

Children's Literature in Translation

Challenges and Strategies



Edited by
Jan Van Coillie
Walter P. Verschueren

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2006 by St. Jerome Publishing

Published 2014 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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ISBN 13: 978-1-900650-88-5 (pbk)

Typeset by
Delta Typesetters, Cairo, Egypt

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Children's literature in translation : challenges and strategies / edited by Jan Van Coillie & Walter P. Verschueren.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-900650-88-6 (alk. paper)

1. Children's literature--Translating. I. Coillie, Jan van.

PN1009.5.T75C55 2006

418'.02--dc22

2006007199

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Editors' Preface

It is common practice today to describe the role of the translator as a mediator, as one who facilitates the negotiating 'dialogue' between source text and target audience. Nowhere else is the mediating role of the translator so strongly felt as in the translation of children's literature. It is thanks to translators that children from all over the world can step through the magical looking-glass and venture into the beguiling world of Andersen's fairy tales and Alice's unexpected, mind-boggling Wonderland, or can indulge in the charmingly anarchistic fabrications of Pippi Longstocking, and – more recently – the thrilling, often spine-chilling, universe of Harry Potter. For children who do not master foreign languages, translations are the sole means of entering into genuine contact with foreign literatures and cultures.

At the same time, translators are not as neutral as the term 'mediator' initially seems to suggest. Translators do not simply stand 'in between' source text and target audience, from the beginning they are always an intrinsic part of the negotiating dialogue itself, holding a fragile, unstable middle between the social forces that act upon them (the imposed norms of the publishing industries and the expectations of the adults who act as buyers and often as co-readers), their own interpretation of the source text and their assessment of the target audience (what are the target audience's cognitive and emotional abilities, its tastes and needs?). Surely, the translator mediates, but to an important extent he or she also shapes the image that young readers or listeners will have of the translated work.

Of course, it may be argued that all translation, for children and adults alike, is an act simultaneously involving mediation and refraction. The very awareness that translating for children does not differ in kind from translating for adults, but simply in the extent to which it necessitates or allows forms of textual manipulation, has recently led to the emancipation of this long-neglected subfield of literary translation. Today, translating for children is increasingly recognized as a literary challenge in its own right. A classic work like *Alice in Wonderland*, a book so rich that it continues to attract well-known translators as well as fresh talent, played a key role in the process. More recent classics, too, such as the works of Astrid Lindgren, Roald Dahl, J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman, are now generally recognized as literary masterpieces that, from a translator's point of view, are no less demanding than 'serious' (adult) literature. On the contrary – often the creative, playful use of language offers an additional

challenge in that it requires a special empathy with the imaginative world of the child.

The unprecedented boom of translated children's books over the last few decades and the remarkable rise in the quality of these translations (itself the result of the professionalization of the translation business) were accompanied by a significant growth in scholarly interest. In the field of research the prescriptive approach (*how should you translate?*), so typical of the earliest studies in the 1960s, has been largely substituted by a descriptive approach (*how do texts present themselves as translations?*). The focus of research has thereby shifted from the source text to the target text. This shift, attributing a privileged status to the target readership, offers numerous avenues of investigation for the translation of children's literature. One important and welcome spin-off of the new paradigm is that translators of children's literature are gaining 'visibility'. No longer humbly acting in the shadow of the original authors – themselves outshone by the authors of 'serious' (read: adult) literature – they are slowly stepping into the limelight.

In the present volume we have endeavoured to explore the various challenges posed by this paradigmatic shift and at the same time to highlight some of the strategies that translators can and do follow when facing these challenges. The key issues prompted by recent scholarly work in this vein include the impact of translation norms, the choice between foreignizing and domesticating translation strategies and the dual audience.

Over the last few decades, the study of children's literature in translation has benefited greatly from theoretical developments in the fields of literary studies and translation studies. Four such developments deserve special mention, because they have proven to be particularly fruitful and feature heavily in the present essays. First, there is the overarching concept of the polysystem introduced by Itamar Even-Zohar in the 1970s and one of the first attempts to give children's literature, along with other 'minor' literatures and the whole of translated literature, a proper place in the literary system. Second, Gideon Toury's concept of norms of translation behaviour continues to exert considerable influence on scholarly research; this is also true of the methodology he envisioned for the branch of descriptive translation studies, with its emphasis on the place of the text in the target culture system and on translation shifts. Third, norms also resurface in the ideological implications of Lawrence Venuti's concept of the translator's (in)visibility and his discussion of foreignizing and domesticating translation strategies. Finally, there is the concept of

the child(hood) image, which can be traced back to Philippe Ariès' pioneering *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) and which, applied to children's literature as in Riitta Oittinen's *Translating for Children* (2000), sheds an interesting light on the rationale behind many of the translation shifts that occur in the process of translating 'for children'.

