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# Beasts, Brides, and Brutality: The Intersection of Animalism and Gender in European Fairy Tales

Rachel Matson

Connecticut College, rmatson@conncoll.edu

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Beasts, Brides, and Brutality:  
The Intersection of Animalism and Gender in European Fairy Tales

An Honors Thesis presented by  
Rachel Elizabeth Matson  
to the Department of English  
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all the things I have been  
waiting to say.

## Abstract

This thesis, a comparative study of published fairy tale collections across three nations and three centuries, argues that fairy tales were, in their time, highly charged ideological interventions in period debates about gender, class, and nation. In this thesis I recover not just the historical context of each collection but also the circumstances of production for their print publication. The variables that form the basis of this comparison include: whether stories in a given volume were collected from informants or invented by a single author; the level of attachment of the collector to nationalist movements; and the layers of editorial mediation between informants/writers and the printed editions made from their work. The primary cases are stories of animal transformation, in which the strict boundaries of human and animal are effaced, and the rules of gender are exaggerated or reimagined.

The collections compared in this thesis come from three nations between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries: the Brothers Grimm in Germany; Laura Gonzenbach, a German in Sicily; and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy in France. I analyze gender and class themes in the tales, such as the treatment of the female body, the aging of women, the depiction of subaltern creatures, and animal transformations, in light of contemporaneous political and social changes affecting the status of women in Germany, Italy, and France.

By combining paradigms from three fields—fairy tale studies, animal studies, and gender studies—this thesis offers several findings about the relationship between gender and animalism that were previously unknown to the scholarship. First, when the printed tale is substantially edited or polished for print, or when collectors acted to advance nationalist movements, the following properties are more likely to occur: stricter policing of female propriety; greater restrictions on female agency in the narratives; and harsher punishments for transgressive women. Second, when collections are produced by women, relatively free of masculine intervention, we can expect greater freedom of female character action, even when produced in a less female-friendly early period.

Although they originated as politically charged texts, fairy tales today are typically read ahistorically and therefore lose their original moral and political investments that they held in their time. By examining the burden that nationalist agendas put on women by limiting female characters' agency within fairy tales, I am able to recover the original engagements of published fairy tale collections, offering an argument about the period-specific ideological work done by fairy tales that we do not find in the scholarship.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Fairy tales are not just for children—in fact, in centuries past, children were not even their intended audience. In their time, printed fairy tale collections were highly charged contributions to ideological debates about gender, class, and nation. When we treat them as children’s literature we decontextualize and depoliticize them, robbing the stories of their original commitments and functions. This thesis is an effort to recover the original power of fairy tales.

Fairy tale collections reveal the political ideals, expectations, and fears of their collectors and times, while the message of each collection is in large part a function of the circumstances of its production. These collections prescribe parameters for the differently gendered behavior of men and women. By setting clear expectations of who lives and who dies, who marries and who ends up alone, who is cast as a villain and who gets to be a hero, and who gets to rescue whom, fairy tales show readers which behaviors are punished and which are rewarded.

Although we typically read fairy tales outside of their historical context, fairy tale collections are, in fact, deeply embedded in the times in which they were published. At times when the laws of marriage or the rights of women were being reformed, in either direction, fairy tales were likely to take position on those changes. At other times, when the state of marriage is settled, then the underlying message of a fairy tale might express a desire for progress. Similarly, if the collector is highly committed to a nationalist agenda, then the collection will prescribe roles for men and women in the developing nation, while if the author has no commitment to nationalist projects, she may take creative license to imagine fantastical societies that do not exist. No matter the time period, one thing is clear: the gendered messages of fairy tale

collections are inseparable both from their historical period and from the layers of editorial mediation involved in their production.

This thesis examines three fairy tale collections from three different locations and periods—from Germany, the Grimms’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, first published in 1812 and 1815; from Sicily, Laura Gonzenbach’s *Sicilianische Märchen*, 1870; and from France, Madame d’Aulnoy’s *Les Contes des Fées* and *Les Contes Nouveaux, ou les Fées à la mode*, 1697 and 1698—to determine how the relationship between gender and animalism relates to the rise of nationalist projects and the empowerment—and disempowerment—of women.<sup>1</sup> The object of analysis in this thesis is not the oral tale as studied by ethnographers or anthropologists; my study focuses exclusively on print editions, which may or may not be derived from the mouths of the folk. Although I refer to all three of my collections as fairy tales, only the Grimm and Gonzenbach collections qualify as *folk* tales, as their volumes are the only ones collected from a geographically bounded and culturally homogenous set of informants.

I analyze how the gendered messages of each collection relate to the historical context in which they were published, ultimately arguing that the degree of editorial mediation (usually conducted by men) and the attachment to agendas of nationalism affects the degree to which a collection advances proto-feminist ideals. The Grimms’ project, I argue, is a supreme example of the influence of nationalist agendas of the modern era, while both Gonzenbach and Aulnoy vary from such an extreme reference point: Gonzenbach because she was a geographical and cultural outsider talking to rural women, and Aulnoy because she predates the modern nationalist period. I also examine the differences between works that are collected—texts like those of the Grimms and Gonzenbach, who gathered their stories from real people—and those that are invented—

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<sup>1</sup> Although English scholarship refers to Aulnoy as d’Aulnoy, I follow French style in dropping the “de” when referring to her only by her surname, and will therefore usually refer to her as “Aulnoy.”

collections such as Aulnoy's, which is a product of her imagination. In comparing the two methods of producing fairy tale collections, I show that tales that are invented rather than collected, and thus less editorially mediated, are more likely to develop themes of female agency and to imagine a wider range of outcomes for men and women in companionate marriages. The primary cases are stories of animal transformation, in which the strict boundaries of human and animal are effaced, and the rules of gender are exaggerated or reimaged.

This study of fairy tales fills a critical need in animal studies. The field of animal studies comprehends both literal animals as well as questions of "animality" in a text. The relationship between a human and a non-human animal in most texts frequently serves as a mirror: the human defines himself by determining how he is similar and dissimilar from the animal Other he is faced with. The study of fairy tales, however, complicates the critical field of animal studies because of the prevalence of hybridity and metamorphosis between human and animal. Animals in fairy tales are rarely beast alone; on the contrary, animals and humans frequently morph their physical shape into that of another species, and while humans can take on traditionally animal characteristics, such as violent aggression, animals can also take on human characteristics, such as the ability of speech. It is this fluidity which makes the field of animal studies so salient in fairy tales: no other genre provides such fluid boundaries between what it means to be human and what it means to be an animal as fairy tales do. In the refusal to define humanity in binary terms—a human body versus an animal body—fairy tales allow us to define humanity in broader and more compelling strokes, by looking at a character's actions and feelings instead of just their physical shape. By being the only genre that breaks down the literal definition of man and beast so completely, fairy tales are a key genre for considering such compelling questions of animalism and humanity.



While gender is a highly established topic in the field of fairy tales, this thesis offers a new way of studying it. In most fairy tale collections, gender roles are largely polarized and exaggerated: women are judged in terms of motherhood—marriageable maidens, childless witches, selfish step-mothers—while men are often conceived as little more than heroic princes or grotesque beasts. While this gender dichotomy is well established in the critical field of fairy tales, what is far more interesting and virtually unexplored is how animalism disrupts such defined gender roles. I analyze the animal transformations of male and female characters, examining who is being transformed and by whom, whether the transformation is conducted by choice or as a punishment, and whether the transformation allows the individual more agency than their human form or whether it decreases agency. The answers to these questions vary greatly by gender, both of the transformed and the transformer, as well as by collection. The connection between animality and gender is far more complicated than their roles in isolation, and by bridging the two, as well as relating them to larger questions of nationalist projects, I offer original findings that were previously unknown in the critical field.

This comparative historical analysis of fairy tale collections covers three time periods and countries. My analysis is also a feminist interpretation, which is to say that I take particular interest in the agency and empowerment of women in the narratives in light of the heavily patriarchal climates in which they were written. In the case of the Grimms, I also compared across editions, analyzing editorial changes from the first edition to the seventh in order to show the effect that the increasingly heavy hand of editorial mediation has on print editions even of the same collection. To contextualize each collection in its respective time period I consulted historical sources, examining the policing of gender as found in marriage laws, divorce laws,

rights of custody to children, and shifts from domestic to industrial work, as well as other broad societal and cultural changes.

I also consulted fairy-tale scholarship, of which there is, on the whole, too little. Unsurprisingly due to their popularity and longevity, the Grimms receive the most scholarly attention, most of which is concerned with the treatment of the body, gender, or the brothers' legacy.<sup>2</sup> Aulnoy receives a substantial amount of critical scholarship despite not being a household name, most of which centers on gender, particularly the role of female fairies and childbirth, as well as some scholarship on animalism.<sup>3</sup> Aside from Jack Zipes's paratextual apparatus to his 2006 edition of Gonzenbach's tales, and some basic biographical information elsewhere, there is almost no critical scholarship on Laura Gonzenbach. All of this is to say that there is a troubling lack of critical scholarship on fairy tales; as fairy tales are too often undervalued because of their affiliations with children's literature, few scholars have conducted the in-depth analysis that these stories deserve. Of the existing critical scholarship, the majority is concerned with gender and occasionally engages questions of animalism, although the concepts are rarely analyzed in tandem. Even less research has been conducted on the historical

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<sup>2</sup> For analyses of the body, see Donald Haase, "Re-Viewing the Grimm Corpus: Grimm Scholarship in an Era of Celebrations," *Monatshefte* 91.1 (1999): 121-131; Jeana Jorgensen, "Quantifying the Grimm Corpus: Transgressive and Transformative Bodies in the Grimms' Fairy Tales," *Marvels & Tales* 28.1 (2014): 121-131; and Francisco Vaz da Silva, "Red as Blood, White as Snow, Black as Crow: Chromatic Symbolism of Womanhood in Fairy Tales," *Marvels & Tales* 21.1 (2007): 240-252. On gender in the Grimms' fairy tales, see especially Ruth Bottigheimer, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987, which argues that boys in the Grimm tales are rewarded for the same actions that girls are punished for. On the brothers' enduring historical legacy, see Jack Zipes, *Grimm Legacies: The Magic Spell of the Grimms' Folk and Fairy Tales*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> On Aulnoy, Holly Tucker, "Like Mother, like Daughter: Maternal Cravings and Birthmarks in the Fairy Tales of Mme d'Aulnoy and Mlle de la Force," *French Literature Series* 27 (2000): 33-50, examines her treatment birth spaces and childbirth; Anne Duggan, "Nature and Culture in the Fairy Tale of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy," *Marvels & Tales* 15.2 (2001): 149-167, analyzes how Aulnoy's treatment of gender is different from her contemporary Charles Perrault; and Marcy Farrell, "The Heroine's Violent Compromise," *French Literature Series* 35 (2008): 27-38, explores the violent qualities Aulnoy's female characters are allowed. Lewis Seifret has also done valuable research on masculinity, sexuality, and queerness in French fairy tales: *Manning the Margins: Masculinity and Writing in Seventeenth-Century France*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

contexts of fairy tales, and when done, often applies to an entire time period rather than to specific stories.<sup>4</sup>

By examining the relationship between animalism and gender, especially with the added component of how they relate to each collector's nationalist involvement, my research fills a substantial gap in the critical discourse. It seems only natural to study gender and animalism in conjunction, as doing so reveals whether the definition of humanity is the same for men and women, and yet there are very few scholars who have done so with regard to fairy tales. Further, it seems only intuitive to contrast the tales' gendered themes against the historical contexts in which they were first published, and yet most historical analysis is done only in broad strokes, ignoring the specificity of individual collections.

Fairy tales are politically charged texts whose ideological commitments have been forgotten. When read ahistorically, fairy tales lose their original commitments to gender and power that they held in their time. The majority of scholarship on fairy tales, no matter how closely scholars have read individual stories, has depoliticized the texts by reading them with too little regard for their historical contexts. Fairy tales are an example of how nationalism prescribed gendered parameters, both in society and in the genre itself. By examining the burden that nationalist agendas put on women by limiting female characters' agency within fairy tales, I offer a reading of the period-specific ideological work done by fairy tales that we do not find in the scholarship.

I have decided to arrange my three collections not chronologically, but in ascending order with regard to the presence of proto-feminist themes. I use the term "proto-feminist" because it

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<sup>4</sup> See Elizabeth Wanning Harries, "The Mirror Broken: Women's Autobiography and Fairy Tales," *Marvels & Tales* 14.1 (2000): 122-135, which analyzes how the role of female characters in an extremely wide range of fairy tale collections impacts women's sense of self; and Donald Haase, "Decolonizing Fairy-Tale Studies," *Marvels & Tales* 24.1 (2010): 17-38, which advocates for a transcultural orientation to understanding the specificity of fairy tales.

would be anachronistic to refer to writing before the twentieth century as “feminist.” Although women’s rights have been debated in every time period, we cannot properly speak of feminism until roughly the last century. I consider a tale proto-feminist if its female characters are granted the narrative agency and autonomy to take meaningful actions in regard to plot outcomes, if bodily or other humiliation/mortification of women is absent, and if male characters treat women as peers. I begin with the least proto-feminist of the three, the Brothers Grimm, then proceed to Laura Gonzenbach, and conclude with Madame d’Aulnoy, the most proto-feminist of the three collections. By following this order, I am able to transcend the limitations of strict chronology—overcoming the false assumption, as we will see with Aulnoy, that earlier collections must be less progressive—and focus not only on moments when stories reflect the limitations of their times, but also on when they imagine a better future for women beyond the time in which they were published.

Chapter one examines stories from the first edition of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children’s and Household Tales). They are presented first in my thesis because the Grimms’ stories have the least amount of female agency and are the most concerned with restricting female action and prescribing female propriety—a distinction, I will argue, that is a direct result of the Grimms’ commitment to German nationalism. There is a fair amount of inaccurate assumptions surrounding the Grimms: that they travelled into the German countryside and transcribed the tales from the mouths of peasants, that the tales were always intended for children, and that the stories themselves are entirely German in their origin. The reality of their project, however, is far more complicated. My focus is the first edition, which was published in two volumes, the first in 1812 and the second in 1815, but the brothers didn’t stop there.

With Wilhelm at the helm, the brothers subsequently published six more editions of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* over the next forty-five years, evolving into an 1857 edition that was nearly unrecognizable from the first edition of 1812 and 1815. This seventh edition incorporated over fifty new tales, heavily revised existing tales, deleted numerous original stories, omitted the footnotes, revised prefaces and introductions, and added illustrations, all of which served to make the tales more polished and more appealing to children and families (*Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm* xx).<sup>5</sup> Although the myth of the Grimms includes the brothers traveling across the German countryside—then a collection of smaller states, as Germany itself did not yet exist—to collect the tales directly from peasants, they actually collected the tales in a far more academic fashion.

The tales were shared by individuals who represented a wide range of social classes— young women in Kassel and Munster, lower-class people in villages, educated friends—and who provided either oral tales or transcriptions of oral tales (xxi). Some were even taken from published books. Some have argued that the Grimms' tales are the first real women's literature: Alison Lurie has argued that the vast majority of the Grimms' informants were women and that therefore the stories reflect the values of a matriarchal society (Lurie, *Fairy Tale Liberation* n.p.). This statement, however, is not supported by fact: only ten of the Grimms' thirty-six informants were women (*Original Grimm* 475-478), and as such, it does not seem appropriate to label the Grimms' tales as matriarchal or as chiefly women-sourced. Further, such an approach fails to recognize both the nationalistic aims of the collection and also follows the incorrect assumption that the Grimms did not also get their stories from educated men. Rather, such a description would be better suited to Laura Gonzenbach, a woman who collected fairy tales exclusively from other women.

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<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter cited as *Original Grimm*.

For the Grimms, culture and language were intrinsically intertwined. In chapter two I discuss how the Grimms' collection was part of a larger effort to construct a common German culture—the *Volk*—as efforts towards German unification increased. Zipes explains that the brothers set out to “collect and preserve all kinds of ancient relics—tales, myths, songs, fables, legends, epics, documents, and other artifacts—as though they were sacred and precious gems.” (Zipes, *Grimm Legacies* 65) This emphasis on resurrecting folk tales as a sanctified national effort is crucial, for it points to the Grimms'—and, more broadly, the German people's—desire to project the carefully curated and culturally flattering history of their people, even if this narrative is made-up. In an 1811 letter to Clemens Bretano, a romantic writer and poet who wanted to adapt oral tales for a similar book of literary fairy tales, Jacob Grimm explains the brothers' intent, writing:

We are going to start by collecting all the oral tales from the entire German fatherland and only wish that we do not misconstrue the general and extensive sense of the matter by the manner in which we are approaching it. We are thus going to collect each and every tradition and tale of the common man whether the contents be sad or humorous, didactic or amusing, no matter what the time period is, whether they have been composed in the simplest prose or set in rhyme. (Quoted by Zipes 11-12)

This is further expounded upon by the brothers in the prefaces to volumes one and two of the original collection, where their ideas are laid out in fuller form. In the preface to volume one, the brothers write that the endurance of storytelling occurs when “the imagination has not yet been obliterated by the perversities of life,” that this “genuine poetry” is born “without the involvement of mankind,” that the brothers have been careful to interpret these stories of Germany's culture “as purely as possible” because “they cannot be invented.”<sup>6</sup>

In chapter two I analyze how this nationalist effort—collecting “genuine” folk tales, ones that reflect the supposedly unadulterated ideals of an earlier time, in order to develop a unified

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<sup>6</sup> Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, preface to *The Original Folk & Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, p. 4, 6, 9.

German culture—results in tales that gradually reduce female agency, prioritizing instead patriarchal and Christian power. This shift is made evident by analyzing the changes in animal transformations even between volumes one and two, published just three years apart. The first volume is kinder towards the female subaltern, provides stories of men who can transform out of their animal beastliness, and imagines safe spaces for young women through animal transformation. By the second volume, one that is already feeling the effects of a rising commitment to nationalist agendas and that reveals the editorial changes that would be made more egregiously in future decades, much has changed: the female subaltern is cast as dangerous and threatening, men's beastliness is intrinsic and irremediable, and there are fewer places for young women to be safe, as humans or as animals. This difference between volume one and two has not been noted in the scholarship I have surveyed.

Chapter three analyzes the folk tales of Laura Gonzenbach, whose stories act as a kind of middle ground between the misogynistic Grimms and the proto-feminist Aulnoy. After Gonzenbach published her fairy tale collection *Sicilianische Märchen* (Sicilian Folk Tales) in 1870, she went largely unnoticed by scholars and historians. Although she published the tales in German, Gonzenbach herself was born to a Swiss-German merchant family in Sicily. She was Protestant, married with five children, and died at the age of thirty-six in 1878, eight years after her collection was published (Zipes, *Laura Gonzenbach's Buried Treasure* xi-xii).<sup>7</sup> Although she was, from the teachings of her older sister, fluent in four languages (German, French, Italian, and Sicilian), she never attended university and had no academic or literary standing. Like the Grimms' collection, the tales in Gonzenbach's volume are collected, not invented. Unlike the Grimms, Gonzenbach's informants were all real peasant women. In addition, although her collection was created in the midst of Italy's national unification, her collection does not share

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<sup>7</sup> Hereinafter cited as *Laura Gonzenbach*.

the same nationalist commitment as the Grimms' did because of her dual-outsider status as both a woman and a non-Italian cultural outsider.

Sadly, her notes and manuscripts were destroyed in Messina's 1908 earthquake, and because she was not trained as a folklorist, she has gone largely unnoticed by scholars (Haase, *Laura Gonzenbach* 417). Because the print versions of the stories were published in *hochdeutsch* (High German), (Zipes, *Laura Gonzenbach* xvii), the collection is categorized by scholars as *buchmarchen*, or book fairy tales (xxv). Although this is the same term used for the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which implies that the two collections are very similar in intent and execution, I argue that there is an important difference in the significantly lesser extent of editorial mediation that Gonzenbach's collection endured compared to the Grimms' (xxv.) She published them with the help of Otto Hartwig, a historian and theologian to whom she initially sent a few stories for inclusion in the history of Sicily he was writing. By 1868 she had sent him ninety-two stories, and Hartwig edited and published the collection with accompanying notes by folklorist Reinhold Köhler (Haase *Laura Gonzenbach* 417). Although they seem to have been forgotten in the twentieth century, there is evidence that her work was not ignored when it was published; for instance, Thomas Fredrick Crane's 1885 *Italian Popular Tales* published Gonzenbach's "Beautiful Angiola" nearly verbatim, with no substantial editing or gender-motivated mediation (Crane 26-29). Although little is known about her methods in collecting these stories, it is generally acknowledged that there is a lower level of mediation involved than in other collections. Zipes argues that Gonzenbach "did not intermediate as a censor," although she "may have edited the tales somewhat to bring out her own progressive views about women" (Zipes *Laura Gonzenbach* xii).



One framework I employ to understand Gonzenbach's stories is that of the male gaze. A concept introduced by film critic Laura Mulvey, the male gaze refers to women's typical presentation as an erotic object for male viewing. Although Mulvey's argument is based on women in film, I employ and broaden her concept of the male gaze to understand how it affects female characters—young and old, beautiful and ugly—who are being viewed by men within a fairy-tale narrative. My analysis of the animal transformations within Gonzenbach's collection positions her as a mid-point between the Grimms' nationalist conservatism and Aulnoy's proto-feminism, due to the variation in her stories between female agency and disempowerment. All of the transformations—whether of women becoming ugly or animalistic, older women changing the appearance of younger women for their own advancement, or men transforming out of their beastliness—point to the overarching question of how, in the midst of frightening material peril, to keep women safe in marriage. Some women, such as young maidens, are empowered with narrative agency, while others, such as older women who seize too much power, are punished. In simply providing such a variety of scenarios, the different outcomes present in Gonzenbach's collection may be evidence of the lower degree of editorial mediation and meddling by male editors as compared to the Grimms.

Because Gonzenbach's stories were collected from Sicilian women peasants, they offer an unusual contrast to the male-dominated, academic world of fairy tales that the Grimms represent. Zipes claims, and I agree, that her stories, on the whole, favor the lower class, offering situations in which the peasants are smarter or cleverer than their upper-class counterparts (Zipes xii). Further, I argue that the tales also favor a decidedly proto-feminist perspective, granting women greater freedoms than history or society allowed.

My fourth and final chapter concerns the fairy tales of Madame d'Aulnoy, the most progressive of my three collections despite being written over a hundred years earlier. Marie-Catherine le Jumel de Barneville was born in 1650 or 1651, into a solidly aristocratic Norman family (McLeod 91). In 1666, at the young age of fifteen or sixteen, she married a forty-six-year-old nobleman, François de la Motte, Baron d'Aulnoy. The marriage was likely arranged without her consent and was one of convenience to unite her aristocratic line with the baron's money (92). In the early years of their marriage she gave birth to four children, each in eleven-month intervals (Jasmin 62). The marriage was strained by financial difficulties—when François's patron died, he was left without a regular income and was nearly imprisoned for bad business ventures—which prompted Marie-Catherine to leave public life and away with her mother (61). She dropped from sight for almost twenty years, giving birth to two daughters of unknown paternity and possibly spending a year in a convent (63), then returned to Paris to write in 1690 (McLeod 93).

Aulnoy is distinct from the Grimms and Gonzenbach in that she had a literary career outside of fairy tales, and the tales themselves were not folk tales—they were not collected from the mouths of real countrymen but were, rather, her own fictions. By the end of the 1690s she was a respected author, one of only nine French women holding membership in the esteemed Accademia dei Ricovrati in Padua (McLeod 93). Although she began her literary career by writing religious tracts in manuscript form (Jasmin 63), she was an eclectic writer, and by the end of the decade had published twenty-eight volumes, including novels, fairy tales, histories, poetry, travel books, memoirs, and a collection of letters (McLeod 93). She entered Parisian society and opened her own salon, which was one of the most popular in the city and was frequented by princes and aristocrats (Jasmin 63).

Aulnoy's most famous works, and the focus of my fourth chapter, are two collections of fairy tales: *Les Contes des Fées* (Tales of Fairies), published in 1697, and *Les Contes Nouveaux, ou les Fées à la mode* (New Tales, or Fashionable Fairies), published in 1698. Her title is the first occurrence of the now-ubiquitous term: fairy tales. The tales were intended not for children but for the fashionable ladies of Parisian society, and were therefore told in salons and written in the kind of playful conversational style found there (McLeod 96). In addition, the tales are influenced by Aulnoy's education; although she had limited formal education, she was familiar with classical literature, Spanish Baroque drama, parodic Renaissance verse, and medieval French lays and *fabliaux*. The salon atmosphere also influenced the tales, which are written in the literary style of *préciosité*, the conversations and word games used by witty and educated women of salons, reflecting the speech of refined Parisian society (92). By embracing the fairy tale genre, Aulnoy succeeded in taking full advantage of her literary career, not only choosing a genre that was steadily gaining in popularity as she wrote, but also exhibiting impressive creative diversity (Jasmin 64).

Aulnoy's objective is very different from that of the Grimms and Gonzenbach: freed from any factual ties, the fictional genre allows Aulnoy to be more intentional and strategic about depicting in her tales a more woman-friendly world. Unlike the other collections in this thesis, Aulnoy's stories were invented, not collected. Instead of being derived from informants, Aulnoy's stories are the product of her creative imagination, and because she pre-dates the modern nationalist period, she has no commitment to nationalist agendas. As such, the questions that will be relevant for analyzing the Grimm and Gonzenbach collections—those of mediation, alteration, polishing, and editing—do not arise here. Further, as a woman writing in the female-friendly space of the salon, Aulnoy was also able to write free from the masculine influences that

other female authors—such as Laura Gonzenbach, who had a male editor and a male annotator—were under. Aulnoy’s fairy tales differ from the folk tales of the Grimms and Gonzenbach even in their cultural references: in some stories, for example *The Green Serpent*, Aulnoy refers by name to Corneille and Molière, playwrights of her time, and to the classical tale of Cupid and Psyche. Whereas folk tales are comparatively insular, containing a rusticness rather than a worldly quality, Aulnoy presents herself as a shamelessly cultured woman who wants her reader to be aware that she is well-read. Glenda McLeod argues, and I agree, that the fairy tale genre allows Aulnoy to write stories that depict stronger and more complicated women than French society otherwise allowed. McLeod writes that fairy tales provided Aulnoy

a setting in which her heroines could assume active, powerful roles, and an opportunity to utilize her comic and satiric gifts....[I]t allowed her to critique existing social structures with impunity....Released from social realism, Mme d’Aulnoy could introduce characters capable of acts unthinkable in her own social milieu. Both male and female, these protagonists function effectively as courtiers, lovers, soldiers, and rulers who work to change their own lives and their society....While not a utopia, the world of Mme d’Aulnoy’s contes des fées does provide an alternative to the more limited world of her other literary production and prepares the way for new forms (96-98).

As we will see in chapter four, Aulnoy’s fairy tales imagine a world that is far more progressive than the France she lived in, or even, at times, than the world we live in today. Her heroines have voice, agency, and choice; her heroes are forgiving, accommodating, and loving. Most of all, both male and female characters are complex and are allowed a range of emotions, reactions, and motivations.

