

Introduction

Sophie Raynard

This book project was born from a strongly felt need to revise standard biographies of classic fairy-tale authors and editors and to present them together in a single volume. Documentary evidence, sometimes newly discovered, sometimes newly recovered from nineteenth-century suppressions, here reconfigures long-familiar images. In the case of Henriette-Julie de Castelnau, Countess de Murat, the sixteen-year-old ingénue dressed in Breton folk costume who charmed members of Louis XIV's court dissolves in the face of police evidence of a tumultuous private life, punctuated by detentions because of scandalous lesbian liaisons and physical violence. Marie-Catherine Le Jumel de Barneville, Baroness d'Aulnoy, was a fifteen year old married off to an old débauché, whom she, by the age of nineteen, tried vainly to have executed with the help of her mother and her mother's lover. And Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, a prim and highly moral governess and author of improving books for girls, had a colorful past that included marital ambiguities. These women were all influential authors of fairy tales in the same long European tradition that included Charles Perrault, Antoine Galland, Benedikte Naubert, the Grimm brothers, and Hans Christian Andersen.

The biographies of other classic tellers of fairy tales have been unevenly available. Giovan Francesco Straparola's life was largely undocumented; Giambattista Basile's was little publicized. Others were well documented but skewed in their presentation. Perrault, for example, so often presented as a courtier, took little part in court society even

though he had an office in the Versailles palace for some years. The Grimms' social lives were only examined with reference to their collection's origins in the 1980s, while Andersen's life remained until recently sentimentalized by an adoring public into a fairy tale that Andersen himself fostered.

Although scores of nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century editions and translations of Perrault's tales can be found today, those of his contemporaries d'Aulnoy, Bernard, Lhéritier, Murat, and de La Force, whose much larger oeuvre outshone Perrault's in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, largely dropped from view in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Consequently, earlier researchers had to resort to rare and original editions from research libraries or private collections. Moreover, reconstituting those female authors' oeuvre required, until recently, consolidating scattered tales from the novels in which many of them had been embedded. In the case of d'Aulnoy's *Contes*, Nadine Jasmin's 2004 edition marks the first time in more than two hundred years that volume 3 of her *Contes* has been printed. Similarly, the public has also rediscovered de Murat's fairy tales with Geneviève Patard's 2005 edition, while Lhéritier's original fairy-tale collection *Œuvres mêlées* became newly available in Raymonde Robert's 2005 Champion edition, which also incorporated those of de La Force, Durand, and d'Auneuil. As scholars revisit and reedit classic authors' oeuvre, they have also reconstituted authors' lives and have contextualized their works.

Similarly partial or skewed biographies grew up around the figures who preceded the French storytellers. Only a few documents can be directly linked to Giovan Francesco Straparola, but richly layered studies of Renaissance writers' livelihoods, the worlds of print and publishing, and of daily life in Northern Italy in general and in Caravaggio and Venice in particular, have—taken together with evidence from his early and late writings—provided a basis for reconstructing his life. Giambattista Basile left more tracks in his world, and from them Nancy Canepa, who has newly translated Basile's *Pentamerone* into English, has created a coherent biography.

As for the storytellers who followed the French authors of the late seventeenth-century fairy-tale vogue, their biographies also appear here in newly revised form. In the case of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, historical detective work has fleshed out a past that de Beaumont had carefully obscured. In the case of the Grimms, the powerful historical current of nationalism long shaped Jacob and Wilhelm Grimms' biographies into exemplars of national virtues that in essential respects

misleadingly embellished the lives they actually lived. Much the same thing happened with the biography of Hans Christian Andersen, whose life story was reconfigured and romanticized, while in contrast it is safe to say that few people know Ludwig Bechstein's name, and even fewer have an idea of his biography, despite the fact that his tales far outsold the Grimms' tales from the time they first appeared until the end of the nineteenth century. In short, this collection of newly researched biographies of the best-known authors of European fairy tales rectifies false data, adds new information, and provides a reliable historical context for Europe's fairy tales.

A word about the authors' names: In French we would commonly refer to women authors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by their title: *Mademoiselle Bernard*, *Mademoiselle Lhéritier*, *Madame de Murat*, *Mademoiselle de La Force*, and *Madame d'Aulnoy*, but to men authors simply by their last name: *Perrault*, *Galland*. English usage since the 1980s requires similar forms of identification for men and women writers, and we will follow that pattern in this book. It has become customary in English to refer to *Madame d'Aulnoy* as *d'Aulnoy* even though this is not acceptable in French, but because it is common practice among English-speaking scholars we will do the same here.