The present collection of essays offers a sample illustration of this methodological indebtedness. In the opening essay, 'The Translator Revealed', **Gillian Lathey** offers a review of historical and contemporary prefaces to translated children's books published in the UK. Drawing on prefaces by Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Howitt, Joan Aiken and Ann Lawson Lucas, she demonstrates that, viewed historically, translators' prefaces offer rare insights into the selection of texts for translation, the development in translation practices and changes in the image of the child reader.

From a similar historical perspective, **Rita Ghesquiere** discusses in a polysystemic context how translations have helped children's literature to fulfil a basic role in the establishment of literary canons. Her article also deals with the current status of children's literature worldwide and raises the intriguing and important question of whether the import of Western children's books is a blessing or a hindrance to the development of native (non-Western) children's literatures.

In 'No Innocent Act: On the Ethics of Translating for Children', **Riitta Oittinen** analyzes the way translations of children's literature are determined by the norms and values (ethics) of a given society, and by the norms and values that lie dormant in the translator's personal child(hood) image. Without taking an overt stance in the debate between foreignization and domestication, Oittinen points out the 'delicate' nature of these concepts in the context of children's literature: in the end, all translating for children inevitably becomes an activity 'guilty' of textual domestication.

In her study of translations of children's literature in the former East Germany, **Gaby Thomson-Wohlgemuth** demonstrates how books were selected for translation in order to play a role in the creation of an ideal socialist society and how they enjoyed a remarkably high status because of the indispensable role they played in educating the masses.

Vanessa Joosen, in turn, concentrates on the changing attitude in the Netherlands toward the adolescent novels of the British author Aidan Chambers. By comparing two Dutch translations of *Breaktime*, she shows how attention shifted from Chamber's use of taboo to a greater awareness of his stylistic complexity. The question of taboo and censorship also

proves relevant to *Postcards from No Man's Land*, whose mixture of Dutch and English posed a particular challenge to the translator.

Studying the collision of norms in different translations of *Nils Holgersson's Wonderful Journey throughout Sweden* by Selma Lagerlöf, **Isabelle Desmidt** goes straight to the heart of the matter and addresses the question of whether such collision, typical of much children's literature, can be adequately described by using existing models. Putting Andrew Chesterman's prototype approach to the test, she argues that the results of her own comparative analysis seem to indicate a further need to fine-tune the model, but she nevertheless concludes that the prototype approach promises to remain a valuable future tool for translation studies.

In the context of children's literature, the choice between foreignizing and domesticating translation strategies is often linked to didactic and pedagogic norms. For a long time most translators found it self-evident that the source text should be adapted to the target culture. These adaptations were based on the assumption that the linguistic and literary formation of the young reader, as well as his or her knowledge of the world generally, was too restricted to guarantee a sufficient degree of recognizability and empathy, two features that were deemed of the utmost importance for children's books. Since the 1980s there has been a widespread reaction to this 'domesticating' tendency. Today, more and more translators, out of respect for the original text and because they want to bring children into contact with other cultures, choose to retain a degree of 'foreignness' in their translations.

Belén Gonzalez Cascallana focuses on the handling of cultural intertextuality in the Spanish translations of contemporary British children's fantasy books. She concludes that the translators' overall orientation does not fully favour either the domestication or foreignization of source text features. Translators primarily aim to stay close to the source text and bring the experience of a foreign text of literary merit to the target child audience, but in other ways increasingly show a concern for the target reader's comprehension and their ability to enjoy the presence of cultural intertextuality.

Following the polysystem theory, **Isabel Pascua-Febles**, studying the translation strategies in an English and Spanish translation of a German youth novel, concentrates on the social and educational conventions and the way different translators focus on the young reader as evident in cultural markers such as juvenile expressions and diastratic varieties (i.e., various social registers).