In the times in which they were written, fairy tales were deeply engaged in debates about the prescribed role of women in society. Be they nationalist and conservative like the Grimms, proto-feminist like Aulnoy, or somewhere in between the two like Gonzenbach, fairy tales are products of their historical context. I undertook this project to recover these engagements because we have forgotten the ideological debates that fairy tales intervened in and how much

was at stake when they were written. This thesis uncovers how the commitments of the fairy tale collectors—to expand or proscribe the role of women within the nation—impacts female narrative agency. I argue that in European fairy tales, the strength of proto-feminist themes is largely contingent not only on the social structures governing women’s lives within each historical time period, but also on the layers of editorial mediation and commitment to nationalist agendas. I do so by examining female agency in overlapping moments of animalism and gender and by concentrating on what animals people are turned into, by whom, and to what effect. In doing so, I find that collections which favor nationalist agendas feature disempowering female animal transformations and violent masculine animal transformations, all while emphasizing the vulnerability of the human female body. Collections that are creative and free of editorial and nationalistic constraints, meanwhile, feature animal transformations that overcome such constrictive gender roles, whether it is women into wild beasts or men into emasculated animals, all while daring to imagine a world freer than the one at hand.

## Chapter Two

### Girls Gone Mild: Women's Place in the Nationalist Imagination

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales), despite being one of the best-known fairy tale collections, remains too little understood in its period context. Because of the way we experience fairy tales now, we forget that the Grimms were heavily invested in restricting female agency and subjecting women to nationalist priorities of female propriety in service to the emerging German nation. As German nationalism marched onward, women in the Grimms' tales got pushed backward. The elevation of nationalist priorities, at the expense of women's agency and empowerment, increases over time—not only between the Grimms' first and seventh editions, but even in the three-year gap between volumes one and two of their first edition. This chapter compares stories across volumes to examine how the changes in animal transformations of male and female characters reflect larger intentions of replacing female agency with Christian ideology and patriarchal supremacy to support nationalist agendas.

#### Historical Introduction

The first edition of the Grimms' *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, published in 1812 and 1815, was born from a nationalistic effort to develop a unified "German culture" at a time when Germany itself was a series of disconnected states. German unification did not occur until January 18, 1871, and the decades preceding unification were largely focused on finding ways to culturally unite the German-speaking states. After the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved in 1806, the Congress of Vienna decided to consolidate Central Europe—at the time about 300 sovereign, independent states—in 1814 and 1815. This consolidation, occurring right when the

Grimms were publishing their first edition of their collection, resulted in German states being combined into what was called the German confederation. With the fall of the Holy Roman Empire, discussions about what kind of Germany should be created continued amidst revolution and nationalist demands in 1848-49, as rivals Austria and Prussia also pursued their interests in the “German question.” No German nation-state was formed, but after Prussia defeated Austria in 1866, the German Empire was established in 1871 (Blackbourn xviii). In brief, because Germany as a unified country did not exist at the time of the Grimms, and would not exist for some time, there was an opportunity to debate what a unified Germany should look like and what its values should be. In order to ground these values, the Grimm brothers—among others—sought to exhibit “Germany’s” oldest and most authentic literature: fairy tales. This project fits into what is referred to by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger as the “invention of tradition,” in which certain values and norms of behavior are embedded by a repetition that “implies continuity with the past.” (Hobsbawm 1) In other words, the Grimms aligned their tales with the past not just by *finding* history, but also by *making* history.

This nationalist concept of demonstrating a country’s values through literature can be traced to German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. In the late eighteenth century, Herder developed the Romantic idea that the modern nation’s history can be traced back to its oldest cultural groups, introducing a version of ethnic nationalism. In particular, he was invested in the concept of the *Volk*. Martin Schütze defines the *Volk* as the “less sophisticated part of an ethnic or political group...distinguished by the qualities of mind and character associated with a more or less simple, wholesome, laborious, responsible, sober and unstrained way of life.” (Schütze 118) For Herder, the distinguishing feature of the *Volk* is that these people share a common culture

(Spencer 192), one that is so old that it is defined by song culture, rather than religion, or ruler sovereignty, or political borders (81). Herder writes,

If I wanted to replace something, it would be those new romance writers and that new folk poetry, which in most cases have as much in common with the originals as the monkey with the human. They lack life, the soul of their original, i.e. truth, faithful representation of passion, of the time, of the customs, they are pointless fops dressed up as venerable bards, or ragged blind beggars. (Quoted by Oergel 54)

The *Volk* signified original humanity, a single people with a common language (Spencer 81).

This concept is particularly idealistic considering that Germany at the time had no standardized language, but rather a conglomeration of different dialects. Further, Herder sought to reawaken this supposedly wholesome way of life through the *Volkslieder*, two volumes of folk songs published in 1788 and 1799. The *Volkslieder* was intended to “celebrate cultural diversity and are simultaneously grounded in the common humanity of authenticity, spontaneity, and cultural identity.” (82) By doing so, the *Volkslieder* was intended to awaken in modern readers the liveliness and spontaneity of the *Volk*, which was lost by the stratification of European society that divided philosophy and science from the arts (songs, poems, etc.) of the general public. The *Volk* for Herder represented an ideal society: one that is livelier than classicist literature but also remains separate from the kind of primitivism and distaste for modern society that Rousseau expressed. Lastly, the *Volkslieder* aimed to reawaken authenticity within modern artists: a loyalty to one’s own time and place, something that the *Volk* embody but that modern society has forgotten, embracing rude simplicity as opposed to the artifice of polite society (83).

This project of forging nationalism through literature is further explored by Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. One of Anderson’s points is that identity units forged on the basis of “nationality” (rather than, for instance, religion) were built as other “cultural conceptions”—religious communities, dynastic realms, and apprehensions of time—faded from



power (Anderson 13-36). Nations, Anderson argues, are imagined not only in their borders but also in their implausibility: a nation boasts connection between its members, but even members of the smallest nation will never know all of its other citizens (Anderson 6). As a concept, nations are therefore impossible and contradictory: they are new but believed to be as old as time itself, unique to their country but universal as a concept, philosophically empty but politically powerful (5). The establishment and longevity of a nation, therefore, relies on the strength of its shared history, a way to link “fraternity, power, and time meaningfully together.” (36) The building of this shared history through literature was assisted by print-capitalism, which made it possible for a large number of people to think about themselves and to relate to others in their nation (36), and therefore the advent of the novel and the newspaper, both of which re-presented the “kind of imagined community that is the nation.” (25) As ideologies of a nation, fairy tales are therefore printed and distributed for mass consumption in the same way that the novel and newspaper are.

As such, this first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, completed as German unification was beginning to grow as an idea, is largely concerned with finding ways to culturally unite the states by resurrecting a kind of common “German history.” In developing the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the Grimms intended to develop a collection that would be passed on from generation to generation, creating a nationalism through literature that would continue for centuries and whose origins extended backwards into time (Ihms 47). The Grimms, like Herder, were largely preoccupied with the idea of the *Volk* as a means of cultural unification. Understood as “the people,” the *Volk* refers to the folk ethnic group that represents Germany’s history, who originally possessed Germany’s common culture (Zipes, *Original Grimm* xxii). In actuality the idea of the *Volk* during the Grimms’ time was romantic rather than factually accurate, but it

provided the cultural springboard the brothers so longed for. The *Volk*, and the purportedly genuine bond between people's experiences it represented, served as the foil to "modern" literature, which was devoid of this "genuine" culture and was therefore considered artificial (xxv). This "modern" literature—also defined as *kunstpoesie*, literally meaning "cultivated literature"—is representative of the curated, refined, and rich literature of the time, devoid of imagination from the perspective of the *Volk*-lovers. In contrast, the folktales that the Grimms sought to collect were considered *naturpoesie*. Literally translated as "natural poetry," *naturpoesie* is considered as the epics, sagas, and tales that represent the essential age-old truths about German cultural heritage (xxv).

By collecting these folk tales as instances of *naturpoesie*, the Grimms sought to demonstrate how the cultivated literature, the *kunstpoesie* of the modern time, actually evolved out of Germany's original *naturpoesie*, which was then forced to melt into the folk in oral traditions (xxv). As such, this project was nationalistic, considered by Zipes as a "gesture of protest against French occupation and a gesture of solidarity with those people who wanted to forge a unified German nation," (xxv) "artistically creating a German popular culture rooted in the belief systems and customs of the German people," and embodying "a romantic wish-fulfillment dream that would unite the German people." (Zipes, *Grimm Legacies* 22)

According to the Grimms, the introduction of modernity has robbed society of its imagination, a concept that we embrace in childhood and what the folk have managed to retain: "the same purity runs through these tales that brings out the wonderful and blessed qualities in children." (5) Although the stories themselves are not designed for children, they represent the kind of imagination which childhood represents, a purity of thought which is enacted at birth and lost with the introduction of modernity. The stories that they collect, therefore, represent the

childhood phase of the nation's history of unadulterated imagination, even though the stories themselves were meant to be read by adults.

This concept of purity also has an explicit connection to language. The brothers write that “the accomplishments of education, refinement, and artistic command of language ruin everything, and where one feels that a purified literary language...[has] become more tasteless and cannot get to the heart of the matter.” (9) As such, a divide is created in language: refinement leads to destruction, whereas purity leads to creativity. The simplicity of language in fairy tales is a subject frequently discussed, often pointed to as an indication of its intended audience of children. In actuality, however, this simplicity points to the supposed purity and creativity of the ideas being communicated. Donald Haase argued that “in becoming convincing ventriloquists for the folk,” the brothers “created a fairy-tale language whose apparent artlessness, purity, and simplicity seemed completely transparent and facilitated the translation of their tales as universal stories.” (Haase, *Decolonizing Fairy-Tale Studies* 28) The tales therefore are derived from these universal sources, although the German tales themselves are not universal and are specific to Germany. Further, the simplicity of these tales and the people who tell them have resulted in a simple way to view evil and its manifestations: the brothers write that “misfortune is a dark power, a monstrous, cannibalistic giant...evil is also not anything small or close to home...rather, it is something terrible, dark, and absolutely separate so that one cannot get near it.” (Preface 6) Max Lûthi has argued that this simple duality in fairy tales also means that “folktale motifs are emptied of their usual substance...all elements become pure, light, and transparent and join in an effortless interplay that includes all the important themes of human existence.” (Lûthi 73) The simplicity of language in these tales, therefore, speaks not to a lack of intelligence on behalf of the authors or the editors, or of an effort to make the language more

accessible to children, but a conscious effort to demonstrate the universality of the ideas being expressed.

All of this history is crucial in order to conduct a thorough analysis of the Grimms' stories. When reading the stories, it is important to remember that they were first published without the explicit intent of being read by children, and therefore included footnotes and gruesome violence, and lacked illustrations. Further, it cannot be forgotten that the first edition was published just as the German confederation was created, and as such reflect upon what kind of unified country Germany should look like. As such, the stories reflect the resurrected values of the Volk that include the creative purity of the *naturpoesie*, a carefully recalibrated version of German history, at a time when the history itself is a romantic rather than factual ideal and Germany itself did not even exist yet. According to the Grimms, these stories and their simple language thus encapsulate the universal human experience, pure because they are taken from the common people, which the modern German-speaking states have forgotten.

The rest of this chapter will focus on the first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, volume one published in 1812 and volume two published in 1815. This choice is to ensure that the stories I analyze retain the Grimms' original content and intent, including themes that are not watered down for children, and which reflect the nationalistic motive of German unification that the brothers possessed. Further, these tales are largely devoid of the Christian and puritanical ideology that was injected into later volumes—although I later argue that stories in volume two already exhibit a shift to Christian ideology— and as such retain the “pungent and naive flavor of the oral tradition.” (Zipes, *Original Grimm* xx) This first edition is also published relatively free of the brothers' fingerprints, whereas later editions have a heavier hand, such as the 1857 edition that was heavily edited by Wilhelm, and as such retains the “unusual perspective on human

behavior and culture” that it was intended to (xxi). These layers of editorial mediation, whether it is from the first volume to the second or from the first edition to the seventh, therefore significantly impact the underlying messages of female propriety, the more layers of editorial mediation resulting in a decrease in female agency and autonomy.

### **Story Introduction**

This chapter will analyze six stories from the first edition of the Grimm Brothers’ *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, three from each of its two volumes. From volume one: *Fitcher’s Bird*, *Jorinda and Joringel*, and *The Three Sisters*; from volume two: *King of the Golden Mountain*, *The Soldier and the Carpenter*, and *The White Bride and the Black Bride*. All six of these stories fulfill the following criteria that I designed: they are stories where the difference between active and passive behavior is distinctly gendered—whether it is strong female empowerment, masculine violence, or female passivity—and strongly incorporate animal transformation. I compare three stories from volume one against similar stories in volume two to explore the following themes: the presence of female witches, masculine animalism, and violence towards the female body.

In my analysis of each story, I will be asking two questions. First: how does gender function in the narrative? What freedom is a woman given, and what kind of life is she allowed to carve out for herself? Is she rewarded for these choices, or is she punished—through textual silencing, through death? Then, how does the presence of animals and animal transformation complicate this presentation of gender? If a woman is transformed into an animal, does this give her further freedoms? How are these transformations conducted, and are they voluntary? Analyzing the Grimms’ stories from this feminist lens provides powerful insight into how gender is wielded by the Grimms in the cultural formation of a German nation. All six stories engage

questions of gender, violence, and animalism, all providing different answers to the overarching question of what German “history” looks like. These stories provide a useful variety in content: some animal transformations are conducted at will, others are performed as punishment. Some stories end in marriage, others conclude in violence. Most importantly, all of these stories dance on the edge of what it means to be human, what separates humans from animals, as well as the ideal view of womanhood.

### **Presence of Witches: *Jorinda and Joringel* and *The Soldier and the Carpenter***

In analyzing the presence of female witches in the text, I examine *Jorinda and Joringel* from volume one and *The Soldier and the Carpenter* from volume two. Witches at the time of the Grimms were more than fantasy: not even two hundred years earlier, Germany witnessed the Würzburg witch trials, one of the largest mass-trials and mass-executions that Europe witnessed during the Thirty Years War. Further, as Europe shifted from paganism to Christianity, witches as an idea replaced goddesses, and were also the precursors to the fairy tale idea of fairies (Zipes, *Irresistible Fairy Tale* 57). What is particularly interesting to this project, however, is the historical connection between witches and gender as it relates to the female body.

In her book *The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe*, Linda Hulst explains that a witch’s identity ultimately resided not in any magical accessories, but rather her very body (Hulst 19). This is because the witch embodied the “grotesque female body.” Instead of exemplifying the characteristics and beauty of the classical body, the grotesque female body is unfinished, impure, eccentric, and disproportionate, subverting the rules of reason (17). This body is considered grotesque because of the very physical elements that characterize its femininity: in menstruating, giving birth, and lactating, women’s bodies are open and raw, and therefore readily interpreted as “vehicles of disorder.” (17) This is in direct opposition to the

male body, which is not only closed off in ways that the female body cannot be, but is also the pinnacle of superior moral and intellectual capacities (16). Lastly, the witch also operates against acceptable femininity: whereas the good housewife and mother are invested in cleaning and the removal of dirt and other substances, the witch “revels in impurity,” handling the filth and waste of magic and also of womanhood. (22) Historically, therefore, witches represent a dangerous manifestation of womanhood, one that is bodily dirty, impure, irrational, and unequivocally powerful, in opposition to the rationality of men and the purity of good women. The stories *Jorinda and Joringel* and *The Soldier and the Carpenter* both strongly feature witches, but to very different effects, varying in levels of violence as well as their relationship to womanhood.

*Jorinda and Joringel* is a tale provided to the Grimms by Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, who wrote the original in his autobiography *Heinrich Stillings Junglingsjahre* in 1788 (Zipes, *Original Grimm* 501, 476). The story begins with an old sorceress who lives alone in a castle: during the day she turns herself into a cat or a night owl, and in the evening she returns to her human form, and lures birds and game for dinner. If a man comes within 100 steps of the castle she casts a spell over him so he cannot move; if a maiden comes, she transforms her into a bird and stuffs her into a basket, releasing her into a room full of these captured maiden-birds. Lovers Jorinda and Joringel are traveling through the woods when they become lost and catch sight of the castle. Jorinda begins to sing and is turned into a nightingale; meanwhile Joringel is rendered immobile, and he watches a night owl be transformed into a haggard old woman who takes the bird away. He has a dream about a flower that releases Jorinda from her spell, and when he wakes up he goes looking for it. Upon discovering the flower, Joringel discovers that he is now able to go into the castle without becoming enchanted. He enters the bird room, where the sorceress is now unable to touch him, and looks for his bride in the midst of hundreds of

nightingales. He catches the old woman carrying one of the nightingales to the door; he touches the basket, then the old woman, with the flower, and rids her of her magic. Jorinda reappears, they turn the rest of the birds back to their human state, then go home to live in happiness (227-230).

*Jorinda and Joringel* contains three key elements: female empowerment, animal transformation, and witch presence. Joringel, the only man in the story, is certainly not a figure of male violence or of overpowering sexuality. Instead, Joringel serves an accessory to the female-centered storyline, which pits an older woman, the unnamed sorceress, against a young maiden, Jorinda. There are also two kinds of animal transformation, both of which feature women: the voluntary transformation of the sorceress into a cat or night owl, transformations that grant her more mobility and power than her human form, and the involuntary transformation of the maiden into a nightingale, a transformation that limits her mobility.

These transformations have a direct correlation to society's standards of beauty and demonstrate what is considered an "acceptable" figure. The sorceress, described as "old and haggard," transforms into animals that are known for intelligence rather than beauty: a cat, signifying stealth and witchery, or an owl, signifying wisdom and age. That her transformation is done willingly demonstrates that it is performed out of her own desire and agency. Her transformation is not one of a punishment or curse, but rather one that is undergone at will, signifying her own power and magical achievements. In addition, it is performed in order to achieve the desired goal of escaping the human form, which, being having lost its value and therefore its worth, is not valued by society. In these animal transformation, the witch is therefore granted narrative agency: she is in control of her body's appearance, and she utilizes this power to temporarily escape the oppressive restrictions of her human form.



In contrast, Jorinda's transformation is involuntary, performed out of the malice of the witch, and causes her physical imprisonment. Whereas the witch's transformation grants her further mobility, escaping the female form that, in its age and marital status, causes her to be devalued by society, Jorinda's transformation causes her to be immobilized. Being a young, beautiful, and eligible maiden, Jorinda is granted more mobility out of being a human than a bird, and by losing this human form, Jorinda and the other maidens are successfully pushed out the marriage market. In being removed from humanness, the maidens—young, beautiful, and a traditional foil to older female characters—lose their marital eligibility and therefore their worth as women.

The witch in *Jorinda & Joringel*, therefore, is not so much threatening for her “impurity” as she is an almost sympathetic character, operating out of desperation to hold on to her agency in a world that has dismissed her for her age. Transforming young women into birds gives her the ability to regain power of her body: eliminating the power of a young woman's ability to seduce with her beauty gives the witch a level playing field on which to operate. Ruth Bottigheimer points to the role of silence in fairy tales, that when characters are textually silenced, this can be understood as a continuation of societal systems that silence women (Bottigheimer 73). As such, by silencing women through transforming them into animals, the witch of *Jorinda and Joringel* gains further power, constructing a micro-society in which the power of the body is eliminated, and the power of words—i.e. spells—is heightened, giving her a space to become valuable in society once again. By eliminating the agency of young women, the witch's own agency increases: she is finding power within an oppressive patriarchal structure by understanding what it considers valuable. This story isn't concerned with friendship or allegiances between women, but rather is a typical example of the jealous intergenerational

relationship between women. The sorceress's power, therefore, is derived only at the expense of other women.

*Jorinda and Joringel* also complicates Marcia Lieberman's argument. Lieberman argues that in fairy tales, women who are powerful and good are never human, while human women are nearly always portrayed as repulsive (Lieberman 391). In *Jorinda and Joringel*, the sorceress—who perhaps resides in a gray territory between human and inhuman—is magnificently powerful while simultaneously playing the villain role; in contrast, Jorinda is human, but, by nature of her youth, beauty and obedience, can be categorized as good, and is punished for this goodness by losing her humanness. Power is derived, *Jorinda and Joringel* demonstrates, not from a lack of humanity, but from a willingness to forfeit “goodness” in order to straddle the boundary between humanness and animalism. If womanhood is conflated with sin, something that Christian thematic literature has long preached, then the greatest act of power a woman can perform is a transgression, one that straddles the bounds of morality. In order to achieve power, women must sacrifice both their goodness and their humanness. This is especially true for older women, whose age demands a decrease in social capital. That the sorceress changes her own form and those of other women, therefore, points to her own substantial power, one that comes from disempowering other women.

*Jorinda and Joringel* demonstrates that residing in the female body, no matter the age, comes with significant drawbacks and threats. For young women, the female body is a precarious place to be: powerful only in relation to beauty and marriage, vulnerable to external forces of men and society as well as posing a threat to older women, punished by being reduced to an animal and the loss of voice. The body of an older woman, meanwhile, is deemed as useless by society, causing them to find other sources of power and agency: eliminating the competition of

younger women by ridding them of their humanity and elevating the status of voice above the body. However, by giving the reader a glimpse into such power, and, more importantly, concluding the story with the witch alive, *Jorinda and Joringel* points to the possibility of female empowerment, exposing the ways in which both younger and older women can find power within a patriarchal society.

*The Soldier and the Carpenter* (German name: *Der Soldat und der Schreiner*) was supplied from the Van Haxthausen family (*Original Grimm* 513), friends of the Grimms who had a vast knowledge of folk literature. In particular, the two daughters Ludowine and Anna sent many dialect tales to the Grimms, which were never published in the editions and were found posthumously in the papers of the Grimms (476). It begins with two friends, a soldier and a carpenter, setting out for a journey, and in a forest they find a castle. The castle is lit, with a black dog in front and a red swan on the pond, but the inside is empty. The friends explore the castle the next day, finding three people in three different cellars: an old woman, a boy of fourteen, and a maiden of twelve, none of which answer them, as well as discovering a crucifix and prayer books. On the way back upstairs, each individual tells the friends they cannot go upstairs because of the animals up there—a grey cat, black dog, and red swan—telling them that they must kill the animals in order to leave. The brothers find weapons and go after the animals, aided by a dove who turns into a young man. They kill the animals, only to have the old woman and the children emerge from the cellars yelling that the friends have killed their greatest friends and are traitors. The three men kill the trio, and, insinuating their Christianity from the crucifix and prayer books, bury them. They hear strange whispers but return home, the blood on their fingers betraying them into explaining what happened. A young man explains that the woman was an old witch who turned everyone into stone or animals once her masters scolded her, who

wanted the friends to kill the animals so she would be free. He explains that the castle is no longer enchanted, and the stone people have become alive; he leads them to the lord of the castle, who gives them his two daughters, and the friends live happily ever after as great knights (422-428).

There are several differences between *Jorinda and Joringel* to *The Soldier and the Carpenter*, the largest of which is that themes of female empowerment have been replaced by Christian ideology. In many ways, the story parallels *Jorinda and Joringel*: a couple stumbles upon a house in the woods that is inhabited by a witch, there is a threat of danger, and the couple escapes unharmed. But instead of a couple in love we have two young men, instead of a magical flower we have the magic of a crucifix, and instead of the secondary animal characters of the cat, dog, swan being turned back into humans—as the nightingales turn back into maidens in *The Soldier and the Carpenter*—they die as animals, never returned to their human form. Further, and perhaps most importantly, instead of our witch surviving the story with a mere loss of her magical powers, she is violently dismembered and killed. These differences boil down to this central point: that Christian themes and female empowerment are all but textually incompatible.

Both witches in these stories are powerful, but to very different ends. Like the witch in *Jorinda and Joringel*, the witch in *The Soldier and the Carpenter* performs magic as a way to execute her agency: turning people into animals and stone if she is scolded, ridding them of their mobility and rationality. Where the stories differ, however, is where their magic gets them; the witch in *The Soldier and the Carpenter* is imprisoned by her own magic, eventually getting killed through it. Her magic is punishable to the extent that it is her downfall: even the animals that she created as a means of exercising her power serve as a barricade between her and her freedom. We are not invited to look kindly upon the witch, admiring her for her substantial

powers, but rather are encouraged to view her as a lesson of what happens when a witch—a woman, unmarried, of an older age—tries to achieve more power than society will ordain. Further, her death is not a magical one, but rather is one of brute violent force. If magic is an inherently female power, then the story tells us that the only way to control an excess of feminine energy is through a show of masculine strength.

The witches of the two stories also differ in their levels of violence. The animals and witch of *The Soldier and the Carpenter* meet gruesome ends, killed with a sword, iron tongs, and a bow and arrow, an act so violent that the men cannot leave the scene without the visible evidence of blood on their hands. That the witch can only be killed through such violent means emphasizes the visceral and grotesque quality of witches that Hults explores: the excess of blood emphasizes the impure, raw, dirty, and, in many ways, feminine, qualities of the witch and her powers. Her screams and lies also point to the ways in which she is supposed to be intellectually inferior, a body that operates on emotion rather than reason. This operates in direct opposition to the men in the story: a soldier also performs acts of violence, but ones that are clean, good, and rational—and, therefore, masculine.

This gendered opposition of the witch's negative femininity versus the soldier's positive masculinity is further complicated by the Christian ideology. The stories of volume two are peppered with Christian themes, whether in parable-like stories such as *The Poor Man and the Rich Man* or moral lessons such as *The Devil's Sooty Brother*. The presence of the prayer books, praying, and religious burials in *The Soldier and the Carpenter* solidify the story's Christian undertones. In addition, the very presence of a witch reinforces the Christian nature of the story: when Christianity replaced pagan times, witches replaces goddesses (*Zipes, Irresistible Fairy Tale* 57). This advent of Christian ideology, one that is nearly invisible in the Grimms' first

volume but is already very influential by the second, functions as more than just a plot device. Instead, the Christian elements set the moral tone of the story: that, as discussed above, the presence of witches, and the ways in which they promote women to seek power, cannot be tolerated in this moral society. We might expect an increase in Christian morality and Christian selection of the tales from one edition to another, but just by comparing these two stories, it is clear that this shift to Christian themes is already taking place by the second volume. When compared to a more pagan story, such as *Jorinda and Joringel*, the Christian morality of this *The Soldier and the Carpenter* appears in higher relief. The themes of potential female empowerment seen in volume one, such as the witch in *Jorinda and Joringel* being a powerful character who leaves the story with her life, are simply incompatible with the introduction of Christian ideology.

For stories injected with religion, female empowerment, especially through the hands of magic, is rewarded only with death. While Zipes argues that it is the later editions that are infused with Christian ideology and an editorial hand (Zipes, *Original Grimm* xx), it is clear from this story alone not only that Christian ideology appears as early as the second volume of the first edition, but also that this introduction substantially changes the tone of the stories. Whereas many of the stories in volume one have a kind eye towards magic and the freedom it grants to women, the early presence of Christian themes in volume two recasts these same values as dangerous and socially unacceptable, representing the witch not as a symbol of power or as a woman who operates in opposition to other women, but as a filthy and irrational figure that can only be eliminated by men.

