

But marriage itself is no party: Angela Carter's

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Translation of Charles Perrault's *La Belle au bois dormant*; or, Pitting the Politics of Experience against the Sleeping.

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 **"But marriage itself is no party": Angela Carter's Translation of Charles Perrault's "La Belle au bois dormant"; or, Pitting the Politics of Experience against the Sleeping Beauty Myth**

Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère

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### Abstract

This article demonstrates the importance of Angela Carter's translations of Charles Perrault's *contes* into English and argues for their profound influence on her subsequent literary career. Against feminist critics who rejected fairy tales as conservative and informed by patriarchal structures and values, Carter reclaimed

Perrault for feminism by recovering the critical edge and emancipating potential of his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, Avec des Moralités*. This essay shows, through a comparative reading of "La Belle au bois dormant" and "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," that Carter opposed the worldly "politics of experience" that she found in Perrault to the Disneyfied imagery of the Sleeping Beauty myth and modernized the critique of early marriages already contained in Perrault's *Moralités*. The subversive power of Carter's work, therefore, is not directed against Perrault but rather toward cultural and commercial appropriations of the fairy tale, which promote a naïve view of marriage.

**“But marriage itself is no party”: Angela Carter’s Translation of Charles Perrault’s “La Belle au bois dormant”; or, Pitting the Politics of Experience against the Sleeping Beauty Myth**

Except, I assure you, I did not await the kiss of a magic prince, sir! With my two eyes, I nightly saw how such a kiss would seal me up in my appearance forever!  
—Feverers in Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus*

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When we think of *Sleeping Beauty*, what immediately comes to mind is the magical kiss given by the Prince Charming to the eponymous heroine, often filtered through Walt Disney’s animated movie of 1959. A central icon of the Disney fairy-tale industry, the pink, gold, and light blue *Sleeping Beauty* Castle used to feature a Barbie-doll reproduction of the scene as the highlight of Disneyland’s walk-through attraction before being replaced by the original Eyvind Earle artwork. The emblematic scene was also represented in prominent Disney advertising campaigns on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the film. In 2009 the kiss was reenacted by Hollywood movie stars Zac Efron and girlfriend Vanessa Hudgens (themselves Disney Channel products), photographed in a glamorous *mise-en-scène* by Annie Leibowitz.<sup>1</sup> To counterpoint Efron and Hudgens’s American romance, newlywed model Mariya Yamada and husband/actor Toru Kusano posed in front of the original poster to promote the release of Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* on Blu-ray and DVD. Both pictures testify to the ongoing appeal and global dimension of one of the most powerful myths exploiting the confusion between life and fiction.<sup>2</sup>

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Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218  
+1 (410) 516-6989  
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