One of the most interesting focal points where translation problems and strategies meet is the translation of personal names. Very often they are domesticated in order to facilitate the identification process of young readers. In 'Character Names in Translation', **Jan Van Coillie** demonstrates how the translators' choices can cause texts to function differently: shifts may occur in their informative, educational, emotional, entertaining and creative function. His study also sheds a different light on the concept of 'functional equivalence'.

One of the key issues in translating children's literature is the ambivalent audience of young readers and adult buyers (readers). Hans Christian Andersen, one of the world's most widely translated authors, was well aware of his double audience. He wrote his stories for children "always remembering that mother and father often listen in". **Anette Øster** scrutinizes two English translations of Andersen's fairy tales and demonstrates how they are often stripped of their double audience: not only are sexual overtones and irony removed but also their richness of detail and linguistic finesse are lost.

The complex translation strategies resulting from this dual orientation are discussed in the contribution by **Mette Rudvin** and **Francesca Orlati** on the translations of Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* into Italian and Norwegian. Rushdie's novel can be read both as a fairy tale for children and as a political critique aimed at an adult readership. A series of interesting translation issues emerge: the micro-structural coordination of narrative techniques, the macro-structural marketing policies dictating the translation strategies of the political subtext through metaphor and the role of the target reader.

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The Translator Revealed

Didacticism, Cultural Mediation and Visions of the Child Reader in Translators' Prefaces

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Abstract. *The translator takes centre stage in this review of selected examples of historical and contemporary prefaces to translated children's books published in the UK. Viewed historically, translators' prefaces offer rare insights into the selection of texts for translation, developments in translation practices and changes in the image of the child reader. Mary Wollstonecraft, radical author of A Vindication of the Rights of Women, addresses adults in the 'Advertisement' to her 1790 translation of Christian Gotthilf Salzmann's Elements of Morality for the Use of Children; she expresses a didactic, moral purpose that necessitates wholesale cultural context adaptation. Over half a century later, the emphasis is on entertainment in the fey little poem 'To English Children' written by Mary Howitt to mediate her translation of Otto Speckter's fables (1844). In more recent times, prolific children's author Joan Aiken uses the art of the storyteller to beguile her young reader into understanding cultural difference in the lengthy introduction to her translation of the Comtesse de Ségur's L'Auberge de l'Ange-Gardien (1976), whereas the preface to Ann Lawson Lucas's admirable, scholarly retranslation of Collodi's Pinocchio (1996) reveals the dilemma inherent in a translation of a children's classic by an academic. When the translator becomes visible, metatextual comment highlights the particular demands of translating for children.*

Literature on translation abounds with references to translators as 'invisible', and translators for children seem to be the most transparent of all. In accordance with the low status of children's books, an accreditation of the translated work has always been less likely in translations of children's than adult literature, so that many translators of children's books into English belong to the great disappeared of literary history. When searching in vain for the translator's name in some children's texts, for example the British version of Jean de Brunhoff's *The Story of Babar*, it

would be easy to imagine that the book had been transposed from one language to another by some kind of literary osmosis with no human agent involved. Yet there *is*, of course, evidence of the translator's existence, beyond his or her name, as a discursive presence within the translated text. Comparisons between source and target texts reveal a filtering consciousness at work making linguistic choices; adapting the context of the original; aligning it with models in the target culture (Shavit 1996); omitting text or adding explanations. Indeed, Giuliana Schiavi (1996) and Emer O'Sullivan (2000) argue for the addition of the notion of an 'implied translator' to models of narrative communication, a textual construct that in historical texts may well be the only remaining trace of the translator. What I wish to raise in this article, however, is a different kind of literary detective work: a search for a direct rather than implicit record of the translator's voice.

Diaries, letters, journal articles and – in recent times – interviews, all add to our knowledge of past translation practices. But when translators emerge from the shadows to write an introduction or prefatory note to a translation for children, they do so to justify the choice of the text, to commend its didactic intent, or to reconcile teachers, parents and child readers to its provenance and content. There's no doubt that prefaces to translated children's texts are rare, particularly so in the UK, where translations have always represented a very small percentage of publications for children and the origin of a translation may owe more to chance than to coherent publishing policies. Moreover, according to Jeremy Munday (2001), the translator's preface generally is fast disappearing and is now limited to retranslations of classic texts. Nevertheless, provided that they are treated with an appropriate degree of scepticism – translators' pronouncements on their work are not necessarily any more reliable than those of authors – prefaces are statements of intent that offer insights into the selection of texts for translation, into past and present translation strategies for a young readership, and into the inspiration and motivation (not always merely financial) of translating for children.