### **Beastly Boys: *The Three Sisters* and *King of the Golden Mountain***

In exploring masculine animalism, I analyze *The Three Sisters* from volume one and *King of the Golden Mountain* from volume two. Although both stories feature masculine animalism in connection to violence, they do so in very different ways: *The Three Sisters* featuring a literal physical animal transformation, and *King of the Golden Mountain* featuring a more subtle animal transformation. Both stories also comment on a woman's role in society, both in marriage and in motherhood.

*The Three Sisters* (German name: *Die drei Schwestern*), is supplied by Johann August Musaus (*Original Grimm* 504), who wrote the original version in the 1782 book *Volksmährchen der Deutschen*, one of the first significant collections that contained adapted legends and folktales (477). It begins with an arrogant king, who has lost all his money, attacked by a bear in the woods. The bear says he will spare him if the king gives him his daughter, and the bear will also give him a hundred pounds of gold in addition. Although the king tries to hide his daughter, the bear comes and takes her away. This happens two more times with the king's next two daughters, marrying his second daughter to an eagle and the third daughter to a whale.

Meanwhile, the queen has a son named Reinald and tells him about his three sisters who are being held by beasts in the magic forest, and when he turns sixteen he goes looking for them. He finds the oldest sister first: she is playing with a bear cub and lives in a bear cave, every seven days her bear husband turns into a handsome prince, his cave a castle, the animals into servants, and the cubs into children. Her bear husband transforms and they all visit, he gives the prince three magic hairs, and the sister sends him on his way before her husband resumes his form and eats him. He finds the same thing with his other two sisters, the eagle husband who gives him three eagle feathers, and the whale who gives him three scales. On the way home the

prince is attacked by a bull, and uses each of the husbands' gifts in succession to save himself. He finally cracks an egg open and finds a key that opens a gate, on the other side of which he finds a sleeping maiden, whom he wakes by throwing a slate to the ground. She is revealed to be the sister of the brothers-in-law: when she rejected the proposal of a sorceress, she was imprisoned to an eternal sleep and each of her brothers was transformed into a beast. Each husband is released from their spell, and the prince marries the maiden (251-262).

The animal transformation and male beastliness of *The Three Sisters* is extreme and literal. The animal nature of each of the husbands presents a not-so-subtle representation of the natural beastliness of men: a quality that can be released in any and all men, in which civility is short-lived and can give way to natural instinct at any moment. The husbands of *The Three Sisters* project an unbridled sense of dangerous masculinity, one that lends itself to violence and rage that cannot be stopped in its cycle, and is also considered so appropriate that the wives do not exhibit surprise or try to escape. They are slaves to instinct, animals in their most basic form, unable to obtain a grip on rationalism, capable of murder with little afterthought.

It is not only the husbands, however, who possess a lack of rational thought so dangerous it has the potential to cause physical harm: the father character also presents his own set of issues. Although he is not a literal animal, it is because of his foolishness that his daughters end up in such a dangerous position, a further example of when a woman's safety is in jeopardy as a result of a male character. In addition, the father doesn't just exhibit carelessness, but also astounding levels of financial irresponsibility and selfishness. His crime, of trespassing onto the animals' territory, is not fantastical: in Germany, power is held by landed men, and trespassing is considered a punishable offense. It is his desire to live a life of unsustainable luxury, and his reckless approach to the law that causes him to endanger the family and reduce his daughters'



marriage partners to such bestial options. Therefore, the young women are not only threatened by the physical beastliness of their husbands, but also by their father's lack of rational judgement, presenting two different but equally dangerous kinds of male animalism.

Whereas many stories depict a female animal transformation, either for their own mobility or to secure captivity, the sisters in this story are wholly human. The conflation of masculinity with animalism isolates the woman: when her husband is an animal, the sister is left vulnerable as the sole human of the household. The danger that comes from residing in the female human body, therefore, is magnified even more so than in *Jorinda and Joringel* or, as seen later, *Fitcher's Bird*: the threat is not imprisonment as a result of female jealousy, but rather complete arbitrary violence. Not only does the humanness of the sisters emphasize the danger of presiding in a female body, but it also textually ensures that each wife is able to fulfill her societally predetermined role of mother, as her humanness allows her to physically bear the children and also retain the kindness and gentleness of humanity that is necessary in motherhood. This aligns with Daniela Richter's observation that motherhood is perceived as an antidote to the damages of war: following the Napoleonic Wars, German states turned to motherhood, and its maternal values of nurturing and kindness, as a way to balance out the belligerent, masculine culture that was indicative of wartime (Richter 135). Therefore, by remaining human, the three sisters provide the maternal capabilities that not only provide for and protect their children, but also balance out the violence and beastliness of their husbands. While their humanness is what puts them at physical risk, therefore, it is also their most redeeming and powerful property within this patriarchal system.

The three sisters are not the only women in the story, however: the fourth woman, the sister of the beastly brothers and Reinald's future wife, also plays a crucial role. In some ways,

this sister is immobile and powerless. She is released from her spell only through the action—a romantic one, at that—from Reinald, and is narratively and physically silenced for the majority of the text because of her magical sleep. This immobility of both voice and physical movement is akin to that of the captivity and transformation of Jorinda, acts that eliminate a woman's agency through physical immobility and muteness. That she is imprisoned because she rejected a powerful man's advances further emphasizes this lack of mobility that a woman is confined to, at both physical risk from literal animals and also unable to exercise her mental capacity. Being a female in *The Three Sisters*, therefore, is often akin to being reduced to an animal: robbed of rationality and vulnerable to physical harm.

This other sister, however, also possesses substantial power. It is her imprisonment upon which the entire story is based, a condition she is reduced to after rejecting a powerful man's advances, speaking to her independence. Her freedom then prompts a chain of freedoms: for the three sisters to be free from a violent marriage and for the three brothers to be free from an uncontrollable masculinity. When one woman is loved, that is the action that frees the other women and men from overly powerful men. Although she is not a mother, the purity and goodness she provides is similar to the remedial powers of the three sisters, and the conclusion of the story with her marriage implies that she will soon become a mother as well. *The Three Sisters* presents a clear animalistic dichotomy between men and women: the former as predators, animalized either literally or through an abandonment of rational thought, and the latter as victims, vulnerable but also powerful because of their humanness and therefore goodness.

Whereas most of the Grimms' stories are derived from named informants, such as painters, writers, and family friends, *The King of the Golden Mountain* (German name: *Der König vom goldenen Berg*), is based on a story told to the Grimms by an unnamed soldier (Zipes,

*Original Grimm 508*). It begins with a merchant, father of a boy and a girl, who loses his fortune at sea, and makes a deal with a little black man to regain it, promising that in twelve years he will bring the little black man the first thing that brushes against his leg when he returns home. The merchant heads home, expecting his dog to brush against his leg, but is greeted instead by his son, and although he is horrified, he finds the money the little black man promised him and is pleased. Twelve years pass and the merchant meets and argues with the little black man, eventually deciding that the son belongs to neither of them, and will get into a little boat and drift downstream, having his fate decided by the river. The boat capsizes and the father believes his son is dead, although the boy survives and happens upon an enchanted castle that is empty except for a snake, who is really an enchanted princess. She tells him that he will release the kingdom from its spell: tonight, she says, twelve black men wearing chains will torture him and the son must let him. They will do so for three nights, until the third night when they chop off his head and he will be saved by the princess. They do so, and on the third night the princess saves him and is released from her spell. They are married and the boy becomes king of the Golden Mountain.

Years pass and the boy decides to visit his father. His wife gives him a wishing ring that will transport him, and makes him promise that he will not use it to summon her. Her forgets and summons her when he meets his father, and his wife is so angry that she leaves him and takes his son. He travels to find her and steals three giants' inheritance in the journey: a sword that chops off the head of everyone but the user and says "all heads off except mine," an invisibility cloak, and magic boots. He transforms himself into a fly and travels to the top of the golden mountain, where he finds his wife getting married to a new man. He terrorizes and intimidates her, and

when the wedding guests try to take him prisoner he kills his wife and all the wedding guests, rendering him king of the Golden Mountain once again (301-307).

*The King of the Golden Mountain* presents a startling view on marriage that aligns, in many ways, with the fluctuating views of marriage in Germany at this time. Different marriage codes were applied in different German states, some of which were valid until 1900, and as such, a woman's experience of marriage could vary exceedingly. Some codes were forgiving and progressive: the Common Prussian Law of 1794 provided unprecedented provisions for single mothers to claim financial support for themselves and their child from their father, and also maintained gender-neutral divorce regulations which allowed either spouse to file for separation. Other codes, such as the Napoleonic Code Civil, were more conservative and restrictive, allowing women to file for divorce only if their husband had an affair within their home (Richter 82). A knowledge of this history is crucial to analyzing *The King of the Golden Mountain*, a story that takes unusual lengths to explore beyond the "happily ever after" ending of most stories with an alarming narration on marriage.

In many ways, the woman of *King of the Golden Mountain* shares the power of empowerment and choice of the women in volume one. She is the one to save our protagonist, and she undergoes a transformation, from snake to woman, that is desired and which she seems to have some sort of control over. If the story ended with marriage, it might have ended with the happily-ever-after of peaceful spouses. Instead, however, the story ends in violence, a tension that boils down to mobility. The wife tells her husband, plainly, that her one request in his visit to her family is that she retain control over her own movement: she does not want to come, and she certainly does not want him to summon her himself. He then violates this promise—flagrantly and carelessly—in a moment of selfishness. She responds independently, leaving him

but causing him no harm, removing herself from his reach in a moment of physical mobility. If the story ended here, it might retain the tone of loose female empowerment of the stories in volume one, depicting a woman's mobility and independence, even in the midst of marriage. Instead, however, it ends in blood and rage, arguing that a woman's excess of independence, whether it is control over mobility or a request for "divorce," is inexcusable, a crime worthy of death.

The bloody end of *The King of the Golden Mountain* sends a warning to women who might be tempted to exhibit independence, mobility, or to court divorce. These tales were also an anthropological and political project in the discussion of what the new "Germany" should look like: that *The King of the Golden Mountain* takes such a violent perspective on a woman who tries to initiate divorce suggests, therefore, that the story also functions on a political level, proposing, in a subtle textual way, which direction the new Germany being created should fall in establishing divorce laws.<sup>8</sup> Desiring divorce, the story suggests, on the basis of a selfish indulgence—the longing for mobility, freedom over one's own body—is so inexcusable it can only end with death.

The gender narrative of *King of the Golden Mountain*, however, is further complicated by its two animal transformations. The first is simple, traditional, and fairly inconsequential: the woman turns from a snake to human by the hands of the merchant. In some ways, this transformation can be read as textual foreshadowing, that the woman is deceptive and slippery to her core: an animal, devoid of rational thought. This is further corroborated by the presence of Christian themes: she has "evil on her mind," (305) is described as a "faithless thing," (307) and

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the Civil Law Code (*Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch*) of 1900, the first "German" code, followed the conservative regulations of the Napoleonic Code Civil, restricting women's opportunities to initiate divorce or to secure their own financial support. The introduction of the Civil Law Code made it futile to publicly criticize the legality of marriage, as it eliminated any debate about the rules of marriage or divorce (Richter 82).

wonders whether “the devil got me in his power.” (306) That her original form is that of a snake, the Christian tempter of Eve, further suggests her duplicitous and sinful nature. This transformation is physical and literal and easy, but is, I believe, superficial and misleading. This reading of the transformation suggests that a desire for mobility, for independent thought, calls on our heroine’s animalistic nature—deceptive, self-indulgent—when in actuality, it calls on her humanity and rational thought. The true animal of the story, as in *The Three Sisters*, is the man who compromises her safety: her husband, the King of the Golden Mountain.

. This animal transformation of the husband is not a literal one, and therefore is not immediately apparent. The merchant of *King of the Golden Mountain* is “transformed” through physical and verbal imitation into a giant, much as, discussed below, the woman in *Fitcher’s Bird* is “transformed” through disguise. He takes the clothes of the giants he encounters, and in wearing their sword, cloak, and boots, assumes a physical disguise that is likely as convincing and transformative as that seen in *Fitcher’s Bird*. Whereas the transformation of *Fitcher’s Bird* was verbally accepted and reinforced by a crowd of townspeople, however, it is the merchant himself who performs this act of verbal acceptance. By yelling “all heads off except mine,” the merchant performs the verbal act of the giants, imitating not only their violence but also their animalistic thoughts. It is this phrase that allows him to perform such a massacre, killing not only his wife but also kings, princes, and ministers, an act so gruesome and filled with rage that it points to the absence of rational thought or forgiveness: the characteristics of humanity. The true animal transformation of the text, therefore, is that of the merchant, transformed into a giant not only in appearance but also in thought and in deed. By imitating the violence of animals, the merchant performs an animal transformation that is more profound and more dangerous than that of the literal beastliness in *The Three Sisters*, as this transformation is not due to external forces,

but is rather indicative of a deep-seated, internal beastliness. Both *The Three Sisters* and *King of the Golden Mountain* expose that the greatest threat to a woman is not that of literal animals, but rather of the beastliness that men assume when they abandon rational thought for selfishness or rage, an animalism that lies dormant inside of a human man and cannot be removed.

### **Female Body Integrity: *Fitcher's Bird* and *The White Bride and the Black Bride***

*Fitcher's Bird* (German name: *Fitchers Vogel*), is a tale provided by two women, Friederike Mannel and Henriette Dorothe (*Original Grimm* 492). Friederike was the daughter of a minister in Allendorf, who sent tales through letters to Wilhelm (477); Henriette was a member of the Wise family, a pharmacist's family in Kassel who were close to the Grimms, and the eventual wife of Wilhelm Grimm (478). It tells the story of a maiden who is captured by a sorcerer and taken to his home. He gives her a key and an egg to protect, and makes her promise to not go into the room that the key opens. She does so anyway, only to find a basin full of dead and butchered people; she drops the egg in the basin and tries to wipe the blood off, but it reappears immediately. When the sorcerer sees the bloody egg he realizes that she has gone into the room, and he chops her up into pieces and deposits her into the basin. He captures her sister and the same thing happens. He captures the third daughter, who is smart and cunning, and puts the egg in the cupboard before going to the chamber. She finds her sisters in the basin and puts them back together, hiding them. When the sorcerer doesn't find any blood stains on the egg, he proposes to the third daughter: she accepts and forces him to carry a basket of gold to her parents, but sneaks her sisters in the basket instead. Meanwhile, she decorates a skull with jewels and dips herself in honey, rolling around in feathers until she is unrecognizable. She travels home, and wedding guests who see her on the road address her as "Fitcher's bird." The sorcerer

returns and thinks the skull is the bride, waving to it. The sisters' helpers lock him inside the house and set fire to it, and the sorcerer and his guests are burned to death (146-148).

*Fitcher's Bird* is an example of a nontraditional animal transformation, as well as female empowerment pitted against masculine violence. This is one of the few stories in which a woman is the sole heroine: although she is only able to rescue her own sisters, she does so independently and saves two lives in doing so. It is a story that is reminiscent of modern horror tales, of serial rapists and girls locked in basements, a pattern of human nature that remains relevant today, while also retaining relevance to its time. Although I do not want to put too much weight on unknown questions of authorship, it is also significant that this is one of the only stories that was provided by two female informants. The startling female empowerment in *Fitcher's Bird* corroborates Zipes' argument about female authors: in *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, Zipes points out that there is a plain difference when women make their own art, that when women tell their own stories, "the resistance to violence and misogyny becomes clear." (Zipes 79) Further, the gender of the author can prompt a difference in the depiction of female characters, that "in the hands of male tellers... [women] tend to be depicted as helpless, if not passive. To be good, they must be obedient and industrious...a more patriarchal view of women as domestics and breeders, born to serve the interests of men." (80) Although this statement has the potential to quickly evolve into an essentialist line of thought, it points to a powerful and often overlooked point: that especially at a time when women were positioned at the margins of both society and the page, the presence of female tellers provides a distinctly different and often female-centered story. There is an undeniable narrative benefit to women being able to tell their own stories.

Although *Fitcher's Bird* doesn't include a literal animal transformation, the metamorphosis that the third sister undergoes at the end of the story is so monumental that it can



be treated as if it were an actual physical transformation. The power and safety that the disguise creates, as well as the verbal reinforcement it incites from bystanders, demonstrates that although the sister has not literally changed her shape, the disguise is persuasive enough to fool society. Further, the fact that the title of the story is of this transformation, “Fitcher’s Bird,” further corroborates the suggestion that this non-literal metamorphosis can be treated as an animal transformation. Becoming a bird, it seems, is perhaps not a matter of sprouting wings, but of convincing others that your shape has changed. The sister’s transformation is unusual in its intentionality: she is not transformed at the hands of a witch or a sorcerer, but rather by her own hand, into the animal of her choosing through her own means. This is not only an exercise in agency, but also is a method of intelligent protection, for it is only through this transformation that the sister is able to escape safely and enact revenge on the sorcerer and his guests. Although the sister acts *like* a bird, rather than truly becoming one, the powerful and wide-ranging effects of this metamorphosis demonstrate that it can be treated as if it were an animal transformation. In addition, the safety that the transformation provides shows that, in *Fitcher’s Bird*, there is a conflation of animalism and rational thought. Other stories have categorized animalism as a loss of intelligence or rational thought, but *Fitcher’s Bird* argues the opposite: that it is only through an animal disguise, by pretending to be not a woman, that a woman can remove herself from the oppressive restrictions of patriarchal society and reap her full potential.

The gendered aspect of this transformation is also of particular importance. The performance of gender in *Fitcher’s Bird* is amplified: the man displays heightened sexual violence; some women are both incredibly weak, being literally dismembered and reassembled; and others are also remarkably strong, the third sister healing the others, ensuring their safety, and being a heroine whose story does not end in marriage. This division suggests, on a basic

level, the power of female relationships. In the face of a masculine threat to the body, the story seems to suggest, a woman can only be mended by another woman.

The animal portion of the text, however, pushes beyond such a conclusion. That the third sister can only escape by transforming herself into a bird suggests not only the relative safety that an animal form provides, but also the alarming danger that is associated with inhabiting the female body. In *Fitcher's Bird*, the female body is under extreme duress, being literally taken apart and reduced to its most basic physical parts, prioritized by the male villain for the body rather than the mind. By escaping only in "bird" form, the third sister's success argues not only that inhabiting a female body is dangerous, but also that the transition into an animal grants that individual a larger amount of freedom. The bird disguise gives the third sister the freedom of mobility, agency, and choice: all of the characteristics that, supposedly, define rationality and humanity. Therefore, it is only as a bird that a woman in this story is able to truly fulfill her human freedoms, ones that are societally denied to her in human form. If humanness is defined by freedom, then *Fitcher's Bird* argues that a woman can only be more human as a bird.

*The White Bride and the Black Bride* (German name: *Die weiße und schwarze Braut*), was also supplied by the Van Haxthausen family and also originated from an anonymous tale from Mecklenburg. It is based on a story that appeared in *Sagen der böhmischen Vorzeit* (Tell the Bohemian Prehistory) in 1808, which Jacob Grimm wrote down in abbreviated form, and was also included in an early version of the tales, the Ölenberg Manuscript of 1810 (Zipes, *Original Grimm* 514). It begins with a mother, daughter, and step-daughter walking in the woods: the mother and daughter insult a poor man, while the step-daughter shows him kindness. The poor man, the (Christian) Lord in disguise, turns the mother and daughter black as night and ugly as sin, while he blesses the step-daughter with three wishes, and she receives beauty,

wealth, and a ticket to heaven, and out of jealousy the mother's heart turns evil. The step-daughter's brother, Reginer, paints her portrait to encapsulate her beauty, and when the portrait is noticed by the king, he picks the step-daughter as his bride because she resembles his wife. The mother, meanwhile, enchants Reginer so he is half-blind and enchants the step-daughter so she is half-deaf, and she tricks the step-daughter into giving her clothes to the daughter. They push the step-daughter out of the carriage and into a river, and a white duck rises out of the water. Reginer, who is still half-blind, brings the disguised black sister to the king to be married, and he is angered at how ugly she is and orders Reginer to be thrown into a pit of snakes. The mother, an old witch, charmed the king and deceives the king to marry the black daughter. Meanwhile, the white duck swims out of the drain and into the castle three nights in a row, asking questions to the kitchen boy, until he tells the king. The king goes to the kitchen and waits for the duck, and when she emerges from the drain he cuts off her neck with a sword and she transforms into a beautiful, soaking wet, maiden. She orders Reginer to be released from the snake pit, and the mother-daughter pair are tricked into being stripped naked, loaded into a nail-studded barrel, and hitched to a running horse. The king marries the white bride, and rewards Reginer by making him a rich and respected man (440-444).

In many ways, the depiction of womanhood in its relation to animalism is similar to that seen in *Fitcher's Bird*, presenting scenarios in which a woman is safest when she is not in human form. The beauty contest between the daughters yields extreme physical harm to themselves and everyone around them: Reginer is half-blind, the white bride is half-deaf, and the step-mother and black bride undergo gruesome torture. For the white bride, transforming into a duck provides her a respite from these human dangers, much as becoming a bird allowed the daughter in *Fitcher's Bird* to escape the threat of masculine violence. As an animal, she is separated from the

threat of violence that comes from residing in the female body, removed from the marriage market and the violence it inspires between women. The combination of womanhood and humanness is a dangerous place to be, in which the body is under the constant threat of physical harm, whether it is being dismembered into a basin or loaded into a nail-studded barrel.

This, however, is where the similarities between the two end, for the differences between *Fitcher's Bird* and *The White Bride and the Black Bride* are vast and powerful. One is the question of agency and the use of female characters. Although both stories have a high percentage of female characters, they are used to very different ends: the women in *Fitcher's Bird* working in unison to protect each other from the looming threat of masculine violence, the women in *The White Bride and the Black Bride* working in violent opposition in competition for a single man. The villain of *The White Bride and the Black Bride* is not a single man, working with serial-killer-like violence and randomness, but is an entire population of women, working under desperation to marry and to survive. As with the other stories in volume two, *The White Bride and the Black Bride* witnesses an injection of Christian ideology: the step-sisters meet the "dear Lord" at the beginning of the story, and their goodness or lack thereof is what prompts the rest of the story. The unflattering, violent, and mean depiction of women in *The White Bride and the Black Bride*, especially when compared to the similar story *Fitcher's Bird*, further corroborates Zipes's argument that stories told by women witness an increase in female empowerment. However, the story's lack of female empowerment cannot be reduced simply to a religious tone or the presence of male tellers, for unlike other stories, the motive of the villains in this story is real: marrying is crucial to survival. For single women at this time in Germany, unmarried life was a result of failed marriage plans. It caused women to remain in their parents' households as "neither child nor bride," as financially dependent as children, and were only

useful if they could provide additional labor—a virtue that became increasingly unnecessary due to the increase of technological advances (Richter 108). The step-mother and her daughter, therefore, are working under dire societal pressures for the most basic human need: survival.

It is not just that women are the villains of this story, however, but also the violent fate they meet. The text does not confirm whether the step-mother and her daughter are killed by this deed; rather, it is plausible that it is a fate they suffered forever. However, the act of being loaded into a nail-studded barrel, naked, and strapped to a horse is undoubtedly the most gruesome of the violent acts seen so far. Their nakedness contrasted against the nails emphasizes the vulnerability of the human (female) body, no match for the violence of man or industry, and also gives the whole action a sexual-shaming tone. It is their bodies, not their minds, that are being punished, stripped of the clothes that grant human dignity and decency. Further, that the women are tricked into revealing this punishment themselves suggests a lapse of rational thought: they are not smart enough to anticipate the consequence of their actions, and suffer the fate that their lack of intellectual capacity deserves. Therefore, the punishment of the step-mother and the step-daughter—of a crime that came from their own very real need for survival—is one that rids them of their humanness and treats them as animals. All of this troubling subtext culminates to the larger point being made: that although assuming the animal form is protection for good and beautiful maidens, for unmarried or older women, for evil women, the only suitable punishment is one that reduces them to animals.

## **Conclusion**

In analyzing just the differences between volumes one and two of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, published only three years apart, the impact of editorial mediation on female narrative agency is clear. These editorial changes continued throughout the subsequent editions,

resulting in stories from the seventh and final edition that largely reduce female autonomy and increase Christian morality in favor of a nationalist agenda. This is evident from analyzing the editorial changes between the first and seventh editions of one of the Grimms' most well-known stories: Cinderella. When Cinderella's mother is dying at the beginning of the story, in the first edition she instructs Cinderella to plant a tree on her grave that will grant her wishes, and tells her to "stay good and pure." (Grimm, *Original Grimm* 69) By the seventh, her mother instructs her only to "remain pious and good, and then God will always stand by you, and I shall look down upon you from heaven and be at your side." (Grimm, *Selected Folktales* 77-79) In this one change, the layers of editorial mediation has literally replaced female agency with passivity and Christian ideology: instead of granting Cinderella the ability to plant the tree, one whose power she can summon whenever she deems fit, she must simply act pious and hope that God notices enough to keep her safe. Cinderella's misery is a well-known feature of her story, and it is therefore hugely significant to her safety whether she can ask for assistance from her mother versus passively hoping that her actions reflect well enough that God will take pity on her. Although seventh-edition Cinderella eventually gains access to the wish-granting tree, it is only by fortuitous accident, not through the protective love of her mother or from her own agency. The safety of this edited Cinderella is not in her own hands, but rather in the deeds of others—a shift in agency that is typical of how the subsequent editing and polishing of the Grimms' collection robs women of narrative autonomy.

Then, at the end of the story, the step-sisters' fates are significantly changed. Although the step-sisters in both editions cut their feet to try to fit them in the slippers, the seventh-edition sisters receive one further important punishment: as Cinderella is getting married, doves swoop down and peck out the sisters' eyes, blinding them (Grimm 89). In the first edition, meanwhile,

the sisters conclude the stories only “horrified and pale.” (Original Grimm 77) For committing the same actions, from the same motivations, the step-sisters receive two very different fates after decades of mediation. The seventh-edition sisters receive a punishment, as in *The White Bride and the Black Bride*, of bodily humiliation. Further, that the punishment is blindness emphasizes that it is designed to reduce their independence: their blindness exacerbates their dependency and robs them of agency, but the very nature of their transformation means that they are now so ugly that they will likely never get married. These two seemingly small changes in just one story are typical of the effect of multiple layers of editorial meditation on eroding the extent of narrative female autonomy.

