older and historically more dominant one: the situation of Slovakia toward Poland is about the same, and the question is even more acute for all minority languages.

## **VI. The Question of Minority Languages**

Last but not least, we shall address the problem of the minority languages of Europe, which are indeed numerous. In the previous part devoted to

Spanish, one could have asked «which Spanish?», as well as «which Norwegian?» or even «which Polish?» (Kashubian, Silesian, Tatra Polish, etc).

In order to consider once again a representative case, we will focus on the Celtic languages, which enclose a great deal of typical characteristics regarding H.C. Andersen's Fairy Tales' translation into minority languages.

There is no translation of the 175 tales into Irish, Gaelic, Welsh or Breton: only some translations of isolate tales are to be found (e.g. «The Nightingale» in Irish – some other tales are translated but still not published<sup>2</sup>). Elfyn Pritchard translated and adapted 15 Tales into Welsh for a children's edition. In Breton there is a translation of «The Little Mermaid» by Ropartz Hemon dating from 1928: once again it's an illustrated children's edition. A few tales are translated into Scottish Gaelic too, but still in children's editions.

The situation of H.C. Andersen's Tales in Celtic languages may be the most intricate of all. They remain clearly at the utmost periphery of the polysystem as children's literature, partially translated and in some cases only adapted. Moreover, for most of these tales it is unclear whether they were translated directly from Danish, or through English or French (i.e. the main languages spoken in the considered areas, as there are relatively few native speakers for every single Celtic language throughout Europe). What is rather certain is that that Ropartz Hemon did not know Danish, and that his source was a French translation.

Two factors play a great part in the positioning of these translations in the Celtic polysystem: as it has been the case in Norwegian, these translations are underlain by a cultural sense of identity. Thus, they may have been promoted by a will to raise interest in children about the ancestral language of their country/origins, in order to encourage them to read other central Celtic texts afterwards, or merely to help them communicate in languages which are quite difficult to learn, and remote from local main languages, such as English or French. Besides, Ropartz Hemon, the Breton translator, was himself committed to national-regionalism, which may suggest that his translation, and maybe those of other translators as well, were also committed into promoting the regional identity.

On the other hand, Celtic cultures possess an important part of their literature devoted to tales and fairy tales: e.g. the Welsh *Mabinogion*, the Cornish *Ordinalia*, the Breton *Barzhaz Breizh* or the very important Irish

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<sup>2</sup> Some of these manuscripts were to be seen at the exhibition for the bicentenary of H.C. Andersen in Dublin the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2005.

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Gaelic literary corpus. Even the stories about King Arthur as they were first adapted by Chrétien de Troyes in France (*Lancelot* in 1181 and *Perceval* 1190) are originally Celtic. From Chrétien de Troyes to Tolkien, the Celtic myths have supplied numerous European tales or fairy tales-related literature (as this is also the case with Scandinavian myths, and the situation of Norway could be explained in similar terms too). Thus, the need for complementary literature of this kind within the Celtic literary scene is rather faint. But this does not mean that Andersen's tales won't be translated into Celtic one day: actually, a third problem occurs, which is to find a translator competent in both Danish and a Celtic language...

### VII. Conclusion

The situation of H.C. Andersen's Fairytales' translation in Europe emphasizes several singularities regarding the polysystem: one sole literary work can occupy several places in a polysystem (peripheral or central depending on the readership it is meant for). Furthermore, the places may be shifting (as it is the case in France, Spain and Poland for example), and this can explain why most translations are obsolete after few decades<sup>3</sup>. Besides, the fact that the Tales are a translated text doesn't necessarily have a significant incidence on its position within the polysystem (and this contradicts in some respects the claim according to which translated text should be «an integral system within any polysystem» (Even-Zohar 2004: p. 200), while the historical relationship between the source-country and the target-country is not incidental in some cases (Norway) and the translation can also be used as a tool for identity claim. Finally, the existing literary mythical corpus of the target culture may affect the place the work has within its polysystem.

Gilles Quentel (University of Gdańsk, Poland)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Among the 34 French translations of H.C. Andersen's *Fairy Tales* published from 1848 until 1962, only two are still available in 2006 (the ones written by A.M. Paraf and D. Soldi).

<sup>4</sup> Born in 1973 in Bretagne (speaker of Breton), he is now associate professor of comparative linguistics. He wrote his Ph.D. thesis at the University of Sorbonne about the translation of Scandinavian Languages and several papers about translation theory (focusing on phonetic aspects of translation), Scandinavian and Celtic studies.

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