The prefaces I have collected so far reflect the fluctuating tension between instruction and entertainment familiar to historians of children's literature; they also display a remarkable range in content as well as tone and mode of address, either to the adult with the child's interests at heart, or to the child reader. Before moving on to case studies, I'd like to start with just a few brief, contrasting snapshots taken from within this range. An early translator's preface to a text translated for children – one of the earliest in the English language – is that of schoolteacher Charles Hoole

M.A, translator of the German text of the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* by Johann Comenius, published in 1659. Hoole's four pages of advice on the pedagogical application of the text proclaim a didactic purpose even in the heading to his piece, which is entitled: 'The Translator, to all judicious and industrious School-Masters' (Comenius 1672). He commends the orderly, rational approach to learning through the senses in Comenius' text, since children had previously been taught like parrots to repeat material beyond their understanding; Hoole also appreciates Comenius' attempt to match his material to children's cognitive development. Equally revealing of contemporary constructions of childhood some two hundred and fifty years later is the deeply critical attitude towards the child of Emma Stelter Hopkins, translator of Johanna Spyri's *Heimatlos* (Homeless) in 1912. Stelter Hopkins expresses in tight-lipped fashion the hope that Spyri's stories will teach children to appreciate home comforts: "to which they grow so accustomed as often to take them for granted, with little evidence of gratitude" (Spyri 1912:iii). Such a remark immediately evokes the oppression and expectations of a late Victorian or Edwardian childhood. On the other hand, the child-friendly voice of Joan Aiken in the mid-1970s (to which I shall return) aims to charm children into reading her translation. Although we can never know how many of these prefaces were actually read – children are certainly not known as great preface readers and nor, on the whole, are adults – such fleeting views of translators' intentions towards the child reader, whether didactic, dismissive or enticing, indicate their potential for any historical investigation of translation for children.

As a starting point for the selective overview to follow, I have chosen as a more detailed case study a preface written in 1790 by an early feminist and radical, Mary Wollstonecraft, because of the insights it offers into contemporary translation practices in relation to the child reader. In the second part of this paper, further examples taken from the 19th and 20th centuries will illustrate in turn the preface as a medium of cultural mediation; the child-centred preface as story and, finally, the preface as an expression of the adult-child duality that characterizes all writing for children.

Translation Practices and Ideological Purpose

Mary Wollstonecraft lived from 1759 to 1797 at a time of intellectual and political ferment: the French Revolution was taking place as she wrote

the translation I am about to discuss. Wollstonecraft is best known as the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, a “treatise on female rights and manners” (1792:73) that enjoyed a renaissance at the time of the Women’s Movement in the 1970s. She lived for a time in a community of intellectuals and dissenters in Newington Green, north London, set up a school there. Later joined the dazzling social circle of publisher and bookseller Joseph Johnson that included the visionary poet and artist William Blake, William Godwin, the political and social theorist whom she eventually married, and Henry Fuseli, the German-Swiss painter who briefly became her lover. In short, she was a free-thinking, independent woman, who determined her own life and affairs. While working on a number of commissions for publisher Joseph Johnson, she translated a text by a leading German author of Enlightenment literature for children, Christian Gotthilf Salzmann. To this translation of Part One of Salzmann’s *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children*, first published in 1790, she added an ‘Advertisement’¹ that reveals not only an appreciation of the preoccupation with childhood and education that was sweeping Europe in the wake of Rousseau’s *Émile* (1762), but also a sovereign approach to translating for the child reader born of moral conviction and pedagogical experience.