These six stories from the first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* share several themes of womanhood in Germany. One is the inherent danger that a woman faces from simply residing in a female body: this is a body that is fragile, vulnerable to the physical threats of men and beasts alike. This body also comes with an expiration date, and when it is no longer valued by society, women must find other avenues by which to secure power. The dangerous nature of the female body means that, frequently, the safest place for a *young* woman to be is to escape the human form entirely by transforming into an animal, whether or not this transformation is voluntary. In the Grimms’ worldview, a woman’s greatest value is therefore her marriage-eligibility and her ability to bear children: to reproduce the German volk. Two, these stories demonstrate that men pose the greatest threat to women not when they are literally animals, but when they exhibit animalistic qualities while residing in their human form, whether by their lack of rational thought or a predisposition to rage. Lastly, the injection of Christian ideology in the Grimms’ second volume substantially changes the tone of these stories—casting witches as dangerous women with too much power and reducing a woman’s agency within marriage. These

changes eliminate the possibility for female empowerment, and reveal how collectors' commitments to nationalist agendas reduce female narrative agency.

The relationship between gender and animalism in these tales is intertwined and symbiotic. The function of animals in each tale emphasizes the existing gender roles in German society, and the performance of gender is also exaggerated through the role of animals. As a whole, these folk stories from "Germany's history" emphasize, perhaps above all, that womanhood is an ultimately dangerous position, human or not, and that violence and loss of empowerment can come from any direction: man, beast, or religion.



## Chapter Three

### **Girls Just Wanna Have Fun—Not Get Abducted: Female Empowerment Within Patriarchal Structures**

The moment in Sicily in which Laura Gonzenbach gathered her folk tale collection *Sicilianische Märchen* (Sicilian Folk Tales), published in 1870, was a perilous time to be a woman. The combination of changes in industrial labor, unhealthy living conditions, and the restricted mobility allowed women in Sicilian society meant that women's best option for safety was marriage, but the marriages available were themselves violent, patriarchal, and risky. A woman's most valuable attribute in such a society was therefore her beauty, for by being more attractive, she would likely receive a wider range of marriage options and would be more likely to end up in a safe marriage. The stories of Laura Gonzenbach are, consequently, obsessed with appearances: women changing appearances, women manipulating appearances, and men valuing appearances. Gonzenbach's collection reflects the perilous conditions of her time by telling stories of female empowerment while also staying true to her specific population of informants within patriarchal structures.

#### **Historical Introduction**

Just as the Grimms published the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in the midst of Germany's fight for unification, Laura Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen* was created in the midst of Italy's Risorgimento. Italian for "rising again," the Risorgimento was Italy's nineteenth-century movement of national unification. The early stages of the Risorgimento began during the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars (1796-1815), during which several Italian states were consolidated and the middle class grew in numbers and political activity. Although the

movement lost steam after Napoleon's defeat in 1815, establishing Austria as the dominant power in Italy and witnessing a series of failed revolutionary efforts, it regained momentum in 1831 when Giuseppe Mazzini organized the political group Young Italy to fight for the "conquest of Independence, Unity, and Liberty for Italy." (Riall xi) Piedmont rose to power and after a series of revolutionary efforts, some successful and others not, Italy defeated Austria in 1859 with the help of the French, and a Kingdom of Italy was declared in 1861 (xii-xiii). The Risorgimento concluded with Italy's official unification in 1870—the year, it just so happens, *Sicilianische Märchen* was published (xiv). As such, Gonzenbach's collection is published in a very similar political condition to the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*: a nation in the midst of asking, discovering, and deciding just who they are and what they stand for.

Gonzenbach's project, however, resides decidedly outside of such nationalist agendas in a way that the Grimms' does not. This is partially due to her heritage—living in Sicily despite a lack of Italian heritage positioned Gonzenbach as an outsider to the country with no explicit national commitment—but is also partly because of her gender. A woman's relationship to her nation is very different than that of her male peers. As we saw in the previous chapter, the concern is not that nationalist-movement projects in the nineteenth century have no interest for women; on the contrary, such projects are highly committed to creating specific prescribed roles for women—ones that render them immobile and rob them of narrative agency. Whereas the Grimms were politically and personally invested in the idea of a German nation, and thus developed their stories to reflect the feminine propriety that aligned with the traditional, domestic associations of women in the nation, Gonzenbach does not share this power or interest. Thus, Gonzenbach's project exists outside of a nationalist effort despite the fact that it occurred during

the time of nation-building, and as such, has fewer obligations to reflect the kind of female morality that the Grimms' did.

Sicily in the late nineteenth century was not only undergoing a political revolution but also a domestic one. Sicilian women in the 1870s were workers—in the 1871 Italian census, 50% of women were counted as active workers—but by 1901, a time when female labor participation was increasing in other industrializing nations such as France, less than 30% of Sicilian women were counted as workers (Gabaccia 168). The Italian market was, and largely remains, heavily dependent on agriculture, but with the advent of industrialization women had fewer places to be employed as textile machines replaced them in cloth production. While women in the 1870s produced the clothes for the family, by 1880 Sicilian women as industrial workers faded from local records (170). Although women turned to the field with their husbands, the shift away from subsistence agriculture meant that men monopolized the job positions, while unemployed women found themselves newly housebound (173). As opportunities for women to work outside of the home decreased with industrialization, the focus shifted to their role inside the home, creating a gendered division of housework and for more polarized gender relations to emerge in the domestic sphere (174). As such, Sicilian women in the time that Laura Gonzenbach was writing and publishing were mediating not only what their role in society and in the workplace would be in the rapidly-evolving market, but also how these economic changes would impact their independence.

Further, it should also be noted that living conditions during this time in Sicily were particularly unpleasant. As anthropologist Seragino Amabile Guastella vividly described in the 1884 *Le Parità e le storie morali dei nostri villani* (The Equality and Moral Stories of Our Villains) on a peasant woman's desperation in the hungry months post-Christmas: “a curse on

her who married! The father in the countryside, who eats and drinks and is undisturbed...and I here...in this hell.” (Quoted by Cook 636) In his oft-cited 1880s report of a parliamentary inquest on living conditions, economist Stefano Jacini reported that sanitary conditions were crude, and infant mortality was so high that, according to custom, there would be no crying at the funeral of an infant (632). Hunger was so rampant that the peasant mother was considered “the true martyr of the family,” the last one to eat (637). Economic conditions were precarious, especially in relation to marriage: the economic assets brought by the husband and wife to each marriage would have a major impact on their quality of life, and therefore made it nearly the largest decision a peasant would make in their lifetime (633). This was especially pertinent for women, who were expected to provide a sizeable dowry: while men married “only with their pants”, women were expected to bring a large dowry in order to compensate the groom for acquiring an unemployable dependent (Gabaccia 175).

Women’s mobility was not only limited economically, but also physically. Abduction of women was considered, by the Jacini report, to be “most frequent” for the following reasons:

in small part to the hot climate, and in great part to the desire to possess the loved woman and to facilitate a marriage opposed by the parents...when done out of love and with a view of marriage, [abduction] is only considered as a half violent, but not illegitimate, way to pursue a legitimate end. (Quoted by Cook 635)

Lastly, the Sicilian woman was also considered a sexual object, the mother of a man’s children and his “resourceful and hardworking subordinate.” Cook translates Guastella to describe that “after the donkey, but many rungs beneath it, and when he does not have anything else to do, the peasant also loves his wife, but he loves her with a comfortable and non-perturbing love, as one loves a little kitten born in one’s house...a little by habit, and a little because of need.” (Quoted by Cook 636) A woman’s independence was so limited that she was subjected to her husband’s

tyrannical mood changes: in his 1897 work *Customs and Habits of Sicilian Peasants*, Salvatore Salomone-Marino writes,

Woe to that wife who, in such moments, does not do her work well, breaks a household utensil [sic]...He suddenly loses the light of reason and his traditional calm, and the wife must submit in holy peace, often undeservedly, to the nastiest insults, bestial punches, kicks, beatings, or blows given with the first object the furious man grabs hold of. She bears bruises, swellings, sometimes wounds and fractures, but still she does not let out a cry; she put up on resistance, doesn't weep at all for fear of worse, nor does she spread in public the woes and hell she endures in her family....Whenever someone reproves her...she gives a dry and simple answer: we women are always in the wrong, for we are altogether bad; a husband is husband, he is master even of our lives, since we live only for him and are at his mercy. (42-43, trans. Rosalie Norris)

The impression from such primary sources is plain. In the historical time period in which Gonzenbach was writing, changes in industrialization meant that women ceased to have survival options other than marriage, and yet the marriages available were overwhelmingly violent, patriarchal, and undeniably risky. Women were at risk of being abducted “out of love”; were compared not only to animals but to beasts even more subaltern than a donkey (because, we might presume, a donkey has some utilitarian value, while a woman is simply a burden); and were subjected to the random, furious, and “bestial” rages of their husbands, told by society that they were “altogether bad.” What, then, might we hope for a Sicilian peasant woman: to remain unmarried, economically and physically vulnerable, or to marry and risk living with a beast?

This is the backdrop for Gonzenbach's stories. Sicilian peasant women were, by all standards, in an unenviable position during the 1800s. They were negotiating their place in the workforce and in the world in the midst of serious economic change, unhealthy living conditions, and a lack of physical and social mobility. This change in employment opportunities meant that women's only option for safety and security was marriage, but the version of marriage available was so risky that it hardly seemed worth the gamble. Gonzenbach's folk tales reflect this new cultural problem, preoccupied with the question of how to keep women safe in marriage. Her

stories mirror the terrors and fears that women in nineteenth-century Sicily would have, but also look beyond them to imagine a different world, one where marriage might just be a happy ending rather than the beginning of a nightmare.

### **Story Introduction**

This chapter will analyze five stories from Laura Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen*, edited by Jack Zipes into the English version *Beautiful Angiola: The Lost Sicilian Folk and Fairy Tales of Laura Gonzenbach*. The stories, *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils*, *The Green Bird*, *Beautiful Angiola*, *Maria and Her Brother*, and *Prince Scursuni*, are selected for their significant animal transformations and because they engage questions of class and gender. Typical of Gonzenbach's collection, these stories offer a different perspective than those of other fairy-tale collectors, providing alternating viewpoints to the masculine-edited Grimm tales and the upper-class and female empowered stories of Aulnoy.

All of these stories also confront the idea of the male gaze. Although the term, coined by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," is traditionally used in film criticism, the fundamental concepts of the male gaze are easily applied to other media. In her essay, Mulvey argues that women on screen are presented as erotic objects for two audiences: the characters within the story and the spectator that is viewing the film (Mulvey 11). The gaze both on and off screen therefore can be categorized as scopophilic (taking pleasure in viewing) and voyeuristic (pleasure of seeing while remaining unseen), which, Mulvey argues, means that women are offered for the pleasure of the male gaze and as an object to be surveyed (10, 15). Lastly, not only does the theory argue that women are presented as a passive receptor of the active male gaze (11), but that the cycle has advanced so severely that women have now internalized the male gaze as their own (13), now only able to see themselves

through the perspective of the male gaze. Essentially, the male gaze functions in two steps that create an asymmetrical relationship of viewing: first, men look at women, and second, women watch themselves being looked at.

It should also be noted that the concept of the male gaze has allegiances with Michel Foucault's reading of the panopticon prison. Developed by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, the idea of a panopticon relies on internal surveillance: one watchman stands in the center of a prison, from which point he can see all of the inmates. Although it is impossible for the watchman to physically see all of the inmates at all times, the idea that he could be watching means that the inmates will act as if they are being watched, thus internalizing the gaze of the watchman and self-surveilling (Bentham 38-39). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault expounds on the idea of the panopticon as a means of power, explaining that individuals are now chained not by bars or locks, but by the self-consciousness that comes from permanent visibility (Foucault 202). This concept of the panopticon and the surveillance state is easily applied to that of the male gaze. Women have internalized the male gaze so much that they will act as if they are being watched—being aware of their physical appearance, their attractiveness, potential appeal to male suitors—even when they are not, in that moment, being surveilled. The male gaze therefore has so much power that its effects can be seen even in the absence of a literal male gaze: instead, it perpetuates and sustains itself inside women.

The concept of the male gaze, the power in both looking and of being seen, is at play in each of the five Gonzenbach tales I have selected. In this chapter I analyze how female characters—young and old, human and subaltern, beautiful and ugly—are viewed by men within the narrative. In doing so I utilize Mulvey's theory of gaze, how women are presented as erotic objects for viewing and how the gaze is internalized to the point that women self-surveil, to gain

further understanding of how women are both empowered and disempowered within Gonzenbach's stories.<sup>9</sup> The concept of gaze is so pertinent to Gonzenbach's stories because it highlights the anxieties that underlie each of the marriages depicted. These stories are obsessed with appearances: manipulation of appearance, of duplicitous appearances, of transformed appearances, because in a world in which marriage is risky to the point of being life-threatening, the most frightening scenario of all might not be becoming a spinster, but the terror of marrying someone who is not what they first appeared to be.

Although all of these stories include overlapping themes and ideas, and could be compared to each other in a multitude of different combinations, I have broken down my analysis into three sections. The first section includes stories in which the female body is under the direct scrutiny of the male gaze: *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* and *The Green Bird*. The second section examines how Gonzenbach allows older women to seize power within this patriarchal paradigm by changing the appearance of the young women such men are looking at, as seen in *Beautiful Angiola* and *Maria and Her Brother*. My concluding section evaluates *Prince Scursuni*, a story that provides perhaps the safest scenario of marriage, in which the power of gaze—judging the appearance of another—is negated in favor for individuals' internal value. All of these stories provide different answers to the overarching question of how to keep women safe in marriage, depicting various fears, problems, and possibilities that marriage can bring. Gonzenbach's stories present multiple interpretations of the role of women in Sicilian society, as well as both the avenues to and limitations of gaining agency in the midst of a male-dominated society. Many of the stories she collected present gender realities that deviate from

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<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, other theories of the gaze besides Mulvey's early argument, such as Nicholas Mirzoeff's argument of the colonial gaze, which emerges from colonial systems of surveillance (Mirzoeff 98). The range of other theoretical uses of the gaze means it can be applied to a wide range of objects. In my case, I am adapting the theory of the gaze to the fairy tale.



historical accounts and from the gender presentations that the Grimms published, arguing that her collection is, in many ways and for her time, proto-feminist. Although the space for women in the nation is restrictive, disempowering, and harmful, Gonzenbach's collection imagines how women might be kept safe within a narrative.

### **Changed Women: *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* and *The Green Bird***

In exploring the role of the female body in the eyes of men, I analyze *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* and *The Green Bird*. Although both of these stories present a version of the female body that is considered undesirable or grotesque, they offer two opposing male reactions. The suitor of the *Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* is a forgiving and loyal suitor, while the suitor in *The Green Bird* is selfish and mean. The differing fates of the men in the tales offer insight not only into the function and power of female beauty, but also present situations in which female agency is able to take some control over the male gaze.

*The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* begins with infertility: a king and queen pray for a child, promising to build a fountain that provides oil in his fourteenth year, and their wish is granted. They build the fountain when he turns fourteen, but by the time he is fifteen the oil is almost gone, and he watches an old woman sponge the remains into a pitcher. In his arrogance he throws a stone and breaks the woman's pitcher, and she curses him that he will never marry until he finds the beautiful maiden with seven veils. The prince sets off to find the maiden, receiving instructions from a peasant family, then a hermit and his brothers, who give him complicated and detailed instructions on how to trick the ogress who stands guard over the three veiled maidens and to flatter her accomplices, such as her servants and cooks, concluding with the instruction to seize one of the three caskets—it doesn't matter which—and bring it to the forest, then pour water into it. He does as instructed, and when he finally pours water into the

casket, a maiden emerges wearing nothing but seven veils. He hides her in a tree so that he can find her some clothes, and as he leaves, she warns him not to allow his mother to kiss him, and that if she does, he will forget about the maiden and only remember her one year, one month, and one day later. Although he gives this instruction to his mother, she kisses him in his sleep and he forgets the maiden, who waits in the tree.

After a year has passed, a slave described as ugly and black passes the fountain for water, and when she sees the maiden's reflection, she thinks it is her own. She leaves with the conviction that she is beautiful, and tells her mistress that because of her beauty, she shouldn't have to do work, and breaks a pitcher. The slave meets the maiden and sticks a needle in her head, but instead of dying, the maiden is transformed into a white dove. Meanwhile, the prince is cursed yet again—this time to marry a bride as white as marble and as red as blood—after laughing at an old chambermaid who can't speak correctly, and in the moment that he is cursed, simultaneously remembers his maiden. He goes to the tree and finds the deceitful slave, who tells him that her appearance has changed because of being exposed to the elements in his long absence. Assuming the blame, the prince, fooled, marries her despite her ugly appearance. The white dove visits the castle routinely and finally meets the prince, and is transformed back into a maiden when he pulls out the needle. She tells him what has happened, and the prince introduces the maiden to his wife, who does not recognize her. The maiden tells the story at dinner, and his wife continues not to recognize her. The prince coyly asks his wife what punishment the slave deserves, and she answers: to be cooked in a kettle of boiling oil and then dragged through the city by the tail of a horse, and this is what happens to the duplicitous slave. The story concludes with the marriage of the prince and the maiden (Gonzenbach 387-397).

There are several key components to *The Maiden with the Seven Veils*. In comparison to the majority of the Grimms' stories, it is clear from this single story that the Gonzenbach tales present a more complicated and three-dimensional story and view on character. Although the function of each female character is furthering the development of the prince, this story includes three individualized women, representing a variety of ages and social classes, each with their own desires and power. The prince, meanwhile, undergoes considerable personal growth, beginning the story arrogant and ending it humbled, a transformation that is reflected by the physical transformation he believes his bride has undergone.

Both of the young female characters, the maiden and the slave, function directly under the gaze of the prince. He seeks out the maiden not for love, but out of cursed necessity and as a result of his own arrogance, charged with finding a woman who is defined only by a physical description, and finally selects his bride haphazardly, choosing one of three identical coffins. Although this moment can point to the power of fate in fairy tales—that the prince will choose the bride he is destined for without ever needing to see her—it also suggests an interchangeability of women in marriage. This non-uniqueness means that one woman is as good as any, that for the prince, the marriage will be the same no matter who the bride happens to be. The prince doesn't see his bride until after she is chosen, an introduction that heavily relies on the role of vision. Her body is shrouded inside a casket, and when he opens it, he hears the maiden's voice before laying eyes on her, a vocal introduction that mandates need and vulnerability ("water!") and immediately situates the pair in the traditionally asymmetrical power dynamic.

Once he finally sees her, naked aside from the water-soaked veils, it is her beauty that he notices: "a magnificently beautiful maiden arose. She was so beautiful that her beauty shone

through the seven veils.” (393) Their relationship having been established, he immediately hides her from the public view—largely, we are to assume, that of other men—and sets off to find her clothes, giving him even more power as the clothes he chooses will determine how she is seen by the world. Not only does this imply shame, as commanding her to hide suggests that her body is not decent enough to be exposed, but it also immediately deprives her of any mobility and therefore agency. In other words, the unlucky maiden goes from being held captive by an ogress, to being held captive by a prince, imprisoned inside a tree, in a matter of moments. The establishment of this relationship, conducted in just a few sentences, is entirely defined by vision, both in concealing the female body from the sight of others and the function of beauty as determined through the prince’s eyes. This is the male gaze functioning at its most basic level, presenting the female body for the scopophilic pleasure of a man.

When the prince returns and finds the slave in the maiden’s place, the power of the male gaze continues, although changed. Upon seeing the slave, he is “horrified” by her “ugly figure,” but when she explains that her physical transformation is a result of the elements, the ones she was subjected to as a result of his own demands, he assumes responsibility and vows to marry her, “no matter how you look.” (394) He then dresses her in the clothes that he has brought and brings her home, where he repeats this statement of responsibility to his mother. In this exchange, the male gaze seems to lose some of its power: although he still retains the ability to call a woman ugly, the force of his own irresponsibility outweighs whatever visual dissent he might have. As such, the function of the male gaze transitions from something scopophilic—an immobile woman being viewed—into something ineffectual. His judgements from looking have lost their power: he can think the woman he is looking at is ugly, but he marries her anyway. By adopting this changed gaze and the humility and responsibility it entails, the prince is

subsequently rewarded for the rest of the story: he suffers no harm and is ultimately reunited with his maiden, who is equally unharmed. This lack of narrative punishment—which, as seen in the upcoming story *The Green Bird*, is not always the case—rewards this new outlook on appearances, offering a proto-feminist moral that is largely absent from other stories. If a man is able to see a woman for more than her appearance, the story argues, he is able to revel in the safety of a happy, punishment-free ending.

Because the “transformed woman” is not his maiden, however, but a disguised slave, this argument on how men see women is complicated. The relationship between the maiden and the slave girl results in two transformations: the literal transformation from maiden to bird and back again, and the nonliteral transformation of the slave from ugly to beautiful and back again. The transformation from maiden to bird is unusual. It is violent and deadly in its intent, performed by a young woman, not a witch, and with an instrument of domesticity and female labor, the needle. Further, it is performed to expel the maiden from the marriage market, as seen in other Grimm stories featuring witches, but out of competition, rather than aged jealousy. All of these elements point to the unexpected power of a lower-class woman, one who is marginalized not only by her class but also her supposed ugliness, who finds agency through a single object to, she believes, change her fate and raise her status. Further, the slave-woman takes control of her own image: upon realizing that the beautiful reflection in the pool is of the maiden and not her own, instead of succumbing to her class position, she inserts herself into the social role of the maiden, relying on the prince’s infatuation of the memory of her beauty and deceiving him into seeing her as something that she is not.

As such, the slave is successful in taking some control over the power of the male gaze, manipulating the prince to see not what is in front of him, but what she *wants* him to see.

Although the act is one of deception, and she is punished cruelly, this carefully executed act also exhibits a kind of intelligence, agency, and cunning that is rarely seen in fairy tale literature, let alone at the hands of a slave. Indeed, that the slave's fate is so vulgar and dedicated to bodily mutilation speaks to the potential success of her power and deception: in the logic of a proportional response, the parallel way of thinking that dictates folk tales, the only appropriate punishment for a woman who manages to escape from her body and assume that of another is to destroy her body so physically that it is shamed and rendered unrecognizable. That the slave is punished in a way that other meddling women—namely the woman collecting the oil and the chambermaid—are not also implies that the slave woman receives such cruel punishment because of her race. Her punishment is so brutal and severe that it suggests that it is fueled by a racial-purity narrative that is absent from the old women who impact the prince's fate—that her marital and physical safety is, because of her race, even more vulnerable than that of the other women of the story.

The narrative is quick to punish the slave, lest the reader gain any subversive ideas, and so the idea of women changing their appearance to advance their social status is not thoroughly condoned or revealed, but by lying dormant for the observant eye, provides a thought-provoking alternative. The punishment narrative means that we can't read the slave as an empowered woman—this is not a story that imagines gender circumstances completely different from those of reality, like Aulnoy's stories do—but even though the narrative punishes the slave, the reader is introduced to a realm of possibility in which a woman disempowered by both her race and gender might be able, for a moment, to find power within a patriarchally oppressive system. If this were an Aulnoy story, as we will see in chapter four, then the slave would likely conclude the narrative without any physical harm and would live on in peace, but just by introducing a

disempowered woman who finds agency, this story is already more proto-feminist than any the Grimms supplied.

Older women in *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* also have substantial narrative power. The role of the mother is critical in determining the narrative historically, especially when it comes to marriage. In the time Gonzenbach was collecting these stories, Sicilian mothers, especially mothers of the groom, played a key role in arranging the choice of partner for their child. After the wedding, the wife was undressed and put to bed by her mother-in-law; next morning, the newly married couple was visited by both of the mothers, who would verify the sign of the wife's prior virginity (Cook 635).

It is therefore appropriate in this story, as will be seen in several others, that the mother plays such a vital role in condoning or foiling a potential marriage, especially one for a son. Similarly, the two old women—first the one collecting the oil and then the chambermaid—also play the role of marital matchmaker, although this power is founded not in history, as with the mother, but a result of fairy-tale fantasy. As with the slave girl exhibiting control over her fate and how she is viewed, both old women wield control that is disproportionate to their societal status. Despite the marginalization that their age, gender, and social status mandate, both women exhibit profound power over the prince's marriage, and therefore his happiness and fate. Such an act suggests not only class solidarity—a theme that is corroborated by the class-separated ending—but also presents yet another instance in which even the most ostracized, subaltern members of society are able to wield extraordinary power of their own to punish a cruel nobleman. Further, both the mother character and the older peasant women manage to wield their power of marital matchmaking outside the bounds of the male gaze: the mother changes the prince's fate—setting him up for the redemption of marrying the ugly slave—while he is asleep,

eyes closed, while both peasant women rise above the confines that his gaze assigns them, of being poor or mute, by drawing their power from their voice.

*The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* provides a variety of messages about how women are seen by men: the young maiden who is viewed for his pleasure, the slave woman who is able to seize control over her image but is viciously punished, the older women who work behind the scenes and outside the confines of gaze to impact the prince's fate. The cohabitation of empowering and disempowering messages reflects Gonzenbach's struggle on how to find narrative safety for women while also staying true to the collected Sicilian narratives, resulting in a story that is realistically complicated and, at times, contradictory.

*The Green Bird* begins with an astrologer's prediction: that the destiny of the king's daughter, Princess Maruzza, will take a horrible turn when she turns eleven. The king confines his daughter to a tower, where she is denied anything that is potentially dangerous. At age eleven, however, she finds an animal bone and makes a hole in the wall, through which a green bird enters, exclaiming: "I'm a bird and want to be a man!" (Gonzenbach 10) The bird-man explains that he is an enchanted prince and will make the princess his wife someday. She is released from the tower at age twelve but is depressed, and the king creates a contest that whoever can get her to laugh will be rewarded. An old woman hears of the contest, and is led to a castle inhabited by twelve fairies. In the castle she meets the green bird, who transforms into a man and laments Maruzza's absence. She tells the story to Maruzza, who laughs at her story and is delighted to hear of the bird, and asks the old woman to come back the next day to lead her to the castle in exchange for a gift. She does so, and Maruzza is reunited with her prince, who, saddened at seeing her in the magic castle, says he must now leave and fly for seven years, seven days, and seven hours without rest. If she can wait, he says, without eating, drinking, or



speaking, then he'll be released and they can be married. She does so, and when he returns her white skin has become black, her face ugly, and her arms and legs stiff. The prince, horrified, says he does not love her anymore, claims he doesn't know her, and debases her, spitting on her face and calling her a dog.

The fairies console the princess, promising that she will become even more beautiful and will get revenge. They wash her with rose water until she is completely white and beautiful so that no-one will recognize her, and build her a palace. The prince sees her and falls in love without recognizing her, but she slams the window in front of his nose. This repeats: the prince sees the princess, she slams the window, and he asks his mother to go over with a luxurious gift (a gold headband, gold crown, and gold chain), which she disgraces (feeding the headband to the geese, putting the crown around her kettle, and using the chain for a dog collar), and shames the mother. The prince becomes sick, and begs his mother to visit one last time. The mother does so, reluctantly, and tells Maruzza he is so ill that without her, he cannot live. She concedes that if he will let himself be carried in a coffin from his house to hers, ring death bells, and be accompanied by funeral songs, she will marry him. He does so, and she spits in his face, condemning him for debasing himself out of love for another. Her revenge exacted, he recognizes her, and they marry (Gonzenbach 9-17).