The opening to Wollstonecraft’s preface may well be disingenuous: she claims that Salzmann’s text “accidentally fell into my hands, when I began to learn German, and, merely as an exercise in that language, I attempted to translate it” (Wollstonecraft 1989:5). Whether this was a fortuitous encounter or not, what caught and held Wollstonecraft’s interest was the fact that “chance had thrown my way a very rational book”. Wollstonecraft continues that she would never have completed such an arduous task² had she not considered Salzmann’s book to be a “very useful production” (1989:5) written “on the same plan” as her own earlier publication, *Original Stories from Real Life* of 1788. Wollstonecraft’s *Original Stories*, with their emphasis on reason and civilized behaviour as the basis of morality, strike the modern reader as coldly didactic and

¹ ‘Advertisement’ is used in its original sense of a notice to the public.

² Wollstonecraft probably refers to the translation of Salzmann in a letter to her friend George Blood, where she expresses the sheer exhaustion of working in an unfamiliar language: “I am so fatigued with poring over a German book, I scarcely can collect my thoughts or even spell English words, of course, you must not expect any chat, indeed I have nothing new to talk about”, London 15 Sept 1789 (in Wardle 1979:183).

have been condemned by John Rowe Townsend, a historian of British children's literature, as "perhaps the most repellent piece of English Rousseauism" (Townsend 1965:43) of the period.³ Nonetheless, the parallel with Salzmann's book lies in the social and moral instruction of children through fables and stories taken from daily life rather than fanciful tales, which at the time were considered to be a dangerous incitement of the child's uncontrollable imagination.

No wonder, then, that Wollstonecraft found the translation of Salzmann's book congenial. Salzmann's suggested mode of delivery, too, must have struck a chord with Wollstonecraft as a practised teacher of young children. His own preface, which Wollstonecraft translated for the English edition, is a blueprint for imparting the lessons of his text in a manner that engages rather than simply instructs the child: he advises adults to read these exemplary tales about the Herrmann family aloud with warmth and interest (1989:10-11); to assume voices for the different characters; to encourage children to ask questions, to read the tales for themselves – also aloud – and to look closely at the accompanying illustrations.⁴

Wollstonecraft, too, pays careful attention to the child reader's potential response in announcing her translation strategies. She readily admits that hers is not a literal translation, and that *naturalization* – an early use of that term that predates Klingberg's 'cultural context adaptation' by two hundred years – was essential to the task she had set herself:

I term it a translation, though I do not pretend to assert that it is a literal one; on the contrary, beside making it an English story, I have made some additions, and altered many parts of it, not only to give it the spirit of an original, but to avoid introducing any German customs or local opinions. My reason for naturalizing it must be obvious – I did not wish to puzzle children by pointing out modifications of manners, when the grand principles of morality were to be fixed on a broad basis. (Wollstonecraft 1989:5)

³ The content of *Elements of Morality* echo not only Wollstonecraft's own moral didacticism, but also that of her close contemporaries Sarah Trimmer (1741-1810) and Thomas Day (1748-89).

⁴ Although the first edition of Wollstonecraft's translation lacked this visual element, William Blake adapted the original designs for Salzmann's text by Chodowiecki to adorn the second edition (Darton 1999).

In practice, Wollstonecraft's 'naturalization' leads to the Anglicization of names, food and other culturally bound items. The unnamed German town becomes Bristol; the Herrmann family name is changed to Jones, the young son of the family, Karl, to Charles and, on the culinary front, "Märkische Rüben" and "Schöpfenbraten" (Salzmann, second edition, 1819:206) become "mutton-chops and apple-dumplings" (Wollstonecraft 1989:143) – all good eighteenth-century fare.

But Wollstonecraft's adaptations do not stop at changes in names or culture-specific vocabulary. In a section of the preface that immediately arouses the modern reader's curiosity, she refers to an addition to the original: "I have also here inserted a little tale, to lead children to consider the Indians as their brothers, because the omission of this subject appeared to be a chasm in a well-digested system" (1989:6).⁵ On comparing Salzmann's original (the second, 1819 edition) with Wollstonecraft's translation, it becomes clear that this observation concerns a parable told to young Charles by a passing curate who has found the lost and panicking child in a wood. Wollstonecraft replaces the curate's story about a cowardly German hussar learning to overcome imaginary fears, with a similar tale about a British soldier set in the American War of Independence. That war had taken place between 1775 and 1782, and had ended less than ten years before Wollstonecraft wrote her preface, so the reference was recent enough to be of keen interest to her young readers and their parents. A modern equivalent would be a translator's insertion into a children's text of a reference to the Gulf War or a reference to the Iraq War a few years from now. When, in Wollstonecraft's version of the curate's story, the British soldier loses his way in the dark in a pathless American wood, his unjustified fear of the native "copper coloured men" is dramatically exposed when a native American rescues him and attends to his injury. Wollstonecraft drives home her point by referring to this American in her preface as "one of those men, whom we Europeans with white complexions, call savages". Within the text she emphasizes the humanity of this man who binds the British soldier's wounds and guides him back to his army camp (1989:28).

This alteration, when measured against the later imperialist sentiments of much British children's literature of the 19th century, seems

⁵ 'Indian' is the term by which native Americans were known in Britain until the end of the 20th century.

surprisingly modern and even prefigures the politically correct approaches to children's books in the last decades of the 20th century. In the late 18th century, however, such egalitarianism was an intellectual construct rather than a historically grounded response. A rational approach to human behaviour simply could not allow one race to be considered inferior to another; indeed, Salzmann's original text includes a story about a Jewish dentist who cures young Karl of toothache and, as a result, of his incipient anti-Semitism. This advocacy of tolerance is a foundation stone of the "well-digested system" to which Wollstonecraft refers and in which she rather unfairly identifies a gap: a reference to native Americans arising from a war with the British could hardly be expected of a German author. However, in the spirit of Salzmann's values and of the Enlightenment, Wollstonecraft is at pains to dispel prejudice in the young through a story with a humane message, even when that entails taking a cavalier approach to an original text.

Although translation strategies such as *naturalization* and the insertion of a topical reference are familiar to this day, the difference from modern practice lies in the primacy of the moral message, and the vision of the implied child reader that Wollstonecraft shares with Salzmann. That child is a being whose natural instincts are not to be trusted, who is in constant danger of moral failure, disobedience or succumbing to prejudice. Wollstonecraft's principled stance clearly differs from the recent practice of adapting the cultural context in translations for children for reasons of accessibility, or to ensure that translations are commercially viable. Wollstonecraft insists that children's attention should not be distracted by the unfamiliar – the "German customs or local opinions" to which she refers – not simply because they might be alienated from the text, but because nothing must stand in the way of the transmission of the "grand principles of morality" she advocates. Such moral precepts were to lead, in accordance with the intellectual climate of the late 18th century, to the repression of the child's instinctive behaviour in favour of a reasoned, enlightened approach to human interaction.

To the modern reader these stories seem dull and the messages heavy-handed, but the preface puts Wollstonecraft's own stamp on Salzmann's message in a manner that indicates her decisive temperament and radicalism in other spheres. It is also a reminder that translators in the UK have historically exercised a degree of control in presenting their interpretations of prevailing value systems. Some thirty years after Wollstonecraft's accidental encounter with Salzmann, another translator

justified his deliberate choice of text, the *German Popular Stories translated from the Kinder und Hausmärchen* of the Brothers Grimm (1823), from an opposing, anti-rationalist perspective. In his translator's preface, Edgar Taylor writes a scathing condemnation of the "age of reason":

Philosophy is made the companion of the nursery: we have lisping chemists and leading-string mathematicians: this is the age of reason, not of imagination; and the loveliest dreams of fairy innocence are considered as vain and frivolous. (1823:iv)

Although he adds a caveat that fiction should not interfere with the moral education of the young, Taylor's advocacy of the re-introduction of popular and imaginative tales into the reading matter of British children places him at the leading edge of the renaissance of the fairy-tale, romance and fantasy that began in earnest in mid-nineteenth century British children's literature. The influence of Grimms' Tales on British children's literature is of course well known; but the pivotal role of their first British translator is seldom acknowledged.

Cultural Mediation

Both Wollstonecraft and Taylor held strong opinions on the purpose of children's literature, on the one hand as a means of conveying a moral imperative, and on the other as a catalyst for developing the child's imaginative faculty. As children's literature developed through the 19th century, the context adaptation that Wollstonecraft practised for ideological reasons became one aspect of a general process of cultural mediation that has continued to this day to be a prominent feature of translations published in the UK, largely because of British children's limited experience of reading translated texts. Publishers, editors and translators add prefaces, introductions and paratextual material (blurbs and textual extracts) to ease the passage of children's texts into the British market and the hearts and minds of young British readers. In recent times the cachet of an accredited and trusted children's writer has assisted the reception of translated texts. One example is children's poet Walter de la Mare's gentle reassurance in his 1931 preface to Margaret Goldsmith's translation of Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives* that there is nothing in this German story "that *might* not happen (in pretty much the same way as it does happen in the book) in London or Manchester or Glasgow tomor-