*The Green Bird*, in many ways, parallels to *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils*. The maiden is introduced in a state of distress, surrounded by danger, and is also sheltered from the world around her. Once she meets her prince, there is a delay on their happiness in which she must become immobile and wait for him, which she does. Something happens during this period of inaction that changes her appearance, and the prince is distressed upon their reunion.

Unlike the transformation of deception in *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils*, however, the maiden's transformation in *The Green Bird* from beautiful to ugly is a real instance of bodily transformation. The limitations that she is put under are severe, limiting not only her movement but also her speech and health, and have a direct consequence on her body: "in the rain and storm and in the glowing heat of the sun...her fine white skin became black, and her face became ugly and distorted, and her tender arms and legs became stiff." (13)<sup>10</sup> There is something visceral about the nature of this transformation, for unlike a transformation at the hands of a witch or any other magical metamorphosis, her transformation is gradual, involving a slow degradation of the body, and is undeniably *real*. Further, she isn't transformed out of any punishment, but as a result of her fidelity and devotion: she follows instructions, waits for her prince, and is physically wrecked because of it. Dependence and obedience for Maruzza is therefore highly unsafe, resulting in the abasement of her body that is so severe that it (temporarily) ruins her chances at marital safety.

Her transformation is so severe that, in the eyes of the prince, it surpasses ugliness and becomes something animalistic. Her appearance isn't changed to that of an animal, nor has it been substituted for another, and yet when he sees her appearance, "how ugly she had become and how black," he debases her, mocking Maruzza for laying "here on the terrace *like a dog*." (13, emphasis mine) We saw in *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* how the male gaze has extreme power within a romantic relationship, but here it is taken one step further: it transforms a woman from maiden to beast. Non-literal animal transformations have been plentiful in other fairy tales, such as men acting beastly or a woman disguising as a bird, but this

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<sup>10</sup> That Maruzza's skin turns black as a result of being left to the elements means that her transformation can be read as an indicator of class: among white people, a paler skin tone is a mark of higher class, those of the nobles versus the agrarian, the landed versus the landless. Although it lends itself to race study, this is not the scope in which I read the story.

is the most compelling one yet. Completed in just a few words, a statement rooted in one man's opinion and vision has the remarkable power of degrading a woman, insulting her body to the extent that he claims she is unrecognizable, removing her from the marriage market and also isolating from her family ("I left my old father because of you!"), dehumanizing her to the extent that she is now, in his eyes, an animal.

This verbal confirmation is key in executing the transformation, as her appearance alone doesn't solidify the change—*The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* demonstrated that this prince's reaction is not the only one available. If the prince married her anyway, taking responsibility for his actions, the maiden would be able to avoid the animalistic transformation, but by verbalizing his disgust, the asymmetrical power relationship is established and her transformation is completed. Whereas many animal transformations, including that of the prince himself, are rooted in freedom, expanding abilities of mobility, such as flying, that are impossible in human form, the maiden's transformation is characterized by her passivity, by her inability to perform the most basic actions of speech and consumption that determine her humanness. *The Green Bird* argues that in the absence of beauty, the most crucial attribute a woman can have, her worth is reduced to that of an animal. Further, the transformation is executed and confirmed by the prince's statement: it is through the power of his singular gaze that her appearance is transformed, not only to herself but to others. If the story ended here, it would be reflective of female disempowerment: a woman who is so dependent and immobile that her love causes her to become physically altered to the point of being unrecognizable, unable to be married. The prince's punishment, however, complicates such a reading.

Just as the prince in *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* was rewarded in the narrative for his goodness, the prince in this story is punished for his cruelty to Maruzza. This

revenge does not come from the blind fate of the narrative—he doesn't get struck by lightning, or devoured by a beast—but rather comes from the calculated actions of Maruzza, who sets out to debase him as much as he dehumanized her. She is successful, and remarkably so, her quips equal parts clever and bizarre, carefully devaluing everything that the prince and society deem valuable. If Maruzza's power lies in her beauty, then the prince's is clearly in his wealth and possessions, and when she fails to recognize the monetary worth and respectability of these possessions, the prince is unnerved to the point of debasement. She inverts everything the prince believes to know about his reality—devaluing his prized possessions, denying his love—and is so successful that his health deteriorates drastically. This achievement far surpasses that of the prince's verbal animal transformation, for the prince becomes so reduced that he is sick to the point of near-death, dependent on the maiden not just for love or affirmation, but for his life: "if she rejects me and closes the window with so much disdain," he tells his mother, "I shall fall down dead before her very eyes." (16) Although the maiden's transformation was drastic, the prince's seems even more dramatic and dangerous, involving not only serious health ramifications but also singularly dependent on one individual's romantic confirmation.

Therefore, while romantic dependency is unsafe for both parties, especially women, Maruzza's punishment of the prince situates the power back to her. Maruzza develops from being sick, unhealthy, and ruined, to a woman who inspires love sickness in the man who caused such pain. Whereas the marriages in nineteenth-century Sicily disempowered women, making them economically and physically vulnerable, the marriage of *The Green Bird* gives Maruzza the upper hand and also forces the prince to earn her love. Maruzza's transformation hints to the inevitable transformations of age that will come in later years, and by punishing her prince for such a disdainful reaction, Maruzza makes it clear before they are even married that appearance

cannot be the only tenant of their relationship. Now that the power dynamic between the two has been balanced, each having sacrificed for the other, we might assume that their marriage will be a safe one: Maruzza has displayed her power and he has submitted, seeing her for more than her looks, with the hope that they might age together in peace.

Both *The Maiden with the Seven Veils* and *The Green Bird* express the anxiety of a changing appearance in a relationship. These stories express the fears of an aging relationship: if you left your maiden in the wilderness and came back to find her appearance monumentally changed, these stories ask, would you marry her anyway, or would you be so blind as to not fail to recognize her? The differing fates of the princes clearly presents which answer is right and punishment-free, and that such a clear formula for narrative reward exists exhibits that safety in marriage for men is not hard to come by. For the maidens of both stories, however, the anxiety runs deeper, revealing fears that as you age, it's possible that your husband could one day simply cease to recognize you and leave you vulnerable. For both maidens and the slave woman, safety in these narratives and in real life is based on appearance: beauty leads to marriage, and marriage, we hope, leads to safety. This beauty-as-currency model and its weaknesses highlight the anxieties of women whose temporary transformations reveal the potential insecurities of their marriages, emphasizing the conflict of Gonzenbach's collection: stories in which women are neither completely empowered nor disempowered, but looking to find safety within an unforgiving patriarchal power structure.

### **The Narrative Power of the Older Woman: *Beautiful Angiola* and *Maria and Her Brother***

*Beautiful Angiola* and *Maria and Her Brother* examine the intergenerational relationship between women. The relationship between young women and older women—often cast as witches and step-mothers—is fraught, largely consisting of a power struggle that is saturated

with competition and jealousy. It is so extreme that, with few exceptions, the only time an older woman assists a younger woman is if they are related by blood. This competitive relationship is not unique to Gonzenbach, but in a collection so invested in the power of appearances, the conflict between older and younger women is elevated. Alison Lurie notes that in Victorian fairy tales, it is only the maidens who are passive and helpless, and that “in the older generation, women often have more power and are more active than men” (Lurie, *Witches and Fairies* n.p.), and indeed, in these two stories the women with the most power are not maidens or princes, but older women who derive power from the sidelines. In order to advance their own interest within a patriarchal system, the older women in these stories manipulate the appearance of younger women. This action intercepts the traditional male gaze: the man is not just looking at a younger woman, but is looking at a *version* of her, one that has been altered by a third-party—an older woman—in order to control male decision making. By doing so, these older women are able to manipulate the way men see younger women.

In both of these stories, an older woman takes control over a younger woman’s appearance, superseding the unilateral direction of the traditional male gaze. The man is not looking upon an unadulterated version of a woman, but one that has been strategically changed by an older woman to generate a specific reaction from the man who is looking. These women, therefore, understand how the male gaze operates, weaponizing this knowledge to manipulate what men see. Thus, men’s power becomes their weakness. Further, because older women are no longer susceptible to the sexual desire of the male gaze—their age, in fact, demands that they be ignored by it—this manipulation of gaze happens without the man’s knowledge. Men are powerless to the influence of older women because, according to their limited scope, they cannot even recognize that an older woman exists in their plane of vision. In these two stories, older

women find power on the sidelines: a man is now looking on a young woman who, unbeknownst to him, has been visually changed by an older woman. The man then sees—and, with sight, judges and objectifies—the woman he is gazing on differently, a change that is overseen and controlled by an older woman.

Although this gives older women extraordinary narrative power, it cannot be forgotten that this strength doesn't operate within its own power structures, but operates *inside* the confines of patriarchy. These older women are therefore not subverting the power of the male gaze, but are rather finding power while working within the oppressive male paradigm. Some might argue that the fact that the power of older women must operate within the paradigm of patriarchy only heightens the power of the male gaze. This, they might say, is the concept of self-surveillance, of the idea of the panopticon, to the extreme: the restrictions and rules of patriarchy—defining what beauty is, what marriage eligibility is—are perpetuated not only by men, but even by the actions of older women. Although it would be ideal for older women to find agency within a non-gendered power structure, however, such a hope is simply impossible, especially in nineteenth-century Sicily. If existing outside of the paradigm is not an option, then these stories present scenarios in which older women can seize power within the male paradigm. By doing so, older women are able to find their own source of power within an oppressive system. Despite being marginalized by both age and gender, older women, by manipulating the appearance of young women, are able to gain agency and power within the hegemony of the male gaze.

*Beautiful Angiola* begins with three pregnant women who go searching for jujubes—a berry-like fruit—in the neighboring garden owned by a witch. One woman is caught by the witch, and is let go on the condition that she will give the witch her baby when it turns seven.

The woman gives birth to a daughter named Angiola. When Angiola is six, the witch, disguised as an aunt, pesters her to remind her mother of her promise, but her mother, frightened, instructs Angiola to tell the witch she forgot. This continues for several days, until the witch bites off a chunk of Angiola's finger, and Angiola's mother is forced to give her daughter to the witch. Angiola is taken to a tower with no doors and only one window, the witch only able to reach her by climbing through the window via Angiola's braids. A prince sees this done and tricks Angiola to let him up, and soon he convinces Angiola to run away with him and be married. Although Angiola bribes all of the inanimate objects to hold her confidence, the broom betrays her (having not been bribed) and tells the witch where Angiola has gone. The witch chases after the pair, and although Angiola puts up a very good fight against her with magic balls, the witch catches up to her and curses her face into that of a dog. The prince, panicked, tells Angiola that he can't present her to his parents any more, and takes her to live in a cottage. Her dog, seeing her distress, goes back to the witch to convince her to change back Angiola's face, and after much flattery, the witch is convinced. Angiola's dog face disappears and she is married (47-52).

The underlying themes of *Beautiful Angiola* are familiar. Similar to Maruzza in *The Green Bird*, Angiola is locked away from the world and its dangers—chiefly, we are to assume, the danger of strange men—and is allowed limited contact with the outside world. In addition, the prince's anxiety and reluctance to marry an ugly woman is similar to the panic of Maruzza's suitor. The transformation of the maiden's face to that of a dog is also reminiscent of Jorinda's transformation into a nightingale by the witch in the Grimms' *Jorinda and Joringel*. The ways in which *Beautiful Angiola* deviate from these similarities, however, points to the narrative impact that older women can create.



First, the issue of isolation. As mentioned above, this story is certainly not the only one to feature a woman who is locked away from society. From classics like *Sleeping Beauty* to the aforementioned *The Green Bird*, it is common for young women in fairy tales to be kept in isolated confinement as a means of protection. Despite the fact that isolation always fails, that men find a way in and that parents cannot consistently protect their daughters, fairy tales consistently assume that the best option to ensure a woman's safety from a dangerous world is to lock her away. Some of this thinking is rooted in reality: this chapter has already discussed the prevalence of abduction in Sicily, and therefore the threat that a strange man might crawl through a woman's window and take her away is based on a very real fear. This story is unusual, however, in that the supposed threat that warrants Angiola's isolation is unknown; there is no prophecy, there is no war, there is only the unpredictable danger of everyday life. In addition, the presence of a father or another protective male figure who might order this confinement is entirely absent from the story, leaving Angiola to be locked away by another woman. The lack of explanation and motivation concerning Angiola's captivity is unusual, and gives the most power to the witch. She decides what the dangers are, where they reside, and how best to protect Angiola from them.

The nature of Angiola's transformation is also unusual, as it is the only female transformation discussed thus far that transforms the woman into a grotesque figure. All of the stories discussed in this thesis thus far that include a female animal transformation are of women changing into beautiful, feminine birds: a white dove in *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils*, a nightingale in *Jorinda and Joringel*, disguising as a bird in *Fitcher's Bird*, and a white duck in *The White Bride and the Black Bride*. Therefore, the fact that Angiola is transformed into a dog is highly significant. In contrast to delicate white birds, a dog can be wild, uncivilized,

masculine, and dangerous; everything, in essence, that a woman should avoid being. It is an animal so grotesque that her suitor can no longer marry her, it is a shape so ugly that she must now resume a life of isolation. In her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed analyzes the role of grotesque women in horror movies such as *The Exorcist*, *Carrie*, and *Psycho*, and although her argument concerns modern film, her conclusion is useful to breaking down the significance of Angiola's transformation: "the presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity." (Creed 7) Angiola's transformation, therefore, is reflective not of a woman's fears, but the male fears seen in previous chapters: that the woman of your desire might evolve into something visually horrific. The witch allows Angiola to retain her beautiful, human form all while she is held in captivity, and it is only once she is removed from the witch's custody, only once she is released into the male gaze and into the wider world, that she transforms her into something grotesque. Thus, the transformation does not reflect the witch's desires—she doesn't force Angiola to return to living with her, nor does she gain anything from this transformation—but rather it illuminates male fears of female transformation.

When Angiola is living with the witch, removed from the male gaze, her appearance doesn't matter because no-one of importance is looking at her. Her life will continue just the same in isolation if she looks like a dog or not. Once someone of marital significance is looking at her, the witch transforms her into something undesirable to remove her from the marriage market, successfully manipulating the prince by relying on the male weakness of valuing appearance above all else. Thus, the witch is successful in challenging the traditional power structures of looker vs. object that Mulvey and Creed discuss, positioning herself in an active

role of power, and situating the prince in the passive role of spectatorship. The witch in *Beautiful Angiola* is in complete control of Angiola's life, marriage, and how the prince sees her, and when she finally transforms Angiola back into a woman, she does so at her leisure and loses no power of her own. The witch understands what it is that the prince wants to see, and manipulates this expectation as she sees fit. This, then, is highly remarkable: despite being disenfranchised by both her gender and her age, the witch yields extraordinary narrative power, influencing Angiola is seen by men and deciding whether or not she will be beautiful. It is the witch who determines Angiola's safety in marriage.

Similarly, the most powerful woman in *Maria and Her Brother* is not its title character, but the step-mother. The story begins with a father remarrying, choosing for his bride a peasant woman who has an ugly daughter with only one eye. The step-mother hates her step-daughter Maria because she is so beautiful, and looks for ways to cause her ruin. She finally convinces her husband to abandon his children—daughter Maria and son Peppe—in the woods, and although he is reluctant, he does so, tricking his children into thinking he's still there. Maria, however, uses her smarts and finds their way back to the house with a trail. This happens two more times, but the second time, the bran that Maria leaves to mark their path blows away and they cannot find their way back. Peppe becomes thirsty and wants to drink from the brook, but the brooks he encounters threaten to turn him into an animal. Finally, the third brook says that if he drinks from it, Maria will become more beautiful and Peppe will become a sheep, and although she doesn't want him to drink, he does.

They live in the forest for years, until one day a king goes hunting and his dog finds the sibling pair in a cave. The king falls in love with Maria, and they go back to the castle with sheep Peppe to be married. The sheep follows Maria everywhere and sleeps in her room, and

meanwhile, the step-mother's heart becomes filled with envy. When Maria is about to give birth, she tricks her into opening the window right above the sea and pushes her into it, where she is immediately swallowed by a shark. The step-mother then puts the queen's nightgown on her own daughter, and when the king returns, she convinces him that his wife (her step-daughter in disguise) has been altered because the sheep knocked out her eye. The king sends the sheep to a dungeon, where he talks to his sister via song. The king recognizes Maria's voice, and he rescues her via her instructions, pulling her out of the shark's jaw with a hook. The rescued queen gives birth to a boy, and the king cuts off the step-sister's head, sending it to the mother disguised as tuna. She recognizes it and demands the king for her daughter back, but he throws the mother into boiling water (130-137).

As with *Beautiful Angiola, Maria and Her Brother* is a story that assigns the most power and narrative influence to an older woman, in this case a step-mother. From the beginning of the story the step-mother wields tremendous power, even able to convince her husband to abandon his own children in the woods. This amount of power is highly unusual: as seen in the historical introduction, women in this time were typically disempowered by marriage rather than able to yield influence over their husbands. As such, we can deduce that the step-mother's power and motivations are of grand proportions, surpassing traditional power structures of obedience and compliance for the gain of her own daughter. She is a power player, defying what might have been historically possible by women in order to see her daughter married. Nothing an evil step-mother can ever do will effectively mask the inferiority of her own daughter, but this one gets alarmingly close to securing her daughter's happy ending.

The step-mother's motivation is rooted in the power of gaze: who sees whom, and what it is that the looker is seeing. In a world in which marriage is perhaps the most viable option to

safety, both physically and societally, the step-mother's desire to see her daughter protected by any means necessary is understandable. A one-eyed woman from low social status will almost certainly remain unmarried, developing into a spinster dependent on the money and home of her parents. Once the step-mother feels that her own daughter's marriage potential is threatened by the beauty of Maria, so much so that allowing Maria to share the same space as her daughter will ruin her chances at marriage, she takes control and solves the problem by removing Maria from the same physical location as her daughter. If a suitor comes to the house, he will now be unable to compare Maria's looks to those of the step-daughter. If such a comparison were available, then the step-daughter's ugliness would be accentuated, ruining her chances at marriage. In the absence of such a juxtaposition, however, the male gaze might be more forgiving to the step-daughter's appearance, and her chance for marriage would be renewed. Thus, the step-mother has exhibited control over the male gaze by intercepting what it is that he is seeing: she may not be able to change her daughter's appearance, but she is able to change how she will be viewed in a man's eyes by eliminating any beautiful comparison. Although she is still working within the paradigm of the male gaze—traditional interpretations of beauty, female competition, etc.—she is able to manipulate the male gaze to her family's advantage.

Then, at the end of the story, the step-mother performs this act of mediation again. Much like the slave in *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* convinces the prince that she is his bride, albeit physically altered, the step-mother in this story persuades the king that the disfigured woman he is viewing is the same one he has always seen, just changed. Thus, the step-mother has seized power again over the male gaze; through her own power of verbal persuasion, she changes, in the prince's eyes, what he is looking at. The power of the prince's gaze, therefore, no longer resides in trusting his own vision, but rather relies on the verbal

confirmation of the step-mother. If the step-daughter's ugliness likens her to an animal—a subaltern, undesirable body—then her mother's ability to intercept the male gaze humanizes her daughter, lifting her from a life of destitution and into the marriage market, positioning her next to royalty itself.

Further, an older woman's power in *Maria and Her Brother* is also noteworthy in its added dimension of reflection. In her book *Imaging Desire*, Mary Kelly discusses the multifaceted functions of looking, arguing that in looking, “the woman, not exclusively, but more emphatically, is caught in a self-reflexive web of identifications—Am I like that? Was I like that?...She is no longer surveying the image but her own reflection in it, hoping to catch a glimpse of herself as others see her.” (Kelly 139) This reflective nature of viewing is especially pertinent to mothers, who fear that as their children age, they will no longer be like their mother (137). Therefore, the step-mother's desire and success in changing her daughter's perception in the eyes of men also reflect her own desire for beauty confirmation. When she looks at her daughter's ugliness, the step-mother sees not only how her daughter is viewed by men, but also herself: she sees a woman who was once a part of her, who looks like her, and who also represents how she *could* have looked had things gone differently for herself. In looking at her daughter, the step-mother sees both her successes and failures as a mother, and therefore as a woman. By changing how her daughter is viewed by men and the world, the step-mother is also able to reclaim her own power of viewing: the daughter that she looks upon is no longer a failure or undesirable, but has the potential to be married, to be a queen.

Both *Beautiful Angiola* and *Maria and Her Brother* exhibit the narrative power of older women, figures who are largely marginalized both societally and within most narratives. It should not be forgotten that both the witch and the step-mother in these stories are cast as villains

with unhappy, and, in the case of the step-mother, punitive, endings. Just as the slave woman is unable to escape the narrative safely, the step-mother's reach for power is met with harm and punishment. These are not women who are allowed to be fully empowered within their narrative—as, we will see, powerful women in Aulnoy's stories are—but that they hold such power at all points to their substantial narrative influence. Despite this pressure to be powerless, the witch and step-mother wield extraordinary power during the story. They manipulate the male gaze when they want to and how they want to: the witch of *Beautiful Angiola* taking advantage of male desires for her own gain, and the step-mother of *Maria and Her Brother* mediating the male gaze for the success of her daughter. Further, the step-mother gains the additional power of also impacting her own reflective gaze, altering how her daughter is viewed in order to change how she sees herself. These are women who understand the power of appearances in marriage, and understand it so well that they can realize and bring to life men's fears of changing female appearances for their own gain. In presenting such narratives, Gonzebach offers a narrative possibility of female agency not seen widely in other types of literature, let alone fairy tales.

### **Benefits of Beastliness: *Prince Scursuni***

Whereas *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils*, *The Green Bird*, *Beautiful Angiola*, and *Maria and Her Brother* center around appearance-based marriages, unions in which men fall in love with beauty and out of love with ugliness, *Prince Scursuni* offers a marriage that functions apart from appearances. It begins, yet again, with infertility: a woman wishes for a son, even if he is a serpent. She becomes pregnant, but when it is time to deliver her child, the midwife falls down dead as soon as she enters the room. This happens again and again with other women who try to help the queen. A young woman, a shoemaker's daughter, is sent to the queen by her horrible step-mother, but receives instruction from her mother's spirit on how to help the

queen without dying. She delivers the baby, who is born a large snake. The snake-child continues to grow, until he asks his mother for a wife. Although his mother doesn't want to, claiming that no-one will want to take him, she brings him a wife anyway. At night he strips off his snake skin and is transformed into a handsome man, but when he learns that she is only the daughter of a weaver, he slips back into his snake skin and stings her to death. This repeats with several more low-class maidens: each morning, the mother arrives back to the room to find the maiden stretched dead on the bed.

The shoemaker's daughter is sent, and her mother's spirit instructs her to lie and tell the prince she is the daughter of a great prince. She does so, and they sleep peacefully until the next morning, when he slips back into his snake skin. They decide to marry. For months they live together, and she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, whom they hide from the king and queen. The queen, however, finds the son, and asks the shoemaker's daughter how to break her son's curse. The maiden asks the son, and he instructs her on the steps, the last of which is to burn the snake skin and hold him tightly so he will not throw himself into the fire. The maiden and the queen perform the tasks, and the son is released from his curse. The maiden reveals her lower social status, but they marry anyway because she was the one to defeat the curse (Gonzenbach 123-129).

At first glance, *Prince Scursuni* is a typical "beast as bridegroom" trope, akin to other familiar stories like *Beauty and the Beast*. The Gonzenbach version is nuanced, however, providing a deceptively complicated story. First, the beast: it seems curious that our Prince Scursuni is cursed at birth, assuming the shape of a monster not as a fault of his own, but because of his mother's desire to have a child—he explains to the shoemaker's daughter, "A curse has been placed on me. It was caused by my mother when she wished for a son, even if she were to



give birth to a scursuni.” (128) This is no small curse, for snakes were associated with a special kind of danger; in Sicilian folklore the snake was regarded very dangerous, paralyzing anyone who looks into their eyes (Zipes 569), and a scursuni in particular is a poisonous grass snake (123, footnote). As with other similar stories, such as the Grimms’ *The Three Sisters*, the prince’s animalism acts as a thinly veiled metaphor for masculine violence. With the skin on, he is a beast: killing easily and often, abandoning reason to satisfy his own desires. He removes the skin and exposes his vulnerability only sparingly, waiting until he finds the suitable maiden who is worthy of this side of himself. When the time comes to divest himself of his skin, he instructs the maiden that someone must burn the skin quickly and to immediately cover him in a robe and hold him tightly, otherwise he will throw himself into the fire (Gonzenbach 129), implying a dormant desire to stay connected with his animalistic, violent side, so much so that he has no ability to physically control his own impulses on the matter. This quality of the skin—providing an excuse for haphazard and gruesome violence, to which the prince feels a strong attachment—is congruent with the historical attitude towards masculine violence.

In the nineteenth century, a Sicilian housewife was expected to deal with such violent outbursts regularly. Salvatore Salomone-Marino writes that she waits “to be blamed openly when the hoped-for effect is missing or has been the opposite...[her husband] won’t admit he is wrong because he does not intend to lessen his authority in any way,” (Salomone-Marino 41) and the Jacini report, as mentioned in the introduction, includes the statement that men could be expected to abduct women in an effort to marry them (Cook 635). The animal form, therefore, is not only the reflection of a man’s inner violence, but is also the excuse for such brutality, a desired-for cover that replaces rationality with violent passion.

The role of the shoemaker's daughter, however, complicates the story. Her resilience, survival, and eventual marital success is remarkable, especially when contrasted against the high concentration of female death that pollutes *Prince Scursuni*, from the midwives to the potential spouses, as well as the spirit of the shoemaker's daughter's mother. She survives dangerous situations twice, first the birth of the prince and then his marriage proposal, speaking not only to a class inversion of the peasant saving the nobility, but also to her own individual heroism. Further, she is an unusual heroine: that she was old enough to be present for the prince's birth means that she is significantly older than he is, and though she is initially described as "very beautiful," that she is so much older than the prince and that there are no descriptions of her appearance as an adult implies that she is likely not as spectacularly beautiful as maidens in fairy tales typically are. She is also an unusual heroine because of her class: as a shoemaker's daughter she is one of the only peasant women in Gonzenbach's collection who marries nobility. In the absence of extraordinary beauty or belonging to the noble class, the daughter proves her worth from her talents: she is resourceful and brave and strong, all qualities that are based on internal rather than external worth. Their relationship is based on *value*: despite her lower class, she is the only one who can tame his animalism. She is right for him, and therefore gives him the worth of community, of marriage, of family, and by proving this value, she is allowed to live. This is the closest we see in Gonzenbach's stories to a companionate marriage, a union that transcends appearances and focuses instead on value.