row afternoon” (de la Mare 1995:10).⁶ A much earlier example of a translator’s approach to mediation is the fey little verse by Mary Howitt, best known as a children’s poet and the first translator into English of the work of Hans Christian Andersen (initially from German, then later from Danish). The poem introduces her translation from the German of the fables of Wilhelm Hey in 1844:

“To English Children”

This little book comes from the hand,
Dear Children, of a friend –
Throughout the kindred German land,
Tis loved from end to end,
‘Tis loved when sternest winter chills;
When summer gilds the vine;
From Russia to the Tyrol hills;
From the Black Sea to the Rhine. (Howitt 1844:1)

And so she continues in similar vein. Howitt artfully sets out to diminish the threat of the culturally alien: the book is “little”; it comes not only from the hand of a friend, but from a “kindred” land. Although Howitt has a sure touch in the pleasing rhyme and rhythm of her preface, the mode of address to ‘dear children’ is condescending, and the preface eventually degenerates into a set of trite and sentimental comments with references to the book as “a gift from Heaven” or as accompanied by a “flower-enwoven wreath”.

Howitt’s attempt to inspire the confidence of her young readers in the foreign text they are about to encounter raises the delicate issue of cross-cultural representation that is currently of great interest in the field of image studies. Image studies, according to Joep Leerssen, “deals with the discursive and literary articulation of cultural difference and of national identity” (Leerssen 2000:268). Reductive representations of other nationalities or ethnic groups in children’s literature result either from assumptions that children cannot process the complexity of difference, or from an adult consensus as to the image of another nationality to be presented to the young in any given historical period. Political relationships between particular countries determine images of other nationalities, as

⁶ This preface has been reprinted in the currently available Red Fox edition, translated by Eileen Hall.

Emer O'Sullivan has demonstrated in her survey of the stereotypical Germans in British children's fiction (O'Sullivan 1990). With few exceptions (Mary Wollstonecraft was a pioneer in attempting to counter prejudice), British children's literature is littered throughout its history with stock characters, simplified sketches of other nationalities or stereotypical caricatures until the sea-change of the post-colonial era in the latter part of the 20th century. In translations, peritextual material frequently consolidated this approach by limiting the representation of a nation or culture to a set of clearly defined and familiar features.

This tendency is amply illustrated in Anna Barwell's preface to her translation of *Little Sidsel Longskirt* from the Norwegian of Hans Aanrud (Aanrud 1923) in the early 1920s.⁷ Rather than attempt to demystify the foreign as Howitt does, Barwell is far more ambitious: she adopts the position of a connoisseur presenting the Norwegian landscape, culture and people to the English reader in a manner designed for easy assimilation by the young. This undertaking deteriorates, as it inevitably must, into the stereotypical. Barwell tells her young readers that "many of the people of Norway – descendants of the Vikings though they are – spend very busy lives in fishing and in cutting down the pine trees that grow in the dark forests" (Aanrud 1923:5). That little parenthesis on Viking ancestry is telling, since history lessons in British schools at the time and for decades thereafter portrayed the Vikings as invaders and ancient enemies. So a note of reservation colours this introduction of a nation of "peasants" – Barwell's word – who spend the long, light summer evenings dancing and singing "merry folk-dances and songs", but are nevertheless so well educated that "it is very rare to find anyone dull or stupid" (1923:8). A preface intended to mediate a text by introducing its culture of origin only succeeds in inducing in readers a distorted understanding of Norwegian life, a comforting emphasis on quaint folklore that denies children any valid cultural or socio-economic insights.

An alternative strategy is to situate the unfamiliar within a framework of comparison. By focusing on opposition, the mediating translator emphasizes a permanent and inherent otherness, and at the same time reinforces the young reader's own sense of national and cultural identity.

⁷ Barwell's translation was published by J.M. Dent in the Kings Treasuries of Literature series that included world literature titles. That such a series could exist indicates a time when British children's publishing was more enterprising in international terms than it is now.