For exhibiting extraordinary internal characteristics, the shoemaker's daughter is not only rewarded with a profitable marriage, but also with a marriage that seems perhaps the safest out of all the unions in this chapter. By acknowledging his beastliness upfront in taking the form of a snake, the prince reveals himself at his most dangerous, his most aggressive, and by marrying

him in his animal form, the daughter therefore knows exactly what she is getting herself into. There is no fear of a dormant beastly violence that could emerge later in their marriage—a fear that is not eliminated in other stories—instead, the potential animal is seen immediately. Further, from the burning of the snakeskin, it can be deduced that this animal part of the prince has been eliminated, meaning that their marriage will now be forever free of violence. If all men have the potential to be beasts, then perhaps the safest option is to marry a man who wears his beastliness out in the open. An exposed animalism, *Prince Scursuni* invites us to think, is safer than a dormant one.

From both sides, this relationship exists outside the confines of vision and gaze, as both parties are not what they appear from the first glance: the shoemaker's daughter masquerading as nobility, and the man that lies beneath the snakeskin. In her essay "In the Shadows of the Periphery: Italian Women in the Nineteenth Century," Donna Gabaccia notes that peasant women were "invisible not only as women, but also as poor, illiterate rural dwellers, as agricultural workers and peasants, and as residents of a region that became at most a minor power among Western nations." (Gabaccia 167) It therefore seems fitting that in order for the shoemaker's daughter to transcend her class, she must enter a romantic situation in which the power of vision is eliminated. The shoemaker's daughter lies to transform herself from peasant to noblewoman, uses the power of speech to alter the prince's perception and therefore what he sees when he looks at her. The prince, meanwhile, is presented to the shoemaker's daughter as a beast but transforms into a human, and then father and husband, through her actions and her love. She is not expected to take the prince at face value, and by the time he learns of her true nature, it doesn't matter that she is not who he thought either. The marriage of *Prince Scursuni* manages to sidestep the confines of appearances altogether, suggesting that the prospect of

individual value and companionate love can overpower the other limiting factors such as class or physical form.

## **Conclusion**

These five stories from Laura Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen* exhibit not only a wider range of gender roles than is typically found in fairy tales of the time, but also what is possible when women's stories are told free of nationalist agendas. Whereas the Grimms are invested in defining the appropriate, subservient role of women in the nation, Gonzenbach is focused on imagining safer roles for women within the patriarchal system they live in. In some stories, the female body is presented in crisis, and it is her suitor's reaction to this body—horror or forgiveness—that determines *his* fate within the story. In these moments, even though the power of the male gaze is dominant, Maruzza's successful revenge and the narrative safety of the prince in *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils* suggests that young women are, to an extent, able to have agency over their representation in the male gaze. Other stories present older women with the narrative power to change how men view young women, gaining narrative power despite hegemony of the male gaze. Lastly, Gonzenbach invites the reader to consider that the safest marriage of all is one where the potential for beastliness is acknowledged rather than hidden, and where the importance of appearances is trumped by a woman's personal worth and mutual companionship.

All of these stories present women with unusual power, and although not all of the women are rewarded, the fact that the stories are published at all suggests a proto-feminist mentality that is struggling to find its place in a male-dominated society. Gonzenbach's fidelity to the world of her female sources, including the patriarchal system in which they lived, may account for the comparatively lesser degree of proto-feminist values as opposed to what we find

in the imaginative stories of Aulnoy, but they are certainly more committed to female agency and independence than the stories told by the Grimms.

This, then, is what is possible when women's folk tales are told by women, apart from the nationalist projects and editorial polishes that efface female agency, apart from the narrative restrictions on women as gendered pawns of the nation. Gonzenbach is a woman ready to listen to other women, and it makes us wonder what German women might have told us if they were allowed to speak apart from such nationalist restraints. Although the building of the nation leaves little allowance for a woman's independent voice, the stories collected by Laura Gonzenbach value this voice on the page, one that will be passed down to future generations for daughters to be inspired by.

## Chapter Four

### Girls Who Run the World: Imagined Societies

Although the living conditions for women in seventeenth-century France were no more ideal than in the nineteenth century of the Grimms and Gonzenbach, the invented tales of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy imagine a world in which women enjoy freedoms that far exceed the ones they were allotted in their historical time period. The stories in her volumes *Les Contes des Fées* (Tales of Fairies, 1697), and *Les Contes Nouveaux, ou les Fées à la mode* (New Tales, or Fashionable Fairies, 1698), depict complicated characters, both male and female, who explore a wide range of emotions, reactions, and motivations, including animal transformations that are similarly diverse. Her proto-feminist collection is the product of an uncensored and unmediated woman, one who imagines a world far more fantastic than the one at hand.

#### Historical Introduction

The France in which Aulnoy wrote her fairy tales was one in crisis and significant change, and before a thorough analysis of her stories can be conducted, we first need to take a detour through the historical and political context in which she was writing. The introduction of new marriage laws meant that women's rights, already very minimal, were being further restricted. Education for women was not readily available, protected by restrictions and taboos designed to preserve masculine superiority and privately directed modes of schooling (Gibson 40). If a woman was lucky or bold enough to receive an education, it was “despite society, rather than with its assistance or approval.” (39) The schooling that a woman might receive was likely from other women—such as charitable ladies who financed and ran classes for young girls, mothers, nuns, etc.—and if a woman was to make her love for learning public, then she was met

with public “irony, ridicule, and the inevitable reminder that a woman’s most fitting occupation in life was to school herself to catch and retain a husband.” (40) Although the prospects for single women were bleak, single women could find solace in convents: referred to as “spinster clusters,” convents could provide single women a place to pool resources and skills and form a substitute family, separate from a husband or parents (Hufton and Tallet 75). Indeed, such a colony might have been the best hope for women, as the newly written laws concerning marriage and childbirth put them at the utmost risk.

As an institution, marriage was not designed for pleasure, but was considered joyless, a “loveless estate” and a family matter concerned with acquiring financial advantages, heirs, and name (Gibson 41-43). Much like Marie-Catherine’s marriage to the baron, marriage in the seventeenth-century among elites was a functional one, a transaction that was typically negotiated by third parties, vetted and approved by the church and law, and designed to unite titles, estates, or fortunes, holding the single end-goal of procreation (58). This kind of sterile marriage was further complicated by the concept of the marriage pact. A series of laws concerning marital consent, the marriage pact served to give parents the largest amount of power in arranging marriages for their children. This was effective in lessening the power of the church to condone marriage, and favored instead the power of the newly rising *noblesse de robe*, and was successful in not only outlawing clandestine marriage, but also in restricting women’s rights to dangerous lengths.<sup>11</sup> The 1556 French Parlement passed a statute that dictated persons who married without parental support could be deprived of family support and disinherited, and lengthened the age of minority from 20 to 30 years for males, and 17 to 25 years for females (Hanely 56). In 1578, the Ordinance of Blois enacted further restrictions on marriage, such as the

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<sup>11</sup> Translated to mean “nobles of the robe,” the *noblesse de robe* were French aristocrats whose rank (and therefore a kind of nobility) came not from birth, but from holding certain posts. This positioned them in opposition to the *noblesse d’épée*, “nobles of the sword” or old nobility, whose rank came from a family history, usually knighthood.

law that persons who married without parental approval would be charged with the crime of *rapt de violence* (forced abduction) or *rapt de séduction* (willing elopement), and declared the crime of “rapt” a capital offense punishable by death (57). By 1639, Parlement registered a decree that summarized all of the marriage provisions of the last hundred years and added still more, the most important of which required parental consent—on threat of disinheritance—regardless of the age of the persons, making minority age irrelevant (57).

The laws of the marriage pact also limited a woman’s path for social mobility. Whereas earlier church law regulating marriage protected widows, allowing them to marry young men to facilitate their rise in the world, the marriage pact of 1556 allowed a husband to live off a woman’s assets long enough to get a start in life, then abandon his wife and children to find a better marriage opportunity for himself. This confined young women to the trap of upwardly mobile marriages to young men with dowries, leaving them morally ruined with a dowry severely depleted by fines, often sent to a convent, and was denied future marriage prospects (Hanley 63).

These frightening provisions extended not only to marriage but to childbirth as well. The 1556 Parlement forbade women to hide a pregnancy or to deliver a newborn secretly, requiring women to declare a pregnancy officially and to give birth before multiple witnesses. If she did not and delivered a dead child, she would be charged with the crime of murder and would be punished with death as an example to others (56). In a world that witnessed a high concentration of infant mortality—in 1740 an estimated 30% of newborns in France died before their first birthday—such a law made illicit sex a dangerous game (Pison n.p). This law also meant that childbirth as an act became heavily regulated, aiming to prevent abortion, infanticide and, by extension, secret marriage. This surveillance was performed by professional midwives—a



licensed corporate group—which meant that women were now of the practice of policing the actions of other women in service of family-state priorities (Hanley 63). Further, the approach to childrearing in the seventeenth century was not one of affection; on the contrary, it reflected the kind of physical and emotional distance that was exhibited between the mother and father (Gibson 82).

In essence, the laws and interests of the marriage pact reflected the shifting priorities and power structures of France, favoring the ideologies of the *noblesse de robe* instead of the church or other nobility. The restrictions on marriage—that it required public notice and parental consent—combined with the dangers of disinheritance, being prosecuted in the parlement for the crime of *rapt*, or being prosecuted for murder for delivering a dead secret child, meant that illicit sex was, in nearly every way, very risky (Hanley 58). Although these changes in marriage law impacted all of youth, it is clear that women paid the highest price for clandestine marriage. The combination of restrictive laws and oppressive restriction “bent women in an eternally submissive posture before the stronger sex,” as dependent and helpless “as vines.” (Gibson 41) The laws created a world in which human passion “spelled social, economic, and emotional ruin” (Hanley 63), in which women lived in fear and were under constant surveillance from not only their parents and from the state, but also from other women.

The state of marriage was not the only concept in flux, however, for concepts of politics, nobility, and religion were also in crisis. The end of the sixteenth century witnessed a political and social collapse referred to as the French Wars of Religion. Beginning with the massacre at Vassy in 1562 and concluding with the peace of Alais in 1629, the French Wars of Religion were a period of brutal fighting conducted primarily between French Catholics and Protestants (Huguenots) over religious and political beliefs (Holt 1-2). The best known incident in this

conflict was the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre, a series of assassinations and Catholic mob violence—including the coordinated murder of several dozen Huguenot leaders, a three-day wave of killings in Paris, and a wave of provincial massacres—that left thousands dead (82). Modern counts estimate the death toll of the French Wars of Religion to be between two and four million people (Knecht 91). As France transitioned from the nobility of the late Middle Ages, it was a country in the midst of great crisis, full of “kidnappings, drownings, massacres, and assassinations.” (Bitton 3) The rise of a French nationalism, therefore, depended on forgetting the violence which bonded its people to begin with, ignoring that its Catholics united over the bodies of dead Protestants.

In this time, the role of nobility was also in crisis. Nobles experienced a decline of income because of the price revolution, now living on only 500 to 1,000 livres a year, and many were in debt. Others were in a state of unemployment, as changes in the nature of warfare lessened the importance of mounted warriors and transformed the constitution of armies, giving noblemen less of an opportunity to spend time in military service (Bitton 3). In addition, there was much debate and anxiety about just what constituted a nobility, as non-noblemen were advancing into noble ranks. Roturiers (ordinary people) were the beneficiaries of active upward social mobility, now able to buy aristocratic estates and then assume an aristocratic manner of living: avoiding paying the *taille* (a tax on common people from the king), establishing marriage connections with noble families, and eventually becoming accepted as a real nobleman (94). Many viewed this shift as the bastardization of nobility, citing a confusion of ranks within the nobility and the increase of children from mixed marriages (92-93). This prompted lawyer and officer, bailli of Vertus (a king's administrative representative), François de L'Alouëte to divide the noble class in 1577 into those who were *born* nobles versus those who were *made* nobles

(103). Thus, intense jealousy grew between the old *noblesse d'épée* and the new *noblesse de robe*, as the former struggled to keep separate from the latter, who so wanted to join their ranks (116). By the time Aulnoy was writing her stories, the reign of King Louis XIV was in full excessive swing. The aristocratic “state of mind” that was being embraced was reminiscent of the earlier periods of noble anxiety and unrest as described above, a state in flux about who they were, what they stood for, and who was in power (Smith 26).

This crisis in nobility and religion also had a significant impact on masculinity and gender relations. Long argues that as women gained power and visibility, masculinity was gradually becoming destabilized by a growing group of female intellectuals—most notably the *querelle des femmes*, discussed below, as well as female authors such as Louis Labé and Clémence de Bourges—and the accession of women to political power, such as Catherine de Médici of France and Elizabeth I of England (Long xi). The rise of these powerful women meant that women were now surpassing their socially defined roles to wield power that was typically held by men, viewed by many male authors to be a feminine appropriation of political power that was threatening to the social order and emasculating. This can be seen in political pamphlets of the time, which expressed the fear of Catherine de Médici with images of castration and a loss of voice (xii). The political and literary landscape of France was changing shape, and men responded with anxiety and alarm, struggling to find their place in a world that might, they feared, no longer have space for them.

This masculine anxiety was certainly not aided by one of the most fascinating cultural occurrences of the time: the *querelles des femmes*. Literally translated to mean “the quarrels of women,” it is often referred to in English as “the woman question,” referencing a larger connotation of the fight for women’s rights. The *querelles des femmes* were a series of written

debates by two camps over the equality of the sexes and the role of women. One camp, who we now might identify as proto-feminist, argued that because women possess all the same necessary organs as men, they are capable of exactly the same mental processes (Gibson 17). On the opposing side, a camp we might refer to as misogynistic pigs argued against the fight for equality. One man, a duke from Breton, elegantly stated that a woman would be considered sufficiently learned if she could distinguish between her husband's doublet and his shirt (18). Another man is quoted by Catharine Macaulay in 1790 as comparing women to children, in that "a man of sense only trifles with them, plays with them, humors and flatters them, as he does an engaging child, but he neither consults them, nor trusts them in serious matters." (Macaulay 131)

The defenses of the women who belonged to the querelle focused on what might now be called gender, arguing that sexes are culturally, not just biologically, formed. These women fought not only against the idea that women were the "defective sex," but also against the societal pressures on women to fit these expectations (Kelly, *Early Feminist Theory and the 'Querelle des Femmes'* 9). They were largely the daughters of educated men, women in revolt against the fathers who "schooled them for a society they forbade all women to enter." (8) The battle between the camps was of the written word, and the women of the querelle were largely successful in exposing the male bias of learning in its intent to keep women subject to men and in demonstrating how learning was used to create an alternative image of historic female power (28). The work towards equality that these women performed could not have been completed without the social disruption that happened in their time. This emerging feminist theory and its dialogue was able to take place because the new gendered expectations of a new society prompted women to respond not with despair, but with the initiative to imagine a life of possibilities beyond their current circumstances (7). Although this shift in culture meant that

aristocratic women were losing some of their economic, political, and cultural power, this shift allowed a “new class of women” to be created, one which was formed in response to new thoughts about gender in a world when nobility mattered less and domestication mattered more (7).

Lastly, this changing society also meant that the role of literature was shifting. France’s crises of religion and politics meant that, as Hampton argues, one could not “write the French nation because, haunted as it is by discontinuity, violence, and fragmentation, it escapes representation.” (Hampton xi) Instead, literature of the time reflects a community in danger, one which fears the threat of an alien enemy and of the Other (227). This changing world of literature also promoted a new literary venue: the salon. Aulnoy ran and maintained her own fashionable salon, and an understanding of the nature and power of a salon is crucial to understanding both her critical perspective and her rhetorical style. Salons emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to “encourage socializing between the sexes, bring nobles and bourgeois together, and afford opportunities for intellectual speculation.” (Kale 2) For women and writers such as Aulnoy, the salon offered intellectual opportunities that were a far cry from a domestic woman’s life: to “match and sharpen minds,” to meet a variety of people from different professions and backgrounds (Gibson 178), and to be exposed to that which preoccupied French elites, such as politics, literature, art, fashion, and business (Kale 2). Women also critiqued men’s work: prior to publication, male authors would often consult the women of a salon about a letter, for as “creatures of subtlety and delicacy,” they were considered highly qualified to examine the finer points of literature (Gibson 178).

In a time when female learning was limited—Louis XIV had just excluded women from the Royal Academy of Sciences and denounced their role in the Republic of Letters—the salon

gave women not only the opportunity to be intellectually challenged, but to challenge the very gender norms that dictated their lives. Kale argues that the salon as an institution allowed new genres of expression to be possible, freedoms that other literary and political institutions did not. Free from most societal restrictions, the conversations in salons encouraged women to “challenge traditional notions of marriage and maternity, advocate unions based on love, and emphasize the importance of individual autonomy.” (Kale 18) Despite the dangers of womanhood that were so real and prevalent in society, in salons being a woman was not only accepted, but an advantage: it is believed that salons were able to survive for so long because of the decidedly feminine attributes—a luxurious space, feminine governance, a curated guest-list, polite conversation—that it advertised (3). Salons presented a sort of gendered alternate reality, one that is mirrored by the fairy tales Aulnoy told in them. The new social space of the salon made it possible for Aulnoy to write the stories that she did. In its hypothetical absence, it is likely that she would have run into problems of editorial involvement and mediation, and her stories would not exist in the condition that they do.

Lastly, the salon is important because of its relationship with nobility. I have discussed how nobility in seventeenth-century France was in crisis, and the power structures of salons reflect this transformation. The rule of Louis XII and the ministry of Cardinal Mazarin, from 1610 to 1661, has been credited by Kale with standardizing the traditions of the upper class, providing the very setting of feminine literary expression that salons relied upon (Kale 2). By the middle of the 1600s, the most important of the salons—the *précieuses*—emerged when powerful noblewomen ascended to political and military roles, promoting a culture of feminine assertiveness (17). In addition, the social dynamics of a salon—those that encouraged unusual voices— were heavily influenced by the redefinition of nobility, one that considered nobility as a

behavior-based attribute rather than a title from birth, and even encouraged mingling between members of the nobility and the bourgeoisie (25).

I have taken this somewhat long detour through the history of seventeenth-century France because I believe it is crucial to understanding the nature of Aulnoy's tales. The country that Aulnoy lived in and wrote about was one in crisis and flux. Womanhood was far from ideal, policed by emerging laws that gave marital power to parents and kept women in a state of fear of disinheritance or death. Women were given few opportunities for social mobility, and despite phenomena such as "spinster clusters," the relationship between women was largely hostile, competitive, and highly surveilled. The marriages women ended up in were largely ones of convenience, and passionate relationships carried such monumental risks that they bred a society of fear. Nobility, meanwhile, was in a similar state of change, as the definitions of noblemen shifted and, with it, what it meant to be French and what it meant to be a man, all while extraordinary acts of violence occurred across the country as a means of uniting its people. Despite overwhelming pressures otherwise, women were able to find their intellectual voice through written debates such as the *querelle des femmes* and the atmosphere of the salons, which pointed to an incipience of feminist thought and class leveling that might someday be reflected in mainstream society.

Aulnoy's writing reflects the proto-feminist attitudes evident in salons and the *querelle des femmes*, as her heroines exhibit a complexity and independence that is often at odds with the frightening regulations of her historical time-period. As discussed in my introduction, I say proto-feminist because to refer to Aulnoy's work as "feminist" would be anachronistic. Despite a lack of historical feminist context, the themes in Aulnoy's story resemble present day understandings of feminism—female autonomy and agency, an absence of bodily harm towards

women, and men who treat women as peers—that I name it as such. Aulnoy’s fairy tales are the most literary, romantic, and lyrical of the three collections I have analyzed, and because her focus is not nation-building or staying true to a specific population of informants, she is able to use her writing in a way that is unique to this thesis: for pure fiction, and imagining a better world that might lie beyond.

### **Story Introduction**

This chapter will analyze six stories from Madame d’Aulnoy’s *Les Contes des Fées* and *Les Contes Nouveaux, ou les Fées à la mode*. Because there are very few first edition copies of the stories, let alone volumes translated from the French to English, I consulted the 1923 edition *Aulnoy’s Fairy Tales*, a combination of both volumes translated by J.R. Planché in 1855, and cited by Paul Buczkowski as the “first precise English translation” of her tales. Because Planché translated the earliest editions of Aulnoy’s stories that he could find and ventured as little as possible from the original text (Buczkowski 61), I am confident that consulting his edition is as close as I can get to a first edition of Aulnoy’s tales in English.

I examine five stories that engage gender and animal transformations in compelling ways concerning the historical background Aulnoy worked in. First, I explore the role of wild women in *Babirole* and *The Bee and the Orange Tree* to examine moments when uncivilized women roam free. Then, I analyze the power of transformative love and masculine sacrifice in *The Blue Bird*. Lastly, I examine the unusual heroines of *The Green Serpent* and *The White Cat*. All five of these stories imagine a gendered community that far exceeds the one that Aulnoy—and, at times, our own present world—inhabits. Women are granted independence, voice, strength, and, most of all, complexity: a permission to inhabit multiple spheres, to be selfish in addition to loving, to be fearless as well as frightened.



It can be no accident that the most three-dimensional women, the most equality-based male reactions, and the most proto-feminist stories seen in this thesis are from an unedited author. Aulnoy did not need to publish her stories, which she most likely told orally in the female-friendly salon environment, and as such her stories are divorced from the kind of editorial commitment that other female authors might run into, such as Gonzenbach's editorial commitment to Otto Hartwig. Her creation, then, is the true manifestation of women enjoying the simple freedom of an unadulterated voice. Her stories are not collected, like those of Grimm and Gonzenbach, but invented. The result? Stories so intelligent, witty, and complicated, heroines so compelling and three-dimensional, that the only space they can find in society is in fiction.

### **Girls Gone Wild: *Babiole* and *The Bee and the Orange Tree***

*Babiole* and *The Bee and the Orange Tree* have many similarities, the most obvious being that they feature a heroine who, in one way or another, spends a significant amount of her story as nonhuman. *Babiole* begins with a childless queen who is visited by the fairy Fanferluche, who tells her in order to avoid a child that will bring her woe, she must attach a branch of hawthorn to the child's head after she is born. The queen gives birth to a daughter and does as instructed, and the baby princess immediately turns into a monkey. Disgraced and worried that her subjects will think she has given birth to a monster, the queen, on advice from her attendants, deceives her husband that the baby has died. She orders a valet to lock the monkey in a box and throw it into the sea. The valet, tempted by the box's beauty, opens it on the shore, exposing the monkey within just as a chariot arrives bearing the queen's sister and her young son. The sister sees the monkey and the boy demands to keep it, naming her Babiole. The boy grows attached to Babiole and raises her, dressing her like a princess and teaching her to walk on her feet. When she learns to speak on her own accord, however, Babiole is taken away

from the prince to the queen's apartments. Babiole eventually becomes famous as a fascinating talking monkey, and while she grows attached to the prince during his visits, as he grows up he begins to forget her.

The king of the monkeys, Magot, decides to marry Babiole, and sends his ambassadors to profess his love with an elaborate poem and a glass chest. Despite the queen's pleas that marrying Magot would avert a war between their two kingdoms, Babiole does not want to marry him, citing a "disagreeable figure" (Aulnoy 210), and professes her love for the prince instead. He laughs at her proposal, bidding her to marry Magot, and she condemns him for his cruelty. Having refused Magot, Babiole runs away. She dives into a river and meets a wise old man, Biroquoi, who warns her not to lose the glass chest Magot sent her and gives her a tortoise to ride. Although she tries to escape, Babiole is captured by one of Magot's servants soon after her departure from the river.

The servants try to bring Babiole to Magot but become lost, and accidentally bring her to the kingdom where Babiole was born, where the queen believes her daughter is dead and has banned monkeys of any kind. Babiole is in a state of great sadness, as the narrator describes

When unhappiness attains a certain point, nothing further alarms us, even death, perhaps, is looked forward to as a boon. Such was her situation—her heart, tortured by the recollection of the prince, who had despised her, and her mind by the frightful image of King Magot, whose wife she was about to become. (212)

The queen talks to Babiole and eventually realizes the monkey is her daughter, becoming so overcome with joy and relief that she faints. She consults her attendants again about what to do, and when they suggest disposing of the monkey—one attendant remarking, "you must protect your own fame. What would the world think of you if you declared yourself the mother of a monkey infant?" (214)—the queen sobs in despair, eventually deciding to shut Babiole up in a château. Upon hearing of her imminent imprisonment, Babiole flees into the forest. After two

days on her own, she becomes weak from hunger and decides to eat from the glass chest Magot gave her. She eats an olive: oil flows out of it, and when she rubs it over her body, she is transformed back into a human princess. She eats the nut from the box and little people fall out and build her a castle, then a city, which she lives in as ruler.

Word of her beauty travels and many suitors come to visit. One day, two knights fight over her so aggressively that they nearly kill each other, and upon further inspection, she discovers that one of the knights is her cousin, close to death. As she tends to his wounds he begins to fall in love with her so deeply that it causes him physical pain, and she is so horrified at causing his distress that she runs into the woods. She is carried away by the fairy Fanferluche, the very same who transformed her at birth, and is imprisoned inside a glass bottle, where she is so miserable without the prince that she wishes for death. The prince goes looking for her and, with the help of Biroquoi, rescues her with a winged dolphin. She reveals her identity to him and he loves her all the more: “you have been an ape,” he says, “and loved me, I have been so aware of it, and was capable of rejecting the greatest of all blessings!” (220) The story concludes with Babiole reunited with her mother and marrying the prince (203-221).

In another fairy-tale collection, we might expect Babiole to be treated as a subaltern. The animal form that she inhabits is not a white elegant bird, as seen in the stories of Grimm and Gonzenbach, in which women are able to retain their femininity even in animal form, but rather a monkey, something considered more wild and exotic. In addition, as Kathryn Hoffman notes, Babiole is one of the few animal transformations that are explicitly marked as monstrous (Hoffman 69), even by her own mother: quite unlike the queen of Gonzenbach’s *Prince Scursuni*, the queen laments that with Babiole, I have “given birth to a monster!” (Aulnoy 204)

And yet, monkey Babiole is far from beast. When she speaks, she is heralded as a “reasonable creature” (205), and when she encounters a throne upon returning to her kingdom in adulthood, she approaches it “with the air of a sovereign more than that of a captive ape.” (213) Babiole, we are encouraged to believe, suffers from an identity crisis, a mind and body that are wholly incompatible. She laments to the queen, “it has been my misfortune to be born an ape...what I feel when I see myself in a looking-glass, a little ugly black creature...and at the same time knowing that I am not without intelligence, that I possess some taste, refinement, and feeling.” (213) Similarly, and perhaps most poignantly, Babiole goes on to say, “what a difference...between that which I am, and that which I ought to have been.” (214) Babiole possesses all of the characteristics of humanity that society has allowed her: she can talk, dine properly, dress well, and approach her kingdom with grace. Her mind is as civilized as it can be, and her inability to find love for the duration of the story is due to a flaw of her body completely out of her control. She is, as much as she can be, a proper lady unable to reach her full potential.

There are only two situations when Babiole expresses a lack of humanity that mirrors her animal form. First, Babiole loses control of her civility when she is in love with the prince. When she realizes her feelings for him, she becomes distressed at her monkey reflection because it is so at odds with her inner understanding of herself. She breaks mirrors wherever she goes “so that people constantly said, ‘a monkey will always be a monkey: Babiole cannot rid herself of the mischief natural to her species.’” (231) Similarly, in the scene where the prince is in pain, she, back in human form, tears at her hair and “utters wild shrieks.” (216) Such a loss of decorum is marked as animalistic behavior, whoever commits it, and Babiole recognizes it as such: when the prince initially rejects her love when she is still in monkey form, she remarks that it is “well for you that I have not exactly the disposition of an ape; any other than I would have already

scratched out your eyes, bitten off your nose, and torn off your ears, but I abandon you to the reflections that you will one day make on your unworthy conduct.” (210) That Babiole therefore loses control in such a colossal way, despite her knowledge of it being considered animal behavior, suggests that love in this story is an area which surpasses the traditional rules of civility.

Wild behavior is equated to desiring or experiencing love, suggesting that humanity is not defined by learning the artificial rules, like proper dress and food, that Babiole is educated in, but in the most basic human desire: romantic attachment. In experiencing desire without being able to obtain the object of her desire, Babiole succumbs to the animal that people assume her to be, whether she is in monkey form or not, and in its presence, she finds herself fully human. For Babiole, a woman who so desperately wants to be understood for the human she believes herself to be, to lower herself to such animalistic behavior argues that in matters of love—of true love, of wild love—civility and appearances and humanness matter very little. The story invites us to want Babiole to find happiness, and when it is denied to her, a loss of reason seems only natural. Babiole *needs* to be with the object of her desire. In its absence she becomes wild, and in its presence she is tamed. Love, therefore, is an exceptionality powerful thing, prompting individuals to trade decorum and reason for a lack of rationality—to act crazy, to be like an animal.

This line of thinking embraces the clandestine marriage that was being outlawed in the seventeenth century. We saw in the historical review how France progressively eliminated individual choice in marriage, voting in new marriage laws that gave power to parents and increased the risk of secret love to dangerous levels, with the result that the very act of marriage between two people who loved each other was all but being written out of law. Aulnoy herself,

meanwhile, was married at age fifteen or sixteen to a man at least thirty years her senior, likely without her consent (McLeod 92), giving birth to four children in eleven-month intervals (Jasmin 62). For a story to advertise such passionate, wild love in a time in which romantic love was being systematically shut down is therefore highly significant. When romance in marriage was being systematically replaced by laws of control and power, in a moment when women had very little say over who they spent their lives with, Aulnoy imagines a powerful alternative: a world in which a woman could love someone so deeply, so passionately and violently, that even the conventions of civility are thrown out the window.

Second, Babiole's humanity lapses in her belief that she cannot experience familial love and her unfamiliarity to parental affection. When she meets her mother, she throws herself on the queen's neck and becomes "agitated by feelings *then unknown* to her" (emphasis mine), and when she expresses dismay at her animal form, the queen asks "art thou susceptible of love?" to which Babiole "sighed without replying." (213) These moments are heartbreaking: having never felt the love of a parent, Babiole is unable to understand the feelings that overcome her with the queen, and having been rejected by the prince because of her beastly form, she is left to wonder whether she is capable of love at all. This supposed inability, however, says less about Babiole's humanity than it does about her circumstances. Whereas romantic love is something instinctively felt and understood, this exchange with the queen demonstrates that Babiole believes herself unable to follow the required motions of familial love without first being taught. The civilized nature Babiole has previously exhibited suggests that she would be capable of such expressions of love if she had only been exposed to them, much as she had been educated in proper dress. How, we wonder, could we expect anyone, man or beast, to be confident in love if she was never given the opportunity, never exposed to familial affection, and in love with a suitor who laughs

in her face because her body is not in an acceptable form to him. Therefore Babiole's inability to recognize love does not point to her own inhumanity, but rather to the beastliness of the humans around her, those who have denied her such fundamental experiences. It is Babiole who is the most human character in the story: excelling in all tests presented to her, except for the ones denied by the figurative beasts who cannot make allowances for her body.

We are invited to draw this conclusion because of the strategic way that Aulnoy presents the story. If this story had been told by the Grimms, I highly doubt that such a conclusion on Babiole's humanity could be made, for the sympathetic undertones of this story are at complete odds with the way the Grimms restrain female action and experience within the parameters in which they portray emotions, particularly given the nationalist agenda of their project. In a world of marriage pacts and unions of convenience, of disempowering marriage laws and potential death to unwed mothers, in an environment where the relationship between parent and child was cold and distant, a mother could never encourage her child to pursue romantic love, let alone ask the simple, poignant question, "art thou capable of love?" that so emphasizes Babiole's humanity and the inhumanity of others. The story invites us to sympathize with Babiole because we want her to find love, and we cheer when she scolds the prince for his shortsightedness—"our hearts are also unlike," she tells him, "you are an ingrate, for a long time I have suspected it, and I am very foolish to feel an affection for a prince who so little deserves it" (210)—and yet such a proclamation from a real-life seventeenth-century woman could never be uttered without severe, if not fatal, consequences.

That the story invites us to feel sympathy for a monkey at all should be shocking, as writers of the time frequently associated women with animals not to emphasize their humanity, but to explain their lack of reason (Duggan 150). Jacques Olivier, for instance, in his charming

alphabet-book on women’s finer qualities, published in 1665 and entitled *Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes* (Alphabet of the Imperfection and Malice of Women), refers to women in the first three chapters as *A: Très-avide animal* (very hungry animal), *B: Bestiale barathrum, abysme de bestie* (Animal pit: abyss of stupidity) and *C: concupiscence de la chair* (lust of the flesh), and includes equally agreeable drawings on the state of women (Olivier 15, 21, and 26).<sup>12</sup> Further, the concept of a monkey-girl, albeit fantastic and alluring, is also based in history. Women such as Tognina Gonzales (“monkey girl”) and Barbara Urslerin (“the hairy maid”), earned their nicknames from being hypertrichotic, suffering from an abnormal amount of hair growth, and were put on display in freak shows, gawked at like animals as if they were not humans who could feel embarrassment, shame, and loneliness (Hoffman 69). These women were gazed at voyeuristically, a delight like in a museum, and were therefore debased as if they were subhuman. In addition, monkeys were considered to be particularly suspect of deviant desires—many hybrid, monkey-like demons were thought to exist (75).

I point out all of this—the laws of marriage, parenting styles, and the connections between women and animals—to emphasize that the sympathy the story directs towards Babiole, despite her monkey form, and how much we want for her to find love both from the queen and from her prince, is no accident from Aulnoy. Rather, these are intentional artistic choices, ones that defy time and period, and are designed to give us a heroine so advanced that she does not even have to be human to be a strong woman. In the face of an increasingly hostile climate, Aulnoy provides a story that advocates true love and companionate happiness in marriage, a love so powerful that simply feeling it, even without attaining it, reduces us to monkeys. That the story invites the reader to feel such overwhelming sympathy with Babiole points to Aulnoy’s

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<sup>12</sup> For a sample of Olivier’s illustrations, see Appendix.



artistic commitment to eliciting such a reaction, one that operates in direct opposition to her historical climate.

*The Bee and the Orange Tree* begins with a long-childless king and queen who finally welcome the birth of a daughter, Aimée. Their luck goes awry when Aimée is suddenly shipwrecked on an island inhabited by the ogre Ravagio and his wife Tourmentine, who is half-ogre and half-fairy. Tourmentine is stunned by Aimée's beauty and decides to spare her, resolving to raise the baby herself so that she can grow up to marry their son. Fifteen years pass and Aimée's parents believe her dead, and the king asks his brother to send the son most suitable for reigning so that he will have an heir. The king's brother sends his son Aimé, who is shipwrecked on the same island before he can reach the king and queen. Aimée, meanwhile, has been brought up ignorant of civilization: she does not know how to read or write, speaks the language of the ogres, and wears a tiger-skin dress with buckskins and a bow and arrow, ignorant of her beauty and overwhelmed by loneliness. She encounters Aimé on the beach and saves him, and though they cannot understand each other, the pair soon fall in love: "The young prince was astonished at seeing so beautiful a creature, in such savage attire, in so deserted a country. In this mutual astonishment they continued to talk, without being understood by the other; their looks and their actions being the sole interpreters of their thoughts." (Aulnoy 140)

Aimée leads the prince to a cave and ties him up to protect him from the ogres, and she visits him in secret regularity to bring him food. They are each in agony that they cannot be together and in their inability to communicate, and she gives him a turquoise heart of her mother's as a gift. The prince reads the engraving and realizes Aimée's identity, and they continue to visit for days until Aimée is informed she is to marry the ogre. She communicates this to Aimé and they are heartbroken: "he knew neither the roads, nor the means of saving her,

nor did she. They shed tears together, looked at each other, and mutually signified it would be better to die together than to be separated.” (143) Afterwards, Aimée steps on a thorn and is no longer able to visit Aimé, so he sets off to find her. He enters the ogre cave where Ravagio nearly eats him, but Aimée convinces Ravagio to wait until the wedding so that she herself could eat him and follow ogre customs. Aimée continually outsmarts the ogres to save Aimé from being eaten—tricking them into eating their own children instead—and steals Tourmentine’s wand to give herself the power of speech. Finally able to communicate, the couple profess their love to each other, he reveals her true identity, and together they run away.

Followed by Ravagio, Aimée uses the wand to trick the ogre multiple times by transforming herself and Aimé into various objects for disguise (e.g. a bean, him into a boat and her into an old woman, him into a picture and her into a dwarf), and when he gives up looking for the couple, exhausted, Tourmentine goes instead. Frightened by Tourmentine’s wit, Aimée transforms them one final time, herself into a bee and Aimé into an orange tree, and when travelers steal the wand, they are unable to transform back.

A princess named Linda, a young woman who has refused to marry because “she feared she should not be always loved by the person she might choose for a husband,” stumbles upon them. Linda sits beneath the orange tree to pluck a blossom, but Aimée the bee stings her so viciously that she leaves, explaining to Aimé that “all that is yours belongs to me, and that I defend my property when I defend your blossoms.” (152) Linda returns to the orange tree protected by a feather-covered helmet, cuirass, and gauntlets, surrounded by her ladies who are similarly armed. She chops off a branch and blood spurts out; Aimée, panicked, flies to Arabia for a magic salve and heals his “finger.” Both women feel guilt, and Linda sends for a fairy

queen for help, who transforms them back to human form. Aimée and Aimé travel back to their home island and are married (136-155).

Much like *Babiole*, *The Bee and the Orange Tree* features women more independent than their time allowed. When we meet Aimée, she is living such a savage lifestyle that she could be categorized as an animal. Although she has a beautiful female body, the very thing that Babiole desires, she has no ability to speak Aimé's language, and is so isolated from proper society that she does not even recognize her beauty. Despite being uneducated in every sense, however, Aimée exhibits an extraordinary amount of power. She demonstrates dominance over the prince twice: first, when she leaves him in the cave and he falls to her feet in a gesture of romantic passion, "she saw clearly what he meant, but she repulsed him with a little air of severity; and *he felt he must accustom himself betimes to obey her,*" (142, emphasis mine) and then again, when she places a crown on his head to trick Ravagio into eating his own children, Aimé "dared not detain her, however desirous he was of doing so. The respect he had for her, and the fear he had of displeasing her, prevented him." (149) This is remarkable not only for the story's allowance of Aimée's power, but also for Aimé's willingness to mold his behavior—which had been informed by the gendered rules of civilization—to accommodate her dominant personality. This is a man who is not only unafraid of strong women, but is also secure enough in himself to change himself for it to happen—a far cry from the seventeenth-century Frenchmen who issued pamphlets of anxiety over Catherine de Médici.

From the beginning, Aimée is established as a woman in control of herself and others, overcoming gender conventions that she doesn't even know exist and succeeding in getting her way. As is typical in Aulnoy's stories, women get to act: Aimée has undeniable narrative agency. When it comes time to escape the ogres, Aimée is the one to perform the magic, and when she

does so, she transforms herself into an animate thing, such as an old woman, so that she can talk to Ravagio and trick him, but transforms Aimé into mute, inanimate objects, such as a boat. She feels capable of protecting herself against wild animals with her bow and arrow (148), is clad in animal skins like Diana, and when Aimé becomes injured, she does not express a desire to die with him or succumb to an immobile expression of helpless love, but rather flies to Arabia, stating that “she preferred living for him.” (152) Aimée is, to extraordinary lengths, an empowered and powerful woman, even by present-day standards, who knows what she wants and succeeds in getting it.

Although most of Aulnoy’s female characters are women to admire, Aimée is by far the most powerful of them all. Because of her upbringing away from French society, her lack of civilized language means that she is not, by seventeenth-century standards, fully human—Aimé notes that “the rude and barbarous language sounded so badly from her beautiful mouth” (141)—and yet she is not the literal animal that Babirole is. On this island, in the absence of social conventions, there is plain gender equity. Isolated from the real world and its gender prejudices, Aimée is able to realize her full potential, unhindered by the societal restrictions that she might have lived in otherwise. This suggests that gender inequality is not biologically based, but is a result of social conventions. Such an argument is reminiscent of the “nature versus nurture” debate that had just begun with philosophers such as John Locke, and echoes the sentiments of the *querelle des femmes*: that the only thing setting women apart from men is society’s fervent devotion to emphasize gendered difference.

And yet, Aimée has flaws and moments of vulnerability. Much like Babirole, Aimée finds her weakness in romance. Being apart from Aimé makes her “feel faint,” (140) one of the only times that she reveals physical weakness. When she is finally able to communicate with Aimé,

she is insecure in her abilities and fears her inequality, telling him that her “expressions are more simple, but they are not less sincere.” (147) The jealousy that she exhibits against Linda is unfounded and unbecoming and utterly believable. It is a moment so irrational that it speaks to Aimée’s humanity, showing that the strongest of women, even one who can outsmart an ogre under threat of death multiple times, is capable of losing reason and becoming unglued by the most seemingly insignificant of things. Disgusted by her jealousy, Aimé lets out a snarl that is quite unlike the accommodating man he is seen previously to be, noting that

There is a great difference between an accomplished person, richly dressed, and of considerable rank in these parts, and an unfortunate princess, whom you found covered with a tiger’s skin, surrounded by monsters who could only give her coarse and barbarous ideas, and whose beauty is not great enough to enslave you. (152)

That Aulnoy shows us this side of Aimée corroborates my argument that Aulnoy is not only invested in writing strong women, but also *complicated* women, a factor that distinguishes her work as proto-feminist. The goal is not, in other words, to write a perfect woman, but to write women with the believable weaknesses and failures of real women, people who not only summon power in the face of fear, but also whose wild passion can overcome their commitment to logic.

Aimée is not the only strong female character in this story, however, for Linda is also highly significant in this regard. A woman who is not only purposefully single, but also single because she has not found the right person, is borderline science-fiction in comparison to the real lives of women in seventeenth-century France. Linda finds her strength from other women—much like the spinster clusters found in convents—and possesses armor. Most of all, she has the weapon and strength to chop off one of Aimé’s branches. Although I am hesitant to delve into the Freudian topic of castration anxiety, as it seems, to me, to be a topic saturated in heteronormative and sexist fears masquerading as science, I find that I must, for a moment,

digress. The image of a woman in armor chopping off a male appendage is undeniably phallic: Linda is a woman who is so unconcerned with the approval of men that she is able to enact significant violence against one. Further, as discussed in this chapter's historical introduction, men in this time period were already expressing fears of feminine power as castration and, especially, a loss of voice: let us not forget that at the moment of injury, Aimé is a mute, immobile tree. There is clearly a gendered force at play here in which Linda is portrayed as a sort of castrating woman, one who can yield extraordinary power and strength.

But just as Aimée is softened by her love for the prince, Linda is likewise a sympathetic figure. If this story were being told by the Grimms, it is likely that Linda's power would be processed as anxiety: the wound might be more severe, and Linda would almost certainly be punished with death for it. In Aulnoy's story, however, Linda is granted a special kind of heroism: she is the one who summons the fairy who transforms not only the prince but Aimée as well, and it is because of Linda that they are reunited, able to live their happy ending. That Linda isn't mentioned at the story's end suggests that she continued to live amongst her female friends, and that she suffered no violence on account of her actions. Lastly, we are even given a glimpse at her romantic capability and desire: when Aimé is transformed back into a man, Linda "became immovable; she was struck with admiration and so peculiar a feeling for him, that she had already lost her former indifference." (154) If Linda is confronting the same question as Babiole—are you capable of love?—then such a statement confirms that we are not expected to condemn her as a frigid woman or a misandrist—as seen in the Grimm stories, when female independence was nearly always balanced with a loss of magic or brutal physical harm—but are rather invited to think that she is waiting for a companion who will be the right match for her, and until then, has no problem being on her own. Not only is she not punished with physical

harm, death, or a loss of magic, as would likely be her fate in other collections, but Linda is allowed to continue her life just as it was, free of judgement or ridicule or harm.

*Babirole* and *The Bee and the Orange Tree* share more than just wild women. Both stories present women who might typically be marginalized, mocked, or ignored due to circumstances beyond their control and give them extraordinary strength as well as believable weakness. *Babirole* emphasizes that humanity is defined not by literal animalism, but by kindness, love, and affection, that sometimes the most human character in a story can be a monkey-faced girl who finds herself overwhelmingly lonely. Aimée and Linda exhibit that, in the absence of societal pressures, women express a wide range of emotions, from confidence to vulnerability. The strength of these women stands in direct opposition to the historical situation in which they were written, and as such reflect a conscious choice made by Aulnoy to imagine what a differently gendered world could look like. Perhaps, she leads us to think, women are at their most human when they are given the societal allowance to be wild.

### **Transformative Love: *The Blue Bird***

*The Blue Bird*, at first glance, is a story reminiscent of others seen in this thesis, heavily featuring masculine animalism and a cunning and resourceful step-mother who is determined to find success for her unattractive daughter. Despite these themes which seem similar to Grimm and Gonzenbach, however, *The Blue Bird* tells a very different story. It begins with a newly widowed king and his beautiful, fifteen-year-old daughter Florine. His subjects try and fail to console his grief until a veiled, “cunning” widow visits: the pair grieve in tandem, and when the king is exhausted from mourning, the widow removes her veil, exposing her beauty, and the pair are soon married. The new queen sends for her own daughter, named Truitonne for the trout-like red spots on her face, and tries to make her more favorable to the king than his own daughter.

King Charmant visits and the queen tries to trick him into marrying Truitonne by dressing her extravagantly and ignoring Florine. This, however, only emphasizes Truitonne's ugliness, and Charmant soon falls in love with Florine. The queen orders for Florine to be kidnapped and held captive in a tower room, then tricks Charmant into thinking Truitonne is Florine by hiding her in the light of a window. She is successful, and he proposes to Truitonne, thinking it is Florine. Truitonne, disguised by a veil and the dark of night, sets off with Charmant. Charmant realizes his mistake and refuses to marry any but Florine, but Truitonne's fairy godmother Soussio insists, reminding him of his promise. For twenty days Charmant does not talk, eat, sleep, or sit, refusing to marry Truitonne, until Soussio punishes him by transforming him into a blue bird for the sentence of seven years. Agonized, Charmant flies off to find Florine.

Frustrated by her daughter's failure to marry Charmant, the queen vows to make Florine regret her love for the king. She convinces Florine that he has, in fact, married Truitonne, and leaves Florine in a state of despair. Seeking Florine, the blue bird stumbles upon her window and reveals his identity. They rejoice in their reunion, and he brings her gifts of jewels from his palace. Two years continue in this fashion, Florine wearing the jewels at night during his visits and removing them in the day so as to not arouse suspicion. When the queen overhears Florine singing to the blue bird she sends a girl to spy on Florine, who overhears her calling for the blue bird and their professions of love. The queen orders a neighboring cypress tree to be covered with sharp blades, and when the bird approaches, he cuts off his feet and wounds his wings so severely that he cannot visit the princess, and believes it was Florine who has betrayed him in an attempt to make peace with the queen. He is discovered by his best friend, an enchanter, who heals his wounds, while Florine, meanwhile, assumes him dead.



Florine's father the king dies and the people demand that Florine rule. They then revolt against the queen and Truitonne, believing the pair have abused their influence, and stone the queen to death. Rescued, Florine is proclaimed queen and sets off to find Charmant, "quite alone, without anyone's knowing whither she was gone." (Aulnoy 48) The king's enchanter friend debates with Soussio about the fate of Charmant, and although he does not want the king to marry Truitonne, the following agreement is made: Truitonne is brought to King Charmant's palace for a few months so that he can decide whether he wants to marry her, during which time he will resume his human form, and if he refuses Truitonne, he will turn back into a bird.

Florine, disguised as a peasant, searches for Charmant. She is given four magical eggs by a fairy, each of which helps her to find the prince. By the time she reaches his kingdom she is informed by the inhabitants—who, it should be noted, call her a "young slut" because of her disheveled appearance—that Charmant is about to marry Truitonne, and she falls into despair (51). Florine trades a series of valuable gifts for nights in the palace, and although she stays in the cabinet of echoes, which carries sounds up to the king's chamber, her laments against him every night go unheard by the king. Finally he hears her one night and they are reunited in happiness. The king's enchanter friend and the fairy who gave Florine the eggs reappears, bearing the news that they have joined their power to overturn Soussio's, and Florine and Charmant are married. Truitonne is turned into a sow, and the couple live in happiness (30-56).

As is typical in Aulnoy's stories, the lack of violence inflicted on female characters in *The Blue Bird* is remarkable. It's generally the case that an overly-powerful woman's fate involves violence to her body, such as being loaded inside a nail-studded barrel, as we saw in the last chapter. Such violence, however, is significantly absent from *The Blue Bird*. The queen does die, but not out of revenge for ambition and not in bodily humiliation, but for neglecting her

monarchical responsibilities and likely putting her subjects in danger. Despite Truitonne's mean-spirited cruelty, and near-success in inheriting a throne and husband that were not for her, Aulnoy concludes the story with the relatively benign punishment of being transformed into a sow. Although this is hardly something to wish for, when compared to being cooked in boiling oil and then dragged through the city by the tail of a horse, as happened to the slave in Gonzenbach's *The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils*, being transformed into a sow is positively luxurious.

What is most extraordinary about *The Blue Bird*, however, is its treatment of men, offering an emasculating animal transformation and a hero who must sacrifice his identity for love. The majority of animal transformations, both in this thesis and in the fairy tale canon at large, are female, while the male animal transformations—the animal husbands in the Grimms' *The Three Sisters*, the snake in Gonzenbach's *Prince Scursuni*, and Peppe the sheep in *Maria and Her Brother*—are, with the possible exception of Peppe, transformations that emphasize the underlying beastliness in men. These stories are invested in exploring the dormant danger and dominating power of the men whom the women are marrying, embracing the masculine characteristics—aggression, violence, and rage—that are akin to beasts.

The transformation of King Charmant into a bird, therefore, could not be more different. Birds, being delicate, flighty, and romantic, are often reserved for female transformations—the nightingale in *Jordina and Joringel*, for instance, or the dove in *The Maiden with the Seven Veils*—not for a man, and certainly not for a king. At his transformation, the narrator emphasizes his change in size and new feminine adornment: “his legs and feet became black and *diminutive*, and *furnished* with crooked talons; his body *shrinks*—it is all *garnished* with long, *fine*, *thin* feathers.” (37, emphasis mine) As a bird, the king is exposed to a host of dangers: Florine

worries, “who will preserve him from the sportsman? Or from the sharp talons of some eagle or hungry vulture?” (40) In the cage, Charmant suffers a number of near-death experiences. His lack of strength becomes painfully apparent when Florine is in danger, bemoaning “how great his misery to know he was not in a state to defend her!” (43) Most significantly, as a bird, Charmant can no longer rule: his friend explains that “those who would obey a man will not bow to a parrot: those who feared you while a king, surrounded by grandeur and pomp, would be the first to pluck out all your feathers, now you are a little bird.” (47) The cost and stakes of this transformation, therefore, are as high as they possible can be, robbing Charmant of all the facets of his identity that make him a man.

As a bird, Charmant must wrestle with a physical form that is incongruent with the dominance of the male body he has always inhabited. He is no longer strong, he is no longer in power, and he is no longer independent. Thus, this transformation emphasizes not the beastly potential of men, but rather a process of emasculation. This is not the bird of Gonzenbach’s *The Green Bird*, flying around the world, but a bird entrapped, a bird confined to a cage. The bird must be taken care of, he must be protected, he is constantly being overlooked, and he is vulnerable. He is a worry to others and is noted for his beautiful qualities. He cannot even assume his rightful duties as ruler, and, as the harm that comes to his feet and wings emphasizes, he has restricted mobility. Charmant faces, in other words, all the dangers that a seventeenth-century Frenchwoman would be battling on a daily basis: susceptibility to harm, dependency, and being treated as ornamentation.

Once again, that the story invites us to draw such conclusions is a direct result of how Aulnoy tells the tale. If told by the Grimms, the story of the blue bird might read as a warning sign, a worst-case scenario of when women—in this case, a female fairy—have too much power

and, consequently, social structures fall apart and masculinity collapses. The reason behind Charmant's transformation, however, negates such a reading of Aulnoy's tale. Charmant is not transformed accidentally—he is not the victim of some at-birth mishap, such as Babiole or Prince Scursuni, nor is he transformed as punishment for some prior sin, such as the husbands in *The Three Sisters*. Rather, his transformation is intentional: Soussio holds him for days, gives him other options, and finally asks him point-blank if he would like to be punished for seven years instead of marrying Truitonne, to which he says yes.

His punishment, therefore, is a consequence of his fidelity, the evidence of his persevering love for Florine. That feeling such love causes him to be emasculated is a cost that he is willing to pay: just as *Babiole* and *The Bee and the Orange Tree* showed that romantic love is the most powerful source imaginable, *The Blue Bird* demonstrates that love is so strong a force that it overcomes the supposed power of gender roles. “O love!” the narrator remarks, “How hard thou art to hide! Thou art visible everywhere—on a lover's lips, in his eyes, in the tone of his voice,” (33) and this is true for Charmant: his love consumes him to the point that it makes everything else completely unimportant. In this transformation, Charmant must prove himself true not through chivalry, not by saving Florine, and not by defeating a foe, but by demonstrating devotion. This sacrifice mimics those that women are expected to make for love—to lose agency, to lose control, to lose identity—but in this world, the one Aulnoy provides, it is men who must endure such a test. The women in *The Blue Bird* have to sacrifice for love as well, but this sacrifice is nothing compared to the one that Charmant must make. Florine has to just don a temporary disguise and appear as a peasant—for which she is called a slut—but this is a voluntary, guileful transformation. Her transformation is based on freedom and agency, and therefore pales in comparison to Charmant's transformation, to the everyday living conditions of

women. Compared to Charmant, Florine's sacrifice is minimal. By Charmant's decision to prioritize proximity to Florine over retaining his masculinity, *The Blue Bird* demonstrates that when romantic love is involved, even being faithful to the conventions of masculinity is overshadowed by proving and obtaining love.

As such, *The Blue Bird* reimagines traditional gender conventions and the role of masculinity to create a world where it is men who sacrifice for women—men who transform their bodies, men who pay the cost. This is a story that does not indulge the fragile male ego. It expands the parameters of masculinity even further than Aimé in *The Bee and the Orange Tree*, who makes revises his priorities and his sense of self for Aimée, and offers instead a man so consumed by love that he willingly forfeits some of the most integral components of his masculinity, assuming a submissive role akin to a woman. Aulnoy's interest is not in the typical masculine animal transformations that would be seen in the folk tales in the following centuries—the kind, like those of the Grimms, which yield a simple conclusion (men are animals.) Instead, Aulnoy invites the reader to imagine what powerful, heart-stopping, *transformative* love would feel like, invites us to wonder what we might sacrifice to be closer to someone, and in doing so, reveals that the conventions of masculinity are less important to a relationship than men may think. True companionate love, Aulnoy invites us to think, can not only withstand a relinquishing of masculinity, but may require it.

### **Unusual Heroines: *The Green Serpent* and *The White Cat***

*The Green Serpent* begins with a king and queen having twin daughters, Laidronette and Bellotte. They invite fairies to the feast but not Magotine, who out of revenge turns Laidronette into the ugliest woman in the world. As they age, the difference of the sisters' appearances becomes more apparent, Laidronette becoming so "frightful that, in spite of all her intelligence, it

was not possible to look at her; while her sister's beauty increased hourly." (Aulnoy 239) When she is twelve, Laidronette begs her parents to shut her up in a tower so that she will no longer affect anyone with her ugliness, and for the next two years she lives in a castle alone. Bellotte gets married and Laidronette's loneliness and misery increase. She meets a serpent in the forest and, terrified, rejects his friendship. Days later the same serpent saves her when she is drowning, despite the fact that she still finds his ugliness repulsive.

When she wakes, Laidronette finds herself at a beautiful castle inhabited by pagods who vow to suit her every need if she will remain among them. She consents and soon wants for nothing, and as time goes on, her ugliness becomes less and less important. She begins to have nightly conversations with the invisible king of the castle, "the unhappy sovereign of this realm, who adores you, madam, and who cannot tell you so without trembling," (246) who flatters her beauty, despite her protests. Against her own wishes, Laidronette slowly begins to fall in love with him, confiding that "I have resolved never to love...for if it be true that you love me, you are perhaps the only being in the world who could be guilty of such a weakness for a person so ugly as I am." (247) He reveals that Magotine has cursed him as well—he has been condemned to suffer for seven years and therefore cannot appear before her—and asks her to marry him, but to wait two years until she looks at him. She agrees, and he reveals further that if she does follow these instructions, Magotine will restore her beauty, and the pair marry in private.

Laidronette sends for her parents and sister to share in her happiness, deciding that she will tell them the mythological tale of Psyche to help them understand her condition—that she believes she has married Cupid—but she fumbles the story to the point of appearing mad, and her mother and sister decide that she is deceiving them and herself. She reveals she has never seen her husband and the women insist that it is a trap, that her husband is a monster, and berate

her for listening “with such extreme simplicity to such fables.” (249) Riddled with confusion, Laidronette sneaks a look at her husband and screams when she sees that he is the green serpent—the same that repulsed her so much before she came to the castle. This calamity leads to war breaking out as Magotine takes over the kingdom, and Laidronette has to perform a series of manual duties for the fairy, all the while longing to see the serpent again, missing his company and love. The fairy Protectrice visits Laidronette and restores her beauty by instructing her to wash herself with magical water (water of discretion): Laidronette drinks it first to embellish her mind, then washes herself with it, and when she does, she becomes “so beautiful, you would have taken her for a goddess” (254). The fairy re-names her Queen Discrète after her new beauty, and, on her instructions, sets off to find the serpent.

Queen Discrète goes into an enchanted forest to hide and waits with a bucket of the magic water for Protectrice to bring her green serpent. She meets a collection of animals that have been transformed from their human selves by fairies, and spends three years with them. Magotine finds her and demands that she bring her to the infernal regions: she has been desiring eternal life, she says, and if the queen helps her to achieve this, she will bother her no longer. The queen does so when she finds her husband transformed back into a human, they fall in love even further. The story concludes with Magotine achieving eternal life and giving the king and queen their kingdom (238-250).

Most obviously, *The Green Serpent* is unusual in its featuring an “unattractive” heroine. This thesis has discussed how beauty functions as currency within the social structures of the fairy tale and its greater historical context. Beautiful girls are the ones with the privilege of a wider variety of marriage prospects, and are therefore more likely to end up in a safer marriage, while their less attractive counterparts’ options are to end up in an abusive marriage; single and

therefore economically and physically vulnerable; or, in the case of many fairy tales, punished with gruesome bodily mutilation for daring to find a husband who is above their rank. *The Green Serpent*, however, offers a different narrative. Although Laidronette's appearance is a result of a curse and is magic-inflicted, it is severe: her "ugliness disgusts even my nearest relatives" (241) and causes her to live her life in lonely isolation, divorced from any hope of finding company, romantic or familial. This is a highly unusual story: tales of this sort either chronicle the journey of a beautiful but unlucky girl, or, like *Babirole*, give an unattractive heroine an alternative community. Laidronette, however, is given neither of these things: she is the girl who in other stories would be ignored or punished.

To provide her heroine happiness, Aulnoy imagines her most fantastical setting yet: a world in which appearances don't matter. This chapter has explored other similar imaginings of worlds separated from societal conventions, such as the island in *The Bee and the Orange Tree* whose absence of social conventions yields gender equality, but the community Laidronette stumbles upon is special in its elimination of all social constructions of power. Other stories still hold characters to the rules of society—as when Aimé recognizes Aimée's beauty because he has been raised in the civilized world; in *Babirole*, as a monkey, Babirole is expected to marry not the man she loves, but the man of her breed—but the same cannot be said for *The Green Serpent*. In the community that Laidronette finds herself in, the stratifying power of beauty is completely eliminated: Laidronette realizes that "there was no longer talk of her ugliness, of zinzolin petticoats, or greasy ribbons," (244) and such a change in social conventions influences how Laidronette views herself, beginning "to fancy she was less disagreeable, in consequence of the great pains they took in attiring her." Although she resists the idea of loving someone, as it is an emotion that feels foreign and unwarranted, the serpent reassures her that she is deserving and



capable, telling her that if she “would consent to love, you would soon know it is possible to remain with a beloved object, not only in a palace, but in a frightful wilderness, for ages without wishing to leave it.” (246) The act of looking in *The Green Serpent* is a dangerous thing; Laidronette’s looking at him in serpent form causes a repulsion so deep that in order to win her love he must be invisible, and sneaking a look at him once married causes war to break out. In this world she stumbles upon, the role of appearances is reduced so greatly that it affects both parties: Laidronette’s ugliness does not exist, and the serpent must remove himself from her gaze.

In the erasure of such restrictive societal conventions, Laidronette is able to not only find the love that would have been denied to her at home, but also companionate love. One of the most poignant lines from the story, and from Aulnoy’s collection as a whole, is the serpent’s declaration of love for Laidronette:

I have seen you, madam, and have not found you what you represent yourself. Be it in your person, your merit, or your misfortunes, I repeat: I adore you. (247)

Such a proclamation bears the sentiment that most individuals hope to find in a union: not for your partner to be ignorant of your faults, but to see them, know them, and love you more because of them. This might seem like an obvious statement to find in a fairy tale, but it is worth remembering that such proclamations are wholly absent from the Grimm and Gonzenbach collections, that even other Aulnoy stories relay the sentiment in more subtle iterations or advertise wild, impassioned love, in which the individuals fall in love on sight before seeing each other’s depths and complexities. This is a multifaceted kind of love, one that far transcends the power of beauty. In the previous chapter I discussed the idea of the gaze in Gonzenbach’s collection and how the stories often function in a one-way exchange: man looks at woman, man looks at a woman that has been altered by another woman, woman looks at beastly man. In such

stories, the lovers' appreciation of one another occurs on the visible surface and doesn't go any deeper. In *The Green Serpent*, however, Aulnoy reminds us that seeing also means understanding. The serpent saying "I have *seen* you" seems to imply much more than the surface meaning; on the contrary, it references a sight that goes beyond vision, that in "seeing" he has *understood* everything about Laidronette. While sight in Gonzenbach is visual, limited to surface value and a mere performance of the eye, in Aulnoy, the meaning of the verb expands to encompass everything that goes along with sight. Whether it be her person, her merit, or her misfortunes, he understands it all: and loves her still.

In addition, Laidronette is not only an unusual heroine in her appearance and in the kind of love she attains, but also in the doubt Aulnoy allows her to have. When her mother and sister visit they are not at all convinced in her supposed perfect love, and plant the doubt that leads to her sneaking a glimpse of the serpent, a moment in which Laidronette allows herself to doubt that her love is as wonderful as she assumes it to be. The love of most fairy tales is so confident that there is no room for second-guessing: a couple meet and, often by first glance, are completely certain that they have found the love of their life. The obstacles to their love are external forces, such as a meddling step-mother, not some internal conflict like overthinking. That Aulnoy provides Laidronette the narrative allowance of pausing to doubt is therefore highly significant: here is a heroine who is cautious, who wants to be sure of the man she married. Against all odds, here is a heroine who is certain of her worth, whose doubt demonstrates that she refuses to stay married to anyone less than she deserves. This act of second-guessing also signifies that Laidronette believes she has a *choice* in marriage: she wishes to see her husband so that she can escape if he proves dangerous or undesirable. Once again, Aulnoy imagines marriage expectations beyond her time: in a moment when women had virtually no choice over

their partners, Aulnoy gives her heroine the freedom to doubt and, in doubting, the opportunity to leave a threatening partner.

*The White Cat* begins with a king who fears one of his three sons will try to seize his throne while he is alive, so he gives them a distracting task, proposing that whichever son retrieves the handsomest little dog in a year's time will be his heir. The youngest son comes across a beautiful castle populated by cats. He meets a white cat, who is friendly and can talk, and notices that the miniature portrait on her bracelet is of a man who greatly resembles himself. The prince and the white cat spend a lot of time together, and time passes so well and quickly that he begins to forget his task and his home, thinking of nothing else but "mewing" with the white cat. He becomes so entrenched that he even wishes he could be a cat, bemoaning to her, "I love you so dearly! Either become woman, or make me a cat," (343) and a full year passes. He finally remembers his task just as the deadline approaches. She gives him an acorn that contains a dog, and when he opens it in front of his father the most beautiful multicolored dancing dog appears.

Not wanting to relinquish his throne, the father gives them another quest, and then a third: to find the most beautiful maiden, to whom the winner will be married and then he will be king. The prince returns to the white cat and spends another year there, hunting, fishing, playing chess. After a year has passed she informs him he must cut off her head and tail with a sword and throw them in the fire, and although he initially resists such violence, when he does so, she is suddenly transformed into a beautiful maiden, and the cats are turned into lords and ladies.

As a maiden, she tells him her story: her mother, a queen, desired a fairy fruit and became so addicted that she agreed to trade her soon-to-be born daughter for fruit. The fairies took the daughter away and raised her inside a door-less castle, until one day she met a handsome prince.

They fell in love but the fairies forbade her to marry, insisting she would marry the fairy king, Migonnet, a monkey who had feet like an eagle. She spun a ladder in the hopes of escaping, and when Migonnet arrived to take her away, she refused. Her prince arrived to save her from Migonnet but was eaten by a dragon before her eyes, and as she tried to throw herself into the dragon's jaws, the fairies transformed her into a white cat, declaring that "a speedy death is too mild a punishment for this unworthy creature." (364) The fairies transformed her lords and ladies into cats and declared that she could only be released by a prince who perfectly resembled the prince she married.

The maiden concludes her story, explaining that the prince is this exact likeness in features, air, and voice. They travel back to the prince's kingdom, where he reveals his maiden to his father. The maiden declares that, as she rules six kingdoms, she will give one to the king and one to each of his sons. Each couple is married and depart for their own kingdoms (337-366).

As in *The Green Serpent*, the heroine of *The White Cat* is unusual by fairy-tale standards. As a cat, she is highly mysterious. She seems to know everything: on their second meeting, the prince "recounts to her the success of his journey, which she knew perhaps better than he did," (345) and on their third meeting, she has the castle ready for him because "she knew the day and moment he would arrive." (350) Her personality is, according to the prince, at odds with her cat body to the point of confusion, remarking that "she was wiser than a cat is allowed to be." (346) When the prince laments his troubles, she responds not with advice or consolation, but only with a "deep sigh." She is so elusive that the prince doesn't know what to do with her, grappling with the knowledge that they are on uneven footing: that while she seems to know everything about him, he knows only what she chooses to show him. The narrator comments,

He asked her whether she was a fairy, or whether she had been transformed into a cat; but as she never said anything but what she chose, she also never made answers that were not

perfectly agreeable to her, and consequently her replies consisted of a number of little words which signified nothing particular, so that he clearly perceived she was not inclined to make him a partaker of her secret. (351)

This power relationship is highly unusual, controlled not only by a woman but a woman who is not even in human form. She is the one who holds the knowledge, strategically revealing what she chooses to the prince, and it is she who is in complete control over the speed and success of their relationship. This is not only a heroine who resists passivity, but is one who is so active that she is a more dominating force than her male counterpart.

The white cat is not only dominant in terms of manipulation, but is also so authoritative that she possesses the narrative autonomy that a man would typically show. Whereas the prince barely speaks out loud, the cat overpowers the entire narrative for twelve whole pages, an uninterrupted soliloquy whose sole purpose is to tell *her* story. As the white cat, she also offers a blunt analysis of the prince's character, one that is reminiscent of the kind of examination on female character that men often perform—she tells him, “I am convinced of the kindness of thy heart. It is a rare article among princes. They would be loved by everybody, yet not love any one themselves. But thou art a proof that the rule has its exception” (348)—emphasizing that she is unafraid to have opinions, unafraid to speak them, and unafraid to express disdain towards an entire gender.

Perhaps most significantly, she is violent. When the prince thinks that the walnut she gives him to complete his task is faulty, he cries out that the white cat has fooled him, only to feel “a cat's claw upon his hand, which gave him such a scratch that the blood came,” (349) and as queen, she arranges violent sports such as a naval battle between the cats and rats. Most of all, the act that transforms her back into a human is alarmingly violent, involving a sword—an inherently masculine and patriarchal object used to wage war—and throwing head and tail into

the fire. The prince, meanwhile, is comparatively feminine: he doesn't want to harm the cat and becomes distraught at the prospect, is foreign to both committing and receiving violence, and allows himself to be so swept up by the glamour of the cat and her castle that he loses complete track of time. In essence, she is the one commanding the action, and he is the one carrying out the instructions.

This aggressive and in-control personality of the white cat, however, is quite different from the person she was before her animal transformation. As a human, before being transformed into the white cat, our heroine was comparatively passive and naive. In her explanation to the prince, we learn that she grew up with no power over her circumstances. Whereas the white cat sees and knows everything, as a maiden she was naive and ignorant, describing that the fairies "called me their daughter, and I believed myself to be so" and that she had never seen a young man except "in a painting," (358) leaving the impression that her view of the world was so limited that she knew only what had been shown to her through a limited scope. When recounting her failed escape, she describes that she was "so young, so inexperienced," and her ambassador relayed the message to her prince that she was "sufficiently willing: she only lacks the power." (361) Lastly, when she tried to resist Migonnet, she describes a scene of forced marriage and abduction: "they determined to bring him into my chamber at night, while I slept, to tie my hand and foot, and place me in his fiery chariot, to be taken away by him." (363) Although this description is vastly different from the empowered character of the white cat, such a person would be the ordinary maiden in Aulnoy's time: a woman who is given a limited education, limited life experience, and limited marital agency. That her pre-cat personality is so different in terms of agency and power than her animal self reveals a conclusion distinct to Aulnoy: that the thing restricting women from achieving their full power, from being in narrative

and marital control, is not any biological force, but the restrictions put on women from society. As a cat, released from the societal expectations of humanness and womanhood, our heroine can do all that she was unable to do as a human: to be in control, to have an opinion, and to have a voice.

Lastly, *The White Cat* deviates from traditional gender conventions in its handling of love. The stories in this chapter have emphasized romantic love—couples who are determined to be together despite forces trying to keep them apart, couples who take care of one another equally, couples who fall in love with each other's minds. There are, to be sure, some romantic moments in *The White Cat*. In traveling back to the kingdom, for instance, the narrator remarks: "if her beauty was matchless, her mind was no less so, and the young prince was equally perfect, so that they interchanged all sorts of charming ideas." (364) But proclamations of infatuation, such as the kind seen in *The Green Serpent*, are notably absent. Instead, Aulnoy presents a love that is not wild, such as that of *Babirole*, but is companion-based: they each know and see each other for what they are, and find that the other will satisfy their needs.

This is not the story of a couple destined to be together, but of a prince's destiny to facilitate the freedom of the maiden. While the prince is infatuated with the cat and her castle, assuming the romantic role that women would normally inhabit, she seems distant, if not indifferent. Further, he is able to end her spell not because he is her true love, but because he *resembles* the man she was first married to. Such a plot point is reminiscent of Freud's concept of the uncanny that is so prominent in fairy tales, the idea of things recurring in cycles to the effect that an individual cannot remember where they have seen it previously, when the "distinction between imagination and reality is effaced," (Freud 244) as well as the concept of doubling: characters who are "considered identical because they look alike." (234) The prince's

visual resemblance to the maiden's first love does give the story a distinctly uncanny quality—Is he a reincarnation of the first love? Are they related? Is magic at play?—especially when combined with the strange quality that time takes on at the castle, passing quickly as if in a dream, but it also points to something new to fairy tales: the interchangeability of men. Although this interchangeability doesn't mean that *any* man will qualify to be the white cat's husband, it does reveal an allowance for multiple marriage partners, for the idea that there can be more than one man who can make a woman happy. Further, that his qualifications for marriage eligibility depend on his looks is also highly unusual: here is a story in which it is the man's appearance which is at stake, his looks which are being evaluated and judged.

This kind of romance, combined with the gender-role reversal of narrative agency of the prince and the maiden, means *The White Cat* handles gender in perhaps the most extreme way of the stories seen in this chapter. It is not just proto-feminist in that Aulnoy is writing a strong woman—a vocal woman, a woman with the potential to be violent—nor is it just because she is portraying a man who is comparatively frightened, feminine, and accessorized. Rather, Aulnoy gives us a story in which a woman uses a man the way men use women: for personal gain. That they still live happily ever after means that the story invites the reader to look fondly upon such a union, rather than condemn her for any selfishness, and seems to reassure us that nontraditional gender roles can still yield happy and traditional marriages. A woman in charge, Aulnoy reassures us, is a fit marriage. Most of all, the differences between the maiden in human and animal form demonstrate that, divorced from the social constraints of humanity and therefore femininity, the maiden is able to become the *person*, not the woman, that she always had the potential to be.



## Conclusion

If the Grimms asked what the role is for married women in sustaining the nation, and if Gonzenbach asked how we keep women safe in marriage, then Aulnoy's stories ask how couples can be happy in marriage. Without a doubt, Aulnoy's stories are the most proto-feminist tales in this thesis. Her female characters are complicated, defying the usual requirement that a heroine must be civilized, human, beautiful, peaceful, and quiet, to order to give us a range of emotions to show women as they truly are: passionate, smart, selfish, witty, kind, aggressive. Her male characters, meanwhile, are comparatively unconcerned with living up to societal standards of masculinity and have no trouble making room for powerful women in their lives and in their stories.

Although it is impossible to pinpoint why Aulnoy's stories are so much more progressive than those of the Grimms and Gonzenbach—despite, it should be noted, being written over one hundred years earlier—there are several conditions that can account for such a difference. One is the salon. In a time when just being a woman was inherently dangerous, the salon gave women a safe and encouraging space to write and a forum to develop sophisticated opinions and to converse with other intelligent individuals. The salon blurred societal boundaries, encouraging women to mingle with men, for nobility to mix with lower classes, and, in the elimination of such restrictions, room is created for progressive stories. It is also significant that Aulnoy wrote in a France that predated nationalism, meaning that she had absolutely no allegiance to portray a certain depiction of the nation that might have reduced the agency of her female characters. She was also an upper-class woman, one whose status likely provided additional freedoms, and her personal history—traveling with her mother, leaving her husband, having two children of unknown paternity—hints that she herself was an independent woman who had mobility and

who viewed marriage and relationships in perhaps a more fluid way than did her peers. In isolation, it's possible that none of these conditions—the salon, the absence of nationalist thought, the mobility she claimed for herself—would be powerful enough to account for the progressive quality of these stories, but when considered in sum, they point to an environment that favors female freedom much more than that of the Grimms and Gonzenbach.

All of these conditions, however, function in a historical context that was not nearly so forgiving. The French laws of marriage were being rewritten to disempower women, passionate love was nearly impossible, and women were encouraged by society to police each other's actions. Society and nobility were being reconfigured, and thousands of people were being killed over politics and religion. Thus, the stories in Aulnoy's collection are not just progressive by present standards, but are revolutionary for the time in which they were written.

We have seen from the Grimms how increased editorial mediation yields patriarchal and borderline misogynistic stories, and from Gonzenbach how removing a layer of nationalistic interest results in stories that give women a wider range of emotions, experiences, and outcomes. Now, by analyzing Aulnoy, it is plain: the fewer layers of editorial mediation, and the less attachment to nationalist agendas, the more the stories advance proto-feminist ideals. In a time of social change and uncertainty, Aulnoy uses fiction to invite the reader to imagine a society that treats women very differently. Such stories would not appear if they were collected, like the Grimms and Gonzenbach, but through invention Aulnoy gives us a peek at the difference between the society that is, and the society that ought to be

## **Conclusion: Who Lived Happily Ever After**

Fairy tales have been in print since seventeenth-century France and have remained in the forefront of popular culture ever since. Stories such as Rapunzel, Hänsel and Gretel, Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, and Rumpelstiltskin—all of which are included in the final edition of the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*—have become a staple of children's literature. In the last five years alone, to name a few examples, Phillip Pullman, author of "His Dark Materials," published *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm: A New English Version*; novelist Michael Cunningham published a reimagining of popular fairy tales entitled *A Wild Swan: And Other Tales*; Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1957 musical *Cinderella* has been revived on Broadway; and there has been at least one popular, big-budget film adaptation of a fairy tale every single year.<sup>13</sup> The fairy tales consumed by today's popular culture, however, are substantially different from the stories as they appeared on their first publication—even when they are essentially the same story. The Grimms' stories have been changed to the point where they are now completely removed from their original social functions, while the more female-friendly stories of Gonzebnach and Aulnoy have been entirely forgotten.

The Grimms themselves altered their stories substantially in the editions published in their own lifetime. The stories' longevity since then has come at the cost of extra layers of editorial mediation, conducted not by the Grimms, but by generations of adapters far removed from early nineteenth-century Germany. As we get further away from questions of folk informants and female agency, the fairy-tale mediations of more recent times have changed the

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<sup>13</sup> See *Snow White and the Huntsman*, dir. Rupert Sanders, 2012; *Mirror Mirror*, dir. Tarsem Singh, 2012; *Frozen*, dir. Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, 2013; *Maleficent*, dir. Robert Stromberg, 2014; *Cinderella*, dir. Kenneth Branagh, 2015; *The Huntsman: Winter's War*, dir. Cedric Nicolas-Troyan, 2016; and *Beauty and the Beast*, dir. Bill Condon, forthcoming in 2017.

tales to make them more fit for mass global audiences. The Grimm stories we all know are not the originally gruesome and misogynistic tales, the ones steeped in larger nationalist and political agendas, but rather stories that have been developed into something for children. The messages of these modernized stories have bypassed the ideological commitments to debates about gender, be they conservative or progressive, in which fairy tales originally intervened. This infantilization of the genre means that the new versions have lost the ideological charge that their originals possessed, that they have been removed from their historical context and from their commentary on women's empowerment. That the Grimms' stories have been adapted in ways that are separate from the *Volk* and German nationalism, evolving into something universal rather than remaining specific, reveals that their lifespan is contingent upon forgetting the basis on which they were founded. The Grimms have thus been able to live forever, but only by sacrificing the original intent of their stories. Which collection, then, lived happily ever after: those of Gonzenbach and Aulnoy, whose less mediated stories are still available in textually faithful editions that are extremely difficult to find, or the Grimms, whose stories have been mangled by society to the point that they are nearly unrecognizable?

Despite how different today's fairy tales are from the stories they originated from, many of the same questions concerning methods of adaptation and women's narrative voice persist. Much as Gonzenbach was unable to tell women's stories totally free of masculine editorial mediation, female artists of today are under similar limitations even when it comes to telling their own stories. Recent research done by Carmen Fought and Karen Eisenhauer on Disney princess films—most of which are based on fairy tales—discovered that even the movies that supposedly center on women are dominated by the voices of men. For instance, men speak 71% of the time in “Beauty and the Beast” (1991), 77% of the time in “Mulan” (1998) (not even

counting when Mulan is impersonating a man), and 68% of the time in “The Little Mermaid” (1989) (Guo, n.p.), a story inspired by a Hans Christian Anderson tale and which features a heroine who is vocally silenced for nearly half the film in an effort to get her man. Of the seven recent fairy-tale films, only one has featured a female director: Jennifer Lee, who was a co-director and also wrote the screenplay. That the film in question, “Frozen” (also based on a Hans Christian Anderson story), is largely considered to be the most feminist of the movie bunch—the kiss of true love that concludes the film comes from a sister rather than a lover—points to the feminist influence female artists can lend. Of the remaining six films—all of which, let us not forget, center on a female protagonist—there is only one female screenwriter: Linda Woolverton of “Maleficent.” Woolverton reimagines the story of Charles Perrault’s *Sleeping Beauty*, centering this time on its villain: an older woman, one with power and strength, and who ends the story un-married. The gendered messages of “Frozen” and “Maleficent” are clear: just as with Gonzenbach and Aulnoy, there is an undeniable narrative benefit to women being granted the simple privilege of telling their own stories.

For as long as there has been culture, there have been debates about what women’s place should be. In their original forms, printed fairy tale collections provided ideologically charged commentaries on female propriety in society; in their present-day form, the fairy tales regurgitated by mass media and digested by the public have lost their original political intentions to become something that can be easily consumed. These present-day fairy tales, however, have not made the kinds of progress on female narrative agency that the passages of centuries of time might lead us to think would happen. Even Gonzenbach’s stories, despite their position between misogynistic and proto-feminist tales, would, as stories told by poor peasant women in late nineteenth-century Sicily, provide a welcome variety to the often homogenous fairy-tale

narratives of today. Aulnoy's tales were vastly ahead of her time in terms of imagining progressive gender roles, and also did so in a historical moment that was far more restrictive than our present. At their best, these collections have the ability to invite us to imagine the power of a world comprised of smart, complicated women. We owe it to readers of all ages to restore the imaginative and liberatory potential of fairy tales.

## Appendix

Sample images from Jacques Olivier's  
*Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes* (1665).



*Avidissimum animal*

TRÈS-AVIDE ANIMAL



*Bestiale barathrum*

ABYSME DE BESTISE



*Concupiscentia carnis*

CONCUPISCENCE DE LA CHAIR

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